

¿Qué tipo de idea? Las premisas dramáticas o tramas de Ronald Tobias. (20 Master Plots: and how to build them)

**1.- Búsqueda.** *El Mago de Oz. Don Quijote.*

Distingue entre el propósito (objeto buscado) y motivación (el porqué de la búsqueda). El protagonista regresa siempre al punto de partida y atraviesa un proceso de maduración interior.

**2.- Aventura.** *En busca del Arca Perdida. Las minas del Rey Salomón. Parque Jurásico.*

No confundir con la búsqueda, pues el énfasis no recae en el protagonista ni en su transformación, sino en el viaje mismo.

**3.- Persecución.** *Terminator. El fugitivo. Bonnie & Clyde.*

Fases: Reglas de la persecución, cacería y fin de la persecución. La caza es más importante que quienes participan en ella.

**4.- Rescate.** *Centauros del desierto. Alien. La princesa prometida.*

Se explora un mundo mientras el protagonista trata de salvar a alguien o a algo. Dependen del antagonista. Fases: separación, persecución y confrontación héroe y villano.

**5.- Huida.** *Chicken Run. El expreso de medianoche. Cadena perpetua.*

La víctima se rescata a sí misma. El héroe es la víctima. Fases: Protagonista encarcelado, encierro y plan de fuga, y huida (el plan definitivo suele fracasar).

**6.-Venganza.** *Hamlet. Gladiador.*

La sangre llama a la justicia. Fases: Crimen, plan de venganza y lucha vengador criminal.

**7.- Enigma.** *Memento. Diez negritos. El halcón maltés. Chinatown.*

Estructura de rompecabezas. Es necesario camuflar la información importante con naturalidad.

**8. Rivalidad.** *Ben-Hur*

Los personajes persiguen el mismo objetivo, por una motivación particular. Las curvas de ascenso y descenso de los protagonistas se cruzan.

**9.- Desvalido.** *Rocky. La Cenicienta. Karate Kid.*

El más débil de la competición vence gracias a la lucha final en igualdad de condiciones.

**10.- Tentación.** *Fausto. Amadeus.*

Supone la ruptura de un código moral que debe ser observado por el protagonista.

**11.- Metamorfosis.** *Drácula. La bella y la bestia.*

Un personaje cambia de apariencia, y esto se refleja en su vida interior. Fases: maldición que se cura con el amor, aproximación de las partes en conflicto y crisis final.

**12.- Transformación.** *Estación central de Brasil. My Fair Lady.*

El personaje hace un examen interior y termina conociéndose a sí mismo. Se centra en adultos en proceso de cambio.

**13.- Maduración.** *Cuenta conmigo. El indomable Will Hunting.*

Similar a la transformación pero aplicada a niños y adolescentes. Fases: Estabilidad (infancia), ruptura (en otro mundo), rechazo de la nueva situación y desarrollo de un nuevo sistema de creencias, puesto a prueba.

**14.- Amor.** *La reina de África. Noche de reyes. Algo para recordar.*

Chico conoce a chica, pero... Se trata de buscar obstáculos a ese amor.

**15.- Amor prohibido.** *Romeo y Julieta. West Side Story. El jorobado de Notre-Dame. Ana Karenina. Titanic.*

La historia amorosa provoca la ruptura de una regla social, cultural o moral.

**16.- Sacrificio.** *La milla verde. Solo ante el peligro. Casablanca. La vida es bella.*

Inmolación del protagonista en pro de una persona o causa mayor. Fases: Principios del protagonista, dilema moral que se opone al instinto de conservación y sacrificio.

**17.- Descubrimiento.** *El protegido. Lo que queda del día. Edipo Rey.*

El objetivo del personaje es entender el sentido de la vida a través de una purificación interior. Fases: El personaje antes de la revelación, incertidumbre (análisis del personaje reticente al cambio) y enseñanza.

**18.- Precio del exceso.** *Apocalypse Now. Wall Street. Macbeth.*

El autor trata de llegar a los extremos de una inquietud, y analiza lo que empuja hacia esos extremos (vicio, avaricia, guerra...) Puede darse en personajes ordinarios en mundos extraordinarios, o viceversa. Fases: Estabilidad, pérdida gradual del control y pérdida absoluta y consecuencias.

**19 y 20.- Ascenso y caída.** Historias morales de personajes que se purifican o envilecen.

Ascenso (parábola): *La ley del silencio, El hombre elefante.* Descenso (cuento moralizante): *El padrino, Ciudadano Kane.*

## Master Plot #1: Quest

The quest is the "search for a person, place or thing, tangible or intangible." Specifically, the main character is looking for that certain something that they expect or hope will change their life.

### Structure of the Quest

**Act one** is setup, where the hero(ine) gets the royal boot -- "a force moves him to act, either out of necessity or desire." There is usually a major event or incident, a "motivating incident", which shapes and foreshadows the rest of the quest. Don't forget the sidekicks, good buddies, and other traveling companions. There is almost a natural magnetism about a person setting out on a quest that pulls a suitable cast of helpers out of the fields, woods, and other secret places. After act one, the reader should be asking "Will (fill in your protagonist's name here) find the (fill in desired object of quest)?"

**Act two** is where we wander through wonders, disappointments, and delays. We run into difficulties, obstacles, those little "experiences" that make your character show their mettle in interesting ways.

**Act three!** Do we reach the goal (get the gold, find the lost treasure, etc.)? And when we do, what happens? "It isn't unusual in this type of plot for there to be additional complications as a result of obtaining the goal. Things aren't what the hero expected them to be, and it could be that what the hero was searching for all this time wasn't what she really wanted. But there is the moment of realization, which is an insight made by the hero about the nature and meaning of the quest itself."

### Checklist:

1. What is the object of the quest? How does it relate to the intent and motivation of the main character?
2. Where is the quest going to take the main character? Why? What do they learn, what changes occur, how are they prepared for the finale? We should wander through strange lands and outrageous situations, and every one of them should tie into the final effort, the final realization when the goal is won (or lost!).
3. Are we leaving home and returning there? Or at least starting and ending in the "same" place? How are the changes in the character displayed against that backdrop?
4. What or who does the main character become? How are they different?
5. What is the "wisdom" which the hero "comes to realize" from the search? Does a child become an adult? Does an adult learn something about life?
6. Make sure your beginning provides solid motivation to initiate the search. And make sure the readers knows why your character is setting out. Just because there is a quest waiting doesn't mean every person will set out on it, so give your character solid reasons for leaving.
7. Think about the traveling companion, the foil for conversation, insight, even emotions. Who are they? Why are they traveling with the big oaf?
8. What is the revelation or realization that the main character finds?
9. Don't forget--what the main character finds (both in object and realization) is often something different than they expected originally. The treasure on the hill might be a philosophic work, for example.

1. Let's start with a character. Your choice.

2. Now write one sentence about what this character needs to learn.

Perhaps they haven't found out that other people hurt? Or maybe they just need to learn that what they want doesn't come by wishing?

1. The best things in life are free

2. The bluebird of happiness is sitting in your own backyard
  3. Parents are people too
  4. Home is where the heart is
  5. Don't burn your bridges until you get across them
  6. Learning grows out of the broken shells of mistakes
3. Back up a step. What kind of specific person, place or thing could they be searching for that would teach them that lesson? Make a list of five people, places or things they could be searching for. Pick one that you like.
1. an animal (pet? rare breed for xxx? you decide...)
  2. a place that matches the ... (picture? memory? description?)
  3. the almost forgotten relative (teacher, etc. pick the relation)
  4. a dreamed of place... (with shades of ancient myths peering over your shoulder)
  5. the fabled jewel of Apt (with amazing properties, more valuable than your dreams, and...)
  6. the cure for (pick a condition. does the character suffer or)
4. What can the search itself teach them? Again, try making a list of five possible lessons the search could teach them (which may reflect, diverge, or have some other relationship to what the character thought they were searching for or learning). Pick one that you like.[aphorisms and other simplifications of life available from horoscopes, books of quotations, and similar sources near you.]

## Master Plot #2: Adventure

The Quest is a character plot, a plot of the mind. The adventure, in contrast, is an action plot, a plot of the body. The difference is that in the quest, we are watching a person making a journey; in the adventure, our attention is on the journey. Exotic, strange, dangerous, new! A venture into the unknown, a look at the unexpected or unusual...

The Plot in Outline:

1. Set the scene and motivate the adventurer. Consider the "unwilling" adventurer and the "willing, even eager" adventurer—often the same person starts as one, then becomes the other.
2. On the journey. Events, difficulties, excitement. Don't forget to put some thought into reasons for your hero(ine) to be venturing into the wilderness.
3. We have arrived (somewhere). Fairly often, there are also romantic twinings and other rewards to having gotten there.

Checklist

1. Focus on the journey more than the person
2. The story concerns a foray into the world, to new, strange places and events.
3. Fortune is "out there," not at home—we have to search for it
4. Give your hero(ine) a good kick by someone or something to start the adventure
5. Make sure that your acts have some cause-and-effect links – watch out for the overly episodic adventure.
6. Your hero(ine) may not change much. It goes with the territory.
7. Don't forget the seasonings--romance, suspense, etc.

Okay, it must be time to play.

1. A kitchen (four star restaurant? truck stop? The golden barfers? You decide)
2. backstage (at the all nude review? Broadway? rather far off Broadway, in our own little high school? pick one)
3. at a shelter (homeless? running away from home? pick the shelter...)

4. in the mink-wrapped lap of luxury (homes of the rich and famous, you know the type)
5. in a home (you pick the family, you pick the striations of wildness and oddity, you design the little steps that lead from the common world outside into the heart of deepest, strangest suburbia...no one knows what goes on behind... picture windows?)
6. institution (school, prison, asylum, monastery or other place, at your insinuation)

So we have a bit of a framework for where we might go. Take a moment and think about the character(s) in your world. Remember that we want them to explore this strange new world, to go boldly where we dare not peek.

Stop now and consider at least five wonder enriched moments (touched by a rainbow? spangled with silver bangles? full of the finest whipped lard? You decide what makes these moments, views, escapees from the cupboards, or other touches of drama truly esoteric and lightful—delight must be the lack of light, right, so these are lightful?) Ponder them, smell their savory excitement, and then pick...the best two or three.

And back up one more step, pick a number from one to six:

1. To help a friend
2. To win a bet (on a dare? you betcha!)
3. Because someone said "You can't!"
4. Following someone (something? the flickering shadow of the little man that wasn't there?)
5. You answered the phone (read the message, read the closed captioning?) and it said to go...
6. To get away from...(daddy? the bent nose boys? the rat race of daily life, rolling along in its ruts...)

Pick your number, please?

1. an arroyo - a steep-sided gully in an arid region, carved by heavy rains
2. a caldera - large basin formed by the explosion and collapse of the center of a volcano
3. a fen - low boggy land partly covered by water
4. the weald - forest, wilderness; rolling, upland region of woods
5. a pool - a deep, quiet place in a stream; a small body of water
6. an estuary - the point where the river mouth meets sea's tide; the arm of the sea at the river mouth

Okay? That's the place we're going to end up. Note that it need not be literal, it may be a metaphorical background enveloping the apparent physical setting, but think about that natural resting place, that peaceful presence as something that flavors the last act of your tale.

Got it? Pick your characters, move them out, take a walk on the weird side of life, and end with a grand trope, trope, trope the metaphors are roiling, a simile of place that resounds within the echoing minds of your readers...let the adventure begin!

### **Plot #3: Pursuit:**

"The pursuit plot is the literary version of hide-and-seek." "The basic premise of the plot is simple: One person chases another. All you need is a cast of two: the pursuer and the pursued. Since this is a physical plot, the chase is more important than the people who take part in it."

First phase: establish the situation, who is running and who is chasing, and why? Stakes? Motivating incident?

Second phase: the thrill of the chase! twists, turns, reversals, death-defying plunges, narrow squeaks, and that's just the beginning!

Third phase: the resolution. Are they caught? Or do they escape?

The cardinal rule: Don't Bore the Reader!



The tension is greatest at the moment just before it seems capture is inevitable. Wham! Foiled again, and off and running....

Don't forget confinement—limit the motion, and feel the tension mount.

Checklist:

1. The chase is more important than the people, so stress it.
2. Make sure the pursued is really in danger of getting caught.
3. Give the pursuer a reasonable chance of catching the pursued; even let her catch him...for a moment.
4. Physical action!
5. Make sure the twists and characters are stimulating, engaging, and unique—the plot surely isn't.
6. Develop characters and situations against type to head off cliches at the pass (ouch!)
7. Make the area of the chase as confined and tight as feasible.
8. In the beginning, make sure the reader knows the ground rules for the chase, the stakes involved, and the motivating incident that starts the race.

First, how about picking a number from one to six?

1. a horse
2. a frog
3. a cat
4. a snake
5. a monkey
6. a fish

Now, before we go any farther, take your animal in mind and consider it.

What breed is it? What color eyes does it have? How old is it? Think about its life—what sets it apart from the rest of the...herd, lily pad gang, backalley slinkers, jungle drapery, swingers, or school? And with that in mind—What kinds of locomotion does it use? What kinds of motivations? What pursues it? Make up a list of at least five points about the way this animal travels.

Second, let's pick again (one to six, if you please?):

1. to get the answer
2. to stop a crime
3. to overcome one's fears
4. to give them the object
5. to keep them from revealing the answer
6. out of anger

This, in case you can't guess, is a bit of motivation. Pick a pair of characters (type, age, and other characteristics at your discretion.

You may even elect to have more than two, if you like.) Flip a coin to decide who is going to chase who. And take your motivation and think it through. Why is this going to motivate the chase? What is involved? What kind of incident could unveil the characters and their chase, clearly and quickly?

You may want to stop at this point and do some dreaming about the chase itself. Think about some incidents along the way, some skids and twists that might happen. Think about surprising the reader, making them duck as the skeleton falls out of the ceiling or jump wildly as the shotgun blasts away on hitting the concrete floor... (one approach is to list about five different twists, then throw out a couple and focus on the real winners. Think about order—start with a little twist, raise the stakes and the involvement, then get into a little more white-knuckle stuff, back off, and slide right into a real cruncher...

One more little tidbit to color your mentation (yes, one to six!):

1. birling -- log rolling, or log birling; turning a log underfoot as it floats, which loggers known as river drivers did as work and sport.
2. clip a brand -- to cut away a critter's hair, grown long during the winter, to get a good look at the brand.

