

BOOK TWO:

STAGES OF THE JOURNEY

STAGE ONE:

THE ORDINARY WORLD

"beginning is a very delicate time."

—from *Dune*, screenplay by David Lynch,
based on the novel by Frank Herbert



In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes the beginning of the typical hero's journey. "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder..." In this chapter, we'll explore that "world of common day," the Ordinary World, and see how it frames the hero and sets modern-day stories in motion.

The opening of any story, be it myth, fairy tale, screenplay, novel, short story, or comic book, has some special burdens to bear. It must hook the reader or viewer, set the tone of the story, suggest where it's going, and get across a mass of information without slowing the pace. A beginning is, indeed, a delicate time.

A GUIDE TO THE JOURNEY

As a guide through the labyrinth of story, let's imagine ourselves as a tribe of people who live by hunting and gathering, as our ancestors did a hundred thousand years ago, or as people still do in remote parts of the world today. We'll check in with these Seekers at each stage of the hero's journey, and try to put ourselves in their skins.

Look around, sister, brother Of the Home Tribe. You can see the people are barely getting by, surviving on a dwindling supply Of last season's food. Times are bad and the country all around seems lifeless. The people grow weak before our eyes, but a few Of us are filled with restless energy.

Like you. You're uncomfortable, feeling you no longer fit in with this drab, exhausted place. You may not know it, but you're soon to be selected as a hero, to join the select company Of the Seekers, those who have always gone out to face the unknown. You'll undertake a journey to restore life and health to the entire Home Tribe, an adventure in which the only sure thing is that you'll be changed. You're uneasy, but there's a thrill running through you. You're poised to break free from this world, ready to enter the world Of adventure.

BEFORE THE BEGINNING

Before a story even begins, a storyteller faces creative choices. What's the first thing your audience will experience? The title? The first line of dialogue? The first image? Where in the lives of your characters will the story actually begin? Do you need a prologue or introduction, or should you jump right into the middle of the action? The opening moments are a powerful opportunity to set the tone and create an impression. You can conjure up a mood, an image, or a metaphor that will give the audience a frame of reference to better experience your work. The mythological approach to story boils down to using metaphors or comparisons to get across your feelings about life.

The great German stage and film director Max Reinhardt believed that you can create an atmosphere in a theatre well before an audience sits down or the curtain goes up. A carefully selected title can strike a metaphor that intrigues the audience and attunes them to the coming experience. Good promotion can engage them with images and slogans that are metaphors for the world of your story. By controlling music and lighting as the audience enters the space, and consciously directing such details as the attitudes and costumes of the ushers, a specific mood can be created. The audience can be put in the ideal frame of mind for the experience they will share, prepared for comedy, romance, horror, drama, or whatever effect you wish to create.

Oral storytellers begin their tales with ritualized phrases ("Once upon a time") and personalized gestures to get the attention of the audience. These signals can cue the listeners to the funny, sad, or ironic mood of the story they will hear.

Today many elements go into making those first impressions before the book or the movie ticket is bought; the title, the book cover art, publicity and advertising, posters and trailers, and so forth. The story is cooked down to a few symbols or metaphors that begin to put the audience in the right mood for the journey.

TITLE

A title is an important clue to the nature of the story and the writer's attitude. A good title can become a multi-leveled metaphor for the condition of the hero or his world. The title of *The Godfather*, for example, suggests that Don Corleone is both god and father to his people. The graphic design of the logo for the novel and movie lays out another metaphor, the hand of a puppeteer working the strings of an unseen marionette. Is Don Corleone the puppeteer, or is he the puppet of a higher force? Are we all puppets of God, or do we have free will? The metaphoric title and imagery allow many interpretations and help to make the story a coherent design.

OPENING IMAGE

The opening image can be a powerful tool to create mood and suggest where the story will go. It can be a visual metaphor that, in a single shot or scene, conjures up the Special World of Act Two and the conflicts and dualities that will be confronted there. It can suggest the theme, alerting the audience to the issues your characters will face. The opening shot of Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* shows a man outside a farmhouse, digging a grave for his wife who has just died. His relationship with his wife and the way she changed him are major themes in the story. The image of a man digging a grave outside his house can be read as an apt metaphor for the plot: The hero leaves home and journeys to the land of death, where he witnesses death, causes death, and almost dies himself. Eastwood the director returns to the same setup at the end of the film, using the image to give a sense of closure as we see the man leave the grave and return to his home.

PROLOGUE

Some stories begin with a prologue section that precedes the main body of the story, perhaps before the introduction of the main characters and their world. The fairy tale of "Rapunzel" begins with a scene before the birth of the hero, and Disney's *Beauty*

and the Beast begins with a prologue illustrated in stained glass, giving the backstory of the Beast's enchantment. Myths take place within a context of mythical history that goes back to the Creation, and events leading up to the entrance of the main character may have to be portrayed first. Shakespeare and the Greeks often gave their plays a prologue, spoken by a narrator or a chorus, to set the tone and give the context of the drama. Shakespeare's *Henry V* begins with an eloquent passage, intoned by a Chorus character who invites us to use our "imaginary forces" to create the kings, horses, and armies of his story. "Admit me Chorus to this history," he requests, "Who, prologue-like, your humble patience pray/Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play."

A prologue can serve several useful functions. It may give an essential piece of backstory, cue the audience to what kind of movie or story this is going to be, or start the story with a bang and let the audience settle into their seats. In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, a prologue shows the discovery of a mysterious squadron of World War II airplanes, perfectly preserved in the desert. This precedes the introduction of the hero, Roy Neary, and his world. It serves to intrigue the audience with a host of riddles, and gives a foretaste of the thrills and wonder ahead.

In *The Last Boy Scout* a prologue shows a pro football player going berserk and shooting his teammates under the pressure of drugs and gambling. The sequence precedes the first appearance of the hero and intrigues or "hooks" the audience. It signals that this is going to be an exciting action story involving life-and-death matters.

This prologue and the one in *Close Encounters* are a little disorienting. They hint that these movies are going to be about extraordinary events that may strain credibility. In secret societies, an old rule of initiation is: **Disorientation leads to suggestibility**. That's why initiates are often blindfolded and led around in the dark, so they will be more psychologically open to suggestion from the rituals staged by the group. In storytelling, getting the audience a little off-base and upsetting their normal perceptions can put them into a receptive mood. They begin to suspend their disbelief and enter more readily into a Special World of fantasy.

Some prologues introduce the villain or threat of the story before the hero appears. In *Star Wars*, the evil Darth Vader is shown kidnapping Princess Leia before the hero, Luke Skywalker, is introduced in his mundane world. Some detective films begin with a murder before the hero is introduced in his office. Such prologues cue the audience that the balance of a society has been disturbed. A chain of events is set in motion, and the forward drive of the story cannot cease until the wrong has been righted and the balance restored.

A prologue is not necessary or desirable in every case. The needs of the story will always dictate the best approach to structure. You may want to begin, as many stories do, by introducing the hero in her normal environment: the Ordinary World."

THE ORDINARY WORLD

Because so many stories are journeys that take heroes and audiences to Special Worlds, most begin by establishing an Ordinary World as a baseline for comparison. The Special World of the story is only special if we can see it in contrast to a mundane world of everyday affairs from which the hero issues forth. The Ordinary World is the context, home base, and background of the hero.

The Ordinary World in one sense is the place you came from last. In life we pass through a succession of Special Worlds which slowly become ordinary as we get used to them. They evolve from strange, foreign territory to familiar bases from which to launch a drive into the next Special World.

CONTRAST

It's a good idea for writers to make the Ordinary World as different as possible from the Special World, so audience and hero will experience a dramatic change when the threshold is finally crossed. In *The Wizard of Oz* the Ordinary World is depicted in black and white, to make a stunning contrast with the Technicolor Special World of Oz. In the thriller *Dead Again*, the Ordinary World of modern day is shot in color to contrast with the nightmarish black-and-white Special World of the 1940s flashbacks. *City Slickers* contrasts the drab, restrictive environment of the city with the more lively arena of the West where most of the story takes place.

Compared to the Special World, the Ordinary World may seem boring and calm, but the seeds of excitement and challenge can usually be found there. The hero's problems and conflicts are already present in the Ordinary World, waiting to be activated.

FORESHADOWING: A MODEL OF THE SPECIAL WORLD

Writers often use the Ordinary World section to create a small model of the Special World, foreshadowing its battles and moral dilemmas. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy clashes with ornery Miss Gulch and is rescued from danger by three farmhands.

These early scenes foretell Dorothy's battles with the Witch and her rescue by the Tin Woodsman, Cowardly Lion, and Scarecrow.

Romancing the Stone begins with a clever foreshadowing technique. The first thing the audience sees is an elaborate fantasy of a noble heroine battling sleazy villains and finally riding off to romance with a comically idealized hero. The scene is a model of the Special World Joan Wilder will encounter in the second act. The fantasy is revealed to be the conclusion of Joan Wilder's romance novel, which she is writing in her cluttered New York apartment. The opening fantasy sequence serves a dual purpose. It tells us a great deal about Joan Wilder and her unrealistic notions of romance, and also predicts the problems and situations she will face in the Special World of Act Two, when she encounters real villains and a less than ideal man. Foreshadowing can help unify a story into a rhythmic or poetic design.

RAISING THE DRAMATIC QUESTION

Another important function of the Ordinary World is to suggest the dramatic question of the story. Every good story poses a series of questions about the hero. Will she achieve the goal, overcome her flaw, learn the lesson she needs to learn? Some questions relate primarily to the action or plot. Will Dorothy get home from Oz? Will E.T. get home to his planet? Will the hero get the gold, win the game, beat the villains?

Other questions are dramatic and have to do with the hero's emotions and personality. Will Patrick Swayze's character in *Ghost* learn to express love? In *Pretty Woman*, will the uptight businessman Edward learn from the prostitute Vivian how to relax and enjoy life? The action questions may propel the plot, but the dramatic questions hook the audience and involve them with the emotions of the characters.

INNER AND OUTER PROBLEMS

Every hero needs both an inner and an outer problem. In developing fairy tales for Disney Feature Animation, we often find that writers can give the heroes a good outer problem: Can the princess manage to break an enchantment on her father who has been turned to stone? Can the hero get to the top of a glass mountain and win a princess' hand in marriage? Can Gretel rescue Hansel from the Witch? But sometimes writers neglect to give the characters a compelling inner problem to solve as well.

Characters without inner challenges seem flat and uninvolved, however heroically they may act. They need an inner problem, a personality flaw or a moral

dilemma to work out. They need to learn something in the course of the story: how to get along with others, how to trust themselves, how to see beyond outward appearances. Audiences love to see characters learning, growing, and dealing with the inner and outer challenges of life.

MAKING AN ENTRANCE

How the audience first experiences your hero is another important condition you control as a storyteller. What is he doing the first time we see him, when he makes his **entrance**? What is he wearing, who is around him, and how do they react to him? What is his attitude, emotion, and goal at the moment? Does he enter alone or join a group, or is he already on stage when the story begins? Does he narrate the story, is it told through the eyes of another character, or is it seen from the objective eye of conventional narrative?

Every actor likes to "make an entrance," an important part of building a character's relationship with the audience. Even if a character is written as already on stage when the lights come *up*, the actor will often make an entrance out of it by how she first impresses an audience with her appearance and behavior. As writers we can give our heroes an entrance by thinking about how the audience first experiences them. What are they doing, saying, feeling? What is their context when we first see them? Are they at peace or in turmoil? Are they at full emotional power or are they holding back for a burst of expression later?

Most important is: What is the character *doing* at the moment of entrance? The character's first action is a wonderful opportunity to speak volumes about his attitude, emotional state, background, strengths, and problems. The first action should be a model of the hero's characteristic attitude and the future problems or solutions that will result. The first behavior we see should be characteristic. It should define and reveal character, unless your intent is to mislead the audience and conceal the character's true nature.

Tom Sawyer makes a vivid entrance into our imaginations because Samuel Clemens has painted such a character-revealing first look at his Missouri boy hero. The first time we see Tom he is performing a characteristic action, turning the rotten job of whitewashing the fence into a wonderful mind game. Tom is a con artist, but the con is thoroughly enjoyed by his victims. Tom's character is revealed through all his actions, but most clearly and definitively in his entrance, which defines his attitude toward life.

Actors stepping onto a stage and writers introducing a character are also trying to *entrance* the audience, or produce in them a trance-like state of identification and recognition. One of the magic powers of writing is its ability to lure each member of the audience into projecting a part of their ego into the character on the page, screen, or stage.

As a writer you can build up an atmosphere of anticipation or provide information about an important character by having other characters talk about her before she shows up. But more important and memorable will be her own first action upon entering the story —her entrance.

INTRODUCING THE HERO TO THE AUDIENCE

Another important function of the Ordinary World is to introduce the hero to the audience. Like a social introduction, the Ordinary World establishes a bond between people and points out some common interests so that a dialogue can begin. In some way we should recognize that the hero is like us. In a very real sense, a story invites us to step into the hero's shoes, to see the world through his eyes. As if by magic we project part of our consciousness into the hero. To make this magic work you must establish a strong bond of sympathy or common interest between the hero and the audience.

This is not to say that heroes must always be good or wholly sympathetic. They don't even have to be likeable, but they must be *relatable*, a word used by movie executives to describe the quality of compassion and understanding that an audience must have for a hero. Even if the hero is underhanded or despicable, we can still understand her plight and imagine ourselves behaving in much the same way, given the same background, circumstances, and motivation.

IDENTIFICATION

The opening scenes should create an identification between audience and hero, a sense that they are equals in some ways.

How do you achieve this? Create identification by giving heroes universal goals, drives, desires, or needs. We can all relate to basic drives such as the need for recognition, affection, acceptance, or understanding. The screenwriter Waldo Salt, speaking of his script for *Midnight Cowboy*, said that his hero Joe Buck was driven by a universal human need to be touched. Even though Joe Buck engaged in some pretty sleazy behavior, we sympathize with his need because we have all experienced it at

some time. Identification with universal needs establishes a bond between audience and hero.

THE HERO'S LACK

Fairy tale heroes have a common denominator, a quality that unites them across boundaries of culture, geography, and time. They are lacking something, or something is taken away from them. Often they have just lost a family member. A mother or father has died, or a brother or sister has been kidnapped. Fairy tales are about searching for completeness and striving for wholeness, and often it's a subtraction from the family unit that sets the story in motion. The need to fill in the missing piece drives the story toward the final perfection of "They lived happily ever after."

Many movies begin by showing an incomplete hero or family. Joan Wilder in *Romancing the Stone* and Roger Thornhill in *North by Northwest* are incomplete because they need ideal mates to balance their lives. Fay Wray's character in *King Kong* is an orphan who knows only "There's supposed to be an uncle someplace."

These missing elements help to create sympathy for the hero, and draw the audience into desiring her eventual wholeness. Audiences abhor the vacuum created by a missing piece in a character.

Other stories show the hero as essentially complete until a close friend or relative is kidnapped or killed in the first act, setting in motion a story of rescue or revenge. John Ford's *The Searchers* begins with news that a young woman has been kidnapped by Indians, launching a classic saga of search and rescue.

Sometimes the hero's family may be complete, but something is missing from the hero's personality — a quality such as compassion, forgiveness, or the ability to express love. The hero of *Ghost* is unable to say "I love you" at the beginning of the film. Only after he has run the course of the journey from life to death is he able to say those magic words.

It can be very effective to show that a hero is unable to perform some simple task at the beginning of the story. In *Ordinary People* the young hero Conrad is unable to eat French toast his mother has prepared for him. It signifies, in symbolic language, his inability to accept being loved and cared for, because of the terrible guilt he bears over the accidental death of his brother. It's only after he undertakes an emotional hero's journey, and relives and processes the death through therapy, that he is able to accept love. At the end of the story Conrad's girlfriend offers to make

him breakfast, and this time he finds he has an appetite. In symbolic language, his appetite for life has returned.

TRAGIC FLAWS

The Greek theory of tragedy, expressed twenty-four centuries ago by Aristotle, describes a common fault of tragic heroes. They may possess many admirable qualities, but among them is one tragic flaw or *hamartia* that puts them at odds with their destiny, their fellow men, or the gods. Ultimately it leads to their destruction.

Most commonly this tragic flaw was a kind of pride or arrogance called *hubris*. Tragic heroes are often superior people with extraordinary powers but they tend to see themselves as equal to or better than the gods. They ignore fair warnings or defy the local moral codes, thinking they are above the laws of gods and men. This fatal arrogance inevitably unleashes a force called *Nemesis*, originally a goddess of retribution. Her job was to set things back into balance, usually by bringing about the destruction of the tragic hero.

Every well-rounded hero has a trace of this tragic flaw, some weakness or fault that makes him thoroughly human and real. Perfect, flawless heroes aren't very interesting, and are hard to relate to. Even Superman has weak spots which humanize him and make him sympathetic: his vulnerability to Kryptonite, his inability to see through lead, and his secret identity which is always in danger of being exposed.

WOUNDED HEROES

Sometimes a hero may seem to be well-adjusted and in control, but that control masks a deep psychic **wound**. Most of us have some old pain or hurt that we don't think about all the time, but which is always vulnerable on some level of awareness. These wounds of rejection, betrayal, or disappointment are personal echoes of a universal pain that everyone has suffered from: the pain of the child's physical and emotional separation from its mother. In a larger sense, we all bear the wound of separation from God or the womb of existence — that place from which we are born and to which we will return when we die. Like Adam and Eve cast out of Eden, we are forever separate from our source, isolated and wounded.

To humanize a hero or any character, give her a wound, a visible, physical injury or a deep emotional wound. The hero of *Lethal Weapon*, played by Mel Gibson, is sympathetic because he has lost a loved one. The wound makes him edgy, suicidal,

unpredictable, and interesting. Your hero's wounds and scars mark the areas in which he is guarded, defensive, weak, and vulnerable. A hero may also be extra-strong in some areas as a defense for the wounded parts.

The movie *The Fisher King* is a thorough study of two men and their psychic wounds. The story is inspired by the Arthurian legend of the Holy Grail and the Fisher King, whose physical wound symbolized a wound of the spirit. This legend tells of a king who was wounded in the thigh and was therefore unable to rule his land or find any pleasure in life. Under his weakened kingship, the land was dying, and only the powerful spiritual magic of the Holy Grail could revive it. The quest by the Knights of the Round Table to find the Grail is the great adventure to restore health and wholeness to a system that has been almost fatally wounded. The Jungian psychologist Robert A. Johnson brings insight to the meaning of the Fisher King wound in his book on masculine psychology, *He*.

Another wounded, almost tragic hero is Tom Dunson, played by John Wayne in the classic Western *Red River*. Dunson makes a terrible moral error early in his career as a cattleman, by choosing to value his mission more than his love, and following his head rather than his heart. This choice leads to the death of his lover, and for the rest of the story he bears the psychic scars of that wound. His suppressed guilt makes him more and more harsh, autocratic, and judgmental, and almost brings him and his adopted son to destruction before the wound is healed by letting love back into his life.



The Hero Rejects a Call if the heart with tragic consequences.

A hero's wounds may not be visible. People put a great deal of energy into protecting and hiding these weak and vulnerable spots. But in a fully developed character they will be apparent in the areas where she is touchy, defensive, or a little too confident. The wound may never be openly expressed to the audience — it can be a secret between the writer and the character. But it will help give the hero a sense of personal history and realism, for we all bear some scars from past humiliations, rejections, disappointments, abandonments, and failures. Many stories are about the journey to heal a wound and to restore a missing piece to a broken psyche.

ESTABLISHING WHAT'S AT STAKE

For readers and viewers to be involved in the adventure, to care about the hero, they have to know at an early stage exactly what's at stake. In other words, what does the hero stand to gain or lose in the adventure? What will be the consequences for the hero, society, and the world if the hero succeeds or fails?

Myths and fairy tales are good models for establishing what's at stake. They often set up a threatening condition that makes the stakes of the game very clear. Perhaps the hero must pass a series of tests or his head will be cut off. The Greek hero Perseus, portrayed in the movie *Clash of the Titans*, must undergo many ordeals or his beloved princess Andromeda will be devoured by a sea monster. Other tales put family members in jeopardy like the father who is threatened in *Beauty and the Beast*. The hero Belle has a strong motivation to put herself in a dangerous position at the mercy of the Beast. Her father will languish and die unless she does the Beast's bidding. The stakes are high and clear.

Scripts often fail because the stakes simply aren't high enough. A story in which the hero will only be slightly embarrassed or inconvenienced if he fails is likely to get the "So what?" reaction from readers. Make sure the stakes are high — ~~life~~ life and death, big money, or the hero's very soul.

BACKSTORY AND EXPOSITION

The Ordinary World is the most appropriate place to deal with exposition and backstory. Backstory is all the relevant information about a character's history and background — what got her to the situation at the beginning of the story. Exposition is the art of gracefully revealing the backstory and any other pertinent

information about the plot: the hero's social class, upbringing, habits, experiences, as well as the prevailing social conditions and opposing forces that may affect the hero. Exposition is everything the audience needs to know to understand the hero and the story. Backstory and exposition are among the hardest writing skills to master. Clumsy exposition tends to stop the story cold. Blunt exposition draws attention to itself, giving the backstory in the form of a voiceover or a "Harry the Explainer" character who comes on solely for the purpose of telling the audience what the author wants them to know. It's usually better to put the audience right into the action and let them figure things out as the story unfolds.

The audience will feel more involved if they have to work a little to piece together the backstory from visual clues or exposition blurted out while characters are emotionally upset or on the run. Backstory can be doled out gradually over the course of the story or yielded up grudgingly. Much is revealed by what people **don't** do or say.

Many dramas are about secrets being slowly and painfully revealed. Layer by layer the defenses protecting a hurtful secret are torn away. This makes the audience participants in a detective story, an emotional puzzle.

THEME

The Ordinary World is the place to state the theme of your story. What is the story really about? If you had to boil down its essence to a single word or phrase, what would it be? What single idea or quality is it about? Love? Trust? Betrayal? Vanity? Prejudice? Greed? Madness? Ambition? Friendship? What are you trying to say? Is your theme "Love conquers all;" "You can't cheat an honest man," "We must work together to survive;" or "Money is the root of all evil"?

Theme, a word derived from Greek, is close in meaning to the Latin-based **premise**. Both words mean "something set before;" something laid out in advance that helps determine a future course. The theme of a story is an underlying statement or assumption about an aspect of life. Usually it's set out somewhere in Act One, in the Ordinary World. It could be an offhand remark by one of the characters, expressing a belief which is then rigorously tested in the course of the story. The real theme of the piece may not emerge or announce itself until you have worked with the story for a while, but sooner or later you must become aware of it. Knowing the theme is essential to making the final choices in dialogue, action, and set dressing that

turn a story into a coherent design. In a good story, everything is related somehow to the theme, and the Ordinary World is the place to make the first statement of the main idea.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

I refer often to *The Wizard of Oz* because it's a classic movie that most people have seen, and because it's a fairly typical hero's journey with clearly delineated stages. It also has a surprising degree of psychological depth, and can be read not only as a fairy story of a little girl trying to get back home, but also as a metaphor of a personality trying to become complete.

As the story unfolds, the hero Dorothy has a clear outer problem. Her dog Toto has dug up Miss Gulch's flowerbed and Dorothy is in trouble. She tries to elicit sympathy for her problem from her aunt and uncle, but they are too busy preparing for a coming storm. Like the heroes of myth and legend before her; Dorothy is restless, out of place, and doesn't know where to light.

Dorothy also has a clear inner problem. She doesn't fit in anymore, she doesn't feel "at home." Like the incomplete heroes of fairy tales, she has a big piece missing from her life — her parents are dead. She doesn't yet know it, but she's about to set out on a quest for completion: not through a marriage and the beginning of a new ideal family, but through meeting a series of magical forces that represent parts of a complete and perfect personality.

To foreshadow these meetings, Dorothy encounters a small model of the Special World adventure. Bored, she tries to balance on the thin railing of a pig pen, and falls in. Three friendly farmhands rescue her from danger; predicting the roles the same actors will play in the Special World. The scene says, in the language of symbol, that Dorothy has been walking a tightrope between warring sides of her personality, and sooner or later she will need all the help she can get, from every part of her being, to survive the inevitable fall into conflict.

Heroes may have no obvious missing piece, flaw, or wound. They may merely be restless, uneasy, and out of sync with their environment or culture. They may have been getting by, trying to adjust to unhealthy conditions by using various coping mechanisms or crutches such as emotional or chemical dependencies. They may have

deluded themselves that everything is all right. But sooner or later, some new force enters the story to make it clear they can no longer mark time. That new energy is the Call to Adventure.

