

A WRITING QUEST  
GUIDE:

# THE 3 ACT STORY STRUCTURE

**BY** BRENDEN  
PUGH



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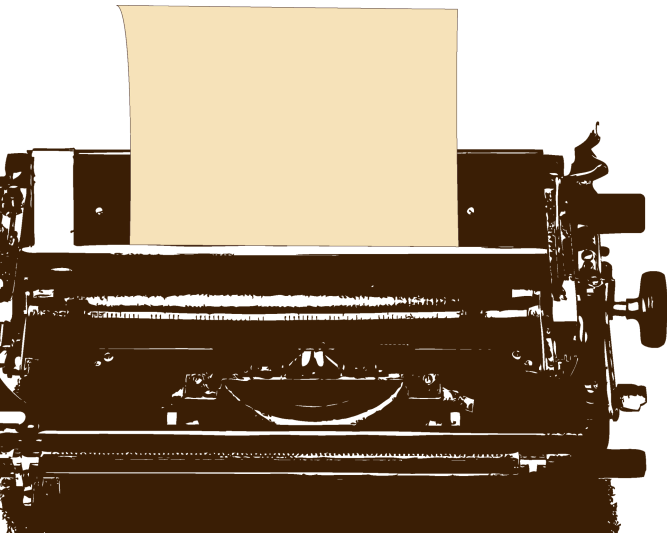
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This guide is intended to inform and give insight into the process of writing a novel. It does not guarantee or promise success in writing or publishing. However, this will be an excellent resource for those who wish to go on their own Writing Quest.

Huzzah!

Brenden Pugh

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*For those who possess the courage to go on their own  
Writing Quest...*



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# PROLOGUE

Hello and welcome to this Writing Quest guide on using the 3 - Act Story Structure. In this guide, you will learn the basics of the 3 Act Story Structure, how to use it, and why it is essential to build an outline for your novel before you begin writing. This guide is intended to help you be more organized and knowledgeable, allowing you to write more vital stories faster.

If you are new to Writing Quest, I want to welcome you personally and commend you on taking your first steps on a very rewarding journey, the quest to write a novel. I am always doing my best to learn and grow as a writer every day, and I want to share everything I have learned along the way. Throughout this guide, there will be links to videos we have produced, each complementing and expanding upon the teaching in this guide. I encourage you to read each page of the guide and watch the corresponding video, which will help you learn and apply these principles.

The next step is to get after it! Here at Writing Quest, we have the desire to tell great stories and light the path for those who wish to do the same. We, as aspiring writers ourselves, are learning and growing each day as we write and work to share our stories. We believe that by studying story structure, working through an outline, and then beginning your draft, you will not only be more successful and less frustrated by the process but will ultimately tell a better, stronger, and more exciting story.

Huzzah!  
Brenden Pugh

# 1.

## THE OPENING HOOK

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**T**he Opening Hook is exactly what it sounds like. It is the beginning. It aims to hook the reader into the story with something completely irresistible. What is the thing that is supposed to be irresistible? Internal Conflict.

The goal of any story is to be a page-turner, to be interesting, and to suck the reader in from the very beginning. This doesn't mean the external events have to be huge and bombastic or that the writing has to be fast-paced. It means the reader has to care about the characters by making the story matter to your protagonist. If the events of the story matter to your characters, the events of the story will matter to your readers, and they won't be able to put it down.

Crafting the Opening Hook can be hard. Writing a first line, first paragraph, or first page that keeps your reader turning the page is no easy task, but if you can nail this critical scene, your story will be irresistible.

