# Classic Blockbuster Formula. created by Leo Partible

# THE CLASSIC STORY FORMULA

The story formula for a blockbuster is a combination of 3 elements:

Catharsis (Pity + Fear) + Comedy + Religious Experience = Blockbuster

Think of these elements as expressions of the Holy Trinity:

**Catharsis** embodies the **Father**. Catharsis represents man's separation from his creator.

Comedy, or Good works, represents the **Son**, because he embodies something that is totally outrageous and illogical: the fact that all-powerful God would become a vulnerable man, and as His own Son.

The Religious/Spiritual

experience represents the **Holy Spirit**, which leads us to all truth and lights our way through beauty.

All the great classic, blockbuster films — Star Wars, Avatar, Titanic, Jaws, It's a Wonderful Life, The Sound of Music, Braveheart, My Big Fat Greek Wedding, Ben Hur, Casblanca, Lord of the Rings, to Kill a Mockingbird, A Christmas Story, The Godfather, the Pixar movies, the Marvel and DC movies, and many others — these films, many people name them as having an impact on their lives, and often, spoken about with an emotional, religious devotion by their fans.

It's because these elements are present.



## THE THEOLOGY OF STORY

To achieve a Religious experience, the Gospel written as the structure embedded as the DNA of the Story.

The Theology of Story is found in every major blockbuster film — from Casablanca, It's a Wonderful Life, Ben Hur, The Sound of Music, to today's films, especially in all the successful animated films and superhero stories.

## **STRUCTURE**

Act 1 expresses begins with Eden (initial state) and ends with the Fall of Man.

Act 2a reflects the characters in the Old Testament and builds to the Midpoint (roughly page 60). The Midpoint is symbolic of the Birth of Christ, and reflects the contrast between the Old Testament (Act 2a) and the New Testament after the midpoint (Act 2b) Act 2b is the story of Christ — Birth, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.

Act 3 symbolizes Revelation and the fulfillment of the prophecies which result in New Jerusalem. Which is why the characters must not be the same as they were in Act 1 and the must not get what they want in Act 1 (Man's Will) because they get what they need (God's Will). Otherwise, the story is not the Gospel. Also, the initial state (Act 1) is about the individual and the end (Act 3) is about the need — Relationship (with God) and Community (with Neighbor).



# CHARACTER'S WANT VS. NEED

The Character's **Want** in Act 1 represents **Man's Will**. The character discovers his **Need** in Act 3, which is **God's Will**. They cannot be the same because the end must represent a New Man, being bornagain, and a distinction between Eden and New Jerusalem.

Most Christian Subculture movies lack this understanding because God becomes simply a genie who caters to our every request. They end up denying God's Will. The end of the story must result in a relationship (with God and Man) and less about achievement.

Examples of Want vs. Need:

# Shrek

The selfish Shrek wants to be left alone, but he needs to learn to be unselfish, live in a community and make friends.

## It's a Wonderful Life

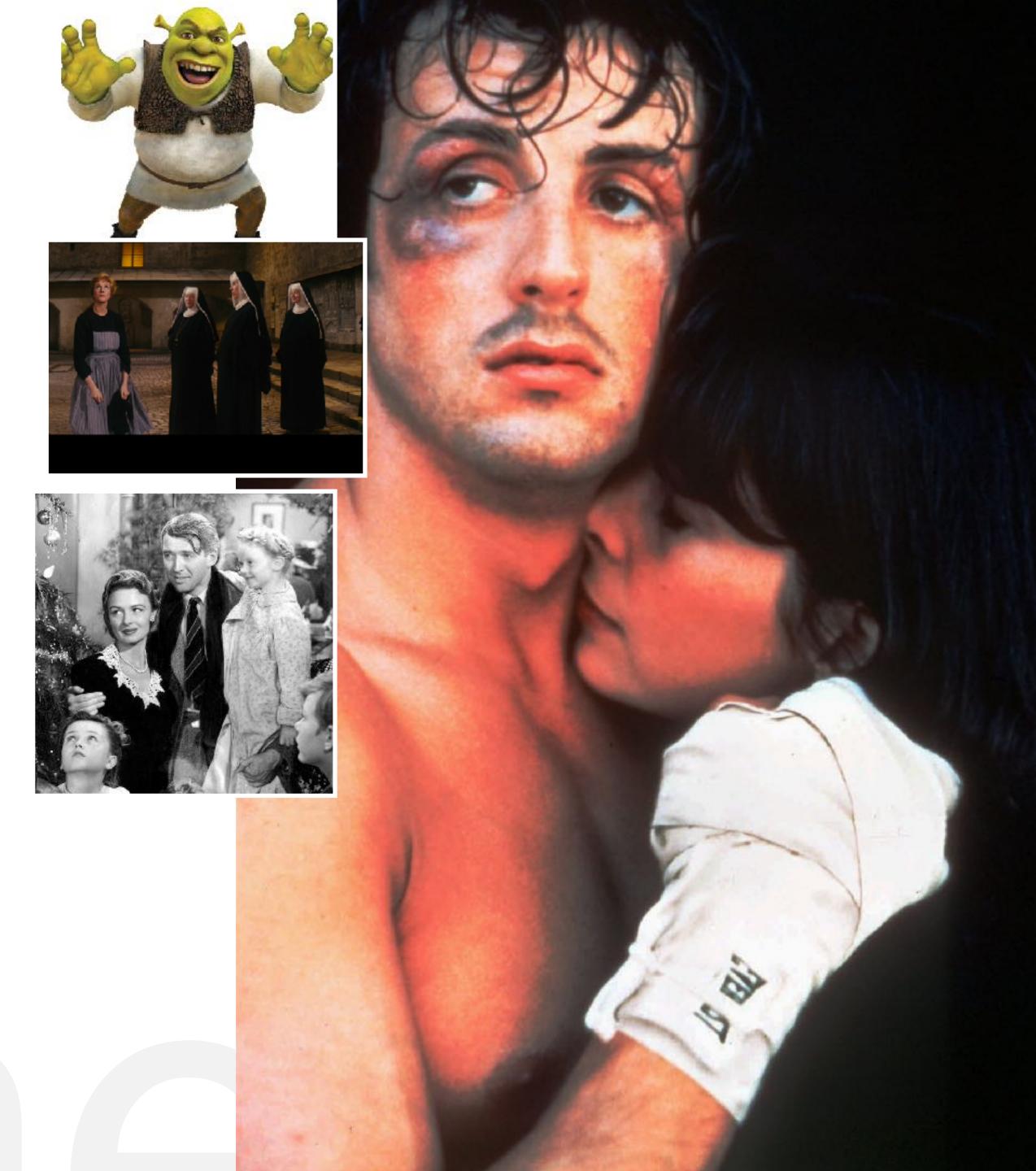
George wants to be get out of town and become famous, but he needs to understand he has a greater purpose in staying town, and that is to mobilize the town against Mr. Potter.

