

# The Map:

## Act I (The first 25%)

1. Heroes are introduced in ***The Ordinary World***, where
2. they receive the ***Call to Adventure***.
3. They are ***Reluctant*** at first, or ***Refuse the Call***, but
4. are encouraged by a ***Mentor*** to
5. ***Cross the First Threshold*** and enter the Special World, where

## Act II (The middle 50%)

6. they encounter ***Tests, Allies and Enemies***.
7. They ***Approach the Inmost Cave***, crossing a second threshold, where
8. they endure ***The Ordeal***.
9. They take possession of their ***Reward***, and

## Act III (The final 25%)

10. are pursued on ***The Road Back*** to the Ordinary World.
11. They cross the third threshold, experiencing ***Resurrection***, and are transformed by the experience.
12. They ***Return with the Elixir***, a boon or treasure to benefit the Ordinary World.

# Corresponding Character Arc:

## Act I

1. Limited awareness of a problem
2. Increased awareness
3. Reluctance to change
4. Overcoming reluctance
5. Committing to change

## Act II

6. Experimenting with first change
7. Preparing for big change
8. Attempting big change
9. Consequences of attempt (improvements and setbacks)

## Act III

10. Rededication to change
11. Final attempt at big change
12. Final mastery of the problem.

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## The Archetypes:

- **Hero** - Self-sacrificing protagonist
  - Psych. Function - Hero incorporates all experiences into a complete, balanced entity
  - Dram. Function –
    - Identification – gives reader a window into the story, an entry where they can see themselves in the Hero's shoes
    - Growth - change *will* occur by the end of the story
    - Action - reader follows our Hero through the adventure
    - Sacrifice - true Heroes are always sacrificing themselves for the greater good
    - Dealing with death (literal or symbolic)
    - Character Flaws – Starting point of imperfection, room for growth
- **Mentor** – Enthused – *en theos* – god-inspired
  - Psych. Function – Mentors represent the god within us, our Hero's highest aspirations
  - Dram. Function –
    - Teaching – and learning from students
    - Gift-giving – gifts are given when earned by learning, sacrifice or commitment
    - Hero's Conscience - somebody has to be
    - Motivation - gives the little shoves needed to keep going
    - Planting - Mentors are good at dropping plants (info or props) that will be useful later on
- **Threshold Guardian** – Obstacles along the way - not always villains, or even people – just obstacles (big ones) that challenge the hero's advancement
  - Psych. Function – TGs are ordinary obstacles, but *deeper* (neuroses, scars, vices, dependencies...)
  - Dram. Function –
    - Testing the Hero; Hero must meet challenges: may run, deceive, attack head-on, bribe, or make an Ally of the Guardian (get under their skin, become the enemy, incorporate them in)
    - Resistance comes when we try to make a positive change in our lives
    - Signals of new power. Heroes might recognize Guardians as early indicators of future success
    - Heroes can use Guardians as sources of strength.
- **Herald** – Person or force, active in Act I especially, who issues challenge, announces coming change, new energy that makes it impossible to 'just get by' any longer
  - Psych. Function – Announcing Call for change, Strike of bell inside
  - Dram. Function – Motivation, gets the story rolling, something is out of balance

- **Shapeshifter** – Two (or more)-faced character, often of the opposite sex, ever-changing in hero's eyes
  - Psych. Function –
    - Express Hero's repressed unconscious – Hero projects their ideal, their inner perfection onto Shapeshifter, trying to make them match their ideal
  - - Catalyst for change, symbolic of psychological urge to transform oneself
  - Dram. Function –
    - Brings doubt and suspicion into story (keeps reader guessing)
    - Can be anyone who assumes mask, even Hero himself
  
- **Shadow** – Energy of the dark side – suppressed monsters of our inner world
  - Psych. Function – Power of repressed feelings, psychoses that threaten to destroy us
  - Dram. Function –
    - Change the hero and give her a worthy opponent in the struggle
      - Can be external (vanquish) or internal (bring to light, or even redeem, turn positive)
  
- **Trickster** –
  - Psych. Function –
    - Cuts big egos down to size
    - Brings Hero and readers down to earth (helps us realize our common bonds)
    - Points out our folly and hypocrisy
    - Brings about healthy change by drawing attention to imbalance or absurdity of a stagnant psychological situation
    - Natural enemies of status quo; brings perspective
  - Dram. Function –
    - Comic relief – relieve tension, revive interest
    - Balance
    - Often catalyst characters who affect lives of others but are unchanged themselves
  
