Wielding the Power of Story

Secrets to Taking Your Writing to the Next Level

Robin Perini
Georgia Romance Writers, April 16, 2016

+ Take What You Want
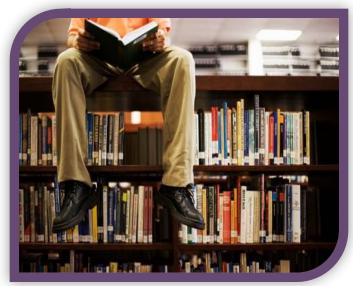## ...and Leave the Rest

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

+ How do you write?

- **Pantsters, Plotters and Planners**

- **What we have in common: Elements of Story**
  - Character
  - Plot
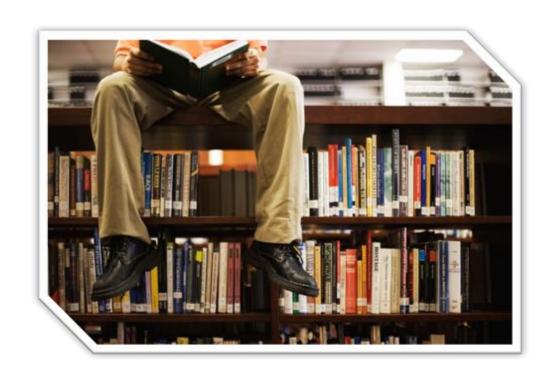 - Theme
  - Voice

+

Non-Craft

+ Non-Craft

- Life-long learning (you, your critique group) – challenge yourself.

- Discover **YOUR** process
  - Strengths and Weaknesses
    - Plot, Character, etc.
  - Robin's journey
      - Discovering Story Magic
      - W-Diagram
      - Alexandra Sokoloff

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Know what you know!

- Elements I knew – from contests, critiques and REJECTIONS
  - Character
  - Deep Character
  - Turning Points
  - Romantic Conflict
  - Hooks
  - Drama

+ Consider Your Writing Life

- Make writing a priority…decide what's important.

- Write regularly…discover how fast you can write a book, and what it takes.

- After you complete one book, take a short break then start another

+ Creative Goal Setting

- Strengths & Weaknesses as a Writer (Don't dwell)

- What author's career would you like to emulate?

- Does it jive with strengths?

- Write down 3 goals (SMART)

- Take home assignment –
  - Plan of Action

EXERCISE!

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Discover YOUR Story

+

Uncover YOUR Emotional Cues
(Laura Baker – www.fearlesswriter.com)

- Authentic writing comes from authentic emotion
  - Emotions connect character and structure
  - Embrace the emotions that 'speak' to you
  - Write what you 'know'

- List your 3 most powerful childhood memories
  - Define three key emotions in each memory

EXERCISE!

+ What do you Look for in a Read?

- Name two authors whose work you love!
  - What are the key emotions they explore?
    - Write down 2 for each author if possible

- Identify your favorite 'keeper book'
  - Who is your favorite character in that book?
  - Identify 3 key emotions of that person.

EXERCISE!

+ Your Writing

- Identify the book that was easiest for you to finish? (If you haven't finished a book yet, identify another 'keeper'; or use the book that you've written on the most).)
    - List 3 prominent characteristics of this book
    - Identify the most compelling character
    - List 3 prominent characteristics of this character

COMPARE THE LISTS OF EMOTIONS

EXERCISE!

+

Aha Moment

- Is there a common thread?
  - Similarities?
  - Opposites?

- Consider the book you have been UNABLE or STRUGGLED to finish?

EXERCISE!

Identify YOUR Emotional Cues

■ Write a paragraph and include:

- What is the emotional experience you crave to read?

- What is a big element of your easiest story?

- What personal issue recurs in your life or your books? (What theme do you need/want to explore?)

- What are you good at?

EXERCISE!

Take Away

- Embrace your emotional cues

- Leverage the power of your emotions

- Consider merging this emotional identity with your author brand

Maximize Your Characters

No matter what inspires the story, a story begins and ends with character

Strong Character Goals

- **Story is character.**
  - Character is the metaphor for a human being
  - A character's goals tell us a lot about their deep character. Ask **WHY?**

- **Character Sketch** (see end of handout)

- **Make the Reader Care**
  - How much a character cares about his/her goal is in direct proportion to how much the reader will care (Laura DeVries)
  - Long and Short-Range Goals

Plot

Goals

Conflict

Emotional Journey

Character vs. Characterization

- Characterization - Sum total of observable traits and qualities
  - Age, sex, education, profession
  - Introverted, extroverted, optimistic, pessimistic

- Character - Deep true nature of your character, revealed by making choices under pressure
  - Shift the character's reality
  - Ask yourself what your character would NEVER do, and then figure out a way to make them do it.
  - Each time you remove an obstacle, uncover one more.

- The key question: WHY?

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

Look beneath the surface

- Favorite book or movie character
  - What do they seem to be at the beginning of the story
  - Who do we discover they are?

Name	Characterization	Character
James Bond	Lounge Lizard	Hero
Indiana Jones	Professor	Hero
Eve Dallas	Tough Cop	Caring and personally vulnerable
?		

EXERCISE!

Character Growth

- The key to character growth is a character flaw.

- Identify the Protagonist--the person who grows and changes the most.
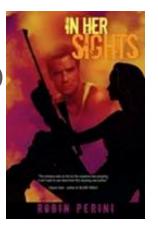 - Name Your Protagonist **Jasmine "Jazz" Parker (nee Jane Sanford)**

- Identify the Protagonist's Internal Conflict (Character Flaw) (based on emotion)
  - 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
  - What is your protagonist's flaw?
    - **Fears she can't protect those she is responsible for (those she loves) because she didn't in her past**

EXERCISE!

Duality of character

Character's strength is their weakness

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

+ Major Secondary Characters and Villains

+ Major Secondary Characters

- Impact the main plot through action and example

- Illuminate, illustrate, emphasize and 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

EXERCISE!

+ 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.

Foreshadow:This us one way to layer theme into your story.

+

Braid Character and Structure
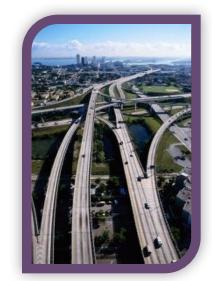
Whether you start with an idea, setting or scene.

Plot ≠ Story

- **A Plot**
  - Is what happens
  - Provides the action
  - Provides motion
  - Road it takes to get you there

- **A Story**
  - Is what it does to the 'who' it happens to.
  - Provides the reactions
  - Provides emotion
  - Journey to truth

- ***A Story…***
  - *Recounts events that must be translated into feelings. It concerns . . . someone's reactions to what happens; his feelings; his 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.