**Video:** [How to write a GREAT Opening hook! 5 Tips](#)

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE OPENING HOOK:**

- 1. PRESENT THE MAIN CHARACTER'S INTERNAL CONFLICT**
- 2. FORESHADOWING**
- 3. PRESENT DANGER BUT GIVE THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL**
- 4. SHOW CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS  
- GOOD AND BAD**
- 5. FORESHADOW THROUGH DIALOGUE, NOT EXPOSITION**



# 2.

## THE INCITING INCIDENT

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**T**he Inciting Incident is when an external event clashes with your hero's internal conflict, therefore forcing them head first into the story. It's the part where they have to begin confronting their fears, and they can't turn back. Everything from this point on is unavoidable, despite your character's best efforts to run as far and fast as possible. It begins the character change, ultimately leading your reader to fall in love with the Protagonist.

The best stories are character-driven, not plot-driven. Plot-driven stories feel like the author simply pushes the reader through the story. Character-driven stories pull the reader through the story. Do you see the difference? Pushing the reading doesn't leave a good impression; you're forcing them to read instead of getting them to read. It is a simple, yet profound perspective shift.

The Inciting Incident is an external event, but it must clash with the character's internal conflict. That is what drives the narrative. That pulls your character through the story toward the ultimate final conflict and hopeful victory. It is the true beginning and is critical to setting up the rest of your story to end in a satisfying and, ultimately, character-driven way.

**Video:** 5 EXCELLENT tips to make your Inciting Incident

MATTER

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE INCITING INCIDENT:**

- 1. PUSH THE CHARACTER INTO THE ACTION. NO TURNING BACK.**
- 2. EXTERNAL EVENT PREYS UPON THE CHARACTER'S INTERNAL CONFLICT**
- 3. RAISES THE STAKES EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY**
- 4. MUST FORCE THEM TO BE DIFFERENT, EVEN THOUGH THEY DON'T WANT TOO**
- 5. CHALLENGES THEIR BELIEFS**

# 3.

## THE BUILD-UP

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**T**he Build Up is all about tension. Pile on the drama, pile on the character conflict and do everything possible to make your main character as uncomfortable as possible. How do you do that? By pitting the reactions to the events of the inciting incident of every character, including your main character, against their internal conflict.

The Build Up is the part of the story when you continually build friction between where the character is now, their beliefs, and the new information presented by the Inciting Incident. It's where you put a rift between their old way of living and their new reality. The best stories take someone from point A to point B. They fundamentally alter the character's beliefs and bring them to, hopefully, a better place. The Build Up is when this begins to happen when their old reality can no longer stand as their new reality begins to take shape.

**Video:** [5 Tips on How To write the Build Up of your Novel](#)

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE BUILD-UP:**

- 1. CONTINUALLY THROW UP OBSTACLES TO CHALLENGE THE PROTAGONIST**
- 2. CHALLENGE THEIR THINKING AT EVERY TURN**
- 3. NEVER ALLOW THEM TO REST**
- 4. PIT THE CHARACTERS' CHOICES AGAINST THEIR RELATIONSHIPS**
- 5. PIT THE CHARACTER'S CHOICES AGAINST THEIR OWN INTERNAL CONFLICT**

# 4.

## THE FIRST PLOT POINT

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**T**his is the Impossible Choice. The First Plot Point is when your protagonist finally has to choose to go on the adventure because the alternative is to stay, which is no longer a valid option. It is when the pain of staying is no longer easier than the pain of going, and now your character is thrust fully into the unknown.

It's a pivotal moment for your character. To leave their home and go on an adventure in the face of even more danger, sacrifice, and turmoil. But it beats the alternative of staying with their old life.

If you can, try turning this moment into something that creates immense doubt for your character. They shouldn't know if they made the right choice, and even if they feel they have, continuing to sow the seeds of doubt will only increase the tension, ultimately pulling your reader further into the story.

Because this happens to all of us, right? We start a new job, go to a new restaurant, and make a new friend because it's easier to do those things than stay where we are, but that doesn't stop us from doubting our choice...at first.

