

Intention & Obstacle



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The Drive Shaft of the Story



“Drama is intention and obstacles, somebody wants something, something is standing in their way of getting it.”

- Aaron Sorkin

Two Types of Intentions



External: What the protagonist acknowledges

Survive the games

Escape Dunkirk

Get rid of the ring

Internal: Not acknowledged

Redeem herself

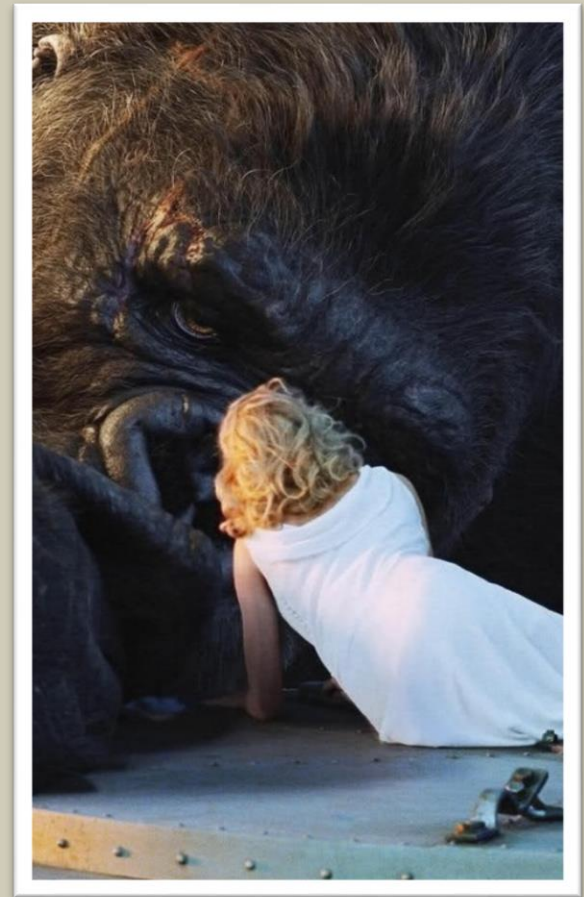
Be a hero

Atone for

External Intentions:



- To win
- To stop
- To escape
- To find
- To get somewhere
- To rescue or retrieve
- To seek justice

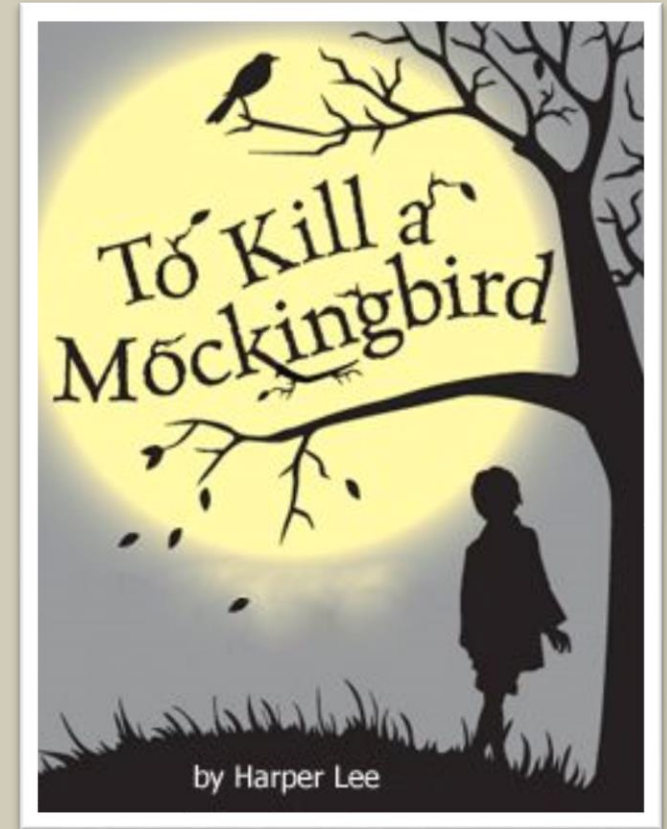


Internal Intentions



Readers love a worthy intention:

- Love
- Atonement
- Justice
- Duty
- Redemption
- Self-Respect





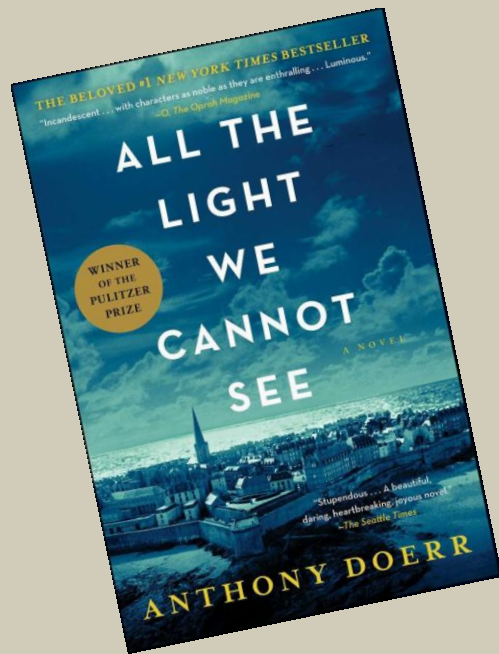
Your protagonist doesn't have to
win, she has to try.

Intentions evolve as obstacles
mount and the journey unfolds.

Intention(s) & Obstacles

Mainstream vs Literary?

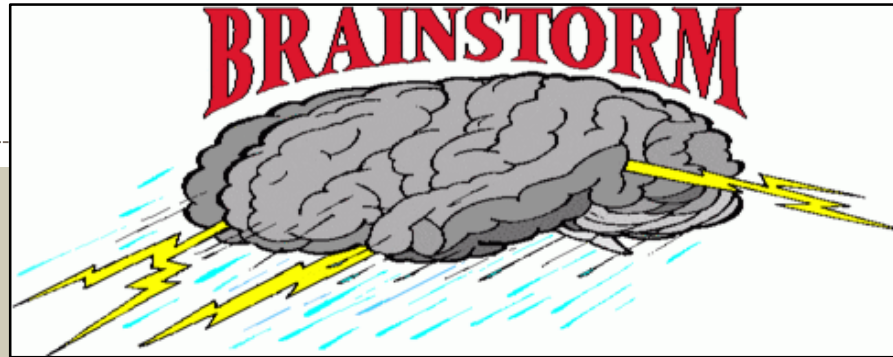
Q: What are the trends?



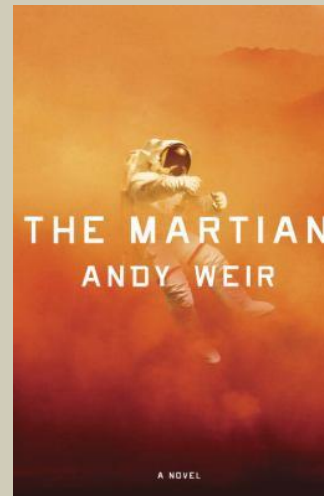
Scene Analysis



What is the first intention / obstacle?
When does the scene (conflict) begin?
What is the internal intention?
What are the external obstacles?
Does the tension mount as the
intention/obstacles ramp up?



With a partner, brainstorm Intention and Obstacle with one of these:



YOUR
CHOICE

When Does a Story Start?

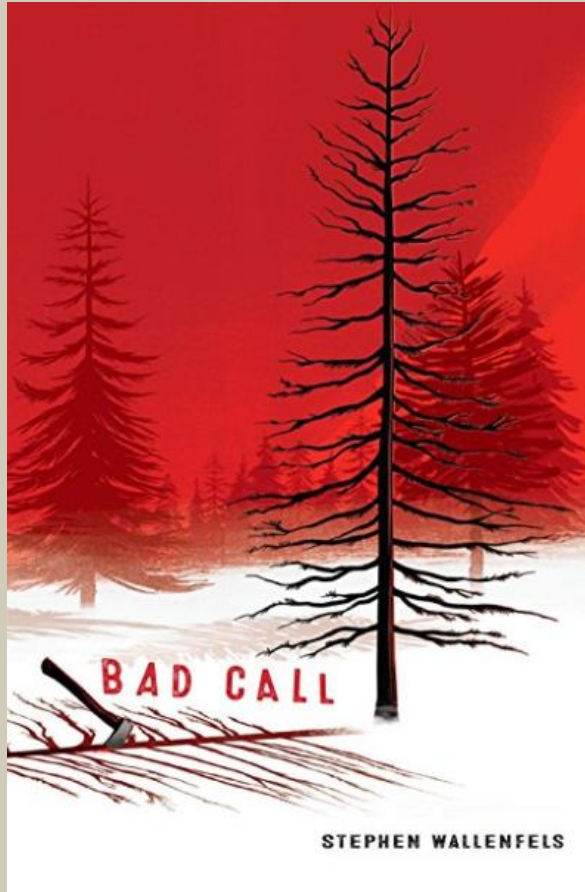


Story begins when you introduce the obstacle

- Lena wants to find her father (external)
- Lena wants to find out what her deformities mean about her (internal)



The Obstacles Introduce Conflict



Two high school seniors attempt to mend their strained friendship on an ill-fated camping trip with tragic consequences that lead to accusations of murder.

