

Hero's Journey Analysis – "Sideways"

ORDINARY WORLD

A knocking on the door – no answer
MILES (Paul Giamatta) has to move his car

Saturday
San Diego, CA

He has to move his car for workman
Not sure what that tells us about him

He's really late
Calls his friend
Says he's out the door – but he's not
and his place is a mess

Then stops to get himself a spinach croissant
Clearly a foodee

Does the crossword on the steering wheel as he drives
Clearly bright, verbal

3:07

He stops to pick up his mate, JACK (Thomas Hayden Church)
Big house in Los Angeles
He's very late

Meet the fiancée, CHRISTINE
Very beautiful

Asks Miles opinion on the cake (though noone actually
says wedding)

They congratulate him for his novel getting published
But it doesn't look it's over the line

He prefers the dark cake
Like his character

5:39

They drive off – the ADVENTURE is underway

Where the fuck were you, man?
Says the traffic was bad
But Jack says you're hungover

They clear up the book deal
Miles is not confident it will happen
But his friend says he thinks it will
Glass half full/half empty

They are spending a week together
 Jack opens the bottle against his wishes
 Pinot noir
 Miles gives him an explanation

Asks him his impression of the new draft of the book
 Lies – hasn't read it

9:19
 Stop in to see Miles' mother
 Jack not happy
 But then says it's for his mother's birthday

Comes out that Jack is getting married next week
 Mentions his starring role as Derek Somersby
 Clearly Jack was a minor celebrity

They stay for dinner
 11:47

Mother says his sister Wendy is coming over in the morning
 Not keen to stay
 Clearly not a tight family

Slips away and steals money
 12:50

Clearly he's short of money – and morals

Picture of him with wife on her dresser
 Melancholic when he returns

Miles is Jack's best man
 Mother says that Miles should get back with his former wife, Victoria
 He says he just got divorced
 Two years ago, buddy
 She was good for you
 His mother worries about him

He is a man in pain

Sunday
 14:43

Jack is coming on to a young waitress

CALL TO ADVENTURE – beyond just their week together
 Jack says that he's going to get Miles laid

That will be his present to him

REFUSAL

Miles isn't keen — I'd rather have a knife

Miles is on anti-depressants
Seeing a shrink

Fuck therapy

You need to get your joint worked on, Miles
Miles says he's going to show Jack a good time
And Jack says "And get your bone smooched"

Jack is a MENTOR figure — however flawed

17:40

In the car, Miles gives Jack a wine education
Pinot is a thin skinned grape
(Just like him)

They visit their first winery
Miles, the wine MENTOR, teaches Jack
He knows his shit

Jack woofs it down
Miles takes his time — too busy analysing
Too in his head.

They stop at the Windmill Inn
20:40

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

Jack asks if he's making a mistake getting married to
Christine
With his experience
Christine's father is asking him to join the father's
business
But it wouldn't mean giving up acting
(Yeah, right)

Come into the restaurant — the classic WATERING HOLE
scene
They ask him how his book is going

22:54

They toast to us
It's going to be great
FORESHADOWING that it isn't going to be

Waitress in the restaurant

Who's that chick?
 CALL TO ADVENTURE - ALLY
 Maya (Virginia Madsen)
 Jack says that she's cute
 Miles says she's married - REFUSAL

She comes over
 She's obviously into you, Miles
 Into wine
 Likes Pinot
 A waitress here?
 How is that ever going to work out?
 Why do you have to always see the negative? Jack asks
 Miles

25:06
 Maya finishes work
 Miles, uncharacteristically, invites her over

This is a CROSSING OF THE FIRST THRESHOLD for Miles

She asks how the book is going
 Jack says it's being published
 That's why they are celebrating
 (Clearly he's not going to let on that he's getting married)

She asks him what they're doing tonight
 Miles says that they're tired and going home
 REFUSAL
 Jack is pissed off Miles
 27:18

She's not married
 No rock

Monday

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR
 They have breakfast
 Jack says he's not going to let Miles fuck up his week
 He's going to get laid
 Again, a CALL TO ADVENTURE

Miles hands over his keys in a fit of pique
 REFUSAL

Jack says it's their week to cut loose
 It's something they should share
 29:55

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

They do a wine tour
Several vineyards

Jack is into quantity
Fuck the quality

CALL TO ADVENTURE - ALLY
They meet Stephanie (Sandra Oh)
31:00

Jack keen – not very big on REFUSAL where women are concerned
Miles is critical of the wine
Cabernet Franc
Jack says where they are staying

