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Dynamic Story Creation

Part Three

The Physical Layer & The Hero's Journey

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The Big Question

What does this do for my story?

In everything you learn in this industry, always test it before you change your entire manuscript. Even if something works for another writer, it does not mean it will work for you. Remember, creativity is subjective. - DRAKE

“We’re not on our journey to save the world, but to save ourselves. But in doing that, we save the world.”

- Joseph Campbell 1904 – 1987
(The Power of Myth)

A Story is Two Layers

The Invisible Layer – the message of the story readers unknowingly consume.

The Physical Layer – Are you kidding? Fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, true love, miracles...

The Invisible Layer – very formulaic, and always follows very similar patterns.

The Physical Layer – what makes your story different from all other stories.

The Character = The Reader

All this harkens back to what I feel is the KEY – It's all about the reader.

Sure, you create a character to be affected by the events of your plot, but the reader does not care about any of that.

In Speculative Fiction, what you're really doing is creating a shell that the reader BECOMES. And Readers want to be affected by the journey they take as your character.

It's Why and the Affect, Not How or What

In other words, readers don't care about the details of how a character goes about overcoming the obstacles of your plot nor what they do next. They care about WHY the characters do what they do, and how it AFFECTS them and the world around them.

If a reader can't relate to the WHY, or if they aren't moved by how things are AFFECTED, they will not enjoy reading your story.

Create a story that resonates with the reader

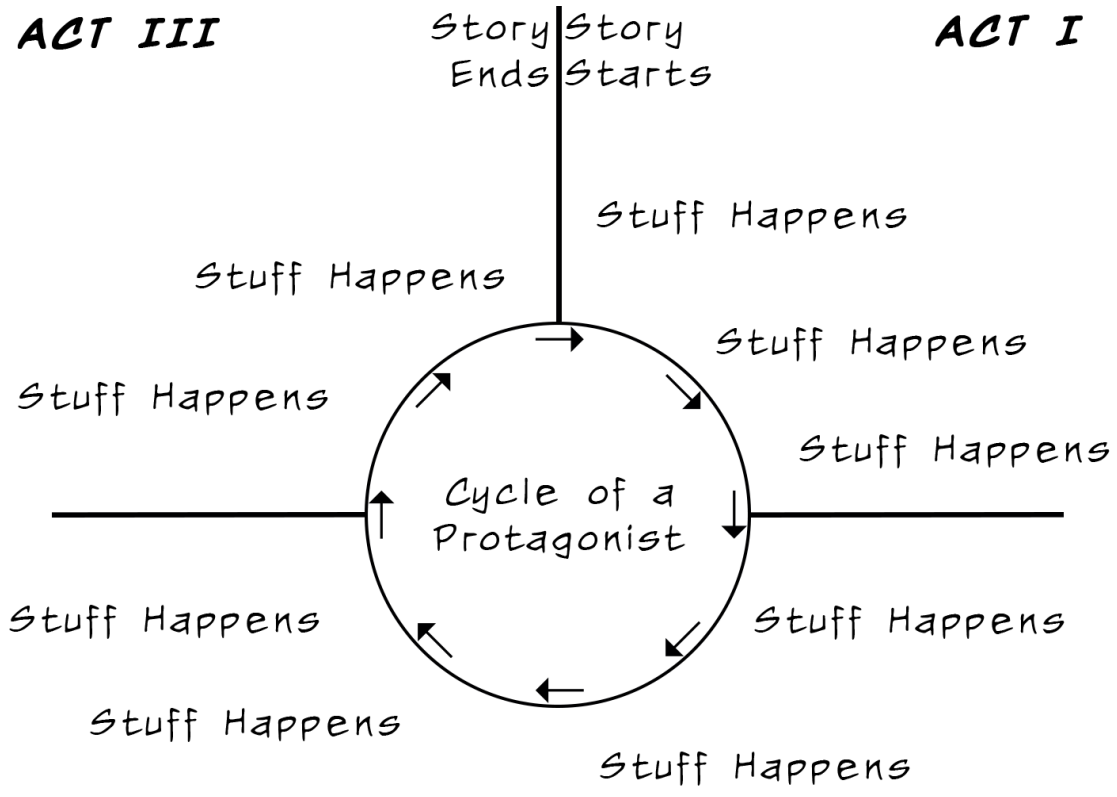
Throughout the ages, the fundamentals of storytelling have not changed. There are common threads through every story that will reach out and grab the imagination of the reader.

