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

Emerald City Writers Conference 2014

presented by

Robin Perini

+

Take What You Want
...and Leave the Rest

- What a writer *… "wants is a set of rules on what to do and what not to do in writing fiction….when one begins to be persuaded that certain things must never be done in fiction and certain other things must always be done, one has entered the first stage of aesthetic arthritis, the disease that ends in pedantic rigidity and the atrophy of intuition.* "— John Gardner, The Art of Fiction
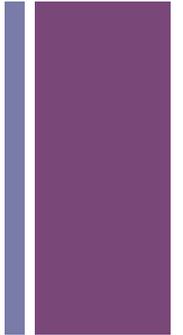
+ Introduction

- *"The <u>power</u> of fiction lies in accurately portraying the <u>truth</u> of the human condition. — Laurine Ark, Writing from the Exterior Dramatic Perspective*

- You already do this instinctively

- Pantsters and Planners

> *Actions don't drive the story,*
> *Actions drive emotions…*
> *EMOTIONS drive the story.*
> *— Unknown*

Identify Your Theme – Step by Step
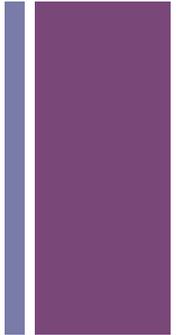
- Anchors your book
  - The backbone of your story

- Identify the Protagonist--the person who grows and changes the most.
  - Name Your Protagonist ___Deb Lansing___

- Identify the Protagonist's Internal Conflict (Character Flaw)
  - A need, belief or fear that keeps them from being the best they can be
  - By the end of the story, they will learn to overcome this flaw

Step 1: What is your Protagonist's Flaw?
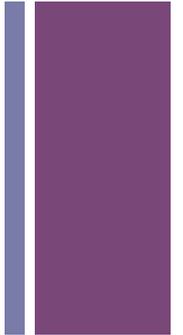
- Protagonist: the person who grows and changes the most.

- Antagonist: who or what drives that change.

- **Believes she will let down those who rely on her (therefore she can't let anyone in).**

A MONTGOMERY JUSTICE NOVEL

GAME OF FEAR

ROBIN PERINI
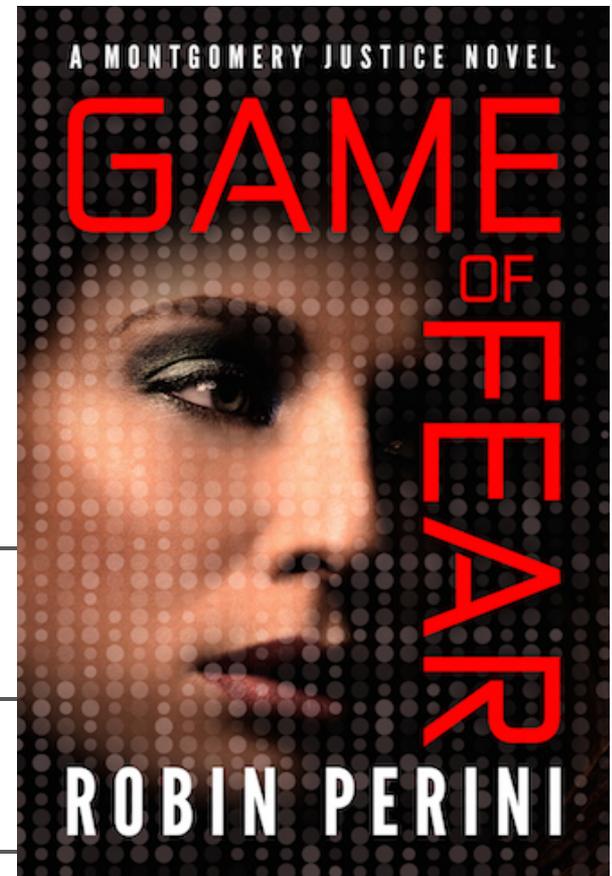
Step 2: What's the Theme of Your Book?
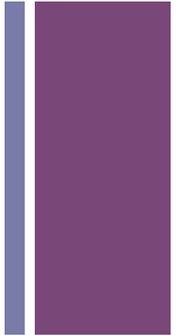
- The Quick and Dirty Way to Figure Out the Theme: ***The epiphany of your protagonist is the theme of your book.***

  - What does the character learn?

