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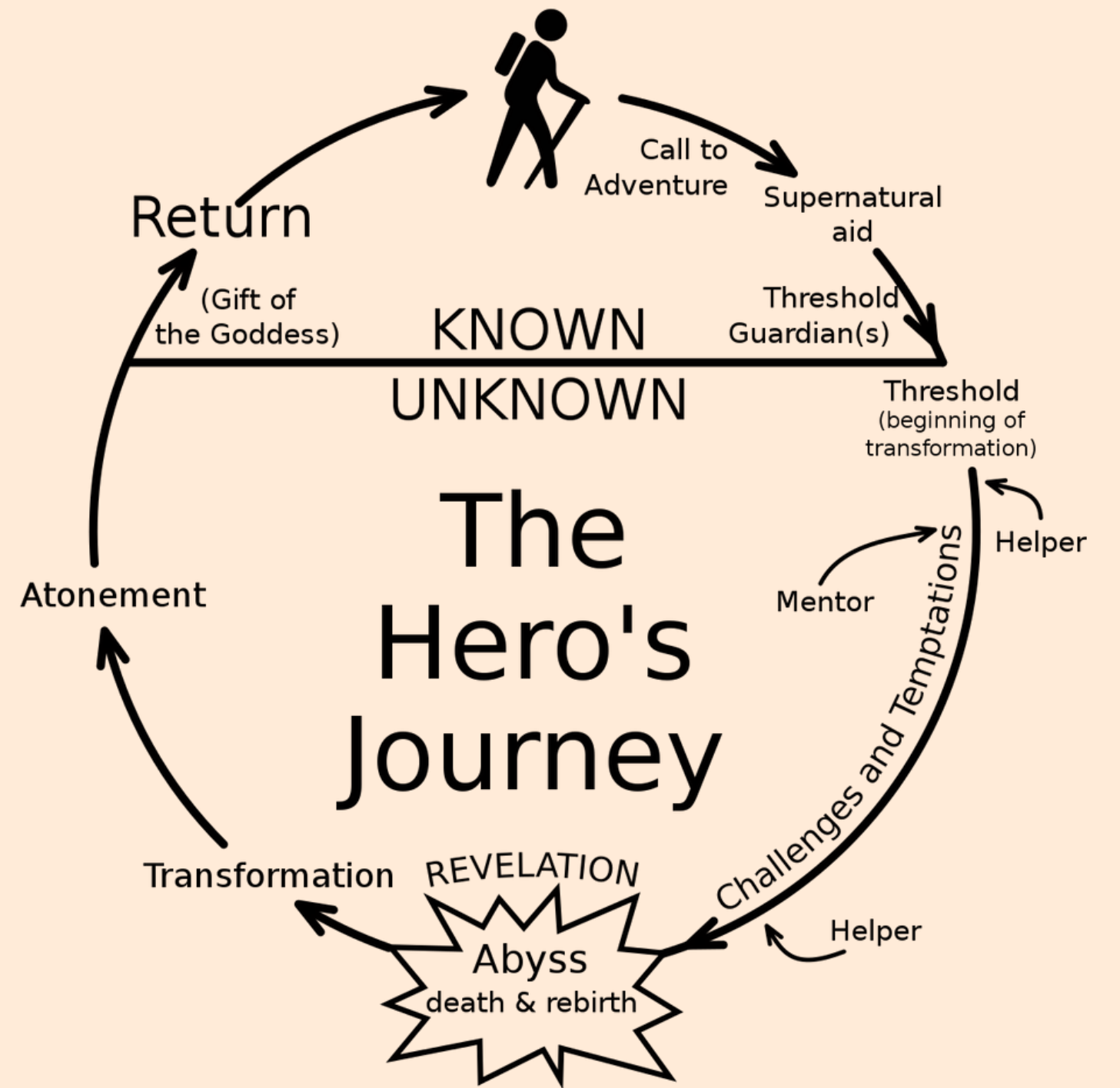
