

“Tower Heist” from the script writer’s point of view

Screenwriting Corner

“Tower Heist” from the script writer’s point of view

Genres: Comedy/Drama/Action/Adventure

By Ronnie Tharp-Garber

Designing Principle

Ben Stiller and Eddie Murphy lead an all-star cast in Tower Heist, a comedy caper about working stiffs who seek revenge on the Wall Street swindler who stiffed them.

Premise

After the workers at a luxury Central Park condominium discover the penthouse billionaire has stolen their retirement, they plot the ultimate revenge: a heist to reclaim what he took from them.

This is a comedy with the sub-genre of heist-comedy. The drama elements are the known Opponent, with a moral dilemma that blows in the Battle scene, with the Opponent defeated: finally a Wall St. multi-million dollar player who thinks he’s above the law is brought down by some very creative “working stiffs.”

The elements of action come into play with the Hero, Ben Stiller, greatly incensed when the trusted employee/doorman of a high rise tower building is bilked out of his life savings by the Opponent and then tries to commit suicide. To stay in this genre where comedy is the overall force, the doorman could not be killed – Ending up in a hospital, yes. And the Hero goes for a visit and vows to make things right. As a comic action Hero, “a man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do!”

The Character Web of hotel workers and bosses and funny residents of this super-expensive, posh residence that resembles Trump Tower is neatly played out. All of the secondary characters play against their natures, which contributes to that “comic gap” that is the mainstay of comedy: The desk clerk Russian young woman is studying for the bar and will end up being the shark lawyer for the Hero; the Jamaican maid is a brain with safe-cracking; the lonely, broke, divorced and bankrupt Wall St. occupant becomes part of the heist team instead of going asunder; the primo thief, Eddie Murphy, is bailed out of jail and wears a stolen business suit with attache case and becomes the heist trainer for these other “pansy-ass” would be thieves, who have never stolen anything in their lives.

All of the secondary characters support the Main Desire Line of the Hero, who wants to retrieve the money that the Opponent stole from the employees’ pension plan. Each character approaches the Desire according to his/her particular “quirk” and value system.

What keeps the Narrative Drive going is the continued “immoral” acts that the Hero commits to reach his goal/Desire of getting the money back for the employees. The Hero smashes a prized race car to smithereens; he engineers a safe-break-in; trains with a jailed criminal. The comic gap with his straight man character is that in the beginning of the story, he is a perfectionist- well-respected and politically correct with the wealthy residents of the Tower at all times. He plays along with the Opponent boss and maintains his calm under pressure. But then he goes berserk and is willing to jump completely out of character to go after the goal/Desire.

In a tightly crafted script such as this one, the story beats are all orchestrated: There’s the Inciting Incident at the 12-minute mark: The news that the pension fund has been raped by the unscrupulous boss. The end of Act 1 is at the

30 minute mark when the Hero receives new information to propel him into a definitive Plan of action to solve a huge dilemma that not only he is faced with, but all of his employees, or “working stiffs” as the Opponent likes to call them.

Act 2 is filled with preparation and training for the big heist moment. A sub-plot love interest for the Hero is woven in with the F.B.I. agent also desirous of putting the Opponent away, as she is totally disgusted with the rich raping the poor and being above the law. At the 60-minute mark, also called the Mid-Point Break, there is a distinct change of story world where the characters are in a very precarious time, just steps away from being discovered by the F.B.I., the Main Opponent, and the police. On page 75, a unique reveal occurs, and on page 85, another unique reveal occurs to jolt the audience forward with the Narrative Drive of the story. On page 90, the low point is very definitive, but because this is comedy, it is not a devastating low point.

There is a creative twist at the end, which comes after the Battle scene. The final sequences are compressed, as in comedy genre, these sequences are generally shorter than in other genres. The average comedy is about 96 minutes long, and this film is 99 minutes, including 5 minutes of credits. There is no Self-Revelation or New Equilibrium sequence, as the audience mainly cares about the Battle scene and wants to see the Opponent get his due.

For an entertaining, rollicking and good-humored 99 minutes, this film delivers. The cast is superb, the script is tight, and the comedy-heist genre is transcended, whereby the audience knows it will be a happy ending, but they will be surprised with the twist – It’s not a *deus ex machina* type of twist, but rather a set-up in good script writing, so that the audience feels a “poetic justice” type of emotion for a clever turn on predictability.

Understanding Myth Genre: “Avatar”

“Avatar”

Genres: Mythology, Action, Romance –

Logline: A paraplegic Marine, dispatched to the moon Pandora on a unique mission, becomes torn between following his orders and protecting the world he feels is his home.

It’s important to note that frequently, a film can be marketed as a genre(s) that may or may not have been the intention of the screenwriter. “Avatar” was marketed as a Fantasy, Action, Adventure. From the point of view of James Cameron, the writer, “Avatar” was crafted as a conflict between the Male Myth and a combination of Female Myth and Ecological Myth; Action, and Romance.

There is generally a misunderstanding of what the Myth genre really embodies. As a writer, it will greatly help you if you can distinguish between the different kinds of Myth forms that you can utilize when crafting your story. Whereas ancient myth dealt with a pastoral world and contained gods and goddesses who ruled that world in various forms, what can be called “the new myth forms” are cutting edge because they deal with mankind in the modern world.

To imbue your Hero with mythological elements when crafting his character is to create a Hero with great depth. This is a Hero who is also universally compelling because the genre of Mythology travels the world better than any other genre. Ie. It is not “culture specific.”

Here are some of the basic Myth story beats that define it from other genres:

1. The Hero goes on a circular journey: He starts from home, travels and slays many dragons, and then returns home to find what was already there for him. After the journey, his perception is changed; he's been through a self-revelation which is public and oftentimes cosmic – Moses; Jesus; Odysseus; Kings or Queens; great warriors who have become leaders of their people.

2. The Hero has a late Desire line, but when he finds it, his Desire is his Destiny.

3. The Myth genre contains the following: Birth, Death, Rebirth. Other genres do not deal with this. Also, there may be more than one rebirth: Each dragon that is slain represents a rebirth. Myth genre therefore, gives us the broadest track of personal growth of all the other genres.

4. The Hero in "Avatar" has 4 rebirths. Watch the film and see if you can find them.

5. There is more than what has been called "the monomyth." Recommended reading is Joseph Campbell's The Hero's Journey. But this is "the monomyth." It's important to note that this monomyth is not found in all stories because it is the male warrior myth story.

6. There are more myth forms than male warrior myth. "Avatar" is a combination of 3 myth forms: The Male Myth, the Female Myth, and the Ecological Myth.

7. The male warrior is an archetypical character from the Male Myth; the earth mother is an archetypical character from the Female Myth. In the Ecological myth, the individual and the entire society are a positive blend and balance. The ultimate outcome of a utopian vs. dystopian universe is that the individual, the family, the society, nature, and technology have all blended together.

Suggested viewing: "American Sniper," "Frozen," "Gravity."

Jason Bourne: Script Learning Curve

Jason Bourne is a known entity – It is a highly successful franchise: The Bourne Identity, The Bourne Ultimatum, The Bourne Supremacy, The Bourne Legacy, and now – Just plain Jason Bourne because that’s all we need. The name says it all.

The genre that audiences love – Action/Thriller fully delivers, with a shaky-cam that can sometimes drive an audience to dizziness. Every single scene starts late and arrives early. In other words: The party is already in full swing when the guest arrives; a door slams and the guest is in his getaway car. The camera cross-cuts to the various story lines with record-breaking speed and then, we get a rap-up or mop-up in the last sequence of the story.

