



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

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Imaginary Realms: Creating Story Universes

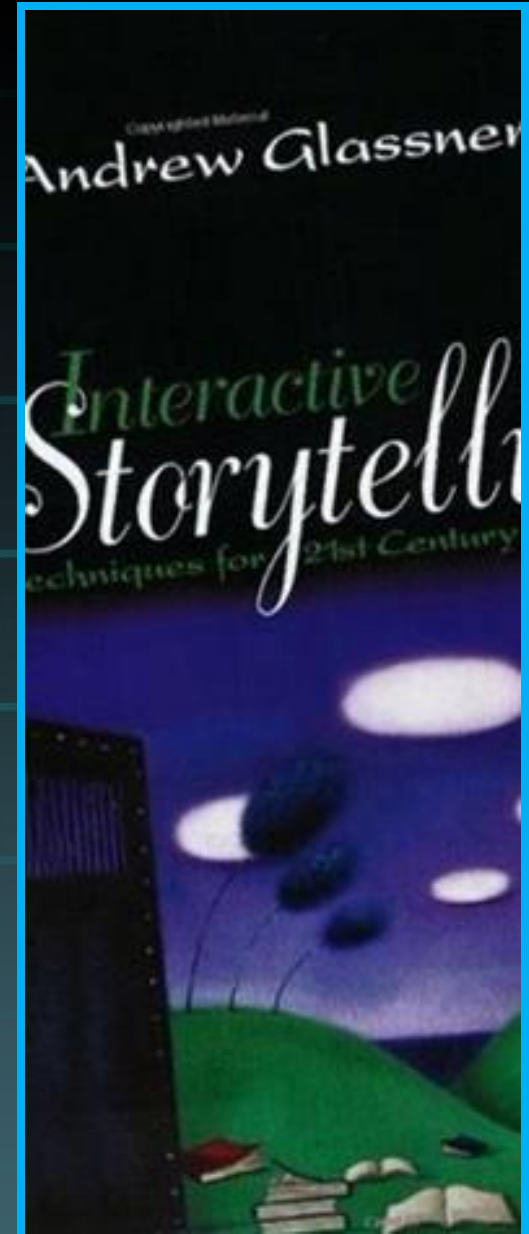
Narrative Structure and Theory:
Plot and Monomyth



Narrative Structure and Theory

Andrew Glassner: *Interactive Storytelling*

- The Three-Act Plot
- Joseph Campbell's '*Hero's Journey*' / '*The Monomyth*'
- Other Plot Considerations





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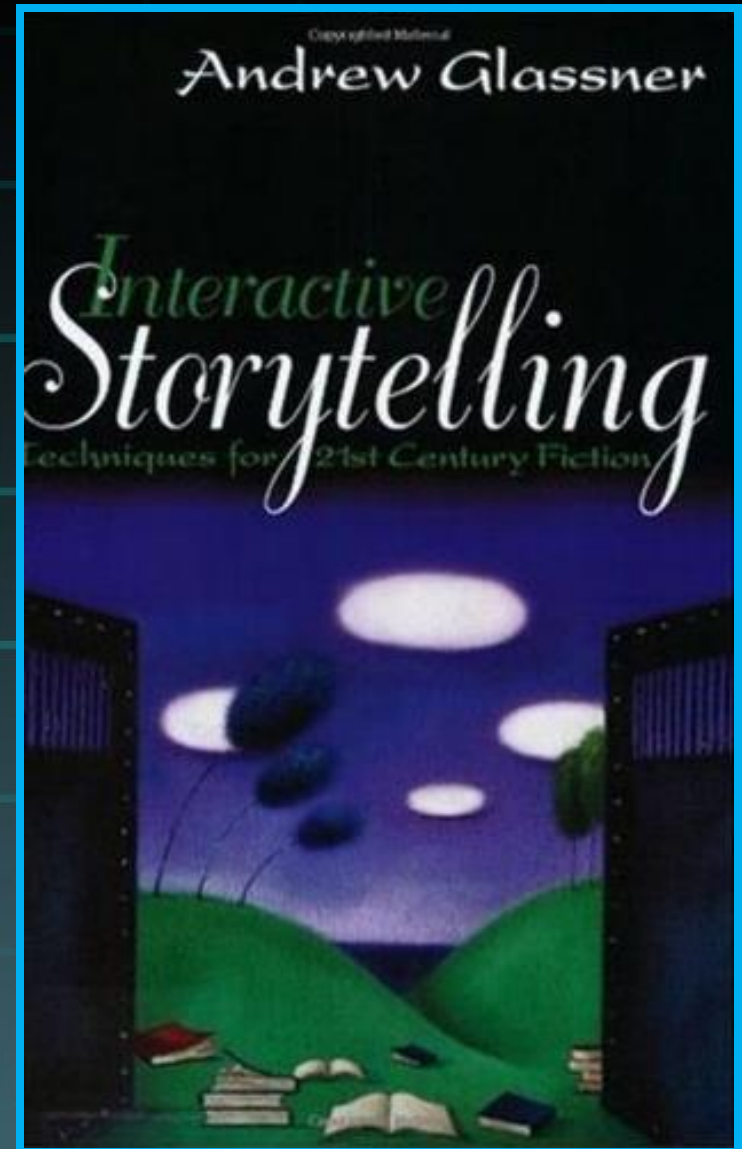
Imaginary Realms: Creating Story Universes

