

CPR



FOR DEAD OR

LIFELESS FICTION

A Writer's Guide to Deep and Multifaceted Development
and Progression of **C**haracters, **P**lots, and **R**elationships

3D FICTION FUNDAMENTALS
VOLUME 6



KAREN S. WIESNER

 Writers Exchange

3D Fiction Fundamentals Collection, Volume 2:

C P R

for Dead or Lifeless Fiction

by Karen S. Wiesner

A Writer's Guide to Deep and Multifaceted Development and
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3D Fiction Fundamentals Collection, Volume 6: *CPR for Dead or Lifeless Fiction* {A Writer's Guide to Deep and Multifaceted Development and Progression of Characters, Plots, and Relationships}

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Divergent, Book 1: Divergent Trilogy by Veronica Roth

CPR FOR DEAD OR LIFELESS FICTION

Bonus Companion Booklet

Author's Note

About the Author

If you want to read more about books by this author, they are listed on the following pages...

3D Fiction Fundamentals

2-in-1 Romance Books

Adventures in Amethyst Series

Angelfire Series

Arrow of Time Chronicles

Bloodmoon Cove Spirits Series

Denim Blues Mysteries

Falcon's Bend Series with Chris Spindler

Family Heirlooms Series

Friendship Heirlooms Series (Family Heirlooms spin off)

Gypsy Road Series

Incognito Series

Peaceful Pilgrims Series

Woodcutter's Grim Series

Wounded Warriors Series

Single Titles

DEDICATION

In the process of creating this book, several people we're invaluable: Linda Derkez, first reader, who always shows me how to rein it in so the material can be most helpful to those who read it and who provided her insights while in the midst of what had to be the busiest time of her life; Christine Spindler and Margaret L. Carter, critique partners and extraordinary authors in their own rights who provided very different, indispensable advice and critical evaluations.



Character **P**lot **R**elationship

Developmental

Signs of Life

Animated

Evidence of functionality, breathing, heartbeat, the spark of life.

Living

Not simply existing and going through the motions but possessing fully developed external and internal conflicts.

Interacting

Dynamic, realistic, and believable relationships.

Vitality and Voice

Three-dimensional character attributes.

Engaged

Definable objective and purpose of being along with goals and motivations.

INTRODUCTION

Arrested Development

*"I misjudged you. You're not a moron. You're only a case of arrested development."
~Harvey to Cohn in The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway*

In the field of medicine and psychology, the term "arrested development" means a premature stoppage of physical or psychological development, or the cessation of one or more phases of the developmental process resulting in a lack of completion that may produce potential anomalies. Arrested development can be applied to many situations, including writing. It's something that happens often in fiction with the three core elements of every story--Characters, Plots, and Relationships (CPR)--becoming arrested in their development.

We live in a publishing era that can easily be viewed with growing concern given that the absolute requirement of developing CPR in a story is being sorely neglected in books made available for purchase. In the ideal, a reader wants to immerse himself in a glorious story that pulls him into a fictional world so realistic and populated with three-dimensional characters, plots, and relationships he never wants to leave. He's paid for that, after all, so why shouldn't he get it? Instead, he's saddled with a story that starts bad and only seems to be getting worse. Why would anyone keep reading? The author obviously didn't care to do it right nor did the editor, if there ever was one involved. Despite the time and money invested in this endeavor, it's just easier to walk away. Whether subpar writing is done out of laziness, a lack of skill in crafting, or simple ignorance, having a reader drop a bad book and never come back to it (or to the creator) is the last thing an author should want or allow.

USING CPR {DEVELOPMENT} ON DEAD OR LIFELESS FICTION

Deep, multifaceted development of characters, plots, and relationships can only be achieved through three-dimensional writing, something I've written in-depth about in my reference *Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing*. All of those concepts are crucial to character, plot, and relationship (which I'll call CPR often from this point on) development and we'll go over them briefly in this book as well.

What makes a person alive? According to *WebMD*, the three organs that are so crucial to life that you'll die if they stop working are the lungs (breath), heart (blood and oxygen), and brain (functionality). The three work together and without them (or life support), a person is either comatose or deceased.

I would add a fourth component that may not bring around true death to live without: A person needs a soul to *live* and do more than simply *exist*--and that means

there's an objective or purpose in being. Arguably, a lack of soul can steal all the joy out of living and/or never provide the "spark" that exemplifies life.

If you noticed the CPR Signs of Life Acronym Chart I included at the beginning of this book, we can certainly say that it's possible to see the animation in a character that provides evidence of functionality, breathing, heartbeat, and the spark of life. To truly be living, characters aren't simply existing and going through the motions. They possess fully developed external and internal conflicts. They're interacting in dynamic, realistic, and believable relationships. They have three-dimensional character attributes that give them both vitality and voice. Finally, they're engaged in what makes life worthwhile with definable goals and motivations. I also created a poster of this that you'll find on the last page of this book. You can print or cut it out and put it next to your work space for ease of reference.

Characters, plots, and relationships need to be breathing, blood and oxygen flowing through their veins in order to function, or they're in a vegetative state or just plain dead. The soul of the character is what turns an ordinary paper doll into a vibrant, memorable personality.

In fiction, the potential for zombies is only too common, and I don't simply mean zombie *characters*. *Plots* and *relationships* can be just as zombie-like. Who wants to read about something that's alive (i.e., not dead) but not really living either? Even in books about zombies, it's the heart-beating, breathing, functional characters, plots, and relationships that make the story come to life. (By the way, if your zombie is living--as in *iZombie* style--and not simply alive, it's not a true zombie by definition.) As we said, a soul--providing unforgettable character traits, conflicts, and interactions with a very definite "life spark" that makes a reader care and immerse himself in a story--is imperative to make the characters, plots, and relationships compelling.

The CPR development technique we'll talk about all through this reference is a two-step process.