The story is compelling: A loner with a mysterious past. He’s been dealing with amnesia, but through all the Bourne movies, he’s slowly gotten his memory back. The plot has revolved around the fact that this Hero is looking for his past so he can understand his present and then hopefully, move on to a future. This is the compelling notion about crafting such a Main Character: Most of the people in the audience can certainly identify with his quest for self-understanding, as the journey most of us take through life involves connecting these three core elements: Past, Present, Future.

The problems with this script were not enough to make the film a failure, but there were problems, and if you can identify what they were, it will help to make you a better writer.

First of all, Nicki, the potential love interest and ally is knocked off at the end of Act 1. At approximately the 31

minute mark, she dies from several bullet wounds. Because the writer chose to kill off the potential love interest and Bourne's only ally at the end of Act 1, no time was invested in any type of relationship between the Hero and his love interest, who did have a vested affection for Bourne, as was established in prior films in this franchise. The audience doesn't feel emotionally involved by Bourne's loss in this film because there is simply no set up for it. If the writer was counting on every viewer having seen the prior films, that was an error. She could have been killed off on p. 75 which would set up the eventual show-down with the Main Opponent, the Tommy Lee Jones character.

Instead, the Vikander character appears as Bourne's new ally. She is a fake ally, as will be revealed in the Climax. But again, this is a "dropped in" contrivance of the writer. The audience is sucked in to thinking she's the new ally, and she is set-up nicely for this because the Opponent is aware that she is helping Bourne, but finds her conveniently useful to advance his own Plan – to take down Bourne. Suddenly, she turns and wants power and the whole thing about being Bourne's ally hits the dust. He is on to her though, as he is a "superman warrior who misses nothing," and we are given this little "twist" at the end of the Climax, into the New Equilibrium sequence of the story. All of this at the end was contrived and predictable and highly irritating because audiences are not as stupid as Hollywood thinks they are.

By the end of Act I, Bourne has figured out his identity and he has also gleaned remarkably new information about his father. This was powerful stuff and certainly could have sufficed to catapult him into Act 2 to avenge his father's murder. Instead, as already noted, Nicki, the love interest is the "new information" that pushes him out of his Ordinary World of fighting in bars and just existing in hiding into the C.I.A. world of high gadgetry, action, more murder, car chases, more opponents – All the stuff that audiences love in

this genre. The high-tech guru, with heady references to Snowden and identity theft, also on today's audience's minds, takes a bullet on p. 75 instead of Nicki, the love interest. Maybe the writer toyed with this idea. What was lacking here was what the high-tech guru had as a relationship to Bourne's character development – I couldn't find it. It made for a big disconnect. It was not a good feeling to see the guy felled by a bullet, but it was a plot contrivance and it was predictable. Yes, it was set-up when the high-tech guru had his meeting with the Opponent, the Tommy Lee Jones character. But again, unless the high-tech guru character either challenged, supported, or negated the Bourne character, he should have been rewritten in this script.

Then we had, per an interview with Matt Damon, approximately 170 cars demolished in this film. Kudos to Las Vegas for allowing all this craziness on the Strip. But 70 cars demolished would have been enough. The massive pile-ups were staged to the point of looking like an animation. And why not take the money from the savings of buying 100 cars and then smashing them up and give the money to some out of work Vegas people? All the casino employees who lost their jobs when the bubble burst in 2008 would have loved a lottery to win a car from Jason Bourne.

This brings me back to the compelling Weakness/Need of the Hero who is trying to connect his past with his present so he can move forward into his future. He's been used and abused by a corrupt system within the C.I.A., a common mantra these days. The audience identifies with this Hero. I'm not discounting the acting of Matt Damon, a very lovable, believable "All American" kinda guy. And the genre of Action/Thriller is a crowd-pleaser. But certain elements in this action-packed thriller could have made the character even more compelling and elevated the story line to a much higher level. Fancy camera work, cross-cutting, and superb high-tech gadgetry aside, it's the story that everyone remembers. It's

the inner struggle, that term called the “character arc,” that audiences remember. It was a bit thin in Jason Bourne.

Eliminate Your Inner Censor

When I was in the 9th grade, my compositions were lauded by my wonderful English teacher, who read many of them to the class. I lowered myself in my chair and did not give eye contact to the teacher while he read my story. As most teenagers are highly embarrassed about baring their soul “to the world,” or in this case, to my 30 classmates, I knew that they would not be clapping for my great accomplishment: An A on my composition.

Maybe they only got a C or maybe they failed because they didn't write anything at all. As for me, the writing part was like drinking a cup of Cappuchino. It was effortless. All of my writing had always been effortless. I was the worst student in school and actually contemplated running away for most of my academic years because I loathed the concept of going to school. So ironically, for me, the A was not deserved because I didn't have to work at it. If it had been an A in Biology, a class I hated with a passion even stronger than showing up to school, then it would have been deserved.

So there I was, sitting in my 9th grade class, with my classmates hating me or being jealous of me, or just plain bored with the fact that they themselves had to sit in their worst ever class. For English class was one of the most hated, but required classes in all of high school. How could I ever tell my classmates that I didn't deserve the A because I didn't have to work at it? They would hate me even more because then I would be telling them that I had a gift, but

that I was too stupid or dense to appreciate that gift.

“The Road Not Travelled” spoke to me that year more than ever. My English teacher announced to the class that the reason he had chosen my composition to read above all of the others was that I had been honest in my writing and it had shone through with every sentence. Whatever was in my brain had transferred to the paper without censorship. That tiny little voice that issues warnings: Don’t tell the truth. The truth won’t look so good. Lie about your family life. It sucks, but don’t tell the world about it. Lie about how you like to sweat when you dance because nobody wants to admit that they sweat. The idea is to look “cool,” man, cool dude. Especially if you’re a teenager. Cool and cynical.

And so, now – with writing a screenplay, which is writing about characters in whose mind you must climb and in whose skin you must live and in whose brain and heart you must think and feel – It’s the honesty that shines through to your audience. Characters who are fake have fake motivations; get into fake predicaments; have a plot line that is predictable, and an audience that goes, “Get me outta here.”

Take the road not travelled. If it’s the honest road, take it. When you are creating characters and crafting a story for film, t.v., novel, or stage, your honesty as a writer, without censorship of that little voice will shine through. It’s the first thing that should be on your mind when you sit down in front of your computer to write: I’m going to tell the truth. Whether I get an A or this screenplay never makes it past my trash file, I’m going to tell the truth. Amen!

The Domino Effect of Desire

In screenplay writing, Desire is what will help form the Spine of your story. From the getgo, in Act 1, this Desire is what drives your Hero in his Ordinary World. The Desire of your Hero is then seized upon by the Inciting Incident of your story, which is the “match that lights the fire” of the Desire. The Inciting Incident is an external event, which will ultimately catapult your Hero with a slightly changed external Desire into the world where most of the story will take place: in Act 2 and Act 3.

In “American Sniper,” it might look something like this: Although it is established early on that the Hero is a sharp shooter, the Hero’s Desire in his Ordinary World is to win rodeos. The World Trade Center is attacked by terrorists and 3,000 people are murdered in one day. The world stands still, in shock. The Hero is not one to stand

still- Islamic terrorists are behind the murders- So the Hero, no longer desirous of winning rodeos, joins the Navy S.E.A.L.S. with a changed Desire: He's going to Iraq to fight the evils of Islamic terrorism. Once in Iraq, his Desire becomes: Fight off the Islamic terrorists while protecting the backs of his fellow soldiers. His Desire to "protect" is intensified by his particular skill set: He is a spot on, fearless sniper. The Desire of the Hero of "American Sniper" stays with him until the end of the story, and the audience is at the edge of their seats during all three acts.