**Video:** [The Impossible Choice...how to write the First Plot Point.](#)

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE FIRST PLOT POINT:**

- 1. EVERYTHING UP UNTIL NOW MUST CULMINATE IN THEM HAVING TO CHOOSE**
- 2. THERE IS NO RIGHT ANSWER**
- 3. THE CHOICE MUST HURT SOME CHARACTERS AND HELP OTHERS**
- 4. THEY MUST DOUBT THEIR CHOICE**
- 5. THE CHOICE SHOULD HAVE REWARDS AND CONSEQUENCE**

# 5.

## THE FIRST PINCH POINT

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**T**he Shadow of the villain rises! The First Pinch Point is all about the villain, or rather the villain's shadow. Whether or not you reveal the villain at this moment, which you can certainly do, is irrelevant. What's more important is building the threat of danger looming in the background of your character's mind or revealing to the character that there is more to this story than just their selfish desire to escape their pain.

Lord of the Rings is a great example of this. We know Sauron is the enemy, and we know he is the villain Frodo must ultimately defeat, but he is not the immediate threat at the moment. He is only a lurking shadow. Frodo must overcome multiple other dangerous creatures before ever considering facing Sauron and destroying the ring. Orcs, Goblins, Ringwraiths, and other enemies are all more important to Frodo's current survival. He knows who the real enemy is, he can feel the enemy's evil looming over his existence, but the final villain is not the main threat.

**Video: Writing the First Pinch Point - 5 Tips That Can Make Your Story Better**

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE FIRST PINCH POINT:**

- 1. FORESHADOW THE LOOMING DANGER OF THE VILLAIN**
- 2. DON'T FULLY REVEAL THE THREAT**
- 3. THE HERO IS NOT IN CONTROL OF THIS SITUATION**
- 4. YOU CAN SHOW OR HIDE YOUR VILLAIN**



## 5. THE HERO IS CAUGHT OFF GUARD AND IS NOT EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM

## 6.

## THE PRE-MIDPOINT HERO

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**T**he Pre-Midpoint Hero is all about fear. Everything your hero has done up to this point has led them to believe they have created a plan to solve their problems. There's only one big issue with their plan. It is the wrong plan.

If you have firmly planted the story in your main character's internal conflict, then the Pre Midpoint Hero will do everything they can to escape their fears. Because that is the natural reaction, right? If an event (Inciting Incident) causes enough tension (Build Up) to force you into making an impossible choice (First Plot Point) and then something puts you in danger (First Pinch Point), anyone's natural response would be to run as far away as possible. The pain of running away hasn't yet eclipsed the pain of turning a facing your internal fears.

You might think, 'Why does my character have to run? They could just turn around and face their problems.' Because your Hero hasn't yet gone through enough trial and tribulation to warrant having a character-changing moment that would overcome their desire to run, most people simply want to return to normal, to homeostasis. Until the pain of

running overshadows the pain of changing the circumstance, people will run every time.

Your hero should do the same.

Video: 5 Tips for Writing a Strong Pre midpoint hero to Make Your Story Matter

## **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE PRE MIDPOINT HERO:**

- 1. YOUR HERO MUST FOLLOW A FLAWED PLAN**
- 2. THE PLAN MUST NOT SEEM FLAWED TO THE HERO**
- 3. THE HERO IS RUNNING AWAY FROM DANGER**
- 4. THE HERO HAS NOT FIGURED OUT THE REAL PROBLEM**

## 5. THE PLAN IS BASED ON A FEAR-BASED GOAL

# 7.

## THE MIDPOINT

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**C**hanging the game. Plot Twist. Whatever you want to call it, the Midpoint is all about changing everything. It's part of your story when you turn everything on its head and up the ante.

At this point, your hero has gone on a long and hard journey based on fear and running away. During the Game Changing Midpoint, an event occurs, turning your hero from a frightened character looking to run away from everything to a frightened character willing to face their problems head first. They don't have all the skills they need, don't know all the variables, and are still scared to their core, but now they have reason enough to charge ahead and face their problems.

