

What's the Story?

Principles of Complex Systems | @pocsvox
CSYS/MATH 300, Fall, 2017

Prof. Peter Dodds | @peterdodds

Dept. of Mathematics & Statistics | Vermont Complex Systems Center
Vermont Advanced Computing Core | University of Vermont

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Essence

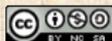
References



The University of Vermont



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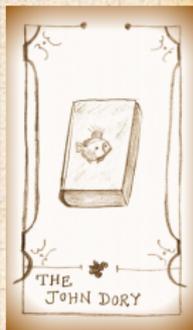
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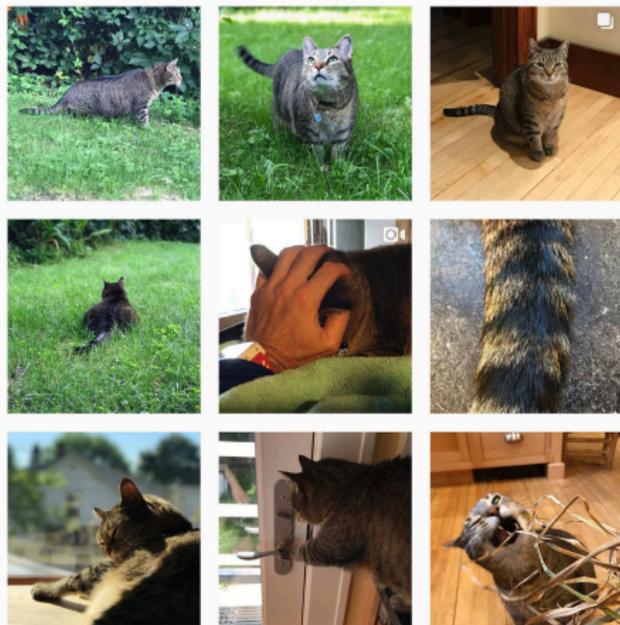


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Special Guest Executive Producer: Pratchett



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 On Instagram at [pratchett_the_cat](https://www.instagram.com/pratchett_the_cat) 



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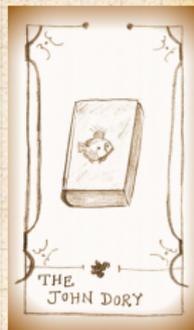
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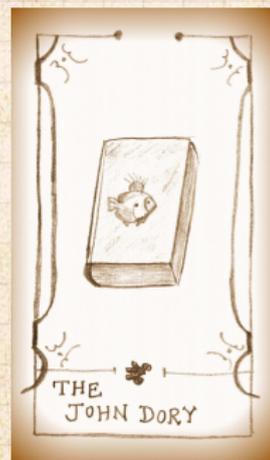
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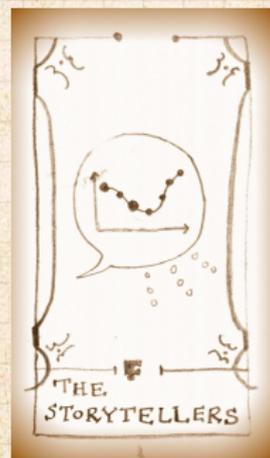
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It's all about algorithms (stories):

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What's the Story?



"On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction" [a](#) [↗](#)
by Brian Boyd (2010). ^[3]



"The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human" [a](#) [↗](#)
by Jonathan Gottschall (2013). ^[7]

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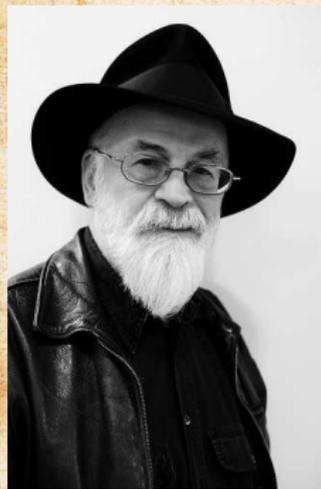
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(Sir Terry) Pratchett's Narrativium

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What's the Story?



🌀 “The most common element on the disc, although not included in the list of the standard five: earth, fire, air, water and surprise. It ensures that everything runs properly as a story.”

🌀 “A little narrativium goes a long way: the simpler the story, the better you understand it. Storytelling is the opposite of reductionism: 26 letters and some rules of grammar are no story at all.”

🌀 “Heroes only win when outnumbered, and things which have a one-in-a-million chance of succeeding often do so.”

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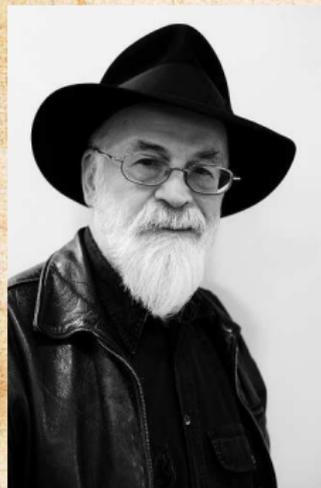
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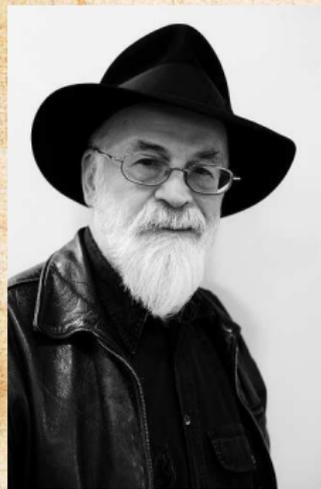
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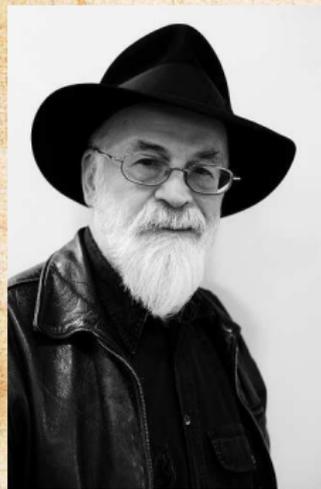
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Competing storytelling organizations:

-  News.
-  Art.
-  Music industry.
-  Books, magazines.
-  Movie studios, Netflix, HBO, Disney.
-  Video Games.
-  Social media: Facebook, Medium, Tumblr, blogs.

Cultural products from [Partridge et al.](#)

-  Writers, artists, movie directors, video game directors.

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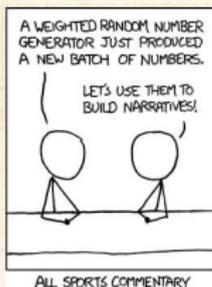
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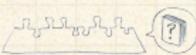
Understanding the Sociotechnocene—Stories:

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What's the Story?



xkcd.com/904/



Goal: a Science of Stories.



Claim: *Homo narrativus*—we run on stories.



“What’s the John Dory?”



“They’ve lost the plot/thread”



Claim: The narrative hierarchy and the Scalability of stories.



Research: Extraction of metaphors, frames, narratives, and stories from large-scale text.



Research: The taxonomy of human stories.

