



The 21 Story Steps

When writers create a story, what ‘building blocks’ do they use to construct it? Well, one way of exploring that question is to ask: what are the key elements of a story that you couldn’t do without if it were to be a story? And these are what we would call the **21 Story Steps**. Let’s have a look at what they are...

*** Protagonist and Antagonist** – Most stories have a central character (the protagonist) who is trying to do something and another character (the antagonist) whose aim is to stop them from doing it. The writer John le Carré once said that ‘The cat sat on the mat’ is not the beginning of a story, but ‘The cat sat on the dog’s mat’ is. Why? Because as soon as the dog comes along and sees his mat occupied by the cat, there’s bound to be trouble – and it’s the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist that is usually the main dynamic of a story. There are other terms it is possible to use in this context, including ‘hero’ and ‘villain’, but here, it should be said, that the instigator of the plan is technically the protagonist, and that character is not always the same as the ‘hero’. Also, it should be noted, protagonist and antagonist are gender neutral terms.

“All drama is conflict. Without conflict, there is no action. Without action, there is no character. Without character, there is no story.”

Syd Field, story theorist

“All good plots come from well-orchestrated characters pitted against one another in a conflict of wills.”

James N. Frey, American writer and creative writing teacher

“Don’t just write a strong female protagonist. Be one.”

A.D. Posey, poet



Back Story – This is what has happened before the story began, but which is still relevant to what is going on right now. The back story is also sometimes called ‘The Ghost’, because what happened in the past is still ‘haunting’ people in the present. This is particularly the case when a character is dealing with a past trauma. Think here of the events of Godric’s Hollow and that literal scar on Harry Potter – ‘Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning’ – which becomes the physical embodiment of Harry’s back story.

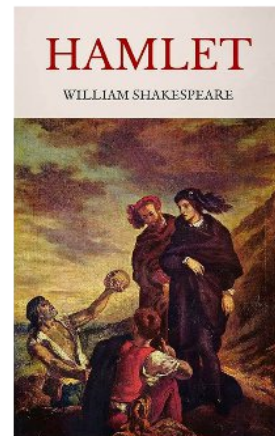
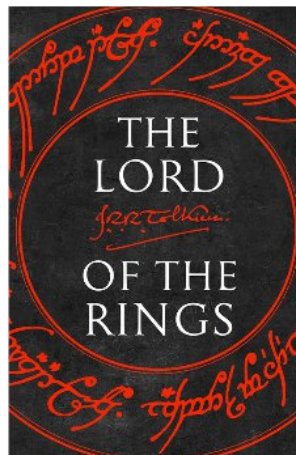
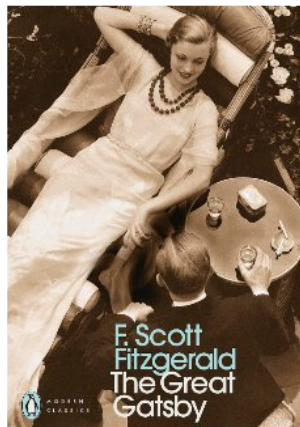
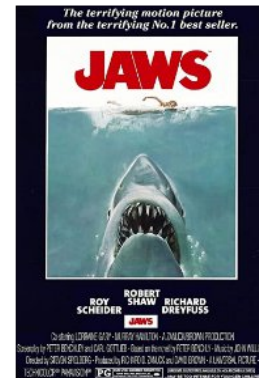
“The most important things to remember about back story are that (a) everyone has a history and (b) most of it isn’t very interesting. Stick to the parts that are, and don’t get carried away with the rest.”

Stephen King, *On Writing*



*** The Day of Change** – This is when something happens that creates an imbalance in the life of a character. The Day of Change is referred to by writers as the ‘Catalyst Event’ because it’s what upsets the apple cart and the status quo. The Day of Change can be internal, as in puberty in coming-of-age stories (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Catcher in the Rye*), or external, as in a sudden change in the weather, especially storms (*Robinson Crusoe*, *The Martian*). *The Wizard of Oz* involves both types of change, as the tornado is real, but it also represents the inner turmoil of a teenager. She’s not called Dorothy Gale for nothing. The Day of Change can also result from a new arrival in town (*Jaws*, *Agamemnon*), unexpected information that makes you reevaluate the situation (*Hamlet*, *The Matrix*), or a chance find, coincidence or encounter that can upset the balance of your world (*The Lord of the Rings*, *The Great Gatsby*). But a Day of Change is not enough in itself: it must incite a need to alter things back to what they were or create a new and acceptable equilibrium.

