

STORY STRUCTURE

206 - BRAD DAILEY

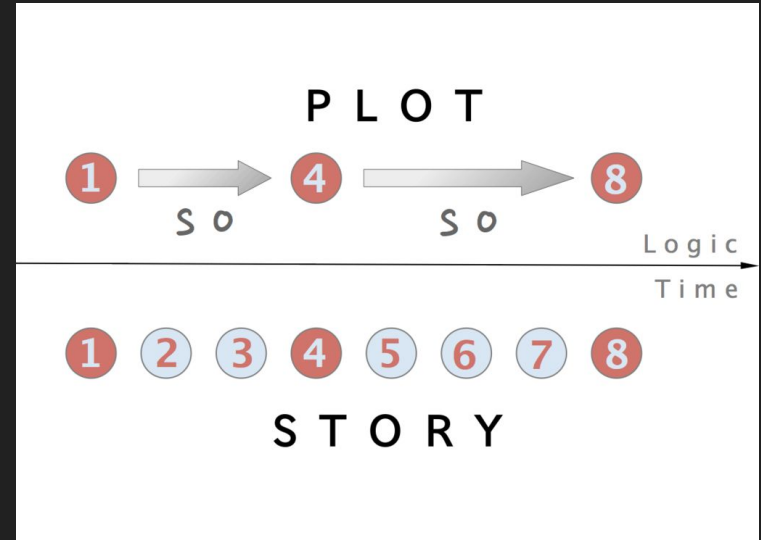
PLOT VS STORY

Plot - The main events of a play, novel, movie, or similar work, devised and presented by the writer as an **interrelated sequence**. (Google)

- A sequence of events that are related through cause-effect.

VS STORY

- Story is a collection of scenes. Not all need to be causal. A story contains plot, but is not entirely made up of plot. **A story is held together by plot, character, and/or theme.**



SUBPLOT

- Plot related to a supporting character, antagonist, or causation outside of the primary goal of the Protagonist.
- Might only be related through theme.
- Takes up less time, action, and usually involves characters of lesser significance.



PLOT DEVICES



- **MacGuffin**
 - The 'goal' of a character's journey, but oftentimes the nature of the item is unrelated to the story as a whole.
- **Red Herring**
 - An item, fact, or idea meant to be a distraction to the audience; to mislead the viewer away from the truth.
 - Common in mystery and noir.
- **Deus Ex Machina**
 - Someone or something that saves the day that was not sufficiently established earlier in the work.
 - Sudden, unestablished solutions to established problems.

LINEAR VS NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES

Linear Narratives

- The story is presented in (mostly) chronological order.

Non-Linear Narratives

- The story is told out of order, through the use of flashbacks and/or rearranged scenes.
 - Pulp Fiction
 - Most Christopher Nolan Films
- Flashbacks - A scene set earlier than the present of the primary plot.



STRUCTURE AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Western (American) audiences have grown accustomed to CLOSED-FORM (CIRCULAR) NARRATIVES.

CLOSED-FORM (CIRCULAR) NARRATIVE

- The plot and all (or most) of the subplots are resolved.
- The story usually ends where it started; geographically, thematically, or situationally.

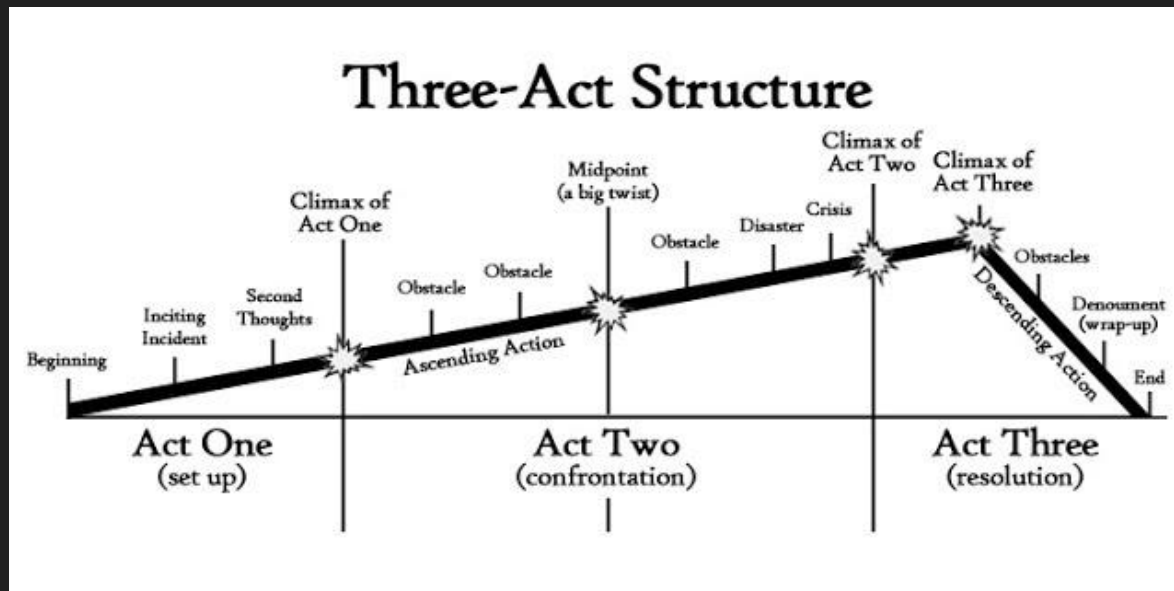
Asian, European, and Australian audiences tend to prefer an OPEN-ENDED NARRATIVE.

OPEN-ENDED NARRATIVE

- Plots and/or subplots are left unresolved for thematic or philosophical reasons.

