

Treasure ho! Mapping Your Way to Story

"Write Your Novel Now"
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Overview

- Touching base
- How are we feeling about our plots?
- Which models did we use?
- Let's share!

Mapping Our Trip: The Scenes Between

- We know what landmarks we'll be visiting on our trip (Hero's Journey or Story Circle)
- But how do we get from one landmark to another? Individual scenes!
- Defining scene as a discrete storytelling unit
 - Contained action-reaction chain
 - Some think of "action" scenes and "reaction" scenes
 - I prefer to keep these chains generally (almost always) within the same scene
 - "But what about cliffhangers?"
 - Often in a single setting (but not always)
 - Distinction between scene and setting
 - Important for intra-scene structure
- What is "intra-scene structure?"
 - The five core components of scene structure
 - Important to ensure every scene counts
 - Economical storytelling
 - Advancing on multiple fronts (character, plot, theme)
 - Ensures furtherance of momentum

The Five Core Components of Scene Structure

Setting

- Location, location, location
- Pushing past the ordinary
 - Restaurants, bars, cafés
 - These are relatable, convenient meet-up places, and instances where art imitates life, but

- these locales often lack uniqueness, fail to maximize tension, and prohibit full immersion in the uniqueness of our worlds
- Exceptions
 - *Cheers*
 - *Friends*
 - *Seinfeld*
 - Why might these not be great comparisons, however?
- “Okay, but there are exceptions in literature, too.”
 - Yes, but which do you remember most? Why?
 - Are your restaurants, cafes, and bars going to do the same amount of heavy lifting?
 - They can, but this is but one factor worth considering where scene is concerned
- **Guideline:** If a scene can take place in any other setting, it’s not happening in the right setting
 - This is admittedly stringent
 - But that’s why it’s a *guideline*, not a rule
- Setting as a source of tension
 - Can it amp up the pressure on our characters?
 - What role is it playing in affecting internal and external conflicts?

Checkpoint: How many scenes in your current work in progress take place in a restaurant, bar, or café? Could they take place somewhere else? How might changing the setting better enrich characterization, advance plot, or strengthen theme?

Exercise: Imagine the first scene for the [character] we’ve been working with. Where does your book open? What corner of your [character]’s ordinary world will we see?

Goal

- A scene’s first heartbeat
 - Sense of direction
 - Makes promise to reader
 - Maintains focus for readers, our characters, *and us*
- What does our protagonist want?
 - What are they *actively* trying to achieve *in this scene*?
 - Goals achieved or failed in one scene connect to goals in subsequent scenes
 - Checkpoints along the way with increasing stakes
 - Importance of *actively* trying to achieve in that scene

- Avoiding character-as-proxy-for-reader scenarios
- What do *other characters* want?
 - How might this contribute to tension and conflict?

Exercise: What does your [character] want to do in your book's first scene? What are they trying to achieve in their ordinary world on your first page?

Conflict

- What's going to stop, obstruct, or prevent our [character] from achieving their goal in this scene?
 - This is *not* just characters arguing, fighting, or drawing lines in the sand
 - Conflict must pertain to character's most-immediate goal
- Sources of conflict
 - Conflicting goals
 - Collaborative goals
- Conflicting goals
 - Protagonist versus antagonizing force
 - Defining "antagonizing force"
 - Internal
 - External
 - *Active* opposition to each other
 - Examples
 - Emma Donoghue's *Room*
- Collaborative goals
 - Protagonist and allied force have goal in common
 - Conflict arises due to disagreement about how to achieve goal
 - Allied forces does *not* always equal ally
 - Examples
 - *Game of Thrones* - Arya and the Hound
 - *Accounting for It All* and fatal flaws as antagonizing forces
 - Two halves of the protagonist
 - Short-sighted Robin
 - Long-term Robin
 - Both halves want stability and safety
 - One half will lie or conceal to achieve this in the short run
 - The other half pushes for full disclosure
 - This leads to inner turmoil, a character that is "torn"

Exercise: What is going to stop, obstruct, or prevent your [character] from achieving their scene's stated goal? Will it be an external or internal conflict, or will it be both? Will conflicting or collaborative goals be the source of this consternation?

