

Hero's Journey Analysis – "MEET THE PARENTS"

ORDINARY WORLD

Video shots of Pam Burns (Teri Polo)

Greg (Ben Stiller) practises his marriage proposal on a patient

Learn that they've been going out 10 months

Find out he's a nurse not a doctor – this is going to be a running gag.

Pam teaches kindergarten

Greg arrives there

Greg tries to line the kids up to hold up signs that spell out the marriage proposal – a CALL TO ADVENTURE
5:19

But just as they do

Pam's sister calls to say she's engaged

Getting married in 2 weeks

Her fiancée asked the father

Knew well enough to ask Dad

So Greg calls it off – REFUSAL

Finds out that the guy gave her Dad a gift

The Call to Adventure becomes this invitation to the wedding – there is no Refusal surrounding this particular call. And it isn't at all clear what the hero's inner need is. So this is a very abbreviated first act.

2 weeks later

TESTS, ALLIES & ENEMIES

Greg tries to take luggage onto plane

Won't fit – it has her engagement ring

Greg's luggage not there

8:48

Baby pukes on him

He buys a rare flower for Pam's father

Because he's been involved in them for 30 years

They arrive at the house

She throws Greg's cigarettes on the roof because her father considers them a sign of weakness

She greets father Jack Burns (Robert De Niro)
 She plays the little girl
 Clearly not really an adult with them
 9:25

He kisses mother – she feels awkward
 She's uncomfortable

Father asks him about choice of car size
 And colour – TESTING

Find out about his missing luggage
 She carried hers on – father approves
 Greg has failed this TEST and the father, a true
 SHAPESHIFTER, is looming as the enemy.

His name is Focker
 Which interests the parents

Jinx the cat arrives
 Taught him to use the potty

Tries to make joke about him leaving up seat
 Goes flat

She says that he hates cats
 Doesn't go down well
 12:38

He CROSSES THE FIRST THRESHOLD – the door to their home,
 which is going to be a house of horrors for Greg.

He puts her father's clothes on – this resonates because
 he is in foreign terrain.

They open present
 Jerusalem Tulip
 Underwhelmed
 14:28

Embarrassing silence
 Father says not many men in his profession – nursing
 Fails the TEST

Jack has started his own business
 Surveillance of child minders
 Hidden cameras – Nanny camera
 Motion activated

The Nanny Cam was looking up the mothers' dress
 Heightening his discomfort

Phone call – Jack arranges a drop off
Manufactures a reason to get out of the house

But Pam suggests that Greg should join him

Pam says that she thinks Jack likes Greg
Mother clearly doesn't think that Jack does

Awkward conversation in the car
Asks him why he doesn't like cats
19:26

Prefers dogs
Prefer an emotionally shallow animal?

Puff the magic dragon
Greg draws the drug allusion
But Jack doesn't approve
Quizzes him on his drug taking

Greg is constantly being posed TESTS by the ENEMY and he
is failing all of them.

Go to drug store

Buys Nicorette gum

Sees Jack do his transaction in the car park
Looks suspicious

Grabs a magazine
Happens to be open at Breast pumps
Says he grew up on a farm
Fails TEST

23:16
Has dinner with the parents
Is asked to say grace
But he's jewish

Starts reciting My Sweet Lord
Hilarious scene – but at core this is about a hero being
in foreign terrain and failing a TEST.

Sees an artifact
Makes a joke
But it contains the ashes of Jack's mother
25:43

Mother says she should read out his poem about his mother
Jack reads
Terrible maudlin poem
He's moved to tears

So much love, and yet so much information

Gets quizzed about his "grew up on a farm" claim
In Detroit?

He said he milked animals

Which animals?

A cat.