In crafting your story, your character needs to know what he wants. Once he establishes what he wants, he now has his Desire, which is his "end goal." Unlike the Desire embedded in an emotional yearning, the Desire your Hero wants is an external Desire. Knowing what the external Desire of your story is will result in your audience rooting for the

Hero. The Desire will be the force that creates the Spine of your story; it creates focus; it gives clarity to your story.

Examples of a Hero's external Desire: To win the gold medal in the Olympics; to get the girl; to reach the top of Mt. Everest; to get a divorce; to win custody to see his children; to find the person who murdered his wife; to discover a cure for cancer; to protect a witness from a murderer; to slay 10 dragons who are keeping his family hostage; to consummate an illicit affair; to take over a family mafia business; to get to the truth behind child abuse by pedophiles.

However, just like "real life," it is a tough challenge to figure out one's Desire. So the Hero's Desire in the beginning of the story might be: To drink and play the rodeo circuit: "American Sniper"; to get into trouble with the ex-wife which will preclude getting child custody rights: "Mrs. Doubtfire"; to stay as far away from a Mafia family as

possible: “The Godfather”; to bury the truth about pedophiles destroying children’s lives because it goes against tradition: “Spotlight”; to ignore the love of his life for a more shallow goal of making money: “Jerry Maguire.”

Therefore, the Hero’s Desire is not clear in the beginning of your story. The Desire that your Hero has in the first few pages of the story will get “ramped up” after the Inciting Incident, which comes about 10, 11, or 12 pages into the story. The Desire doesn’t completely change, but rather, it takes a “bend in the road.” By the end of Act 1, or about 30 pages into the story, the Hero will have the beginnings of a Plan and also a more clearly defined Desire.

[How Do I Start to Write?](#)

1) Decide on your genre. Think about genres that really speak to you, that move you deeply.

Is this an historical epic? Are your characters real or fictional? Is

this a drama? A political thriller? An action/adventure? Is this a mix of romance and comedy? Drama and historical epic? Science fiction mixed with Drama and Mythology?

2) Where did your story originate? Are you the sole author? Is it a derivative work based on other material, such as a book, magazine article, short story? Is the derivative work public record? If not, you have to acquire rights of the living person to write the story.

Maybe this was an event that occurred that you now want to write about. Maybe you “read about this person” and always wanted to write a story, incorporating this person’s story, but fictionalizing it.

Maybe you lived in the arena you want to write about—Journalism, tennis, ballet, medicine, education, the oil industry, the legal profession, politics, art, music. This is good. But if you did not live in the arena you want to write about, you need to start doing research about the arena. As you get deeper and deeper into the research, you will be amazed how inspired you will become. New ideas and perspectives will reveal themselves. You will become knowledgeable and feel that you have the depth to write a story that is believable and “grabs” your audience!

3) Story values within your story idea – Come up with a main character who has those values.

What draws you to that story? What does the story reveal about the human condition? Your main character has psychological needs and moral needs – What are they? What happened to him/her that caused this character to have these needs? What flaws does this character have as a result of his/her psychological/moral make-up? All of this moral structure value system for your story will give it spine and a theme, and the moral structure value system of your main character will play out in the climax. So it’s important to devote some time to this in the very beginning!

The “Running Start”

Working within the 3-Act Structure of a screenplay, the writer has to be aware of many structural plot points that work cohesively to craft a great story. The Main Character/Hero/Protagonist will start off in most genres with “A Running Start,” as opposed to a “Community Start” (characters dancing at a wedding, etc.), or a “Slow Start” (a narrator whom we are mystified as to his identity).

Therefore, with the “Running Start,” the Hero will usually be introduced in the first few pages of Act 1. But wait!! Exceptions:

An example would be the Crime Genre, in which the crime is enacted in the first few pages of Act 1. Also, in the Crime Genre, the crime could be the Inciting Incident. This is the incident that acts as a catalyst for the Hero to engage in the action of the story. The Inciting Incident in Crime Genre and other genres will usually occur on page 10, 11, or 12, or 10, 11, or 12 minutes into the story. To sum up, the Hero will start off with “A Running Start” oftentimes after the crime, and the crime will occur in the first few pages of the story or on p. 10, 11, or 12 of the story.

In “Lincoln Lawyer,” a Redemption Story, Micky Haller is introduced to the crime after he has come face to face with the Main Opponent of the story. At this point in time, there is no REVEAL to the Hero or to the audience that Micky Haller is looking into the eyes of a psychopath. The face to face moment occurs at the “Inciting Incident,” on page 12. And then the Hero will have a meeting with the Main Opponent and his mother and their family lawyer, and the crime the Main Opponent is accused of is related in Flashback. The Hero is off to a “Running Start” to find the murderer.

In “Witness,” the crime is committed as part of the “Inciting Incident

moment,” on p. 13, and this crime is witnessed by a little Amish boy in the bathroom of a train station. The Hero, Detective John Book, is introduced after the crime has been committed, right after the Inciting Incident. John Book is now off to a “Running Start” that will take him into Amish country to hide the boy until Book can confront the murderer, a dirty cop.

However, in “The Fugitive,” the crime is in motion on the opening page of the story. The Hero is taken into custody because he is in his home, covered with blood, with scratches on his neck when the police arrive after his dying wife has called 9-1-1. The Hero, Dr. Richard Kimble, is in the interrogation room of the police department and the crime is slowly revealed with Cross-Cut Flashback technique. The Hero is then off to a “Running Start” from the moment he is sentenced in court to lethal injection for the murder of his wife, which he did not commit.

The “Running Start” is a preferred way to open a story because the Hero is going for his Goal/Desire from the getgo. This ramps up the Narrative Drive of the story and it’s what keeps viewers on the edge of their seats.

Do You Have Writer’s Block?

Or Do You Just Need to Take Another Shower?

The brain and the heart combine with our collective conscience in the shower of all places. It’s happened so many times, and my screenwriting students have reported this phenomenon so many times that I now believe it to be the

answer/solution to:

Writer's Block.

But Writer's Block is really not a Block. It is just a very nice smoke screen. It's protective armor from:

Marital issues; child-rearing problems; finance issues; the weather; house leaks; plumbing leaks; dirty dishes; the state of world affairs; mounting terrorist attacks; more finance issues; more child-rearing problems; more marital issues; issues of singledom; dating issues; divorce; death; taxes...You can fill in the paragraph and write about ten pages more.

Once Writer's Block sets in, it's time to take another shower. The water flows and clears the nasal passages and we are cleansed of all of our problems until, of course, we finish our shower and then the Block sets in again and again and again.

So in addition to taking about ten showers per day, which will raise your water bill; not be good for a drought-ridden climate; make your skin extremely dry and sensitive, but very, very clean—I would suggest making a drink of your very favorite elixir, settling down in front of your computer, and watching the cursor click silently on the empty page.

Then, it's time to write down the following: I feel inspired right now. My past has caught up with my present, but I won't allow it to Block me from enjoying my future. Then, think of a character you'd like to write about: A woman on the bus; a child crying at a restaurant; a disabled passenger being helped off a bus by a soldier; a soldier returning home to his dog, family, cat, girlfriend, or childhood best friend.

Sit with your elixir for about 15 minutes and write a paragraph about this character. Think about the next shower

you're going to take. Do not answer the phone or return an e-mail or speak to a soul for a solid 15 minutes. Close your 15-minute document and put it into your file that you've named: Writer Unblocked. Keep the file on your Desktop. Open the file tomorrow and repeat for one week.

Stay tuned...

Ronnie Tharp-Garber

How the Premise Becomes a Hook!

