

The Hero's Journey ¹

www.theauthorschair.com



Antagonism/Conflict



Antagonism/Conflict

Ultimate Conflict



Object of Desire/Goal



Resolution and New Ordinary World

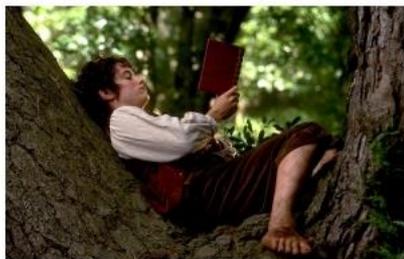
Antagonism/Conflict



Pursuit of Goal



Ordinary World

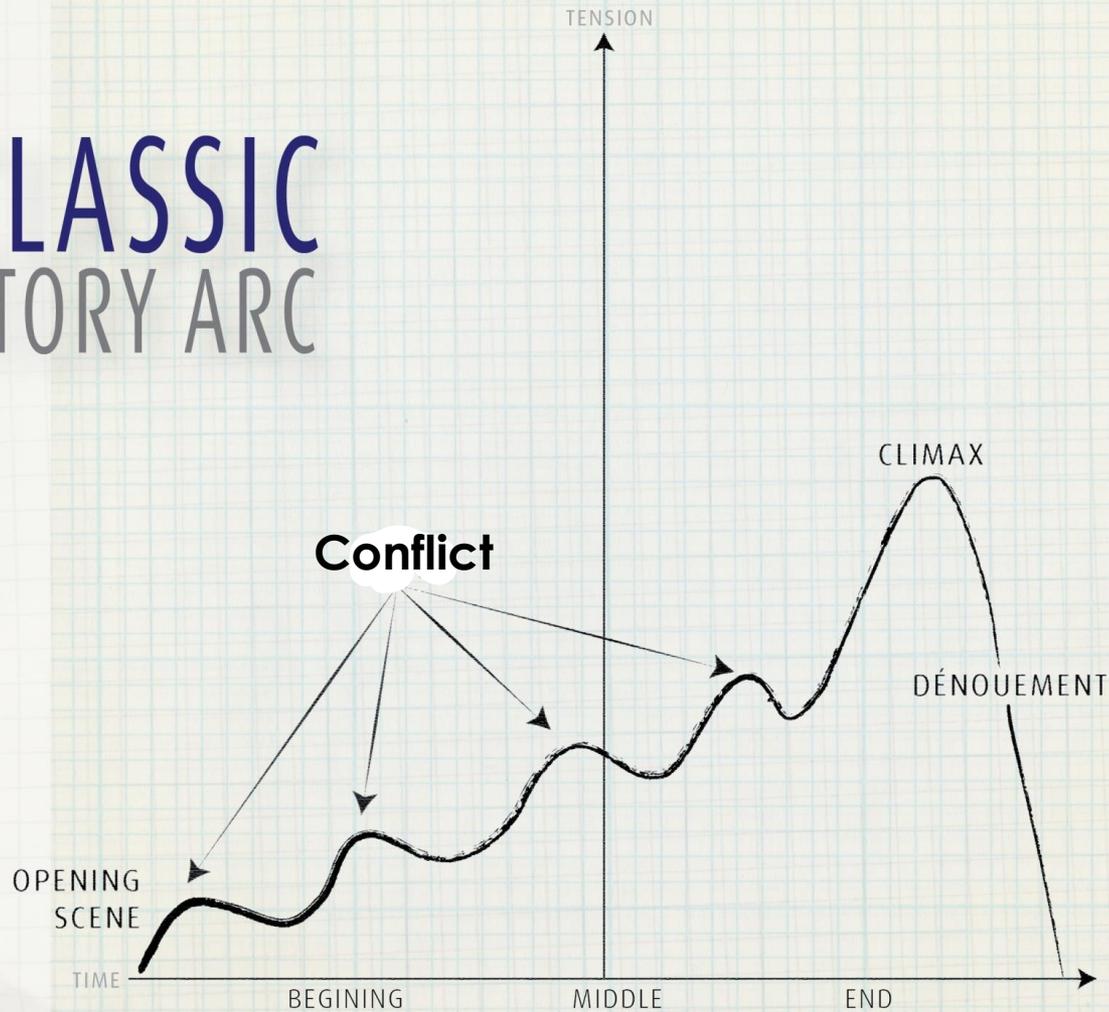


Crisis/Inciting Incident



**Hero's Journey
Story Structure**

CLASSIC STORY ARC



The First Few Paragraphs

- ▶ Grab the readers' attention with a strong "Hook" beginning.
- ▶ Start readers wondering what will happen next, and raise questions that readers want answered, but avoid answering the questions right away.
- ▶ Give an indication that the answers are coming, but don't tease readers for too long. Give an answer here and there as the story progresses while adding more questions. Always leave some questions open.

Story Opening Example #1

How nice it must be to sleep so peacefully when doom awaited at dawn. Letting out a sigh, Faye pulled a threadbare blanket from a top bunk and surveyed the many beds and sleeping bodies lined up in the cramped room. How little they all knew, these poor, ignorant laborers. Perhaps they would die unaware of the tragedy about to befall them.

As she folded the blanket and laid it back on the bed, a tear welled in her eye. Why did it have to happen this way? She was only a nursemaid, one slave in the midst of thousands. Why should she die because of one man's actions? It simply wasn't fair. No, it was cruel, inhumane, tragic ... evil.

She slowly clenched a fist. Fair or unfair, the time had come. The plan had to proceed.

Warning Signs – Bog Ahead

- ▶ Avoid detailed descriptions at the beginning. Give just enough to set the scene. Focus on “quality” words instead of a quantity of words.
- ▶ Describe surroundings that are unusual and necessary to the scene or those that foreshadow later events or revelations. If possible, let your characters interact with the details.
- ▶ Don’t dump back story information. Build a bridge to the back story with tidbits of information as the scene moves along.

Story Opening Example #2

The death alarm sounded, that phantom punch in the gut I always dreaded. I touched the metallic gateway valve embedded in my chest at the top of my sternum—warm but not yet hot. The alarm was real. Someone in my territory would die tonight, and I had to find the poor soul. Death didn't care about the late hour. Reapers like me always stayed on call.

I rose from my moth-eaten reading chair, blew out the hanging lantern's flame, and stalked across my one-room apartment to the window, guided by light from outside. The internal alarm grew stronger. Prickly vibrations raced along my cloak from the baggy sleeves to the top of the hood, tickling the two-day stubble across my cheeks and chin. Time was growing short—probably less than an hour left.

Story Opening Example #2

I shoved open the window sash and leaned into the darkness of the urban alley. With electricity cut-off hour long past for residents, only streetlamps glowed from a neighborhood road to the left. A tall woman in a black trench coat stood at the corner holding an umbrella over her head and a suitcase at her side, as if she were waiting for a ride, maybe a taxi.

I leaned farther out to get a better look. It hadn't rained in three days, and the skies were clear—a dry night in Chicago and too warm for a trench coat. No cabbie would pick up this woman even if he could see her.