Character and Structure Function

■ **Character function**

- Brings to the story the qualities necessary to convincingly act out **choices** (Robert McKee)

■ **Structure function**

- Provides **progressively building pressures** that force characters into more and more difficult dilemmas where they must make more and more difficult risk-taking **choices** and actions, gradually revealing their true natures, even down to the unconscious self. (Robert McKee)

The Power of Character Growth

- Conflict (in the form of events) of a progressively building nature reveals character, and hopefully changes deep character.

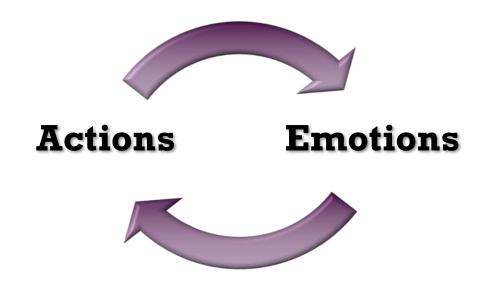- Use Character Grid Concept (Discovering Story Magic) to track character elements and growth.

My Main Tool: 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		

Emotions Connect Character and Structure

- Actions don't drive the story. Actions drive emotions. Emotions drive the story.
  - How the characters feel, create should change choices→plot

Actions   **Emotions**

+ Why is this character the ONLY character for this story?

- Choose plot to exploit character.
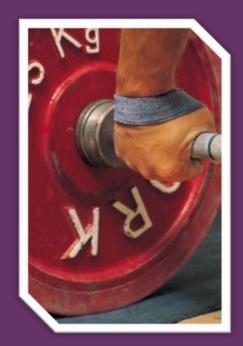- Use Plot to Put Your Character into Conflict
  - Emotions → Choices/Goals → Action (Plot) → Conflict → Emotions
  - Escalation of the intensity of emotions and/or the stakes increases tension.
  - Strive for character causing plot, not plot forcing character
- The real question: Is the drama motivated?
- Jack and Jill

Conflict → Emotions → Choices/Goals → Action (Plot) → (cycle)

EXERCISE!

Use Scene to Braid Character and Structure

- Purpose of a scene.
  - Take a character through conflict where things get worse or get better, but
    - GOAL – CONFLICT - DISASTER
  - New events stem from emotion.
    - EMOTION – QUANDARY – DECISION – ACTION

- The mistakes people make.
  - Writing scene without emotion.
  - Writing scene without conflict.
  - Writing scene without an arc
  - Writing a scene without purpose/goal
  - Writing a scene that isn't compelling.

- Always be thinking about making the lives of characters miserable.

The Power of One Liners

+ One Liners – A Hidden Test of Story Strength

- **Finding Her Son** (Harlequin Intrigue, March 2012) - a woman who is determined to find her kidnapped son and suspected in her husband's death and is forced to team with the embattled SWAT cop who is assigned to prove her guilt.

- **Cowboy in the Crossfire** (Harlequin Intrigue, July 2012) - A woman desperate to protect her young son after he witnesses a murder is forced to team with a disgraced Texas Sheriff who her family framed.

- **Behind the Lies** (2013) –A woman discovers her 'perfect' husband is a cold-blooded, international assassin and is forced to put the lives of her and her young son in the hands of a man who lives behind his own lies.

+

The One-Sentence Blurb

- **Internal and External Conflict in One Sentence**
  - **The more clear, the easier the book will be to write and the stronger the book will be**

Story Question Will Guide Your Writing

_____ **MUST**	_____ **BY**	_____
Your Protagonist	Critical Plot Goal	Conflict with the Antagonist

ONLY TO REALIZE _____

What the Character Learns about life that helps him/her change his goal during the journey of the book.

Example: Jacob Marshall **must** avenge his father's honor **by** implicating Serena Jones' father, **only to realize** revenge often hurts the innocent.

The Story Question:
The Wizard of Oz

	must		by	
Your Protagonist		**Critical Plot Goal**		**Conflict with the Antagonist**

Only to Realize _____

What the Character Learns about life that helps him/her change his goal during the journey of the book.

- Dorothy **<u>must</u>** get help from the Wizard of Oz to find her way home **<u>by</u>** defeating the Wicked Witch, **<u>only to realize</u>** that she had the power to go home all the time (there's no place like home).

+ Compose YOUR Story Question and Story Journey

SWAT Team Sniper, Jazz Parker,

must

save the man she shouldn't love, his daughter and herself from a vicious killer out to destroy her

by

Facing the demons of her past and a hidden enemy bent on revenge
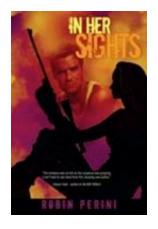
Your Protagonist — Critical Plot Goal — Conflict with the Antagonist

Only to Realize

The past does not control her and make her unworthy, her actions now make her worthy.

What the Character Learns about life that helps him/her change his goal during the journey of the book.

IN HER SIGHTS

ROBIN PERINI

EXERCISE!

+ Marketing Fragments

- Power of High Concept
  - Sells your book
  - The stronger, the better

- In Her Sights – A female SWAT team sniper who is being stalked

- Behind the Lies – A woman on the run from her assassin husband

- Game of Fear – Dozens of brilliant kids who mastered a video game are disappearing—and no one noticed. Until now.

+ Your One-liner

■ Create a one-liner using one of the methods above.

EXERCISE!

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Know and Use Theme

+ Character Determines Theme

■ Theme = Truth (It's simple, and in its simplicity lies its power.)

  ■ What do you want your reader to understand about the world after he/she finishes your book. (The Heart of your Book)

  ■ List of five: Title, first line, last line, sentence or passage with the most unusual or significant detail, most important line. (Thanks Bruce Ballenger & Barry Lane, "Discovering the Writer Within")

  ■ The Quick and Dirty Way to Figure Out Your Theme: The epiphany of your protagonist is the theme of your book.
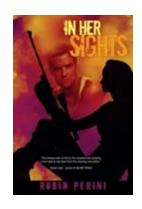   ■ What does your protagonist need to learn to overcome their flaw?

What's Your Theme?

- Step 1: Identify the protagonist's character flaw/internal conflict (based on emotion)
  - **Jazz Parker** (protagonist) will [now or eventually] have to face and get past that he/she NEEDS/BELIEVES/

    FEARS **Fears she can't protect those she is**

    responsible for (those she loves).

    because she didn't in her past

- Step 2: What does your character learn to overcome their flaw? = Your Theme!