The Midpoint doesn't need to be a positive or negative event; it simply needs to present a massive new piece of information to your character and, by extension, the reader, that changes the focus of your character from running from the problem to the actual problem. At this point, the real

character change begins as they learn the lessons they've been seeing right before them from the beginning.

**Video:** [5 GREAT Tips on How to write the Midpoint Plot Twist](#)

## **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE MIDPOINT:**

- 1. HALTS THE HERO'S PREVIOUS PLAN**
- 2. SURPRISE THE MAIN CHARACTER**
- 3. CHANGE THE FEEL OF THE STORY**
- 4. DESTROYS THEIR ABILITY TO RUN AWAY FROM THE PROBLEM**
- 5. INTRODUCES NEW ELEMENTS FOR THE HERO TO CONTEND WITH**

# 8.

## THE POST-MIDPOINT HERO

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**T**he Post Midpoint Hero is all about action. After the Game Changing Midpoint events, your hero embarks on the same quest as before, but with renewed confidence and a better plan. They are ready to take on whatever comes their way. They know they can't avoid the problem any longer, forcing them to face their fears head-on.

At this point, the hero is still afraid, they are still learning, and everything still runs against their internal conflict. Still, they have committed to overcoming and gaining the skills necessary to solve the problem. At this time, the hero starts to do the right things in the eyes of their mentor, or maybe it's the wrong thing, but their mentor respects their choices. Either way, the Post Midpoint Hero is a new person, capable of great things and confident enough to pursue those things. It's this new confidence that will ultimately bring them down toward true character change and growth in Act Three.

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE POST MIDPOINT HERO:**

- 1. THE HERO CREATES A NEW AND SEEMINGLY BETTER PLAN**
- 2. GIVE THEM MORE CONFIDENCE**
- 3. CONTINUE TO KEEP THE GOAL ROOTED IN THEIR INTERNAL CONFLICT BUT FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE**
- 4. THE HERO THINKS THIS IS THE ONLY PATH**

## 5. MAKE THE OTHER CHARACTERS DISAGREE WITH THE HERO

# 9.

## THE SECOND PINCH POINT

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**T**he Second Pinch Point is when the villain comes into focus. During the First Pinch Point, the hero was aware of the villain or at least the villain's shadow, but there might not have been a confrontation.

Now the villain is putting direct pressure on the hero, and while the hero may have more control of the situation, things do not go well. The hero runs once again from the villain. But not all hope is lost, as the hero's plan begins to take shape, the villain may have won the battle, but they are farther from winning the war.

At this point, you leave subtle clues about how the hero may ultimately win. They haven't yet experienced enough disaster to warrant them fully learning the lesson the story is trying to teach them, but the path is starting to be laid before them. The question starts to become not so much about whether they will or won't succeed but how and when they will succeed.

Put the pressure on your hero, but not all hope is lost.

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE SECOND PINCH POINT:**

- 1. REVEAL THE TRUE VILLAIN, OR SO THE HERO THINKS...**
- 2. THE HERO HAS MORE CONTROL OF THE SITUATION, BUT NOT ENOUGH.**
- 3. THEIR PLAN FROM THE POST MIDPOINT STARTS TO WORK.**
- 4. KEEP THE DANGER, BUT HOPE IS NOT LOST**



## 5. SET THEM UP TO WIN IN THE FUTURE, EVEN IF THEY LOSE IN THE MOMENT

# 10. SUPPOSED VICTORY

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**A**t last, the hero won! They have achieved the goal and defeated the villain. Except they haven't. The Supposed Victory is when the hero wins the battle but thinks they have won the war. Little do they know, disaster lurks dangerously around the corner, just out of sight.

They haven't defeated the villain, though it looks like they have. They've successfully run away and reached sanctuary but are moments away from everything crashing down. The reader can know what lurks in the shadows, but your characters are oblivious. To them, the story is over, and they are happy for possibly the first time since the beginning of their journey. Safety has settled over the characters, and they can finally relax...for now...