THE THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

- BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END.
- It's called three-act structure, but how many acts are there really?



ACT 1

THE BEGINNING (SET-UP)

THE BEGINNING, OR STASIS

- Stasis is the protagonist's regular situation. This is The Ordinary World.
- This situation can be good or bad. Either way, it's what the protagonist is used to.

- In a feature film, this is usually the first few scenes, at least. These establish the regular characters, relationships, locations, and scenes.
- In a short film, the Stasis might only be the first scene, or it might only be implied, or it might not be established at all.
 - Why is the stasis less important in a short film?

THE INCITING INCIDENT

- The Inciting Incident is what truly sets the story into motion. It directly alters the protagonist's stasis in such a way that continuing in the way things were would be impossible.
 - If the protagonist's stasis was good, something or someone has come along that turned their good situation upside-down, and the goal is usually, ultimately to return things to normal.
 - What might be an example of this?
 - If the protagonist's stasis was bad, something or someone comes along that offers a chance for change, and the goal of the journey is to make their normal life better.

- The person or thing that brings about this change is called the **Herald** in Jungian archetypes.

Refusal, Hesitation, + the End of Act 1

- The Protagonist should initially resist to engage in the journey, even if their situation was bad before. They might need the support or encouragement of Mentors or Allies.
 - Why?
- By the end of Act 1, the audience should know who the primary protagonist is, and what their goal is.
 - A lot of the time, the primary force(s) of antagonism is established as well.

ACT 2

THE MIDDLE (COMPLICATIONS)

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

- At some point, the Protagonist becomes so engulfed in their journey to achieve their goal that they can no longer return to their point of Stasis.
- Sometimes, the Protagonist simply has no want or desire to return, and is fully committed to their mission.
- Most of the time, however, something prohibits the Protagonist from returning. It could be as simple as distance, or it might be more complicated.

- The Point of No Return can serve as the transition point from Act 1 to Act 2, or the transition point from Act 2 to Act 3 (the Midpoint, considering Three-Act Structure is really four acts).

THE OTHER WORLD

- Once the Protagonist sets out to achieve their goal, they enter The Other World. This is a place that is different physically, culturally, energetically, and/or emotionally from the world of Stasis.
- Whatever the Protagonist needs to achieve their goal, it lies in The Other World.

THE ROAD OF TRIALS (OBSTACLES)

- The Road of Trials is the name for the Protagonist's attempts to get closer to their goal.
- Part of this might be the process of training or learning the ways of The Other World.
- This also includes early attempts, successes and failures, of the Protagonist to achieve their goal, or missteps when trying to get closer.
- This is where the audience learns much more about The Other World, through the Protagonist's exploits.
- The Protagonist will meet many other characters here, especially Allies and Threshold Guardians (bosses or things that test the Protagonist).

THE MIDPOINT

- The Midpoint is around the middle of your narrative, and is a period where the Protagonist usually has a moment of clarity or revelation.
- They see their journey or goal differently.
- Sometimes they want to give up and make a new life in The Other World.
 - Oftentimes, they need the help of an Ally or Mentor to help re-center their perspective or remind them of their motivations.
- If looking at Three-Act Structure as four acts, this is the transition point from Act 2 to Act 3.

ACT 3

THE END (RESOLUTION)

THE CRISIS

- The Crisis is when the Protagonist is feeling lowest, and like they are incapable of achieving their goal.
- Oftentimes this is near a moment of epiphany or self-revelation.
- The Protagonist might seem to die and be reborn. (Or at least their fate is left a mystery to the audience for a moment, or even a few minutes.)
- The Protagonist is once again reminded of their motivation and ability by their Allies and Mentors.
- New skills or information help give hope once again.

THE CLIMAX

- The Climax is the scene where the Protagonist's goal is finally within reach, but can they grasp it?
- Depending on the narrative, this might be the big bad boss fight.
- If the plot is driven by a MacGuffin, the device is right there.
- The Protagonist doesn't always need to succeed. Failure is oftentimes just as illuminating and helpful for growth.
- Even in success, the Protagonist might realize the folly of their goal. What was really the point?

