

Discovering Story Magic

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*Presented by
Robin L. Perini*

In the remote reaches of the Southwest, three authors have journeyed to a cabin. They draw curious stares at their provisions of white boards, sticky notes, and legal pads. Cabin managers approach the cabin quietly, leaving stacks of towels, fire starters, and extra packages of coffee just outside the door. They dare not enter. Something strange is going on here. They've heard whoops of joy from inside. The cabin seems transformed somehow, enveloped in mystery.

They're right. Because inside that cabin, magic happens.

"A novel is about a particular human being involved in a particular struggle" — James Frey, How to Write a Damn Good Novel.

"The power of fiction lies in accurately portraying the truth of the human condition." — Laurine Ark, Writing from the Exterior Dramatic Perspective

Biography

Robin L. Perini

BIOGRAPHY

A 2013 RITA finalist, award-winning and national bestselling author, Robin Perini invites readers to 'step into the crossfire' with her fast-paced, high stakes adventures laced with a love story sure to melt your hearts. Robin's strong characters and tightly woven plots garnered her seven prestigious Romance Writers of America Golden Heart® finals. She won the Golden Heart® in 2011, and that title became her first Harlequin Intrigue, Finding Her Son (March 2012). Her other 2011 Golden Heart® Finalist, In Her Sights, was published by Amazon's Montlake Romance (November 29, 2011). Robin went on to sell fourteen novels in approximately two years.

She was on the committee that produced the first edition of the LERA Writer's Guide, an instructional book for writers that has been recommended by Writer's Digest books. Her standing-room-only workshops at RWA National have landed her on the 24 Most Popular Sessions CD five consecutive years. You can find out more information at her website www.robinperini.com or visit her on Twitter @RobinPerini, Facebook (Robin PeriniAuthor), Goodreads or Pinterest. Her agent is Jill Marsal of Marsal Lyon Literary Agency.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Book List

Montgomery Justice Novels Amazon Montlake Romance

In Her Sights (2011)
Behind the Lies (2013)
Game of Fear (2014)
Edge of Deceit (2015)

Harlequin Intrigues

Finding Her Son (3/12)
Cowboy in the Crossfire (7/12)
Christmas Conspiracy (10/12)
Undercover Texas (6/13)
The Cradle Conspiracy (12/13)
Secret Obsession (8/14)
Secrets, Lies and Trouble (12/14)

The LERA Writer's Guide, ISBN 0-9660063-0-5

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I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Join Robin Perini for an exploration of the integral relationship between **character**, **conflict**, **plot**, **realization** and **turning points** in producing salable fiction. This enlightening 3-step process will force you to focus on building your story from the inside out. We will be analyzing the movie **Jerry Maguire** to illustrate the process's components.
1. It works. Robin Perini has been a 7-time Golden Heart Finalist, won the award and sold fourteen books in the two years after her first sale. She's an RT Top Pick, SEAL of Excellence finalist, RITA finalist, Readers Choice Award finalist, and has won numerous awards with her published novels.
 2. Workshop Credo: Take what you want and leave the rest.
- B. It's a three-step process that takes the writer from that nebulous idea of a character and a scene, or the skeleton of a plot, to a full-blown conglomeration of three-dimensional characters, escalating conflicts and a tight, interwoven plot where internal and external conflicts intertwine and become indistinguishable.
1. Character Grid
 - Introduced to us by Kathy Lloyd during a daylong Beginner's Seminar at the 1993 RWA National Conference in St. Louis, MO.
 2. Turning Points
 - The major building blocks, the backbone, of your book.
 3. Story Board
 - A method for organizing scenes and tracking pacing.

II. THE CHARACTER GRID

A. Introduction

1. *In fiction, we put one or two aspects of life under our microscope, subject them to an eternal experiment called conflict and then document what happens. A good dramatic story is a laboratory of human nature. It says something about some aspect of human life that the author believes in deeply.* — James Frey, How to Write a Damn Good Novel
2. *It always comes back to the same necessity: go deep enough and there is bedrock of truth, however hard.* — May Sarton
3. Must be filled out for all your major characters.
 - Protagonist: the person who grows and changes the most.

