

# ***Lost* and Found: An Archetypal Analysis of the Hit Show**

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## RESONATING WITH VIEWERS

When the first episode of the ABC drama *Lost* aired in September 2004, creators Jeffrey Lieber, J.J. Abrams, and Damon Lindelof already had the major events for six seasons all planned out but were holding their breath to see how America received the characters and initial plotline for the program. *Lost*'s two-part pilot episode was the most expensive in the network's history because it required the crew to purchase a plane, destroy it, and do it all in Oahu—an especially expensive place to film. The premise for the show doesn't seem especially unusual at the outset (a group of strangers crashes on an island), but it soon becomes clear that this is no ordinary island. Also setting it apart from many other American television dramas, *Lost* asks more questions than it answers and offers a unique blend of drama, science fiction, mystery, romance, adventure, and fantasy. Because there are so many complicated and strange plot lines, the number of viewers has dropped over the years, but the show still appeals to hard-core fans who are not frustrated by loose plot ends.

Each episode focuses on one character and provides exposition through flashbacks, flashsideways, or flashforwards. The first device was used in Seasons 1-5 to show how the characters lived before the plane crashed, while flashsideways are being used in Season 6 (airing now) to demonstrate what life would have been like for the survivors if the plane hadn't crashed over five years ago. The flashforwards were used in the fourth and fifth seasons to show what would happen to six selected survivors after they were rescued from the island. These scenes from life off the island allow viewers to associate themselves more with the characters in everyday circumstances. In flashbacks, they grapple

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with issues (like failing to connect with a father) that viewers are more likely to experience than coming face-to-face with a killer polar bear. In addition, the time changes reveal that some of the survivors have met each other off the island before it all happened, prompting viewers to take a closer look at their own relationships.

The main way the writers keep the audience hooked is through mystery, although there is an occasional romantic coupling or showdown brawl. With the end of the series approaching in the next few months, a few answers to some long-standing questions have been revealed, but many have yet to be explained.

### THE LOCATION OF THE QUEST

In the first season, the HERO Jack Shepard and his main ALLY Kate Austen leave the beach (where the body of the plane has landed) to find the dying pilot in the cockpit of the plane, which has landed in the middle of the jungle. Before the pilot is dragged off by the mysterious smoke monster, he reveals the fact that nobody will find them because they were 1000 miles from Fiji before they crashed. The jungle is the most dangerous part of the island—the survivors often hear whispering in the trees and fear going through it at night. In the Season 4 finale, the island physically moves when Ben Linus, the SHAPESHIFTER/MENTOR, pushes a wheel to make the island become invisible so that the men trying to find and arrest Linus can't get to him. But only a few episodes into the first season, the survivors realize they are not going to be rescued. They are lost, both in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and in their lives, for the time being.

### THE OBJECT OF THE QUEST

All of the characters are searching for their true identities, which they have not managed to find in their ORDINARY WORLD. The point of coming to the island is to start over, though that's not totally possible, as evidenced by the secret of Kate's having murdered her father being revealed in the Season 1 episode, "Tabula Rasa." Still, the island is a place where the survivors can craft new identities for themselves. In

the beginning, the main priority is trying to find food and just survive, but as the show progresses they try to find out whether and, if so, why they have been brought to the island by destiny.

## CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Jack Shepard: HERO

Kate Austen: ALLY

John Locke: SHAPESHIFTER/MENTOR/SHADOW

Ben Linus: SHAPESHIFTER/MENTOR

Hugo Reyes (Hurley): TRICKSTER

*Lost* begins by introducing us to the de facto leader and HERO of the series, Dr. Jack Shepard, the doctor/leader/perfectionist who struggles between making decisions based on faith or reason. In his ORDINARY WORLD he is a spinal surgeon faced with grueling surgeries under the supervision of his boss and alcoholic father, Dr. Christian Shepard. On the island, his OUTER PROBLEM is trying to keep everyone in the group alive and safe; his INNER PROBLEM is never being as sure of himself as he portrays himself to be.

The archetype of the son trying and failing to please his father plays directly into Jack's character. In his ORDINARY WORLD, Jack has never seen eye-to-eye with his father. The reason Jack is on the plane (returning to Los Angeles from Sydney) when it crashes is that his father has died in Australia and he has to fly there to retrieve the corpse. On the island, the figure of his father visits survivors right before they are going to die because he never received a proper burial. Jack is especially haunted by the image of his dead father because he turned him in to the Board of Trustees at his hospital for being an alcoholic, causing him to lose his job as a top-ranking surgeon.