QUESTIONING THE JOURNEY

1. What is the Ordinary World of *Big?* *Fatal Attraction?* *The Fisher King?* Look at a film, play, or story of your choice. How does the author introduce the hero? Reveal character? Give exposition? Suggest the theme? Does the author use an image to foreshadow or suggest where the story is going?
2. In your own writing, how well do you know your hero? Do a complete biographical sketch, specifying personal history, physical description, education, family background, job experiences, romances, dislikes and prejudices, preferences in food, clothes, hair, cars, etc.
3. Do a timeline, specifying what the character was doing and where he was at every stage of life. Find out what was going on in the world at these times. What ideas, events, and people have been the greatest influences on your character?
4. How is your story's hero incomplete? Get specific about the character's needs, desires, goals, wounds, fantasies, wishes, flaws, quirks, regrets, defenses, weaknesses, and neuroses. What single characteristic could lead to your hero's destruction or downfall? What single characteristic could save her? Does your character have both an inner and an outer problem? Does she have a universal human need? How does she characteristically go about getting that need met?
5. Make a list of all the points of backstory and exposition that the audience needs to know to get the story started. How can those be revealed indirectly, visually, on the run, or through conflict?
6. Do different cultures need different kinds of stories? Do men and women need different kinds of stories? How are the heroic journeys of men and women different?

STAGE TWO: THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

*ait's money and adventure and fame! It's the thrill of a lifetime!...and a long
sea voyage that starts at six o'clock tomorrow!"*

— from *King Kong*, screenplay by
James Creelman and Ruth Rose



he Ordinary World of most heroes is a static but unstable condition. The seeds of change and growth are planted, and it takes only a little new energy to germinate them. That new energy, symbolized in countless ways in myths and fairy tales, is what Joseph Campbell termed the Call to Adventure.

Trouble shadows the Home Tribe. You hear its call, in the grumbling of our stomachs and the cries of our hungry children. The land for miles around is tapped out and barren and clearly someone must go out beyond the familiar territory. That unknown land is strange and fills us with fear, but pressure mounts to do something, to take some risks, so that life can continue.

A figure emerges from the cam!fire smoke, an elder of the Home Tribe, pointing to you. Yes, you have been chosen as a Seeker and called to begin a new quest. You'll venture your life so that the greater life of the Home Tribe may go on.

GET THE STORY ROLLING

Various theories of screenwriting acknowledge the Call to Adventure by other names such as the inciting or initiating incident, the catalyst, or the trigger. All agree **at** some event is necessary to get a story rolling, once the work of introducing the main character is done.

The Call to Adventure may come in the form of a message or a messenger. It may be a new event like a declaration of war, or the arrival of a telegram reporting that the outlaws have just been released from prison and will be in town on the noon train to gun down the sheriff. Serving a writ or warrant and issuing a summons are ways of giving Calls in legal proceedings.

The Call may simply be a stirring within the hero, a messenger from the unconscious, bearing news that it's time for change. These signals sometimes come in the form of dreams, fantasies, or visions. Roy Neary in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* gets his Call in the form of haunting images of Oevil's Tower drifting up from his subconscious. Prophetic or disturbing dreams help us prepare for a new stage of growth by giving us metaphors that reflect the emotional and spiritual changes to come.

The hero may just get fed up with things as they are. An uncomfortable situation builds up until that one last straw sends him on the adventure. Joe Buck in *Midnight Cowboy* has simply had enough of washing dishes in a diner and feels the Call building up inside him to hit the road of adventure. In a deeper sense, his universal human need is driving him, but it takes that one last miserable day in the diner to push him over the edge.

SYNCHRONICITY

A string of accidents or coincidences may be the message that calls a hero to adventure. This is the mysterious force of **synchronicity** which C. G. Jung explored in his writings. The coincidental occurrence of words, ideas, or events can take on meaning and draw attention to the need for action and change. Many thrillers such as Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* get rolling because an accident throws two people together as if by the hand of fate.

TEMPTATION

The Call to Adventure may summon a hero with **temptation**, such as the allure of an exotic travel poster or the sight of a potential lover. It could be the glint of gold, the rumor of treasure, the siren song of ambition. In the Arthurian legend of Percival (aka Parsifal), the innocent young hero is summoned to adventure by the sight of five magnificent knights in armor, riding off on some quest. Percival has never seen

such creatures, and is stirred to follow them. He is compelled to find out what they are, not realizing it is his destiny to soon become one of them.

HERALDS OF CHANGE

The Call to Adventure is often delivered by a character in a story who manifests the archetype of the Herald. A character performing the function of Herald may be positive, negative, or neutral, but will always serve to get the story rolling by presenting the hero with an invitation or challenge to face the unknown. In some stories the Herald is also a Mentor for the hero, a wise guide who has the hero's best interests at heart. In others the Herald is an enemy, flinging a gauntlet of challenge in the hero's face or tempting the hero into danger.

Initially heroes often have trouble distinguishing whether a Enemy or an Ally lies behind the Herald's mask. Many a hero has mistaken a well-meaning mentor's Call for that of an enemy, or misinterpreted the overtures of a villain as a friendly invitation to an enjoyable adventure. In the thriller and film noir genres, writers may deliberately obscure the reality of the Call. Shadowy figures may make ambiguous offers, and heroes must use every skill to interpret them correctly.

Often heroes are unaware there is anything wrong with their Ordinary World and don't see any need for change. They may be in a state of denial. They have been just barely getting by, using an arsenal of crutches, addictions, and defense mechanisms. The job of the Herald is to kick away these supports, announcing that the world of the hero is unstable and must be put back into healthy balance by action, by taking risks, by undertaking the adventure.

RECONNAISSANCE

The Russian fairy-tale scholar Vladimir Propp identified a common early phase in a story, called **reconnaissance**. A villain makes a survey of the hero's territory, perhaps asking around the neighborhood if there are any children living there, or seeking information about the hero. This information-gathering can be a Call to Adventure, alerting the audience and the hero that something is afoot and the struggle is about to begin.

DISORIENTATION AND DISCOMFORT

The Call to Adventure can often be unsettling and disorienting to the hero. Heralds sometimes sneak up on heroes, appearing in one guise to gain a hero's confidence and then shifting shape to deliver the Call. Alfred Hitchcock provides a potent example in *Notorious*. Here the hero is playgirl Ingrid Bergman, whose father has been sentenced as a Nazi spy. The Call to Adventure comes from a Herald in the form of Cary Grant, who plays an American agent trying to enlist her aid in infiltrating a Nazi spy ring.

First he charms his way into her life by pretending to be a playboy interested only in booze, fast cars, and her. But after she accidentally discovers he's a "copper," he shifts to the mask of Herald to deliver a deeply challenging Call to Adventure.

Bergman wakes up in bed, hung over from their night of partying. Grant, standing in the doorway, orders her to drink a bubbly bromide to settle her stomach. **It** doesn't taste good but he makes her drink it anyway. **It** symbolizes the new energy of the adventure, which tastes like poison compared to the addictions she's been used to, but which ultimately will be good medicine for her.

In this scene Grant leans in a doorway, silhouetted like some dark angel. From Bergman's point of view, this Herald could be an angel or a devil. The devilish possibility is suggested by his name, revealed for the first time as "Devlin." As he advances into the room to deliver the Call to Adventure, Hitchcock follows him in a dizzying point-of-view shot that reflects the hung-over state of the hero, Bergman, as she lies in bed. Grant seems to walk on the ceiling. In the symbolic language of film the shot expresses his change of position from playboy to Herald, and its disorienting effect on the hero. Grant gives the Call, a patriotic invitation to infiltrate a Nazi spy ring. As it is delivered, Grant is seen right side up and in full light for the first time, representing the Call's sobering effect on Bergman's character.

As they talk, a crown-like, artificial hairpiece slides from Bergman's head, showing that her fairy tale existence as a deluded, addicted princess must now come to an end. Simultaneously on the soundtrack can be heard the distant call of a train leaving town, suggesting the beginning of a long journey. In this sequence Hitchcock has used every symbolic element at his command to signal that a major threshold of change is approaching. The Call to Adventure is disorienting and distasteful to the hero, but necessary for her growth.

LACK OR NEED

A Call to Adventure may come in the form of a loss or subtraction from the hero's life in the Ordinary World. The adventure of the movie *Quest for Fire* is set in motion when a Stone Age tribe's last scrap of fire, preserved in a bone fire-cage, is extinguished. Members of the tribe begin to die of cold and hunger because of this loss. The hero receives his Call to Adventure when one of the women puts the fire-cage in front of him, signalling without words that the loss must be made up by undertaking the adventure.

The Call could be the kidnapping of a loved one or the loss of anything precious, such as health, security, or love.

NO MORE OPTIONS

In some stories, the Call to Adventure may be the hero simply running out of options. The coping mechanisms no longer work, other people get fed up with the hero, or the hero is placed in increasingly dire straits until the only way left is to jump into the adventure. In *Sister Act*, Whoopi Goldberg's character witnesses a mob murder and has to go into hiding as a nun. Her options are limited —pretend to be a nun or die. Other heroes don't even get that much **choice**—they are simply "shanghaied" into adventure, conked on the head to wake up far out at sea, committed to adventure whether they like it or not.

WARNINGS FOR TRAGIC HEROES

Not all Calls to Adventure are positive summonses to high adventure. They may also be dire warnings of doom for tragic heroes. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, a character cries out the warning, "Beware the Ides of March." In *Moby Dick*, the crew is warned by a crazy old man that their adventure will turn into a disaster.

MORE THAN ONE CALL: CALL WAITING

Since many stories operate on more than one level, a story can have more than one Call to Adventure. A sprawling epic such as *Red River* has a need for several scenes of this type. John Wayne's character Tom Dunson receives a Call of the heart, when his lover urges him to stay with her or take her with him on his quest. Dunson himself

issues another Call to physical adventure when he invites his cowboys to join him on the first great cattle drive after the Civil War.

Romancing the Stone issues a complex Call to Adventure to its hero Joan Wilder when she receives a phone call from her sister who has been kidnapped by thugs in Colombia. The simple Call of physical adventure is set up by the need to rescue the sister, but another Call is being made on a deeper level in this scene. Joan opens an envelope which her sister's husband has mailed to her and finds a map to the treasure mine of *El Corazon*, "The Heart," suggesting that Joan is also being called to an adventure of the heart.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Dorothy's vague feelings of unease crystallize when Miss Gulch arrives and spitefully takes away Toto. A conflict is set up between two sides struggling for control of Dorothy's soul. A repressive Shadow energy is trying to bottle up the good-natured intuitive side. But the instinctive Toto escapes. Dorothy follows her instincts, which are issuing her a Call to Adventure, and runs away from home. She feels painted into a corner by a lack of sympathy from Aunt Em, her surrogate mother; who has scolded her. She sets out to respond to the Call, under a sky churning with the clouds of change.

The Call to Adventure is a process of selection. An unstable situation arises in a society and someone volunteers or is chosen to take responsibility. Reluctant heroes have to be called repeatedly as they try to avoid responsibility. More willing heroes answer to inner calls and need no external urging. They have selected themselves for adventure. These gung-ho heroes are rare, and most heroes must be prodded, cajoled, wheedled, tempted, or shanghaied into adventure. Most heroes put up a good fight and entertain us by their efforts to escape the Call to Adventure. These struggles are the work of the reluctant hero or as Campbell called it, the Refusal of the Call.

STAGE THREE: REFUSAL OF THE CALL

uYou're not cut out for this) Joan) and you know it.))

-- from *Romancing the Stone*, screenplay
by Diane Thomas



he problem of the hero now becomes how to respond to the Call to Adventure. Put yourself in the hero's shoes and you can see that it's a difficult passage. You're being asked to say yes to a great unknown, to an adventure that will be exciting but also dangerous and even life-threatening. It wouldn't be a real adventure otherwise. You stand at a threshold of fear, and an understandable reaction would be to hesitate or even refuse the Call, at least temporarily.

Gather your gear; fellow Seeker. Think ahead to possible dangers) and reflect on past disasters. The specter Of the unknown walks among us) halting our progress at the threshold. Some Of us turn down the quest) some hesitate) some are tugged at by families who fear for our lives and don't want us to go. You hear people mutter that the journey is foolhardy) doomed from the start. You feel fear constricting your breathing and making your heart race. Should you stay with the Home Tribe) and let others risk their necks in the quest? Are you cut out to be a Seeker?

This halt on the road before the journey has really started serves an important dramatic function of signalling the audience that the adventure is risky. It's not a frivolous undertaking but a danger-filled, high-stakes gamble in which the

hero might lose fortune or life. The pause to weigh the consequences makes the commitment to the adventure a real choice in which the hero, after this period of hesitation or refusal, is willing to stake her life against the possibility of winning the goal. It also forces the hero to examine the quest carefully and perhaps redefine its objectives.

AVOIDANCE

It's natural for heroes to first react by trying to dodge the adventure. Even Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of the Crucifixion, prayed "Let this cup pass from *me*." He was simply checking to see if there was any way of avoiding the ordeal. Is this trip really necessary?

Even the most heroic of movie heroes will sometimes hesitate, express reluctance, or flatly refuse the Call. Rambo, Rocky, and innumerable John Wayne characters turn away from the offered adventure at first. A common grounds for Refusal is past experience. Heroes claim to be veterans of past adventures which have taught them the folly of such escapades. You won't catch them getting into the same kind of trouble again. The protest continues until the hero's Refusal is overcome, either by some stronger motivation (such as the death or kidnapping of a friend or relative) which raises the stakes, or by the hero's inborn taste for adventure or sense of honor.

Detectives and lovers may refuse the Call at first, referring to experiences which have made them sadder but wiser. There is charm in seeing a hero's reluctance overcome, and the stiffer the Refusal, the more an audience enjoys seeing it worn down.

EXCUSES

Heroes most commonly Refuse the Call by stating a laundry list of weak excuses. In a transparent attempt to delay facing their inevitable fate, they say they *would* undertake the adventure, if not for a pressing series of engagements. These are temporary roadblocks, usually overcome by the urgency of the quest.

PERSISTENT REFUSAL LEADS TO TRAGEDY

Persistent Refusal of the Call can be disastrous. In the Bible, Lot's wife is turned to a pillar of salt for denying God's Call to leave her home in Sodom and never look back. Looking backward, dwelling in the past, and denying reality are forms of Refusal.

Continued denial of a high Calling is one of the marks of a tragic hero. At the beginning of *Red River*, Tom Dunson refuses a Call to an adventure of the heart and begins a slide into almost certain doom. He continues to refuse Calls to open his heart, and is on the path of a tragic hero. It's only when he finally accepts the Call in Act Three that he is redeemed and spared the tragic hero's fate.

CONFLICTING CALLS

Actually Tom Dunson faces two Calls to Adventure at once. The Call to the heart's adventure comes from his sweetheart, but the one he answers is the Call of his male ego, telling him to strike out alone on a macho path. Heroes may have to choose between conflicting Calls from different levels of adventure. The Refusal of the Call is a time to articulate the hero's difficult choices.

POSITIVE REFUSALS

Refusal of the Call is usually a negative moment in the hero's progress, a dangerous moment in which the adventure might go astray or never get off the ground at all. However, there are some special cases in which refusing the Call is a wise and positive move on the part of the hero. When the Call is a temptation to evil or a summons to disaster, the hero is smart to say no. The Three Little Pigs wisely refused to open the door to the Big Bad Wolf's powerful arguments. In *Death Becomes Her*, Bruce Willis' character receives several powerful Calls to drink a magic potion of immortality. Despite an alluring sales pitch by Isabella Rossellini, he Refuses the Call and saves his own soul.

ARTIST AS HERO

Another special case in which Refusal of the Call can be positive is that of the artist as hero. We writers, poets, painters, and musicians face difficult, contradictory Calls.

We must fully immerse ourselves in the world to find the material for our art. But we must also at times withdraw from the world, going alone to actually make the art. Like many heroes of story, we receive conflicting Calls, one from the outer world, one from our own insides, and we must choose or make compromises. To answer a higher Call to express ourselves, we artists may have to refuse the Call of what Joseph Campbell terms "the blandishments of the world:"

When you are getting ready to undertake a great adventure, the Ordinary World knows somehow and clings to you. It sings its sweetest, most insistent song, like the Sirens trying to draw Odysseus and his crew onto the rocks. Countless distractions tempt you off track as you begin to work. Odysseus had to stop up the ears of his men with wax so they wouldn't be lured onto the rocks by the Sirens' bewitching song.

However, Odysseus first had his men tie him to the mast, so he could hear the Sirens but would be unable to steer the ship into danger. Artists sometimes ride through life like Odysseus lashed to the mast, with all senses deeply experiencing the song of life, but also voluntarily bound to the ship of their art. They are refusing the powerful Call of the world, in order to follow the wider Call of artistic expression.

WILLING HEROES

While many heroes express fear, reluctance, or refusal at this stage, others don't hesitate or voice any fear. They are **willing heroes** who have accepted or even sought out the Call to Adventure. Propp calls them "seekers" as opposed to "victimized heroes." However, the fear and doubt represented by the Refusal of the Call will find expression even in the stories of willing heroes. Other characters will express the fear, warning the hero and the audience of what may happen on the road ahead.

A willing hero like John Dunbar from *Dances with Wolves* may be past the fear of personal death. He has already sought out death in the first sequence of the movie as he rides suicidally in front of Rebel rifles and is miraculously spared. He seeks out the adventure of the West willingly, without refusal or reluctance. But the danger and harshness of the prairie is made clear to the audience through the fate of other characters who represent Refusal of the Call. One is the mad, pathetic Army officer who gives Dunbar his scribbled "orders." He shows a possible fate for Dunbar. The frontier is so strange and challenging that it can drive some people

insane. The officer has been unable to accept the reality of this world, has retreated into denial and fantasy, and refuses the frontier's Call by shooting himself.

The other character who bears the energy of Refusal is the scroungy wagon driver who escorts Dunbar to his deserted post. He expresses nothing but fear of the Indians and the prairie, and wants Dunbar to Refuse the Call, abandon his enterprise, and return to civilization. The driver ends up being brutally killed by the Indians, showing the audience another possible fate for Dunbar. Though there is no Refusal by the hero himself the danger of the adventure is acknowledged and dramatized through another character.

THRESHOLD GUARDIANS

Heroes who overcome their fear and commit to an adventure may still be tested by powerful figures who raise the banner of fear and doubt, questioning the hero's very worthiness to be in the game. They are Threshold Guardians, blocking the heroes before the adventure has even begun.

In *Romancing the Stone*, Joan Wilder accepts the Call and is totally committed to the adventure for the sake of her sister in Colombia. However, the moment of fear, the way station of Refusal, is still elaborately acknowledged in a scene with her agent, who wears the fearful mask of a Threshold Guardian. A tough, cynical woman, she forcefully underlines the dangers and tries to talk Joan out of going. Like a witch pronouncing a curse, she declares that Joan is not up to the task of being a hero. Joan even agrees with her, but is now motivated by the danger to her sister. She is committed to the adventure. Though Joan herself does not Refuse the Call, the fear, doubt, and danger have still been made clear to the audience.

Joan's agent demonstrates how a character may switch masks to show aspects of more than one archetype. She appears at first to be a Mentor and friend to Joan, an ally in her profession and her dealings with men. But this Mentor turns into a fierce Threshold Guardian, blocking the way into the adventure with stern warnings. She's like an overprotective parent, not allowing the daughter to learn through her own mistakes. Her function at this point is to test the hero's commitment to the adventure.

This character serves another important function. She poses a dramatic question for the audience. Is Joan truly heroic enough to face and survive the

adventure? This doubt is more interesting than knowing that the hero will rise to every occasion. Such questions create emotional suspense for the audience, who watch the hero's progress with uncertainty hanging in the back of their minds. Refusal of the Call often serves to raise such doubts.

It's not unusual for a Mentor to change masks and perform the function of a Threshold Guardian. Some Mentors guide the hero deeper into the adventure; others block the hero's path on an adventure society might not approve of — an illicit, unwise, or dangerous path. Such a Mentor/Threshold Guardian becomes a powerful embodiment of society or culture, warning the hero not to go outside the accepted bounds. In *Beverly Hills Cop*, Eddie Murphy's Detroit police boss stands in his way, orders him off the case, and draws a line which Murphy is not supposed to cross. Of course Murphy does cross the line, immediately.

THE SECRET DOOR

Heroes inevitably violate limits set by Mentors or Threshold Guardians, due to what we might call the Law of the Secret Door. When Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* is told she has the run of the Beast's household, except for one door which she must never enter, we know that she will be compelled at some point to open that secret door. If Pandora is told she must not open the box, she won't rest until she's had a peek inside. If Psyche is told she must never look upon her lover Cupid, she will surely find a way to lay eyes on him. These stories are symbols of human curiosity, the powerful drive to know all the hidden things, all the secrets.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Dorothy runs away from home and gets as Jar as the carnival wagon of Professor Marvel, a Wise Old Man whose function, in this incarnation, is to block her at the threshold of a dangerous journey. At this point Dorothy is a willing hero, and is left for the Professor to express the danger of the road for the audience. With a bit of shamanic magic, he convinces her to return home. He has convinced her to Refuse the Call, for now.

But in fact Professor Marvel is issuing a higher Call to go home, make peace with her embattled feminine energy, reconnect with Aunt Em's love, and deal with her feelings rather than run away from them.

Although Dorothy turns back for the time being) powerful forces have been set in motion in her life. She finds that the frighiful power of the tornado) a symbol of the feelings she has stirred up) has driven her loved ones and allies underground) out of reach. No one can hear her. She is alone except for Toto) her intuition. Like many a hero she finds that once started on a journey) she can never go back to the way things were. Ultimately) Refusal is pointless. She has already burned some bridges behind her and must live with the consequences of taking the first step on the Road of Heroes.

Dorothy takes rifuge in the empty house) the common dream symbol for an old personality structure. But the whirlingforces of change) which she herself has stirred up) come sweeping towards her and no structure can protect against its awesome power.

Refusal may be a subtle moment, perhaps just a word or two of hesitation between receiving and accepting a Call. (Often several stages of the journey may be combined in a single scene. Folklorists call this „conflation:’) Refusal may be a single step near the beginning of the journey, or it may be encountered at every step of the way, depending on the nature of the hero.

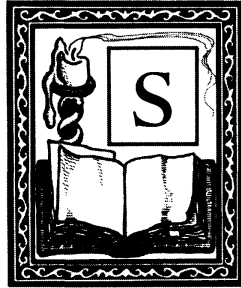
Refusal of the Call can be an opportunity to redirect the focus of the adventure. An adventure taken on a lark or to escape some unpleasant consequence may be nudged into a deeper adventure of the spirit.

A hero hesitates at the threshold to experience the fear, to let the audience know the formidability of the challenges ahead. But eventually fear is overcome or set aside, often with the help of wise, protective forces or magical gifts, representing the energy of the next stage, Meeting with the Mentor.

STAGE FOUR: MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

*uShe (Athena) assumed the appearance Of Mentor and
seemed so like him as to deceive both eye and ear..."*

— *The Odyssey* of Homer



ometimes it's not a bad idea to refUse a Call until you've had time to prepare for the "zone unknown" that lies ahead. In mythology and folklore that preparation might be done with the help of the wise, protective figure of the Mentor, whose many services to the hero include protecting, guiding, teaching, testing, training, and providing magical gifts. In his study of Russian folktales, Vladimir Propp calls this character type the "donor" or "provider" because its precise fUnction is to supply the hero with something needed on the journey. Meeting with the Mentor is the stage of the Hero's Journey in which the hero gains the supplies, knowledge, and confidence needed to overcome fear and commence the adventure.

You Seekers,fearjul at the brink Of adventure, consult with the elders Of the Home Tribe. Seek out those who have gone bifore. Learn the secret lore Of watering holes,game trails, and berry patches, and what badlands, quicksand, and monsters to avoid. An old one, too feeble to go out again, scratches a map for us in the dirt. The shaman Of the tribe presses something into your hand, a magic gift, a potent talisman that will protect us and guide us on the quest. Now we can set out with lighter hearts and greater confidence,for we take with us the collected wisdom Of the Home Tribe.

HEROES AND MENTORS

Movies and stories of all kinds are constantly elaborating the relationship between the two archetypes of hero and Mentor.

The *Karate Kid* films, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and *Stand and Deliver* are stories devoted entirely to the process of mentors teaching students. Countless films such as *Red River*, *Ordinary People*, *Star Wars*, and *Fried Green Tomatoes* reveal the vital force of Mentors at key moments in the lives of heroes.

SOURCES OF WISDOM

Even if there is no actual character performing the many functions of the Mentor archetype, heroes almost always make contact with some source of wisdom before committing to the adventure. They may seek out the experience of those who have gone before, or they may look inside themselves for wisdom won at great cost in former adventures. Either way, they are smart to consult the map of the adventure, looking for the records, charts, and ship's logs of that territory. It's only prudent for wayfarers to stop and check the map before setting out on the challenging, often disorienting, Road of Heroes.

For the storyteller, Meeting with the Mentor is a stage rich in potential for conflict, involvement, humor, and tragedy. It's based in an emotional relationship, usually between a hero and a Mentor or advisor of some kind, and audiences seem to enjoy relationships in which the wisdom and experience of one generation is passed on to the next. Everyone has had a relationship with a Mentor or role model.

MENTORS IN FOLKLORE AND MYTH

Folklore is filled with descriptions of heroes meeting magical protectors who bestow gifts and guide them on the journey. We read of the elves who help the shoemaker; the animals who help and protect little girls in Russian fairy tales; the seven dwarfs who give Snow White shelter; or Puss-in-Boots, the talking cat who helps his poor master win a kingdom. All are projections of the powerful archetype of the Mentor, helping and guiding the hero.

