

The Three Dimensions of Story

Written and Developed

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Introduction:

I believe it best to start with a question: What is Story?

Education tends to offer two categories of study: one of the sciences, the other of the arts. The sciences tend to focus on the world: how to break, fix, and even improve everything around us. Art, on the other hand, has a tendency to be less defined. After all, art is different things to different people, but still impacts everyone, and that may be the secret. If art affects everyone in different ways, then the arts are essentially the study of people and how they act, react, and interact with everything around them.

Art, in all forms, reflects its creator, their experience shining through their creation. The audience understands the art, learning something new about life, about the creator, about themselves. Say what you will about authorial intent, there is a communication here, a communication that, in any other form would fall flat, a communication that is governed by rules, a language if you will, a communication that says one thing above all else: relate.

So if the Arts are a study of people, society if you will, and art itself is a form of communication, a communication that begets relatability, and we know stories are a form of art, what is it that they communicate? Robert McKee says in his book Story that “Story is a metaphor for life.” Story is the study of people, real and fictitious, and their journeys through life, and a communication for how we should live our own lives, but we can take this one step further. As we dive deeper into story structure, one aspect we will discuss will be an active character. This doesn’t mean they are constantly on the move, but instead that they are consciously making choices that affect them and the world around them, and then dealing with the consequences. So we could say that story is the study of the choices and consequences of people and societies. So this leads us to our next question:

How do we craft a story?

Like any form of communication, there are rules that allow people to understand each other, often classified as a language. For storytelling, the rules are called story structure. There are many story structures out there that range from vague to specific, and even then, there are others that don't believe these rules exist. Some people plan out their stories, every detail, before they write, others writing and seeing what flows naturally, finding structure to be too restricting on their creativity. In fact, the first thing I would tell you is:

DO NOT USE THIS STORY STRUCTURE!!!!

I know it seems odd that I, who wrote and recommend this structure for writing would say that, but as much of a planner as I am, I can not help but agree with those that don't. I would recommend starting out to write without a plan. In the end, whatever comes out will be awful, but it will also be unrestricted. After you have allowed your imagination to flow naturally, then, and only then, I would pull out this structure, putting all of your ideas in, allowing the structure to turn the mess of imagination into a well ordered and well told story that everyone will love. This leads us to one final point:

Creativity is the focus of imagination, and imagination is inspired by experience.

Creativity is known as the ability to create art, and your skill in that field translates directly into your ability to use that art to communicate. Creativity comes from imagination, but as you know from dreaming, imagination is a mess and challenging to unscramble. Creativity is the language that imagination uses to communicate, but like all languages, communication develops from a need to express your experience to others. Experience is the base of all creativity and no matter how far a fantasy stretches it, no matter what colors express what emotions, no matter what experience a tune carries, all art tries to communicate one thing above all else: relate. The purpose to this structure is to take you through everything you should need to craft a story, but if I could offer a single piece of advice, it would be to keep it personal. No matter how it is dressed, personal experiences shine through and are relatable. Relatability, which we will speak of later, comes in a number of forms, but is essential to have. To be able to relate you need to have experience. To show that you relate you need to have imagination. To be able to communicate that to others you need creativity.

So the next time that you have writer's block, the next time you are stuck in your own mind, go experience something different. This can come from experiencing a movie, game, song, or other art designed to experience someone else's experience, but, if you can, the best thing you can do is go out and experience something yourself.

The Three Dimensions of Story:

Since we have defined story, and art in general, as a form of communication, the language, the rules for communicating, would be story structure. There are many different story structures, each one coming from someone who handled their story in a different way. Some of these, especially the screenplay formatters, treat storytelling as a recipe with exact amounts of exact ingredients. Others don't even give you the full list of ingredients in the first place. Don't get me wrong, these are all brilliantly laid out by people far smarter than I, but it's a lot of information to go through and when pitted against each other, can leave one rather confused.

Story structure can be traced back to the Divine Comedy. Dante's Inferno is said to have inspired the Tarot Cards, which Carl Jung used to develop personality types, personality types that Joseph Campbell used in his development in the Hero's Journey, a journey that was simplified into the Story Circle by Dan Harmon, and that is just the three act structure. The five act structure was developed by Gustav Freytag off of William Shakespeare's plays, and has since been the basis for many screenplay books. That isn't even all of them, and yet each one inspired a hundred books about them each.

With all of these options, what is the right path to take?

Story structure is complicated. Some say there is no structure, and even the ones that do subscribe to different ones. I lean towards the three act structure, despite recognizing that any story can have more than three acts. I still stick with the three act structure though because the five act structure never made sense to me, and that thought never made sense to me.

Shakespeare and Freytag knew what they were doing, many of these people who have structures that I don't subscribe to knew what they were doing. I believe that the reason for this is because each of these people only had one part of story structure. My goal here is to combine them in a way where they create a complete guide to story, and my hope is that this will help a lot of people along the way. I would also encourage anyone to still study the original structures as well. More knowledge can not hurt your craft.

This structure is divided into three parts. It is called the three dimensions of story because it helps create three dimensional stories, characters, and worlds, because it is based on the three act structure, and because there are three parts. I know, real original, but not to worry, I have an odd illustration that comes with it. If you could, let's imagine story as a human body.

The first dimension of my structure is actually the middle ring on my map. I call it the story map, but I also call the entire graphic the story map so remember that when explaining this to others. It is a list of words used in storytelling and how they all connect, the ingredients, if you will. These help the story stand up and define the shape and size of the story. Many of these words are developed in the background, never seen or known about, and yet the story could suffer without them, even if the audience has no idea. This is the Skeletal structure. The bones shape and hold a person up, some bones, despite their importance, going completely unnoticed by those that use them. But this skeletal structure can not move without the muscular system.

The second dimension of my structure, which I call Journey, is the outer ring, based heavily off of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey and Dan Harmon's Story Circle, as well as all that influenced them. This dimension puts the characters at the forefront and allows their choices to move the story forward. The story would not happen without this as it is essentially the muscle of the story.

There were two things I never really understood about story, the five act structure and the pacing curve. The reason why is the third dimension, the middle triangle and everything in it. I found that the five act structure and the pacing curve are synonymous, which is why I call this third dimension the Pacing Curve. Pacing is like the respiratory system of the body. It gives life to your story, lets it breath, and keeps the story's energy going. It is the job of pacing to keep the audience engaged.

While we covered all three parts of the structure, we can add two more to our analogy. The high concept of a story defines the world and the characters' place in it. It is what sucks people into the story in the first place. It is the chance for the audience to be whisked away to a different world. This is the endocrine system. It is the skin, hair, and nails designed to dress the story and make it appealing to the audience.

Lastly we can boil a story down to its DNA. There are four words that I continually came across in my studies: internal, external, active, and reactive. I applied each of these four words to the first dimension of story. When we boil a story down to its DNA, we can truly understand what makes it work.

There is one final thing I would like to add. If this synopsis is too long already, if you were to just take what you have learned here and not read any further, I would implore you to revisit these three pieces of advice. Creativity is the focus of imagination, and imagination is inspired by experience. If you want to write, you must experience things. Through that

experience you are able to write things that will relate to others; keep it personal. Lastly, for everything you do, every decision you make in your writing, stop and ask why you did it. If you can answer why, the reason is personal, and are happy with the experience it brings, you are probably going in the right direction.

The First Dimension:

The first dimension, or story map, starts in the middle of the map. It is all the words that are outside of the triangle. This dimension can be divided into what I consider to be the three parts of narrative: world, story, and character. I believe that stories are cyclical. You can see here that the world creates the character, the character's actions drive the story, and the story shapes the world, which continues the cycle with new characters and stories. Each of these three elements are developed through five different parts, each part having their own action, reaction, internal, and external aspects to them.

Between each piece is also how each piece affects the next, and the possible systems that can come from that. There is a lot of possible variety here to really make the story your own. Just remember to keep it all connected and make sure the parts you show, and even some of the ones you don't, mean something to the world, characters, and story. Let's get started:

World: The World is anything that has an affect on the main character and their surroundings. While you could say that the setting is a part of the World, it would almost be more accurate to say the setting exists because of the state of the World. A World can be as large as a galaxy, like in Star Wars, or as small as a town, like in E.T. The necessary element is that it affects the characters within it. The three act structure usually has a transition between acts represented by a transition between the familiar and unfamiliar worlds. Luke Skywalker desires action because he lives on a boring farm with an aunt and uncle because of the death of his parents. The set up of the World helps determine who Luke is. As Luke learns the truth about the World, as more is revealed, he is pulled in more and more till his actions, his choices, push the story forward and end up changing the world.

Internal: The Internal for World is BELIEF. This belief is what is held by the World around the characters, sometimes personifying as a character itself. This can range from a village not wanting people to leave because of monsters, to a galaxy devoid of hope because of an oppressive empire. It is also worth considering that a great villain lives by the mantra that no one sees themselves as the villain. There are two ways to do a villain, one where they can justify their actions to themselves, another where they directly attack aspects of the protagonist. The best villains can do both, justifying their actions to the protagonist, a protagonist that has grown out of that state of mind. Star Wars has a very black and white morality, and that is great because it matches the themes of the series, but in one of the animated series, Resistance, one of the ally characters changes sides because her father didn't have a job under the old Republic. The Empire, which had only been seen to ruin people's lives, took care of someone who is considered an ally. The BELIEF of the World can be seen through many viewpoints from many characters.

External: The External for World is RULES. While the World is usually not an antagonist, though it can be, it usually is changed in some way at the end of a story. The world is often challenging to the protagonist in some way, and while we spoke of belief before and how a lot of antagonists don't see themselves as the villain, the RULES they take to submit their belief is often where they cross the line. In Harry Potter, Voldemort's return is something that scares everyone. For the majority of the books everyone assumes Voldemort is gone forever, but when he comes back at the end of the fourth book, the heroes try to warn everyone, but the government lets their fear get the best of them and cover up any information about Voldemort. This puts them as the bad guys, but it is simply the RULES they set out to feed their belief, that they were safe from Voldemort.

