

CRACKING YARNS

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Introduction to Screenwriting

Session 1:
What do audiences want?

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Lesson Downloads

- www.crackingyarns.com.au
- Under “Resources” in the top level navigation
- “Course downloads”

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Who's heard of Scheherazade?



Imagine you are Scheherazade

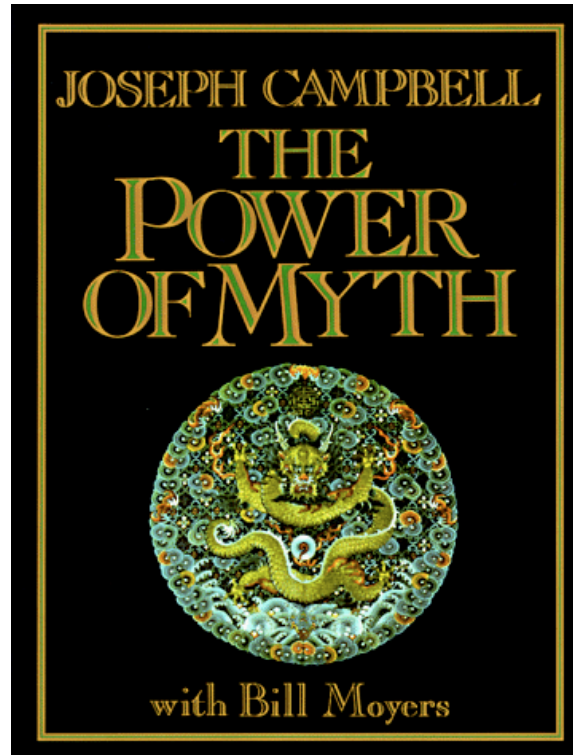
- Split into groups of 4
- You must choose a movie to show for your life
- If your audience doesn't love the film, you die
- Who is your audience? Us
- To get our votes
- 1. We have to have seen the film AND ...
- 2. Loved it (at least 4 out of 5 stars)
- Winning group - most votes

What do audiences want?

- To be entertained
- To be educated
- To escape
- Spectacle
- To be inspired
- To have their life choices affirmed
- To be moved
- To laugh, to cry

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What do audiences want?



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What do audiences want?

“I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive ... so that we can actually feel the rapture being alive.”

Joseph Campbell
“The Power of Myth”

What do audiences want?

- Expand emotional bandwidth
- Universal connection
- Reminder of higher self

What did Aristotle think audiences ultimately wanted?

- Catharsis
- “With incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions”
- Emotional cleansing or purging

What produces catharsis?

- Two key ways
- 1. Release of tension
 - Set goal, build our fears, then resolve
- But there's an even more effective way
- 2. Seeing hero transformed
 - Why?

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What do audiences want?

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Me

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We want to write
cracking screenplays

- But where to start?

How screenplays differ from novels

- Length
- Attention span

How screenplays differ from novels

- Length
- Attention span
- **Action vs description**
 - From Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy
 - “When Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till they were within an unimportant distance of his ears, his eyes were reduced to chinks, and diverging wrinkles appeared around them, extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun”

How screenplays differ from novels

- Length
- Attention span
- Action vs description
- **Show don't tell**
- From Catch 22 by Joseph Heller
- “The Texan was well-meaning, generous and likeable. In three days no-one could stand him.”

How screenplays differ from novels

- Length
- Attention span
- Action vs description
- Show don't tell
- **External rather than internal**
- From The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger
- “In my mind, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw.”
- Doesn't mean we don't have interior journey - as you'll see ...

How screenplays differ from novels

- Length
- Attention span
- Action vs description
- Show don't tell
- External rather than internal
- In summary, not writing prose but scripting drama

What is drama?

1. Drama is conflict
2. Drama is conflict
3. Drama is conflict

(remember this if you remember nothing else)

Why is conflict so important?