Heroes of mythology seek the advice and help of the witches, wizards, witch doctors, spirits, and gods of their worlds. The heroes of Homer's stories are guided

by patron gods and goddesses who give them magical aid. Some heroes are raised and trained by magical beings that are somewhere between gods and men, such as centaurs.

CHIRON: A PROTOTYPE

Many of the Greek heroes were mentored by the centaur Chiron, a prototype for all Wise Old Men and Women. A strange mix of man and horse, Chiron was foster-father and trainer to a whole army of Greek heroes including Hercules, Actaeon, Achilles, Peleus, and Aesculapius, the greatest surgeon of antiquity. In the person of Chiron, the Greeks stored many of their notions about what it means to be a Mentor.

As a rule, centaurs are wild and savage creatures. Chiron was an unusually kind and peaceful one, but he still kept some of his wild horse nature. As a half man/half animal creature, he is linked to the shamans of many cultures who dance in the skins of animals to get in touch with animal power. Chiron is the energy and intuition of wild nature, gentled and harnessed to teaching. Like the shamans, he is a bridge between humans and the higher powers of nature and the universe. Mentors in stories often show that they are connected to nature or to some other world of the spirit.

As a Mentor, Chiron led his heroes-in-training through the thresholds of manhood by patiently teaching them the skills of archery, poetry, surgery, and so on. He was not always well rewarded for his efforts. His violence-prone pupil Hercules wounded him with a magic arrow which made Chiron beg the gods for the mercy of death. But in the end, after a truly heroic sacrifice in which he rescued Prometheus from the underworld by taking his place, Chiron received the highest distinction the Greeks could bestow. Zeus made him a constellation and a sign of the zodiac — Sagittarius, a centaur firing a bow. Clearly the Greeks had a high regard for teachers and Mentors.

MENTOR HIMSELF

The term **Mentor** comes from the character of that name in *The Odyssey*. Mentor was the loyal friend of Odysseus, entrusted with raising his son Telemachus while Odysseus made his long way back from the Trojan War. Mentor has given his name

to all guides and trainers, but it's really Athena, the goddess of wisdom, who works behind the scenes to bring the energy of the Mentor archetype into the story.

"The goddess with the flashing eyes" has a big crush on Odysseus, and an interest in getting him home safely. She also looks out for his son Telemachus. She finds the son's story stuck in the opening scenes (the Ordinary World) of *The Odyssey* when the household is overrun by arrogant young suitors for his mother's hand. Athena decides to unstuck the situation by taking human form. An important function of the Mentor archetype is to get the story rolling.

First she assumes the appearance of a traveling warrior named Mentos, to issue a stirring challenge to stand up to the suitors and seek his father (Call to Adventure). Telemachus accepts the challenge but the suitors laugh him off and he is so discouraged he wants to abandon the mission (Refusal of the Call). Once again the story seems stuck, and Athena unsticks it by taking the form of Telemachus' teacher Mentor. In this disguise she drums some courage into him and helps him assemble a ship and crew. Therefore, even though Mentor is the name we give to wise counselors and guides, it is really the goddess Athena who acts here.

Athena is the full, undiluted energy of the archetype. If she appeared in her true form, it would probably blast the skin off the bones of the strongest hero. The gods usually speak to us through the filter of other people who are temporarily filled with a godlike spirit. A good teacher or Mentor is enthused about learning. The wonderful thing is that this feeling can be communicated to students or to an audience.

The names Mentos and Mentor, along with our word "mental," stem from the Greek word for mind, *menos*, a marvelously flexible word that can mean intention, force, or purpose as well as mind, spirit, or remembrance. Mentors in stories act mainly on the mind of the hero, changing her consciousness or redirecting her will. Even if physical gifts are given, Mentors also strengthen the hero's mind to face an ordeal with confidence. *Menos* also means courage.

AVOIDING MENTOR CLICHES

The audience is extremely familiar with the Mentor archetype. The behaviors, attitudes, and functions of Wise Old Women and Men are well known from thousands of stories, and it's easy to fall into clichés and stereotypes — kindly fairy godmothers and white-bearded wizards in tall Merlin hats. To combat this and

keep your writing fresh and surprising, defy the archetypes! Stand them on their heads, turn them inside out, purposely do without them altogether to see what happens. The absence of a Mentor creates special and interesting conditions for a hero. But be aware of the archetype's existence, and the audience's familiarity with it.

MISDIRECTION

Audiences don't mind being misled about a Mentor (or any character) from time to time. Real life is full of surprises about people who turn out to be nothing like we first thought. The mask of the Mentor can be used to trick a hero into entering a life of crime. This is how Fagin enlists little boys as pickpockets in *Oliver Twist*. The mask of Mentor can be used to get a hero involved in a dangerous adventure, unknowingly working for the villains. In *Arabesque*, Gregory Peck is tricked into helping a ring of spies by a fake Wise Old Man. You can make the audience think they are seeing a conventional, kindly, helpful Mentor, and then reveal that the character is actually something quite different. Use the audience's expectations and assumptions to surprise them.

MENTOR-HERO CONFLICTS

The Mentor-hero relationship can take a tragic or deadly turn if the hero is ungrateful or violence-prone. Despite the reputation of Hercules as a peerless hero, he has an alarming tendency to do harm to his Mentors. In addition to painfully wounding Chiron, Hercules got so frustrated at music lessons that he bashed in the head of his music teacher Lycus with the first lyre ever made.

Sometimes a Mentor turns villain or betrays the hero. The movie *The Eiger Sanction* shows an apparently benevolent Mentor (George Kennedy) who surprisingly turns on his student hero (Clint Eastwood) and tries to kill him. The dwarf Regin, in Nordic myth, is at first a Mentor to Sigurd the Dragonslayer and helpfully reforges his broken sword. But in the long run the helper turns out to be a double-crosser. After the dragon is slain, Regin plots to kill Sigurd and keep the treasure for himself.

Rumpelstiltskin is initially a fairy-tale Mentor who helps the heroine by making good on her father's boast that she can spin straw into gold. But the price he demands for his gift is too **high**—he wants her baby. These stories teach us that not

all Mentors are to be trusted, and that it's healthy to question a Mentor's motives. It's one way to distinguish good from bad advice.

Mentors sometimes disappoint the heroes who have admired them during apprenticeship. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* Jimmy Stewart learns that his Mentor and role model, the noble Senator played by Claude Rains, is as crooked and cowardly as the rest of Congress.

Mentors, like parents, may have a hard time letting go of their charges. An overprotective Mentor can lead to a tragic situation. The character of Svengali from the novel *Trilby* is a chilling portrait of a Mentor who becomes so obsessed with his student that he dooms them both.

MENTOR-DRIVEN STORIES

Once in a while an entire story is built around a Mentor. *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, the novel and film, is a whole story built on teaching. Mr. Chips is the Mentor of thousands of boys and the hero of the story, with his own series of Mentors.

The movie *Barbarossa* is a wise and funny look at a Mentor relationship sustained throughout the story. Its focus is the training of a country boy (Gary Busey) by a legendary Western desperado (Willie Nelson). The young man's learning is so complete that when the movie ends, he is ready to take Barbarossa's place as a larger-than-life folk hero.

MENTOR AS EVOLVED HERO

Mentors can be regarded as heroes who have become experienced enough to teach others. They have been down the Road of Heroes one or more times, and they have acquired knowledge and skill which can be passed on. The progression of images in the Tarot deck shows how a hero evolves to become a Mentor. A hero begins as a Fool and at various stages of the adventure rises through ranks of magician, warrior, messenger, conqueror, lover, thief, ruler, hermit, and so on. At last the hero becomes a Hierophant, a worker of miracles, a Mentor and guide to others, whose experience comes from surviving many rounds of the Hero's Journey.

CRITICAL INFLUENCE

Most often, teaching, training, and testing are only transient stages of a hero's progress, part of a larger picture. In many movies and stories the Wise Old Woman or Man is a passing influence on the hero. But the Mentor's brief appearance is critical to get the story past the blockades of doubt and fear. Mentors may appear only two or three times in a story. Glinda the Good Witch appears only three times in *The Wizard of Oz*: 1) giving Dorothy the red shoes and a yellow path to follow, 2) intervening to blanket the sleep-inducing poppies with pure white snow, and 3) granting her wish to return home, with the help of the magic red shoes. In all three cases her function is to get the story unstuck by giving aid, advice, or magical equipment.

Mentors spring up in amazing variety and frequency because they are so useful to storytellers. They reflect the reality that we all have to learn the lessons of life from someone or something. Whether embodied as a person, a tradition, or a code of ethics, the energy of the archetype is present in almost every story, to get things rolling with gifts, encouragement, guidance, or wisdom.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Dorothy, like many heroes, encounters a series of Mentors of varying shades. She learns something from almost everyone she meets, and all the characters from whom she learns are in a sense Mentors.

Professor Marvel is the Mentor who reminds her that she is loved, and sends her on her quest for ("home," a term that means far more than a Kansas farmhouse. Dorothy has to learn to feel at home in her own soul, and going back to face her problems is a step in that direction.

But the tornado flings her to Oz, where Dorothy encounters Glinda, the good witch, a new Mentor for a new land. Glinda acquaints her with the unfamiliar rules of Oz, gives her the magic gift of the ruby slippers, and points her on the way of the Yellow Brick Road, the golden Road of Heroes. She gives Dorothy a positive feminine role model to balance the negativity of the Wicked Witch.

The three magical figures that Dorothy meets along the way, a man of straw, a man of tin, and a talking lion, are allies and Mentors who teach her lessons about brains, heart, and

courage. They are different models of masculine energy that she must incorporate in building her own personality.

*The Wizard himself is a Mentor, giving her a new Call to Adventure, the impossible mission of fetching the witch's broomstick. He challenges Dorothy to face her greatest **fear**—the hostile feminine energy of the Witch.*

The little dog Toto is a Mentor, too, in a way. Acting entirely on instinct, he is her intuition, guiding her deeper into the adventure and back out again.

The concept of the Mentor archetype has many uses for the writer. In addition to offering a force that can propel the story forward and supply the hero with necessary motivation or equipment for the journey, Mentors can provide humor or deep, tragic relationships. Some stories don't need a special character solely dedicated to perform the functions of this archetype, but at some point in almost any story, the Mentor functions of helping the hero are performed by some character or force, temporarily wearing the mask of the Mentor.

When writers get stuck, they may seek the help of Mentors just as heroes do. They may consult writing teachers or seek inspiration from the works of great writers. They may delve deep inside themselves to the real sources of inspiration in the Self, the dwelling place of the Muses. The best Mentor advice may be so simple: Breathe. Hang in there. You're doing fine. You've got what it takes to handle any situation, somewhere inside you.

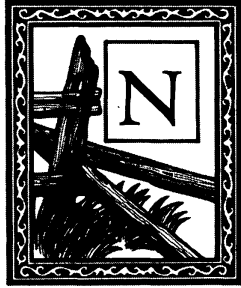
Writers should bear in mind that they are Mentors of a kind to their readers, shamans who travel to other worlds and bring back stories to heal their people. Like Mentors, they teach with their stories and give of their experience, passion, observation, and enthusiasm. Writers, like shamans and Mentors, provide metaphors by which people guide their lives —a most valuable gift and a grave responsibility for the writer.

It's often the energy of the Mentor archetype that gets a hero past fear and sends her to the brink of adventure, at the next stage of the Hero's Journey, the First Threshold.

STAGE FIVE: CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD

(Just follow the Yellow Brick Road.))

—from *The Wizard Of Oz*, screenplay by
Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and
Edgar Allan Woolf



Now the hero stands at the very threshold of the world of adventure, the Special World of Act Two. The call has been heard, doubts and fears have been expressed and allayed, and all due preparations have been made. But the real movement, the most critical action of Act One, still remains. Crossing the First Threshold is an act of the will in which the hero commits wholeheartedly to the adventure.

The ranks Of the Seekers are thinner now. Some Of us have dropped out) but the final few are ready to cross the threshold and truly begin the adventure. The problems Of the Home Tribe are clear to everyone) and desperate —something must be done) now! Ready or not) we lope out Of the village leaving all things familiar behind. As you pull away you feel the jerk Of the invisible threads that bind you to your loved ones. It's difficult to pull away from everything you know but with a deep breath you go on) taking the plunge into the abyss Of the unknown.

We enter a strange no-man)s-land) a world between worlds) a zone Of crossing that may be desolate and lonely) or in places) crowded with life. You sense the presence Of other beings) other forces with sharp thorns or claws) guarding the way to the treasure you seek. But there)s no turning back now) we all feel it; the adventure has begun for good or ill.

APPROACHING THE THRESHOLD

Heroes typically don't just accept the advice and gifts of their Mentors and then charge into the adventure. Often their final commitment is brought about through some external force which changes the course or intensity of the story. This is equivalent to the famous uplot point" or uturning point" of the conventional three-act movie structure. A villain may kill, harm, threaten, or kidnap someone close to the hero, sweeping aside all hesitation. Rough weather may force the sailing of a ship, or the hero may be given a deadline to achieve an assignment. The hero may run out of options, or discover that a difficult choice must be made. Some heroes are ushanghaied" into the adventure or pushed over the brink, with no choice but to commit to the journey. In *Thelma & Louise*, Louise's impulsive killing of a man who is assaulting Thelma is the action that pushes the women to Cross the First Threshold into a new world of being on the run from the law.

An example of the externally imposed event is found in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. Advertising man Roger Thornhill, mistaken for a daring secret agent, has been trying his best to avoid his Call to Adventure all through the first act. It takes a murder to get him committed to the journey. A man he's questioning at the U.N. building is killed in front of witnesses in such a way that everyone thinks Roger did it. Now he is truly a uman on the run,' escaping both from the police and from the enemy agents who will stop at nothing to kill him. The murder is the external event that pushes the story over the First Threshold into the Special World, where the stakes are higher.

Internal events might trigger a Threshold Crossing as well. Heroes come to decision points where their very souls are at stake, where they must decide uDo I go on living my life as I always have, or will I risk everything in the effort to grow and change?" In *Ordinary People* the deteriorating life of the young hero Conrad gradually pressures him into making a choice, despite his fears, to see a therapist and explore the trauma of his brother's death.

Often a combination of external events and inner choices will boost the story towards the second act. In *Beverly Hills Cop* Axel Foley sees a childhood friend brutally executed by thugs, and is motivated to find the man who hired them. But it takes a separate moment of decision for him to overcome resistance and fully commit to the adventure. In a brief scene in which his boss warns him off the case,

you see him make the inner choice to ignore the warning and enter the Special World at any cost.

THRESHOLD GUARDIANS

As you approach the threshold you're likely to encounter beings who try to block your way. They are called Threshold Guardians, a powerful and useful archetype. They may pop up to block the way and test the hero at any point in a story, but they tend to cluster around the doorways, gates, and narrow passages of threshold crossings. Axel Foley's Detroit police captain, who firmly forbids him from getting involved in the investigation of the murder, is one such figure.

Threshold Guardians are part of the training of any hero. In Greek myth, the three-headed monster dog Cerberus guards the entrance to the underworld, and many a hero has had to figure out a way past his jaws. The grim ferryman Charon who guides souls across the River Styx is another Threshold Guardian who must be appeased with a gift of a penny.

The task for heroes at this point is often to figure out some way around or through these guardians. Often their threat is just an illusion, and the solution is simply to ignore them or to push through them with faith. Other Threshold Guardians must be absorbed or their hostile energy must be reflected back onto them. The trick may be to realize that what seems like an obstacle may actually be the means of climbing over the threshold. Threshold Guardians who seem to be enemies may be turned into valuable allies.

Sometimes the guardians of the First Threshold simply need to be acknowledged. They occupy a difficult niche and it wouldn't be polite to pass through their territory without recognizing their power and their important role of keeping the gate. It's a little like tipping a doorman or paying a ticket-taker at a theatre.

THE CROSSING

Sometimes this step merely signifies we have reached the border of the two worlds. We must take the leap of faith into the unknown or else the adventure will never really begin.

Countless movies illustrate the border between two worlds with the crossing of physical barriers such as doors, gates, arches, bridges, deserts, canyons, walls, cliffs,

oceans, or rivers. In many Westerns thresholds are clearly marked by river or border crossings. In the adventure *Gunga Din*, the heroes must leap off a high cliff to escape a horde of screaming cult members at the end of Act One. They are bonded by this leap into the unknown, a Threshold Crossing signifying their willingness to explore the Special World of Act Two together.

In the olden days of film, the transition between Act One and Act Two was often marked by a brief fade-out, a momentary darkening of the screen which indicated passage of time or movement in space. The fade-out was equivalent to the curtain coming down in the theatre so the stagehands can change the set and props to create a new locale or show elapse of time.

Nowadays it's common for editors to cut sharply from Act One to Act Two. Nevertheless the audience will still experience a noticeable shift in energy at the Threshold Crossing. A song, a music cue or a drastic visual contrast may help signal the transition. The pace of the story may pick up. Entering a new terrain or structure may signal the change of worlds. In *A League Of Their Own* the Crossing is the moment the women enter a big-league baseball stadium, a marked contrast from the country ball fields where they've been playing.

The actual Crossing of the Threshold may be a single moment, or it may be an extended passage in a story. In *Lawrence Of Arabia*, T. E. Lawrence's ordeals in crossing "the Sun's Anvil," a treacherous stretch of desert, are an elaboration of this stage into a substantial sequence.

The Crossing takes a certain kind of courage from the hero. He is like the Fool in the Tarot deck: one foot out over a precipice, about to begin free-fall into the unknown.

That special courage is called making the **leap of faith**. Like jumping out of an airplane, the act is irrevocable. There's no turning back now. The leap is made on faith, the trust that somehow we'll land safely.

ROUGH LANDING

Heroes don't always land gently. They may crash in the other world, literally or figuratively. The leap of faith may turn into a crisis of faith as romantic illusions about the Special World are shattered by first contact with it. A bruised hero makes pick herself up and ask, "Is that all there is?" The passage to the Special World may be exhausting, frustrating, or disorienting.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

A tremendous natural force rises up to hurl Dorothy over the First Threshold. She is trying to get home but the tornado sends her on a detour to a Special World where she will learn what "home" really means. Dorothy's last name, Gale, is a wordplay that links her to the storm. In symbolic language, it's her own stirred-up emotions that have generated this twister. Her old idea of home, the house, is wrenched up by the tornado and carried to a far-off land where a new personality structure can be built.

As she passes through the transition zone, Dorothy sees familiar sights but in unfamiliar circumstances. Cows fly through the air, men row a boat through the storm, and Miss Gulch on her bicycle turns into the Wicked Witch. Dorothy has nothing she can count on now but Toto — her instincts.

The house comes down with a crash. Dorothy emerges to find a world startlingly different from Kansas, populated by the Little Men and Women of fairy tales. A Mentor appears magically when Glinda floats onto the scene in a transparent bubble. She begins to teach Dorothy about the strange ways of the new land, and points out that the crash of Dorothy's house has killed a bad witch. Dorothy's old personality has been shattered by the uprooting of her old notion of home.

Glinda gives a mentor's gifts, the ruby slippers, and new direction for the quest. To get home, Dorothy must first see the Wizard, that is, get in touch with her own higher Self. Glinda gives a specific path, the Yellow Brick Road, and sends her over another threshold, knowing she will have to make friends, confront foes, and be tested before she can reach her ultimate goal.

The First Threshold is the turning point at which the adventure begins in earnest, at the end of Act One. According to a corporate metaphor in use at Disney, a story is like an airplane flight, and Act One is the process of loading, fueling, taxiing, and rumbling down the runway towards takeoff. The First Threshold is the moment the wheels leave the ground and the plane begins to fly. If you've never flown before, it may take awhile to adjust to being in the air. We'll describe that process of adjustment in the next phase of the Hero's Journey: Tests, Allies, Enemies.

STAGE SIX: TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES

*uSee) you got three or four good pals) why then you got yourself
a tribe-- there ain)t nothin) stronger than that.))*

-- from *Young Guns*, screenplay

by John Fusco



ow the hero fully enters the mysterious, exciting Special World which Joseph Campbell called "a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials." It's a new and sometimes frightening experience for the hero. No matter how many schools he has been through, he's a freshman all over again in this new world.

Jtt Seekers are in shock -- this new world is so different from the home we've always known. Not only are the terrain and the local residents different) the rules of this place are strange as they can be. Different things are valued here and we have a lot to learn about the local currency) customs) and language. Strange creatures jump out at you! Think fast! Don't eat that) it could be poison!

Exhausted by the journey across the desolate threshold zone) w/re running out of time and energy. Remember our people back in the Home Tribe are counting on us. Enough sight-seeing) let's concentrate on the goal. Jtt must go where the food and game and information are to be found. There our skills will be tested) and we'll come one step closer to what we seek.

CONTRAST

The audience's first impressions of the Special World should strike a sharp contrast with the Ordinary World. Think of Eddie Murphy's first look at the Special World of *Beverly Hills Cop*, which makes such a drastic contrast to his former world of Detroit. Even if the hero remains physically in the same place throughout the story, there is movement and change as new emotional territory is explored. A Special World, even a figurative one, has a different feel, a different rhythm, different priorities and values, and different rules. In *Father of the Bride* or *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, while there is no physical threshold, there's definitely a crossing into a Special World with new conditions.

When a submarine dives, a wagon train leaves St. Louis, or the starship Enterprise leaves the earth, the conditions and rules of survival change. Things are often more dangerous, and the price of mistakes is higher.

TESTING

The most important function of this period of adjustment to the Special World is **testing**. Storytellers use this phase to test the hero, putting her through a series of trials and challenges that are meant to prepare her for greater ordeals ahead.

Joseph Campbell illustrates this stage with the tale of Psyche, who is put through a fairy-tale-like series of Tests before winning back her lost love, Cupid (Eros). This tale has been wisely interpreted by Robert A. Johnson in his book on feminine psychology, *She*. Psyche is given three seemingly impossible tasks by Cupid's jealous mother Venus and passes the Tests with the help of beings to whom she has been kind along the way. She has made Allies.

The Tests at the beginning of Act Two are often difficult obstacles, but they don't have the maximum life-and-death quality of later events. If the adventure were a college learning experience, Act One would be a series of entrance exams, and the Test stage of Act Two would be a series of pop quizzes, meant to sharpen the hero's skill in specific areas and prepare her for the more rigorous midterm and final exams commgup.

The Tests may be a continuation of the Mentor's training. Many Mentors accompany their heroes this far into the adventure, coaching them for the big rounds ahead.

The Tests may also be built into the architecture or landscape of the Special World. This world is usually dominated by a villain or Shadow who is careful to surround his world with traps, barricades, and checkpoints. It's common for heroes to fall into traps here or trip the Shadow's security alarms. How the hero deals with these traps is part of the Testing.

ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Another function of this stage is the making of Allies or Enemies. It's natural for heroes just arriving in the Special World to spend some time figuring out who can be trusted and relied upon for special services, and who is not to be trusted. This too is a kind of Test, examining if the hero is a good judge of character.

ALLIES

Heroes may walk into the Test stage looking for information, but they may walk out with new friends or Allies. In *Shane*, a shaky partnership between the gunfighter Shane (Alan Ladd) and the farmer (Van Heflin) is cemented into a real friendship by the shared ordeal of a saloon-shattering brawl. When John Dunbar in *Dances with Wolves* crosses the threshold into the Special World of the frontier, he gradually makes alliances with Kicking Bear (Graham Greene) and the wolf he names Two Socks.

SIDEKICKS

Westerns frequently make use of a long-standing bond between a hero and a sidekick, an Ally who generally rides with the hero and supports his adventures. The Lone Ranger has Tonto, Zorro has the servant Bernardo, the Cisco Kid has Pancho. These pairings of hero and sidekick can be found throughout myth and literature: Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Prince Hal and Falstaff, or the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh and his wild companion Enkidu.

These close Allies of the hero may provide comic relief as well as assistance. Comical sidekicks, played by character actors such as Walter Brennan, Gabby Hayes, Fuzzy Knight, and Slim Pickens, provide humor lacking in their stalwart, serious heroes they accompany. Such figures may freely cross the boundaries between

Mentor and Trickster, sometimes aiding the hero and acting as his conscience, sometimes comically goofing up or causing mischief.

TEAMS

The Testing stage may also provide the opportunity for the forging of a team. Many stories feature multiple heroes or a hero backed up by a team of characters with special skills or qualities. The early phases of Act Two may cover the recruiting of a team, or give an opportunity for the team to make plans and rehearse a difficult operation. The World War II adventure films *The Dirty Dozen* and *The Great Escape* show the heroes bonding into a coherent team before tackling the main event of the story. In the Testing stage the hero may have to struggle against rivals for control of the group. The strengths and flaws of the team members are revealed during Testing.

In a romance, the Testing stage might be the occasion for a first date or for some shared experience that begins to build the relationship, such as the tennis match between Diane Keaton and Woody Allen in *Annie Hall*.

ENEMIES

Heroes can also make bitter enmities at this stage. They may encounter the Shadow or his servants. The hero's appearance in the Special World may tip the Shadow to his arrival and trigger a chain of threatening events. The cantina sequence in *Star Wars* sets up a conflict with the villain Jabba the Hutt which culminates in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Enemies include both the villains or antagonists of stories and their underlings. Enemies may perform functions of other archetypes such as the Shadow, the Trickster, the Threshold Guardian, and sometimes the Herald.

