

Cohesive Story Building

3D Fiction Fundamentals Collection, Volume 2

BONUS COMPANION BOOKLET

by Karen S. Wiesner

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3D Fiction Fundamentals Collection

About the Author

Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

Frequently I'm asked whether the worksheets, checklists, charts, examples, exercises, and/or other aids from my writing reference titles are available in a usable download format. While the original publisher of the main book did offer free copies of some of these in PDF format on their website, naturally these were only "usable" if they were printed out and written on by hand.

My publisher and I wanted to offer a download of all of these in an editable format (RTF) that allows you to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed.

Cohesive Story Building Bonus Companion Booklet contains all the blank worksheets from the main book along with detailed exercises and examples. These are free to download from the Writers Exchange E-Publishing website. Follow the link to the collection in the back of this booklet. Please be aware that this file is provided as a supplemental to *Cohesive Story Building*. The assumption is that you purchased a copy of that book and therefore have a working knowledge of the methods discussed in that book. For those who prefer print, a paperback equivalent is available for purchase.

Remember that this material is copyrighted. It is illegal to distribute, share, or put it on your website for any reason. The material is strictly for individual use by the purchaser.

Happy writing!

Karen S. Wiesner

Worksheets from *First Draft Outline*

Character Sketch

General Setting Sketch

Character Setting Sketch

Plot Sketch

Formatted Outline Capsule

Character Sketch

Title:

Character Name:

Nickname:

Birth Date/Place:

Character Role: (hero, heroine, secondary character, villain)

Physical Descriptions:

Age:

Race:

Eye Color:

Hair Color/Style:

Build (Height/Weight):

Skin Tone:

Style of Dress:

Characteristics or mannerisms:

Personality Traits:

Background:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Occupation/Education:

Miscellaneous Notes:

General Setting Sketch

Title:

Name of Setting:

Characters Living in This Time Period and Region:

Year or Time Period:

Season:

State:

City or Town:

Miscellaneous Notes:

Character Setting Sketch

Title:

Character Name:

General Settings for This Character (See Corresponding Worksheet 2A for Details):

Character's Home:

City or Town (See Corresponding Worksheet 2A):

Neighborhood Character Lives In:

Street Character Lives On:

Character's Neighbors:

Character's Home (Apartment, House, Mansion, Trailer, Ranch, etc.):

Home Interior:

Character's Workplace:

City or Town (See Corresponding Worksheet 2A for Details):

Business Name:

Type of Business:

Neighborhood:

Street:

Individual Workspace:

Co-workers:

Miscellaneous Notes:

Plot Sketch

Title:

Story Goal:

Romance Thread (Optional):

Subplot Threads:

#2

#3

#4

#5

#6

#7

#8

Additional

Plot Tension:

Romantic/Sexual Tension (Optional):

Release:

Downtime:

Black Moment:

Resolution:

Aftereffects of Resolution (Optional):

Formatted Outline Capsule

Title:

Chapter and Scene:

Day and Time:

POV character:

Additional Characters:

Location:

Facts Necessary:

Notes:

Questions:

Draft of scene:

Story Checklists

Story Plan Checklist

Cohesion Checklist

Punch Checklist

Revision Checklist

Editing and Polishing Checklist

Story Plan Checklist

Title:

Genre(s):

POV Specification:

High-Concept Blurb:

Estimated Length of Book/Number of Sparks:

BEGINNING STORY SPARK:

Identifying the Main Character(s):

Character Introductions:

- *First Character:*
- *Second Character:*

Description (Outside POV):

- *First Character:*
- *Second Character:*

Description (Self POV):

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Occupational Skills:

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Enhancement/Contrast:

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Symbolic Element:

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Setting Descriptions:

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Character Conflicts (Internal):

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Plot Conflicts (External):

MIDDLE STORY SPARK:

Character Conflicts (Internal):

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Plot Conflicts (External):

END STORY SPARK:

Character Conflicts (Internal):

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

- *First Character:*

- *Second Character:*

Plot Conflict (External) Resolutions:

Cohesion Checklist

How do you know if your characters, settings, and plots are truly cohesive? Once you finish your Story Plan Checklist, check the obvious first:

- Does your Story Plan Checklist read like a mini version of the novel?
- Are there any sections on the checklist you didn't fill out?
- Did you leave important characters off the list? If you put them on now and filled out their basics, and external and internal monologues, would the story be more cohesive?
- Are your story sparks intriguing enough, or can you punch them up more?
- Do your settings truly fit the characters and plot, or are they simply *there*?
- Do beginning, middle, and end internal monologues follow a progressive, logical course?
- Are resolutions logical? Predictable? Would a twist ending be more effective and exciting?

If you're satisfied that your story is cohesive, try one final test to be absolutely sure. On the following page, circle the answer that best fits your reaction to the question. Remember, anything but a resounding "Yes!" to each question means you need to go back to that element of your story and work in more cohesion.

