

# 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.**