THE RIVAL

A special type of Enemy is the rival, the hero's competition in love, sports, business, or some other enterprise. The rival is usually not out to kill the hero, but is just trying to defeat him in the competition. In the film *The Last of the Mohicans*, Major Duncan Hayward is the rival of hero Nathaniel Poe because they both want the same woman, Cora Munro. The plot of *Honeymoon in Vegas* revolves around a similar rivalry between the hapless hero (Nicolas Cage) and his gambler opponent (James Caan).

NEW RULES

The new rules of the Special World must be learned quickly by the hero and the audience. As Dorothy enters the land of Oz, she is bewildered when Glinda the Good asks, "Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" In Dorothy's Ordinary World of Kansas, there are only bad witches, but in the Special World of Oz, witches can also be good, and fly in pink bubbles instead of on broomsticks. Another Test of the hero is how quickly she can adjust to the new rules of the Special World.

At this stage a Western may impose certain conditions on people entering a town or a bar. In *Unforgiven*, guns cannot be worn in the sheriff's territory. This restriction can draw the hero into conflicts. A hero may enter a bar to discover that the town is totally polarized by two factions: the cattlemen vs. the farmers, the Earps vs. the Clantons, the bounty hunters vs. the sheriff and so on. In the pressure cooker of the saloon, people size each other up and take sides for the coming showdown. The cantina sequence in *Star Wars* draws on the images we all have of Western saloons as places for reconnaissance, challenges, alliances, and the learning of new rules.

WATERING HOLES

Why do so many heroes pass through bars and saloons at this point in the stories? The answer lies in the hunting metaphor of the Hero's Journey. Upon leaving the Ordinary World of village or den, hunters will often head straight for a watering hole to look for game. Predators sometimes follow the muddy tracks left by game who come down to drink. The watering hole is a natural congregating place and a good spot to observe and get information. It's no accident that we call neighborhood saloons and cocktail lounges our "local watering holes."

The crossing of the First Threshold may have been long, lonely, and dry. Bars are natural spots to recuperate, pick up gossip, make friends, and confront Enemies. They also allow us to observe people under pressure, when true character is revealed. How Shane handles himself in a bar fight convinces a farmer to become his Ally and stand up to the bullying cattlemen. In the tense bar-room confrontations in *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker sees flashes of Obi Wan Kenobi's spiritual power and Han Solo's "look out for Number One" mentality. The bar can be a microcosm of the Special World, a place through which everyone must pass, sooner or later, like the saloon in *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*. "Everybody Comes to Rick's," says the title of the play on which *Casablanca* is based.

Bars also play host to a number of other activities including music, flirting, and gambling. This stage in a story, whether it takes place in a bar or not, is a good place for a musical sequence that announces the mood of the Special World. A nightclub act may allow the introduction of a romantic interest, as in Jessica Rabbit's sensational torch song in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Music can express the dualities of the Special World as well. At this stage in *Casablanca* the polarities are movingly presented in a musical duel between the passionate "Marsellaise" sung by the French patriots and the brutal "Deutschland uber Alles" sung by the Nazis.

In the lonely outposts of adventure, saloons or their equivalent may be the only places for sexual intrigue. Bars can be the arena for flirting, romance, or prostitution. A hero may strike up a relationship in a bar to get information, and incidentally acquire an Ally or a lover.

Gambling and saloons go together, and games of chance are a natural feature of the Testing stage. Heroes may want to consult the oracles to see how luck will favor them. They want to learn about the wheel of fortune, and how luck can be coaxed their way. Through a game the stakes can be raised or a fortune can be lost. In the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*, a cosmic family feud is set in motion by a rigged game of chance between two sets of brothers. (The bad guys cheat.)

THE WIZARD OF OZ

OJ course not all heroes go to bars at this stage of the journey. Dorothy encounters her Tests, Allies, and Enemies on the Yellow Brick Road. Like Psyche or the heroes of many fairy tales she is wise enough to know that requests for aid on the road should be honored with an open heart. She earns the loyalty of the Scarecrow by getting him unhooked from his post and by helping him learn to walk. Meanwhile she learns that her Enemy, the Wicked Witch, shadows her at every turn and waits for the chance to strike. The Witch influences some grumpy apple trees to become Enemies to Dorothy and the Scarecrow. The Scarecrow proves his worthiness to be on the team by outwitting the trees. He taunts them into throwing apples, which he and Dorothy pick up to eat.

Dorothy wins the affection of another Ally, the Tin Woodsman, by oiling his joints and listening sympathetically to his sad story of having no heart. The Witch appears again, showing her enmity for Dorothy and her Allies by hurling a fireball at them.

To protect her dog Toto) Dorothy stands up to the blustering of the Cowardly Lion) a potential Enemy or Threshold Guardian) and ends up making him an Ally.

The battlelines are clearly drawn. Dorothy has learned the rules of the Special World and has passed many Tests. Protected by Allies and on guard against declared Enemies) she is ready to approach the central source of power in the land of Oz.

The phase of Tests, Allies, and Enemies in stories is useful for "getting to know you" scenes where the characters get acquainted with each other and the audience learns more about them. This stage also allows the hero to accumulate power and information in preparation for the next stage: Approach to the Inmost Cave.

STAGE SEVEN: APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE

COWARDLY LION: *There's only one thing more I'd like you fellows to do.*

TIN WOODSMAN, SCARECROW: *What's that?*

COWARDLY LION: *Talk me out of it!*

—from *The Wizard of Oz*



Heroes, having made the adjustment to the Special World, now go on to seek its heart. They pass into an intermediate region between the border and the very center of the Hero's Journey. On the way they find another mysterious zone with its own Threshold Guardians, agendas, and tests. This is the Approach to the Inmost Cave, where soon they will encounter supreme wonder and terror. It's time to make final preparations for the central ordeal of the adventure. Heroes at this point are like mountaineers who have raised themselves to a base camp by the labors of Testing, and are about to make the final assault on the highest peak.

Our band of Seekers leaves the oasis at the edge of the new world, refreshed and armed with more knowledge about the nature and habits of the game we're hunting. We're ready to press on to the heart of the new world where the greatest treasures are guarded by our greatest fears.

Look around at your fellow Seekers. We've changed already and new qualities are emerging. Who's the leader now? Some who were not suited for life in the Ordinary World are now thriving. Others who seemed ideal for adventure are turning out to be the least able. A new perception of yourself and others is forming. Based on this new awareness, you can make plans and direct yourself towards getting what you want from the Special World. Soon you will be ready to enter the Inmost Cave.

FUNCTIONS OF APPROACH

In modern storytelling, certain special functions naturally fall into this zone of **Approach**. As heroes near the gates of a citadel deep within the Special World, they may take time to make plans, do reconnaissance on the enemy, reorganize or thin out the group, fortify and arm themselves, and have a last laugh and a final cigarette before going over the top into no-man's-land. The student studies for the midterm. The hunter stalks the game to its hiding place. Adventurers squeeze in a love scene before tackling the central event of the movie.

COURTSHIP

The Approach can be an arena for elaborate courtship rituals. A romance may develop here, bonding hero and beloved before they encounter the main ordeal. In *North by Northwest*, Cary Grant meets a beautiful woman (Eva Marie Saint) on a train as he escapes from the police and the enemy spies. He doesn't know she works for the evil spies and has been assigned to lure him into their trap. However, her seduction backfires and she finds herself actually falling in love with him. Later, thanks to this scene of bonding, she becomes his Ally.

THE BOLD APPROACH

Some heroes boldly stride up to the castle door and demand to be let in. Confident, committed heroes will take this Approach. Axel Foley in *Beverly Hills Cop* crashes into the precincts of his enemy a number of times at the Approach phase, conning his way past Threshold Guardians and flaunting his intention to upset his opponent's world. Cary Grant in *Gunga Din* marches into the Inmost Cave of his antagonists, a cult of assassins, singing an English drinking song at the top of his lungs. His bold Approach is not pure arrogance: He puts on the outrageous show to buy time for his friend Gunga Din to slip away and summon the British army. In true heroic fashion Grant's character is sacrificing himself and tempting death on behalf of the group.

The Approach of Clint Eastwood's character in *Unforgiven* is not so much arrogant as ignorant. He rides into the Inmost Cave of the town during a rain-storm, and is unable to see a sign forbidding firearms. This brings him to an ordeal, a beating by the sheriff (Gene Hackman) that almost kills him.

PREPARATION FOR THE ORDEAL

Approach may be a time of further reconnaissance and information-gathering, or a time of dressing and arming for an ordeal. Gunfighters check their weapons, bullfighters dress carefully in their suits of lights.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

The Wizard Of Oz has such a well-developed Approach section that we'll use it throughout this chapter to illuminate some of the functions of this stage.

OBSTACLES

Having made some Allies in the Testing stage, Dorothy and friends leave the woods on the border of Oz and immediately see the glittering Emerald City of their dreams. They Approach in joy, but before they reach their goal, they face a series of obstacles and challenges that will bond them as a group, and prepare them for the life-and-death struggle yet to come.

BEWARE OF ILLUSIONS

First they are put to sleep by a field of poppies sown by the Wicked Witch's magic. They are brought back to consciousness by a blanket of snow, courtesy of Glinda the Good.

The message for the hero is clear: *Don't* be seduced by illusions and perfumes, stay alert, *don't* fall asleep on the march.

THRESHOLD GUARDIANS

Dorothy and friends reach the City, only to find their way blocked by a rude sentry, a perfect Threshold Guardian (who looks suspiciously like Professor Marvel from Act One). He is a satirical figure, an exaggerated image of a bureaucrat whose job is to enforce stupid, pointless rules. Dorothy identifies herself as the one who dropped a house on the Wicked Witch of the East, and she has the Ruby Slippers to prove it. This wins the respect of the sentry who admits them immediately, saying, "Well that's a horse of a different color!"

Message: Past experience on the journey may be the hero's passport to new lands. Nothing is wasted, and every challenge of the past strengthens and informs us for the present. We win respect for having made it this far.

The satire of bureaucratic nonsense reminds us that few heroes are exempt from the tolls and rituals of the Special World. Heroes must either pay the price of admission or find a way around the obstacles, as Dorothy does.

ANOTHER SPECIAL WORLD

Dorothy and company enter the wonderland of the City, where everything is green except for a horse pulling a carriage, the famous Horse of a Different Color who changes hue every time you look at him. The Driver also looks like Professor Marvel.

Message: You've entered yet another little Special World, with different rules and values. You may encounter a series of these like Chinese boxes, one inside the other, a series of shells protecting some central source of power. The multi-colored horse is a signal that rapid change is coming. The detail of several characters looking alike, or the same character taking a variety of roles, is a reminder we are in a dream world ruled by forces of comparison, association, and transformation. The protean changes of Professor Marvel suggest that a single powerful mind is at work in Oz, or that Dorothy's dream, if that's what it is, has been deeply influenced by his personality. Professor Marvel has become an animus figure for Dorothy: a focus for her projections about mature male energy. Her father is dead or absent and the male figures around the farm, Uncle Henry and the three farmhands, are weak. She is seeking an image of what a father can be, and projects Professor Marvel's paternal energy onto every authority figure she sees. If the Good Witch Glinda is a surrogate mother or positive anima for her, these variations of Professor Marvel are surrogate fathers.

BE PREPARED

Dorothy and friends are primed, pampered, and prepared for their meeting with the Wizard, in the beauty parlors and machine shops of the Emerald City.

Message: Heroes know they are facing a great ordeal, and are wise to make themselves as ready as they'll ever be, like warriors polishing and sharpening their weapons, or students doing final drills before a big exam.

WARNING

Our heroes, feeling pretty good now, go out singing about how the day is laughed away in the merry old land of Oz. Just then the Witch screeches over the city, sky-writing from her broomstick, "Surrender Dorothy!" The people back away in terror, leaving our heroes alone outside the Wizard's door.

Message: It's good for heroes to go into the main event in a state of balance, with confidence tempered by humility and awareness of the danger. No matter how hysterical the celebrations in Oz, they always seem to be damped by an appearance of the Witch, a real party pooper. She is a deep disturbance in Dorothy's psyche which will ruin every pleasurable moment until dealt with decisively. The isolation of the heroes is typical. Like Gary Cooper trying to line up support from cowardly townspeople in *High Noon*, heroes may find good-time companions fading away when the going gets tough.

ANOTHER THRESHOLD

Our heroes knock at the Wizard's door and an even ruder sentry, another ringer for Professor Marvel, sticks his head out. His orders are "Not nobody, not nohow" is to get in to see the Wizard. Only the information that he's dealing with "the Witch's Dorothy" convinces him to go confer with the Wizard. While he's gone, the Lion sings "If I Were King of the Forest," expressing his aspirations.

Message: The credentials of experience may have to be presented repeatedly at successive rungs of power. When delayed by obstacles, heroes do well to get acquainted with their fellow adventurers and learn of their hopes and dreams.

EMOTIONAL APPEAL TO A GUARDIAN

The Sentry returns to report that the Wizard says, "Go away." Dorothy and her companions break down and lament. Now they'll never have their wishes met and Dorothy will never get home. The sad story brings floods of tears to the Sentry's eyes, and he lets them in.

Message: Sometimes, when the passport of experience no longer works to get you past a gate, an emotional appeal can break down the defenses of Threshold Guardians. Establishing a bond of human feeling may be the key.

AN IMPOSSIBLE TEST

Our heroes cross yet another threshold, being ushered into the throne room of Oz by the Sentry, now their friend. Oz himself is one of the most terrifying images ever put on film — the gigantic head of an angry old man, surrounded by Hames and thunder. He can grant your wish, but like the kings of fairy-tales, is miserly with his power. He imposes impossible tests in hopes that you will go away and leave him alone. Dorothy and friends are given the apparently unachievable task of fetching the broomstick of the Wicked Witch.

Message: It's tempting to think you can just march into foreign territory, take the prize, and leave. The awesome image of Oz reminds us that heroes are challenging a powerful status quo, which may not share their dreams and goals. That status quo may even live inside them in strong habits or neuroses that must be overcome before facing the main ordeal. Oz, Professor Marvel in his most powerful and frightening form, is a negative animus figure, the dark side of Dorothy's idea of a father. Dorothy must deal with her confused feelings about male energy before she can confront her deeper feminine nature.

The status quo might be a aging generation or ruler, reluctant to give up power, or a parent unwilling to admit the child is grown. The Wizard at this point is like a harassed father, grouchy about being interrupted and having demands put on him by youth. This angry parental force must be appeased or dealt with in some way before the adventure can proceed. We must all pass tests to earn the approval of parental forces.

Parents sometimes set impossible conditions on winning their love and acceptance. You can't ever seem to please them. Sometimes the very people you naturally turn to in a crisis will push you away. You may have to face the big moment alone.

SHAMANIC TERRITORY

The heroes pass on to the eerie region surrounding the Wicked Witch's castle. Here they encounter more Threshold Guardians, in the witch's creepy servants, the flying monkeys. Dorothy is kidnapped and flown away by the monkeys, and her companions are beaten and scattered. Tin Woodsman is dented and Scarecrow is torn limb from limb.

Message: As heroes Approach the Inmost Cave, they should know they are in shaman's territory, on the edge between life and death. The Scarecrow being torn

to pieces and scattered by the monkeys recalls the visions and dreams that signal selection as a shaman. Shamans-to-be often dream of being dismembered by heavenly spirits and reassembled into the new form of a shaman. Dorothy being flown away by the monkeys is just the sort of thing that happens to shamans when they travel to other worlds.

COMPLICATIONS

The terrorized heroes are discouraged and confused after the monkey attack. Scarecrow's scattered limbs are reassembled by the Tin Woodsman and Cowardly Lion.

Heroes may have disheartening setbacks at this stage while approaching the supreme goal. Such reversals of fortune are called *dramatic complications*. Though they may seem to tear us apart, they are only a further test of our willingness to proceed. They also allow us to put ourselves back together in a more effective form for traveling in this unfamiliar terrain.

HIGHER STAKES

Dorothy is now trapped in the castle. The Witch, mirroring the action of her look-alike Miss Gulch, crams Toto into a basket and threatens to throw him in the river unless Dorothy turns over the Ruby Slippers. Dorothy agrees to hand them over but the Witch is zapped by Glinda's protective spell when she tries to take the shoes. The Witch realizes she'll never get the shoes while Dorothy's alive and sets before her the hourglass with its rushing red sand like dried blood. When the last grain runs out, Dorothy will die.

Message: Another function of the Approach stage is to up the stakes and rededicate the team to its mission. The audience may need to be reminded of the "ticking clock" or the "time bomb" of the story. The urgency and life-and-death quality of the issue need to be underscored.

Toto in the basket is a repeated symbol of intuition stifled by the negative anima of the Witch/Miss Gulch. Dorothy's fear of her own intuitive side keeps stuffing away her creativity and confidence, but it keeps popping up again, like Toto.

The Ruby Slippers are a deep dream symbol, representing both Dorothy's means of getting around in Oz and her identity, her unassailable integrity. The shoes

are a reassuring Mentor's gift, the knowledge that you are a unique being with a core that cannot be shaken by outside events. They are like Ariadne's Thread in the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, a connection with a positive, loving anima that gets you through the darkest of labyrinths.

REORGANIZATION

Toto escapes from the basket as he did in Act One and runs out of the castle to join forces with the three friends who are still piecing together the Scarecrow. Toto leads them to the castle, where they are daunted at the task of getting the helpless Dorothy out of the forbidding, well-defended place. The responsibility of moving the adventure forward has fallen to Dorothy's three Allies; this place is so terrible that there's no help here from kindly wizards and witches. They have gotten by as clowns; now they must become heroes.

Message: Toto again acts as Dorothy's intuition, sensing that it's time to call on Allies and lessons learned to get her out of a trap. The Approach stage is also a time to reorganize a group: to promote some members, sort out living, dead, and wounded, assign special missions, and so on. Archetypal masks may need to be changed as characters are made to perform new functions.

With her freedom of action removed, Dorothy has switched archetypal masks here, trading the Hero mask for that of the Victim, the archetype of helplessness. The three companions have also traded masks, being promoted from Trickster clowns or Allies, to full-fledged Heroes who will carry the action for a while. The audience may find that assumptions about the characters are being overturned as surprising new qualities emerge under the pressure of Approach.

The sense that the heroes must face some things without the help of protective spirits is reminiscent of many mythic tales of trips to the underworld. Human heroes often have to go it alone on a mission from the gods. They must travel to the land of the dead where the gods themselves are afraid to walk. We may consult doctors or therapists, friends or advisors, but there are some places where our Mentors can't go and we are on our own.

HEAVY DEFENSES

Scarecrow, Lion, and Tin Woodsman now creep up to observe the threshold of the Inmost Cave itself, the drawbridge of the Wicked Witch's castle, defended by a whole

army of ferocious-looking Threshold Guardians, wearing bearskin hats and gloves and growling their grim marching song.

Message: Heroes can expect the villain's headquarters to be defended with animal-like ferocity. The castle itself, with its barred gate and drawbridge like a devouring mouth and tongue, is a symbol of the elaborate fortifications around an all-consuming neurosis. The defenses around the Witch's negative anima make the Wizard's guards and palace look inviting by comparison.

WHO IS THE HERO AT THIS POINT?

The three reluctant heroes evaluate the situation. The Lion wants to run, but the Scarecrow has a plan which requires Lion to be the leader. This makes sense since he is the most ferocious-looking, but he still wants to be talked out of it.

Message: The Approach is a good time to recalibrate your team, express misgivings, and give encouragement. Team members make sure all are in agreement about goals, and determine that the right people are in the right jobs. There may even be bitter battles for dominance among the group at this stage, as pirates or thieves fight for control of the adventure.

However, here the Cowardly Lion's efforts to escape responsibility are comic, and point up another function of the Approach: comic relief. This may be the last chance to relax and crack a joke because things are about to get deadly serious in the Supreme Ordeal phase.

GET INTO YOUR OPPONENT'S MIND

As part of their Approach, the three heroes try to cook up a plan as they move closer to the gate. Three sentries attack them, and after a struggle in which costumes fly through the air, our heroes emerge wearing the uniforms and bearskin hats of their enemies. In this disguise, they join the platoon of marching sentries and stride right into the castle.

Message: Here the heroes employ the device of "getting into the skin" of the Threshold Guardians before them. Like the Plains Indians donning buffalo robes to creep close to their prey, the heroes literally put on the skins of their opponents and slip in among them. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. This aspect of the Approach teaches that we must get into the minds of those who seem to stand in

our way. If we understand or empathize with them, the job of getting past them or absorbing their energy is much easier. We can turn their attacks into opportunities to get into their skin. Heroes may also put on disguises to conceal their real intentions as they get close to the Inmost Cave of the opponent.

BREAKTHROUGH

The three heroes now discard their disguises and make their way to the chamber of the castle where Dorothy is imprisoned. The Tin Woodsman uses his axe to chop through the door.

Message: At some point it may be necessary to use force to break through the final veil to the Inmost Cave. The hero's own resistance and fear may have to be overcome by a violent act of will.

NO EXIT

With Dorothy rescued, and the foursome united again, they now turn their attention to escape. But they are blocked in all directions by the witch's guards.

Message: No matter how heroes try to escape their fate, sooner or later the exits are closed off and the life-and-death issue must be faced. With Dorothy and companions "trapped like rats," the Approach to the Inmost Cave is complete.

The Approach encompasses all the final preparations for the Supreme Ordeal. It often brings heroes to a stronghold of the opposition, a defended center where every lesson and Ally of the journey so far comes into play. New perceptions are put to the test, and the final obstacles to reaching the heart are overcome, so that the Supreme Ordeal may begin.

STAGE EIGHT: THE ORDEAL

JAMES BOND: *What do you expect me to do, Goldfinger?*

GOLDFINGER: *Why Mr. Bond, I expect you to die.*

—from *Goldfinger*, screenplay

by Richard Maibaum and Paul Dehn



Now the hero stands in the deepest chamber of the Inmost Cave, facing the greatest challenge and the most fearsome opponent yet. This the real heart of the matter, what Joseph Campbell called the Ordeal. **I**t is the mainspring of the heroic form and the key to its magic power.

*Seeker, enter the Inmost Cave and look for that which will restore life to the Home Tribe. The way grows narrow and dark. You must go alone on hands and knees and you feel the earth press close around you. You can hardly breathe. Suddenly you come out into the deepest chamber and find yourself face-to-face with a towering figure, a menacing Shadow composed **O**f all your doubts and fears and well armed to defend a treasure. Here, in this moment, is the chance to win all or die. No matter what you came for, it's Death that now stares back at you. Whatever the outcome **O**f the battle, you are about to taste death and it will change you.*

DEATH AND REBIRTH

The simple secret of the Ordeal is this: Heroes must die so that they can be reborn. The dramatic movement that audiences enjoy more than any other is death and rebirth. In some way in every story, heroes face death or something like it: their

greatest fears, the failure of an enterprise, the end of a relationship, the death of an old personality. Most of the time, they magically survive this death and are literally or symbolically reborn to reap the consequences of having cheated death. They have passed the main test of being a hero.

Spielberg's E.T. dies before our eyes but is reborn through alien magic and a boy's love. Sir Lancelot, remorseful over having killed a gallant knight, prays him back to life. Clint Eastwood's character in *Unforgiven* is beaten senseless by a sadistic sheriff and hovers at the edge of death, thinking he's seeing angels. Sherlock Holmes, apparently killed with Professor Moriarty in the plunge over Reichenbach Falls, defies death and returns transformed and ready for more adventures. Patrick Swayze's character, murdered in *Ghost*, learns how to cross back through the veil to protect his wife and finally express his true love for her.

CHANGE

Heroes don't just visit death and come home. They return changed, transformed. No one can go through an experience at the edge of death without being changed in some way. In the center of *An Officer and a Gentleman*, Richard Gere survives a death-and-rebirth ordeal of the ego at the hands of drill instructor Lou Gossett. It dramatically changes Gere's character, making him more sensitive to the needs of others and more conscious that he's part of a group.

Axel Foley, with a villain's gun to his head in *Beverly Hills Cop*, seems sure to die, but is rescued by the bumbling, naive white detective Rosewood (Judge Reinhold). After this rescue from death, Foley is more cooperative and willing to submerge his gigantic ego in the group.

THE CRISIS, NOT THE CLIMAX

The Ordeal is a major nerve ganglion of the story. Many threads of the hero's history lead in, and many threads of possibility and change lead out the other side. It should not be confused with the climax of the Hero's Journey — that's another nerve center further down near the end of the story (like the brain at the base of a dinosaur's tail). The Ordeal is usually the central event of the story, or the main event of the second act. Let's call it the crisis to differentiate it from the climax (the big moment of Act Three and the crowning event of the whole story).

A crisis is defined by *Webster's* as "the point in a story or drama at which hostile forces are in the tensest state of opposition." We also speak of a crisis in an illness: a point, perhaps a high spike of fever, after which the patient either gets worse or begins to recover. The message: Sometimes things have to get worse before they can get better. An Ordeal crisis, however frightening to the hero, is sometimes the only way to recovery or victory.