The past does not dictate who I am. I am not my past…I am my own actions.

EXERCISE!

+ Ways to Layer Theme in Your Novel

- Villains
  - The villain is the personification of your protagonist's flaw and takes advantage of the protagonist's flaw. (i.e. the real danger to your protagonist is their flaw)

- Secondary Characters
  - Mirror and echo protagonist/antagonist

- Subplots
  - Mirror and echo main plot

- Imagery

+

Show, Don't Tell

Show, Don't Tell Emotions

- Identify a key word from the Emotion Exercise

Sacrifice　　Redemption　　Joy

Betrayal　　Forgiveness

- Write a paragraph showing this emotion without using the word (or a form of the word)

EXERCISE!

Show Don't Tell Through Narrative and Description

- Significant Detail based on emotion, not research

- Choose a setting. Choose two opposite emotions. Write a paragraph illustrating the emotions through significant details, without using the specific words (or a form of the word).
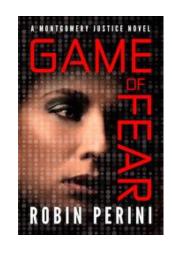
Hope

Despair

EXERCISE!

Show Don't Tell Through Deep Point of View

- The character tells the story, not the author

- Imagery based on character

Finally reaching the landing, Deb slipped her key into the lock and opened the door. Ashley better have a good reason for being here and not at her Air Force Academy dorm where she belonged.

Her sister threw her textbook to the floor and jumped up from the beige corduroy couch like a gun had exploded in her ear.
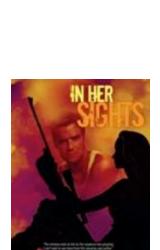
Deep Point of View: Take 2

Luke Montgomery kept to the shadows, studying the surroundings for potential threats and quick exits. He preferred covert operations, but stealth wasn't an option here. Even he couldn't blend his six-feet-four-inch frame in this cracker box. Though he hadn't set foot in the joint in a couple of years, too many people would recognize him.

A sharp rap of the cue ball hitting its target echoed like a gunshot over the raucous laughter. Nope, Sammy's Bar hadn't changed. Neither had the clientele.

Cops. And some of them were on the take.

+ Watch Out

- **'s/he felt,'**

- **'s/he thought,'**

- **'s/he saw,'**

- **'s/he wondered,'**

- **'s/he realized…**
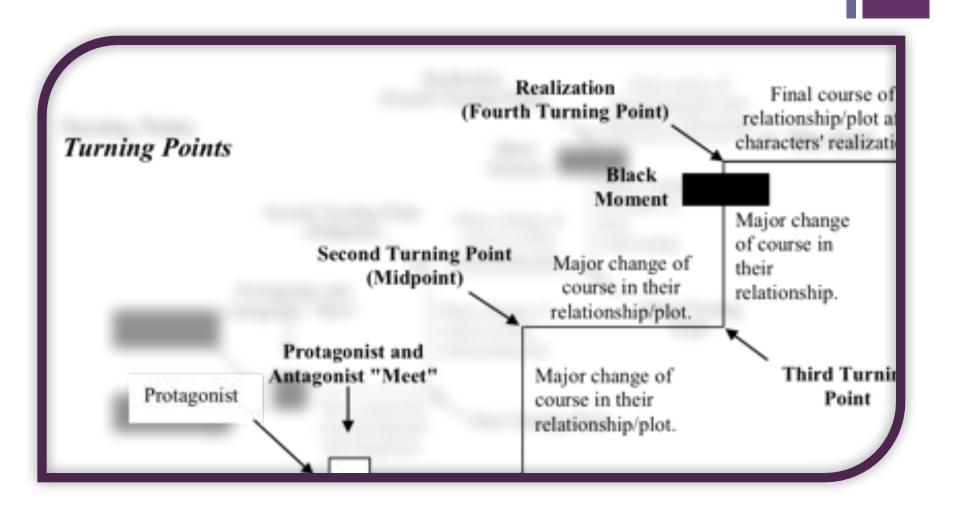
Turning Points, Reversals and Arcs

+ Elements of a turning points?

- Keys to a Successful Story
    - Deep Character—ask 'WHY'
    - Theme—the point of your story
    - Braiding internal and external conflict—intertwine plot and character
    - Layering—multipurpose scenes and multi-dimensional characters
    - Surprise—the unexpected keeps the reader turning the pages and reveals character

- Each turning point contains ALL of these elements

What are Turning Points?

- Significant and surprising scene or series of scenes which change the direction of your plot or subplot FOR THE CHARACTER and the reader.
- Layer internal and external conflict (i.e. events AND character/emotion) and theme
  - The greatest danger to the character is *not* the external plot but the character's flaw
  - The villain is the personification of the danger to the protagonist (Swain)
  - The attacks continue until the black moment forces an irrevocable change in the character (the realization)
- No matter which plotting or writing method you choose, ask: do the turning points scene(s) include all turning point elements of plot **AND emotion**?

+ Turning Points

Turning Points

Realization (Fourth Turning Point)

Final course of relationship/plot at characters' realizati[on]

Black Moment

Major change of course in their relationship.

Second Turning Point (Midpoint)

Major change of course in their relationship/plot.

Protagonist and Antagonist "Meet"

Major change of course in their relationship/plot.

Protagonist

Third Turnin[g] Point

Sample TP and Reversal Scenes
Identify Heart Clenching Moments (Elizabeth Sims)

- ❖ Love at first sight (Marius Pontmercy meets Cosette)

- ❖ A huge moral lapse (Judas takes the money)

- ❖ Murder (Miles Archer's sets Sam Spade in motion)

- ❖ Death by other means (Injun Joe starves to death in the cave)

- ❖ A refusal of grace (Mayella Ewell sticks to her story in spite of taking the courtroom oath)

- ❖ Nature gone wild (shark dines on first recreational swimmer)

- ❖ Someone standing up to corruption (Shane picks up his gun again)

- ❖ A change of heart, for good or ill (Michael Corleone offers to kill Sollozzo and Captain McCluskey)

- ❖ An act of depraved violence (Bill Sykes cudgels Nancy)

- ❖ Betrayal (Sandy puts a stop to her mentor Jean Brodie)

- ❖ Forgiveness (Melanie insists Scarlett join her in the receiving line)

- ❖ A revelation (Pip's secret benefactor is none other than … !)

