



1. Archetypal Narratives.

Archetypal Narratives are stories that follow familiar and traditional patterns. They are found in every age and culture, organising and communicating both individual and social sense-making. Archetypal narratives have affectivity- meaning that they create particular effects on an audience, be it an individual, group, community or country. They function as an evolutionary cognitive resource to make sense of unknown and to connect communities. Different archetypal narrative can either constrain or enhance strategic effects.

FLiNT has undertaken archetypal-narrative analysis for many organizations and UK government agencies since 2019.

The following provides an example schematic for spotting archetypal narratives around the topic of the climate crisis and net zero:

Basic Plot Pattern	Shaping Audience Expectations & Affects	Dominant Characters, Language, Tropes & Trends	So What? What does this mean for your organization? Shaping Future Narratives & Future Realities
<p>Tragedy (collapse) e.g., <i>Oedipus</i>, <i>Macbeth</i>, <i>Hamlet</i>, <i>Scarface</i>, <i>Goodfellas</i></p> <p>Variations and subplots: Descent into Hell; Riches to Rags; Sacrifice</p> <p>Key backstories: Covid Ukraine Economic shock Climate related stories in Australia, USA, N. Europe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall, rise, fall again • Pessimism, dystopias • Teleologically driven – unhappy endings for all (messy) anticipated • Deaths and sacrifices of major and minor characters (actual or figurative; i.e., career) • Lack of agency/autonomy • May prompt follow-on ‘revenge’ plots/narratives (against random/unrelated targets) • Sudden changes of fortune anticipated (‘expecting the unexpected’) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global heating as inevitable and world changing/destroying • ‘Morally flawed’ characters dominate (sympathies may also switch suddenly) • Macro-scale suffering and death expected/accepted (looked for) – but understood through micro-stories of individuals (metonymies – which may lack representative legitimacy) • Potential solutions & mitigations hyped (i.e., hopes raised in ‘2nd act’ only to make further failure in ‘act 3’ feel all the worse) • Unrepresentative failings and disaster stories hyped • Governments/decision makers in high power roles (perceived as playing ‘god’ with human lives – and as ignoring rules set for ‘ordinary mortals’, e.g., pandemic/tax rule-breaking) • Common language used: philosophical (fate; suffering; sacrifice; inevitability; hell; mistakes; misunderstandings; life and/or death; failure; lies; victim) 	
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<p>Overcoming the monster e.g., Perseus, Star Wars, Alien, Terminator, Jaws, any disaster movie</p> <p>Variations and subplots: Hero vs. Nature; Disaster; Dangerous Friends & Family; Fatal Imprudence; Loss of the Beloved; Cruelty of Fate/Misfortune; Against the Odds; Betrayal</p> <p>Key backstories: Covid Ukraine Economic shock Climate related stories in Australia, USA, N. Europe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple/linear/fixed-term • Optimistic, utopian futures • Narrowly focused (sub-plots minimal/parallel) • Teleologically driven – happy endings for all (neat/closed) held in sight (a fantasy which reality cannot deliver) • Invites sense of agency/autonomy • ‘Sequels’ may be anticipated (annual/winter resurgence of floods, fires, drought); • Proxy ‘revenge’ patterns – especially problematic given the multi-faceted (hydra-headed) ‘monster’ of climate crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood, drought, heatwaves, wildfires, smog as ‘monsters’ (attributed intent, intelligence, ‘othering’ tropes – but without a tangible presence proxy targets may be attacked) • Science as heroic (low-tech/high-tech tropes; innovation/invention – rogue behaviours expected/accepted) • Frontline jobs as heroic (self-sacrificing characterisation tropes, deaths expected & celebrated; but sudden inversions of character roles possible – anti-heroes become heroes and vice versa) • Governments in saviour roles (may seek and be granted extraordinary powers) • Common language used: warfare (frontline; battle; lockdown; restrictions; target; patrol; wartime spirit; heroes; nostalgia) 	
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<p>Quest e.g. Odysseus, Jason & the Argonauts, Wizard of Oz, Indiana Jones, Avengers, any adventure movie</p> <p>Variations and subplots: Hero vs. Higher Power; Voyage & Return; Rescue/Deliverance; MacGuffins; Meta-quest for a government - positioning as heroic, acting as part of a team</p> <p>Key backstories: Covid Ukraine Economic shock Climate related stories in Australia, USA, N. Europe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerous voyage into the unknown (some will expect a safe return 'home' – risking potential backlash when this proves impossible) • Optimistic, nostalgic, transformative, futures • Teleologically driven – happy/successful endings for most (not all) expected • Deaths and/or sacrifices of minor characters expected • Learning/growing through experience; learning new team skills – stronger together • Sequels expected and prepared for – 'happy ever after' tropes resisted • Trips, traps, riddles (and fatal mistakes) faced • Ugly truths and schisms revealed (will the quest and its sacrifices be worth it?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change solutions and mitigations a journey into and through the unknown – with many hoping for a return to 'normal/ BAU, only to find a changed home/world • Leadership roles eclipsed by team and its members • Conflict arises from inside team • Help welcomed from characters outside the team – 'others' providing specialist solutions/cures/fixes (but cause of conflict – aid from China, Russia, etc) • Team action varied by attention on micro-stories of (often paired) individuals • Money, specialist skillsets, and lo-tech 'hacks' fix problems • Governments/decision makers distanced from main action – may seem capricious and 'out of touch' • Common language used: adventure (journey; 'in this together'; 'the unknown'; discovery; team; rescue; save; protect; goal) 	
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<p>Rebirth (growth)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise, fall, rise again • Optimism, utopianism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis as transformative 	