Joseph Campbell - The Hero with 1000 faces

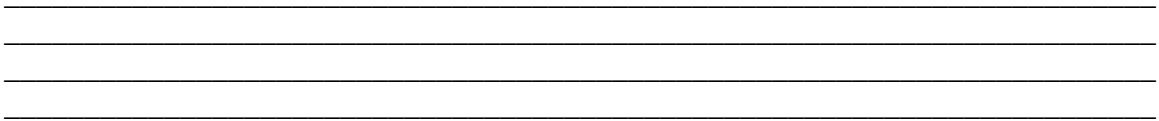
ACT III

Story Ends | Story Starts

ACT I

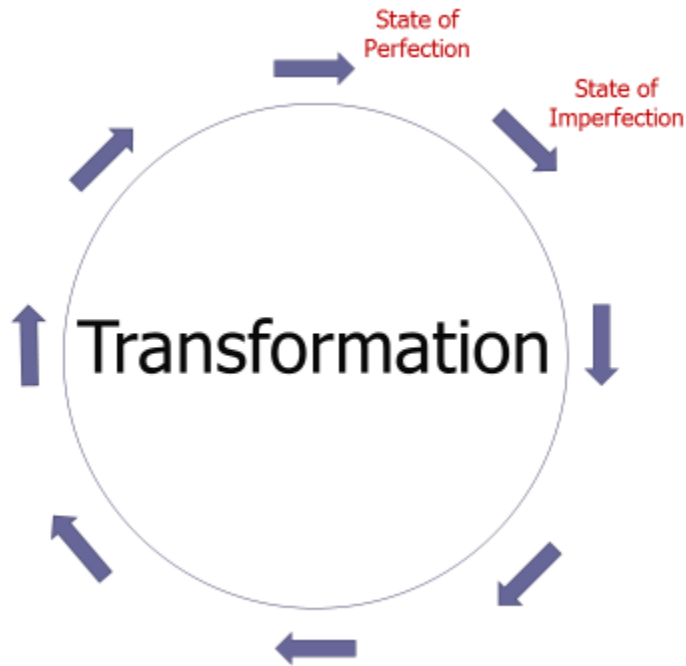


ACT II



Transformation

- 1) Transform on the Invisible Layer (Theme)
 - 2) Transform on the Physical Layer
 - 1) Transform their View of the World
 - 2) Transform their Physical Location
 - 3) Transform their Social Standing
 - 4) Transform into Something New
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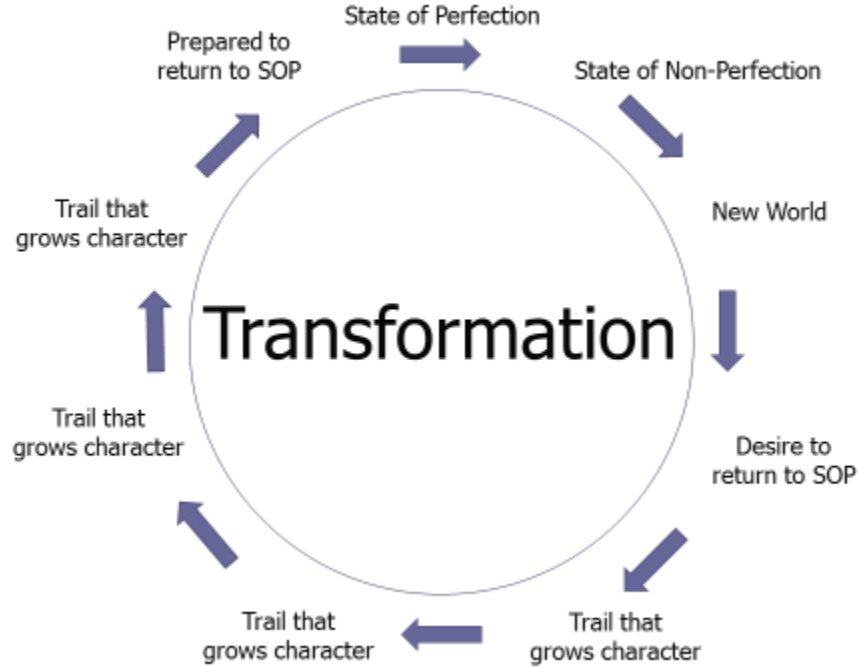


Benchmarks

All stories must start in either the State of Perfection or the State of Imperfection so you can setup the benchmarks readers need to get their emotional fulfillment from the story.