Andrew Glassner

***Interactive Storytelling: Techniques
for 21st Century Fiction.***

(2004)

Coyote Wind LLC, Canada.





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Narrative Structure and Theory

Plot

Andrew Glassner: *Interactive Storytelling* (2004)



Plot

A story is a sequence of events, usually referred to as the **plot**.

There are many different kinds of plot structures used in modern fiction. The most common is called the **three-act form**.

This form is used in virtually all contemporary TV dramas and films lasting an hour or more.



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Plot

These **three acts** may be described by the following terms:

Act 1:

Complication

Act 2:

Development

Act 3:

Resolution



Act 1: Complication

Typically, the story begins with a character who is in a **state of balance** in their life.

This does not mean that they are happy, or even that their life is in any way attractive or desirable to themselves or to the audience, but it has some form of stability.

If left to their own devices, their life would carry on just as it is.

Then a **complication** comes along that **upsets that balance**.



Act 1: Complication

Once a character's life has been thrown out of balance, they will do what is necessary to correct it.

Whatever has gone wrong will receive their best efforts until it is made right again.

(Glassner, 2004, p.55)





Act 1: Complication

The event that disrupts the character's life ideally will present two related but **ultimately contradictory challenges**:

- **An overt challenge** (the action our Hero must take in the world)
- **A subtle challenge** (one that addresses their inner beliefs)



Act 1: Complication

Act 1 **may build slowly**, as the Hero deals with a series of smaller problems before the biggest obstacle confronting them comes into clear focus.

The course of Act 1 typically **shows the character slowly coming to grips with the major problem** facing them and trying a number of minimal solutions to address it.

Finally, the Hero understands the existence and magnitude of their most important problem and knows some major work is required to correct it. Act 1 typically ends when the Hero makes their **first significant effort to address this problem**.

(Glassner, 2004, p.55)



Act 2: Development

In Act 2, the Hero finds that the problem is **different or worse than they thought**, facing a series of developments that steadily raise the stakes.

Sometimes the problem itself proves to be deeper or more complex than the Hero thought, and sometimes it appears that the problem was only a smaller piece of a much larger one.

(Glassner, 2004, p.56)



Act 2: Development

Act 2 plunges the Hero into a **new situation**.

By this point, the Hero has begun to fully engage in solving their problem, but each time they commit to an action they find that instead of solving everything, even greater acts and risks are expected of them.

These increasing challenges, and the Hero's need to respond to them, form a sequence of **developments**.

(Glassner, 2004, pp.56-57)



Act 2: Development

This is the essence of Act 2 – the Hero strives and does everything in their power to solve the problem but it just gets harder and harder.

Sometimes the problems are of their own making, sometimes they are deliberately put in the Hero's way by other characters and sometimes they are there simply because of the nature of the situation.