When Jack is rescued from the island and returns home in Season 5, he becomes an alcoholic and pushes away his ALLY and fiancée (Kate). In Season 6, a flashsideways shows an alternate reality (depicting what would have happened if the plane hadn't crashed going back to Los Angeles) where Jack fails to connect with his son, an accomplished

pianist who fears his father will always be disappointed in him. Jack's cyclical life shows that no matter how much we might say we don't want to be like our parents, we still end up acting like them.

In the opening scene of the first episode, "Pilot, Part 1," Jack's eye is the first image that is visible, inviting the audience to see the show through his eyes. Wearing a dark suit, he runs towards the destroyed plane dazed by sensory overload—the engine is still running, people are screaming, and the sun is too bright. This image is similar to the experience that newborn babies have coming out of the womb, when their hearing is hypersensitive and their vision is blurry. Jack and all the other survivors are RESURRECTED on the island after the crash. They survive a plane crash and are rewarded with a seemingly fresh start and a new world to explore.

The show starts immediately with a CRISIS: people are injured and struggling to survive. Jack's initial TEST is to save as many people as he can, and people listen to him because they respect his knowledge. As the HERO, he takes care of the critically injured people before going to a private area to tend to his own injuries. He pulls up his shirt and reveals a large gash on his back that he can't quite reach. It is at this moment that his main ALLY and future love interest Kate comes out of the jungle and sees his wound. Kate represents a strong, positive feminine energy as well as a significant factor in Jack's emotional decision-making. Jack asks Kate to stitch him up, and while she does so, she makes herself a part of him physically. By the end of the pilot episode, Kate already sees herself as a part of Jack; they have already formed a bond that will persist for the rest of the show. When he says he is going to find the cockpit of the plane, she answers, "I'm going with you." In the closing scene of the pilot, the survivors hear the smoke monster for the first time and realize they are in a place of supernatural intervention.

The Season 1 episode that provides backstory on Kate is entitled "Tabula Rasa." The truth about Kate's life in the ORDINARY WORLD is revealed through flashbacks: she is a convict on the run who was on the plane going back to Los Angeles with a sheriff who hunted her down in Australia. At the end of the episode, Kate tries to come clean about her life on the run at home, but Jack responds, "It doesn't matter

Kate—who we were, what we did before the crash. Three days ago we all died. We should all be able to start over.” Images of the survivors looking after one another on the island are shown at the end of the episode, but John Locke, the MENTOR/SHAPESHIFTER/SHADOW, is shown sitting alone on the beach and glancing at everyone else. While it seems Kate has not in fact received a clean slate (*tabula rasa*) when she was reborn on the island, Locke was paralyzed before the crash and is now able to walk. His only injury is a superficial vertical cut down the right side of his face. In addition, a woman named Rose had terminal cancer which she no longer feels the symptoms of. These characters have been given new strength by the island to transcend their earthly pains and illnesses.

In the first look at John Locke’s ORDINARY WORLD, an episode called “Deus Ex Machina,” Locke is setting up a game of Mouse Trap in a general store, an anecdote which ties in later as he tells Jack that he loves to play games. He is approached by a nervous woman who tells him he was placed in foster care because he was immaculately conceived, but then this woman leads him to his father, Anthony Cooper, whom he has never met before. Anthony Cooper takes his son hunting for some father-son bonding, and eventually tells him he is dying while waiting for a kidney transplant. Locke agrees to give his birth father one of his kidneys, but when he wakes up in the ICU, his father is gone. When he tracks him down a few episodes later at his office, Cooper pushes Locke out an eighth-story window, paralyzing him from the waist down. When he is lying on the ground, Jacob, the MENTOR for the leaders of the island, touches him and then leaves. His name is an allusion to Jacob, the patriarch of the Jewish people who leads them on their exodus. Jacob makes contact with every main character on the island and indirectly guides them to Sydney so that the return plane to Los Angeles can crash and bring them to the island.

Locke is the namesake of the philosopher John Locke, best known for his postulation of *tabula rasa*, the notion that our minds are “blank slates” at birth and all knowledge is the result of individual experience. Locke is also a MENTOR to the survivors in the beginning of the show, as his hunting and tracking skills gained from the trips with his father come in handy when shooting wild boar for the group to eat.