- 1) Builds empathy between reader and story
- 2) Let's Reader understand what the character feels is "perfect"
- 3) Lets the reader care about what is about to be/already lost
- 4) Lets the reader understand the character's motivation – what they want to return to
- 5) Gives the reader what they need to know when the character returns to their SOP

What Really Happens is Transformation



How do we use the Monomyth?

The Hero's Journey... Drake's 16-step guide (that he mostly stole from others) to the life and times of your Hero.

Keep in mind, a list is a good place to start. None of this has to be in the order presented. None of it is the "be all, end all" of storytelling. This is a skeleton you can hang your story on. Nothing more. Use whatever you want that follows, use them multiple times, move them to different acts. It is all your call depending on what you are trying to give to the reader. The READER is all that matters.

Let us set the basics

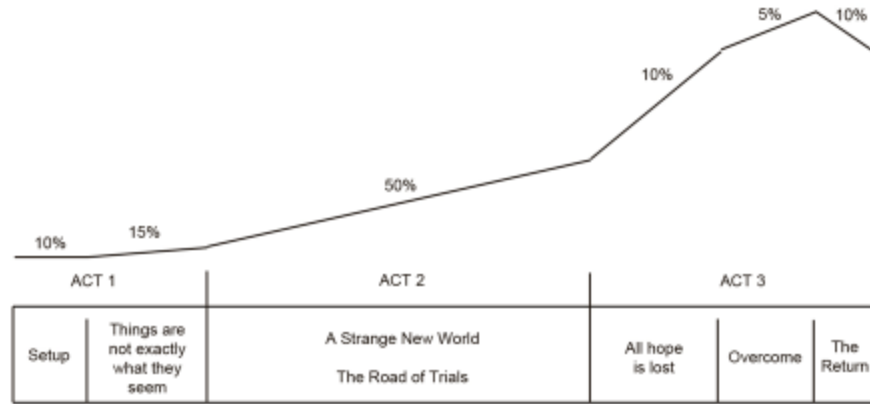
Most stories follow a three act Structure

Act 1 – This is your origin section of your story

Act 2 – This is the questing section of your story

Act 3 – This is the resolution section of your story

ACT ONE



Act One

Thinking Point One – Creating the “Every Man”

What is the world like that our hero comes from?

What is his home life like?

What is his job?

What can you do to connect the reader to this hero?

You know, all the mundane things that will help the reader relate to the character.

What this really does is set a benchmark. A place the reader can understand is “normal”.

How does this help Transformation?

The lower they start, the higher they can grow.

Luke – moisture farmer (And who among us has not farmed moisture?)

Frodo – living in the shire, helping his uncle with the day-to-day errands

Thinking Point Two – The Call to Adventure

Something comes along and pulls the hero from his mundane world and thrusts them into the “special” world of your story.

This is the event that gets them into the story, or takes them out of whatever you established as normal and comfortable for the character.

How does this help Transformation?

Foreshadowing that bad things are coming. If done right, it gets the reader concerned about what the POV character is about to lose.

Luke – buys a droid, finds a message, “Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, you’re our only hope” (the real Call to Adventure moment is Obi-Wan telling him to join the rebellion.)

Frodo – given a magical ring and is then told he is being hunted and must run for his life

Thinking Point Three – Refusal of the Call

For this to be an epic quest, the hero must be called to do something that is beyond them. Something he does not currently have the ability to do.

How does this help Transformation?

People resist change.

Luke – Obi-Wan says, let’s go deliver this message. Luke says no. When his family is killed, he is forced to go. (Notice this is just a baby step to the actual call to action, which is that Luke is going to destroy the Death Star.)

This does not have to be a refusal, could just be a momentary pause of, “Oh crap, this is big” to let the reader *feel* the enormity of the situation.

Frodo – after Gandalf gets him ready, he stops and looks around his house.

It’s just that time to let your readers know that what is about to happen is really big, really dangerous, and really about to happen.

Thinking Point Four – The Outside Aid

Someone or something shows up just in time to set the hero on the path to start gaining what they will need to overcome the obstacles ahead.

How does this help Transformation?

Gives believable growth.

Luke – has Obi-Wan and gains Han. Obi-Wan is like, here is your father’s light saber, here is how to use the force.

Frodo – Gandalf starts him on his way, oh, and here is Samwise whom you will need, oh and find Strider, oh and go with him to Rivendale and the Elves.

So, up to now, these are really just plot elements that set up the story. For the most part, the above is happening in the “normal world” where we found our hero at the start of the story.

