



INTRODUCTION: PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

"This is the tale I pray the divine Muse to unfold to us. Begin it, goddess, at whatever point you will."

—The Odyssey of Homer

I invite you to join me on a Writer's Journey, a mission of discovery to explore and map the elusive borderlands between myth and modern storytelling. We will be guided by a simple idea: **All stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies.** They are known collectively as **The Hero's Journey.** Understanding these elements and their use in modern writing is the object of our quest. Used wisely, these ancient tools of the storyteller's craft still have tremendous power to heal our people and make the world a better place.

My own Writer's Journey begins with the peculiar power storytelling has always had over me. I got hooked on the fairy tales and Little Golden Books read out loud by my mother and grandmother. I devoured the cartoons and movies pouring out of TV in the 1950s, the thrilling adventures on the drive-in screens, the lurid comic books and mind-stretching science fiction of the day. When I was laid up with a sprained ankle, my father went to the local library and brought back wonder stories of Norse and Celtic mythology that made me forget the pain.

A trail of stories eventually led me to reading for a living as a story analyst for Hollywood studios. Though I evaluated thousands of novels and screenplays, I never got tired of exploring the labyrinth of story with its stunningly repeated patterns, bewildering variants, and puzzling questions. Where do stories come from? How do they work? What do they tell us about ourselves? What do they mean? Why do we need them? How can we use them to improve the world?

Above all, how do storytellers manage to make the story mean something? Good stories make you feel you've been through a satisfying, complete experience. You've cried or laughed or both. You finish the story feeling you've learned something about life or about yourself. Perhaps you've picked up a new awareness, a new character or attitude to model your life on. How do storytellers manage to pull that off? What are the secrets of this ancient trade? What are its rules and design principles?

Over the years I began to notice some common elements in adventure stories and myths, certain intriguingly familiar characters, props, locations, and situations. I became vaguely aware there was a pattern or a template of some sort guiding the design of stories. I had some pieces of the puzzle but the overall plan eluded me.

Then at the USC film school I was fortunate enough to cross paths with the work of the mythologist Joseph Campbell. The encounter with Campbell was, for me and many other people, a life-changing experience. A few days of exploring the labyrinth of his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* produced an electrifying reorganization of my life and thinking. Here, fully explored, was the pattern I had been sensing. Campbell had broken the secret code of story. His work was like a flare suddenly illuminating a deeply shadowed landscape.

I worked with Campbell's idea of the Hero's Journey to understand the phenomenal repeat business of movies such as *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*. People were going back to see these films as if seeking some kind of religious experience. It seemed to me these films drew people in this special way because they reflected the universally satisfying patterns Campbell found in myths. They had something people needed.

The Hero with a Thousand Faces was a lifesaver when I began to work as a story analyst for major movie studios. In my first jobs I was deeply grateful for Campbell's work, which became a reliable set of tools for diagnosing story problems and prescribing solutions. Without the guidance of Campbell and mythology, I would have been lost.

It seemed to me the Hero's Journey was exciting, useful story technology which could help filmmakers and executives eliminate some of the guesswork and expense of developing stories for film. Over the years, I ran into quite a few people who had been affected by encounters with Joe Campbell. We were like a secret society of true believers, commonly putting our faith in "the power of myth."

Shortly after going to work as a story analyst for the Walt Disney Company, I wrote a seven-page memo called "A Practical Guide to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*" in which I described the idea of the Hero's Journey, with examples from classic and current movies. I gave the memo to friends, colleagues, and several Disney executives to test and refine the ideas through their feedback. Gradually I expanded the "Practical Guide" into a longer essay and began teaching the material through a story analysis class at the UCLA Extension Writers' Program.

At writers' conferences around the country I tested the ideas in seminars with screenwriters, romance novelists, children's writers, and all kinds of storytellers. I found many others were exploring the intertwined pathways of myth, story, and psychology.

The Hero's Journey, I discovered, is more than just a description of the hidden patterns of mythology. It is a useful guide to life, especially the writer's life. In the perilous adventure of my own writing, I found the stages of the Hero's Journey showing up just as reliably and usefully as they did in books, myths, and movies. In my personal life, I was thankful to have this map to guide my quest and help me anticipate what was around the next bend.

The usefulness of the Hero's Journey as a guide to life was brought home forcefully when I first prepared to speak publicly about it in a large seminar at UCLA. A couple of weeks before the seminar two articles appeared in the Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner*, in which a film critic attacked filmmaker George Lucas and his movie *Willow*. Somehow the critic had got hold of the "Practical Guide" and claimed it had deeply influenced and corrupted Hollywood

storytellers. The critic blamed the "Practical Guide" for every flop from *Ishtar* to *Howard the Duck*, as well as for the hit *Back to the Future*. According to him, lazy, illiterate studio executives, eager to find a quick-bucks formula, had seized upon the "Practical Guide" as a cure-all and were busily stuffing it down the throats of writers, stifling their creativity with a technology the executives hadn't bothered to understand.