There are four other aspects, each with their own DNA, that go into creating the World of your story: History, STEER, Status Quo, Elixir.

History: Like I said before, stories are cyclical. History is essentially the story that turned the World into what it is during your story. It is very important to know what events led up to why the World is the way it is and why it affects the characters the way it does. The Star Wars prequel films are the History of why the galaxy is the way it is, but more importantly, why Luke is the way he is at the start of the movie, what he gets from his parents and why his surroundings are the way they are.

Internal: The Internal for History is PAST. The events of the PAST affect the future. They have already happened and can not be changed, but they can be learned from, even if that doesn't often happen or they learn the wrong things. The PAST is almost like a character arc for the World. The story has it grow and change, and those effects should show in some way in the next story. In Moana, her father forbids her from going out into the ocean because when he was younger he went out with a friend who died because of it and he doesn't want to lose her as well.

External: The External for History is FUTURE. The FUTURE hasn't happened yet, but it unfolds through the story. A story is about change, and the FUTURE is that change. Sometimes that change is new, other times that change is a reversion back to an old way. In Captain America: Civil War, Vision says that their strength invites challenge. Stories are cyclical and patterns emerge through the History of a story. We see this in Star Wars where the Republic turns to the Empire, a toppled Empire turns into a New Republic, and the failures of that Republic lead to the First Order.

Reaction: The Reaction for History is SHAPES. The story from before is what shapes the World that creates these characters. In the Hunger Games, the past civil wars created the hunger games, designed to keep each of the districts in line.

Action: The Action for History is DEVELOPMENT. After the story shapes the World, the World develops its beliefs and rules to handle what is currently going on in the World after History, and it is these beliefs and rules that the characters deal with in this story. Again, in the Hunger Games, the titular games were developed to keep civil war from breaking out again.

The development that HISTORY causes leads to STEER

STEER: STEER stands for Social (political), Technological (magical), Ecological, Economical, and Religious. These five tenets can help you really define your world. Star

Wars: A New Hope has a galaxy run by an Empire that doesn't reach where Luke lives, an Empire with the most technologically advanced weapon used to spread fear, wiping out races that rebel and using the rest for slave labor, sets up their own imperial credit system, and has erased the religion of the Jedi from record. Not only does Star Wars hit every point, but we see how this changes through the different entries. The Mandalorian sees Dyn refuse Imperial Credits as payment after they are defeated, but is paid with Beskar by an ex-imperial warlord who still has resources the empire gathered.

Internal: The Internal for STEER is POLITICS. Politics are what the societal leaders deem put in place due to the five aspects above. While empires and democracies are very popular, this could be a parents ruleset or a village elder keeping people in due to monsters outside the village, like in The Village. There can be many Worlds in a story. Star Wars has the empire, but they also have the moisture farms where Luke grew up. A village where Uncle Own and Aunt Beru made the politics and rules for Luke.

External: The External for STEER is SETTING. SETTING is the outside environment, often set up by the atmosphere, which we will dive into later. Every movie has a SETTING, but the SETTING should reflect the tone. A horror movie adds a feeling of claustrophobia with a small locked house, adding tension. An adventure movie has many large open locations to add that sense of travel.

Reaction: The Reaction for STEER is DEVELOPMENT. The Reaction for one word is the action for the previous one, an interaction between them even.

Action: The Action for STEER is SETTLE. By the time the story starts, habits have developed that set up the status quo for the protagonist. This is because the World they live in has SETTLED into these habits where the protagonist begins, habits they must break to continue their journey.

These five aspects and how they affect your World may or may not ever be seen by the audience, but setting these up will add a depth to your World that the audience will feel.

Status Quo: After the history of the world sets up a new set of actions through STEER, they settle into a new Status Quo. This is the normal World that the protagonist is the master over. We will dive more into that during the Journey, but this is Tatooine for Luke, Katniss' Home, anywhere the protagonist is comfortable and has habits they participate in with ease.

Internal: The Internal for Status Quo is STAGNANT. At a certain point a character can do what they do so well they don't even have to think about it, but they don't grow either. In Thor: Ragnarok, Thor tells Loki that life is about growth and change and while Thor has changed, Loki and their relationship hasn't. Thor leaves Loki behind where he can live comfortably, but Loki comes with Thor in the end, having changed. In many smaller stories in Star Wars, including both of the games of Battlefront 2 and Squadrons, the main character is ready to leave the empire and urge their friends to come with them, but they don't. They fail the refusal of the call and their work becomes personal as they feel betrayed, which we will talk about more later. While the STAGNANT is not fun, it is easy, and the fear of the unknown can trump the temptation of adventure.

External: The External for Status Quo is EVOLUTION. While a lot of the world will stick with the Status Quo, there is always a protagonist who wants to grow, to change, to

EVOLVE. They conquer their fear of the unknown and go out into the world, but when they return, they also bring with them an EVOLUTION for the ordinary World as well. When Luke returns to Tatooine in The Return of the Jedi, Tatooine has largely been untouched, but now as a Jedi, he EVOLVES and helps Tatooine EVOLVE too.

Reaction: The Reaction for Status Quo is SETTLE, the same action STEER takes on the Status Quo. It is the SETTLING in routines that create the ordinary world of the protagonist.

Action: The Action for Status Quo is QUEST. Once a protagonist conquers their fear, or whatever holds them back, they have to leave the ordinary world behind and embark on a QUEST to get whatever it is that they need. I would provide an example here, but it is nearly every story ever where a hero embarks on a quest.

Once the protagonist breaks out of the Status Quo, it is time to break the World out of the Status Quo.

Elixir: The Hero with a Thousand Faces talks about an Elixir that the Hero, having completed their quest, brings back, something to make the ordinary world better, something to bring it out of its status quo. This Elixir can be an item, knowledge, powers to help people, anything that changes the status quo of the World. This is Luke's knowledge of the force in a New Hope that is the only reason they beat the Death Star. This is the hope that Katniss provides through kindness in the Hunger Games. This is anything that disrupts the habits of the world around the protagonist.

Internal: The Internal for Elixir is BALANCE/REVERSAL. These are two ways the story can change the World. The World can be BALANCED, the darkness eradicated, people helped, but it can also be REVERSED, where the villain stays in power, the hero becomes a villain, or the World reverts to a previous form that people assume will be better where they are. Star Wars shows this through the BALANCE of the Force when Vader kills Palpatine, but also a REVERSAL as the galaxy reverts back to a new republic. The issues with the old republic allowed Palpatine to turn the republic into the empire with ease, and while the dark side won, to many people that was the Elixir to BALANCE the Galaxy.

External: The External for Elixir is GHOST. The GHOST is caused by the World and is the main reason the character is the way they are. It is a past event that shapes a character's perspective on the World and on themselves. Bojack Horseman is a bad person, but as you go through the show, you find that his parents were as well. His mom told him never to cry, making it impossible for him to cry in front of others. Everything that happened in his childhood shapes who he is today. How to Train Your Dragon has Hiccup as a much smaller person than everyone else while trying to fit into a combat like culture. His GHOST is that he can't measure up, but he finds another way to make his mark. In the Star Wars prequels, Anakin's GHOST is that he has people he cares about when he isn't supposed to as a Jedi. This makes him afraid and causes him to make choices based on that fear.

Reaction: The Reaction for Elixir is QUEST. The QUEST is where the Elixir comes from. Whether the Elixir is an internal change or an external item, it comes from the QUEST.

Into the Spider-Verse has the Elixir as, after the death of the first Spider-Man, new Spider-Man to keep people safe. Star Wars: A New Hope has Luke destroy the Death Star giving hope to the galaxy.

Action: The Action for Elixir is CHANGE. The Elixir CHANGES the world, often for the better. Into the Spider-Verse brings back a new Spider-Man after the old one died, and this gives the world hope again.

The Elixir is the main thing that contributes to the story changing the World.

This is everything that comprises of World, but we haven't shown the Reaction or Action yet. This is because there is more to them to connect them to Story and Character.

Action: The Worlds Action is GHOST, the same and the elixir's external. The GHOST is something that happened before the story to make the character into who they believe they are today. Bojack Horseman doesn't believe he can be better because of his parents. Star Wars has Luke believe he will be destined for farmwork forever because his parents are gone. In Captain America, Steve believes that fighting for your country is the greatest honor because that is what his parents died doing. There are many ways a character can handle their GHOST though.

Lie: Usually a character's Ghost leads them to believe in their LIE, something about themselves that isn't true. Luke believes that he will be a farmer forever because he is born on Tatooine with no parents. A big part of the character arc is them overcoming this lie to see the truth.

Doubt: Sometimes a character doesn't grow, doesn't change. This is called a flat arc character. Flat arc characters usually start out with the truth right away, or start out with the lie and never find the truth. These characters instead have doubt. There are points where the lie is so convincing that it seems like the right path. In a story characters have to change, so if the protagonist doesn't, the side characters must. It is these characters who usually help a protagonist through their doubt, a character they helped overcome their lie. Paddington is a movie about a bear who is happy and optimistic no matter what bad things happen to him. While he never changes, every life he touches does.

Not only is the GHOST the **Action** of World, but also the **reaction** of character.

The World creates the Character through their Ghost.

Character: This section is obviously about the protagonist, but less obviously about your side characters, your mentors, your villains. This section is all about how to create three dimensional characters. Remember, your audience won't see everything you write out, but the more solid a foundation you have, the easier it will be to craft compelling characters.

Internal: The Internal for Character is NEED. The NEED is an Internal realization a character has that pushes the theme forward. It is often something universal and relatable, something the audience will think about after finishing your story. In Toy Story, Woody realizes he NEEDS to share Andy with the other toys. Mulan's NEED is to find her place in the world. In Kingdom Hearts, Sora NEEDS to realize that the power was inside of him all along.

External: The External for Character is WANT. The WANT is an external goal the character

goes to complete. It is something unique to the character and the story that pushes the plot forward. In Toy Story, Woody WANTS to be Andy's favorite toy. Woody has to give up his WANT to obtain his need. Mulan WANTS to keep her father safe. Her want leads her on the path to find her need. Sora's WANT is to save his friends. Sora's need enables his want. There are many ways the WANT and NEED can work together to make your story great.