(Glassner, 2004, p.57)



Act 2: Development

This struggle is at its most engaging and profound when it simultaneously taxes our Hero's inner and outer worlds: the **physical struggle** is matched by an **internal struggle** with their own emotions and beliefs.

In great stories, these struggles are increasingly at odds with one another, so that the character cannot satisfy both the inner and outer pressures.

(Glassner, 2004, p.57)



Act 2: Development

Finally at the end of Act 2, the Hero faces a **critical decision**.

At the end of **Act 1**, the Hero **entered** into the struggle, while at the end of **Act 2**, they must reaffirm their intention by utterly **committing** to it.

(Glassner, 2004, p.57)



Act 3: Resolution

When Act 3 begins, the Hero is in a situation where there is **no turning back**, and must commit all of their resources to achieving their goal.

Act 3 continues to build on the pressure and problems from Act 2 until it reaches the **climax**, or the point of ultimate conflict.

At this point **the character must risk everything** to achieve their goal, or perish in the trying – which can either be literal or it can be an intimate spiritual or emotional loss.



Act 3: Resolution

At it's most powerful, this pressure will put the Hero's inner and outer worlds at their greatest peril or conflict.

In choosing an action in this most terrible of moments, the Hero will **discover who they really are**.

They may find they are strong and brave, or weak and afraid. They may be resourceful or escape into madness.

Whatever the Hero does, they will display their **truest essence** in the choice.

(Glassner, 2004, p.58)



Act 3: Resolution

In this final, ultimate action the Hero will act at the very upper limits of their abilities to bring about a **resolution** to the problem.

This resolution may cleanly end the problem, leading to a happy or sad ending.

It may also be **ambiguous**, so the Hero has both won and lost in the process.

(Glassner, 2004, p.59)



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Summary of Three-Act Plot

Act 1:

Complication

(Life in balance, then thrown out of balance by a complication)

Act 2:

Development

(Hero finds themselves in a new situation, problem is worse than they thought, greater acts and risks are expected of them. A critical decision has to be made)

Act 3:

Resolution

(Point of no return – Hero risks everything and discovers their true self while bringing about a resolution to the problem)



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Narrative Structure and Theory

The Hero's Journey

Andrew Glassner: *Interactive Storytelling* (2004)



Campbell's *Monomyth* / *The Hero's journey*

Folklorist and historian **Joseph Campbell** studied many myths and stories from many different cultures and eras and discovered that many of them shared a similar structure.

He called this 12-step structure the *Hero's Journey* (sometimes also called the *Monomyth*).

The steps of the Hero's Journey are clearly present in many of today's stories, including popular feature films.

(Glassner, 2004, p59)



Campbell's Monomyth / The Hero's journey

The Hero's Journey is only one of several general story architectures, but it is perhaps the most common and versatile one used today.

The Hero's Journey is **not only applicable to big adventures**. It also applies to personal and intimate stories that take place largely in a world of emotions and private feelings.

In this case, the characters and objects in the hero's journey may be encountered **metaphorically** rather than **literally**.

(Glassner, 2004, p.59)



Campbell's *Monomyth* / *The Hero's journey*

In many stories **only some** of the elements of the Hero's Journey appear.

Sometimes these steps occur out of Campbell's 12-step sequence, or they repeat, or go backwards.

“The Hero's Journey is not a rigid prescription to be obeyed, but a general-purpose tool for analysing the structure of many stories.”

(Glassner, 2004, p.59)



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The structure of **The Hero's Journey** consists of 12 steps, defined by Campbell:

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 The Ordinary World | 7 Approaching the Cave |
| 2 The Call to Adventure | 8 The Ordeal |
| 3 Refusal of the Call | 9 The Reward |
| 4 Meeting with the Mentor | 10 The Road Back |
| 5 Crossing the Threshold | 11 Resurrection |
| 6 Tests, Allies, Enemies | 12 Returning with the Elixir |



1 The Ordinary World

The story begins with the hero in his or her everyday, ordinary world.

This setting gives the audience the opportunity to either recognise this world as their own or to be quickly introduced to its qualities.