Question	Answer	Areas to Rework
Are conflicts, goals, and motivations defined enough to pinpoint within the high-concept blurb?	Yes! No Not Sure	• Conflicts • Goals and Motivations • High-Concept Blurb
Do internal and external conflicts, goals, and motivations intersect, collide, and impact?	Yes! No Not Sure	• Internal and External Conflicts • Goals and Motivations
Do characters have believable, identifiable, and compelling conflicts, goals, and motivations they care about deeply?	Yes! No Not Sure	• Characters • Conflicts • Goals and Motivations
Are each character's conflicts, goals, and motivations urgent and causal (can't have one without the other)?	Yes! No Not Sure	• Characters • Conflicts • Goals and Motivations • Plot
Do the characters have the skills to achieve the goal if sufficiently motivated?	Yes! No Not Sure	• Characters • Occupations • Goals and Motivations • Plot
Are the main characters directly involved in resolutions of internal and external plot conflicts?	Yes! No Not Sure	• Characters • Conflicts • Goals and Motivations • Plot
If the story was set anywhere else, would the setting make the characters and plot less cohesive?	Yes! No Not Sure	• Settings • Characters • Conflicts • Goals and Motivations • Plot

Punch Checklist

Items that need to be attended to in the revision and/or in the editing and polishing.

Story Title:

Problem	How to Fix	Chapter/Page #(s)

Revision Checklist

You should pay special attention to a number of items as you're evaluating and revising:

- Structure
- Character, setting, and plot credibility and the cohesion of these elements
- Depth of conflicts, goals, and motivations
- Scene worthiness
- Pacing
- Effectiveness of hints, tension and suspense, and resolutions
- Transitions
- Emotion and color
- Hooks and cliffhangers
- Character voice
- Consistency
- Adequacy of research
- Properly unfurled, developed, and concluded story threads
- Deepening of character enhancements/contrasts and the symbols of these

The table below will help you build consistency. In the first column, include the timeline or other detail. In the second column, include every page number on which the detail is mentioned. For instance:

Timeline or Detail	Page in Ms.
<i>First murder occurred at 7:32 P.M.</i>	<i>3, 12, 91–93</i>
<i>Andrea moved to New York in 1995.</i>	<i>7</i>

Timeline or Detail	Page in Ms.

Editing and Polishing Checklist

The process of editing and polishing involves any or all of the following:

- Rearranging sentences or paragraphs
- Showing, not telling, where most needed
- Tightening sentences and individual words (such as changing passive to active, and dull to impacting; cleaning up repetitiveness)
- Smoothing out roughness and making purple prose more natural
- Punching up tension and suspense
- Ensuring variation in sentence construction and length
- Word enrichment

Additionally, evaluate these areas as you edit and polish:

Description

- ___ Have I interspersed character descriptions throughout scenes instead of in a single block?
- ___ Have I described characters from another character's POV? (i.e., characters are *not* describing themselves)
- ___ Have I mentioned descriptive details (hair and eye color, etc.) only once or twice within the story?
- ___ Have I kept adjectives in descriptions to a minimum?

Dialogue

- ___ Have I used external and internal dialogue effectively?
- ___ Have I avoided dialogue bullets except to create extreme tension?
 - ___ Have I used dialogue to reveal my characters' personalities, goals and motivations, etc.?
- ___ Does each character's dialogue fit that character?
- ___ Would my story or the individual scenes be more effective if started with intriguing dialogue?

___ Do all of my characters "speak" differently?

Introspection

___ Have I effectively used introspection to allow readers to get inside my characters' heads?

___ Have I written with such emotional impact, readers will experience the same emotions as my characters?

Miscellaneous

___ Have I varied my sentence length and structure?

___ Have I written each sentence in an active voice that ensures the most impact?

___ Are my scenes compellingly shown, with telling reserved only for those instances in which a scene doesn't need to be built around a minor point?

___ Have I cleaned up as many adverbs as I can?

___ Have I revised sentences to avoid as many of these overused words as I can? *Was/wasn't, were/weren't, did/didn't, have/haven't, is/isn't, are/aren't, to be/been*

___ Have I removed unnecessary clutter, particularly in changing *was going to* to *would*?

___ Have I fixed as many overused idea stringers, like *when, as, realized, wondered, occurred, felt, seem, appear, and look* as possible?

___ Have I revised passive sentences that begin with *There was/were, It was, They were, He was*?

___ If I'm writing a contemporary novel, have I used contractions?

___ Do I have any long, hard-to-absorb sentences? Can they be revised as two or more sentences for more immediacy?

___ Have I defined exactly what "it" is, especially at the beginning of sentences?

___ Have I avoided careless repetition unless the repetition drives the impact deeper?

___ Does anything I've written make it sound like I used the thesaurus too freely?

Story Plan Checklist Exercises

Introduction

Exercise 1: Beginning Story Spark

Exercise 2: Basic Story Information

Exercise 3: Character Identification and Introductions

Exercise 4: Character Description (Outside and Self POVs)

Exercise 5: Occupational Skills

Exercise 6: Enhancement/Contrast and Symbolic Element

Exercise 7: Setting Descriptions

Exercise 8: Character Internal Conflicts

Exercise 9: Evolving Motivations and Goals

Exercise 10: External Plot Conflicts

Exercise 11: Middle Story Spark

Exercise 12: Character Internal Conflicts

Exercise 13: Evolving Motivations and Goals

Exercise 14: External Plot Conflicts

Exercise 15: End Story Spark

Exercise 16: Character Internal Conflicts

Exercise 17: Evolving Motivations and Goals

Exercise 18: External Plot Conflict Resolutions

Suggestions for Making Your Story Plan Checklist Items Cohesive

INTRODUCTION

In this section, I'm going to present three story sparks (beginning, middle, and end) to you. For each spark, you'll perform exercises to come up with Story Plan Checklist essays for each area on the worksheet. By doing this, you'll flex your story-building muscles. Work from the beginning spark. If an entire story becomes very clear to you with that spark, or if you already have story sparks that are more cohesive than the suggestions, feel free to use yours. (And bravo!) Otherwise, use the sparks I suggest and build from there.

