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CREATE A BRAND
STORY LIKE A
HOLLYWOOD MOVIE

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FADE IN:

EXT. AFRICA - DAY (60,000 YEARS AGO)

HUNTER-GATHERERS cross the plain. Bloody spears at the ready.

SHAW (V.O)
Sixty thousand years ago, our
ancestors began their conquest of
earth. Global domination fuelled by
our big brains. Upright posture.
Opposable thumbs. A paradoxical
eusociability...

EXT. LASCAUX CAVE - NIGHT (30,000 YEARS AGO)

STUART SHAW -- in hard hat and wellies -- beams before the cave
paintings. He looks freezing cold -- because he is.

SHAW
... And a love of stories. Stories
that graduated from Palaeolithic
tales of survival like how to start a
fire or catch up with lunch...

INT. ATHENS - LYCEUM - DAY (335 BC)

Shaw shivers in his robes as ARISTOTLE wafts lyrical to the
awe-struck students.

SHAW (V.O)
... To philosophical stories about
who we are and where we came from...

INT. CINEMA - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Shaw sits front row in 3D glasses. He munches popcorn.

SHAW
... To the epic yarns that dazzle us
today. 21st Century storytellers
have come a long way. Or have we?

We see on screen that Shaw is watching the same human
migration out of Africa shown in the intro.

SHAW
As a master storyteller of evolution,
E.O. Wilson, cautions: "We have
created a Star Wars civilization with
Stone Age emotions."

Shaw gets up and annoys the hell out of those behind him.

EXT. CINEMA - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

Shaw comes out and heads home along a bustling sidewalk.

SHAW

And because our primitive emotions haven't changed, neither has the essence of the stories we tell. Every story ever told is about one thing: Solving a problem.

Shaw stops in his tracks. A bespectacled, too-busy-for-words female INVENTOR (35) blocks the way.

INVENTOR

I solve problems for a living. But surely there are different types of stories out there than problem solving stories?

EXT. ROOF - DAY

Shaw hangs from the roof with a fierce looking cat.

SHAW

Think of the stories you tell everyday. How you fixed the washer. Pulled off that deal at work. Saved the cat from the neighbour's roof -- again. What kind of stories are they, you cat rescuer you?

Shaw drops the cat and the inventor -- steadying the ladder -- catches it. The decidedly ungrateful cat proceeds to claw the inventor to shreds.

INT. STARBUCKS - DAY

Shaw sits at the window. He sips a frothy latte and watches traffic in the busy street outside.

SHAW

Every brand story is a problem solving story too. Brands create products and services that solve eternal human problems: hunger, security, disease, reproduction, boredom.

Shaw reads the exciting menu trying not to be bored.

SHAW

Products and services wrapped in brand stories designed to out-story the competition.

Shaw looks out the window at "JOE'S JAVA JOINT" across the street. It is empty and boarded up.

SHAW

Business survival is survival of the fittest brand story.

An eager WAITER cleans the table. Too eager and Shaw protects his coffee from the cleaning spray.

SHAW

But the good ones don't just use their brand stories to mythologise products and services. Brand stories also inspire workplaces that employees can buy into and are a key ally in the ongoing 'War for Talent'.

A WAITRESS looms around Shaw. She places down a saucer with his change. Shaw is shocked at how little things change.

SHAW

Seems brands with great brand stories can even charge the earth.

The inventor is sat behind Shaw gnawing at a bagel, crumbs spilling on her laptop. We hadn't noticed her before.

INVENTOR

Okay, gotcha. But I'm not J.K. Rowling. I'm launching a brand over here -- I've got stuff to ship.

EXT. 1 INFINITE LOOP - DAY

Shaw points back at Apple's shiny HQ.

SHAW

When the brands we love left the garage, all they had was a great story to tell. And learning how to tell -- and sell -- a great story -- is something everyone can do.

Shaw really, really, tries to look convincing.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD SIGN - DAY (AERIAL SHOT)

Shaw leans out a helicopter and points at the sign as they fly madly toward it. He has to shout to be heard.

SHAW

I'm going to reveal some of Hollywood's story-telling secrets to help you create your brand story.

The inventor hangs under the helicopter in a stunt harness that doesn't look too safe.

INVENTOR

Why!?

SHAW

Because Hollywood movies use a problem-solving story formula that you can use to structure and create your brand story.

INVENTOR

Yeah? How already!

SHAW

Every movie is made up of 3 Acts. Each Act comprising a number of plot points. Using Star Wars as an example, I'm going to highlight how these plot points can inspire and structure your brand story.

INVENTOR

That mean I'm gonna be able to spot the same plot turns used in all Hollywood movies?