PLACEMENT OF THE ORDEAL

The placement of the crisis or Ordeal depends on the needs of the story and the tastes of the storyteller. The most common pattern is for the death-and-rebirth moment to come near the middle of the story, as shown in the Central Crisis diagram.

CENTRAL CRISIS



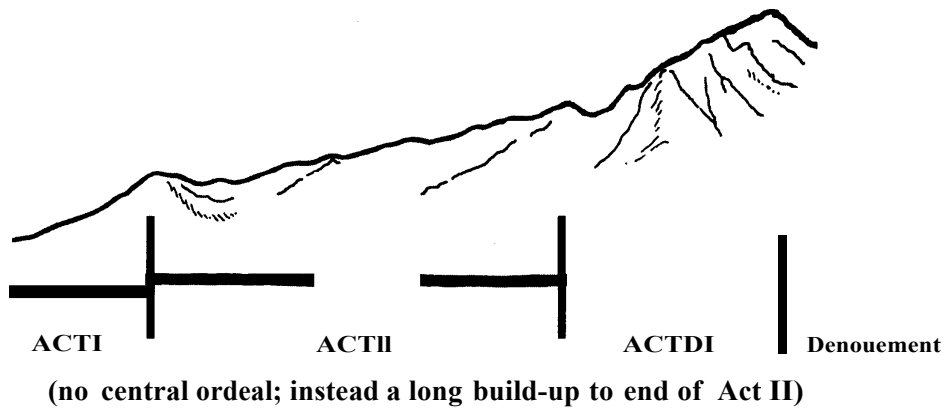
-A:•C•T•I- A•C•T•II-a- I-•A•C•T•II-b- I-•A•C•T•III-... 1--Denouement

Midpoint Ordeal

Dramatic high points in a story with a *Central Crisis*
(vertical lines represent the high point of each act)

A **central crisis** has the advantage of symmetry, and leaves plenty of time for elaborate consequences to flow from the ordeal. Note that this structure allows for another critical moment or turning point at the end of Act Two.

DELAYED CRISIS



Dramatic high points in a story with a *Delayed Crisis*

However, an equally effective structure can be built with a **delayed** crisis that comes near the end of Act Two, about two-thirds to three-quarters of the way into the story.

The delayed-crisis structure matches closely with the ideal of the Golden Mean, that elegant proportion (approximately three to five) that seems to produce the most pleasing artistic results. A delayed crisis leaves more room for preparation and Approach and allows a slow buildup to a big moment at the end of Act Two.

Whether the crisis is at the center of the story or nearer the end of Act Two, it's safe to say every story needs a crisis moment that conveys the Ordeal's sense of death and revival.

POINTS OF TENSION

Act Two is a long stretch for the writer and the audience, up to an hour in an average feature film. You can look at the three-act structure as a dramatic line stretched across two major points of tension, the act breaks. Like a circus tent hanging on its poles, structure is subject to gravity —the waning of the audience's attention in the time between these peaks of tension. A story that has no central moment of tension may sag like a circus tent that needs an extra support pole in the middle. Act Two is an hour-long chunk of your movie, or a hundred pages of your novel. It needs some kind of structure to hold it in tension.

The crisis at the halfway point is a watershed, a continental divide in the hero's journey, that acknowledges the traveler has reached the middle of the trip. Journeys naturally arrange themselves around a central event: getting to the top of the mountain, the depth of the cave, the heart of the forest, the most intimate interior of a foreign country, or the most secret place in your own soul. Everything in the trip has been leading up to this moment, and everything after it will be just going home. There may be even greater adventures to come —the final moments of a trip may be the most exciting or memorable—but every journey seems to have a center: a bottom or a peak, somewhere near the middle.

The words crisis, critic, and critical come from a Greek word that means "to separate." A crisis is an event that separates the two halves of the story. After crossing this zone, which is often the borderland of death, the hero is literally or metaphorically reborn and nothing will ever be the same.

WITNESS TO SACRIFICE

The reality of a death-and-rebirth crisis may depend upon point of view. A witness is often an important part of this stage, someone standing nearby who sees the hero *appear* to die, momentarily mourns the death, and is elated when the hero is revived. Some of the death-and-resurrection effects in *Star Wars* depend on the presence of witnesses, such as the two robot Allies, R2D2 and C3PO. In an elaborate Supreme Ordeal sequence, they are listening by intercom to the progress of their heroes, Skywalker and company. The robots are horrified to hear what sounds like the heroes being crushed to death in a giant trashmasher deep in the Inmost Cave of the Death Star.

These witnesses stand for the audience, who are identifying with the heroes and feeling the pain of death with them. It's not that audiences are sadistic and enjoy seeing their heroes killed. It's that we all relish a little taste of death every now and then. Its bitter flavor makes life taste sweeter. Anyone who has survived a true near-death experience, a sudden close call in a car or plane, knows that for a while afterward colors seem sharper, family and friends are more important, and time is more precious. The nearness of death makes life more real.

A TASTE OF DEATH

People pay good money for a taste of death. Bungee-jumping, skydiving, and terrifying amusement park rides give people the jolt that awakens fuller appreciation of life. Adventure films and stories are always popular because they offer a less risky way to experience death and rebirth, through heroes we can identify with.

But wait a minute, we left poor Luke Skywalker being crushed to death in the heart, or rather the stomach, of the Death Star. He's in the belly of the whale. The robot witnesses are distraught at hearing what sounds like their master's death. They grieve and the audience grieves with them, tasting death. All of the filmmaker's artful technique is dedicated to making the audience think their heroes are being ground to a paste. But then the robots realize that what they thought were screams of death were in fact cries of relief and triumph. The robots managed to shut off



I have a bad feeling about this.

the trashmasher and the heroes have miraculously survived. The grief of the robots and of the audience suddenly, explosively, turns to joy.

THE ELASTICITY OF EMOTION

Human emotions, it seems, have certain elastic properties, rather like basketballs. When thrown down hard, they bounce back high. In any story you are trying to lift the audience, raise their awareness, heighten their emotions. The structure of a story acts like a pump to increase the involvement of the audience. Good structure works by alternately lowering and raising the hero's fortunes and, with them, the audience's emotions. Depressing an audience's emotions has the same effect as holding an inflated basketball under water: When the downward pressure is released, the ball flies up out of the water. Emotions depressed by the presence of death can rebound in an instant to a higher state than ever before. This can become the base on which you build to a still higher level. The Ordeal is one of the deepest "depressions" in a story and therefore leads to one of its highest peaks.

In an amusement park ride you are hurled around in darkness or on the edge of space until you think you're going to die, but somehow you come out elated that you have survived. A story without some hint of this experience is missing its heart. Screenwriters sometimes have a lot of trouble with the length of Act Two. It can seem monotonous, episodic, or aimless. This may be because they've conceived of it as simply a series of obstacles to the hero's final goal, rather than as a dynamic series of events leading up to and trailing away from a central moment of death and rebirth. Even in the silliest comedy or most light-hearted romance, Act Two needs a central life-or-death crisis, a moment when the hero is experiencing death or maximum danger to the enterprise.

HERO APPEARS TO DIE

The long second act of *Star Wars* is kept from sagging by a central crisis section in which the borders of death are thoroughly explored in not one, but a series of ordeals. At another point in the giant trash compactor sequence, Luke is pulled under the sewage by the tentacle of an unseen monster. It was this scene that really made me understand the mechanism of the Ordeal.

First, the audience and the witnesses at hand (Han Solo, Princess Leia, the Wookiee) see a few bubbles come up, a sign that Luke is still struggling, alive, and breathing. So far, so good. But then the bubbles stop coming. The witnesses begin reacting as if he were dead. In a few seconds you begin to wonder if he's ever coming up. You know George Lucas is not going to kill off his hero halfway through the film and yet you begin to entertain the possibility.

I remember seeing a preview screening of *Star Wars* on the Fox lot and being completely taken in by the critical few seconds of this scene. I had invested something of myself in Luke Skywalker and when he appeared to be dead, I instantly became a disembodied presence in the screen. I began flitting from surviving character to character, wondering who I could identify with next. Would I ride through the rest of the story as the spoiled Princess Leia, the selfish opportunist Han Solo, or the beastly Wookiee? I didn't feel comfortable in any of their skins. In these few seconds I experienced something like panic. The hero, for me, was truly in the belly of the whale, inaccessible, effectively dead. With the hero dead, who was I in this movie? What was my point of view? My emotions, like the basketball held under water, were depressed.

Just then Luke Skywalker explodes to the surface, slimy but alive. He has died to our eyes, but now he lives again, rebirthed by the companions who help him to his feet. At once the audience feels elated. The emotions ride higher for having been brought down so far. Experiences like this are the key to the popularity of the *Star Wars* movies. They fling heroes and audiences over the brink of death and snatch them back repeatedly. It's more than great special effects, funny dialogue, and sex that people are paying for. They love to see heroes cheat death. In fact they love to cheat death themselves. Identifying with a hero who bounces back from death is bungee-jumping in dramatic form.

HERO WITNESSES DEATH

Star Wars has not given us enough of a taste of death yet. Before the Ordeal section is over, Luke witnesses the physical death of his Mentor, Obi Wan, in a laser duel with the villain Darth Vader. Luke is devastated and feels the death as keenly as if it were his own. But in this mythical world, the borders of life and death are deliberately fuzzy. Obi Wan's body vanishes, raising the possibility he may survive somewhere to return when needed, like King Arthur and Merlin.

To a shaman like Obi Wan, death is a familiar threshold that can be crossed back and forth with relative ease. Obi Wan lives within Luke and the audience through his teachings. Despite physical death he is able to give Luke crucial advice at later points in the story: "Trust the Force, Luke:"

HERO CAUSES DEATH

The hero doesn't have to die for the moment of death to have its effect. The hero may be a witness to death or the cause of death. In *Body Heat* the central event, William Hurt's Ordeal, is murdering Kathleen Turner's husband and disposing of his body. But it's a death for Hurt too, deep in his soul. His innocence has died, a victim of his own lust.

FACING THE SHADOW

By far the most common kind of Ordeal is some sort of battle or confrontation with an opposing force. It could be a deadly enemy villain, antagonist, opponent, or even a force of nature. An idea that comes close to encompassing all these possibilities is the archetype of the Shadow. A villain may be an external character, but in a deeper sense what all these words stand for is the negative possibilities of the hero himself. In other words, the hero's greatest opponent is his own Shadow.

As with all the archetypes, there are negative and positive manifestations of the Shadow. A dark side is needed sometimes to polarize a hero or a system, to give the hero some resistance to push against. Resistance can be your greatest source of strength. Ironically, what seem to be villains fighting for our death may turn out to be forces ultimately working for our good.

DEMONIZATION

Generally the Shadow represents the hero's fears and unlikeable, rejected qualities: all the things we don't like about ourselves and try to project onto other people. This form of projection is called demonizing. People in emotional crisis will sometimes project all their problems in a certain area onto another person or group who become the symbol of everything they hate and fear in themselves. In war and propaganda, the enemy becomes an inhuman devil, the dark Shadow of the righteous, angelic image we are trying to maintain for ourselves. The Devil himself is God's Shadow, a projection of all the negative and rejected potential of the Supreme Being.

Sometimes we need this projection and polarization in order to see an Issue clearly. A system can stay in unhealthy imbalance for a long time if the conflicts are not categorized, polarized, and made to duke it out in some kind of dramatic confrontation. Usually the Shadow can be brought out into the light. The unrecognized or rejected parts are acknowledged and made conscious despite all their struggling to remain in darkness. Dracula's abhorrence of sunlight is a symbol of the Shadow's desire to remain unexplored.

Villains can be looked at as the hero's Shadow in human form. No matter how alien the villain's values, in some way they are the dark reflection of the hero's own desires, magnified and distorted, her greatest fears come to life.

DEATH OF A VILLAIN

Sometimes the hero comes close to death at the Ordeal, but it is the villain who dies. However, the hero may have other forces, other Shadows, to deal with before the adventure is over. The action may move from the physical arena to a moral, spiritual, or emotional plane. Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch in Act Two, but faces an ordeal of the spirit: the death of her hopes of getting home in Act Three.

A villain's death should not be too easy for the hero to accomplish. In an Ordeal scene in Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*, the hero tries to kill a spy in a farmhouse with no real weapons at hand. Hitchcock makes the point that killing someone can be much harder than the movies usually make it seem. Anyone's death has an emotional cost, as well, as the movie *Unforgiven* repeatedly shows. Clint Eastwood's bounty hunter kills but is painfully aware his targets are men just like him. Death should be real, and not a mere plot convenience.

THE VILLAIN ESCAPES

The hero may wound the villain at the Ordeal or kill the villain's underling. The chief villain escapes to be confronted once again in Act Three. Axel Foley has a death-and-rebirth confrontation with the criminal mastermind's lieutenants in Act Two of *Beverly Hills Cop*, but the final showdown with the main Shadow is held back for Act Three.

VILLAINS ARE HEROES OF THEIR OWN STORIES

Keep in mind that while some villains or Shadows exult in being bad, many don't think of themselves as evil at all. In their own minds they are right, the heroes of their own stories. A dark moment for the hero is a bright one for a Shadow. The arcs of their stories are mirror images: When the hero is up, the villain is down. It depends on point of view. By the time you are done writing a screenplay or novel, you should know your characters well enough that you can tell the story from the point of view of everyone: heroes, villains, sidekicks, lovers, allies, guardians, and lesser folk. Each is the hero of his own story. It's a good exercise to walk through the story at least once in the Shadow's skin.

HOW HEROES CHEAT DEATH

In the classic hero myths the Ordeal is set up as a moment in which the hero is expected to die. Many have come to this point before and none have survived. Perseus' Approach to the monster Medusa is choked with statues of heroes turned to stone by her glance. The labyrinth which Theseus enters is littered with the bones of those who were eaten by the monster inside or who starved trying to find their way out.

These mythic heroes face certain death but survive where others have failed because they have wisely sought supernatural aid in the earlier stages. They cheat death, usually with the help of the Mentor's gifts. Perseus uses the magic mirror, Athena's gift, to approach Medusa and avoid her direct gaze. He cuts off her head with his magic sword and keeps it from doing further harm by stowing it in his magic pouch, another Mentor's gift.

In the story of Theseus, the hero has won the love of Ariadne, daughter of the tyrant Minos of Crete, in the Approach phase. Now, when Theseus must go into the uncertain, deadly depths of the Labyrinth, he turns to Ariadne for aid. The princess goes to the Mentor of the story, the great inventor and architect Daedalus, designer of the Labyrinth. His magical help is of the simplest kind: a ball of thread. Ariadne holds one end while Theseus winds through the Labyrinth. He is able to find his way back from the house of death because of his connection to her —because of love, the thread that binds them.

ARIADNE'S THREAD

Ariadne's Thread is a potent symbol of the power of love, of the almost telepathic wiring that joins people in an intense relationship. **It** can tug at you like a physical connector at times. It's close kin to the "apron strings" that bind even adult children to their mothers —invisible wires but with greater tensile strength than steel.

Ariadne's Thread is an elastic band that connects a hero with loved ones. A hero may venture far out into madness or death, but is usually pulled back by such bonds. My mother tells me she had a medical emergency when I was a child that almost killed her. Her spirit left her body and flew around the room, feeling free and ready to leave, and only the sight of my sisters and me snapped her back into life. She had a reason to go on living, to take care of us.

The Old English word for a ball of thread is a "dew." That's where we get our word due. A due is a thread that a seeker traces back to a center, looking for answers or order. The skeins of thread that connect one heart to another may be the vital due that solves a mystery or resolves a conflict.

CRISIS OF THE HEART

The Ordeal can be a crisis of the heart. In a story of romance it might be the moment of greatest intimacy, something we all desire and yet fear. Perhaps what's dying here is a hero's defensiveness. In another story it might be a dark moment in the romance when the hero experiences betrayal or the apparent death of the relationship.

Joseph Campbell describes what we might call the romantic branches of the Ordeal in two chapters of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* called "Meeting with the Goddess" and "Woman as Temptress." As he says, "the ultimate adventure... is commonly represented as a mystical marriage... the crisis at the nadir, the zenith, or at the uttermost edge of the earth, at the central point of the cosmos, in the cosmos, in the tabernacle of the temple, or within the darkness of the deepest chamber of the heart." In stories of love, the crisis may be either a love scene or a separation from a loved one. Crisis, remember, comes from a Greek word meaning "to separate."

In *Romancing the Stone* the crisis is both a physical Ordeal and a separation of loved ones. Joan Wilder and her shapeshifting companion Jack Colton enter a literal Inmost Cave where they take possession of the giant emerald, *El Corazon*. But that's much too easy and a few moments later they go through a real Supreme Ordeal as

their car plunges over a waterfall and they dive out. Joan Wilder disappears under the water for several shots. The audience sees Jack Colton struggle ashore, and for scant seconds we are left wondering if Joan has died. Those few seconds are sufficient for the magic of the Supreme Ordeal to work. Joan then appears, struggling onto a rock in the foreground. That she has died and been reborn is clearly acknowledged in the dialogue. On the opposite bank, Colton cries out, "I thought you drowned." Joan acknowledges, "I did."

Colton is elated by their physical survival, but now the focus of the crisis for Joan shifts to the emotional plane. The untrustworthy Colton is on the opposite side of the raging river with the jewel. A real test of their love is coming. Will he keep his promise to meet her in the next town, or will he simply run away with *El Corazon* and break her heart? Will she be able to survive in the jungle of the Special World without him?

SACRED MARRIAGE

In stories with emotional and psychological depth, the Ordeal may bring a moment of mystic marriage within a person, a balancing of opposing inner forces. The fear and death aspect of the Ordeal may haunt the wedding: What if this doesn't work out? What if the part of myself I am walking to the altar with turns and overwhelms me? But despite these fears, heroes may acknowledge their hidden qualities, even their Shadows, and join with them in a sacred marriage. Heroes are ultimately seeking a confrontation with their anima, their soul, or the unrecognized feminine or intuitive parts of their personality.

Women may be seeking the animus, the masculine powers of reason and assertion that society has told them to hide. They may be trying to get back in touch with a creative drive or a maternal energy they've rejected. In a moment of crisis, a hero may get in touch with all sides of her personality as her many selves are called forth en masse to deal with her life-and-death issues.

BALANCE

In a Sacred Marriage both sides of the personality are acknowledged to be of equal value. Such a hero, in touch with all the tools of being a human, is in a state of balance, centered, and not easily dislodged or upset. Campbell says the Sacred

Marriage "represents the hero's total mastery of life," a balanced marriage between the hero and life itself

Therefore the Ordeal may be a crisis in which the hero is joined with the repressed feminine or masculine side in a Sacred Marriage. But there may also be a Sacred Breakup! Open, deadly war may be declared by the dueling male and female sides.

THE LOVE THAT KILLS

Campbell touches on this destructive conflict in "The Woman as Temptress." The title is perhaps misleading —as with "The Meeting with the Goddess," the energy of this moment could be male or female. This Ordeal possibility takes the hero to a junction of betrayal, abandonment, or disappointment. It's a crisis of faith in the arena of love.

Every archetype has both a bright, positive side and a dark, negative side. The dark side of love is the mask of hate, recrimination, outrage, and rejection. This is the face of Medea as she kills her own children, the mask of Medusa herself ringed with poison snakes of blame and guilt.

A crisis may come when a shapeshifting lover suddenly shows another side, leaving the hero feeling bitterly betrayed and dead to the idea of love. This is a favorite Hitchcock device. After a tender love scene in *North by Northwest*, Cary Grant's character is betrayed to the spies by Eva Marie Saint. Grant goes into his mid-movie Ordeal feeling abandoned by her. The possibility of true love that she represented now seems dead, and it makes his Ordeal, in which he's almost gunned down by a crop-dusting plane in a cornfield, all the more lonely.

NEGATIVE ANIMUS OR ANIMA

Sometimes in the journey of our lives we confront negative projections of the anima or animus. This can be a person who attracts us but isn't good for us, or a bitchy or bastardly part of ourselves that suddenly asserts itself like Mr. Hyde taking over from Dr. Jekyll. Such a confrontation can be a life-threatening Ordeal in a relationship or in a person's development. The hero of *Fatal Attraction* finds that a casual lover can turn into a lethal force if crossed or rejected. An ideal partner can turn into the Boston Strangler or a loving father can become a killer as in *The Shining*.

The wicked stepmothers and queens of the Grimms' fairy tales were, in the original versions, mothers whose love turned deadly.

GOING PSYCHO

One of the most disturbing and subversive uses of the Supreme Ordeal is in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. The audience is made to identify and sympathize with Marion Oanet Leigh), even though she is an embezzler on the run. Through the first half of Act Two, there is no one else to identify with except the drippy innkeeper, Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins), and no audience wants to identify with him —he's weird. In a conventional film, the hero always survives the Ordeal and lives to see the villain defeated in the climax. It's unimaginable that a star like Janet Leigh, an immortal heroine of the screen, will be sacrificed at the midpoint. But Hitchcock does the unthinkable and kills our hero halfway through the story. This is one Ordeal that is final for the hero. No reprieve, no resurrection, no curtain call for Marion.

The effect is shattering. You get that odd feeling of being a disembodied ghost, floating around the frame as you watch Marion's blood pour down the drain. Who to identify with? Who to be? Soon it's dear: Hitchcock is giving you no one to identify with but Norman. Reluctantly we enter Norman's mind, see the story through his eyes, and even begin to root for him as our new hero. At first we're supposed to think Norman is covering up for his insane mother, but later we discover Norman himself was the killer. We have been walking around in the skin of a psycho. Only a master like Hitchcock can pull off such a defiance of the rules about heroes, death, and Ordeals.

FACING THE GREATEST FEAR

The Ordeal can be defined as the moment the hero faces his greatest fear. For most people this is death, but in many stories it's just whatever the hero is most afraid of: facing up to a phobia, challenging a rival, or roughing out a storm or a political crisis. Indiana Jones inevitably must come face-to-face with what he fears **most**—snakes.

Of the many fears faced by heroes, the greatest dramatic power seems to come from the fear of standing up to a parent or authority figure. The family scene is the core of most serious drama, and a confrontation with a parent figure can provide a strong Ordeal.

STANDING UPTO A PARENT

In *Red River* Montgomery Clift's character, Matthew Garth, faces this fear halfway through the story when he tries to take away control of a cattle drive from his foster-father, Tom Dunson (John Wayne), who has become a formidable Shadow. Dunson started the story as hero and Mentor, but traded those masks for that of a tyrant in the Approach phase. He's turned into a demented god, wounded, drunk, and cruel: an abusive father to his men, carrying duty too far. When Matt challenges his Mentor and role model, he is facing his greatest fear in an Ordeal.

Dunson decrees he will play god and hang men who broke the laws of his little world. Matt stands up to him at the risk of being shot himself. Dunson, the Lord Death rising from his throne, draws to kill him; but Matt's Allies, earned in the Testing phase, step in and blow the gun out of Dunson's hand. Matt's power as a hero is now such that he doesn't need to lift a finger against his opponent. His will alone is strong enough to defeat death. In effect he dethrones Dunson and becomes king of the cattle drive himself, leaving his foster-father with nothing but a horse and a canteen. In stories like this, facing the greatest fear is depicted as youth standing up to the older generation.

YOUTH VERSUS AGE

The challenging of the older generation by the younger is a timeless drama, and the Supreme Ordeal of standing up to a forbidding parent is as old as Adam and Eve, Oedipus, or King Lear. This ageless conflict provides much of the power of playwriting. The play *On Golden Pond* deals with a daughter's frantic effort to please her father, and its Ordeals are the daughter standing up to the father, and the father experiencing his own mortality.

This generational drama is sometimes played out on a world stage. The Chinese dissident students who took over Tiananmen Square and blocked the tanks with their bodies were challenging the status quo imposed by their parents and grandparents.

Fairy-tale struggles with wolves and witches may be ways of expressing conflicts with parents. The witches are the dark aspect of the mother; the wolves, ogres, or giants the dark aspect of the father. Dragons and other monsters can be the Shadow side of a parent or a generation that has held on too long. Campbell spoke

of the dragon as a Western symbol of a tyrant who has held fast to a kingdom or a family until all the life has been squeezed out of it.

The conflict between youth and age can be expressed internally as well as in external battles between children and parents. The smoldering combat that ignites in the Ordeal may be an inner struggle between an old, comfortable, well-defended personality structure and a new one that is weak, unformed, but eager to be born. But the new Self can't be born until the old one dies or at least steps aside to leave more room on the center stage.

In rare cases an Ordeal can be the occasion for a healing of deep wounds between a hero and a parent. Campbell calls this possibility "Atonement with the Father." Sometimes a hero, by surviving an Ordeal or by daring to challenge the authority of a parental figure, will win the parent's approval and the seeming conflicts between them will be resolved.

DEATH OF THE EGO

The Ordeal in myths signifies the death of the ego. The hero is now fully part of the cosmos, dead to the old, limited vision of things and reborn into a new consciousness of connections. The old boundaries of the Self have been transcended or annihilated. In some sense the hero has become a god with the divine ability to soar above the normal limits of death and see the broader view of the connectedness of all things. The Greeks called this a moment of **apotheosis**, a step up from enthusiasm where you merely have the god in you. In a state of apotheosis you *are* the god. Tasting death lets you sit in God's chair for a while.