3. ear down -- to twist or bite the ears of a horse to get him to stand still; said especially of broncos, where one cowboy ears down the horse while another saddles it for a first ride. Horses that are often eared down and thus wary of having their ears touched are called ear-soured.
4. hidalgo – In the south-west, a Hispanic landowner, usually an aristocrat. Borrowed from Spanish, it's generally pronounced by Americans with an h, Hee-DAHL-goh.
5. muckamuck (1) In Chinook jargon, food. (2) In verb form, to eat. High muckamuck (also from the Chinook term) is a derisive expression for a person of importance.
6. praying cow – A cow that's getting up. The critter rises hind end up and the cow momentarily looks like it's on its knees.

Take your animal. Don't tell us about it, but do use that wily nature as the background for the chase. Think about the motivation, maybe review the checklist provided above. And don't forget that touch of Wild West color, smearing across the watercolors of your creation.

## Plot #4: Rescue:

The hero(ine) of the rescue plot must go out into the world, searching for someone or something, and often involving chases. It is usually a physical plot, depending heavily on action. But this is also a plot that relies heavily on three characters and the dynamic among them. The hero(ine), the antagonist, and the victim.

Protagonist: has an attachment to the person who is sought (love, or sometimes something a bit less lofty--money will do in a pinch) and therefore sets out to find and rescue the victim. Almost always has to go somewhere that they are not familiar with, putting them at a disadvantage. [a grand old plot--newlyweds, and \*crash\* the bad guy(s) steal the wife! now the lone groom must go out into the world, confront whatever comes, and rescue her...you could always have someone steal the groom, if you wanted something a little different? and for something completely different, try a man with three buttocks.]

Antagonist: (boo! hiss!) The evil magician who kidnaps the beauty...the more power, the better. Also, if at all possible, the schemer should be trying to make our protagonist fail, setting up traps and nooses, deadfalls, all kinds of little problems...

Don't forget, though -- "The antagonist is a device whose purpose is to deprive the protagonist of what she believes rightfully belongs to her."

Victim: The real conflict lies between the other two. As a result, the victim often is just a shadowy embodiment of what the hero(ine) seeks. There may not be much if any detail here. [one twist that is often fun--after the victim is rescued, a bit of byplay to show that the hero(ine) doesn't know what they just rescued.]

Act one: Separation. That antagonist separates the protagonist from the victim, thus motivating the action. Establish the relationship of the protagonist and the victim, then let the abduction begin!

Act two: Pursuit. Which way did they go, which way did they go? I must follow them! Traps, tricks, diversions, red herrings, rotten cheese, no matter what stands in the way, I will follow! [Note: this is the chance to test and build the character into a real hero...]

Act three: Confrontation! Often an action-packed clash, of cliché proportions. So be witty, wise, and surprising. Think about how you can finish without getting bogged down in syrup! One twist--the victim isn't a victim after all.

"The rescue plot is perhaps more formulaic than most of the other plots. It has standard characters and situations. But don't underestimate its immense appeal. Like the revenge and temptation plots, it is one of the most satisfying emotionally. It confirms the moral order of the universe by overcoming evil; it restores order in a chaotic world; and it reaffirms the power of love."

### Checklist?

1. Do you have more action than development of character?
2. Do you have a hero, a villain, and a victim? Does the hero rescue the victim from the villain?
3. Do you have a moral argument? Is it black and white? (note: the norm is good vs. bad. feel free to vary if you like)
4. Is the focus of the story on the hero's pursuit of the villain?
5. Does the hero go out into the world to confront the villain? Does the confrontation take place on the villain's home turf?
6. Is your hero defined by her relationship to the villain?
7. Does the antagonist deprive the hero of what he believes is rightfully his?
8. Does the antagonist constantly interfere with the hero's progress?
9. Does your victim force the hero to confront the antagonist? Does the victim take too much of the story?
10. Do you have well-developed phases of separation, pursuit, and confrontation and reunion?

Suppose we wanted to write such a story (if you can imagine that, for just a moment). Where to begin? How about...

Pick a number from one to six

1. spouse (significant other? spice? you know...)
2. parent-child
3. mister (mistress? sexual involvement, anyway)
4. teacher-student

5. doctor-patient
6. friend (really, we're just friends)

There you go. We have a relationship! So our protagonist and our victim are related. Spend a little time thinking about how long they've had their relationship, how deep the bonds are, how well (or poorly) they know the other person...

Stop here and contemplate a blank pad. List five reasons an antagonist might have for making off with...

[Whoops! Flip a coin and decide who is going to be the victim. Sorry about that, you can't just kidnap anyone that's wandering around, now can you? Although the mistaken kidnapping plot is always good for a chuckle or two...]

So, list some reasons an antagonist might have for depriving our protagonist of their beloved. Then pick the one you are going to use, and embellish it. Decide where the antagonist met the victim, and why no one else will do (a what kind of sacrifice? at the full moon, on top of the Aztec pyramid Xzchalipecktoids? well, it's your story...)

Now, take a moment and sketch out a scene that introduces us to the protagonist and the victim, and shows us the relationship that is going to pull the protagonist along, waterskiing the rapids of life behind the fleeing antagonist...feel free to have the antagonist break into the primordial splendor at the point that will cause the protagonist the utmost agony.

Next? Pick a number...

1. quicksand
2. beartraps
3. a frame (for a crime)
4. deadfalls
5. a maze
6. burnt bridges

Pad ready? Good! Write down the category of blockages that you have just selected, then think about at least five different kinds of traps or blocks that are related. I.e., quicksand, flypaper... you can put down characteristics of the category, if you like (sticky stuff, dirty, etc.) just make some notes about what this category (or thing) stirs up in your mind.

Now go back over those notes and pick out or make up some of the tricks and problems that your antagonist is going to put in the way of your protagonist. You should probably list or sketch out at least five scenes, then pick the best two or three.

Finally, do the confrontation and resolution. Where does it take place? What revelations, surprises, and other delights will we provide to send the reader off with a grin, looking for more writing by this author?

Try this...a number from one to six?

1. ... Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (Shakespeare, Macbeth)
2. ... A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life. John Milton.
3. ... The tree of liberty only grows when watered by the blood of tyrants. Bertrand Barere.
4. ... You should hammer your iron when it is glowing hot.--Publius Syrus: Maxim 262. John Heywood
5. ... Who goeth a borrowing/... Goeth a sorrowing. Thomas Tusser
6. ... The falling out of lovers is the renewing of love.—Robert Burton: Anatomy of Melancholy, part iii. sec. 2.

Take that quote, and let it act as the crystal sinking into your final scene, focusing and refracting the white light into a veritable rainbow of understanding...

Refine, pump up the backdrops and fill in the connections, make the sun shine down, don't forget the lashes of lightning and mutters of thunder, put a bit of music into it, and the next thing you know...

## Plot #5: Escape:

"...The escape plot is physical, and as such, concentrates its energy on the mechanics of capture and escape. ... Escape in this plot is literal: The protagonist is confined against her will and wants to escape."

This is a kind of mirror to the rescue plot—instead of waiting patiently to be rescued, here the victim is their own hero and frees themselves.

Escape plots tend to revolve around unfair imprisonment (the innocent imprisoned for a crime they did not commit; prisoners in war; witch, ogre, or other evil creatures seem to love to imprison hero(in)es), but it doesn't have to—sometimes it is a test of wills between two strong personalities—the gaoler and the jailee.

Phase One: The protagonist is imprisoned. The crime may be real or not, and the punishment suitable or not.

Phase Two: Imprisonment and plans for escape. Attempts at escape, especially during phase one, should fail, be foiled, or only allow the temporary illusion of success before recapture and return to prison.

Phase Three: The Great Escape Attempt! Don't forget the lesson of Mission Impossible: even the best plans have to have something go wrong so that the stars can improvise a brilliant save. Or as someone military put it, the most careful battle plans only last until the first shot is fired. (p. 96) "Wild cards come into play. Enter the unexpected. All hell breaks loose. To this point the situation has been tightly controlled by the antagonist, but suddenly the situation becomes fluid, out of control either by gratuitous circumstance or by design of the hero. The hero, who has been at a distinct disadvantage, finally gets the upper hand, and if there's a moral score to settle, the time has come for settling it."

Checklist:

1. Escape is literal, so – how is your hero(ine) confined? Is it unjust or just unwillingly?
2. How clearcut (black and white) is the moral argument? Usually it should be clear why this escape is really a triumph for good.
3. The hero(ine) should be the victim.
4. How does the hero(ine) become imprisoned? Are there some initial attempts to escape which fail? (I.e., do you have a phase one?)
5. How does your hero(ine) plan to escape? Are there several attempts which are thwarted? (i.e., what's phase two?)
6. What is the real attempt to escape? Is there a real chance for it to succeed? Is there a real chance for it to fail? (phase three!)
7. Does the antagonist have control during the first two dramatic phases? How do they lose control or how does the hero(ine) gain control during the final phase?

Onward to consider plotting a tale of escape. Pick ye olde number from one to six, please?

1. false imprisonment
2. prisoner of war
3. locked in (a store? a school? a locker room? someplace...)
4. kidnapped
5. captured by terrorists
6. taken hostage during a crime (bank robbery? car wash robbery? etc.)

If you think about it, there are lots of opportunities now to be captured by inanimate "guard" systems, as well as all kinds of groups that might feel better with an unwilling guest or several. There are also so many different fantasy and fiction evil captors—feel free to pick another one if you like.

[and lest we skip lightly past it, consider that "imprisonment" or "caging" means different things to different folks. One might even be cast out—and want to somehow escape back into that society and fellowship that means so much! One might even consider the age-old tension between teenager anxious to try out things and parental desires to limit the damages to be a variant on the escape plot...]

Stop here and consider your characters. There should be a fairly strong captor to make our protagonist work to get away. The POW camp director should make our day grim. And our protagonist needs to have some strength of character, some moral drive to make sure they don't break, although they will certainly bend, twist, and ache.

Now take a blank sheet and write one character's name on one side, the other on the other side at the top. Underneath, write the kind of imprisonment that the protagonist is facing.

Think of three to five different ways to put them into that captivity. Perhaps one of the more interesting ones is to start with an aborted attempt to escape, just as they are being shoved into the gates. A flurry of action, some exchanges of words, and the character of the protagonist can be revealed, often along with some hints at the raw power that the antagonist wields.

Pick the one you like, though, and sketch that scene out.

Now think of several different ways that the protagonist might try to escape. Take the one that you are going to really use and set that aside. Take two or three others and use them as attempts that fail. It is often helpful to think through how these failed attempts are going to contribute to the final attempt. You can also go back and revise to work some threads in (e.g., perhaps during one of the early attempts the protagonist picks up a two-foot piece of monofilament, which becomes critical during the real attempt—you might not have written it in during the first pass, but you can go back and revise it in easily when you realize that he really needs that).

How about a number from one to six?

1. monofilament fishing line
2. a clothes hanger
3. an eight inch square of aluminum foil
4. a papier mache red pepper
5. a 5 pound tub of margarine
6. a cockroach

Okay? There you have an object. It could be art, it could be trash, it could be just the magic needed to make one of your escape methods take off. In any case, toss it into your mental grinder and let it simmer.

One more number, one to sixish?

1. anger
2. love
3. fear
4. desire
5. hatred
6. moral righteousness

Just for fun, feel free to sprinkle a bit of this emotional sauce into the mix. I suggest that one of the characters should probably feel driven by this emotion, perhaps towards the other one.

Go back and answer the questions in the checklist.

That should put you well on the way to writing an escape plot. Take your imprisonment, your object for meditation, and a heaping scoop of emotional spicing, knead well, and let it rise. Bake in the oven of your own talents until golden brown with an aroma that invites the reader to partake of the feast, slather on a dab of butter and honey, and watch for smiles...

a quick start for those who are in fear of blank pages? How about:

The door closed quietly behind her, until the lock clicked home with a metallic chuckle. That's when she spun and threw herself against the door.

For those who wonder, this beginning is provided for your use, abuse, or even discarding. Feel free to start here and go on to an ending, if that helps.

[a hot-air balloon escape? why not! but having a troll talk during the whole escape would be awfully boring, don't you think?  
oh, that was no troll, that was your boss? I think I see...]

## Plot #6: Revenge:

"In literature the dominant motive for this plot is loud and clear: retaliation by the protagonist against the antagonist for real or imagined injury. It's a visceral plot, which means it reaches us at a deep emotional level. We bristle against injustice and we want to see it corrected. And almost always, the retaliation is outside the limits of the law."

(p. 100) "At the heart of the story is the protagonist, who is generally a good person forced to take vengeance into her own hands when the law won't give satisfaction. Then there's the antagonist, the person who has committed the crime, who for some quirk in the natural progress of events has escaped punishment for his crime. Last, there's the victim, the person whom the protagonist must avenge. As a character, the victim obviously is expendable; his purpose is to arouse our sympathies, for him and for the protagonist (who has been denied love, companionship or the like). Sometimes the victim is the protagonist himself. The more heinous the crime (rape, murder, incest), the more the protagonist is justified in seeking vengeance. "

Phases:

1. The Crime. Establish the hero and his loved ones, and terminate their happiness with an awful crime. The hero cannot defend. Either he is not present or he's restrained (may be forced to watch). Sometimes the crime is committed before the beginning of the story. This may weaken the reader identification—their emotional experience. The hero may try to get justice from other sources. But these should not provide satisfaction.
2. Revenge. Planning, perhaps spiced with a little pursuit, and preparation. There may be some resistance, some friends or others who point out what will happen and try to dissuade the protagonist from this mad pursuit.
3. Confrontation. If there are more than one criminal, the biggest, baddest, and worst must come last. Make the punishment fit the crime, and make it a real struggle, where the protagonist has to work to triumph.

Classical revenge revolves around violence. But there are also the con man conned and other non-violent possibilities.

(p. 108) "Revenge is an emotionally powerful (and one might say dangerous) plot to work with. You manipulate powerful emotions in your reader by creating a situation that cries for justice. We respond at a deep level when someone violates us or anyone else who doesn't deserve violation. In many cases, victims are like Everyman. It's as if you say to the reader 'If it could happen to this person, it could happen to you, too.' Chilling. And to protect ourselves from that kind of outrage (murder, rape, mayhem, etc.) we demand swift and complete justice. You put yourself in a strong moral position as you write this plot. You say what is proper and what is improper behavior. Be careful. What you recommend may be wild justice, but that too may have its price."

Checklist

1. Does your protagonist seek retaliation against the antagonist for a real or imagined injury?
2. Do you focus on the act of revenge? Have you really provided some motivation, some depth to your characters?
3. How "wild" is the hero's justice? How far outside the limits of the law does your vigilante justice go?
4. Did you engage the feelings of the reader by showing them a man or woman of action forced to avenge the injustices of the world by events when the institutions that normally deal with these problems prove inadequate?
5. Does your hero have moral justification for vengeance?
6. Does your hero's vengeance equal by not exceed the offense?
7. Did your hero try to deal with the offense through the traditional means, such as the police, and fail?
8. Does your first phase establish the hero's normal life and the disruption that the crime made? Show the audience the full impact of the crime, what it costs in physical and emotional terms.
9. Does your second phase show the hero planning the revenge and pursuing the antagonist? Does your antagonist escape early attempts by chance or design?
10. Does the third and last phase show the confrontation between the hero and the antagonist? Are there holes in the revenge plan that force the hero to improvise, some good twists and shocks to make the reader's heart thump?