- Universally intriguing
- Catharsis is release of tension
- Before you can release it, need to build it
- Without conflict, can't build tension
- No conflict, no catharsis
- No conflict, bum ride for the audience
- No conflict, back to your day job

Aristotle on tension

- Aristotle: “Tragedy ... is an imitation not only of a complete action, but also of incidents arousing pity and fear”
- Not just fear of injury or death
- Fear of not getting what they want
- Fear creates tension
- To fear them not getting what they want, need doubt
- To create doubt, need opposition or antagonism
- Someone or something that’s resisting them
- Someone or something that also wants what they want

What you need to create drama

“Someone wants something badly and they’re having difficulty getting it”

Frank Daniel

(If you don’t remember “drama is conflict”,
please, please, remember this)

4 fundamentals of screen stories

- To deliver “someone wanting something badly and they’re having difficulty getting it”, need 4 elements:
- 1. Hero (aka protagonist)
- 2. Goal
- 3. Conflict (aka antagonist)
- 4. Stakes

4 fundamentals of screen stories

- 1. Hero
- Whose film is it?
- Whose story are we telling?
- Who most needs to change?
- Who acts to resolve at climax

4 fundamentals of screen stories

- 2. Goal or want
 - Get
 - Stop
 - Retrieve
 - Escape
- Clear finish line
- External (not “inner peace”)

4 fundamentals of screen stories

- 3. Conflict
- Why is it going to be hard?
- Why should we be interested?
- What are the forces of antagonism?
- Who is the antagonist?
- Are they a challenge for the protagonist?

4 fundamentals of screen stories

- 4. Stakes
- What happens if the hero doesn't go on this journey?
- If they don't get their goal?
- Why MUST they do this?
- Why should we care?

4 fundamentals of screen stories

- 1. Hero
- 2. Goal
- 3. Conflict
- 4. Stakes
- 90% scripts don't have these basics
- Your screenplay MUST have these 4 fundamentals

5th fundamental of screen stories

- 4 fundamentals sufficient to create drama
 - Raiders of the Lost Ark
- But, to deliver transformation, hero must be what at the start?
- Flawed

5 elements for transformative story

1. Hero
2. Goal
3. Conflict (Antagonist)
4. Stakes
5. Flaw

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How to shape these 5 elements?

- How to build and release tension and deliver catharsis?
- Structure

Is structure bad?

- Australian resistance?
- Too “Hollywood”?

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“Hollywood” films

A Few Good Men
African Queen
Being There
Blood Simple
Blues Brothers
Body Heat
Bridget Jones's Diary
Brokeback Mountain
Bull Durham
Casablanca
Chinatown
Crash
Dead Poets Society
Dirty Harry
Eternal Sunshine of the
Spotless Mind
Fargo
Fast Times at Ridgemont
High
Ferris Bueller's Day Off
Five Easy Pieces
French Connection
Godfather

Goodfellas
Groundhog Day
It happened one night
It's a wonderful life
Juno
The King's Speech
Kramer vs Kramer
Lars and the Real Girl
LA Confidential
Little Miss Sunshine
Lost in Translation
Midnight Cowboy
Mississippi Burning
Moonstruck
My Fair Lady
No Country for Old Men
North by Northwest
One Flew Over the
Cuckoo's Nest
Psycho
Pulp Fiction
Quiz Show
Raging Bull

Raiders of the Lost Ark
Rainman
Rear Window
Remains of the Day
Reservoir Dogs
Risky Business
Rocky
Saturday Night Fever
Schindler's List
Sea of Love
Serpico
Shortcuts
Shrek
Sideways
The Social Network
Some Like it Hot
Star Wars
Starman
Taxi Driver
10 Things I hate
about you
The Apartment
The Big Chill

The Conversation
The Empire Strikes Back
The Fugitive
The Goodbye Girl
The Graduate
The Incredibles
The Maltese Falcon
The Shining
The Verdict
Thelma & Louise
There's something about
Mary
39 Steps
Tootsie
Toy Story
Trading Places
Twelve Angry Men
Unforgiven
Up
Virgin Suicides
Vertigo
When Harry Met Sally
Witness

Isn't structure bad?

- Australian resistance
- Too "Hollywood"?
- A limit to creativity?

Why we need structure

Typical script “coverage” report

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Concept				
Character				
Dialogue				
Structure				
Emotional engagement				

Why we need structure

Typical script “coverage” report

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Concept			x	
Character		x		
Dialogue	x			
Structure				x
Emotional engagement				x

Why we need structure

- No structure, no emotion
- No emotion, no audience
- No audience, you have to go back to working for a living

Why we need structure

- How we engage the audience
- How we escalate tension
- How we modulate the tension
- How we create unbearable tension
- How Scheherazade kept her head connected to her shoulders
- How we deliver catharsis
- What separates professional writer from the amateur
- Want to write movies for a living? Must master structure