SHAW

Love stories. Thrillers. Zombie flicks. Westerns. They all use the same screenwriting structure. At least they do if they want to make any money. So if you don't want to know how movies work, look away now...

The hapless inventor doesn't realise she is about to splat into the Hollywood sign.

Shaw nods to the PILOT looking back at them like they are both just plain nuts. He reluctantly yanks back the stick.

EXT. TATOOINE - DAY

We are watching Star Wars. The part where we meet LUKE, the basin-haired farm boy dreaming of getting out and becoming a star fighter in a galaxy far, far away. Shaw talks over the movie (V.O here standing of course for 'Voice Over').

SHAW (V.O)

Every movie introduces the hero as someone flawed. With issues. Hang ups. Bad at their jobs. Losers in love. In other words: they have a problem that is holding them back. Luke's problem: he doesn't know who he is.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Shaw stands before the TV screen -- Star Wars on pause. The inventor sits at the other end of a really clean boardroom table. She looks down at an unused notepad.

SHAW

Ok, Brandwalker, what was life like on your planet before you created your planet-changing brand? Was there something in your work or personal life holding you back?

INVENTOR

What have I got to do with my brand?

SHAW

Everything. Brands aren't things: they're people doing things. And in every successful movie -- and every great brand story -- there are not one but two happy endings.

INVENTOR

Two?

Shaw points to a whiteboard where we see written:

- 1) The happy ending of blowing up the Death Star
- 2) And the happy solution to Luke's inner problem

SHAW

Your brand's journey is twice as powerful if you can articulate it with a dual narrative that includes your personal journey too.

The inventor fidgets the notepad -- still unconvinced. Shaw turns back to the TV.

INT. OBI WAN'S HUT - NIGHT

On screen: we see the moment where Luke shows OBI WAN the message from PRINCESS LEIA.

SHAW (V.O)

In every movie -- whether it's a love story or a thriller -- half way through Act 1 -- about ten minutes in -- the hero's stuck-in-a-rut equilibrium is shattered.

INVENTOR (V.O)

"Shattered?"

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Shaw begins to fast forward the action on screen.

SHAW
Something happens. Something unexpected. What screenwriters call the 'inciting incident'.

INVENTOR
Luke discovering the hidden message?

SHAW
Yes, but the inciting incident is more than the catalyst for the hero to move out of their comfort zone. It marks the moment in the movie where there is no turning back.

Shaw pauses the movie as Luke discovers his dead aunt and uncle.

SHAW (CONT'D)
At the end of Act 1, screenwriters typically signal the momentous importance of this moment by making the hero physically leave home -- or quit a job -- and embark on a journey.

INVENTOR
Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore. So you want to know what came out of left field -- shook up my boring life -- and led me here?

SHAW
It could be a book that changed how you thought about your career or the world. Or a conference speech or chance conversation in a lift that sparked an idea that wouldn't go away.

INVENTOR
I'm like Mrs. Caractacus Pott here.

SHAW
So when did you realize that something needed fixing and only Mrs. Pott could fix it? Your epiphany?

INVENTOR
It didn't lead me half way around the Galaxy.

SHAW
No, just out of Finchley. But we -- your audience I mean -- want to hear about it.

INT. MOS EISLEY CANTINA - NIGHT

On screen: The scene where Obi Wan is bartering with HAN SOLO over the price of chartering a ship.

SHAW (V.O)

There is an old playwriting adage that goes: Get your hero up a tree. Throw stones at him. Then let him down gracefully. But to climb a big brand tree, you need a plan.

INVENTOR (V.O)

A business plan?

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Shaw turns to the inventor as the film continues.

SHAW

At the end of Act 1, the inciting incident has pushed our hero -- you -- in a new direction. But to get there, they -- you -- need a plan. In Star Wars, that plan is hiring a ship and finding the Princess.

INVENTOR

You do know my first business plan was a total waste of space?

Shaw smiles knowingly and turns back to the movie.

INT. TRASH COMPACTOR - NIGHT

On screen: The final desperate moments of the famous trash compactor scene.

SHAW (V.O)

Act 2. We're up the tree and drama -- which arises from conflict between the hero and their nemesis -- builds and builds.

INVENTOR (V.O)

My nemesis being what, my competitor?

SHAW (V.O)

The nemesis in the movie world is the same as the nemesis in the business world: The bad person who wants what you want as bad as you do.

We watch R2D2 save Luke, Leia and Han from being crushed.

SHAW (V.O) (CONT'D)
But that final confrontation doesn't happen till Act 3. Right now, we're in stone throwing Act 2. The part where our hero calls for help. Unless you were very lucky, I'm guessing you made some mistakes?

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

The inventor stops taking notes.

INVENTOR
Enough for a dozen movies. You want me to include my screw ups?