Catalyst, noun. 1. Something that makes a chemical reaction happen more quickly without itself being changed. 2. An event or person that causes great change
Cambridge Dictionary

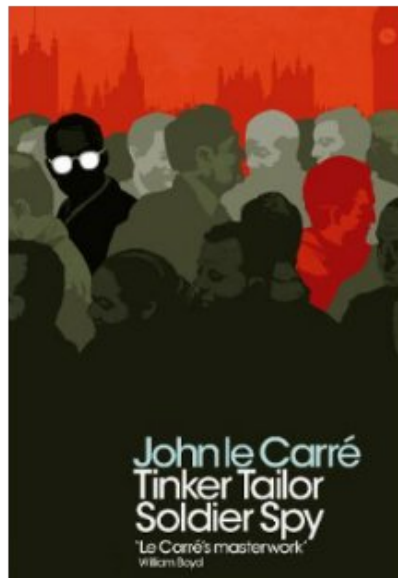


*** The Trigger for Action** – This is when an incident in the tale incites the desire in a character to change things or correct something that has gone wrong. That's why this event is often referred to by writers as the 'Inciting Incident'. And it's the action that follows from this trigger that drives the story forward – where action can be defined as the purposeful intent of the character to achieve their goal. That's why the 'action' of any tale is always a verb, such as *to win, to find, to make, to sell, to escape, to discover...*

“The inciting incident is how you get (characters) to do something. It’s the doorway through which they can’t return, you know. The story takes care of the rest.”

Donald Miller, A MILLION MILES IN A THOUSAND YEARS

The Puzzle – In any story, especially a mystery, there is usually a secret to be uncovered or revealed. The mystery element of a tale raises curiosity, and this is important because one of the reasons why people keep on reading a story is that they want to know what happens next.



Who’s the mole?

The Inner Flaw or Problem – This is what is lacking or missing in the character that needs to be put right in order to make the character a more complete and better person. The Greek word for this, which Aristotle uses in his *Poetics*, is *hamartia*. A flaw can be a psychological need – those aspects of a character’s nature that are lacking within them, for example, a need to be more self-confident – or a moral need

– how a character must learn to act differently towards others, for example, being less bossy. And often in a story what a character learns about themselves and why they must change becomes part of how they ultimately achieve their goal.

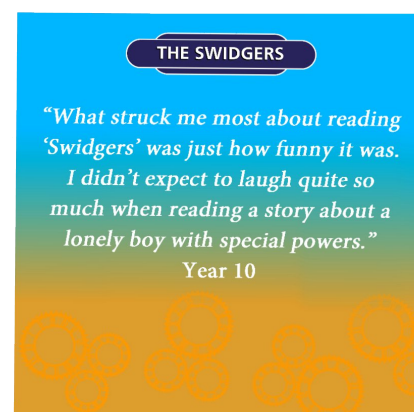
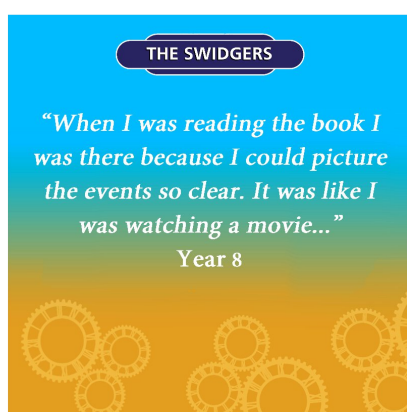
“Tell me what you want and I’ll tell you who you are.”

Anton Chekhov, writer

*** Motivation and Desire** – There is always a reason behind a character’s actions, and this usually comes from a want or desire in that character. However, what someone wanted at the start of a tale isn’t always the same as what they want by the end – and this is because the story journey can alter how a character sees themselves and the world they live in. A classic example of this is Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.

“An intention comes into existence through a motive. The intention always wants to attain a goal. The goal is always identical with the elimination of the motive. Therefore, the intention becomes extinct as soon as the goal is attained.”