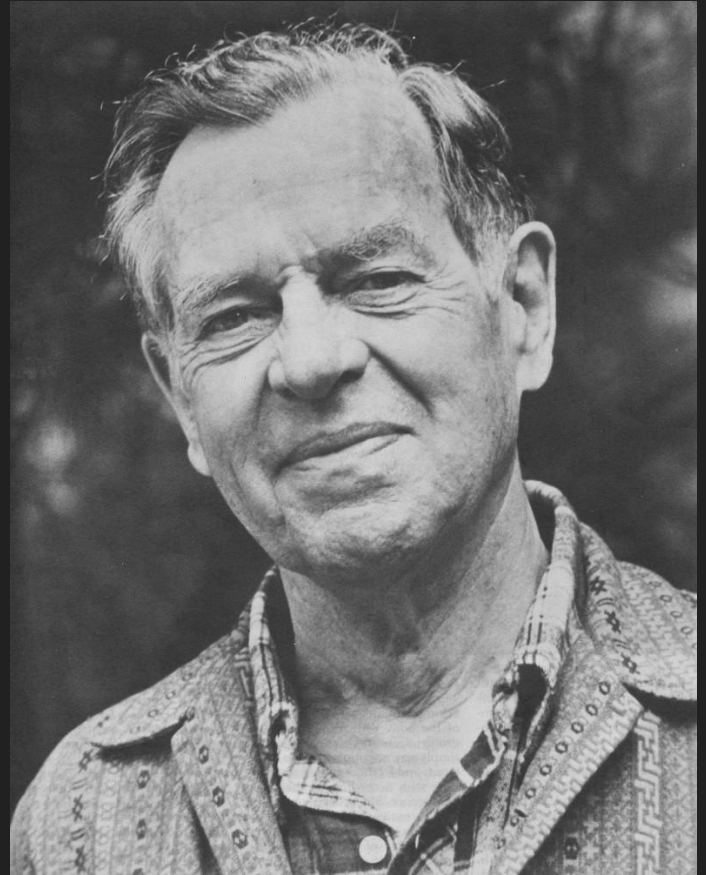
DENOUEMENT

- The Denouement is the part of a story, after the Climax, where the story is wrapped up.
- The primary plot and, ideally, all of the subplots are tied up.
 - In Western Culture films, almost certainly. As mentioned, Eastern Culture is more likely to feature open-ended films.
- The Protagonist often returns to The Ordinary World, but we see how things have changed.

JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S
MONOMYTH, OR
THE HERO'S JOURNEY

JOSEPH CAMPBELL (1904-1987)

- Academic, Professor of Literature
- Identified consistencies and similarities between myths of different cultures throughout time.
- Worked based on that of Carl Jung, specifically Jungian Archetypes.
- Much like Jung's Archetypes, which are based on the theory that character types are as much a part of the human unconscious as instincts, Campbell's *Monomyth* is built on the theory that the shared human experience (life and death) has led to similarities between stories across all peoples.



THE MONOMYTH, OR HERO'S JOURNEY

Departure

1. The Call to Adventure
2. Refusal of the Call
3. Supernatural Aid
4. The Crossing of the First Threshold
5. The Belly of the Whale

Initiation

6. The Road of Trials
7. The Meeting with the Goddess
8. Woman as the Temptress
9. Atonement with the Father
10. Apotheosis
11. The Ultimate Boon

Return

12. Refusal of the Return
13. The Magic Flight
14. Rescue from Without
15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold
16. Master of the Two Worlds
17. Freedom to Live

CRITICISMS AND DISCLAIMERS

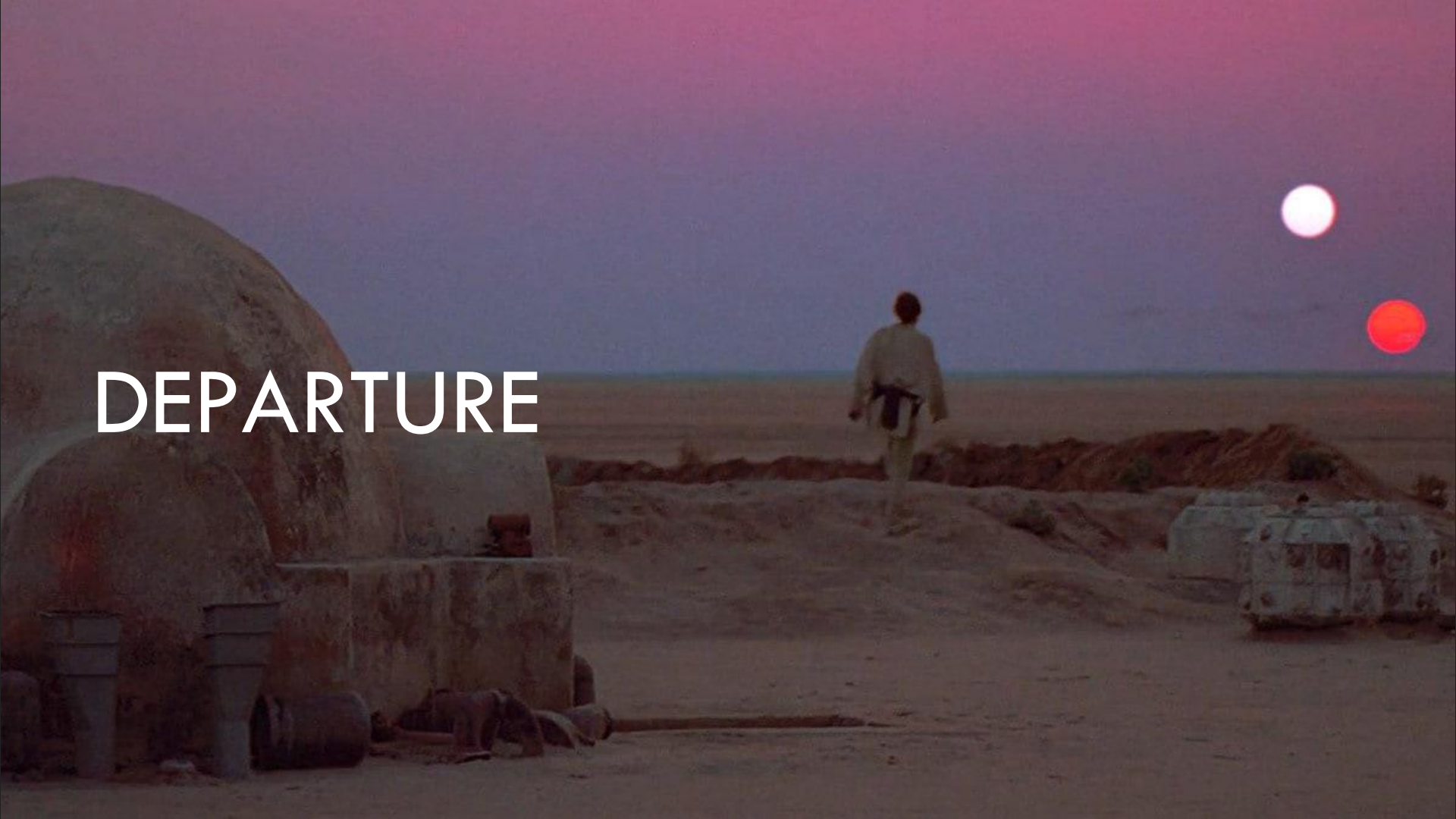
- Criticisms

- Too 'Hero'-centric; not enough about allies?
- Made with male protagonists in mind?
- Too 'formulaic'?
- Discards cultural identity?