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE SUPPOSED VICTORY:**

- 1. THE HERO REJOICES! THEY WON! SUPPOSEDLY...**
- 2. THEY HAVEN'T DEFEATED THE VILLAIN; THEY'VE JUST COMPLETED THE GOAL**
- 3. THEY SUCCESSFULLY RUN AWAY FROM THE VILLAIN**

**4. THE HERO IS HAPPY FOR POSSIBLY THE FIRST TIME IN THE STORY**

**5. EVERYONE FEELS SAFE, OR AT LEAST MORE SAFE THAN BEFORE**

**11.**

**THE DISASTER**

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**T**his time, it's personal. Disaster strikes, and everything your hero thought they achieved during the supposed victory comes crashing down. War rages, enemies come into the light, and the hero is left running for their life. At this point, the story becomes truly personal to the main character. Until now, they have mostly been working on running from the problem and avoiding confrontations, but it has become personal. Their friends, family, and colleagues are hurt, everything they've worked for is in danger, and life for them comes completely unhinged as the villain gains the upper hand.

The illusion of control they might have held in their mind shatters, and their goals are destroyed. If they had hope before, it is all gone now. The villain shows their true and real power over the narrative the hero had thought they'd built to

protect themselves and shows the hero they are no match for their ultimate power.

## **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE DISASTER:**

- 1. REVEAL SOMETHING TRULY PERSONAL TO THE PROTAGONIST, AND EXPLOIT IT**
- 2. MAKE THE VILLAIN SEEM UNSTOPPABLE**
- 3. ALL ILLUSIONS OF CONTROL ONCE AGAIN SHATTER**

**4. DESTROY THE GOAL THEY ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE SUPPOSED VICTORY**

**5. KILL OFF SOMEONE CLOSE TO THE MAIN CHARACTER**

**12.**

**THE DARKEST MOMENT**

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**T**he hero falls into their deepest and darkest moment with the world shattered around them. How can they fight such terrible evil? How could they ever come close to combatting something which defeated them so easily? And the personal stakes are higher than ever, as the hero's friends and family are affected by the tragedy.

To make matters worse, someone is to blame. Everyone blames someone else, and nobody takes responsibility except for the hero, who firmly places blame on their shoulders. True or not, the hero believes it is all their fault and feels the defeat personally. There is no more fighting. No more plans to make. All hope is lost for good.

# **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE DARKEST MOMENT:**

- 1. EVERYONE IS DEVASTATED, AND SOMEONE IS TO BLAME**
- 2. THE MAIN CHARACTER FEELS EVERYTHING IS THEIR FAULT**
- 3. THE DEFEAT IS PERSONAL. THE MAIN CHARACTER'S INTERNAL CONFLICT IS REALIZED**

**4. NO MORE PLANS**

**5. ALL HOPE IS LOST**

**13.**

## **THE AHA MOMENT**

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In this darkest moment, the hero is finally ready to learn and accept the lesson that has been in front of them all along. Their internal conflict has been realized, and they are distraught, but now, at the bottom, real growth for the character can begin.

The Aha Moment is when the character finally learns the lesson and overcomes their internal conflict. That doesn't mean their internal conflict goes away or they somehow no longer feel fear about anything happening to them. It just means they have the strength and will to overcome the fear and put one foot in front of the other. This lesson is personal, as personal as the events of the disaster were, which started their path to this moment.

This is the character change. This is when the hero starts going in the right direction for the first time. This is the beginning of the end for your villain.

## **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE AHA MOMENT:**

- 1. THE FINALLY ACCEPT WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED ON THE JOURNEY**
- 2. THE LESSON IS DEEPLY PERSONAL**
- 3. THE LESSON OVERCOMES THEIR INTERNAL CONFLICT**



**4. THE ANSWER COMES FROM WITHIN THE CHARACTER**

**5. PRODUCES THE FINAL PLAN, AND THEY KNOW WHAT THEY MUST DO**

# **14.**

## **CLIMACTIC CONFRONTATION**

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**T**he battle begins! Your hero and villain clash in an all-out war for supremacy. Initially, your villain knows in their core that they have the upper hand in this fight. They believe they have the hero on the ropes, and nothing can stop them from achieving their goal. Little do they know that the hero has found a renewed lease on life, and they won't go down easy.

