



by
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Look out! The plot is afoot!

Did I succeed in getting your attention?

Great! Let's discuss the **plot** and the **plot hook**, but where to begin?

Let's start with some definitions.

One dictionary states the definition of **plot** /plät/ as:

The main events of a play, novel, movie, or similar work, devised and presented by the writer as an interrelated sequence.

Wikipedia.org [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plot_\(narrative\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plot_(narrative)) expands the definition:

In a literary work, film, story, or other narrative, the **plot** is the sequence of events, where each event affects the next one through the principle of cause-and-effect. The causal events of a plot can be thought of as a series of events linked by the connector "and so". Plots can vary from simple structures—such as in a traditional ballad—to complex interwoven structures sometimes referred to as **subplot** or **imbroglio**. In the narrative sense, the term highlights important points which have consequences within the story, according to Ansen Dibell.

The term plot can also serve as a verb referring to a character planning future actions in the story. Plot is similar in meaning to the term **storyline**.

Most writers, including this one, believes your story's plot is all that ... and *much* more.

In fact, the plot the single most important thing your story must have if it will present and represent anything meaningful to your readers.

Many writers will argue it's even more important than the characters themselves, or that the plot becomes a de facto character in its own right.

Consider this simple example:

“The dragon died, and then the knight died.”

Okay, that’s a *story*. It’s short, but definitely not interesting.

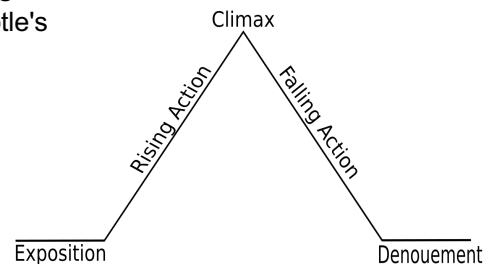
“The dragon died, and then the knight died, not knowing they shared a bond that was forged long before their births.”

That’s a *plot*.

A plot is the mechanism or elements beyond simple descriptions by which the writer moves their story logically (or not) from one scene to the next, usually following a predetermined path, and sharing certain details along the plot’s timeline. It’s what draws the reader into the world the author has created and keeps the reader enthralled enough to keep reading, hopefully, until the end.

This mechanism can be as structured as **Gustav Freytag’s Pyramid** (as taken from Wikipedia.org), based upon Aristotle’s theory of tragedy:

- **exposition** (introduction)
- **rising action** (rise)
- **climax**
- **falling action** (return or fall)
- **denouement** (ending or catastrophe)



Or it can be, in the case of short-short stories, something like:

- **quick introduction**
- **presentation of conflict**
- **action**
- **conclusion**

The plot is what happens to and what affects the characters in your story.

Otherwise, of course, the characters would just wander around aimlessly and wonder what was going on. So, will your readers. Your job as a writer is to present the roadmap for your characters and your readers, so that both will ultimately reach some level of satisfaction by the end of your story.

Make sure your plot includes your main theme (make sure you know what your main theme is) and connect the beginning to the end of your story.

What if it Doesn’t Advance the Plot?

“If a scene or information does not advance the plot, should it be kept in the story?”

“Can I change the way plots are supposed to work?”

“What if I think my speculative fiction story, which relies on some well-trodden science fiction tropes, needs to break the mold?”

The answer to each of these questions is **it depends**, and we’ll dig deeper into this area of plot (and other areas) in the next *Writing Series* discussion in March 2020, when we talk about **Breaking the Formula and Subverting the Trope**.

What is a Plot Hook?

Also called the “narrative hook” or just “hook,” the term “plot hook” has many flavors.

If you’re into role playing games, there are dozens, maybe hundreds, of “plot hook” generators on the Internet that you can use to get your story ideas. Frankly, many are decent enough to use for any type of story development.

In screenplays, the hook needs to happen in the first couple of pages. Viewers’ attention spans are much shorter these days than ever, and viewers have less patience waiting for the action to get moving. Horror and suspense films, in particular, are famous for including a death or murder scene at the beginning. Such plotting methods have certainly become cliché and viewers want *something* much more these days. (More to come in the next *Writing Series* presentation.)

For our purposes here, the “plot hook” is what captures a reader’s attention at the beginning of your story, novel, or screen play. You may think your opening – several paragraphs in your short story or several pages in your novel – is your hook, but it’s often the first sentence.

What is a Good Plot Hook?