The character's life is typically in balance: without some kind of external pressure, things will continue on as they are.



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1

The Ordinary World: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

The Kokiri forest, where Link has lived his entire life.





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1

The Ordinary World: *The Matrix*

Neo's apartment and the office in which he works.





2

The Call to Adventure

Now that we've been introduced to the balance of forces in the Hero's world, something happens to upset that balance. Events such as the following can introduce this:

- A herald delivers shocking news
- A doctor reports bad test results
- A Knight announces the arrival of a dragon in a nearby town
- A soldier staggers home with a story of surprise attack and imminent invasion
- The Hero discovers the problem themselves by accident

This is the **Call to Adventure**, when the Hero learns that their world has been changed and they must respond.



2

The Call to Adventure: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Navi wakes Link and tells him he needs to go to the Deku Tree.





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2

The Call to Adventure: *The Matrix*

The phone call that Neo receives from Morpheus.





3

Refusal of the Call

Once the Hero has accepted the reality of their problem, and the necessity of taking action to address it, they will often try to avoid it.

Campbell refers to this denial as the **Refusal of the Call**.



3

Refusal of the Call: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

The game **skips this step** – Link, the story's Hero, goes to the Deku Tree as quickly as the player can get him there.





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3

Refusal of the Call: *The Matrix*

Neo refuses the call by rejecting help from Morpheus as he stands on the office building, leading to his interrogation by the agents.





4

Meeting with the Mentor

At this point the character often finds themselves at a roadblock: they feel the need to take action, but they cannot or will not because someone or something stands in their way.

This roadblock is broken when the Hero meets their **mentor**.

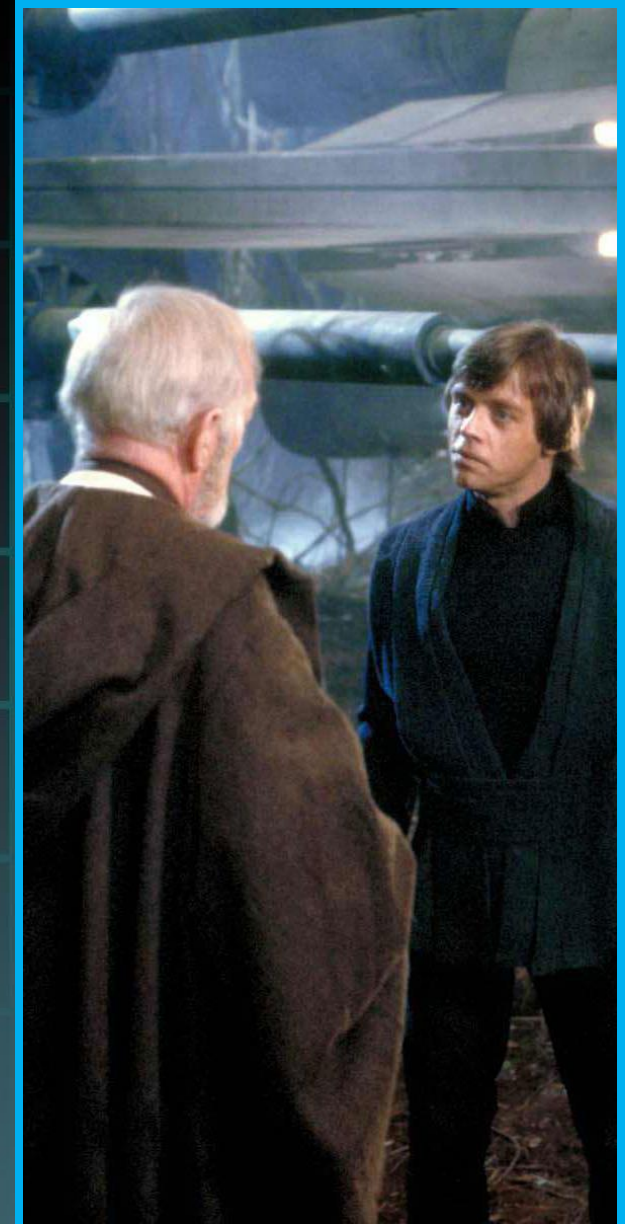


4

Meeting with the Mentor

The mentor may be someone the Hero has known all his or her life or it may be someone who has suddenly appeared, usually in a way related to the onset of the problem.