A slight glow around her eyes confirmed her status. She was a ghost, probably level two, far too opaque to be newly dead and glowing too much to have wandered for more than a couple of weeks. If not for the death alarm, I could take the time to collect her. For now she would have to keep wandering. I had to use all my senses to figure out who was about to die.

What the Opening Should Accomplish

- ▶ Provide a goal for the protagonist, and begin developing his or her character qualities through the pursuit of that goal.
- ▶ Create a feeling that a crisis of some sort is coming by employing foreboding words and hinting at a difficult obstacle ahead. Make it clear that danger looms.
- ▶ Complete the journey toward the initial goal by showing success or failure.
- ▶ Establish an emotional connection between the protagonist and readers.

Danger Looms

“Right. Your first cycle.” I glanced along the trash-cluttered alleyway below. Still no messenger. With bandits abundant lately, a messenger likely wouldn’t venture out until the last minute. “How many souls do you have?”

“Not enough.” She leaned into the light, revealing the whites of her eyes, a stark contrast against her skin’s lovely dark tone, a hue resembling coffee with a shot of cream, quite different from my cream-only complexion, though her hair color matched mine—darker brown than her skin. “If I meet quota by morning,” she said, “will you take me with you?”

Danger Looms – Part 2

“If you knew what the Gateway extraction feels like, you wouldn’t be so anxious to go.”

“A Reaper has to learn sometime, and I’d rather go with someone who knows the ropes.”

“Fair enough.” I wrinkled my brow. “Are you going to the executions to make quota? Do you have any idea how dangerous it is?”

“You go reap Molly. I can handle a little danger.”

Initial Goal – Success or Failure?

12

Molly's eyes opened. She blinked at Alex, then at her family. She smiled weakly for a moment, whispered an almost imperceptible "I love you," then closed her eyes and fell limp. Her head lolled to the side, and she breathed no more.

Fiona sobbed. Colm pulled her close and stroked her back. Colleen just stared, her mouth hanging open.

Her eyes still flickering, Alex rose and backed away from the bed. "Reaper ... her soul awaits."

I boiled inside. This devilish woman had ushered death into the room, just as surely as if she had opened a coffin and rolled out the corpse. But I couldn't let anger get in the way. I had to do my job.

The Crisis Creates a New Goal

I crept to the front of Colm's house, Sing following, and leaned over the edge of the roof. At the entry steps, the door opened, and Alex's voice rose from below.

"Pack one small suitcase for each member of your family. The bus will come for you soon, so get ready quickly. And don't try to escape. I already have someone watching your house."

"Bus?" Sing whispered.

"A camp bus. She's sending them to corrections." I heaved a sigh. "I guess I don't have any choice. I shouldn't have left them alone with her in the first place." I snapped the spool from my belt and handed Sing the weighted end of the line. "If you'll anchor this to your belt, I'll drop down and—"

The Crisis Creates a New Goal

“No.” Sing grabbed my arm. “You can’t.”

I looked again at the steps below. Alex appeared, slowly descending.

“Colm and Fiona are too old for the camp,” I hissed. “They’d never survive.”

Finishing Your Opening Scene

- ▶ Complete the initial goal, whether with failure or success.
- ▶ That failure or success leads to a crisis event that drastically alters or destroys the hero's ordinary world.
- ▶ The crisis creates a new goal for the hero to achieve.
- ▶ The new goal takes the hero on a journey from the ordinary world into an exciting adventure.

Writing Prompt #1



Writing Prompt #2





Writing Prompt #3

Writing Prompt #4

19



Writing Prompt #5

20



Writing Prompt #6





Writing Prompt #7

Establish an Emotional Connection

23



Establish an Emotional Connection

24



Emotions that Make Connections At the Beginning of a Story

25

Loss

Sadness

Loneliness

Suffering

Injustice

Heartbreak

Betrayal

Dissatisfaction

Withdrawal /
Numbness

Suffering Captures the Heart

26



Grab the Heart

Creating Emotional Attachment

- ▶ Physical need – A common handicap, illness, or negative environment
- ▶ Emotional issue – A need or desire that most have felt
- ▶ A purpose – A goal that most would find praiseworthy
- ▶ Urgency – The goal must be gained soon
- ▶ Obstacles – Barriers that readers would identify with
- ▶ Vulnerability – A soft spot to make all of these items work
- ▶ Sacrifice – Character performs a sacrificial act to overcome obstacles

Relatable Setup – Part 1

The death alarm sounded, that **phantom punch in the gut** I always dreaded. I touched the metallic gateway valve embedded in my chest at the top of my sternum—warm but not yet hot. The alarm was real. Someone in my territory would die tonight, and **I had to find the poor soul**. Death didn't care about **the late hour**. Reapers like me always stayed on call.

I rose from my **moth-eaten reading chair**, blew out the hanging lantern's flame, and stalked across my one-room apartment to the window, guided by light from outside. The internal alarm grew stronger. Prickly vibrations raced along my cloak from the baggy sleeves to the top of the hood, tickling the two-day stubble across my cheeks and chin. Time was growing short—**probably less than an hour left**.

Relatable Setup – Part 2

I shoved open the window sash and leaned into the darkness of the urban alley. With **electricity cut-off hour long past for residents**, only streetlamps glowed from a neighborhood road to the left. A tall woman in a black trench coat stood at the corner holding an umbrella over her head and a suitcase at her side, as if she were waiting for a ride, maybe a taxi.

I leaned farther out to get a better look. It hadn't rained in three days, and the skies were clear—a dry night in Chicago and too warm for a trench coat. **No cabbie would pick up this woman even if he could see her.**

A slight glow around her eyes confirmed her status. She was a ghost, probably level two, far too opaque to be newly dead and glowing too much to have wandered for more than a couple of weeks. **If not for the death alarm, I could take the time to collect her.** For now she would have to keep wandering. **I had to use all my senses to figure out who was about to die.**

Emotional Connections – Vulnerability

30

On the dresser's top, I slid a tri-fold picture frame closer and ran a finger along the photos of my father, mother, and Misty. I touched her image. Misty. The girl across the street. The girl I had known all my life before I had to leave for good.

I touched the pewter band on my ring finger, a gift from Misty when we were both thirteen, the day we confirmed our promise to each other—the day I left home for the last time.

Her voice, flavored as always with a lovely Scottish accent, filtered into my mind. "Twenty years is a long time," she had whispered as she rested her head on my shoulder. "No matter what, I'll be waiting for you. Just promise me you'll do everything you can to get out early. I hear there are shortcuts."

I pushed the frame back in place. Someday I would see her again ... if she was still alive.

Emotional Connections – Sacrifice

I shook the bottle, making it rattle. “Only two pills left. If they don’t help, I brought something injectable, but it’s way past expired so it has to be a last resort.”

“We believe in you, Phoenix,” Colm said. “You will make the right choice.”