Character is made up of four parts that lead a character through their journey, each one with the DNA of story attached. They are Engaging, Inciting, Relationship, and Arc.

Engaging: A story can be as short as five minutes, as long as three hours, or even be something that takes days, weeks, or months to experience. Story is metaphor for life, relatable to the audience's life, so one of the most important things to do is have a character that the audience wants to spend time with.

Internal: The Internal for Engaging is LIKEABLE. This is a character that the audience would enjoy hanging out with. The Lord of the Rings has Bilbo Baggins as a fun, social, great host who most people would enjoy spending time with. In Blake Snider's book, Save the Cat, he recommends someone do something that instantly makes them likeable, like saving a cat. In The Last of Us Part Two, Abby is shown to save a Zebra to show her as a LIKEABLE character. The Incredibles has Mr. Incredible, who is clearly in a rush to get things done, stop to help everyone he comes across.

External: The External for Engaging is CAPABLE. This is someone who is great at what they do, something that not everyone can do. Batman and Sherlock Holmes are not characters who are particularly likeable or social, but they are interesting to watch because they do things that are not easy for the average person. Borderland Two's Handsome Jack and Far Cry Three's Vass, as well as Batman's Joker are not characters who you would want to spend time with as the three of these are crazy, but in an entertaining sort of way. While they are good at what they do, we don't see a lot of it. While you would not want to spend time with these three, and while we don't see all of their actions, they may be enjoyable to listen to from a distance because they are, not likeable, but interesting.

Reaction: The Reaction for Engaging is SHAPES. The world SHAPES the Character through their GHOST, which is what makes them a likable, interesting, or capable person.

Action: The Action for Engaging is RELATABLE, SYMPATHETIC, or EMPATHETIC. Your character should be as RELIABLE as possible. Star Wars has Luke as a RELATABLE Character, someone who is bored with like and longs for something new. This is something we can all relate to. Batman's villain, Mr. Freeze, is a SYMPATHETIC character, doing bad things to take care of his dying wife. He is a bad guy, but we know why he does those things and we feel sad for him. In Captain America: Winter Soldier, Captain America is an EMPATHETIC Character as he tries to help Bucky. We have all have a brainwashed friend we want to bring back to who they were, or at least someone we want to help.

Once we create an engaging Character, we need to get them started to make them active.

Inciting: The Inciting incident is something that starts the Hero out on their Journey. The Inciting incident needs to be something simple, easy to understand, and if possible,

relatable.

Internal: The Internal for Inciting is TEMPTING. For most adventures, a start requires going to a world that is unfamiliar, and that is scary. A lot of journeys start with a character who refuses the call for one reason or another, but it is such a tempting offer that, regardless of what is holding a character back, they eventually chose to go, this being one of their first big decisions in the story. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins initially refuses to follow the dwarves because Hobbits love their quiet life. After a loud night though, what seems to be a sigh of relief after the Dwarves leave, lead him to realize he doesn't want that quiet life. In *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Luke wants to leave Tatooine, but doesn't want to leave his Aunt and Uncle on their own, but after their death he goes with Obi-Wan.

External: The External for Inciting is FORCED. While most adventures start with a choice, some do not, being FORCED into their journey instead. If this happens it removes their first large choice from the story, which means it is essential that they make big choices for the rest of the story. These choices are usually more powerful though because if a character is FORCED into their journey, they usually are making choices where none normally exist. In *Gladiator*, Maximus is forced into slavery and into being a gladiator, but he still makes the choice to be hopeful, to keep fighting, to improve other's lives, and to get his revenge. In *The Shawshank Redemption*, Andy is FORCED into jail, but chooses to use his skills to get what he needs, maintain hope, give hope to others, and eventually escape.

Reaction: The Reaction for Inciting is RELATABLE. Once we have that Engaging Character that people want to stick through the story with, we need to make them relatable so the audience will remember them long after the story is over.

Action: The Action for Inciting is AGENCY. You will often hear that you need to have an active character and not a passive one. This does not mean the character has to constantly be doing something, but instead that they are making choices that affect them and everyone around them, and then dealing with the consequences. A *New Hope* has Luke Skywalker refuse to go with Obi-Wan, then choose to go with Obi-Wan, then choose to rescue Leia, then choose to attack the Death Star, then choose to use the Force. This agency is essential for Characters to remain entertaining.

After the Hero starts their journey, it is their choices that move the story forward, and their connections that help them make those choices.

Relationship: When we talk about Relationships, we mean any connection between any Characters. This can be between the protagonist and the world, their friends, or even their enemies. Relationships are important because they help the audience compare and contrast the character's growth and values.

Internal: The Internal for Relationship is ALLY. This isn't just an ALLY for the protagonist, but for their beliefs. A *New Hope* has Luke Skywalker wanting to help people, something Leia and Obi-Wan, his ALLIES, do. They pull him towards those beliefs.

External: The External for Relationship is ADVERSARY. This is someone who has contrary beliefs to the protagonist. Han Solo is an ally in the story, but here he is an

ADVERSARY, fighting against helping anyone but himself and refuting the Force. Darth Vader is also an ADVERSARY in the more traditional sense, but only because he believes in what the Empire stands for, where Luke does not.

Reaction: The Reaction for Relationship is AGENCY. A protagonist needs to make choices that push the story forward.

Action: The Action for Relationship is GROWTH. We talked already about how a protagonist needs to make choices that have consequences, but to add one, the way they deal with these consequences is what helps them GROW. The Relationships they have help direct their growth to settle on one of the many possibilities. A New Hope could have had Luke join Han to look out for themselves. Luke could have helped other with Leia, but it was Obi-Wan teaching Luke about the Force that allowed him to destroy the Death Star.

The Relationships help shine light on the themes of a story, on all the possible ways a protagonist could have turned out, and help complete their Character arc.

Arc: A Character Arc is the journey a Character takes, from where they started to where they ended up, as they change and usually grow. A single Character can have many Arcs growing in different ways through the stories. Star Wars has Luke embrace the Force in episode four, choose the light in episode five, and help others choose the light in episode six.

Internal: The Internal for Arc is LIE/DOUBT. These are the possible experiences a Character has in response to their ghost. A character either has a lie about themselves that they must overcome, or knows the truth, but challenges will make them doubt. This is the beginning of their Character Arc.

External: The External for Arc is CONFLICT. Every story, every life, has CONFLICT of some kind. Games especially mistake combat as the only form of CONFLICT, but CONFLICT is anything that gets in the way of the Character getting what they want.

Reaction: The Reaction for Arc is GROWTH. A Character Arc starts with their ghost, continues through the story with conflict, and ends with a character having fixed one of their flaws. This is GROWTH, the fact that a Character has changed. How to Train Your Dragon has Hiccup try to be like everyone else, but grows into someone who is not only unique, but someone who is unapologetic for it.

Action: The Action for Arc is CHANGE. Growth is what leads a Character to the end of their Arc, CHANGE. In Toy Story, Woody goes from someone trying to keep Andy to himself to someone truly looking out for Andy and others by sharing.

The Character Arc is who the Character is, how and why they change, and who they become. It is reflective of the theme, relatable, and shows that we can change too.

This is everything you should need to create all of your Characters, but we need to talk about how the Characters drive the story forward.

Action: The Character's Action is CONFLICT. CONFLICT is anything that stands between a Character and their goal. External CONFLICT drives the plot of a story while internal CONFLICT drives the theme of the story. While most CONFLICT is there to be battled

against, some battles can't be won. CONFLICT is what drives a Character's arc and usually leads to one of two places.

Truth: A Character starts the story with a lie, something they believe because of their ghost. As the story progresses and the Characters grow and change, they come to the realization of the TRUTH, which is usually the key to their growth and change. Flat arc characters start with the TRUTH, but again, don't change, so they too end up with the TRUTH, but a firmer notion of it as they have been proven right. This is how most stories go.

Chaos: A Character doesn't always grow though. Some Characters believe the truth, but the Conflict is too much for them, or some believe a lie and stick to that lie regardless. The end result for this is CHAOS. In X-Men: First Class, Magneto as raised to unlock his power through anger. While Professor X showed him that is not true, others show Magneto that they will answer in anger, so he clings to the lie that he must answer in kind. In the Star Wars prequels, Anakin's ghost was that he had people he cared for when he wasn't supposed to. His lie was that he was in this alone. He feared for their safety, but there was no one he could turn to. Palpatine was the only person who reached out to Anakin, showing him that he wasn't alone, but instead replacing that lie with a worse lie, that only Palpatine could help him.

Not only is the CONFLICT the **Action** of Character, but also the **reaction** of story.

Characters drive the story forward with their choices.

Story: The Story is everything that happens, why it happens, but above all, how and why the characters change and change the world. A narrative is a life lesson wrapped in an entertaining tale, a thesis paper with a world we can enjoy, a way for us to choose to live wrapped in a story so entrancing that we don't even notice. In a way, character and world are inside Story, what creates and moves the story, but the worlds you can create are huge with many characters and this is just one Story. In a way Story is also inside world and character. The Story of A New Hope is about people who have the hope to fight against tyranny. The Story of Persona Five is the Story about people fighting against those that use their abilities to hurt other people.

Internal: The Internal for Story is THEME. The THEME is everything internal: a character's need, a moral, what the audience feels. After the Story is done, the THEME is what will stick with the audience long after. A plot can turn someone into a Hero, but a THEME can turn them into a legend. The THEME is Kung Fu Panda is that you are special as you are. The best movies often can be interpreted to have many themes. In Star Wars: A New Hope, one could debate the themes of nature against technology, about the importance of religion, about the power of hope. Just because one movie has a theme doesn't mean you can't use it. In How to Train Your Dragon, another Dreamworks film, the THEME is similar, that you don't have to be someone else. Both of those movies do something different for a similar theme.

External: The External for Story is PLOT. The PLOT is everything external: what the character does, how the world reacts, the awesome set pieces everyone enjoys. A PLOT is what happens in the Story. The PLOT of Kung Fu Panda is that Po trains to defeat Tai Lung.