Jack is making conversation
Find out she knows Maya
Miles is blind to the opportunity
Impatient to taste more wine
Further indication of his character flaw

Jack says Stephanie's a bad girl
She says she needs to be spanked

When Jack emerges he has it all organised
They are all going out
Jack, Miles, Stephanie, Maya

Jack is pissed off that Miles almost told Stephanie that he's getting married

33:35

ORDEAL
They stop at a place where he shared a wine with his ex wife, Victoria
Jack has something to tell him
Victoria is coming to the wedding
He knew that
And she got remarried
About 6 weeks ago
A guy with a restaurant
(ie A successful version of Miles)

Miles wants to be driven home

He's not happy that Jack has been talking about the situation of Miles at the wedding with Victoria

Grabs a bottle of wine
Swigs it

Runs off into the vineyard

This is the death of his marriage
He had been kidding himself
Still living in that place
Now he has to admit it's gone

REWARD

They lie on the bed back at the motel

Jack goes down for a swim
Miles stays
Is asleep when Jack returns

Miles is talking about some girl down at the Jacuzzi
He's going nuts

APPROACH

Jack tries to help Miles choose his clothes
Calls his fiancée

Jack says he's not going to accept Miles fucking up his
night
If they want to drink Merlot, we're drinking Merlot
Miles nearly freaks
We're not drinking Merlot!!!

They come in and join the ladies for dinner
Miles and Maya talk wine
Jack and Stephanie talk shit

41:38

Montage of dinner

Jack says they are there to celebrate Miles' book deal

They are overdoing the montage a bit

Miles is getting a bit drunk and a bit boringly technical
He's not really in the moment

Jack looks worried
Tries to stop Miles drinking
Maya sees he's drinking too much

Miles calls Victoria
43:31

ORDEAL

She can tell he's pissed
She says don't call her when he's drunk

Says he's decided not to go to the wedding
 He was taken aback
 Thought maybe there was a chance
 She says maybe it would be good if he didn't come to the wedding

Slumps back in his chair at the restaurant
 Pissed
 Depressed

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

Maya and Stephanie excuse themselves
 What the fuck!!! Get your shit together!!! Says jack
 Did you drink and dial?
 Jack says Maya is great
 Says he can't keep doing this downer bullshit
 Miles points out that life wasn't always so great with Victoria. Made him feel small.
 Miles doesn't want to hear it.

But after the pep talk, he's pers up a bit

The girls have decided they should retire to their place

As Jack and Miles go in, Jack gives Miles a condom and keeps several for himself

REWARD

Miles joins Maya out back
 Stephanie has retired with Jack to the bedroom

Miles is in a better place now
 He says he has a '61 Cheval Blanc just sitting at home
 What are you waiting for?

He says he's waiting for a special occasion

CALL TO ADVENTURE

She says the day you open a '61 Cheval Blanc, that's the special occasion

He acknowledges that Maya's assessment of the wine they are drinking is right.

Stephanie has a kid
 Miles doesn't have any

51:07

We can hear Jack doing his schtick

Maya and Miles head outside
 She asks about his novel
 The Day after Yesterday
 You mean today?
 It sums him up – he's not in the now
 And it sounds like a complete crock of shit
 52:35

She's writing a paper
 Doing a Masters in Horticulture
 She commutes to attend college
 Plans to work in a winery

She wants to read his book
 Says he happens to have a manuscript in his car

Then we hear Jack and Stephanie fucking
 53:40
 They don't know where to look
 Need to move so they can't hear it

She asks a personal question
 Why are you so into Pinot?
 He says it's a hard grape to grow
 Temperamental
 Not a survivor
 Pinot needs constant care and attention
 Only grows in tiny tucked away corners
 Only responds to the most patient and nurturing of
 growers
 He is describing what is needed of the person who is
 going to bring the best out in him

Why is she into wine?
 Got into it through her ex husband
 Discovered she had a sharp palate
 She likes to think about the life of wine
 How it's a living thing
 What was happening when the wine was growing
 The people who tended and picked the grapes
 Likes the way it continues to evolve
 Very lyrical description

And it tastes so fucking good

She has her hand on his
 Clearly up for it – CALL TO ADVENTURE

But he declines
 REFUSAL

Changes the subject

He's scared
 Been hurt – doesn't want to go there again

In the bathroom
 Looks at himself
 You're such a fucking loser
 He is literally looking at himself in the mirror – it's
 the halfway point of the film. Very typical for this to
 happen at this point – at least in a figurative sense.