<p>e.g., Cinderella, Harry Potter, 'the Easter Story'; any Disney film or fairy tale (inc. Satirical and Soviet/DDR socialist fairy tales with bite and revolutionary impulse)</p> <p>Variations and subplots: Rags to Riches; To Hell and Back; Against the Odds; Transformation</p> <p>Key backstories: Covid Ukraine Economic shock Success stories from China, India</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teleologically driven – happy endings for all (tidy) expected and held in sight throughout; but even fairy/Disney tales can have a dark side and/or signal bigger crises looming • Deaths and/or sacrifices of some characters expected • Learning & growing through experience & suffering – focus on new resilience & preparedness for new world and resists 'return to normal' (build back better, safer, greener, etc) • 'happy ever after' ideas raise false expectations of future prosperity (undermining future resilience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Underdog' characters dominate (but sympathies may also switch) • Donor roles ('fairy godmothers' or 'Yodas') celebrated – Scientists providing specialist solutions/hacks/fixes • Macro-scale suffering of others reported – but attention on positive micro-stories of individuals • Setbacks expected – but perceived as only temporary blips • Governments/decision makers in polarised roles – good/bad, wise/foolish; seen as removed from main action but taking decisions that materially affect lives & outcomes • Common language used: optimistic/green and comparatives (better, stronger, etc): '-er' suffixes (green shoots; turning point; sacrifice; 'new normal'; recovery; build; new; up) 	
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<p>Revenge e.g. Odysseus, Kill Bill, Gladiator, Carrie, Ex</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retaliation for real or imagined (inc. anticipation) harms & sense of injustice – may be sought with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different strands to this plot: (1) global heating seen as 'nature's revenge' against humankind for a multitude of global crimes (2) society and individuals seek justice for others' 	

<p>Machina, numerous myths and fairytales, horror movies/sequels</p> <p>Variations and subplots: Rebellion; Betrayal</p> <p>Key backstories: Ukraine Economic shock</p>	<p>violence and outside legal limits (vigilantes hailed as heroes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly emotive, affective, and visceral • Moral outrage, rebellion – may include ‘wild/natural justice’ • Nihilistic, moralistic, futures – conspiracy theory aligned • Teleologically driven – searching for answers, justice, reparation, somebody’s head on a spike • Proxy ‘revenge’ patterns – especially problematic given the multi-faceted (hydra-headed) ‘monster’ of climate crisis (may 	<p>perceived failings – failure of international leadership; government failure to prepare or mitigate against predicted crisis; government ‘lies and omissions’; misleading/false data and warnings from experts; failure to provide economic safety nets for all; failure to secure water, energy, food supply chains, etc; failure to manage global immigration crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants may become targets • Common language used: justice (accountability; truth; inquiry; payback; settlement; fairness; cheated) 	
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Markers of AN				
Accountability	Revenge	Tragedy		
Achieve	Quest	Monster	Rebirth	
Action	Quest	Monster	Rebirth	Revenge
Adapt	Rebirth	Quest	Tragedy	
Anthropocene	Rebirth	Quest	Monster	
Attack	Monster	Revenge	Quest	Tragedy
Back	Rebirth	Revenge	Quest	
Backlash	Revenge			
Battle	Monster	Quest	Revenge	