- In other words--what do you want your reader to understand about the world after he/she finishes your book?

- What's the theme of Game of Fear?

**I don't have to be perfect.
I can let myself rely on others.**
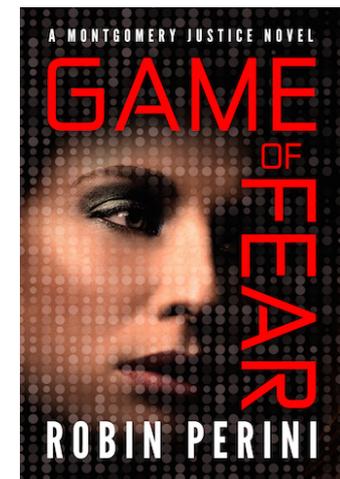
+ What's YOUR Theme?

?
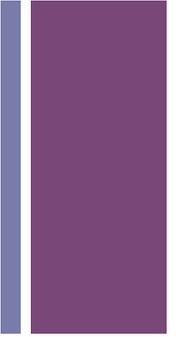
Layering Complexity: Character vs. Characterization
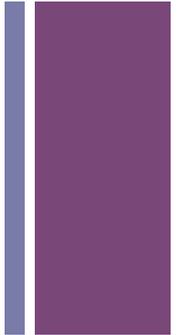
- Characterization is the observable traits and qualities (TELLING)
    - Age, sex, education, profession
    - Introverted, extroverted, optimistic, pessimistic

- Character is the deep true nature of your character, revealed by making choices under pressure (or choices in dilemma) (SHOWING)

- It always comes back to the same necessity; go deep enough and there is a bedrock of truth, however hard. – May Sarton

Contrasting Characterization and Character
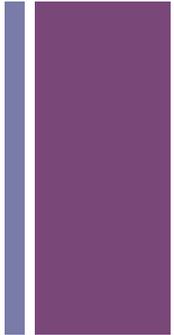
Name	Characterization	Character
Indiana Jones	Professor	Hero
James Bond	Lounge Lizard	Hero

More Complexity: The Power of Character Growth
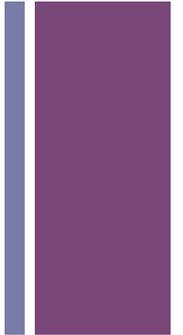
- Conflict (in the form of events) of a progressively building nature reveals character, and hopefully changes deep character.

- Use Character Grid Concept (Discovering Story Magic) to track character elements and growth.

Character Grid

- **Inciting Incident** - on the road to change

- **Long Range Goal** - self concept meets innermost dreams

- **Short Range Goal** - beginning goal of character's first scene

- **Character Flaw** - barrier of making him/her best they can be

- **Relationship Barrier** - barrier to relationships with others

- **Black Moment** - the worst that can happen to the character

- **Realization** - what the character learns

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

Duality of Character (Laura Baker)

Self-Image Worksheet
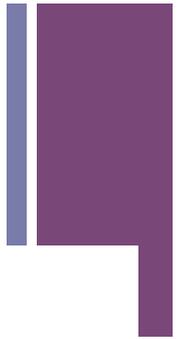
| Strength	Character Flaw	Weakness
Strong-willed/Decisive	Needs to be in Charge	Too Impetuous
		Self-Involved
Realistic/Lives in the Present	Needs Balance	Controlled by Circumstances
Self-Reliant	Needs Independence	Can't Rely on Others
Goal-Oriented	Need to Achieve	End Justify Means
Competent/In Charge	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

+ Major Secondary Characters
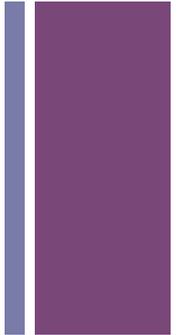
- Impact the main plot through action and example

- Illuminate, illustrate, complicate the lives of the protagonist/antagonist

- Hint: maximize roles within secondary character
  - Best friend & Cop & Lover
  - Villain and Mentor