Most modern revenge plots don't require the hero to pay too high a price (emotionally or otherwise) for revenge, thus allowing the audience the luxury of a cheap cathartic release.

1. Let's start with a character. Your choice.

2. Now write one sentence about what this character needs to learn. Perhaps they haven't found out that other people hurt? Or maybe they just need to learn that what they want doesn't come by wishing? Having trouble? Pick a number from one to six, grab one of these oldies, and refine it.

1. The best things in life are free
2. The bluebird of happiness is sitting in your own backyard
3. Parents are people too
4. Home is where the heart is
5. Don't burn your bridges until you get across them
6. Learning grows out of the broken shells of mistakes

3. and a bit of fresh stuff--pick a number from one to six, okay?

1. Because they lied
2. Because they hurt someone
3. Because they scared someone
4. Because they destroyed it (the sacred object)
5. Because they betrayed the trust (revealed the secret?)
6. Because they upset/enraged/angered you...

This is our reason for revenge. But right now it's pretty sketchy, so take a few moments to think about five to ten possible detailed expansions of this motivation. I.e., who are "they" and exactly how did they lie? What did they say, and what did it do to the protagonist (or their proxy, if there is a separate victim)?

Pick the best of those, the one that makes you really want to do something to the antagonist.

4. Pick a number from one to six? (you've played here before, haven't you? I thought I recognized the sparkle on your terminal screen...)

1. spouse (significant other? spice? you know...)
2. parent-child
3. mister (mistress? sexual involvement, anyway)
4. teacher-student
5. doctor-patient
6. friend (really, we're just friends)

There you go. We have a relationship! So our protagonist and our victim are related. Spend a little time thinking about how long they've had their relationship, how deep the bonds are, how well (or poorly) they know the other person...

5. Now, go back and answer the questions in the checklist. Fill out the basic plot outline with details. Work with it, revise and correct, then when you're ready, show us what you've done.

[Quick start? How about this one:

There was blood in the tracks.

## Plot #7: The Riddle:

"A riddle is a deliberately enigmatic or ambiguous question." The answer should have both surprise and cleverness. This has evolved into the mystery. "A challenge to the reader to solve the problem."

(p. 113) "Your mystery should have at its heart a paradox that begs a solution. The plot itself is physical, because it focuses on events (who, what, where, when, and why) that must be evaluated and interpreted (the same as the riddle must be interpreted). Things are not what they seem on the surface. Clues lie within the words. The answer is not obvious (which wouldn't satisfy), but the answer is there. And in the best tradition of the mystery, the answer is in plain view."

Clues! Not too obvious, and ambiguous ones do well...avoid the red herrings, the clues that don't add up, the throw-away clues...work on clues that must be understood correctly. Give the reader a chance.

The Purloined Letter—with a thoughtful protagonist, with all clues revealed to the reader, and the riddle clearly visible from the beginning. Will the reader solve the riddle first, or will the protagonist?

Frank R. Stockton's *The Lady or The Tiger*—the unresolved paradox! Where the reader learns something about themselves in considering which way they would resolve the dilemma.

So what are the phases, the drama of the riddle?

Phase one -- introduce the problem, the riddle. Who is the victim? What is the crime? Who is the protagonist that will try to solve the crime? Who are the major players? In general, pose the question—Who Killed Cock Robin?

Phase two--specifics! as good bloodhounds, let us sniff at the clues, and follow paths...camouflage information and let the readers read right past those critical clues. Action, lights, cameras...keep us squinting, keep us blinking, and make us wonder just who really is telling the truth.

Phase three--solve the riddle. confrontation and chase. maybe a mob scene, with your very own detective first making us think it was the butler, then the maid, then the victim...and the son of the victim really did it, didn't you, Alfred? Who would ever have suspected that you had come back after twenty years in the sewers? Don't forget that somewhere in this scene we need to find out that one piece of the puzzle is upside down or backwards, the key to understanding the whole deadly picture...

Note: Kafka and others have explored another flavor of riddle, the open-ended ones which are impossible to solve. These are sometimes called "symbolic" riddles, which challenge the reader to think about a situation or event outside the ordinary. Be aware that these are not usually considered mass market pieces.

Checklist!

1. Is the core of your riddle cleverly hidden in plain sight?
2. Is there a tension in your riddle between what seems to be happening and what is really happening?
3. Does your riddle challenge the reader to solve it before the protagonist does?
4. Is the answer to the riddle always in plain view without being obvious?
5. Does your first dramatic phase lay out the generalities of the riddle (persons, places, events)?
6. Does the second dramatic phase lay out the specifics of the riddle (the details of how persons, places and events relate to each other)?
7. Does the third dramatic phase provide the riddle's solution, explaining the motive(s) of the antagonist(s) and the real sequence of events?
8. Have you decided on an audience?
9. Does your riddle clearly choose between an open-ended and a close-ended structure? (open-ended riddles have no clear answer; close-ended ones do.)

I think I shall cheat! Pick a number from one to six, if you would?

[no, don't sneak ahead without picking a number...I saw that. Pick your number, then read on. That's better.....]

1. A human diplomat is found murdered in an alien embassy. Seventeen aliens are present. Each claims to be the sole murderer, and because of their psychological makeup, each passes a lie detector test.
  - Are any of them telling the truth?
  - Why was the human killed?
  - How do you question aliens who are congenital liars?
2. An alien whose planet is at war with Earth turns up in one of our embassies, claiming sanctuary. The embassy is staffed with only twelve humans, all loyal to earth. Before the alien can be debriefed, it is found murdered in its quarters. The embassy's state-of-the-art security system has been circumvented, and what should have been a clear holograph of the killing is nothing but a three-dimensional black blur.
  - Who killed the alien?
  - How was the murder accomplished?
  - Why was it killed?
3. A wealthy alien falls ill on Earth, and is taken to a hospital. The orderly in charge of it gives it a human-normal oxygen tent, and it dies, as it cannot handle such a dose of oxygen. The orderly claims that the alien requested more oxygen, and that he was merely catering to its wishes. Further investigation shows that distant members of the orderly's family will gain control of many of the alien's holdings upon its death. Was it incompetence, negligence, or murder?
4. An alien, visiting Earth, takes out an ad offering a huge sum of money to the man who can solve its murder--and, sure enough, it is killed within hours of the ad appearing.
  - How did it know it would be murdered?
  - Given its foreknowledge, why could it not avoid its killer?
  - Who killed it, how, and why?
5. An alien, here to study our native animal life, is killed by same. To people who know animals, the attack may even have been justified. A detective from the alien's race now arrives on Earth, determined to prove that this attack by unthinking animals was murder. The men in charge of the animals--game rangers, lab scientists, whatever--must prove to an alien who cannot even differentiate between a simian and a human that their animals are innocent. Handle it straight or funny, as you wish.
6. Mood piece. A private eye is hired by a wealthy family to find their daughter, whose arranged wedding to a man of comparable wealth and position is pending. Far from being kidnapped, she is living with an alien male. A sexual relationship is hinted at but never explicitly stated. She explains that she is happy here, and that she is of age to make her own decisions. The private eye must weigh this against the fact that he took a fee to deliver her...and must make a decision. How did I cheat? These are six of the mystery "seeds" used in this anthology (and More Whatdunits, the second in the series) written by Mike Resnick. He handed out these little fragments to authors, and they wrote... So I know that these can be the seeds for successful mystery stories! All you have to do is add the details, the scenes, the little things. Come on, you know you want to...

[Quick start? The first body was behind the door when we opened it.

## Master Plot #8: Rivalry

(p. 125) "A rival is a person who competes for the same object or goal as another. A rival is a person who disputes the prominence or superiority of another. Nowhere else is the concept of deep structure more apparent than in a rivalry. Two people have the same goal—whether it is to win the hand of another or to conquer each other's armies or to win a chess game--and each has her own motivation. The possibilities are endless. Whenever two people compete for a common goal, you have rivalry."

"A principle rule of this plot is that the two adversaries should have equivalent strengths (although they can have different weaknesses). ... The point is that whatever the strength of one party, the other party has a compensating strength that levels the balance."

May be the classic struggle between good and evil, or both parties may be deserving. "The tension comes from their opposition. Whether it's a pitcher facing a batter or two politicians squaring off to run for office, two people cannot occupy the same space. One must win, one must lose (with all its variations of winning and losing). Rivalry is competition." (my note: what happens when one party reframes the struggle in a win-win framework, expanding the possibilities into both gaining?)

That great classic, the Love Triangle (coming to a book near you everyday!), often embodies a rivalry plot, at least from two of the positions in the triangle...

First Dramatic Movement: "The two rivals have a common ground. They meet and are perceived as equals." Don't spend too much time on this (you might even want to do it as a flashback), because there is no conflict here. Go on to:

Introduce the conflict, and pit the two against each other. I.e., the rivals take sides, and the stage is set.

A catalyst here often helps turn the posturing into real action. "One rival moves to gain the advantage over the other. This is a struggle for power. One rival acts to overcome or overwhelm his competition."

One rival moves up the power curve (becoming more powerful, gaining advantages) while the other moves down. Typically, the antagonist takes the initiative and makes the protagonist suffer.

Second Dramatic Movement: Events occur that reverse the descent of the protagonist.

Once the protagonist has fallen, they are able to learn, to study, to gain power to challenge the antagonist.

(p. 128) "The antagonist is often aware of the empowerment of the protagonist. (It heightens the tension if the antagonist continually looks over his shoulder, anticipating the inevitable confrontation.)"

until "The stage is set. The empowered protagonist's motivation is morally justified. The antagonist prepares to defend." and...

The Third Dramatic Movement: The Confrontation

In most cases, this is the climax, the short, fast, action-filled scene where all the blinders are removed, all the trickery fails, and the two are forced to face each other in deadly reality.

(p. 129) "If the basic premise of the rivalry plot is what happens when an immovable object meets an irresistible force, you should structure your characters and situations along those lines."

Establish two conflicting and competing characters who vie for the same goal. Give them equal but different strengths. "Then create circumstances that test your characters according to their strengths." Make sure both characters win some, and lose others--make the reader really wonder who will win.

This is a plot about human nature. Make sure you know why both characters want to overcome the other--is it anger, jealousy, fear, or what that motivates the ambitions? Then give the reader a real sense of the depth of their obsession, and where it springs from.

Checklist:

1. Does the conflict in your story come from an irresistible force meeting an immovable object?
2. What is the struggle for power between the protagonist and antagonist that fuels the rivalry in your story?
3. Are your adversaries equally matched?
4. Does each rival have compensating strengths to match areas where the other is apparently stronger?
5. Does your story start with the point of initial conflict, or have a fast demonstration of the status quo and then move rapidly into conflict?
6. Do you have a clear catalyst scene, where the antagonist begins moving against the will of the protagonist and the action starts?
7. Do your characters move up and down "power curves" during the story, with one rising while the other falls?
8. Does your antagonist gain superiority over the protagonist during the first dramatic phase? Is the protagonist clearly at a disadvantage, suffering from the actions of the antagonist?
9. Are there moral issues involved and clearly tied to the different sides?
10. What brings about the reversal of fortune and stops the protagonist's descent on the power curve?
11. Is the antagonist aware of the protagonist's empowerment? Does he take steps to block it, or does he simply laugh it off as inconsequential?
12. Does the protagonist reach a point of parity on the power curve and then issue the challenge, or does something make them rush the challenge? (a favorite theme is the spunky challenger, coming back from defeat, apparently not ready...and with a surprising twist, they win!)
13. Is there a final confrontation between rivals? (the third dramatic phase)
14. How does the protagonist restore order for himself and his world after the resolution of the confrontation? (Note: there is often some "balancing" that needs to happen to straighten out the events of the first phase, when the protagonist was losing right and left.)

And let us get to work. Can you select a number from one to six?

1. The person in the middle (a desired friend, or perhaps just a dreamed-of meeting of souls passing at midnight?)
2. The desired job (position, etc.)
3. The desired prize (you decide the contest, you decide the rules--this is your world!)
4. The chance for glory
5. The desired recognition by others
6. The race (goes not to the swift, but to the steady...) A competition, by any name...

There you have a very broad clue at a possible goal for our characters to strive for, to act as the fuse for their rivalry. Take a few moments and refine this. What is the prize that will be pulled and yanked between the two?

While you are considering that, go ahead and sketch out (at least in your mind) a little about the characters. Remember, they should have roughly equivalent strengths and weaknesses, and be a good match for the struggle ahead. Make sure that they each have solid reasons for pursuing that goal.

Drop back a moment and consider a number from one to six. You will find your selection below:

1. Competitions are for horses, not artists. Bela Bartok, Saturday Review, Aug. 25, 1962
2. Every advantage has its own tax. Emerson, "Compensation," Essays: First Series (1841)
3. Against great advantages in another, there are no means of defending ourselves except love. Goethe, Elective Affinities, (1809), 23.
4. The folly which we might have ourselves committed is the one which we are least ready to pardon in another. Joseph Roux, Meditations of a Parish Priest (1886), 4.84, tr. Isabel F. Haggood.
5. The turning point in the process of growing up is when you discover the core of strength within you that survives all hurt. Max Lerner, "Faubus and Little Rock," The Unfinished Country (1959), 4.
6. There is no reality except the one contained within us. That is why so many people live such an unreal life. They take the images outside them for reality and never allow the world within to assert itself. Hermann Hesse, Demian (1919), 6, tr. Michael Roloff and Michael Lebeck.

Allow yourself a moment to consider that quote. You have your two characters, the unifying goal which will drive them apart, and a little quote. How does that quote play with (or against) your thinking?

Now stretch all of this against the backdrop of that archtypal plot for rivalry, and the questions in the checklist. Lay out your scenes, and consider: How are you going to introduce the rivals? How about the point of conflict that will bring the rivalry into focus? Who is going to fall first, and why? How do they try to recover? And then...

Go on to the end, revise, polish, and don't forget the foreshadows. Don't even forget the deep dark backshadows.

[Quick Start?

Yesterday they had been friends. Tomorrow, one of them would be dead.

You are welcome to use this as a beginning if it helps you.]

## Master Plot #9: Underdog

(p. 131) "The underdog plot is a form of rivalry plot...in the underdog plot, the strengths aren't equally matched. The protagonist is at a disadvantage and is faced with overwhelming odds."

