The Plot Machine

Graphics

"The Plot Machine," a story-plotting guide, contains numerous lists.

These lists range from types of stories, to story elements, and the various components of story structure.

As it may be difficult to study these lists in e-book and audio versions of "The Plot Machine," I have created this PDF file. I hope it makes the concepts in the book more easily comprehensible.

Happy plotting.

A Full Length Story

Act I

In which the hero is introduced
and a compelling need established.

Act II

In which the hero undertakes a unique
endeavor to achieve their goal.

Act III

In which the hero fails or succeeds.

Story Taxonomy Chart

Motivation: Threat or Desire?

    Threat—something attacking hero
    Desire—something hero wants

Source: Internal or External?

    External Threats—War, Criminals, Fire
    Internal Threats—Disease, Trauma
    External Desire—Money, Food, Shelter
    Internal Desire—Love, Revenge, Honor

Target: General or Specific?

    General Threats—Storms, War
    Specific Threats—Blackmail, Vendetta
    General Desires—Peace, Prosperity
    Specific Desires—Treasure, a Mate

Common Entertainment Values

Emotions
Poetry
Music
Comedy
Beautiful or terrifying scenery

Physical Conflict
Fights
Chases
Epic battles

Information
Puzzles and Riddles
Secrets revealed

Physical Feats
Sports
Races
Acrobatics

Spectacle
Explosions or Fireworks
Natural disasters

Popular Character Arcs/Themes

Start	End
From Dishonest	To Honest
From Lone Wolf	To Team Player
From Traumatized	To Healed
From Naive	To Worldly
From Peacemaker	To Warrior
From Impulsive	To Thoughtful
From Bitter	To Forgiving
From Selfish	To Selfless
From Timid	To Bold
From Intellectual	To Emotional

Common Starting Elements

Characters
Lover
Warrior
Fool
Introvert

Settings
Contemporary
Historical
Fantasy

Situation
A new power or wealth
Facing a great challenge
Going into battle
Finding a killer

Goal
The love of another
A great treasure
Vengeance
Accomplishing an impossible feat

Genre
Romance
Crime
Mystery
Thriller
Science Fiction

General Framework and Subdivisions

ACT I

Hero's World
    Hero's need/strengths/flaws
    A tangible Goal
    An endeavor to reach goal
    Rejecting the Endeavor
    Added Pressure

Turning Point: Embark on Endeavor

ACT II

The Endeavor
    Fun and Games
    Mid-point Reversal
    Obstacles and Complications

Turning Point: Death Moment

ACT III
    Catharsis
    Resurrection/A New Plan
Climax
    Denouement

POPULAR MID-POINT REVERSALS

Hero obtains a treasure and is now chased
Hero on the defense goes on offense
Hero realizes new power is a burden
Hero escapes but must free others
Detective makes arrest...wants conviction
Hero learns he was set up as a fall-guy
Hero wins goal, but must hide subterfuge

POPULAR DEATH MOMENTS

The hero dies and must be resuscitated
The hero is wounded and out of action
The endeavor has failed miserably
The hero is fired from his job
The couple breaks up their romance
The wedding is called off
The hero is mocked by his peers
The ideal mate marries someone else
The villain reaches their destination
The treasure is lost
A key ally is killed

POSITIVE CATHARSIS MOMENTS
The hero learns to...
trust others.
be a team player
accept his real self
not hide behind a mask
let others shine
not take shortcuts
play by the rules
grow up and act his/her age
take responsibility for actions

NEGATIVE CATHARSIS MOMENTS
The hero learns to...
play outside the rules.
fight fire with fire.
use trickery and subterfuge.
show no mercy
risk everything

POPULAR RESURRECTION / NEW PLANS
The hero finds...
a means to heal his wounds
an alternative weapon to use
a means to reach the villain in time
a message with new information
a new witness
a new map
a key to escape captivity
inspiration in a pep-talk from an ally
inspiration from an ally's sacrifice

POPULAR DENOUEMENTS

A wedding
A public declaration of love
The hero welcomed home
An award ceremony
The hero spending the treasure
The hero helping his allies
The hero at peace with himself
Hero helps others with similar challenges
The hero honoring fallen comrades
The hero retiring from her job
The villain suffering in defeat
The villain punished
The villain vowing revenge

POPULAR OBSTACLES

The early rounds of a tournament
Various henchmen guarding Mr. Big
Layers of defenses
Bad weather
Unreliable transportation