While flattered that someone thought I had such a sweeping influence on the collective mind of Hollywood, I was also devastated. Here, on the threshold of a new phase of working with these ideas, I was shot down before I even started. Or so it seemed.

Friends who were more seasoned veterans in this war of ideas pointed out that in being challenged I was merely encountering an **archetype**, one of the familiar characters who people the landscape of the Hero's Journey, namely a **Threshold Guardian**.

That information instantly gave me my bearings and showed me how to handle the situation. Campbell had described how heroes often encounter these "unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten" them. The Guardians seem to pop up at the various **thresholds** of the journey, the narrow and dangerous passages from one stage of life to the next. Campbell showed the many ways in which heroes can deal with Threshold Guardians. Instead of attacking these seemingly hostile powers head-on, journeyers learn to outwit them or join forces with them, absorbing their energy rather than being destroyed by it.

I realized that this Threshold Guardian's apparent attack was potentially a blessing, not a curse. I had thought of challenging the critic to a duel (laptops at twenty paces) but now reconsidered. With a slight change in attitude I could turn his hostility to my benefit. I contacted the critic and invited him to talk over our differences of opinion at the seminar. He accepted and joined a panel discussion which turned into a lively and entertaining debate, illuminating corners of the story world that I had never glimpsed before. The

seminar was better and my ideas were stronger for being challenged. Instead of fighting my Threshold Guardian, I had absorbed him into my adventure. What had seemed like a lethal blow had turned into something useful and healthy. The mythological approach had proven its worth in life as well as story.

Around this time I realized the "Practical Guide" and Campbell's ideas *did* have an influence on Hollywood. I began to get requests from studio story departments for copies of the "Practical Guide". I heard that executives at other studios were giving the pamphlet to writers, directors, and producers as guides to universal, commercial story patterns. Apparently Hollywood was finding the Hero's Journey useful.

Meanwhile Joseph Campbell's ideas exploded into a wider sphere of awareness with the Bill Moyers interview show on PBS, "The Power of Myth." The show was a hit, cutting across lines of age, politics, and religion to speak directly to people's spirits. The book version, a transcript of the interviews, was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over a year. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell's venerable warhorse of a textbook, suddenly became a hot bestseller after forty years of slow but steady backlist sales.

The PBS show brought Campbell's ideas to millions and illuminated the impact of his work on filmmakers such as George Lucas, John Boorman, Steven Spielberg, and George Miller. Suddenly I found a sharp increase in awareness and acceptance of Campbell's ideas in Hollywood. More executives and writers were versed in these concepts and interested in learning how to apply them to moviemaking and screenwriting.

The Hero's Journey model continued to serve me well. It got me through reading and evaluating over ten thousand screenplays for half a dozen studios. It was my atlas, a book of maps for my own writing journeys. It guided me to a new role in the Disney company, as a story consultant for the Feature Animation division at the time *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* were being conceived. Campbell's ideas were of tremendous value as I researched and

developed stories based on fairy tales, mythology, science fiction, comic books, and historical adventure.

Joseph Campbell died in 1987. I met him briefly a couple of times at seminars. He was still a striking man in his eighties, tall, vigorous, eloquent, funny, full of energy and enthusiasm, and utterly charming. Just before his passing, he told me, "Stick with this stuff. It'll take you a long way."

I recently discovered that for some time the "Practical Guide" has been required reading for Disney development executives. Daily requests for it, as well as countless letters and calls from novelists, screenwriters, producers, writers, and actors, indicate that the Hero's Journey ideas are being used and developed more than ever.

And so I come to the writing of this book, the descendant of the "Practical Guide." The book is designed somewhat on the model of the *I Ching*, with an introductory overview followed by commentaries that expand on the typical stages of the Hero's Journey. Book One, **Mapping the Journey**, is a quick survey of the territory. Chapter 1 is a revision of the "Practical Guide" and a concentrated presentation of the twelve-stage Hero's Journey. You might think of this as the map of a journey we are about to take together through the special world of story. Chapter 2 is an introduction to the archetypes, the *dramatis personae* of myth and story. It describes seven common character types or psychological functions found in all stories.

Book Two, **Stages of the Journey**, is a more detailed examination of the twelve elements of the Hero's Journey. Each chapter is followed by suggestions for your further exploration, **Questioning the Journey**. An Epilogue, **Looking Back on the Journey**, deals with the special adventure of the Writer's Journey and some pitfalls to avoid on the road. It includes Hero's Journey analyses of some influential films including *Titanic*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The Lion King*, *The Full Monty*, and *Star Wars*. In one case, *The Lion King*, I had the opportunity to apply the Hero's Journey ideas as a story consultant during the development process, and saw firsthand how useful these principles can be.