- Disclaimers

- There can be many representations of certain stages (as we'll see).
- Not all narratives touch on all stages, especially in shorter works.
- The order of the stages can usually be changed without affecting their overall impact.
- Not all stages are easily represented visually. Some are more internal changes in the Hero(es) that might not be represented by any particular scene.

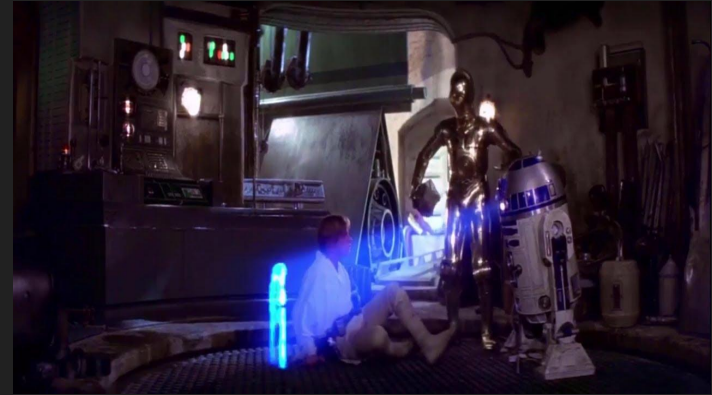
DEPARTURE



1. The Call to Adventure

We're introduced to the Hero (the Protagonist) in their normal life. The Herald delivers the call to adventure by delivering details of the journey.

- Luke picks up C-3PO and R2-D2; the latter which contains the hologram of Princess Leia giving the infamous "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope".
- Obi-Wan is a hermit. Luke's need for saving from the sandpeople is the Herald.
- Han and Chewie meet Obi-Wan and Luke, who detail the 'job', which is to transport them to Alderaan.



2. Refusal of the Call

The Hero should initially refuse to accept the call to adventure. This could be for any number of reasons, but oftentimes it's due to prior obligations or a fear of change.

- Obi-Wan is hesitant to come out of solitude and take on such a challenge alone, due to his old age. He then campaigns for Luke to join him.
- Luke refuses to act because of his obligations to helping his aunt and uncle on their farm during the upcoming harvest.
- Han and Chewbacca hesitate to accept the job with only 2,000 credits now, but they could really use the 15,000 that Obi-Wan promises them later.
- Later, Han initially refuses to help Luke search for Princess Leia, but Luke ultimately convinces him with the promise of a large monetary reward for freeing her.

3. Supernatural Aid

The Hero meets a *Mentor*. The *Mentor* might teach them skills or about what lies ahead. They might also give them gifts, like magic items or weapons that will aid them on their journey.

- Luke, searching for his lost droids, is ambushed by sandpeople. He's saved by Obi-Wan Kenobi. Obi-Wan initiates Luke on the rebellion, the Jedi, and the Force. He also introduces Luke to the lightsaber.
- Han and Chewie are mentors of the underworld, and the *Millenium Falcon* is their magic item of aid.



4. The Crossing of the First Threshold

The Hero enters into the other world of the unknown. They have left the world of relative (mental) comfort from where they started. The Mentor's gifts are of value.

- Luke and Obi-Wan go to the Mos Eisley cantina to search for a pilot.
 - Obi-Wan uses his Force power of persuasion to get into Mos Eisley.
 - They run into inhospitable bar dwellers, and Obi-Wan has to defend them with his lightsaber.
 - They meet Han Solo and Chewbacca. Obi-Wan can offer them 15,000 credits when they get to Alderaan.
- After leaving Tatooine, the Millennium Falcon, capable of light speed, helps the group escape from Imperial forces. Han and Chewie are used to being antagonized by bounty hunters and outlaws, but the Empire is a different foe.

5. The Belly of the Whale

The Hero can no longer turn back. They are deep into the other world. The Hero might experience a minor moment of 'rebirth' (a brush with death, initiation ritual, and/or change of costume).

- Luke's uncle and aunt were killed by Stormtroopers, who tracked the droids from the Jawa carrier.
 - He can no longer return to his life as a farm boy.
- Alderaan has been destroyed by the Death Star.
 - The world of diplomacy and decency that Obi-Wan once knew is literally destroyed.
- The Millennium Falcon is caught in the Death Star's tractor beam.
- The group disguises themselves as Stormtroopers.
- The group gets trapped in the trash compactor with the monster. Luke is almost drowned.

INITIATION

A cinematic still from Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace. The scene is set in a dark, industrial environment filled with twisted metal and debris. On the left, Padmé Amidala, dressed in her signature white gown, stands with her arms outstretched, looking towards the right. In the center and right, two Jedi Knights in their iconic white armor stand amidst the wreckage. The Knight in the center is looking towards Padmé, while the Knight on the right is looking towards the right side of the frame. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on the characters and deep shadows in the surrounding debris.