Wouldn't it be great if you could go back in time and hear how some of your favorite movies or novels were pitched?

Benchley: "...so a Great White Shark is eating people at a beach resort, and this water-phobic sheriff has to figure out a way to kill it before the 4th of July

week-end when tourism is at its peak...”

Cameron: “ We know the ship sank, but did we know that a young man in steerage class was aboard to sacrifice his life to save the love of his life?”

The actual “pitching” is really saying what your premise is by first stating your main character; next comes the inciting incident that catapults your main character into action and conflict; and last is the outcome of the story, or what it is that the main character needs to do to solve his problem.

The premise of your story becomes “high concept” when you employ a “conflagration of opposites” methodology. This means that an immediately unlikely situation occurs in the story. For example: What if a man decides to dress up as a nanny in order to get to see his children after a divorce decree prevents him from having custody? What if there were a lawyer who suddenly could not tell a lie? Because lying is how lawyers make their living...

This “conflagration of opposites” can also be called a hook, which is the idea that sells the story. It isn't the story itself, because the hook doesn't *tell* you what happens next – instead, it *sets up the question* “what happens next?” You can transcend what has been done before by added an epic element. i.e. Man's struggle against nature; the human race will be destroyed; a societal breakdown of the family structure will occur.

Once you have your high-concept premise, it should be no longer than 28 words. This would be like sending a text message that needs to include only the 3 main elements: main character; inciting incident; end game of the story. You can use this 28-words as your elevator speech; your pitch; your focus when you are writing your story. If you find yourself getting off-course, refer back to the high-concept premise to remind yourself exactly what your story is about.

The Life Gets In The Way Syndrome (LGITWS)

Do you have the Life Gets In the Way Syndrome (LGITWS)?

The first sign is when all kinds of self-doubt appear: This will never work; nobody will read this; this is a lousy idea.

But the story idea keeps you up at night and sometimes you dream about it and maybe a few characters pop into mind as you are showering. Or maybe when you hit the pillow at night, the characters rap you on the shoulder and you start having a few words with them.

A few months later, you jot down some ideas on a napkin while you're at a café. You search the internet and see if anyone has already "worked" your idea. Then you do the laundry or wash the dishes or go to your day job. Your story sits, like a gift unopened, for another few months or years.

You go back to your story and either throw it away, delete it from your Dumb Story Ideas file, or...You say, "Hey! This is fantastic! I still like this and I love my characters." Then you pick the kids up or go out to dinner or maybe you get sick or someone you know is sick and needs attention. Or maybe you are in the military and get called to action; maybe you get fired from your job...So many maybes, so much time...Things to do and places to go... So you shelve the story for another few months or years.

To overcome the LGITWS, find your **writer's voice** in addition to coming up with your **story idea**. When you are sitting in the

café, write down your favorite movies or novels. When you get home, add this list to all your other lists. After a few months or years of the LGITWS, make a master list. Then check out genre on the internet. Take each movie or novel on your list and match it to the genre you think it is. Take some time and look up the movie on www.imdb.com and see if your “genre guess” matches how the film was marketed. Then do a cross-check list for yourself and make columns and see which genres are your favorite.

Now ask yourself: WHY do these genres *speak* to me? And then ask yourself what values were most prevalent in these films and novels? And then ask yourself: WHY do these values *speak* to me?

So, the next time you get the LGITWS, go to your favorite movies/novels/genres/values list. Then have a little talk with your characters, who have been waiting for you to get over the LGITWS so they can be completed! They’ve been very patient with you. It’s time to sit down and put your characters first and push the LGITWS away...Even for a few minutes. Let your characters out of the bag. It’s time...

How Do I Start to Write?

1) Decide on your genre. Think about genres that really speak to you, that move you deeply.

Is this an historical epic? Are your characters real or fictional? Is this a drama? A political thriller? An

action/adventure? Is this a mix of romance and comedy? Drama and historical epic? Science fiction mixed with Drama and Mythology?

2) Where did your story originate? Are you the sole author? Is it a derivative work based on other material, such as a book, magazine article, short story? Is the derivative work public record? If not, you have to acquire rights of the living person to write the story.

Maybe this was an event that occurred that you now want to write about. Maybe you “read about this person” and always wanted to write a story, incorporating this person’s story, but fictionalizing it.

Maybe you lived in the arena you want to write about—Journalism, tennis, ballet, medicine, education, the oil industry, the legal profession, politics, art, music. This is good. But if you did not live in the arena you want to write about, you need to start doing research about the arena. As you get deeper and deeper into the research, you will be amazed how inspired you will become. New ideas and perspectives will reveal themselves. You will become knowledgeable and feel that you have the depth to write a story that is believable and “grabs” your audience!

3) Story values within your story idea – Come up with a main character who has those values.

What draws you to that story? What does the story reveal about the human condition? Your main character has psychological needs and moral needs – What are they? What happened to

him/her that caused this character to have these needs? What flaws does this character have as a result of his/her psychological/moral make-up? All of this moral structure value system for your story will give it spine and a theme, and the moral structure value system of your main character will play out in the climax. So it's important to devote some time to this in the very beginning!

What the Protagonist Thinks He Believes

Desire is the motive energy behind all action.

When doing a character bio the trickiest thing to do is to create an area of misunderstanding or misguided belief in your protagonist, (the one who changes the most) and in your antagonists (the characters who obstruct, impede, challenge, love, hate, and generally impact the protagonist.) It means you have to know the difference between what they actually need, and what they believe they need.

If a character is motivated to act because he is "barking up the wrong tree," then this will cause him to act, but soon he will realize that the antagonist blocking him from getting what he wants is precisely why he must re-evaluate what it is he wants. If he can get closer to that core truth about what he really wants, then the action will be ramped up a notch. The desire will increase to obsessive desire. This is where audiences witness character change through story. The ramped up desire also increases narrative drive, which in turn increases conflict. This "barking up the wrong tree" is the

basis of all desire in your characters, and desire is the motive energy behind all action.

The main character will also think: What will happen if he doesn't get what he wants???

In books (and to a much greater extent in movies) the protagonist's obsessive drive is wanting something more than we do. In our lives we make compromises. We usually follow the path of least resistance because we can't endure the conflict. We generally want easy lives. In stories, characters want stuff so badly that they actually go about getting it, doing whatever it takes to get it, in ways we probably wouldn't.

If a protagonist doesn't want something badly enough, he or she won't do anything about trying to get it, and then there won't be any story!!

An Artist With Words

Practice having eyes in the back of your head; use your imagination! Show, don't tell! The following exercises will help you with your description and your scenes. Practice writing the scenes in the first person and in the third

person*(see NOTE below).

SHOW, DON'T TELL.

How would you "picture write" the following scenes:

1. You are drunk.
2. You are abandoned.
3. You arrive at a foreign airport.
4. A policeman stops you for speeding.
5. You witness/are in an accident.

Hint: Describe the surroundings, the weather, your clothes, etc. Position every object/person/animal/bird/reptile, etc. around yourself. "Action" yourself with verbs, such as jump, hop, crawl, slide, slither, enter, slump, crumble, skip, climb, run, limp, sprint, etc.

HAVE EYES IN THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD

Take the following scenes, and describe other scenes that occurred at the same exact time. 1. You are drunk. A bank is robbed. A dog runs down the street. 2. You are abandoned. A car races down the street. Firemen put out a blaze. 3. You arrive at a foreign airport. A man bumps into you. 4. A policeman stops you for speeding. You faint in the driver's seat. 5. You witness/are in an accident. A helicopter lands on top of a building. An earthquake tremor cracks the sidewalk where you are standing.