“Let’s just hope a DEO doesn’t show up, or all choices are out the door. Word on the street says that Molly’s critical, so an officer might get wind of it.”

Emotional Connection

Anticipation and Frustration

- ▶ **Pauses** – A pause immediately before an attempt to achieve a goal reminds the reader of the importance of the goal and enhances anticipation. If possible, restate the goal and the danger.
- ▶ **First attempt never works** – Avoid allowing a goal to be achieved on the first attempt. The victory will be less satisfying. It will seem too easy.
- ▶ **Obstacles increase** – New obstacles add frustration, which will enhance relief and the sense of triumph later. We can relate to frustration.
- ▶ **Complete failure achieving early goal** – An early goal should not be the most important one, though failure causes real pain. When the character fails to achieve the goal, this proves that failure is always possible, even with the big goals, thereby enhancing the danger and suspense as the story progresses. Since we all experience failures at times, we can relate.
- ▶ **Failure leads to bigger goal** – A failure is often a crisis point that creates a bigger goal, which can be the story's ultimate object of desire.
- ▶ **Increasing sacrifice** – Character willingly exposed to danger, whether physical or emotional, and the danger increases.

Pauses to Remind

I returned the flashlight to the belt and pulled my hood over my head far enough to shade my eyes. I had to display the persona. To the dying and the bereaved, confidence in my abilities meant everything.

I patted my cloak pocket where the pill bottle and syringe lay. Communicating my hope to cure instead of collect would be tricky. As Crandyke said, the Council's spies could be anywhere, even in the midst of a close-knit family.

First Attempt Never Works

Molly choked on the pills and coughed them up. Her body stiffened, and she let out a moan. While the three patted her hands and stroked her head in futility, I swallowed hard. Even after more than three years as a Reaper, the sight of a dying child still tore a hole in my heart.

My cloak vibrated, sending hot prickles across my arms. The end was near. Only one hope remained—the syringe.

.

Obstacles Increase

As I reached into my pocket, the rusty hinges at the front door squeaked. Everyone froze. Fiona whispered, “I heard no knock.”

Colm shoved the pill bottle into his pocket. Fiona and Colleen rose and backed away from the bed, their eyes wide with fear. Molly’s body loosened, and she breathed in gasping spasms.

The bedroom door swung open. A tall woman dressed in black leather stepped in and scanned the room. Piercing gray eyes set beneath a somber brow gave her the aspect of a bird of prey searching for a victim. With youthful face, trim body, and blonde hair draped over her shoulders, she looked nothing like the steroid-jacked male officer who normally patrolled at night. Yet, the leather pants and jacket with a Gateway insignia on the left breast pocket confirmed her status as a death officer of some kind.

Her shifting gaze halted at Molly. “A young one,” she said in a low monotone. “My condolences.”

Complete Failure Achieving Early Goal

Molly's eyes opened. She blinked at Alex, then at her family. She smiled weakly for a moment, whispered an almost imperceptible "I love you," then closed her eyes and fell limp. Her head lolled to the side, and she breathed no more.

Fiona sobbed. Colm pulled her close and stroked her back. Colleen just stared, her mouth hanging open.

Her eyes still flickering, Alex rose and backed away from the bed. "Reaper ... her soul awaits."

Failure Leads to Bigger Goal #1

I crept to the front of Colm's house, Sing following, and leaned over the edge of the roof. At the entry steps, the door opened, and Alex's voice rose from below.

"Pack one small suitcase for each member of your family. The bus will come for you soon, so get ready quickly. And don't try to escape. I already have someone watching your house."

"Bus?" Sing whispered.

"A camp bus. She's sending them to corrections." I heaved a sigh. "I guess I don't have any choice. I shouldn't have left them alone with her in the first place." I snapped the spool from my belt and handed Sing the weighted end of the line. "If you'll anchor this to your belt, I'll drop down and—"

"No." Sing grabbed my arm. "You can't."

I looked again at the steps below. Alex appeared, slowly descending. "Colm and Fiona are too old for the camp," I hissed. "They'd never survive."

Failure Leads to Bigger Goal #2

Alex stared at me long and hard. “And what of my proposition?”

“I told you I need more time. Three seconds isn’t enough. Give me twenty-four hours.”

She put the helmet on. Blonde locks flowed around the edges. “Molly’s family members were charged with medicine trafficking, and they are going to the corrections camp. They will be safe there for twenty-four hours. After that, there are no guarantees.”

“If I decide to accept your offer, how will I find you?”

“No need. I will find you before your time runs out.”

I pushed back my cloak and set my hands on my weapons belt. “Just remember, I could have stopped you from reporting this family.”

“You have more confidence in your abilities than you should.” Alex picked up the gun and slid it into her holster. “Still, I will keep your restraint in mind. Just stay away from the family for now, and when we meet again, we can discuss their future.”

Increasing Sacrifice

Alex shot to her feet. She grabbed my arm, bent it behind my back, and shoved me against the wall, rubbing my cheek on the rough plaster. Cold steel pressed against my skull. Her breaths blew past my ear, hot and heavy. “You think you’re so smart, don’t you? Three years on the street, and you know it all. You think you’re bucking the system being Mr. Nice Guy Reaper, looking down your nose at loyalists. You think I’m just an enforcer who gets her jollies inflicting pain.”

She twisted my arm, sending shock waves to my spine. “Well, you’re wrong. There is method to my madness. Pain is just one tool in my arsenal of ways to get what I want. And what I want right now is for you to realize that you’re dealing with someone who could jerk your soul out of your skull and hurl you into the abyss without a second thought. And if I find out you’ve been lying to me, that’s exactly what I’ll do.”

I grimaced but refused to grunt. “What’s the abyss?”

“A place no one wants to go.” She spun me around and pressed the gun barrel between my eyes. “You have nothing to worry about if you’ll keep that smart-aleck mouth of yours shut.”

Communicating the Emotions

40

Point-of-
View
Intimacy

Motivation
Reaction
Units

Show, Don't
Tell

Intimate Point of View

41

Intimacy – The Reader feels “inside the skin” of the character

All visuals, sounds, smells, etc, come through the POV character’s sensory input

Delve deeply into the character’s mind to explore thoughts and emotions.

Don’t report anything the character cannot sense or wouldn’t notice.

Don’t “blind” the reader to what the character senses.

Avoid “narrator” phrases (He saw, she heard, etc)

Intimate POV Example

Randall halted his march and let his gaze drift from a tall evergreen tree to a moss-covered boulder to a marshy pool. The sounds of the forest had diminished, ominously so. Even the breeze had settled, and the treetops no longer rustled. Leaves fell from the deciduous trees like rain, as if autumn had arrived at an accelerated rate. The loss of shelter was troubling. Soon, any flying beast could spot them.

Sensory Input

Feeling Inside the Character

I picked up Emma's socks, pressed both against my nose, and inhaled. The odor was strangely subdued—dirt blended with a subtle perfume. Skin lotion? Maybe. Whatever it was, it masked Emma's essence, assuming it was even there. This wouldn't work.