- **Ally** – Sidekick(s)
  - Psych. Function – might represent unexpressed or unused parts of the personality that must be brought into action to do their jobs
  - Dram. Function – alternate paths for problem solving, rounding out Hero's personalities

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# Act I

## Stage 1: Introduction to the Ordinary World

- We meet home base, gaining context for our story
  - Provides contrast for the Special World to come
- Opening image is a suggestion of: the story to come; or the theme; or the Special World
  - It sets the stage
  - It conjures up a mood, an image or a metaphor, all by our design
- Hero's entrance - Defines the hero straight away
  - How will our reader first experience our hero?
    - First actions speak volumes
    - First actions and behaviors should be characteristic – defining and revealing character
      - No bait and switch - be consistent
  - Raises dramatic questions about hero – goals, inner and outer problems
    - What's at stake?
- Lures our reader into our hero – empathy – identification, bond, sympathy
  - Universal goals, drives, desires, or needs
  - Hero's Lack (missing elements) can drive reader's sympathy and desire for their wholeness
    - Hero's Lack makes him human, real
    - Lack is sometimes hidden, but still somehow revealed
- First statement of theme comes in the Ordinary World (In *Act I*)
  - Theme: "something set before" – needs to be laid out in advance
- Backstory through exposition – artfully and gracefully reveal all backstory and all other pertinent information about the plot
  - Reader will be more involved if they have to work a little to piece things together
    - Reveal indirectly: visually, on the run, through conflict

## Stage 2: The Call to Adventure

- New energy comes in to germinate the seeds of growth and change that have been planted in Stage 1
  - This is our Catalyst, our Trigger, our Inciting Incident
- Herald often issues the Call
  - Other options:
    - Loss can indicate Call
    - Being shanghaied into adventure when running out of options can be the Call
  - Call can be disorienting and uncomfortable
  - More than one Call is acceptable
- Tools to employ at this stage:
  - Synchronicity – coincidental occurrence of words, ideas, or events can draw attention to need for change
  - Symbols all over the place represent major threshold of change

## Stage 3: Refusal of the Call

- A halting to consider - Fear and hesitation are common when approaching a threshold
  - Pause signals danger to reader – helps tension along
  - Can be huge, or small and subtle
- Hero may:
  - Try to avoid the Call

- Make excuses
- Continually refuse (tragic Hero)
- Fight opposing Calls (choices)
- Refuse a negative Call = positive outcome (call could have been temptation)
- Encounter more Calls in the form of distractions, or
- Be a willing hero, ready to attack
  - Refusal of the call then needs to be realized elsewhere in story, possibly through others' warnings or similar pauses to reflect on the wisdom of continuing (Threshold Guardians).
  - Doubts and Threshold Guardians create emotional suspense
- Heroes inevitably violate limits set by Mentors and Threshold Guardians
  - The Law of the Secret Door shows how limits indicate future violation.
    - 'You can have anything, but not *this one thing*,' which is of course the first thing you'll become fixated with and *have to have*.
- Refusal can be an opportunity to redirect the focus of an adventure
  - Shallow -> Deeper

#### Stage 4: Meeting with the Mentor

- Here our Hero gains supplies, knowledge & confidence to overcome fear and commence the adventure
- Mentor is a source of wisdom, even if not a character (history, maps, books...)
- Hero-Mentor relationship is an emotional one
  - Rich in potential humor, involvement, conflict and tragedy
- Good teacher or mentor is *enthused* about learning, and their enthusiasm can be transmitted to students or readers (hopefully both!)– they are contagious
- Be careful of cliché mentors
- Mentors can be tricky, and bad, leading astray – not all are to be trusted
- Overprotective mentors can lead to tragedy
- Mentors can be evolved heroes experienced enough to teach others
- Mentor is often a brief passing influence
- *Mentors get story unstuck by giving aid, advice, or magical equipment*
  - When **writers** get stuck, they may seek mentors just like heroes do
    - Writers are mentors of kinds to their readers – great responsibility!