SHAW
Every screw up. Every wrong turn. And big up your nemesis. The odds you faced in business and your personal life. And when you got stuck up that tree, tell us which family members or friends helped you. The first investors who came to your rescue.

Outside we hear but don't see two people walk by. They are laughing about something. The inventor smiles.

INVENTOR
You want me to say how I got my Avengers to assemble?

SHAW
Everyone loves an origin story. Just look at how many times they've remade Superman or Batman. But no hero makes it on their own.

EXT. REBEL BASE - NIGHT

On screen: The Death Star is moving into position to destroy the rebel base.

SHAW (V.O)
At the end of Act 2, the hero reaches what screenwriter's call 'the lowest point'. This is where everything seems lost.

INVENTOR (V.O)
They thought they'd got away, but the Millennium Falcon was bugged. The Death Star is moving in to blow the rebel base into smithereens. How can our heroes ever stop them now!?

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Shaw lets the footage roll. The inventor smiles sarcastically.

INVENTOR

It's Hollywood. The hero always gets up and finds a way to win. Life isn't like Hollywood.

SHAW

You made it. You might not have had a brand-killing moment. But most brands hit a low.

INVENTOR

When the accountant called me for a change.

SHAW

And when you realised your original plan maybe was a waste of space. How did you and your team of Avengers pull together and find a way to win?

The inventor thinks back.

INT. X-WING COCKPIT - NIGHT

On screen: Luke is alone. This is the moment where only he can destroy the Death Star.

SHAW (V.O)

Act 3. The big hero versus nemesis showdown. In love stories, this is the part where the hero wins their sweetheart. In thrillers, when the bomb is diffused at the last moment.

We watch Luke hear Obi Wan telling him to use the force.

INVENTOR (V.O)

And in Star Wars, the part where Luke hears voices and bullseye's the death Star. I didn't hear voices.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Shaw walks to the window and stares out across London.

SHAW

You listened to your accountant.

The inventor observes Shaw, but can't help watching the screen as Luke fires his missiles and the Death Star is blown to pieces.

SHAW

Remember in Act 1 when we said that every movie -- every story -- tells two problem-solving stories. Without looking, what were they?

The inventor steals a glance at the whiteboard -- then notices Shaw watching in the window: busted.

INVENTOR

Blowing up the Death Star -- and solving personal issues. You're saying that Luke can only destroy the Death Star --

SHAW

-- If he learns to believe in himself.

INVENTOR

You want to know if I had some kind of revelation?

SHAW

If you came through your hardest moment a better person, maybe it was because you became a better person. Not every movie puts the hero's self-revelation before the final showdown. It can happen after. But for the story to work on both levels it has to be there.

Shaw stands before the TV. The inventor takes notes.

INVENTOR

That's it?

Shaw clicks fast forward. Not quite.

INT. GRAND AUDIENCE CHAMBER - NIGHT

On screen: The heroes are receiving medals.

SHAW (V.O)

Every movie ends with a few scenes that show us what happened next.

INVENTOR (V.O)

Because people hate not knowing how things turned out.

SHAW (V.O)

We like to get all teary-eyed as the couple walk into the sunset. Or cheer as the battered agent gets up ready to face the next bomb threat.

INVENTOR (V.O)
I thought that was just Hollywood
selling us on a sequel?

SHAW (V.O)
Hollywood is a business too. But
movie epilogues show us that the inner
problem holding back the hero in Act
1 has been resolved: Two endings.

INVENTOR (V.O)
He's blown up the Death Star -- and got
a new family. I get it.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Shaw turns off the film. Wipes the whiteboard.

INVENTOR
But I'm not married.

SHAW
You are to your brand. A brand that
you've carried up a tree and shielded
from rock throwing competitors.

Shaw wipes the whiteboard.

INVENTOR
So that's it? The end? Wait, how
long is it meant to be?

Shaw starts to write something new and unseen.

SHAW
Most screenplays are 110 pages long,
each page a minute of screen time.
But don't write a 110 page brand
story, unless you've got a movie deal.

Shaw steps back. He has written:

Two years ago, [YOU] was stuck in a rut doing
[PREVIOUS JOB/LIFE] when something happened
[THE INCITING INCIDENT].

This set you off in a new direction to create
[YOUR BRAND] which could [STOP/CHANGE/DO
SOMETHING UNIQUE].

Along the way, you encountered many
[OBSTACLES] but with the help of [ALLIES] you
made it together.

All of which taught you something important
[YOUR SELF REVELATION] about yourself.

SHAW

The most important thing is be true to your story. Unless you want someone else to tell it for you.

The inventor finishes her notes. Shaw goes to the door.

INVENTOR

Is that it?