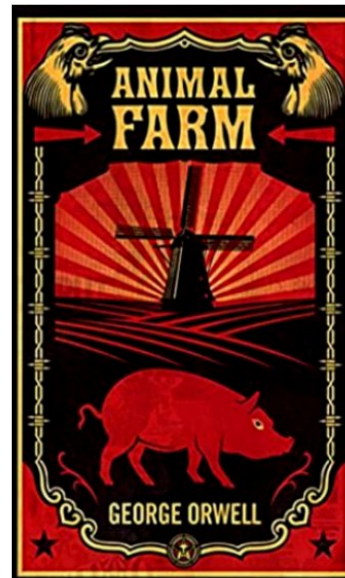
Eugene Vale, *The Technique of Screenplay Writing* (1944)



The Character Arc – This is what writers call the internal change that occurs in the character as the story progresses. An arc in geometry is a curve between two points, and storytellers use the term ‘character arc’ because as the character moves through a story, there is a transition between what they were like at the beginning point and what they are like by the end point. The ‘arc’ can be many shapes – smooth and gradual or rapid and acute – depending on the story you are telling.

The final lines of *Animal Farm*:

‘Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.’



*** The Task and the Strategy** – In a story, the main character is sometimes given a task to complete, or they have to come up with some sort of action plan in order to achieve their goal. Either way, the character needs to find the right strategy and tactics to attain what they want.

CLARA: Now, what's the plan?

DOCTOR: Who said I've got a plan?

Doctor Who, 'The Snowmen', written by Steven Moffat

Helping Hands and Opposing Forces – Usually, in a story, there are numerous forces and obstacles which work against the main character and their plan. Apart from the antagonist (sometimes called the villain), these opposing forces can include the weather, objects that go wrong, and gateways or thresholds that the main character can't get past. But often, as well, there are allies, helpers and gifts that can assist the protagonist on their way. If the helper is an older and more experienced figure, then this character is referred to as the 'Mentor'. Think, for example, of Dumbledore in the 'Harry Potter' series, and Granny in the Time Adventure series THE SWIDGERS.

Note here that there is a section on the www.nallon.com website called ORPHANS AND THEIR MENTORS, which discusses in detail the nature of the Mentor, as well as the history and story tropes of tales in popular culture focusing on the orphan child.

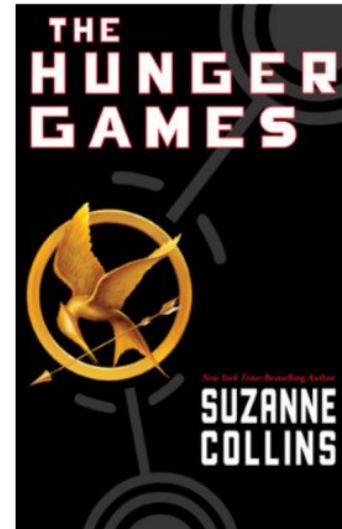
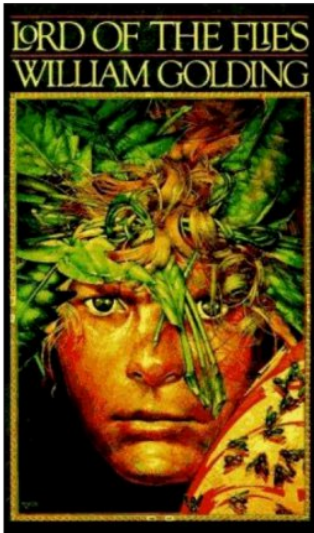
Time Limit – Often, a story will have a deadline to be met, which means that the main character must complete the task within a fixed period of time, thus upping the jeopardy and the story stakes. In storytelling, this is usually referred to as 'The Clock'. Think here of how many of the challenges in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* are time limited.

"Everything is an experiment until it has a deadline. That gives it a destination, context, and a reason."

Brian Eno, English musician, songwriter and record producer



Setting – This is the world of your story and includes the time period, the physical space, and that world’s moral and political culture. ‘World building’ is the phrase that writers use for creating an environment that is believable and credible, even if it is a fantasy, a dystopia, or has a supernatural setting.



The Unexpected Outcome – This is when a character thinks something will go one way, but instead it goes in the opposite direction. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Harry Potter thinks he’s in trouble after his first experience on a broomstick: ‘Now he’d done it. He hadn’t even lasted two weeks.’ Harry is marched away by Professor McGonagall, but instead of being expelled, as he expected, he’s taken to meet Oliver Wood. “I’ve found you a Seeker,” McGonagall says. “The boy’s a natural. I’ve never seen anything like it.” Harry Potter goes from believing he’s going to be sent back home forever to becoming a Quidditch Seeker in a matter of moments – a complete turnaround to the opposite. The Greek word for this, which Aristotle uses in his *Poetics*, is *peripeteia*. It’s important to say that stories aren’t just built on ‘*What happens next?*’ but ‘*Wow! What happened next was such a*

shocker! – for it's those unpredictable or unforeseen events in a story that keep people turning the page until they get to the very final 'twist'.