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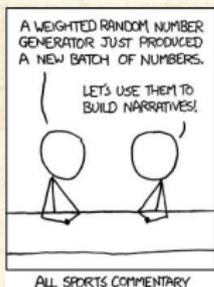
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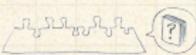
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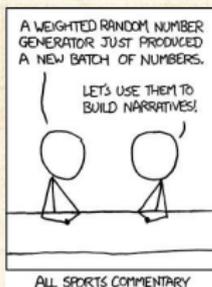
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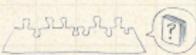
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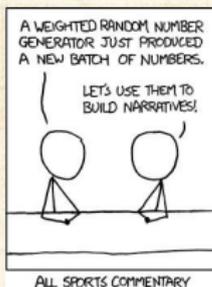
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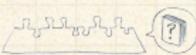
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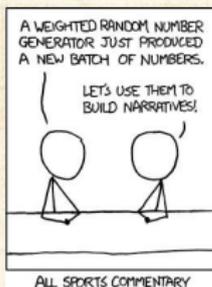
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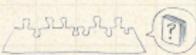
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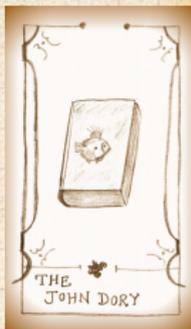
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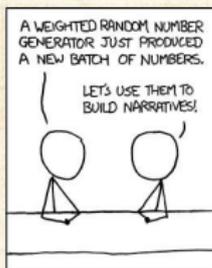
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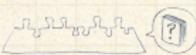


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ALL SPORTS COMMENTARY

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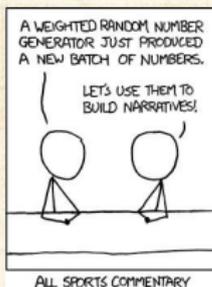
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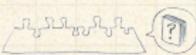
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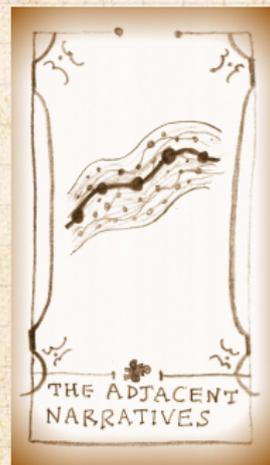
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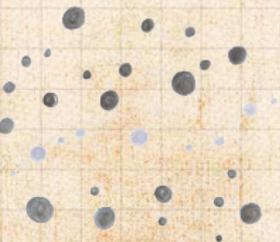
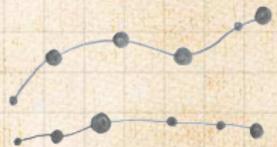
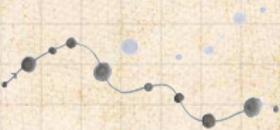




Adjacent narratives —why mistruths and conspiracy theories exist and flourish:

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1999 Gallup poll: [↗](#)

 6% of Americans said the lunar landings were fake.

 5% were undecided.

 [Video replay](#) [↗](#) (The Comments).

Buzz Aldrin has enough:

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JK Rowling doesn't exist: conspiracy theories the internet can't resist , The Guardian, 2017-10-27:

Highlights:

-  The Earth is flat. <https://www.tfes.org> .
-  The Beatles never existed: <http://www.thebeatlesneverexisted.com> .
-  Per the title, JK Rowling doesn't exist.
 -  Q: It's impossible that a person can write six thick books that are translated into 15 languages and sell more than 250 million copies in less than 10 years, is it? — Nina Grunfeld 
 -  A: Yes, yes it is. — This course 

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It's not possible that a person can write six thick books that are translated into 50 languages and sell more than 250 million copies in less than 10 years? — Nina Grunfeld ↗



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Phantom time hypothesis

- ☑ The years 614–911 AD never existed.
- ☑ Straight up jump of 297 years orchestrated by a first millennium cabal.
- ☑ The year 2017 AD is really 1820 AD.
- ☑ Good to know.
- ☑ Holy Roman Emperor Otto III (@TheBoss37), Pope Sylvester II (@PSly2) wanted to live in 1000 AD, legitimize power.
- ☑ Crushed by reality: Records of solar eclipses, comets, dendrochronology.



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Finland does not exist:



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Poe's law

 In short: There is no parody too extreme that, when taken out of context, someone somewhere won't take to be sincere.

 Minor comment by Nathan Poe on christianforums.com:

"Without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humor, it is utterly impossible to parody a Creationist in such a way that someone won't mistake for the genuine article."

 Usual win for Stigler's Law of Eponymy .

 Post by Jerry Schwarz on Usenet, 1983:

'Avoid sarcasm and facetious remarks. Without the voice inflection and body language of personal communication these are easily misinterpreted. A sideways smile, :-), has become widely accepted on the net as an indication that "I'm only kidding". If you submit a satiric item without this symbol, no matter how obvious the satire is to you, do not be surprised if people take it seriously.'

 Related: "Nobody ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people" — H. L. Mencken ([but not exactly](#) .

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 Post by Jerry Schwarz on Usenet, 1983:

'Avoid sarcasm and facetious remarks. Without the voice inflection and body language of personal communication these are easily misinterpreted. A sideways smile, :-), has become widely accepted on the net as an indication that "I'm only kidding". If you submit a satiric item without this symbol, no matter how obvious the satire is to you, do not be surprised if people take it seriously.'

 Related: "Nobody ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people" — H. L. Mencken (but not exactly .

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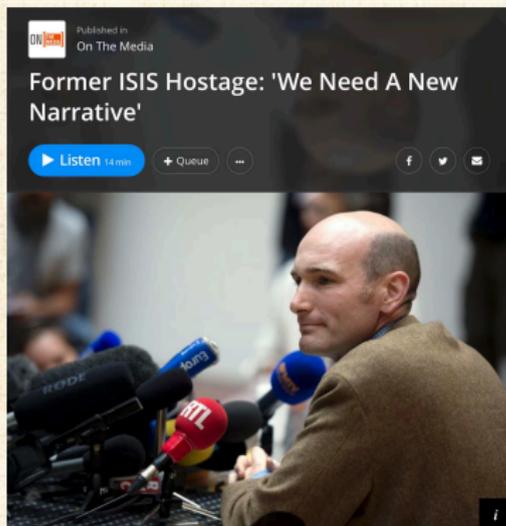
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Story Wars:



Nicholas Hénin ,
 French Journalist,
 held captive for 10
 months .

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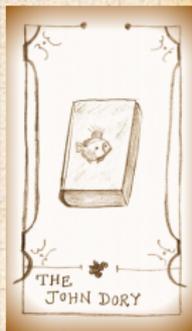
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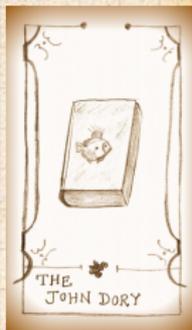
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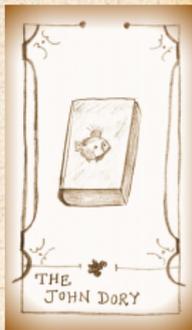
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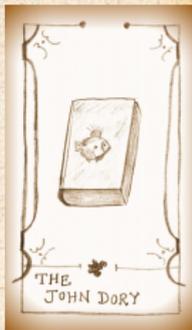
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The Comet Ping Pong Gunman Answers Our Reporter's Questions: [↗](#)



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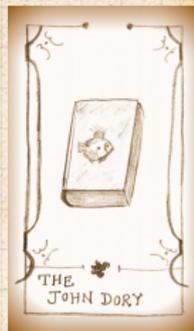
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 Make the truth a needle in a haystack

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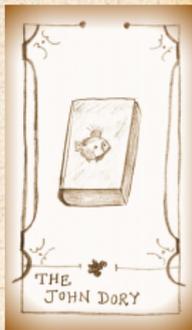
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Low tech, lost cost.



Infrastructure maintained in the Social Wild by storytellers and storybelievers.



Omnipresence and omniscience: The end of privacy.



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- ❏ The story that anyone can become King or Queen.
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"I don't know what the new national story will be, but maybe it will be less individualistic and more redemptive. Maybe it will be a story about communities that heal those who suffer from addiction, broken homes, trauma, prison and loss, a story of those who triumph over the isolation, social instability and dislocation so common today."

