Assignment 02: Story Arcs

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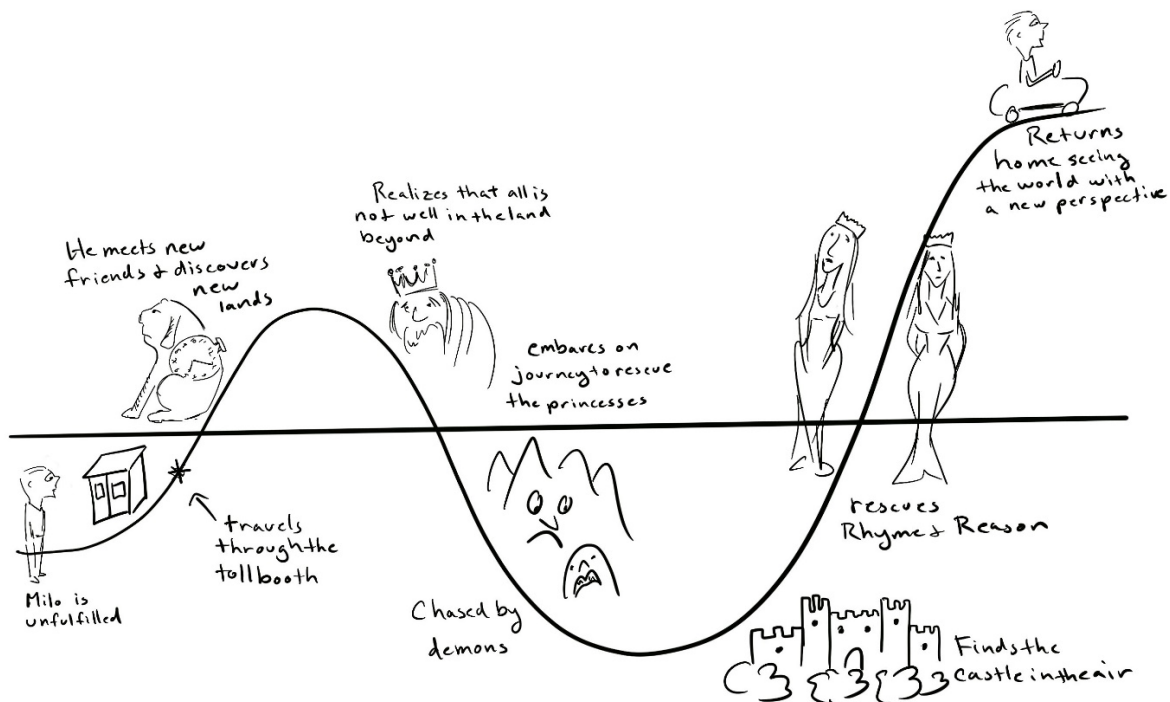
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Identify the emotional shapes of your 3 favorite stories. Draw them out and annotate the key points.