INCITING OBSTACLE

One of the four campers backs out at the last minute. The leader substitutes a girl that none of the other boys know.

Two Types of Obstacles



- Internal
 - Fear
 - Unworthy
 - Self esteem
 - Unloved
 - Unknown
- External
 - Man / Machine / Beast
 - Environment
 - Physical injury or handicap

External



Dunkirk: They're trapped, the Germans are closing in from all directions and they need to get the hell out of there.



Internal



- Dunkirk: Gibson is French, stranded and terrified. He pretends to be British so he can evacuate. He battles two fears: fear of discovery, fear of being left behind.



Obstacles: External & Internal



- Risk must be (or perceived to be) real
- Obstacles must be external and internal
- Tension must be relentless
- Antagonists strengthen the conflict
- Solution must require everything the protagonist has
- Solution should be inevitable, but surprising (Aristotle)

Scenes: Intention, Obstacles, Disaster



- Does the obstacle directly interfere with or threaten the protagonist's goal?
- Will the scene's complication and resolution lead to a new goal/obstacle/disaster? ***Escalation.***
- Does the *scene's* disaster set-up the next *scene's* goal.

Weak disaster=weak following scene.



BEWARE OF THE **SOD**
(SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF)

Don't make an obstacle too heavy to lift.

1st Scene



- **We meet the main character**
- Protag has an external intention
- It is the “now” of the story
- There is a major obstacle
- A story question is raised



Character



- “You don’t show the audience who a character is—you show the audience what a character wants.” A. Sorkin
- Characters are defined by their actions in the face of obstacles.

What Makes a Story Work?

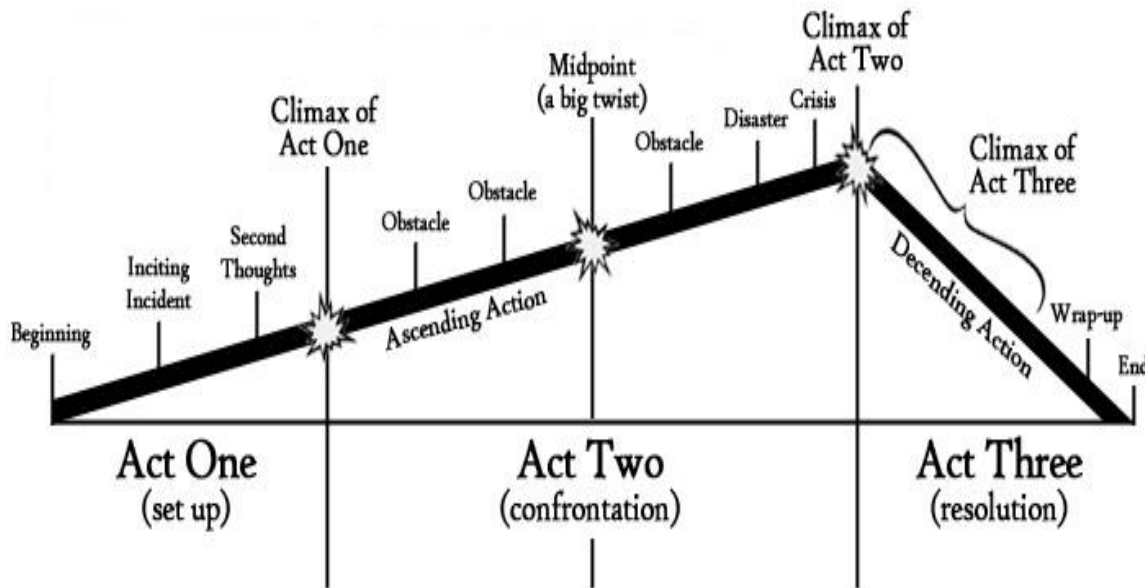


- Story is about transformation.
- Story isn't about plot. It's about how events (obstacles) change people.

Not All Scenes are Created Equal



Three-Act Structure



10%

80%

10%

Scene Heavy Lifters

threshold scenes

(2)

twist scenes (2-4)