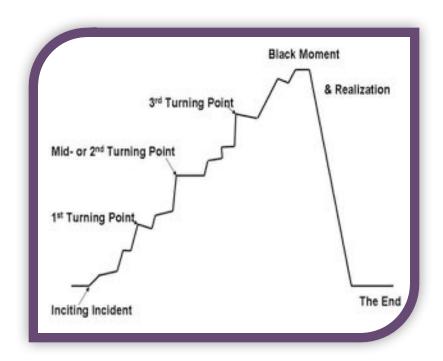# Types of Turning Points

- Major turning points of the story--dependent on the protagonist **and** the genre.
    - Scenes of significant plot AND character development
    - Result in intense emotion by character and reader

- Minor turning points (between major turning points) and even within chapters (reversals)

- Subplot turning points

- Other characters' turning points

Turning Points are about Character as much as plot

- Escalate the internal and external stakes as you go from turning point to turning point.

- A good rule of thumb: 1 MAJOR turning point every 25,000 words

- Could a kiss be a turning point? Why?

Black Moment

& Realization

3rd Turning Point

Mid- or 2nd Turning Point

1st Turning Point

Inciting Incident

The End

General Structure

Story Board

For a 20-Chapter Book with Four Turning Points

1	2	3	4	
Story's Inciting Incident				Tu...
6	7	8	9	
				Mid o... Turnin...
11	12	13	14	
				T... Tu... P...
16	17	18	19	
		Black Moment	Realization	

Step-by-Step Guide to Turning Points: Step 1—The basics

- Identify the theme. ✔

- Compose your story question ✔

- Identify the beginning and the ending

- List the big scenes

- Identify the turning points
  - The MAJOR turning points are distinct steps on your protagonist's plot and emotional journey through the story and are genre-specific.

Compose Your Story Question and Story Journey ✔

SWAT Team Sniper, Jazz Parker,

must **save the man she shouldn't love, his daughter and herself from a vicious killer out to destroy her** **by** **Facing the demons of her past and a hidden enemy bent on revenge**
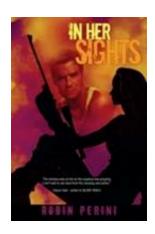
Your Protagonist		Critical Plot Goal		Conflict with the Antagonist

Only to Realize **The past does not control her and make her unworthy, her actions now make her worthy.**

What the Character Learns about life that helps him/her change his goal during the journey of the book.

Identify the Beginning & Ending

- Identify the Story's Beginning (Protagonist's Inciting Incident (II))
    - The beginning sets the stage, the tone, the path of your story.
    - The beginning delivers the ending.
    - What's your story's beginning (Plot and emotion)?_____

    Jazz saves a life and ignites the anger of a vicious killer from a past she is desperate to keep hidden.

- Identify the Story's Ending (Protagonist's Black Moment (BM) and Realization (R))
    - Your destination for the protagonist and plot.
    - The proof of your theme (test what your protagonist learns)

- What's your story's ending (plot and emotion)?_____
_____

    Jazz, after failing to protect those she loves, faces her past, brings it out into the open and realizes that her past has made her who she is—a hero.

EXERCISE!

+ List the Big Scenes

- Make a list of the big scenes in the story that have major emotional and plot impact and surprise. In a romance, at least one of these is probably the first kiss or the first love scene. List 5 from your story.

- Scene 1 **Jazz and Luke connect romantically**

- Scene 2 **Luke finds out that Jazz isn't her 'real' name**

- Scene 3 **Jazz fails—Luke's daughter is kidnapped**

- Scene 4 **Jazz is accused of murder**

- Scene 5 **Jazz misses a shot and a SWAT member (Luke's brother is gravely injured)**

EXERCISE!

Comparison of Plotting Methods

Plot Method	Book's Journey				
Discovering Story Magic	Inciting Incident	First TP: first attack on character flaw	Second TP: second attack on character flaw aspect (more intensity)	Third TP: third attack on character flaw (even more intensity)	Fourth TP = Black Moment (worse thing that could happen to character) & Realization
	Inciting Incident	First change in the relationship where the character is forced into action	Typically the first real defeat. There is a change in plans for the character and reconsideration of the goals	Intense, major setback which will lead the character inexorably into the black moment	(same as above)
	Inciting Incident	TP 2 (either of above)	Midpoint Reversal (180 degrees from where protagonist began) Turn the goal or emotions upside down.	TP 3 (either of above)	(same as above)
Three-Act Structure	Set-up & Initiating Event	End of Act 1	Middle of Act 2 Reversal	End of Act 2 (cont) & Point of No Return	End of Act 3 (Crisis, Dark Moment, Climax, Resolution)
W-Diagram	Goal Recognition	Low Point	High Point	Rug Pull	Catastrophe, Struggle and Resolution
Hero's Journey	Ordinary world & call to adventure	Crossing first threshold	Test, Allies, Enemies	Approach to the innermost cave	Supreme Ordeal, Reward, Resurrection and Return

+ Identify YOUR Turning Points

- TP 1 **Jazz misses a shot and a SWAT member (Luke's brother is gravely injured) (she fails a teammate)**

- TP 2 **Jazz and Luke connect romantically (she lets herself love and risks Luke discovering the truth and caring about him)**

- TP 3 **Luke's daughter is kidnapped**

- TP 4 **Her past has caused Luke and his daughter to be 'killed'. She has failed. → She realizes that her past does not define who she is. Her actions do.**
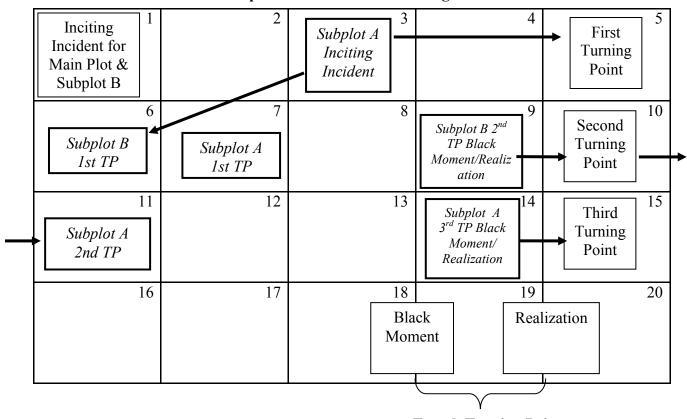
EXERCISE!