+ Villains

- Love them

- Strength of villain must exceed strength of hero/heroine at the beginning. (SWAIN)
  - Only through character growth is villain vanquished

- Relationship with a major character

- Clear Goals

- Attack hero and heroine from physical and emotional perspective

+
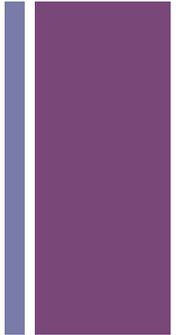
Get into the Head of Your Villain

I am my own villain

Layering Theme Using Villains or Secondary Characters
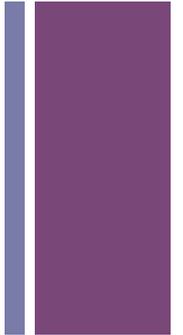
- Villains should take advantage of protagonist's flaw

- Secondary characters should conflict/ contrast and echo the protagonist → flaw, character ,etc.

+ Subplots
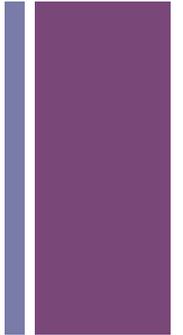
- Mirror or parallel main plot

- If you can take subplot out and not impact main plot, it's another book

- Illustrate emphasize, illuminate or complicate main plot (external or internal or both)

Layering Complexity With Subplots
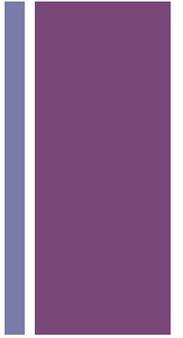
- Using Turning Points

- Parallel plot lines which meet at end

- Plot to the surprise

+
Turning Points

Final course (either defeated or learned something)

The End

Second Turning Point (Midpoint)

Major change of course in the relationship.

Major change of course in the relationship.

Major change of course in the relationship.