- Antagonist: who or what drives that change.
4. You will know not only how the characters start out, but also how they develop through the book.

B. Inciting Incident

1. *A story recounts events that must be translated into feelings. It concerns . . . someone's reactions to what happens; his feelings; emotions; his impulses; his dreams, his ambitions; his clashing drives and inner conflicts. Plunge the character into a pre-planned situation that challenges the part of him that cares, that threatens the thing he feels is important.* — Dwight V. Swain, Techniques of the Selling Writer.
2. The change that throws the person from their normal world into the story.

C. Goals

1. Goals must be well motivated and ingrained in the personality of the character. Who we are, our morals, values and beliefs, drive our goals.
2. How much the character cares about their goal is in direct proportion to how much the reader will care.

D. Long Range Goal

1. Overriding drive in the character's life; what she/he wants or needs to make life what she/he wants it to be, in a global sense. Where they see themselves in the world.
2. Will change over the course of the book for at least one character.

E. Short Range Goal

1. Tangible goals directly in front of your character.
2. A new short-range goal ends every scene.
3. Conflict causes a change in a character which results in a change in the goal.
4. For more on goals, look at *Techniques of the Selling Writer*, by Dwight Swain and *Writing Novels that Sell* and *Scene and Structure* by Jack Bickham
 - Definition of Scene: **Goal – Conflict - Disaster**
 - Definition of Sequel: **Emotion – Quandary – Decision – Action**

F. Character Flaw (Internal Conflict)

1. Introduction
 - Emotions are the key. Actions Don't Drive the Story – Actions Drive Emotions. **Emotions Drive the Story.**

- The function of story is the dramatic portrayal of the human struggle between two opposing values, with one ultimately winning.
2. What shapes a character—first and foremost—is his emotional drive.
 - Define the flaw as a BELIEF, NEED or a FEAR
 - The most significant role of CF is foreshadowing what the character must face: both externally and internally.
 3. Character Flaw can be defined as the **barrier** that keeps the character from moving forward, to becoming the person they should be.
 - The barrier must be single-minded, strong, and definite.
 4. Determining character flaw through characters’ strengths/weakness/emotional drives (see self-image hand out).

G. Relationship Barrier

1. Relationship Barrier is the INTERNAL BARRIER TO THE RELATIONSHIP. It has nothing to do with external factors. It keeps the characters from developing their relationship further; it keeps them apart. It’s what inside that keeps the character from developing or moving forward with a relationship. It’s the barrier to the relationship.
2. Ask, “What’s inside of her that keeps her from loving him?” “What’s inside of him that keeps him from loving her?”
3. The power of the romance depends on how insurmountable you make this obstacle to the relationship.
4. The Relationship Barrier must grow out of something already on the grid.
5. In your story the needs and fears of one character are in conflict with the needs and fears of another character.
6. This is where the author begins to draw the threads together from other conflicts. It’s the strongest when it grows from all four areas.

H. Black Moment

1. The romance is in jeopardy.
2. Grows directly from the Relationship Barrier. The character’s fears are realized.
3. Hero and heroine are now aware that the other person can cause emotional pain.
4. Ask, “What’s the worst that will happen if I fall in love with him or her?”

I. Realization

1. Simply, what the character learns.

2. Directly related to the Character Flaw, Relationship Barrier and Black Moment.
3. Characters must have a realization in order to overcome the Black Moment.
4. Put realization as close to the end of the book as possible.
5. The test of realization is that the change is absolute
6. The realization of the hero or heroine is the theme of the book.
 - The end of the book delivers on the promise of the beginning
 - Purposeful Writing and Take Home Value
 - List of Five (Bruce Ballenger, Barry Lane “Discovering the Writer Within”)
 1. Title
 2. First line
 3. Last line
 4. Sentence or passage with most unusual or significant detail
 5. Most important line
- 7.

