

# ROCK-SOLID FICTION

Tim Shoemaker

## **PLOTTING**

### ***The Three Act Structure***

In its simplest form, most fiction plots fit into a 3-act structure.

**Act 1- Beginning-** We are introduced to a character and confronted with a problem or a goal to which the character reacts.

**Act 2- Middle-** The character struggles with how to handle this problem or attain this goal, experiencing success and failure.

**Act 3- End-** The character wins or loses, resolution results and the character likely changes, or gains insight in some way.

There are many fiction formulas available. Often they take the THREE ACT STRUCTURE and expand it to include more elements.

### ***The HERO'S JOURNEY . . . a classic plot model or structure for fiction.***

#### **ACT 1**

##### **1. The ORDINARY WORLD**

-Introduce your hero in their REGULAR LIFE.

##### **2. The hero is CONFRONTED with a CALL**

-A CALL to ADVENTURE. A CHALLENGE. A PROBLEM. A CONFLICT.

##### **3. The REFUSAL of the CALL**

-DENYING IT. I don't know if I can do this . . . or want to. But it is FORCED on the Hero.

##### **4. CROSSING the THRESHOLD**

-Stepping into the OTHER WORLD . . . deciding to take it head-on.

#### **ACT 2**

##### **5. TESTS, ALLIES, & ENEMIES**

-They're on the journey, but the road has trials & trouble. Villains are met. Enemies.

-Allies are met and formed. Things keep the hero from getting what they want

##### **6. The APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE**

-The ENEMY RAMPS UP THEIR GAME. Truth revealed that rocks the hero's world.

##### **7. The ORDEAL**

-The BLEAKEST MOMENT. All SEEMS LOST. The hero hits ROCK BOTTOM.

##### **8. The REWARD**

-Out of the ordeal comes a REWARD. (May not be THE reward)

##### **9. The ROAD BACK**

-The hero makes a DECISION resulting in a change to the new ordinary world.

##### **10. SUDDEN THREAT**

-Something that can UNDO it all—just when all seemed right.

#### **ACT 3**

##### **11. The RESURRECTION**

-The hero fights back and finds another way.

##### **12. The RETURN**

-Finding home, all is well, & the hero attains a new-found treasure or lesson.

## **CHARACTERIZATION**

The characters we CREATE are going to be CRITICAL to the success of our story.

Unless our readers find a reason to LIKE our main character, they really WON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM. If they don't truly care what happens to them, they probably WON'T KEEP READING YOUR STORY.

## **DEEP POINT OF VIEW**

**FIVE THINGS to CONSIDER to HELP YOU WRITE IN A DEEPER POV that is CONSISTANT and TRUE to your POV CHARACTER**

**1. PERSPECTIVE** -What is the perspective of my character? How does he see THINGS?

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2. **PERSONALITY** – Reflected in his REACTIONS... his SPEECH...his INTERNAL THOUGHTS

3. **PRIORITIES** -What does he WANT RIGHT NOW at this moment? What is he FOCUSED ON?

4. **PREDISPOSITION** -What kind of mood is he in JUST BEFORE the scene opens?

5. **PANDORA'S BOX** - What are they AFRAID WILL GET OUT and cause them TROUBLE?

### **SHOW DON'T TELL**

To write well... we need to **SHOW A STORY... NOT TELL IT**. Readers want the FULL EXPERIENCE of a good story— NOT a QUICK SUMMARY of what is going on. Think of your readers as BLIND... they can't see the GREAT STORY in your HEAD. YOU WANT to show them a movie ...

**Example A:** Let's look at SHOWING someone is COLD versus just telling.

Telling: *Katy was really cold while she waited for the bus.*

Showing: *Katy rubbed her hands together, then cupped them over her mouth and blew on them. It didn't help. She drove her hands in her pockets and jumped in place. She had to get her blood circulating. She looked down the block. Still no bus. If she'd known the driver was going to be this late she'd have brought her gloves—or maybe some hot cocoa.*

**Example B:** Let's look at showing someone is ANGRY versus just telling the reader they're angry.

Telling: *Kyle's Dad found out what he did and grounded him. Kyle's Dad was really angry.*

Instead, show them what happens—and let the reader figure out Kyle's dad is angry.

