

THE PROTAGONIST'S JOURNEY PART THREE: BREAKING STORY

Willamette Writers Conference
Master Class

1:30PM-3:00PM

“SUICIDE 21”

Logline: Assisted suicide is legal for adults over 21. A young man and woman meet at a death clinic and decide to spend their last hours together. **Writer:** Greg Wayne **Genre:** Science Fiction Thriller **Production Companies:** Catapult Entertainment Group, Needle’s Eye Productions **Date:** 7/26/2018. **Notes:** Writer conceived, developed, and wrote the script in the 24 week The Quest master class with Scott Myers.

IF YOU DO THE WORK, IT WORKS.



**STAGE I:
PROTAGONIST CHARACTER
TREATMENT**

PROTAGONIST CHARACTER TREATMENT

- Who is my Protagonist?
- What does my Protagonist want?
- What does my Protagonist need?
- Who is trying to stop my Protagonist from attaining their goal?
- What is at stake for the Protagonist?
- What is your sense of the eventual outcome in terms of the Protagonist's Want and the Protagonist's Need?
- What does the Protagonist fear the most?
- Why does this story have to happen to this character (Protagonist) at this time?

Protagonist Character Treatment

Title: Up

Logline: A grief-stricken widower flies his balloon house to South America only to discover new friends and challenges on his adventure.

Who is my Protagonist?

Carl Fredricksen.

What does my Protagonist want?

After Ellie dies, he wants to live out the string of his days and join his deceased wife Ellie.

By the end of Act One, his Conscious Goal is to get his balloon house to Paradise Falls to fulfill his promise to Ellie.

What does my Protagonist need?

To be left alone.

By the end of Act One, his Unconscious Goal is to rediscover his zest for life and meaning for living.

Who is trying to stop my Protagonist from attaining their goal?

Although Russell, Kevin, and Dug play their part in creating obstacles, the real Nemesis is Charles Muntz.

What is your sense of the eventual outcome in terms of the Protagonist's Want and the Protagonist's Need? Will those aspects synthesize in a way that the Protagonist will achieve their goal and some sort of unity state -- or not?

Carl's need supplants his want, specifically he discovers a surrogate family in Russell, Dug, and even Kevin to fill the void left by Ellie's death.

Screenwriter Robert Towne (Chinatown) suggested that one of the best ways to get at the core of a character is to ask: "What are they afraid of?" So pose these questions to your Protagonist: What do you fear most? What scares you at the core of your being?

He fears having to live without Ellie as she provided meaning to his existence. However his new surrogate family gives new meaning to his life, leading to his 'resurrection'.

Then ask this question from your perspective as the story's writer: Why does this story have to happen to this character (Protagonist) at this time? Imagine that your Protagonist has been living their life in their story universe up until this very moment. You are choosing to start telling their story here and now. Why? What has happened in the Protagonist's life that necessitates you to type FADE IN and tell their story?

Ellie's death creates a void which is unsustainable. He needs to change or continue on a slow descent to his own death.

**STAGE 2:
BRAINSTORMING**

BRAINSTORMING GOALS

- Engage your creative self with your story and you best do that through your characters.
- The next level is to track where your brainstorming takes you.
- Engender and respect the *organic* part of brainstorming.

- What other **characters** -- primary, secondary, tertiary -- inhabit this world?
- What critical **events** -- both major and minor plot points -- are there?
- What **themes** start to emerge?

- Master Brainstorming List

MASTER BRAINSTORMING LIST

- Questionnaire
- Biography
- Free Scene
- Interview
- Monologue
- Stream Consciousness

Everything you brainstorm goes into this list. All your character work, plotting, scene ideas, themes, anything and everything goes here. That way, you have it all in one place.

INDIRECT ENGAGEMENT EXERCISES

- Questionnaire
- Biography
- Free Scene

- Goal: Think about them to get them to come to life.

QUESTIONNAIRE

- What is their name?
How old are they?
How would they describe their physical appearance?
How do they feel about the way they look?
- Who are their parents?
Describe their relationship with their mother.
Describe their relationship with their father.
- Who is the most important person in their life? Why?
Are they in love?
If so, describe their lover and their relationship with them.
If not, why not?
Describe what their soul-mate would be like?
- Do they believe in God?
If so, describe their relationship with God.
If not, why not?
When did they stop believing in God?
Do they consider themselves to be an optimist or a pessimist? Why?

BIOGRAPHY

In taking on the role of biographer, you strive to assemble details of a character's life into a chronology. Here is a list of subject areas posed as questions you may use as prompts:

- **Who are they?** Origins, ancestry, life goals.
- **Why are they?** Upbringing, education, seminal moments.
- **Where are they?** Neighborhood, travel, subcultural influences.
- **How are they?** Temperament, personality, character flaws.

Over time, you start to stitch together bits and pieces of what you learn about a character into a coherent biography.

FREE SCENE

Another way to get at a character is to write a scene in which they are a participant. Create a scenario which might arise out of their life experience in which they engage with at least one other character. As you write the free scene, you act as an observer, recounting in words what you see and hear transpiring in the individuals' interactions. Do not be concerned whether the scene will have any direct bearing on your story. The point of this exercise is merely to set two characters into motion, then see what they do with each other.

Instead of answering a questionnaire or writing a biography about a someone, by writing a free scene, you draw closer to their inner world: *Why are they saying what they are saying? Why are they doing what they are doing? What are they thinking? What are they feeling?*

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT EXERCISES

- Interview
- Monologue
- Stream of Consciousness

Goal: Not talking about them, but talking with them, talking to you.