Story is made up of four parts, each part being one of many that together create the next.

These are Beat, Scene, Segment, and Act.

Beat: A Beat is the smallest element of Story. A beat is an action and a reaction between two elements of Story. The World can do something to the Character and have the Character react, or the Character can do something to the villain, and the villain will react to it. The Beat is an action reaction set, one after another. In Iron Man, the Ten Rings hold hostages as an action. Iron Man reacts by pretending to put down his weapon and then using a different one. In a way it is very much like taking turns. In Toy Story, Buzz Lightyear sees a commercial about him being a toy, which he has denied the entire movie. The world acts on Buzz and Buzz reacts by testing his abilities.

Internal: The Internal for Beat is BE. It's the first half of Beat, I know very original, but it fits. Taken literally, BE can be all about the character being, feeling, thinking. In Iron Man The Ten Rings are losing the fight, so they take hostages. Iron Man's BE is putting down his weapons and surrendering. After seeing the commercial Buzz decides to test and see if he can fly.

External: The External for Beat is AT. AT is an action verb and I am completely trying to defend my word play here. It is the action to the reaction. Sometimes a character or world can act on a character and that character can react, other times a character can react and act one after another. Iron man lowers his weapons in reaction to the hostages, but then acts with a new weapon to free them. Buzz reacts to the commercial by testing if he can fly, but the world acts on him with gravity, proving he is what everyone said he was.

Reaction: The Reaction for Beat is DRIVES. A character's actions and reactions DRIVE the Story, a Story made of Beats. Remember it is important to still have a character making active choices in the story more often than not. A character DRIVES Story, a Story does not DRIVE the character.

Action: The Action for Beat is TEXT/SUBTEXT. TEXT is any form of communication. This can obviously be dialogue, but also gestures, actions, combat, anything that conveys a message. SUBTEXT is TEXT with a deeper meaning. In American Beauty a family is sitting at the table. The daughter asks the change the music and the mother says, "When you slave all day to make a delicious meal, you can pick the music." The mother wasn't just saying no, but indirectly saying she worked hard and wants appreciation. TEXT/SUBTEXT takes you from one Beat to the next till they connect to create a scene. In Toy Story, there is a different type of TEXT/SUBTEXT. After Buzz learns that he is a toy, he puts his wings to the test by trying to fly off of the balcony. He fails, hits the floor, and has a broken arm. For the children in the room they can see that Buzz is broken. For the adults though, they know that Buzz is internally broken.

Each Beat comes after another until you string enough together to get a scene. Remember that a Beat will begin at the beginning of a scene, and a Beat will end at the end of a scene.

Scene: A Scene is a collection of beats strung together till there is a shift in emotion, location, or both. In Iron Man the scene ends after he defeats the Ten Rings and frees the locals. He leaves, a change in location, and is happy that he helped others, a change in emotion. In Toy Story, after Buzz falls to the ground, there is a change in location, the next time we see him he is drinking tea, and he is depressed, a change in emotion.

Internal: The Internal for Scene is EMOTION. A Scene changes when there is a shift in a character's EMOTION, something that is a change from how they were the Scene before. Iron Man's change is that he goes from anger, that his weapons are being used to hurt others, to relieved, that he can do something about it. Rhodes changes his EMOTIONS slightly though as he simply goes from annoyed to concerned to trusting. In Toy Story, Buzz has a huge shift from confident to depressed, but Woody has smaller changes going from hatred to disdain, to annoyance, to actually liking Buzz.

External: The External for Scene is LOCATION. Usually after an emotional shift, a character needs to process or act on it. This usually leads to someone leaving the current location, which is why, as well as an easier way to break up scenes, a scene has a shift in LOCATION

Reaction: The Reaction for Scene is TEXT/SUBTEXT. As a beat has actions and reactions in the form of TEXT/SUBTEXT impacting characters, it can change their emotions, and in turn, their locations.

Action: The Action for Scene is SHIFT. A Scene can have a reversal in emotion, happy to sad, scared to brave, and the biggest and best SHIFTS will, but each scene should in some way have a SHIFT, no matter how big or small, in both emotion and location.

Each Scene comes after another until you string enough together you get a segment. Remember that a beat and Scene will begin at the beginning of a segment, and a beat and a Scene will end at the end of a segment.

Segment: A Segment is often harder to pin down. Robert McKee, in his book Story says that a scene is a change in emotional values, a Segment is a bigger change, an act is an even bigger change, and a Story is a huge change. As someone who learned a lot from this book and really respects its author, this is not helpful at all. Instead I determine a Segment as a shift in who a character is in their Journey. We will discuss the Journey part of my work next, but there are seven stages where a character becomes a different person on their Journey: The Human, The Adventurer, The Stranger, The Guest, The Master, The Broken, The Hero. Each of these represent a different step on the Hero's journey and what I consider a segment. In a way, the scene is a change in the events of Story, where the segment is a change in the place of a character. Star Wars has Luke go from being a Human, a person familiar and comfortable in his life, to an Adventurer, someone excited to see what is next.

Internal: The Internal for Segment is PERSPECTIVE. As a character grows, they may see things from a different point of view. Star Wars has Luke goes from being someone excited about what is out in the galaxy to someone scared of it to someone ready to fight for it.

External: The External for Segment is ROLES. In a similar way, a character grows to not only see things from a different angle, but participate in them as well. Star Wars: A New Hope has Luke excited to participate in danger, but as he grows into a Jedi, The Return of the Jedi sees him as someone who feels like it is his responsibility to stop the danger.

Reaction: The Reaction for Segment is SHIFT. As a scene SHIFTS, it steadily pushes a character towards a different way they view the world. Once they see the world from a

different angle, that is not just a change of scene, but of Segment as well.

Action: The Action for Segment is CONSEQUENCES. As your character grows, both personally but also within the world, so too will the consequences. They usually start off as someone whose actions have small CONSEQUENCES, such as going on an adventure, to someone who the antagonist has taken note of and is personally invested in stopping them. These CONSEQUENCES get bigger each Segment and may or may not impact the character directly, but will impact them indirectly otherwise.

Each Segment comes after another until you string enough together to get an act. Remember that a beat, scene, and Segment will begin at the beginning of an act, and a beat, scene, and segment will end at the end of an act.

Act: If a scene is the change in Story events, and a segment is a change in the characters arc, then an act is a change of world. The worlds are often divided into the familiar and the unfamiliar. When a Story has more than three Acts it is usually due to the fact that there are multiple unfamiliar situations to participate in. Within three Acts it's usually because the hero goes from a world that they are familiar with to a world that they are not, and then back again. In Avengers, the first Act sees all of the Heroes in their familiar worlds on their own. They fight and defeat the enemy that appears, but they don't know how to work with others. The second Act sees them in an unfamiliar situation as they come together and struggle to work with each other, something they work towards, but fail at and have to deal with the consequences of that failure. The third and final Act is where they are back in their element. They are fighting the enemy, but this time know how to do it together and win because of it.

Internal: The Internal for Act is TRUTH/CHAOS. As the Hero progresses, they have to find their TRUTH or the entire world could fall into CHAOS. In Avengers, the TRUTH is that they can not win alone and they need each other. They find that which allows them to win.

External: The External for Act is REVOLUTION. This REVOLUTION is a shift in power, either balancing it out or having one side handle too much of that power. In Avengers, they don't eliminate all crime, but they do stop Loki and all the power he had. This gives a small time of peace and a hope that lasts much longer.

Reaction: The Reaction for Act is CONSEQUENCE. Scene after scene increases the CONSEQUENCES that the Hero has to deal with, eventually leading to them having to change to handle these.

Action: The Action for Act is CHANGE. Each Act leaves a Hero changed, managing the consequences of their actions. These changes can be external as they get stronger to handle them, but also internal as the Hero deals with consequences for choices they may regret, having them change how they do things. Not only that, but an Act is also a change for the world as they Hero moves between the familiar and unfamiliar, and for the story as the Hero knows what they want to do and how they want to do it, getting ready for or finishing up the final battle.

Each Act comes after another until you string enough together to get an Story. Remember that a beat, scene, segment, and Act will begin at the beginning of a Story, and a beat, scene, segment, and Act will end at the end of a Story.

Now that we have talked about how all the parts of Story line up, and how best to organize your Story, it is time to talk about the final piece, how Story cycles around and affects the world for the next Story.

Action: The Story's Action is REVOLUTION. This is of course a double meaning, firstly meaning that stories are cyclical, but the second meaning can be a REVOLUTION, a revolt against a norm in an attempt to change it. The Story shapes the world through these REVOLUTIONS.

Balance: A Balanced world doesn't mean a peaceful one, though they tend to correlate. Instead it is a world where all the groups have an equal amount of power so they can not overbear on each other. Star Wars is a great example of this. When Vader defeats the Emperor, the Sith are gone and there is only one known Jedi. The Empire loses control of the galaxy, but a new government has not quite taken over either. A democracy is designed to create balance by distributing power, but over time this distribution can lean in the favor of some.

Reversal: A Reversal is a complete flip of power. While this can be violent, it doesn't have to be. Star Wars is, again, very fitting for this. The Jedi were wiped out very quickly as the Sith took power and the Republic, which had been suffering for some time, quickly turned into an Empire. The senate was still intact, ensuring voices were heard, but the Emperor had all the power to fix it. This is not always a bad thing. In the Netflix version of Luke Cage, Luke goes up against the gangs, but realizes he can't win without a ton of people getting hurt. He can not balance the world, so he takes control of one of the gangs to slowly minimise the damage and work to dismantle it from the inside.

A Story often creates a power shift, power being anything that gives you control over someone else. In a teen drama the parents hold all the power, but as the family learns to communicate, they share that power and balance the family dynamic. A Story shifts this power which is what shapes the world.

The Story shapes the world through the events of the Story, creating a new world that will create new characters through their own unique ghosts. Star Wars is a great example of this. Anakin, Luke, and Rey all grew up in barren wastelands struggling to survive. Anakin's ghost was that we saw suffering and wanted the power to stop it. Luke was bored and wondered about his place in the world. Rey was waiting for her family and constantly tried to replace it with others. Even the smallest details can make huge waves in Story.

