

Treasure ho! Mapping Your Way to Story

"Write Your Novel Now"
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A Belated Introduction

- Uh, hi, everyone
- Call me Ryan
- Books and Background

Recap

Concepts

- How are we looking?
- Questions, comments, concerns?
- Let's share!

Identifying Landmarks: Structuring Our Characters' Journey

The Importance of Structure

- Culturally instilled sense of direction
 - Thousands of years of storytelling
- Readers and viewers have innate expectations about it
 - Memorable checkpoints
 - Set up and payoff
 - Increase in tension and heightening of stakes as story advances

Philosophies on Structure

- "UGH, I HATE COOKIE CUTTER PLOTS"
 - The shape of the cookie is important, yes
 - But it doesn't affect the taste of the cookie itself
- Purists
 - Stick with your ol' reliables
 - Do not deviate
- Freewheelers
 - "There is no structure, only chaos."

- *Les raisonnables*
 - “There’s a reason these structures evolved and they’ve clearly proven effective, so let’s see how I can use that to my advantage while also keeping readers on their toes by deftly subverting expectations after careful consideration.”

Different Structure Models

- Act structure
 - Three-act
 - Four-act
 - Five-act
 - Shakespeare
- Narrative arc
 - Seven-point structure
- Many others
 - Kishōtenketsu (China, Japan, Korea)
 - Hakawati (the Middle East)

The Hero’s Journey

- Joseph Campbell’s (no relation) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*
 - Exercise in comparative mythology
 - What commonalities do we see across story structures?
- Distills narrative structure into 17 unique steps that present a hero who must leave their ordinary world to take on an extraordinary challenge before returning home triumphant (normally)
- Christopher Vogler later condensed those 17 steps into 12
- Very effective
 - Used for all POV characters in *Imminent Dawn*
 - Also used in *both* past and present timelines in *Accounting for It All*
 - Quiet subversion of the notion of heroism
- Thousands, if not millions, of pages of analysis
 - We’ll only be covering a thin slice of the structure’s depth

1) The Ordinary World

- Character is in their safe place, their regular world
- Provides a sense of status quo, a backdrop for comparison
- Danger and Clichés
 - starting with character waking up
 - generally lingering too long
 - failure to stitch in a “disturbance in the Force”

**Star Wars* and *The Wizard of Oz* examples adapted from shmoop.com*

Star Wars: Luke is working on the moisture farm on Tatooine.

The Wizard of Oz: Dorothy in black-and-white Kansas.

Accounting for It All: Robin arrives at her place of work for her “Thursday morning routine.”

Exercise: What’s your [character]’s ordinary world? What will you do to present a backdrop for comparison once the story begins in earnest? What “disturbances in the Force” might you include?

2) The Call to Adventure

- The disturbance!
- A threat is posed to our character’s safety, that of their family or friends, or their value system
 - Can be mortal (Bruce Wayne’s parents being murdered in the *Batman* franchise)
 - Can be more tame (bad news, the breaking of a bond or physical item, as in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini)
 - Can be literal (meta narratives like *Rick and Morty* S03E04, “Vindicator 3: the Return of Worldender”)
- Often coincides with “inciting incident” as it’s referred to in other models
- In other analyses, might coincide with “first plot point”

Star Wars: Luke discovers a message from Princess Leia inside R2-D2. Leia declares, “Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You’re my only hope,” and Luke’s life is forever changed whether he realizes it or not.

The Wizard of Oz: Almira Gulch threatens Dorothy and Toto with lawsuits and worse as a result of perceived slights against her and her cats. Dorothy feels called to abandon her home.

Accounting for It All: The owner of Robin’s place of employment asks her to become head accountant.

Checkpoint: What differences do we detect in the shapes these calls to adventure can take? Are they always literal calls to a literal adventure, or is their room for nuance?

Exercise: What's the call to adventure in your tale going to be? Is the threat it poses mortal or is it more subtle? Can you visualize how it might be presented on the page?