1) **Establishing**: Foundation begins in plotting and planting the seeds of development for the CPR process right from the very first scene in a book. You wouldn't just plunk down a plant you want to flourish in an area where it won't get sun, rain, or the nutrients it needs to survive, would you? Plotting and planting are all about properly setting *up* before setting *out*, anchoring and orienting readers before leading them with purpose through your story landscape. That's something that needs to be done in every single scene of a book with the basic grasp of setup. The longer it takes for a reader to figure out where he is and what he's doing there, the less chance he'll engage with the story and agree to go along for the journey.

2) **Progressing**: The one thing a story can't and should never be is *static*. Development isn't something that stops with the foundational introduction or establishment of threads. Development keeps happening throughout a story. Every single scene that follows the first must show a strong purpose in developing, revealing

and advancing characters, plots and relationships in a wide variety of facets. Progress must be made to push past the point of plotting and planting seeds to cultivating the core element "blooms" that pop up into the landscape in every scene. The only way to achieve three-dimensional development of characters, plots, and relationships is to actively take each opportunity to establish and advance the elements that--if properly sketched--should appear in an organic way along the path to telling the story.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of *CPR for Dead or Lifeless Fiction: A Writer's Guide to Deep and Multifaceted Development and Progression of Characters, Plots, and Relationships* is to show writers in any stage of their career, whether unpublished or published with a single work-in-progress or a dozen under their belts, the distinctive core elements of a story and how to build three-dimensional aspects into them through all stages in the writing process. As you saw in the table of contents, this book is broken down into an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion followed by an appendix. Below is a more detailed overview of what each chapter will cover:

Chapter One includes ten telltale ways to spot dead or lifeless characters, plots, and relationships. While analyzing evidence of whether a character is dead or lifeless may seem obvious on the surface, getting down deep may call many things into question, so here you'll see ways of identifying barren or apathetic elements.

Chapter Two goes over three-dimensional writing. These concepts are absolutely crucial for CPR development, requiring that we cover the basics here. We'll also discuss three types of scenes--namely opening, resolution, and bridge--that make up a well-developed story. This chapter has a crash course overview of three-dimensional writing.

Chapters Three through Five explore how to develop deep and multifaceted, three-dimensional characters, plots, and relationships and progress them steadily throughout a story. The Three-dimensional CPR Development sketch worksheets provided in each will ensure that your character, plot, and relationship development covers all dimensions.

Chapter Six offers from-the-ground-up techniques for ensuring your story has the required CPR development and steady progression. We'll cover the simplest approach to evaluation of CPR development in a modified form of a back cover blurb with a Heart of the Story Blurbs Worksheet. If more help is needed, I'll provide a Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart that gets down to the scene-by-scene nuts and bolts of CPR development in a story. By analyzing in this manner, you'll see for yourself how three-dimensional CPR development is revealed, established, developed, advanced, and resolved scene by scene, and the chart contained in this section will help you pinpoint down to the exact scene where lack of CPR development and progress may hinder your story.

Chapter Seven goes over why some form of pre-writing is necessary to ensure proper development and steady progress. We'll also talk about writing in stages to avoid the missed opportunities for CPR development that are so prevalent in writing styles that avoid any sort of pre-writing before the writing actually begins.

The **Conclusion** provides a view of the current and future state of the publishing industry as well as a sum up of what we've learned about the vital role development and advancement play in producing deep and multifaceted characters, plots, and relationships.

The **Appendix** contains all the materials we've used throughout the chapters so you can work your way through the CPR developmental process with blank worksheets and charts.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Virginia Woolf said, "As for my next book, I am going to hold myself from writing it till I have it impending in me: grown heavy in my mind like a ripe pear; pendant, gravid, asking to be cut or it will fall." This quote precisely describes how a story should grow in the author's mind until it absolutely *has* to be written. The best case scenario is always, always, always to start a story only *after* you have a lot of story ideas, vivid characters, settings, plots, and relationships, etc. to work with.

A writer starts with a solid story that's ready to drop into his hands like ripe fruit. While you can do the same for an idea that's not ready, it'll be a *lot* harder. In fact, it might take the author decades to get an unripe story off the ground. In Chapter Seven, we'll talk about methods to get a story to the point of "ripeness" and what to do when you have a ton of ideas vying to be worked on at the same time. I don't recommend undertaking the CPR development technique or any other until you have a story that's ready to be developed, so keep that in mind.

A couple of notes before we get started: Throughout this book, for consistency, I'll refer to *characters* in the female point of view (hereafter referred to as POV). To offer distinction, I'll refer to *readers and writers* in the male POV. Clearly, characters, readers and writers can be of either sex and this gets a bit awkward in some specific situations, but, to prevent an erratic jump from one to the other, I've done it this way all throughout this manual.

One other thing to take notice of is that a great number of the examples used throughout this book are from movies or even videogames. The reason for this is because those mediums are so much more visual and also because the sad fact is that there are more movie-goers and gamers than readers these days. Safe to say, the fiction in movies and games may be better known than that in books, although those reading this reference probably do plentiful reading. Ultimately, all the examples are fiction, so I saw no reason not to use some from all mediums.

Additionally, I'll note upfront that I believe a series name is part of its branding (see my book *Writing the Standalone Series*). Not only should the series title be included everywhere the name of a book is spoken or written about, but the word "series" or "trilogy" should be *capitalized* in order to further solidify the branding. In other words, I never refer to my series Family Heirlooms as simply that. Always, I refer to it as the "Family Heirlooms Series" because that's the full title and most effective way to brand it to my readers. That's why you'll see every series mentioned in this book with the word "series" or "trilogy" capitalized, even it's not the way publishers or distributors normally do it.

One final note of clarification: Keep in mind that you don't have to perform every step in this or any other writing method. Authors are all different, we all think and perform differently, and ultimately it makes no sense to do more work than you need to. The goal for each writer should be to find what works for *you* personally, as an individual. Most of the time that means finding what *doesn't* work first. My motto is, utilize what works for you; discard or revise the rest to fit you personally. The point of sketches, worksheets, charts, and checklists is to give help in pinpointing problem areas. If you're not having a problem in a certain area, go ahead and skip the in-depth processing.