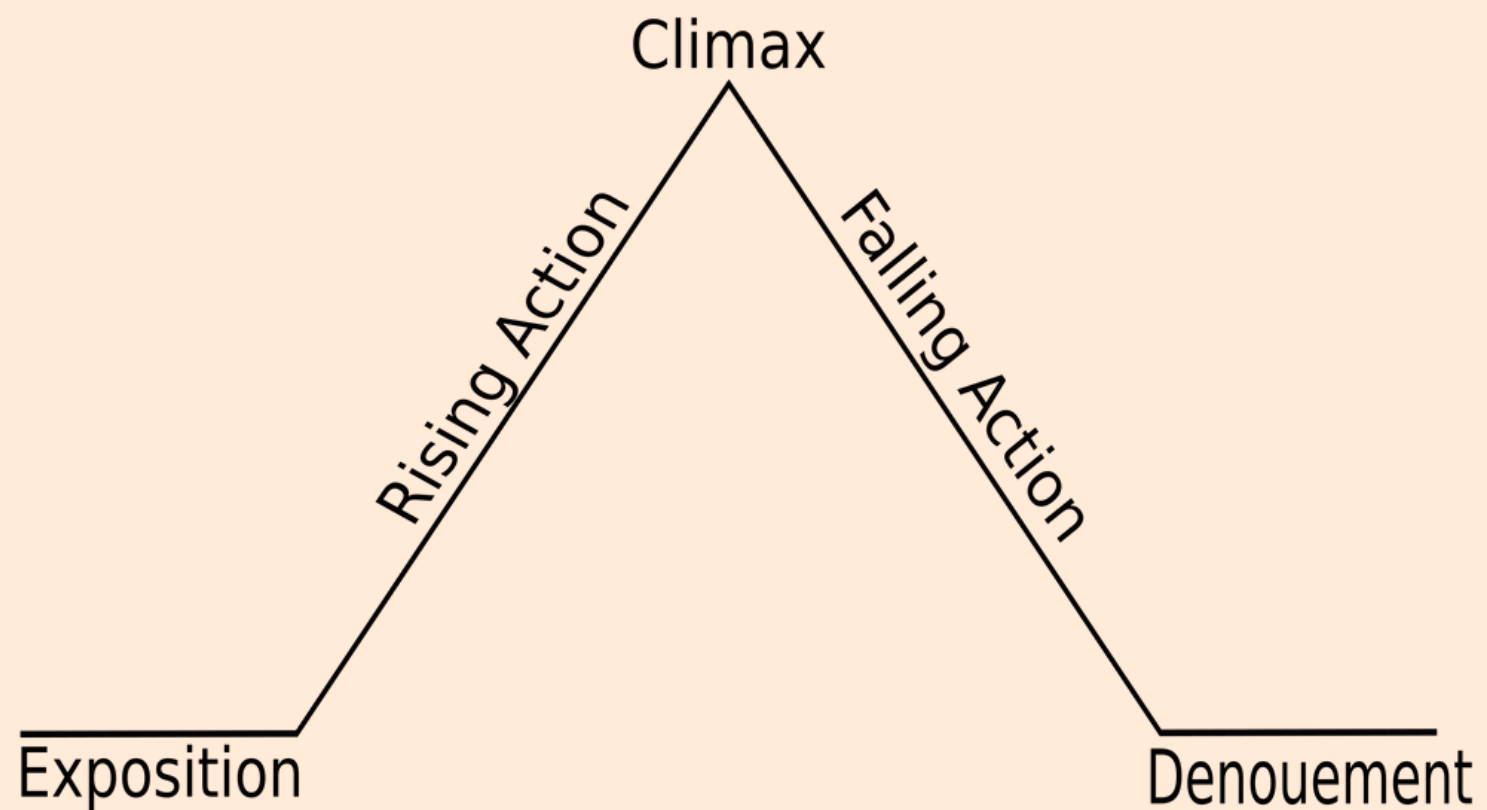
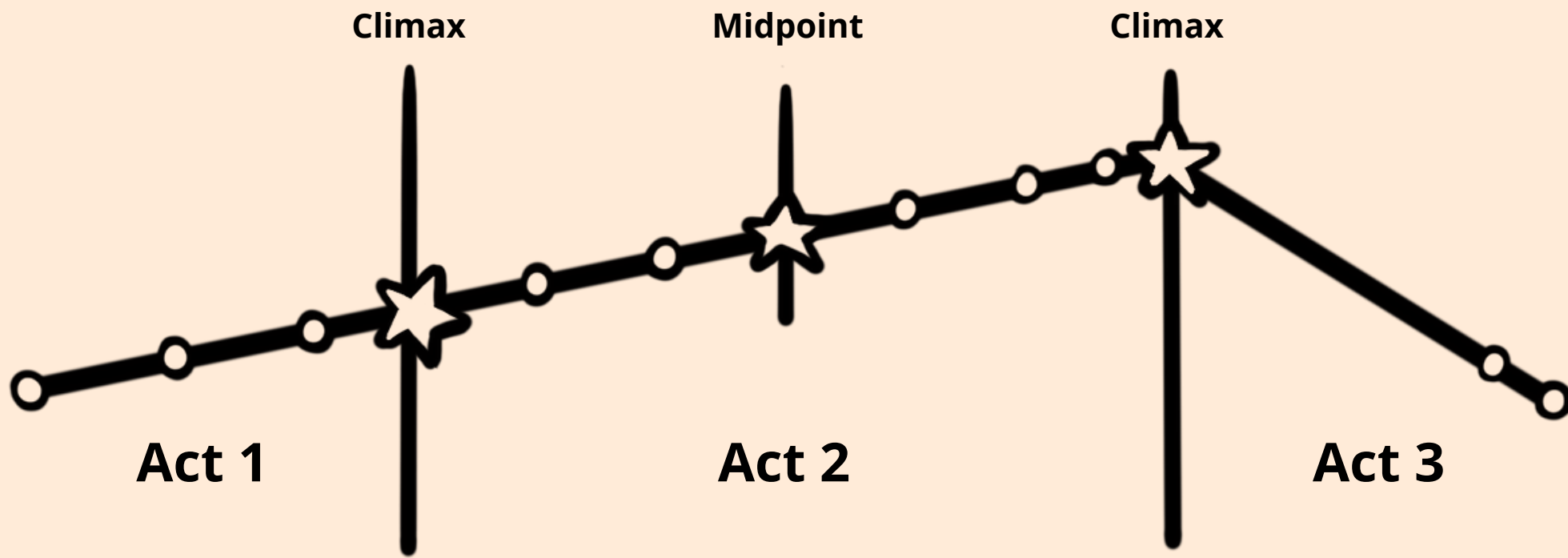
Writing the Essential Scenes of Act One