3) A Refusal of the Call

- Fear seeps in, hero shuns their journey
- "The ordinary world is safe! Why can't I just stay here?"
- Hero might suffer in some way for refusing the call
 - Inability to escape grief posed by threat so long as they stay in ordinary world

Star Wars: Luke refuses to join the rebellion, even after meeting Obi-Wan Kenobi. He skitters back to his moisture farm and finds his aunt and uncle have been murdered.

The Wizard of Oz: Dorothy runs from Almira Gulch and from her life on the farm as a whole. When she begins to realize this may be a mistake, she turns back—only to find a tornado bearing down on her and the farm.

Accounting for It All: Robin refuses her owner's offer to become head accountant until the owner shows her what her new salary would be. This tempts Robin to succumb to her fatal flaw.

Exercise: When does your [character] refuse their call to adventure? How will that refusal manifest itself? Will they suffer some inconvenience or loss for this? What will that look like?

4) Meeting the Mentor

- In our [character]'s moment of need, a mentor is found
- Mentor provides insight, physical implements, training, or instills confidence
- [Character] is then stronger, more courageous, or otherwise prepared enough for adventure

Star Wars: Luke *returns* to Obi-Wan and seeks his help.

The Wizard of Oz: After arriving in Oz and after her family's home has killed one of the wicked witches, Dorothy meets Glinda the Good Witch of the North, who tells her how she might get home.

Accounting for It All: After accepting the owner's offer and learning an IRS audit is incoming, Robin seeks out a community college

accounting instructor to help get her up to speed on this accounting business.

Checkpoint: Of the three examples above, which meets the criteria for this stage of the hero's journey precisely? Which doesn't or don't? What does this tell us about how these structures can be implemented?

Exercise: Who is your [character]'s mentor? When will the two meet? What will the mentor teach or endow your [character] with so that they're ready to take on their journey?

5) Crossing the Threshold

- [Character]'s journey begins in earnest
- Threshold need not be physical, but in many cases is
- Important note: once [character] crosses this threshold, *they cannot turn back*
 - If our [character] can walk away at any time, so can our readers
 - This ties into the nature of what our character *must* achieve by time novel ends (their [act] from the story's concept)

Star Wars: Luke and Obi-Wan venture to the Mos Eisley spaceport and subsequently, the cantina. This is a whole new world to Luke, and he's entirely out of his element.

The Wizard of Oz: Dorothy steps foot on the yellow brick road and begins her journey outright. One could also argue she crossed the threshold the moment she landed in Oz, but at that point she hasn't met her mentor. What does this tell us about the order of steps and perceptions thereof?

Accounting for It All: ☺

Checkpoint: What do we notice about the examples above, vis-à-vis the ability to turn back?

Exercise: What threshold will your [character] cross? Will it be physical or emotional? What will this mean for their ability to return to their ordinary world?

6) Tests, Allies, and Enemies

- The longest stretch of the story

- [Character] must overcome obstacles put in their way by their antagonist or, in some cases, themselves
 - Obstacles will test our [character] mentally, physically, and/or emotionally
- The [character] forges alliances and encounters “mini-bosses”
- Enemies become friends, friends become enemies

Star Wars: Luke brings Han Solo and Chewbacca into the fold, stormtroopers attempt to stop them when they leave Tatooine, Luke escapes with R2-D2 and C3PO in tow and heads for Alderaan.

The Wizard of Oz: Dorothy meets the scarecrow, the tin man, and the lion. The Wicked Witch of the West dogs them throughout their journey, and a number of other obstacles intercede (the apple trees, the poppy field, etc.).

Exercise: Who else will your [character] meet along the way? Will they be friend, foe, or at different times, both? What are some of the obstacles your [character] and their ragtag team of allies will encounter as they inch closer to achieving the [character]’s goal?