In my writing methods, in particular, my goal is to make sure authors have everything needed to learn to write instinctively. What I mean by that is that through laborious amounts of practice, usually over the course of several years, your brain begins to grasp the basics of crafting characters, plots, and relationships, and even some of the harder concepts of writing, like writing these elements three-dimensionally. This means you can fill out fewer worksheets before you outline a story, as in, you may not have to do endless character or plot sketches, etc. You may instinctively inject just the right amount of dimension that has definite purpose beyond simply conveying information or you know exactly where tension is needed.

After having more than 130 books published, I write instinctively, so my story crafting (including building three-dimensional CPR development into every scene) is done in the course of outlining each and every book I write. Those things come automatically, without the need for filling out worksheets. If you don't feel like some or any of this is instinctive for you, go through the steps as I've set them down. Every author's endgame is and should be instinctive writing.

GETTING STARTED

If your characters, plots, and relationships that make up each scene in your story are truly three-dimensional and properly developed and advanced, your book will be so vivid, readers will be haunted by the unforgettable, vibrant world conveyed through your words even after they finish reading. My hope is that *CPR for Dead or Lifeless*

Fiction gives you a solid plan of action from start to finish through in-depth discussions and examples with leave-no-stone-unturned aids, and a layering process that covers all the bases, allowing you to take the CPR development technique into your own writing.

CHAPTER ONE

The Basics of CPR Development

"Confirming and declaring that someone is dead is a careful process. Check for a pulse, pupil response, and heart sounds. If a patient is in a coma, check for signs of brain death, including irreversible brain and brainstem damage, an inability to breathe on their own, and, again, a lack of pupil response. An EEG, a test that measures electrical activity in the brain, will flatline when all functions in the heart and brain stop." ~"Exactly How a Doctor Knows That Someone is Dead" by Sara Coughlin on the Refinery29 company website

In real life, you can get to know some people easily. With others, it may take you years and an incredible amount of effort to truly get to know them and understand who they are. Characters are just the same. Some come to life with the first story spark and flesh themselves out continuously throughout all the stages of writing. Other characters refuse to come out of hiding so easily. In some ways, these characters are hiding from the writer, so it becomes that much harder for the writer to get to know them and bring them to life. These characters have barriers the author absolutely must break through in order to bring them to life.

A lot of authors ask, *How do I know whether my characters are coming to life?* The assumption is that, if a character is walking, talking, and moving through each scene in the book, she must be coming to life. Real, living characters and merely lifelike characters are two completely different things, especially in this age, when it's so easy to manipulate images and facts. Authors can be holding those characters like lifeless puppets, thrusting them through the story when there's no life in them. Real, living characters are what you're striving for because only these characters allow the readers to understand what lies behind the face presented within the story. Readers will see personality, deep issues and conflicts, goals and motivations, and amazingly natural growth and evolution. Lifelike characters are merely cardboard, and most readers will see right through the careful façade you constructed because there's clearly nothing behind it--no personality, no growth, no true internal conflicts, response to external conflict, or deeply personal goals and motivations as a result of the problems.

If you don't have to ask whether your characters are coming to life, it's probably because your story is reeling through your mind in full color. As a writer, you should wake up with your characters in the morning and go to bed with them at night. In any given situation, you should know exactly what they'd be thinking and saying and doing. You see them growing and developing as they work through their conflicts and relationships, and you have a solid idea about what motivates them in any situation. It

goes without saying in this best of all scenarios that your characters, their conflicts and relationships are living and breathing *through* you. If your critique partners, publisher, agent, and readers feel the same way, consider yourself blessed.

It's harder to define when--and especially why--some characters don't come to life. However, in most instances, the characters, plots, or relationships are lifeless because the author hasn't developed them three-dimensionally enough to allow them to live and breathe. You as the writer need to create solid CPR development throughout the story. But keep in mind that both author and character need to share control of development. An author should never be so controlling that the character is too stifled by rigidity to come to life nor can an author allow the character to run amok in a story in ways that simply don't fit. The author should give his character enough freedom to be able to emerge and develop naturally and enough discipline to keep the story logical and cohesive.

Dead CPR development sounds as easy to spot as a dead body in real life. See the quote at the beginning of this chapter for the medical process of determining such a state. Dead doesn't move, doesn't so much as twitch, groan, or reach for help, especially the longer it's been lying around. There's nothing there. No breath, no pulse, no warmth, conscience or *consciousness*, let alone activity or movement that might imply something once existed, walked, and talked at any time previously. If nothing else, the analysis of your own story's core elements in the search to locate signs of life should point to either a definitive extreme in the positive or the negative or something in-between. Unfortunately, it's not always so cut and dried in telling whether or not our characters are dead or lifeless.

In some instances where this fact was (unbelievably and yet it happens) ignored, the dead elements may reek so badly, there's no question about whether you're in the presence of something dead or lifeless. Few readers will get past the first paragraph. No one wants to get near it, not even those who claim to love and care about you but are begging off desperately concerning this story. On one hand, it's a good thing if it's this obvious. At least you know, right? Logic says that, if you realize it, you can do something about it.

In other cases, only one or two of the core elements are actually dead. The living elements are "carrying around" the other one or two. (If that's not a vivid image, I don't know what is.) In theory, we should be able to recognize dead development when it's paired with something living. In that situation, can you point out what you're enjoying and connecting with? Those are the living parts. Are other potentially specific things unfocused, surreal, and maybe even unbelievable, without a pulse, a sign of life, or the proper foundation to begin building on? Those are dead or lifeless.

Easy peasy? Sigh. Not so much.

It should be simple to spot these conditions in our characters, plots, and relationships, I know, but it's unfortunately anything but. I feel your pain in identifying

dead or lifeless CPR elements because it's a question that been with me from the very first book I wrote. With the need to identify dead or lifeless CPR development in mind, let's go over some general ways that should pinpoint whether any aspect is dead or merely lifeless. In the chapters that follow, identification will allow us to give the lacking areas either the kiss of life or a jolt of electricity.