"This plot is near and dear to our hearts because it represents the ability of the one over the many, the small over the large, the weak over the powerful, the 'stupid' over the 'smart.'"

"If you want your reader to feel empathy for your protagonist, make sure that her emotional and/or intellectual plane is equal to or lower than the reader's. ..."

Phase 1—in interruption or crisis in the protagonist's life, with a glimpse of life before, and the dramatic reversal that throws the protagonist into conflict and competition. In the underdog format, the antagonist immediately gains and exercises the upper hand, with the protagonist thoroughly disempowered, overwhelmed, suppressed.

Phase 2—something happens that reverses the descent. Humble, modest little underdog asks for something which turns out to be the strength or ally that empowers. And the phase really gets underway when the challenges begin! Can I? If you can find the needle in the haystack—and you did? Well, if...(don't forget, one down, two down, and three times a charm!) The real movement here is from being the victim to effectively challenging...

This often results in a split life, one secret victorious, the other public drudgery.

Phase 3—an equal and open competition or challenge ensues, where it at last becomes obvious to all who the secret victor is, and the antagonists are as thoroughly defeated as they deserve.

The real trick to this plot is making the underdog strongly enough motivated and realistic enough to believe in. The odds are stacked against the underdog, but there must be some way of winning through courage, honor, strength, and wit. Keep the audience rooting for the underdog, and make sure they feel like they had struggled through the depths and overcome all the obstacles with the underdog.

Checklist:

1. Are your adversaries unequally matched? The antagonist, whether person, place, or thing, should clearly overpower the protagonist.
2. Does your protagonist clearly fail in the first phase, change and recover in the second phase, and come back for the final climactic conflict?
3. Is there a real chance that the underdog will simply get crushed again? While the underdog usually overcomes the opposition, consider letting them lose, or otherwise vary the "expected" ending.

How about some "daily life" underdog situations? Perhaps we could start with a number from one to six?

1. A waitress being heckled and hounded by a customer
2. The clerk who keeps folding and rehangng the clothes for the rich teenager
3. A flight attendant being asked for a date
4. A cleaning person mopping the floor—and the bored truckers who keep walking across it
5. The donut shop person who gets screamed at for taking people in order, instead of waiting on Mr. Impatient
6. The employees who must get to the meeting on time, so that the boss can come in ten minutes late everytime...

While I suspect none of us has experienced any of these scenarios, perhaps you can imagine the feelings of the underdog, the oppressor(s), and the onlookers?

[don't like these? how about any of the "big business", "government sleazocracy", or other big crunchers against the individual scenarios? pick your David, line up a fine Goliath, and set the scene for us...]

Crank it up. Make us really feel sympathy for this underdog and disgust with the sorry example of humanity that is leaning on them. Give us a scene that makes that oppression ours.

Then transform it--the cook calls the waitress over and hands her a chocolate cream pie, with a wink? or maybe the radio reads out the daily double numbers, and our underdog grins?

And nail that sucker. A full pot of iced tea poured into his briefs? The boss reams out the employees, and then turns around to find his boss was waiting behind the door? Whatever, you're in charge, and make us enjoy the victory dance of the underdog, the moon baying charge of the beagle, the satisfying squelch of a dog's raised leg against the finesse of a well-tailored suit leg and polished leather shoe...

Simple enough?

## Master Plot #10: Temptation

(p. 138) "To be tempted is to be induced or persuaded to do something that is either unwise, wrong or immoral...."

It may be difficult for some of you to believe, but there are those of us who sometimes are attracted by things which we probably shouldn't indulge in, whether they are strictly illegal or just undesirable...yes, it is true, some of us feel tempted.

Structure

Phase 1. Establish the nature of the temptation and show the protagonist succumbing to it. May be some resistance, rationalization, and lots of opportunity for denial...

[You can do anything, but don't open the door...]

Phase 2. Show the effects of giving in. Denial, lying, etc. are all part of the package, with the effects growing. The protagonist tries to deal, but the more she attempts to wriggle free, the more oppressive it becomes.

[You did it? No, I didn't, really, not...]

Phase 3. The Crisis. The effects are unbearable, the conflict has risen, the stakes are so high...and will our protagonist continue to agonize or confess? Repent and be forgiven.

"The temptation plot isn't about action as much as it's about character. It is an examination of motives, needs and impulse. The action supports the development of character, and as such, it's a plot fo the mind rather than of the body."

To write about temptation, think about the nature of the 'crime' your character will be tempted with. What is gained, what is lost, what are the prices that are paid for giving in?

"Don't focus your story completely on the temptation and the cost of giving into it. Focus your story on the character who gives in to the temptation. Define the internal struggle raging inside the character. Is it guilt? If so, how does that guilt show itself in the behavior and actions of your character?...Temptation can reveal a wide range of emotions in your character. Don't create a character who is capable of only one emotional note. Your character will probably go through a variety of emotional states. The result of all the turmoil will be a realization about himself. He will reach a conclusion about giving in to temptation. What is the lesson learned, and how has your character matured?..."

Checklist:

1. What are the motives, needs, and impulses of human character underlying your temptation plot?
2. What are the changes in morality and the effects of giving in to temptation that drive those changes in your story? Where does your character start in terms of morality and where do they end, and what are the lessons taught about temptation?
3. What is the inner turmoil of the protagonist? What does she know she should do, and what does she do instead? How do you show this interior conflict, and how is it manifested in the exterior actions?
4. Does your first dramatic phase clearly establish the nature of the protagonist (and antagonist, if there is one)?
5. Does your story clearly show the nature of the temptation, the effects on the protagonist, and the struggles over the decision that the protagonist makes?
6. Does your protagonist clearly give in? Are there short-term gratifications?
7. Does your protagonist rationalize giving in?
8. Does your protagonist deny the whole thing, refusing to admit that they yielded to the temptation?
9. Does the second dramatic phase clearly reflect the effects of yielding? Do you show how the short-term benefits go sour and the real drawbacks start to become apparent? Is it clear that this was the wrong decision?
10. Does the protagonist try to find ways to escape responsibility and avoid punishment?
11. Do the negative effects build up, growing and increasingly involving more and more of the protagonist's life?
12. Does the third phase resolve the internal conflicts? Is there atonement, reconciliation and forgiveness?

So, do you feel tempted to write about Temptation? Feel that old snake slithering around the bottom of a tree? Those surges of sap rising?

How about a number from one to six?

1. finding a wallet filled with money (with ID or not? you decide)
2. finding an expensive piece of jewelry
3. an opportunity to look at something forbidden (what? porno?)
4. a chance to try out the forbidden fruit (a call boy? strip joint? gambling? you decide...)
5. an opportunity to secretly (and nastily, with emphasis on the prejudice) scuttle the competition's work
6. a chance to cheat on an important test (in school and life, we face many tests...and who is to say which part is the test?)

Take a few moments, a deep breath, (cold shower optional) and list at least five different ways that this could be a temptation. Ten is better, but dash them off as quickly as possible. Oh, and yes, write them down...

Now stop and think a moment. Perhaps a number from one to six again?

1. Eastern city
2. Eastern small town in the country (yes, they do exist)
3. West Coast city
4. Western small town
5. Southern city
6. Southern small town

[Don't like what you got? Okay, you may select slum, West Virginia back roads rough, ranch, Lower Sbogada, or other place at your delight...]



This is where the protagonist (yes, a real character) has grown up. Take a few moments to get inside their skin, to block out a key incident or five that has shaped our little twig, to make sure you know who this is...what's the backstory (yep, there's that word) behind the story we're going to write?

Now let's start putting it together. We need a scene where we discover the temptation--and the reasons our protagonist has for struggling. Then we need a scene or two where we intensify the struggle, define the moral agony, make the conscience of the reader sweat...leading into the climax, where we learn...well, what do we learn?

Roll your die, roll and choose:

1. "All men are tempted. There is no man that lives that can't be broken down, provided it is the right temptation, put in the right spot." Henry Ward Beecher, *Proverbs from Plymouth Pulpit* (1887).
2. "When temptations march monotonously in regiments, one waits for them to pass." Frank Moore Colby, "Some of the Difficulties of Frollicking," *The Colby Essays* (1926), v. 1.
3. "No temptation can ever be measured by the value of its object." Colette, "Human Nature," *Earthly Paradise* (1966), 4, ed. Robert Phelps.
4. "There are several good protections against temptations, but the surest is cowardice." Mark Twain, "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar," *Following the Equator* (1897), 1.36
5. "We are punished by our sins, not for them." Elbert Hubbard, *The Note Book* (1927).
6. "There is a charm about the forbidden that makes it unspeakably desirable." Mark Twain, *Notebook* (1935)

Consider our character (add in a few...the opposition...the watching chorus of modern-day noninvolved bystanders...characters to suit your tastes), the temptation (and why is this a temptation? Pick one from your list, and roll with it), and how this puzzling little quotation might tie the whole package into a Gordian knot binding the Freudian slip of our tempting tale in place.

Write it up. Review it against the checklist above, revise it against your best standards, and make us feel every detail of this person's journey into temptation.

## Master Plot #11: Metamorphosis

(p. 146) "If any one plot is truly magical, metamorphosis is it. Most of the master plots are grounded in reality: They deal with situations and people whom we readily recognize because they're based in our experience. Even good science fiction and fantasy stories are ultimately as real in their portrayal of people and events as anything by Henry James or Jane Austen. Science Fiction author Theodore Sturgeon pointed out that a good science fiction story deals with a human problem and a human solution. Fiction, whether it happens in Middle Earth or in a galaxy far, far away, is always about us. Fiction reveals truths that reality obscures."

"...In the metamorphosis plot, the physical characteristics of the protagonist actually change from one form to another. ..." animal to human, human to beast, etc. with change that is physical and emotional. metaphor, allegory, and mixes...wolfman, vampire, beauty and the beast, etc.

Often the metamorphosis is the result of a curse, wrongdoing, an offense against nature. Then, of course, the cure is love!

(p. 148) "The point of the plot is to show the process (or failure) of transformation. Since this is a character plot, we're more concerned with the nature of the metamorph than with his actions. The metamorph represents mystery: What sin has he committed to warrant this change? What must he do to free himself from the curse? The metamorph is an innately sad person, burdened by his affliction."

Three Dramatic Phases (of the moon? depends on your metamorph, or your metaphor?)

Phase one: introduce the protagonist and the current state of his condition. Usually the curse has been in place for some time, and we enter the story at the point of change.

Also, introduce the antagonist, the "catalyst that propels the metamorph towards release." While the antagonist is usually "the one" that the metamorph has been waiting for, neither one necessarily recognizes the antagonist as the agent of change. May even be a victim or captive of the metamorph, often with real repulsion, hatred, or disgust building a wall between them.

Phase two - evolve the relationship between the two. Usually, pity, fear, or fairness start to change the initial dislike, and the antagonist starts to exert control over the metamorph through "beauty, kindness or knowledge." I.e., the two start seeing the real person behind the physical shells, and are attracted.

The main two complications in this phase revolve around escape attempts by the antagonist and expressions of bestiality by the metamorph.

Phase three -- the release happens, often through some unusual and unexpected twist, and the metamorph changes! E.g., the frog is transformed into a...well, a prince if you must. The scientist changes into a fly, trapped in a spider web. Or maybe the werewolf becomes a monk, praying for deliverance?

This is usually the point where the mystery of the curse and the secret causes of such abnormal punishments are revealed.

(p. 151) "This plot combines the grotesque with the curative power of love, and its appeal is as old as literature itself."

#### Checklist

1. Is your metamorphosis the result of a curse?
2. Is the cure for the curse love?
3. Which form of love? Love of parent for child, lovers, teacher-student, love of God, etc.?
4. Is your protagonist the metamorph?
5. Does your plot show the process of transformation back to humanity?
6. Does your story show us the nature of the metamorph, emphasizing the character over the actions?
7. Is your metamorph an innately sad character?
8. Is your metamorph's life bound by rituals and prohibitions?
9. Does your metamorph want to find a way out?
10. Do you identify a way out of the predicament, a form of release?
11. Does the antagonist carry out the terms of the release?
12. Why is your protagonist barred from hurrying or explaining the events or actions which the antagonist must perform to reverse the curse? (psssst...put your protagonist to sleep, don't let them talk, do something to keep them quiet)
13. Does your first phase show the metamorph in the midst of the curse?
14. Is the beginning of the story a reasonable point leading to the resolution of the curse?
15. Does your antagonist act as the catalyst that forces the protagonist toward release?
16. Does your antagonist start as one of the intended victims and then end as the 'chosen one'?
17. Does your second phase concentrate and reveal the evolving relationship of the two?
18. Do your characters move towards each other emotionally?
19. Does your third phase fulfill the terms of the release, freeing the protagonist from the curse, either returning him to his original state or killing him?
20. Does the reader learn the reasons for the curse and the root causes?

Enough from Tobias! Let's consider how you might put together a metamorphosis...

One of the first requisites is a good animal...suppose we start with a number from one to six, and pick one of the following:

1. dog or wolf (breed? you pick the coat of your dreams...)
2. cat (wild? tame? up to you...)
3. seal!
4. donkey, ass, horse, pick the beast of burden you prefer
5. pigs can be fun? or maybe some other barnyard pet?
6. rat, rabbit, squirrel...you pick one of the little rascals

[sigh. I skipped all the birds, reptiles, fish of any scale, the little bugs that bite and sting, jellyfish and their spineless relatives, the many worms of our lives, and other vegetation, mechanizations, and so forth. Well, if you really want an oddity, pick one, or just try doing the never-ending tale of "A Mushroom by Night, only Human by Day, He's Fungi Man!"]

Okay? Got yourself a prime example of inhumanity in mind? Make a list of ten characteristics about the specific animal (or other wonder) you are going to use as an "secret identity" for your protagonist (antagonist? sure, sure, play with the roles if you want).

[Aside: You might think about whether the transformation is complete or partial. A pig's tail on a policeman, for example, might almost be considered poetic justice?]

Now, beside each characteristic you've noted, put down how this relates to the characteristics which the protagonist has as a human! If he sheds everywhere in his animal persona, is he messy as a human? Or particularly neat, tidying up even where it isn't really needed? I.e., sketch out the similarities and points of difference between the animal and the human.

So we have our jekyll and hide...ah, how about we pick a direction? Flip a coin, or just pick odd or even, and:

1. start as human, change to animal
2. start as animal, change to human

If you insist, you may play with cyclical transforms (the moon! The tide? solar flares and gamma rays?) and other variations, of course.