The mentor is there to give the Hero the push he or she needs to accept the call to adventure. Usually this is a gentle push but sometimes it can be violent.





4

Meeting with the Mentor: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Link is befriended by the owl Kaepora Gaebora, who guides him on his adventure and offers him advice and help.



Hoo hoot!
Link...
Look up here!



4

Meeting with the Mentor: *The Matrix*

Neo meets with Morpheus at the hotel. Morpheus's experience, resources and information make him a powerful mentor.





5

Crossing the Threshold

Now that the Hero has decided to act, they must start somewhere. This often means that the hero travels into a different world, which Campbell calls the **special world**.

This special world can be another physical place like a different city or country.

The Hero may also enter the special world by staying in the same place, but becoming part of a different social stratum or culture.

Similarly, they may enter a new world of perceptions and ideas entirely within themselves.



5 **Crossing the Threshold:** Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

Link enters the new world when he passes through the tunnel out of the Kokiri forest and enters the greater world of Hyrule.





5

Crossing the Threshold: *The Matrix*

Neo crosses the threshold when he swallows the red pill, initiating a transformation from which there is no turning back.





6 Tests, Allies, Enemies

Upon arrival in the special world, the Hero is immediately confronted with the need to understand how the world works, what is expected of them there, and how not only to survive but to be effective.

Often the Hero is alone in this special world, which can make them easy prey for bad characters.

As the Hero meets new people, some will become friends and allies, and others will become enemies.



6

Tests, Allies, Enemies: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Link makes friends with Malon at the ranch with Zelda's guardian Impa, and with Princess Zelda herself. He also witnesses the evil Ganon kidnapping Zelda.





6

Tests, Allies, Enemies: *The Matrix*

Neo finds powerful Allies in Morpheus, Trinity and the rest of the crew of the ship, and discovers that the agents are his enemies.





6

6b – Meeting With the Goddess

At this point the Hero **sometimes encounters a character** that Campbell calls the “goddess”, representing a mother figure.

Like all archetypes, the goddess has **both positive and negative** aspects.



6

6b – Meeting With the Goddess

She can **help the Hero through gifts and insight** and help them access their own intuition, emotions and spirit.

However, the goddess can also encourage acts and beliefs that are **unwisely irrational**, over-dependent on sentimentality, or driven by emotions like guilt or fear.



6

6b – Meeting With the Goddess: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Link meets the goddess in Zelda, who gives him the Ocarina of Time.





6

6b – Meeting With the Goddess: *The Matrix*

Neo meets the goddess when Morpheus brings him to talk to the Oracle.





6

6c – Atonement With the Father

The Hero often finds themselves facing a character who represents the archetypal father.

While the mother typically provides support and encouragement, the father typically tests and judges the hero and then offers a reward if the hero proves worthy.



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6

6c – Atonement With the Father: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

In the *Legend of Zelda*, the father figure is represented by Impa, Princess Zelda's Guardian.





6

6c – Atonement With the Father: *The Matrix*

Neo's world is turned upside-down when Cypher betrays the crew. He and the others are forced into extraordinary action by this test and Neo proves himself worthy by his response.





7

Approaching the Cave

As the Hero proceeds through the special world, they build up increasing skill and confidence to deal with their ever-increasing challenges.

As these challenges become more difficult, the risk of failure becomes more likely and the cost of failure more extreme.

Eventually the hero realises, perhaps with the prompting of their allies or mentor, that they must face a specific and difficult peril.



7

Approaching the Cave

Campbell calls this stage the **approach to the cave** as a common mythological embodiment of this step occurs when the Hero enters the cave of a monster they must defeat

Often this step requires the Hero to either symbolically or literally confront their own darkest nature.



7

Approaching the Cave: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Link literally enters many caves as he journeys into a variety of dungeons.