III. SECONDARY CHARACTERS

A. Villain

1. The strength of the villain must exceed the strength of the protagonist(s) at the beginning. Only through character growth is the villain vanquished.
2. Great villains develop from emotional and physical challenges to major characters.

B. Other Secondary Characters

1. Strong secondary characters impact the main plot through action and example.
2. Strong subplots mirror or parallel the main plot to emphasize the theme or major conflicts.

IV. TECHNICAL DETAILS BEFORE MOVING ON TO PLOTTING

A. Gather the Materials

1. White Board or Poster Board and Post-it Notes

B. Ask the questions

1. What’s the market? What are the characteristics of that market? Subplots, length, chapters?
 - The length has a lot to do with the number of layers that can be explored.

V. TURNING POINTS

A. Change in the direction of the book.

1. Turning points are crucial scenes of plot changes and internal conflict.
2. In a romance, the key turning points involve the relationship between your hero and heroine.
3. The emotional turning points are triggered by major plot turning points and vice versa.

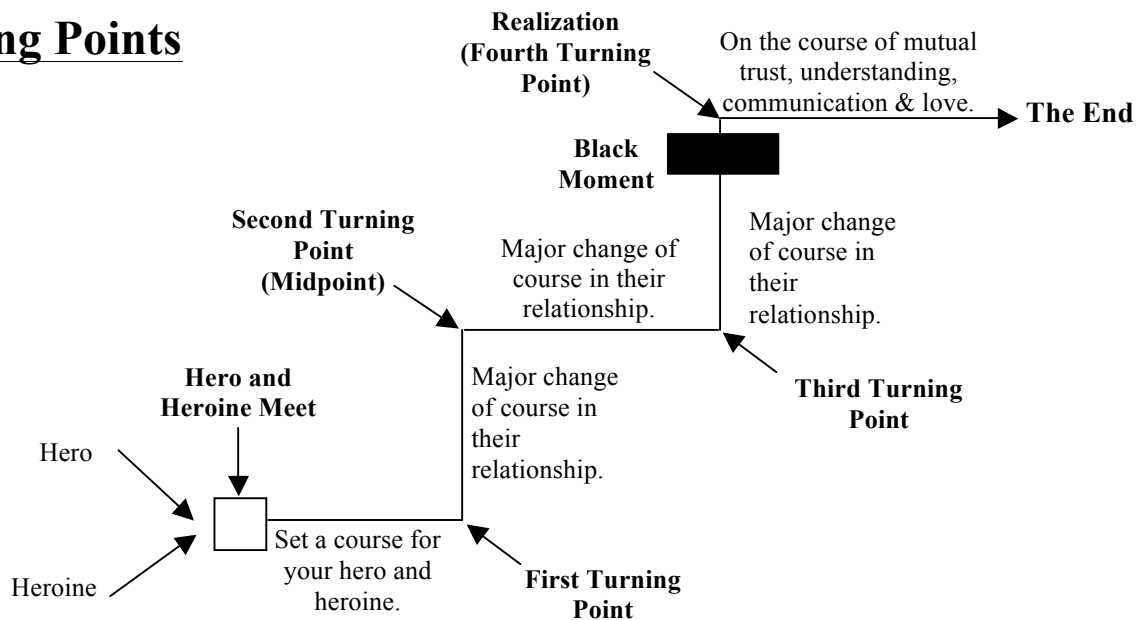
B. Major building blocks of the book that escalate in intensity and in the stakes.