Interconnectivity of Turning Points

- Incorporating Subplots into Plots to Add Complexity to Your Story Using Story Board & Plot Lines **--Pantsters Beware here** ☺

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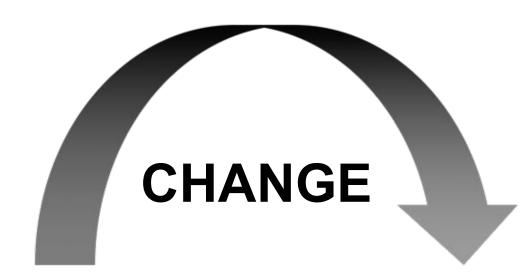**For a 20-Chapter Book with Four Turning Points**

1 Inciting Incident for Main Plot & Subplot B	**2**	**3** *Subplot A Inciting Incident*	**4**	**5** First Turning Point
6 *Subplot B 1st TP*	**7** *Subplot A 1st TP*	**8**	**9** *Subplot B 2nd TP Black Moment/Realization*	**10** Second Turning Point
11 *Subplot A 2nd TP*	**12**	**13**	**14** *Subplot A 3rd TP Black Moment/ Realization*	**15** Third Turning Point
16	**17**	**18** Black Moment	**19** Realization	**20**

Fourth Turning Point

Take Advantage of Arcs

- **Character Grid**
  - Inciting Incident
  - Long Range Goal
  - Short Range Goal
  - Character Flaw
  - Relationship Barrier
  - Black Moment
  - Realization

- **Story = Change**
  - Plot
  - Emotion
  - Character

CHANGE

+

Arcs

- **Polarity of Arcs**

- **Character, Scene, Chapter, Turning Points, Book**

- **Scene and Sequel**
  - Definition of Scene: GOAL – CONFLICT - DISASTER
  - Definition of Sequel: EMOTION – QUANDARY – DECISION – ACTION
  - Identify the Scene's Arc

Hope → Despair

Character, Book, TP, Chapter Scene Arcs

1 Story's Inciting Incident	2	3	4	5 First Turning Point
6	7	8	9	10 Mid or Second Turning Point
11	12	13	14	15 Third Turning Point
16	17	18 Black Moment	19 Realization	20

+ Arc of the Scene

- **Identify the Beginning of the Scene:**
  - Emotionally where your character <u>was</u>
  - Where your character is <u>presently</u> in the plot
  - Emotionally where your character is going by the end of the story

- **Identify the End of the Scene (before or after you write):**
  - Emotionally where your character <u>is</u>
  - Where your character is <u>now</u> in the plot
  - Emotionally where your character is going by the end of the story

Create Suspense

Keep Your Readers Up Until 4 AM

+

Suspense Through Words

- *"Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass." –Anton Chekhov*

- *"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug." – Mark Twain*

Suspense - Definition

- Keeps the reader turning the pages until 4 AM
  - Builds apprehension and anticipation in the minds of your readers
  - Think: Worry equals suspense
  - Always have an unanswered question in the reader's mind (What happens next?)

- Suspense builds as danger approaches and we care!

+ 4 Factors Create Suspense

- Reader Empathy → Character

- Reader Concern → Character, Conflict, Plot, Emotion, Hook

- Impending danger (emotional or physical) → Character, Plot, Hook, Emotion

- Escalating Tension → Plot, Surprises, Character Choices, Scene and Sequel, Turning Points, Hook, Word Choices

Keep Them Reading!

- If you don't hook your readers, they won't get into the story.

- If you don't drive the story forward by making readers worry about your main character, they won't have a *reason* to keep reading.

- The basic narrative fuel is always the **slow unveiling of the final answer.** (Lee Child) – if you want to build suspense, postpone it
    - Suspense happens in the moments between the promise of something dreadful and its arrival.

+ Five Ways to Create Suspense

- Hook the Reader

- Put character in physical or emotional jeopardy

- Surprise the reader

- Drive the Story Forward

- Escalate the Tension

+ Hook the Reader

- Beginning Hooks (chapters and scenes)
  - Openings are critical

- Ending Hooks (first page, third page, scene, chapter, book):
  - Threat of Danger (Emotional or Physical)
  - Shock Factor
  - Ending Question
  - Ending Prediction

- Let's look at some hooks!

Dialogue Only
Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card

"I've watched through his eyes, I've listened through his ears, and I tell you he's the one. Or at least as close as we're going to get."

"That's what you said about the brother."

"The brother tested out impossible. For other reasons. Nothing to do with his ability."

"Same with the sister. And there are doubts about him. He's too malleable. Too willing to submerge himself in someone else's will."

"Not if the other person is his enemy."
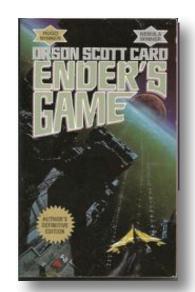
"So what do we do? Surround him with enemies all the time?"

"If we have to."

"I thought you said you liked the kid."
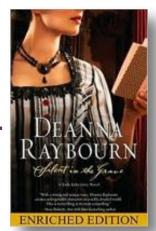
"If the buggers get him, they'll make me look like his favorite uncle."

"All right. We're saving the world, after all. Take him."

TYPE of Hook – Threat of Danger, Shock Factor

+ First person
Silent in the Grave by Deanna Raybourn

London 1886
Other sins only speak; murder shrieks out.—John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi

To say that I met Nicholas Brisbane over my husband's dead body is not entirely accurate. Edward, it should be noted, was still twitching upon the floor.

I stared at him, not quite taking in the fact that he had just collapsed at my feet. He lay, curled like a question mark, his evening suit ink-black against the white marble of the floor. He was writhing, his fingers knotted.

I leaned as close to him as my corset would permit.

"Edward, we have guests. Do get up. If this is some sort of silly prank—"

"He is not jesting, my lady. He is convulsing."
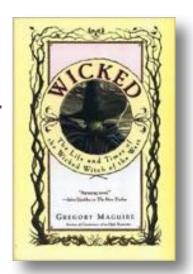
TYPE of Hook – Shock Factor

+ Omnicient

Wicked: The life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the west by Gregory Maguire

On the Yellow Brick Road
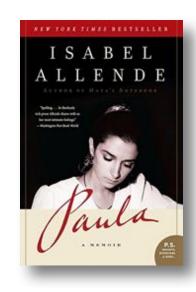
A mile above Oz, the Witch balanced on the wind's forward edge, as if she were a green fleck of the land itself, flung up and sent wheeling away by the turbulent air. White and purple summer thunderheads mounded around her. Below, the Yellow Brick Road looped back on itself, like a relaxed noose. Though winter storms and the crowbars of agitators had torn up the road, still it led, relentlessly, to the Emerald City. The Witch could see the companions trudging along, maneuvering around the buckled sections, skirting trenches, skipping when the way was clear. They seemed oblivious of their fate. But it was not up to the Witch to enlighten them.