#### Stage 5: Crossing the First Threshold

- Threshold to the Special World, or Act II
- Crossing Threshold = Plot Point or Turning Point
  - Could be a quick moment or longer scene
- Crossing over is a pure act of will – wholeheartedly committing to the Adventure
- Stakes suddenly higher
- No turning back!
- Threshold Guardians, able to appear anywhere, tend to cluster around doorways, gates, and narrow passages of threshold crossings
  - Some must be ignored or pushed through
  - Some must be absorbed or their hostile energy must be reflected back at them
  - Some just need to be acknowledged or recognized
- Crossings should be noticed as a shift in energy
  - Possibly an actual crossing – river, gorge, ocean, door, bridge, etc.
  - Possibly a mood change or visual contrast
  - Single moment or extended passage – doorway vs. ocean - either are acceptable

- Leap of faith needed (courage) – *Irrevocable act!*
- Adventure begins in earnest
- Story is like an airplane in flight
  - Act I is process of loading, fueling, taxiing and rumbling down runway
  - First Threshold is the moment the wheels leave the ground
    - It may take a while to adjust to being in the air, but we're there!

## Act II

### Stage 6: Tests, Allies, and Enemies

- Readers' first impression of the Special World should strike a sharp contrast with the Ordinary World – different feel, rhythm, priorities, values, rules.
- Testing to sharpen the hero
- Making Allies (sidekicks, teams...) or Enemies (rivals...), and differentiating between the two
- New rules *to adjust to quickly*

### Stage 7: Approach to the Inmost Cave

- Final preparations for the central Ordeal of the Adventure
  - Taking time to plan, recon, reorganize, fortify, arm themselves
    - Last laugh, final cigarette, one last kiss
  - *Get Ready!*
- Romance may develop here
- Approach may be bold, or not
  - Approach, though it may be confident, should be tempered with humility for balance
- Credentials of experience may be needed to pass through several stages
  - Make allies – they may prove useful!
- Emotional appeal can also break through Threshold Guardians
- Heroes (facing change) are challenging a *powerful* status quo – The Special World may be not what it was hyped up to be, they may face complications, things may get worse before they get better.
- Up the stakes – rededicate to mission
- Remind reader of ticking clock of story - urgency

### Stage 8: The Ordeal

- Hero must die (literally or figuratively) so that they can be reborn
  - Options: (Think Story Engineering tentpole analogy)
    - Central crisis happens at midpoint
      - This is halfway through Act II. Story Engineering just goes right on ahead and calls them two separate Parts.
      - Leaves plenty of time for elaborate consequences to flow from the Ordeal
    - Delayed crisis – rear end of Act II (2/3 or ¾ through story)
      - Matches closely with Golden Mean (~3:5)
      - Leaves more room for preparation and Approach and allows slow buildup to a big moment at the end of the Act II
- Witness needed – to witness death and revival

- Represents reader – brings them in to react with them
- Elasticity of emotion – Basketball analogy
  - Basketball pushed down underwater will rebound high
  - The harder you throw a basketball at the floor, the higher it will rebound
  - Emotions depressed by the presence of death can rebound in an instant to a higher state than ever before
    - This can be the base on which you build to yet a higher level
    - *The Ordeal is one of the deepest depressions on a story, and therefore leads to one of its highest peaks*
- Story needs a central (or delayed) life-or-death crisis to lead up to and trail away from
  - Hero can die, witness death, cause death, or all 3
- Facing the Shadow – a separate person or the *negative possibilities of hero himself*
  - *Hero's Shadow = Hero's Greatest Opponent*
  - Resistance can be your greatest source of strength
  - Devil himself is God's shadow, a projection of all the negative/rejected potential of the Supreme Being
  - Shadow needs to be brought out into the light to deal with (duke it out)
- Use Ariadne's Thread – the elastic band that connects a Hero with loved ones, that pulls them from the brink (Ariadne's gift to Theseus in the Labyrinth)
- Ordeal can be the marriage of Hero and his repressed half, completing him
- Ordeal can be the moment the Hero faces his greatest fear

## Stage 9: Seizing the Reward

- Survival of Death - Big Deal!
- Taking possession of whatever hero was seeking – Seizing the Sword
  - Not passive – generally active, aggressive even
  - Sword is image of hero's will, forged in fire, broken, remade, sharpened
  - Could also be Holy Grail, Ultimate Boon, Jewel, etc...
  - Elixir – secret to life and death – often needs to be stolen
- Celebration, rest, recuperation, refueling
  - Campfire-type scenes – gathering, reviewing, jokes, boasting
    - Nostalgia, remembrance
    - Catch breath (reader too)
    - Emotional, quieter moment (slowed from frantic pace)
  - Possible Love Scene (well-earned)
- Initiation – Act III is new beginning in new rank – *new creature*
  - Death sharpens perception of life
  - Seeing through deception, seeing clearly
  - Self-realization
  - Epiphany – realization of divinity – seeing the cure
- Conquest of death *can* create distortions instead of clarity (ego, etc)