Throughout the book I make reference to movies, both classic and current. You might want to view some of these films to see how the Hero's Journey works in practice. A representative list of films appears in Appendix 1.

You might also select a single movie or story of your choice and keep it in mind as you take the Writer's Journey. Get to know the story of your choice by reading or viewing it several times, taking brief notes on what happens in each scene and how it functions in the drama. Running a movie on a VCR is ideal, because you can stop to write down the content of each scene while you grasp its meaning and relation to the rest of the story.

I suggest you go through this process with a story or movie and use it to test out the ideas in this book. See if your story reflects the stages and archetypes of the Hero's Journey. (A sample worksheet for the Hero's Journey can be found in Appendix 3.) Observe how the stages are adapted to meet the needs of the story or the particular culture for which the story was written. Challenge these ideas, test them in practice, adapt them to your needs, and make them yours. Use these concepts to challenge and inspire your own stories.

The Hero's Journey has served storytellers and their listeners since the very first stories were told, and it shows no signs of wearing out. Let's begin the Writer's Journey together to explore these ideas. I hope you find them useful as magic keys to the world of story and the labyrinth of life.





A PRACTICAL GUIDE

"There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before."

—Willa Cather, in *O Pioneers!*

In the long run, one of the most influential books of the 20th century may turn out to be Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

The ideas expressed in Campbell's book are having a major impact on storytelling. Writers are becoming more aware of the ageless patterns which Campbell identifies, and are enriching their work with them.

Inevitably Hollywood has caught on to the usefulness of Campbell's work. Filmmakers like George Lucas and George Miller acknowledge their debt to Campbell and his influence can be seen in the films of Steven Spielberg, John Boorman, Francis Coppola, and others.

It's little wonder that Hollywood is beginning to embrace the ideas Campbell presents in his books. For the writer, producer, director, or designer his concepts are a welcome tool kit, stocked with sturdy instruments ideal for the craft of storytelling. With these tools you can construct a story to meet almost any situation, a story that will be dramatic, entertaining, and psychologically true. With this equipment you can diagnose the problems of almost any ailing plotline, and make the corrections to bring it to its peak of performance.

These tools have stood the test of time. They are older than the Pyramids, older than Stonehenge, older than the earliest cave paintings.

Joseph Campbell's contribution to the tool kit was to gather the ideas together, recognize them, articulate them, name them, organize them. He exposed for the first time the pattern that lies behind every story ever told.

The Hero with a Thousand Faces is his statement of the most persistent theme in oral tradition and recorded literature: the myth of the hero. In his study of world hero myths Campbell discovered that they are all basically the same story, retold endlessly in infinite variation.

He found that all storytelling, consciously or not, follows the ancient patterns of myth and that all stories, from the crudest jokes to the highest flights of literature, can be understood in terms of the Hero's Journey: the "monomyth" whose principles he lays out in the book.

The pattern of the Hero's Journey is universal, occurring in every culture, in every time. It is as infinitely varied as the human race itself and yet its basic form remains constant. The Hero's Journey is an incredibly tenacious set of elements that springs endlessly from the deepest reaches of the human mind; different in its details for every culture, but fundamentally the same.

Campbell's thinking runs parallel to that of the Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung, who wrote about the **archetypes**: constantly repeating characters or energies which occur in the dreams of all people and the myths of all cultures. Jung suggested that these archetypes reflect different aspects of the human mind — that our personalities divide themselves into these characters to play out the drama of our lives. He noticed a strong correspondence between his patients' dream figures and the common archetypes of mythology. He suggested that both were coming from a deeper source, in the **collective unconscious** of the human race.

The repeating characters of world myth such as the young hero, the wise old man or woman, the shapeshifter, and the shadowy antagonist are the same as the figures who appear repeatedly in our dreams and fantasies. That's why myths and most stories constructed

on the mythological model have the ring of psychological truth.

Such stories are accurate models of the workings of the human mind, true maps of the psyche. They are psychologically valid and emotionally realistic even when they portray fantastic, impossible, or unreal events.

This accounts for the universal power of such stories. Stories built on the model of the Hero's Journey have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they well up from a universal source in the shared unconscious and reflect universal concerns.

They deal with the childlike universal questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go when I die? What is good and what is evil? What must I do about it? What will tomorrow be like? Where did yesterday go? Is there anybody else out there?

The ideas embedded in mythology and identified by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* can be applied to understanding almost any human problem. They are a great key to life as well as a major instrument for dealing more effectively with a mass audience.

If you want to understand the ideas behind the Hero's Journey, there's no substitute for actually reading Campbell's work. It's an experience that has a way of changing people.

