SCREENWRITING SERIES

THE HERO’S JOURNEY:
INTRO TO THREE ACT STRUCTURE

With Ashley Charbonnet
• BEFORE WE GET INTO STRUCTURE
  – What is your story?
  – What do you want your audience to experience?
  – Think “Questions” not “Answers” - We are writers not teachers
  – Can’t be all structure and no story
THE HERO’S JOURNEY

- One of the foundation of 3 act structure
- Paradigm in mythology where a flawed character reluctantly surmounts a trial or obstacle but in order for him to prevail he must first conquer his own flaw or inner fears as well as an outside antagonist. Using his strengths and help from a loved one or the gods he prevails.
- Many (though not all) films follow this paradigm visible in myths like The Odyssey
  - Raiders of the Lost Arc, The African Queen, The Wizard of Oz, The Matrix...
- Other Films that follow the paradigm but the Hero’s success is some kind of understanding and others have modified Journeys like the Anti-Hero Journey
  - Rocky, Chinatown, The Unforgiven, Cool Hand Luke (anti-hero)
3 ACT STRUCTURE

NOT SOME HOLLYWOOD CREATION
– Called *Classical 3 Act Structure* because it was used as the format for Greek (Classical) theatre to modern theatre to films and even novels.

THE ACTS
• ACT I: The Set Up
  – *Engaging the Audience*
• ACT II: Obstacles
  – *Elaborating and Extending the Engagement*
• ACT III: Resolution
  – *Releasing the Engagement*

REMEMBER: 3 Act Structure is the typical format for a feature screenplay but not a formula.
• Takes up ¼ of your screenplay

• Somebody wants something
  – We meet our protagonist living their life and we connect with them on common ground (*The Godfather*)

• Undisturbed Status Quo
  – Identify the protagonist as the main character in the story
  – She should be in active pursuit of her own life
  – Identify the world in which the drama will occur as well as the tone and style of storytelling
THE DILEMMA

- Establishing the character’s want within the story and why it may be difficult to get it
  - What does Dorothy Want at the Start of the Story?

- What is changeable in the Protagonists Inner Life
  - The plot is the vehicle for this change and the real material

- INCITING INCIDENT OCCURS
  - EX: Dorothy runs away from home with ToTo and is thus swept away in a twister, Neo is approached by Morpheus - which pill does he take?
  - The Character must make a decision
  - We may meet our antagonist and other important characters, though it could potentially happen in act ii.

End of Act I & result of inciting incident—Dorothy lands in Oz
ELABORATING ON THE WORLD AND THE DILEMMA

• ½ of your script
• Go Deeper into the world

• How hard will it be to achieve the goal?

• The Nature of the Character is further explored - His weaknesses, blind spots, etc.

• The first obstacle begins the ascending action

• If the antagonist and other characters haven’t been introduced they are now

Neo understands the matrix in the first half of act ii.
FIRST MAJOR OBSTACLE & FIRST POTENTIAL BREAKTHROUGH

• Often discover the power of the antagonist here and makes first tough encounter (Dorothy encounters the witch, Sarah Connor meets the Terminator and hides out with the police)

• The first breakthrough is dominated by the drive of the character (Dorothy is set on the Yellow Brick Road)

• Create highs and lows for the quest and the first hard setback (Dorothy meets the scarecrow, tin man and lion and encounters a variety of obstacles along the way to OZ - The poppies are the first tough setback)

• Ends with the MIDPOINT of the script
MORE ON MIDPOINT

CENTER POINT OF THE STORY

• The protagonist could go either way (*Neo visits the oracle and could choose to believe or not, Dorothy Reaches Oz only to find out that the Wizard won’t help her, See Terminator Ex.*)

• The search is more focused as a result of an event and The protagonist has made his first serious attempt to solve the problem.

• Subplots can be expanded here as well (*Sarah and Kyle romance*)

Sarah Connor (TERMINATOR) can’t count on the police but has to trust Kyle from the future
MORE ON SUBPLOTS

MAIN SUBPLOT INTRODUCED

• Often the main subplot (often the love story but not necessarily) is introduced or expanded after the midpoint as a break from the main tension (*Dorothy’s friends in Oz* - *will they get what they need from the Wizard, The romance in Terminator and Matrix*)

• You may have as many subplots as you like but they should relate back or connect to your main tension

• The subplots have their own beginning, middle and end and the characters involved have their own wants.

Will Lawrence make it through basic training?
THE GREATEST EXERTION

• The most difficult obstacle yet has to be overcome and the hero must either do or die (Dorothy is trapped in the witch’s castle and must kill her, Morpheus is captured and Neo must save him)

• The character arc is near complete here and directly related to main conflict
  – Dorothy stands up to the wicked witch on her own (stands up to the Mrs. Gultch rather than running away)
  – Neo can see the matrix and realizes that he may be the one
  – Sarah Connor is no longer the victim she was in the beginning but a warrior when she takes responsibility for Kyle

**Dorothy must face the witch and kill her.**
FALSE RESOLUTION

- The most direct solution is attacked. This is the solution we would expect to work. *(Dorothy returns the broom to the Wizard, Sarah blows up the truck with the Terminator inside)*

- The Twist - The protagonist and the audience realizes that it didn’t work *(Dorothy’s confidence in the Wizard and defeating the witch will not get her out of Oz, The Terminator is “unkillable”).*

TIE UP YOUR SUBPLOTS BY NOW (USUALLY)

- Scarecrow and company get their brain, heart, and courage and also realize they had them all along while Sarah has fallen in love with Kyle, made love and conceived their child and savior of humanity, Trinity kisses Neo and confesses her love
FINAL TEST OF CHARACTER & TRUE RESOLUTION

- This is usually and even greater do or die moment (Neo must face Agent Smith himself, Dorothy needed to learn to appreciate home and believe she had the power to get herself home, Sarah must use herself as bait to kill the Terminator)

- The inner change in the character is put to the test here.

THE END OF THE WANT & AFTERMATH

- The protagonists has ceased to want what he did at the beginning

- Wind down your story
  - Sarah heads to Mexico to arm against future machines, Dorothy goes home, Neo rejoins the team ready to expose the matrix and protect Zion.

“There’s no place like home.”
• *How to Build a Great Screenplay* - David Howard

• *Save the Cat* - Blake Snyder

• *The Writer’s Journey* - Christopher Volger

• *On Filmmaking* - Alexander Mackendrick