Third Turning Point

Protagonist

Set a course for relationship

Sec. Char/ Villain

First Turning Point
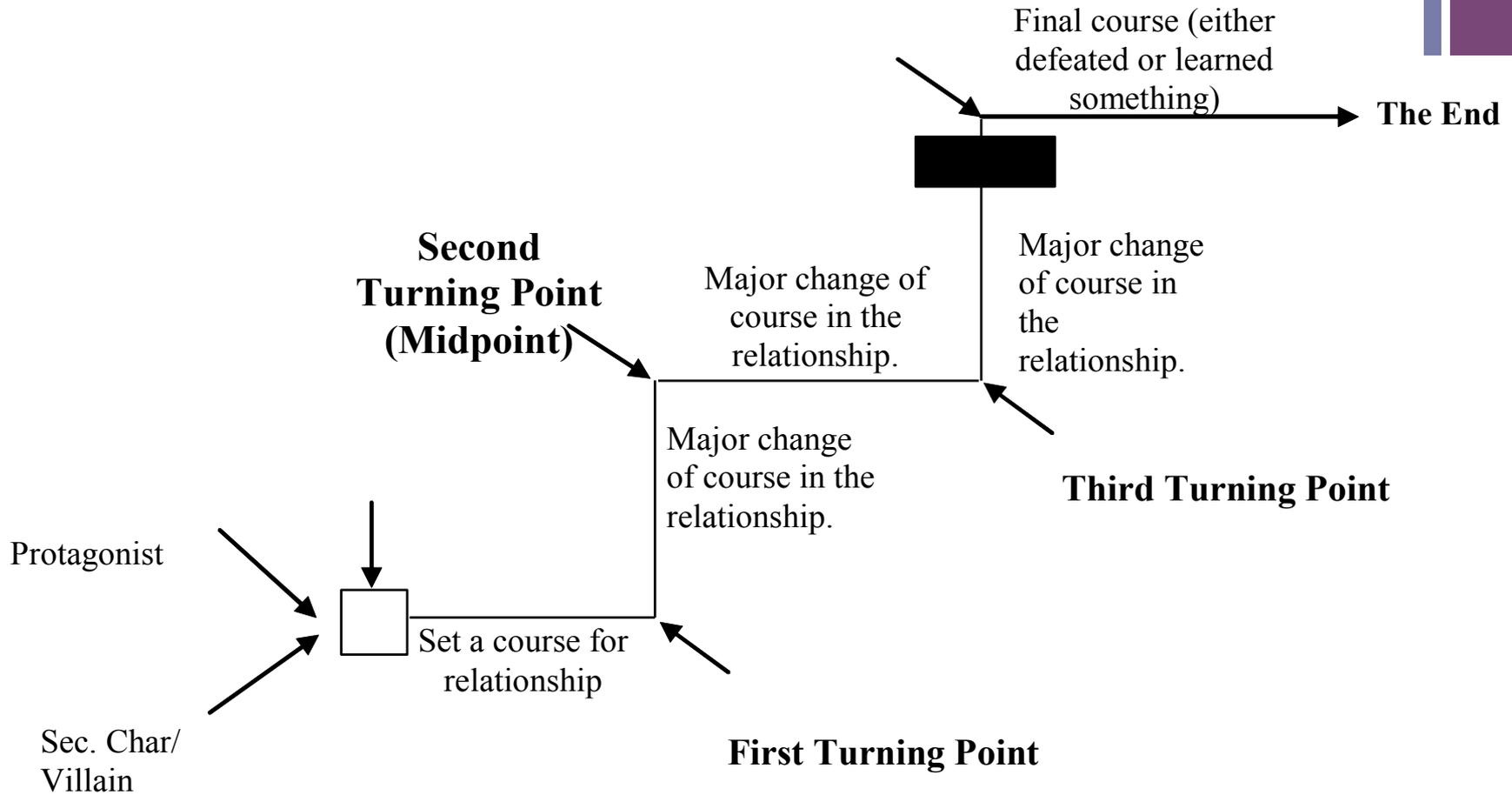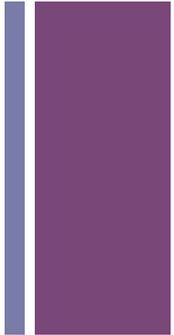
# Interconnectivity of Turning Points
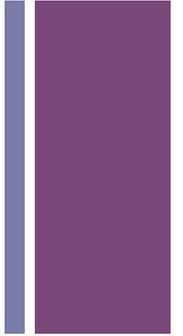
- Incorporating Subplots into Plots to Add Complexity to Your Story Using Story Board & Plot Lines

- **Pantsters Beware here** ☺

Story Board
For a 20-Chapter Book with Four Turning Points

1	2	3	4	5
First Scene		*Subplot First Scene*		First Turning Point

6	7	8	9	10
	Subplot First Turning Point			Second Turning Point

11	12	13	14	15
Subplot Second Turning Point			*Subplot Black Moment/ Realization* →	Third Turning Point