6. The Road of Trials

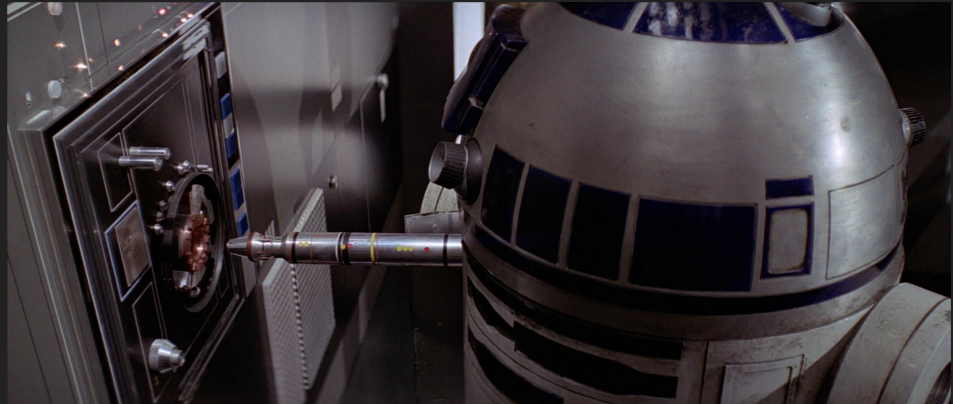
The Hero experiences a number of challenges and obstacles. There's often a failure or setback, but ultimately the Hero overcomes their challenges.

- Greedo tries to apprehend Han for the bounty placed on him by Jabba. Han kills Greedo.
- Jabba and his gang intercept the group, trying to leave Tatooine. Han talks Jabba into giving him another chance.
- Imperial troops catch up to the group as the Millennium Falcon prepares for takeoff.
- Obi-Wan trains Luke to use the lightsaber, and then the Force to sense the oncoming lasers.
 - Han temporarily plays an antagonist through his disbelief of the Force, which Obi-Wan is trying to get Luke to believe in.

7. The Meeting with the Goddess

At this stage, the Hero might come face-to-face with what they have come for, or they acquire important items or skills that they will use later to achieve their ultimate goal.

- R2 locates the tractor beam generator in the Death Star layout.
- R2 discovers that Princess Leia is being held captive on the Death Star.
- The Stormtrooper uniforms that the group acquires give them important items which they'll use later on.



8. Woman as the Temptress

The Hero is tempted to stray from the path of their journey. They might be tempted to stay in the other world. Or they might just be tempted to give up.

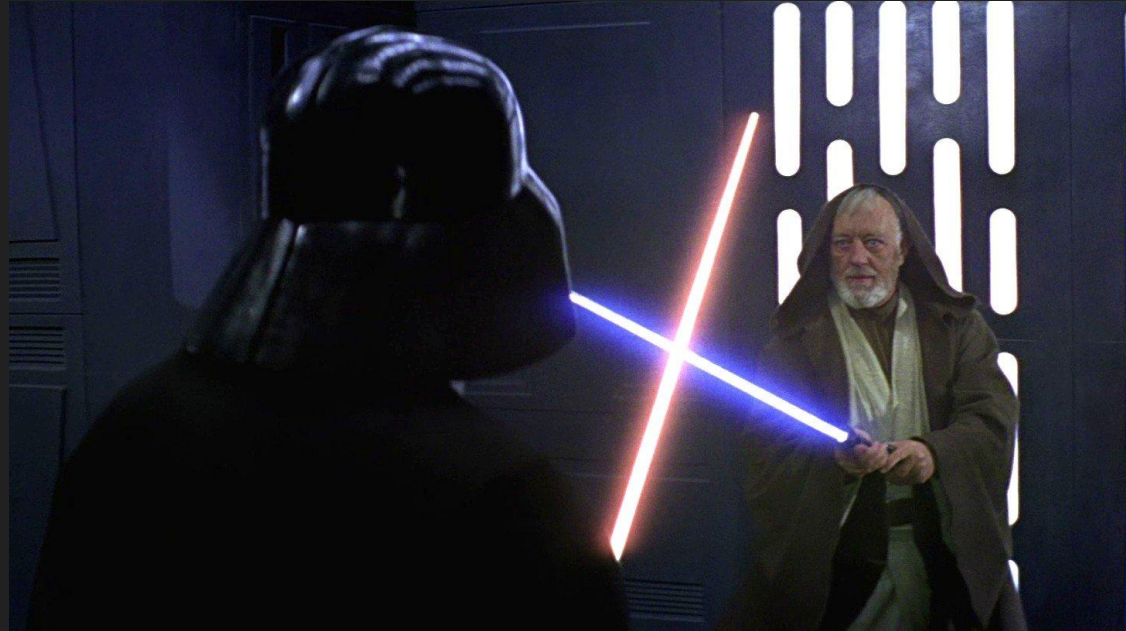
- Han is tempted to collect his payment and return to his life of being a drifter.



9. Atonement with the Father

The Hero confronts whatever holds power over them. This is usually them facing their fears.

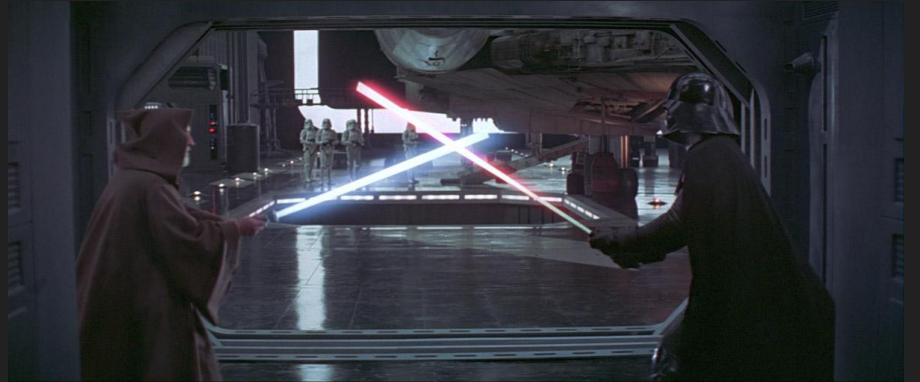
- Obi-Wan and Vader face off.