JAFAR: The universe is mine to command! To control!

ALADDIN: Not so fast, Jafar! Aren't you forgetting something?

JAFAR: Huh?

ALADDIN: You wanted to be a genie? You got it!

[cufflinks form on Jafar's wrists]

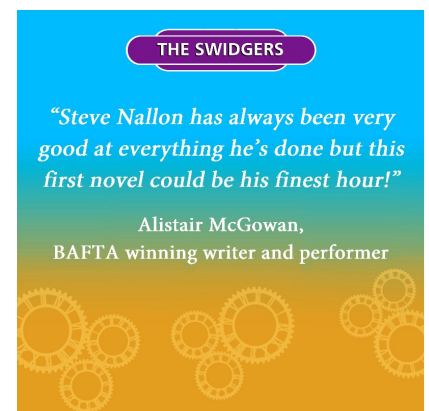
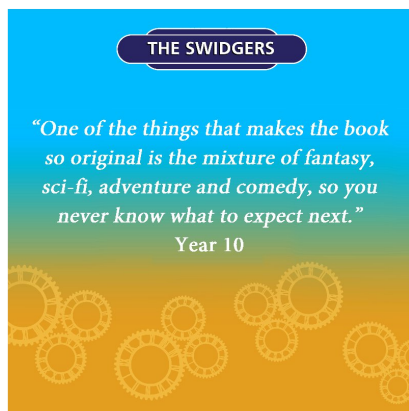
JAFAR: What?

ALADDIN: And everything that goes with it.

[Aladdin holds up the black genie lamp, which then sucks Jafar into it]

JAFAR: No! No!

From *Aladdin*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, with original screenplay by Ron Clements, John Musker and Ted Elliott



From Ignorance to Knowledge – This refers to the moment of realisation when a character discovers, for example, that someone they thought they knew well is not what they seemed, or said they were at all. The Greek word for this that Aristotle uses in his *Poetics* is *anagnorisis*. A well-known example of the change from ignorance to

knowledge is in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* where Pip had believed his benefactor to be Miss Havisham, but it turns out it was the convict Magwitch. And most 'Harry Potter' stories have characters who at important points in the plot are revealed to be other than they seemed to be. The twitching and stammering Professor Quirrell has been wearing a turban to conceal the fact that he allowed himself to be possessed by Lord Voldemort; 'Mad-Eye' Moody is discovered to be Barty Crouch Jr, a Death Eater formerly presumed dead; Ron's rat Scabbers is really Peter Pettigrew, and Tom Riddle is revealed to be the Heir of Slytherin. And it's worth saying that the idea of ignorance to knowledge doesn't just involve people, for it can apply to objects and places too.

'You've always had the power my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself.'

Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz*



*** The Hour of Despair** – This is the lowest point that the character faces in the story – the rock bottom, you might say. This part of a story is sometimes referred to by writers as the ‘Nadir’ (the word nadir comes from the Arabic *naḍhīr*, meaning ‘opposite’ — the opposite, that is, of the ‘Zenith’, the highest point of the celestial sphere). The nadir is the moment in the tale where the character is at a maximum remove from their goal. A plot can have several low spots, but the one where all seems lost and unwinnable is what we’re talking about here. Writers also use the term ‘Crisis Point’ for this part of the tale – and importantly it nearly always comes just before the climax.

“Never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that is it’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.”

Rahm Emanuel, American politician and diplomat

The Impossible Choice – Nothing in a story is ever easy for a character. Often, there is a difficult dilemma that must be faced and a choice made. In *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, Elliott would like his extra-terrestrial friend to remain on Earth, and E.T. would like Elliott to fly away with him – but both not are possible. The words the characters say are simple enough – “Stay” and “Come” – yet, given all that has gone before, they have tremendous emotional impact.



The Reversal of Fortune – This refers to the change of fortune in story. It can be slow and gradual, but more often it goes from the worst situation to the best situation in a matter of moments. This is because that sort of dynamic is exciting to read or watch. Yet how that reversal of fortune is achieved shouldn't be too obvious. The rule is to give readers what they want, but in a way they don't expect it. Think here of the sudden importance of the idea that 'the wand chooses the wizard' at the climax of *Deathly Hallows*. It turns Harry's situation completely around, but it's only clear afterwards why exactly that reversal came about.