But don't forget: Your goal in using the Story Plan Checklist is to come up with *cohesive* ideas for character, setting, and plot, so you won't just be brainstorming random ideas and putting them together. You *must* make each of the items on your Story Plan Checklist cohesive. Your character(s) must be in an occupation that fits the beginning story spark. The external and internal conflicts must fit together in the strongest ways possible. You must find organic ways to link them. In other words, in each area, build on what you've done before in such a way that everything fuses.

Also, remember what I said in chapter two of the main book--you're free to mix up the elements on the Story Plan Checklist. (For the purpose of completing these exercises, though, follow the most logical order--the one provided in the blank Story Plan Checklist found.)

Each exercise will include instructions, plus cohesiveness tips for the beginning items on the checklist, which will apply to middle and end sections as well. Additionally, I'll include a bonus at the end of this appendix to show you possible cohesive elements for the story spark examples you'll use in the pages to follow.

Good luck!

EXERCISE 1: BEGINNING STORY SPARK

Writer, this story spark is rife with possibilities. Regardless of your genre, you should be able to brainstorm unique and intriguing to fit this spark. You're ready to begin on the next page. Feel free to revise this beginning spark in any way you choose.

Beginning Story Spark

As an eight-year-old child, the main character was kidnapped and held captive in the woods for a period of ten days until he or she was rescued. When your story opens, this main character is an adult (twenty-eight years old), and he or she has just heard the devastating news that another eight-year-old child has been kidnapped.

EXERCISE 2: BASIC STORY INFORMATION

Write down something basic to get you started.

Title:

Genre(s):

POV Specification:

High-Concept Blurb:

Estimated Length of Book/Number of Sparks:

EXERCISE 3: MAIN CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION AND CHARACTER INTRODUCTIONS

Now we come to the external monologues section. If you need some help coming up with ideas for this section, you might try using a character sheet you like to help you.

Once you've got some ideas rolling, put the basic information below. To identify the POV characters, simply state their full names. Under character introductions, your goal is to identify in general terms who the characters are when the story opens. If you need help, turn back to Layer II and review the examples from Death on the Nile, or read through the other Story Plan Checklist examples included in Appendix C of the main book. Also, remember that you can identify secondary characters and villains in both sections if they're important enough to play a significant role in the story.

Identifying the Main Character(s):

Character Introductions:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 4: CHARACTER DESCRIPTION (OUTSIDE AND SELF POVS)

Building on the beginning story spark, blend in character descriptions. Remember, these are not physical descriptions, like you'd include in a basic character sketch. Instead, these are essays on how other people see the main character(s) and how each one sees himself. Flip back to Layer II and review the examples from Death on the Nile, or read through the other Story Plan Checklist examples included in Appendix C of the main book. Feel free to include secondary characters and villains in both sections.

Cohesiveness Tip: Any character type—vulnerable, jaded, or otherwise—would work well in the scenario suggested in the beginning story spark, so the trick is to make whatever character type you decide on blend with the rest of the items in the Story Plan Checklist, or to find an intriguing contrast. Remember, to be cohesive is not to be predictable!

Description (Outside POV):

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

Description (Self POV):

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 5: OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS

Building on the beginning story spark, blend in the occupational skills of your main character(s). Remember, your character's job must match the situation he is facing in the beginning story spark. For examples, flip back to Layer II or look at Appendix C of the main book. Generally, you wouldn't need to include secondary characters and villains in these sections, but do so if you feel it's necessary.

Cohesiveness Tip: Any main character who doesn't have an occupation that suits his internal conflicts and plot conflicts can't be truly cohesive, nor will readers sympathize with (and love) him. But that doesn't mean that a character's occupation has to be predictable. For instance, for the beginning story spark presented here, the most obvious occupation for the main character would be that of a cop. But you can turn that plot on its ear if the main character is a priest or pastor, or even a reformed criminal. Both of these suggestions are completely cohesive with the internal conflicts and plot conflicts. In real life, you can find lawyers who are predictably ruthless and greedy. You can just as easily find doctors and nurses who don't really care about patients. Even these stereotypes usually have families who love them. Just remember, fiction isn't always like reality.

Occupational Skills:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 6: ENHANCEMENT/CONTRAST AND SYMBOLIC ELEMENT

Building on the beginning story spark, blend in the enhancement/contrast for your main character(s), then add a symbolic element for each that is character- or plot-defining, or both. But note that you don't need either an enhancement/contrast or a symbolic element—include these only if they fit the plot and characters. Remember, enhancement is a subtle, balanced, or extreme element that complements a character's established traits. A contrast, which can also be subtle, balanced, or extreme, is an element in opposition to a character's established traits.

If you decide to include a symbolic element, remember that it must be something that defines a character, defines the situation he's in, or both. Whether it's tangible or intangible, the symbolic element should enhance and/or contrast, thereby developing the character and plot in deeper ways. Cohesion with what you've done previously is a must! If you need more help with this section, return to Layer II, or look at Appendix C of the main book. Generally, you wouldn't need to include secondary characters and villains in these sections, but do so if you feel it's necessary.