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7

Approaching the Cave: *The Matrix*

Neo approaches the cave when he works in the imaginary world of the Matrix to save Morpheus.





8

The Ordeal

When the Hero enters the cave, they must face the **ordeal** that awaits them.

The ordeal is the final obstacle before the attainment of their goal.

This is the big fight before the Hero can claim their reward, but **this is not the ultimate climax of the story** – that comes a little later. This is the confrontation that sets up the climax.



8

The Ordeal: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Link confronts and defeats the boss of each dungeon.





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8

The Ordeal: *The Matrix*

Neo fights the Agents to save Morpheus.





9

The Reward

When the ordeal is complete, the Hero can finally claim their reward.

It is the moment when the Hero attains the overt goal of their quest.



9

The Reward: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Link gains important pieces of adventuring equipment in the dungeons he visits.





9

The Reward: *The Matrix*

Neo saves Morpheus from the agents. His reward is his understanding of his true power in the Matrix and the knowledge that he doesn't have to obey the rules that appear to be real.





10 The Road Back

In the classical Hero's Journey, **the story is not over** when the Hero has obtained the object of their desire.

They are still in the special world and must return to the world of their normal life, bringing the fruits of their quest to the ordinary world.

In the process, they will find a way to internally integrate what they know of both the ordinary and special worlds.



10 The Road Back

Sometimes the Hero **doesn't want to return** to their ordinary world, which is usually not too hard to understand – they have spent significant time and effort learning about the special world and mastering its rules, and now they are truly a Hero in that world.

Although they might recognise the need to return home, they may refuse to step foot on **the road back**.



10 **The Road Back:** *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

The road back begins when Link defeats Ganon and the villain's tower crumbles, forcing Link and Zelda to run for their lives.





10 The Road Back: *The Matrix*

This is part of the final battle between Neo and the agents, where he finds that he is the master of both their world and his own.





11

Resurrection

The return home holds challenges of its own.

It is at this point that **the hero confronts the villain** in his most elaborate and dangerous form.

Even more than the ordeal, this final encounter is a brutal, life-and-death situation. The only way forward is to destroy the opponent, whether it is inside or outside, psychological or physical.

But brute force will not be enough.



11

Resurrection

To defeat the villain, the Hero must take the ultimate step of **facing that which they are most afraid of**, whether it is a physical monster or an internal demon.

In the most powerful of stories, the Hero must face **both of these at once**, as the demands on their inner and outer worlds pull at them in contradictory directions.



11 **Resurrection:** *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Link must defeat the final version of the evil Ganondorf without his Master Sword.





11 Resurrection: *The Matrix*

Neo's eyes open in the ship. He has survived the battle and is reborn, more powerful than ever.





12 Returning with the Elixir

The final stage in the Hero's journey is when they return to their home **with the physical and spiritual knowledge** they gained on their quest.

This triumphant return is sometimes met with mixed reactions.

If they originally journeyed to defeat an army or dragon that was threatening their village, they deserve gratitude and cheers.

But **sometimes there is a darker side** to the return home.



12 Returning with the Elixir

Some **people may not believe** the Hero's stories of the special world – they may think of them as exaggerations, fabrications or lies, leading to **resentment and anger**.

But even more threatening is the mere presence of the Hero in their newly enlightened state.

As part of the journey, the Hero has examined and **questioned many of their beliefs** they have been raised with and shared by their contemporaries.



12 Returning with the Elixir

Based on their experiences far from home and what they have learned on their quest, the Hero often finds that **their prior beliefs were limiting, or even wrong or misguided.**

This is dangerous knowledge. Societies do not appreciate people who challenge their fundamental assumptions, even if they are heroes.



12 Returning with the Elixir

If the Hero's truths are not too radical or threatening, or they do not feel the need to express them, then the culmination of his journey **need not end in conflict**.

The Hero has found peace in themselves and a place in their world and can move forward on an optimistic and positive note.



12

Returning with the Elixir: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Ganondorf is sealed away, and Link is returned to his original time, where he resumes his childhood from where he left it when he started the quest.





12

Returning with the Elixir: *The Matrix*

Neo places a phone call into the Matrix and tells it directly that he plans to make some changes. He has brought back from his experience the secret of the Matrix.