The Confrontation or Battle – This is the final encounter between the protagonist and the antagonist. The outcome of this meeting decides how the story action will end. What we're talking about in colloquial terms is 'the final showdown', 'the supreme ordeal', or 'the shoot-out'. In courtroom dramas, this usually takes place on the witness stand, and in Westerns, on a deserted street at high noon.

"We may stumble and fall but shall rise again; it should be enough if we did not run away from the battle."
Mahatma Gandhi, peace campaigner



* **The Climax** – This is when the protagonist reaches their goal. It may or may not be that they achieve or complete the task, but whatever happens, the important point of the climax is that nothing will be the same again. The climax, then, is the apex, top, pinnacle, and zenith of your tale.

“The climax is the stage at which the protagonist finds release from their seemingly inescapable predicament.”

John Yorke, *Into the Woods*

The Rebirth – this is when the protagonist changes inside and becomes different in some way and grows as a person. This often relates back to the inner flaw or what was missing or lacking in the character at the beginning of the tale but has now been fixed as a result of what has happened in the story. And often here there is what appears to be a physical rebirth of some kind. An example of this is in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, where Harry Potter is thought to be dead, but is then revealed in fact to be very much alive.



* **The Resolution** – This is the final element of a story or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together, loose ends are reconnected, and matters that need to be explained are cleared up. The resolution could be said to be the aftermath or breathing space following the climax, and in theatre plays this part of the story is traditionally called the *dénouement* (from the French word *dénouer*, meaning ‘unknot’). The resolution is also that part of the tale that gives you a sense of what may come next for the characters and the world they live in. If the opening of a story starts with ‘*Once upon a time...*’, then it’s the resolution that says ‘*And they all lived happily ever after.*’

THE SWIDGERS





How the 21 Story Steps Can be Adapted and Reinvented

These, then, are the universal **21 Story Steps** which all writers use to construct their tale. In principle, they can be applied to any story, from *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, to *Romeo and Juliet* and *An Inspector Calls*.

Some of the 21 Story Steps are essential elements in that you can't do without them for your story to be a story. If you and your class want to simplify the 21 Story Steps, concentrate on the starred (*) plot elements, but note these are usually kept in a particular order. The Day of Change comes first, leading to the Trigger for Action, the Story Action, and the Task or Strategy. The Hour of Despair is usually just before the Climax, and the Resolution, obviously, comes at the end.

It is possible to do without certain Story Steps, such as the Time Limit, the Inner Flaw and the Character Arc, but leaving these out will leave the tale less captivating and less emotionally involving. Many story elements, such as Back Story, the Unexpected Outcome, and From Ignorance to Knowledge, can be moved around within the plot structure, depending on the type of tale being told.

No storyteller treats the 21 Story Steps as if they are some sort of blueprint with rules that must be strictly adhered to. The opposite, in fact, for it's the variations, deviations, and exceptions that make a story

truly original, engaging and entertaining. All stories, then, have their own unique perspective – and they wouldn't be any good if they didn't – but you'll find that the 21 Story Steps remain key components to pretty much every tale you choose to tell, watch or read. And knowing and understanding what they are and how they work can help creatively in making up stories of your own.



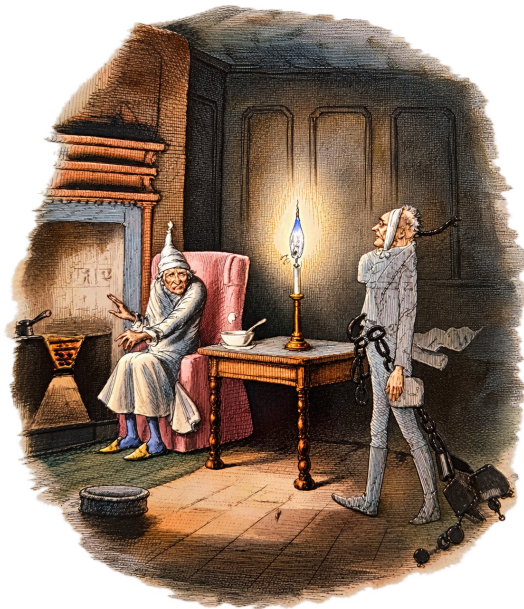


Discovering the 21 Story Steps of *A Christmas Carol*

No storyteller keeps exactly to the 21 Story Steps as if they were some sort of magic formula, for there are always adaptations, deviations, and exceptions. In *A Christmas Carol*, a tale that does include most of the Story Steps in its structure, Charles Dickens brilliantly develops and varies the key elements in such a way that makes his tale truly original. What matters, then, is *how* writers modify and reinvent these Story Steps in their creation of an engaging, entertaining, and imaginative work.