Tells a story about a runt

Couldn't get access to the teat

Milked the little teats

Can milk anything with teats

Can you milk me, Greg

FAILS TEST

Gets the champagne he's bought

Find out that Kevin gave Pam the same ring

She was engaged to Kevin - REVELATION

Champagne pops out and breaks the urn

The ashes of Jack's mother go everywhere

31:21

She says that it was just physical

But it doesn't really help - not surprisingly

We were only engaged for 3 months

She kisses him

Starts getting aroused

Jack and mother arrive

Jack says not worry about what happened

33:04

Lets put it all behind us

He's told to sleep downstairs

Don't flush the toilet - a TEST is set up

Is told to "keep his snake in his trousers" for 72 hours

Again, foreign terrain, different rules that he must
follow of suffer the consequences

Greg can't get his luggage

Finds Jinx using the toilet

Jack says Greg is not right

Jack not impressed that he is "the one" for his Pam

35:21

Pam's middle name

Pamela Martha Focker

APPROACH to the literal INNERMOST CAVE

Greg falls down
 Door opens to a special cave
 Interrogation equipment
 Lie detector

Jack in shots with Majaheed in

On a note pad
 Operation Ko Samui

Father catches him
 36:55

Invites him to try out the lie detector
 You've got nothing to hide
 No of course not

Asks him whether pot roast was undercooked
 Has he ever watched porn

In some ways this is an ORDEAL, but it's not even
 figuratively life or death. In MYTHOLOGICAL terms, it's
 just the APPROACH.

CUT TO
 He's eating Nicorette tabs
 Tells Pam about what he's just been through

She admits that he was never in the rare flower business
 In CIA for 34 years
 He was a psychological profiler

She hugs him
 Kisses him
 She wants to have sex
 He says no – wants to respect his rules

MEETING WITH MENTOR
 Pam told me she let you in on a little secret
 You are now in the Burns family circle of trust

42:23

Breakfast
 Comes down in his pajamas
 Sister and Dr Bob the fiancée are there
 His father is a world famous surgeon
 Laugh when he says he's a nurse

He said he chose nursing above doctor
Aced his ACADs

These are more ENEMIES

Andy can't make it
Greg stand in for Andy
Bob doesn't seem too keen

44:45

Excuses himself to go for a shower

Says he's not comfortable wearing Jack's clothes
Goes up to brother's bedroom
No-one there

Gets underpants
Brother comes through the window
Been smoking dope

Tries to be hip with the brother
Doesn't work

Jack sets alarm
The boys try on their suits and top hats
Greg puts on brother's jacket
Clearly there is something in there
When the brother gets the dope pipe out
Jack finds him
Believes his story that it is Greg's

Tell me the truth
What are we talking about?
I will be watching you
49:48

Another APPROACH sequence

They arrive at Kevin's house
He is Bob's best man - RIVAL

Greg finds photos of Pam and Kevin in about ten different
holiday snaps – clearly they went out for more than 3
months

52:44

Kevin is rich
Day trader
But his real passion is carpentry
Jesus got him into carpentry

He has built a wedding altar for Bob and Deb

55:41

We had some good times together
She is a tomcat

Kevin clearly is a formidable Rival

ORDEAL

Greg doesn't want to go swimming
Has no trunks
Has been given a pair of sluggoes

Kevin spikes the ball at Greg
Greg spikes the ball at the bride
Breaks her nose
Suddenly he's the bad guy

His luggage arrives
59:05

REWARD

She comes in
He is pissed off about the intimacy with Kevin
She kisses him
Starts fondling her
Jack comes in

Greg tries to talk to him
Says Greg flushed the toilet
Greg says Jinx flushed the toilet

ORDEAL

There is shit on the lawn
Septic tank has overflowed

Greg tries to open suitcase
But its' the wrong one

1:03:10

Jack picks the lock
And finds odd sexual paraphernalia

Greg lets Jinx out

Jack gets someone to run a check on Greg
Says Greg didn't take the MCATS
Thinks he just uses his position to access drugs

Meanwhile Jinx has climbed onto the roof
Greg follows

Finds the cigarettes
 And has a smoke
 Hears Jack talking on the phone in Thai

Takes out his smoke
 Throws it – lands in the gutter

Holds Jinx about Jack
 Is left holding the collar
 Tries to put fire out in leaves in gutter

Gutter crashes into electrical wire
 Sets fire to the altar

HUGE ORDEAL – and yet something is held back because
 noone knows yet that it was Greg's fault.