7) The Approach (to the Inmost Cave)

- The cave can be physical (though it’s often not), but we want it to be emotional
- Character is forced to confront deepest fear or doubts that plagued them in step three, the refusal of the call
- A sense of inevitability sets in; we’re so close to a big “battle”
 - Sometimes this is a quiet moment of respite
 - Other times, it’s absolute chaos, terror, and fear

Star Wars: Luke and the team never make it to Alderaan, as they find it’s been destroyed by their most fearsome foe yet—the Death Star. This insurmountable obstacle prompts Luke to say, “I have a bad feeling about this,” and we wonder how Luke and company will ever possibly overcome.

The Wizard of Oz: The approach to the witch’s castle, complete with flying monkeys and other horrifying encounters. Dorothy and her team are so close to the witch, but it appears all is lost!

Exercise: As your [character] nears their final battle, what moment will make them say, “Oh no” or “all is lost” or, like with *Star Wars*, “I’ve got a bad feeling about this?” How will this mirror the fears they had during the refusal of the call?

8) The Ordeal

- Facing the final foe, be it internal or external (or ideally both!)
- [Character] must rely on all they've learned to overcome
 - Otherwise why did they need to go on their journey?
- Stakes are at their highest
 - Failure will lead to physical death or death of soul
 - This is where our [consequences] really come into play.
 - We must understand (and feel!) their gravity

Star Wars: Luke must rescue Princess Leia. He does(!), but Obi-Wan is killed by Darth Vader. Now *that's* an ordeal.

The Wizard of Oz: The witch overturns the hourglass to kill Dorothy, and she and her companions are cornered by the witch's guards. Dorothy hurls a bucket of water at the witch, who melts.

Exercise: What or who will your [character] face off against at this critical juncture in their journey? Will their possible death be physical or emotional? How will they have to rely on what they've learned in order to overcome? What will they gain and lose during their ordeal?

9) The Reward

- [Character] is transformed as a person (or sometimes physically) in light of their success
- Reward can be physical
 - Powerful object (or relinquishment thereof)
 - Treasure
- Can also be intangible
 - Reconciliation
 - Knowledge or insight gained
 - Freedom
- The reward will permit [character] to return to ordinary world

Star Wars: Luke joins the rebellion as a pilot, which is something he wished for since his life on Tatooine.

The Wizard of Oz: Dorothy gets the witch's broomstick and a renewed sense of confidence; they can now head to the Wizard without fear of being dogged by the Wicked Witch.

Exercise: What will your [character] earn for having overcome their ordeal? Will it be physical, emotional, both? How will it help them return to their ordinary world?

10) The Road Home

- [Character] begins their journey back to the ordinary world
- Turns the refusal of the call on its head
 - Rather than carry a sense of dread, [character] now feels vindicated, boastful, or generally proud
 - They're confident they can now return home a hero
- [Character] is often presented with a choice to act selfishly or aspire to a higher cause that needs them

Star Wars: Rather than return to Tatooine (where there's nothing waiting for him), Luke's ordinary world is one where the Empire is vanquished. Han offers Luke the chance to leave, but Luke decides to stay and help destroy the Death Star, putting him on his road home.

The Wizard of Oz: To get home, Dorothy will need the help of the Wizard of Oz, who ultimately grants her companions all they desire, but mentions Dorothy will need a little more if she's to return home (the hot air balloon and the ruby red slippers).

Exercise: How will your [character] feel on their road home? Will they have the option to choose between behaving selfishly and returning home unimpeded or aspiring to something greater? What might that something greater be? What choice will your [character] make?

11) The Resurrection

- But wait! More danger awaits.
- With [character] having aspired to greater cause, stakes are now even higher
 - Now if our [character] fails, *others* will suffer
- The final battle, the climax
- [Character] emerges triumphant
 - "World" is saved

Star Wars: The attack on the Death Star. If Luke fails, our hero will perish and the Empire will reign supreme. Luke ultimately destroys the Death Star.

The Wizard of Oz: ... we get a little muddled here, in my view. It's possible this is the bit where the hot air balloon flies off and Dorothy is feeling trapped (ultimately leading to her use of the ruby red slippers). If that feels like a stretch, I don't disagree, but what might this tell us about the rigidity of these steps?