3 act structure basics

- Act 1
 - The beginning
- Act 2
 - The middle
- Act 3
 - The end

3 act structure basics

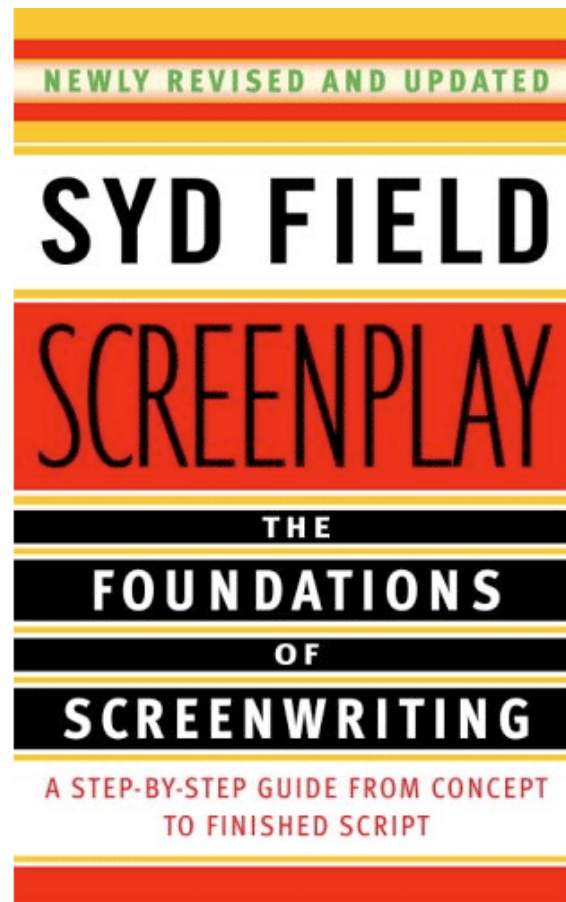
- Act 1
 - Engage the audience
- Act 2
 - Explore and escalate the conflict (and leave us dangling)
- Act 3
 - Resolve conflict (and deliver catharsis)

Is 3 Act Structure enough?

- 90-110 pages
- 3 acts
- Enough guidance?
- If it is, you don't need me
- Mere mortals need help

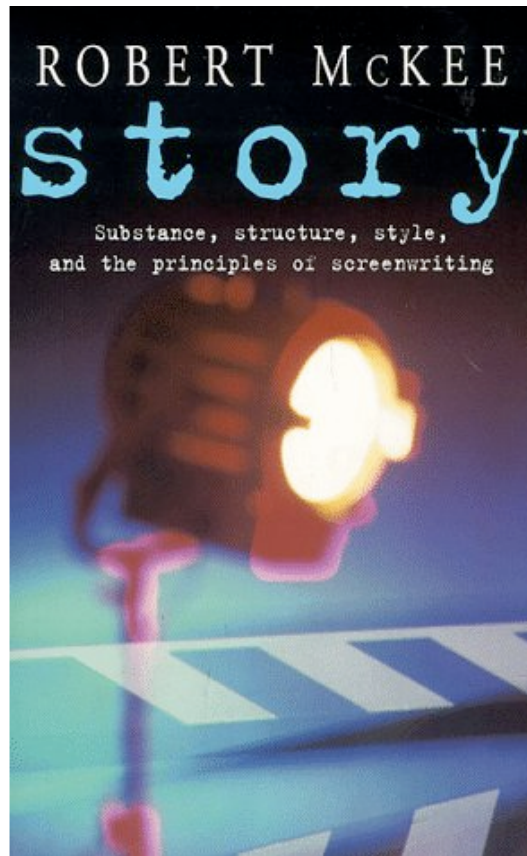
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Story Paradigms