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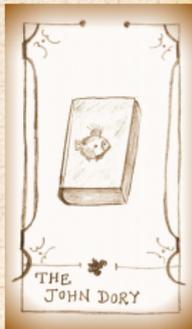
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Claim: Stories must have real substance to endure

- ✂ Enormous disasters: Fabrications of real experiences.
 - 📖 "I lied, I'm making stuff up" A million little pieces [↗](#)
 Oprah will get you.
 - 📖 Wikipedia has a list of famous fake memoirs [↗](#).
 - 📖 Expansive plagiarism: How Oprah Mentha Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life [↗](#)
 #kudos
 - 📖 Self-plagiarism and more standard badness: Jonah Lehrer [↗](#)
 Amazingly: Made up Bob Dylan quotes.
 - 📖 Laraine Anderson: Also got to meet Oprah.
- ✂ Enormous power: Fiction that speaks to real experiences.

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- ✦ Self-plagiarism and more standard badness: [Jonah Lehrer](#).
- ✦ [Fakingly Made](#) by Ben El-Mechaieq.
- ✦ Lance Armstrong. Also got some Oprah.

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... Oprah Made Me Famous by quotes.

Lance Armstrong. Also got a meet Oprah.



Enormous power: Fiction that speaks to real experiences.

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✳️ Wikipedia Made Me Do It by Ben El-Mechaieq.

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Why I Made My Best by Quoting

Lance Armstrong. Also got a me! Oprah



Enormous power: Fiction that speaks to real experiences.

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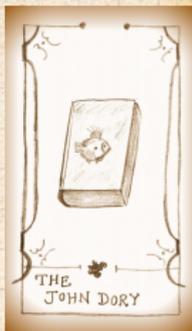
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Limits: The story trap by Philip Ball, 2015-11-12

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What's the Story?



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- “We use neat stories to explain everything from sports matches to symphonies. Is it time to leave the nursery of the mind?”
- “...we might wonder if the ultimate intelligibility of the universe will be determined not so much by the capacity of our minds to formulate the appropriate concepts and equations, but by whether we can find a meaningful story to tell about it.”



Competitive Punning, The Economist, 2017-08-12

The quip and the dread

Why English is such a great language for puns

Gamers now even take part in world champunships

 Punster pseudonym: “Punder Enlightening”

Being funny, a grand challenge for AI:

 Wired (2014-04-01): It's Comedian vs. Computer in a Battle for Humor Supremacy . Myq Kaplan pun-off.

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 “Warning: This paper may cause the reader to groan to death.”

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What's the Story?

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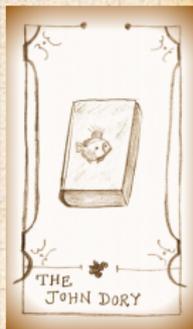
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Kurt Vonnegut on the shapes of stories:

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ?rel=0>



The Shapes of Stories by Kurt Vonnegut

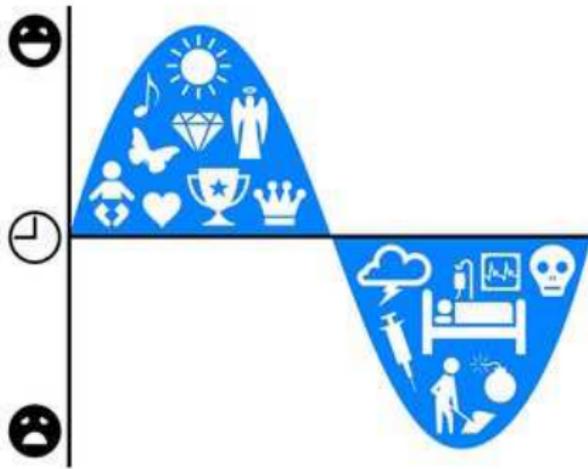
Kurt Vonnegut gained worldwide fame and adoration through the publication of his novels, including *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Cat's Cradle*, *Breakfast of Champions*, and more.

But it was his rejected master's thesis in anthropology that he called his prettiest contribution to his culture:

The basic idea of his thesis was that a story's main character has ups and downs that can be graphed to reveal the story's shape.

The shape of a society's stories, he said, is at least as interesting as the shape of its pots or spearheads. Let's have a look.

Designer: Maya Eitam, www.mayaaitam.com
Sources: *A Man without a Country* and
Palm Sunday by Kurt Vonnegut



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Kurt Vonnegut on the shapes of stories:

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Man in Hole



The main character gets into trouble then gets out of it again and ends up better off for the experience.

-  Arsenic and Old Lace
-  Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle

Boy Meets Girl



The main character comes across something wonderful, gets it, loses it, then gets it back forever.

-  Jane Eyre
-  Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

From Bad to Worse



The main character starts off poorly then gets continually worse with no hope for improvement.

-  The Metamorphosis
-  The Twilight Zone

Which Way Is Up?



The story has a lifelike ambiguity that keeps us from knowing if new developments are good or bad.

-  Hamlet
-  The Sopranos

Creation Story



In many cultures' creation stories, humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity. First major staples like the earth and sky, then smaller things like sparrows and cell phones. Not a common shape for Western stories, however.

Old Testament



Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, but is suddenly ousted from good standing in a fall of enormous proportions.

-  Great Expectations

New Testament



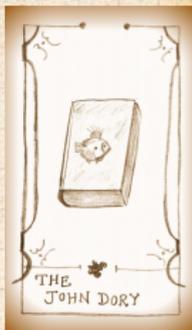
Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, is suddenly ousted from good standing, but then receives off-the-charts bliss.

-  Great Expectations with Dickens' alternate ending

Cinderella



It was the similarity between the shapes of Cinderella and the New Testament that thrilled Vonnegut for the first time in 1947 and then over the course of his life as he continued to write essays and give lectures on the shapes of stories.



Done



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The New Yorker, December 16, 2013, p. 56.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afWLwPZZv2w?rel=0>



"I hate metaphors."



Ron Swanson:

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 "I hate metaphors. That's why my favorite book is Moby Dick."



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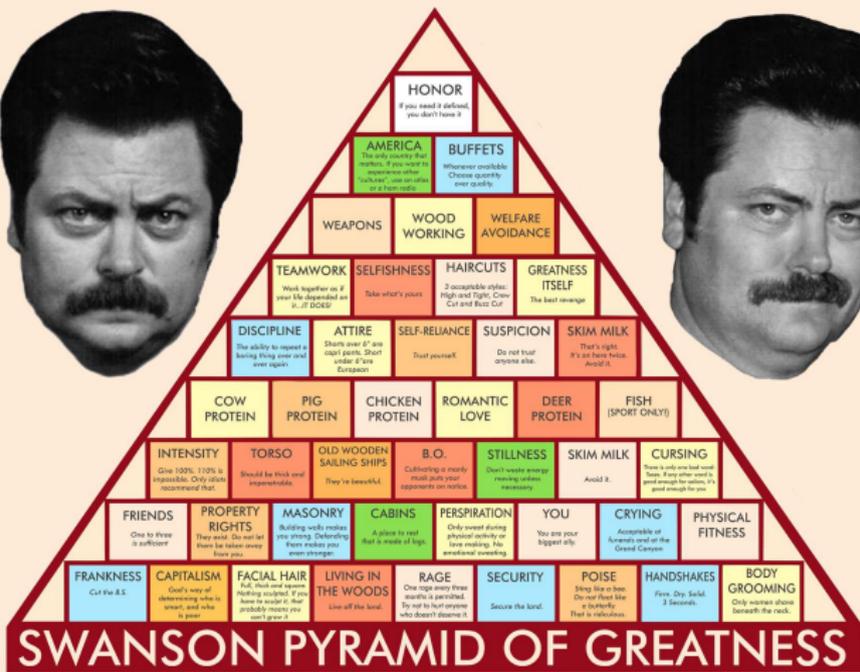
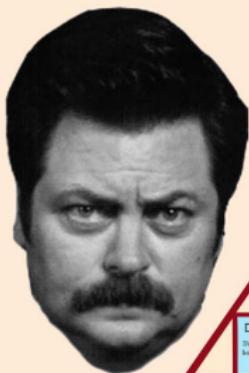
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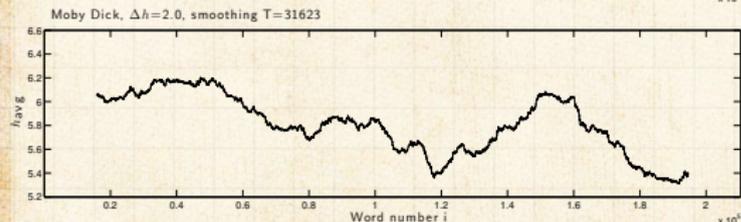
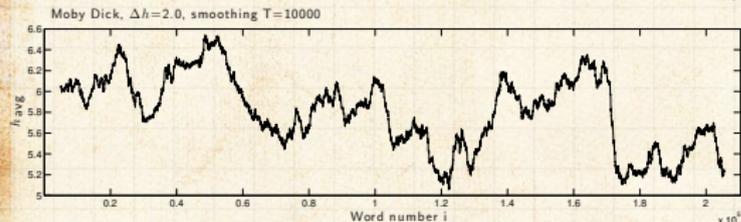
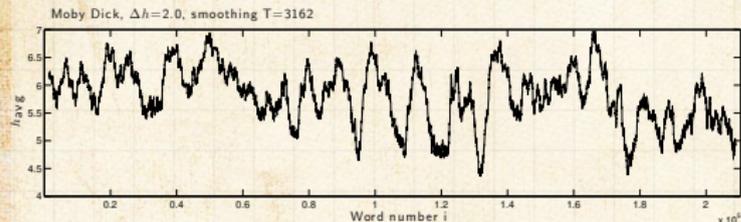
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🧩 "I hate metaphors. That's why my favorite book is Moby Dick. No frou-frou symbolism. Just a good, simple tale about a man who hates an animal."