Exercise: What's at stake now that your [character] has aspired to a higher cause? Who or what will they have to defeat to ensure the safety of their loved ones (or whatever you've chosen as a stand-in for loved ones)?

12) Return Home (with the “Elixir”)

- Finally, our [character] having vanquished all of their enemies, they return home having changed
- The [character]’s return to the ordinary world might mean bringing home a cure (the elixir) or perhaps they themselves and the insight they’ve earned *is* the elixir
- The elixir might even be the chance to just get some peace and quiet

Star Wars: Luke returns to join the rest of the Rebels, whose cause now represents his ordinary world. He does receive a medal from Princess Leia, a kind of elixir in this case. Hurray!

The Wizard of Oz: Dorothy is now back in black-and-white Kansas, and she has to confront the reality everything she just underwent was a dream. Despite this, she can now see her life in Kansas in a new light (her elixir).

Exercise: What will your character’s elixir be? How will this final step and their return to their ordinary world demonstrate that they’ve changed as a result of their journey?

The Hero’s Journey and *Adventure Time*

- S01,E03: “The Enchiridion”
- (Nearly) all 12 steps in a 12-minute cartoon
- Currently on Hulu
 - Resources from Writescast Network and author blog to analyze this episode
 - Will send links by email

Another Model

The Story Circle

- Takes main character from comfort zone and later returns them to it... having changed
- Dan Harmon’s “Super Basic” Blog Post
 - Creator of *Community*, *Rick and Morty*

- Underlies *all* plots
 - Or at least as close to “all” as one can get
 - How?
- About character change
 - This is at the heart of all narratives
- Using the Hero’s Journey will get you the story circle
 - But using the story circle won’t necessarily get you the Hero’s Journey
- Fit is important
 - Which better suits how you want to shape your narrative?
- Not exclusive
 - Can use both lenses for analysis and creation of same story
- Useful for writing synopses(!)
- Why is it a circle?
 - Let’s draw out the steps one by one!
- Eight steps instead of twelve
 - 1) You
 - 2) Need
 - 3) Go
 - 4) Search
 - 5) Find
 - 6) Take
 - 7) Return
 - 8) Change

1) Establishment of Protagonist (“You”)

- Who (or what) will we be following?
 - The “or what” as [character]
 - What is their ordinary world like?
 - Why follow this person?
 - “Save the Cat” moment
 - Book by Blake Snyder

2) Something Isn’t Right (“Need”)

- Our character’s status quo (or that of their world) is disturbed
- Also known as inciting incident
 - Can be highly intrusive
 - Think robberies, explosions, gunshots, sinking boats, a break up, the serving of divorce papers, the running away of a pet
 - Tess Sharpe’s *Far From You*
 - Can be subtle, too
 - More often in literary fiction, though not always
 - *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt (explosion)

- Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*
- **Main takeaway:** Something is intervening in our character's world and causing them distress that will necessitate action on their part

3) Crossing the Threshold ("Go")

- Our adventure begins
- World of order versus world of chaos
 - Also known as ordinary world versus special world
 - Again, can be explicit
 - Fantasy and Science Fiction
 - Harry departs for Hogwarts
 - Ned Stark leaves Winterfell for King's Landing
 - Frodo leaves the Shire
 - Luke Skywalker leaves Tatooine
 - Can also be implicit or more subtle
 - [You] discover your water heater is broken [need]. You call [go] someone to take a look at it.
 - *Flowers for Algernon*
 - Charlie Gordon [you] desires average or above average intelligence [need]. Charlie undergoes surgery to achieve this [go].
 - Initiation of procedure versus physical relocation (though there's admittedly a relocation to undergo the procedure)
 - Importance of being active
 - Again, our character must [go] (or take an action that has them taking steps to address this new need)

4) The Road of Trials ("Search")

- Our character attempts to address their [need]
 - What steps will they take to do this?
 - How will one success or failure lead them to their next step?
 - Who will they encounter along the way?
 - Who will prove to be a friend? A foe?
 - What will our character begin to learn about themselves or this world of chaos ("special world")?
 - In other words, how do successes or failures mentioned above begin to shape them as a person?
- Again, the word is "search," not wait
 - Importance of being active continues
- Examples