TEN WAYS TO SPOT DEAD OR LIFELESS CHARACTERS, PLOTS, AND RELATIONSHIPS

Poking and prodding your characters, plots, and relationships in all the compass points with sketches should exhibit some reaction one way or the other. When you start asking questions about all of these things, getting absolutely no response--beyond a blank, cadaverous stare--is clear enough. Yup, dead. Time of death? The moment of execution. (Forgive the really bad pun.)

Merely lifeless core elements, however, may show a few signs of life and that's what makes lethargy in development so hard to spot. As we said earlier, conceivably, some evidence of development can allow those areas that are at least functional to carry around the dead elements. In these cases where the book is already published and the functional elements are hoisting the dead ones in a sack over the shoulder, readers may even overlook your failure because the solid development of those one or two core elements gives the reader part of what he's seeking.

The identification of partial necrosis is almost always deeply startling to readers. There are times when I'm reading a story I'm enjoying but not in an overwhelmed, obsessive way that I'll suddenly visualize the author's hand holding the character as if she's a puppet or a dead body, forcing a certain situation on the poor thing. That hand will move the character around in response to action, even thrusting another story puppet/dead body up against her in a contrived effort to make something happen between the two that's equally artificial, awkward, and not a little disturbing.

One aspect or another in a story like this is *undeveloped* or *underdeveloped* and, in the course of reading, I'll usually, eventually, figure out what's lacking. Maybe the main or secondary characters have no obvious signs of life, nothing that makes them unique, no legitimate personality, personal goals or motivations. A main character's conflicts as they're portrayed may not convince me she truly cares about them, has an intensely personal investment in them, or that they're cohesive with what's been set up as who this person is and what's she's all about in other aspects.

Whether the conflicts are internal or external, the story may not feel like it's actually *hers*. Events are randomly happening to her, and there's no personal connection to them. She's not authentically motivated to act in the face of what's happening to her. It may be easier for her to run away--and that goal at least may feel legit. When she's

compelled to react, jerky clunkiness may be the result, more robotic than flesh and blood.

Also, her relationships might not seem quite realistic and deeply planted, growing enough to feel warm and realistic. Maybe she's going through the motions with these people who are part of her life, but even those most intimate ones don't go in-depth enough to spark emotion in me, as the reader. In the worst case scenario, I've read romance stories where relationships are integral to the genre yet those attachments had little or no depth, dimension, desire, or connection between two people who were supposed to be falling in love and making romantic, reading hearts swoon. If a romance story doesn't include strong, profoundly emotional relationships, it's failed on the most elementary level.

I've also read books and even series--some of them that were actually published--where the author has deigned to give a main character a first name, neglected the last, and sometimes doesn't bother with physical descriptions or details about the past nor "drive" for the future (we'll talk more about the importance of all these things in this and later chapters) that would fully flesh out the character. Plots and conflicts (and the corresponding, crucial goals and motivations) are almost always spur of the moment, created scene by scene, no setup, no buildup, no curiosity, and certainly no tension. The relationships feel cold, stilted, off-focus, frequently with secondary characters that serve no other purpose in the story beyond being soundboards for the main character or, worse, merely bulking up the word count. Even if a minor effort has been made to plant foundational seeds of character, plot, and relationship, so often those seeds aren't developed and advanced properly or at all throughout the subsequent scenes in the book. They're buried so deep, it's not possible for them to come out to see the light of day and flourish.

This lack of development and progress in character, plot, and relationship is something that can be seen throughout the entire book and sometimes the whole of a series. James Scott Bell advises asking yourself, "Who cares?" and "What's the purpose?" to ensure validity and clarification of the reason for each scene even existing. I'd add for clarification that characters, plots, and relationships *all* need to have a reason for existing. If readers are never engaged on even one count of core elements, what's the purpose of the book existing and, honestly, who cares if it gets read? If there isn't passion burning inside all three of the core elements, bursting out so the story *has* to be told, there is quite literally no point to starting, continuing or finishing. For anyone.

Development of all three elements is crucial and progression has to be evident from one scene to the next. If something is actually happening in a story with all three of the CPR elements, the reader will want to stick around to find out more--to find out *everything*, with a sense of avid anticipation and participation rather than frustration and disengagement, uncertainty, and dissatisfaction.

Off the top of my head, I can think of two current bestselling authors writing series focused on main characters in white collar fields. In both series, the stories are plot-*laden* (as opposed to merely heavy). These authors are known for action-packed stories, and they deserve kudos for providing that every single time. However, in both cases, the series are almost completely character and relationship-development *deficient*. In either, beyond what the main character does for a living--with above-average intelligence--we learn almost nothing about him personally, about his current life beyond his work and the story quest, about his past and his future drive. All his internal conflicts and goals and motivations are plot-focused to the point where his own private needs and desires are rarely if ever considered or attended to. Relationships never feel well-grounded. They happen in the present--and they merely *happen*. We're given only sparse glimpses about what occurred between characters in the past and those glimpses are cold without strong, emotional connections, memories, or developments. Readers don't feel any encouragement about future developments with those relationships either. Personal attachments--temporary or otherwise--serve the plot. Period.

The sheer evidence of the insufficiency of character and relationship development lives in how neither author includes enough "downtimes" (a point in which the main character takes a rest from the action to reflect) within the extreme action sequences of the individual stories. The main character in both series is almost constantly running from or toward something. He doesn't sit down and ruminate on his life, let alone take that time to cultivate strong connections and emotional attachments with the people running around with him. As a result, the consequences are muted, lacking both tension and intrigue, and certain exhaustion (*also for the reader?*) may be the only end-game in sight. We'll talk more about the importance of having downtimes in a story in Chapter Four.

Whenever I read these series which are admittedly enjoyable (though ultimately disappointing because of all the reasons I mentioned above), I'm forced to imagine the author holding a doll of his very popular series character and slam-driving that poor, defenseless thing through one breath-stealing action sequence after the other without a single break in the arduous trek each book goes through. Nothing personal breaks up these ruthless tasks the character is given back-to-back in every story.