INTERVIEW

CHARACTER SIT-DOWN: MONOLOGUE

“Michael. Dear Michael. Of course it's you, who else could they send, who else could be trusted? I... I know it's a long way and you're ready to go to work... all I'm saying is wait, just wait, just-just-just... please hear me out because this is not an episode, relapse, fuck-up, it's... I'm begging you Michael. I'm begging you. Try and make believe this is not just madness because this is not just madness. Two weeks ago I came out of the building, okay, I'm running across Sixth Avenue, there's a car waiting, I got exactly 38 minutes to get to the airport and I'm dictating. There's this, this panicked associate sprinting along beside me, scribbling in a notepad, and suddenly she starts screaming, and I realize we're standing in the middle of the street, the light's changed, there's this wall of traffic, serious traffic speeding towards us, and I... I-I freeze, I can't move, and I'm suddenly consumed with the overwhelming sensation that I'm covered with some sort of film...”

-- *Michael Clayton*

CHARACTER SIT-DOWN: STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

“Nonsense you look like a girl you are lots younger than Candace color in your cheeks like a girl A face reproachful tearful an odor of camphor and of tears a voice weeping steadily and softly beyond the twilit door the twilight-colored smell of honey suckle. Bringing empty trunks down the attic stairs they sounded like coffins.”

– *As I Lay Dying*, William Faulkner

INDIRECT ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE BIOGRAPHY

Who are they? Origins, ancestry, life goals.

Why are they? Upbringing, education, seminal moments.

Where are they? Neighborhood, travel, subcultural influences.

How are they? Temperament, personality, character flaws.

Spend 10 minutes thinking about a character and their background.

**INDIRECT ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE
WORKSHOP**

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE INTERVIEW

- You are interviewing them for a job.
- You're out on a date and getting to know them.
- You're a police detective interrogating them.
- You're a psychiatrist with a client.

Spend 10 minutes interviewing a character about who they are.

**DIRECT ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE
WORKSHOP**

RECEPTIVE WRITING AND EXECUTIVE WRITING

- Inside the story universe / Outside the story universe
- Both aspects of the writing process are critical. It is imperative for us to engage our characters directly and immerse ourselves in their lives, so that we open ourselves to them — in other words, *receptive* writing. That provides the raw material, hopefully much of it a kind of direct download from our characters.
- At other times, we can look at what we've written with a more critical eye, mindful that we have to transform that content into what works on the page as a scene. This is *executive* writing — editing, shaping, tightening, making sure our characters' actions and dialogue serve the story and move the plot forward.
- One valuable tool is Character Archetypes.

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Protagonist, Nemesis, Attractor, Mentor, Trickster

PROTAGONIST

- Almost always the story's central character
- A hero but not necessarily heroic
- Journey: Physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual
- Metamorphosis
- The Protagonist represents you