- *Flowers for Algernon*
 - This is where, after undergoing surgery, Charlie tests his newfound intelligence. He's [searching] for meaning in a world he now sees very differently (special world, anyone?)
- *Accounting for It All*
 - Robin, our adult-film-star-turned-accountant, [searches] for someone to help her confront this IRS audit while [searching] for ways to keep her secret hidden

5) Meeting the Goddess ("Find")

- Character's [need] is addressed
 - So wait... isn't our story over?
- No, because they discover there was something greater underlying their [need]
- Example
 - *Flowers for Algernon*
 - Charlie [finds] himself at well beyond average intelligence.

6) Paying the Price ("Take")

- Remember the "What will our character begin to learn about themselves or this world of chaos?" question from the [search] step?
- Character, despite having [found] what they wanted, realize now it isn't what it was cracked up to be
 - But disillusionment leads to determination
 - They've come this far and won't be stopped now
 - They will [take]
- Example
 - *Flowers for Algernon*
 - Charlie has earned much acclaim for his intelligence, but to what end? Is he truly happier now after discovering the cruel truth behind why people treated him so "nicely?"
 - Decides to [take] ownership of intelligence and further immerse himself in research, and this is when he discovers flaw in study design; his intelligence will dissipate (paying the price).

7) Bringing it Home ("Return")

- Character returns "home" with their [need] fulfilled
 - Home as a physical place
 - The Shire, Privet Drive

- Or a state of being
 - Circling back to stasis or stability
 - Can be both a physical return and a “state of being” return
 - But it doesn’t have to be
- They have incurred some loss along the way (as well as some gain, obviously)
- Example
 - *Flowers for Algernon*
 - Charlie regresses to original intelligence level (“home”). He gained the experience and perspective of those with above-average intelligence, but lost friends and a sense of blissful naïveté along the way (as well as, ultimately, his enhanced intelligence).

8) Master of Both Worlds (“Change”)

- New perspective gained
 - Love found (or rediscovered)
 - Self-acceptance (or discovery)
 - Sense of belonging, etc.
- Physical transformation undergone
- Either way, the new perspective or physical transformation (or both) makes them the “master of both worlds” (only they can see and understand both their ordinary world and the special world in this unique way).
- Example
 - *Flowers for Algernon*
 - Charlie gained the experience and perspective of those with above-average intelligence, but lost friends and a sense of blissful naïveté along the way (as well as, ultimately, his enhanced intelligence). This forever changes him and his understanding of himself and his world.

“I don’t know about this...”

- Easy to feel like we’re “forcing it”
- An outline’s not a contract
 - But it does give us perspective into our character’s journey
 - How is our understanding of our novels changed by laying them out like this?
- Think of it this way...

[You] [needed] to understand plot and structure. You [went] to UW Continuing Studies and enrolled in this course. You [searched] for the model that would best help you along the way, and [found] what you

were looking for. But you pay a price when **[taking]** these models with you in that you might feel “forced” to use one of these structures (and because you’ll never see story the same way again—loss of innocence, so to speak). You then **[return]** home to work on the structure that will best support your story as the master of both worlds. You know best what your story needs, but have **[changed]** sufficiently to understand one of the things it needs is structure, and you can now meld your ordinary world (original vision) with the special world (new perspective) in a way that no one else can!

- Throwing it all out the window
 - Well, maybe not all of it
 - Granting oneself wiggle room
- Drafting as a process of self- and story-discovery

What comes next?

Exercises for next week

- Compare and contrast your novel’s structure when viewed through the lens of the Hero’s Journey or the Story Circle
 - Which feels like a better fit for you?
 - Can you see yourself keeping elements of both in mind? Which?
- Look for these structures in media you watch or read
 - Remember *Adventure Time* example

Until next week...

WRITE ON AND WRITE WELL.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'rrc' followed by a stylized flourish.