The Phantom Tollbooth

- Exposition
  - Milo is introduced. He is bored and uninterested in the world around him. Finding the tollbooth in his room is the inciting incident
- Rising Action
  - Milo meets new and unusual characters and begins to show signs of curiosity
  - He embarks on a journey to rescue Rhyme and Reason
- Climax
  - Milo and his friends, Tock and Humbug, escape demons to rescue Rhyme and Reason from the Castle in the Air
- Falling Action
  - Milo and his friends are congratulated on their achievements and order is restored to the Land Beyond
- Resolution
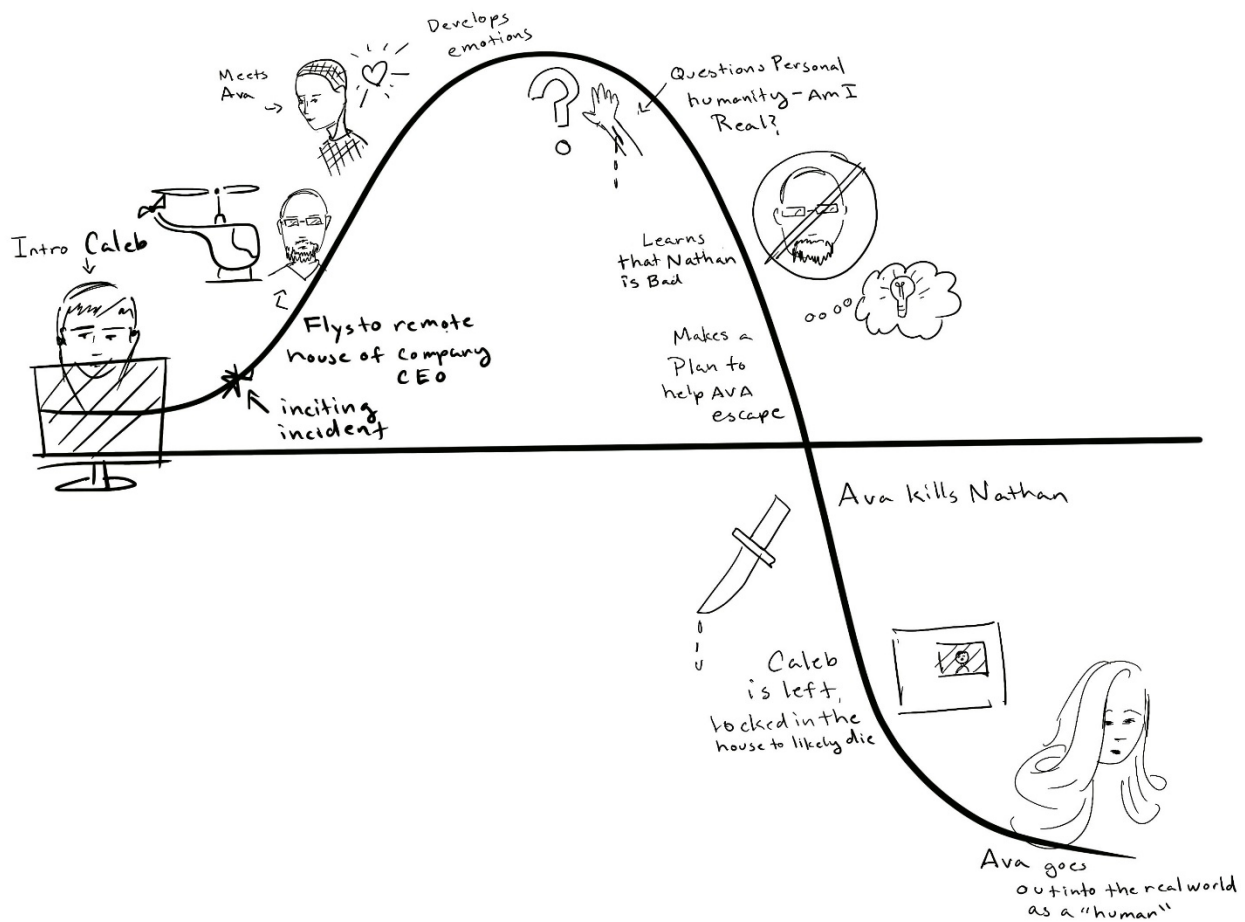 - Back at home, Milo sees that life is fuller and more exciting than he realized