It is now time to let the reader know they need to buckle up, because Kansas is going bye-bye.

Thinking Point Five – The Belly of the Whale

Now our hero has everything they need to cross that threshold from his normal, mundane world to that “special” world that will be the playground for the remainder of our story.

Like Jonah, our hero has been swallowed by destiny and is now being spit out into a new world.

He does not have what he needs to win the final battle. But, he is not the same person we met at the beginning of the story.

How does this help Transformation?

Blowing up the POV character’s world and replacing it with something new.

Luke – Luke, Han, and the gang are all in the M.F. laughing it up. Han is waxing all philosophical about his jaded views of the universe and Obi-Wan is all like, use the force, Luke. Then they drop out of hyperspace and BAM! Rocks, asteroids, tie-fighters, Death Star. (Welcome to act 2)

Frodo – He is healed and united with his friends in Rivendale. They have completed their mission and are going home. Then, BAM! Everyone is arguing and fighting, and Frodo knows they will use the ring instead of destroying it, and it will eventually fall into Sauron’s hands. (Welcome to act 2)

From here, things tend to go downhill really fast for our heroes.

This is normally the point where act one ends and act two begins. The calm before the storm, as it were. During the first five steps, you are introducing your other characters, pointing to your subplots, and hinting at the big nasty antagonist behind all the bad stuff that has been rolling our hero’s way.

Act Two

The Gauntlet or The Road of Trials

This is not really a step. Or, it is, just broken down into several mini-steps that will follow. But, basically, your hero has the fundamentals of what they need to start their quest. They have left their comfort zone and are starting to dive into the meat of your story. But, they don't have everything they need to win. Stage six (and act two in general) is where your hero goes on their "mini-quests" and gains the rest of what is needed to get the final job done.

Luke – has to escape the Death Star, rescue the princess, join up with the rebels, learn to fly a fighter, grow, gain a reason to hate the empire, gain some friends, learn more about the force and destroy the Death Star.

Frodo – cross the world, avoid basically everything, and drop the ring into the volcano

Act 2 is all about doing things. Remember, this is Drama! Just as you must show your plot progression, you must show your hero's growth progression.

In your plot, you are doing things, like physically moving your characters to where they need to be, and you also need to be doing the same thing with their inner growth.

This is where you will have the majority of your "internal arc" plots taking place. Or your smaller, more personal stories. Your budding romances, your friendships, your heroes gaining the small things they need, etc.

SW – Luke and Obi-Wan develop their father/son relationship. The Luke, Han, Lea love triangle develops. We learn that Wookies are poor losers.

LOTR – we gain some weapons, Gimly finds out what happened to his uncle in Moria, Gandalf finds out Saromon is bad.

Remember, a hero needs to make sacrifices. If you let your hero skate along your readers will quickly lose interest in them and see them as a spoiled brat who gets anything they want.

Conflict is the name of this game.

George Polti wrote "the 36 dramatic situations." I recommend it.

Thinking Point Six – For Love and Honor

One plot device that is a wonderful motivator for a hero is Love – specifically the desire to rescue or protect. It may seem cliché, but it is not only a believable plot device, it is one that grows your character.

How does this help Transformation?

Gives believable, organic device to force the character to change and grow.

Luke – Luke has a crush on Lea from her message. When he finds out she is on the Death Star and going to be killed, this attraction helps him man up and go rescue her.

Frodo – It is Frodo's love of his friends that spurns him to leave them behind.

Thinking Point Seven – Mother as Goddess

The hero, to become complete and overcome the ultimate challenge of the plot, needs to mature, or to unite their masculine and feminine sides. Become whole and comfortable with who they are.

Our Masculine side contains the aggressive, focused, conquering traits.

Our Feminine side contains our soft, nurturing, contemplative traits.

For a hero to beat the bad guy, they need both to become whole.

This could come from a brush with the opposite sex, a mother figure (father for female), or anything that can open our hero's eyes to whatever trait they have not been using thus far.

How does this help Transformation?

Gives the hero whichever side they don't have.

Luke – It is Luke's willingness to "trust the force" that allows him to destroy the Death Star.

Frodo – He is more passive in the beginning. It is not until towards the end when he realizes he must fight if he is to succeed.

Thinking Point Eight – Atonement of the Father

The hero finally comes face to face with his antagonist. This is a big growing point for our hero, as he is forced to face his future, and it is not all that bright.

How does this help Transformation?