Showing: *Kyle's dad slammed his fist on the table so hard that coffee burped out of his cup and splattered onto the floor. "How many times have I told you not to hang around that kid?"*

*Kyle kept his eyes on the floor and his mouth shut. Did Dad really want him to answer that?*

*"Look at me when I talk to you."*

*Kyle forced himself to look up. There was something almost funny about his Dad's face—so incredibly red—with that vein popping out in his neck like he'd swallowed an extension cord.*

*"So what am I supposed to do with you—huh?"*

*Kyle raised his hand. "Give me another chance?"*

*Dad leaned in close. "Go to your room, smart guy."*

*Kyle didn't wait to be told again. He bolted from his chair and stomped out of the kitchen.*

*"And you're going to stay there... all weekend."*

*Terrific. Kyle took the stairs two at a time.*

*"Did you hear me?"*

*How could he not? Everybody in a three-block radius probably heard him.*

### **FOUR TIPS FOR "SHOWING THE MOVIE"...** For SHOWING INSTEAD of TELLING.

1. **SHOW THE READER WHAT IS HAPPENING...** Let them INTERPRET WHAT IS GOING ON.

If you want to say someone is angry, or cold, or scared, or nervous... don't use that word... SHOW IT.

2. **CHOOSE THE WORDS THAT SHOW THE PICTURE BEST...**

3. **SHOW ME ONLY WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THE CHARACTER at THAT MOMENT.**

4. **For REALISTIC... MOVIE-LIKE WRITING...**

Show me what is going on OUTSIDE your character...and then show me how your character REACTS. Just a little of each. Alternate back and forth.

## **CREATING STRONGER SCENES**

### **Three elements essential to every scene**

1. –A beginning—Start with A CLEAR GOAL
2. –A Middle—Move into STRONG CONFLICT
3. –An End—Accomplishing goal or better yet DISASTER

### **Transitions ... setting up for the next scene**

We need a little setup to transition or bridge to the next scene.

1. *Reaction* -How does your POV character *react to the disaster at the end of the last scene?*
2. *Dilemma* -*What to do?* -Here's the situation POV character is in—*what options does he have?*
3. *Decision* -Our POV character needs to make a decision.  
-He's had a GOAL -He's run into CONFLICT -The scene ended in DISASTER  
-We saw his REACTION -He mentally worked through his DILEMMA -Now he makes a DECISION  
-And this decision leads us right to the GOAL for the next SCENE.

## **DIALOGUE**

### **11 THINGS an EDITOR CAN SPOT QUICKLY THAT MAY HURT YOUR BOOK**

#### **1. Not enough dialogue.**

When they turn page after page of narrative, description, or whatever. Full margins left to right of copy—not a good sign.  
**SOLUTION:** *You need to break it up with more dialogue.*

#### **2. Too much dialogue—a real motor mouth.**

If one character is talking too much your readers won't like it as much as you think.

**SOLUTION:** *Right-hand margin should be ragged, totally irregular in a section of dialogue. Some lines of dialogue only partial. Others a line and a half. We need to see some white space. If not, characters are probably saying too much at a time. You don't want a long spiel by any one character.*

#### **3. Too much dialogue—let 'em up for air.**

When two or more characters are talking back and forth without any breathers to break it up and balance it.

**SOLUTION:** *Break up your dialogue with a little action or description. What does your POV character see, smell, sense, feel and think?*

#### **4. Slow start in dialogue.**

Ramping up to the "good stuff"—too slow a start. Polite exchange of greetings or small talk is realistic and normal in real conversations, but it is boring in print.