But, not only are the creators forcing the characters through the motions, the authors aren't going beyond those motions themselves--and that's the biggest travesty of un-/underdevelopment of core elements. In both cases, the main character isn't dead but he's almost certainly lifeless. Unfortunately for demanding readers who want three-dimensional core elements, the intrigue here is with plots (and--in a stretch--settings, which is a component of character development) almost exclusively. I consider these particular characters little more than zombies. Yes, there is a semblance of life. The POV character is actually moving around, going through the motions, but he isn't

actively living, breathing, or functioning beyond basic instinct in direct response to the plot, which he serves. With a little more effort, these authors could actually breathe life into all CPR elements of these series stories and make them wonderful and memorable beyond the exciting plots.

Fix this axiom in your mind: Character reveals plot and relationships, just as plot and relationships reveal character, and relationships reveal character and plot. This trinity is vital to the cohesiveness of your stories. They work together to unearth, connect, and layer a story. The strongest stories are the ones in which every part of the story--the characters' role, physical descriptions, personalities, strengths and weaknesses, relationships, skills, conflicts, goals and motivation, and even settings--becomes cohesive and fits together organically. We've all read books in which the key aspects didn't quite merge naturally. Maybe we didn't notice a specific issue, but we knew something was off, lacked logic, or didn't quite fit with the rest of the story, and the imbalance frustrated us. There's a chance you never finished reading those books. The ones that you absolutely cannot put down and that stay with you every minute of the time you're reading them and for years afterward are the ones in which every aspect is so intricately connected that separating the threads of CPR development is difficult, even impossible.

Cohesion needs to start with the first spontaneous spark of a story in your head. If a story doesn't work, it could very well be because your character, plot, and relationship elements aren't blending naturally. Story elements need to be cohesive and progressive, layering and building up and bringing together all aspects within the book until the resolution. In Chapters Three through Five, we'll go in-depth in our quest for providing the foundation that reveals, develops, advances, and concludes these core story elements. If you're not sure whether your core elements are truly cohesive, my book titled *Cohesive Story Building* explores this theme and everything you need to know about story cohesion is there.

In the introduction, we talked about the two-step process for CPR development, including:

- 1) **Establishing**: Setup is so crucial for proper CPR development. Until something is introduced, it can't be advanced, certainly not because the writer abruptly realized the story needed intrigue and revitalization and thinks a random injection will do the trick. Including a progression of a story element can't be done arbitrarily or haphazardly without the initial introduction coming first because anything that doesn't have the proper establishment can only be described as indiscriminate tacking on that creates an odd appendage instead of solid story crafting.

- 2) **Progressing**: Plant the seeds of CPR development early, develop and push them forward steadily, cohesively, and logically. If you neglect to establish a development in advance, always go back and provide the necessary introduction where it makes the most sense for it to be revealed. Also, one of the reasons I advise writing in stages

(Chapter Seven) is for just this reason: So you can catch each and every new opportunity, allowing CPR development to unfurl consistently through a story in a natural way. If each story goes through multiple stages of production, every stage gives you the chance to spot any missed opportunities for revelation, growth, and development.

This two-step process is all about properly setting *up* before setting *out*, anchoring and orienting readers before leading them with purpose through your story landscape (present dimension), looking back in careful increments to fill in realistic layers (past dimension), and always making certain there's a whisper of what's to come (future dimension).

There are telltale scenarios that may reveal if any aspect of your CPR development is outright dead or simply lifeless, in whole or in part with the "alive" part potentially carting around the "lifeless" or "dead" elements. Some of these may overlap but I want to call attention to the individual, basic scenarios because they're so often utilized as if they're legitimate methods in so-called CPR development--and they can't and shouldn't be.

1) The One Trick Pony Writer

My husband told me a story his dad related to him after he went to work as a manager at a factory. One of the workers kept doing everything wrong, and my husband's father tried multiple times to tell him the right way to accomplish the tasks. The worker was offended and claimed that he'd had 20 years of experience, so no one could tell him what was right and what was wrong. My husband's dad's response (that I can't imagine went over very well): "You don't have 20 years of experience! You have one year of experience repeated 20 times."

I'm fairly amazed at how often in my years of experience in this field I've seen authors who write the same characters, plots, and relationships over and over and over again from one single-title book to the next. Maybe the very first time he wrote this story, it was original and unique and all the story elements came to life. But, after that first time, it's guaranteed he was working with carbon-copy material, not actually crafting something new. Names, jobs, locations, and minor plot details may have been changed in later books along with minor alterations that kept the writer from facing the fact that this was his first story subtly revised. If this author went on to write 20 books, it was actually just one book written 20 times with a few detail swaps.

Just like every human being is unique, every story needs to have its own distinctive characters, plots, and relationships. Carbon copies, reproductions, character types, personas, tropes, caricatures, stereotypes, whatever, are *not* unique. They're a rehashing of something that already exists in reality or fiction. If you can substitute a name, a role, a job, or a plot from one book to the next and *easily* and not much else

about the story has changed, you're not writing a remarkable, singular story every time that has its own distinct CPR flavor. That situation sets the groundwork for dead or lifeless core elements.

If a friend, critique partner, or "fan" points out to you (or you realize all on your own, maybe after reading this), that all your stories feel eerily similar, fill out development worksheets for every new story you write, comparing them with previous stories to make sure you're not simply rescripting the same themes of character, plot, and relationship in subtly modified ways.