I opened the bag. Three items lay inside—a locket, a framed photo, and a diary with a purple cover.

As I withdrew the diary, my hand trembled. Why? Maybe the color. I wasn't sure. A tiny gold key protruded from a lock on the front. I turned it and opened the cover. Pretty handwriting on the first page spelled out, "Emma Castillo – Stuff I Think About."

I pressed the page to my nose and inhaled. Nothing more than a hint of dust. I looked toward the neighborhood. I couldn't go back and ask for a different scent source, not with police prowling everywhere.

Sensory Input

Feeling Inside the Character

I lifted the diary to my nose again and took a deep draw of the final page. This time the aroma of ink entered, and a new sensation joined it—freshness, vibrancy, and ... a hint of shame? Maybe regret?

The sensation never failed to amaze me. A scent could stay consistent enough to be tracked yet change based on the mood of the one who left it. The subtleties had taken some time to learn, but now they were easy to detect, like downturned lips reflecting a shift in a person's mood. The face itself wouldn't change. Anyone could identify a friend no matter how emotions altered the friend's features, and anyone could also detect a friend's mood shift. So it was with me and scents.

I let Emma's scent and moods flow across the frayed nerve endings within my wounded heart. The sensation seemed to heal and wash afresh, a cleansing more luxurious than any truck-stop shower could offer.

As I exhaled, I smiled, maybe the first real smile in years. I had found the scent of Emma's soul, so beautiful, so filled with life.

And the strangest part of all? She smelled like Emily.

Avoiding Narrator Phrases

- ▶ Signaling for Wallace to follow, she closed in. She saw a heavy chain and an iron manacle that bound the dragon's back leg to the pedestal. She also noticed long scratches on his wings and a gouge dividing two scales on his neck. He appeared to have been scourged and then shackled, a prisoner left here alone. *But for what purpose?* she thought.
- ▶ Signaling for Wallace to follow, she closed in. A heavy chain and an iron manacle bound the dragon's back leg to the pedestal. Long scratches covered his wings, and a gouge divided two scales on his neck. He appeared to have been scourged and then shackled, a prisoner left here alone, but for what purpose?

Errors in Reporting Sensory Input

- ▶ Cameron opened the box and looked inside. He couldn't believe his eyes! This would be a surprise Nancy would never forget!
- ▶ Valerie tiptoed up to the door and pressed a ear against the wood. No sounds came through. If only she could learn what Prince Nott was planning. Maybe a party celebrating her birthday tomorrow? That would be wonderful.
- ▶ Little did she know that inside the room King Golan and Prince Nott were plotting Valerie's murder.
- ▶ Melvin pushed back his jet-black hair and ambled toward his red Ford Focus, parked in his driveway, as always. Two oak trees stood in his yard, their boughs arching over the mailbox at the curb.

Motivation/Reaction

- ▶ Motivation (stimulus) precedes reaction (response)
- ▶ Misty cringed when the dog barked.
- ▶ Usual reaction order: Involuntary action (feeling), voluntary action, speech
- ▶ The Doberman snarled. Her legs trembling, Misty ducked behind a skinny tree and cried out, “Help me!”
- ▶ The POV character's actions, without exception, must have a reasonable motivation.

Motivation/Reaction

- ▶ Wrong order - He arched his back and cried for mercy as electricity shot through his chip, running up and down his spine.
- ▶ Right order - Electricity shot through his chip, running up and down his spine. He arched his back and cried for mercy.

- ▶ Wrong order - His head cracked on the floor once more as another jolt shook him, and blackness overcame all his senses.
- ▶ Right order - As another jolt shook him, his head cracked on the floor once more, and blackness overcame all his senses.

Intimate Action Introduces Thoughts

“You go reap Molly. I can handle a little danger.” Sing thrust herself off the rail and dropped, plunging through the brighter light. With her shimmering black cloak fanned out, she looked like a glowing raven sailing toward the pavement, though sepia curls lifting above her head spoiled the image.

She landed, bending her knees to absorb the impact, and ran toward the alley opening. The ghost at the corner stood nearby, but Sing paid no attention as she breezed past and slinked into the shadows—a sable cat, stealthy and sleek.

I leaned out again. Why didn't she try to collect the ghost? As a rookie, maybe she thought she wasn't experienced enough to handle such a difficult reaping.

Thoughts Create Motivations

50

Elyssa returned her gaze to the sphere. What did this peculiar torture device mean to the dragons? With its prominent placement in the observatory, it had to be more than a lie detector. It was a treasure, perhaps even an object of worship. And that made it a point of vulnerability.

Grimacing as the pain increased, Elyssa reared back with the blade, ready to strike. “You will take us to Jason, or I’ll smash your precious crystal!”

“You will not!” Arxad shouted.

Motivation/Reaction Units (MRUs) Connected

51

My cloak vibrated, sending hot prickles across my arms. The end was near. Only one hope remained—the syringe.

As I reached into my pocket, the rusty hinges at the front door creaked. Everyone froze. Fiona whispered, “I heard no knock.”

Colm shoved the pill bottle into his pocket. Fiona and Colleen stood and backed away from the bed, their eyes wide with fear. Molly’s body loosened, and she breathed in gasping spasms.

The bedroom door creaked open. A tall woman dressed in black leather stepped in and scanned the room. Piercing gray eyes set beneath a somber brow gave her the aspect of a bird of prey searching for a victim. With blonde hair draped over her shoulders, youthful face, and trim body, she looked nothing like the steroid-jacked male officer who normally patrolled at this time of night. Yet, the leather pants, jacket, and Gateway insignia on the left breast pocket confirmed her status as a death officer of some kind.

Her shifting gaze halted at Molly. “A young one,” she said in a low monotone. “My condolences.”

I withdrew my hand from my pocket and, forcing a melancholy countenance, crouched next to the bed. “She’s still alive, though the end is near.”

- ▶ “Quite near.” She sat on the bed, her knee close to my arm, and stroked Molly’s hair. Her hand trembled as her fingers passed over the little girl’s locks again and again. “Such a beautiful princess. She will be a glittering star in the heavens. I am looking forward to seeing her drawn away from this broken shell so she can be set free to brighten the skies.”
- ▶ The family’s terrified expressions shouted urgency. Somehow I had to get rid of this officer so we could try to save Molly.
- ▶ I touched the officer’s arm. “Because of this child’s age and the high potential for extraction pangs, the reaping will cause an emotional upheaval, so if you wouldn’t mind sitting in the front room, I will withdraw her soul in private and call you when—”
- ▶ “Heightened emotions are normal and expected.” She unzipped her jacket, revealing a form-fitting white t-shirt and a gun in a shoulder holster. “Pain is normal. Weeping is a necessary cathartic.”
- ▶ I drew back. “I suppose that’s true, but—”
- ▶ “My name is Alex.” She extended her hand, though her expression remained stern. “I assume you are Phoenix.”