Cohesiveness Tip: Consider your characters in the scenario suggested in the beginning story spark. Whatever type you've decided on will help you choose whether they need an enhancement or contrast. A balanced character will probably only need something (or someone) to better define his character or the plot. If a character has any quality to an extreme, he'll need a corresponding opposite quality. A hard character will need softness. Someone uptight will need something or someone that mellows. Remember, too, that these enhancements and contrasts should blend well with the character's occupational skills (though they don't necessary have to *match*).

Enhancement/Contrast:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

Symbolic Element:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 7: SETTING DESCRIPTIONS

Building on the beginning story spark, blend in your settings in such a way that they're cohesive with your characters and plots. Make them larger than life—settings readers will want to return to in the future in other books (even if you don't write a series). Generally, you don't need to include secondary characters and villains in these sections, but do so if you feel it's necessary. For examples, see Layer II, or study Appendix C of the main book.

Cohesiveness Tip: Think carefully about your setting—there are lots of details to consider. For instance, if the main character lived in a small town and was held in the woods at the edge of town, would it make more sense for him as an adult to get away from a small town and move to a big city, where there aren't so many trees? If you intend the main character to save the child who's been kidnapped in the current story, does it make more sense for him to know the town well in order to find the child? If so, perhaps he shouldn't move. The latest missing child could be kidnapped not in the main character's childhood home town, but in his current town, should he have relocated—you choose which works best for your story.

Setting Descriptions:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 8: CHARACTER INTERNAL CONFLICTS

We've reached the internal monologues section of the checklist. Building on the beginning story spark, blend in your characters' internal conflicts in such a way that they're cohesive with your settings and plots, and that they intrinsically increase the tension and suspense. Internal monologues are free-form essays that deep-delve into a character's internal conflicts. You're building a story from the inside out with these. They must be cohesive with external conflicts, as they work together to form a complete story. Again, keep in mind that you don't need to include secondary characters and villains in these sections, but do so if you feel it's necessary. For examples, see Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Cohesiveness Tip: The scenario that may be most effective in this situation is the obvious one (and maybe that's the best reason you should find something different here but equally cohesive): The main character has never truly gotten over what happened to him as a child. (You'll have to decide whether what happened to him included mental, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse and torture.) While he might hide it and not really face that fact himself, it's clearly his internal conflict. The possibilities are endless, but those possibilities should be cohesive with his internal conflicts and the plot conflicts.

Character Conflicts (Internal):

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 9: EVOLVING MOTIVATIONS AND GOALS

Building on the beginning story spark, blend in your characters' evolving goals and motivations. Give them reasons and incentives to keep fighting. For examples, see Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Cohesiveness Tip: Characters succeed because they rise above their fears, and this requires goals and motivations that are cohesive with the characters you've equipped for this task. For a character to succeed, you must set the stage *from the beginning* for the particular skills your main character uses in rescue, escape, defeat, and villain-battling (in whatever way makes sense in light of the character you've created—intellect to intellect, strength to strength, etc.). Don't try to pull a fast one by expecting the reader to believe, for instance, that a man who can barely get out of bed in the morning and who is afraid of his own shadow can suddenly knock down walls and take on an armed man with nothing more than a rubber band and a rock. Remember, when David fought Goliath, he'd already killed a lion with his bare hands.

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 10: EXTERNAL PLOT CONFLICTS

Now blend in your external plot conflicts in such a way that they're cohesive with your characters and settings, and intrinsically increase the tension and suspense. For examples, see Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Cohesiveness Tip: Putting twists into each story spark is a sure-fire way to turn a suspenseful story into a nail-biting one. Ask yourself, *In light of the rest of my story and the cohesiveness I must provide, what's the most shocking thing I could have happen at this point? What is the reader absolutely not expecting?* This twist must be set up properly from the very beginning of the book to make it believable. And resolutions must fit perfectly with every angle this twist presents.

Plot Conflicts (External):

EXERCISE 11: MIDDLE STORY SPARK

Writer, this second story spark is rife with new possibilities. However, if you prefer to make up your own because it's more cohesive or simply fits your previous structure better, feel free. Otherwise, get started on the next step.

Middle Story Spark

The eight-year-old child who was kidnapped still hasn't been found. Your main character is kidnapped and held captive. His or her kidnapper seems familiar.

EXERCISE 12: CHARACTER INTERNAL CONFLICTS

Building on the middle story spark, blend in your characters' internal conflicts in such a way that they're cohesive with your settings and plots, and intrinsically increase the tension and suspense the beginning story spark set off. For examples, see Layer II, or Appendix C of the main book.

Character Conflicts (Internal):

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 13: EVOLVING MOTIVATIONS AND GOALS

Building on your middle story spark, blend in your characters' evolving goals and motivations. For examples, Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 14: EXTERNAL PLOT CONFLICTS

Blend in your external plot conflicts in such a way that they're cohesive with your characters and settings, and that they intrinsically increase the tension and suspense the beginning story spark set off. For examples, see Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Plot Conflicts (External):

EXERCISE 15: END STORY SPARK

Writer, this final story spark is rife with new possibilities that should cohesively merge with all that you've built into this story previously. However, keep in mind that all story threads must be tied up in this final section of the book, and resolutions must be logical, based on what you've set up in the beginning and middle of the story. For that reason, the final spark should enlighten (though it should also enliven in the process!). Include how each conflict is tied up and resolved. If you prefer to come up with your own spark, feel free. Otherwise, jump in!