*NOTE: If you are writing a novel in the first person, the "I," then this is a limited view of the world because the person writing the story cannot get into the minds of the other characters and you, the author, have that same limitation. The "I" person can get information and report it, but the "I" person is always limited: "My best friend told me she didn't want to see me anymore because her mother didn't want her to be around someone like me. Imagine that!" But the

“I” point of view can really get into the mind of the character, which can be very revealing to the reader.

If you are writing a novel or a screenplay in the third person, the “he, she, or they,” then this is an omniscient view of the world. You, the writer, can get into the lives and motivations of the opponent, all the sub-plots, the point-of-view character, and all the other characters. You, the writer, can describe three different scenes, all occurring concurrently: The protagonist, or main character can be struggling with a car accident. But at the same time, you, the writer, can cut to the main character’s house where his girlfriend is eating a sandwich and drinking from a bottle of Scotch; the teenage daughter is in her room with headphones on, rocking to some music; the main opponent is driving away from the scene of the car accident (a hit and run).

Depending upon the genre of your story, you might prefer to use the first person or narrator approach or the third person omniscient approach. Sometimes, you might want a mystery narrator who is not revealed until the end of the story.

[What is my Premise?](#)

[Blog Post 4-30-15 Premise examples](#)

We are at the VERY BEGINNING of the writing process for a great story idea you have been toying with for years. Do you buy screenwriting software and plug in your characters and start typing away? Answer: NO. THIS IS THE DEATH KNEEL FOR A STORY. AFTER A FEW PAGES, YOU WILL BE LOST.

TAKE YOUR TIME AND...Start with the Premise. A premise in screenplay writing is also called a Log Line. If you stand in a parking lot and yell across to a friend and tell the friend what the story is about, you should require only one or two sentences. In Premise talk, you should be able to tell what your story is about in approximately 25 words or less.

A Premise is a combination of character and plot. It is NOT theme, not a character's weakness, not every detail in the story, not a sequence of events. It should include the following:

1. The inciting incident
2. The main character
3. The outcome (highly summarized) of the story

A Premise gives you the "High Concept" of the story. The "high concept" is the premise with a flip. The Premise should also enable the reader to tell what the genre is in those concise 25 words.

The Premise should NEVER be the same as a movie you have seen. The Premise should never be an idea that you cannot develop into a story that has all the structure beats.

Here are examples of some famous Premises:

JAWS – Great white shark eats tourists off a small East Coast island community; a conflict-avoiding, water-phobic sheriff has to go out and kill it. (24 words)

The Inciting Incident in **JAWS** is when someone is eaten alive by the Great White. The main character is the sheriff. The outcome of the story is that the Great White is killed.

MRS. DOUBTFIRE – a Divorced Dad who misses his kids disguises himself as a British nanny and is hired by his ex- so he can see his kids more. (26 words)

The Inciting Incident in **MRS. DOUBTFIRE** is when the divorced dad is told by a judge that his wife has sole custody of his kids. The main character is the divorced dad. The outcome of the story is that the divorced dad will be able to see his kids.

THE FIRM – A young lawyer joins a law firm, only to be told by FBI he'll be indicted soon since it is Mafia-owned; no one quits. (25 words)

The Inciting Incident in **THE FIRM** is when the

young lawyer joins a law firm. The main character is the young lawyer. The outcome of the story is that the young lawyer will find a way out of the Mafia-owned firm without getting killed.

Please open the pdf attachment in our Blog: Premise Examples. This is a page from a typical cable t.v. listing of films for the week. Note that several films are about 50 years old. The Premise Line concept was not as prevalent with the older films. In the 1980's, the Premise Line concept started to be a requirement by the Hollywood studios.

Practice writing down the 3 main components of each Premise Line. Be aware of the "High Concept" and the genre for each film. The more you do this exercise, the better equipped you will be to start writing your own Premise Lines.

First in a Series about Genre: The Thriller

When you first begin your journey of writing a great story, you want to be sure that your story fits within the parameters of the correct genre. What follows are 5 main Thriller genre story

structure beats that you as a writer need to hit. I am using the film, *Hostage*, starring Bruce Willis, as an example, so you can see how this works.

1) In the Thriller genre, the hero acts like a detective, but becomes the hunted. In *Hostage*, Talley IS a cop (not acting like one) and is a negotiator, usually in charge. He becomes the hunted when MAIN OPPONENT has a line on him and takes Talley's wife and daughter as hostages. Now Talley is NOT in charge.

2) In the Thriller genre, there has to be a Desire line, which is an external goal that the main character is GREATLY motivated to achieve while the main character is being pursued. Talley's Desire: Get the 2 kids out of the house while escaping attack by the Main Opponent.

Question asked in Thriller Genre: Is your suspicion justified?

We first realize that bad guys are the 3 young men who have broken into a rich man's house, taken his 2 children hostage, want to steal his money; psycho wants to abduct the daughter.

Talley first thinks their father is good guy. Then he realizes the father is in cahoots with the Main Opponent; Talley's Desire will become obsessive when the stakes are raised. He also struggles with his weakness/need, which involves his wife and daughter, with whom is having trouble

communicating; his "hostage/negotiator" world has so hardened him to cynicism and he feels he has failed to rescue some of his victims, that he can't have a normal family life. This weakness/need is the internal part of Talley's psychological and moral conflict. The Desire line is part of his external goal that will drive the story action forward.

3) The Thriller genre focuses on inner feelings of the hero. Detective should have a quality that makes him susceptible to danger. Talley's weakness/need is that he failed in his job to protect innocent children. He will die to protect innocent children who are casualties of psycho society in which he moves as a negotiator. His need to jump into the action can possibly get him killed and he is in constant conflict with the other police chief as to proper protocol vs. just jumping into action.

4) Thriller: Single suspect. Main Opponent is with a mask all the time. We don't get to see his face, but he is well-acquainted with Talley's weakness/need as he knows Talley was a chief negotiator in LA and he tried to escape that psycho world by coming to a sleepy town. The stronger and more in control that the Main Opponent is in will mean that there is a dual of wits with the hero. When the Main Opponent knows some of the hero's background, he uses that information to "get under the skin" of the hero.

5) In the Thriller genre, we can connect love to the thriller: Faith vs. skepticism. Talley loves his wife and daughter, but he lives in a world of psychos and has disconnected from his family.

Therefore, the story line will have 2 lines: Personal line and Crime line. We need to show how the hero's unique psychological and moral weakness will be solved by solving the crime.

Talley will be re-united and re-connected with his family after he saves them from certain murder by a master killer Main Opponent.

Talley's weakness/need vs. Opponent who keys in to Talley's weakness/need makes the story move forward, beat by beat, obstacle by obstacle. The 3 young bad guys are also keying into Talley's weakness/need and this also makes the story move forward, beat by beat.

Stay tuned for the coming entries, when we will look at the 7 major story beats that a writer must hit for ALL genres. We will also be looking at Story Structure, scene by scene for the genre of Thriller, using the film, *Hostage* for examples.

“If not now, when?” Who was

Hillel the Elder?

... and what does he have to do with the goals of JCAD (American Friends of the Jerusalem Center for Artistic Development)?

Hillel the Elder, born in Babylon, in 110 BCE, lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod and the Roman Emperor Augustus. Both Hillel and Moses lived 120 years!! Unlike Moses, at the age of forty, Hillel went to the Land of Israel; forty years he spent in study; and the last third of his life he was the spiritual head of the Jewish people. His activity of forty years likely covered the period of 30 BCE to 10 CE, when he died.

Hillel the Elder contributed to a famous treatise called the Ethics of the Fathers (Pirkei Avot).