2) Un-, Under-, and Overdeveloped CPR Elements

Obviously, *undeveloped* and *underdeveloped* CPR elements are problems for the reasons we've already talked about thus far in this reference and we'll discuss in more depth in later chapters. Whenever it's convenient to reveal a factoid that's intriguing about a character, plot, or relationship that forces a development just because the need is there at that moment, un-, under-, or overdevelopment may take the place of *proper* CPR development. Each time I watch the first Harry Potter movie and Harry and Ron fall down into the Devil's Snare, I laugh when Ron says, "Lucky this plant was here, really." To me that's what coming up with on-the-fly CPR developments is like. What's needed is abruptly there without introduction, preface, or justification. *It's magic, Harry.*

Some potential scenarios include:

If a story is a romance (not erotica) and the couple went from *stranger* to *in love* in no time at all or after some moment of epiphany that the reader can't really connect with reality (maybe because it never happened?), about a dozen steps that are integral to proper romance relationship setup have been skipped over egregiously. (In Chapter Five, we'll talk about links in the chain of romance relationship development that can't be leapt over or neglected without the romance deflating like a soufflé.)

If characters and relationships need to have a certain conflict occur at some point, whatever's needed might suddenly appear exactly where it should go, out of a clear blue sky. I think it was author Sandra Brown who gave the advice to throw in a dead body whenever a story is lagging. Unfortunately, too many authors heeded that advice. Literally. But any story element, no matter how exciting, has to be properly set up in advance of development (you can't *advance* what hasn't been *introduced* in the first place) and cohesive with every other part of the story.

I've also seen a lot of stories where the plot is so poorly researched, the reader questions every aspect of it almost right from the start. The basic trust the reader started the story with diminishes whenever these on-the-fly plot developments show up in the nick of time without prior or proper setup. The distrust might start slowly, with the question in the reader's mind, *Is this really how it works?* The further the story

and plot go along (blissfully ignorant), the more that question becomes certainty that the author didn't do his homework. Nothing is taken at face-value from the first question rising and everything becomes active doubting after that.

Authors, if you don't know enough about any topic to write about it intelligently, even confidently, go back to the beginning. Do the necessary research so you feel like you understand what you're writing about as if you do this for a living--through your characters--and you do that job pretty darn well. If you're not willing to do the work of research, then lose that angle of the story. If you're not sure about even the smallest thing you're writing about, your waffling will show blatantly in the story as if it fell from the sky in neon pink and now glows garishly on a humongous billboard for all to see. You can't hide or cleverly fudge ignorance. You'll lose your readers (for that book and possibly all you've written) with sloppy laziness like that. Nothing can save a story at that point. It's not worth taking the risk in including any aspect that hasn't been adequately researched.

Strange as it sounds, *overdevelopment* of one or all of the core elements can actually be a sign of un- or underdevelopment, too. These may come in the form of characters who have been everywhere, done everything--and the reader learns of this impressive trophy wall of accomplishments randomly, sporadically and--most indicatively--*conveniently*. If someone needs to solve a problem, this character has the skills or a relationship may be manipulated to serve an auspicious, extemporaneous need. (Again, something like this needs to be set up in advance, fittingly, to be believable.)

Please note here that my problem isn't with introducing new developments--not at all, since progressions of foundationally-grounded development need to happen throughout the course of a story, in every single scene. It's the *lack* of setup in establishing those developments that I have issues with. I also have no problem with incorporating twists. I love twists, as all readers do. However, in order for a twist to be believable, it must be set up from the very beginning, resolutions need to fit perfectly with every angle the twist presents, and everything about it should be obvious and in plain sight in retrospect. The big difference between a twist and a trick is the reader reaction. If he's stunned, speechless, gratefully overjoyed, that twist surprise is welcomed and applauded. If he feels cheated, the victim of a bait and switch, unforgivably incensed, chances are your books just made his Dead-to-Me list.

Planting the seeds of development has to be done at the start of a story so when those buds push through the story soil later, they're accepted, anticipated, and the excitement for all the directions they could go in is legitimate rather than conveniently *there*. Creating on the fly frequently causes un-, under-, or overdevelopment that's rarely believable, logical, or cohesive.

If you have any parts of your story where a CPR development appeared out of nowhere and wasn't introduced earlier in some form (hints or stronger), that's a good indication you haven't set up your CPR elements properly. It's conceivable that you

could come up with a justifiable angle of your CPR aspects while in the middle of writing. Just make sure you go back into earlier portions of the story and add the necessary foundation so readers will recognize the introduction in advance and feel the progression all along rather than marveling incredulously at something conveniently showing up just when it's needed.

3) I'm Going to China Reactions

In writing, an "I'm going to China" situation crops up in a story when a un-, under- or overdeveloped character will suddenly decide to run off to somewhere else with a new landscape in order to hide from understanding herself, the conflicts she's facing, or the relationships she's avoiding. In many cases, the character will literally pull up stakes and head somewhere the problems in the story world no longer raise their tarnished little heads. But this scenario doesn't always have to be an actual place. The character might alternatively do something drastic (indulge in some irrational behavior, which we'll talk about in the next point) that takes her away from the situation at hand.

This is actually something I say to my husband all the time when I have an issue with something he's doing or not doing. When I bring it up to him, instead of focusing on the problem, he'll perform some insane action that doesn't fit the situation at all and certainly does nothing to resolve it. Rather than facing the issue, he'll "go to China" (or any other exotic location on the opposite side of the world) instead of dealing with it, thereby avoiding the situation altogether (temporarily). Instead of resolution, the tactic means everything is all new and the old problem doesn't exist for him there...until I fly him back to the problem at hand all over again. For instance, one time I commented that all the dishes he failed to wash properly are part of the next load that *I* have to wash, which is very unfair. His response: Whenever he does dishes now, he puts them away instead of leaving them in the drainer, as if somehow I won't notice some of the dishes on the shelves or in the cupboards are dirty. That's a "going to China" response. The reaction doesn't make sense in the situation. Logically, he should do a better job of cleaning the dishes when it's his turn to do them so I don't have to redo them with the next load, right? Instead, he tries to hide the dirty ones as if I can't scrutinize them as easily in one place as the next. He thinks I'm being mean to him about this (another "going to China" reaction?), but my point is that this questionable technique doesn't work in real life any better than it does in writing fiction.