Can't find Jinx
 1:07:44
 You tried to milk him, didn't you?
 And Jinx is meant to be carrying the rings

While the wedding rehearsal proceeds
 Greg is assigned the job of finding Jinx

Goes to pet store
 There is one that looks like Jinx
 Except the tip of the cat's tail is white

As rehearsal proceeds
 Greg arrives with "Jinx" – but of course he's just
 painted its tail

Everyone happy but ...

Dancing and music
 REWARD

Greg is still on the phone
 Trying to find the real Jinx
 He's now the man of the hour

Greg keeps wanting to talk to Jack about marriage

Cat is eating nicorettes
 Pulls the wedding dress down

Everyone dancing and feeling good
 Only Kevin is alone
 She says she was never in love with Kevin
 They kiss

THE ROAD HOME

As Greg tries to call to find Jinx
Jack calls and gets message from neighbour that Jinx has
just walked in

Jack says that when they get back Jinx will show his new
tricks

They race home – the “ROAD HOME” becomes a literal road
home
1:15:19

Jack takes short cut
Beats Greg home

Greg very low

Scream comes from the house
Cat has destroyed all the wedding stuff
Clearly it's not Jinx

Jack accuses Greg of spraypainting the cat's tail
Sounds outlandish
But he admits it's true
She can't believe

What are you going to tell us now
You burnt the altar
He admits that too

Jack throws him out of the house
She says he lied about everything
Including the MCATS
He says he didn't lie

Truth and honesty
Greg thinks he has an ace
But when he tells them about Operation Ko Samui
He just reveals the surprise honeymoon trip for the
wedding couple to Thailand
1:21:50

Caps off his demise
Everyone is turned against him
Door closes

HUGE HUGE ORDEAL

He leaves
She comes out
I'm going to the airport

I guess you're going to stay here
 Jack comes out
 They all come out to support her
 His luggage arrives as he's about to leave
 Gaylord M Focker

Greg leaves and heads for the airport – his lowest ebb
 She lies in bed

Greg at the airport
 With unhelpful clerk
 Do you want to check any bags today?

RESURRECTION
 She gets fax
 Gaylord got 97% percentile

At the airport, Greg looks at the engagement ring

Mother comes in to Jack
 She hands the MCAT results
 He says this doesn't change anything

She says I love you, Daddy
 But you can be a real jerk sometimes
 He's not good enough
 No-one has ever been good enough
 Do you realise you never warmed to Kevin until after they
 split up?

Pam calls to say that she forgives him
 Loves him
 Jack listens

Jack tracks down which flight he's on

Woman won't let him board
 All remaining rows
 He comes up
 1:29:29

Jack drives to the airport

Greg tries to put the bag in the overhead locker
 Won't fit
 He argues with the woman

Gets carried off the plane
 Kicking and screaming

Jack shows up

Greg is being interrogated
Jack comes in

No more lies

RESURRECTION

Jack asks him a series of questions
Did you do these things because you were seeking my approval
Do you love her?
Do you want to marry her?
Not sure that he wants to any more because of Jack
You have some serious issues
If I lightened up?
A lot
Accept me being a nurse?
Jack proposes to Greg

Jack presents the ring to him
Greg is at her bedside

SHARING THE ELIXIR

He says that he had an elaborate plan
He proposes to her
Jinx, the ring bearer, brings through the ring – the ELIXIR
Will you marry me?

Jack unsure about meeting Greg's parents

The sister gets married

Jack replays the video of Greg taking a pee and flushing

Jack listens to Greg on the video

SUMMARY:

A very funny comedy that uses elements of the Hero's Journey but lacks real emotional punch because the focus of the story – Greg – is not the character who needs to change. It's the father, Jack Burns (De Niro) who is flawed and his constant testing of Greg creates the film's comedy. Ultimately, it is he who must recognise his flaw in expecting perfection in a son-in-law and accept Greg. We care about Greg and his suffering, but we don't feel as much at the end of the film as we would if he were the character who changes. I'm not suggesting that the story should have been any different but it's just not going to move people as much as a film that does have a central character who either changes or who makes other characters change.