A few things to consider when writing your plot hook:

- A good question! No, seriously ...
- A dramatic action scene or situation, told with as few words as possible
- An interesting character’s description, but just one or two traits, not an entire biography
- A quotation from something that inspired you to think up the story in the first place
- A statistic or interesting fact that gets turned upside down
- A mystery, open-ended and begging to be solved
- A sound, smell, or taste – things we often forget to think about when writing
- A later start in your story than you first imagined. No, seriously ...

What other things could you consider?

Match these 13 Hooks in Speculative Fiction

(See the separate **Answer Key** for the correct matches.)

- _____ **Neuromancer** – William Gibson
- _____ **The Princess Bride** – William Goldman
- _____ **Slaughterhouse-Five** – Kurt Vonnegut
- _____ **1984** – George Orwell
- _____ **Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy** – Douglas Adams
- _____ **Fahrenheit 451** – Ray Bradbury
- _____ **Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea** – Jules Verne
- _____ **Clockwork Orange** – Anthony Burgess
- _____ **The Golden Compass** – Philip Pullman
- _____ **A Christmas Carol** – Charles Dickens
- _____ **Peter Pan** – J. M. Barrie
- _____ **The Handmaid's Tale** – Margaret Atwood
- _____ **The Voyage of the Dawn Treader** – C.S. Lewis

1. “What’s it going to be then, eh? There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar trying to make up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening, a flip dark chill winter bastard though dry.”
2. “Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the Western Spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-eight million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea.”
3. “Marley was dead, to begin with.”
4. “All of this happened, more or less.”
5. “There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”
6. “It was a pleasure to burn.”
7. “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”
8. “The sky above the port was the color of television tuned to a dead channel.”
9. “All children, except one, grow up.”
10. “The year that Buttercup was born, the most beautiful woman in the world was a French scullery maid named Annette.”
11. “Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening Hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen.”
12. “The year 1866 was signalized by a remarkable incident, a mysterious and puzzling phenomenon, which doubtless no one has yet forgotten.”
13. “We slept in what had once been the gymnasium.”

Other Examples of Plot Hook in Literature

1. **Pride and Prejudice** – Jane Austen

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”

A marriage thematic statement sets the mood and captures the reader's attention because of its cultural contrariness.

2. **A Tale of Two Cities** – Charles Dickens

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

This first (long) line sets the tone of the entire novel by focusing on the tension that occurs between love and family and between oppression and hatred.

3. **Gravity's Rainbow** – Thomas Pynchon

“A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now.”

This sets the stage for a narrative that focuses on the design, production, dispatch of Nazi V-2 rockets at the end of World War II, and the quest of several of the characters to discover the secret of the mysterious device named the “Schwarzgerät” (“Black Device”).

What Plot Hooks Have You Used?

Next Steps?

Your plot is in your hands. Review the resources on the next page and begin writing your own stories today with a great hook.

Resources

- **Hook the Reader – Writing Narratives (YouTube, 02:04 mins.)**
ClickView
<https://youtu.be/eToYioSm7Cg>
- **7 Clever Steps To Hook Your Reader Into Your Narrative**
Writer's Edit
<https://writersedit.com/fiction-writing/7-steps-hook-reader-narrative/>
- **The 8-Second Advice for Writing a Narrative Hook**
Innovative Editing
<https://www.innovativeediting.com/post/writing-a-narrative-hook>
- **Narrative Hook**
Fiction Writer's Mentor
<http://www.fiction-writers-mentor.com/narrative-hook/>
- **How to engage the reader in the opening paragraph**
BBC Bitesize
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zn8tkmn/articles/zrkr2sg>
- **How to Write Your Screenplay's Hook**
Gina VanName
<https://www.scriptfly.com/sceneanalysis/>
- **Geek & Sundry**
"Geek & Sundry's Best, Funniest, and Weirdest D&D Adventure Hooks"
<https://geekandsundry.com/geek-sundrys-best-funniest-and-weirdest-dd-adventure-hooks/>
- **Kassoon Dungeons and Dragons**
Random Plot Hook Generator
<https://www.kassoon.com/dnd/random-plot-hooks-generator/>

Random Plot Hook Generator

Quest and plot ideas for any adventure.

A farmer named Garreth who saw a purple worm once long ago and won't shut up about it. Thinks it's gonna pop up out of the ground and tear up his farm. 'Mind the woooooorm!'

OR

Virgin succubus cursed to never get laid desperately seeks assistance; slowly goes apeshit crazy.

OR

For years, the sea lanes which connected the city to the world have been cut off by sea monsters, and business is drying up.

[Another!](#)

- **Wizards of the Coast LLC – Dungeons & Dragons**
"Plot Hooks & Adventure Seeds," including the "Wizards of the Coast Plot Hook Archive"
<https://www.dnd-compendium.com/dm-resources/plot-hooks>