Betrayal	Revenge	Tragedy			
Better	Rebirth	Quest			
Blame	Revenge	Tragedy			
Break	Rebirth	Tragedy	Revenge		
Brexit	Quest	Rebirth	Revenge	Tragedy	Monster
Britain	Quest	Rebirth	Revenge	Tragedy	Monster
British	Quest	Rebirth	Revenge	Tragedy	Monster
Change	Rebirth	Revenge			
Collapse	Tragedy	Revenge			
Compensation	Revenge				
Conspiracy	Revenge	Tragedy			
Cost	Tragedy	Revenge	Quest		
Crisis	Monster	Tragedy	Quest	Revenge	
Danger	Monster	Tragedy	Quest	Revenge	
Deal	Rebirth	Quest			
Death	Monster	Tragedy	Quest	Revenge	
Deliver	Quest	Rebirth			
Depression	Tragedy	Revenge			
Disaster	Monster	Tragedy	Quest	Revenge	
Discover	Quest	Rebirth			
Down	Tragedy	Rebirth			
Economy	Revenge	Rebirth	Quest		
Essential	Monster	Quest			
Ever	Tragedy	Revenge			
Extinct	Tragedy	Revenge			
Fail	Tragedy	Revenge	Quest	Monster	
Failure	Tragedy	Revenge	Quest	Monster	
Fate	Tragedy	Revenge	Quest	Monster	
Fight(er)	Monster	Revenge	Quest		
Find	Quest	Monster	Rebirth		

Fortune	Quest	Rebirth			
Frontline	Monster	Quest	Tragedy		
Future	Rebirth	Quest			
Generation	Rebirth	Quest			
Goal	Quest	Rebirth			
Green	Rebirth	Quest			
Grow	Rebirth	Quest			
Harm	Monster	Revenge	Tragedy		
Hell	Monster	Revenge	Tragedy		
Help	Quest	Rebirth			
Hero(es)	Monster	Quest	Revenge	Tragedy	Rebirth
Hope	Rebirth	Quest			
Inevitable	Tragedy	Revenge			
Innovation	Quest	Rebirth			
Inquiry	Revenge	Quest	Rebirth		
Instinct	Revenge	Monster	Quest		
Journey	Quest	Rebirth			
Justice	Revenge				
Leaders(hip)	Quest	Monster	Revenge		
Learn	Quest	Tragedy	Rebirth		
Lies	Revenge	Tragedy			
Life (Lives)	Tragedy	Revenge			
Light	Rebirth	Quest			
Lockdown	Revenge	Tragedy			
Loss	Tragedy	Revenge	Monster		
Manage	Quest	Monster	Rebirth		
Messages	Quest	Tragedy	Rebirth		
Minority	Tragedy	Quest			
Mission	Quest	Monster	Revenge	Rebirth	
Mistakes	Revenge	Tragedy			

Misunderstandings	Revenge	Tragedy		
Monster	Monster	Quest	Revenge	Tragedy
Moral	Revenge	Tragedy		
New	Rebirth			
Old	Monster	Revenge	Tragedy	
Partners	Quest	Monster	Rebirth	
Patrol	Monster	Quest	Revenge	
Payback	Revenge	Monster		
Point	Quest	Monster	Tragedy	
Potential	Rebirth	Quest		
Power	Monster	Quest	Revenge	
Protect	Monster	Quest	Revenge	Rebirth
Rebirth	Rebirth	Quest		
Recession	Revenge	Tragedy	Rebirth	
Recover	Rebirth	Quest	Tragedy	
Recovery	Rebirth	Quest	Tragedy	
Regeneration	Rebirth	Quest		
Renew	Rebirth	Quest		
Rescue	Rebirth	Quest	Tragedy	Monster
Reset	Rebirth	Quest	Revenge	
Resilience	Rebirth	Quest		
Responsible	Revenge	Tragedy		
Restore	Rebirth	Quest	Revenge	
Results	Rebirth	Monster	Quest	Revenge
Return	Quest	Revenge	Rebirth	Monster
Rise	Rebirth	Monster		
Risk	Quest	Monster		
Rules	Monster	Quest	Revenge	
Sacrifice	Tragedy	Monster	Quest	Revenge
Safe	Rebirth	Monster	Quest	

Scapegoat	Revenge	Monster		
Setback	Quest	Monster		
Settlement	Revenge			
Spirit	Quest	Rebirth		
Strong	Monster	Quest	Rebirth	
Stronger	Monster	Quest	Rebirth	
Suffering	Tragedy	Revenge		
Survival	Monster	Quest	Tragedy	
Target	Monster	Quest	Revenge	
Team	Quest	Rebirth		
Time	Rebirth	Revenge		
Tragedy	Tragedy	Revenge		
Transform	Rebirth	Quest		
Truth	Revenge			
Turn	Rebirth			
Ultimate	Quest	Revenge	Tragedy	
Unexpected	Rebirth			
Unprecedented	Rebirth	Quest	Monster	
Victim	Tragedy	Revenge	Monster	
Vigilante	Revenge	Monster		
War	Monster	Revenge	Quest	Tragedy
Weak	Tragedy			
Whistle-Blower	Revenge			
Work	Quest	Monster	Rebirth	
Young	Rebirth	Quest		