10. Apotheosis

The height of the Hero's understanding of the journey. Epiphany.

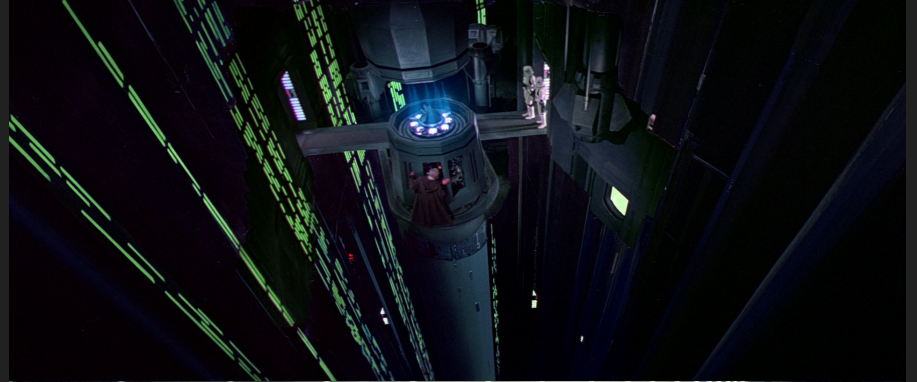
- Obi-Wan knows it is his fate to merge with the Force, distracting Vader and the Stormtroopers while the group boards the *Millenium Falcon*.
- Luke listens to Obi-Wan and turns off his guidance system, using the Force to guide the missiles to destroy the Death Star.



11. The Ultimate Boon

The Hero's success (or failure) in achieving their goal.

- Obi-Wan disables the tractor beam generator.
- The group frees Princess Leia.
- Princess Leia reveals the Death Star schematics hidden in R2-D2.
- The destruction of the Death Star.



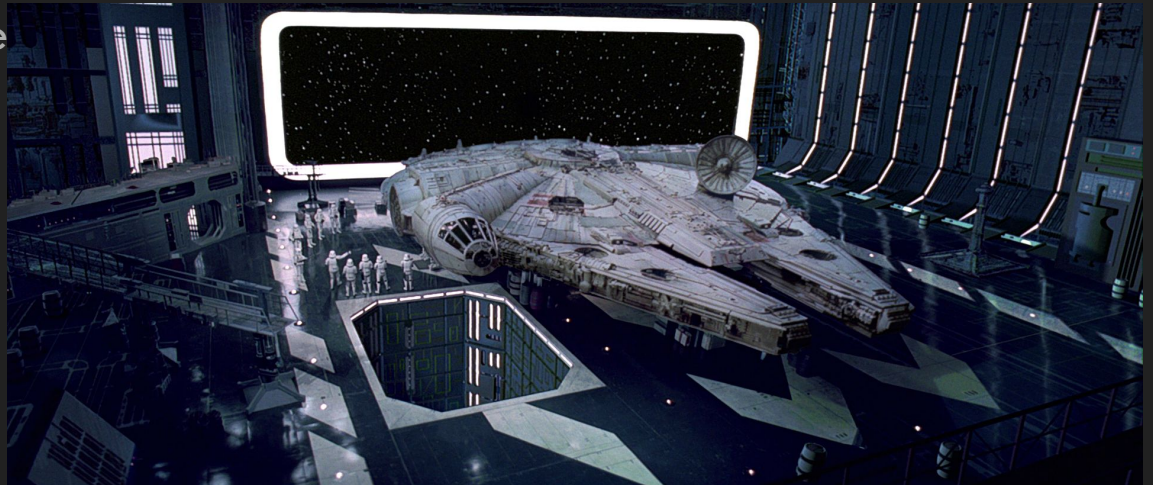
RETURN



12. Refusal of the Return

The Hero refuses or struggles to return to the normal world, to any state resembling the start of the story.

- Luke refuses to leave the Death Star after his mentor, Obi-Wan, appeared to be cut down by Darth Vader. He complies after hearing Obi-Wan tell him to escape from the other side of the Force



13. The Magic Flight

Escaping from the other world isn't always easy, especially if they are trying to steal a valued item. Likely a chase.

- Luke and the other Rebels launch their assault on the Death Star, but are quickly overwhelmed by the Empire.



14. Rescue from Without

The normal world comes to get the Hero, or the other world pushes them out. This might be represented by allies helping the Hero to escape to the normal world, or by negative forces from the normal world coming to take the Hero back.

- Han Solo and Chewbacca return to help save Luke from the pursuing Darth Vader.



15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold

The Hero might struggle to apply what they learned or gained in the other world after they've returned to the normal world. They might fail to remember events, or people of the normal world might refuse to believe the Hero's account of what happened.

- Luke struggles to believe in his capacity to use the Force, needing motivation from Obi-Wan.

16. Master of the Two Worlds

The Hero is freed from the fears and pressures they felt at the beginning of the journey. Their accumulated wisdom and experience allows them to 'transcend' their former selves.

- Obi-Wan has transcended life and death. His body has become one with the Force, and he continues his tutelage of his padawan after physical death.
- Luke has tapped into the other-worldly Force. He knows it to be true.