The reader needs to see that your POV character's understanding of the situation is growing.

Luke – Luke is taken in by the empire and realizes how big the threat really is.

They destroyed an entire planet!

Obi-Wan – confronts Darth Vader

Frodo – puts on the ring and looks directly into the eye of Sauron. On Weathertop, he is attacked and stabbed by the Ring Wraiths

Thinking Point Nine – Temptation

Something comes along to try and lure our hero off his path, or into destruction, or at the least, pull him away from his goal.

Readers want us to test our hero. Show them, hey, he's gotten all these mondo cool powers, weapons, etc. What would happen if he wasn't the good boy we thought he was? How easy would it be for him to abuse what he is gaining?

How does this help Transformation?

Nothing transforms a person like either getting kicked in the teeth, or having to fight for your convictions.

Luke – faces the dark side

Frodo – slips into being more and more like Golem

Thinking Point Ten – The Whiff of Death

There comes a point where you have to take things to the ultimate level. Things must become deadly for your hero.

This can be a near death experience for the hero, the hero making a choice that causes the death of another, the hero watching another's death, the death of a piece of the hero's personality, the loss of something irreplaceable.

How does this help Transformation?

To overcome the final conflict, the POV character can't fear losing, or it will paralyze them.

Luke – Obi-Wan is killed by Darth Vader

Frodo – Ring Wraths almost killed him

This is mostly all going on during Act 2. But, the hero is still not ready. They still do not have what they need to beat that bad guy. So, at some point in your story, you should be getting to the middle of Act 2.

Thinking Point Eleven – The Ultimate Boon

The ultimate boon is that turning point in the hero's quest where he finds the one thing every hero needs – the ability to believe in himself.

This usually happens during the middle/last half of Act 2.

It is the fundamental mental turning point for our hero. The point where he says to himself, "I can do this."

How does this help Transformation?

This lets the reader and the POV character both feel like they got this. In ACT III, when they both discover how wrong they are, this is a wonderful emotional rollercoaster ride for the reader.

SW – Luke has gotten the Light Saber, R2D2, Death Star plans, a rebel army at his back... but it is not until he lets go of his disbelief of the force, and truly comes to terms with the fact that he can use it, that he has any chance of blowing up the Death Star.

LOTR – Frodo gets the sword, the magic ring, the elven food, the elven rope, aid to the foot of Mordor... but until he comes to terms with the fact that he is the ONLY one who can take this ring, and that all the others will eventually try and stop him, is he able to head into Mordor.

This brings us to the end of Act 2. The hero is now standing on the threshold of taking on the plot head-on. He has the tools he needs (and he earned them, so the readers are proud of him). He has grown and matured to the point he needs to be (and the readers have joined him in that growth). He is ready. And he knows it. Act 3 is all about “doing it.”

Act Three

Thinking Point Twelve – The Refusal of the Return

Your hero is larger than life. This is great, because you want a powerful hero. But, have you made them un-identifiable to your readers.

Your hero needs a moment of pause. Either to have some self-doubt, to wonder if all the world is ready (or does it deserve) this new power (or weapon or item) he has found, even just an, “Oh, crap. After I do this, I’ve got to go back to farming? How can I do that?”

How does this help Transformation?

It shows self-doubt, which everyone has. This is a backward slide for the POV character, and one the reader will relate to.

Luke – has to deal with Han declining the offer to join the Rebels, and leaving.
Frodo – The hundreds of times he says, “I can’t do this. I thought I could, but I can’t”.

Thinking Point Thirteen – All Hope is Lost

The hero has stirred up a hornet's nest getting the tools he needs. Now the repercussions of these actions are going to come around and bite him in the butt.

Your villain has not been idle. They are still playing this game to win.

This is the moment that comes in every story where we are going to convince the reader that they hero, even after all this effort, is going to lose.

How does this help Transformation?

This is the proverbial yanking of the rug out from under both the POV character and the reader.

Luke – even after all he went through, once Darth Vader is on his tail in the trenches of the Death Star, Luke is going to die and fail.

Frodo – even after all he went through, by the time he gets to the base of Mount Doom, the ring has corrupted him too much to continue. Frodo lays down and there is no doubt he is going to die and fail.

Thinking Point Fourteen – Rescue from Without

To start them off, the hero needed a mentor. Now they have gotten their boons, stirred up the hornet's nest... They might need a little help.

How does this help Transformation?

Shows the POV character is not invulnerable. As with the Outside Aid, this gives a believable growth point for our POV character.

