

AN INTRODUCTION TO:
STORYCHANGING
AN OWNER'S MANUAL FOR THE SOUL



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What is a story?

To understand the importance of stories in our lives, we must first understand what a story is.

The definition is slippery, to be sure.

I would reduce (and paradoxically, broaden) the definition of a story to this:

Any understandable communication that evokes an emotional pathway from one polarity to another.

Bad example: *Before it was cold, now it is sunny.*

Better example: *These last few months of gray skies and constant rain really took a toll on my sanity, but as those first rays of sunlight broke through the clouds to warm my sallow face, I finally knew everything was going to be okay.*

While both examples took us through the obvious polarity of gray skies to sunshine, the second one is more emotionally evocative, largely due to the language employed, and the use

of a “main character” that we can relate to. In short, it’s a better story.

What other properties does a story have?

A story is **memetic**. That means, it tends to **replicate**. Good stories are handed from one person to another. Great stories find their way around the entire peer group. The cream-of-the-crop stories can galvanize people to rally around a cause; stories that are better still can create or destroy countries, empires, even entire civilizations. Some stories are so good that they become intergenerational templates for how to operate in the world, like an unbroken strand of narrative DNA stretching for thousands of years.

We call these stories “myths.”

I would argue that the first story was invented the moment a caveman used a stick to draw a crude map of the jungle canopy with an arrow pointing toward the tiger’s lair to illustrate its location for the benefit (or detriment) of the other cavemen.

Since the dawn of time, stories have been used to convey meaning, emotion, warnings, desire, love, wisdom and generally seem to have the side effect of *evolving* the human species. With the advent of language, ink, the printing press, filmable and recordable media, the internet, and now AI, stories continue to take on increasingly varied, subtle, complex, abstract, impactful and memetic forms.

When someone dies, a friend or family member honors that person with a *story*.

So begs the question...

Why do we resonate so deeply with stories?

At the very deepest level, we are wired to find meaning. We do this through cataloging, sorting, and finding connections and context everywhere and in everything.

It could be argued that we are “dot connectors,” but I would argue that our main energetic focus is actually turning unstructured information into stories. During the day, our conscious mind makes stories, and at night, the subconscious

mind takes the spoon from us and makes contextual jambalaya out of those stories. Paradoxically, this process of scrambling our context and conceptions actually helps us reformulate some of these stories into more helpful forms.

Stories by day, stories at night. Rinse and repeat until we die.

Put another way, if we see a snail cross a sidewalk and think about it for more than two seconds, we'll make up a story about where it came from, where it's going and why. Some of us might even give it a name.

Bertram. Bertram the snail. Go on, Bertram.

So **why** do we attempt to find connections in literally everything? The answer is literally in our genetic template, which consists of two strands of DNA, constantly forming connection points that perpetually **exchange information**.

Really think about that.

Now, let's go back to my definition of a story:

Any understandable communication that takes an evocative pathway through an emotional polarity to arrive at a satisfying conclusion.

Notice how I left out “between two or more parties.” Beyond creating stories about the people around us and the world at large, we make stories about ourselves. Oftentimes, those are the most powerful stories with the most far-reaching consequences. Since we’re creating stories about everything else around us, it only makes sense that we’d make them for ourselves. After all, we’re the main character in our own life story!

Creating stories about ourselves is far more powerful than creating stories about the outside world, because unlike the stories we create about others, our personal stories are always backed up by the following piece of so-called evidence:

“I know myself better than anyone else, so whatever I think about myself **MUST** be correct.”

Example:

“I have a lisp, so I’ll never find a high-value mate”.

“I didn’t start saving money until I was 30 so I’ll never be able to retire”.

“I am not the kind of person who is capable of X.”

“I always ruin everything.”

It gets even more complicated when we bolster our stories with “supporting documentation.” But there’s something else we should know about stories. Similar stories have a high degree of affinity. That is to say, they closely follow the “like-attracts-like” principle.

“Janine is a jerk because she does X.”

“Everyone who does X is a jerk.”