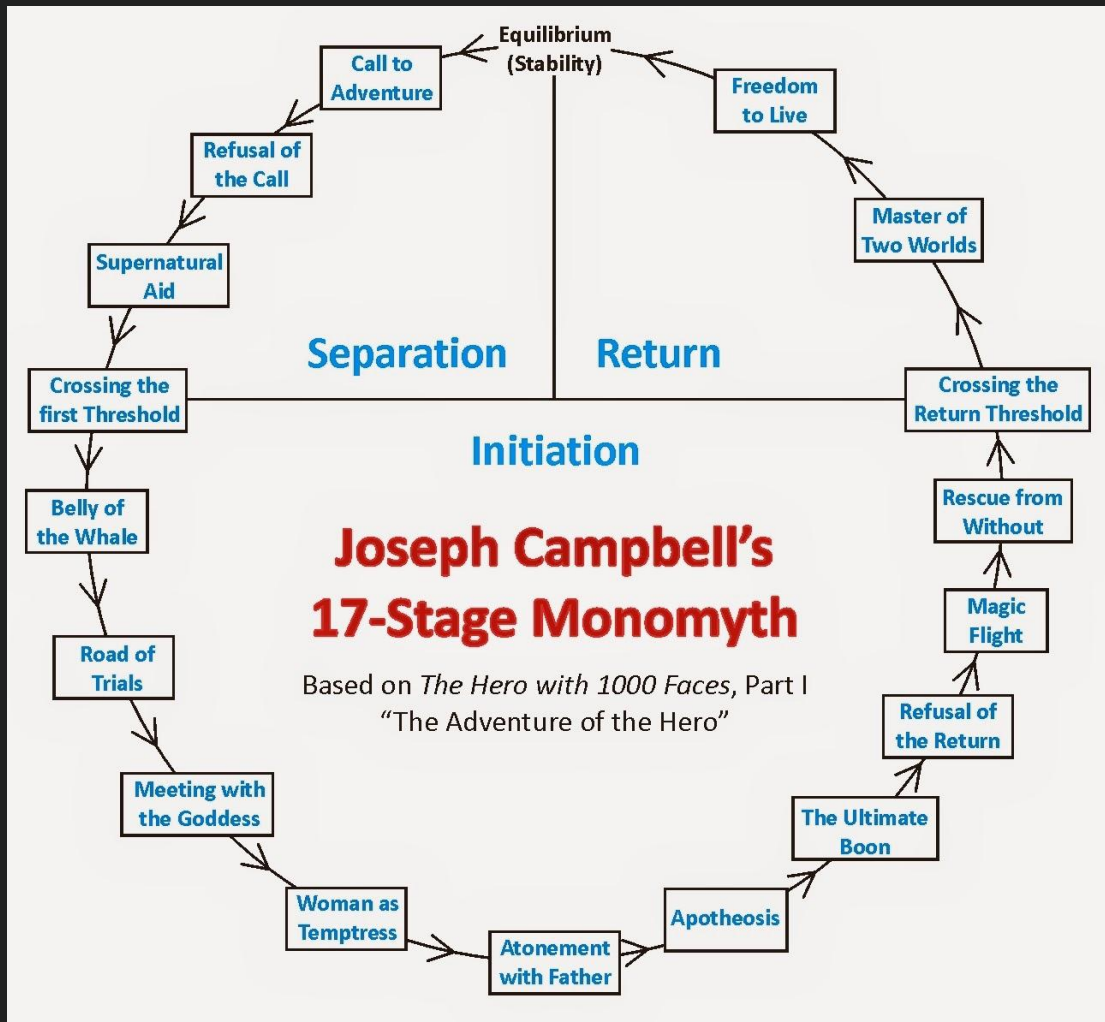


17. Freedom to Live

The Hero is no longer afraid of what may come, nor do they dwell in the past. They are content with what has transpired. They live in the present.

- Luke believes in himself after the Death Star run. He has more confidence, and no longer thinks of himself as just a farm boy.





ADAPTATIONS

- Christopher Vogler's Hero's Journey
- Dan Harmon's Embryo Story Circle
- Brad's As-Yet-Unnamed Story Circle



CHRISTOPHER VOGLER'S HERO'S JOURNEY

1. THE ORDINARY WORLD - The hero is introduced in his ordinary world. Most stories take place in a special world, a world that is new and alien to its hero. If you're going to tell a story about a fish out of his customary element, you first have to create a contrast by showing him in his mundane, ordinary world.
2. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE - The hero is presented with a problem, challenge, or adventure.
3. REFUSAL OF THE QUEST - The hero is reluctant at first. Often at this point, the hero balks at the threshold of adventure.
4. MEETING THE MENTOR - The hero is encouraged by the wise old man or woman. By this time, many stories will have introduced a Merlin-like character who is the hero's mentor. The mentor can only go so far with the hero. Eventually the hero must face the unknown by himself. Sometimes the wise old man is required to give the hero a swift kick in the pants to get the adventure going.

CHRISTOPHER VOGLER'S HERO'S JOURNEY (CONT'D)

5. CROSSING THE THRESHOLD - The hero passes the first threshold and fully enters the special world of his story for the first time. This is the moment at which the story takes off and the adventure gets going.

6. TESTS, ALLIES, AND ENEMIES - The hero encounters tests and helpers. The hero is forced to make allies and enemies in the special world, and to pass certain tests and challenges that are part of his training.

7. THE INNERMOST CAVE/THE APPROACH - The hero reaches the innermost cave. The hero comes at last to a dangerous place, often deep underground, where the object of his quest is hidden (Holy Grail)

CHRISTOPHER VOGLER'S HERO'S JOURNEY (CONT'D)

8. THE SUPREME ORDEAL - The hero endures the supreme ordeal. This is the moment at which the hero touches bottom. He faces the possibility of death, brought to brink in a fight with a mythical beast. (E.T.) This is a critical moment in any story, an ordeal in which the hero appears to die and is born again. It's a major source of the magic of the hero myth. What happens is that the audience has been led to identify with the hero. We are encouraged to experience the brink-of-death feeling with the hero. We are temporarily depressed, then we are revived by the hero's return from death. You're never more alive than when you think you're going to die.