- ▶ “I am.” I shook her hand. “I guess you’re not familiar with customary reaping procedures. Since the family requests privacy ...”
- ▶ “Familiar?” Anger flickered in her eyes. “I attended reapings before you were born, and I have followed your career ever since—” Her brow furrowing, she picked up a pill from the mattress. “What is this?”
- ▶ “Candy,” I said without hesitating. “I always bring some when a dying child has siblings. Molly has two sisters and a brother.”
- ▶ “Is that so?” She extended her hand, her tone remaining calm, even in the midst of Molly’s continuing gasps for breath. “May I see your supply?”
- ▶ I rose and patted my cloak, trying to ignore Molly’s travail and her family’s looks of desperation. “I gave them all away.”
- ▶ “You are kind to give so much to the grieving siblings.” She sniffed the pill, then wrinkled her nose. “Or perhaps not so kind.” Pinching the pill at arm’s length, she scanned the room again, her eyes shifting from the night table to Molly’s body to the family trio as they stood stock-still. Finally, she nodded at Colm and spoke with tightened lips. “Empty your pockets onto the bed.”

- ▶ After a quick glance at me, Colm dug into his pocket, pulled out the pill bottle, and dropped it to the mattress.
- ▶ Alex picked it up. “An odd candy container, don’t you think?” Her tone carried only the slightest hint of sarcasm.
- ▶ I focused on her gun, still visible inside her open jacket, likely a sonic gun—short-ranged, but deadly. Trying to disarm her meant I would have to kill her if I succeeded, or face execution myself if I failed. There had to be another way. “The pill bottle is mine. I traded for it on the black market. I hoped to help Molly.”
- ▶ “Really?” She looked at the label, turning the bottle as she read. “Who is Barney Sexton?”
- ▶ I shrugged. “Probably someone who died before his meds ran out. The shroud doesn’t reveal secrets like that.”
- ▶ “I suppose not.” She closed her hand around the pill. “The penalty for smuggling medicine is death, but I assume the Council will take the family’s desperate need into consideration.”
- ▶ “The family?” I pointed at myself. “But I said it’s mine.”

Showing versus Telling

55

Telling is usually a summary as if provided by a narrator.

Showing is real-time description that makes the reader feel present in the scene.

Telling usually fails to paint vivid pictures in the reader's mind.

Showing provides precise pictures.

Telling often uses vague adjectives that a reader can misinterpret.

Showing creates adjectives in a reader's thoughts.

Telling often fails to incite emotion in a reader.

Showing provides real-time emotions that provoke similar emotions in the reader.

Telling Adjectives

The dog was pitiful, helpless, too crippled to hunt for food.

Pitiful, helpless, and crippled are grammatically correct adjectives, and readers will probably conjure images based on the adjectives, but those images might not match the writer's vision. They won't invade the reader's imagination to paint a precise portrait. Also, "dog" is vague. A good writer will be more specific.

Here is a "show" version of the same account:

The golden retriever clawed at his flank, scraping hair from his mangy coat. After licking the wound, he struggled into a hobbling gait. With every stride, he hopped to favor a mangled back leg. In the distance, a squirrel sitting atop a fallen log stared at him. It chattered, then pranced away without looking back.

Telling Emotions

I was furious and downtrodden. I had never felt so awful in all my life.

Showing Emotions

I slammed the door and screamed, “How dare he call me a tramp!” I snatched my beret off and threw it against the wall. That self-righteous pig! Just because I suggested that we go to his cabin for the weekend, that makes me a tramp!

I stomped into the kitchen and snatched the moose-tracks ice cream from the freezer. I dug the biggest spoon out of the drawer, pried the top off the carton, and gouged out a huge scoop.

As I stared at the chocolate bits in the chunky mass, a tear crept to my eye. The word Why echoed in my mind. Why was my heart thumping so wildly? Why were my ears so fiery hot? Why was I ready to shovel ice cream into my mouth like a spoiled toddler? And most of all, why did I care so much about the cruel label he stamped on my forehead?

I sank into the corner of the kitchen and dropped the spoon into the carton. Because I have no respect for myself? Because I have about as much self-control as a drug addict? I let out a long sigh. Because maybe I really am a tramp?

I set the carton aside, curled my legs up to my chest, and sobbed.

The Limits of Showing

Don't show everything. Sometimes telling is the better option, especially when showing in real time makes a scene tedious. Tell by summarizing events that are not critical to a story:

- ▶ Transitions between important scenes.
- ▶ Dialogue that retells events that have already been shown.
- ▶ Backstory elements that set a scene.

At the Zodiac, people embraced, some danced, others just knelt and wept. The fires of liberation were spreading.

During the next hour or so, the liberated slaves gathered their few belongings, collected food from the homes of the dead dragons, and distributed it freely to everyone. Arxad, Magnar, Fellina, and Xenith carried the most seriously wounded to the healing waters while the healthy soldiers walked to the river leading to the demolished barrier wall and washed there.

After making sure the wounded had been cared for, Adrian walked toward the barrier river, following a chorus of splashing sounds. When he arrived, he found several soldiers bathing, including Ollie.

“Hey, Adrian!” Ollie tossed a square fragment of soap. “Word has it you’re engaged to Marcelle!”

Dialogue that Retells Events

61

Adrian grasped his father's wrist. "It would take a long time to explain what they're all about, so I'd better focus on the most important issues."

"Very well. Let's hear them."

"We have a problem at home. A man named Cal Broder has taken over as governor of Mesolantrum. Arxad thinks he is a male Starlighter who has the power to usurp the king's throne."

After Adrian provided a few more details, his father described how Frederick escaped from his prison of ice as well as how they battled both white and dark dragons all the way from the forest to the village.

When they finished exchanging stories, Adrian exhaled. "Sorry I missed the action."

Shellinda and Wallace knelt at the opposite side of the grave, both with tears tracking down their dirty faces and grass staining their trousers. Their rolled-up sleeves revealed grime covering their arms as well, interrupted in spots by a rash—the telltale sign of the fatal disease plaguing nearly all of Starlight. They couldn't stay here to mourn. The only possible cure lay to the north where Cassabrie had flown with Regina's spirit in tow. Dwelling within Exodus, this world's guiding "star," Cassabrie had floated away less than an hour earlier, guiding the buoyant, glowing sphere with her powerful mind. The only sensible step was to follow.

The Hero - Protagonist

- ▶ Prepare your main character for heroism
- ▶ Strong motivation, internal and external
- ▶ Hero should be likeable, have inner virtue
- ▶ Let the virtue come out in courageous action
- ▶ Has weaknesses that make his objective seem unlikely



The Crisis – Starting the Fire

- ▶ Something horrible must happen
- ▶ The crisis destroys the normal way of life
- ▶ The crisis ignites an object of desire, a goal
- ▶ Achieving the desire is dangerous
- ▶ Desire must be strong



The Villain - Antagonist

- ▶ The villain should be stronger than the hero in some ways
- ▶ The best villains are personal, able to react
- ▶ The villain should be believable and have realistic motivations
- ▶ The villain can be charming

65



The Pursuit of the Object of Desire

- ▶ Never let the tension go away
- ▶ Have rest periods, but make them part of the tension building
- ▶ Every effort by your hero is stronger than the previous one
- ▶ Every counter-effort by your villain matches it



Rest Periods

String together escalating action

Allows characters to be proactive rather than reactive

Reflect on failure

Consider lessons learned

Internal changes come to the surface

Plan for next action

Rest Sequence Example

While Sing and Shanghai curled on their cushions, I laid my head and shoulders on mine, my feet propped on the roof's parapet. A cool breeze wafted over the warm rooftop, caressing my cheeks with shifting temperatures that soothed my tired body. Sleep would come soon. I could feel it.

