

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Joseph Campbell, an American mythological researcher, wrote a famous book entitled *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In his lifelong research Campbell discovered many common patterns running through hero myths and stories from around the world. Years of research lead Campbell to discover several basic stages that almost every hero-quest goes through (no matter what culture the myth is a part of). He calls this common structure “the monomyth.”

George Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars*, claims that Campbell's monomyth was the inspiration for his groundbreaking films. Lucas also believes that *Star Wars* is such a popular saga because it taps into a timeless story-structure which has existed for thousands of years.

Many followers of Campbell have defined the stages of his monomyth in various ways, sometimes supplying different names for certain stages. For this reason there are many different versions of the Hero's Journey that retain the same basic elements.

THE ORDINARY WORLD

Heroes exist in a world is considered ordinary or uneventful by those who live there. Often the heroes are considered odd by those in the ordinary world and possess some ability or characteristic that makes them feel out-of-place.

- *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*: Dorothy in Kansas
- *The Hobbit*: Bilbo Baggins in Hobbiton
- *Star Wars*: Luke Skywalker on Tatooine
- *The Lion King*: Simba at Pride Rock

THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

For heroes to begin their journeys, they must be called away from the ordinary world. Fantastic quests don't happen in everyday life. Heroes must be removed from their typical environment. Most heroes show a reluctance to leave their home, their friends, and their life to journey on a quest. But in the end they accept their destiny.

Usually there is a discovery, some event, or some danger that starts them on the heroic path. Heroes find a mystic object or discover their world is in danger. In some cases, heroes happen upon their quest by accident. Campbell puts it like this, “A blunder—the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world.”

The new world the hero is forced into is much different than the old one. Campbell describes this new world as a “fateful region of both treasure and danger...a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state...a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight”. This description may seem pretty vague, but think of all the various fantasy realms characters have entered throughout the years: Middle-Earth, Oz, Narnia, Wonderland. It could even be outer space, a

haunted house, or the Matrix. Regardless of the details, the new world is sure to be filled with adventure.

- *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*: The tornado
- *The Hobbit*: Gandalf the wizard arrives
- *Star Wars*: R2D2's cryptic message

REFUSAL OF THE QUEST

During the *Call to Adventure* heroes are given a task or quest which only they can complete. They are faced with a choice: accept the quest or deny it. Their choice might seem like a no-brainer. If they don't accept the quest, there won't be much of a story—or will there? Actually there are stories where heroes *don't* accept their destinies. When this happens, the stage is set for disaster. There's a reason why the powers-that-be have chosen a particular hero. A refusal of the quest only brings trouble.

King Minos, the monarch of Crete who antagonizes the Greek hero Theseus, does not do what the gods ask of him. Poseidon, Lord of the Seas, sends him a beautiful white bull. The god's only order is that Minos must sacrifice the creature back to him. After seeing the magnificent beast, Minos decides he just can't bring himself to do what the god asks and keeps the bull as a personal trophy.

Enraged, Poseidon vows revenge and causes Minos' wife to burn with lust for her husband's prized beast. The rest of this story is strictly NC-17. It results in the birth of the Minotaur, a creature half-bull, half-human, a curse to his father King Minos.

Campbell notes that heroes who refuse their quest often become characters in need of rescuing or in Minos' case, the villain of another hero's journey.

- *Star Wars*: Luke refuses the quest until he learns his aunt and uncle are dead
- *The Lion King*: Simba refuses to return to Pride Rock and accept his destiny
- *Groundhog Day*: Example of the negative cycle caused by refusing the call

ACCEPTING THE CALL: Once the adventure is accepted, the heroes advance into the next stage of their journey.

ENTERING THE UNKNOWN

As they embark on their journey, the heroes enter a world they have never experienced before. Very often it is filled with supernatural creatures, breathtaking sights, and the constant threat of death. Unlike the heroes' home, this outside world has its own rules, and they quickly learn to respect these rules as their endurance, strength, and mettle are tested time and time again. After all, it is not the end of the journey which teaches, but the journey itself.

- *The Wizard of Oz*: Dorothy must learn the rules of Oz
- *The Matrix*: Neo must come to grips with the realities and unrealities of the Matrix

SUPERNATURAL AID

Supernatural doesn't have to mean *magical*. There are plenty of hero stories that don't have wizards or witches per se. *Supernatural* simply means "above the laws of nature." Heroes are almost always started on their journey by a character who has mastered the laws of the outside world and come back to bestow this wisdom upon them. This supernatural character often gives them the means to complete the quest. Some of the time the gift is simply wisdom. Other times it is an object with magical powers. In every instance it is something the hero needs to succeed. As Campbell says, "One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear." The job of the supernatural assistant is to give the heroes what they need to finish the quest—not finish it for them.