It's also a good idea to read a lot of myths, but reading Campbell's work amounts to the same thing since Campbell is a master storyteller who delights in illustrating his points with examples from the rich storehouse of mythology.

Campbell gives an outline of the Hero's Journey in Chapter IV, "The Keys," of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. I've taken the liberty of amending the outline slightly, trying to reflect some of the common themes in movies with illustrations drawn from contemporary films and a few classics. You can compare the two outlines and terminology by examining Table One.

TABLE ONE
Comparison of Outlines and Terminology

<i>The Writer's Journey</i>	<i>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</i>
Act One	Departure, Separation
Ordinary World	World of Common Day
Call to Adventure	Call to Adventure
Refusal of the Call	Refusal of the Call
Meeting with the Mentor	Supernatural Aid
Crossing the First Threshold	Crossing the First Threshold
	Belly of the Whale
Act Two	Descent, Initiation, Penetration
Tests, Allies, Enemies	Road of Trials
Approach to the Inmost Cave	
Ordeal	Meeting with the Goddess
	Woman as Temptress
	Atonement with the Father
	Apotheosis
Reward	The Ultimate Boon
Act Three	Return
The Road Back	Refusal of the Return
	The Magic Flight
	Rescue from Within
	Crossing the Threshold
	Return
Resurrection	Master of the Two Worlds
Return with the Elixir	Freedom to Live

I'm retelling the hero myth in my own way, and you should feel free to do the same. Every storyteller bends the mythic pattern to his or her own purpose or the needs of a particular culture.

That's why the hero has a thousand faces.

A note about the term "hero": As used here, the word, like "doctor" or "poet," may refer to a woman or a man.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

At heart, despite its infinite variety, the hero's story is always a journey. A hero leaves her comfortable, ordinary surroundings to venture into a challenging, unfamiliar world. It may be an outward journey to an actual place: a labyrinth, forest or cave, a strange city or country, a new locale that becomes the arena for her conflict with antagonistic, challenging forces.

But there are as many stories that take the hero on an inward journey, one of the mind, the heart, the spirit. In any good story the hero grows and changes, making a journey from one way of being to the next: from despair to hope, weakness to strength, folly to wisdom, love to hate, and back again. It's these emotional journeys that hook an audience and make a story worth watching.

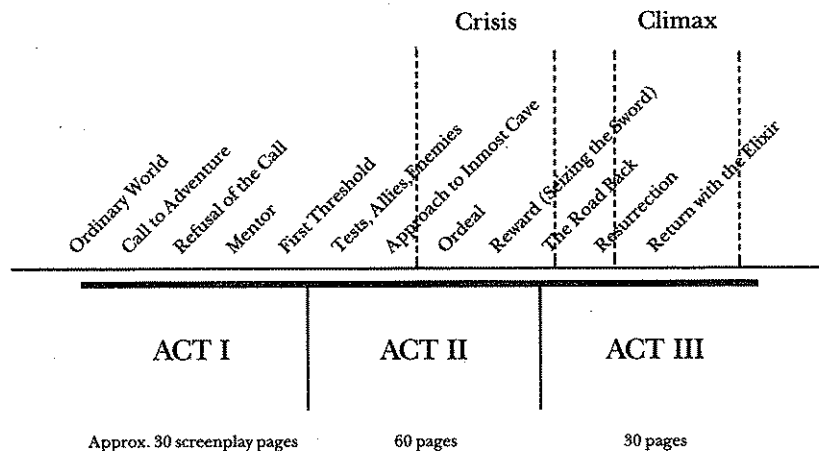
The stages of the Hero's Journey can be traced in all kinds of stories, not just those that feature "heroic" physical action and adventure. The protagonist of every story is the hero of a journey, even if the path leads only into his own mind or into the realm of relationships.

The way stations of the Hero's Journey emerge naturally even when the writer is unaware of them, but some knowledge of this most ancient guide to storytelling is useful in identifying problems and telling better stories. Consider these twelve stages as a map of the Hero's Journey, one of many ways to get from here to there, but one of the most flexible, durable and dependable.

THE STAGES OF THE HERO'S JOURNEY

1. Ordinary World
2. Call to Adventure
3. Refusal of the Call
4. Meeting with the Mentor
5. Crossing the First Threshold
6. Tests, Allies, Enemies
7. Approach to the Inmost Cave
8. Ordeal
9. Reward (Seizing the Sword)
10. The Road Back
11. Resurrection
12. Return with the Elixir

The Hero's Journey Model



1. THE ORDINARY WORLD

Most stories take the hero out of the ordinary, mundane world and into a Special World, new and alien. This is the familiar "fish out of water" idea which has spawned countless films and TV shows ("The Fugitive," "The Beverly Hillbillies," *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Witness*, *48 Hours*, *Trading Places*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, etc.).