End Story Spark

Your main character recognizes his or her captor ... and suddenly nothing—and everything—makes sense.

EXERCISE 16: CHARACTER INTERNAL CONFLICTS

Building on the end story spark, blend in your characters' internal conflicts in such a way that they're cohesive with your settings and plots, and that they increase the tension and suspense the middle story spark set off. Include in these areas how you'll resolve any lingering internal-conflict loose ends. For examples, see Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Character Conflicts (Internal):

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 17: EVOLVING MOTIVATIONS AND GOALS

Blend in your characters' evolving goals and motivations. Include in these areas how you'll resolve any loose ends related to character goals and motivations. For examples, see Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Evolving Goals and Motivations:

First Character:

Second Character:

Third Character:

EXERCISE 18: EXTERNAL PLOT CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

Blend in your external plot conflicts in such a way that they're cohesive with your characters and settings, and that they resolve the tension and suspense the beginning and middle story sparks set off. Be specific about how external-plot loose ends are tied up with satisfying resolutions. For examples, see Layer II or Appendix C of the main book.

Plot Conflict (External) Resolutions:

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING YOUR STORY PLAN CHECKLIST ITEMS COHESIVE

These are the most obvious scenarios that could be developed in response to the story sparks introduced in the exercises, but remember to always generate the unexpected in your readers. Discombobulate them within the confines of logic, satisfactory resolutions, and cohesion. Also note: To cut down on the number of "he or she" references here, all references below are to "he," though of course I mean "he or she" in every case.

Beginning Story Spark:

As an eight-year-old child, your main character was kidnapped and held captive in the woods for a period of ten days until he was rescued. When your story opens, the main character is an adult (twenty-eight years old) and he has just heard the devastating news that another eight-year-old child has been kidnapped.

Cohesive Main Character Introductions:

Though you can include a minor romance in any genre, if you're writing a novel with a romance element, a cohesive heroine for your main character might be his partner on the job, someone who knows what he's been through (like his therapist), or someone from the past (a childhood neighbor who's come back to town, one he either confided in or who simply knew what happened to him).

Cohesive Occupational Skills:

In any genre you can think of (contemporary, historical, science fiction, fantasy, futuristic, time-travel), a law enforcement occupation would blend wonderfully with this scenario. Any type of military, spy, or secret agent profession would also work. A position within the justice system would match well. Any type of therapist works. If your imagination takes you beyond these suggestions, bravo!

Cohesive Enhancement/Contrast:

In the scenario above, you could easily have a character who, jaded from his experience as a child, is now a cop ruthless in his pursuit of

capturing criminals. His soft contrast could be that he counsels children who have been kidnapped.

Alternately, you may have a vulnerable character who's never really gotten over his own experience. His "enhancement" might be a self-destructive vice he falls into whenever he feels the world is too dark and claustrophobic, such as sex (with the work partner, therapist, or childhood acquaintance he may otherwise turn away) or alcohol. Or maybe he feels insanely safe in a dark and claustrophobic world now, and this is what sets off destructive vices.

Cohesive Symbolic Element:

Your main character's symbol in the scenario above could be any number of tangible or intangible items, such as a rock or object he used to try to escape or held for comfort when he was held captive as a child.

It could work very well to make his symbol tangible, too—perhaps he carries a gun (or takes along something else that makes him feel safe—a dog?) at all times now.

He might have a scar or other disability or disfigurement caused in the course of his captivity.

Or, intangibly, his symbolic element might be singing a certain song or type of song when he's afraid or overwhelmed—the same one he sang when he tried to block out his fear as a kidnapped child.

Or he might physically walk away whenever anything heavy happens. He simply can't face conflict because of his experiences.

Cohesive Setting Descriptions:

In terms of your main character's setting, would it be more likely that he stayed in the town where his own kidnapping took place, or that he moved long ago? *What* about the town he lives in now should either contrast or enhance his internal conflicts and the plot you're about to unveil?

Now let's narrow the setting and consider his home—think about the elements you've already created. If you have a character who's running from the past, in which he was held captive in a claustrophobically tiny, dark room, he'd probably live in a big house with lots of windows, possibly no curtains. A house that he can't

stand to have dark—and he may even leave the lights on when he goes out so he doesn't have to come home to darkness. He may have taken all the doors off the closets, etc. if he was held in a closet, or even blocked all the doors to the basement. In a romance, his love interest's abode might be too dark and closed-in for him to remain there comfortably.

On the other hand, if it's more cohesive with what you've built previously, maybe he's gotten to the point that his experience has so twisted him that he prefers darkness and closed-in quarters. In a romance, his love interest's abode might be too open and bright for his tastes.

Cohesive Character Internal Conflicts:

Since it's obvious that his childhood trauma is his internal conflict, let's explore the possibilities in this. If he's romantically involved with his work partner, his therapist, or childhood neighbor, he may be forced to face his own demons and may rebel for part of the story if he's jaded and unwilling to accept his vulnerability.

Does he avoid the woods at every turn (even for a simple walk)?

Maybe he even hides the fact that he was kidnapped as a child because of the fame he inadvertently received after his rescue, possibly going to the extent of changing his name.