Put another way, if you put a bunch of beliefs into a room and let them hang out for a while unsupervised, you’re going to

come out with a **belief system**. Which is just another way of saying... a story.

Here's something else to think about. A lot of the stories floating around your head aren't even yours. They belonged to your parents, the school bully, the village elder 1000 years ago, whomever. They were just **passed on to you**.

The natural predilection of stories to congeal into defined structures can start to make you think that your destiny is predetermined—that no matter what you do, you cannot escape the marionette strings of some inexorable fate, held tightly by a capricious force that you will never understand.

Like a character in a book.

So on that note, here's a question: What do James Bond, Garfield, Frodo and Katniss Everdeen have in common?

They are all creations of their authors.

In this case, Ian Fleming, Jim Davis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Suzanne Collins.

Let's take Katniss Everdeen. In the *Hunger Games* books, Katniss has to navigate through a dystopian shitshow that constantly tests her resolve. If you were to go inside her head, she'd probably be thinking, "Man, this sucks, I'd rather be in Cabo." But she can't take a vacation to Cabo or Bimini or anywhere else, because she is responsible for the fate of Panem. If she only knew that there was someone named Suzanne Collins pulling her strings. Then maybe she could make an appeal for some time off, or go on strike... something.

But she won't. She will go through the entire series of books being put through her paces by Suzanne Collins without actually knowing that someone named Suzanne Collins even exists.

Most of us go through our entire lives like Katniss, feeling largely manipulated by circumstances beyond our control, not knowing who's writing our life story or weaving subplots into it.

Here's the difference between you and Katniss Everdeen...

Are you ready? This one deserves some buildup because you're about to receive a piece of information that will cut the marionette strings for good.

(pregnant pause)

The author of your life story is **you**.

Yes, you.

What's more, **you are the author AND main character of your life story, at the same time.**

That means that there were never any marionette strings.

You always had the power to change any part of your life story at any point.

Knowing the truth of that statement should bring forth a rush of endorphins. If you already knew this before, congratulations, I want to meet your spiritual teacher.

Now that you know this, the idea is to spend more and more time in the simultaneous headspace of creator/main character, and then learn to phase-shift between the two. Do this, and you'll...

...find yourself becoming more powerful and intentional.

...start being present during moments where you were previously unconscious.

...start asking yourself, "is this really me?" "what should I really do here?"

...start saying to yourself, "maybe I should do THIS instead..."

When a character in a story faces more than one choice, this is called a **choice point**. Starting from today, start to recognize your own choice points. Some are obvious, some you'll have to dig for in places where you previously acted on autopilot. If you continue this practice, you'll soon see them all over the place.

If you start to consciously act during your own choice points, the more you'll be able to orient the arc of your destiny toward something more in alignment with your **highest potential destiny**, as opposed to merely playing the role of "you," whatever that means.

How do you know you're making the "right choice?" Because the right choice usually feels harder. And if you listen hard enough, there will be an accompanying whisper coming from somewhere very deep that says, "I'm doing the right thing." This feeling will become more discernible with practice.

But with all the individual choices you face in a day, and all the ramifications of those choices spidering off into a thousand possible futures, how do you really know—collectively— if the choices you're making will amount to the life you were actually meant to lead?

You won't. Not yet at least.

This is because you've been living from the POV of the main character for your entire life. You don't have nearly as much

experience as **the author**. So you'll have to do what all great authors do:

Learn the structure that underpins the creation of epic stories, and apply it to your life.

It won't be easy, but that's why I'm here. To bring my twenty years as a professional storyteller to bear on helping you achieve this. I can be your mentor of sorts. And you can help me bring perspective to my journey. The more people that cut the marionette strings to uncover their true potential, the better off the world becomes. And that's the point.

The question is: why exactly does this process work?

To understand that, we have to zoom out.

Far.

No. Further than that.

Zoom out so far that you can see multiple galaxies at once.

Are you still with me?

Good.

From this vantage, it's obvious that there's some sort of creative force at play. The oldest mystical traditions that describe this force tend to get closest to its essence by describing what it *isn't*. Since I forgot my sackcloth robe and rope belt at the cleaners, I'll make a human attempt to describe what it is.