Type of Hook – Ending

+ First Person
Paula: A Memoir by Isabel Allende (2014)

My soul is choking in sand. Sadness is a sterile desert. I don't know how to pray. I cannot string together two thoughts, much less immerse myself in creating a new book. I plunge into these pages in an irrational attempt to overcome my terror. I think that perhaps if I give form to this devastation I shall be able to help you, and myself, and that the meticulous exercise of writing can be a salvation. Eleven years ago I wrote a letter to my grandfather to say goodbye to him in death. On this January 8, 1992, I am writing to you, Paula, to bring you back to life.
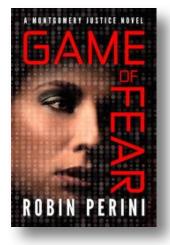
Type of Hook – Ending

Third Person
Game of Fear by Robin Perini (2014)

"You've figured it out already, haven't you, Zach?"

The excrement-flinging fan was winding up now.

"Spell it out for me. I'm feeling a little slow."

Whitney paled, then raised her chin. "Somehow I doubt that." She clicked her seat belt into place. "I'm your half sister," she said, her tone professional. "And before you ask, I'll tell you everything I know. Your parents separated for a short while. Your father got drunk, took my mother to bed one time, and I'm the result. Now that that little turd has been dropped into the punch bowl, we have more important things to worry about. Can we talk about Winslow?"

Type of Hook – Shock Factor, Ending Question

Is this a hook?

It was a cold and rainy day. Lyssa Cafferty walked down the street going home for the evening.

Secret Obsession (August 2014)

The sting of frozen rain pricked Lyssa Cafferty's cheeks, another attack couldn't prevent. She hurried from the L station toward her small Chicago apartment. If only she could pull her hood over her head, duck down and avoid the piercing needles of ice on her face, but then she'd lose her peripheral vision.

She couldn't afford to allow comfort to trump safety.

Not now. Not ever.

Openings and Application of SPICED

- Set the tone of your story

- Set reader expectations

- Hook them in!

- Now…apply SPICED!

The Day Life Changed (RS)

Diana approached the door with the same dread and fear that she had lived with for years.

Memories from within this room flooded her mind. The many times her husband had accused her of infidelity despite her never looking at another man since they had met. The times he knocked her down. Pinning her against the floor, he held her down… screaming at her. If she tried to argue with him, he held her down even tighter and screamed even louder. After they married, he seemed to have become very insecure, a totally different man from the one she had fallen in love. It was hard to understand why. He was tall, tanned and handsome.. A great man in international business. Max had always been prince charming in her life until they said "I do". She felt as if she was going to be physically sick every time she entered the main room of the house. Her fingertips trembled as she pressed them against the wood, slowly opening the heavy mahogany door onto a scene that she will never forget.

Blood was everywhere. Fear struck her as she gasped and looked deep into the room. The moonlight shining across the dark room revealed the spattering of deep red blood about the room….on the walls, on the keys of the piano, even smeared across the oil painting of her handsome husband that sat judgmentally over the fireplace. His cold eyes seemed to survey the scene with that smirk of a smile he used to charm others. His face wearing the same expression that he wore when he examined a business contract, or when he beat her. His expression never changed. Oh, how she hated him with such passion. Hard to imagine how she could love and hate such a man.

The moonlight shimmered against the large crystal chandelier in the center of the high ceiling revealing more blood. She wondered, *how could blood get on the chandelier and the painting*?

She was snatched out of her nightmarish daydreaming by a tiny, weak noise. It came from somewhere in the room, but she couldn't tell what made it. She knew she was not alone.

+ Create Characters Readers Care About

- ❖ Put them in jeopardy (physical and/or emotional)
  - ❖ Make it personal (not just a world in danger, Grandma lives there)
  - ❖ Isolate the character so choices are limited
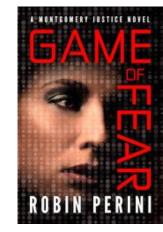
- ❖ GMC
  - ❖ Goal: How much a character cares about his goal is in direct proportion too how much the reader will care (Laura DeVries)
  - ❖ Motivation – why he wants it and what makes it important
  - ❖ Conflict – what's stopping him from getting it and what are the stakes (what terrible consequences will result if he doesn't get it?)

- ❖ Character Arc

- ❖ Surprise the Reader

Writing so Readers Care: Use S-P-I-C-E-D

❖ **S**pecificity (including senses)

❖ **P**owerful Verbs, etc.

❖ **I**mage-making and picture-forming words

❖ **C**ompelling Dialogue (Inner/Spoken)

❖ **E**nding Hooks (And Openings) aka Surprise

❖ **D**eep Point of View

Showing Character with Deep Point of View – An Example from Game of Fear (August 2014)

Finally reaching the landing, Deb slipped her key into the lock. Ashley better have a good reason for being here and not at her Air Force Academy dorm where she belonged.

Deb shoved the door open. Her sister jumped up from the beige corduroy couch like a gun had exploded in her ear. The textbook vaulted from her hand landing five feet away.
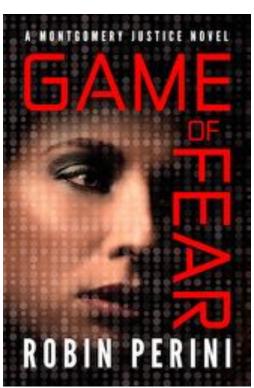
+ What do you know about Deb?

GAME OF FEAR

❖ SPICED in a single scene from Game of Fear – Montlake Romance, August 2014

❖ Brilliant kids from all over the country are disappearing after mastering the video game,
Point of Entry—but no one
knows why. Until now.

❖ Deb Lansing - Heroine

Care about the Character
SP**I**CED – **I**mage-making and Picture-forming words

The whirr of the circling Bell 212 helicopter rotors echoed through the cockpit. New Mexico's Wheeler Peak, barely visible in the dusk, loomed just east, its thirteen-thousand-foot summit laden with snow. Deborah Lansing leaned forward, the seat belt straps pulling at her shoulders.

Far, far to the west, the sun was just a sliver in the sky.

"It's almost dark, Deb. We have to land," Gene Russo, her local Search and Rescue contact, insisted.

Why do we care? Search and rescue, in jeopardy

Characters Must Have GMC

- GMC
  - Goal: How much a character cares about his goal is in direct proportion too how much the reader will care (Laura DeVries)
  - Motivation – why he wants it and what makes it important
  - Conflict – what's stopping him from getting it and what are the stakes (what terrible consequences will result if he doesn't get it?)

Care about the Character: GMC
SPICED - Compelling Dialogue (Inner/Spoken)

Deb squinted against the setting sun; her eyes burned with fatigue. They'd been at it for hours, but she couldn't give up. Not yet.