## Act III

### Stage 10: The Road Back

- A few heroes stay in the Special World, but most head back
- Story's energy is revved up again (push back up to light)
- Return to Ordinary World and implement lessons learned in Special World
- Hero may fear that wisdom and magic of Ordeal could evaporate in the harsh light of the common day – Fear, skeptics,
  - Hero shares anyway
- Hero is rededicated to adventure

- Threshold from Act II to Act III
  - May change aim of story
  - Motivation can be inner or outer
- Finish the enemy – or they may rise up again, angrier than ever
  - May be a chase scene
    - Pursuit by an admirer can be an interesting twist
    - Pursuit of escaped villain
  - Possible catastrophic reversal of Hero's good fortune – reality
  - Could be *Delayed Crisis* spoken of earlier
  - Road back could be a brief moment or an elaborate sequence

## Stage 11: The Resurrection

- Final purging and purification before re-entering Ordinary World – Once more they must change
  - Show change by behavior or appearance, not by just talking about it
  - Demonstrate that Hero has been through resurrection
- New self must be created for new world
  - Heroes had to shed old selves to enter Special World, must now shed personality of journey and build new one suitable for return to Ordinary World
    - Reflect best parts of old selves and lessons learned along the way
  - Cleanse Hero of smell of death (think: poorly integrated Vietnam vets)
    - Tunnels, immersion, symbols
  - Heroes must be tested again to see if they retained learning from Supreme Ordeal
    - To learn something is one thing, to bring home knowledge as applied wisdom is another – *Field Trial*
      - Was Hero sincere? Will Shadow prevail?
- Stakes are at their highest now – broad – whole world affected
- Hero must be the one to act – not be rescued
- Maybe a difficult choice to test Hero's values
- Climax options:
  - Quiet climax – gentle cresting or wave of emotion
  - Rolling climaxes – series of climaxes of subplots, or series of climaxes on different levels (mind, body, spirit, etc...)
  - *Catharsis* – purifying emotional release or breakthrough (climax needs to provide catharsis)
    - Sudden expansion of readers' awareness
    - Laughter, tears
    - Catharsis is the logical climax of character arc
- Resurrection is Hero's last chance to make major change in attitude or behavior
  - May backslide, then reappear
  - Hope may seem dead, just before success
  - Last-minute threat may appear
  - Proof of Special World may disappear, causing doubts – *hard to explain to others!*
- Calls for sacrifice by Hero
  - Opportunity for Hero to show he has incorporated all lessons into himself
  - Outward signs that Hero has changed – appearance or action

## Stage 12: Return with the Elixir

- Tying up loose ends – closing the circle
  - New questions OK, but all old must be resolved, *or at least restated*
  - Circular Form – narrative returns to starting point (full circle)



- Happy endings
  - Open-Ended Form – story-telling goes on after book is over – leave conclusions to readers
    - Posing new questions
    - Imperfect endings – realism – challenge cultural assumptions
- Return is last chance to touch readers' emotions – Do it intentionally!
  - Satisfy them, or
  - Provoke them
- Needs some unexpected – twist – misdirection
- Reward and punishment doled out – poetic justice
- Elixer – what does Hero bring from Special World to Ordinary World to share?
  - Literal or metaphoric, but sharing is needed for a true Hero
  - Hero shares the fruits of his quest
    - With others in the Ordinary World
    - With readers, or
    - With both
  - Love, responsibility, wisdom, clarity, experience, money, fame, thrill...
- Pitfalls of the Return - Avoid these!
  - Unresolved subplots - all need to be acknowledged or resolved in Return
    - All subplots should have at least 3 beats (scenes) distributed throughout, one in each act
      - Their resolution is found here
  - Too many endings – KISS – pick an ending, go with it
  - Abrupt ending – need emotional space to decompress
  - Lack of FOCUS!
    - Answer questions raised in Act I and Tested in Acts II and III
    - Did you ask the right dramatic question?
    - Keep theme consistent
  - Lack of Punctuation - ., ?, !, ... End with one (strong!) - even if it's a '.'