If you're going to show a fish out of his customary element, you first have to show him in that **Ordinary World** to create a vivid contrast with the strange new world he is about to enter.

In *Witness* you see both the city policeman and the Amish mother and son in their normal worlds before they are thrust into totally alien environments: the Amish being overwhelmed by the city, and the city cop encountering the 19th-century world of the Amish. You first see Luke Skywalker, hero of *Star Wars*, being bored to death as a farmboy before he sets out to tackle the universe.

Likewise in *The Wizard of Oz*, considerable time is spent to establish Dorothy's drab normal life in Kansas before she is blown to the wonderworld of Oz. Here the contrast is heightened by shooting the Kansas scenes in stern black and white while the Oz scenes are shot in vibrant Technicolor.

An Officer and a Gentleman sketches a vivid contrast between the Ordinary World of the hero — that of a tough Navy brat with a drunken, whore-chasing father — and the Special World of the spit-and-polish Navy flight school which the hero enters.

2. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

The hero is presented with a problem, challenge, or adventure to undertake. Once presented with a **Call to Adventure**, she can no longer remain indefinitely in the comfort of the Ordinary World.

Perhaps the land is dying, as in the King Arthur stories of the search for the Grail, the only treasure that can heal the wounded land. In *Star Wars*, the Call to Adventure is Princess Leia's desperate holographic message to wise old Obi Wan Kenobi, who asks Luke to join in the quest. Leia has been snatched by evil Darth Vader, like the Greek springtime goddess Persephone, who was kidnapped to the underworld by Pluto, lord of the dead. Her rescue is vital to restoring the normal balance of the universe.

In many detective stories, the Call to Adventure is the private eye being asked to take on a new case and solve a crime which has upset the order of things. A good detective should right wrongs as well as solve crimes.

In revenge plots, the Call to Adventure is often a wrong which must be set right, an offense against the natural order of things. In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Edmond Dantes is unjustly imprisoned and is driven to escape by his desire for revenge. The plot of *Beverly Hills Cop* is set in motion by the murder of the hero's best friend. In *First Blood* Rambo is motivated by his unfair treatment at the hands of an intolerant sheriff.

In romantic comedies, the Call to Adventure might be the first encounter with the special but annoying someone the hero or heroine will be pursuing and sparring with.

The Call to Adventure establishes the stakes of the game, and makes clear the hero's goal: to win the treasure or the lover, to get revenge or right a wrong, to achieve a dream, confront a challenge, or change a life.

What's at stake can often be expressed as a question posed by the call. Will E.T. or Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* get home again? Will Luke rescue Princess Leia and defeat Darth Vader? In *An Officer and a Gentleman*, will the hero be driven out of Navy flight school by his own selfishness and the needling of a fierce Marine drill instructor, or will he earn the right to be called an officer and a gentleman? Boy meets girl, but does boy get girl?

3. REFUSAL OF THE CALL (THE RELUCTANT HERO)

This one is about fear. Often at this point the hero balks at the threshold of adventure, **Refusing the Call** or expressing reluctance. After all, she is facing the greatest of all fears, terror of the unknown. The hero has not yet fully committed to the journey and may still be thinking of turning back. Some other influence — a change in circumstances, a further offense against the natural order of things, or the encouragement of a Mentor — is required to get her past this turning point of fear.

In romantic comedies, the hero may express reluctance to get involved (maybe because of the pain of a previous relationship). In a detective story, the private eye may at first turn down the case, only to take it on later against his better judgment.

At this point in *Star Wars*, Luke refuses Obi Wan's Call to Adventure and returns to his aunt and uncle's farmhouse, only to find they have been barbecued by the Emperor's stormtroopers. Suddenly Luke is no longer reluctant and is eager to undertake the quest. The evil of the Empire has become personal to him. He is motivated.

4. MENTOR (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 relationship between hero and Mentor is one of the most common themes in mythology, and one of the richest in its symbolic value. It stands for the bond between parent and child, teacher and student, doctor and patient, god and man.

The Mentor may appear as a wise old wizard (*Star Wars*), a tough drill sergeant (*An Officer and a Gentleman*), or a grizzled old boxing coach (*Rocky*). In the mythology of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show", it was Lou Grant. In *Jaws* it's the crusty Robert Shaw character who knows all about sharks.

The function of Mentors is to prepare the hero to face the unknown. They may give advice, guidance or magical equipment. Obi Wan in *Star Wars* gives Luke his father's light-saber, which he will need in his battles with the dark side of the Force. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Glinda the Good Witch gives Dorothy guidance and the ruby slippers that will eventually get her home again.

However, the Mentor can only go so far with the hero. Eventually the hero must face the unknown alone. Sometimes the Mentor is required to give the hero a swift kick in the pants to get the adventure going.

5. CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD

Now the hero finally commits to the adventure and fully enters the Special World of the story for the first time by **Crossing the First Threshold**. He agrees to face the consequences of dealing with the problem or challenge posed in the Call to Adventure. This is the moment when the story takes off and the adventure really gets going. The balloon goes up, the ship sails, the romance begins, the plane or the spaceship soars off, the wagon train gets rolling.

Movies are often built in three acts, which can be regarded as representing 1) the hero's decision to act, 2) the action itself, and 3) the consequences of the action. The First Threshold marks the turning point between Acts One and Two. The hero, having overcome fear, has decided to confront the problem and take action. She is now committed to the journey and there's no turning back.

This is the moment when Dorothy sets out on the Yellow Brick Road. The hero of *Beverly Hills Cop*, Axel Foley, decides to defy his boss's order, leaving his Ordinary World of the Detroit streets to investigate his friend's murder in the Special World of Beverly Hills.

6. TESTS, ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Once across the First Threshold, the hero naturally encounters new challenges and **Tests**, makes **Allies and Enemies**, and begins to learn the rules of the Special World.

Saloons and seedy bars seem to be good places for these transactions. Countless Westerns take the hero to a saloon where his manhood and determination are tested, and where friends and villains are introduced. Bars are also useful to the hero for obtaining information, for learning the new rules that apply to the Special World.

In *Casablanca*, Rick's Cafe is the den of intrigue in which alliances and enmities are forged, and in which the hero's moral character is constantly tested. In *Star Wars*, the cantina is the setting for the creation of a major alliance with Han Solo and the making of an important enemy with Jabba the Hutt, which pays off two movies later in *Return of the Jedi*. Here in the giddy surreal, violent atmosphere of the cantina swarming with bizarre aliens, Luke also gets a taste of the exciting and dangerous Special World he has just entered.

Scenes like these allow for character development as we watch the hero and his companions react under stress. In the *Star Wars* cantina, Luke gets to see Han Solo's way of handling a tight situation, and learns that Obi Wan is a warrior wizard of great power.

There are similar sequences in *An Officer and a Gentleman* at about this point, in which the hero makes allies and enemies and meets his "love interest." Several aspects of the hero's character — aggressiveness and hostility, knowledge of street fighting, attitudes about women — are revealed under pressure in these scenes, and sure enough, one of them takes place in a bar.

Of course not all Tests, Alliances, and Enmities are confronted in bars. In many stories, such as *The Wizard of Oz*, these are simply encounters on the road. At this stage on the Yellow Brick Road,

Dorothy acquires her companions the Scarecrow, Tin Woodsman and Cowardly Lion, and makes enemies such as a orchard full of grumpy talking trees. She passes a number of Tests such as getting Scarecrow off the nail, oiling the Tin Woodsman, and helping the Cowardly Lion deal with his fear.

In *Star Wars* the Tests continue after the cantina scene. Obi Wan teaches Luke about the Force by making him fight blindfolded. The early laser battles with the Imperial fighters are another Test which Luke successfully passes.

7. APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE

The hero comes at last to the edge of a dangerous place, sometimes deep underground, where the object of the quest is hidden. Often it's the headquarters of the hero's greatest enemy, the most dangerous spot in the Special World, the **Inmost Cave**. When the hero enters that fearful place he will cross the second major threshold. Heroes often pause at the gate to prepare, plan, and outwit the villain's guards. This is the phase of **Approach**.

In mythology the Inmost Cave may represent the land of the dead. The hero may have to descend into hell to rescue a loved one (Orpheus), into a cave to fight a dragon and win a treasure (Sigurd in Norse myth), or into a labyrinth to confront a monster (Theseus and the Minotaur).

In the Arthurian stories the Inmost Cave is the Chapel Perilous, the dangerous chamber where the seeker may find the Grail.

In the modern mythology of *Star Wars* the Approach to the Inmost Cave is Luke Skywalker and company being sucked into the Death Star where they will face Darth Vader and rescue Princess Leia. In *The Wizard of Oz* it's Dorothy being kidnapped to the Wicked Witch's baleful castle, and her companions slipping in to save her. The title of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* reveals the Inmost Cave of that film.

Approach covers all the preparations for entering the Inmost Cave and confronting death or supreme danger.

8. THE ORDEAL

Here the fortunes of the hero hit bottom in a direct confrontation with his greatest fear. He faces the possibility of death and is brought to the brink in a battle with a hostile force. **The Ordeal** is a "black moment" for the audience, as we are held in suspense and tension, not knowing if he will live or die. The hero, like Jonah, is "in the belly of the beast."