Story Shape Image

Ex Machina

- Exposition
  - There is very little to no exposition as Caleb is introduced quickly as a winner of some prize with the inciting incident being him flown to the remote house of the company CEO for the weekend. We don't learn anything about Caleb
- Rising Action
  - Caleb meets Nathan who introduces him to Ava, an AI. Caleb interacts with Ava and forms and emotional connection to her.
- Climax
  - Caleb discovers Nathan's disturbing behavior with the AI's in the house, questions his own humanity, and devises a plan to help Ava escape.
- Falling Action
  - The plan goes wrong and Ava kills Nathan. Caleb ends up locked in a room in the house as Ava escapes.
- Resolution
  - Ava sets out into the real world looking fully human with no one to suspect otherwise. Caleb is abandoned in the house to likely die.
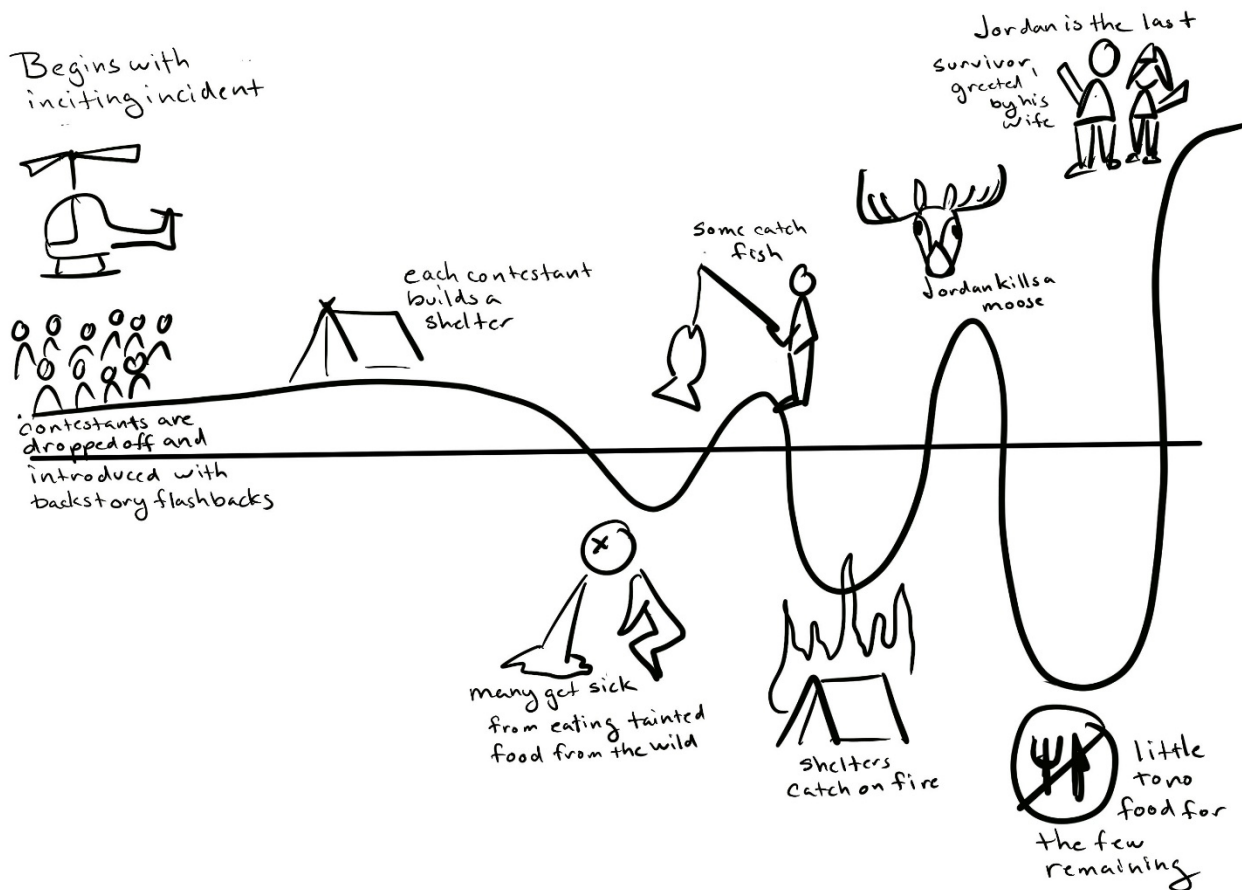
Story Shape Image

Alone Season 6

- Exposition
  - 10 contestants are gradually introduced as they are dropped off in the Canadian Arctic, isolated from each other
- Rising Action
  - One by one, contestants left tapped out from the show, either for injury, health concerns, or loneliness.
- Climax
  - The strange aspect of this climax in this story is that none of the contestants know who else remains. The story becomes more focused on the last 3 contestants. All three struggle for food, but Jordan kills a moose.
- Falling Action
  - Even though Jordan is eating moose every day, he is losing weight due to its low fat content. He stores the kidney fat from the moose to render and eat, but some wolverines end up stealing it. Through all of this, Jordan remains calm and unphased.
- Resolution
  - After over 70 days in the wilderness, one of the final three contestant's shelter burns down and the other is removed from the show due to her low weight. Jordan learns he is the last one standing as his wife meets him in the arctic to bring him home.