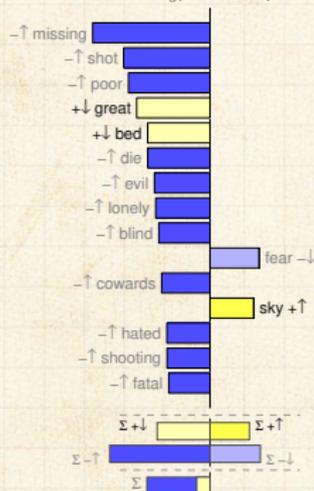




The emotional shapes of stories—Moby Dick:



© $h_{avg}(\text{Last } 10\%)=5.69$
 $< h_{avg}(\text{First } 25\%)=6.20$



Narrativium

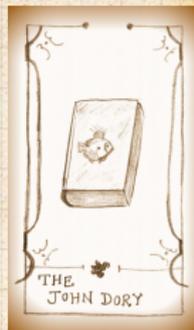
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Partly inspired by [Vonnegut's Shapes of Stories](#) ↗.



Online, interactive Emotional Shapes of Stories for 10,000+ books:

Frankenstein; Or the Modern Prometheus [\(wiki\)](#)

by Mary Shelley

Search Gutenberg Corpus

by Title ▾

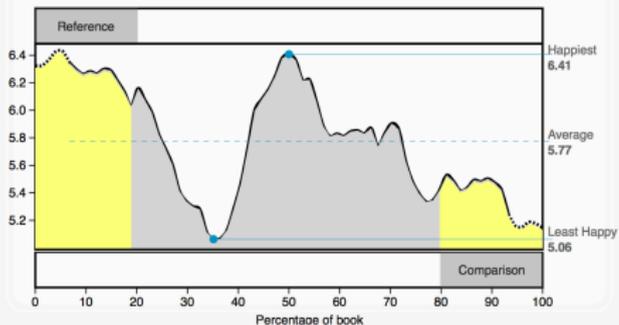
Classics ▾

Harry Potter ▾

Random

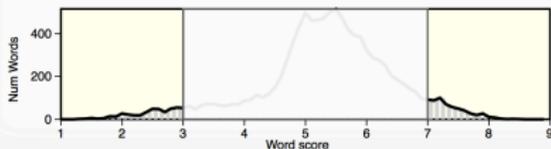
Book happiness time series:

Explore the work's emotional dynamics by sliding and resizing the reference and comparison sections.



Lens (for advanced users):

Slide and resize the stop-window to change the lens:

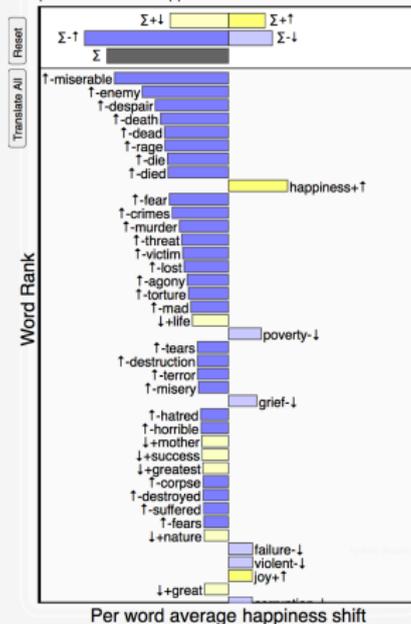


Word Shift:

Why comparison section is less happy than the reference one

Reference section's happiness = 6.31

Comparison section's happiness = 5.35



Online, interactive Emotional Shapes of Stories for 10,000+ books:

Harry Potter (all books together)

by J.K. Rowling

Search Gutenberg Corpus

by Title ▾

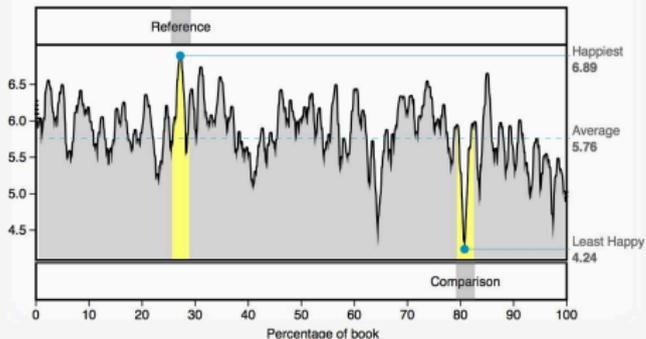
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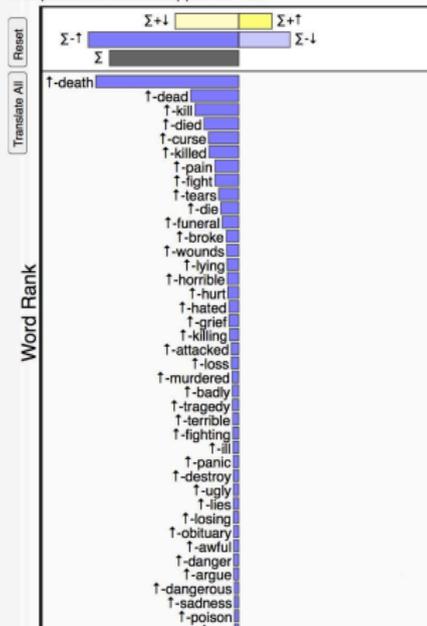


Word Shift:

Why comparison section is less happy than the reference one

Reference section's happiness = 6.13

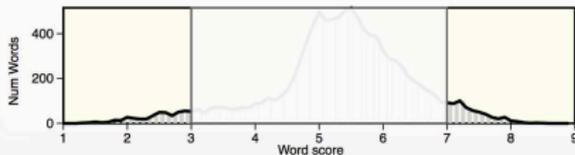
Comparison section's happiness = 5.14



Per word average happiness shift

Lens (for advanced users):

Slide and resize the stop-window to change the lens:



Online, interactive Emotional Shapes of Stories for 1,000+ movie scripts:

Pulp Fiction

directed by Quentin Tarantino

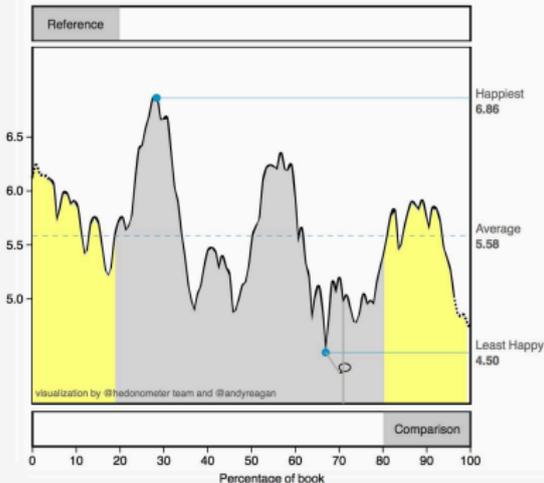
Classics ▾

Team Picks ▾

Random

Movie happiness time series:

Explore the work's emotional dynamics by sliding and resizing the reference and comparison sections.



Movie script:

Portion of script scored for each point in timeseries.

Zed takes the chair, sits it in front of the two prisoners, then lowers into it. Maynard hands The Gimp's leash to Zed, then backs away.

MAYNARD
(to The Gimp)
Down!

The Gimp gets on its knees.

Maynard hangs back while Zed appraises the two men.

MAYNARD
Who's first?

ZED
I ain't fer sure yet.

Then with his little finger, Zed does a silent 'Benie, meany, miney, moe...' just his mouth mouthing the words and his finger going back and forth between the two.

Butch and Marsellus are terrified.

Maynard looks back and forth at the victims.

The Gimp's eyes go from one to the other inside the mask.

Narrativium

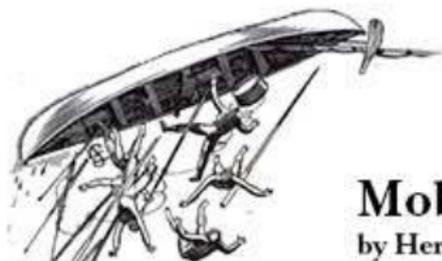
Power

Shapes

Taxonomy

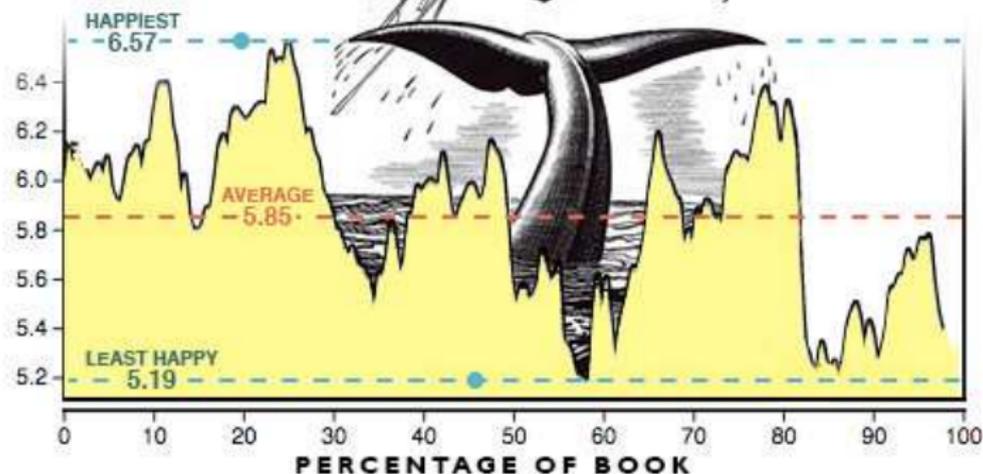
Essence

References

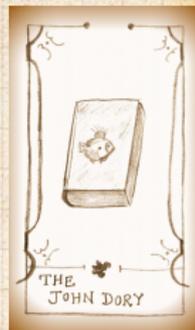


Moby-Dick

by Herman Melville



Moby-Dick illustration by Rockwell Kent, 1930

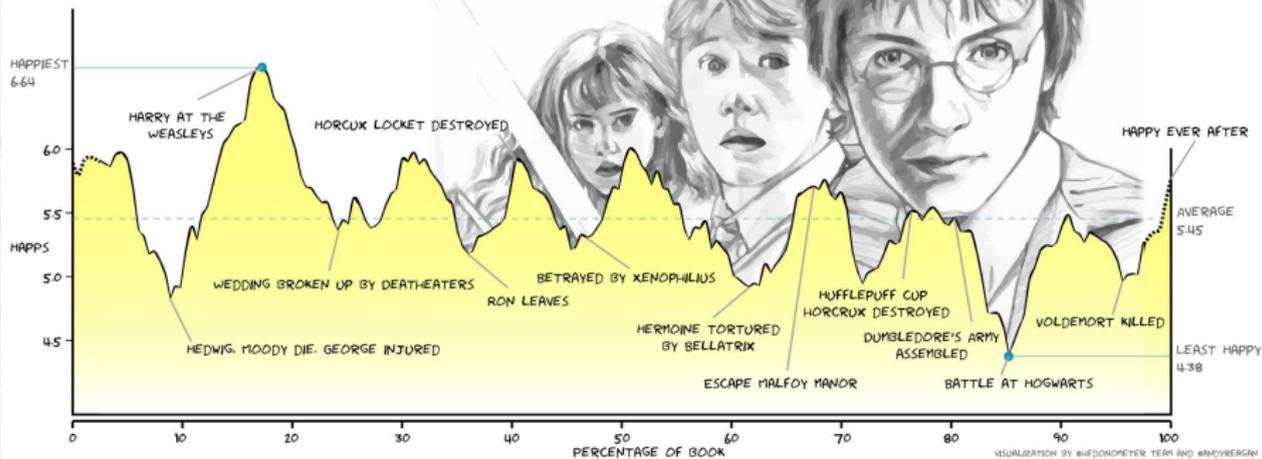


<http://whyfiles.org/2015/in-10-languages-happy-words-beat-sad-ones/>



Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

by J.K. Rowling



Reagan et al. 2016.



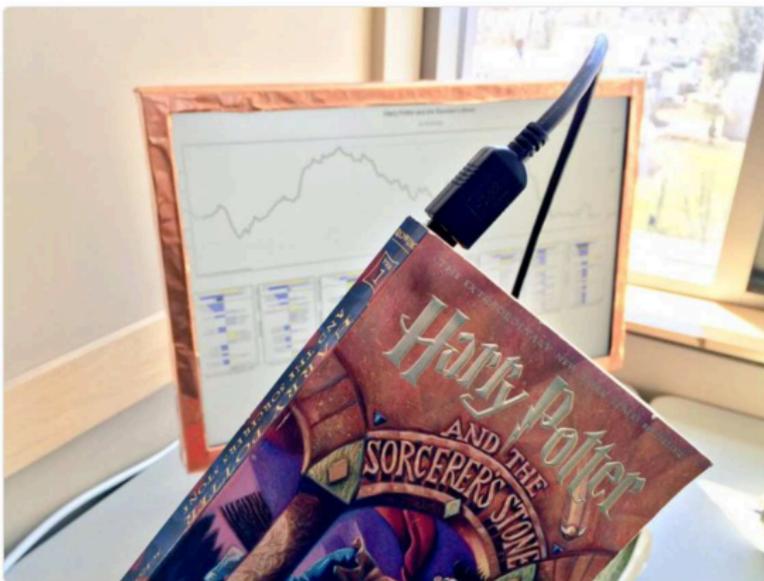
UVM

@uvmvermont



Following

USB in a book? What is this wizardry? Check it out at the Student Research Conference creative lounge. #[uvmresearch](#)



RETWEETS

8

LIKES

14



9:30 AM - 28 Apr 2016

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What's the Story?