The major element left is to determine the action(s) needed to reverse the transformation, to convert the curse into a blessing, or whatever. Shall we require a kiss (or something more blatant and involving)? Must we find the one and only authentic chalice of Moord, the Frog Goddess, and drink the blood of an innocent from it...offered without force? Are there seven keys to the doom of the Ancients, each to be found and the mysterious riddle turned to save the world from ourselves? Feel free to dream up your own narrow path of possibilities for the characters to tread, hoping to escape...

If you like, pick a number from one to six to determine the main thrust of your tale of change:

1. Love stops the transformation
2. Love reverses the transformation
3. Love does not change the transformation--but makes it wonderful!
4. Death stops the transformation
5. Death reverses the transformation (breaks the curse and restores the person)
6. Death does not stop the transformation, but it makes death bearable?

Now, with animal in one hand, human in the other, and method of salvation in mind...think of the other main character. Who is the victim/antagonist/foil that can make your brooding beast someone we want to reach out to, someone we want to take care of, someone we want to save?

Sketch out the scenes. What could happen to bring the two together? Why do they stay together long enough to learn what lies behind the mask of the beast, the rough pelt, the claws and anger that holds off the world? And what is the climactic event that changes these two lives forever, leaving them (and us) gasping at the wonder of it all? Then, of course, put it together. Start at the beginning (what cursed animal inhabits this foul pit? it is a cyberspatial twink, and I must release the bits!). Go on to the middle (what? a twink has feelings too? if you turn off the switch, doth it bleed? nay, say it is not so, for in that network many bits have passed.). And, of course, when you get to the part where they're peeling their hearts, you can always close your eyes...sorry, when you get to the end, make us sigh, and say goodbye.

## **Master Plot #12: Transformation**

(p. 153) "The plot of transformation deals with the process of change in the protagonist as she journeys through one of the many stages of life. The plot isolates a portion of the protagonist's life that represents the period of change, moving from one significant character state to another."

Some "standard" points of change: becoming adult; war and combat; search for identity; divorce and other family shifts; facing violence; deaths; and learning something new (remember Pygmalion?).

But the large-scale change is only one kind. Consider small events that may build and shake lives...

Structure:

Phase one - an incident that starts a change in the protagonist's life. Be sure the reader knows who the protagonist is before the change!

Now let the ripples of the incident begin to stretch out..."There are lessons to be learned, judgments to be made, insights to be seen."

Phase two - show us the full effects of the transforming incident. What hidden parts of the main character are stirred up in the wake of the storm?

Phase three - show us (often via another incident) the results of the transformation. What does the protagonist (and the reader) learn? "It's common for a protagonist to learn lessons other than what he expected to learn. The real lessons are often the hidden or unexpected ones. Expectations are baffled; illusions are destroyed. Reality overtakes fantasy."

Checklist:

1. Does your plot of transformation deal with the process of change as the protagonist journeys through one of the many stages of life?
2. Does the plot isolate a portion of the protagonist's life that represents the period of change, moving from one significant character state to another?
3. Does the story concentrate on the nature of change and how it affects the protagonist from start to end of the experience?
4. Does the first dramatic phase relate the transforming incident that propels the protagonist into a crisis, starting the process of change?
5. Does the second dramatic phase depict the effects of the transformation? Does it concentrate on the self-examination and character of the protagonist?
6. Does the third dramatic phase contain a clarifying incident representing the final stage of the transformation? Does the character understand the true nature of the experience and how it has affected him? Does true growth and understanding occur?
7. What is the price of the wisdom gained? a certain sadness?

Thus spake Tobias (along with some paraphrasing).

Transformation, change...what could be more appropriate for our little Halloweenies contest? (Don't know what I'm talking about? Take a look at <http://web.mit.edu/mbarker/www/hall97/hall.html> !)

Let's pick a number! From one to six, or thereabouts?

1. amphisbaena -- serpent having a head at each end (Greece)
2. dybbuk -- dead person's evil spirit that invades a living person (Jewish folklore)
3. ghoul -- evil being that feeds on corpses
4. lamia -- monster with the head and breast of a woman and body of a serpent that lured children to suck their blood
5. phoenix -- immortal bird that cremates itself every 500 years, then emerges reborn from the ashes (Greece)
6. windigo -- evil spirit, cannibal demon (Native American folklore)

Now, back up and consider your character(s). How old are they? What change or shift in their life are they facing? For example, someone who is just starting high school has a little different viewpoint from someone who is about to graduate from college and face the world of work, or from the young couple about to have their first baby, or the slightly older parent thinking about their child leaving home, or... And don't forget, if you don't want to go with the big shifts, a little dabble do you! So think about the change they were facing...

Then mix in that delightful creature you picked up in the first part. Offhand, I'd recommend making a couple of lists. First, a list of points about the change—what's good, what's bad, what are we going to learn from it? Second, a list of points about the monster in our midst—what's good, what's bad, what are we going to do about it? Now, look at the linkages between the lists. Can defeating the monster be turned into a sort of metaphor for the change we are dealing with? What if we don't defeat the monster, but learn from it something about ourselves? Could defeating the monster be an "anti-metaphor," contrasted to the change which we cannot defeat?

What if we are transformed into the monster? Or what if there is no monster, just poor sad humanity, hiding behind the cloak of the monster?

Let's see. How about something borrowed, and perhaps blue? Pick a number, one to six, and let's see what you got:

1. a yellow highlighter
2. a red papiermache pepper
3. a 5 pound bag of sugar
4. a spoonful of hot fudge
5. a two year old comic book from a dentist's waiting room
6. a clipboard

There you go. Now you have a prop, a little bit of physical setting which you are going to cleverly weave into the story. And don't forget, if you mention hot fudge in the first scene, someone should have a sundae before we get done...

Put it all together, it spells...

Well, that's up to you!

## Master Plot #13: Maturation

[the loss of illusions...]

(p. 160) "The maturation plot—the plot about growing up—is one of those strongly optimistic plots. There are lessons to learn, and those lessons may be difficult, but in the end the character becomes (or will become) a better person for it."

(p. 161) "The protagonist of the maturation plot is usually a sympathetic young person whose goals are either confused or not yet quite formed. He floats on the sea of life without a rudder. He often vacillates, unsure of the proper path to take, the proper decision to make. These inabilities are usually the result of a lack of experience in life—naivete..."

"This coming-of-age story is often called the Bildungsroman, which is German for 'education novel.' The focus of these stories is the protagonist's moral and psychological growth. Start your story where the protagonist has reached the point in her life at which she can be tested as an adult. She may be ready for the test, or she may be forced into it by circumstances."

Phase the First: Before

(p. 162) "...begin with the protagonist as he is before events start to change his life. We need to see who this character is, how he thinks and acts, so we can make a decision about his moral and psychological state before he undergoes change. Your character may exhibit a lot of negative (childlike) traits. Perhaps he is irresponsible (but fun-loving), duplicitous, selfish, naive—all the character traits that are typical of people who haven't accepted the responsibilities of adulthood or who haven't accepted the moral and social code that the rest of us abide by (more or less)..."

When suddenly...

(p. 163) "Which brings us to the test. The catalytic event. ... suddenly something comes along and smacks her square in the face...."

death of a parent, divorce, loss of home....

"...The event must be powerful enough to get the attention of the protagonist and literally shake up her belief systems...."

"You will prove your skills as a writer by making us feel the apocalyptic force of the event on the child's psyche..."

Phase Two: I Don't Wanna

The first reaction usually is denial, either literal or figurative. Don't shortcut this. There's anger, resistance, etc.--work your character through them.

(p. 165) "It may be, in fact, that your protagonist is actually trying to do the right thing, but doesn't know what the right thing is. That means trial and error. Finding out what works and what doesn't work. That is the process of growing up, the journey from innocence to experience."

Phase Three: Finally

(p. 165) "Finally your protagonist develops a new system of beliefs and gets to the point where it can be tested. In the third dramatic phase, your protagonist will finally accept (or reject) the change. Since we've already noticed that most works of this type end on a positive note, your protagonist will accept the role of adult in a meaningful rather than a token way."

Be careful with this plot. Don't lecture or moralize, let the reader find the meaning buried in the prosaic...and see the world fresh again.

Checklist:

1. Is your protagonist on the cusp of adulthood, with goals that are confused or not yet clear?
2. Does your story clearly show the readers who the character is and how s/he feels and thinks before the event occurs that begins the process of change?
3. Does your story contrast the protagonist's naive life (childhood) to the reality of an unprotected life (adulthood)?
4. Does your story focus on showing the protagonist's moral and psychological growth?
5. Does the "precipitating event" clearly challenge the beliefs and understanding of the world that you have shown?
6. "Does your character reject or accept change? Perhaps both? Does she resist the lesson? How does she act?"
7. Does your story show your protagonist undergoing the process of change? Is the change realistically gradual and difficult?
8. Is your young protagonist convincing? Does she display adult values and perceptions before she has developed them?
9. Does your story try to convert someone to "instant adulthood"? Or does it use small lessons and major upheavals to reflect the long process of growing up?
10. Does your story accurately show the psychological price that this lesson demands, and how your protagonist copes with that cost?

That's our technical background lesson from Tobias...

Since we're still in the time of the halloweenies, let's consider whether growing up (maturation) could be the basis of a horror...aha!

Suppose, just for example, that we have our normal, fun-loving bunch of teenagers (young people, pick your age group)...hotrodding, dancing on the beach, headed for the prom...or just hanging out at the mall?

And then comes...the bubbling goo from outer space? the phone call from the doctor (and just what was the diagnosis?) or the maniac from central New Jersey?...design your precipitating incident, anyway.

Spend a while mixing, brewing, stirring the soxes off the emotional twists and turns of the kids...

And rock our little worlds with the maturity that the kids step up to. Did Jose really skip the homecoming dance just to sit with Fernando, watching the sun rise one last time before...or does Emily decide that she doesn't care if the baby does have cloven hoofs and those buds on its skull, it's her baby and it's going to get a college education if it wants one...what about the wonderful

way that Alfred admits to the police that while he did lure the graduating class into the swamp, he was simply not aware that the great vampire bat migration was going on....

In short, it seems to me that facing down a little natural (or unnatural, take your pick) horror often is the catalyst for maturation. Take that kid with the cotton candy, add a boll weevil gleefully eating its way towards his heart, and if he's plucky, bold, and true...you may end up with an adult who knows that dental hygiene helps avoid cavities.

(and if you think you've seen this plot before a few times--you're right! but there are still a few tales for you to wring out of this one...so start twisting!)

How about...a number from one to six?

1. "Mature man needs to be needed, and maturity needs guidance as well as encouragement from what has been produced and must be taken care of." Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (1950), 7.
2. "We have not passed that subtle line between childhood and adulthood until we move from the passive voice to the active voice--that is, until we have stopped saying 'It got lost,' and say 'I lost it.'" Sydney J. Harris, *On the Contrary* (1962), 7.
3. "The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing the follies, prejudices, and false opinions he had contracted in the former." Jonathan Swift, *Thoughts on Various Subjects* (1711).
4. "To live with fear and not be afraid is the final test of maturity." Edward Weeks, "A Quarter Century: Its Retreats," *Look*, July 18, 1961.
5. "The turning point in the process of growing up is when you discover the core of strength in you that survives all hurt." Max Lerner, "Faubus and Little Rock," *The Unfinished Country* (1959), 4.
6. "One of the signs of passing youth is the birth of a sense of fellowship with other human beings as we take our place among them." Virginia Woolf, "Hours in a Library," *Times Literary Supplement*, "Nov. 30, 1916.

How about making a list of five different qualities which you admire (honesty? okay...) Then consider how someone who has not yet achieved that level of maturity may act. Focus down to the one that your character is going to be tested on (or challenged)...

Then pick the catalytic event. If you like, here's a list (pick your number!):

1. Death (of a friend, a relative, etc.)
2. Illness
3. Pregnancy
4. Reaction by others to revealed "secret" (you did what?)
5. Being "invited" to join in a crime
6. Having a parent (or other influential adult) leave

Refine that general event. Lay out the reactions to it. (and if you want, mix in the horror...up the ante on that catalyst! I think almost every item on the list has been used as the basis for horror--just push them a bit beyond the everyday, and you find fear and loathing grinning through the muck...)

Then lay out the story. Introduce us to the young person(s). Have their life interrupted by...change. Show us the actions and reactions, the attempts to escape, to hide, to avoid...and then show us the growth into maturity, into someone who acts with knowledge of the price of their actions...

(wow! what a tale you've got to tell! write!)

## Master Plot #14: Love

[Do you need somebody to love? – beatles!]

(p. 168) "...Since we know conflict is fundamental to fiction, we also know 'Boy Meets Girl' isn't enough. It must be 'Boy Meets Girl, But...!' The story hinges on the 'But...!' These are the obstacles to love that keep the lovers from consummating their affair."

"Sometimes the lovers are within what we might call social normals, but situations arise that aren't conducive to love, and people won't condone it. Unlike the lovers in forbidden love, who usually pay for their 'folly' with their lives, these lovers have decent chance of overcoming the obstacles that make their affair such rough sailing."  
Obstacles include confusion, misunderstanding, mistaken identities, gimmicks (one of us is a Ghost!), madness...even the size of certain organs (noses, for example).

(p. 171) "The first attempt to solve the obstacle is almost always thwarted. Don't forget the Rule of Three. The first two attempts fail, the third time's the charm...." "The lesson of fairy tales is the basic lesson of all love stories: Love that hasn't been tested isn't true love. Love must be proved, generally through hardship."

(p. 172) "What makes a good love story? The answer lies more with the characters than with the actions. That's why the love plot is a character plot. A better way of putting it is by saying that successful love stories work because of the 'chemistry' between the lovers. You can create a plot that has plenty of clever turns and gimmicks, but if the lovers aren't convincing in a special way, it will fall flat on its face. ..."

(p. 173) "...If you want to break away from Everylover and write about two (or more) characters who are unique, you must delve into the psychology of people and love. \_A love story is story about love denied and either recaptured or lost.\_ Its plan is simple; executing the plan is not. It all depends on your ability to find two people who are remarkable in either a tragic or a comic way as they pursue love."

(p. 175) talking about how to write something original in this well-plowed field... "A sincere work--a work of sentiment--generates its own power; a sentimental work borrows feelings from stock. Rather than create characters or events that generate unique feelings, the sentimentalist merely relies on stock characters and events that already have their emotions built in."

(p. 178) Don't forget the down side--falling out of love.

"Falling out of love is about people, too. It's about the end rather than the beginning of a relationship. The success of your story depends on an understanding of who your characters are and what has happened to them. By the end of your story, the situation is driven to crisis, which results in some kind of resolution: resignation to perpetual warfare, divorce and death being the most common resolutions."

The Structure:

Depends on the nature of the plot you intend to use. You are going to have to adapt.