He comes into the kitchen
 Kisses Maya
 She says she should go
 58:40

He follows her in his car

Then she gets out of the car
 Gives him directions to the Windmill
 Says she had a great time tonight
 Still want to read novel?
 He hands over the manuscript
 Two boxes worth

The two cars diverge

Tuesday
 Jack's mobile phone is ringing
 It's his fiancée calling
 Then she calls on the motel phone
 1:00:45

Jack returns
 Sound of motorbike
 That chick is unbelievable
 Stephanie is down on her motorbike
 He wants to go with her for a hike
 Rather than play golf with Miles

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

Jack says Miles was a dumb fuck last night
 Miles says he should call Christine
 Miles goes outside while he makes the call
 Steph says Maya had a fun time
 You should call her - CALL

Jack wants the condom he gave Jack earlier

They drive off
 Miles looks self-pitying

1:03:57

APPROACH

Cuts his toenails
 Comes down for crap breakfast
 Rubbish coffee
 Makes notes on his manuscript

No messages on his phone
 Eats lunch alone

Plays golf alone
 No joy

Returns to the room to find
 Jack fucking Stephanie
 Has to leave the room

1:05:31

Miles joins Jack in the bar
 Stephanie took Jack to the Pinot fields
 Says he's getting into it

MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

Miles asks Jack what he's doing with this girl
 Says he's been honest
 Hasn't said he's available
 He's been thinking about putting the wedding on hold
 He says being with Stephanie has opened his eyes
 Miles points out that Jack is being an idiot
 Jack says they should move up here and run a vineyard
 together
 Miles says he's crazy

They go to an amusement arcade
 Jack plays with Stephanie's kid, Sienna
 Stephanie's mother (?) bitching
 Jack goes off with them all
 Leaving Miles on his own again
 1:09:22

Miles buys some supplies
 Including a Barely Legal porn magazine
 Pulls the blinds

Falls asleep with the Barely Legal on his chest

1:10:13

Wakes up with fresh resolve
 Goes to the Hitching Post

But Maya isn't working that night
 Finds this out after he's ordered a bottle of wine

Owner a bit worried about Miles
 Very pissed as he leaves
 1:11:41

This sequence didn't advance the story a whole lot

Wednesday
 Jacks tees off at golf
 Says Maya really likes Miles

Miles hasn't heard anything from his agent
 No messages
 Jack thinks his negativity is premature
 Says he should publish himself

APPROACH
 Miles tells him to shut up
 Where is this hostility coming from?

Some guy hits through them
 So Miles turns around and hits back at them
 1:14:46

They come at them with buggies
 Jack chases them with a club

Jack says Miles has to persist with Maya
 Says that when she finds out he's not published
 If a guy doesn't have money at this age ...
 Negative, negative, negative
 1:16:32

REWARD
 Stephanie calls
 They hook up with the girls
 Maya says she's glad he stopped by at the restaurant
 He plays it down
 But clearly she is keen

They stop for a wine lecture
 Pompous lecture by a Pom

They retire
 Head into where the vats are

1:18:23

They picnic in the fields

Again, a lot of montage

Back at Stephanie's place

They are partying
 Sienna, the daughter comes out
 Uncle Jack will put you back to bed

1:19:14
 Maya drives Miles home
 Miles looks happy
 They retire to her place
 He puts his hand on her shoulder
 They kiss
 She drags him inside

Thursday
 Maya wakes
 Looks at Miles in bed

More montage
 Maya and Miles at some sort of fair

THE ROAD HOME
 They picnic
 She mentions a dinner on Sat night
 Miles say they have to get back for the rehearsal dinner
 Who's getting married?

She's really pissed off
 Jack has been spinning quite a story to Stephanie

So, just when it was going well, it fucks up.
 She says her relationship was full of deception
 She's just tried to get herself out of that
 He says it's been a big deal for him
 He says he's not Jack
 He's his freshman year room-mate from San Diego State
 (An example of how you don't have to dump this stuff out
 early)

When he gets back
 Jack hugs him
 So happy for him
 Jack wants details
 But Miles won't play ball

Miles says Jack is an infant

Christine calls
 He answers

Miles curls up in a ball
 The week hasn't gone the way he hoped
 Miles says he knows the solution

Takes him to a big touristy vineyard
Wine filling trucks
Guys on guitar
Bus loads of people