In *Star Wars* it's the harrowing moment in the bowels of the Death Star when Luke, Leia, and company are trapped in the giant trashmasher. Luke is pulled under by the tentacled monster that lives in the sewage and is held down so long that the audience begins to wonder if he's dead. In *E.T.*, the lovable alien momentarily appears to die on the operating table. In *The Wizard of Oz* Dorothy and her friends are trapped by the Wicked Witch, and it looks like there's no way out. At this point in *Beverly Hills Cop* Axel Foley is in the clutches of the villain's men with a gun to his head.

In *An Officer and a Gentleman*, Zack Mayo endures an Ordeal when his Marine drill instructor launches an all-out drive to torment and humiliate him into quitting the program. It's a psychological life-or-death moment, for if he gives in, his chances of becoming an officer and a gentleman will be dead. He survives the Ordeal by refusing to quit, and the Ordeal changes him. The drill sergeant, a foxy Wise Old Man, has forced him to admit his dependency on others, and from this moment on he is more cooperative and less selfish.

In romantic comedies the death faced by the hero may simply be the temporary death of the relationship, as in the second movement of the old standard plot, "Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl." The hero's chances of connecting with the object of affection look their bleakest.

This is a critical moment in any story, an Ordeal in which the hero must die or appear to die so that she can be born again. It's a major source of the magic of the heroic myth. The experiences of the preceding stages have led us, the audience, to identify with the hero and her fate. What happens to the hero happens to us. We are encouraged to experience the brink-of-death moment with her. Our emotions are temporarily depressed so that they can be revived by the hero's return from death. The result of this revival is a feeling of elation and exhilaration.

The designers of amusement park thrill rides know how to use this principle. Roller coasters make their passengers feel as if they're going to die, and there's a great thrill that comes from brushing up against death and surviving it. You're never more alive than when you're looking death in the face.

This is also the key element in rites of passage or rituals of initiation into fraternities and secret societies. The initiate is forced to taste death in some terrible experience, and then is allowed to experience resurrection as he is reborn as a new member of the group. The hero of every story is an initiate being introduced to the mysteries of life and death.

Every story needs such a life-or-death moment in which the hero or his goals are in mortal jeopardy.

9. REWARD (SEIZING THE SWORD)

Having survived death, beaten the dragon, or slain the Minotaur, hero and audience have cause to celebrate. The hero now takes possession of the treasure she has come seeking, her **Reward**. It might be a special weapon like a magic sword, or a token like the Grail or some elixir which can heal the wounded land.

Sometimes the "sword" is knowledge and experience that leads to greater understanding and a reconciliation with hostile forces.

In *Star Wars*, Luke rescues Princess Leia and captures the plans of the Death Star, keys to defeating Darth Vader.

Dorothy escapes from the Wicked Witch's castle with the Witch's broomstick and the ruby slippers, keys to getting back home.

At this point the hero may also settle a conflict with a parent. In *Return of the Jedi*, Luke is reconciled with Darth Vader, who turns out to be his father and not such a bad guy after all.

The hero may also be reconciled with the opposite sex, as in romantic comedies. In many stories the loved one is the treasure the hero has come to win or rescue, and there is often a love scene at this point to celebrate the victory.

From the hero's point of view, members of the opposite sex may appear to be **Shapeshifters**, an archetype of change. They seem to shift constantly in form or age, reflecting the confusing and constantly changing aspects of the opposite sex. Tales of vampires, werewolves and other shapechangers are symbolic echoes of this shifting quality which men and women see in each other.

The hero's Ordeal may grant a better understanding of the opposite sex, an ability to see beyond the shifting outer appearance, leading to a reconciliation.

The hero may also become more attractive as a result of having survived the Ordeal. He has earned the title of "hero" by having taken the supreme risk on behalf of the community.

10. THE ROAD BACK

The hero's not out of the woods yet. We're crossing into Act Three now as the hero begins to deal with the consequences of confronting the dark forces of the Ordeal. If she has not yet managed to reconcile with the parent, the gods, or the hostile forces, they may come raging after her. Some of the best chase scenes spring up at this point, as the

hero is pursued on **The Road Back** by the vengeful forces she has disturbed by Seizing the sword, the elixir, or the treasure.

Thus Luke and Leia are furiously pursued by Darth Vader as they escape the Death Star. The Road Back in *E.T.* is the moonlight bicycle flight of Elliott and E. T. as they escape from "Keys" (Peter Coyote), who represents repressive governmental authority.

This stage marks the decision to return to the Ordinary World. The hero realizes that the Special World must eventually be left behind, and there are still dangers, temptations, and tests ahead.

11. RESURRECTION

In ancient times, hunters and warriors had to be purified before they returned to their communities, because they had blood on their hands. The hero who has been to the realm of the dead must be reborn and cleansed in one last Ordeal of death and **Resurrection** before returning to the Ordinary World of the living.

