

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."

Eliminate Your Inner Censor

When I was in the 9th grade, my compositions were lauded by my wonderful English teacher, who read many of them to the class. I lowered myself in my chair and did not give eye contact to the teacher while he read my story. As most teenagers are highly embarrassed about baring their soul “to the world,” or in this case, to my 30 classmates, I knew that they would not be clapping for my great accomplishment: An A on my composition.

Maybe they only got a C or maybe they failed because they didn't write anything at all. As for me, the writing part was like drinking a cup of Cappuchino. It was effortless. All of my writing had always been effortless. I was the worst student in school and actually contemplated running away for most of my academic years because I loathed the concept of going to school. So ironically, for me, the A was not deserved because I didn't have to work at it. If it had been an A in Biology, a class I hated with a passion even stronger than showing up to school, then it would have been deserved.

So there I was, sitting in my 9th grade class, with my classmates hating me or being jealous of me, or just plain bored with the fact that they themselves had to sit in their worst ever class. For English class was one of the most hated, but required classes in all of high school. How could I ever tell my classmates that I didn't deserve the A because I didn't have to work at it? They would hate me even more because then I would be telling them that I had a gift, but that I was too stupid or dense to appreciate that gift.

“The Road Not Travelled” spoke to me that year more than ever. My English teacher announced to the class that the reason he had chosen my composition to read above all of the others was that I had been honest in my writing and it had shone through

with every sentence. Whatever was in my brain had transferred to the paper without censorship. That tiny little voice that issues warnings: Don't tell the truth. The truth won't look so good. Lie about your family life. It sucks, but don't tell the world about it. Lie about how you like to sweat when you dance because nobody wants to admit that they sweat. The idea is to look "cool," man, cool dude. Especially if you're a teenager. Cool and cynical.

And so, now – with writing a screenplay, which is writing about characters in whose mind you must climb and in whose skin you must live and in whose brain and heart you must think and feel – It's the honesty that shines through to your audience. Characters who are fake have fake motivations; get into fake predicaments; have a plot line that is predictable, and an audience that goes, "Get me outta here."

Take the road not travelled. If it's the honest road, take it. When you are creating characters and crafting a story for film, t.v., novel, or stage, your honesty as a writer, without censorship of that little voice will shine through. It's the first thing that should be on your mind when you sit down in front of your computer to write: I'm going to tell the truth. Whether I get an A or this screenplay never makes it past my trash file, I'm going to tell the truth. Amen!

[Do You Have Writer's Block?](#)

Or Do You Just Need to Take Another

Shower?

The brain and the heart combine with our collective conscience in the shower of all places. It's happened so many times, and my screenwriting students have reported this phenomenon so many times that I now believe it to be the answer/solution to:

Writer's Block.

But Writer's Block is really not a Block. It is just a very nice smoke screen. It's protective armor from:

Marital issues; child-rearing problems; finance issues; the weather; house leaks; plumbing leaks; dirty dishes; the state of world affairs; mounting terrorist attacks; more finance issues; more child-rearing problems; more marital issues; issues of singledom; dating issues; divorce; death; taxes...You can fill in the paragraph and write about ten pages more.

Once Writer's Block sets in, it's time to take another shower. The water flows and clears the nasal passages and we are cleansed of all of our problems until, of course, we finish our shower and then the Block sets in again and again and again.

So in addition to taking about ten showers per day, which will raise your water bill; not be good for a drought-ridden climate; make your skin extremely dry and sensitive, but very, very clean—I would suggest making a drink of your very favorite elixir, settling down in front of your computer, and watching the cursor click silently on the empty page.

Then, it's time to write down the following: I feel inspired right now. My past has caught up with my present, but I won't allow it to Block me from enjoying my future. Then, think of a character you'd like to write about: A woman on

the bus; a child crying at a restaurant; a disabled passenger being helped off a bus by a soldier; a soldier returning home to his dog, family, cat, girlfriend, or childhood best friend.

Sit with your elixir for about 15 minutes and write a paragraph about this character. Think about the next shower you're going to take. Do not answer the phone or return an e-mail or speak to a soul for a solid 15 minutes. Close your 15-minute document and put it into your file that you've named: Writer Unblocked. Keep the file on your Desktop. Open the file tomorrow and repeat for one week.

Stay tuned...

Ronnie Tharp-Garber

The Life Gets In The Way Syndrome (LGITWS)

Do you have the Life Gets In the Way Syndrome (LGITWS)?

The first sign is when all kinds of self-doubt appear: This will never work; nobody will read this; this is a lousy idea.

But the story idea keeps you up at night and sometimes you

dream about it and maybe a few characters pop into mind as you are showering. Or maybe when you hit the pillow at night, the characters rap you on the shoulder and you start having a few words with them.

A few months later, you jot down some ideas on a napkin while you're at a café. You search the internet and see if anyone has already "worked" your idea. Then you do the laundry or wash the dishes or go to your day job. Your story sits, like a gift unopened, for another few months or years.

You go back to your story and either throw it away, delete it from your Dumb Story Ideas file, or...You say, "Hey! This is fantastic! I still like this and I love my characters." Then you pick the kids up or go out to dinner or maybe you get sick or someone you know is sick and needs attention. Or maybe you are in the military and get called to action; maybe you get fired from your job...So many maybes, so much time...Things to do and places to go... So you shelve the story for another few months or years.

To overcome the LGITWS, find your **writer's voice** in addition to coming up with your **story idea**. When you are sitting in the café, write down your favorite movies or novels. When you get home, add this list to all your other lists. After a few months or years of the LGITWS, make a master list. Then check out genre on the internet. Take each movie or novel on your list and match it to the genre you think it is. Take some time and look up the movie on www.imdb.com and see if your "genre guess" matches how the film was marketed. Then do a cross-check list for yourself and make columns and see which genres are your favorite.

Now ask yourself: WHY do these genres *speak* to me? And then ask yourself what values were most prevalent in these films and novels? And then ask yourself: WHY do these values *speak* to me?

So, the next time you get the LGITWS, go to your favorite movies/novels/genres/values list. Then have a little talk with your characters, who have been waiting for you to get over the LGITWS so they can be completed! They've been very patient with you. It's time to sit down and put your characters first and push the LGITWS away...Even for a few minutes. Let your characters out of the bag. It's time...