Locke passes many physical and mental TESTS on the island, but fails one crucial test in his ORDINARY WORLD. When Locke was five years old, a man named Richard Alpert, a leader of a rebel group on the island, visited him and said he ran a school for very special children. (This character's name alludes to the contemporary spiritual leader and colleague of Timothy Leary also known as Baba Ram Dass.) Richard acted as a THRESHOLD GUARDIAN when he laid several items on a table and asked John which one belonged to him: a compass, a globe, a book of mysteries, a vial of granules, or a knife. When Locke picked the knife, Richard appeared angry and left without explanation. This test is like the one used to confirm a reincarnated tulku such as the Dalai Lama. At this point in his life, Locke is not ready to be chosen, but by the time he reaches Sydney, he is.

Midway through the first season, the survivors find a sealed hatch in the ground and struggle to break it open. Locke is frustrated by the hatch, which represents a THRESHOLD GUARDIAN for him, and repeatedly cries, "This was supposed to work!" In a comic scene that serves to lighten Locke's desperation, a fellow survivor has awful headaches and turns reluctantly for help to Jack, who determines that he needs glasses. Jack forges two pairs of glasses together and Hurley, the TRICKSTER who usually vocalizes the group's unspoken worries, says, "Dude, it looks like someone steamrolled Harry Potter." In a dramatic scene at the end of the episode, Locke pounds on the door of the hatch as it is pouring down rain and screams, "I've done everything you wanted me to do. So why did you do this? Why?" A light then comes on from inside the hatch.

In the Season 1 finale, "Exodus," the survivors are escaping from The Others—a group of inhabitants who capture the survivors in the middle of the night, inoculate them, and then brainwash them. Kate, Jack, Locke, and Hurley go to the Black Rock, an old slave ship in the middle of the jungle, to get TNT so they can blow up the hatch. At the ship they face an ORDEAL—they need to get dynamite to blow up the hatch, but the TNT itself is highly unstable. Jack and Kate decide to SACRIFICE themselves and carry the packs of dynamite even after seeing Lester, a scientist who accompanies them on their journey, blown to smithereens while moving a crate of TNT. While walking

back to the hatch, the Smoke Monster (a violent cloud of smoke that makes clicking noises) drags Locke away and almost down into a hole. As Locke is being dragged off, he tells Jack not to help him, but Jack decides to save him against his wishes.

Locke is a SHADOW to Jack—he is his nemesis as a leader. The two men are philosophical opposites and often quarrel with each other. Initially, most of the survivors trust Jack because he helped them in the beginning while Locke just watched over everyone, but Jack's popularity dwindles as the show progresses.

Below is a transcription of the pivotal scene in “Exodus,” after Jack rescues Locke, when the different philosophies of the two men are made most obvious.

LOCKE: I believe that I was being tested. You're a man of science. Me, well, I'm a man of faith. Do you really think all of this is an accident? Do you think we crashed on this place by coincidence? Each one of us was brought here for a reason.

JACK: Brought here? And who brought us here, John?

LOCKE: The island. This is no ordinary place. The island chose you too, Jack. It's destiny.

JACK: I don't believe in destiny.

LOCKE: Yes, you do. You just don't know it yet.

After this tense discussion in the jungle, Jack, Kate, and Locke reach the hatch with the packs of TNT and successfully blow the lid off. Season 1 ends with a shot of Locke and Jack looking down the hatch.

Locke is murdered by a SHAPESHIFTER/MENTOR named Ben Linus in Season 5 once they have gotten off the island, but Richard Alpert, whom John meets again on the island, has already warned Locke that he must sacrifice himself for the island. Locke is RESURRECTED as the Smoke Monster on the island, but assumes his previous human form when conversing with people. In Season 6, this new SHAPESHIFTER Locke is a darker and more menacing figure than ever before.

## VOGLER STAGES

Christopher Vogler, in his book for screenplay writers, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, describes twelve stages in the hero's journey, based on Joseph Campbell's work on myths.

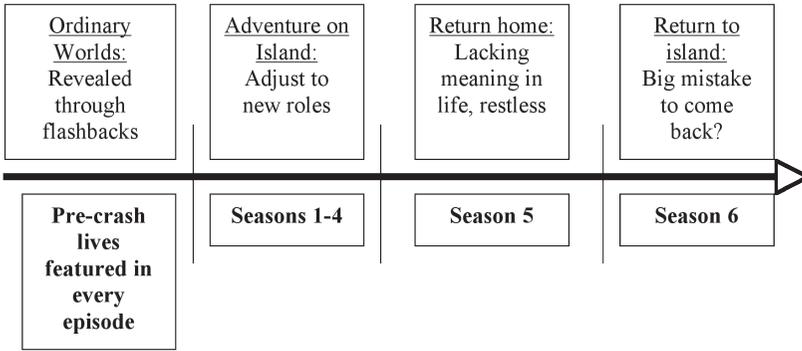


Figure 1: Vogler Stages

Much of the time in each episode is devoted to uncovering the ORDINARY WORLD of the main characters: Jack is a perfectionist spinal surgeon; Kate is a convict running from the law; Locke is a lonely, frustrated paraplegic; and Hurley is a mama's boy who won the lottery.