In an "I'm going to China" scenario, a character isn't developed enough to know herself and her conflicts let alone have any motivation, goals, or aptitude to resolve them in a healthy way. Readers won't get why she's acting and reacting the way she is or why everything in the story suddenly alters into something all-new. "China" or whatever avoidance place/situation she decides to run off and hide in provides mere

distraction. At times, I also think this is done to bulk up the story word count (but more about that later) instead of offering legitimate conflict resolution.

Unfortunately, in too many cases, the problems still exist right back where the story left off before the character did a runner somewhere else to avoid them. The writer either simply abandoned the earlier progress or lack thereof altogether or, less frequently, he eventually comes back to them but never really deals with them appropriately. Logical progression and true cohesion are never achieved and yet so often these stories are published in this malformed state of arrested development and allowed to see the light of day. Inexperienced and unskilled authors, editors, and publishers let it slide rather than make the tough choice of working harder or not publishing something that's in a state that could be considered low-quality.

You and I both know that what really happened behind the scenes was that the writer threw up his hands and conceded defeat on developing and advancing CPR properly in this story. The main character was removed from the current situation in order to give *the author* a new perspective...and time to churn out a desperate, ill-conceived conclusion just so the story had a resolution, even one that can't possibly make sense with the first half of CPR developments in the book.

If you find your characters irrationally running away or see CPR elements disintegrating into avoidance of core issues, try setting the story aside for as long as you can. Maybe when you return in the future--perhaps after doing the three-dimensional CPR development sketches we'll discuss later in this manual--you'll find viable solutions to fix the problems. Keep in mind that satisfactory endings to a story don't include "going to China" reactions and actions in place of effective, cohesive, logical resolutions.

4) Silly Misunderstandings Rule

This one is related to the last one. Essentially, insane, illogical events happen in stories like this. Characters may behave childishly, erratically, impulsively, and irresponsibly; the conflict itself might be the same; or relationships may end up being handled in non-productive ways. This brings out an overdramatic situation that's often painful to read because the character may be reacting too sensitively to something the author hasn't set up or developed as a three-dimensional conflict for them that's cohesive with other character and relationship elements. Inexplicably, the character shuts out relationships, evades conflicts both internal and external, and goals and motivations at this point are puzzling to the extreme.

Silly misunderstandings are substituted for viable conflicts in stories with improperly developed CPR elements. You replace your main character's authentic emotions with uncharacteristic and illogical reactions/actions inconsistent with what you previously set up as part of the character's personality. In some way or other, you force a shocking

situation into the plot or a relationship that lays the main POV character flat. Instead of having that character consider what's happening, and possibly his part in bringing it about, you have him do something that makes absolutely no sense to anyone in the story or outside it, like the reader.

For instance, I've read a lot of unpublished (though some published as well) stories in which a responsible, sentimental heroine is grieving, feeling sorry for herself, or in such dire emotional straits that she has no clue how to extricate herself from the situation. As if it solves her problem, she acts completely out of character and sleeps with the first guy she sees or an old boyfriend she decided in the past that she's definitely done with. As anyone who's read a self-defeating story like this knows, she always regrets it, but by then the damage is done and the writer spends the rest of the book trying to get her out of the mess she made by acting uncharacteristically irresponsible. Even if this is believable in real life, it makes for train-wreck-bad fiction.

In this case, characters, plots, and relationships will feel very unnatural and wrong to the reader. Hence, the story will become artificial, silly, and probably won't be loved by readers. The author of a story like this has gotten it into his head that the character's behavior has to be justified, and he creates his own means to defend the direction all this is going. Too often, the character's behavior is passed off as a legit personality flaw the writer fully intended and kept going on with, or the author couldn't get himself to face the fact that the character was desperately trying to hide from him, and instead of reaching for a more cohesive means of developing the character, he gave up and just went with it when the story slid wildly off the rails.

How often stories like these are published these days boggles me. I remember reading a story in which the main character got in a bad situation about halfway into the book. Everything went wrong. The character's life, the plot, the central relationship all derailed on the basis of an unbelievably stupid disagreement that popped its foundationless, little head up in the story like a mole. Out of the blue this character decided to fly off to "the family cabin". Now, this place that was in some exotic hot spot had never been mentioned previous to this and was dropped into the story like Utopia beckoning. During the chapters that followed, the character was blissfully ignorant of remembering the life and problems left behind and I think phrases like "having an epiphany" and "refocusing" were pulled out randomly despite that there were no actual thoughts about what sent the character running blindly to this place. Was the analysis of those thoughts done off-stage? Who knows? Even the other main character, who was part of the couple in this romance book, was only mildly concerned about the other's whereabouts despite the silly misunderstanding that drove them apart. When they reunited, the former argument seemed to be left in the "China" cabin. Other convenient plot developments replaced them. At the end of the story, *deus ex machina* had stepped in to resolve the story conflicts. One can only conclude that the ridiculous argument that abruptly overshadowed the book before one of the main characters

bailed for cabin life didn't matter despite that it'd been set up as a viable conflict prior to insanity ensuing.

Misunderstandings can't be legitimate plotlines. They're simply not strong enough to carry even a short story and, frankly, many of these aren't *worthy* to be given such invincible power. Stop and think about that. If a "conflict" can be resolved with a simple conversation or--worse--ignored altogether as if it's not worth the time taken to consider it, it's not properly developed at all. Maybe it's not literally worth considering keeping in the story.

Characters need to be real (as in three-dimensional), likeable (or at least sympathetic and understandable), consistent, placed in identifiable situations with believable relationships, making logical choices. In moments of duress (and that's what fiction is--conflict!), a character's mask drops and the reader comes to know the character's true nature by how she acts and reacts (two chain reactions that have to make sense together and so frequently *don't* in stories like these). That's why it's so important not to set up a character one way and then have her act and react in a completely different manner later.

A good question for a writer to ask himself when writing a story like this is: How do young children react to conflict, to being hurt, frightened, or feeling guilty? They get mad, sad, shut down, become incapable of making a rational decision. Displays of childish, erratic, impulsive, and irresponsible behavior look like any or all of these horrifyingly clichéd scenarios that are rarely viable conflict development:

- Sleeping with someone a main character shouldn't.
- Getting drunk or doing drugs.
- Becoming violent, maybe destroying relationships, or suicidal.
- Outright quitting a job or whatever the main story quest is.

