

How to build a romance plot

2/12/15 My Precious

Objectives

- Techniques
 - Calc # of events
 - MC MOTHR CAR
 - 3 parts
 - What is cool? (what readers come to this type of story for)
 - Specific MOTHR patterns
 - One-man chess
 - Make it hard
- Other
 - List and twist
 - Zing
 - Farmer's faith
 - Creative Q&A

Vot is ze *WHO*

- Welcome to HOW TO BUILD A ROMANCE PLOT. I'm John Brown and this is the Mistress of love and kilts.
- Little bit about Lesli
- In this hour we want to share some techniques we ourselves use that we think you'll find very helpful.
- Get stuck, unsatisfying ending, boring middle, bad pacing, we think these techniques that either or both of us use, will help.
- Overwhelmed, don't know what to write, we think these techniques will help.
- It doesn't matter if you like to sketch it beforehand; or like to do it on the fly
- So how are we going to do this? We came up with an initial sketch of a story. We'll use the techniques to sketch a plot.

Our story

- Present the sketch of our story
- Okay, now what? How do we get it done?

Technique 1: Calc # events

- Calc # of events (Break down the work into a finite set of pieces)
 - Formula
 - Stories
- So what fills those event slots?

2 Keys

- First key: Reader effect
 - **When you're plotting, you're NOT building a plot.**
 - This is a plot (was hungry, went to the store, bought some beans, came home and cooked the beans, said yum, yum to the dog)
 - **You're developing a guided experience**

- When people say there are a lot more half clad men with monster pecs in romance than in real life, there's a reason for that.
- Second key: Lots of effects
 - **Sometimes you want a tent, and sometimes you want a castle**
 - There are a bunch of different reader effects
 - There are many experiences—you need to know which type you're providing
 - Form follows function
 - **The fact that there is no one experience means there is NO single master plot**
 - Crap, does that mean we have no guidance?
 - We have 6 other techniques. We'll start general and get more specific.

Technique 2: MC MOTHR CAR

- What does a good romance feel like?
 - **Suspense, Anticipation, & Melting**
- The pattern that produces suspense & anticipation--MC MOTHR CAR
- MC we can get behind
 - AUDIENCE
 - First let's do a bit more with the MC. Want to be able to get behind her.
 - What would be attractive in personality?
 - In skills?
- MOTHR
 - Some romances have romance as the main MOTHR (Romeo, Sabrina, Ladyhawke)
 - Many have an external plot and the romance, the relationship, is woven through it.
 - We already have the external plot—take back the Lonely Mountain
 - So this is a weave format
- The Want
 - Happiness
 - What is the joy of romance? It's falling in love and being loved back. Being adored and admired and wanted above everyone else by this person you're so attracted to. For many women it includes security. For many men it includes admiration.
 - It's also enjoying the human interaction (wit, banter, etc.)
 - Growing physical attraction.
 - Growing emotional attraction that leads to commitment.
 - So the MOTHR is something that obstructs the development of that wanting AND commitment. It's a threat to it. An obstacle. Part of them wants to like, part doesn't or can't. There's some obstacle. With both of them or just one.
 - We know our MOTHR
 - AUDIENCE
 - What event would make her seem incompetent, fish out of water on this, to hi and us?
 - What event would make him seem like a jerk to her and us?
 - Why can't or won't she walk away from quest?
 - AUDIENCE
 - Why is she going? What's her goal or motive? What reward or opportunity does she see that doesn't have to do with Thorin?

Technique 3: The 3 parts

- This isn't mystical—it's **guiding the reader through** the a process of growing attraction, trust, insecurity, making decisions, and seeing each other in new light.
- 3 parts
 - Trouble

- Struggle
- Resolution
- AUDIENCE:
 - Event to signal romantic possibility?

Technique 4: What's Cool?

- Each type of story delivers a different type of experience. Roller coaster not the same as paragliding or surfing. Thai food not the same as burgers. Romances vs other relationship stories.
- AUDIENCE
 - What are some cool things we enjoy in these types of stories?
 - Lesli, would you add anything?
 - What are some of the cool **plot** things you find in these types of stories?
 - Lesli, would you add anything?
 - What are some events that would increase physical tension, attraction?
 - What are some events that might increase emotional attraction?