The book was a compilation of famous rabbis' wisdom for mankind to aspire to the highest level of ethical and moral behavior. Hillel is credited with the following thought-provoking questions, which have been passed down for more than 2,000 years:

"If I am not for myself, who is for me?" Hillel tells us that we must love ourselves enough to be "for" ourselves, since there is no one else who would or could do this on our behalf.

"And when I am only for myself, what am I?" We should not be tempted to be self-absorbed and forget about the Almighty and our fellow man.

"And if not now, when?" We need to get going and soar like birds and take leaps of faith!

All you have to do is take a walk on the stone streets of Jerusalem and read the street signs, the door posts; see the indentations in the doorways where ancient Mazzuzot were affixed; gaze at the rooftops in certain sections of town, and

walk down the narrow alleyways where only a donkey and a cart can still pass. Today you will see young people with their Smart Phones and cellphones; you will see wine glasses and hear the laughter of crowds on a warm summer evening; or see a mound of snow caressing a stone wall that is a thousands years old; or walk into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and smell the incense; step out onto a wide piazza and buy fresh-baked pita or laffa bread spread thick with chummous.

- The stones upon which Jesus walked and preached during the Second Temple period (538 BCE- 70 AD) are located on an enormous mount, now called the Temple Mount.
- The stones upon which Avraham offered Itzhak to God, (an area called Mount Moriah in the Bible), are on the Temple Mount.
- The stones where The Holy of Holies is buried are under the Temple Mount!
- The stones leading to King David's tomb are in Jerusalem and close to the Temple Mount.
- And the City of David, where King David's palace is under excavation is in Jerusalem, close to the Temple Mount!
- The remains of The First Temple and The Second Temple are in Jerusalem, under the Temple Mount.
- The retaining wall of the First and Second Temple is part of the foundation of the Temple Mount.
- And cisterns, sarcophagi, tunnels, pottery, coins, artifacts, jewelry, human and animal remains from thousands of years ago are in Jerusalem!

If you have a story to tell, "If not now, when?" is what you might ask yourself. Walking amongst the stones of the Bible may inspire you. A character in the Bible might inspire you to tell a modern parable; think up an action/adventure story; come up with a political intrigue or drama or love story. It's all under your feet. Those stones all tell a story. It's time!!

The Writer's Goal of Peeling the Onion©

With our belief in the process of “taking the mystery out of the mystique” of film making and story telling, it is the hope of JCAD that anyone who has the passion to tell stories will do so in an educated and thoughtful, but highly passionate manner! Whether a person tells his/her story through a screenplay, stage play, novel, or documentary, storytelling is an art that is one part pure imagination; a dash of risk and daring to be different; several cups of technical prowess and bending to a paradigm that goes back to Aristotle; many teaspoonfuls of psychological introspection and a pinch of willingness to hold a mirror to the writer's soul. Truth-telling from the heart comes out loud and clear as the writer's voice that can be heard and felt in the hearts and minds of the movie

audience or novel reader.

The Hollywood film industry churns out many films a year, oftentimes films that are “forgettable.” It is not easy to design a story that will translate to the screen and end up being a “Blockbuster.” In addition, not all “Blockbusters” are liked or admired by a segment of the population, who would prefer independently produced films that are on a much smaller budget, speak to a particular niche of an audience, and have a defined message to impart. No matter what the outcome of the writer’s art or craft, whether it is a Blockbuster or Indie screenplay, stage play, novel, or documentary, the point is that with the insight into one’s soul, one can reach heights that never seemed possible. Even if the story never makes millions of dollars, the internal satisfaction of writing a great story is an amazingly cathartic experience.

You can succeed in taking the mystery out

of the mystique of storytelling and film production and then tell your own unique story, one page at a time. The "High Concept" idea is important to remember though. For example, you may think you've got a novel to write, as the result of a bitter divorce, but this might better lend itself to journal writing. A divorce, per se, is not a story. It certainly has story elements, but it is not a story that anyone would want to read about or go see a film about.

Although weddings are fraught with multiple stories and angst and worry that it's all going to "go off" like a calibrated marching band, a wedding is not a story. A death is not a story. A Bar Mitzvah is not a story. A pregnancy is not a story, even if there were complications and the baby died at birth. Missing the train, which ended up getting derailed and killing a hundred people is not a story. Missing a bus, which ended up getting blown up in a

terror attack is not a story. Missing one of the planes that ended up being hijacked by Islamic terrorists who directed the planes into skyscrapers and murdered thousands of innocent people is not a story. ISIS beheading hundreds of human beings is not a story. A little girl getting hit by a car and surviving is not a story.

What is missing from the above examples is a High Concept, a raison d'etre, or a spine or a theme or a moral or conflict or a protagonist or an antagonist or a reason as to why an audience or a reader should see this film or read this book. There are certainly compelling, horrific elements to some of the examples given in the above paragraph, but they are components of a newspaper article, or a journal entry, or an op-ed piece. The idea of making "a wedding" into a story can germinate into a story if the elements of a story are incorporated with compelling characters and conflict and a crisis moment or resolution which is what

the audience or reader is waiting to find out about.

At JCAD, it is therefore our goal to teach the writer how to peel the layers of the onion and get at the truth in storytelling. In other words, we want the writer to get to the core of issues and not just develop a “catchy” plot line with an interesting twist that could be defined as “original.” To scratch the surface is not enough for great storytelling. We therefore get down to value systems and goals, both internal and external. This leads to the creation of compelling characters who are living in 3-D format and who have flaws, most of which are usually not discernable to the characters themselves. Through the storytelling, the flaws will actually come into play when the protagonist seeks to reach his/her goal. And the result will be rewarding for both the main character and the audience.

So peeling the onion can be a rewarding

experience for the writer and for the audience. Maybe with tears? Maybe with a greater understanding of the human condition? Maybe with a feeling that all is well with the world? Or all is horrific, but somehow we survive? Or saving others with no regard for our own safety is a pretty decent goal, one which just might inspire us to do better with our lives after we get home and realize that home is not really a movie, but just plain old home.

[The Character Bio Can Be Tricky©](#)

When doing a character bio the trickiest thing to do is to create an area of misunderstanding or misguided belief in your protagonist, (the one who changes the most) and in your antagonists (the characters who obstruct, impede, challenge, love, hate, annoy and

generally impact the protagonist.) It means you have to know the difference between what they actually need, and what they believe they need. They need to believe that if only they had this, or were that, or could get the other, or weren't this that or the other, then their worlds would be hunky dory and they wouldn't have any problems. This barking up the wrong tree is the basis of all desire in your characters, and *desire is the motive energy behind all action.*

This is where the next question comes in:

What does the protagonist *think* will happen if he/she *doesn't* get what they want?

In books (and to a much greater extent in movies) your protagonist needs to want something really badly. They want it more than we do. In our lives we make compromises. We usually follow the path of least resistance because we can't endure the conflict. We generally want easy lives. In stories, characters want

stuff so badly that they actually go about getting it, doing whatever it takes to get it, in ways we probably wouldn't. If a protagonist doesn't want something badly enough, he or she won't do anything about trying to get it, and then there won't be any story.

A "play" with the words "want" and "need" and "think you need":

But when your character reaches the climax of the story, will he actually get what he *thought* he needed? Maybe so. But maybe not. Here's where the epiphany comes in. It's the realization that at the final moment the character has been fighting for, working toward, racing forward, jumping over highways and byways to get to...Maybe it *was* what he wanted, but maybe there's something that he needed but he didn't realize that he needed it, but now that he has achieved the end goal, he just may get what he *needs*, as opposed to what he *thought* he needed!!