## The Sound of Music

There is nothing in the world that Maria wants more than to be a nun. But she's terrible at it. What she needs to understand is that she was created for a greater purpose — to be the wife and mother to a family that needs someone in that role, especially in shadow of the impending Nazi invasion of Austria.

# Rocky

Rocky is an unloved, frustrated, wannabe boxer employed as a mob thug who wants to be a successful boxer. But when he gets a chance to fight the Champion, he learns that he needs to understand there is something more in life than winning, and that thing is true love, something he has with Adrian.



# STORY FORMULA (FOR LOGLINE & STORY BEAT)

Story Formula (for Story Beats) Protagonist + Conflict + Bad Idea in
response to the Conflict + Twist:
Story Formula (for the Logline) Protagonist + Conflict + Bad Idea in
response to the Conflict + Twist:

Protagonist represents us.

The Conflict represents our sin nature.
The Bad Idea in Response to the Conflict
represents the consequences of our sin
nature, e.g. we make bad decisions.
The Twist is that God intervenes and he is
glorified in different ways, e.g. 1) He makes
beauty from our ashes. 2) His nature is
expressed whether in His mercy, justice, or
righteousness.

Examples from movies:

## Rocky

Protagonist: Rocky

Conflict: He's struggling to prove to everyone that he's not a bum and he can be a great boxer, to the point where he's almost obsessed.

Bad Idea in response to the conflict: He's chosen, a boxer lacking enough experience, to fight the Heavyweight champion of the world, Apollo Creed. Of course, this sounds like a disaster.

Twist: He loses in the end, but he proves that he can go toe-to-toe with the best in world, and he gains someone who loves him for who he is in Adrian. He doesn't get what he wants, but he gets what he needs.

#### **Star Wars**

Protagonist: Luke Skywalker

Conflict: He wants to leave Tatooine because he feels like he's wasting his life away while his friends are doing great things fighting the empire.

Bad idea in response to the conflict: He joins Obi-Wan and the others to rescue the Princess and fight with the Rebel forces. Only problem is he has no real experience.

Twist: The Empire has a planet destroying Death Star and Luke is chosen to lead the attack to destroy the space station.

Examples in the Bible

#### Moses

Protagonist: Moses

Conflict: Israel has been enslaved under Egyptian rule.

Bad Idea in response to the conflict: Moses is an Israelite who is raised in the court of Egypt, unbeknownst to anyone in the kingdom. When he finds out his real identity, he kills an Egyptian and goes into exile, raising a family.

Twist: Moses, now 80 years old, is called to become the Deliverer. This is a man who is fraught with problems — an old man, a murderer, Israelite raised in Egyptian Courts, a man who does not even want to do the job. He delivers Israel from bondage, but because of his impatience with the people, he is barred from entering the Promised Land.

#### **The New Testament**

Protagonist(s): Man and God

Conflict: Mankind is separated from God and the sin nature leads to death.