These characters are not aware of their first CALL TO ADVENTURE until Season 6 when Jacob, the MENTOR who appeared to them at seemingly random points in their lives, is murdered on the island. In the characters' ORDINARY WORLDS, Jacob is just a stranger whom they encounter for a brief moment, such as near a vending machine in the hospital where Jack works. Jacob's character brings up the recurring issue of fate vs. free will—if he has been watching the characters for their whole lives and has chosen them to come live on the island, then he intervened in their lives so they would all end up on the plane to Sydney together, and thus they have had no control over anything in their whole life.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD is evidenced in the Season 1 finale, where Jack and Locke break open the hatch and begin to discover information about the mysterious people they call The Others, who have captured and killed their fellow passengers.

TESTS, ALLIES, and ENEMIES makes up the bulk of the show. The survivors are initially reluctant to trust the SHAPESHIFTER/MENTOR Ben Linus—the leader of The Others. Ben pretends to be a man named Henry Gale (who crashed in a hot air balloon on the island) when the survivors first find him, but this is a false identity. Over the course of Seasons 2-4, Ben manipulates and controls the survivors, until he is ousted as the leader of his group and then must make amends with the survivors in order to ensure his own survival. Charles Widmore is a wealthy and determined ENEMY of Ben's who repeatedly tries to find the island, although his motives are still unknown in Season 6.

Jack is TESTED in Season 3 when he is forced to perform a spinal surgery on Ben. Midway through the procedure, he makes an intentional error and SACRIFICES himself so that Kate can be released from the chambers of The Others where she is being held. Jack's main TESTS are usually internal. As the leader, he must decide which of the survivors to trust and how to justify decisions (based on logic or reason).

Kate's main TESTS are usually to convince people who have run away to come back and join the group because the unofficial motto of the show is "Live together, die alone."

Locke's main TESTS are designed for him to figure out what the island intends for him to do. Ben brings his birth father who paralyzed him (Anthony Cooper) to the island and tells Locke to kill him. Locke ponders his choices and then goes through with it, thus cutting the physical bond between himself and his father.

The TESTS that take place in the SPECIAL WORLD of the island are extraordinary and constant. When the survivors return to the mainland at the end of Season 4, the main TEST they face is keeping their previous whereabouts a secret in order to protect themselves from the destructive and persistent Charles Widmore. They are forced to change their

identities again, do not share any ELIXIR with the outside world, and must internalize their traumatic past few years on the island. When Jack and Kate come back from the island, they live together as a couple and then as fiancés before Jack becomes an alcoholic. His addiction is pointless because liquor cannot quiet his INNER CONFLICT: he feels that he shouldn't have left the island. His self-destructive behavior causes Kate to leave him and break off their engagement. Jack loses his main ALLY because he no longer feels as important as he was on the island.

While Jack is in this depressed state, Ben acts as a MENTOR by telling him he needs to convince all the survivors it is their destiny to go back to the island. Jack issues a CALL TO ADVENTURE here and acts as a HERALD. They all REFUSE THE CALL and say Jack is crazy for wanting to go back, but are ultimately motivated to come back for different reasons, the most obvious being to rediscover purpose and meaning in their lives. By the sixth episode of Season 5, they are back where they never thought they would be again.

The APPROACH is demonstrated two times in *Lost* and both instances involve catastrophic forces that cause the sky to turn white temporarily. In the APPROACH to the first ORDEAL in Season 2, the survivors are introduced to members of the DHARMA Initiative, a scientific organization that collects data on the island's special electromagnetic forces. After blowing up the hatch, Locke and Jack learn from Desmond Hume, DHARMA's liaison, that there is a button in the hatch that needs to be pressed every 108 minutes. Everyone who has been in charge of the hatch has been told to push the button and has done so without questioning its intention. Locke thinks he is being TESTED by the island and says the button doesn't really do anything. At the end of Season 2, the entire island faces an ORDEAL when Locke refuses to push this button. Locke decides to let the countdown clock run down to zero to see if it is merely a psychological test, but then a huge magnetic force surges up behind a sealed door, destroys the station, causes a huge flash of white light, and nearly kills Locke. His search for meaning to quiet his own INNER PROBLEMS has caused an OUTER PROBLEM—the explosion causes a chain of events that cause the island's forces to become unreliable. This is the ORDEAL of the survivors' first few years on the island.