With all of these pieces, you should have everything you need to craft a story. Some of these pieces you won't use, other's you will use, but the audience will never see. This also can not promise a great story on its own, but you can't make a great story without it. Each of these words works as ingredients in your story, but without a structure to hold them together, they can fall flat. That is what the second dimension is for.

The Second Dimension:

I spoke earlier about how this structure is designed to combine most to all of the preexisting structures, but I didn't explain that. A large number of screenplay formatting books tend to start with the three or five act structure as their guide, and even the three act structure

pulls a lot from psychological studies. Eastern story structure differs a bit from western story structure, but mostly in how it is presented and less about the structure itself.

The first dimension was designed to gather and define most to all of the words that could govern pieces of your story, adding up to everything you needed for a complete tale, at least in theory. However, this doesn't really structure it, but instead works as a list of ingredients. For those ingredients to turn into something much more consumable, it requires the instructions for how to put them together. This is where the three act structure comes into play.

Again, I do not believe every movie needs three acts, but the general set up of this structure is something I follow closely. There are a number of variations on the three act structure, the most famous, considered to be the grandfather of the three act structure, being The Hero's Journey. This structure is specific, and while great, can make it hard to fit in pieces that don't seem to fall in any part of this structure.

Dan Harmon crafts television shows, well known ones like Community and Rick and Morty. He developed the Story Circle, a small and concise version of The Hero's Journey that works very well in many scenarios, especially for an episode sized story. Not only is the Story Circle great, but it is also flexible. It can work for a movie, tv show, or web short, but can also work for the story, act, segment, or scene. As you can imagine though, this level of flexibility can make it difficult for those that need a bit more guidance.

There is tremendous merit in both of these structures, but they both succeed best where the other fails. As such I develop my own Journey, one that brings both of these into the fray, one that is designed to structure the ingredients listed above, one that shows the evolution of your characters, one that will make your story great.

The Human: This stage of the journey shows the character in their natural habitat. It may be different from ours, but to them it is the normal everyday life that relates them to our own. When something comes calling to bring them out of this zone of comfort, they resist, no matter how tempting it may be, because while a life of the same may be boring or even awful, it is not as scary as the unknown, no matter how alluring it can be. They have complete control over their lives, being alive, but not living, operating more on habit than anything else.

The Ordinary World: This shows the ordinary and mundane world of the character. This is important because it relates them to the audience and shows the audience that you can still find the special within the mundane. In Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, Miles has two ordinary worlds. The first is unseen as he passes by his old middle school where all of his friends are, and the second is the new school he is attending before becoming Spider-Man.

The Call to Adventure: The call to adventure itself must be strong enough to have the character leave their world of comfort, but also simple enough for them, and the audience to understand. It could be something that destroys their ordinary world, forcing them to leave, something tempting them to leave for something better, something personal, or something that, because the character refused the call, causes something bad to happen, forcing them to accept the call, or the fact that whatever happens next is their fault. When the call to adventure is forced onto the character and they can not refuse the call. Forced or not, the call is often called the inciting incident. Even with a call that is completely optional, the wondering of "what if" will always nag at those who refuse. Into the Spider-Verse calls Miles

Morales to adventure through his new powers, and Star Wars has C3PO and Obi-Wan give him the call.

You: This is where The Story Circle has you set up the character in their ordinary world.

.....A character is in a zone of comfort.....

Story: Star Wars: A New Hope has Luke Skywalker as our character.

Act: The Death Star assault has the Rebels as our character.

Scene: Luke Skywalker's trench run has Luke as our character.

The Hero usually knows this is not something they can do forever, or they are in for a rude awakening.

The Adventurer: At this point the character has agreed to the adventure. They have mustered the courage to leave the familiar and venture into the unknown. Before they leave though, they must prepare. This may seem dull due to the number of times it is used, but it is an important part of the journey, the first part of change. To make this less familiar, it is worth working to make it unique or suspenseful, but above all, personal. Everything the character does to prepare must be personal, linking back to the character, the world, or preferably both.

The Refusal of the Call: Like I said, to accept the call takes a lot of courage. The character always has a refusal of the call to show the audience that, like us, the decision is difficult. Once the hero refuses the call, sometimes they change their mind, pulled by their own desire to go, other times what caused the refusal is removed, and other times there is no refusal because there is no choice there. It is important to ensure your character has as much agency as possible, so if they don't have it here, make sure it floods the rest of the story. This is usually one of their first big decisions in the story. In Star Wars: A New Hope, Luke resists the call because he can't leave his Uncle and Aunt behind. In the Spider-Verse has Miles refuse the call to help Spider-Man. Both of these cases result in the loss of important people that manifests itself as their fault, that they now have something to make up for what they couldn't do before.

Supernatural Aid: A hero who could not go on an adventure before, can not suddenly go now without a change. Often this comes in the form of an item, ally, skill, power, or emotional change that can help them on their journey. It is important to remember that this item must be personal to the character, the world, or both, or it is something that someone can just pick up anywhere. The important thing about the supernatural aid is that it is personal to the characters, world, and story. In Star Wars, Luke's lightsaber is a weapon from his father, a weapon of a path he wants to take, and a weapon from an age past. In the Spider-Verse, the Spider that gives Miles his power now only came from the thing he needs to destroy, but also bring him the allies that will help him manifest the power the spider gave to him.

Meeting the Mentor: An item aside, sometimes the supernatural aid will come in the form of a mentor. This mentor is someone who has already completed their hero's journey. That is not to say they can not have another, as some mentors have a different journey as they

guide the hero, but they have mastered the particular skill and attributes that they will be passing on. This is also a character that comes from the extraordinary world, someone who can guide the character through the hardships and trials. In Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, Miles has three different mentors. The original Spider-Man is killed before he can train him, but he still leaves him with a goal to accomplish. His Uncle Aaron is a mentor to him, allowing him to access his own personality more freely, specifically his artistic side, and teaches him about the world around him. Lastly, Peter B. Parker is a mentor to him, training him like the first Peter was supposed to, but also acting as a Shadow Mentor, a warning to Miles that this is how he could end up if he fails his Hero's Journey.

Crossing of the First Threshold: Here the character is in their ordinary world, but is about to leave. There is often a threshold guardian, someone or something that will remind them of what they are leaving behind, or to show them the hardships ahead, tempting the hero with the easy path, or just preventing them from crossing, ensuring they are ready for the challenges ahead. Once this point is crossed, there is no turning back, and that is not to say a character can not retreat back into their zone of comfort, but they can not do so without wondering what could have happened if they had continued. This is where they become very aware of the other world. Into the Spider-Verse shows Miles everything about Spider-Man, both the good that Peter is doing and everything that stands in his way.

Need: This is where The Story Circle has the character establish a want and take the steps to go after that want.but they want something.....
Story: Luke's need is to learn the ways of the Force and become a Jedi like his father.
Act: The Rebels need to defeat the Death Star.
Scene: Luke needs to defeat the Death Star.

This is where the Hero goes from the familiar world to a place they do not understand.

The Stranger: The character is a stranger here in this new land. Even with their new strength they are completely outmatched in a world they do not know how to navigate.

The Belly of the Whale: This is the first large event in the extraordinary world, quite possibly the first time they felt out of control. This ordeal shows how much farther the hero has to go. This is often shown as a decent as the hero dives into this adventure that, for the moment, is way over their head. It also allows the hero to overcome an emotional trial that will allow them to continue forward, not the need, unless it is, but a conquering of fear or doubt that holds them down in the abyss. This is where the Hero is completely overwhelmed, and the only thing they can do is push forward. A New Hope has Luke completely out of his depth after his family dies, and all he can do is push forward and learn. Into the Spider-Verse has Miles more accustomed to this world before the Belly of the Whale, but after Miles learns about his uncle being the Prowler, and his death after, things that happened because he can't control his emotions or powers, all he can do is get the advice of his friends and father and push onward.

The Road of Trials: The road of trials is casually described as allies, enemies, and obstacles. When people get stuck on the second act, this is why. This is a large section to pass through that gives little details compared to other parts. The nice piece about Dan Harmon's story circle is its flexibility and how it can easily fit right into this spot. However, it is important to remember that all of this has to be personal. The allies need to reinforce or counter a character's beliefs, enemies need to test those beliefs, and obstacles need to test their conviction to their current cause. When putting this section together, it is important to remember that everything needs to revolve around your main characters core beliefs. Once you feel like a character is sufficiently challenged, do it some more, and then move on, as your character has become a guest. This is where the hero begins to master their supernatural aid. Spider-Verse has Miles hunt for a device they need to save the world and he trains along the way. A New Hope has Luke training through the Death Star. This is not just physical training, but an emotional one as well, as they learn to overcome their flaw.

Go: Here, Harmon says the characters enter an unfamiliar situation. That sums this up perfectly.They enter an unfamiliar situation...

Story: Luke Skywalker enters an unfamiliar situation when the Millennium Falcon gets caught by the Death Star.

Act: The Rebels enter an unfamiliar situation when they assault the Death Star against Tie Fighters and surface guns.

Scene: Luke Skywalker enters an unfamiliar situation when he goes into the trench to destroy the Death Star.

Here, the Hero becomes familiar with the extraordinary world, slowly acclimating to it.

The Guest: The character as a guest is one who is no longer a stranger, but has a long way to go before they truly understand the world. Here they are a guest of the Goddess, the Temptress, and the Father.

Meeting with the Goddess: This character is the representation of a new or renewed path. After the character is fully tested, the goddess usually provides or is a new strength for the journey. They also can either renew you for your journey, change your journey, or just redirect it. This is the reflection before the next test. A New Hope has Leia and Spider-Verse has Gwen, two characters who, while not mentors in their own right, have passed their Hero's Journey, giving their experience and confidence to pursue their goals.

