

**Know Your Ending – How a Killer Outline Elevates Story**

Saturday, Sept. 10, 2022, 2:30 pm

Conference Room V

**Presenter: Rob Samborn**

**Course Outline**

1. Introduction
2. Outlining techniques
3. Writing a strong premise line
4. Three-act breakdown
5. Twelve-sequence breakdown
6. Character-driven plot
7. Beat sheet (scene outline)
8. Working backwards – cause and effect
9. Creating page-turning chapters and cliffhangers
10. Workshopping (throughout)

**CREATING AN OUTLINE – PROCESS TIPS AND TRICKS**

**GENERAL PROCESS**

1. Start with a premise line
2. Write the premise line from the antagonist’s POV
3. Break the premise line into three acts
4. Break the three acts into twelve sequences
	1. Write each sequence as a premise line for both your MC and antagonist (don’t worry about grammar).
5. Break the twelve sequences into 4-8 scenes each (this is your scene outline)
6. Starting at the end, work backwards using a cause-and-effect principle
7. Work the cause-and-effect principle into the scene outline going forwards using a character-driven perspective
8. Break at the appropriate section and chapter marks to create cliffhangers
9. Rework your premise line
10. Revise and review the scene outline, working in details, some dialogue, etc.
11. Brainstorm and revise again, adding in dilemmas, character arcs, themes, and everything else.
12. Write the manuscript—expand the scene outline into prose.

**PREMISE LINE FORMULA**

The premise line is a one-sentence description that goes to the climax of the story (not the ending).

KNOW:

Primary Genre

Setting

Main Character

Antagonist

Inciting Incident

Primary Problem/Action/Conflict/Stakes

MC’s Goal by Act 3

STATE AS:

When the <main character> <becomes involved in an incident/is introducing to something potentially life-changing/their life is upended in some way> they must <do something that will help them achieve> <their goal> against <the antagonist> AND/OR before <stakes happen>.

* Avoid names.
* Include irony, contrast or inherent conflict.
* Avoid specifics unless critical to the plot.
* 25-50 words.
* You don’t need to use the specific words in the formula (e.g., when, becomes involved, etc.)

Examples:

Harry Potter:

When a neglected orphan learns he comes from a family of wizards, he must go to a wizardry school to learn the powers that will enable him to defeat the dark lord who murdered his parents.

Star Wars Ep. IV A New Hope (the first movie):

When a teenage space farmer accidentally receives a desperate message from a kidnapped princess, he must team up with a ragtag group of outlaws to infiltrate a massive space station, save the princess, and bring down the evil empire that destroyed his family.

Rocky:

When a struggling, nobody boxer is given a chance to fight the heavyweight champion, he must rise to the occasion and prove all the naysayers wrong in the ring.

**BASIC STORY STRUCTURE**

**ACT 1 (set-up)**

Intro

Inciting incident

Dilemma

Decision & action – setting sail

**ACT 2 (journey and obstacles)**

First culmination

Decision & action

Second culmination

Dilemma

Decision & action

Midpoint (could be a twist) – major raising of stakes/escalation of conflict/new direction

Third culmination

Low point – all is lost moment/crisis

Decision & action - inspirational moment/rise to the occasion – set up the fight to the finish

**ACT 3 (resolution)**

Third act twist/fourth culmination

New dilemma

Decision & action - completion of character arc

Fight to the finish

Hero wins

Denouement (get out quickly!)

(Break sections and chapters at the end of these events.)

**CAUSE AND EFFECT PRINCIPLE FORMULA**

**Know your ending!**

**For the whole manuscript:**

1. What is the Central Dramatic Question? (e.g., will Harry defeat Voldemort?)
2. What action by the MC touches off the fight to the finish, giving rise to the CDQ?
3. What action by the MC (or antagonist) sets up the fight to the finish?
4. What common elements connect these two premises?
5. What is the object of the plot? (This is the writer’s objective. This could be a theme, an entertainment proposition, etc.)
6. What is the final effect? (aka the ending)
7. What is the immediate cause of that effect?
8. What is the cause of that effect?
9. What is the cause of that effect?
10. And continue all the way to the beginning.
11. Start again at #5 for each of the three acts.
12. Once that’s done, reverse it into book order.

**PAGE-TURNERS/CLIFFHANGERS**

Ways to turn section breaks and chapters into page-turners (for any genre)

1. Break at a literal question, especially dialogue. If one character asks a question, withhold the answer until the next section or chapter.
2. Break in the middle of action. If your character is in the middle of a chase and reaches a turning point or crucial decision, break there.
3. Don’t follow your characters too closely. We don’t need to know every step. Our brains fill in the gaps, especially of typical human behavior or cause-and-effect actions. Cut the mundane and pick up with the compelling narrative.
4. Wait to tell us what happens! In the literal definition of a cliffhanger, a character is dangling from a cliff and we have to wait until we find out what happens.

**CHARACTER-DRIVEN PLOT**

Statement formula:

When a <type of person> has/does/wants/gets <something/someone/somewhere> they do/get/try/learn <something>, only to discover that <something else> now happens, and they must respond by <doing something unexpected to solve the problem>.

Who is the main character? *A sympathetic person*

What is the MC trying to accomplish? *A compelling goal*

Who is trying to stop the MC? *A ruthless, committed opponent*

What happens if the MC fails? *A life-or-death consequence (figuratively or literally)*

THE FOUR ARCHETYPE PARADIGM

The hero should embody all of these in four equal stages as the story progress. This can apply to any genre.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Orphan** | **Wanderer** | **Warrior** | **Hero/Martyr** |
| The hero is adrift, away from something they need. In some sense powerless, lonely, below potential. Something not of their own volition will happen to them, jolting them out of the rut they’re in. | Jolted out of their normal life, the hero tries to make sense of the new reality that confronts them - they're re-active, rather than proactive, usually following the lead of others. | The hero takes charge of their own destiny and, with increasing boldness, attempts to work towards the resolution they desire - but ultimately fails, leaving things worse than ever before | More mature, the hero now realizes that to do what needs to be done will require them to make a greater sacrifice than they ever before contemplated. They will be willing to die, literally or figuratively, for their cause. |

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Rob Samborn is the author of ***The Prisoner of Paradise*** and the upcoming novella, ***The Swordsman of Venice****,* and novel, ***Painter of the Damned***. He has a three-book print deal with TouchPoint Press and a three-book audiobook deal with Tantor Media. He’s represented by Brower Literary and Management. He’s also a screenwriter with nine features, five of which have been optioned. Originally from New York City, he now makes his home in Denver.

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