A few stars shone through the haze, a rare sight in the city. Ever since the meltdown, no one in Chicago bothered to gaze at the heavens. The specter of what couldn't be seen ... or reached ... brought to earth the choking reality of our condition. We were trapped, human waste that couldn't escape from a tawdry shell, this dumpster called life.

And I was a waste-disposal unit, destined to haul forsaken souls to a shadowy door that opened to the unknown—the Gateway, that unexplained beyond-reproach expectation of release from this festering cavity.

A horn blared far away. A woman shouted, something about burning her hand on a candle, likely a cry of pain echoed within many a wall in the windy city. With electricity cut-off hour now past, the lights-out routine had been repeated a million times from row house to row house, from shanty to shanty. In the jungle, the natives did what they could to survive.

Rest Sequence Example

In my mind, a thousand matches touched a thousand candlewicks, giving light to an equal number of darkened chambers. A man carried a silver taper to a bedroom and checked on three sleeping children crowded on a bed. The wavering light fell across the contented faces, giving the man reason to sigh with relief.

A woman probed a pantry with a stubby red candle, hoping to find something to prepare for the next day's meals. Her hands trembling, she grasped a can of beans, then a bag of rice, a thin smile on her face—one more day her children could go to bed without the pangs of hunger.

And in the glow of a flickering unity candle, two inches high and blackened by years of giving light, an old man kissed a frail old woman, slid into bed with her, and blew out the flame.

The scene faded to gray, then to black. All was silent. The city waited anxiously for dawn. They waited for someone to rise up and prove that their hopes and prayers weren't for naught. They needed a courageous warrior who would open the gate and show them the other side of eternity.

"Hope," I whispered. "It's all they have. Who'll keep it alive?"

"What?" Sing touched my elbow. "Phoenix, did you say something?"

"Just talking to myself."

Hero vs. Villain - The Final Conflict

- ▶ Show Goal Ahead of Time
- ▶ Foreshadow Final Conflict
- ▶ Build Tension by hinting at the final conflict
- ▶ Keep goal in readers' minds
- ▶ Face-to-face meeting before final conflict
- ▶ Actual conflict – Exciting, intense, defeat for hero is certain
- ▶ Enemy vanquished?



The Goal

- ▶ Goal is achieved after a final conflict
- ▶ In victory, hero sometimes learns that his conscious stated goal might not be his true goal
- ▶ If you have an unstated/emotional goal, show the emotional goal as something that has been developing all along
- ▶ Show the negative side of the stated goal to bring about emotional change in hero



Make
Your
Readers
Glad They
Came -
Victory
Emotions

72

Loss - Gain

Sadness - Happiness

Loneliness - Companionship

Suffering - Healing

Injustice - Justice

Heartbreak - Restoration

Betrayal - Trust

Dissatisfaction - Contentment

Withdrawal / Numbness - Renewal

Reward the Focal Character

Viral Execution – Amanda L. Davis

Aric smiled. “But thanks to Monica, that doesn’t matter anymore.”

“Yes, but now the heroine is Sierra.” Simon bowed low. When he raised up, he gazed at her with sparkling eyes. “My dear girl, we are all greatly indebted to you. Without your courage, your sacrificial love, and, if I may use the phrase, your gritty stubbornness, we would all likely be dead. If I have anything to do with it, your name will be recorded in the history books alongside the greatest heroes and heroines of all time. You are deserving of the highest praise.”

“Hear, hear!” Aric edged close to Sierra and kissed her on the forehead. “Thank you, Sierra. Thank you for everything.”

She pressed her lips together, tears again welling. “And thank you. Both of you. You’re both heroes in my book.”

Reward the Heroes

74



As the story moves through the middle stages Add a success and the revelation of the greatest goal

75

- ▶ Pauses – Keep adding pauses to keep the goals and dangers in mind.
- ▶ Success – If your protagonist always fails, then your reader will get frustrated, but don't allow a success to remove the tension. Success in one goal leads to knowledge of an even greater goal.
- ▶ Obstacles keep increasing – Make even bigger obstacles so that the final goal seems impossible. The best obstacles are those that stab at the heart.
- ▶ Continued sacrifices – Challenge the character to make greater and greater sacrifices, including those that cause emotional torture. The best challenges create a decision between two painful choices, either of which would break the character's heart. Look for a dilemma that reaches back into the character's past (must be foreshadowed) as well as one that touches recent issues. The dilemma might even force the character to choose between a long-cherished love (not necessarily romantic) and a new one.

A Pause that Reminds

When we arrived within the pedestals' triangle, I looked past the squirming figure in the chair and scanned the yard. Twilight had descended, making it difficult to see the prisoners' living quarters, especially with the searchlights nearly blinding us to everything beyond the makeshift arena.

By now, Sing was probably inside the quarters, and with the spotlights already frozen on the center of the yard, she could make her escape move at any time. Since the guards had been doubled, she would have to overpower two guards twice—once at the door to the quarters and again at the Hilton's rear exit when they opened the door in response to her knock. With each passing moment, every step in our plan seemed more unlikely to work.

Still, if anyone could do it, Sing could. I had to keep my hopes alive, though trying to free Cairo really complicated matters. Our chances of escape were as thin as the smoke in our capsules.

Success Leads to a Greater Goal

77

I gave Sing a quick summary of what happened while she was breaking the family out of the camp, including our staged battle to the death and Alex's constant enticement to take the energy from the depot tube, though I left out the part about Kwame ... for the time being.

When I finished, I turned toward Sing. "So, where are the Fitzpatricks?"

"They're safe with my people," Sing said as she leaned her head against my shoulder. "The hardest part was relocking the door after I got them out. At least the prisoners I left behind were smart enough not to bang on it, but some of the women were crying. It broke my heart."

"I can imagine."

"And I have bad news. I heard Cairo's a prisoner in the camp now. I didn't see him or else I would've asked him to help me. He's in danger because Alex plans to terminate fifty prisoners each day until they're all dead and reaped."

"Fifty!" An image of Cairo playing his cello flashed to mind, then dozens of faces in the camp's living quarters. We had to get them all out, and we needed lots of help.

