



# How Do You Build Great Plots?

*From characters, not clichés*

*Part two of a series about plotting from character.*

Do your characters recognize their needs and motivations, or are these unacknowledged?

Let's go back to our hypothetical characters from Part One of our series.

Our heroine knows she wants a house. But does she know why? Maybe she knows she wants to belong. How do we add conflict?

Have her hate this weakness. She's independent, strong, and successful — and this need irritates her. Now she's in conflict with herself.

What about if she doesn't know she has this need? How to increase the pressure?

Maybe she has trouble explaining her attachment to this house — it's only a feeling. And this embarrasses her. The hero's frustrated with her lack of communication, and she resents him pushing her for answers.

Notice that either approach creates conflict, but also creates two different people. That's going to mean two different stories.

Make your choices based on what works for you. Repeat this with all your characters, but particularly focus on your main characters.

Just as you think about what's going to keep your hero and heroine apart, what personality traits are going to pull them together?

Go beyond he's hot and she's sexy. These two need to click emotionally, mentally and on levels

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beyond physical.

Maybe she makes him laugh — she's spontaneous without being a total flake. That's a hint she's got the potential to satisfy that basic need of his — but there's a journey past his baggage to get to a relationship that works.

For her, maybe he's the version of her father she remembers from before her childhood fell apart.

Again, the reader needs hints — not clubs over the head — that somehow these two can satisfy the basic need in each other. Or perhaps the character will grow past this need.

Keep layering. Add traits that are strengths and weaknesses, make them complement and contrast to the other person.

Maybe he's good with fixing things — nice potential here to have his shirt off as he hammers nails — but he's short tempered.

Maybe she's patient and creative, but procrastinates. Can you start to see scenes for how these traits clash? Or work together?

Use these characteristics to jot down scene ideas of how you'll show these traits in action — that's story.

You also need a clear goal for each character. Something that connects to that core need you found. Character goals must put the two characters in conflict, but there are two approaches.

Either have the goals be opposite — she wants to keep the house, he wants to sell it, or she wants a family, he wants no responsibility, and so on.

Or give them the same goal and make the conflict come from each person's approach to achieving it. As in, they both want to sell the house, but he's knocking out walls while she's trying to paint them.

Or her plan for a family is no plan at all, while he's got it mapped out with travel for five years, then marriage, a house, and two kids spread three years apart.

This is a great way to create sizzle because it seems as if the complimentary goals ought to work, but they keep clashing.

With your characters developing, now we're ready to shape the scenes to give us the four main points of the book: first turning point, mid-point, third turning point (sometimes called the third act dark moment), and resolution (where the main character realizes that he or she has changed).

In a romance, the resolution is also where the reader sees that the hero and heroine have moved to where a deeper relationship is possible.

This is a good time to play the "what if" game.

*To be continued....*

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