

A GALAXY OF STORIES

Hannah Foulger

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...

Any treatise of the history of filmmaking would be remiss to mention the influence of George Lucas. Director/creator of the Star Wars universe (which spans movies, TV shows, video games, comic books, toys, and more), Lucas initiated a world of storytelling with one screenplay about a hero named Luke Starkiller (before the fortunate revision to Luke Skywalker). Lucas was two drafts in when he discovered Joseph Campbell's *Hero of a Thousand Faces*, which explained Joseph Campbell's theory of the *monomyth*, also known as the Hero's Journey. Simply put, Joseph Campbell analysed myths from around the world and concluded that they all had the same basic three-act structure of departure, initiation, and return. Lucas used the Hero's Journey to structure *Star Wars*, which gave the film a sense of universal mythos

and contributed to the film's unprecedented success.

In 1990, 13 years after the original release of *Star Wars*, Robert McKee, a Disney employee, caught wind of Lucas' plan and read *Hero of a Thousand Faces*. He realized that the value of Joseph Campbell's monomyth and sent out a memo that said this was how all films should be written from then on.

Not only did the Hero's Journey become industry standard, but it launched

Robert McKee's career. His book *Story* is the screenwriting bible for the modern filmmaker and McKee has taught workshops and master classes on screenwriting and storytelling around the world, to writers of all types.

One cannot deny the influence of Campbell, Lucas, and McKee across the disciplines. I often refer back to the Hero's Journey while in the initial stages of plot development and most films can be charted along the Hero's Journey, as well as



many novels and plays.

But there is a problem with the Hero's Journey.

The reason this form has been told again and again, all through the stages of humanity's development, is that it conceptualizes the myth of achievement and endings. The [Freytag's pyramid](#) structure – in which someone works hard, accomplishes their goal in a tense, conflicted climax, and things resolve, and to which the monomyth adheres – is wishful thinking.

Things don't operate like that in real life. One achievement begets another trial after another. There is rarely a throughline we can follow chapter to chapter in our lives for one specific goal. There are millions within one lifetime. Even love isn't a finality. E.M. Forester, in his

book *Aspects of the Novel*, writes: "Love, like death, is congenial to a novelist because it ends a book conveniently. He can make it a permanency and his readers easily acquiesce because one of the illusions of love and attachment to love is that it will be permanent."

Anyone who has been in a relationship knows that, when two people get together, it is hardly the end of a story. Even if you don't subscribe to Forester's pessimistic ideology, you understand that a relationship is hardly the end of conflict.

This idea of a beginning, achievement, and end, is a myth in itself. A story like this is comforting because it gives us the illusion that our own lives have that kind of structure.

The monomyth is especially useful in Western storytelling because it upholds the capitalist ideal that, as the main character of your own story, if you work hard, you will conquer your enemies and return home to the love and affection of your peers. However, we know that working hard is never a guarantee of success.

As comforting as the monomyth is, it is, like every story, a comforting illusion of certainty in an uncertain world.

Though Lucas relied on the Hero's Journey, the Star Wars universe also supersedes it, containing multiple

journeys over much time and space. One story of three friends – Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa, and Han Solo – begat a universe of stories, often around the Jedi Order, the dangers of the Sith, and the mystery of the Force. The Hero's Journey is repeated, expanded, and problematized by the loose structure defined by video games and hundreds of comic books and novels.

The story continues in 1,000 ways. Lives, and the universe, expand. One trilogy of films cannot contain it all. 



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