In the APPROACH to the second ORDEAL, Jack receives conflicting advice. Throughout Season 5, the survivors are caught time-traveling because the SHAPESHIFTER/MENTOR Ben Linus pushed a wheel that moved the island so he could hide from his enemy Charles Widmore. A physicist named Daniel Faraday tells Jack that he needs to detonate a hydrogen bomb on the island to stop the time-traveling, which has caused cranial bleeding and death for some of the survivors. Here Jack faces an INNER and OUTER PROBLEM. He knows that the bomb could kill them all, but he trusts the physicist's expertise, so he goes along with what Faraday tells him to do. Kate, Jack's main ALLY, initially doubts his decision, making him seem like a frustrated leader who agrees too quickly to use a resource that could kill them all. But eventually they all decide it is their only chance to regain some normalcy to their lives on the island, so Jack detonates the nuclear bomb into the well where the wheel was pushed. Season 5 ends midway through this ORDEAL in a dramatic cliffhanger: the bomb didn't detonate successfully. Juliette, a minor character who is a SHAPESHIFTER and temporary love interest of Jack, is sucked down into the well and strikes the bomb with a rock eight times before it finally detonates and everything is consumed in white light.

After the hydrogen bomb detonates at the end of Season 5, the survivors are RESURRECTED in a flashsideways, a technique used throughout Season 6 where an alternate reality is presented. Clips from their lives as if they had never been on the island, and instead completed the return trip from Sydney to Los Angeles, are presented over the course of Season 6.

Both ORDEALS occur in season finales and significantly shape the events of the seasons to come. The first ORDEAL shows the awesome power of nature, while the second ORDEAL shows the destructive power that mankind can unleash when we understand how nature works.

In Season 6, Jack receives another CALL: to be the protector of the island. Jack is guided to the lighthouse by the TRICKSTER Hurley, who has the gift of being able to communicate with the now dead MENTOR Jacob. In this special mirror, Jack sees that Jacob has been watching him for his whole life and that his last name is inscribed on

a wheel. He becomes angry about this and shatters the mirror behind the wheel before storming away, thus REFUSING this new call. Jack initially acted as a HERALD to get people to come back to the island, but now he regrets having ever come back.

Below is a transcript from a scene in the Season 6 episode “Lighthouse,” before Hurley and Jack reach the lighthouse.

HURLEY: This is cool, dude. Very old school.

JACK: What?

HURLEY: You know, you and me trekking through the jungle, on our way to do something that we don’t quite understand. Good times. You mind if I ask you something?

JACK: Sure.

HURLEY: Why’d you come back, you know, to the island?

JACK: Why’d you come back?

HURLEY: Back in L.A, Jacob hopped into the back of my cab, and told me I was supposed to, so I came.

[Jack shakes his head and laughs dismissively.]

HURLEY: What? If you have a good reason for coming back, let’s hear it man.

JACK: I came back here because I was broken. And I was stupid enough to think this place could fix me.

HURLEY: Dude, I’m sorry.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

The show’s recurring themes include a search for reconciliation, redemption, and identity. Dichotomies such as light/dark and yin/yang are prevalent throughout all six seasons. The light/dark imagery is demonstrated through strategic lighting and wardrobe choices. The concept of yin/yang applies to the leadership styles of Jack and Locke, who are POLAR OPPOSITES in terms of their justification for leadership and actions. This is most evident in Season 1 right before they are about to blow up the hatch. Still, they work together in the sense

that they assume shared responsibility for the safety of everyone on the island.

*Lost* is a frustrating show for many viewers because of continuity problems—it jumps frequently between the past and present, and sometimes into the future and alternate realities. Still, it is this confusion and the many allusions to philosophy, religion, and science that keep viewers hooked. The plot may be complex, but the story is simple: the survivors of a plane crash from an ORDINARY WORLD (Los Angeles) are reborn in a SPECIAL WORLD (the island) and search for meaning in their new lives.

Midway through the sixth and final season, it is unclear if the survivors will get off the island for good. Jack, the HERO and the character the audience sees the most of, has recently realized that he won't find what he came back for, making their situation even more desperate. ●

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