One common one: two lovers find each other in the beginning and then circumstances step in to separate them. The phases are:

1. Lovers Found. Present the two main characters and establish the relationship. Deep love, marriage...and disaster strikes. Kidnapping, parental moves, ex-spice, war, disease, accident, the flying fickle finger of fate...
2. Lovers split. One (or both) of the two tries to find/rescue/reunite/rekindle. Usually one is active, while the other is relatively passive. Setbacks, complications, and troubles ensure that the situation gets worse, not better.
3. Lovers reunited! Somehow, somehow, when you least expect it--Candid Camera will bring them together! "Opportunity presents itself to the diligent, and the active lover finally finds an opening that allows her either to overcome the antagonist or [overcome] the preventative force..."

Checklist:

1. Do you meet the prospect of love with a major obstacle, so that while your characters obviously want it, they can't have it.
2. Do your lovers have the obstacle of being ill-met? E.g., from different social classes, backgrounds, physically mismatched?
3. Do you thwart the first attempt to solve the obstacle? Do you make sure that success doesn't come easily, and that the only way to love is dedication and persistence?
4. Do you show us that one lover is more aggressive than the other, and provide us with good reasons for the difference?
5. Did you force a happy ending when your story really is sad?



6. Did you make your main characters appealing, convincing, real people? Are their personalities and their situation unique and interesting? Do you really feel for your characters?
7. Do you develop a full range of feelings and emotions in your story? Don't focus just on the positive feelings--use some dark to bring out the light of your story.
8. Do you understand the role of sentiment and sentimentality in your story and use the right mix for the market you are aiming at?
9. "Take your lovers through the full ordeal of love. Make sure they are tested (individually and collectively) and that they finally deserve the love they seek. Love is earned; it is not a gift. Love untested is not true love."

That's what Tobias has to say...now let's see.

How about picking a number from one to six?

1. Work
2. Social/cultural/class differences
3. Disease/addiction
4. Parents/family/friends
5. Sexual desires/experiences (including rape, impotence, etc.)
6. Psychological/Personality differences

Stop here and think a bit. You have an issue or topic there, something that could get in between our lovers and cause some problems. Make a list of five (or more! but at least five) specific problems that might get in their way.

Now, I pick number four! Yes, that's right, take number four off your list of specific problems. Think about it. Expand on it. Embroider the edges of the difficulty, and consider how to use this problem to make your lovers walk across hot coals to be together.

And, if you'll pick yet another one of those wonderful numbers from one to six?

1. I don't want people to love me. It makes for obligations. Jean Anouilh, *The Lark*, (1955), 2, adapted by Lillian Hellman.
2. To love without criticism is to be betrayed. Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, (1937)
3. First love, with its frantic haughty imagination, swings its object clear of the everyday, over the rut of living, making him all looks, silences, gestures, attitudes, a burning phrase with no context. Elizabeth Bowen, *The House in Paris* (1935), 2.5.
4. Unable are the Loved to die/For Love is Immortality. Emily Dickinson, poem (c. 1864)
5. We don't love qualities, we love persons; sometimes by reason of their defects as well as of their qualities. Jacques Maritain, *Reflections on America* (1958), 3.
6. Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, May 14, 1904, tr. M.D. Herter Norton.

So now you have a quotation about love. That goes with the problem that is going to get in the way of love. One of the simpler plots is to start with this quotation, and a heaping portion of love--but the lovers don't quite understand the quotation yet. Now separate, mix, blend, chop, and let the seasonings simmer...until they learn! and bring them back together, wiser and tougher, with love on high...

Our problem right now probably is to pick the characters. How about this? Take your two numbers from above. Multiply together. And find the result below:

- 1-6: Father and child
- 7-12: Homosexual males
- 13-18: Adults, heterosexual
- 19-24: Teenagers, heterosexual
- 25-30: Homosexual females
- 31-36: Mother and child

Feel free to elaborate. For example, if you have a pair of heterosexual adults, are they an old married couple (yes, love does happen there too...) or perhaps a pair meeting for the first time at the corner bar? Build up the two characters into full rounded people, who really do have a relationship (where did they go on their first date? What happened? and so on).

Pick out the scene you want to use to show us how much they care for each other. It can be their wedding, or maybe it's walking through the National Zoo in Rock Creek Park, throwing peanuts to the chimps and laughing together at one of the outside tables where busloads of kids eat their lunches...

Sketch in the disaster striking. Make us feel the pain of that separation, the shock of it.

And then show us the struggle. The first attempts to overcome the problem—and the failure. The renewed determination, the refusal to give in, the dark nights of crying and fear...make us sweat!

Finally, when it seems as if there is nothing, no way to win...that peanut in your pocket is just the thing that will tip the scale and give you a chance to win through! or maybe not?

Your choice as to whether you are going to play it for laughs (two dirty old men, just learning that being dirty together is more fun than being dirty alone?) or for romantic (young love, sweet love...ah, the innocence) or for serious (love, transforming the world, but at what price!).

You might like to think about how you would answer the following questions. I've borrowed this list from Barry Longyear's suggestions in *Science Fiction Writer's Workshop I*, ISBN 0-913896-18-7.

#### Background

1. Where are we? (setting)
2. Who is involved? (characters, strengths, flaws)
3. Where are they headed? (goals, motives)
4. What stops or blocks them? (obstacle(s))
5. What are they going to do about it? (plans to overcome problems) Story
6. What hook(s) or bait for the reader will I use? (where start) What story question do I pose for the reader?
7. What backfill is needed? (background that needs to be filled in)
8. What buildup do I want? (scenes)
9. What is the climax?
  - how does the character change? (overcome weakness, etc.)
  - how is the plot resolved? (overcome problems and achieve goals)
  - What answer does the reader get to the story question?

#### Higher Level

10. What purpose, moral, or theme am I writing about?

## Master Plot #15: Forbidden Love

Society lays out boundaries--social class, economic, religious, race, age, and various other groups that are "off-limits" for love.

(p. 183) "...But the power of love--or just the idea of being in love--is enough to make some cross 'the line' and enter forbidden territory. And since fiction often acts as our social conscience, there are plenty of stories to warn us about the penalties of crossing that line. Occasionally a story comes along that flies in the face of social taboos and shows that love can sometimes be more powerful than the disapproval of an entire society. Love sometimes thrives in the cracks."

two lovers with feuding families...

teacher and student...

the ugly or grotesque and the beauty...

Adultery is the most common form of "forbidden love."

(p. 185) "The character triangle in stories about adultery is always the same: the wife, the husband and the lover. The strict moral codes of the nineteenth century could never allow an adulterous affair to be a \_happy\_ one, and since the wage of sin is death, ... all die. ..." "Writing about adultery wasn't always such stern stuff. Before we became so serious-minded, it was often treated casually. The French \_fabliaux\_ (short, humorous tales written between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries) and English Tudor drama often played on the theme of the cuckolded husband. ..."

(p. 186) "The person committing the adultery is often the protagonist. The betrayed spouse is often the antagonist and frequently seeks revenge. The plot easily reverses itself and has the adulterers turn into murderers by killing or trying to kill the spouse..."

Incest...a bit darker, and always considered aberrant.

Homosexual love - often treated as forbidden. (p. 186) "Our literature reflects this intolerance by making stories about homosexual lovers tragedies."

May-December romance - sometimes considered in this light, it also often escapes from the conventions of morality.

Structure:

Phase the first: show the beginning of the relationship. Who are the lovers? (p. 188) "Usually society, if it knows about the forbidden love, expresses its disapproval or takes direct action to stop it. The lovers either pursue their affair in secret or in open defiance of what everyone else thinks. The secret affair is almost always found out. Society is always ready to punish those who don't abide by its rules."

Phase the second: The heart of the relationship. Show us the pressures, the love, the conflict between what society ordains and what these two lovers desire. Make us feel reality and love collide.

Phase the third: "...the lovers must pay their overdue bill to society." Death, mutilation, disillusionment, despair... "Society, it seems, never loses."

Checklist:

1. Does the love go against conventions of society? Which ones? What are the explicit or implicit forces that will be exerted on the lovers?
2. Do your lovers ignore or flout social convention and follow the dictates of their hearts? Are the results disastrous?
3. Are you writing about adultery? Is the adulterer the protagonist or antagonist? What about the offended spouse?
4. Does your first dramatic phase define the relationship between the lovers and frame it in its social context? Do you clearly show the taboos that they have broken? Do they have trouble accepting that they have broken the taboos? How do people around them react to the broken taboos? Are the lovers trying to ignore the problems or are they dealing with the reality of their situation?
5. Does the second phase clearly show the development of the relationship? Do you show the love, and the social/psychological pressures? Is there dissolution, denial, or what?
6. Does your third phase bring the lovers to the end of their relationship and play out the moral imperatives? Do you separate (and punish) your lovers through death, force, desertion, etc.?

Thus spake Tobias...

and now, for plotting our own little diversion, please take a number (one to six? pick up sticks!)

1. Anniversary
2. Engagement
3. Valentine's Day
4. Moonlight beach
5. Island cruise
6. An airport

This is going to be a time or place which plays a part in your tale of forbidden love. You can use it as the catalyst for one character to reveal the secret, the hidden truth, or whatever. Or it can just be the backdrop for the two (or three or so?) to play out their affections and the disaffection of society for them...

Take your choice. Consider some of the elements that are usually associated with that time/place. And then...

Another number, from one to six, if you please?

1. Social separation -- family? position? class?
2. Religious differences
3. Racial differences
4. Adultery
5. Homosexual
6. Take Your Pick! Physical differences, Ex-con, Psychological divisions, phase of the moon difficulties...or whatever you like as reasons that these two should not be allowed to follow their hearts.

Okay? Two (or more, especially in the case of adultery) characters. Make a list for each one of the five (or more) characteristics they have that draw them together. Make a special note of the one (or more) that isn't normally considered acceptable. And make a list of the kind of problems that are associated with that kind of difference. Include the stereotyped ones and push for a few that aren't quite so stereotyped--what about the children of the homosexual father wanting to visit?

And for the splashy craft of it, step through these story questions. At least sketch the answers to each one:

Background

1. Where are we? (setting)
2. Who is involved? (characters, strengths, flaws)
3. Where are they headed? (goals, motives)
4. What stops or blocks them? (obstacle(s))
5. What are they going to do about it? (plans to overcome problems) Story
6. What hook(s) or bait for the reader will I use? (where start)  
What story question do I pose for the reader?
7. What backfill is needed? (background that needs to be filled in)
8. What buildup do I want? (scenes)
9. What is the climax?
  - how does the character change? (overcome weakness, etc.)
  - how is the plot resolved? (overcome problems and achieve goals)
  - What answer does the reader get to the story question?

Higher Level

10. What purpose, moral, or theme am I writing about?

Got your answers? Then you should be ready to write that story! Make us feel the tension between love most tender (and most illicit!) and the bigotry, hatred, and sheer prejudice that would (and most likely will) destroy these two, even if it cannot destroy their love. Show us how much they love each other, how far above the ground the tightrope they walk, how strong the storm that threatens them...and let us sigh with relief as they step onto solid ground and kiss OR make us cry for them as they plunge to their deaths, arms around each other, love that overcomes all...

Wow! What a story! I never thought about...oh, my, what tenderness...what romance...what horror!

## Master Plot #16: Sacrifice

(p. 191) "Originally the concept of sacrifice meant to offer an object to a god to establish a relationship between yourself and that god..."

(p. 193) "That may be the point of sacrifice: It always comes at a great personal cost. It may cost your character her life, or it may cost in profound psychological ways. Your character should undergo a major transformation."

"Your protagonist may begin this transformation from a lower psychological state, in which she's unaware of the nature and complexity of the problem that confronts her. But circumstances (or Fate, if you prefer) suddenly propel your character into a dilemma that demands action. She must make a decision. She can take the low road, which is the easy way out (run, play it safe, etc.) or she can take the high road, which is the hard way and comes at a great personal cost...Generally, your character will balk at doing the right thing. Sacrificing yourself is never easy."

Instantaneous, intuitive sacrifices make nice drama, but "we're more intrigued by the profound internal struggle of a person who must make a decision that will either result in shame (for taking the easy way out) or honor (even though it may cost him his life)..."

(p. 194) "The foundation of sacrifice as a plot is character; the act of sacrifice itself is a manifestation of character, and so it's secondary to it."

Structure:

First Dramatic Phase: Introduce the protagonist. In most cases, this will be a person apparently without ideals (unless the sacrifice itself is the ideals...) This highlights the struggle between immoral egoist and the decision of real conscience.

(p. 196) "By setting the foundations of character, you will make believable the transition from a selfish state to a selfless state. You can't just turn a character around 180 degrees and reverse her attitudes and actions by a simple event. You must show convincingly how the character could get from point A to point Z. ... The plot question is, 'Who will he help? And how? What will make him change his mind and come out of his shell.'"

Second Dramatic Phase: What's wrong? (p. 197) "In the second dramatic phase the character should be confronted with a moral dilemma that has no easy solution. Your character may try to find that easy solution at first—he may avoid doing the right thing—but eventually the truth and the choices become obvious. That doesn't mean you should be obvious, because that will make your story predictable and uninteresting. We shouldn't ever be entirely sure what your protagonist will do. There may be a real chance that he won't do the right thing. People do rationalize. They do find easy ways out that save their conscience. In this plot, doing the right thing often comes at a high price."

Make sure the stakes are big enough, and the motives clear. This doesn't mean that fate of the universe always has to hang on the horns of the dilemma, but the protagonist (and others) should have meaningful involvement. Don't forget that self-esteem or other psychological stakes cost, too.

Third Phase: You've made your choice, now pay the price... (p. 199) "As you develop your third dramatic phase, focus on the payment your character must make to make his sacrifice. Most stories about sacrifice build up to this point: It is the moment of truth for your character. Will he or won't he do the best thing? ... In this phase you should concentrate on two major aspects:

- the actual sacrifice of your character and how it affects him
- the effect of the sacrifice on the other characters

Watch out for over-sentimental or melodramatic pitfalls. Don't exaggerate at this point.

(my note: watch out for the tendency to cheapen the sacrifice by the sudden miraculous "save". Yes, readers like a happy ending—but having a deus ex machina swoop in and keep the protagonist from paying the full price of the sacrifice won't make them happy.)

Checklist:

1. Does your story show the great personal cost of the sacrifice? Is your protagonist playing for high stakes, either physical or mental?
2. Does your protagonist undergo a major transformation during the course of the story, moving from a lower moral state to a higher one?
3. Do the events force the protagonist to make a decision?
4. Is there an adequate foundation of character so that the reader understands his progress on the path to making the sacrifice?
5. Do all events in the story reflect the main character? Do they test and develop character?

6. Does the story show clearly the motivation of your protagonist so that the reader understands why he would make that kind of sacrifice?
7. Does the line of action show through the line of your character's thought?
8. Does the story have a strong moral dilemma at its center?