The hero facing an Ordeal has moved her center from the ego to the Self, to the more godlike part of her. There may also be a movement from Self to group as a hero accepts more responsibility than just looking out for herself. A hero risks individual life for the sake of the larger collective life and wins the right to be called

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Dorothy and friends, trapped by the Wicked Witch and her Threshold Guardian army, now face their Supreme Ordeal. The Witch is enraged at them for having penetrated her Inmost

Cave and stolen her greatest treasure, the Ruby Slippers. She descends on the foursome and threatens to kill them one by one, saving Dorothy until last.

The threat of death makes the stakes of the scene clear. The audience now knows it's going to be a battle between forces of life and death.

The Wt'ch begins with the Scarecrow. She lights her broomstick and uses it as a torch to set him on fire. His straw blazes up and it looks like all is lost. Every child in the audience believes the Scarecrow is doomed and feels the horror of death with him.

Dorothy operates on instinct and does the only thing she can think of to save her friend: She grabs up a bucket of water and splashes it all over the Scarecrow. It puts out the fire, but it also wets down the Wt'ch. Dorothy had no intention of killing the Wt'ch, didn't even realize water would make her melt, but has killed her just the same. Death was in the room, and Dorothy merely deflected it onto another victim.

But the Wt'ch does not just go (poof" and disappear. Her death is protracted, agonizing, and pathetic. ((Oh, my beautiful wickedness! What a world, what a world!" By the time it's over you feel sorry for the Wt'ch, and have had a real taste of death.

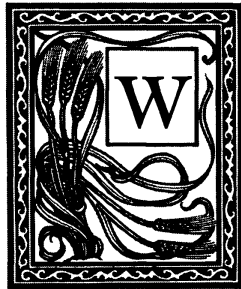
Our heroes have gone face-to-face with death and can walk away to tell about it. After a moment of being stunned, they are elated. They go on to reap the consequences of defying death, in the next step: Reward, or Seizing the Sword.

STAGE NINE: REWARD

aWe came, we saw, we kicked its ass."

-from Ghostbusters, screenplay by

Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis



With the crisis of the Ordeal passed, heroes now experience the consequences of surviving death. With the dragon that dwelt in the Inmost Cave slain or vanquished, they seize the sword of victory and lay claim to their **Reward**. Triumph may be fleeting but for now they savor its pleasures.

*We Seekers look at one another with growing smiles. We've won the right to be called heroes. For the sake **Of** the Home Tribe we faced death, tasted it, and yet lived. From the depths **Of** terror we suddenly shoot up to victory. **It** time to fill our empty bellies and raise our voices around the campfire to sing **Of** our deeds. Old wounds and grievances are forgotten. The story **Of** our journey is already being woven.*

*You pull apart from the rest, strangely quiet. In the leaping shadows you remember those who didn't make it, and you notice something. You're different. You've changed. Part **Of** you has died and something new has been born. You and the world will never seem the same. This too is part **Of** the Reward for facing death.*

Encountering death is a big event and it will surely have consequences. There will almost always be some period of time in which the hero is recognized or rewarded for having survived death or a great ordeal. A great many possibilities are generated by living through a crisis, and Reward, the aftermath of the Ordeal, has many shapes and purposes.

CELEBRATION

When hunters have survived death and brought down their game, it's natural to want to celebrate. Energy has been exhausted in the struggle, and needs to be replenished. Heroes may have the equivalent of a party or barbecue at this stage in which they cook and consume some of the fruits of victory. The heroes of *The Odyssey* always offered a sacrifice and had a meal to give thanks and celebrate after surviving some ordeal at sea. Strength is needed for the return to the upper world, so time is given for rest, recuperation, and refueling. After the buffalo hunt (a Supreme Ordeal and brush with death) in *Dances with Wolves*, Dunbar and the tribe celebrate **ith** barbecue in which his Reward for saving a young man from death is greater acceptance by the Lakota.

CAMPFIRE SCENES

Many stories seem to have campfire-type scenes in this region, where the hero and companions gather around a fire or its equivalent to review the recent events. It's also an opportunity for jokes and boasting. There is understandable relief at having survived death. Hunters and fishermen, pilots and navigators, soldiers and explorers all like to exaggerate their accomplishments. At the barbecue in *Dances with Wolves*, Dunbar is forced to retell the story of the buffalo hunt many times.

There may be conflict over the campfire, fighting over spoils. Dunbar gets into an argument over his hat, which has been picked up by a Sioux warrior after Dunbar dropped it during the buffalo hunt.

A campfire scene may also be a chance for reminiscence or nostalgia. Having crossed the abyss of life and death, nothing will ever be the same. Heroes sometimes turn back and remember aloud what got them to this point. A loner hero might recall the events or people who influenced him, or speak about the unwritten code by which he runs his life.

These scenes serve important functions for the audience. They allow us to catch our breath after an exciting battle or ordeal. The characters might recap the story so far, giving us a chance to review the story and get a glimpse of how they perceive it. In *Red River*, Matthew Garth reviews the plot for a newcomer to the story, Tess Quanne Dru), in a campfire scene. He reveals his feelings about his foster-father and gives the audience a perspective on the complex, epic story.

In these quiet moments of reflection or intimacy we get to know the characters better. A memorable example is the scene in *Jaws* in which Robert Shaw's character, Quint, tells about his horrible World War II experiences with sharks in the Pacific. The men compare scars and sing a drinking song. It's a "getting-to-know-you" scene, built on the intimacy that comes from having survived an Ordeal together.

In Walt Disney's classic animated features such as *Pinocchio* or *Peter Pan*, the pace is usually frantic, but Disney was careful to slow them down from time to time and get in close on the characters in an emotional moment. These quieter or more lyric passages are important for making a connection with the audience.

LOVE SCENES

The aftermath of a Supreme Ordeal may be an opportunity for a love scene. Heroes don't really become heroes until the crisis; until then they are just trainees. They don't really deserve to be loved until they have shown their willingness to sacrifice. At this point a true hero has earned a love scene, or a "sacred marriage" of some kind. The *Red River* campfire scene described above is also a highly effective love scene.

In the thriller *Arabesque*, Gregory Peck and Sophia Loren, having survived an Ordeal together, are bonded in a love scene. She is a bewildering Shapeshifter who has told him a string of lies, but he has seen through to her essential core of goodness, and now trusts her.

The romantic waltz in *Beauty and the Beast* is the Beast's Reward for having survived an Ordeal with the townspeople and Belle's Reward for having seen past the Beast's monstrous appearance.

TAKING POSSESSION

One of the essential aspects of this step is the hero taking possession of whatever she came seeking. Treasure hunters take the gold, spies snatch the secret, pirates

plunder the captured ship, an uncertain hero seizes her self-respect, a slave seizes control of his own destiny. A transaction has been made — the hero has risked death or sacrificed life, and now gets something in exchange. The Norse god Odin, in his Supreme Ordeal, gives up an eye and hangs on the World-Tree for nine days and nights. His Reward is the knowledge of all things and the ability to read the sacred runes.

SEIZING THE SWORD

I also call this unit of the journey Seizing the Sword because often it's an active movement of the hero who aggressively takes possession of whatever was being sought in the Special World. Sometimes a reward like love is given. But more frequently the hero takes possession of a treasure or even steals it, like James Bond taking the Lektor, a Soviet translating device, in *From Russia with Love*.

A moment of taking possession follows the death-and-rebirth crisis in *King Kong*. A transformation had occurred in the monster ape during the Approach phase. King Kong shifted from being Fay Wray's abductor to being her protector, fighting off a tyrannosaur on the way to his Inmost Cave. By the time he reaches the Supreme Ordeal, defending her in a battle to the death with a giant serpent, he has become a full-fledged hero. Now he takes possession of his Reward. Like any good hero, he gets the girl.

In a tender but erotic scene, he takes her out onto the "balcony" of his cave and examines her, cradled in his enormous palm. He pulls off her clothes, strip by strip, sniffing her perfume curiously. He tickles her with his finger. The love scene is interrupted by another dinosaur threat, but it was definitely a Reward moment, a payoff for having faced death head-on during the crisis.

The idea of a hero Seizing the Sword comes from memories of stories in which heroes battle dragons and take their treasure. Among the treasures there may be a magic sword, perhaps the sword of the hero's father, broken or stolen by the dragon in previous battles. The image of the sword, as portrayed in the Tarot deck's suit of swords, is a symbol of the hero's will, forged in fire and quenched in blood, broken and remade, hammered and folded, hardened, sharpened, and focused to a point like the light-sabers of *Star Wars*.

But a sword is only one of many images for what is being seized by the hero at this step. Campbell's term for it is "The Ultimate Boon." Another concept is the Holy Grail, an ancient and mysterious symbol for all the unattainable things of the soul that knights and heroes quest after. A rose or a jewel may be the treasure in another story. The wily Monkey King of Chinese legends is seeking the sacred Buddhist sutras that have been taken to Tibet.

ELIXIR THEFT

Some heroes purchase the treasure in effect, buying it with their lives or the willingness to risk life. But other heroes steal the magic thing at the heart of the story. The prize is not always given, even if it has been paid for or earned. **It** must be taken. Campbell calls this motif "elixir theft."

Elixir means a medium or vehicle for medicine. **It** could be a harmless sweet liquid or powder to which other medicine is added. Administered alone or mixed with other useless chemicals, it might still work by what's known as the "placebo effect." Studies have shown that some people get better on a placebo, a substance with no medicinal value, even when they know it's just a sugar pill —testimony to the power of suggestion.

An elixir can also be a medicine that heals every ill, a magical substance that restores life. In alchemy the elixir is one of the steps towards the philosopher's stone which can transmute metals, create life, and transcend death. This ability to overcome the forces of death is the real Elixir most heroes seek.

The hero is often required to steal the Elixir. **It** is the secret of life and death, and much too valuable to be given up lightly. Heroes may turn Trickster or thief to make off with the treasure, like Prometheus stealing fire from the gods for mankind, or Adam and Eve tasting the apple. This theft may intoxicate the hero for a time, but there is often a heavy price to pay later.

INITIATION

Heroes emerge from their Ordeals to be recognized as special and different, part of a select few who have outwitted death. The Immortals of ancient Greece were a very exclusive club. Only the gods and a smattering of lucky humans were exempt from death, and only those humans who had done something remarkable

or pleasing to the gods would be granted admittance by Zeus. Among these were Hercules, Andromeda, and Aesculapius.

Battlefield promotions and knighthood are ways of recognizing that heroes have passed an ordeal and entered a smaller group of special survivors. Joseph Campbell's overall name for what we are calling Act Two is '< Initiation;' a new beginning in a new rank. The hero after facing death is really a new creature. A woman who has gone through the life:...threatening territory of childbirth belongs to a different order of being. She has been initiated into the company of motherhood, a select sorority.

Initiation into secret societies, sororities, or fraternities means that you are privy to certain secrets and sworn never to reveal them. You pass tests to prove your worthiness. You may be put through a ritual death-and-rebirth Ordeal and may be given a new name and rank to signify you are a newborn being.

NEW PERCEPTIONS

Heroes may find that surviving death grants new powers or better perceptions. In the previous chapter we spoke of death's ability to sharpen the perception of life. This is beautifully captured in the northern tale of Sigurd the dragon-killer. Sigurd's Supreme Ordeal is to slay a dragon named Fafnir. A drop of the dragon's blood happens to fall on Sigurd's tongue. He has truly tasted death, and for this is granted new powers of perception. He can understand the language of the birds, and hears two of them warning him that his Mentor, the dwarf Regin, plans to kill him. He is saved from a second deadly danger because of his newfound power, the Reward for surviving death. New knowledge may be the sword that the hero seizes.

SEEING THROUGH DECEPTION

A hero may be granted a new insight or understanding of a mystery as her Reward. She may see through a deception. If she has been dealing with a shapeshifting partner, she may see through his disguises and perceive the reality for the first time. Seizing the Sword can be a moment of clarity.

CLAIRVOYANCE

After transcending death, a hero may even become clairvoyant or telepathic, sharing in the power of the immortal gods. Clairvoyant means simply 'seeing dearly.' A hero

who has faced death is more aware of the connectedness of things, more intuitive. In *Arabesque*, after the love scene between Gregory Peck and Sophia are trying to figure out a secret code in ancient hieroglyphics. Peck suddenly realizes, with his newfound perceptive ability, that what the spies are after is not the code but a microfilm dot on the piece of paper. Surviving death has given him new power of insight. The realization is so exciting that it propels the movie into Act Three.

SELF-REALIZATION

Insight might be of a deeper type. Heroes can sometimes experience a profound **self-realization** after tricking death. They see who they are and how they fit into the scheme of things. They see the ways they've been foolish or stubborn. The scales fall from their eyes and the illusion of their lives is replaced with clarity and truth. Maybe it doesn't last long, but for a moment heroes see themselves clearly.

EPIPHANY

Others may see the hero more dearly, too. Others may see in their changed behavior signs that they have been reborn and share in the immortality of gods. This is sometimes called a moment of **epiphany**: an abrupt realization of divinity. The Feast of the Epiphany, observed in the Catholic Church on January 6, celebrates the moment when the Magi, three Wise Old Men, first realized the divinity of the newborn Christ. One of the Rewards of surviving death is that others can see that heroes have changed. Young people coming back from a war or from an ordeal like basic training seem different — more mature, self-confident, and serious, and worthy of a little more respect. There is a chain of divine experience: from enthusiasm, being visited by a god, to apotheosis, becoming a god, to epiphany, being recognized as a god.

Heroes themselves may experience epiphany. A hero may realize suddenly, after a moment of Supreme Ordeal, that he is the son of a god or a king, a chosen one with special powers. Epiphany is a moment of realizing you are a divine and sacred being, connected to all things.

James Joyce expanded the meaning of the word epiphany, using it to mean a sudden perception of the essence of something, seeing to the core of a person, idea, or thing. Heroes sometimes experience a sudden understanding of the nature of things after passing through an Ordeal. Surviving death gives meaning to life and sharpens perceptions.

DISTORTIONS

In other stories the conquest of death may lead to some distortions of perception. Heroes may suffer from an inflation of the ego. In other words, they get a swelled head. They might turn cocky or arrogant. Perhaps they abuse the power and privilege of being a reborn hero. Their self-esteem sometimes grows too large and distorts their perception of their real value.

Heroes may be tainted by the very death or evil they came to fight. Soldiers fighting to preserve civilization may fall into the barbarism of war. Cops or detectives battling criminals often cross the line and use illegal or immoral means, becoming as bad as the criminals themselves. Heroes can enter the mental world of their opponents and get stuck there, like the detective in *Manhunter* who risks his soul to enter the twisted mind of a serial killer.

Bloodshed and murder are powerful forces and may intoxicate or poison a hero. Peter O'Toole as Lawrence of Arabia shows us a man who, after the Ordeal of the battle of Aqaba, is horrified to discover that he loves killing.

Another error heroes may make at this point is simply to underestimate the significance of the Supreme Ordeal. Someone hit by the hammer of change may deny that anything has happened. Denial after an encounter with death is one of the natural stages of grief and recovery described by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Anger is another. Heroes may just let off some steam after the Ordeal, expressing justifiable resentment over having been made to face death.

Heroes may also overestimate their own importance or prowess after a duel with death. But they may soon find out that they were just lucky the first time, and will have other encounters with danger that will teach them their limits.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

The immediate aftermath of the Ordeal in The Wizard of Oz is an act of Seizing. Instead of a sword, it's the burnt broomstick of the Wicked Witch that Dorothy takes possession of. Actually she's much too well mannered to just grab it; she politely asks for it from the fearsome guards who have now fallen to their knees to show their loyalty to her. Dorothy had good reason to fear they would turn on her after the Witch's death. But in fact the guards are glad the Witch is dead, for now they are free of her awful slavery. Another Reward of surviving death is that Threshold Guardians may be completely won over to the hero's side. The guards give her the broomstick gladly.

Dorothy and companions return swiftly to the Wicked Witch's throne room where she lays the broom before the ferocious floating Head. She has fulfilled her bargain with the Wicked Witch, and completed the seemingly impossible task. Now she and her friends claim their heroes' Reward.

But to their surprise, the Wicked Witch balks at paying up. He gets furious and argumentative. He is like an old personality structure or a parent that knows it must yield to a maturing offspring but is reluctant to let go, putting up one last fight.

It's then that the little dog Toto fulfills his purpose in the story. His animal intuition and curiosity got Dorothy in trouble in the first place, when he dug in Miss Gulch's flower bed. Now they are the instrument of salvation. As Toto noses around behind the throne, he discovers a meek little old man behind a curtain, controlling the monstrous illusion of Oz, the great and powerful. This man, not the bellowing head, is the real Wicked Witch of Oz.

This is a typical post-ordeal realization or moment of insight. The heroes see, through the eyes of the intuitive, curious Toto, that behind the illusion of the mightiest organization is a human being with emotions that can be reached. (This scene has always seemed to me a metaphor for Hollywood, which tries very hard to be scary and awesome, but which is made up of ordinary people with fears and flaws.)

At first the Wicked Witch professes to be unable to help them, but with encouragement he provides Elixirs for Dorothy's helpers: a diploma for the Scarecrow, a medal of valor for the Lion, and a windup heart for the Tin Woodsman. There is a tone of satire about this scene. It seems to be saying: These Elixirs are placebos, meaningless symbols that men give each other. Many people with degrees, medals, or testimonials have done nothing to earn them. Those who have not survived death can take the Elixir all day long but it still won't help them.

The true all-healing Elixir is the achievement of inner change, but the scene acknowledges that it's important to get outward recognition as well. As a surrogate parent for the lot of them, the Wicked Witch is granting them the ultimate boon of a father's approval, a Reward that few people get. Heart, brains, and courage are inside them and always were, but the physical objects serve as a reminder.

Now the Wicked Witch turns to Dorothy and says sadly there is nothing he can do for her. He was blown to Oz in a balloon from the Nebraska state fair and has no idea how to get back home himself. He's right — only Dorothy can grant herself the self-acceptance to get home."

that is, be happy inside herself wherever she is. But he agrees to try and orders a big hot-air balloon to be built by the citizens of Oz. The heroes have seized everything except the elusive prize of Home, which must be sought in Act Three .

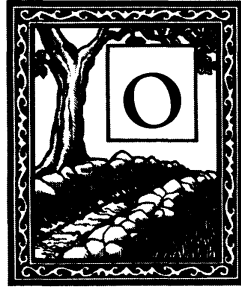
Facing death has life-changing consequences which heroes experience by Seizing the Sword, but after experiencing their Reward fully, heroes must turn back to the quest. There are more Ordeals ahead, and it's time to pack up and face them, on the next stage of the Hero's Journey: The Road Back.

STAGE TEN: THE ROAD BACK

uEasy is the descent to the Lower World; but) to retrace your steps

and to escape to the upper air -- this is the task) this the toil.))

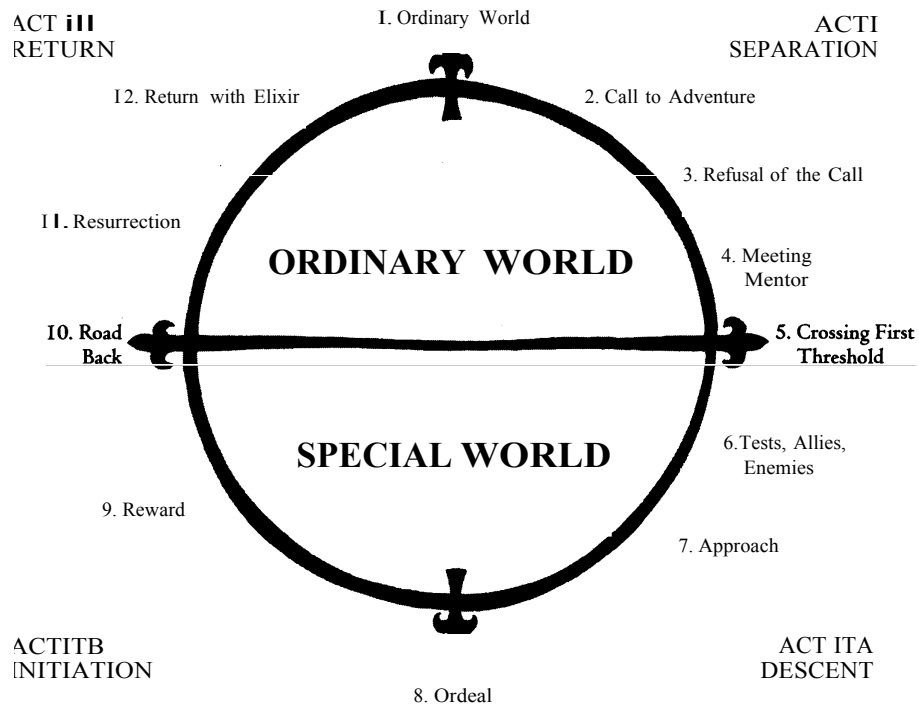
-- The Sibyl to Aeneas in The Aeneid



nee the lessons and Rewards of the great Ordeal have been celebrated and absorbed, heroes face a choice: whether to remain in the Special World or begin the journey home to the Ordinary World. Although the Special World may have its charms, few heroes elect to stay. Most take The Road Back, returning to the starting point or continuing on the journey to a totally new locale or ultimate destination.

This is a time when the story's energy, which may have ebbed a little in the quiet moments of Seizing the Sword, is now revved up again. If we look at the Hero's Journey as a circle with the beginning at the top, we are still down in the basement and it will take some push to get us back up into the light.

*Wake up) Seekers! Shake **off** the iffects **of** our feast and celebration and remember why we came out here in the first place! People back home are starving and it)s urgent) now that w/v'e recovered from the ordeal) to load up our backpacks with food and treasure and head for home. Besides) there)s no telling what dangers still lurk on the edge **of** the hunting grounds. You pause at the edge **of** camp to look back. The'lll never believe this back home. How to tell them? Something bright on the ground catches your eye. You bend to pick it up -- a beautiful smooth stone with an inner glow. Suddenly a dark shape darts out at you) all fangs. Run! Run for your life!*



In psychological terms this stage represents the resolve of the hero to return to the Ordinary World and implement the lessons learned in the Special World. This can be far from easy. The hero has reason to fear that the wisdom and magic of the Ordeal may evaporate in the harsh light of common day. No one may believe the hero's miraculous escape from death. The adventures may be rationalized away by skeptics. But most heroes determine to try. Like the Bodhisattvas of Buddhist belief, they have seen the eternal plan but return to the world of the living to tell others about it and share the elixir they have won.

MOTIVATION

The Road Back marks a time when heroes rededicate themselves to the adventure. A plateau of comfort has been reached and heroes must be pried off that plateau, either by their own inner resolve or by an external force.

Inner resolve might be represented by a scene of a tired commander rallying dispirited troops after a battle, or a parent pulling a family together after a death or tragedy. An external force might be an alarm going off, a dock ticking, or a renewed threat by a villain. The heroes may be reminded of the ultimate goal of the adventure.

The Road Back is a turning point, another threshold crossing which marks the passage from Act Two to Act Three. Like crossing the First Threshold, it may cause a change in the aim of the story. A story about achieving some goal becomes a story of escape; a focus on physical danger shifts to emotional risks. The propellant that boosts the story out of the depths of the Special World may be a new development or piece of information that drastically redirects the story. In effect, The Road Back causes the third act. **It** can be another moment of crisis that sets the hero on a new and final road of trials.

The rocket fuel may be fear of retaliation or pursuit. Often heroes are motivated to hit The Road Back when the forces they have defied in the Ordeal now rally and strike back at them. If the elixir was stolen from the central forces rather than given freely, there may be dangerous repercussions.

RETALIATION

An important lesson of martial arts is **Finish your opponent**. Heroes often learn that villains or Shadows who are not completely defeated in the crisis can rise up

stronger than before. The ogre or villain that the hero confronted in the Ordeal may pull himself together and strike a counterblow. A parent who has been challenged for dominance in the family may get over the initial shock and unleash a devastating retaliation. A martial arts opponent knocked off balance may recover his center and deliver a surprise attack. In the Tiananmen Square incident, the Chinese government rallied after several days of confusion to launch a crushing response that drove the students and their Goddess of Liberty from the Square.

One of the most vivid examples of this retaliatory movement in films is in *Red River*, when Tom Dunson has been toppled from his throne by his foster-son, Matthew Garth, in a central Supreme Ordeal. In the Reward stage, while Matt and his men are celebrating in the town where they've sold the cattle, Dunson is busy recruiting a small army of gunmen. In The Road Back phase, he comes riding after Matt with the force of a railroad train and the stated intention of killing his adopted son. What had been a story of overcoming obstacles on a cattle drive now becomes a story of a parent stalking his child to get revenge.

The peculiar force of this passage is carried in John Wayne's physical acting. He lurches toward the showdown with Montgomery Clift like a zombie, with the unstoppable energy of a machine, flicking cattle out of his path and shrugging off a bullet from a secondary character who tries to deflect him from his intent. He is the living image of the angry parental energy that can be roused by challenging a Shadow.