Narrativium

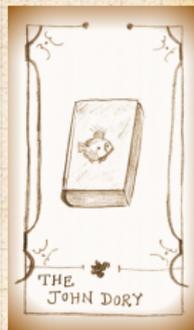
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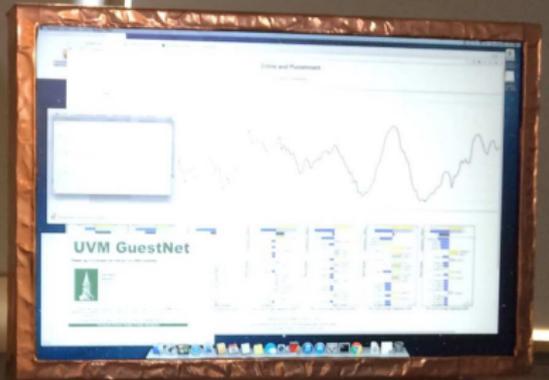
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Harry Potter and the Chamber of Plot Devices:

Narrativium

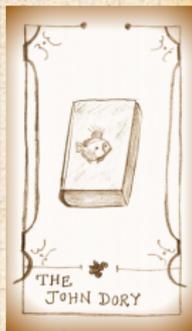
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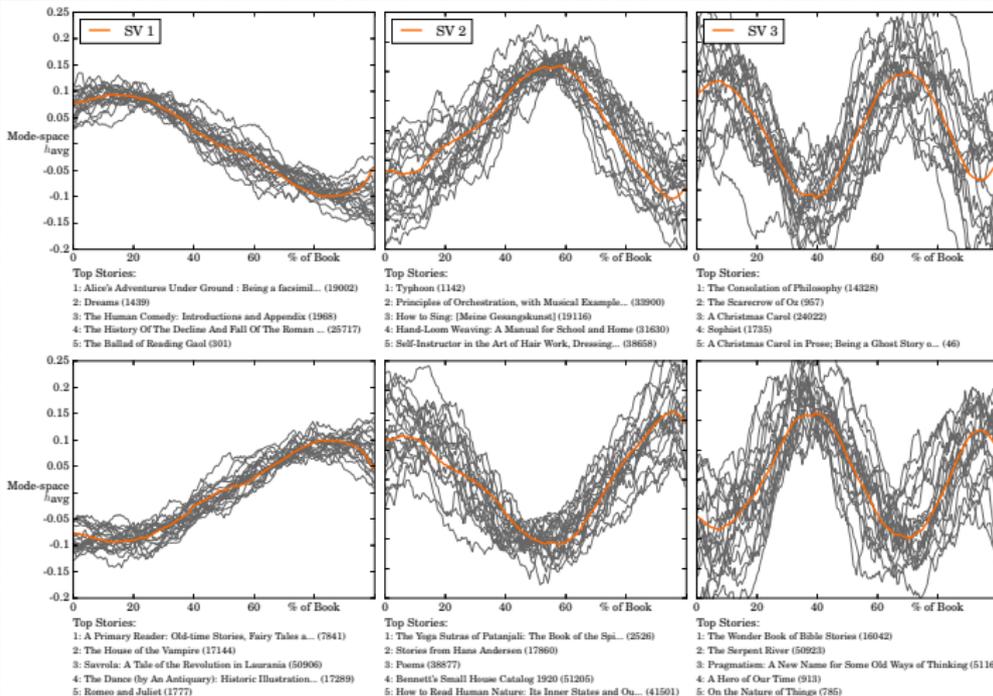
Shapes

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Six basic shapes: Tragedy, Icarus, Oedipus, Rags-to-Riches, Man-in-a-hole, Cindarella.



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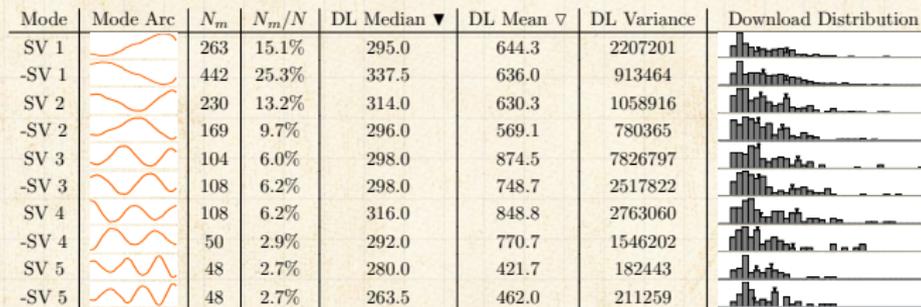


FIG. 6: Download statistics for SVD Modes with more than 2.5% of books. Modes *SV 3* through *-SV 4* (both polarities of modes 3 and 4) exhibit a higher average number of downloads and more variance than the rest.



"The game story space of professional sports: Australian Rules Football" ↗

Kiley, Reagan, Mitchell, Danforth, and Dodds.

Physical Review E, **93**, 052314, 2016. [8]

Narrativium

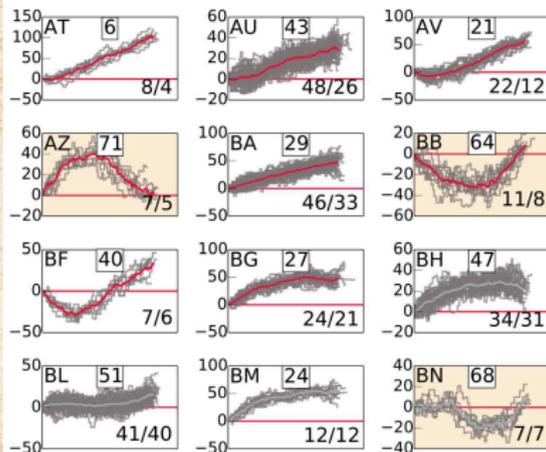
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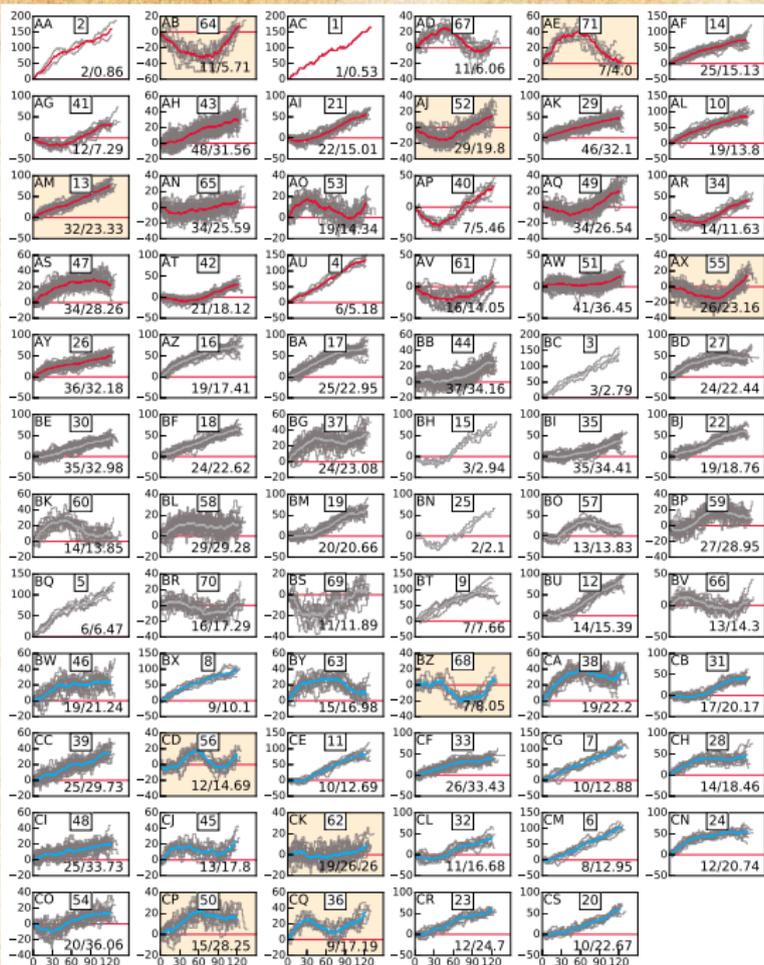
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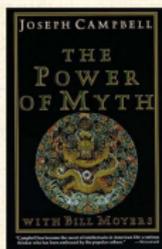
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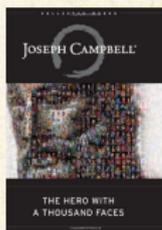
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The "I wonder who wrote this?" Great Man Theory:



"The Power of Myth" [a](#) [↗](#)
by Campbell and Moyers (1991). [5]



"The Hero with a Thousand Faces" [a](#) [↗](#)
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Highly influential but it's a trap! [↗](#)

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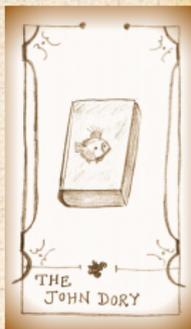
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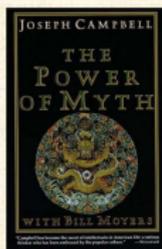
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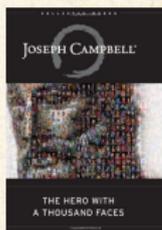
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How to write a screenplay:



"Save the Cat!"  
by Blake Snyder (2005). ^[10]



9 acts.

-  Someone important to the main characters gets toasted in the second act, blah, blah.
-  Believes irony is key.
-  Logline = one or two sentence summary.
-  Logline fails to be a summary of logline.

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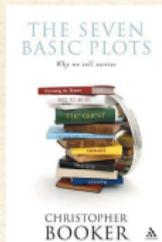
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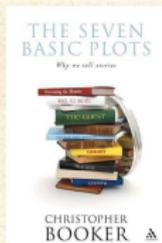
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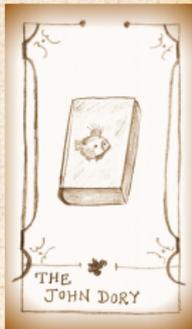
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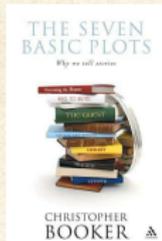
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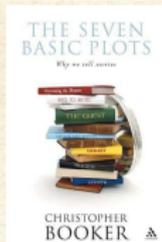
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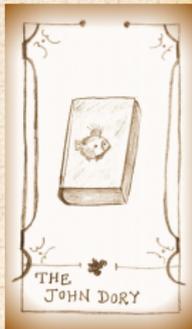
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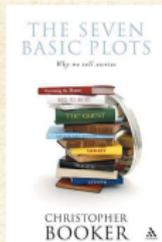
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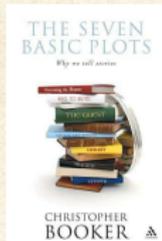
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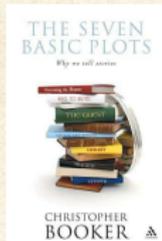
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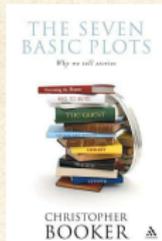
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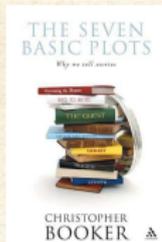
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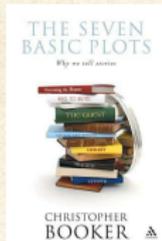
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The taxonomy of stories:

- **ANIMAL TALES** 1-299
 - Wild Animals 1-99
 - The Clever Fox (Other Animal) 1-69
 - Other Wild Animals 70-99
 - Wild Animals and Domestic Animals 100-149
 - Wild Animals and Humans 150-199
 - Domestic Animals 200-219
 - Other Animals and Objects 220-299
- **TALES OF MAGIC** 300-749
 - Supernatural Adversaries 300-399
 - Supernatural or Enchanted Wife (Husband) or Other Relative 400-459
 - Wife 400-424
 - Husband 425-449
 - Brother or Sister 450-459
 - Supernatural Tasks 460-499
 - Supernatural Helpers 500-559
 - Magic Objects 560-649
 - Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699
 - Other Tales of the Supernatural 700-749
- **RELIGIOUS TALES** 750-849
 - God Rewards and Punishes 750-779
 - The Truth Comes to Light 780-799
 - Heaven 800-809
 - The Devil 810-826
 - Other Religious Tales 827-849
- **REALISTIC TALES** 850-999
 - The Man Marries the Princess 850-869
 - The Woman Marries the Prince 870-879
 - Proofs of Fidelity and Innocence 880-899
 - The Obstinate Wife Learns to Obey 900-909
 - Good Precepts 910-919
 - Clever Acts and Words 920-929

Folkloristics:



Academic area formally started around 1900.



Aarne-Thompson classification systems 



Motif-based taxonomy.



Online classification database 

Narrativium

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"Computational folkloristics" 
 Abello, Broadwell, and Tangherlini,
 Communications of the ACM, **55**, 60–70, 2012. ^[1]

 Motivation: "As a simple, historical example from the Danish materials, no one has yet classified (according to the ATU index) the several thousand fairy tales in the collections of the Danish Folklore Archive (<http://www.dafos.dk> ) , nor does it seem anyone ever will."

 'Imagine a system in which the complexities of a folklore corpus can be explored at different levels of resolution, from the broad perspective of "distant reading" down to the narrow perspective of traditional *close reading*. 

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"The phylogeny of Little Red Riding Hood"

Jamshid J. Tehrani,
PLoS ONE, **8**, e78871, 2013. ^[11]

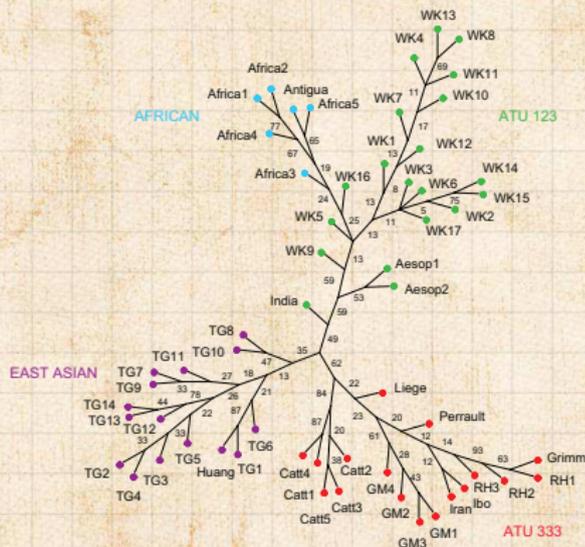


Figure 2. Majority-rules consensus of the most parsimonious trees returned by the cladistic analysis of the tales. Major groupings are labelled by region or ATU international type and indicated by the coloured nodes. Sub-types are indicated in the taxa labels (RH = Little Red Riding Hood; GM = Story of Grandmother; Catt = Catterinella; WK = The Wolf and the Kid; TG = Tiger Grandmother). Variants by particular authors, or from countries/ethnic groups that are discussed in the text have individual labels. Numbers beside the edges represent the level of support for individual clades returned by the bootstrap analysis.
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0078871.g002



Famous folklore scholar:



Comic Book Guy (CBG).



