

Layering Complexity, Texture and Theme Using Subplots, Secondary Characters and Villains

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"The power of fiction lies in accurately portraying the truth of the human condition."

— Laurine Ark, Writing from the Exterior Dramatic Perspective

I. INTRODUCTION

- a. Take what you want and leave the rest.
- b. Pantsters vs. Planners

II. IDENTIFY THE THEME

- a. Theme = Truth (It's simple, and in its simplicity lies its power.)
 - i. What do you want your reader to understand about the world after he/she finishes your book. (The Heart of your Book)
 - ii. Anchors Your Book
 - iii. The Quick and Dirty Way to Figure Out Your Theme: The epiphany of your protagonist is the theme of your book. (Know your Protagonist and Antagonist)
 1. Protagonist: the person who grows and changes the most.
 2. Antagonist: who or what drives that change.
 - iv. **Your Theme:** _____

III. LAYERING COMPLEXITY: START WITH CHARACTER NOT CHARACTERIZATION

- a. Characterization - Sum total of observable traits and qualities.
- b. Character - Deep true nature of your character, revealed by making choices under pressure.
- c. *It always comes back to the same necessity: go deep enough and there is bedrock of truth, however hard.* — May Sarton

- d. Duality of Character
 - i. Character's strength is their weakness

Self-Image Worksheet

Strength	Character Flaw	Weakness
Strong-willed/Decisive	Needs to be in Charge	Too Impetuous Self-Involved
Realistic/Lives in the Present	Needs Balance	Controlled by Circumstances
Self-Reliant	Needs Independence	Can't Rely on Others
Goal-Oriented	Need to Achieve	End Justify Means
Competent/In Charge	Fear of Failure	Boss/Arrogant
Power of Convictions	Wants Fairness/Justice	Righteous
Self-Assured	Needs No One	Arrogant
Loyal	Needs to be Trusted	Gullible/Unrealistic
Logical/Practical	Needs Order	Too Rigid
Optimistic	Needs to Please	Decides by Feelings
Persistent/Determined	Needs Result/Endings	Won't Give Up
Spontaneous	Needs Freedom	Undisciplined/Unpredictable
Intuitive	Fears Misjudgment	Distrusts Logic
Adventurous/Daring	Needs Change	Unreliable/Rash
Balanced	Fears Risk	Unemotional
Persuasive	Needs to be Right	Manipulative
Competitive	Needs Goals/Tests	Insensitive
Analytical	Needs Logic/Fears Chaos	Critical
Self-Sacrificing	Needs Love	Submissive
Perfectionist	Needs Goals/Fears Failure	Hard to Please
Adaptable	Needs Balance	Indecisive
Tolerant	Fears Confrontation	Unable to Take Stand
Idealistic	Needs to Hope for Best	Naïve
Confident	Needs to Win/Succeed	Domineering

IV. MORE COMPLEXITY: THE POWER OF CHARACTER GROWTH

- a. Function of story design/structure is to provide conflict (in the form of events) of a progressively building nature, which will at the very least reveal character in contrast to characterization and possibly change the deep character over the course of the story.
- b. Character Elements and Growth (Character Grid → For form e-mail me)
 1. Inciting Incident - on the road to change
 2. Long Range Goal - self concept meets innermost dreams
 3. Short Range Goal - beginning goal of character's first scene
 4. Character Flaw - barrier of making him/her best they can be
 5. Relationship Barrier - barrier to relationships with others
 6. Black Moment - the worst that can happen to the character
 7. Realization - what the character learns

V. Major Secondary Characters and Villains

- a. Specific Uses of Secondary Characters
 - i. Strong secondary characters impact the main plot through action and example.
 - ii. Illuminate, illustrate, emphasize, complicate the protagonist/antagonist's lives

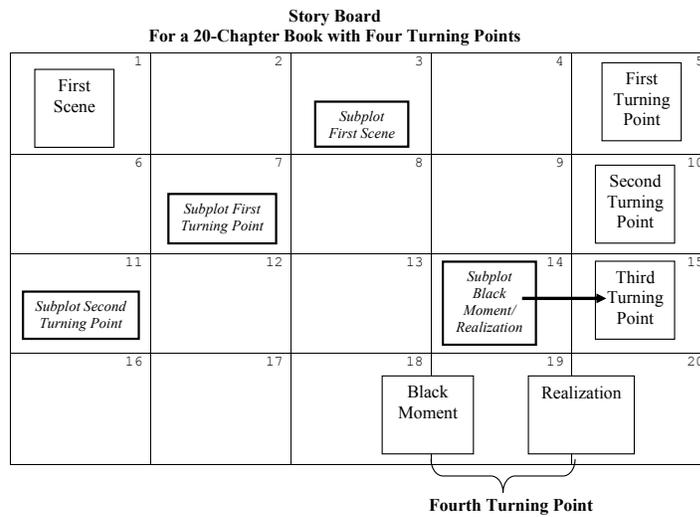
- iii. Maximize roles within secondary characters
- b. Villains
 - i. Love your villains. Find their humanity.
 - ii. The strength of the villain must exceed the strength of the hero or heroine at the beginning. Only through character growth is the villain vanquished.
 - iii. Great villains develop from emotional as well as physical challenges to major characters.
- c. Layering Theme
 - i. Villains take advantage of protagonist's flaw
 - ii. Secondary characters conflict, contrast and echo the protagonist