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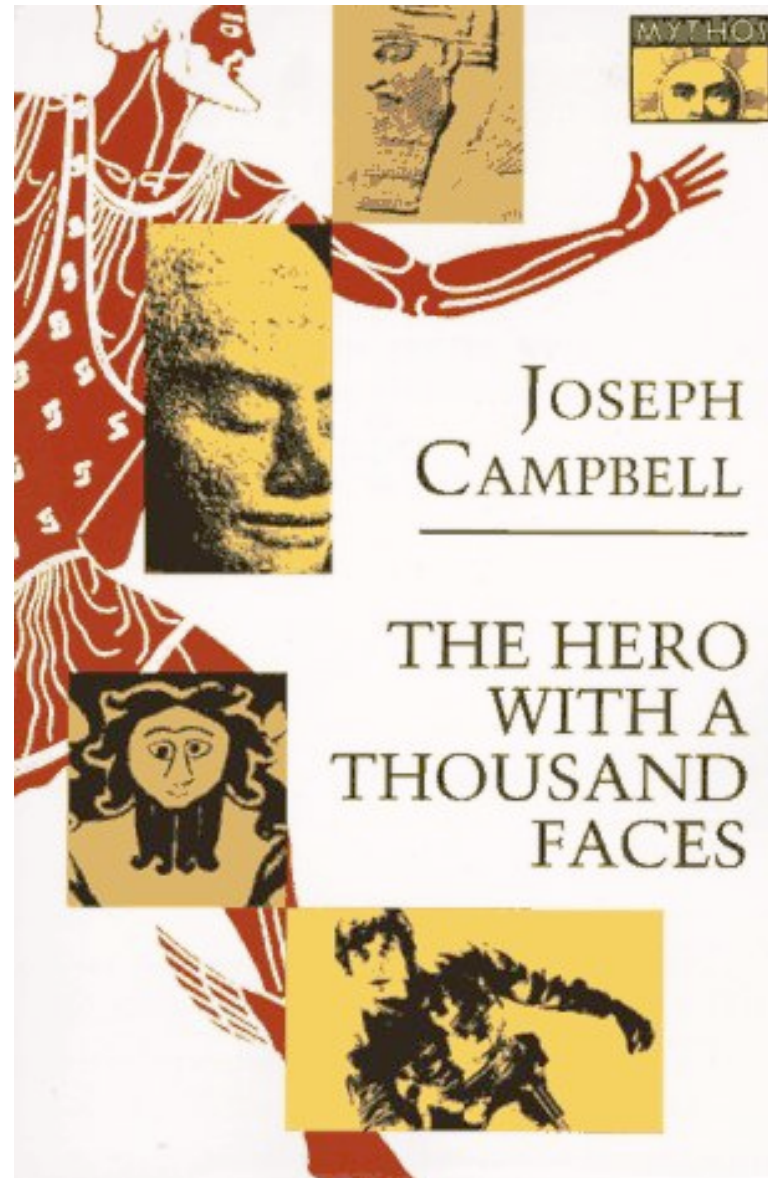
Story Paradigms



Other theorists I'd recommend

- Aristotle's Poetics
- Lajos Egri
- John Truby
- Michael Hauge
- Eugene Vale
- Frank Daniel
- But ahead of all of them ...

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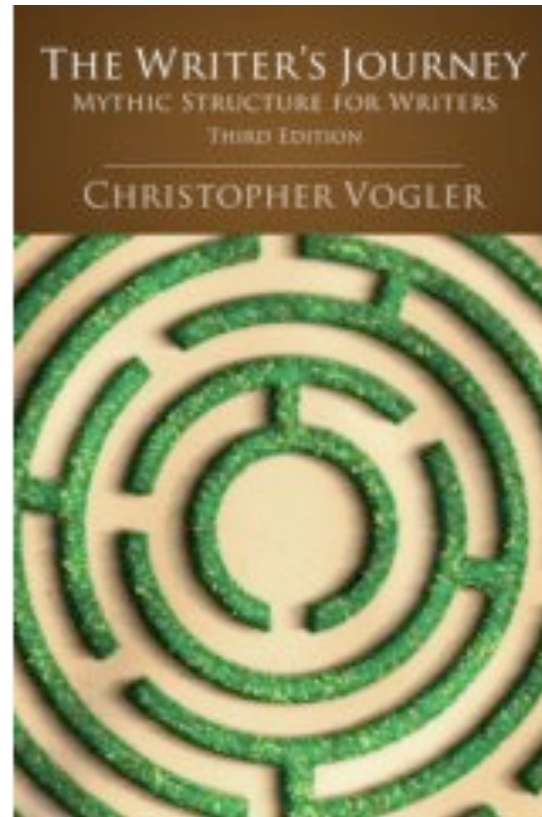