Miles thinks the wine is absolute shit

ORDEAL

He calls his agent

1:27:42

The publisher is passing

They liked it

Didn't know how to market it

She doesn't think she can take it any further

He comes back in

He gets a taste

Throws it back

Asks for a refill

Throws it back

Tells him it's a winery not a bar

He suggests he should buy a bottle and go outside

They fight over a glass

He pours the dregs bucket over himself

GREAT SCENE

REWARD

Miles sits with Jack

Says he can't write another book

Doesn't matter what he has to say

1:31:44

Half his life is over and he has nothing to show for it

ORDEAL

They head back

Stephanie is waiting

Punches the fuck out of Jack

Breaks his nose with her bike helmet

You said you loved me

Miles won't even admit to having told Maya

They wait in a doctor's surgery

REWARD

Miles calls Maya

Says how much he enjoyed their time together

His book not getting published

Not much of a writer
Not much of anything

Montage again

Jack comes out looking the worse for wear
Needs a couple of operations
Might fuck up his career
But he won't sue – to protect Christine

1:36:19

Miles still won't admit that he told Maya

REWARD

They go out for dinner
Jack hits on the chubby waitress
She recognises him from his TV series
Derek Somersby from One Life to Live
She is thrilled

Jack is going to head off with Cammy

Miles can't believe it

1:39:11

Can't we just go home?

Jack says there are things he has to do that Miles
doesn't understand.

Demonstrates Jack's indomitable spirit

Friday

Mad beating on the door

Jack comes in naked
Freezing
Needs pain relievers

Chick was married

Husband comes home and catches him with cock in his
wife's ass

Ran home

Through an ostrich farm

REWARD

Miles pisses himself laughing

THE ROAD HOME

He has to go back there

The rings are in the wallet

CALL TO ADVENTURE

They have to go back

REFUSAL

Miles says just say you left them in the bar

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

Jack breaks down and Miles agrees

RESURRECTION

They drive back there

The plan?

Jack wants Miles to go

His ankle is buggered

Miles goes in

Showing a bit of spine

Can't find the wallet in Jacks' jeans

Crawls along the floor

They are fucking

As they relive what she did

Sees the wallet on the dresser

Goes into the room

Grabs the wallet

Gets chased out by fat hairy naked guy

They drive off

This is probably something that Miles wouldn't have done earlier.

REWARD

Miles packs up

They drive off home

Jack says Miles should invite Maya to the wedding

Jack wants to drive

Veers off the road

1:46:10

Drives the car into a tree

Miles not happy

Jack not happy either

Doesn't look severe enough – to be the cause of his broken nose

Tries to line it up to hit a tree

But it misses

Goes through a fence

And ends in a ditch

1:48:19

Drops off Jack at his house
Can't leave until they see the car
Christine and family buy the story
Miles looks unhappy

Saturday

1:49:32

Armenian wedding

RESURRECTION for Jack

Rings go on
Miles is there
Jack has to apply the cross
Smiles as he does so

SHARING OF THE ELIXIR

Outside the wedding Miles watches

Victoria is there

1:51:10

Meets the new husband
She asks after the book
Admits it's dead
Let's got to the reception – drink a few champagnes

ORDEAL

Not drinking – she's pregnant
A knife in the stomach
Miles leaves
While everyone else heads right out of the church car
park
He heads left

1:55:11

Goes back to his place
Gets the bottle of 61 Cheval Blanc
Eats a burger
Splashes this beautiful wine into a plastic cup
He's following Maya's advice – to not wait

He's teaching English
Student is reading about a funeral

Comes home to his apartment

One new message

Maya

Thanks for your letter – we didn't know about this
Would have called sooner ...
Wanted to read your book

Beautiful

She was confused by the ending

Did the father commit suicide or not?

Says she mightn't be at the restaurant much longer

About to graduate

SHARING OF THE ELIXIR

He knocks on her door. 1:59:45

SUMMARY

I love this film. Two fantastic characters, perfectly contrasted, with a very simple story setup. Even though it's not high concept, there is still an over-arching narrative – Jack is going to get married in a week – and that both generates drama and creates a narrative destination. There are some fabulous scenes here – “We’re not drinking Merlot!!!”, drinking the wine dregs, crawling in to retrieve the wallet, the car missing the tree – but there is a little too much montage which dissipates some of the dramatic tension. There are several ordeals here – Miles finding out Victoria has remarried, calling Victoria (drunk and dial), that his book has been rejected, that Victoria is pregnant, and Jack has a spectacular ordeal with Stephanie where his nose comes off second best – that confront the characters and push them to extend themselves. The one major disappointment is probably the ending. Some will like the minimalism, but I like to be moved by the drama and I’m not moved by this ending. A lot of it is a phone message on an answering machine – hardly cinematic. Yes, he’s moved to a better place, but I like more emotional punch – and they’ve pulled theirs. Still, a lovely film that still made me laugh at the second watching.