Campbell's *Monomyth* / *The Hero's journey*

The Hero's journey is a general structure shared by many stories around the world.

It is not a formula, in the sense that it does not guarantee a great story, and deviating from it does not guarantee a bad story.

The **three-act form** can be thought of as a compressed version of the Hero's Journey.



Campbell's *Monomyth* / *The Hero's journey*

Pieces of the Hero's journey can be found in many popular contemporary stories.

The steps **don't always appear in the sequence stated in the slides, some steps can be visited more than once and others can be omitted altogether.**

It is not uncommon in contemporary stories for the tale to end soon after the climax. The steps of returning home and sharing the fruits of the quest with the Hero's peers are often omitted or only briefly suggested.



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Narrative Structure and Theory

Other Plot Considerations

Andrew Glassner: *Interactive Storytelling* (2004)



Other Plot Considerations

Whatever structure the plot follows, certain elements are always present.

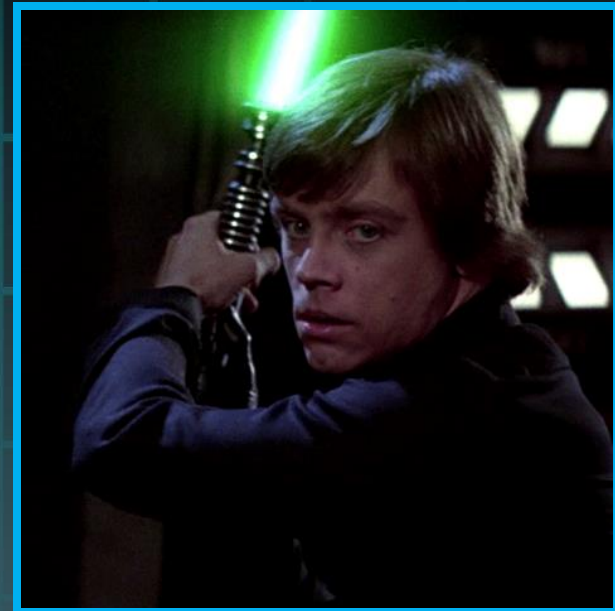
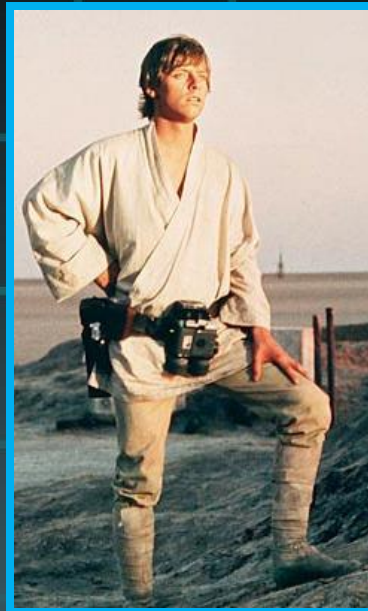
- There is an **inciting incident** that starts the events off.
- The Hero must then **take action** to restore the balance of forces, passing through a series of struggles, each one more difficult and with higher risks than the one before.
- As the issues become more complex, the character's **understanding of their inner and outer world** deepens.



Other Plot Considerations

The Hero often develops in several ways at once:

- Physically
- Intellectually
- Emotionally
- Spiritually



(Glassner, 2004, p.66)



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Summary

- **Andrew Glassner: Interactive storytelling**
- **The Three-Act Plot**
- **Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey* / *Monomyth* & Examples:**
 - *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*
 - *The Matrix*
- **Other Plot Considerations**
 - **Common elements of Plot**
 - **Development of the Hero**



Exercise

- Watch the original 1977 *Star Wars* movie by next session (*Episode IV: A New Hope*)
- Make notes about where the movie adheres to narrative theory – *The Hero's Journey* & *Three-act plot*.
- Discuss results at next week's lecture / tutorial



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Bibliography

Glassner, A., 2004, *Interactive Storytelling: Techniques for 21st Century Fiction*.

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Any Questions?



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