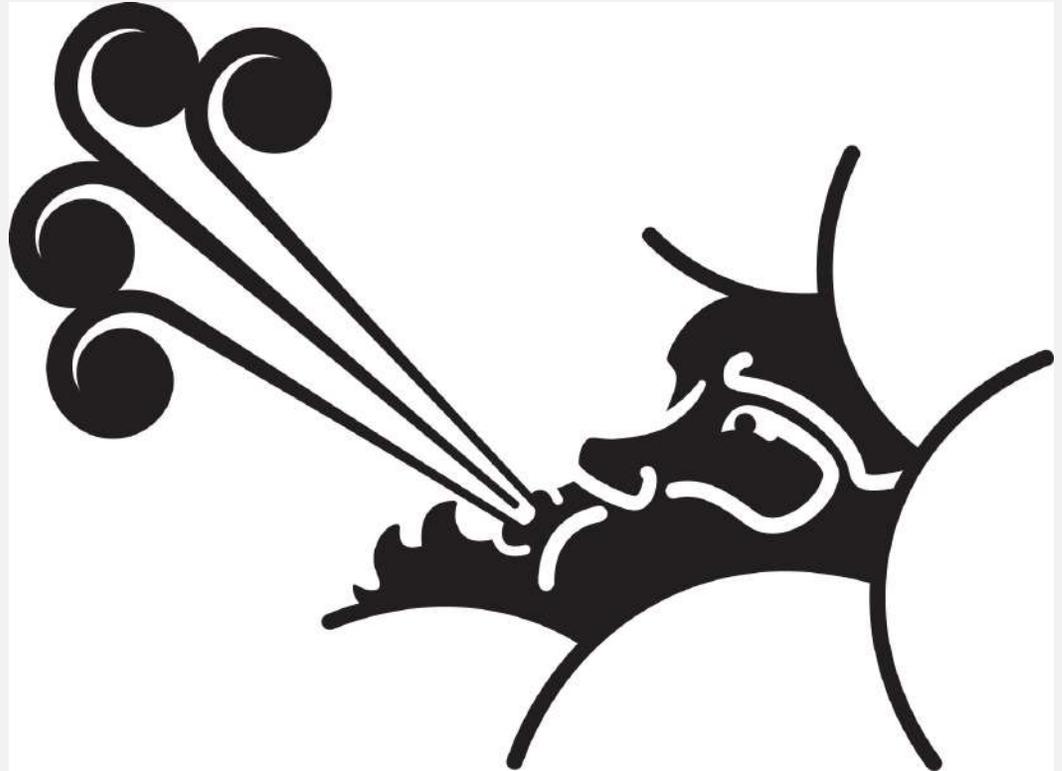


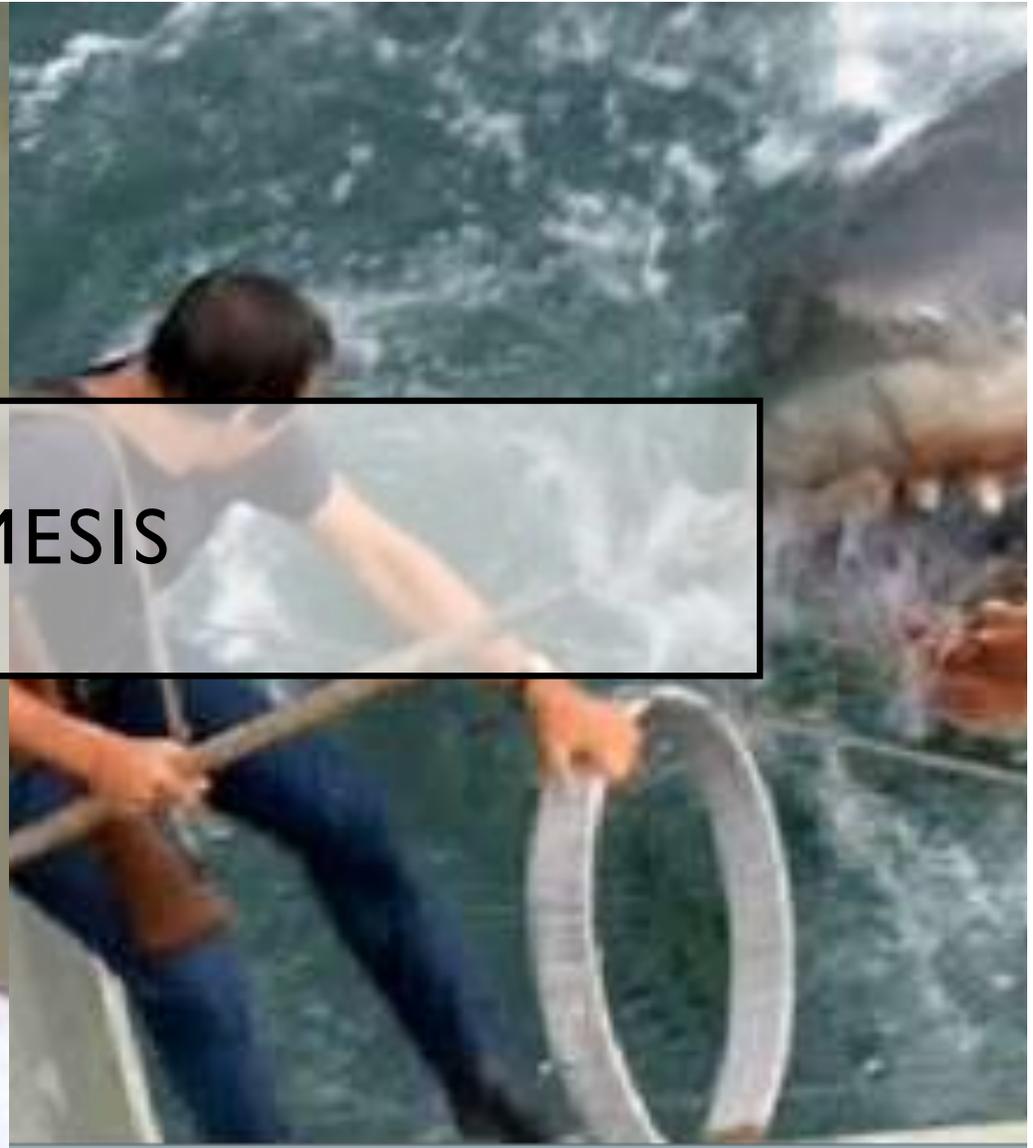
ROCKY™

PROTAGONIST

NEMESIS

- Antagonist function
- Conflict with the Protagonist
- Physicalization of the Protagonist's negative self
- Sustained tension with Protagonist creates drama