Okay? Got Tobias's notions well in mind? Then let's consider what might provide the seeds of a story about sacrifice...

How about a possible goal for our protagonist? Pick a number from one to six:

1. Fulfilling a duty
2. Seeking to protect another
3. Wanting to be the best
4. Gaining redemption
5. Paying a debt
6. Gaining power

Okay? Got your goal? (no, don't cheat, go back and pick one now...we'll wait...that's better, now we can go on.)

Think about the protagonist a bit. What kind of a character are they? Is this going to be a hard goal for them? What would they have to sacrifice...aha! Pick another number from one to six, if you please?

1. Love
2. Honesty
3. Family
4. Honor
5. Friendship
6. Innocence

Now, let's run these right into each other. Suppose that you have a choice between the goal you first picked and this new quality. For example, maybe your protagonist really wants to be the best (at what? you decide!) but also has family obligations. Which one will win? Will the protagonist decide to sacrifice the desire to be best for the demands of the family, or will they sacrifice their family on the altar of ambition?

(note: if you really don't like your goal or your quality, feel free to come up with your own alternatives. Conflicting goals make fine dilemmas as they stretch a character between...)

So...make a list of at least five specific steps that your character might need to make in pursuit of their goal. Pick the one you want to show the character trying to do. Then make a list of at least five ways that the "quality" could conflict with that. E.g., how does love conflict with gaining power? Or how does honesty, family, honor, friendship, or innocence cause trouble for our character in trying to reach their goal?

Psst? Got another number? One to six?

1. A Star of David
2. A ring
3. An old newspaper clipping
4. A doily (you know, those lace things?)
5. An action figure (which show or movie? you decide!)
6. An empty box

What does this have to do with your story? I don't know, but don't forget it. I'm sure it will be an interesting point, perhaps one of those motif thingies that bobs up and down throughout the story, providing English professors with endless hours of amusement trying to figure out the metaphorical imports and exports in lengthy reports...

Step back and set up the character. What is the initial scene (plus flashbacks, if needed?) that you'll use to show us who this person is? What are the faults and foibles of this person, and how can a quick telephone conversation/bar fight/leaving work scene show us...oh, that's right, you're going to answer all these questions?

Then consider the scene(s) you'll need to get them into the dilemma and show us the struggle going on, the stakes, the deepening trap that will not let them take any easy way out...

And, of course, develop that last scene, where the protagonist makes their choice and stands by it, even at the cost of their own life.

Having figured out this much, you might consider writing the story.

Polish, revise, and make us ache with your protagonist as they sacrifice...

(don't forget to doublecheck the checklist up there.)

## **Master Plot #17: Discovery**

(p. 201) "The possibilities of this plot are endless, but all the stories share a certain focus. It is a plot of character, and to this effect perhaps it's among the most character-oriented plots in this collection. Discovery is about people and their quest to understand who they are."

Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life?

Discovery shows us some answers to these questions, using characters and situations that seem real and concrete instead of philosophical abstractions and arguments.

(p. 202) "Discovery isn't just about characters. It's about characters in search of understanding something fundamental about themselves...."

(p. 203) "...Readers won't tolerate a writer on a crusade to tell the world the real meaning of life. What we will tolerate, however, is your sincere attempt to present a character struggling through the difficulties of life."

Three movements:

(p. 204) "To understand what a character is to become, we should understand what she was before the unique circumstances propel her on her journey." Don't delay the catalyst, but do give a strong sense of what life is like before...

Don't forget--start the story as late as possible! We don't need tons of detail setting the stage, just a quick glimpse as the action begins...

"...who he is, what's important to him, what he wants to accomplish."

(p. 204) "This first movement gives way to the second movement, which initiates change. Very often the main character is satisfied with his life and isn't looking to change it. But then life happens. Events force change. The character may be forced to look at his life closely for the first time and learn that everything wasn't as good as it was cracked up to be."

The third movement begins when the protagonist "starts to understand the nature of his revelation."

(p. 205) The main focus is on the middle. This is where you examine your character in depth. They may resist change, because it is hard. Having been shoved out of balance, they may struggle to regain the old equilibrium, but "events force her to confront aspects about herself that she may have always avoided."

Make sure you let them struggle with their discovery.

And work to match the struggle with the 'revelation'. I.e., a serious, hard struggle shouldn't result in a trivial change, nor should trivial struggle cause major change. The degree of upheaval in their life mirrors the depth of revelation they experience.

(p. 207) "These stories tend to be dramatic, even melodramatic. That may be because they deal with such extremes of emotion: love, hate, death. ... It would be easy for a writer to fall in the trap of melodrama."

"When does a story become melodramatic? When the emotion being expressed is exaggerated beyond the subject matter's ability to sustain the level of emotion."

"Once the plot (action) takes over character, you lose proportion. If you want to be sincere and deal with complicated emotions, you must spend the time it takes to develop a character who is strong enough to carry those emotions. Otherwise, all you're trying to do is glue feelings onto a cardboard cutout of a character."

Checklist:

1. Does your story focus on the character making the discovery, not the discovery itself? Does it show understanding of human nature?
2. Does your plot give us an understanding of who the main character(s) are before circumstances change and force the character into new situations?
3. Does your story start as late as possible, with the character on the very cusp of change?
4. Is the catalyst that forces the change significant and interesting enough to hold the reader's attention?
5. Does your story move the character into crisis (the clash between the new and the old) as quickly as possible?
6. Does your story maintain a sense of proportion? Are action and emotion balanced and believable? Are the "revelations" of the character in proportion with the events?
7. Do you exaggerate emotions or actions to "force" emotions from the character? Avoid this melodramatic lure...
8. Do you preach or force the character to carry messages for you, the author? Or do you let the characters and their circumstances show the reader whatever they will, with the readers drawing their own conclusions about the story? (My gloss: could you imagine several readers having a long discussion about the "moral" of your story, each asserting what they got—and none quite sure that the others weren't just as accurate?)

Thus wrote Tobias...and now, let's consider how we're going to write a discovery!

How about starting with a number from one to six?

1. "One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time." Andre Gide, *The Counterfeiters* (1925), 3.15, tr. Dorothy Bussy
2. "The new always carries with it the sense of violation, of sacrilege. What is dead is sacred; what is new, that is, different, is evil, dangerous, or subversive." Henry Miller "With Edgar Varese in the Gobi Desert," *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945)
3. "Let no one say that I have said nothing new; the arrangement of the subject is new." Pascal, *Pensees* (1670), 22, tr. W.F. Trotter
4. "The vitality of a new movement in art or letters can be pretty accurately gauged by the fury it arouses." Logan Pearsall Smith, *Afterthoughts* (1931), 5.
5. "Each new season grows from the left-overs from the past. That is the essence of change, and change is the basic law." Hal Borland, "Autumn's Clutter-November 3," *Sundial of the Seasons* (1964)
6. "There is a time for departure, even when there's no certain place to go." Tennessee Williams, *Camino Real* (1953), 8.

That gives us an observation about change, innovation, discovery. Take a few moments to think about that quote, perhaps noting a few points about what it means to you, or why you might consider it to be true (or false).

Now, let us consider our character. Pick a character. Give them a name, sex, age, all those basics. And if you will pick a number from one to six?

1. Trying to get somewhere in time
2. Trying to avoid going somewhere (disliked? feared?)
3. Trying to fulfill a promise
4. Trying to win a better place for oneself



5. Trying to make up for what a relative did
6. Trying to overcome a handicap

Got that? Try working out the details of how this character is trying to accomplish that goal. What's at stake? What's the background that drives them to attempt this?

Now, since romance is in the air, and love is everywhere...suppose that there is a complication, and his/her name is--you tell me. Further, s/he has this emotional edge, this ability to make our main character go wild with (oh, oh, here comes another one. How about a number from one to eight...see which emotional base we're suffering from or with:

1. Anger: fury, outrage, resentment, wrath, exasperation, indignation, vexation, acrimony, animosity, annoyance, irritability, hostility, and, perhaps the extreme, pathological hatred and violence.
2. Sadness: grief, sorrow, cheerlessness, gloom, melancholy, self-pity, loneliness, dejection, despair, and, when pathological, severe depression.
3. Fear: anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, concern, consternation, misgiving, wariness, qualm, edginess, dread, fright, terror; as a psychopathology, phobia and panic.
4. Enjoyment: happiness, joy, relief, contentment, bliss, delight, amusement, pride, sensual pleasure, thrill, rapture, gratification, satisfaction, euphoria, whimsy, ecstasy, and at the far edge, mania
5. Love: acceptance, friendliness, trust, kindness, affinity, devotion, adoration, infatuation, agape
6. Surprise: shock, astonishment, amazement, wonder
7. Disgust: contempt, disdain, scorn, abhorrence, aversion, distaste, revulsion
8. Shame: guilt, embarrassment, chagrin, remorse, humiliation, regret, mortification, and contrition

So, our character knows where they want to go, they have a romantic involvement with this other character who keeps tripping emotional landmines in their shared life, and they are about to discover...themselves.

Take some time and consider what they are going to discover--what will change? For example, maybe they will learn that achieving their goal isn't as important as they thought it was--or that only by accepting their own emotional turmoil can they achieve their dreams? A very romantic kind of thing is to sacrifice the long-dreamed-of goal for the wonders of love, but it's up to you as to just how the tension is built and plays out.

Don't forget that (with pink romance contact lenses firmly obscuring the details beneath a billow of cotton candy) love oft is thought to overcome all barriers, so perhaps the romantic coupling which first appears to be an obstacle to achievement in the end provides a royal boost along the way (not a kick in the pants, just a JATO unit to help us on our way)?

## Plot #18: Wretched Excess

(p. 209) "We are fascinated with people who push the limits of acceptable behavior, either by choice or by accident." "This fascination for people who inhabit the margins of society is what makes this plot so interesting..." You and I probably fall into the middle...

"But life sometimes throws us a curve that we can't handle. ...Now you're on the margins of society and probably on the margin of acceptable behavior." "The scary thing about wretched excess is that it can happen to anyone under any circumstances. It doesn't just happen to people who are on the edge; it can happen suddenly to people who seem to be the rock of respectability. It doesn't really take much to unravel someone."

(p. 210) "The real tension inherent in this plot comes from convincing the readers that whatever the excess, it could happen to them, too. Which of us knows what evil lurks in the hearts of those around us? Which of us can see the fatal flaws in our behavior or the behavior of others that lets us become unglued in an instant? True horror...lies in the commonplace. ... to make horror from everyday people and everyday events strikes to the core. ... a good writer could convince me that there are terrors just as great [as a vampire] lurking in all our lives. All it takes is the right turn of events."

"...The wretched excess plot is about people who have lost the veneer of civilization either because they are mentally unbalanced or because they have been trapped by circumstances that made them behave

differently than they would under 'normal' circumstances...."

(p. 215) Basic Structure

Part one: an understanding of what life is like before the change...before the character starts being driven to extremes. But be careful—just enough of a hint that we understand the character, not so much that we are bored.

And bring in the catalyst "an event that forces change in the life of the main character. Ultimately, the change will result in a total loss of control. The change may be gradual—maybe hardly noticeable at first—but we watch in horror and fascination as the character begins the decline toward whatever his obsession is."

Part two...develop the gradual loss of control. "How does it affect the character? How does it affect those who are near him? Each successive complication takes him deeper into a well that seems to have no escape."

Part three. Here the character loses control. "It is the turning point of the plot. Clearly things cannot get worse."

You don't have to write a tragedy! "Your character may find a more constructive way out and start back on the road to healing. But something important must happen to resolve the excess."

Checklist:

1. Does your story show us the psychological decline of a character?
2. Is the decline of the character firmly based on a character flaw? What is it?
3. Does the story show the three phases of the decline: before events force a change; during successive deterioration; and at/after the crisis, with the flaw overcoming (in tragedy) or with heroic recovery?
4. Do you develop the character fully enough so that the decline evokes sympathy? Do you let the reader know what the character really feels, giving us enough information early enough?
5. Have you spent extra effort on developing the character, making sure that he will be real to the reader and worthy of their feelings for him?
6. Do you avoid melodrama? Make sure the emotion(s) you are trying to evoke are matched to the scene.
7. Are you straightforward with information that allows the reader to understand your main character? Did you hide something that would help your reader empathize with the character?
8. Have you scaled the crimes to match the reader's understanding of who and what the main character is?
9. Does your crisis get resolved? Does the character move toward complete destruction or redemption?
10. Does the action in the plot relate directly to character? Do "things happen \_because\_ your main character does (or does not) do certain things"?
11. Do you understand (through personal experience or research) the excess you are writing about? Make sure that what you show the character doing is realistic for someone suffering from this excess or madness.

And that's Tobias's guidance to the ways of excess...

Let's see how you might turn this into your very own story, poem, or other toil of representation, illustration, and personification (otherwise known as a work of art!).

I think the right place to start is with the character. So, let's pick a number from one to six, if you would be so kind?

1. Williams
2. Miller
3. Anderson
4. Thompson
5. Taylor
6. Moore

Okay, that was interesting...now another number, if you please, maestro?

1. Blair

2. Dakota
3. Daryl
4. Shannon
5. Marlin
6. Jaime

So, now you have a name. Daryl Taylor? (Note that the second list is taken from Top-listed Cross-gender Names in Baby Names for the 90's by Barbara Kay Turner, so you will need to pick a gender for your character...)

Work a little with your new character. Think about their hair color, where they grew up, what kind of TV shows they watch, have they read the latest novel or do they prefer ancient philosophy for bedtime reading? Do they wear jeans (part of the leisure class, perhaps?) or are they solidly upwardly mobile, encrusted in a suit and tie whenever they are in public? Do they turn the radio on when they are sitting waiting in a car? What kind of music?

And, lest we forget, delve into the mind and soul of your character. Plant a "fatal flaw" if you will...oh, can't think of any? Roll your die!

1. Carelessness
2. Gossip
3. Hypocritical
4. Fear of (pick one, phobias are for everyone!)
5. Hypochondriac
6. Loyalty

(what, loyalty doesn't look like a flaw to you? Okay, consider loyalty taken to extremes...to the point where it endangers life and limb...well, perhaps there is a flaw there?)

So you have a character, with their little personality problem...now think about what might happen to force them face to face with their problem at the extreme. Perhaps the careless person "falls into" a situation where someone's life depends on them being a nitpicking, obsessive person. For example, suppose they are the only person who can rendezvous with the orbiting spacer before they run out of air...and there isn't room for a mistake! Or the gossip spends 24 hours with a live microphone and news crew following them around... The hypocritical person finds out they have been telling their fiancée's father all about the way they have been lying. Or maybe the person who is afraid of...