And what of the child who's just been kidnapped? The main character remembers poignantly what happened to him when he was kidnapped. If this child isn't rescued soon, the same things might happen to this innocent child.

Cohesive Evolving Goals and Motivations:

In the scenario presented, the main character may start the story refusing to get involved, refusing to put himself in the position of remembering what he went through. He may even search and present valid arguments about why he can't become involved in this, and your beginning may focus on these—and his unending torment in voluntarily (and both justifiably and selfishly) removing himself from this situation.

Cohesive External Plot Conflicts:

The external plot conflict in the scenario presented is the parallel between the kidnapping of a young child in the present and the kidnapping of the main character in the past. You may expand this to make the kidnappings a serial scenario in which each instance includes many elements that are similar to what the main character faced in his kidnapping.

Your character can be a cop investigating, or a civilian called in because of his past, but either angle will organically produce both internal character and plot conflicts.

Middle Story Spark:

The eight-year-old child who was kidnapped still hasn't been found. Your main character is kidnapped and held captive. His or her kidnapper seems familiar.

Cohesive Character Internal Conflicts:

The main character could experience flashbacks or nightmares about his kidnapping, and, during these, he feels as though he should know who kidnapped him. The face and name eludes him through the beginning and middle of the book. He may see glimpses in his mind—vague and unformed. Or maybe he remembers a voice or a gesture. Something along these lines desperately needs to be set up from the get-go of the story (in flashbacks, nightmares, or hazy memories that the main character allows only in snatches), and should be cohesive with the other elements.

While originally the main character may not be able to go beyond his own past trauma, the internal conflict involves a child in trouble *now*. He may wish to, but he can't sit back idly—this fact will drive him nearly to the edge of his sanity. He doesn't want to return (mentally or physically, or both) to the place that caused him so much horror. It's the horror that haunts him even now that causes his internal conflicts, years after he was rescued. But your character may experience physical or mental "pieces" of that horror (which could be an injury caused during the kidnapping, or mental images that traumatize him), in a sense implying that he's never really escaped in all this time. Ultimately, he has to accept there is no choice

for him. He has to get involved.

Cohesive Evolving Goals and Motivations:

Based on the main character's internal and external conflicts, he'll have no choice but to "evolve" his original goals and motivations into more proactive ones. Whatever his occupation, he'll no doubt put himself on the case, and ruthlessly and actively pursue the kidnapper in any possible scenario you can think up.

Going back to where his own kidnapping took place could set off several things: a traumatic reliving of the past, which gives him both sympathy and drive for the recently kidnapped child; and the return of his captor, who again kidnaps him (per our middle story spark). Presumably but not necessarily, this person is also the one who kidnapped the child and is currently holding him in the same place as the main character.

Cohesive External Plot Conflicts:

Internal character conflict and plot conflict will build throughout the final two sections of the book to include other conflicts that stem from the story sparks. The middle spark set off a new conflict—the main character is kidnapped as an adult (as we said, this could be by the same kidnapper as when he was a child, the same kidnapper who took the child in the current situation, both, or neither).

The plot conflict suggested is that the main character believes he knows who the kidnapper is, but he may rebel against the idea either because he doesn't have enough facts or because he knows this person and trusts him. Figuring out the identity of the kidnapper will give him the (hopefully shocking!) answers he needs. And possibly the means to escape and/or rescue the eight-year-old.

End Story Spark:

Your main character recognizes his captor ... and suddenly nothing—and everything—makes sense.

Cohesive Character Internal Conflicts:

While reassuring the child held captive with him, bonding with him, the character may be experiencing a newfound sense of control in

the situation—a control he didn't have as a child. He's now in the position of being the therapist he needed all those years after he was rescued—he alone can help this child! Whether or not the control lasts or comes in spurts depending on what the kidnapper does, the main character is working through his past trauma by being proactive in whatever scenarios you come up with for him to deal with.

Cohesive Evolving Goals and Motivations:

The only way for the main character to succeed is to rise above his fears. This drive produces organic goals and motivations. Rescuing the eight-year-old child is the main character's most important goal. He's going to save this child—or die trying.

In later portions of the book, if he believes this kidnapper is the same one who held him captive, his evolving goals and motivations will include discovering who this person is and going after him—whether that means escaping or setting some sort of trap.

We talked about downtime and the black moment in Layer II. Keep in mind that this is the place you'll be including both. The main character may put his all into an escape attempt, only to have it fail. Perhaps his failure almost brings about the death of himself or the child he's trying to rescue. This is his downtime—he's lost all hope. But then the black moment—the worst thing that could possibly happen—arrives, and the showdown begins. He'll find a way to win, whatever the cost, and this time nothing can stop him ... although the villain will definitely give him a challenge.

Cohesive External Plot Conflict Resolutions:

With the middle and end story sparks, finding the means to save the child will be pivotal, along with determining how the identity of the kidnapper can help or hinder the rescue.

Remember, this is the very best place to put in a wonderful twist. You could give the main character a trusted ally who's come into the story multiple times. You've set this ally up as someone the main character trusts implicitly—leading the reader to do the same. Now is the time to unveil the truth: How foolish to have trusted this madman who'd seemed so normal before. If the twist is set up

properly, the reader will remember the times he had doubts, or when the evidence of just this was right before his eyes, yet he never saw it any more than the main character did.

