The 2 Types of Plots Every Writer Should Know

WWO

- I think it's safe to say we all want to write the kind of stories that keep the reader glued to the page.
    - And we want to do that on purpose instead of on accident. Because we want to be able to repeat it.
    - So WHAT ENGROSSES THE READER? WHAT KEEP THEM GLUED TO THE PAGE?
- Some say it's character.
    - We do remember characters and little snippets.
    - But that's not enough. Otherwise, we'd be writing and selling character sketches and descriptions. But we're not. Because we don't read for character.
    - We read to see a character in a plot. A plot that does certain things.
    - And if you don't know how to get such a plot, you won't write fiction most readers want to read.
- There are two types of plot I can see that drive 95% of commercial fiction.
    - So this applies to you if you're writing romance, fantasy, YA, historical fiction, military fiction, adventure—any genre.
    - It applies to you if you're just starting out or if you're experienced.
    - And when you know what these 2 plot types are and understand some basic concepts about them, it gives you control so you can create the kind of stories that entertain and suck readers in on purpose instead of on accident.
- When I was starting out I struggled. Didn't know what I was doing.
    - Hard time answering the question what comes next.
    - Then I learned about the first kind of plot. I read a book that opened it up to me and applied it in my next story. I'd been submitting stories for publication. But they'd gone nowhere. But that all changed. This story won a WOTF prize. $1k for the prize. $1k for publication. Flew me out for a weeklong workshop.
    - I had character. I was lacking plot. And as soon as I had it, things began to change. I just needed a little guidance. And I still use these tools today.
- If plot is something you struggle with, if you're not sure about what you're doing, you probably just need a little guidance too.
    - Today I want to share what I've learned over the years so you can apply it to your stories.

Caution

- Now before we get into this I want to warn you about a trap. I see writers fall into all the time. I fell into it. If you fall into it, it will make it harder to get the results you're looking for.
    - [Hold up cattle prod and ask if anyone knows what it is.]

- o   Please describe it to the rest of the group.
  - o   Notice how he/she explained it—focused on what it does. Not the form. What it does. It's a tool.
  - o   The BIG TRAP is FOCUSING ON FORM AND FORGETTING FUNCTION.
  - o   And I see this happen with plot probably more than anything else.
  - o   And when we forget function, we lose our way. Imagine trying to create a new pen without thinking about its function.
- So let's get this down first. WHAT IS PLOT? HECK, WHAT IS STORY?
  - o   [Ask for answers]
  - o   Let me give you my answer. Story is a tool. It's a means to an end. A story is guided experience. An emotional ride. You are guiding the reader through an emotional ride.
- WHAT IS THAT EXPERIENCE?
  - o   Genre delights.
  - o   But there's something in common across all these genres. It's core. I call it trigger, build, deliver.
  - o   Trigger 3 things. Build them to a sharp point. And then deliver.
    - ▪   Hopes and fears for the character.
    - ▪   Anticipation for something dramatic.
    - ▪   Desire to solve a mystery.
- HOW DO YOU TRIGGER THOSE 3 THINGS? HOW DO YOU BUILD THEM? HOW DO YOU DELIVER?
  - o   You do it with plot. So let's get into it.

Plot type 1 – task-based plot

- The first type of plot is a task-based plot.
- Here's how it works. I'm going to give you an acronym.
- LC THOM CAR.
  - o   Video picnic: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eu2ewxZ9IbY
  - o   Mission Impossible. Get the other half of the key.
  - o   Star Wars. Get the plans to the rebels.
  - o   Zootopia. Solve mystery to get what I've wanted all my life.
  - o   The Martian. Survive until they can send a ship.
  - o   Solve the murder.
  - o   Stop the villain.
  - o   Win as a basketball team.
  - o   Etc.
- General flow, 4 parts
  - o   Introduction.
    - ▪   LC
    - ▪   THOM
    - ▪   Concrete goal.
  - o   Struggle.
    - ▪   Lose. Worst fears realized.

- o Resolution.
  - ▪ Win/Lose.
  - o Savor.
- • Examples
  - o LOTR. Task plot. LC THOM. What was the goal? Get to Elrond in Rivendell.
  - o Da Vinci Code. LC THOM. Figure out the mystery—what was dying man trying to tell us? Find the grail.
- • Variations
  - o Single goal
    - ▪ Try/fail
      - • The Martian
      - • Murder mystery
    - ▪ Multi-step
      - • Behind enemy lines
      - • Raiders of the Lost Ark
  - o Evolving goal
    - ▪ LOTR
    - ▪ Star Wars
    - ▪ Harry Potter
- • WHY CAN WE HAVE THESE VARIATIONS?
  - o Because they TBD. They deliver the ride.
  - o Don't straight-jacket yourself into one structure or pattern. Don't put yourself on some Procrustean bed of plot.
  - o Focus on the function. As long as you build enough reader tension (desire from trigger and not getting it), it's working.

Plot type 2 – byproduct plot

- • The second type of plot is a byproduct plot.
- • A character has a belief. Through one or more experiences they come to a realization and change their belief or value. And they prove it.
- • Relationship. Buddy, familial, romance. Redemption.
- • Often with a task-based plot.
- • Example, COP STORY.
- • Character doesn't have a goal. But the audience does.
  - o HOW'S THAT POSSIBLE?
  - o Because this is about reader tension.
  - o Don't fall for the form trap. Don't focus on form and forget function.
- • LC THOM ERP (experience, realization and change, proof)
- • Form
  - o Introduction
    - ▪ LC THOM
  - o Struggle

- - - Experiences that challenge the belief, present disconfirming information, or show an appealing other side.
    - Often get to a moment when we think they won't change. They won't reconcile. Won't redeem themselves.
  - Resolution
    - Realization and change
    - Action. Proof of change.
  - Savor
- Examples
  - Miss Congeniality.
  - Green Book.
  - Last Samurai (redemption). Repeat test to prove change.

Caution

- Remember: there isn't one specific structure or plot pattern.
- The goal is NOT to follow some form. The goal is to trigger, build, and deliver. And there are 100s, 1000s of permutations that do that. You just need to maintain a certain level of reader tension.
- Focus on the goal. Am I triggering, building, and delivering?

Conclusion

- You now have the framework.
  - What a plot's job is.
  - The 2 types of plots that drive 90-95% of commercial fiction.
  - The general flow.
  - Examples.
- There are other questions.
- How do you trigger? Specific techniques?
- How do you build. How deliver?
- What makes a LC?
- What makes a kick butt THOM?
- How do you transport the reader?
- And much more.
- You can learn more about all that and more on my site.
- I'm also going to start a series of free, how-to webinars on these topics.
- If you'd like to join with us, sign up for my NWA newsletter at https://johndbrown.com.