1. Plot and write to and away from the turning points with escalating series of scenes.

C. Typically Four Turning Points in the Process

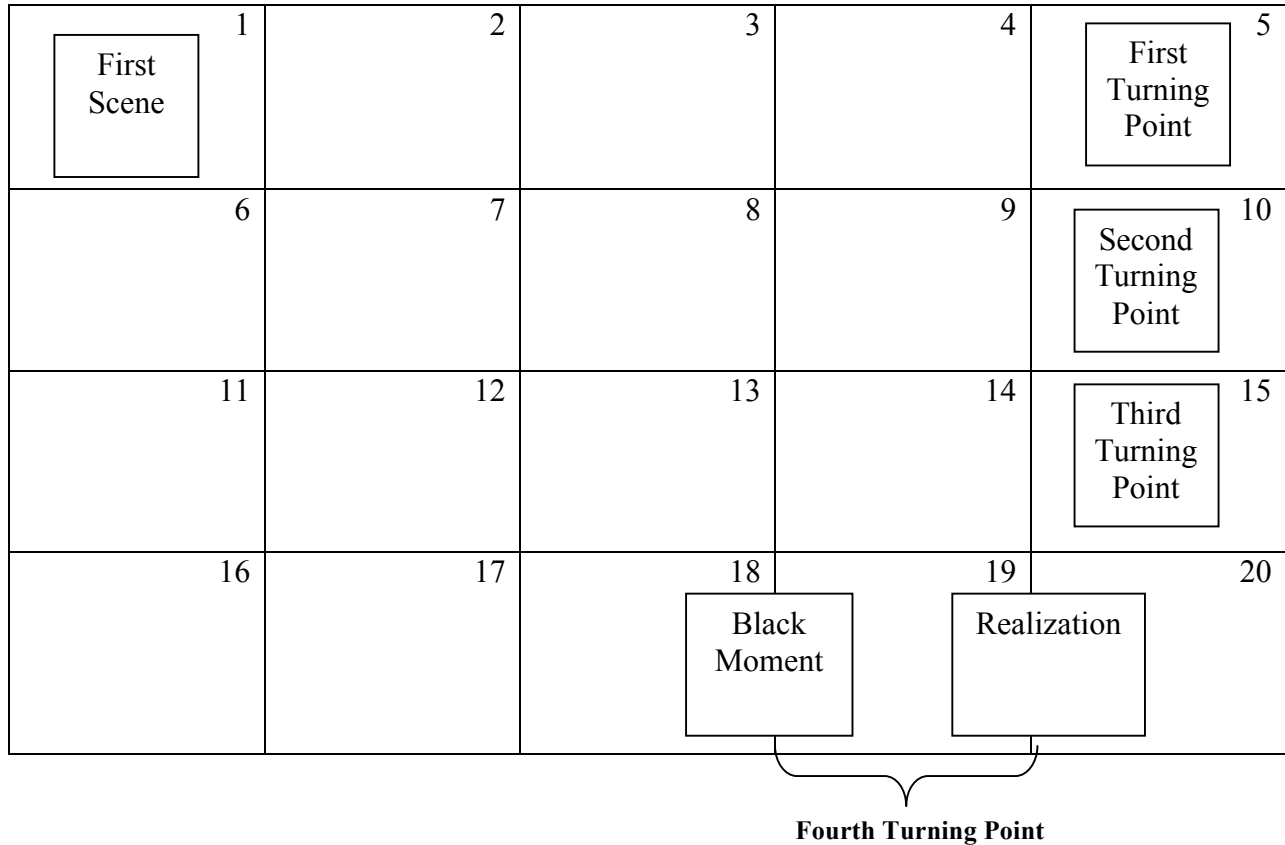
1. First Turning Point: First change in the relationship where the character is forced into action.
2. Second Turning Point (Midpoint): Typically the first defeat. There is a change in plans and reconsideration of goals.
3. Third Turning Point: Intense, major setback that leads to the Black Moment.
4. The final turning point encompasses the Black Moment and the realization.

Turning Points



Story Board

For a 20-Chapter Book with Four Turning Points



VI. COMPLETING THE PLOT

- A. Build scenes from each square in the character grid so that each conflict is illustrated.
- B. Every scene in your book must work on two levels: external and internal.

Story Board – Jerry Maguire For a 20-Chapter "Book"

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20

GRID AS REVISION TOOL

A. Check your manuscript against the grid:

1. You should be able to fill out every box on the grid for all your key characters
2. Test the grid and your story by looking at the protagonist’s grid for:
 - Consistency of conflict and theme
 - Narrowing of the protagonist’s world
 - Black Moment that grows organically from LRG, CF, and RB
 - Absolute, irrevocable change at the end
 - And, a realization that delivers the over-arching theme of the story
3. Then test the antagonist’s grid (or villain’s) within itself, but also against the protagonist.