Luke – Darth Vader is going to kill Luke, no doubt about it. Yet, here comes Han to save the day.

Frodo – The Ring wins, no doubt about it. Yet, here comes Samwise to save the day.

Thinking Point Fifteen – Master of Two Worlds

The hero has reached a point where they can defeat the evil and overcome the plot because they have learned to master both the world around them, and what is inside of them.

They have combined the lessons from the “normal” world they came from with the lessons from the “special” world of the story.

The hero has reached a new understanding of himself, the world around him, and how he fits into it. They can take all the boons and experience from the story and become the man/woman that the reader has been hoping they would become.

This is the turning point where the hero is truly free. Free to live without fear of failure, even death. The unbelievably huge task from the beginning of the story - the thing the hero knew he could not overcome - this is when it becomes achievable.

Do not give this to your hero until the very bitter end. If you give this to your hero too soon, he does not earn the victory.

How does this help Transformation?

Are you kidding? This is when the POV character has finally become the hero we have been hoping they would become. Many times, this means they have completed their transformation into something totally new.

Luke – he trusts the force, turns off the computer, and blows up the Death Star
Frodo – (Samwise cannot destroy the ring – he is not the hero) He overcomes the ring’s influence, runs into the volcano, fights off Golem, and casts the ring into the fire.

Thinking Point Sixteen – The New Hero

Your hero now has to find his place in this new “special” world.

This is the tie up section. It is not really about the hero so much as the reader.

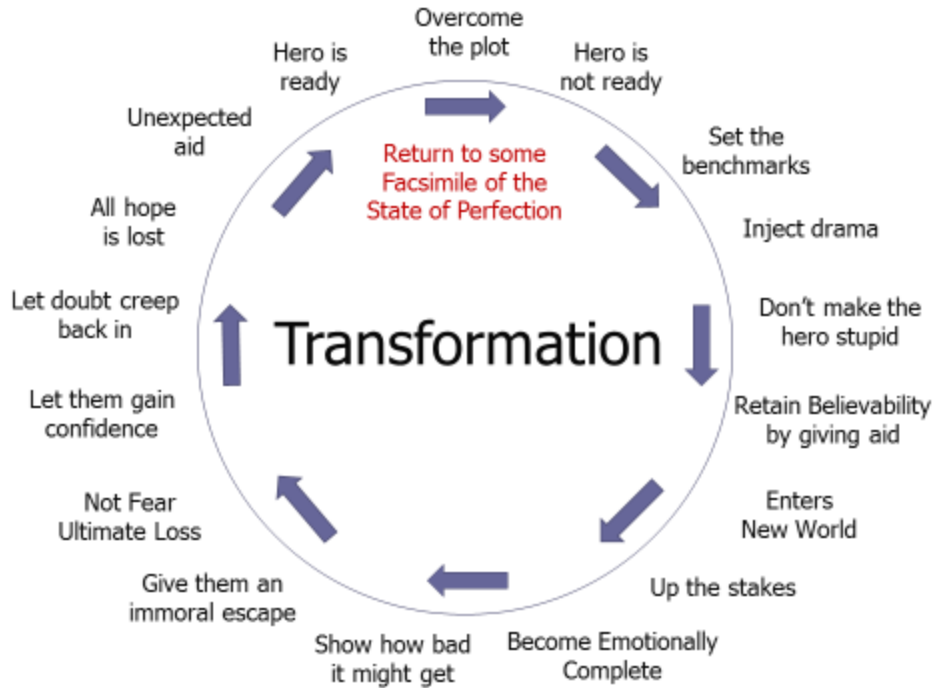
For me, there is nothing worse than a story ending after the crescendo. It is a let down. I feel cheated. Your readers have invested a considerable amount of time in your story. I feel you owe them the part about what happens next. How does the Hero return home? How do his friends and family react to them? How does he react to his friends and family?

How does this help Transformation?

Now the POV character has to return to the ordinary world. What will it be like?

Luke – this happens as the saga continues, but by the end he is forced to exile himself because the universe just can’t handle a Jedi.

Frodo – when they return home, they find that an Orc has taken control of the shire.



End

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you found it informative. I have started a blog dedicated to the discussion of the craft of writing. If you have specific questions, please send them to me at author@maxadrake.com and I will include them on blog.maxwellalexanderdrake.com.

I am on Facebook /MaxwellAlexanderDrake, Twitter @MaxwellADrake, and Instagram /maxwellalexanderdrake. Please look me up.

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