Some call it "God."

Others call it "The Unknowable."

Gonzo journalist Hunter Thompson called it "The Great Magnet."

Jewish mystics call it *Ayn Sof* or, "Without End."

Whatever you want to call it, however you want to dress it up, It's the "animating" force behind every other force. It animated you, Mickey Mouse and is also responsible for making al

pastor tacos so damn tasty. It's the thumb that initiates the movement of the Rube Goldberg machine that is life in this, and all the other known universes.

I like to call this force **The Creator of All Stories**, or **CAS**.

After 5,000 years of study by the greatest sages in history, we still don't really know very much about CAS. That's mostly because us humans trying to contemplate CAS is kind of like a pencil trying to contemplate a pencil sharpener.

We do know this, though. CAS is an absolute FANATIC for stories. Like Roger Ebert times *infinity*.

CAS especially likes stories about *us*.

But there's so much going on in the multiverse, why wouldn't CAS be more interested in observing the metamorphosis of a blue gas giant into a crab nebula or Black Hole M87 devouring a neighboring star?

Think about it from your own experience.

Would you rather go to the theater and watch an invisible vacuum for ten thousand years, or watch two action-packed hours of *Die Hard*, culminating in the moment where John McClane untapes the hidden pistol from his back and shoots Hans Gruber off the roof of Nakatomi Plaza, saving the hostages and his estranged wife?

I mean come on, there's no contest.

Just like us, CAS likes to be entertained. Problem is, CAS is a tough critic. CAS isn't an asshole per se, CAS just has very specific tastes.

So what's entertaining to CAS?

First off, CAS likes stories about itself. You may think CAS is narcissistic, but seeing as there's literally nothing in existence that *isn't* CAS, narcissism doesn't apply. CAS created everything – arguably in the first moment of the Big Bang – and everything that came out of that is all part of CAS.

Cue: *We Are Stardust, We Are Golden.*

So why are **we humans** so flipping entertaining to CAS?

Again, like all those planets and stars and quasars and what-have-you, we are all part of CAS. Unlike those celestial phenomena, we have two aspects to us which are far more compelling. The first is a **human soul**, which gives rise to the second, **free will**. And free will is far more interesting than celestial bodies or blades of grass or brown bears for the sheer amount of **dramatic potential** it presents. (Sorry, Jupiter).

Example: A young, creatively talented boy comes of age in a disadvantaged circumstance in a major city in Eastern Europe, say... Bucharest. He faces the decision to join his uncle Andrus in the counterfeit Gucci trade, but on the day of his initiation, he smuggles himself out of the city and hops a plane to New York to go to art school, leaving his old life behind forever, in the hopes of becoming a painter.

See? Free will is *interesting*. Moreso when external circumstances draw **tension** against it, making it difficult to execute. In human terms, we call this **adversity**.

So to recap, CAS likes stories about us because we're emanations of CAS, we have human souls and because we have the power to exercise free will under adverse circumstances. Drilling down a bit more, what *kinds* of stories about us does CAS enjoy the most?

In a nutshell, stories in which the main character is thrust from familiarity and comfort and compelled into a **special world** where the old rules don't apply. To survive in that world, they must overcome a **need, block, hurt, insecurity or shame** using **force of will or courage** that was heretofore inaccessible in the ordinary world, so they can become the version of themselves that finally has the ability to overcome the **Great Personal Trial**, achieving **At-One-Ment** with their highest purpose. At this point they are able to share the insight – or **“medicine”** they gained from the special world back to the familiar world, so their tribe can be **“healed,”** or evolve in some positive way.

If that story structure feels familiar, there's a reason. It's called the Monomyth, and it's the underpinning for every epic story known to humankind (and even some Marvel movies). If it doesn't feel familiar, go watch *Star Wars* or *The Matrix*.

But how do we *know* that CAS likes these kinds of stories as opposed to, say, a story wherein the main character who grows up with ample means uses her inheritance to buy rental properties and lives happily ever after?