Turn Up the Heat

78

- ▶ Impossible dilemmas – Two or more choices, all of which are essential and any single choice will cause great harm if the other choices are not accomplished. Also, it is apparently impossible to accomplish all of them.
- ▶ Double jeopardy – A character is suffering more than one potential disaster at the same time. For example, not only does she have to escape from a burning forest, she gets bitten by a venomous snake.
- ▶ Black moment – This is the climax, decision-making moment when everything seems to be falling apart. The character has to decide what to do with regard to the impossible dilemma, and making that choice causes pure agony. The decision usually involves great sacrifice that will change life forever.

Turn Up the Heat

79

- ▶ The Point of No Return – Something happens that cannot be undone. A good story has several of these that can happen without the protagonist making a decision, such as the crisis that starts the journey, a murder, a financial collapse, etc. The best ones occur when the protagonist makes a decision that he knows will change things and will cause himself suffering. With each point of no return, the stakes can get higher. The decision that comes from the black moment is usually a major point of no return.
- ▶ Tie it all together – Bring in the vulnerability that you introduced at the beginning and reinforced throughout the story. Make the impossible dilemma hit that soft spot directly, and the resulting decision causes a black moment. This is also a good time to add a double jeopardy. With all of these happening at once, you will ramp up the intensity to an impossible-to-put-down level.
- ▶ The best time to have these happen all at once is during a peak in the action, either the ultimate conflict moment or an earlier peak that feels like the ultimate conflict.

Impossible Dilemma, Black Moment, And Point of No Return with Higher Stakes

80

Alex set the sonic gun at the back of Misty's head. "Feel free to converse, but don't take another step closer."

"Misty!" I extended my arms, but they were way too short. "Are you hurt?"

A sob contorted her face. Tears flowed. As she shook, her lips formed the first part of my real name, but she sucked it back and cried out, "Phoenix! Oh, Phoenix, I missed you so much!"

"I missed you, too!" I tightened a fist and shook it at Alex. "Let her go! She's innocent! She hasn't done anything to deserve—"

"Oh, shut up, Phoenix. I know that." Alex pressed the barrel against Misty's head, bending her neck forward. "This is unveiled, unbridled brute force. If I can get you to kill Shanghai, you'll be mine forever, but I doubt that you yet know yourself the way I know you. You hand over slavish chains in a way you don't yet comprehend."

She nodded at the line of guards. “Four of you hold him. Don’t underestimate his strength.” Peter and three guards stalked toward me. I readied my fists and leaped at Alex. Peter grabbed my arm and jerked me backwards into the foursome’s clutches. As I struggled to get free, he twisted my elbow with incredible strength. Pain rocketed to my brain, sending blinding flashes across my eyes.

“Stop it,” Peter growled, “or I’ll break your arm.”

I swallowed through my dry throat. How could I save Misty when I couldn’t even budge?

“Now, Phoenix ...” Alex’s smile thinned out. “Who will live and who will die?”

“No. Don’t. Please.” Tears blurred my vision. “Let’s make another deal. Any deal. We can negotiate. Please, just don’t kill Misty. She’s got nothing to do with this. She’s inno—”

“Stop begging!” Alex shouted. “You know what I want, and I won’t negotiate. Either Misty or Shanghai will die. It’s up to you. You have five seconds to decide.”

Multi-peak climaxes

82

The rollercoaster ride

- ▶ Once an apparently horrible dilemma has been suffered, you can add another that is even worse – from the frying pan into the fire. Quite often it is good to allow the villain to win the first one so that it is clear that failure is possible in the ultimate peak.
- ▶ If the first peak dilemma resulted in success, the protagonist needs a new goal that surpasses the one achieved by the success. A rest period following the first peak is a good time for the protagonist to realize the necessity of the new goal. This creates the motivation to surmount the next obstacle, which will be the greatest one of all.
- ▶ If the first peak results in failure for the protagonist, the choice that the character makes can bring about some sort of success for someone, even if the protagonist loses something valuable in the process.
- ▶ The second peak has a new choice to make in which the negative consequences of either option are worse than the consequences of the choices in the first peak.

A Second Peak

Alex stabbed a finger at Sing. “Kill her, Phoenix! Be done with this wanton wench. My guard at the prisoners’ residence building deceived you. Theresa deceived you. You are obviously too easily led by the nose. And now letting Sing live will serve only to prove your starry-eyed naïveté once again, and your unprecedented gullibility will mean the deaths of many children who just want a chance to leave this hellhole and go home in peace!”

Sing cried out, her words punctuated by gurgling gasps. “Do what ... you think is right ... I asked you to ... to trust me ... but either way you decide ... I’ll still love you. ... I will always love you.”

“More lies!” Alex shouted. “She has proven you can’t believe a word she says. Kill her now and be done with it.”

My entire body quaked. “I ... I can’t.”

Alex waved a hand at the prisoners. Theresa walked behind a woman and shot her with the sonic gun. The telltale pop jolted my brain. She twitched on the ground for a moment, then lay motionless. Like a vulture, Peter descended on her body and covered her with his cloak.

A little girl screamed, “Mommy!” Two men leaped to their feet, but when a guard grabbed the girl and set a gun to her head, the men dropped to their knees again.

My arm shook harder. I could barely keep the gun in place. A barrage of images blazed in my mind—Sing and Kwame and Alex and Shanghai—all spinning in a wild vortex. Finally, Mex’s image blended into the turmoil. With desperate pulls, he struggled to free himself from the life-sucking vacuum, the death penalty so callously executed by the will of one of the Council’s minions, a sentence delivered because of evidence planted on him, planted by a son and his mother who had conspired to bring about this end at this moment. If I killed Sing, they would have their victory. If I killed Sing, Alex would win. If I killed Sing, my heart would shrivel up and die.

“You’ve run out of time, Phoenix.” Alex’s tone was cold and cruel. “Kill her now, or a child is next. You know I won’t hesitate.”

Triumph and Satisfaction

85

- ▶ Readers need a satisfying ending. Satisfaction comes with a feeling of triumph, which comes from a victory against seemingly impossible odds.
- ▶ There must be some victory. If the story is a series, the first book might not have a complete victory, but at least a sense of accomplishment must occur.
- ▶ A scene after a victory often displays both agony and ecstasy. Victory that comes at great cost usually generates more emotion in a reader.
- ▶ Character's courage and sacrifice are recognized and rewarded in some way. Readers want others to witness what they have witnessed, that this hero is really amazing.
- ▶ If victory wasn't complete, create the setup for a sequel.

Triumph – Agony, Ecstasy, and Reward

“Just when they needed me most, I failed. I couldn’t lift a finger to help any of them.”

Shanghai gripped my arm. “You didn’t fail, Phoenix. You’re the bravest person I’ve ever met. For three years you’ve risked your life to help the desperate people of this city, and you sacrificed everything you love to save those innocent prisoners. In my book, you’re a hero.”

Her words felt like a warm blanket, comforting in spite of new pain cramping my legs. “You are, too, Shanghai. You’re amazing.”

She smiled. “Thank you for saying so.”

My knees buckled, but Shanghai held me up and pushed the staff into my hand. “You look like you need this more than I do.”

Triumph – Agony, Ecstasy, and Reward

I gripped the middle and leaned on it. The cramping eased. “That helps a lot. Thanks.”