Bad idea in response to the conflict. God becomes man! — His own Son Jesus — to live among the people and proclaim the Good News of reconciliation.

Twist: Part of the Good News is Jesus must die, only to be resurrected so that all may have eternal life.









## A CAUSE

There needs to be a cause in the story, something that people can appropriate and adopt as something that defines them personally. It's the thing that shows the true purpose of the character.

The cause gives insight into the present condition, but also expresses something universal that the global audience can understand.

This cause allows the audience to say, "This is who I am."

Examples:

### It's a Wonderful Life

Mr. Potter is a corrupt banker who is making life miserable for the people in the town.

Response: George discovers the reason he didn't leave town to do great things is because he was needed to mobilize the people in the town against Mr. Potter's corruption.

## **Star Wars**

The Empire has conquered the galaxy and spread the philosophy of the Dark Side of the Force.

Response: A simple farm boy, Luke Skywalker is destined to bring down the empire and redeem the dark legacy of his father, a once good man who spread the Dark Side of the Force.

#### Jaws

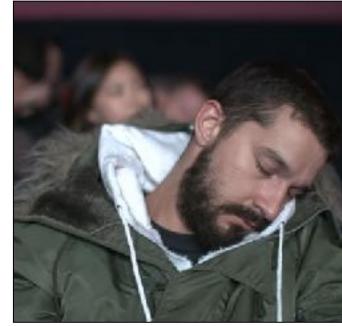
A shark is killing vacationers and it's ruining the local economy.

Response: a beleaguered Sheriff Brody is at odds with local officials and his family and the incident proves to be a test of his moral character.



We don't want people to be bored. Something interesting must always be happening onscreen, otherwise the audience looks like this:



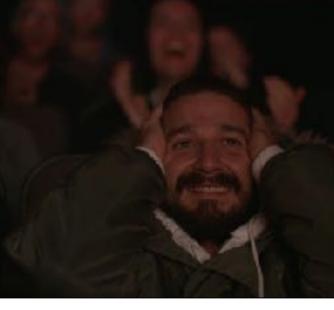


Boredom is the result of telling the story, or rather, dependence on verbal communication, which is only 5% of communication. In the CPID Cycle I developed, the screen page or Group of Scenes every 1-2 minutes should affect the audience. First, we define the **Emotional Objective** (comedy, fear, suspense, etc.) of the scene. Then, structure the page so that the experience creates this cycle:

**Conflict** affects the body this way:



**WTF** affects the body this way:



# Conflict

First, there must be a conflict onscreen that will interest the audience. When the conflict grabs their attention, they have curiosity, and that releases **Dopamine.** 

Therefore...

# WTF

What follows is a What the Frack moment. It should be an action and/or a piece of dialogue that makes the audience wonder or cringe which makes them say "WTF?"

God routinely inserted WTF in the Bible e.g. He commands Ezekiel to eat cakes baked over dung and Hosea to marry a prostitute.

But...

# CPID\* Screen Cycle

\*Can't Put it Down (or Can't Stop Watching ffects the body this! CSW)

**LOL** affects the body this way:

LOL

audience laughs out loud,

or chuckles at the thing in

funny, but rather a moment

suspense (e.g. protagonist

opens a door expecting a

shock, but finds nothing

releases **Oxytocin**, the

chemical.

Therefore...

and chuckles in relief). LOL

trust chemical or the moral

Next comes the LOL

moment, where the

response to the WTF

moment. LOL doesn't

necessarily have to be

of joy, wonder, or even



**Poetry** affects the body this way:



**Discovery** affects the body this way:



# Poetry

The entire scene/ sequence has a rhythm that should feel like poetry in the execution. Also, poetry can be the way a character explains something, or someone does something profound, or an image that is striking. Akira Kurosawa and Stanley Kubrick are especially good at this with their visual poetry.

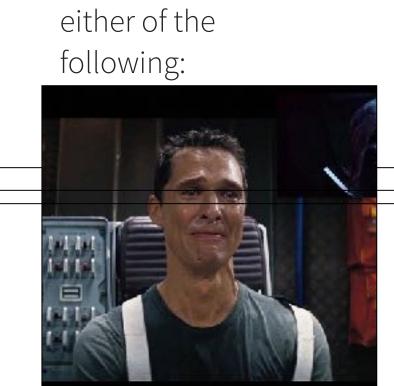
This moment allows the audience to applaud and cheer because the artistry touches the heart.

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But...

# Discovery

At the end of every page/ scene group, the audience should feel like they've discovered or learned something. Also, there should be a piece of dialogue that teaches something new in an entertaining way. Quentin Tarantino and Woody Allen are masters in this way in regards to dialogue.



Depending on the

emotional objective

of the page, the end

of the page/scene

should make the

audience react in



We experience Catharsis as we feel pity and fear for the character. **Phenylethalamine (PEA)**, the "happiness chemical," is released.

Excitement is the result of showing the story, which nonverbal communication — body language and tone — or 95% of communication, because body language affects the body.