Story Shape Image

Create a 3-act story spine using your "What if.. " scenarios. Fill it with the beats for each of the acts, but no need to go into small details.

What if: Pixar Story Spline

1. Once upon a time, a survival show winner named Jordan, was flown to a remote location to meet the show producer to discuss his win and future opportunities.
2. When he arrived, he met Nathan, the producer and his companions Ava and Kyoko. They continued to get to know each other. . .
3. Until one day the house burns down and Nathan dies in the fire.
4. Because of that, Jordan and the two women were forced to travel many miles in the wilderness by foot to the nearest town.
5. Because of what happens on the journey, Jordan learns that the women are actually intelligent robots and Ava disassembles Kyoko for spare parts.
6. Because of that, Jordan questions Ava's actions and motivations since he met her
7. Until finally he pushes Ava off a cliff
8. And ever since then, Jordan lives with the internal conflict of having killed someone vs having saved society from the dangers of robots like Ava.

What if: 3 Act Story with Beats

Act 1

- A survival show winner named Jordan, got flown to a remote location to meet the show producer, Nathan
- When he arrives, he meets Nathan's assistant, a mute named Kyoko, and Ava, a colleague who shows an instant interest in him.

Act 2

- The next evening, Ava wakes Jordan because a fire has started in the house. Jordan grabs his backpack, they find Kyoko and run outside. Nathan is nowhere to be found.
- The three of them are forced to trek through the wilderness to reach the nearest town.
- Along the way, Jordan is attacked by a wolf, but Ava swiftly saves him by killing it with a rock. He is grateful, but more surprised by her ability.
- They find a natural water source and he encourages the women to drink. They decline and Ava is forced to reveal that she and Kyoko are not human.
- When they continue their journey, Ava falls and her leg is crushed by a rock. She disassembles Kyoko without hesitation to restore her own leg and keep the rest for spare parts.

Act 3

- Jordan is confused and full of conflicting thoughts as they forge on. He asks her many questions about her time with Nathan.
- The two stop at a picturesque cliff as they realize they are just a short trek to the town. Ava turns from Jordan and he pushes her off. Ava grabs Jordan's hand and he falls to the ground, forced to look her in the eye. He grabs a knife from his bag and slices her wrist, sending her crashing into the ravine
- Jordan stands, puts the artificial hand into his bag and heads on to the town.

Read nielsen_FromUserToCharacter.pdf and write a couple of paragraphs of responses.

From User to Character Response

Nielsen examines the different approaches to writing scenarios for case studies and how it attributes to their effectiveness. He looks to film scriptwriting as inspiration for how scenarios can be improved by character descriptions. The characters in film scriptwriting are engaging with personal motivations that impact the flow of the story. The personas in scenarios on the other hand tend to be flat and stereotypical.

The author examines scenarios from two authors on scenario-based design methods, John M Carroll and Alan Cooper. Cooper's scenario is more user description focused whereas Carroll's scenario is more use or task driven. Nielson deduces that both scenarios lack character insight and focus on story action rather than character development.

Neilsen looks to authors Lajos Egri and Andrew Horton for insights to creating believable, rounded characters. Egri believes the writer must consider the physiology, sociology, and psychology of a character, each of which influence the character's behavior. Horton looks at a character's inner consciousness and self-consciousness as well as their interaction with culture and society.

I think it's valuable to move away from stereotypes as personas and create more rounded characters. Neilsen points out though that users descriptions and development should be grounded in knowledge of actual users, not fiction.