The psychological meaning of such counterattacks is that neuroses, flaws, habits, desires, or addictions we have challenged may retreat for a time, but can rebound in a last-ditch defense or a desperate attack before being vanquished forever. Neuroses have a powerful life force of their own and will strike back when threatened. Addicts who have made a first effort at recovery may fall off the wagon with a vengeance as their addiction fights back for its life.

Retaliation can take other forms. If you're hunting bear or killing dragons, you may find that the monster you killed in the Ordeal has a mate who comes chasing after you. A villain's lieutenant may survive him to pursue you, or you may find you have only killed an underling in the Ordeal. There may be a bigger Mr. Big who wants revenge for the loss of his servant.

An avenging force may strike a costly blow to the hero's fortunes, wounding him or killing one of his cohorts. This is when Expendable Friends come in handy. The villain might also steal back the elixir or kidnap one of the hero's friends in retaliation. This could lead to a rescue or chase, or both.

CHASE SCENES

In many cases heroes leave the Special World only because they are running for their lives. Chases may occur in any part of the story, but the end of Act Two is one of the most popular places. Chases are useful for torquing up a story's energy. Audiences may get sleepy at this point, and you have to wake them up with some action or conflict. In the theatre, this stage is called "raising the stakes." In the novel, you want to pick up the pace and build momentum for the finish.

Chases are a favorite element of movies, and they figure prominently in literature, art, and mythology as well. The most famous chase in classical mythology is Apollo's pursuit of the shy nymph Daphne, who begged her father, a river god, to transform her into a laurel tree. Transformation is often an important aspect of chases and escapes. Modern heroes may simply assume a disguise in order to escape a tight situation. In a psychological drama, a hero may have to escape a pursuing inner demon by changing behavior or undergoing inner transformation.

MAGIC FLIGHT

Fairy tales often include a chase that involves a whimsical transformation of objects, known as the magic flight motif. In a typical story a little girl escapes from the clutches of a witch with the help of gifts from animals she's been kind to. The girl throws down the gifts one by one in the witch's path and they magically transform into barriers that delay the witch. A comb becomes a thick forest that slows the witch while she gobbles it up. A scarf becomes a wide river which she has to drink.

Joseph Campbell gives several illustrations of magical flights, and suggests the motif stands for a hero's attempts to stall the avenging forces in any way possible, by throwing down "protective interpretations, principles, symbols, rationalizations, anything [to] delay and absorb" their power.

What the hero throws down in a chase may also represent a sacrifice, the leaving behind of something of value. The little girl of the fairy tales may find it hard to part with the lovely scarf or comb given by the animals. Heroes of movie adventures sometimes have to decide what's really important, and toss money out the window to slow their pursuers and save their lives. Campbell cites the extreme example of Medea. Escaping with Jason from her father, she had Jason cut up her own brother and toss his pieces into the sea to delay the pursuit.

CHASE VARIATIONS: PURSUIT BY ADMIRERS

It's most common for heroes to be chased by villains, but there are other possibilities. An unusual variant of the chase is pursuit by admirers, for example in *Shane*, at the beginning of Act Three. Shane has been out on the farm trying to stay away from gunfighting, but now the brutality of the villains in the town draws him back. He tells the little farm boy (Brandon De Wilde) to stay behind, but the boy follows him at a distance. Behind the boy follows the boy's dog, who has also been told to stay home. The point is made that this kid is as faithful to Shane as a dog. It's a chase scene with a twist: Rather than hero fleeing villain, hero is being pursued by his admirer.

VILLAIN ESCAPE

Another chase scene variant is the pursuit of an escaped villain. A Shadow captured and controlled in the Ordeal escapes at this stage and becomes more dangerous than before. Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*, feeling betrayed by FBI agent Clarice, escapes and begins to kill again. King Kong, taken to New York to be displayed in chains, escapes and goes on a rampage. Countless movie and TV Westerns depict a villain trying to make a getaway, then being ridden down and tackled by the hero prior to a final fistfight or gun duel. Such scenes were a staple of the Roy Rogers and Lone Ranger serials and TV shows.

As mentioned above, villains may steal back the treasure from the hero or make off with one of his team members. This could lead to pursuit by the hero and rescue or recovery.

SETBACKS

Another twist of The Road Back may be a sudden catastrophic reversal of the hero's good fortune. Things were going well after surviving the Ordeal, but now reality sets in again. Heroes may encounter setbacks that seem to doom the adventure. Within sight of shore the ship may spring a leak. For a moment, after great risk, effort, and sacrifice, it may look like all is lost.

This moment in the story, the climax of Act Two, may be the Delayed Crisis spoken of earlier. It could be the moment of greatest tension in Act Two and should set the story on the final path to resolution in Act Three.

The Road Back at the end of Act Two may be a brief moment or an elaborate sequence of events. Almost every story needs a moment to acknowledge the hero's resolve to finish, and provide her with necessary motivation to return home with the elixir despite the temptations of the Special World and the trials that remain ahead.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

The Wizard has prepared a hot-air balloon with which he hopes to take Dorothy on The Road Back to Kansas. The people of Oz gather to see them off with a brass band. However, it's seldom that easy. Toto, seeing a cat in the arms of a woman in the crowd, runs after it, and Dorothy runs after Toto. In the confusion, the balloon wobbles off with the Wizard aboard and Dorothy is left behind, apparently stuck in the Special World. Many heroes have tried to return using familiar means — old crutches and dependencies. But they find the old ways as artificial and difficult to control as the Wizard's hot-air balloon. Dorothy, guided by her instincts (the dog) knows deep down that this is not the way for her. Yet she is ready to take The Road Back, and keeps looking for the proper branching of the path.

Heroes gather up what they have learned, gained, stolen, or been granted in the Special World. They set themselves a new goal, to escape, find further adventure, or return home. But before any of those goals are achieved, there is another test to pass, the final exam of the journey, Resurrection.

STAGE ELEVEN: THE RESURRECTION

uwhat can I do) old man? Tm dead) aren)t I

— from *The Third Man* by Graham Greene



ow comes one of the trickiest and most challenging passages for the hero and the writer. For a story to feel complete, the audience needs to experience an additional moment of death and rebirth, similar to the Supreme Ordeal but subtly different. This is the climax (not the crisis), the last and most dangerous meeting with death. Heroes have to undergo a final purging and purification before reentering the Ordinary World. Once more they must change. The trick for writers is to show the change in their characters, by behavior or appearance rather than by just talking about it: Writers must find ways to demonstrate that their heroes have been through a Resurrection.

M weary Seekers shuffle back towards the village. Look! The smoke **O**f the Home Tribe fires! Pick up the pace! But wait — the shaman appears to stop us from charging back in. You have been to the land **O**f Death) he says) and you look like death itself, covered in blood) carrying the torn flesh and hide **O**f your game. **I**f you march back into the village without purifying and cleansing yourselves) you may bring death back with you. You must undergo one final sacrifice before rejoining the tribe. Your warrior self must die so you can be reborn as an innocent into the group. The trick is to keep the wisdom **O**f the Ordeal) while getting rid **O**f its bad iffects. After all we've been through) fellow Seekers) we must face one more trial) maybe the hardest one yet.

A NEW PERSONALITY

A new self must be created for a new world. Just as heroes had to shed their old selves to enter the Special World, they now must shed the personality of the journey and build a new one that is suitable for return to the Ordinary World. It should reflect the best parts of the old selves and the lessons learned along the way. In the Western *Barbarossa*, Gary Busey's farmboy character goes through a final ordeal from which he is reborn as the new Barbarossa, having incorporated the lessons of his Mentor, Willie Nelson, along the way. John Wayne emerges from the ordeal of death in *Fort Apache* and incorporates some of the dress and attitudes of his antagonist, Henry Fonda.

CLEANSING

One function of Resurrection is to cleanse heroes of the smell of death, yet help them retain the lessons of the ordeal. The lack of public ceremonies and counseling for returning Vietnam War veterans may have contributed to the terrible problems these soldiers have had in reintegrating with society. So-called primitive societies seem better prepared to handle the return of heroes. They provide rituals to purge the blood and death from hunters and warriors so they can become peaceful members of society again.

Returning hunters may be quarantined safely away from the tribe for a period of time. To reintegrate hunters and warriors into the tribe, shamans use rituals that mimic the effects of death or even take the participants to death's door. The hunters or warriors may be buried alive for a period of time or confined in a cave or sweat lodge, symbolically growing in the womb of the earth. Then they are raised up (Resurrected) and welcomed as newborn members of the tribe.

Sacred architecture aims to create this feeling of Resurrection, by confining worshippers in a narrow dark hall or tunnel, like a birth canal, before bringing them out into an open well-lit area, with a corresponding lift of relief. Baptism by immersion in a stream is a ritual designed to give the Resurrection feeling, both cleansing the sinner and reviving him from symbolic death by drowning.

TWO GREAT ORDEALS

Why do so many stories seem to have two climaxes or death-and-rebirth ordeals, one near the middle and another just before the end of the story? The college semester metaphor suggests the reason. The central crisis or Supreme Ordeal is like a midterm exam; the Resurrection is the final exam. Heroes must be tested one last time to see if they retained the learning from the Supreme Ordeal of Act Two.

To learn something in a Special World is one thing; to bring the knowledge home as applied wisdom is quite another. Students can cram for a test but the Resurrection stage represents a field trial of a hero's new skills, in the real world. It's both a reminder of death and a test of the hero's learning. Was the hero sincere about change? Will she backslide or fail, be defeated by neuroses or a Shadow at the eleventh hour? Will the dire predictions made about hero Joan Wilder in Act One of *Romancing the Stone* ("You're not up to this, Joan, and you know it") turn out to be true?

PHYSICAL ORDEAL

At the simplest level, the Resurrection may just be a hero facing death one last time in an ordeal, battle, or showdown. It's often the final, decisive confrontation with the villain or Shadow.

But the difference between this and previous meetings with death is that the danger is usually on the broadest scale of the entire story. The threat is not just to the hero, but to the whole world. In other words, the stakes are at their highest.

The James Bond movies often climax with 007 battling the villains and then racing against time and impossible odds to disarm some Doomsday device, such as the atomic bomb at the climax of *Goldfinger*. Millions of lives are at stake. Hero, audience, and world are taken right to the brink of death one more time before Bond (or his Ally Felix Leiter) manages to yank the right wire and save us all from destruction.

THE ACTIVE HERO

It seems obvious that the hero should be the one to act in this climactic moment. But many writers make the mistake of having the hero rescued from death by a timely intervention from an Ally — the equivalent of the cavalry coming to save the day.

Heroes can get surprise assistance, but it's best for the hero to be the one to perform the decisive action; to deliver the death blow to fear or the Shadow; to be active rather than passive, at this of all times.

SHOWDOWNS

In Westerns, crime fiction, and many action films, the Resurrection is expressed as the biggest confrontation and battle of the story, the **showdown** or shootout. A showdown pits hero and villains in an ultimate contest with the highest possible stakes, life and death. It's the classic gunfight of the Western, the swordfight of the swashbuckler, or the last acrobatic battle of a martial arts movie. It may even be a courtroom showdown or an emotional "shootout" in a domestic drama.

The showdown is a distinct dramatic form with its own rules and conventions. The operatic climaxes of the Sergio Leone "spaghetti Westerns" exaggerate the elements of the conventional showdown: the dramatic music; the opposing forces marching towards each other in some kind of arena (the town street, a corral, a cemetery, the villain's hideout); the closeups of guns, hands, and eyes poised for the decisive moment; the sense that time stands still. Gun duels are almost mandatory in Westerns from *Stagecoach* to *High Noon* to *My Darling Clementine*. The so-called Gunfight at the O.K. Corral in 1881 was a brutal shootout that has become part of the myth of the American West and has spurred more film versions than any other.

Duels to the death form the climaxes of swashbucklers such as *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, *The Seahawk*, *Scaramouche*, and *The Flame and the Arrow*; knights battle to the death in *Ivanhoe*, *Excalibur*, and *Knights of the Round Table*. Duels or shootouts are not fully satisfying unless the hero is taken right to the edge of death. The hero must clearly be fighting for his life. The playful quality of earlier skirmishes is probably gone now. He may be wounded or he may slip and lose his balance. He may actually seem to die, just as in the Supreme Ordeal.

DEATH AND REBIRTH OF TRAGIC HEROES

Conventionally heroes survive this brush with death and are Resurrected. Often it is the villains who die or are defeated, but some tragic heroes actually die at this point, like the doomed heroes of *They Died with Their Boots On*, *The Sand Pebbles*, *Charge of the Light Brigade*, or *Glory*. Robert Shaw's character, Quint, is killed at this point in *Jaws*.

However, all these doomed or tragic heroes are Resurrected in the sense that they usually live on in the memory of the survivors, those for whom they gave their lives. The audience survives, and remembers the lessons a tragic hero can teach us.

In *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* the heroes are cornered in an adobe building, surrounded and outnumbered. They run out to face death in a climax that is delayed to the final seconds of the film. The chances are good they're going to die in a hail of bullets, but they'll go down fighting and are granted immortality by a final freeze-frame, which makes them live on in our memories. In *The Wild Bunch* the heroes are elaborately killed, but their energy lives on in a gun which is picked up by another adventurer who we know will carry on in their wild style.

CHOICE

Another possibility for a Resurrection moment may be a climactic choice among options that indicates whether or not the hero has truly learned the lesson of change. A difficult choice tests a hero's values: Will he choose in accordance with his old, flawed ways, or will the choice reflect the new person he's become? In *Lttness*, policeman John Book comes to a final showdown with his ultimate enemy, a crooked police official. The Amish people watch to see if Book will follow the violent code of his Ordinary World or the peaceful way he has learned in their Special World. He makes a clear choice not to engage in the expected shootout. Instead he puts down his gun, leaving the villain armed, and stands with the silent Amish. Like them, he is a witness. The villain can't shoot when there are so many witnesses. The old John Book would have shot it out with his opponent, but the new man chooses not to. Here is the test that proves he's learned his lesson and is a new man, Resurrected.

ROMANTIC CHOICE

The Resurrection choice may be in the arena of love. Stories like *The Graduate* or *It Happened One Night* take heroes to the altar at the climax, where a choice of spouses must be made. *Sophie's Choice* is about the impossible choice of a mother who is told by the Nazis to pick which of her two children will die.

CLIMAX

The Resurrection usually marks the climax of the drama. Climax is a Greek word meaning "a ladder." For us storytellers it has come to mean an explosive moment, the highest peak in energy, or the last big event in a work. **It** may be the physical showdown or final battle, but it can also be expressed as a difficult choice, sexual climax, musical crescendo, or highly emotional but decisive confrontation.

THE QUIET CLIMAX

The climax need not be the most explosive, dramatic, loud, or dangerous moment of the story. There is such a thing as a quiet climax; a gentle cresting of a wave of emotion. A quiet climax can give a sense that all the conflicts have been harmoniously resolved, and all the tensions converted into feelings of pleasure and peace. After a hero has experienced the death of a loved one, there may be a quiet climax of acceptance or understanding. The knots of tension created in the body of the story come untied, perhaps after a gentle tug from a final realization.

ROLLING CLIMAXES

Stories may need more than one climax, or a series of rolling climaxes. Individual subplots may require separate climaxes. The Resurrection stage is another nerve ganglion of the story, a checkpoint through which all the threads of the story have to pass. Rebirth and cleansing may have to be experienced on more than one level.

The hero may experience a climax on different levels of awareness in succession, such as mind, body, and emotion. A hero might go through a climax of mental change or decision which triggers a physical climax or showdown in the material world. This could be followed by an emotional or spiritual climax as the hero's behavior and feelings change.

Gunga Din combines effective physical and emotional climaxes in succession. Cary Grant and his two English sergeant pals have been badly wounded, leaving the water carrier Gunga Din, once a clown, to act as the hero and warn the British army of an ambush. Although wounded himself, Gunga Din climbs to the top of a golden tower to blow a bugle call. The army is warned and many lives are saved in an action scene which is the story's physical climax, but Din himself is shot from the tower and falls to his death. However, his death is not in vain. He is recognized as a hero

by his comrades and is Resurrected. In a final emotional climax the Colonel reads a poem which Rudyard Kipling has written in Din's honor. Superimposed on the scene is Din's spirit, dressed in full army uniform and grinning as he salutes, Resurrected and transformed.

Of course, a well-made story can bring all levels — mind, body, and spirit — to climax in the same moment. When a hero takes a decisive action, her whole world can be changed at once.

CATHARSIS

A climax should provide the feeling of catharsis. This Greek word actually means "vomiting up" or "purging;" but in English has come to mean a purifying emotional release, or an emotional breakthrough. Greek drama was constructed with the intent of triggering a vomiting-up of emotions by the audience, a purging of the poisons of daily life. Just as they took purgatives to empty and cleanse their digestive systems from time to time, the Greeks at regular times of the year would go to the theatre to get rid of ill feeling. Laughter, tears, and shudders of terror are the triggers that bring about this healthy cleansing, this catharsis.

In psychoanalysis, catharsis is a technique of relieving anxiety or depression by bringing unconscious material to the surface. The same is true, in a way, of storytelling. The climax you are trying to trigger in your hero and audience is the moment when they are the most conscious, when they have reached the highest point on a ladder of awareness. You are trying to raise the consciousness of both the hero and the participating audience. A catharsis can bring about a sudden expansion of awareness, a peak experience of higher consciousness.

A catharsis can be combined with a simple physical showdown, for a satisfying emotional effect. In *Red River*, Tom Dunson and Matthew Garth come together for an explosive fight to the death. At first Garth won't fight. He is determined not to be provoked into abandoning his principles. Dunson hammers at him until Garth is forced to fight back to save his own life. They commence a titanic battle and it looks for all the world as if one or both of them must be killed. They crash into a wagon loaded with domestic goods — calico, pots and pans — and destroy it, suggesting the death of hope for building home, family, or society on the frontier.

But a new energy enters the scene: Tess, an independent woman who has come to love Matthew Garth. She stops the fight with a gunshot to get their attention. In

an emotional climax —a genuine catharsis —she spews up all her feelings about the two men, and convinces them that their fight is foolish, because they really love each other. She has changed a deadly physical showdown into an emotional catharsis, a moment of highest awareness.



A Resurrection showdown is resolved by an emotional catharsis.

Catharsis works best through physical expression of emotions such as laughter and crying. Sentimental stories can bring an audience to a catharsis of tears by pushing their emotions to a climax. The death of a beloved character, like Mr. Chips or the doomed young woman in *Love Story*, may be the climactic moment. Such characters are inevitably "resurrected" in the hearts and memories of those who loved them.

Laughter is one of the strongest channels of catharsis. A comedy should crest with a gag or a series of gags that create a virtual explosion of laughter, jokes that relieve tension, purge sour emotions, and allow us a shared experience. The classic Warner Bros. and Disney short cartoons are constructed to reach a climax of laughter, a crescendo of absurdity, in only six minutes. Full-length comedies have to be carefully structured to build to a climax of laughter that releases all the boxed-in emotions of the audience.

CHARACTER ARC

A catharsis is the logical climax of a hero's **character arc**. This is a term used to describe the gradual stages of change in a character: the phases and turning points of growth. A common flaw in stories is that writers make heroes grow or change, but do so abruptly, in a single leap because of a single incident. Someone criticizes them or they realize a flaw, and they immediately correct it; or they have an overnight conversion because of some shock and are totally changed at one stroke. This does happen once in a while in life, but more commonly people change by degrees, growing in gradual stages from bigotry to tolerance, from cowardice to courage, from hate to love. Here is a typical character arc compared with the Hero's Journey model.

CHARACTER ARC	HERO'S JOURNEY
1) limited awareness of a problem	Ordinary World
2) increased awareness	Call to Adventure
3) reluctance to change	Refusal
4) overcoming reluctance	Meeting with the Mentor
5) committing to change	Crossing the Threshold
6) experimenting with first change	Tests, Allies, Enemies
7) preparing for big change	Approach to Inmost Cave
8) attempting big change	Ordeal
9) consequences of the attempt (improvements and setbacks)	Reward (Seizing the Sword)
10) rededication to change	The Road Back
11) final attempt at big change	Resurrection
12) final mastery of the problem	Return with the Elixir

The stages of the Hero's Journey are a good guide to the steps needed to create a realistic character arc.

2



LAST CHANCE

The Resurrection is the hero's final attempt to make major change in attitude or behavior. A hero may backslide at this point, making those around think he's let them down. Hope for that character is temporarily dead, but can be resurrected if he changes his mind. The selfish loner Han Solo in *Star Wars* turns his back on the final attempt to crack the Death Star, but shows up at the last minute, showing that he has finally changed and is now willing to risk his life for a good cause.

WATCH YOUR STEP

The Resurrection can be a potential misstep for a returning hero who may be walking a narrow sword-bridge from one world to the next. Hitchcock often uses heights at this point in a story to stand for the potential failure to return from the Special World alive. In *North by Northwest*, Cary Grant's and Eva Marie Saint's characters end up hanging from the stone portraits on Mount Rushmore, keeping the audience in suspense about their ultimate fates until the last possible moment. The climaxes of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, *Saboteur*, and *To Catch a Thief* all take heroes to high places for a final struggle between life and death.

Sometimes great drama comes from heroes dropping the ball at the last moment just before reaching their goal. The heroes of *Quest for Fire* come back to their people with the elixir of flame, but at the threshold of their world, the fire goes out, dropped into the water by accident. This apparent death of all hope is the final test for the hero, the leader of the quest. He reassures the people, for he knows the secret of fire; he has seen the more advanced tribe using a special stick to make fire at his Ordeal. However, when he tries to copy their technique, he finds he has forgotten the trick. Again hope seems dead.

But just then his wife, a woman he met on the adventure and a member of the more advanced tribe, steps in and gives it a try. The men are not too happy about this, being shown up by a woman and a foreigner at that. However, only she knows the secret (spitting on your hands before using the fire-stick). She succeeds, fire blooms, and the possibility of life returns to the tribe. In fact the tribe itself has passed a final test by learning that the combined knowledge of men and women is needed to survive. A stumble at the final threshold has led to Resurrection and enlightenment.

The misstep for a hero might not be a physical event, but a moral or emotional stumble at the threshold of return. In *Notorious* there are both physical and emotional tests in the closing moments. Alicia Hueberman (Ingrid Bergman) is in grave physical danger from being poisoned by the Nazis, while Devlin (Cary Grant) is in danger of losing his soul if he doesn't rescue her from the clutches of the enemy where his own devotion to duty has placed her.

THE FALSE CLAIMANT

A common Resurrection moment in fairy tales involves a last-minute threat to a hero who has gone on a quest to achieve impossible tasks. As he stakes his claim on the princess or the kingdom, a pretender or **false claimant** suddenly steps forward questioning the hero's credentials or claiming that he, not the hero, achieved the impossible. For a moment it looks like the hero's hopes are dead. To be reborn, the hero must provide proof that he is the true claimant, perhaps by showing the ears and tail of the dragon he slew, perhaps by besting the pretender (the Shadow) in a contest.

PROOF

Providing proof is a major function of the Resurrection stage. Kids like to bring back souvenirs from summer vacations, partly to remind them of the trips, but also to prove to the other kids that they really visited these exotic locales. Not being believed is a perennial problem of travelers to other worlds.

A common fairy-tale motif is that proof brought back from the magic world tends to evaporate. A sack full of gold coins won from the fairies will be opened in the Ordinary World and be found to contain nothing but wet leaves, leading other people to believe the traveler was just sleeping off a drunk in the woods. Yet the traveler knows the experience was real. This motif signifies that spiritual and emotional experiences in a special world are hard to explain to others. They have to go there for themselves. Special World experiences may evaporate if we have not truly made them part of our daily lives. The real treasure from traveling is not the souvenirs, but lasting inner change and learning.

SACRIFICE

Resurrection often calls for a **sacrifice** by the hero. Something must be surrendered, such as an old habit or belief. Something must be given back, like the libation the Greeks used to pour to the gods before drinking. Something must be shared for the good of the group.

In *Terminator 2* the shapeshifting villain is destroyed in a physical climax, but the story brings the audience to a higher emotional climax when the robot hero, the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger), must sacrifice himself to keep from causing future violence. In another sense, the boy John Connor is the hero at this point and must sacrifice part of himself, his Mentor/father figure, by allowing the Terminator to leap to his death. A similar self-sacrificial climax is found in *Alien 3*, when Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), knowing she has a monster growing inside her, gives herself up to destruction for the good of the group. The classic sacrifice in literature is found in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, where a man gives his life on the guillotine to save another man's life.

Sacrifice comes from Latin words meaning "making holy." Heroes are often required to sanctify a story by making a sacrifice, perhaps by giving up or giving back something of themselves. Sometimes the sacrifice is the death of members of the group. Luke Skywalker, at the climax of *Star Wars*, sees many of his comrades killed in the effort to destroy the Death Star. Luke also gives up part of his personality: his dependence on machines. With Obi Wan's voice in his head, he decides to "Trust the Force," and learns to trust human instinct rather than machinery.

Luke undergoes another personal sacrifice at the climax of the second film in the series, *The Empire Strikes Back*. Here he is escaping from the Emperor and loses a hand in the getaway. In repayment, he gains new control over the Force in the third film of the trilogy, *Return of the Jedi*.

