



The Stories We Tell

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Every society has its own version of campfire stories and Sunday sermons, where we discuss our own experiences. Together we curate a common message that we pass on through our societal myths and evolving behaviors.

Today, virtual work and social environments enable marginal individuals to become completely isolated from their physical community. The internet self-organizes to form echo chambers, where outlandish beliefs resonate and are reinforced. Declining personal involvement in local activities decreases exposure to differing beliefs and value systems. When today's citizen is confused by the world, they don't discuss their concerns over the glowing embers of a campfire. They find solace in a glowing phone, PC, or TV screen where they are spoon-fed carefully crafted stories designed to feed existing beliefs, promote camouflaged viewpoints, and, above all, sell advertising.

Advertisers change behavior by repeating commercials -- tiny stories targeted at people whose behavior is easily changed by repeated tiny stories. It's no surprise that our stories are empty. They are bright shiny containers of nothing, innocuous carriers for the product placements that pay the rent.

Joseph Campbell, further interpreted by Vogler, deconstructed the story-telling format (myth) and provided a template for the industrial storyteller. Classic myth structure ties deeply into the human psyche, and the powerful format is robust. The structure is present in almost every modern movie and TV show. Like all knowledge, knowing how to tell a story effectively is morally neutral. It can serve good or evil. Unfortunately, it currently mostly serves emptiness, which is an especially pernicious form of evil.

I hate video games. Their sophisticated sensory-rich storytelling, combined with immersive feedback and often depraved story lines and hyper-antisocial moralities, are doing worlds of harm. I hate video games so much that I decided to make my own and try to divert their power for good. In my video game, the player would become their own

immune system. The strong hooks of good storytelling and superior sensory immersion would, I'm sure, provoke a super-placebo effect and a powerful response to disease. Unfortunately, the patent took so long to prosecute that the business side became unworkable and we were unable to deploy the game. Too bad.

We need to tell better stories. We need to push back against shiny empty tales of nothing, and call them the garbage that they are. We need to demand stories with real conflicts that address modern concerns. We need to insist that our children are exposed to real danger, real hope, and real ideas in their media, not over-processed nutrient-free pseudo-myth. We need to seek out and evaluate differing viewpoints. We need to engage in debate and conversation, not suppress or avoid it. We need to accept responsibility for the content-free media we consume. We need to recognize that true diversity is the diversity of ideas, not the shallow diversity of appearance.

Phil Rink is a [Professional Engineer and Inventor](#), and he writes [Jimi & Isaac Books](#) for Kids