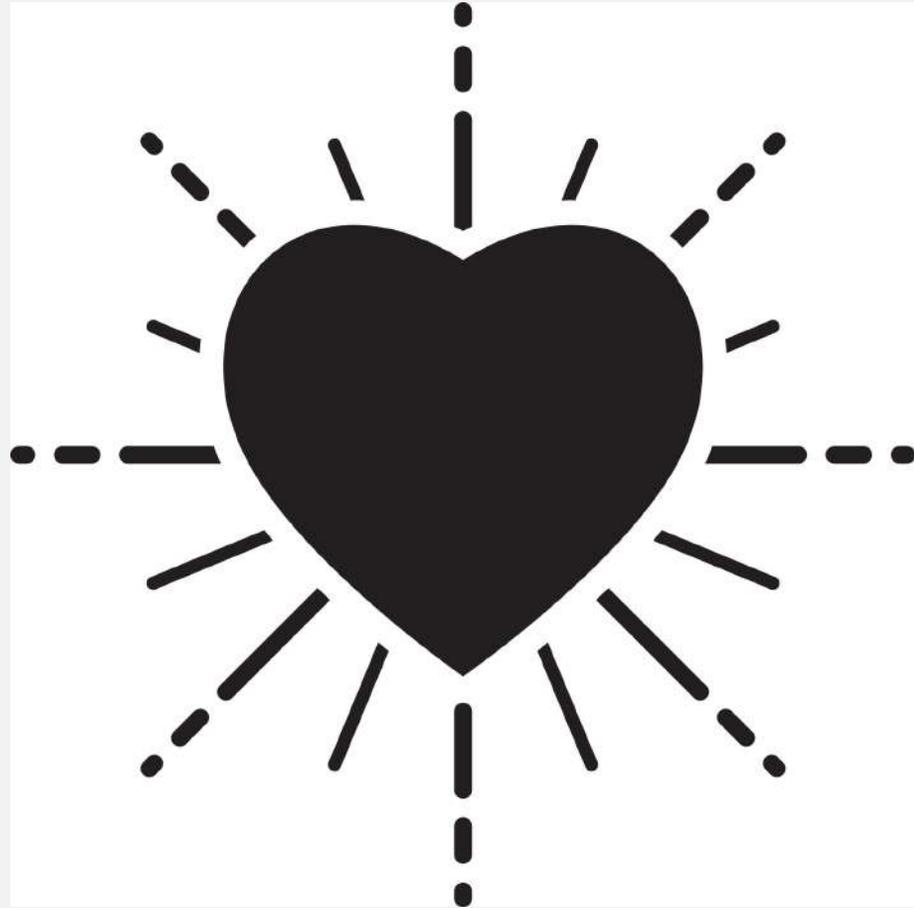


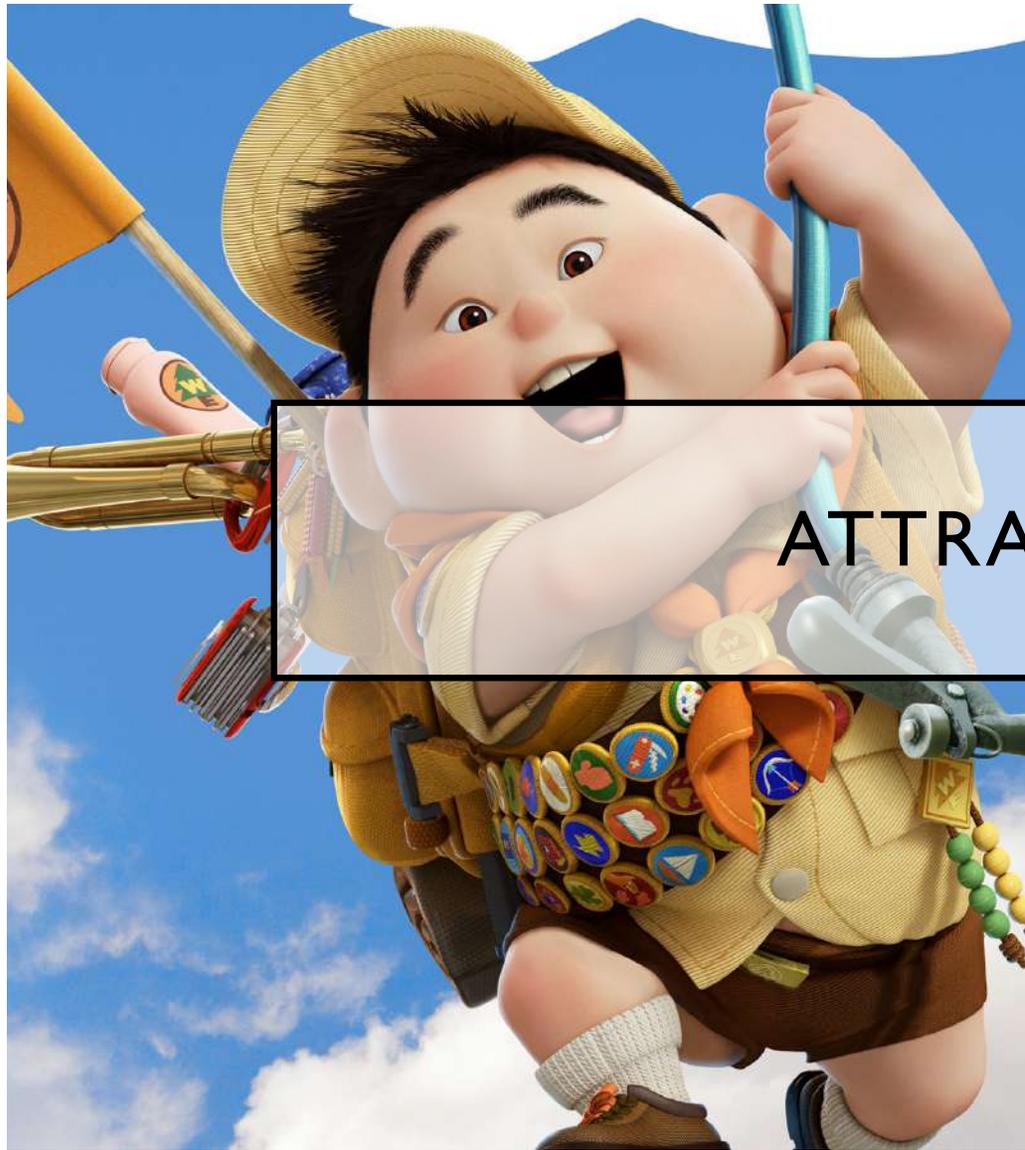


NEMESIS

ATTRACTOR

- Connected to the Protagonist's emotional growth
- Oftentimes a romance figure
- Relationship plays out largely through feelings
- Symbolically represented as *Heart*

