

# What is the difference between Act One midpoint and Act One end?

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In a Story Development class I'm currently teaching at the DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts, we have been discussing screenplay structure and this week in particular, the importance of Act One.

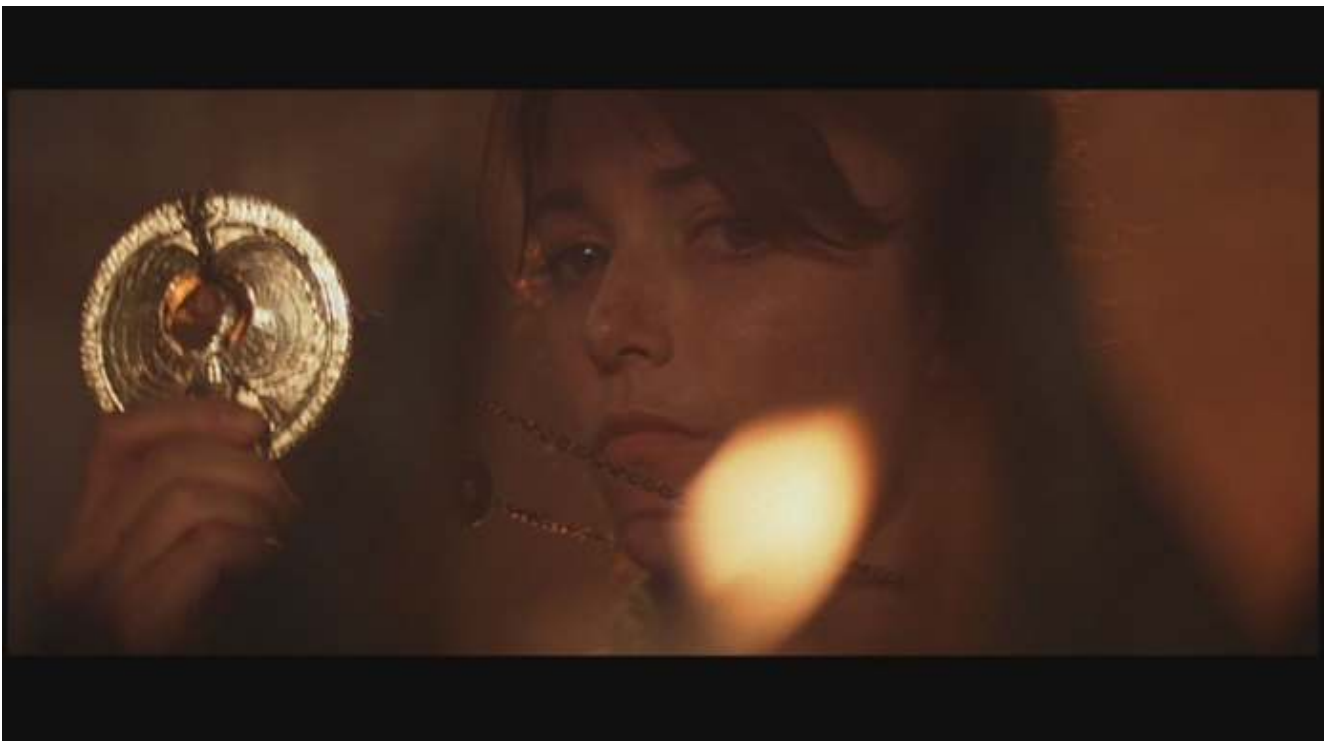
The subject came up about two major Plotline Points which typically happen in the story's setup: **The Act One Midpoint and the Act One End**. The question came up: What's the difference?

Our conversation led me to an article I had done analyzing the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I pick up my response from that point:

*The Hook: When the U.S. government officials seek out Indy's help re the Ark of the Covenant.*



*The Lock: The sequence with Marion, the German agent Toht, the fight, and resulting partnership between Marion and Indy ("I'm your goddammed partner," Marion yells).*



*Let's dig a bit deeper and use the language of the Hero's Journey. There is the Old World, the way the Protagonist has been living. In Raiders, Indy has been rolling along doing his archeological trips and teaching at a university.*

*Something happens. Campbell calls it the Call to Adventure. Some in Hollywood call it the Inciting Incident. I call it The Hook for two reasons: (1) It is generally the first Plotline point to hook into the story and give the narrative significant a twist. (2) It also should serve to hook the reader's attention. "Ah, so Indy is heading off into a mystery involving the Ark of the Covenant. Cool!"*