Because CAS tends to reward those courageous souls who walk the path of heroic transformation with a sense of **intrinsic fulfillment**. By fulfillment, I mean the kind of deep, abiding happiness that nothing else can touch. For brevity's sake, let's call that fulfillment "light." It actually has quite a lot in common with the kind of light that stars and light bulbs give off, but we'll get into why that is a bit later.

If you decide to leave the comfort of the familiar and undertake the journey for yourself, you'll actually be able to understand whether or not you're on the "right" path by measuring the amount of additional "light" that you reveal at each given choice point. Hint: It's usually inversely proportional to the perceived difficulty of said choice point.

Other things start to happen as well. **Mentors** appear, **synchronicities** increase, and you really start to get the sense that you're on an **epic quest**.

Just as stars shed light from a constant nuclear reaction, we tend to express an incrementally increasing amount of “light” by using our free will to exit the familiar in search of our true purpose, and continuing to use it to navigate a series of progressively challenging choice points, moving ever closer to actualization with our true essence – and assuming we pass our personal Trial, we will receive the ultimate reward of being able to **share** our light – or the essence of our actualized self – with those around us. You see, light has no choice but to be shared, it is actually its principle attribute.

You probably know or have met people who have undergone this transformation. They tend to be warm, open, easy to be around, and inexplicably attractive to other humans. They “know” themselves. In short, they give off a lot of light.

You can get there too. It won't be easy. It takes free will deployed correctly at specific, sometimes very difficult choice points in the structural context of your epic story.

Now the final question: WHY does CAS like stories of epic transformation?

It can be explained with the principle of **affinity**.

Billions of years ago, there was nothing. No stars, no planets, no light. Just CAS, all alone, bored. Then, with a bang—a *really big* one, you may have heard of it—CAS created the Universe as we know it. Space and time expanded outward in a rush of light. Eventually the light started to split apart, forming stars, planets and eventually... us. That expansion continues through this day... You could consider this creation of light **the ultimate act of unselfishness**.

Remember how I said that we are all manifestations of CAS? Just as CAS created light from darkness, CAS also created *us* from darkness. We are part and parcel of the Big Bang's light, so to be in *affinity* with CAS, we must learn how to create our own light and share it unselfishly. In human terms, that equates to a life condition where we are in a constant state of selflessly sharing our fulfillment with others. In sum, the more

affinity we have with CAS's nature of selfless sharing, the more fulfillment we are able to receive and give away.

Epic storytelling is the roadmap CAS created for us to get there. Every single one of us. And since we are all unique snowflakes, the path—or the application of the principles of epic storytelling for each one of us— is absolutely unique.

So now we know *what* kinds of stories CAS likes, and *why* CAS likes them. So what kinds of stories does CAS *not* like?

Let's take *Garfield*. Garfield sits around all day, annoys Jon, and is generally a dick to Nermal. Minor hijinks ensue.

While it's funny at times, there's not much going on.

I don't see, in the context of *Garfield*, the titular main character exercising his free will to leave the familiarity of the sofa and take up his metaphorical sword and shield to defend the honor of Jon.

In other words, for *Garfield* as a story to be pleasing to CAS, Garfield the main character would need to:

- A. Stop being such a dick to Nermal
- B. Start exercising
- C. Help Jon open up a foster home for stray cats from other comic strips.

In sum, for your life story to be pleasing to CAS, you will need to start looking at your life from the point of view of the creator and main character, then take the Nestea plunge out of your familiar world of comfort, take up your sword and sandals, and use the principles of epic storytelling to guide you on the path to your own heroic transformation so you can share your gifts with the rest of us.

So now you find yourself at a choice point. Continue on the path you were on, or open the door to an epic journey that will change your life beyond all recognition...

Peruse my offerings, subscribe to my newsletter or book a consultation here: www.patrickchristell.carrd.co

Follow me at www.twitter.com/storyactualized, for actionable tips on how to apply the transformative power of epic storytelling at specific choice-points; for musings about the art of storytelling in general, intentional living, gaining financial and spiritual freedom, all while following your own path to self-actualization.

While we are each on our own personal journey, we can still help one another change our stories. This is how we heal the world. This is how we spread our light.

Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there.

-Rumi