16	17	18	19	20
		Black Moment	Realization	
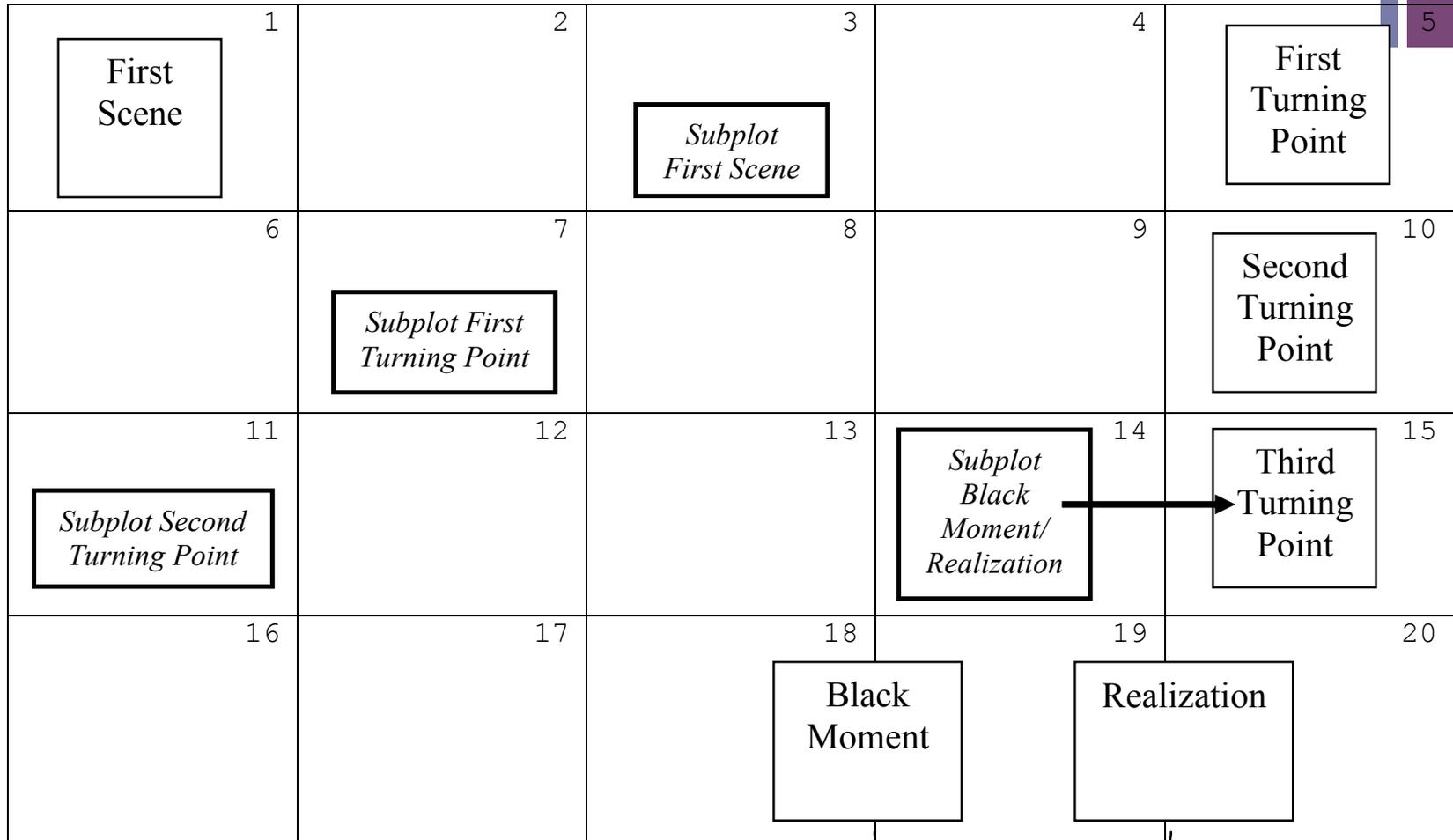
**Fourth Turning Point**

Plot Lines
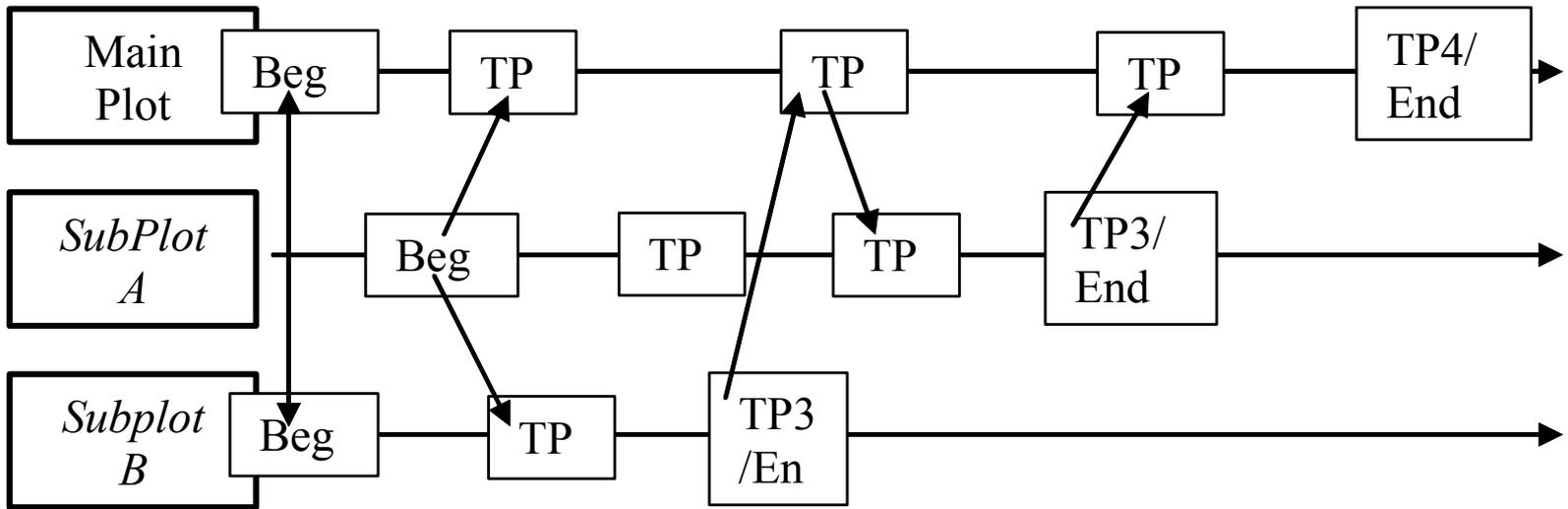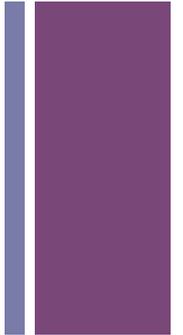
Other Methods of Layering Complexity
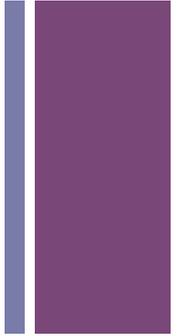
- Writing on two levels: external and internal