Woman as Temptress: After we see that the hero is capable of success on their journey, they become tempted to drive away their new found confidence. This is the temptation to stray from the path. This may seem obvious, but it needs to be personal. In a story where a character's want and need are against each other, the temptation may be for the want. If the character was forced on this journey and has grown, the temptation may be to go back to fix things from before or take the easy way out. Either way, it needs to be personal, something that the audience almost wants the character to take because it would be the easiest path and a relief for the audience to know they are ok, even though they are not

everything they could be. This is often a temptation that takes the form of affirmation of their previous self, the ultimate test to see how they have grown. In *The World Ends With You*, Neku has grown from a loner, to someone who wants to help others. His temptation comes when Joshua, who had the same belief system that Neku had before, reaffirms his old beliefs. Neku passes this test by not only refusing to go back to who he was before, but also pulling Joshua to recognise this as well.

Atonement with the Father: Just like the refusal of the call, this can leave lingering doubts about the “what if” that could happen if they made a different choice, as any of us would. The atonement with the father is here to remove those doubts, placing the hero on the correct path, not only with a renewed faith in the journey, but also in themselves as they now know who they need to be. In *The Spider-Verse* this is the Danger scene. This is where all doubt is removed and Miles masters his powers.

Loss of the Mentor: The mentor is an important figure in the story. It is someone familiar with the new world, a safety net, if you will. So the loss of this mentor is a huge hit for the hero. They are strong enough to continue without at this point, but it will feel like the Belly of the Whale due to how overwhelming it can be. *Star Wars: A New Hope* has Obi-Wan killed to give Luke a chance to escape, but not until after he has given Luke enough information to access and use the Force. In *The Spider-Verse* Peter is killed before he can train Miles, but not till after Peter gives him a task that sets up his journey.

Search: Now that they are in an unfamiliar place, the character can come through and search for what they want till they find it.adapt to it.....
Story: Once on the Death Star, Luke looks for a way to escape.
Act: The Rebels search for the exhaust port to destroy the Death Star.
Scene: Luke Skywalker searches for an opening to get close to the Death Star’s exhaust port.

The Hero is acclimated to this world, it is no longer a stranger to them, but they can often find themselves alone or in difficult situations.

The Master: The character is now the master of the extraordinary world. They can fly through it as easily as they could the ordinary world. They are not done though, as the final challenge awaits.

Apotheosis: This is where the character masters their abilities and is able to finally take down the final enemy, the dragon of the story. At this point they have found their need and either need to apply it, or give the final push to their want. After atonement with the father, this is where the character shows off who they are. In *The Spider-Verse* Miles joins his friends in the final fight, the Danger scene, showing that he is ready.

The Dragon: The Dragon is the ultimate enemy for the hero. The Dragon is someone who has their own want, so there is no holding back. Often the Dragon wants something similar to the hero, or something that crosses the hero’s path, so they are both fighting equally

against each other. The Dragon should also be defeated by something the hero struggled to master through the show, as the ultimate payoff. The Dragon is usually a character too, so don't forget their motivations. This is the final trial, and Into the Spider-Verse has Kingpin as the final battle, but this is just a plot based battle. The best Dragons challenge the Hero emotionally as well. Black Panther has Killmonger who is in the wrong, but shows T'Challa that he can and should be doing more. Dr. Strange has Kaecilius who says a line word for word that Dr. Strange said earlier.

The Ultimate Boon: This is the want for the character, the final mission in the extraordinary world. Many times this is something that, when brought back to the ordinary world, it can change the way things are. This can be an item, an ideal, a person, or anything that can change the hero, world, or both. A New Hope has this as the survival of the Rebellion, the survival of hope. Into the Spider-Verse has this as the return of Spider-Man.

Find: Here they have found what they came here to find.get what they wanted.....
Story: Luke finds and rescues Princess Leah.
Act: The Rebels find the exhaust port.
Scene: Luke Skywalker finds his opening and enters the trench.

The Hero is now as comfortable here as they would be in their original world. Finishing their task seems easy at this point, but the journey to get here has been taxing.

The Broken: This phase consists of things that are the least likely to be used in a story. After The Master phase, the audience is usually on such a high, that the story gives a happy ending right then and there. However, this next part is important as long as it doesn't interrupt the pacing. In fact, The Return of the King can be criticized for its long ending, but that ending is important and is the embodiment of this section right here.

The Refusal of the Return: After spending a long time in the extraordinary world, it becomes the normal world for the hero. It can be hard to go back to the normal world, and they will be curious if you have changed too much to go back. There can also be an obsession with the extraordinary world. It may be something that the hero desires to continue with, without providing the elixir or want back to the normal world, without finding their rest. In the Lord of the Rings, the ring is destroyed but Frodo is unhappy. He can not find peace. They have done what they need to do, but things don't return to normal for Frodo.

The Magical Flight: After you obtain the want, you are often still within the Dragon's lair, sometimes as it falls apart around you. This is all about the escape out, even after the enemy loses, there is still a chance for you to lose too. It is hard to make it suspenseful after the hero has won everything else, so it shows more about the character of the villain than anything else, though sometimes this is the sacrifice that the hero must make. The Lord of the Rings has the eagles bring Frodo and Sam back as Mount Doom falls apart, an escape that they would be unable to make on their own.

Rescue from Without: After struggling with every other obstacle, the hero is exhausted. There is one last thing here that is in their way, not of their want, but of their return. It is something that may be impossible for them to beat, or something that may be easy, but the hero may be too exhausted to take it on without help. This is a dangerous phase as there is often a deus ex machina moment that will rescue the hero, but you can avoid this by setting something up earlier to pay off here. The Lord of the Rings has the eagles bring Frodo and Sam back in the end, but Frodo is not the same. The Magical Flight for Frodo is when he boards the boat to the east to find peace, the only way he can return to a world of peace.

Take: Taking what they want, even as the hero they have grown to be, still costs something. In fact that is the difference between a hero and someone else, is something who is willing to pay the price for others, though you can also have someone who is willing to pay the price for something selfish as well. ...pay a heavy price for it.....

Story: Luke and his friends get to the Death Star with the tractor beam holding them there deactivated, but Obi-Wan dies to allow them to escape.

Act: The Rebels get to the exhaust port, but miss their shot.

Scene: Luke is tailed by Darth Vader and R2-D2 is hit by Vader's Tie.

While this world is familiar to the Hero, the road to get here has been long and taxing. All that is left to do now to return, but sometimes, after everything else, the Hero doesn't have the strength to return on their own.

The Hero: This is where the hero becomes complete. They have grown, gotten what they wanted and needed, and then found the courage to come back. They have become a hero in the eyes of the people, and are at peace now, more than they were before they started. This is where they take their want, often called the elixir, and use it to help others.

Crossing the Return Threshold: The Hero has changed. They have gone on this long journey and for better or for worse, they are different for it. As much courage as it took to start the journey, it takes as much to return, knowing that everything you knew before will be different. Into the Spider-Verse has this when Miles, as Spider-Man who has fully accepted his destiny, hugs his dad. This shows that he has become Spider-Man, but is ready to return as Miles.

Master of Two Worlds: After the Hero has returned, giving the ordinary world what they received on their adventure, they are freely able to jump between the two worlds, operating expertly between them. This is often seen in superhero films. Note that a master of two worlds does not mean a balance between them. Where a balance is impossible, it may be the responsibility of others to enter into the unfamiliar world for the hero. This is a huge struggle for Spider-Man in the Tobi Maguire trilogy. Spider-Man 2 shows Peter give up his powers to live better as Peter, but has to return as Spider-Man, in the end, becoming the Master of Two Worlds, even if balancing them is still a struggle. In Spider-Verse this is where Miles defeats King Pin, not only with what his friends have taught him about his spider abilities, but also what he learned about life from his uncle.

Freedom to Live: The freedom to live is exactly that. The hero has completed their journey and is free to do whatever they want. This is where they must find a new journey to embark on because, like all of us, we are always growing in some way. This is also the point where they can become the mentor. Into the Spider-Verse ends with a Miles who has learned everything he needs to learn, having mastered both worlds, he sends Peter home, but not before becoming the mentor and offering Peter B Parker the advice he will need back home. The Lord of the Rings books have a part where Sam, after all of his adventures, has to save the Shire, and he leads a group of Hobbits to do that. The Freedom to Live is not about peace, but about completing the Journey.

Return: This is where the character returns and often brings back gifts that also change the ordinary world.then return to their familiar situation.....

Story: Luke gets to the Rebellion with the Princess and the Death Star plans so they can destroy the Death Star and save the Rebellion.

Act: Luke Skywalker destroys the Death Star, allowing the rebels to leave and celebrate a huge victory against the Empire.

Scene: Luke Skywalker destroys the Death Star, allowing the rebels to leave and celebrate a huge victory against the Empire.

Change: The last word for the story circle is change. This is great, especially when you apply it to scenes, acts, and segments, but I put it here because really, there is some level of change between each of these parts, of which the story circle does show as it is applied on a smaller scale, but I wanted to emphasize that on the large scale of the story. Change happens between each of these pieces.having changed.

Story: Luke Skywalker learns to use the Force to destroy the Death Star and save the Rebellion.

Act: The Rebellion has shown the galaxy that there is hope and that they can win, strengthening their place in the galaxy.

Scene: Luke Skywalker and his allies are now heroes as they have saved the Rebellion and brought hope to the galaxy.

Regardless of how you construct it, this is the end. Here the Hero has overcome or succumbed to their flaw. There can be another adventure for a different flaw of theirs, they can become the mentor, or both. They can leave a legacy, need help, or help others. However this chapter of their story is over.

The Story Circle: We split up the Story Circle to show where each part fits, but I wanted to take the time to show how the story circle fits together. The 8 words are You, Need, Go, Search, Find, Take, Return, and Change. When expanded out it goes like this. A character is in a zone of comfort, but they want something. They enter an unfamiliar situation, adapt to it, get what they wanted, pay a heavy price for it, and then return to their familiar situation, having changed. This can work for an entire story, an act, a segment, or a scene.

Star Wars: A New Hope- These may be a few small variations from what is above. This is because of the flexibility in the Story Circle and how it operates for every character in the

story.

Story: (You) Luke Skywalker (Need) goes with Obi-Wan to learn the Force to be a Jedi like his Father. (Go) He enters an unfamiliar situation when he gets stuck on the Death Star, (Search) looks for a way to escape, (Find) and finds Princess Leah, (Take) but Obi-Wan dies to allow them to escape. (Return) Luke gets the Death Star plans to the Rebellion (Change) and learns to use the Force to destroy the Death Star.