Campbell's Monomyth

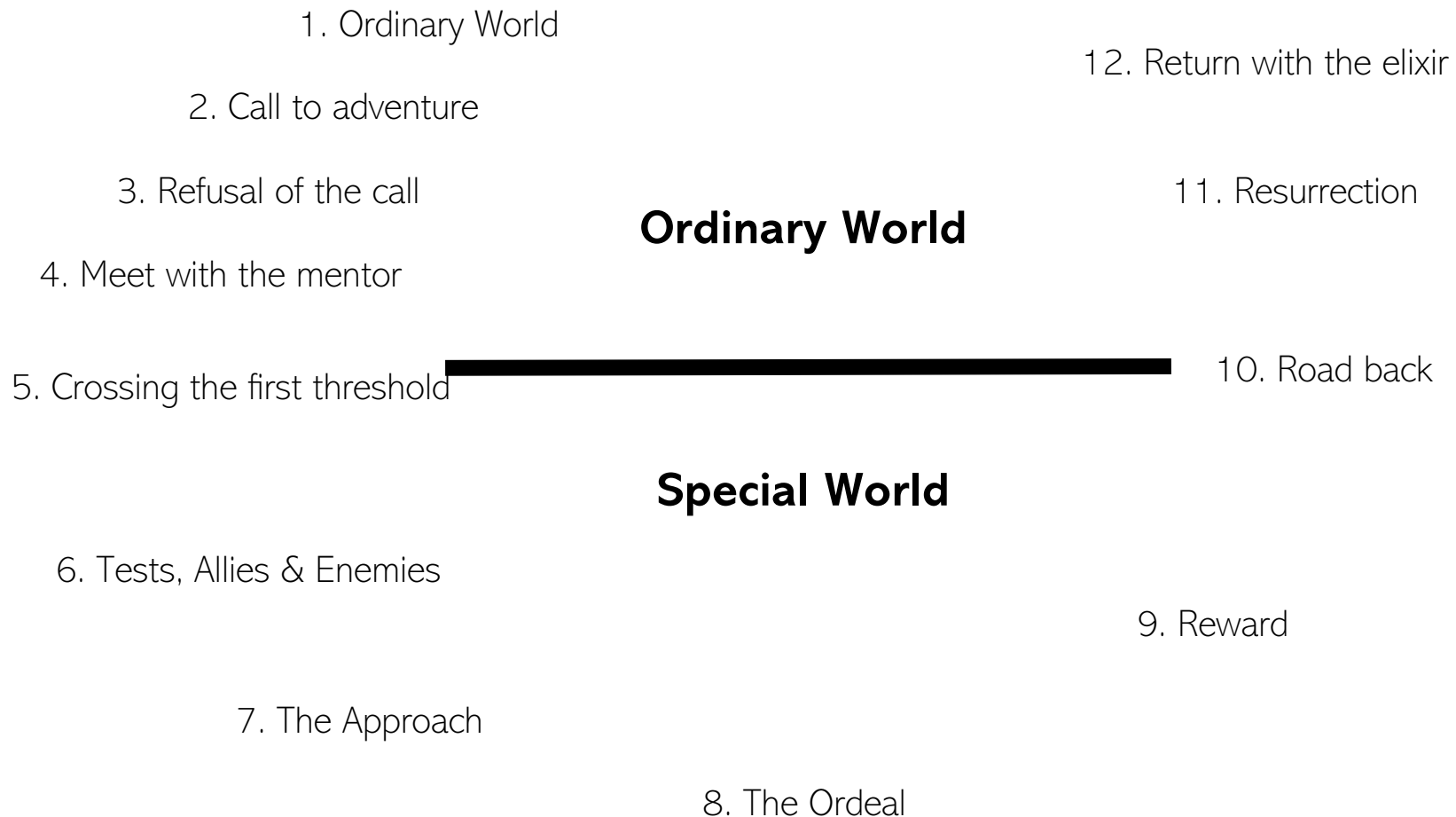
- “A hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”