B. Check your manuscript against the TP’s implied by the grid.

1. You know the beginning (II), the crisis (BM) and the end (realization)
2. So, do you have these dramatic moments in the story?
3. Then look at the escalating threats to the protagonist’s CF

4. Have you taken full advantage of not only the external threat (plot) to the protagonist, but also the full advantage of the emotional risk (CF) to the protagonist?

C. Test the scenes for action/reaction (plot/conflict)

1. For every plot conflict against your protagonist, there should be an emotional reaction
2. Included in handout, a graphic example of this

D. Cross-check your scenes against the grid boxes LRG, CF, and RB

1. Do you have the scenes which show these boxes for each character?
2. Do you have the scenes which show these boxes in conflict with the characters?

VII. HOW IT CAN BE USED

Character Grid – Jerry Maguire (1 of 2)

	Name: Jerry Maguire	Name: Dorothy Boyd
Inciting Incident		
Long Range Goal		
Short Range Goal		
Character Flaw		
Relationship Barrier		
Black Moment		
Realization		

Character Grid – Jerry Maguire (2 of 2)

	Name: Rod Tidwell	Name: Bob Sugar
Inciting Incident		
Long Range Goal		
Short Range Goal		
Character Flaw		
Relationship Barrier		
Black Moment		
Realization		

Self-Image Worksheet

Strength	Character Flaw	Weakness
Strong-willed, deals w/people & ideas skillfully	Needs to Control	Manipulative
Lives in the Present	Fears the Unknown	Controlled by Circumstances
Self-Reliant	Needs Independence	Can't Rely on Others, Unreliable
Earnest, with conviction and purpose	Believes End Justifies Means	Ruthless
Strategist, careful, prepared, can be relentless	Fear of Failure	Tentative, Relentless
Power of Convictions	Needs Justice	Judgmental, Vengeful, Righteous
Intuitive understanding of others	Believes World there to be manipulated	Egotistical
Intuitive, Trusts inherent human judgment	Needs to Trust	Unrealistic
Faithful, Steadfast, Unflappable	Fears Chaos	Uncompromising, Resistant to change
Compassionate	Needs to Please	Failure to know oneself
Challenges Oneself	Need to Prove Worthiness	Self-Involved
Spontaneous	Needs Freedom	Undisciplined, Unpredictable
Perfectionist	Fears Misjudgment	Defensive
Fearless, Intrepid	Needs to Take Risks	Reckless
Independent	Fears Emotional Attachment	Distrusting
Cautious	Needs to be Safe	Fearful
Honest	Needs the Truth	Unemotional
Analytical	Needs Logic	Distrusts intuition, calculating, shrewd, cunning
Self-sacrificing	Needs Love	Submissive
Ability to be someone else (wears masks)	Believes Flawed	Covers Flaw with Mask
Adaptable	Needs Balance	Indecisive, Obedient
Flexible, Diplomatic	Fears does not know best	Pliant, Deferential
Optimistic	Needs to hope for the best	Naïve
Resourceful	Believes own needs surpass everyone	Predatory
Fearless, no fear of consequences	Fears Unredeemable	Pessimistic, Fatalistic
Faithful, Steadfast	Believes the best	Follows others blindly
Places no expectations	Believes love conditional	Fears Emotions
Free from bias, open-minded	Needs Fairness	Gullible
Patience	Believes to endure is to conquer	Compulsive, can't let go