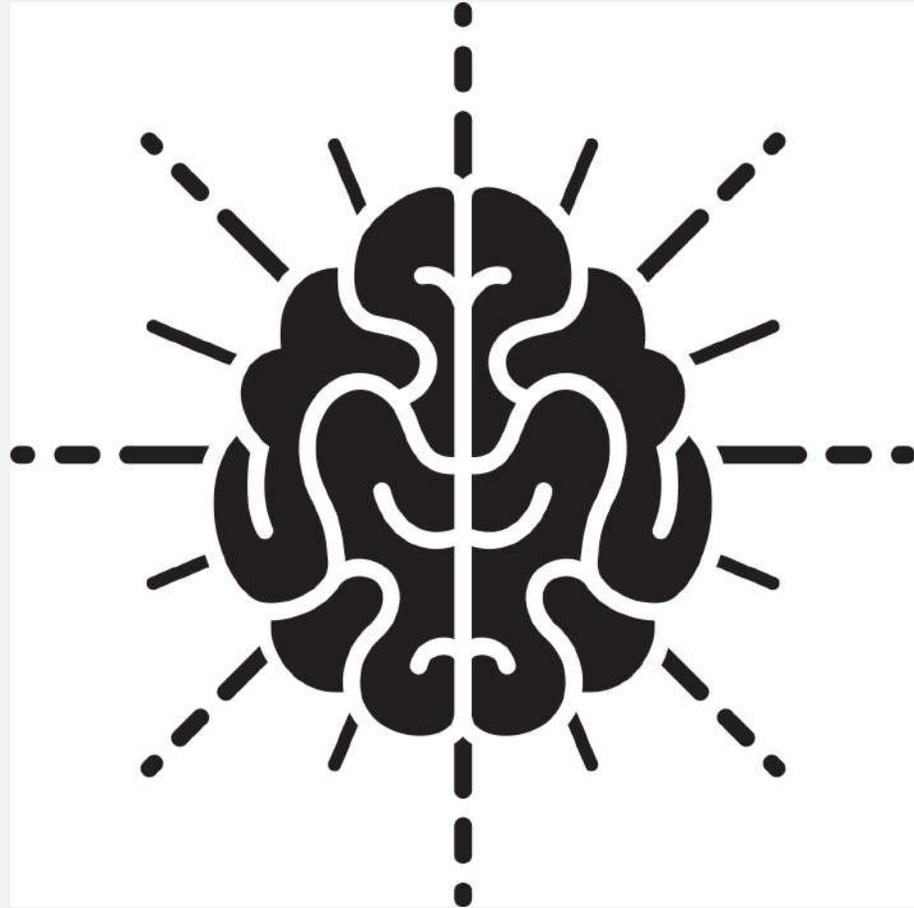




ATTRACTOR

MENTOR

- Connected to the Protagonist's intellectual development
- Often a teaching figure
- Unique insight and knowledge
- Symbolically represented as *Brain*

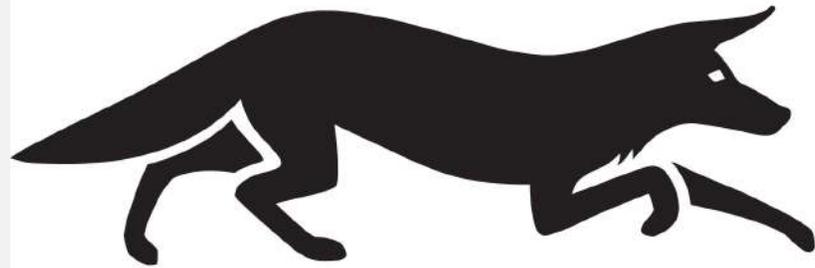




MENTOR

TRICKSTER

- Ally to enemy, enemy to ally
- Tests the Protagonist
- Creates complications and reversals
- Symbolically represented as *Id*





TRICKSTER

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES THE APARTMENT

Protagonist: C.C. Baxter

Nemesis: Mr. Sheldrake

Attractor: Fran Kubelik

Mentor: Dr. Dreyfuss

Trickster: Dobisch, Eichelberger,
Kirkeby, Vanderhoff

CHARACTER
ARCHETYPES
THE SILENCE OF THE
LAMBS

Protagonist: Clarice Starling

Nemesis: Buffalo Bill

Attractor: Catherine Martin

Mentor: Hannibal Lecter

Trickster: Jack Crawford, Dr. Alex Chilton

CHARACTER
ARCHETYPES
CASABLANCA

Protagonist: Rick Blaine

Nemesis: Colonel Strasser, the Nazis

Attractor: Ilse Lund

Mentor: Victor Laszlo

Trickster: Captain Renault

CHARACTER
ARCHETYPES
THE WIZARD OF OZ

Protagonist: Dorothy

Nemesis: Ms. Gulch / Wicked Witch

Attractor: Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly
Lion / Hunk, Hickory, and Zeke

Mentor: Glinda the Good Witch

Trickster: Professor Marvel / Wizard of Oz,
Gatekeeper, Carriage Driver, Guard; Toto

CHARACTER
ARCHETYPES
STAR WARS: EPISODE
IV – A NEW HOPE

Protagonist: Luke Skywalker

Nemesis: Darth Vader

Attractor: Princess Leia

Mentor: Obi-Wan Kenobi

Trickster: Han Solo

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

You can look at the array of characters who emerge in your brainstorming and creative process, and see if any of their respective narrative functions come into focus as one of these five archetypes.