Resolution

- Conclusion to goal-conflict tug of war
- Does *not* mean destination has been reached or goal has been achieved
- Instead, it's the resolution of intra-scene tension
- Diversity of outcome
 - Not an all-or nothing proposition
 - Both characters fall on their butts
 - Ceding battles to win wars

Exercise: In your [character]'s opening scene, what will the resolution be to their goal-conflict tug of war? Will they have achieved their goal? What will they have gained by the scene's resolution? What might they have lost?

Cliffhanger | Pivot Point | Change Moment

- Fifth core component is subdivided into three possibilities
- What do all of these likely have in common?

Cliffhangers

- Character or world in peril
 - *in media res* in reverse, basically
- Danger! Danger! Danger!
 - Pushing past the ordinary
 - But let's keep it grounded in our story
- Clichés
 - Fainting or blacking out
 - A telephone rings
 - Literally hanging from a cliff
- What makes these effective?

Pivot Point

- The plot takes a new direction
 - New goal for character *or*
 - More nuanced understanding of current goal
- Alternatively–
 - Defeat has character questioning strategy
 - Or a win that comes at a cost does the same
- What makes these effective? In what ways is this effectiveness similar to that of cliffhangers? In what ways is it different?

Change Moment

- *Character change*
 - Incremental shift in characterization
 - Lessons learned
 - Self-reflection
- *Examples*
 - *Deadwood*
 - *GLOW*
- What makes these effective? In what ways is this effectiveness similar to that of cliffhangers and pivot points? In what ways is it different?

Combo Time!

- Cliffhangers as the Lone Ranger
 - Action sans reaction
 - Reaction as the heart of change moments and pivot points
- Change Moments and Pivot Points
 - Elements of both can happen
 - Change moment can lead to pivot point

Notes on Diversity

- Varying cliffhanger, change moment, and pivot point endings
- Avoiding over-predictability
- Prevents reader fatigue (cliffhangers)
- Ensures we're developing character and shifting plot
- Need variation not only in endings used, by manifestation thereof
 - How many scenes end with a phone call or text message?
 - How many scenes see their conflict introduced with the same?
 - How many times can we keep relying on this?

Exercise: How does your [character]'s opening scene end? Is it with a cliffhanger, a pivot point, a change moment, or a combination of these last two? What might come next based on this scene's final beat? How is this empowering you and your readers?

Outlining for Scene

SETTING:

GOAL:

CONFLICT:

RESOLUTION:

CLIFFHANGER | CHANGE MOMENT | PIVOT POINT:

- Every scene. Every time. All the way to the end.
- Trusting the process—at least until the unforeseen arises

Analysis and Further Examples

Example One

Setting

Loren and Carlos walking along the riverfront.

Goal

Carlos wants to propose to Loren.

Conflict

Carlos has had proposals turned down in the past (internal).

Resolution

Carlos proposes.

Cliffhanger | Change Moment | Pivot Point

Loren says “yes.” Carlos has taken a big step in overcoming his anxiety.

Example Two, Scene One

Setting

Loren and Carlos walking along the riverfront.

Goal

Carlos wants to propose to Loren.

Conflict

Carlos has had proposals turned down in the past (internal).

Stray dog comes up alongside them. Loren becomes distracted (external).

Resolution

Carlos resolves to put off proposing.

Cliffhanger | Change Moment | Pivot Point

Something scares dog, dog falls into river, Carlos goes in after dog.

Example Two, Scene Two

Setting

Carlos in river.

Goal

Save dog!

Conflict

River is moving fast (external).

Carlos must confront reality that this could be the end for him, for the dog, for his life with Loren (internal).

Resolution

Carlos saves dog!

Cliffhanger | Change Moment | Pivot Point

Carlos, despite having lost ring in river, realizes he can no longer put this off. He proposes. Loren says yes.

What might come next? Can we see how all of this will build?

For Next Week

- Outline as many scenes as you can
- At least the first five for your novel
- Feeling stuck?
 - Jump ahead to one of your plot points and connect the scenes between it and another nearby plot point
 - Remember, you're not locked into anything here
- "An outline's not a contract."

Until next week...

WRITE ON AND WRITE WELL.