This is often a second life-and-death moment, almost a replay of the death and rebirth of the Ordeal. Death and darkness get in one last, desperate shot before being finally defeated. It's a kind of final exam for the hero, who must be tested once more to see if he has really learned the lessons of the Ordeal.

The hero is transformed by these moments of death-and-rebirth, and is able to return to ordinary life reborn as a new being with new insights.

The Star Wars films play with this element constantly. All three of the films to date feature a final battle scene in which Luke is almost killed, appears to be dead for a moment, and then miraculously survives. Each Ordeal wins him new knowledge and command over the Force. He is transformed into a new being by his experience.

Axel Foley in the climactic sequence of *Beverly Hills Cop* once again faces death at the hands of the villain, but is rescued by the

intervention of the Beverly Hills police force. He emerges from the experience with a greater respect for cooperation, and is a more complete human being.

An Officer and a Gentleman offers a more complex series of final ordeals, as the hero faces death in a number of ways. Zack's selfishness dies as he gives up the chance for a personal athletic trophy in favor of helping another cadet over an obstacle. His relationship with his girlfriend seems to be dead, and he must survive the crushing blow of his best friend's suicide. As if that weren't enough, he also endures a final hand-to-hand, life-or-death battle with his drill instructor, but survives it all and is transformed into the gallant "officer and gentleman" of the title.

12. RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR

The hero Returns to the Ordinary World, but the journey is meaningless unless she brings back some **Elixir**, treasure, or lesson from the Special World. The Elixir is a magic potion with the power to heal. It may be a great treasure like the Grail that magically heals the wounded land, or it simply might be knowledge or experience that could be useful to the community someday.

Dorothy returns to Kansas with the knowledge that she is loved, and that "There's no place like home." E.T. returns home with the experience of friendship with humans. Luke Skywalker defeats Darth Vader (for the time being) and restores peace and order to the galaxy.

Zack Mayo wins his commission and leaves the Special World of the training base with a new perspective. In the sparkling new uniform of an officer (with a new attitude to match) he literally sweeps his girlfriend off her feet and carries her away.

Sometimes the Elixir is treasure won on the quest, but it may be love, freedom, wisdom, or the knowledge that the Special World exists and can be survived. Sometimes it's just coming home with a good story to tell.



Unless something is brought back from the Ordeal in the Inmost Cave, the hero is doomed to repeat the adventure. Many comedies use this ending, as a foolish character refuses to learn his lesson and embarks on the same folly that got him in trouble in the first place.

To recap the Hero's Journey:

1. Heroes are introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD, where
2. they receive the CALL TO ADVENTURE.
3. They are RELUCTANT at first or REFUSE THE CALL, but
4. are encouraged by a MENTOR to
5. CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD and enter the Special World, where
6. they encounter TESTS, ALLIES, AND ENEMIES.
7. They APPROACH THE INMOST CAVE, crossing a second threshold
8. where they endure the ORDEAL.
9. They take possession of their REWARD and
10. are pursued on THE ROAD BACK to the Ordinary World.
11. They cross the third threshold, experience a RESURRECTION, and are transformed by the experience.
12. They RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR, a boon or treasure to benefit the Ordinary World.



The Hero's Journey is a skeletal framework that should be fleshed out with the details and surprises of the individual story. The structure should not call attention to itself, nor should it be followed too precisely. The order of the stages given here is only one of many possible variations. The stages can be deleted, added to, and drastically shuffled without losing any of their power.

The values of the Hero's Journey are what's important. The images of the basic version — young heroes seeking magic swords from old wizards, maidens risking death to save loved ones, knights riding off to fight evil dragons in deep caves, and so on — are just symbols of

universal life experiences. The symbols can be changed infinitely to suit the story at hand and the needs of the society.

The Hero's Journey is easily translated to contemporary dramas, comedies, romances, or action-adventures by substituting modern equivalents for the symbolic figures and props of the hero's story. The wise old man or woman may be a real shaman or wizard, but may also be any kind of Mentor or teacher, doctor or therapist, "crusty but benign" boss, tough but fair top sergeant, parent, grandparent, or guiding, helping figure.

Modern heroes may not be going into caves and labyrinths to fight mythical beasts, but they do enter a Special World and an Inmost Cave by venturing into space, to the bottom of the sea, into the depths of a modern city, or into their own hearts.

The patterns of myth can be used to tell the simplest comic book story or the most sophisticated drama. The Hero's Journey grows and matures as new experiments are tried within its framework.

Changing the traditional sex and relative ages of the archetypes only makes it more interesting, and allows ever more complex webs of understanding to be spun among them. The basic figures can be combined, or each can be divided into several characters to show different aspects of the same idea.

The Hero's Journey is infinitely flexible, capable of endless variation without sacrificing any of its magic, and it will outlive us all.

Now that we've looked over the map, let's meet the characters who populate the landscape of storytelling: the **Archetypes**.