**SOLUTION:** *You want to get into the good stuff quicker with written dialogue. Forget the small talk—the family, the weather, how you're doing, etc. You're pulling onto the highway, not into your drive. Step on it.*

#### **5. Misuse of identifiers and tags.**

Identifiers or tags need to let us know who is speaking without drawing a lot of attention to themselves. If our readers get confused as to who is speaking, we need to fix that. Too much use of "he said" or using the speaker's name can be a distraction and take away from the story.

**SOLUTION:** *Stick to the accepted rules of thumb and limit the need to use the speaker's name or "he/she said" by using action or markers.*

**Rules of thumb** When a person first speaks, use his/her name to identify them. Then just use he/she.

Where there are multiple people speaking, you may need to use their proper name more often.

**Using Action** Linking some kind of action to the dialogue to make it clear who is speaking.

Martin swung open the door for her and smiled. "It looks like you changed your mind, eh?"

**Using Markers** Linking some kind of personal characteristic to the dialogue is another way to make it clear who is speaking. If your characters are truly unique, and the readers know your characters, they can often identify the person speaking by **how** they speak. Here is a partial list... **vocabulary, motor mouths, sarcasm, poor grammar, jargon**

**A note on using "said"** Most of the time you'll use a simple tag like, "he said"—and that's OK. It is so commonplace that it is almost transparent. Careful not to overdo it with words other than "said".

**A note on using names** Be careful not to overuse personal names.

#### 6. Misuse of adverbs.

Telling them “how” something was said or sounded should be obvious from the way you write it.

**SOLUTION:** *If you really feel you need the adverb to make it clear, you probably need to work at “showing” a bit more instead of “telling”.*

#### 7. Dialogue is fake—conveying info for author.

When we use dialogue to insert background information, research or other details we think the readers need, the dialog can be unrealistic.

**SOLUTION:** *If both parties know it, don’t put it in there. Don’t have one person remind the other person of something they both know. Be very careful with this—you can always find another way.*

#### 8. Dialogue is fake—stating the obvious.

The author is restating, through dialogue, what they’ve already shown.

**SOLUTION:** *Avoid dialogue about what the reader can see. Don’t talk about what’s happening, show it, or show the reaction to it.*

#### 9. Dialogue is fake—too much like Hollywood.

Trying to be too cool, melodramatic, or using clichés. Characters need to relate to each other, not just recite flashy lines.

**SOLUTION:** *Instead, use body language or other ways of expressing emotion rather than dialogue that is too dramatic. Also, avoid clichés unless that type of talk is what characterizes the person talking.*

#### 10. Dialogue Doesn’t Fit the Character

If my character is a child or a teenager, be sure writing is the way they’d say it.

**SOLUTION:** *Let target audience read it, or ask “how would your friends say . . .” Be Careful—not talking about making the dialogue trendy, though.*

#### 11. Dialogue too close to real life conversations.

Many times writers strive to make dialogue

**REALISTIC**—Just like real conversations. That’s exactly where you can make a mistake, if you’re not careful.

**SOLUTION:** *Dialogue needs to be different from real conversations. We don’t want our dialog to be “true to life” realistic.*

### **WRITING STRONGER DIALOGUE ... PING-PONG PRINCIPLES ...**

### **BELIEVABILITY ... and AVOIDING HOKEY CHRISTIAN FICTION**

*We Need to Make Every Aspect of our Story Believable ...*

#### **What are Some Things to Watch For?**

- Timelines ...
- Reactions ...
- Non-reactions ...
- Physical impossibilities ...
- The Christian Element ...

#### **Ways to Overcome Issues of Believability**

- Let a character question the unbelievable ...
- Anticipate the areas and help the reader over the hurdles ...
- Always ask ... would my character really react this way?
- Trust your gut ...
- The Christian aspects ... does it fit naturally?