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The Writer's Journey



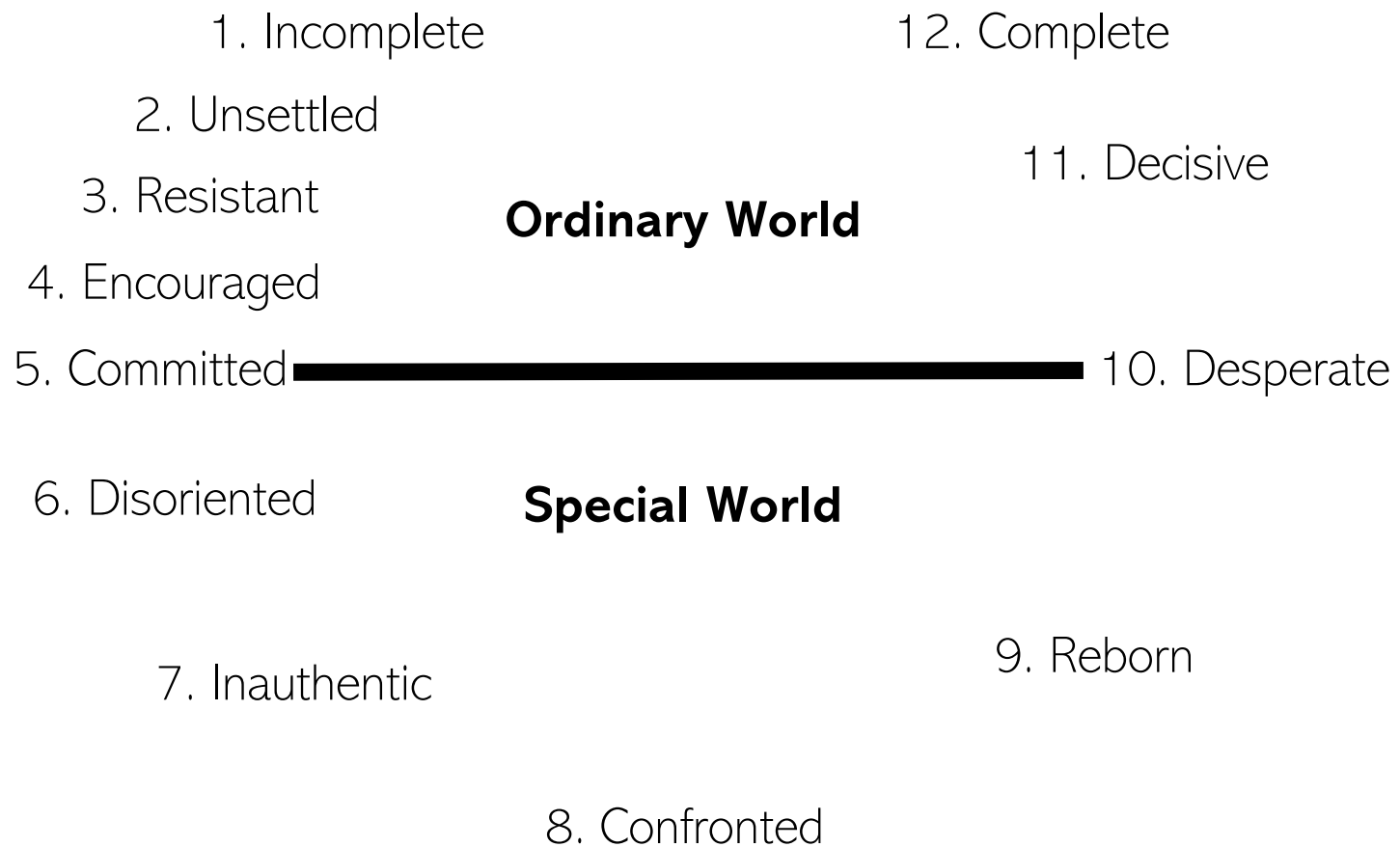
Vogler's Hero's Journey



What might put you off

- Warrior metaphors?
- Constant references to Wizard of Oz?
- Formulaic?
- Plot over character?

Hero's Emotional Journey



Why Hero's Journey?

- Helps guide you through 110 pages
- Not invented. Only identified.
- Delivers catharsis - stories with emotional impact
- It works
- It's true to life

Course Plan - Saturday

- 9:30 - 11.00 What do audiences want?
- 11.15 - 12.45 Hero's Journey Steps 1-5
- 1.30 - 3.00 Hero's Journey Steps 6-9
- 3.15 - 5.00 Hero's Journey Steps 10-12



Course Plan - Sunday

- 9:30 - 11.00 Concept
- 11.15 - 12.45 Character
- 1.30 - 3.00 Scene writing & Dialogue
- 3.15 - 5.00 Concept to screenplay

Expectations

- Introduction
 - Won't explore anything in great detail
- Knowledge not practice
 - How to write, very little actual writing
- 2 days won't be enough
- 2 years won't be enough
- Want to get rich quick? Buy a Lotto ticket
- Course is to start true believers on your way ...

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Why am I here?

- Talent spotting for AFTRS Grad Cert Screenwriting

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Next Session

- Session 2 Hero's Journey Steps 1 - 5
- Starts at 11.15am sharp