The Inner Flaw or Problem – Scrooge’s problem is pretty obvious: he’s cut himself off from the world like an oyster in its shell (“It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people’s”). Scrooge’s moral need – how a character must learn to act towards others – is that he must reconnect with that world and the people in it. His psychological need – that aspect of a character’s nature that is lacking within them – is that he must believe that it is possible for him to change.

The Day of Change – This is the arrival of Marley. Marley first appears in the knocker, but his return is foreshadowed in the opening line. Marley is essentially the herald of the tale, and, as such, he has three main functions. The first is to tell us what will happen – three Spirits will visit Scrooge. Second, Marley acts as a call to action for Scrooge to change his ways. To this end, Marley shows Scrooge what will happen to him if he does not. Third, Marley offers the reader an early glimpse into the unknown supernatural world into which they are about to journey.



The Back Story – The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge back to his 'back story'. It's not normally possible to visit your own back story, except in time travel stories, or, perhaps, in dreams. In *A Christmas Carol*, though, it does happen because we have entered the world of the supernatural, where anything is possible. And the creation of such a tale in an era when time travel tales were almost unknown shows us Dickens's remarkable powers of imagination and story inventiveness.

The Task/Strategy – In most stories, the main character is given a task to complete, and so they have to come up with some sort of action plan in order to achieve their goal. However, Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* works in a different way. Marley's ghost is the one who tells Scrooge that he must change his ways, and to help bring this about, Marley informs Scrooge that he will be visited by three Spirits. Later, the Ghost of Christmas Past is more specific about his purpose when he says that his aim is Scrooge's welfare and 'reclamation'. And to help make this happen, the Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge his past, including his lonely school days and the happy time he had working for Mr. Fezziwig.



The strategy then in *A Christmas Carol* is clear, but it's in the hands of the three Spirits, not Scrooge. If this is the case, what is Scrooge's own **Action Task**?

Scrooge is what you might call a passive character, in that he does not initiate the 'strategy' or 'action plan'. However, that doesn't mean that Scrooge hasn't got things going on inside him.



The key to Scrooge's internal action can be found all through the tale, but particularly in the scene at his nephew's Christmas party, where Dickens writes, 'When this strain of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have listened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.' Scrooge is made *to think* and *to feel* (both verbs) and so it's *thought* and *feeling* brought together that becomes Scrooge's **Action**. Ultimately, Scrooge's task action is to change, and it's through these acts of contemplation as Ebenezer observes each scene that cumulatively lead to his reclamation or redemption.

Time Limit – Often in a story there is a deadline to increase the jeopardy and the stakes in a story, yet with *A Christmas Carol*, it seems to be the opposite. In fact, in this magical tale, Time in its most literal sense collapses, for the hours Scrooge is away with the Spirits do not make up one long night measurable by a clock. There's the journey to his past and his time at his old school, his time at the Fezziwig party and also his time at the home of his former fiancée Belle. Then, during the visitation of the Ghost of Christmas Present, as Dickens makes clear, Scrooge enjoys the whole Christmas season of twelve days. Yet none of these hours and minutes and days can be measured simply by the turning of a dial. But that's exactly how Scrooge does think of Time – as something that should and can only be quantified by the ticking of timepieces and the clanging of bells, both of which heavily feature in the narrative.



But Fred, Scrooge's nephew, offers Scrooge a different perspective. He sees Christmas Time "as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar

of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely.”



This view of Time is more abstract than literal. And part of the journey of Scrooge in the tale is to learn to think of Time more in this way. Scrooge visits his Time Past, his Time Present, and his Time Future, and is fundamentally changed by each. However, what Scrooge comes to understand is that to be complete as a human being, he must live, as he says himself, “in the Past, the Present, and the Future”. And what he discovers on his journey is that to live in the Past is *to be alive to Memory*, to live in the Present is *to know your fellow Man*, and to live in the Future is *to be open to Hope*. So when Scrooge says, “The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me”, what he is really expressing is the need of all of us to be in communion with all ourselves, and, as Fred puts it, our “fellow-passengers to the grave.” And if this new thinking is achieved, ‘Time’ will be always be measured by love and not by the turning dials of a clock on the wall.

Protagonist and Antagonist – As noted earlier, the central ‘action plan’ of the story is in the hands of Marley and the Phantoms. This technically makes the spectres collectively the protagonists, with Scrooge the one resisting their offer of help (compare here the angel Clarence and George Bailey in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*). However, as *A Christmas Carol* is a redemption story, the central conflict and struggle is mainly within Scrooge himself, for he doesn't believe he can change.