Ley Taylor Johnson

Overview

- What are the essential scenes of Act 1?
- What makes them work?
- What questions should they answer?

**What are
essential scenes?**



The Essential Scenes of Act 1

Opening Scenes

Establish the tone, stakes, and status quo.

Catalyst

Adds information, complications, and opportunities.

Act 2 Transition

Shifts from the known to the unknown.

"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort."

“First I should like to know a bit more about things,” said he, feeling all confused and a bit shaky inside, but so far still Tookishly determined to go on with things. “I mean about the gold and the dragon, and all that, and how it got there, and who it belongs to, and so on and further.”

"[The meals] didn't come quite as often as Bilbo would have liked them, but still he began to feel that **adventures were not so bad after all.**"

Opening Scenes

Opening Scenes

It's already time for
the heavy lifting!

- Introduce the protagonist
- Establish the status quo
- Set the story's tone
- Showcase your style

Opening Scenes

Creating an Early Set of Stakes

- Determine the threat to the status quo
- Give the protagonist a problem to solve
- Establish their short and long-term motivations

Guiding Questions

- What does the protagonist's everyday life look like?
- What do they want to change, and why?
- What obstacle are they currently facing? How do they react to it?

Catalyst

Catalyst

Things are about to
get real.

- Kickstarts the plot
- Interrupts the status quo
- Increases the stakes
- Presents a difficult choice

Catalyst

Also known as the
Inciting Event

- Change the scope / immediacy of the threat
- Mark the shift in tone
- Give the protagonist a reason to say "no"

Guiding Questions

- What new information does the Catalyst introduce?
- How does this complicate the existing stakes?
- What does the protagonist stand to lose?

Act 2 Transition

Act 2 Transition

I don't think we're in
Kansas anymore...

- Shifts the focus of the story
- Opens up the world
- Introduces consequences
- Disorients the protagonist

Act 2

Transition

From the Known to
the Unknown

- Show only key grounding details
- Emphasize cause / effect
- Focus on the protagonist's emotions

Guiding Questions

- What changes about the world going into Act 2?
- What changes for the protagonist specifically?
- How do they feel about this?

Conclusion

- Essential scenes are crucial to the structure of your story
- All of the scenes in Act 1 are essential
- Use your Opening Scenes to introduce key establishing details
- Use your Catalyst to raise the stakes and complicate things for the protagonist
- Use the Act 2 Transition to expand the scope of the story and kickstart the emotional arc

Resources

01

Save the Cat! Writes a Novel by Jessica Brody

02

Story Genius by Lisa Cron

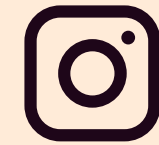
03

90 Days to Your Novel by Sarah Domet

Thank you!



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