INCORPORATION

Resurrection is an opportunity for a hero to show he has absorbed, or incorporated, every lesson from every character. Incorporation literally means he has made the lessons of the road part of his body. An ideal climax would test everything he's learned, and allow him to show that he has absorbed the Mentor, Shapeshifter, Shadow,

Guardians, and Allies along the way. By the time the heroes of *City Slickers* endure their climax, they can apply everything they've learned from a variety of Mentors and antagonists.

CHANGE

The higher dramatic purpose of Resurrection is to give an outward sign that the hero has really changed. The old Self must be proven to be completely dead, and the new Self immune to temptations and addictions that trapped the old form.

The trick for writers is to make the change visible in appearance or action. It's not enough to have people around a hero notice that she's changed; it's not enough to have her talk about change. The audience must be able to see it in her dress, behavior, attitude, and actions.

Romancing the Stone has a well-developed sense of Resurrection that is realized in visual terms. At the action climax of the film, Joan Wilder and Jack Colton unite to defeat the villains, rescue her sister, and reclaim the treasure. But Jack immediately pulls away, putting Joan's romantic plot line in jeopardy. Perfection through a man was within her grasp, but it's snatched away at the last minute. Jack gives her a farewell kiss and tells her she always had what it takes to be a hero, but ultimately he follows money rather than his heart. Colton goes after the emerald, which has been swallowed by an alligator. He dives off a high wall, leaving Joan romantically bereaved and unsatisfied. The action plot has ended in triumph, but the emotional plot appears to be a tragedy. In effect, Joan's hope of emotional completion is dead.

From the shot of Joan looking out over the parapet there is a slow dissolve to a matching shot of her Resurrected self in a New York office a few months later. Her agent is reading Joan's latest manuscript, based on her real-life adventures. It's apparent from every choice on the screen that Joan Wilder has changed, that in some way she has hit bottom, died, and been emotionally reborn. The manuscript has brought the hard-hearted agent to tears. She pronounces it by far Joan's best book, and notes that it was completed very quickly. The Ordeals of the Special World have made Joan a better writer, and she looks better as well, more "together" than we've ever seen her.

At the end of the scene, Joan is put through a final emotional test. The agent refers to the conclusion of the book, which unlike Joan's real life, ends with the hero and heroine united. She leans in close and, in her forceful way, calls Joan "a world-class hopeless romantic:"

Joan could have caved in here, perhaps crying about the sad reality that she didn't get her man. Or she could have agreed with the agent's assessment of her as hopeless. The old Joan might have cracked. But she doesn't. Joan passes this emotional test with her answer. She gently but firmly disagrees, saying, "No, a hopeful romantic:" Her look tells us she is still in some pain, but that she really is all right. She has learned to love herself regardless of whether or not some man loves her, and she has the self-confidence she lacked before. Later, on the street, she is able to brush off men who would have intimidated her before. She has been through a Resurrection. She has changed, in appearance and action, in ways you can see on the screen and feel in your heart.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

The Wizard of Oz is not as visual as Romancing the Stone in its depiction of how the hero has changed, and yet there is rebirth and learning, expressed in words. The Resurrection for Dorothy is recovering from the apparent death of her hopes when the Wizard accidentally floated off in the balloon. Just when it looks as though Dorothy will never achieve her goal of returning home, there is another appearance by the Good Witch, representing the positive anima that connects us to home and family. She tells Dorothy she had the power to return home all along. She didn't tell Dorothy because as she wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself."

The Tin Woodsman asks bluntly, "What have you learned, Dorothy?" She replies that she's learned to look for her (heart's desire) in her (own) back yard." Like Joan Wilder, Dorothy has learned that happiness and completion are within her, but this verbal expression of change is not as effective as the visual and behavioral changes you can see on the screen in the Resurrection scene of Romancing the Stone. Nevertheless, Dorothy has learned something and can now step up to the last threshold of all.

Resurrection is the hero's final exam, her chance to show what she has learned. Heroes are totally purged by final sacrifice or deeper experience of the mysteries of life and death. Some don't make it past this dangerous point, but those who survive go on to close the circle of the Hero's Journey when they Return with the Elixir.

STAGE TWELVE:

RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR

*uNo, Aunt Em, this was a real truly live place. And I remember some of it
wasn't very nice. But most of it was beautiful. But
just the same all I kept saying to everybody was (I want to go home.m
-from The Wizard of Oz*



avmg survived all the ordeals, having lived through death, heroes return to their starting place, go home, or continue the journey. But they always proceed with a sense that they are commencing a new life, one that will be forever different because of the road just traveled. If they are true heroes, they Return with the Elixir from the Special World; bringing something to share with others, or something with the power to heal a wounded land.

We Seekers come home at last, purged, purified, and bearing the fruits of our journey. We share out the nourishment and treasure among the Home Tribe, with many a good story about how they were won. A circle has been closed, you can feel it. You can see that our struggles on the Road of Heroes have brought new life to our land. There will be other adventures, but this one is complete, and as it ends it brings deep healing, wellness, and wholeness to our world. The Seekers have come Home.

RETURN

Quest for Fire has a wonderful Return sequence that shows how storytelling probably began, with hunter/gatherers struggling to relate their adventures in the outer world. The film's heroes enjoy the fruits of their quest at a barbecue around a campfire. The Trickster clown of the hunting party now becomes the storyteller, acting out an adventure from the Tests phase, complete with sound effects and a funny mimed impression of a mammoth Threshold Guardian they met on the quest. A wounded hunter laughs as his injuries are tended: in film language, a declaration of the healing power of stories. Returning with the Elixir means implementing change in your daily life and using the lessons of adventure to heal your wounds.

DENOUEMENT

Another name for the Return is *denouement*, a French word meaning "untying" or "unknotting:" (*noue* means knot). A story is like a weaving in which the lives of the characters are interwoven into a coherent design. The plot lines are knotted together to create conflict and tension, and usually it's desirable to release the tension and resolve the conflicts by untying these knots. We also speak of "tying up the loose ends" of a story in a denouement. Whether tying up or untying, these phrases point to the idea that a story is a weaving and that it must be finished properly or it will seem tangled or ragged. That's why it's important in the Return to deal with subplots and all the issues and questions you've raised in the story. It's all right for a Return to raise new questions —in fact that may be highly desirable — but all the old questions should be addressed or at least restated. Usually writers strive to create a feeling of closing the circle on all these storylines and themes.

TWO STORY FORMS

There are two branches to the end of the Hero's Journey. The more conventional way of ending a story, greatly preferred in Western culture and American movies in particular, is the circular form in which there is a sense of closure and completion. The other way, more popular in Asia and in Australian and European movies, is the open-ended approach in which there is a sense of unanswered questions, ambiguities, and unresolved conflicts. Heroes may have grown in awareness in both forms, but in the open-ended form their problems may not be tied up so neatly.

THE CIRCULAR STORY FORM

The most popular story design seems to be the **circular or closed form**, in which the narrative returns to its starting point. In this structure you might bring the hero literally full circle back to the location or world where she started. Perhaps the Return is circular in a visual or metaphoric way, with a replay of an initial image, or the repetition of a line of dialogue or situation from Act One. This is one way of tying up loose ends and making a story feel complete. The image or phrases may have acquired a new meaning now that the hero has completed the journey. The original statement of the theme may be re-evaluated at the Return. Many musical compositions return to an initial theme to rephrase it at the ending.

Having your hero Return to her starting point or remember how she started allows you to draw a comparison for the audience. It gives a measure of how far your hero has come, how she's changed, and how her old world looks different now. To give this circular feeling of completion and comparison, writers will sometimes put their heroes through an experience at the Return that was difficult or impossible for them at the beginning, so the audience can see how they have changed. In *Ghost*, the hero was unable to say "I love you" in his Ordinary World. But at the Return, having died and passed many tests in the land of death, he is able to say these all-important words so that his still-living wife can hear them.

In *Ordinary People*, the young hero Conrad is so depressed in his Ordinary World that he can't eat the French toast his mother makes for him. It's an outward sign of his inner problem, his inability to accept love because he hates himself for surviving his brother. In the Return, having passed through several death-and-rebirth ordeals, he goes to apologize to his girlfriend for acting like a jerk. When she asks him to come inside for some breakfast, this time he finds he has an appetite. His ability to eat is an outward sign of his inner change. This actual change in behavior is more dramatically effective than Conrad just saying he feels different, or someone else noticing that he's grown and remarking on it. **It** communicates change on the symbolic level, and affects the audience indirectly but more powerfully than a blatant statement. In a subtle way it gives a sense that a phase of his life is over, that a circle has been closed, and a new one is about to begin.

ACHIEVEMENT OF PERFECTION

The "happy endings" of Hollywood films link them with the world of fairy tales, which are often about the achievement of perfection. Fairy tales frequently end with a statement of perfection, like "and they lived happily ever after". Fairy tales bring the shattered family back into balance, back to completion.

Weddings are a popular way to end stories. Marriage is a new beginning, the end of an old life of being single and the beginning of a new life as part of a new unit. New beginnings are perfect and unspoiled in their ideal form.

Striking up a new relationship is another way to show a new beginning at the end of a story. In *Casablanca*, Humphrey Bogart makes a difficult Resurrection sacrifice, giving up the chance to be with the woman he loves. His reward, the Elixir he brings away from the experience, is his new alliance with Claude Rains. As he says, in one of the most famous tag lines in the history of the movies, "Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship:'

THE OPEN-ENDED STORY FORM

Storytellers have thought of many ways to create a circular feeling of completion or closure, basically by addressing the dramatic questions raised in Act One. However, once in a while a few loose ends are desirable. Some storytellers prefer an **open-ended** Return. In the open-ended point of view, the storytelling goes on after the story is over; it continues in the minds and hearts of the audience, in the conversations and even arguments people have in coffee shops after seeing a movie or reading a book.

Writers of the open-ended persuasion prefer to leave moral conclusions for the reader or viewer. Some questions have no answers, some have many. Some stories end not by answering questions or solving riddles, but by posing new questions that resonate in the audience long after the story is over.

Hollywood films are often criticized for pat, fairy-tale endings in which all problems are solved and the cultural assumptions of the audience are left undisturbed. By contrast the open-ended approach views the world as an ambiguous, imperfect place. For more sophisticated stories with a hard or realistic edge, the open-ended form may be more appropriate.

FUNCTIONS OF THE RETURN

Like the journey's other stages, Return with the Elixir can perform many functions, but there is something special about being the last element in the journey. Return is similar to Reward in some ways. Both follow a moment of death and rebirth and both may depict consequences of surviving death. Some functions of Seizing the Sword may also appear in the Return, such as taking possession, celebrating, sacred marriage, campfire scenes, self-realization, vengeance, or retaliation. But Return is your last chance to touch the emotions of the audience. **It** must finish your story so that it satisfies or provokes your audience as you intended. **It** bears special weight because of its unique position at the end of the work, and it's also a place of pitfalls for writers and their heroes.

SURPRISE

A Return can fall flat if everything is resolved too neatly or just as expected. A good Return should untie the plot threads but with a certain amount of surprise. **It** should be done with a little taste of the unexpected, a sudden revelation. The Greeks and Romans often built a "recognition" scene into the endings of their plays and novels. A young man and woman, raised as shepherds, discover to everyone's surprise they are prince and princess, promised to each other in marriage long ago. In the tragic mode, Oedipus discovers the man he killed in the Ordeal was his father and the woman he joined with in sacred marriage was his own mother. Here the recognition is cause for horror rather than joy.

The Return may have a twist to it. This is another case of misdirection: You lead the audience to believe one thing, and then reveal at the last moment a quite different reality. *No Way Out* flips you a totally different perception of the hero in the last ten seconds of the film. *Basic Instinct* makes you suspect Sharon Stone's character of murder for the first two acts, convinces you she is innocent in the climax, then leaps back to doubt again in an unexpected final shot.

There is usually an ironic or cynical tone to such Returns, as if they mean to say, "Ha, fooled ya!" You are caught foolishly thinking that human beings are decent or that good does triumph over evil. A less sardonic version of a twist Return can be found in the work of writers like O. Henry, who sometimes used the twist to show the positive side of human nature, as in his short story "The Gift of the Magi." A

poor young husband and wife make sacrifices to surprise each other with Christmas presents. They discover that the husband has sold his valuable watch to buy his wife a clip for her beautiful long hair, and the wife has cut off and sold her lovely locks to buy him a fob for his beloved watch. The gifts and sacrifices cancel each other out but the couple is left with a treasure of love.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

A specialized job of Return is to hand out final rewards and punishments. It's part of restoring balance to the world of the story, giving a sense of completion. It's like getting your grades after final exams. Villains should earn their ultimate fate by their evil deeds and they should not get off too easily. Audiences hate that. Punishment should fit the crime and have the quality of **poetic justice**. In other words, the way the villain dies or gets his just comeuppance should directly relate to his sins.

Heroes should get what's coming to them as well. Too many movie heroes get rewards they haven't really earned. The reward should be proportionate to the sacrifice they have offered. You don't get immortality for being nice. Also if heroes have failed to learn a lesson, they may be penalized for it in the Return.

Of course, if your dramatic point of view is that life isn't fair and you feel justice is a rare thing in this world, then by all means reflect this in the way rewards and punishments are dealt out in the Return.

THE ELIXIR

The real key to the final stage of the Hero's Journey is the **Elixir**. What does the hero bring back with her from the Special World to share upon her Return? Whether it's shared within the community or with the audience, bringing back the Elixir is the hero's final test. It proves she's been there, it serves as an example for others, and it shows above all that death can be overcome. The Elixir may even have the power to restore life in the Ordinary World.

Like everything else in the Hero's Journey, returning with the Elixir can be literal or metaphoric. The Elixir may be an actual substance or medicine brought back to save an endangered community (a feature of several "Star Trek" TV plots and the object of the quest in *Medicine Man*). It may be literal treasure wrested from the Special World and shared within a group of adventurers. More figuratively, it may

be any of the things that drive people to undertake adventure: money, fame, power, love, peace, happiness, success, health, knowledge, or having a good story to tell. The best Elixirs are those that bring hero and audience greater awareness. In *The Treasure Of the Sierra Madre*, the physical treasure of gold is revealed to be worthless dust, and the real Elixir is the wisdom to live a long and peaceful life.

In the tales of King Arthur, the Grail is the Elixir that, once shared, heals the wounded land. The Fisher King can rest easy again. If Percival and the knights had kept the Grail for themselves, there would have been no healing.

If a traveler doesn't bring back something to share, he's not a hero, he's a heel, selfish and unenlightened. He hasn't learned his lesson. He hasn't grown. Returning with the Elixir is the last test of the hero, which shows if he's mature enough to share the fruits of his quest.

THE ELIXIR OF LOVE

Love is, of course, one of the most powerful and popular Elixirs. It can be a reward the hero doesn't win until after a final sacrifice. In *Romancing the Stone* Joan Wilder has surrendered her old fantasies about men and said goodbye to her old, uncertain personality. The payoff for her is that unexpectedly, Jack Colton comes for her after all, miraculously transporting a romantic sailboat to her New York neighborhood to sweep her away. He has transmuted the Elixir he was after —the precious emerald—into another form, love. Joan gets her reward of romance, but she has earned it by learning that she could live without it.

THE WORLD IS CHANGED

Another aspect of the Elixir is that the wisdom which heroes bring back with them may be so powerful that it forces change not only in them, but also those around them. The whole world is altered and the consequences spread far. There is a beautiful image for this in *Excalibur*. When Percival brings the Grail back to the ailing Arthur, the King revives and rides out with his knights again. They are so filled with new life that flowers burst into bloom at their passing. They are a living Elixir, whose mere presence renews nature.

THE ELIXIR OF RESPONSIBILITY

A common and powerful Elixir is for heroes to take wider responsibility at the Return, giving up their loner status for a place of leadership or service within a group. Families and relationships get started, cities are founded. The hero's center has moved from the ego to the Self, and sometimes expands to include the group. Mad Max, the loner hero of George Miller's *Road Warrior* and *Mad Max: Beyond the Thunderdome*, forsakes his solitude to become Mentor and foster-father to a race of orphaned children. The Elixir is his skill at survival and his recollection of the old world before the apocalypse, which he passes on to the orphans.

THE ELIXIR OF TRAGEDY

In the tragic mode, heroes die or are defeated, brought down by their tragic flaws. Yet there is learning and an Elixir brought back from the experience. Who learns? The audience, for they see the errors of the tragic hero and the consequences of error. They learn, if they are wise, what mistakes to avoid, and this is the Elixir that they bring away from the experience.

SADDER BUT WISER

Sometimes the Elixir is heroes taking a rueful look back at their wrong turns on the path. A feeling of closure is created by a hero acknowledging that he is **sadder but wiser** for having gone through the experience. The Elixir he bears away is bitter medicine, but it may keep him from making the same error again, and his pain serves as fair warning to the audience not to choose that path. The heroes of *Risky Business* and *White Men Can't Jump* have been down a road of learning that mixed pain and pleasure. They ultimately lose the prize of love, must Return without the woman of their dreams, and have to console themselves with the Elixir of experience. These stories create a feeling that the account is closed and the heroes are being presented with the final balance.

SADDER BUT NO WISER

A "sadder but wiser" hero is acknowledging that he's been a fool, which is the first step to recovery. The worse kind of fool is the one who doesn't get it. Either he never

sees the error or he goes through the motions but has not really learned his lesson. Even after enduring terrible ordeals, he slides back to the same behavior that got him in trouble in the first place. He is sadder but no wiser. This is another kind of circular closure.

In this style of Return, a roguish or foolish character seems to have grown and changed. Perhaps he is a down or Trickster, like Bob Hope in the Crosby-Hope pictures or Eddie Murphy in *48 Hours* or *Trading Places*, who swears he has learned his lesson. However, in the end he fumbles the Elixir and returns to an original error. He may fall back to his original, irrepressible attitude, dosing the circle and dooming himself to repeat the adventure.

For this is the penalty of failing to return with the Elixir: The hero, or someone else, is doomed to repeat the Ordeals until the lesson is learned or the Elixir is brought home to share.

EPILOGUE

Just as some stories may have a prologue that precedes the main action, there may also be a need for an epilogue that follows the bulk of the story. An epilogue or postscript on rare occasions can serve to complete the story, by projecting ahead to some future time to show how the characters turned out. *Terms of Endearment* has an epilogue that shows the characters a year after the main story has ended. The feeling communicated is that even though there is sadness and death, life goes on. *Look Who's Talking* has an epilogue that shows the birth of the baby hero's little sister nine months after the main plot has been resolved. Stories that show a group of characters at a formative or critical period, like *American Graffiti* or war movies such as *Glory* or *The Dirty Dozen*, may end with a short segment that tells how the characters died, progressed in life, or were remembered. *A League of Their Own* has an extensive epilogue in which an aging woman ballplayer, having remembered her career in flashback for the main body of the film, visits the Baseball Hall of Fame and sees many of her teammates. The fates of the players are revealed and the surviving women, now in their sixties, stage a game to show that they still know how to play ball. Their spirit is the Elixir that revives the hero and the audience.

These have been a few of the purposes and functions of Return. There are also pitfalls to avoid in Returning with the Elixir

PITFALLS OF THE RETURN

It's easy to blow it in the Return. Many stories fall apart in the final moments. The Return is too abrupt, prolonged, unfocused, unsurprising, or unsatisfying. The mood or chain of thought the author has created just evaporates and the whole effort is wasted. The Return may also be too ambiguous. Many people faulted the twist ending of *Basic Instinct* for failing to resolve uncertainty about a woman's guilt.

UNRESOLVED SUBPLOTS

Another pitfall is that writers fail to bring all the elements together at the Return. It's common for writers today to leave subplot threads dangling. Perhaps in the hurry to finish and deal with the main characters, the fates of secondary characters and ideas are forgotten about, even though they may be extremely interesting to the audience. Older films tend to be more complete and satisfying because the creators took time to work out every subplot. Character actors could be counted on to do their bit somewhere at the beginning, the middle, and the end. A rule of thumb: Subplots should have at least three "beats" or scenes distributed throughout the story, one in each act. All the subplots should be acknowledged or resolved in the Return. Each character should come away with some variety of Elixir or learning.

TOO MANY ENDINGS

On the other hand, the Return should not seem labored or repetitive. Another good rule of thumb for the Return phase is to operate on the KISS system, that is: Keep It Simple, Stupid. Many stories fail because they have too many endings. The audience senses the story is over but the writer, perhaps unable to choose the right ending, tries several. This tends to frustrate an audience, dissipating the energy the writer has created. People want to know the story's definitively over so they can quickly get up and leave the theater or finish the book with a powerful charge of emotion. An overly ambitious film like *Lord Jim*, trying to take on a dense novel, can exhaust an audience with climaxes and endings that seem to go on forever.

An extreme example of keeping it simple might be the karate match that forms the climax of *The Karate Kid*. When the last kick is delivered and the hero wins, the credits roll immediately in a burst of final theme music. There is almost

no denouement. We know the kid is bearing the Elixir of lessons learned well in his training.

ABRUPT ENDINGS

A Return can seem too abrupt, giving the sense the writer has quit too soon after the climax. A story tends to feel incomplete unless a certain emotional space is devoted to bidding farewell to the characters and drawing some conclusions. An abrupt Return is like someone hanging up the phone without saying goodbye, or a pilot bailing out without bringing the plane in for a landing.

FOCUS

A Return may feel out of focus if the dramatic questions, raised in Act One and tested in Act Two, are not answered now. Writers may have failed to pose the right questions in the first place. Without realizing it, a writer may have shifted the theme. A tale that started out as a love story may have turned into an expose of government corruption. The writer has lost the thread. The story will not seem focused unless the circle is closed by Returning to the original themes.

PUNCTUATION

The final function of Return is to conclude the story decisively. The story should end with the emotional equivalent of a punctuation mark. A story, like a sentence, can end in only four ways: with a period, an exclamation point, a question mark, or an ellipsis (the three or four little dots that indicate your thoughts have just trailed off vaguely. Example: Do you want to go now, or...).

The needs of your story and your attitude may dictate ending with the feeling of a period, an image or line of dialogue flatly making a declarative statement: "Life goes on." "Love conquers all." "Good triumphs over evil." "That's the way life is." "There's no place like home."

An ending can give the effect of an exclamation point if the intent of the work is to stir action or create alarm. Science fiction and horror films may end on a note of "We are not alone!" or "Repent or perish!" Stories of social awareness may end with a passionate tone of "Never again!" or "Rise up and throw off chains of oppression!" or "Something must be done!"

In a more open-ended approach to structure, you may want to end with the effect of a question mark, and the feeling that uncertainties remain. The final image may pose a question such as "Will the hero Return with the Elixir or will it be forgotten?" An open-ended story may also trail off with the feeling of an ellipsis. Unspoken questions may linger in the air or conflicts may remain unresolved with endings that suggest doubt or ambiguity: "The hero can't decide between two women, and therefore..." or "Love and art are irreconcilable, so..." or "Life goes on... and on... and on..." or "She proved she's not a killer, but..."

One way or another, the very ending of a story should announce that it's all over — like the Warner Bros. cartoon signature line "That's **all**, folks!" Oral storytellers, in addition to using formulas like "...and they lived happily ever after," will sometimes end folktales with a ritual statement like "I'm done, that's that, and who'll ease my dry throat with a drink?" Sometimes a final image, such as the hero riding off into the sunset, can sum up the story's theme in a visual metaphor and let the audience know it's over. The final image of *Unforgiven*, a shot of Clint Eastwood's character leaving his wife's grave and returning to his house, signals the end of the journey and sums up the story's theme.

These are only a few of the features of Return with the Elixir. As we come full circle, let's leave a little opening for the unknown, the unexpected, the unexplored.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Dorothy's Return begins with saying goodbye to her Allies and acknowledging the Elixirs of love, courage, and common sense she has gained from them. Then, tapping her heels and chanting "There's no place like home!" she wishes herself back to Kansas where she started.

Back home in the Ordinary World, back to black and white, Dorothy wakes up in bed with a compress on her head. The Return is ambiguous: Was the trip to Oz real? or was it the dream of a girl with a concussion? In story terms however, it doesn't matter; the journey was real to Dorothy.

She recognizes the people around her as characters from Oz. But her perceptions of them have changed as a result of her experience in the Special World. She remembers that some of it was horrible, some beautiful, but she focuses on what she's learned — there's no place like home. Dorothy's declaration that she will never leave home again is not meant to be taken literally.

in possession of her best qualities, in control of the worst, and in touch with the positive forms of masculine and feminine energy within her. She has incorporated every lesson she has learned from every being along the road. She is finally happy in her own skin and will feel at home no matter where she is. The Elixir she brings back is this new idea of home, a new concept of her Self

And so the Hero's Journey ends, or at least rests for a while, for the journey of life and the adventure of story never really end. The hero and the audience bring back the Elixir from the current adventure, but the quest to integrate the lessons goes on. It's for each of us to say what the Elixir is — wisdom, experience, money, love, fame, or the thrill of a lifetime. But a good story, like a good journey, leaves us with an Elixir that changes us, makes us more aware, more alive, more human, more whole, more a part of everything that is. The circle of the Hero's Journey is complete.