Yet, in the **Protagonist-Antagonist** relationship, there is Scrooge's crucial final **Confrontation** with the Ghost of Christmas Future. It's here, in the graveyard, that Scrooge comes to realise that he was the corpse he saw earlier that lay abandoned and uncared for (**From Ignorance to Knowledge**).



Understanding that he *is* the dead man, who, in death, is left alone, unloved, and wanted only by rats gnawing at the door, is Scrooge's nadir (**The Hour of Despair**) and **Crisis** point.

The **Climax** is that Scrooge isn't really dead – far from it – for he wakes up very much alive and kicking (**Reversal of Fortune**). Scrooge is now a changed man from what he was (**The Character Arc**), and, furthermore, on waking up, he's born anew (**Rebirth**) – “I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. *I'm quite a baby*. Never mind. I don't care. *I'd rather be a baby*. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!



Scrooge, Dickens tells us in the **Resolution**, ‘had no further intercourse with Spirits, in that respect, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.’ Dickens says too that Scrooge became a second father to Tiny Tim. Perhaps Scrooge read to Tiny Tim those stories that he had

enjoyed as a child – especially of Ali Baba, and Robinson Crusoe and his parrot – and maybe Uncle Ebbie even did the voices. The point is that the resolution gives us some sense of the character's future, but rarely goes into details. That doesn't, however, restrict the 'fancy' of the reader!



THE SWIDGERS

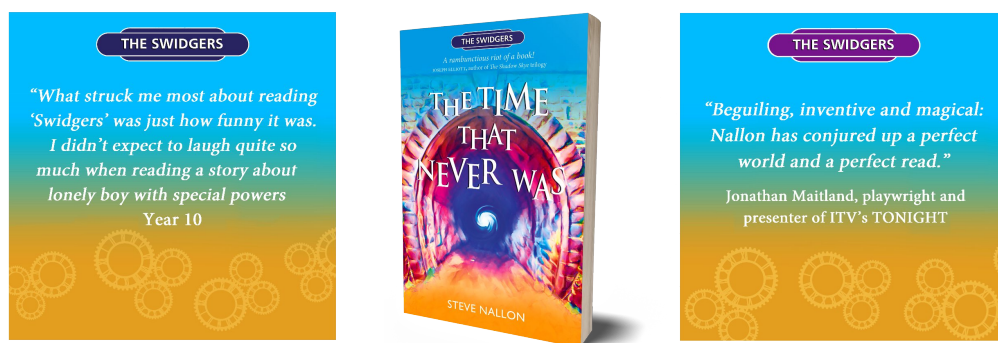
The 21 Story Steps and *The Time That Never Was*

The Time That Never Was, the first book in THE SWIDGERS time adventure series, is a coming-of-age tale, and so **The Day of Change** is when William, the **Protagonist/Hero**, begins to feel that something is different within him. For the first time in his life, William – a *Swidger* who alters people's timepaths for the better – senses exactly what is about to happen if he does not intervene: *'Hang on a second... What was that? Save his life! Where did that thought come from? And how could I know? Because our kind never know.'* Not by coincidence, as the plot later reveals, an attack from a mysterious power comes on this same day that William is experiencing these inner changes, or 'Swidger growing pains', as Granny later describes them. Very strangely, the attack comes via a seemingly inexplicable hail storm.

This mysterious hail storm and its consequences become **The Trigger for Action**, because William from then on wants to know (**Motivation and Desire**) why there has been this attack, and why he is different from other *Swidgers* (**The Puzzle**). And so *to discover* and *to understand* become the central **Actions** of his story.

But William is just a boy, so how will he manage to do this when he isn't even sure what's happening to him? Plus, he's an orphan (William's **Back Story**) who has no protector. Well, that's where the role of Granny comes in. As mentioned, *The Time That Never Was* is a coming-of-age story and in such tale, there is usually an older helper figure – that is the **Mentor** character.

Granny (**The Mentor**) recognises straight away that William isn't ready to take on the mystical power that seeks him out. This is because, first, William isn't daring enough, and second, he needs to develop a different way of thinking (both of these are **Inner Flaws** in William). Yet Granny knows as well that William needs to understand more about what being a *Swidger* is, so she takes him to meet Echo in Dungeness – and the tale that Echo tells on the beach is essentially the **Back Story** of the *Swidgers*.