- *The Hobbit*: Gandalf
- *Star Wars*: Obi-Wan Kenobi
- *Cinderella*: Fairy Godmother

TALISMAN: A special (and often magical) item that assists the heroes on their quest.

- *The Wizard of Oz*: Ruby Slippers
- *The Hobbit*: The Ring
- *Star Wars*: Lightsaber

ALLIES/HELPERS

Every hero needs a helper, much like every superhero needs a sidekick. Without the assistance of their companions and helpers along the way, most heroes would fail miserably. For example, in the Greek hero story of Theseus, Minos' daughter Ariadne, after falling hopelessly in love, helps Theseus navigate the Labyrinth. She does this by holding one end of a golden thread while Theseus works his way inward to slay the Minotaur. Without her help, Theseus would never have fulfilled his quest or found his way out of the maze once he did so.

- *Lord of the Rings*: Samwise Gamgee
- *The Wizard of Oz*: The Tin Woodsman, Scarecrow, and Cowardly Lion

TESTS & THE SUPREME ORDEAL

The heroes progress through a series of tests, a set of obstacles that make them stronger, preparing them for their final showdown. At long last they reach the Supreme Ordeal, the obstacle they have journeyed so far to overcome.

All the heroes' training and toil comes into play now. The journey has hardened them, and it's time for them to show their prowess. Once this obstacle is overcome, the tension will be relieved. The worst is passed, and the quest, while not officially over, has succeeded.

- *Star Wars*: Blowing up the Death Star
- *Lord of the Rings*: Mount Doom
- *The Wizard of Oz*: Defeating the Wicked Witch

REWARD AND THE JOURNEY HOME

Typically, there is a reward given to heroes for passing the Supreme Ordeal. It could be a kingdom. It could be the hand of a beautiful princess. It could be the Holy Grail. Whatever it is, it is a reward for the heroes' endurance and strength.

After the heroes complete the Supreme Ordeal and have the reward firmly in hand, all that is left is for them to return home. Just because the majority of the adventure has passed doesn't mean that the return journey will be smooth sailing. There are still lesser homebound obstacles to overcome.

- *The Hobbit*: The Battle of Five Armies
- *The Lord of the Rings*: Return to Hobbiton

MASTER OF TWO WORLDS/ RESTORING THE WORLD

Success on the heroes' quest is life-changing, for them and often for many others. By achieving victory, they have changed or preserved their original world. Often they return with "the exilir," an object or personal ability that allows them to save their world.

The heroes have also grown in spirit and strength. They have proved themselves worthy for marriage, kingship, or queenship. Their mastery of the outside world qualifies them to be giants in their own.

- *Lord of the Rings*: Frodo saves the Shire
- *The Wizard of Oz*: Dorothy rids Oz of the Wicked Witch

THE MONOMYTH: NOT JUST FOR MYTHOLOGY

While Joseph Campbell's monomyth works best with the traditional form of the quest—folk and fairy tales, myths, legends, and other fantasies—it can be applied to many different genres or types of stories. A quest does not have to include swords and monsters. It can just as easily occur in the *real world*. The monomyth, ageless and universal, exists anywhere and everywhere.

ARCHETYPES APPEARING IN THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Joseph Campbell was heavily influenced by the Swiss Psychiatrist Carl Jung whose theory of the collective unconscious involved archetypes—recurring images, patterns, and ideas from dreams and myths across various cultures. Below are several archetypes often found in myths.

- **HEROES**: Central figures in stories. Everyone is the hero of his or her own myth.
- **SHADOWS**: Villains, enemies, or perhaps the enemy within. This could be the repressed possibilities of the hero, his or her potential for evil.
- **MENTORS**: The hero's guide or guiding principles.
- **HERALD**: The one who brings the Call to Adventure. This could be a person or an event.
- **THRESHOLD GUARDIANS**: The forces that stand in the way at important turning points, including jealous enemies, professional gatekeepers, or even the hero's own fears and doubts.

- **SHAPESHIFTERS:** In stories, creatures like vampires or werewolves who change shape. In life, the shapeshifter represents change.
- **TRICKSTERS:** Clowns and mischief-makers.
- **ALLIES:** Characters who help the hero throughout the quest.
- **WOMAN AS TEMPTRESS:** Sometimes a female character offers danger to the hero (a femme fatale)