- Example of Layering

Layering Texture with Words
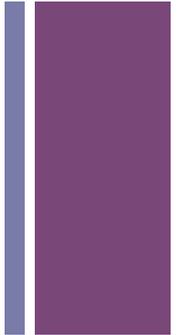
- **Layer emotions**
    - Conscience--No-conscience
    - Snitch--Cop's Cop
    - Moral--Amoral
    - Good--Bad
    - True to Image--False to Image
    - True Justice--No Justice

- **Layer imagery**

- **Layer scene, chapter and turning point arcs**

+ Test Your Theme
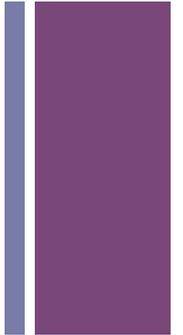
- List of Five
  - Title
  - First Line
  - Last Line
  - Sentence or passage with the most unusual or significant details
 - Most important line

+ Layering Theme - Exercise

- You can't judge a book by its cover

- The end justifies the means

- The truth will eventually be uncovered
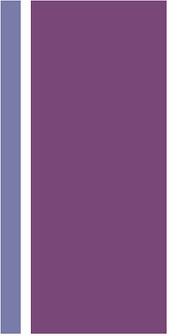
Conclusion

- Subplots, secondary characters and villains add texture and complexity to your story.

- If you leave with nothing else, leave with the idea that wielding the power of theme will make you a stronger writer
  - From the start of the story, we place our protagonist in conflict and force him to make choices in dilemma. His choices, his actions, create events and tell a story. In truth, what we are doing is shining a spotlight on a person in conflict and showing what happens. We are saying, for this person, "Life is like THIS."