Act: (You) The Rebellion flies out to (Need) destroy the Death Star and save their leaders. (Go) The Rebellion has to fight against enemy Tie Fighters and surface turrets to (Search) find the exhaust port and fire a torpedo to destroy the Death Star. (Find) They arrive and fire a torpedo, (Take) but they miss. (Return) Luke Skywalker leads a final assault and blows up the Death Star, (Change) showing the galaxy that there is hope against the Empire.

Scene: (You) Luke Skywalker (Need) needs to destroy the Death Star. (Go) Luke finds the Death Star trench, (Search) enters the trench, (Find) and locates the exhaust port on his scanner. (Take) R2-D2 gets shot, but (Return) Han Solo comes in and saves Luke so he can (Change) use the Force to destroy the Death Star.

Spider-Man: Into the Spider Verse- You could use the Story Circle for every character in this film, but it is how the Story Circles for each character intersect that makes it as great of a movie as it is.

Story: (You) Miles Morales (Need) needs to destroy the supercollider. (Go) He goes to Alchemex to get a Goober, (Search) learns to use his powers to escape, (Find) finds other Spider-People, (Take) but loses his Uncle in the process. (Return) Miles goes to help his friends defeat King-Pin, (Change) and is ready to be the next Spider-Man.

Act: (You) Miles Morales (Need) needs to destroy the supercollider. (Go) He finds his friends, (Search) fights with them, (Find) sends them home, (Take) but now has to fight King-Pin alone. (Return) He uses everything he learned, including what his uncle taught him, to defeat King-Pin and (Change) is ready to be Spider-Man for the city.

Scene: (You) Miles Morales (Need) needs to be himself. (Go) His Uncle takes him to an abandoned train track and (Search) helps Miles paint a drawing he did. (Find) Miles feels happy, but (Take) a spider bites him. (Return) Miles returns to his dorm, but (Change) with spider powers.

Batman: The Dark Knight- Not every aspect of the Story Circle has to be covered every time. As we discussed before, you need to take what parts you need from this structure and leave the rest. This is a guide to help you guide your story, not an instruction manual for how to build it.

Story: (You) Batman (Need) needs to bring order and justice to Gotham. (Go) The Joker shows up in Gotham, (Search) Batman fights him instead of the mob, (Find) captures the Joker, (Take) but the Joker kills Rachel and creates Two-Face. (Return) Batman defeats both Joker and Two-Face, but (Change) had to kill Two-Face, breaking his one rule, to do so.

Act: (You) Batman (Need) needs to bring order and justice to Gotham. (Go) Batman goes after the mob's money, but it has been moved by Lau. (Search) Batman travels to Hong Kong to get Lau, (Find) gets enough to arrest the mob leaders, (Take) but the Joker arrives in the mob's place. (Return) Batman goes after the Joker, (Change) as a new type of enemy.

Scene: (You) Bruce Wayne (Need) wants to have Harvey Dent replace Batman as a symbol of justice in Gotham. (Go) Bruce throws a fundraiser for Harvey, but the Joker arrives.

(Search) Bruce becomes Batman, (Find) beats the Joker, (Take) but the Joker throws Rachel out a window. (Return) Batman saves Rachel, but the Joker escapes. (Change) Batman does not change here.

Again, the Story Circle is essentially a Hero's Journey in miniature, similarly based off of the three act structure. This allows it to operate in many areas, but its lack of detail can leave some feeling a little lost. Together, both the flexible and the detailed can really help you develop your story. You can see that as a scene, act, and story end, they can have similar aspects within the story circle. Not only that, but this works for the main character, a side character, or parts of the world that operate as characters.

Each part is designed around who the character is at that stage in their journey. As you use this to write, you determine who your character is and how they need to get to the next part, and when you need more guidance look to The Hero's Journey, but when you need a bit more freedom, look to The Story Circle.

Not everyone who embarks on The Hero's Journey finishes. Some succumb to temptation, others fail to grasp their truth and embrace the lie, and some come out the other end worse for wear, even becoming the villain. The Hero's Journey can make many stories seem the same, but everyone's Journey is different and unique to them. Parts may seem similar, but each character has their own unique story.

This covers the three act structure from large to small and is everything you need to make your story great. Earlier when I said the pieces above couldn't make your story great, this is why. It was missing the structure to hold them together. However I haven't brought up the five act structure, and while you may have a great story, it doesn't mean you can keep the audience engaged. Fortunately, the final dimension will take care of all of that for you.

The Third Dimension:

As I studied story I went over every book, every subject, every word I could to ensure I could make any story great. However there were always two parts that I couldn't quite wrap my head around. The first was pacing. It was something you had to do, something that would be unique to your story, but I could never quite figure out what it was and how to measure it. I saw the pacing curve, but I didn't understand what all of those parts meant.

The second part that I failed to understand was the five act structure. I learned the three act first and that stuck with me, but the five act structure didn't seem to leave space for more unique storytelling, which makes sense since the three act structure was designed around a large variety of stories from across time and across the planet, while the five act was mostly relegated to the work of William Shakespeare. It didn't mean it doesn't have merit though, and it couldn't just be that one structure worked for me and one didn't. They say that all stories are the same, and again, that is too simplified a statement, but it does carry some weight, making two story structure difficult to comprehend, so I knew I was missing something.

Except I wasn't.

I had everything I needed right in front of me. The pacing curve and the five act structure are connected, in fact they are practically the same. It was this realization that influenced this entire structure, the realization that this is all connected and each piece was only part of the whole.

The five act structure is divided into five parts: Exposition, which sets up the world and shows the inciting incident that starts the adventure, Rising Action, the actions the character must take and the trials they must overcome before they can get what they want, Climax, where the character reaches their lowest point and gets what they need during the highest point of tension, Falling Action, where the story relaxes and the character can reflect as the tension dies down, and Denouement, the end of the story where the action wraps up, the characters fight the final battle, get what they want, and loose ends are explained. Each of these parts fits in with the pacing curve.

Hook: The hook is one of the most essential parts to the pacing curve. Since the pacing curve is designed to keep the audience engaged, the hook is what starts that process. It defines the central conflict, at least of the world if not also the character, and sets the atmosphere, tone, and mood of a piece. Star Wars doesn't introduce Luke first, as that would be a slow start, but shows us the fight between the Rebellion and the Empire, showing us this will be an action packed adventure. This is a great way to set up exposition and mystery. Hooks start the pacing curve, so while that is mostly at the beginning of the story, it can be anywhere you start a pacing curve. A mysterious figure firing a gun set up a mystery, a tragic event sets up a backstory, a fight scene sets up an adventure. The hook does not exactly match up with exposition, but instead gives a piece of that exposition set up with mystery that the audience will want answers to.

Setup: This is where exposition really comes into play. The set up leaves a piece of information that leaves the audience wondering what happens next. In Avenger: Age of Ultron, Thor challenges everyone to lift his hammer, the set up, and no one is able to except Captain America who gets it to twitch, the payoff. Later Ultron is able to lift it, which leads the Avengers to trust him, and in Endgame, Captain America is able to use the hammer. The set up had two pay offs, and the first payoff was also a set up and a character moment, showing that Steve didn't want to show off. In Star Wars: A New Hope, Obi-Wan teaches Luke about the Force and is later killed. In the end, Obi-Wan speaks to Luke and tells him to use the Force. Luke wins, a payoff for two separate set ups. The setup is the exposition in the five act structure. It gives the audience the exact information they need for the story, no more, no less.

Tension: We established that the set up is leaving a piece of incomplete information for the audience. The tension is everything that builds up to that answer. There are many types of tension, a horror movie will have suspense, an action show, combat, a rom com will have drama, and a reality tv show will have all of these, but it is all about wondering what will happen next. Your tension can show up in many ways depending on the genre of your story, but there are two things you need to develop tension. First you need the audience to care about the characters and events involved in the set up. If they don't care about the characters, they don't care about what happens to them, and they won't feel the tension of that build up. The second thing you need are stakes, something that is on the line for the characters. If you care about the character, but their winning or losing does nothing to affect them, then the audience will again not feel the tension. In Star Wars: A New Hope, we care

about Leia, and as an extension, the Rebellion. During the assault on the Death Star, we see the stakes. We know that if the Rebels fail they all die, and they fail if they do not blow up the Death Star in a certain amount of time. We know that it is possible to fail because a ton of rebels have died and the one ship that got close missed the target. We see that time is nearly up, but that tension is relieved when the setup is paid off. It is also pretty common for good guys to win, so sometimes the tension is not derived just off of a victory. When Luke blows up the Death Star we get to see the Rebellion saved, Luke embraces the Force, that the Force works, and we as the audience embrace the Force ourselves. That tension is relieved through multiple payoffs. Alfred Hitchcock said that tension needs to be stretched out as far as possible. If you have people sitting and talking at a table, and a bomb goes off, the audience is shocked, but only for a second. If people are sitting and talking at a table, and the camera moves to show a bomb under the floor, the audience has enough information to feel dread, but not enough to know what is happening. When the protagonist gets up to leave, the audience feels relief from that tension, but when they realize they forgot their jacket and go back to retrieve it, it manifests as instant and extreme dread as the audience knows that their luck has been pushed as far as it can go already. This matches up with the five act structure's Rising Action.

Payoff: The Payoff is simply the answers to the questions that the setups created. Sometimes the audience doesn't even know these questions have been asked. Few people knew during Age of Ultron that the question of Captain America being able to lift the hammer was still being asked. During A New Hope, people were asking if Luke could blow up the Death Star, but no one was asking if he learned how to use the Force. This is the Climax of the five act structure where everything comes to a head.