9. THE HERO SEIZES THE SWORD - Having survived death, beaten the dragon, slain the Minotaur, the hero now takes possession of the treasure he's come seeking. Sometimes the "sword" is knowledge and experience that leads to greater understanding and a reconciliation with hostile forces. The hero may also be reconciled with a woman. Women in these stories (or men if the hero is female) tend to be "shape-shifters." They appear to change in form or age, reflecting the confusing and constantly changing aspects of the opposite sex as seen from the hero's point of view.

CHRISTOPHER VOGLER'S HERO'S JOURNEY (CONT'D)

10. THE ROAD BACK - The hero's not out of the woods yet. Some of the best chase scenes come at this point, as the hero is pursued by the vengeful forces from whom he has stolen the elixir or the treasure (Indiana Jones)

11. THE RESURRECTION - The hero emerges from the special world, transformed by his experience.

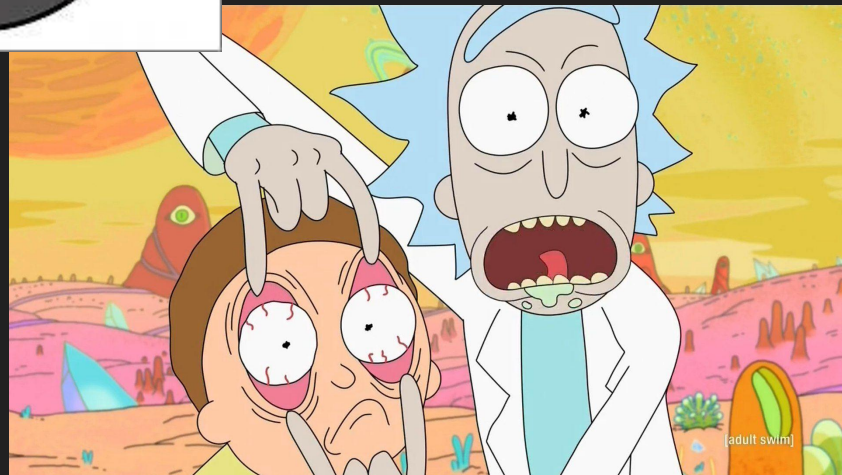
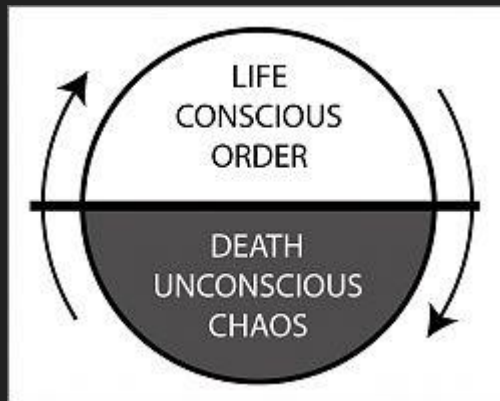
12. RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR - The hero comes back to his ordinary world, but his adventure would be meaningless unless he brought back the elixir, or treasure, or some lesson from the special world. Sometimes it's just knowledge or experience, but unless he comes back with something, he's doomed to repeat the adventure until he does.

DAN HARMON'S STORY CIRCLE - THE EMBRYO

- | | | |
|--|----------------------|----------|
| 1. A character is in a zone of comfort | - When you | - You |
| 2. But they want something | - have a need | - Need |
| 3. They enter an unfamiliar situation | - you go somewhere | - Go |
| 4. Adapt to it | - search for it | - Search |
| 5. Get what they wanted | - find it | - Find |
| 6. Pay a heavy price for it | - take it | - Take |
| 7. Then return to their familiar situation | - then return | - Return |
| 8. Having changed | - and change things. | - Change |

DAN HARMON'S STORY CIRCLE FOR TV

1. I
2. notice a small problem,
3. and make a major decision.
4. This changes things
5. to some satisfaction, but
6. there are consequences
7. that must be undone
8. and I must admit the futility of change.



BRAD'S AS-YET-UNNAMED STORY CIRCLE

1. The Norm. How things have been up to now. We're introduced to the protagonist and their 'normal' life. Some Allies are introduced.
2. The Change. Something happens that sets change in motion. The goal is identifiable. After hesitation, the protagonist either acts to reinforce or negate this change. The Mentor is introduced.
3. Lessons. The protagonist takes on the journey into the 'other' world. They experience obstacles, challenges, complications, etc, while learning the rules and ways of the new world. New Allies and other archetypes are introduced. The protagonist becomes stronger or wiser through experiencing these challenges, but the lessons become increasingly taxing on their body/mind/soul. Mentors and Allies assist.
4. Test. The protagonist applies what they think they have learned. They either experience success and move forward, or a setback and need to find a new way. This is the realm of Threshold Guardians. If Lessons is the dungeon, then Test is the boss. Repeat steps 3 and 4 as needed.
5. The Crisis. The protagonist wants to give up... but doesn't. Mentors and Allies motivate. There is usually an epiphany or revelation about how to achieve the ultimate goal.
6. The Binge. The protagonist gathers all their resources for the final push to achieve their goal. This might be studying or training.
7. The Final. The protagonist makes their final attempt. There might be a setback. The protagonist either succeeds or fails.
8. The New Normal. The protagonist returns to their life, changed and/or with whatever object they were after.