"All the other choppers have landed, Deb. This is too dangerous. Besides, do you really think your spotlight's going to find a snow-covered bus on the side of the mountain with all these trees?"

"Five more minutes. That's all I'm asking."

A metallic glint pierced through a thick carpet of snow-packed spruce.

"There! I saw something." Deb's adrenaline raced as she shoved the steering bar to the right and down, using the foot pedals to maintain control.

"Holy crap, Lansing. What are you doing?" Gene shouted, holding on to his seat harness. "You trying to get us killed?"

Surprise the Reader

❖ Character Surprises – character vs. characterization
  ❖ Who your character appears to be, isn't who he is.
  ❖ Emotional responses

❖ Plot Surprises
  ❖ Set up expectations and keep your promises in unexpected ways
    ❖ List of 20
  ❖ Shift the character's reality
  ❖ Push the readers' emotional buttons
    ❖ Actions don't drive the story; actions drive emotion; emotions drive the story (Laura Baker)

Character Surprise
SPICED – Deep Point of View (Character)

He [Russo] didn't understand. The bird knew exactly what Deb wanted, and she didn't leave people behind to die. Not after Afghanistan. She had enough ghosts on her conscience. She tilted the chopper forward and came around again, sidling near the road toward Taos Ski Valley where the church bus had been headed before it had vanished.

Plot Surprises
SPICED – Powerful Verbs, etc.

She dipped the chopper, scouring the terrain with the spotlight. A metallic flash pierced her gaze once again. "Gene, did you see that? Just south?"

The gray-faced spotter shook his head. "No, I'm too busy trying not to puke all over your windows." He swallowed deeply and adjusted his microphone. "Could you fly this thing steady for a while?"

+ Drive the Story Forward

- Actions don't drive the story.
  Actions drive emotions.
  Emotions drive the story!

Motivated Drama

Drive the Story Forward

❖ Scene and Sequel
   ❖ Definition of Scene: GOAL – CONFLICT – DISASTER
   ❖ Definition of Sequel: EMOTION – QUANDARY – DECISION – ACTION
   ❖ Arc of the Scene

❖ Let the reader in on a secret so they worry about what's coming
   ❖ Anticipation of difficulties to come

❖ Each time you remove an obstacle, uncover one more.
   ❖ This works best if a character's choice causes the dilemma

❖ Surprise the Reader
   ❖ List of 20

+ Revision

- Big Stuff (everything we've talked about)

- Small stuff
  - Dialogue is the best way to show character and emotion
  - Can you tell whose POV it is?
  - Is there a 'zinger' on every page
  - Word Choices
  - Active Words

- Activate Your Writing

Drive the Story Forward
SPICED – Specificity (including senses)

Gene groaned. "Deb, I know you're used to Denver terrain, but you can't treat the Sangre de Cristo Mountains this way. These gullies and drafts can buffet a chopper, especially in some of the gorges. Your lift will disappear, and you'll fly into the mountain."

A peak rose toward them, and Deb pulled up on the collective control stick. The Bell followed her lead easily, but the sun was gone now. The near-total darkness made flying treacherous. The moon was the only thing making the deadly terrain remotely visible outside the spotlight's range.

"At least there aren't Stingers or RPGs shooting at us," she said.

Drive the Story Forward

SPIC**E**D - **E**nding Hooks (And Openings) aka Surprises!

The chopper touched down, and Deb jumped to the snow-packed ground, ignoring the cold around her. For now, she had people to save. As Deb and Gene yanked out the sled to transport the wounded, two men ran toward her, one whose forehead was caked with dried blood.

"Please, we need help. Some of the kids are hurt bad. They need a hospital."

Deb scanned the inside of the chopper. How many could she fit and safely make it back? If she left equipment behind, she could carry someone extra. Her boss would be furious she'd taken the risk, but she'd worry about her job later.

+ What do you know about Deb and the Story?

+ Activate your Writing

- **Read for pacing and compelling storytelling**
    - Dialogue is the best way to show character and emotion. Get rid of introspection if possible.
    - Is there a "zinger" on every page?
    - Is the POV character the right one?
    - Can you tell whose POV character it is on every page?
    - Symptoms of Lack of Conflict
        - Is there repetitious dialogue? (no conflict development)
        - Tack on other issues
    - Have I braided internal and external conflict (do they lead to each other?

- **Three Versions (Activate the story (from telling to showing)**

First Draft - The Cerebral Version

Damn Richard St. James to hell. He'd slaughtered them--he'd slaughtered them all.

Jaw clenched with fury, ~~Jonathan Price urged the horse he'd commandeered at the last posting stop forward.~~ His hands and cloak were soaked with blood. He had to get home. He could only pray he wasn't too late.

The sky billowed with black clouds, and little light illuminated the old Roman road he raced down. His heart pounded, and agony ripped through his chest.

He'd witnessed carnage during the war. Waterloo had been a bloodbath, but Anne should never have witnessed the massacre she'd seen tonight. Until a few hours ago, his fiancée had known nothing of the brutality of man.

St. James had changed her--forever. The bastard.

Anne's family--murdered in cold blood. All of them, down to her young sister barely out of the crib.

Jonathan's stomach wretched at the memory of the Cavanaugh's laid out in front of their home like some gruesome message, their throats torn open as if an animal had feasted. But even that hadn't shredded his heart like Anne's mewing cries as he'd cradled her in his arms. He just prayed her family in York would be able to heal her mind, even if her heart were forever broken.

+ Second Draft

Damn Richard St. James to hell.

He'd slaughtered them. He'd slaughtered them all save one.

A mist of night smoldered the burning remains of the Price family home, and Jonathan blinked through the soot streaking the land that had once been the family's pride and joy. He breathed in, willing the nausea churning his stomach to not desecrate this place. They deserved better.

Jaw clenched, he forced himself to stare into their sightless eyes one by one. His father, his mother, his young sister. Lined up in a row, their bodies were darkened with ash, the only color, the red seeping from their shredded throats.

But that wasn't the worst of it. St. James hadn't just killed them--he'd tortured and humiliated them. Jonathan couldn't bear the thought of what the bastard had done. His young brother, Edward, by happenstance still at Eton, would never know, Jonathan vowed.

With care, he covered his young sister's bare body, and concealed his mother's naked torso with her decimated gown. As for Jonathan's father, St. James had emasculated him, the blood soaking his pants.

Deep fury, like Jonathan had never imagined, even on the bloodiest Waterloo battlefield, skewered his gut like a thousand splinters of glass.