You get the point. Make a list of two or three situations that would push this personality problem into collapse, then think about how to get your character into that position.

Then add in that the flood has just destroyed their house, the business has burnt to the ground, something has pulled all the support that they might normally lean on out from under them. Pretend you really want poor old Jaime Thompson to feel as if no one is on their side, and methodically remove all the social underpinning that holds the character up...

At this point, you might want to go ahead and write the story. Some people will want to sketch out the scenes first, then write them up using that outline. Either way, take us from the ordinary life of our character through the transformation into extraordinary ways and means...and show us how the character reacts, whether they are broken on the rack of life or learn to go beyond what anyone would expect.

Another number?

1. "The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom." William Blake, "Proverbs of Hell," *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790)
2. "Excess on occasion is exhilarating. It prevents moderation from acquiring the deadening effect of a habit." W. Somerset Maugham, *The Summing Up* (1938), 15
3. "They are as sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing." Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97), 1.2.6
4. "We deny that it is fun to be saving. It is fun to be prodigal. Go to the butterfly, thou parsimonious sluggard; consider her ways and get wise." Franklin P. Adams, *Nods and Becks* (1944)

5. "Dry happiness is like dry bread. We eat, but we do not dine. I wish for the superfluous, for the useless, for the extravagant, for the too much, for that which is not good for anything." Victor Hugo, "Jean Valjean," *Les Miserables* (1862) 5.6, tr. Charles E. Wilbour

6. "What is objectionable, what is dangerous about extremists is not that they are extreme, but that they are intolerant. The evil is not what they say about their cause, but what they say about their opponents." Robert F. Kennedy, "Extremism, Left and Right," *The Pursuit of Justice* (1964)

So now you have a quote to mix in (or ignore, if it distracts you too much from your fine beginning). But no matter how much you use or dismiss, please...

## Master Plot #19+#20: Ascension & Descension

Tobias combines the last two plots, so we'll follow right along...

(p. 218) "Real drama, they've been telling us, is a story about a person who falls from a high place because of a tragic flaw in character. ... These days there aren't a lot of kings and queens to choose from, but still we have a fascination for stories about people who fall from high places." "We have an equal fascination with people who rise from humble beginnings to great prominence, the so-called rags-to-riches scenario..."

"These are stories about people, first, last, and foremost. Without a centerpiece character, you have no plot. The main character is the focus of the story. ..." "...you must develop a main character that is compelling and strong enough to carry the entire story, from beginning to end. ..."

(p. 220) "These stories [ascension plots] are less common, which might say something about ourselves, but the ascension plot (the character's spiritual movement from sinner to saint rather than from saint to sinner) is uplifting. Whereas the descension plot serves as a cautionary tale, the ascension plot serves as a parable. ..."

"Stories [like this] are uplifting because they ultimately explore the positive aspects of human character. Your main character should overcome odds not just as a hero who has obstacles to conquer but as a character in the process of becoming a better person. ..."

(p. 223) "Just as the ascension plot examines the positive values of human character under stress, the descension explores the negative values of human character under stress. These are dark tales. They are tales about power and corruption and greed. The human spirit fails in its moment of crisis."

"...As you develop your central character, you will find that she will quickly become extraordinary. Your main character may start out average, but events (Fate, if you prefer) lift the character above the ordinary and the trivial. The question that ultimately backs most of these stories is simple: How will fame (or power, or money) affect this character? We see her before the change, during the change and after the change, and we compare the phases of character development she has gone through as a result of these circumstances. Some handle it well; others don't."

Stages:

(p. 224) "As you fashion your character, keep in mind that it's important for the reader to know and understand the stages of development that your character is going through. We should know what he was like before the great change in his life so we have a basis of comparison. This constitutes the first movement of your plot."

Second movement: show us the change that propels the character from his former life into his emerging life. Gradual or instantaneous, "these events make it impossible for your character to remain the same."

(p. 225) "The third movement is the culmination of character and events. If the character has a flaw, we will see the expression of the flaw and how it affects him and those around him. Your character may overcome that flaw after some drastic event forces him to confront himself, or he may succumb to the flaw. Usually (but not always) some catastrophe—the result of your character's behavior—forces a realization of what he has 'become.'..."

## Checklist:

1. Is the focus of the story about a single character?
2. Is the character strong-willed, charismatic and seemingly unique? Do the other characters "revolve" around this one?
3. Is there a moral dilemma at the heart of your story? Does the dilemma test the character of your protagonist/antagonist, and is it the foundation for the catalyst of change in their character?
4. Are character and events closely related in your story? Does the main character make things happen? Is she the force that drives events, instead of being driven? (There may be events that affect the main character, but the main focus must be on how the character acts upon the world)
5. Does your story show your character as she was before the major change that alters her life? Do you show us bases for comparison?
6. Does the story show the character progressing through changes as the result of events? Do you show us the character suffering horrible circumstances, and then overcoming those circumstances--and show us how that looks? Do you show us various states of the character, with motivations and intents?
7. Does your story show us that reasons for a fall are the result of the character, not gratuitous? And if the character overcomes adversity, make sure you provided solid character-based background for that ability...
8. Do you have some variations in the rise or fall? Vary the tempo, do two steps forward and one back, then one down and two up...keep the reader guessing!
9. Does your story focus on the main character? Do all the events and characters relate to the main character? Do you show us that main character before, during, and after the change?

Thus Wrote Tobias!

So, we'll start right off. How about a number from one to six?

1. "Character is tested by true sentiments more than by conduct. A man is seldom better than his word." Lord Acton, postscript, letter to Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887.
2. "People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character." Emerson, *Worship, The Conduct of Life* (1860).
3. "Old age and sickness bring out the essential characteristics of a man." Felix Frankfurter, *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces* (1960), 2.
4. "Genius is formed in quiet, character in the stream of human life." Goethe, *Torquato Tasso* (1790), 1.2.
5. "No man can climb out beyond the limitations of his own character." John Morley, *Robespierre*, *Critical Miscellanies* (1871-1908)
6. "The things that really move liking in human beings are the gnarled nodosities of character, vagrant humours, freaks of generosity, some little unextinguishable spark of the aboriginal savage, some little sweet savour of the old Adam." Alexander Smith, "On Vagabonds," *Dreamthorp* (1863).

[Quotations from *The International Thesaurus of Quotations* by Rhoda Thomas Tripp ISBN 0-06-091382-7]

Okay, so there's a quote about character. Now, let's flip a coin...

heads – ascent

tails -- descent

So, now we know which way we are going to take the character. If we're going up, you may want to start with a character in that great wasteland of the middle classes -- or one a bit below. If we're going down, on the other hand, you probably want to start with a little extra edge.

Take time to think out the character. What's their name? Where did they go to school? Have they started working--at what? Relationships, friends, enemies...think about all the parts that make this a real person in your imagination. And don't forget those human quirks, those flaws and points of tension waiting for the right pressures to explode.

First, think of a really good, interesting scene to introduce our character. Whether they are being awakened by their masseur or having their shoulder shaken by the cop on the beat, show us who they are. Take us on a quick tour, setting the scene, showing us the world they inhabit and some of their neighbors, and planting the seeds of what is to come.

Next, think about the "initiating event." One of the interesting ways to do this is to plant a hint of it right in the very beginning paragraphs...but not let the reader really understand what it means until you've introduced the character to us. For example, if the beginning scene in the limo includes the radio news announcing a string of stuff among which is "Filor International was the target of a hostile takeover today" but we don't realize until our character can't get into their office that they are the CEO of Filor International--well, we're ready for the developments to come.

Let's take another number, one to six:

1. Business (change in work -- losing or changing job)
2. Change in family relationships (death, marriage, etc.)
3. Change in physical being (illness, etc.)
4. Accident
5. Transitions (leaving home, graduation, retirement)
6. Change in home (moving, loss, etc.)

These are some of the most stressful incidents in our lives. Pick one! and then let your character face it as the catalyst for their change.

Put that into a scene or two. Show us the character encountering the change--and reacting to it! Show us the initial reaction, the delayed double-take, the denial, anger, bargaining, depression and all that...

Building to the climax. This is where we (as writers) test that character to its limits. Here is where the character goes through the tempering, the final forging--and some crack and break, while others come out transformed. Think about what kind of scene you want to use to show us this conflict, and make it really tough for the character. Don't make it too easy--the person who is falling apart should become all too aware of how far they've fallen, while the person who is rising, defying all the odds...let them struggle!

This is one where it's often good to go back after you've written it (having learned more about the character and the situations through writing) and consider "enriching" the characterization. Redo the dialogue, add in those little bits of "business" that mark this character, make sure that every action really shows this character--not just a character.

It's a simple pair of story plots--rags to riches; and the fall from glory. But they're also a place where you as writer can shine, bringing out the depth of characterization, making us feel the rich life of your stories.

So write!

[p.s. don't look now, but there's another chapter in Tobias's book. So we'll have another one in the series, too.]

Twenty plots. Some people will read through them and toss the whole thing aside. Others will try to use them as recipes.

(p. 228) "As you fashion your plot, ask yourself how you want to go about it. There are two main ways that I know of. The first is to bulldoze your way through the work without ever looking back. \_Get to the end and then worry whether or not you got it right\_. Don't let intellectual concerns about plot get in the way of the emotional thrust of writing a book. Lots of writers work that way. They put full stock in the power of rewriting. Write it first and then figure out what's wrong with it...."

"...This school says, \_Know along the way what you're doing and where you're going\_. ..."

"Ask yourself which approach you would feel comfortable with. If you think that constantly applying the elements of plot will stunt your expression of ideas, just get it all on paper. If you know which plot you want (and that may change in the middle of writing your story as you become aware of other possibilities), read over the guidelines and see if they stick in the back of your mind while you write...."

A final checklist:

1. In fifty words, what is the basic idea for your story?
2. What is the central aim of the story? State your answer as a question. For example, "Will Othello believe Iago about his wife?"
3. What is your protagonist's intent? (What does she want?)
4. What is your protagonist's motivation? (Why does she want what she is seeking?)
5. Who and/or what stands in the way of your protagonist?
6. What is your protagonist's plan of action to accomplish her intent?
7. What is the story's main conflict? Internal? External?
8. What is the nature of your protagonist's change during the course of the story?
9. Is your plot character-driven or action-driven?
10. What is the point of attack of the story? Where will you begin?
11. How do you plan to maintain tension throughout the story?
12. How does your protagonist complete the climax of the story?

Okay? That's the end of Tobias' book, but it should be just the beginning of yours. Take a deep breath, and think about...a number from one to six?

1. "Writing has laws of perspective, of light and shade, just as painting does, or music. If you are born knowing them, fine. If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself." Truman Capote, Interview, *Writers at Work: First Series* (1958)
2. "If a book comes from the heart, it will contrive to reach other hearts; all art and authorcraft are of small amount to that." Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), 2.
3. "The writer who loses his self-doubt, who gives way as he grows old to a sudden euphoria, to prolixity, should stop writing immediately: the time has come for him to lay aside his pen." Colette, "Lady of Letters," *Earthly Paradise* (1966), 4, ed. Robert Phelps
4. "Great authors are admirable in this respect: in every generation they make for disagreement. Through them we become aware of our differences." Andre Gide, "Third Imaginary Interview," *Pretexts* (1903), tr. Angelo P. Bertocci and others
5. "The last thing one settles in writing a book is what one should put in first." Pascal, *Pensees* (1670), 19, tr. W.F. Trotter
6. "There is no royal path to good writing; and such paths as do exist do not lead through neat critical gardens, various as they are, but through the jungles of self, the world, and of craft." Jessamyn West, *Saturday Review*, Sept. 21, 1957

A quote about writing, a checklist, and a longer series of exercises concerning the twenty plots... Still nothing comes to mind?

Okay, pick a character, any character, just pick one that feels right to you. Call this one the protagonist. (Yes, write PRO at the top of the sheet.)

Underneath that, make a list of five characteristics about this character. Their favorite color, whether they shave their underarms or not, their goal in life, whatever five things you think someone might want to know about this person.

Go ahead and make your list, we'll wait.

All done? Good, now do the same for the antagonist. Write ANT at the top, then list five things about that rascal, that scallion in a black hat, that...did I just say your character was an onion? nah, I meant rapscallion (onions from downtown?)

Got that? Five things, we'll wait...

Okay, you have a protagonist and an antagonist, each with five little characteristics listed, right?

Add in the goal. Write down five things about that!

Now, take your lists and consider a moment. What relationship does the first characteristic of the antagonist have to either the goal or the protagonist? Second? Keep going, making notes about how they complement or conflict...

Focus on the conflict. That's almost always where a story lies. Can you imagine some way to show us the conflict? Then to show us what happens when...

Let the little grey cells cogitate.



## Mark Twain's Rules for Writing

1. That a tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere.
2. They require that the episodes of a tale shall be necessary parts of the tale, and shall help develop it.
3. They require that the personages in a tale shall be alive, except in the case of corpses, and that always the reader shall be able to tell the corpses from the others.
4. They require that the personages in a tale, both dead and alive, shall exhibit a sufficient excuse for being there.
5. They require that when the personages of a tale deal in conversation, the talk shall sound like human talk, and be talk such as human beings would be likely to talk in the given circumstances, and have a discoverable meaning, also a discoverable purpose, and a show of relevancy, and remain in the neighborhood of the subject in hand, and be interesting to the reader, and help out the tale, and stop when the people cannot think of anything more to say.
6. They require that when the author describes the character of a personage in his tale, the conduct and conversation of that personage shall justify said description.
7. They require that when a personage talks like an illustrated, gilt-edged, tree-calf, hand-tooled, seven-dollar Friendship's Offering in the beginning of a paragraph, he shall not talk like a Negro minstrel at the end of it.
8. They require that crass stupidities shall not be played upon the reader by either the author or the people in the tale.
9. They require that the personages of a tale shall confine themselves to possibilities and let miracles alone; or, if they venture a miracle, the author must so plausibly set it forth as to make it look possible and reasonable.
10. They require that the author shall make the reader feel a deep interest in the personages of his tale and their fate; and that he shall make the reader love the good people in the tale and hate the bad ones.
11. They require that the characters in tale be so clearly defined that the reader can tell beforehand what each will do in a given emergency.

An author should

12. Say what he is proposing to say, not merely come near it.
13. Use the right word, not its second cousin.
14. Eschew surplusage.
15. Not omit necessary details.
16. Avoid slovenliness of form.
17. Use good grammar.
18. Employ a simple, straightforward style.

*[For those who may be interested, all exercises I do are available at*

*<http://web.mit.edu/mbarker/www/exercises/exercises.html>*

*If you don't have web access, send email to [mbarker@mit.edu](mailto:mbarker@mit.edu) and be patient...]*