So when you are creating your character, he/she must have a history that is not perfect by any means. There are triumphs and there are flaws; highs and lows; good days and bad. You need to describe these in as much detail as you can. Make pages of this information. Have fun. What did your character have for breakfast when he/she was little? Where did he/she live? Describe the house/apartment/street. Maybe your character lived in a shelter. Describe. Did your character go to school? If not, what did he/she do during childhood? Maybe like Charles Dickens' Oliver, he stole for a living and lived under the thumb of a ruthless Fagan character. Maybe your character was an orphan. Maybe from a family of ten. Were they religious? Did they go to a house of worship with their family? Or did the parents send the kids and stay home? Or did the parents go and leave the kids home? Was your character rich, poor, or somewhere in-between?

- Describe the neighborhood, town, country where your character grew up.

.Describe physical and emotional characteristics, including age.

**** Note:** *All characters in your story should have a bio.* The main character (protagonist) and the antagonist and the point of view character will get the widest amount of attention. Round them out and make them as real as possible. Try to employ empathy when creating them. Get into their skin!! If they did something that was unusual that was not something you would have done, it is important to go with this. This character is not you. This character has a life of his/her own.

**** Come up with some very high and some very low points of each character's "back story."** Sometimes, people say that "a certain high point" or "low point" defined them for the rest of their life. Whether or not this ends up being true, the character may *think or believe* this!

Character Development – The End Goal vs. The Desire for the End Goal©

After you have decided on the genre of your story, or concurrent with deciding on the genre, you must decide on who your protagonist/hero will be. Whether it's a male or female protagonist, you need to decide on what your character's goal/outer motivation in the story is. Without the goal, the audience is left "hanging," confused, irritated, and wondering why they paid their \$15 to see this movie in the first place. And remember, the protagonist's goal is not your goal. You need to step back and let your character do the talking and the walking.

You must decide what you want to do with this character you want to create—Someone who is waiting to jump off the page into a reader's consciousness or jump onto the screen so the audience can view his/her

story. It's time to give the protagonist a goal and an outer motivation. And he/she must want this goal VERY BADLY. Maybe you don't want this goal because you'd rather sit home and avoid confrontation, BUT THE PROTAGONIST WANTS THIS GOAL AND JUST MIGHT BE READY TO DIE FOR IT.

Goal and Outer Motivation

When the protagonist (hero) is motivated to reach his/her "end goal," this is the physical or tangible goal: To find the killer; to find a way out of prison; to survive a hurricane at sea; to survive a sinking ship and save as many people as possible; to find one's identity that has been lost due to amnesia; to save as many people as possible from tyranny or genocide; to find the way home; to get the right to see one's children when the wife has custody; to give a speech that will bolster a nation on the brink of war and destruction.

Desire to Reach the Goal

It is the protagonist's desire to reach the goal that will drive the story.

The goal of the protagonist defines the story and carries us all the way to the end. The desire to reach that goal will drive the story. The outer motivation is the "finish line." I.e. The hero wins a medal. This is visible, tangible. It would not be: "To achieve success." In *The Fugitive*, the goal for Dr. Kimble is to find the one-armed man. In *Titanic*, the goal for Jack is Rose's safety, for which he is willing to die. In *The Bourne Identity*, the amnesic hero Jason wants to find his identity. In *Schindler's List*, Oscar Schindler wants to save Jews from the Nazis by keeping his company going under false and dangerous pretenses. In *Gravity*, Sandra Bullock wants to survive a mission gone awry and get back to earth without getting killed. In *Mrs. Doubtfire*, the hero wants to get the right to see his kids. In *The Imitation Game*, the hero wants to break Enigma, the Nazi Code. In

Shawshank Redemption, Tim Robbins wants to escape from prison and avenge the crimes and punishment of the evil warden. In *The Firm*, Tom Cruise wants to save his life and the life of his wife and disentangle himself from the mafia firm where nobody ever quits. In *The King's Speech*, George has to give a speech and overcome his life-long stuttering, and lead his country into WWII, after his brother abdicates the throne.

[The Worm Who Could Cut Stone](#) [© Or The Importance of Doing](#) [Your H.W.!!](#)

When writing a novel, screenplay, stage play, or documentary, the importance of research is paramount. In order for your story to have credence, depth,

originality, believability, you must do your homework!!

It is one thing to come up with a salable high concept that is clever, unique, never-before produced. HOWEVER, your audience is not stupid. They hate to be swindled. No matter where your setting is, you need to do your H.W. and get down the "where, when, why, and how" part of your story. Even the "who" part will become more clear as you do your research.

Let's say, you've got an idea of a modern-day character, an archaeologist, who lives in Jerusalem, but who is giving a lecture in Switzerland. Your genre is action adventure. Your character has discovered a stone that is 5,000 years old, but was not affixed to other stones with metal of any kind, yet was laid in a perfect line, with cement, and the walls of a particular structure are thirty feet high.

Here's some history that is the result of

just a tiny bit of research:

In 832 BCE, King David wanted to build the Temple, but because he was Israel's great warrior and had shed much blood, he could not be the one to build the Temple in Jerusalem. His son, Solomon (Shlomo), was chosen through one of the prophets to build the Temple. As part of the process, God told Solomon to not cut the stones with metal utensils or tools because metal symbolizes the sword. Therefore, Solomon had to figure out a way to cut the stones for the construction of the Temple. In a dream, he saw a unique worm that had the ability to cut away at stone. Subsequently, God revealed to him this miraculous worm that was able to cut the stones for the Temple.

The worm was called the Ashmodi, in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate of Shabbat.

Now, maybe you don't "buy" the information that came to Solomon in a dream—But your characters do! They

believe in prophets and dreams and in the ancient men of the period who talked to God. Why? Well, you have to give these believers a history that would tie them to such a belief. Maybe they saw this worm at work. Maybe there was testimony in texts.

In any case, a bit more of research about Jerusalem will give you a sense of where your archaeologist character comes from, which in turn, will make your story more believable:

Your character's home is Jerusalem.

Jerusalem stands on the crest of the Judean hills at an elevation of **2,577 feet** above sea-level, 13 miles west of the Dead Sea, 32 miles east of the Mediterranean Sea, and roughly 80 miles south of the Sea of Galilee. Founded more than 5,000 years ago, Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and the Jewish people.

Recommended reading: *Traveling With the Bible*, by Galia Doron. Take book in hand

and envision a walk through time over stone steps. Remember that the steps can tell the stories of both ancient and modern mankind in Israel, the Holy Land, and the world. In the book, suggested hikes with level of difficulty are given for each historical/biblical site. Quotations from the Bible and references are included for each site you will visit. Whether you come to Israel or just read about the history, the information will help you with your story lines.

[Learn About Values](#)

A JCAD “Learn About Values” Workout

A thought-provoking exercise to hone your characters, your story idea, your theme

First, let’s differentiate between **ethics, morals, and values**

Ethics = A generally accepted set of moral principles

Morals = The good or bad or right or wrong of actions

Values = Individual or personal standards of what is valuable or important

Next, we decide what our values are. Sounds elementary? Take a test:

- Write down the major challenges (both positive and negative) you have encountered in your lifetime. This could be a page long or ten pages long. No time limit. It's just for your eyes.**
- Now, answer this question: How did you overcome or meet these challenges. Are you still dealing with them?**
- Next question: If you could be a main character in a story, what challenges (positive and negative) would you like to give to your main character?**
- Next, how do you think your main character could overcome/meet these challenges you have given to him/her?**
- Next, write down some of the values that "speak" to you. For example,**

1. **Honesty**
2. **Trust**
3. **Kindness**
4. **Integrity**
5. **Courage**
6. **Perseverance**
7. **Personal Responsibility**
8. **Empathy**
9. **Tolerance**
10. **Anything else you can come up with!**

Now, let's do a WHAT IF exercise with values:

We know that problems may arise where individuals allow their personal values to interfere with their actions, thereby potentially bringing their actions into conflict with stated ethical standards.