Real name: Jeffrey
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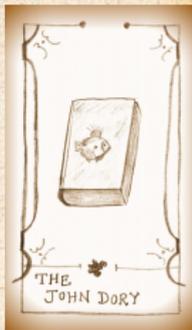
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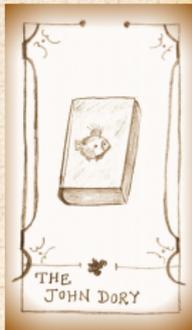
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The taxonomy of stories:

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What's the Story?

Fundamental arcs:

 Kill the Monster.

 Rags to Riches (and Riches to Rags—*Metamorphosis*).

 Journey/Odyssey: Search for a salvation, a “Holy Grail”.

 Romance.

 Narratives in Left Nullspace: All Stories of The Many.

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What about comedies?

 Comedies are not in themselves a story, but a way of telling stories.



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- 🧱 Comedies are not in themselves a story, but a way of telling stories.



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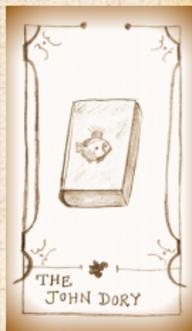
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- Provide dynamic paths and trajectories.
- If this, then that.
- Convey and reinforce how to behave, how not to behave.
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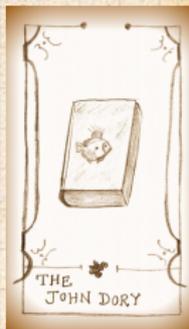
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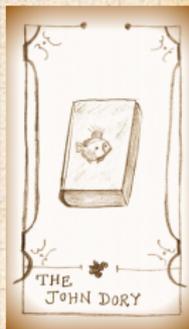
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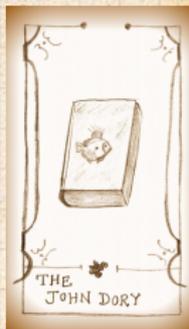
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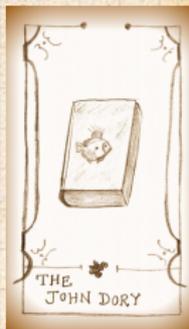
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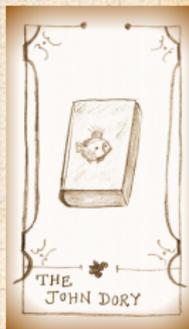
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The boiled-down essence of stories:

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The three fundamental events of (non-clone) life:

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- 3. Survival algorithms for individuals and groups.
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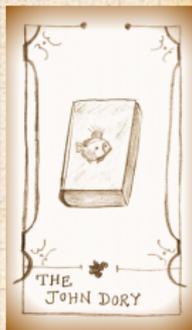
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Super Survival of the Stories:



The Desirability
of
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The Atlantic, Ed
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2017-12-05.

- Study of Agta, Filipino hunter-gatherers.
- Storytelling valued well above all other skills including hunting.
- Stories encode prosocial norms such as cooperation.
- Like the best stories, the best storytellers reproduce more successfully.

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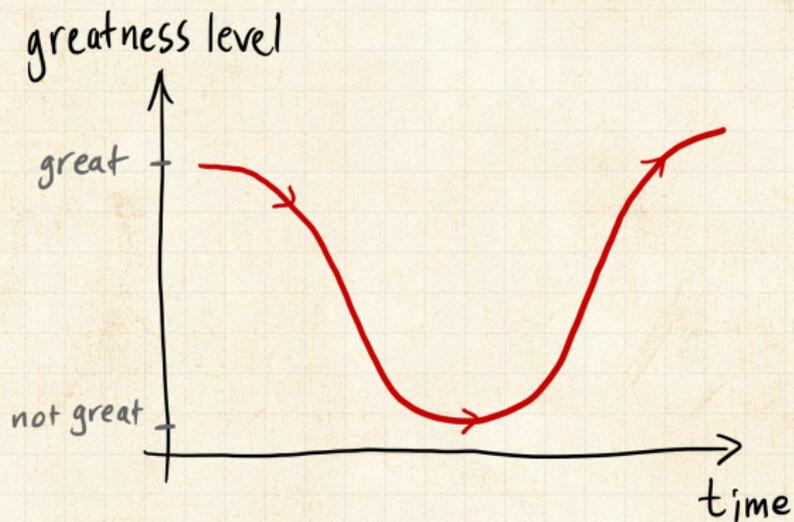
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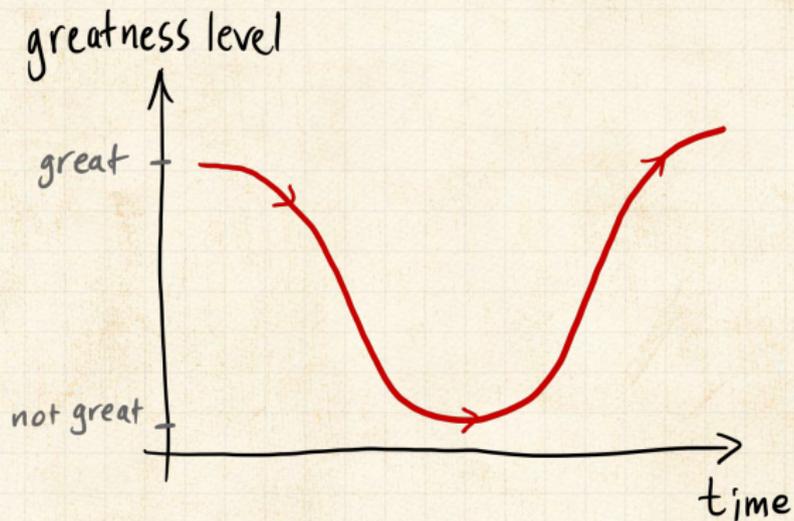


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“Plotted: A Literary Atlas” [a](#) [🔗](#)
by Andrew DeGraff (2015). ^[6]

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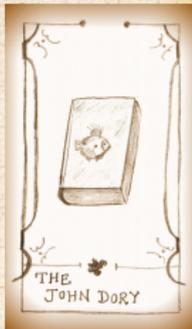
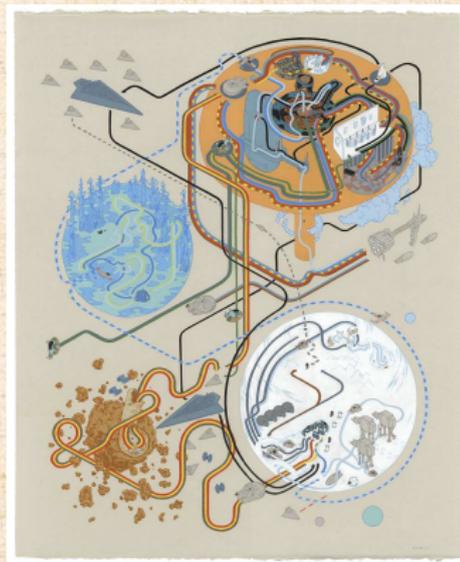
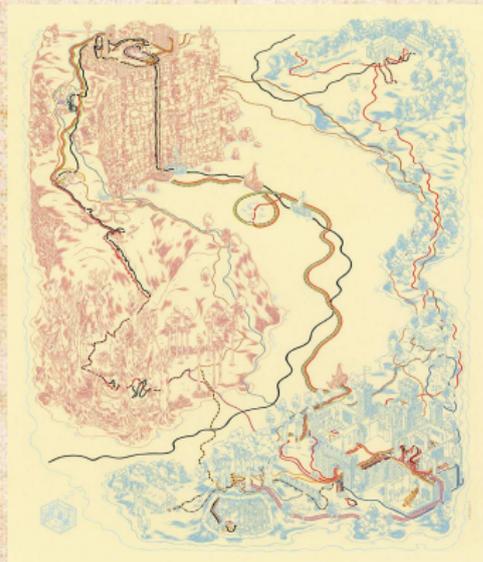
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