Resolutions come in logical sequence as the main character battles the ally, saves the child, and, of course, resolves his own internal conflicts.

Cohesion of elements reigns throughout this Story Plan Checklist and should produce a story that will blow your reader away.

Editing and Polishing Exercises

In the following six editing and polishing exercises, I've taken passages from my novel *Dead Drop* and rewritten them with all the classic blunders of lazy, passive, and (perhaps amusingly) poor writing. Below each exercise, you'll find the published version. Review Layer III in the main book to refresh yourself on tips, then edit and polish the paragraphs to follow.

Good luck!

EXERCISE 1

She nodded, joining her fists in front of her mouth and wishing Daniel's brother Linc was here with her. She had married him shortly after Daniel had disappeared, as, at the time, the reasons to do so had all made sense. Linc was always sensible. Linc always knew just what to do in a crisis. She had relied heavily on his strength, although they had not lived together in a way that was typical of other married couples. She wondered what she would do if she eventually found out that this organization was not a white hat one. She wondered why else they would presume to take away everything a recruit knew and cared about.

She nodded, joining her fists in front of her mouth, wishing Daniel's brother Linc was here. She'd married him shortly after Daniel's disappearance, for reasons that had all made sense at the time. Linc was always sensible, always knew what to do in a crisis. She'd relied on his strength, though she hadn't lived together with him in a way typical of other married couples.

What if this organization isn't a white hat one? Why else would they presume to take away everything a recruit knows and cares about?

EXERCISE 2

Surprising Perry, her petite, lovely mother smiled, raising one dark, elegant eyebrow. "I could not tell you that if I did know, Parris. But I can say emphatically that it is risky to interfere with such an organization."

Perry demanded out loud whether her mother was blatantly implying that she should just stand by and let this organization that may or may not be evil steal her son from her, the way they had the man she loved twenty five years and to this very day.

Her mother's shrewd instincts picked up on what Perry hadn't intended to admit out loud. Somehow her mother realized that she still loved Daniel as much as she ever had all those years ago. She lifted Perry's hand and held it comfortably in her lap. She pointed out that Perry didn't know for certain that Daniel had been stolen by the organization attempting to recruit Danny now. That, from all appearances, Daniel Sands had died in a freak car accident. His blood was found at the scene. Despite this coincidence, there was no clear evidence to disclaim that theory. She then squeezed Perry's hand and told her the very thing she did not want to hear: That she could not go on living in denial. Such a state could never be considered healthy.

Surprising Perry, her mother smiled, raising one dark, elegant eyebrow. "I couldn't tell you if I did know, Parris. But I can say emphatically that it's risky to interfere with such an organization."

"Are you saying I should just stand by and let them steal my son from me, the way they did the man I love?"

Her mother's shrewd instincts picked up on what Perry hadn't intended to admit out loud—that she still loved Daniel as much as she ever had. She lifted Perry's hand and held it in her lap. "Sweetheart, you don't know that Daniel was 'stolen' by

them. From all appearances, he died in a freak car accident. His blood was found at the scene. Despite this coincidence, there's no evidence to disclaim that theory. You can't go on living in denial, Parris. It's simply not healthy."

EXERCISE 3

During the agonizingly slow passage of hours in which Roan knew that Perry was nearby, close enough for him to touch, he was watching her. Watching her had been utter torment for him. The past was most certainly gone, gone like a tumbleweed in the wind. So why could he not get the bittersweet memories out of his too-full head now? He recalled almost too sharply the softness of her peach-colored, fragrant skin; how his rough cheek felt cradled against her smooth forehead, her silken hair, through the mocking hours of the dark night—a blessed dream world with her sweet body completely enveloped in his strong, loving arms. How they had slept so tangled up with each other, separating them would have divided them body and soul. They were yin and yang. They were male and perfect female. They were devil and angel, his mind mocked as cruelly as a sword thrust ruthlessly through his heart.

The slow passage of hours, knowing Perry was nearby—watching her—had been utter torment for him. The past was gone. So why couldn't he get the memories out of his head now? He recalled almost too sharply the softness of her skin. How his rough cheek felt cradled against her peach-soft forehead, her silken hair, through the hours of the night. A blessed dream world with her completely enveloped in his arms. How they'd slept so tangled up with each other. Yin and yang. Male and perfect female. *Devil and angel.*

EXERCISE 4

Roan shrugged uncaringly. "When I'm, like, *dead* and buried six feet under, dude, I ain't gonna *be* concerned with no half-assed *escape*."

"Dude, ya've served too long and too loyal for our head honchos to *cancel* ya with a red-hot bullet, like ya *dissed* us, man. That rumor ... yeah, dude, ya know the one ... the one that keeps newborn baby recruits believin' there *is* no retirement in here without a red-hot bullet. But you, man, *ya* know better. McKee and I've never agreed on what to do 'bout you, dude, any more than I ever agreed with what Jameson did when he brought ya in against yer will."

"Does McKee, like, *know* ya didn't agree with my recruitment, dude?" Roan asked wryly.

"Yeah, man, but it was *outta* her hands then, just like it was yours truly's. It's too late to turn back now, dude. Ya know we can't simply *let ya go*. And, like, sendin' ya off to retirement ... well, that kinda thing, dude, it causes problems for both you and yours truly."

Roan shrugged. "When I'm dead, I won't be concerned with escape."