### **PREDICTABLE ... another thing that leads to HOKEY CHRISTIAN FICTION**

- **Stories seem forced, unrealistic**
- **Agenda driven** ... abortion, salvation, racial reconciliation, human trafficking
- **Things too conveniently get all worked out** with a simple prayer

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- ***Sacrificial death scene*** ... trying to create a Jesus figure ... There is nobody like Jesus. So much Christian fiction relies on a tragic death to pull emotion.

Our writing, the **EXCELLENCE OF IT**, the way it **SEEMS REAL**, the way it **RELATES TO PEOPLE, THAT should relate to people and pull emotion**. **Don't rely on killing someone off to do that.**

*“Like cheesy Christian movies, hokey Christian writing will fail to move the reader. As a result, the reactions you're hoping to get in the readers won't likely be there.”*

### **PREACHY ... still another problem with Christian Fiction**

- *Don't think you must have a Jesus figure.*
- *Don't think you need a conversion scene for the book to be an effective tool for the Lord.*
- *Conversion scenes have been abused and poorly handled by Christian writers ...*
- *Consider a note from the author at the end of the book if you think you must have it.*
- *A CHARACTER RECOUNTING a SERMON -This comes across as FORCED and FAKE.*

### **PHILOSOPHY Behind How Some Write for Cross Over & My Philosophy**

#### **1. The QUESTION of LANGUAGE and SEX**

Some Christian fiction authors seem intoxicated with a sense that they are being real. Edgy. Gritty. **So, they add language. They add sex.** You don't need either to be real.

**As a Christian ... we don't have “Foul LANGUAGE options” in our tool belt.**

*“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Eph. 4:29*

**As a Christian ... we must be very careful about how we use SEX in our writing.**

*“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” Eph. 5:3-4*

*“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do secret.” Ephesians 5:11-12*

**If we're to have nothing to do this in our life ... can we build it into our characters?**

**We don't have the freedom to use LANGUAGE and SEX in our FICTION the way NON-CHRISTIANS DO. But that is okay ... we have to work harder ... but it can be better.**

**What about using language for “BAD CHARACTERS”?**

#### **2. FOR CHARACTERS OPPOSING CHRISTIANITY or CHRISTIAN STANDS, MAKE THEIR ARGUMENTS STRONG and COMPELLING.**

It will identify with skeptics more. Argue both sides of the issue to the best of your ability, and the truth will likely win out as the story plays out.

### **3. SHARE TRUTH ... NOT SERMONS**

Dozens and dozens of times in the Gospels we read a verse with JESUS saying . . . “I tell you the truth . . .” *One of Jesus’ express purposes was to teach truth. Scripture records JESUS ...*

- STRAIGHTENING OUT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GOD
- STRAIGHTENING OUT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SCRIPTURE

**IF WE GET READERS TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH ... MIGHT THAT NOT LEAD THEM TO CHRIST?**

### **We must be about TELLING THE TRUTH—ESPECIALLY in FICTION**

- REMEMBER ... THE WORLD is NOT TELLING THE TRUTH.
- THE WORLD WANTS TO SUPPRESS TRUTH (MATT. 14:5)
- BE TRUTHFUL ABOUT the CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE/LIFE

**WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF LIES AND DECEPTION . . . HELP THEM FILTER THE LIES FROM THE TRUTH. The TRUTH IS NOT NEW... but ANCIENT.**

*“Jesus answered, ‘My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.’”*

*John 7:16-18*

**We want to speak HIS TRUTH ... not just spewing OUR OPINIONS.**

*“The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.”*

*Proverbs 12:6*

### **4. My Philosophy ... IF YOU WRITE A “CHRISTIAN STORY” it will likely NOT CROSS OVER**

- **Are you writing a great Christian story?** You must be careful is isn’t agenda-driven.
- **Are you writing a great story, and one or more of the characters are Christians?**  
Likely it will be real and powerful.

**IF YOU WANT TO WRITE as a Christian in this world ... REMEMBER ...**

- Be the real deal, not a counterfeit.
- If we aren’t following Christ as we should ... what do we really have to teach others?

***Thanks for attending!*** -Tim Shoemaker

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