But William, while in Dungeness, has plans of his own, and when he is alone in Echo's converted railway carriage, William begins his search (William's **Strategy**) in order to find out more about himself. This does lead to an understanding of sorts (**From Ignorance to Knowledge**). Afterwards, and for the first time, William dreams (**Character Arc**).

On the return to London, Granny decides to put William in places and situations where he must learn to think in new ways ("For the battle ahead, my little stick of rhubarb, you must become a poet, develop a corkscrew mind, learn to think round corners, and, most importantly, imagine"). Putting William in positions where he has to take the initiative for himself is essentially Granny's **Strategy**. For example, Granny abandons William in the school staff room just as he is adding a strange liquid she has given him to a barrel of cider. The headmaster comes in, and so it's up to William to explain himself and get out of his predicament. The potion William puts in the barrel of cider leads to much comedy and farce, but this action (William's **Set**

Task) also results in William being expelled from school. This is the main turning point at the mid-section of book one. Now free from school obligations, Granny can take William where he'll be safe from harm – the Old Coach Inn.



Much of the first half of *The Time That Never Was* is focused on Granny's action plan to make William more daring (Granny's **Strategy**), but it was also her intention to get William expelled from school (Granny's **Goal**) because she knew he wouldn't be safe there. With this achieved (the **Climax**), her next **Task Action**, to *protect* William, can begin.

On arriving at the Old Coach Inn – a Gothic world of gravestones, prophecies, and cobwebs – William realises the house has a secret (the House's **Puzzle** and **Back Story**) so he becomes determined to find out what it is. And his action plan (William's **Strategy**) is to explore behind the concealed doors and along the house's hidden, secret passageways.



The ruler of the Old Coach Inn is Aloysius (**The Antagonist / Villain**). Aloysius is determined to keep William in his place and retain his control over all those who live in this strange and often spooky house. And this he does by intimidation and threats of violence (Aloysius' **Strategy**). Although William eventually works out the secret of the house (**From Ignorance to Knowledge**), this discovery leads to an encounter between Aloysius and William. Aloysius, who has a special gift of Time, takes complete and utter control over William. This is one of William's low points in the tale.



Yet it becomes clear that William's arrival at the Old Coach Inn has altered the power dynamics in such a way that there must be a battle for supremacy between Aloysius and William. Aloysius believes that by setting fire to the parchment (Aloysius' **Strategy**) that spoke of William and his future, he can destroy any possibility of William taking over from him. However, a burning fragment of the parchment does exactly the opposite, and a destructive blaze destroys the house (**The Unexpected Outcome**). This leads to a cliff-edge struggle between William and Aloysius (**The Confrontation**), and in the battle, William nearly loses Granny (**Crisis Point**). William, however, sees an unexpected opportunity and uses the helmet Granny wore to protect her from the fire to unbalance Aloysius (**Reversal of Fortune**) – who then falls to his death (**The Climax**).



In **The Resolution**, Granny now feels able to tell William things about being a *Swidger* that she couldn't explain before. Granny, William, and the survivors of the fire then journey to London hopefully to begin a new life.



So that's the story of *The Time That Never Was* – but what about that mysterious attack at the start of the tale and the questions about who or what made it? The point here is that THE SWIDGERS is a trilogy and the **Antagonist** of the second book, *The Time They Saved Tomorrow*, is revealed to be that mysterious force we first encountered in the early chapters of book one. The Despiser, a malevolent and powerful force of Time, has from the beginning sought out William's

gift and he's done it in a very crafty way (The Despiser's **Strategy**). What becomes clear is that it's William's *Swidger* gift that is the story's 'clock' (**Time Limit**). You see, the moment William truly understands what makes him different, well, that's when the final attack will come (**The Confrontation** of book two). And what's more, The Despiser (**Villain/Antagonist**) cannot be killed or destroyed. So how will William, a *Swidger* who cannot by his nature use any form of violence, defeat this dark force of time? Well, that's revealed in book two, *The Day They Saved Tomorrow*.



Note that in THE SWIDGERS there are many strategies and, indeed, many counter-strategies. There are also several different kinds of antagonists that result in various crisis points all through the tale – the first attack, the confrontation with the headmaster and later the encounters with Aloysius. The role of Granny changes too. Although she begins as a helper 'Mentor', Granny becomes what is essentially a joint protagonist with William. The point here is that stories don't work within hard or strict rules. Actions change, and so do the roles characters play. And it is by constantly varying the building blocks of a story that a writer can create – hopefully – a fresh and original tale.



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