Reflection: The Reflection is the Falling Action of the five act structure and is very important. First, humans get acclimated to stimuli, so it is very important to let the audience breath or they will get so used to tension that it won't have any affect on them. This is known as a difference in kind, where something different from what the audience has experienced so far allows the audience to have a soft reset and become excited to get back into what the story promises. The reflection is also important to let the audience feel. We want the audience to care about the characters and the stakes, but when the payoff happens, the audience needs to be a part of the results as well. Star Wars: A New Hope has Obi-Wan die, and while they escape the Death Star, it gives Luke and the audience to process their loss. When they destroy the Death Star, the movie doesn't end, it lets the audience celebrate the victory with the characters. It's slow, not a part of the action the audience is here for, and yet the movie is better with it because the audience needs to reflect, to share in the protagonists' wins and losses, to see and feel what they feel. They need to see that the protagonist feels in these moments and then they need to empathise with them.

Setup: At the end of a reflection, it is time to continue you. A set up after a reflection is the same as any set up, but it usually reverts the mood, tone, and atmosphere of a piece back to their default setting. After Obi-Wan dies in A New Hope, after the reflection, they are being chased by the enemy. This reverts away from that sad moment, one we shared with the protagonist, and brings us back into the fun action we are here for, having taken a break, we are ready for more.

A small disclaimer, if you use the five act structure and it works for you, in no way am I looking to take that away from you. This is how I see things and while I believe that this is the best way to see it, I do not want to mess up what works for you. You see, the five act structure isn't wrong, it's just not a structure. It is the pacing curve for the whole story. Pacing is

everywhere and Shakespeare used it for whole stories, but you can use it for acts, segments, scenes, beats, and even moments. Even the firing of a gun, or swing of a sword, required a decision to act, which is set up, aiming, which is tension, the pulled trigger, which is the payoff, the result of the shot, which is the reflection, and then the cycle starts again. As the pacing curve continues, it continually gets higher and higher as the questions are bigger, the tension is longer, and the payoff is for even higher stakes.

What I show on my graphic is a demo curve. You can have set ups in set ups in set ups, paying them all off in different orders, even having multiple setups for a single payoff or multiple payoffs for a single setup, maximizing story efficiency. To plot all the curves you could track in a story on a single graph would be to make the graph a single color and probably illegible.

While the story determines what the setups and payoffs are, there are a few types of tension that can build and release over the course of the story. The pacing curve is all about what information the audience has and what information they need, but again, none of that matters if the audience doesn't care, and a great way to make them care is by establishing the stakes. Stakes define what the conflict is for. I can not overstate that a story needs to be about something, it needs to be personal, and it needs to be willing to put stuff on the line. This creates and drives the tension. It can be the stakes of a relationship, a combatant's life, a position, money, something that is on the line that means something to the character, something they may win, lose, or sacrifice, something that is relatable. There are essentially three types of stakes: External, Internal, and Moral.

External: Like we spoke of before, a character has a want and a need that can clash or supplement each other. The external stakes are often portrayed as will they survive, will they get together, will they win the fight; it all boils down to will they get their want and what will it cost along the way. The external stakes drive the plot forward. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the fellowship has a goal to destroy the one ring. If they succeed they can defeat Sauron and save a lot of lives.

Internal: The internal stakes are the opposite of that in that it asks if the character will get their need. Will they change, will they apply that change, will they succumb to temptation? These are all little things that happen inside the characters hearts and minds, faults and changes we want to see made, things that make them relatable, changed so that we feel we can grow and change as well. The internal stakes drive the theme forward. In *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo is fighting against the influence of the ring, against the nature of evil.

Moral: The moral stakes are very similar to the internal stakes. Again the characters have flaws like us, it is what makes them relatable. The internal stakes show how they will change, and how we can change as well. The moral stakes are different though, because while they are similar to the internal stakes, they require the external stakes to measure them. A protagonist will find allies and enemies that will have different viewpoints than them and their battle will have moral stakes that show what viewpoint is the right one to have. Again, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the moral stakes are will good defeat evil, and in the end we find that it can't, not alone. Instead it is friendship and mercy that defeated evil, not just the desire to defeat evil, but the friendships you gained along the way and the mercy you showed against the external threats.

Stakes not only drive the story, manage its pace, and keep it interesting, but they also help define the story. The external stakes are shown through the world, the internal through the character, and the moral through the story. Stakes connect the audience to the story, making

them care, and then connects the story back to them, giving them something to consider long after the story ends.

One more thing. I have on the inside of the triangle three words: atmosphere, mood, and tone. People tend to use these words interchangeably, but I believe they not only have their own distinct definitions, but they also connect to both to each other, and to the structure as a whole.

Atmosphere: The Atmosphere is how a setting feels. Horror movies bring in a creepy, claustrophobic Atmosphere, adventure titles have wide open spaces, and comedy brings you to places that seem all too familiar. Atmosphere is all about how a place feels. Both horror and romantic stories have small cramped places for their settings with traps designed to draw the characters close together, and yet they have completely different atmospheres.

Tone: The Tone is how the author and characters feel about the story. In a horror film, the characters are terrified in a creepy atmosphere, but what if they weren't? What if the characters had experience with a terrifying alien or robot from the future and was prepared to fight back? That would be an action movie. What if the monster was a person who dressed up to scare and hurt people, but the protagonists were a bunch of hippies and their dog traveling in a VW bug? That would make it a mystery adventure.

Mood: The Mood of a piece directly affects the genre of the story. It is how the audience feels about the work. In tone we talked about how the atmosphere could leave the audience feeling different things depending on the tone. This is what creates the mood of a piece, how the tone is inside the atmosphere. While there are a lot of story conventions we all use, a great way to subvert these are by placing an unfamiliar tone in a familiar atmosphere.

That is everything I have, and while I can not promise that there is nothing else that could be included here, and while I can promise that you would still be better prepared by learning more from other sources as well, I can assure you that this contains everything you need to craft an amazing story.

Conclusion:

So in summary, a story is about an idea, something you want to naturally communicate. So you need a solid high concept to hide your core ideas, take exactly the right ingredients that will lift your story up, and then run it through the story structure to ensure it is going on the right path, finally measuring it with the pacing curve to ensure that the audience stays engaged with your tale.

This idea comes from your experience. Keeping the story as personal and relatable as possible will allow your experience to shine through and resonate with others. Essentially, stories are about all of us. A very popular phrase is that all stories are the same. In a way this is true, though a very simplified statement. If stories are about us then the same rings true. All people are the same, and yet are all different as well.

As you see here there is a lot that goes into a story, and a lot of variation that can go into each story, but we also know that stories are supposed to fit into a structure, a structure that can feel limiting, but is just there to really cement the three creeds of writing I spoke of before: make it personal and relatable, develop relatability through experience, and always ask why.

Trust yourself first, listen to the experience of others, and then use this to double check. If you do that then you will be well on your way to creating an amazing experience that I can not wait to take part in.

Resources:

There are a lot of resources I used in crafting this theory, and while the goal of this is to provide a simplified version of everything I know story to be about, it would be a disservice to encourage anyone to stop here. My education on this subject can be divided between a handful of books as well as a plethora of YouTube videos. I would highly recommend you all take the time to go back and engage with this source material. To encourage this, I will leave a link to everything I used down below.

YouTube:

1. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCErSSa3CaP_GJxmFpdjG9Jw
Lessons from the Screenplay: This channel goes through the screenplays of different movies and analyzes them, giving insight into how to make your story stand out in the script.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx0L2ZdYfiq-tsAXb8IXpQg>
Just Write: This channel goes into detail in a variety of story techniques that will enhance your story.
3. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFQMO-YL87u-6Rt8hIVsRjA>
Hello Future Me: I can't even explain this channel. It has some writing advice, world building advice, and a lot of Avatar. I would say that this would be my number one channel for writing from an overall perspective, but I enjoy the other channels for their specificity a bit more.
4. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI9DUlgtRGHnH_HmSTcfUbA
The Closer Look: This channel takes a great look at some of the themes of movies as well as writing advise.
5. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXyVz9-w9lppr-j2Yz4zAcQ>
Savage Books: This is a great channel similar to the Just Write and Closer Look.
6. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2DjB2XoSEkiHuasS86vsBA>
Off Screen: There are not a ton of videos here and many of them are about The Hero's Journey, but the variety of approaches to it are good to see.
7. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXjnz8dFzRJRzZY8eFiXNUQ>
Nostalgic: So many of these channels deal with movies, while this one deals with TV, which is such an interesting take.
8. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJkMI0u7faDgqh4PfbpLdg>
Nerdwriter1: There is nothing specific that I can say about this show other than each video offers great advise.
9. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFnskmuQu5Njj2rooCSF7tw>
Tyler Mowery: I enjoy this channel a lot. Tyler has a ton of skills and puts them to use helping people with their stories. Some of his stuff is a bit repetitive, but it's important, so the repetitive isn't a bad thing.

10. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfNcetb0dXVk53jZ9l0uKnA>
Implicitly Pretentious: I just found this channel and I love it. It deep dives into the philosophical, emotional, and character themes that I am certain the writers didn't even know about going in. It is a ton of MCU, but that just makes it better.
11. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi7l9chXMlpUft67vw78qw>
Sideways: I have listened to a few music channels, but this is the best one. It is the perfect balance between needing to know some music, but not a lot, and it takes music as a storytelling tool and really explains it in the best ways.
12. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6-ymYjG0SU0jUWnWh9ZzEQ>
Wisecrack: Psychology is just boring. It's awful, but its applications are nearly infinite. So how do you learn it without wanting to beat yourself to death with a psych textbook that is big enough to do that? Watch this channel. It perfectly matches up the psychology with modern media.

Books:

1. Story: Written by Robert McKee, this book really goes over the essentials of what makes a story work and is a great read.
2. The Hero with a Thousand Faces: This book is a really hard read and is really long. There are a ton of longer and shorter versions available and dozens of videos about it. This book is so influential that a number of channels above have videos about it. Still I would highly encourage you reading this book for yourself. It is written by Joseph Campbell and while I previously stated that story structure goes back farther, he really could be looked at as the father of western story structure.
3. Save The Cat: Blake Snyder specializes in screenplays, but this book is still a great reference point for storytellers of all mediums.
4. The Anatomy of Story: John Truby has a lot of great info on story here. I would put this book right next to Robert's as a great read for story substance from a general perspective.