WHAT IF individuals allow their personal values (which are the opposite of what we wrote above) to interfere with their actions?

For example, let's say personal values are: Dishonesty, immorality (the opposite of what we

wrote).

Now, we have a law firm that specializes in dishonesty and immorality, such as the one in The Firm. Why? Because it's a firm that is a front for the mafia: Nobody ever leaves!!! (except in a coffin)

So we've just taken a value system and corrupted it, and what is the result? **We have CONFLICT.** John Grisham, who wrote The Firm, has given the hero (in the film, the Tom Cruise character), a young, idealistic lawyer, CONFLICT. He doesn't know about what this firm really does when he takes the job. His wife has an inkling that all is not quite right, but Tom Cruise, young lawyer, is swayed by the offer of a Mercedes, a home, a mortgage that comes with a nice down payment, and a huge first-year salary with all the perks. Is it greed on the hero's part? Or is it the lure of a poor boy finally "making it" and being accepted by his wife's wealthy (and snobbish) family?

Then we look at the values of the hero: Integrity, Honesty, the complete opposite of the firm.

And now we know the challenges Tom Cruise's character is going to have to overcome to SURVIVE because the Firm is going to murder him, as they have done to other attorneys who discovered just who they are.

How many of us are confronted with DISHONESTY AND IMMORALITY? Do we consider ourselves to be honest

and moral? Are we ever tempted to be dishonest and immoral? What happens to the Tom Cruise character as he confronts all of his challenges in the story? Is he tempted by immorality? Yes. Is he tempted by dishonesty? Definitely. So, how does he resolve his challenges? We find out in the climax, in Act 3!

What is Genre?

What is Genre:

A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter.

GENRE: HISTORICAL EPIC©

Is Exodus a historical epic? Is Exodus a drama/war film? Is it a historical tragedy?

Why is it so important for a story writer/screenwriter to get the genre correct from the get-go? First of all, to stay within the parameters of genre is to deliver to audiences what they have come to pay for their admission

ticket. Also, characters are believable and credible. A story line that contains a spine and ultimately, a theme causes the audience/reader to sit at the edge of their seat/turn the page until the climax or epiphany is reached by the main character/hero.

It is easy for a screenwriter to grapple with genre throughout the writing process. Because there are certain elements that can or cannot be included in a specific genre, it is easy to get confused along the way. A particular story line lends itself to a certain genre. Yes, there are "cross-over" genres, but only experienced writers should attempt them. It is hard enough to write the great story with one genre in mind.

The historical epic is a genre that can include a biographical epic, such as Schindler's List or Gandhi, or a dramatic epic, such as Gone With the Wind or Gladiator. In the biographical epic, the hero is a real character, as opposed to a fictional character. In the dramatic epic, such as Gone with the Wind, the hero is fictional. The story is based on real events, but the characters are fictional.

In some movie reviews, Exodus is listed as a drama/war genre. Drama is a genre, but not necessarily based on real historical events, such as the history of the State of Israel and all the events both before and after the creation of the State of Israel. War is not a genre. Within a

drama, there can be war, certainly. And within a historical or dramatic epic there can be war.

To see Exodus as coming under the genre of drama is not accurate. Put simply, drama is where the hero/protagonist confronts complex human emotions, which are tested throughout the story. Drama can be a love story, such as Love Story or Wuthering Heights. Drama can be called a thematic drama, such as The Shawshank Redemption or Seabiscuit. Drama can be a psychological drama, such as Good Will Hunting. A drama with tragic overtones could be The Godfather.

To call Exodus an historical tragedy is not the correct genre either. A tragedy in the Greek sense is a cathartic characterization of characters who have flaws that overwhelm them. One associates tragedy with Shakespearean classics such as Macbeth. If tragic events occur to the main characters, then certainly the story that is being portrayed is a tragedy, such as Schindler's List. But the genre is not tragedy.

Let's examine the two films that are basically on the same topic, the Israel War for Independence: Exodus, produced in 1960 and Kedma, produced in 2002.

Now, a look at just a few Exodus film critics' reviews.

Genre: Historical epic

"Exodus" 1960, Otto Preminger

Based on Leon Uris' novel, this historical epic provides a dramatic backstory to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, in the aftermath of World War II. Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman), a passionate member of the Jewish paramilitary group Haganah, attempts to transport 600 Jewish refugees on a dangerous voyage from Cyprus to Palestine on a ship named the Exodus. He faces obstruction from British forces, who will not grant the ship passage to its destination.

Another synopsis:

Fictional but fact-based account of the struggle for the emergence of modern Israel as an independent country and home for world Jewry.

MOVIE REVIEW (partial)

Exodus (1960)

3 1/2-Hour Film Based on Uris' Novel Opens

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

Published: December 16, 1960

THE gingerly awaited film version of Leon Uris' novel, "Exodus," which its producer-director, Otto Preminger, unveiled at the Warner Theatre last night, turns out to be a massive, overlong, episodic, involved and generally inconclusive

“cinemarama” of historical and fictional events connected with the liberation of the State of Israel in 1947-1948.

Another film on the same topic as Exodus is listed as Drama/War:

Genre: Drama/War, 2002 Israeli film

“Kedma” Amos Gitai, Director/Writer

One synopsis:

In May 1948, shortly before the creation of the State of Israel, hundreds of immigrants from across Europe arrive in Palestine—only to risk arrest by British troops.

Another synopsis of Kedma from Wikipedia:

The film is a historical tragedy set during the opening stages of Israel’s 1948 War of Independence. The film follows the fate of a group of refugees from the [Holocaust](#) who are illegally brought to Israel by the [Palmach](#). When they arrive, they are chased by British soldiers. Once they escape, they are immediately drafted into the war, and take part in a grueling battle against Arab irregulars. The film centers on two long monologues, one by an Arab peasant who pledges to oppose the Jews forever; and one by an emotionally demolished refugee who laments the seemingly endless suffering of his people. Gitai intended the film to be a more realistic answer to the

romanticized depiction of the war in Otto Preminger's Exodus. The final shot of *Kedma* is identical to the final shot of Preminger's film.

In summary, the genre for *Exodus* and for *Kedma* is historical epic. One of the problems with *Kedma* is that the director's ego got in the way of producing a story with believable and credible characters, where the audience forms an opinion based on the story line. The film or story should stand on its own and not be an "answer" to someone else's film or vision. If the story is a tragedy, then the audience will form that conclusion when the elements of the story follow the parameters. An audience feels manipulated or confused when the spine of a story meanders in order to follow the writer's preconceived notions of what "truth" should be. The characters in the story are compelling to an audience as they go on their journey, as opposed to a writer's pre-formulated goal for them.

TEST TIME: WHAT IS THE GENRE FOR TITANIC??? DON'T LOOK IT UP. WHAT DO YOU THINK AND WHY???

GENRE FOR TITANIC:

Titanic was indeed a ship that sank in 1912, but the characters of Jack and Rose were fictional and their love story was the catalyst that moved the action of the story forward and caused the audience to feel an enduring epiphany along with the characters. The genre for Titanic is OVERALL,

historical epic, but SPECIFICALLY, a romantic/dramatic epic. JAMES CAMERON COULD – USE CROSS-GENRES LIKE A CHAMP. THE FILM IS AN ALL-TIME GREAT!!