“UP”
CHARACTER
ARCHETYPES

Protagonist: Carl Frederickson

Nemesis: Charles Muntz

Attractor: Ellie, Russell

Mentor: Dug

Trickster: Kevin

**STAGE 3:
FOUR PRIMARY PLOTLINE POINTS**

A person is sitting at a desk, writing in a notebook. A laptop is open in front of them. To the left, a camera is visible. In the foreground, there is a potted plant with green leaves. The scene is lit with warm, soft light, possibly from a candle or lamp.

A SAGE SCREENWRITER'S ADVICE ABOUT WRITING

“Here’s the thing. To write a story, you gotta know four things: What’s the beginning of the story, what happens at the end of the first act, what happens at the end of the second act, and what’s the story’s ending. You know that, you got a story. You don’t know that, you don’t got squat.” –
Anonymous Hollywood writer

**STAGE 4:
FOUR THEMELINE MOVEMENTS
DISUNITY – DECONSTRUCTION –
RECONSTRUCTION - UNITY**

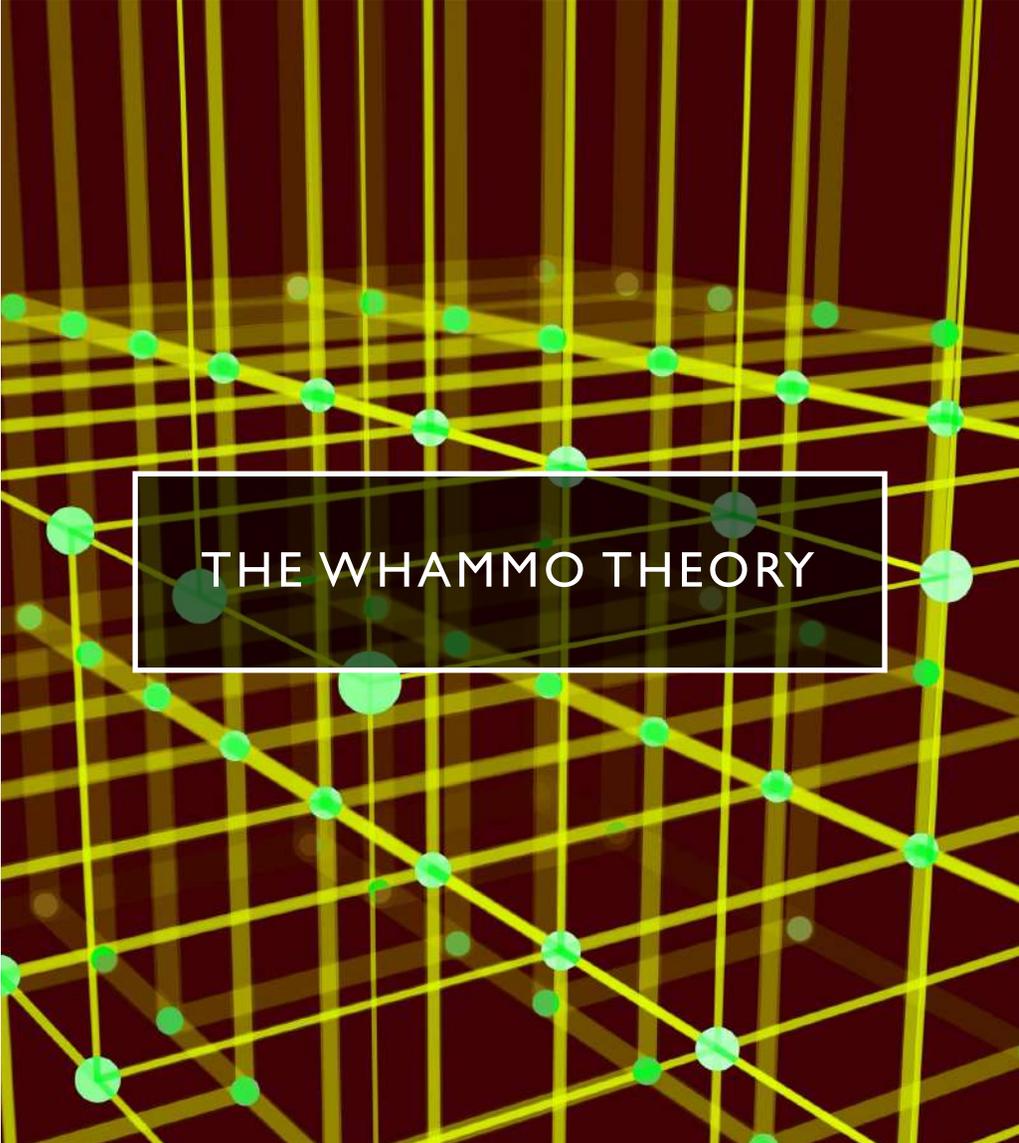


FOUR THEMELINE MOVEMENTS

- **What is your Protagonist's Disunity?**
A good place to start is to go back to those very first questions you asked about your Protagonist: *What do they want? What do they need?* Often their conscious goal is different than their unexpressed goal, and at the core of their Disunity.
- **What is your Protagonist's Deconstruction?**
Consider what aspects of the way your Protagonist has been living before the start of your story – world view, behaviors, defense mechanisms – come into question as they move out of their ordinary world and into the new world.
- **What is your Protagonist's Reconstruction?**
As the Deconstruction process allows the Protagonist's true self start to bubble to the surface, what of its elements are key to the character's psychological, emotional, even spiritual metamorphosis?
- **What is your Protagonist's Unity?**
Often a Protagonist's original goal as articulated by their Want is transformed as their Need emerges into the light. What is the nature of the change that lies at the heart of the Protagonist's unity?

