10

*The Mask* (1994) is an interesting variant of the Superhero theme in contemporary Hollywood – and it serves to shed light on the dynamics of many other Superhero movies. The basic plot involves an ordinary nice guy who is transformed into an Angelic Double possessing special powers.

In *Puss-in-Boots*, the Reluctant Hero and Puss-in-Boots are separate characters who nonetheless undertake parallel journeys. The more typical pattern in Superhero fiction is for the creature to become an aspect of the personality of the Reluctant Hero. The Angelic Double may take the form of a wolf, a bat, a spider or other creature. In *The Mask*, there is little stress placed on this aspect of the Angelic Double’s personality (instead, the focus is laid on the comic possibilities opened up by Stanley’s obsession with Looney Tunes); but Milo, Stanley Ipkiss’ dog, does assume the role of the Angelic Double temporarily. And, at the end of the movie, Milo is explicitly associated with The Mask, when he playfully grabs onto it as Charlie desperately tries to prevent it from floating away.

0. The Initial Situation is a function

*The Mask* begins in Edge City, with a diving expedition laying pipeline beneath the sea. As a diver explores the sea bottom, he notices a sunken chest and starts to try to free it. All of a sudden, a huge piece of piping comes loose far above his head and plunges downward, eventually trapping him beneath its weight on the seabed. As it falls, the edge of the pipe knocks the lid off the
sunken chest, which causes a mysterious Mask that has been trapped inside to rise slowly from beneath the waves. The probable death of the diver represents a Marked Initial Situation: before the story commences, something bad has already happened.

**Stanley’s Journey**

**1–3. Preparation**

Characters: The Female Bank Colleague; Stanley Ipkiss; Charlie; Tina Carlyle  
Setting: The Bank

Stanley Ipkiss is an ordinary, unlucky-in-love bank employee who lives alone with his dog, Milo; he spends most of his spare time watching Looney Tunes cartoons on the TV. Mrs Peenman, his landlady, is a shrill-voiced, mean-spirited woman, with a rather low opinion of her tenant. As the story begins, we see Stanley at work in the bank. By virtue of being at work, rather than at home, Stanley has already executed the First Function of Departure.

*The Second and Third Functions: Requesting and Agreeing*

Stanley has just bought two tickets for a show that evening. He wants to take a female colleague with him, but she protests that a female friend of hers is coming into town and that this friend would also like to go. Since there are no more tickets available, Stanley plays the gentleman by reluctantly giving away both tickets. In this way, Stanley demonstrates both his kind-heartedness and his retiring nature. Unfortunately, it also demonstrates the woman’s complete lack of sexual interest in Stanley. Stanley’s personality is thus an integral part of why he has such a lack of success with women.

Initially, it appears as though Stanley will execute the Second Function of Requesting when he asks the female bank employee whether she would like to go to the show. When she refuses his offer, however, the Second Function is canceled. As Figure 10.1 indicates, the real pair of functions then becomes the Requesting by the female bank employee for the tickets for her and her friend and the Accepting by Stanley, which requires him to give up the tickets.