*Examples of The Hook in other movies:*

*\* Star Wars: A New Hope: When R2D2 plays the message from Princess Leia to Luke Skywalker: "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're our only hope."*

*\* Casablanca: When Rick takes possession of the letters of transit.*

*\* The Wizard of Oz: When Miss Gulch takes Toto, Toto escapes, and Dorothy runs away.*

*\* Tootsie: When Michael's agent tells him no one will hire him as an actor.*

*\* Up: When the court orders Carl to go live in an old folks home and he remembers his promise to Ellie.*

*\* Little Miss Sunshine: When the pageant calls to inform the family that Olive has been accepted into the competition.*

*Something happens. An event that precipitates a*

*change in the Protagonist's life circumstances.*

*The Lock is a Plotline point that signals the end of the story's setup. At this point, all the major characters have been introduced. The central conceit has been set into motion. And importantly, the Protagonist has shifted out of their Old World / Ordinary Life Experience into a New World / Extraordinary Life Experience.*

*That can literally mean traveling to a new place, like Luke Skywalker leaving Tatooine. Or it can signify a significant change in a character's life such as Tootsie where Michael becomes Dorothy Michaels, now living as a woman. So per the other movies:*

*\* Casablanca: Ilsa shows up and detonates Rick's well-ordered, but cynical life.*

*\* The Wizard of Oz: Dorothy gets swept up into a tornado and lands in Oz. Her world literally changes from sepia tone to color.*

*\* Up: Carl and Russell balloon their way to South America, a few miles from the top of Paradise Falls.*

*\* Little Miss Sunshine: The family hits the road heading to Southern California for the LMS beauty pageant.*

*I call it The Lock because it has the effect of locking down the story's setup and sending the narrative off*

*into Act Two.*

*The Hook = Something Happens.*

*The Lock = The First Big Ramification of Something Happening.*

*Now these are not rules nor are they rigid. Indeed, there seems to be something of an emerging trend in movies like Lucy and Ex Machina where the plot jumps right into action in the first few minutes. In Lucy, she is taken hostage by the Bad Guys by minute 5. In Ex Machina, Caleb finds himself swept up from his job as a programmer and flown to a secluded compound by minute 5. Are those events The Hook? I would argue no. They are The Opening.*

*In Lucy, The Hook is when the Bad Guys perform surgery on her and implant the bag of blue stuff. The Lock is when the blue stuff seeps into her blood stream causing her to start changing, leading to her escape. That needs to happen so the Bad Guys are after her which turns the story into a chase movie.*

*In Ex Machina, The Hook is Caleb's first encounter with Ava. The Lock is when Ava tells him not to trust Nathan, thus Caleb and Ava beginning a secret relationship, and a game of cat and mouse with Nathan.*

*A final point I hope helps: The Lock is a bow on the wrapping of Act One so that a reader now knows what*

*the story is. Go through each movie we've mentioned here:*

*\* Raiders: By The Lock, we know Indian and Marion are off to Egypt to search for the Ark.*

*\* Casablanca: By The Lock, we know Rick will have to confront the past and his relationship with Ilsa, while having to deal with the letters of transit.*

*\* The Wizard of Oz: By The Lock, we know Dorothy finds herself in the magical world of Oz and will want to get back home.*

*\* Up: By The Lock, we know Carl is headed toward Paradise Falls with Russell in tow.*

*\* Little Miss Sunshine: By The Lock, we know this is a road trip movie with the family headed off to the pageant.*

*\* Lucy: By The Lock, we know this is a chase movie and that Lucy is going to be changing due to the influence of the blue stuff in her blood.*

*\* Ex Machina: By the Lock, we know that Caleb is caught up in a mysterious triangle relationship with Nathan and a robot.*

*Conversely, at the point of The Hook, we do not know the full details of the story's setup, just that something happened which has jumbled up the Protagonist's life.*

*Both plot points spin the narrative in a new direction, however each serves a different story function.*

Again let me emphasize, these are not rules. There is no single paradigm for screenplay structure. Stories are organic and need to be free to emerge how they should. Nor should writers feel restrained by some alleged set of story structure 'rules'. However, it's pretty typical for the Protagonist to be introduced amidst their ordinary life, something happens which invites or compels them onto some sort of journey, physical and/or psychological in nature, then an event which propels them away from their Old Way of Being into a New World of Experience.

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