First Draft

STARGAZER PLOT/CONFLICT CHART

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PLOT</u>	<u>CONFLICT</u>
Prol.	Lonewolf not believed by council. Lonewolf Time Travels	He must find way to peace
1	Willow has visions when touched by Lonewolf. Willow kidnapped; escapes to cave. Defends her job to Ha'taani.	Attraction.
2	Willow pursued, saved by Lonewolf. Takes Lonewolf to G'father's hogan.	Willow has vision with Lonewolf. Attraction
3	Power of Ha'taani necklace. Lonewolf learns he TT W. hits Lonewolf	Mutual attraction. Visions disturb W. He must return to help People.
4	W. asks G'father about visions. G'father admits he sensed trouble. W. goes to Curtis to call station. W. calls hospital; learns M. in coma. Mentions spec. tests.	G'father realizes W. has visions. W. feels guilty about M. Should be there. W. wants answers from L. She believes in here and now-not myths and legends.
5	W. finds L. and G. on cliff. L. doesn't tell W. of Ha'taani. L. tells W. of another entrance. W. admits to vision. L. questions about other visions. L. questions about boy.	Lonewolf attracted to W. He knows she fears visions. They kiss: vision of W. w/father & M. L. knows their vision entwined. W. won't talk about Manuelito. She wants to believe he can help M. Willow counts on herself. She scolds herself for losing control. She doesn't trust stars. She will see if L. can help M.

Final Draft (1 of 2)

STARGAZER PLOT/CONFLICT CHART

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PLOT</u>	<u>CONFLICT</u>
Prol.	Lonewolf Time Travels	Lonewolf not believed by council. He must find way to peace
1	Willow kidnapped; escapes	Attraction. Has vision. Defends her job to Ha'taani. Mentions Manuelito. Mentions distrust of legends and conflict with Grandfather.
2	Willow pursued, saved by Lonewolf. Meet Grandfather	<u>Willow</u> Thinks of father and his death W. has vision with Lonewolf. Attraction Conflict with Grandfather; more thoughts of her father; <u>Lonewolf</u> : attracted to Willow. Reflects on meaning of vision. Can't trust W. but is attracted to her.
3	Power of Ha'taani necklace. Lonewolf learns he TT W. hits Lonewolf	Mutual attraction. Visions disturb W. He must return to help People.
4	W. reflects she knows L. is not murderer. W. asks G'father about visions. G'father admits he sensed trouble. W. goes to Curtis to call station. W. calls hospital; learns M. in coma. Mentions spec. tests.	W's feelings confused about L. G'father realizes W. has visions. W. can't tell station of L: pain! W. feels guilty about M. Should be there. W. wants answers from L. She believes in here and now-not myths and legends.

Final Draft (2 of 2)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PLOT</u>	<u>CONFLICT</u>
5	<p>W. finds L. and G. on cliff. L tells G of TT and council banishment. G'father will say, "The stars must be angry with you to send you to Willow. She hates anything to do with stargazers.</p>	<p>Lonewolf asks why. G'father: "My son, Willow's father, was a stargazer. He died in Viet Nam when Willow was just a child. She blames the stars."</p> <p>Lonewolf needs to know if Willow is the key. He has visions with her. Does she have them? His motive is to touch her again to evoke vision.</p>
	<p>Willow wants to question L.</p>	<p>Willow is attracted to L. but wary of being touched. Doesn't want another vision.</p>
	<p>L. tells W. of another entrance to cave. They kiss: vision of W w/her father and Manuelito. Father Calls Willow Na-Gleh-na-da</p>	<p>Lonewolf attracted to W.</p> <p>Lonewolf knows their vision entwined. He confronts W. Also: L is affected by vision of child. Reminds him of his own boy and how L couldn't help him.</p>
	<p>L. questions W. about vision and about boy.</p>	<p>Willow is alarmed, confused. Who is this man?</p>
	<p>Willow goes to hogan</p>	<p>She thinks about vision. Is threatened, but can't deny M was part of them. What if Lonewolf can help? She decides to regain control and get Lonewolf's help as a healer.</p>

Character Grid

	Name:	Name:
Inciting Incident		
Long Range Goal		
Short Range Goal		
Character Flaw		
Relationship Barrier		
Black Moment		
Realization		

Character Grid

	Name:	Name:
Inciting Incident		
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