Technique 5: Specific MOTHR patterns

- These threat stories all require a character to do different things and, therefore, have different event patterns:
 - Marriage of convenience (Western mail order bride, Recengies),
 - Recluse/spinster (Gothic)
 - Competitors or enemies or gunslinger/lawman (You've Got Mail, Something to Talk About)
 - Bad boy/good girl (Twilight)
 - Mistaken identity (While You Were Sleeping)
 - Unrequited love (Spiderman)
 - Upper crust/commoner (Sweet Home Alabama, Leap Year, Leagally Blonde, Far & Away, Pride & Prejudice)
- **This is a story about two people learning to admire each other, demonstrate competence and selflessness**
- AUDIENCE
 - Exemplars. How to Train (she catches him in his hobby)
 - What's event that could happen for him to build admiration?
 - What's event that could happen for us and her to see he's not a jerk? Same one?
 - Lesli, would you add anything?

Technique 6: One-man chess

- Sometimes we forget the other person. Let's put Thorin into the mix.
- AUDIENCE
 - You've got this person, what would you do about it?

Technique 7: Make it hard

- **Conflicts:** bad guys, good guys, setting, equipment, self
- AUDIENCE
 - What points of conflicts could we have? What could people or forces outside couple do to undermine relationship?
- What could throw the relationship **for a loop**?
- AUDIENCE
 - What could throw this relationship for a loop? Not the ultimate blow, but a big unexpected one?
- **Black moment**

- When are sports games most thrilling? Nip & tuck and go the whole game against a higher ranked opponent, and your team snatches victory from the jaws of defeat in the last seconds of the game. Often fun to have a moment **the READER feels all hope is lost**. Something happens to make it seem like there's now **no way to win**—the **odds** are too overwhelming. It's a **seemingly killing blow**. It's totally killed the hero's **ability or desire** to win.
- AUDIENCE
 - What turn, what event, could deliver this seemingly killing blow?

Wrap up

- Review questions

Stuff

- Characters take different actions (different events) for different THOMR types.
 - **LELSI**: These relationship stories all require a character to do different things and, therefore, have different event patterns:
 - Buddy
 - Parent/child
 - Older person/younger
 - Crusty dog/newcomer
 - Romances
 - Marriage of convenience (Western mail order bride, Recengies),
 - Recluse/spinster (Gothic)
 - Competitors or enemies or gunslinger/lawman (You've Got Mail, Something to Talk About)
 - Bad boy/good girl (Twilight)
 - Mistaken identity (While You Were Sleeping)
 - Unrequited love (Spiderman)
 - Upper crust/commoner (Sweet Home Alabama, Leap Year, Legally Blonde, Far & Away, Pride & Prejudice)
 - Etc.

Our stuff for My Precious

This is the romance story.

- **Our story**
 - Bilbo becomes Belladonna
 - Bella and Thorin (they're even about the same size!)
 - We'll call it *My Precious*
 - She's incompetent to him; he's a jerk to her
 - There's even another guy who gives her a ring; he's skinny, hair bad hair and teeth, and stalks her (grin)
- **THOMR type:**
 - Romance: Upper crust/commoner (Sweet Home Alabama, Leap Year, Legally Blonde, Far & Away, Pride & Prejudice) or people at odds
 - Decide on main plot or subplot? Main = 51% romance/49% other
- **Specific event elements based on THOMR type and reader desires**
 - Signal romantic possibility
 - Show the big obstacle to it: she's incompetent, he's a jerk
 - Emotional attraction rises and falls

- Moments where Belladonna shows competence and moments where she undermines it. Stakes of incompetence rise.
 - Moments where Thorin shows jerkiness and moments where he shows humility/friendship/tenderness.
- Physical attraction grows
 - Moments that build the romantic attraction: eye contact, physical contact, words spoken, things others say
- Revelation
 - Moment where they admit physical attraction.
 - Moment where they develop respect and admiration of the other person
 - Moment where they decide I want him/her and no other and will whatever it takes
 - The declaration of love
- Black moment
- HEA
- Confirmation of HEA
- **Other elements readers think are awesome**
 - Determine your level of sex
 - Liking both characters
 - Banter
 - Hoping they'll get together, fearing they won't: boy meets girl, boy gets girl, boy loses, boy wins her back
 - Feeling the attraction to the character develop
 - Wish-fulfillment: be like one of them, have the other interested in them
 - Him: heroic, strong, physically attractive, etc.
 - Her: strong, smart, physically attractive. etc.