

Understanding Myth Genre: “Avatar”

“Avatar”

Genres: Mythology, Action, Romance –

Logline: A paraplegic Marine, dispatched to the moon Pandora on a unique mission, becomes torn between following his orders and protecting the world he feels is his home.

It’s important to note that frequently, a film can be marketed as a genre(s) that may or may not have been the intention of the screenwriter. “Avatar” was marketed as a Fantasy, Action, Adventure. From the point of view of James Cameron, the writer, “Avatar” was crafted as a conflict between the Male Myth and a combination of Female Myth and Ecological Myth; Action, and Romance.

There is generally a misunderstanding of what the Myth genre really embodies. As a writer, it will greatly help you if you can distinguish between the different kinds of Myth forms that you can utilize when crafting your story. Whereas ancient myth dealt with a pastoral world and contained gods and goddesses who ruled that world in various forms, what can be called “the new myth forms” are cutting edge because they deal with mankind in the modern world.

To imbue your Hero with mythological elements when crafting his character is to create a Hero with great depth. This is a Hero who is also universally compelling because the genre of Mythology travels the world better than any other genre. Ie. It is not “culture specific.”

Here are some of the basic Myth story beats that define it from other genres:

1. The Hero goes on a circular journey: He starts from home, travels and slays many dragons, and then returns home to find what was already there for him. After the journey, his perception is changed; he's been through a self-revelation which is public and oftentimes cosmic – Moses; Jesus; Odysseus; Kings or Queens; great warriors who have become leaders of their people.
2. The Hero has a late Desire line, but when he finds it, his Desire is his Destiny.
3. The Myth genre contains the following: Birth, Death, Rebirth. Other genres do not deal with this. Also, there may be more than one rebirth: Each dragon that is slain represents a rebirth. Myth genre therefore, gives us the broadest track of personal growth of all the other genres.
4. The Hero in "Avatar" has 4 rebirths. Watch the film and see if you can find them.
5. There is more than what has been called "the monomyth." Recommended reading is Joseph Campbell's The Hero's Journey. But this is "the monomyth." It's important to note that this monomyth is not found in all stories because it is the male warrior myth story.
6. There are more myth forms than male warrior myth. "Avatar" is a combination of 3 myth forms: The Male Myth, the Female Myth, and the Ecological Myth.
7. The male warrior is an archetypical character from the Male Myth; the earth mother is an archetypical character from the Female Myth. In the Ecological myth, the individual and the entire society are a positive blend and balance. The ultimate outcome of a utopian vs. dystopian universe is that the individual, the family, the society, nature, and technology have all blended together.

Suggested viewing: "American Sniper," "Frozen," "Gravity."