"You've served too long and too loyally for us to cancel you with a bullet, Roan. That rumor keeps young recruits believing there *is* no retirement in here without a bullet, but you know better. McKee and I have never agreed on what to do about you, any more than I ever agreed with what Jameson did when he brought you in against your will."

"Does McKee know you didn't agree with my recruitment?" Roan asked wryly.

"Yes, but it was out of her hands then, just like it was out of mine. It's too late to turn back now. You know we can't simply let you go, Roan, and sending you off to retirement ... causes problems for both you and me."

EXERCISE 5

It went against her every instinct to agree, but, as soon as she did, he slid out of the car and disappeared into the woods surrounding the park while she questioned what she'd done and whether all this was worth the chance of having a not-whole Daniel back; of giving her son the father he still wanted and needed desperately. She knew their lives wouldn't be the same, wouldn't be the "happily ever after" life she'd imagined as a young girl, and Roan might never even love her, might not stay with her or become a father to Danny, and so her grief might never end—yet she had to risk it; if there was any chance at all for Roan to be free, she had to save him.

It went against her every instinct to agree. As soon as she did, he slid out of the car and disappeared into the woods surrounding the park.

What had she done? Was all this worth the chance of having a not-whole Daniel back? Of giving her son the father he still wanted and needed desperately? She knew their lives wouldn't be the same, wouldn't be the "happily ever after" life she'd imagined as a young girl. Roan might never even love her, might not stay with her or become a father to Danny. Her grief might never end. Yet she had to risk it. If there was any chance at all for Roan to be free, she had to save him.

EXERCISE 6

Perry went to hide behind the structure she had emerged from a moment earlier. She fully expected it when Roan came bursting after her. She reached for the ski mask she was wearing.

Roan began swearing when she pulled it off, but she turned his attention to the body on the ground by pointing to it. The first time she had seen it, she had gagged. The man was the same height and weight as Roan was, with the same hair color and skin tone he had. If not for how badly damaged this body was, she might have thought he was a twin of Roan's.

Unfortunately, Samuel Crawford had told her more than she had wanted to know about the carefully preserved body of an operative who had recently been killed in the line of duty. An explosion had left him nearly in pieces. Fingerprints could not be matched to the body. Crawford had said a colleague of his would be performing the autopsy and would, at that time, plant samples from Roan's own body on the decoy, along with the transponder he had had implanted in him when he was first inducted. This transponder apparently had a unique signature that his superiors would use to identify it as belonging to Roan. How Samuel had managed to "fix" the transponder so his superiors would recognize its signal as Roan's own signature, she could not even begin to guess.

Perry darted behind the structure she'd emerged from a moment earlier. She fully expected it when Roan burst after her. She reached for the ski mask she wore.

Roan swore when she pulled it off, but she pointed to the body on the ground. The first time she'd seen it, she'd gagged. The man was the same height and weight as Roan, with the same hair color and skin tone. If not for how badly damaged this body was, he might have been Roan's twin.

Unfortunately, Samuel Crawford had told her more than she'd wanted to know about the carefully preserved body of an

operative who'd recently been killed in the line of duty. An explosion had left him nearly in pieces. No fingerprints could be matched to the body. Crawford had said a colleague of his would be performing the autopsy and would plant samples from Roan's own body on the decoy, along with his unique-signature, implanted transponder. How they'd fix the transponder, she didn't know.

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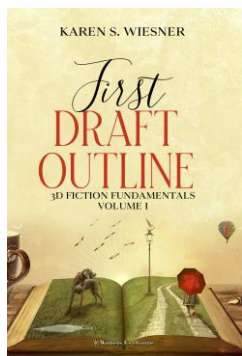
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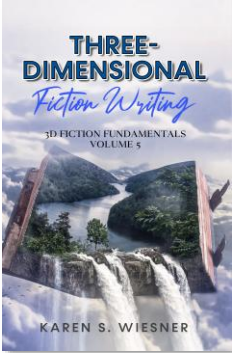
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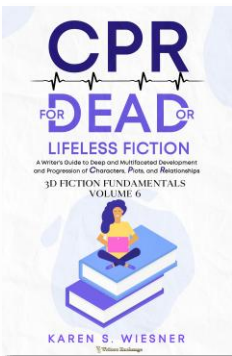
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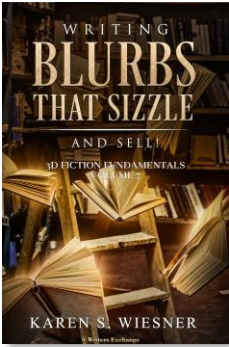
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About the Author

In addition to having been a popular writing reference instructor and writer, professional blurbologist and freelance editor, Karen s. Wiesner is the accomplished author of 156 titles published, which have been nominated/won for over a hundred and thirty awards. The books Karen has edited have won multiple awards, and she's judged numerous writing contests.

Her nonfiction has included more than a half-dozen writing reference manuals that teach writers story crafting techniques as well specific facets of the book industry, such as author promotional techniques and the ins-and-outs of electronic publishing.

Karen is the author of sixteen fiction series which cover such genres as women's fiction, romance, mystery/police procedural/cozy, suspense/thriller, paranormal/supernatural, futuristic, fantasy, science fiction, gothic, inspirational/Christian, thriller, horror, chick-lit, and action/adventure. She also writes children's books and poetry. Karen will begin illustrating children's books starting in 2025.

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