POPULAR SHIFTING GOALS

To reach their primary goal, the hero must:
Secure a weapon
Locate a map
Obtain a key or pass code
Enlist allies
Pinpoint a location
Win an endorsement
Travel a great distance
Find a witness
Convey a message
Escape from a trap

POPULAR COMPLICATIONS

A traitor in their midst
A rival for the goal
False leads and red herrings
Attacks by henchmen or rivals
A wounded ally
Arrested by authorities

POPULAR SUB-PLOTS

Hero's Work Life
Up for Promotion
Fired or put on probation
Asking for a raise
Applying for a new job
Difficulty with a coworker or boss
Assigned a difficult task

Hero's Home Life
Getting married or in a romance
A marriage breaking up
An ill relative
A delinquent relative
Raising children
A friend asks a favor
An annoying neighbor
The death of a friend

Hero's Internal Life
Physical illness or injury
Mental illness or trauma
Crisis of faith
Addiction issues
Self-esteem issues

ENSEMBLE STORY TYPES

Location Based
Residents of a town or city
Of an apartment building or prison
Campers at a summer camp

Organization Based
The workers at a particular business
Aristocracy and servants in a mansion
The crew of an aircraft carrier

Endeavor Based
Commanders and soldiers in battle
Participants in a political movement
Actors putting on a show

Experience Based
Start, middle, and end of marriage
Birthing, raising, and launching children

Theme Based
Love conquers all
Crime doesn't pay

FLAW/DEATH CONNECTIONS

Dishonest	Evades Telling Truth
Lone Wolf	Rejects aide
Traumatized	Avoids facing issues
Naive	Trusts too much
Peacemaker	Tries Diplomacy
Impulsive	Charges into danger
Bitter	Acts spitefully
Selfish	Doesn't share
Timid	Doesn't speak up
Intellectual	Logic fails
Emotional	Instincts fail

FAILURE/NEW PLAN DIVISIONS

Treasure stolen	Must chase after it
Villain has weapon	Must prevent use
Delivered warning	Must fight threat
Obtain Treasure	Ally is kidnapped
Weapon broken	Devise repairs
Rescue loved one	Must flee to safety
Rescue loved one	Must rescue others
Learn target	Race to stop attack
Imprisoned	Must escape

Examples of Pushing Your Hero

The Hero's need for money becomes critical
Added pressure from a ticking clock
Alternatives are explored and fail
Old ties are broken
Hero's safety net collapses

Examples of Pulling Your Hero

Hero's desire intensifies
The endeavor satisfies multiple goals
Peers have already accepted the challenge
Loved ones encourage him

Examples of Growth Steps

From Lone Wolf...
Hero succeeds with lone wolf habits
Hero rejects aide from anyone else and suffers for it
Hero discounts the helpful involvement of an ally
Hero witnesses effectiveness of a team
Hero relapses to lone-wolf ways at death moment
Hero ultimately embraces team collaboration
...to Team Player

From Selfish...
Hero acts in self interest
Others beg for generosity, but he ignores them
His philosophy is every man for himself
He suffers a blow that requires assistance
The person who aided him rejects a reward
He learns his own success was based on generosity
He rejects giving aide with tragic results
He acts selflessly to achieve goal
...to Generous

From Doubting...
Hero is told he/she is worthless
They are dismissed by everyone
Hero practices a skill in secret
He volunteers for a challenge and is mocked
He is defeated and doubts himself
He risks public ridicule and succeeds
...to Confident

The Plot Machine

From Blank Page...

What *do* you have?
What are natural extensions?
What is the Entertainment Value?
Consider Scale, Tone, and Theme.
Identify the General Goal.
Experiment with different Endeavors.
Experiment with Act II Framework.
Obstacles or Sub-Goals?
Do you need a Midpoint Reversal?
What is the Death Moment?
Design a Hero to fit these Elements.
Identify their strengths and flaws.
Design the Failure to Success Sequence.
Design the World to Endeavor Sequence.
Break the hero's Growth Arc into steps.
Link these steps to the Endeavor.
Design the hero's Normal World.
Link hero's Flaw to their Circumstances.
Link Circumstances to Need.
Link Need to Goal with Inciting Incident.
Link Goal to Endeavor.

...to Story

Classic Story Structure

ACT I
Hero's World
Strengths and Flaw
Hero's Need
Logical Solutions
The Inciting Incident
Rejecting the Endeavor
Added Pressure

ACT TWO
Begin the Endeavor
Fun and Games
Shifting Goals
Allies and Obstacles
Mid Point Reversal
Complications and Set-Backs
Death Moment

ACT III
Catharsis and Resurrection
A New Plan
Race to the Climax
The Climax
Denouement