STAGE 5: TEN MAJOR PLOTLINE POINTS

Expand Four Primary Plotline Points
into Ten Major Plotline Points



THE WHAMMO THEORY

“When you run out of theories, you can always pull out the Whammo Chart. Supposedly Joel Silver got this from Larry Gordon, who got it from some Egyptian who worked at American International Pictures (AIP) many years ago. As the legend spreads, it is a scientifically tested theory which requires each action script to have a ‘Whammy’ every ten pages. This would be a big-action set piece, something that would kick you in the groin and wake you up. If the script wavers a bit, spending a little too much time on nuance and character, it violates the theory. According to the natural laws of physics, without a bang the audience is buying popcorn by the twelfth page and looking for the exit sign if you stretch it to page twenty-five.”

ACT ONE

THE OPENING

A scene or string of scenes that introduces us to the story universe, some of its major characters including the Protagonist, and the Protagonist's Disunity.

THE HOOK

Something big happens, typically an unexpected event, that jumbles the Protagonist's world and necessitates a response.

THE LOCK

A plot point that causes the Protagonist to make a choice or forces them to act, propelling them out of their Ordinary World and into the New World of adventure.

ACT TWO

DECONSTRUCTION TEST

On the defensive in the New World, the Protagonist confronts significant opposition, an event that challenges them physically and psychologically.

THE TRANSITION

A midpoint test where the Protagonist experiences a breakthrough by rising to the occasion, demonstrating a growing confidence in their metamorphosis process.

RECONSTRUCTION TEST

Putting to use what they have learned about their Self in the New World, the Protagonist confronts their biggest challenge to date.

ALL IS LOST

Within sight of their goal, the Protagonist suffers a significant blow, a plot point that serves as a major reversal: Will they have the strength, courage and will to go on?

ACT THREE

ON THE OFFENSIVE

The Protagonist digs down to reserves of inner strength they did not know they had, and in tandem with lessons learned along the way mounts a counter-attack.

FINAL STRUGGLE

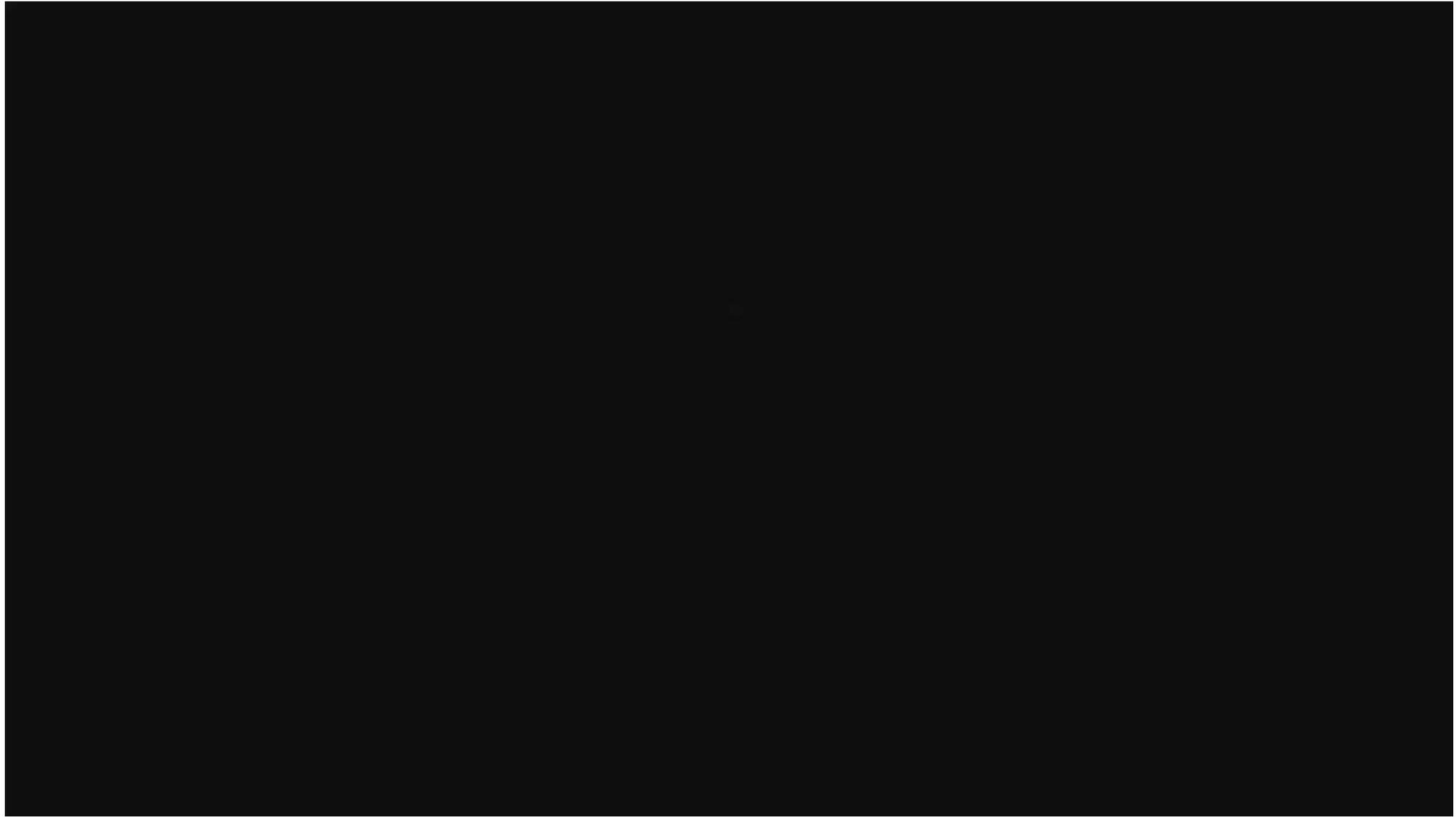
The Protagonist prevails in this ultimate test and achieves their goal.