Bolstered by the lessons they learned during the aha moment, your hero rides onto the battlefield to face the enemy head-on without fear, hesitation, ego, and determination to claim victory. The road ahead looks impossible, full of danger and obstacles physically and mentally, but they have come to terms with the end, and

nothing will stop them. It's a battle for the ages, good against evil, and only one can claim victory.

## **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE CLIMACTIC CONFRONTATION:**

- 1. THE MAIN CHARACTER FINALLY TAKES CHARGE, OVERCOMING FEAR**
- 2. THE ROAD AHEAD LOOKS IMPOSSIBLE, BUT IT IS THE ONLY WAY**
- 3. YOUR HERO COMES TO TERMS WITH THE END**

4. **THE ONLY WAY FORWARD IS THROUGH**

5. **THE VILLAIN THINKS THEY'VE WON WHEN THE BATTLE BEGINS**

**15.**  
**VICTORY**

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**V**ictory is at hand! In a twist of fate, the villain is on the run, and our hero has triumphed. After bringing the full weight of everything they have learned against the villain, your hero has finally and decisively won and claimed victory for their own. They don't achieve everything they want, and there have been many losses, but victory is theirs.

They may not have won the war, and many battles may need to be fought in the future, but for now, at this moment, they have triumphed over evil, defeated their enemy, and found a moment of peace. A difficult moment, full of the darkness and loss it took to win, but a good moment for once. Contentment comes over your hero as they are no longer

running and fully accept the story's lesson to become whom they were meant to be.

## **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE VICTORY:**

- 1. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THEY WIN OR LOSE THE WAR**
- 2. DON'T GIVE THE HERO EVERYTHING THEY WANT**
- 3. THE VILLAIN IS DEFEATED, AT LEAST FOR NOW**

**4. PAIR THE SWEETNESS OF VICTORY WITH THE DARKNESS IT TOOK TO WIN**

**5. YOUR HERO FULLY ACCEPTS THE LESSON FROM THE AHA MOMENT**

# **16.**

## **RESOLUTION**

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It is over. The Resolution of your story is where everything comes to a close, or in the case of a series, reveals clues and questions about how the story will continue. Wrap up loose ends, give the reader the remaining information they need to understand everything that has happened, and allow your characters to feel contentment for the first time.

Then drop them off a cliff.

The Resolution is a sweet moment, full of peace and calm, when everyone can finally take a well-earned break, and everything is revealed. But it is also when you must ask more questions, reveal new mysteries, and create new internal conflict for your character. Even if you aren't writing a series,

you can still leave a few small questions in your reader's minds for them to think about.

Ultimately, whatever you decide, you and your character made it. The story is over, and victory is claimed. Time to rest and relax.

## **5 TIPS ON WRITING THE RESOLUTION:**

- 1. WRAP UP LOOSE ENDS, THEN ASK MORE QUESTIONS**
- 2. LEAVE SOME LOOSE ENDS UNFINISHED**
- 3. DROP YOUR READER OFF A CLIFF**



**4. GIVE THE READER ALL THE INFORMATION THEY NEED**

**5. YOUR CHARACTER NEEDS TO FEEL SOME CONTENTMENT**

**NOTION TEMPLATES BY WRITING QUEST!**

**STORYBOOK**

**STORYBOOK PRO**

**STORYBOOK MASTER NOVELIST**



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Brenden Pugh is an aspiring author on a quest to write and tell his epic fantasy story. He lives with his wife and daughter, homesteading in the middle of nowhere in the midwest.