- There is only one type of story in the YOUR story.—Ray Bradbury
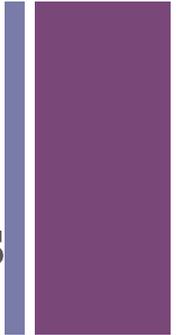
+ Q&A and Drawing
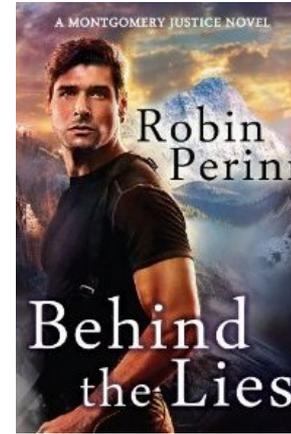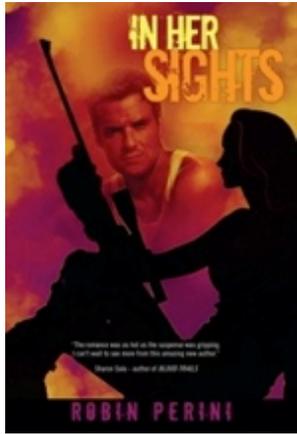
www.robinperini.com
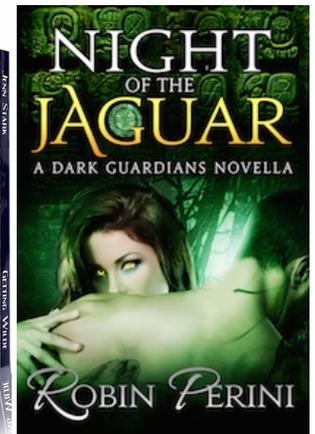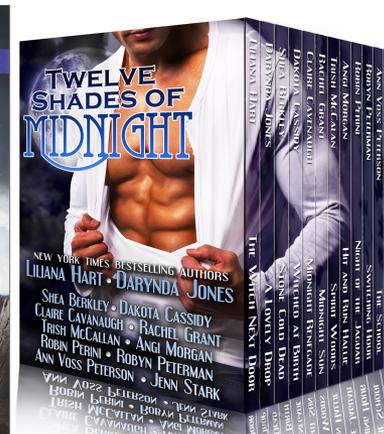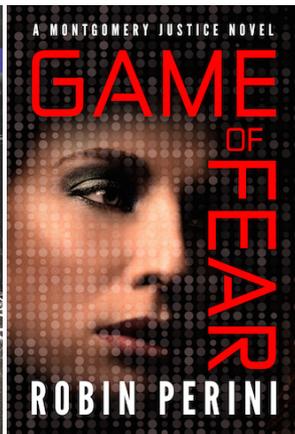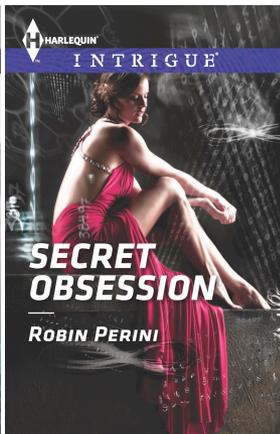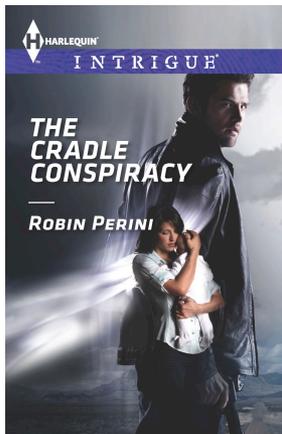
Coming Soon – The GAME: GAME OF FEAR (On Amazon, Itunes and Google Play

Coming Soon – The GAME: GAME OF FEAR (On Amazon , Itunes and Google Play

# Character Sketch (Laura Baker)
Enter into your computer and watch it grow)

- Title of Work:
- Character:
- Sex: Age: Height:
       Weight:
- Hair Color: Eye Color:
- Identifying Characteristics, description:
- Beginning Situational Conflict:
- Greatest Strength:
- Why is the character this way?
- Greatest Flaw (Internal Conflict):
  - How does person hide it, get around it?
  - Why does the character stay this way? What needs to happen to not be this way? Does this trait stay through the end of the book?
- Greatest need or want (Long-Range Goal)?
  - Why is the need or want important? What's at stake? What will it cost this character?
  - How will meeting that need or want affect other characters?
  - Obstacles to meeting that need or want:

+ Character Sketch (cont'd)

- Short Range Goal:
- Dark Secret:
- Other personality characteristics, strengths:
- Other Personality characteristics: weaknesses:
- Greatest Fear:
- Biggest Regret:
- Most Powerful Dream:
- What about this character conflicts with the other protagonist?
- Romantic/Interpersonal Conflict (What's inside of him/her that keeps him/her from loving her/him):
- Danger (If I love her/him . . .):
- Darkest Moment:
- What about this character renews the spirit of other protagonist?
- How does greatest strength overcome the greatest weakness to produce a happy ending?
- What does character learn by the end of the book?