DENOUEMENT

The Protagonist returns or finds a home, the physicalization of their 'new' life of Unity.

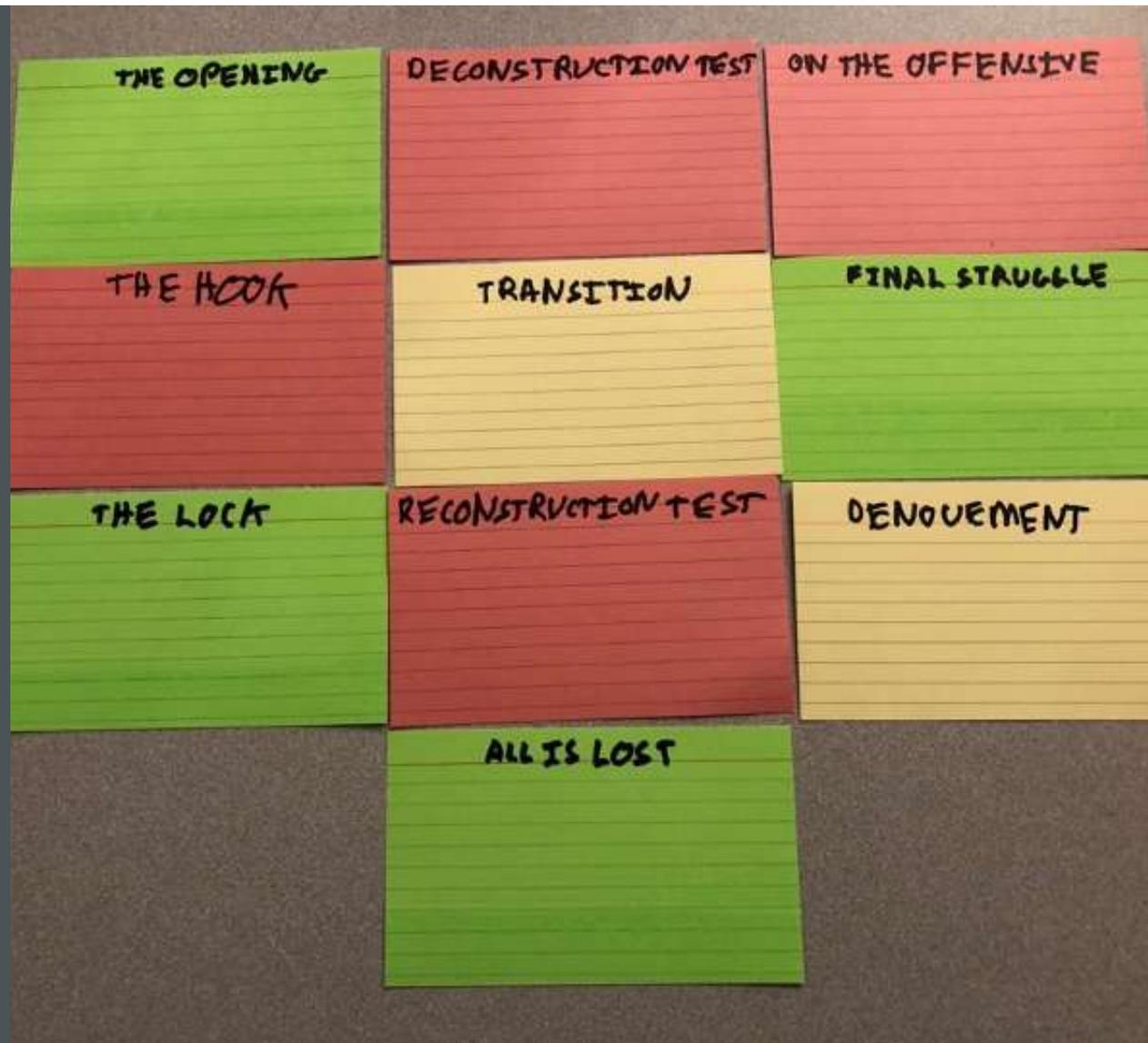
STAGE 6: SCENE-BY-SCENE OUTLINE

Discover the wonderful power of 3 x 5 inch index cards.



WORKING WITH INDEX CARDS

For purposes of the Prep approach, you have your 10 Major Plotline Points. Write those down on individual index cards.





SCOTT
MYERS

- *The Protagonist's Journey: An Introduction to Character-Driven Screenwriting and Storytelling*
- DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts: Offering B.A., B.S., M.F.A. in screenwriting
- ScreenWritingMasterclass.com: Unique online educational resource for writers
- GoIntoTheStory.blcklst.com: Official screenwriting blog of the Black List
- @GoIntoTheStory: 80K+ followers
- Zero Draft Thirty Facebook Group: 4.4K+ members
- scott@screenwritingmasterclass.com
- GITSblog@gmail.com