VI. Subplots

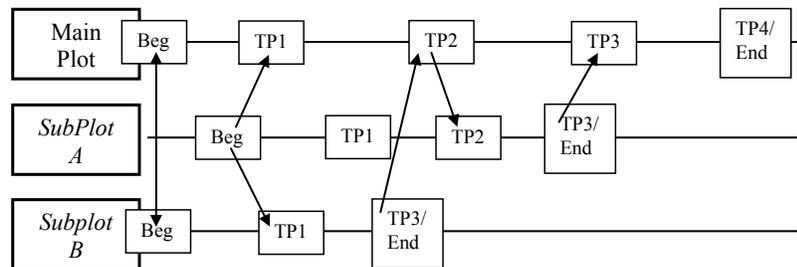
- a. *A story recounts events that must be translated into feelings. It concerns . . . someone's reactions to what happens; his feelings; emotions; his impulses; his dreams, his ambitions; his clashing drives and inner conflicts. Plunge the character into a pre-planned situation that challenges the part of him that cares, that threatens the thing he feels is important.* — Dwight V. Swain, Techniques of the Selling Writer.
- b. Strong subplots mirror or parallel the main plot.
- c. Illustrate, emphasize, illuminate or complicate the plot of your major characters from an external and/or internal perspective.

VII. Layering Complexity Using Subplots

- a. Layer subplots to complicate the plot
- b. Turning Points
 - i. Major changes in the direction of your subplot for the character and the reader.
- c. Escalate the stakes as you go from turning point to turning point.
 - i. Story Board
 - 1. Attack your character's flaw
 - 2. Take full advantage of theme during turning points
 - ii. Build plot and emotions to and away from turning points.
 - iii. Plot and write to and away from the turning points with escalating series of scenes.
 - iv. Turning points in the subplot lead to major events in the main plot
- d. Plot to the Surprise
 - i. Shift the character's reality
 - ii. Each time you remove an obstacle, uncover one more.
 - iii. The end can deliver the main plot's black moment or complicate the plot in a major way.
- e. Using Story Boards & Plot Lines



b. Plot Lines



VIII. Other Methods of Layering Complexity

- a. Write on two levels: external and internal
- b. Example of Layering: Braveheart

IX. Layering Texture

- a. Layer emotions: Actions don't drive the story. Actions drive emotions, emotions drive the story.
- b. Layer Imagery
- c. Layer scene, chapter, and turning point arcs

X. Another look at Layering Theme

- a. Test Your Theme
 - i. List of five (Thanks Bruce Ballenger & Barry Lane, "Discovering the Writer Within"):
 1. Title, First line, Last line, Sentence or passage with the most unusual or significant detail, Most important line

"The only stories worth telling are stories of the human heart in conflict with itself." — William Faulkner

Biography

Step into the crossfire with international bestselling author, Golden Heart® winner and RITA® finalist, Robin Perini. As a writer, Robin is devoted to giving her readers fast-paced, high stakes adventures with a love story sure to melt their hearts. Her strong characters and tightly woven plots garnered her seven prestigious Romance Writers of America Golden Heart® finals and one RITA® final. 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 a little over two years, which tests her sanity on a regular basis.

Bibliography

MONTGOMERY JUSTICE NOVELS (Amazon's Montlake Romance)

In Her Sights (November 2011)
Behind the Lies (April 2013)
Game of Fear (August 2014)

CARDER TEXAS CONNECTIONS (Harlequin Intrigue)

Finding Her Son (March 2012)
Cowboy in the Crossfire (July 2012)
Christmas Conspiracy (December 2012)
Undercover Texas (June 2013)
The Cradle Conspiracy (December 2013)
Secret Obsession (August 2014)
Christmas Justice (December 2014)

DARK GUARDIANS (Thursday Publishing)

Night of the Jaguar (Novella) (October 2014)
The Ultimate Price (2015)