Shaw opens the door. In comes the SALES DIRECTOR. He peeks at the notepad, the whiteboard.

SHAW

You like comedies, rom coms?

The sales director is confused.

SALES DIRECTOR

Actually, horror movies.

The inventor rolls her eyes: typical.

SHAW

Pick a genre: Sci-fi. Crime. Or horror.

INVENTOR

"Horror?" Seriously?

SHAW

I'm not suggesting you write a horror movie, unless your brand was inspired by a social or environmental horror story.

The inventor nods as Shaw goes to the whiteboard again. He scrubs off the template and writes something new.

He steps back. This time he has written:

Luke Skywalker, a spirited farm boy, joins rebel forces to save Princess Leia from the evil Darth Vader, and the galaxy from the Empire's planet-destroying Death Star.

SHAW (CONT'D)

In Hollywood, they call it a 'logline.'

SALES DIRECTOR

The stuff they put on posters?

INVENTOR

And TV listings?

Shaw rings certain words and phrases.

SHAW

Note the emotive power words:
'spirited', 'rebel forces', 'evil',
'planet-destroying'. The 'farm boy'
must find something in himself to save
the day. Just because you're a
business, you don't have to stick to
business speak. Let your story
appeal to the heart and the head.

SALES DIRECTOR

To get bums on seats?

SHAW

And knock 'em dead. Your story has to
be a unique, once-in-a-lifetime
journey they'll want to hear again and
again. If they sit there thinking...

Shaw looks at the inventor. She gets it.

INVENTOR

... I've seen this movie before.

SHAW

They won't come back. And they won't
bring their friends with them. But
don't forget your brand story isn't
just there to entertain your
customers.

Shaw opens the door. In walks a furtive HR.

SHAW (CONT'D)

HR need to tell your brand story too.
To create a workplace and culture
inspired by the values and themes
embodied by your brand story.

Shaw opens the door again. FINANCE strides in.

SHAW (CONT'D)

Finance need to spin your brand story
to investors and markets. Hopefully
in a way that fits your values too.

Shaw opens the door once more. PROCUREMENT enters --
followed by an UNDERAGE MINER -- a tired Chinese FACTORY
WORKER -- and a gaunt Bangladeshi GARMENT WORKER.

INVENTOR

Who are these people?

PROCUREMENT

Not with me.

Shaw wafts a hand through them -- they are all holographic projections.

SHAW (CONT'D)

Not yet. These are ghosts of your supply chain yet to come. Everyone who works for you should go home at night and say to their families that what they heard about your brand rings true. The days of brands spinning two stories: one delivered loud and clear to their rich customers -- and another whispered in Satanic mines and sweatshops -- is over. Unless you want your brand story to really be a horror movie.

Shaw pulls on his coat.

SHAW

Remember, this is the beginning. Every new product or service you ship needs to bask in the same limelight. Don't let your sequel suck.

INVENTOR

I actually preferred 'The Empire Strikes Back'.

SHAW

Me too. And they will if you forget to be faithful to your story.

With that, Shaw bids them farewell, holograms in tow.

A beat as the team look at each other -- then share out the notes.

And as they do, the inventor smiles at the door.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END -- ALMOST

END CREDITS

There are loads of great books about the structure of great screenwriting and classic storytelling.

Check out the following:

'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' by Joseph Campbell. Campbell's pioneering work famously helped George Lucas nail the good versus evil myth structure in Star Wars.

'The Anatomy of Story' by John Truby: www.truby.com

'The Screenwriter's Bible' by David Trottier:
www.keepwriting.com

And 'Writing Screenplays that Sell' by Michael Hauge:
www.storymastery.com

Note: there are movies that don't have self-revelations or epilogues. Movies where the hero is the bad guy. But these are exceptions and as great as some of them are, I'm hoping your brand doesn't do evil and wants a happy ending.

The E.O. Wilson quote comes from an article in the Smithsonian Magazine: 'Edward O. Wilson's New Take on Human Nature'.
www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/edward-o-wilsons-new-take-on-human-nature-160810520/?no-ist

If you want a helpful compilation of power words to use when writing your brand story, drop by Jon Morrow's blog and download his free PDF: <http://boostblogtraffic.com/power-words/>

The 'INVENTOR' is a fictional female inventor working in London. None of the places or events depicted here -- in particular the part where she was nearly bludgeoned by the Hollywood sign actually happened -- because the 'INVENTOR' really is a fictional character.

'SHAW' is real and goes by the name of Stuart Shaw, freelance web copywriter at mine the gap!

In my spare time I like to write screenplays, hence this.

If you want my help writing your brand story -- or if you're a Hollywood producer looking for the next blockbuster --

You can reach me at: www.minethegap.com