“And let me give you something else.”

“What?”

“Everything I have to give.” She depressed her valve, making the center of the clasped hands protrude. Her smile quivering, she pushed close and connected her valve with mine. As we embraced again, now chest to chest, she hummed, “I can’t imagine how much you must be hurting, but I’ll do everything I can to ease your pain.”

Energy flowed into my valve—warm and refreshing. It seemed that Shanghai’s love flowed with it, the combination strengthening my heart along with my muscles. Every passing second brought relief, vigor, and hope. With Sing’s photo stick in my possession and Albert’s soul still available to provide me with information, maybe we could get to the Gateway and the abyss. Maybe we could stop Erin and learn the mysteries beyond the veil. “You’re already easing my pain, Shanghai. It feels wonderful.”

Suffering Captures the Heart

88

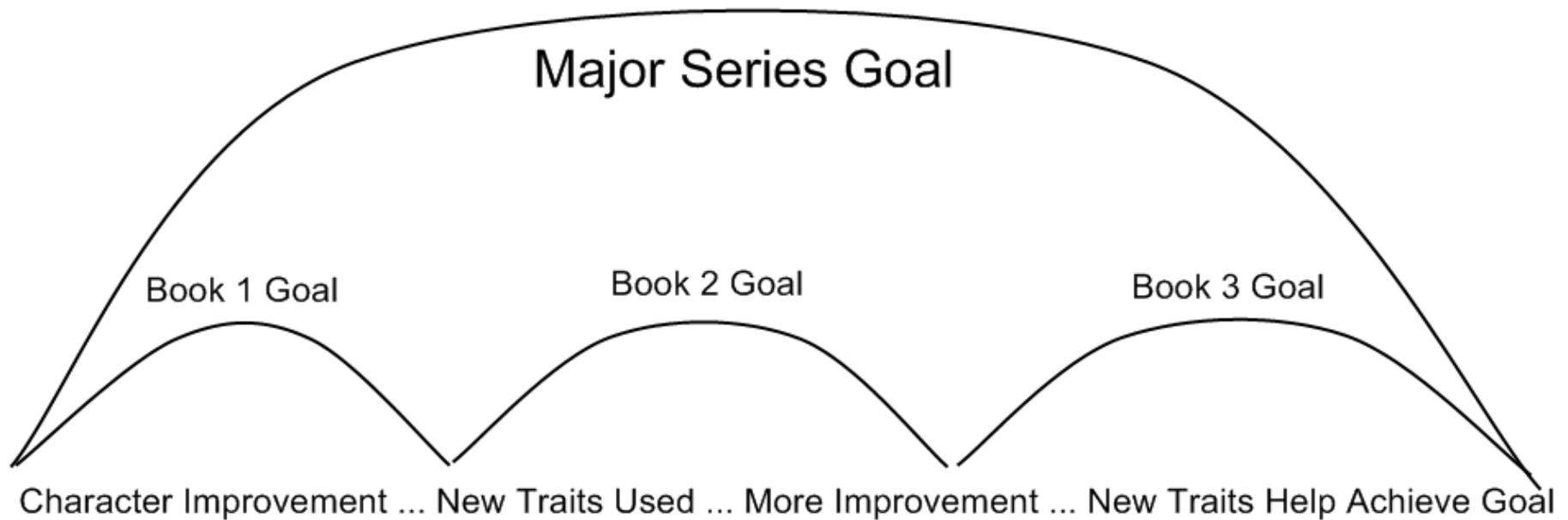


Reward the Focal Character

89



Series Arcs



End the Book with a View to the Next

91

“Just that we need to hurry. Alex will be at my apartment with more energy for me, and she’ll show me how the tracking device works.”

“I’m all for that.” Shanghai pushed the watch into my pocket. “But you’re nearly out of gas. We’ll need transportation.”

I extended my thumb. “Let’s see if hitchhiking will work for a change.”

“Maybe someone will risk it. Your apartment’s not far.”

“After that, we’ll get to the bottom of all the Gatekeeper’s secrets.”

“As long as we’re together.” Shanghai regripped my hand. “For Sing?”

“For Sing.” I took in a deep breath. “Let’s find out what’s beyond the Gateway.”

Character's New External Ability

92

I wrapped my cloak around her and laid it over her shoulders. The fibers latched to her body and adhered like flypaper. As the cloak began absorbing her, she sucked in a breath, her face locked in a grimace, but she stayed quiet. Apparently the new energy was easing the transition process. Otherwise she would be screaming in pain.

My clasp hissed, indicating an energy leak, not unheard of during a ghost collection, but more noticeable than usual. A tingling sensation ran through the valve's wires to my heart—not bad at all.

Tori flattened out against the inside of my cloak. Whimpering softly, she thinned to a mist and disappeared, her eyes the last to vanish.

Character's New Inner Trait

93

The scene faded to gray, then to black. All was silent. The city waited anxiously for dawn. They waited for someone to rise up and prove that their hopes and prayers weren't for naught. They needed a courageous warrior who would open the gate and show them the other side of eternity.

“Hope,” I whispered. “It's all they have. Who'll keep it alive?”

New Goal Immediately Provided

94

Ghosts rarely shocked people anymore, especially Reapers. We were accustomed to seeing the souls of the dead. We carried them in our cloaks, conversed with them, comforted them, and, at times, even scolded them. Nothing surprised us. Yet, when the phantom image of Singapore hovered over my hand as I clutched her photo stick, my heart pounded. She was just a hologram, not even a ghost, but she still haunted me far more than any ghost ever could.

New External Ability Used

95

Shanghai shook her head. “She’s zoning out. We need to snap her out of it.”

“I’ll go into ghost mode and get forceful. With the new energy, I shouldn’t need an anchor, but keep a close eye on me.”

“Will do.”

I concentrated on the energy coursing through my cloak, willing it to flow into my body. My arms transformed into phantom appendages, far faster than usual, and the change spread to my entire body in seconds.

Reward Can Be Hope that Leads to Sequel

96

I am now a daughter of light, and the path set before me is blazed by the glow of Jehovah-Yasha—bloody footprints imbedded in a trail of tears, yet leading to a glorious kingdom set on a shining hill. Though trials stand in the way—a search for lost friends, the awakening of sleeping giants, and the uncertainty of Mardon’s looming specter—I know the path will never lead to a place of desolation. The shining city will always guide me home.

I now look forward to what lies ahead. New friends will mingle with those familiar. Ashley, the daughter of dragons, and Walter, the descendant of a king, will grace the path with their presence, riding on the wind atop the great warrior Thigocia.

My story continues. The joy of discovery awaits. And I hope that my path somehow, someday, crosses the path of another ageless seeker, the receiver of the only blessing I had to offer so many years ago—a handful of stew that quelled a boiling hunger. Yet, it was more than simply a pottage of sustenance; it was my compassion, my humility, my submission. When I gave him the fruit of my hands, I also surrendered my heart.

When I see him again, I will tell him so.