+ Activated Draft

Jonathan Price hurled himself through the fiery hallway, clutching his sister's limp body close to his heart. "Don't give up, Elizabeth." His desperate plea was swallowed by the hellish roar of the inferno crackling around him. Blistering heat seared his hands and face. Black roiling smoke scorched his lungs.

Maddened with grief, he kicked the flaming debris from the doorway and burst into the rainy night. He staggered across the muddy yard, and coughing and hacking, fell to his knees before laying his sister on the sodden grass.

The fire illuminated the vicious wound on her neck, and then her sightless eyes.

Dear God, what manner of beast had done this? Torn the very skin from her throat, killed her with no mercy?

He whirled toward Price Manor. The blaze erupted from every window and door, scarlet serpents of flame devouring all in their path, engulfing everything.

Where was the rest of his family? The servants, the butler, even the scullery maid? Had they escaped or had the beast killed them, too?

"Please." He raced back toward the house, only to be grabbed and flung to the cobblestones. Dazed and gasping for air, Jonathan peered up at the cloaked shape looming over him.

"You cannot save anyone, you fool. They're all dead. Your family, and Lady Anne's as well."
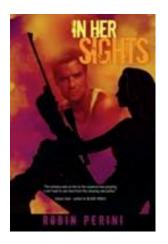
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Activate Your Writing

- **Use powerful, picturing-forming and image-making words**

- **Evoke emotions with your word choices**

- **Excuse me, your research is showing….**

- **Interpreting scenes through the genre and the viewpoint characters' emotions**

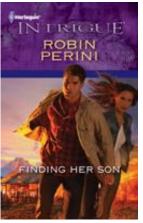- **Deep Point of View – critical to active and emotional writing**

Conclusion

❖ **Trust your instincts**

❖ **Find Your Own Process and Don't Edit Out the Passion**

  ❖ **Let your Voice Shine Through.**

  ❖ **It's YOUR story, but always ask WHY?!**

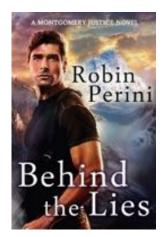 ❖ **Ray Bradbury says, "There is only one type of story in the world--YOUR story."**
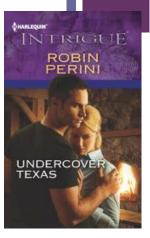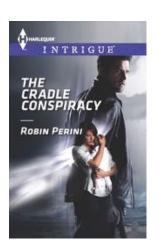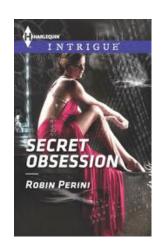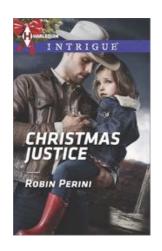
Q&A and Drawing

- **www.robinperini.com**

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Backups

+ VERSION 1 (The Cerebral Version)

"Remind me again why you thought spending Thanksgiving with them would be a good idea?" Josh Wentworth grumbled, as he flipped on the windshield wipers to batten away the snowflakes that were coming down faster. The SUV curved through the Denver traffic and he took the Quincy exit. "It'll be a disaster. It always is. I don't want Joshua's first Thanksgiving to be more like a root canal than a celebration."

Emily Wentworth shot her husband a frustrated glance. "Our one-month old won't be warped. Besides, your parents deserve to get to know their new grandson." An overwhelming sense of rightness filled her as she glanced at the baby in the backseat, his cheeks rosy with warmth as he slept. "With Ryan deployed overseas, your family's all he's got."

VERSION 2 (Honing in on More Important Details)

Eric Wentworth was dying. He didn't have to see the stop sign's shaft penetrating his chest or the blood pulsing from the wound. Strange, though. He felt no pain, but he could feel his life slipping away as surely as the ravaging winter wind whistled through his crumpled car.

He wasn't ready to die. Not yet. He had a wife who loved him and a new baby boy he'd just met. He couldn't leave them alone and unprotected.

"Eric?"

He struggled to turn his head toward his wife's weak cry.

+ VERSION 3 – Final Version
(Active Writing Utilizing Deep Point of View)

This is the prologue that won the Golden Heart in 2011
and sold to Harlequin Intrigue.

Icy wind howled through the SUV's shattered windshield, spraying glass and freezing sleet across Eric Wentworth's face. He struggled in and out of consciousness. Flashes of memory struck. Oncoming headlights on the wrong side of the road. Skidding tires on black ice. The baby's cries. Emily's screams.

Oh, God.

Why couldn't he focus? Above the wind, he heard only silence, then an ominous gurgling sound from his lungs. He shifted his head slightly to check on his wife, and a knifelike pain seared his neck. He stopped, staring in horror at the shaft of metal guardrail penetrating his chest. Blood pulsed from the wound, but he couldn't feel it. He couldn't feel anything.

Eric was dying. And it was no accident. He hadn't taken the threats seriously, hadn't told Emily what he'd done. Why they were all in danger.

Avoid Repetition

Chap. & Start Pg	Time	Plot Points by Scene	Conflict (with focus on Romantic Conflict)	Jazz Knows (Plot-Tower, Ray, Past)	Luke Knows (Plot-Tower, Ray, Past)	Lisa Knows (Plot-Past, Tower, Ray.)
Prol.	Day 1--AM (midmorning)-Friday	Jazz saves Gov's daughter.	He leveled her defenses 2 years ago, and he's the last person she should ever be involved with.	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing
1-p.4	Day 2--AM-Saturday	Sarge calls Jazz in. Tells her about Tower investigation.	We know she had feelings for Luke and for some reason believes he has something she can never have.	No promotion. Tower is investigating her. Worried about past coming up.	Nothing	Has Seen Article, Furious, Plans Revenge (List done). Heard Tower's rant re: Jazz, Article. Use him.
	Day 2--AM	She comes out. Tower is in there sitting at her desk with Luke's article. Lisa has been there, too. Shows her Luke's article. Use some of interaction from workout room. What are you trying to do, be the only star?	Luke wrote the article and it's compromised her promotion and hiding her identity.	Tower is trying to instigate something. Some forced laughter by team.	Nothing	Lisa Sabotages Gun (goes with Tower)
	Day 2--PM (Almost end of work day.)	Start with him and how important the truth is. Jazz confronts Luke about the article. (Does she lie to him about the reason--white lie)	Unwanted attraction. Confrontation about 'You're the last person I wanted to see. You're the last person I wanted to write an article about. You made it clear you didn't want me. She sees Joy's picture. (dagger to the heart)	Doesn't want attention focused on her for 2 reasons: team and past. (she must be cautious).	Luke knows something about article, and questions has spooked her.	

The Power of Your Story

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

- *"In fiction, we put one or two aspects of life under or 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

+ 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?