Instead of laughing at herself in an embarrassing situation that casts her in a poor light, she stomps out of the vicinity, where she turns inward, becomes pouty and self-defeating, depressed, and unreachable.

Throws in the towel, takes a leap of faith, gains a new perspective *{insert any absurd idiom you can think of here that doesn't justify the avoidance}* and moves to China, where they apparently don't care who the heck you are, what you've done or what you're doing now, let alone the reasons why.

The result of this craziness is disintegration, self-sabotage, or running away from the issue instead of dealing with it. The character, plot, and relationships are "burned" foolishly like bridges so the writer can start new and hope the bulked-up page count will become sufficient enough story crafting to carry the work into publication. But it's not. Ever. CPR development and advancement is all about proper, logical setup and

progress that should lead to a resolution that makes complete sense and--if not providing a happily-ever-after--at least leaves the reader satisfied.

Don't replace viable conflict resolution with pouty, petty, silly CPR developments. If you can go through the list of telltale dead or lifeless action no-no's in this chapter and can point to something similar in your own story, you almost certainly don't have proper CPR development. Spend more time on getting to know and fully understand your characters, plots, and relationships in any scenario.

5) Secondary Characters, Plots, or Relationships Overshadow or Exist to be Cabbageheads for the Main

In Phil Farrand's *Nitpicker's Guides*, he uses the term "cabbagehead-isms" to describe a problem that runs rampant in the *Star Trek* and *X-Files* series, namely, a primary character doesn't have the necessary information to complete the job. This results in cabbage-isms: awkward, ponderous explanations used to convey information. In other words, the television show creators decide that viewers need to know certain facts in order to understand what's going on in the episode, or they need a way to turn technical explanations into layman's terms. The easiest way to do this is to make some of the characters look like baffled fools by asking questions about things they inexplicably don't already know. Farrand expanded this term to "cabbagehead" as it applies to the character who performs this act of cabbage-ism. If any of your characters--secondary or otherwise--serves as a cabbagehead and nothing more, they're not properly developed enough to serve the role they need to fill in the story.

While it's perfectly acceptable and even ideal for secondary characters to be so alive readers are desperate to hear their stories--at a later date in another book altogether--secondary characters who take over and make the main characters look uninteresting and unappealing by comparison can be a very obvious sign of un-, under-, or overdeveloped primary characters, plots, and relationships.

On the other side of the spectrum, we may have secondary characters who have absolutely no purpose in the story beyond serving the interests of the main character(s). They're sounding boards, convenient foils, I-have-the-answer-to-solve-this-problem! magicians, or they're simply the means to bulk up word count with extraneous fluff.

Every single character in a story has to be introduced for a purpose--and that purpose can't simply be to give the main character someone to talk to and become the cabbagehead to convey necessary info. All characters need purpose. Secondary characters need to be fleshed out with basic internal conflicts, goals and motivations, and external conflicts because they are important enough to have an objective in being included in the story at hand. But only main characters have full-on CPR development that's the focus of the current story and progresses throughout the book. The biggest

difference between main and secondary characters is that the secondary character's conflicts and goals and motivations aren't usually central to the current story and they're all revealed *through* the main character.

Kind of in-between overshadowing or serving the main is another situation I've seen novice (though sometimes published) writers use frequently: Introducing random, ancillary characters and developing them either a lot or a little in a scene (and usually only in *that* scene, not beyond) for no reason that I can fathom beyond padding word count. In the situations I've seen this being done, there's little or nothing important going on in the scene so I can only guess the author decided to pull a random character in to liven things up. *Say what?* The purpose of that scene (and the ancillary character) is in serious question.

So how do you know whether a character is doing little more than adding useless fluff? If you can put a simple designation for the character (like "her FBI partner" or "the janitor"), and that's all that's needed to explain the character (because they're not actually part of this story beyond the designation), you don't need to include *any* details about that character at all other than the designation--and that goes for including a first or last name. However, there are characters that fill a role with specific purpose (and should probably be named). We'll call them "flat characters" and they do have a purpose in being in the story, though they're not developed as much as a main or secondary character might be. Because they're such a big topic, we're going to talk about them and their legitimate uses in Chapter Three.

Another thing to take notice of in this situation: While you may have two or three main POV characters within one book, you should only have *one* of those characters as the main POV character in *each* scene. Head-hopping between two or more characters in a single scene is an avoidance mechanism that indicates the basic problem of lack of CPR development. Some authors claim to use head-hopping in a scene as a means of getting to know both POV characters simultaneously. I don't buy it. Nearly all cases of head-hopping simply confuse the reader. One minute he's comfortably resting in one character's mind, hopefully discovering nuggets of motivation, conflict, and emotions that make this character likeable and understandable to him, and the next he's abruptly thrust into someone else's head and thoughts.

I encourage you to picture this scenario in your mind because it'll prove how discombobulating it is for a reader to be forced to head-hop in a single scene between two or more heads. After a while, this reader will start dreading the leap back and forth (kind of like a metallic ball would dread a match in a pinball machine if alive). He'll forget where he is and just become confused and uninterested in continuing--not to mention feeling beat up. At the beginning of each scene, the reader needs to be established and oriented to the situation and characters filling this particular section of the story. The writer disrupts the scene whenever he head-hops between characters,

especially if he's doing it because the main POV character isn't as interesting as others in the scene.

Finally, be aware that subplots and relationships can also usurp a story so they take precedence over the main plots and relationships. Every subplot and relationship has to have as much purpose in being developed as the characters in the story do, but they're there to serve a purpose and not become paramount. If those things keep taking the lead, maybe you haven't locked down the main themes of your story well enough. We'll go over a technique for nailing that down in Chapter Six. If you do find something that's supposed to be secondary feels more right as primary than what you originally came up with, you might need to reevaluate your whole story and figure out which direction you should go in. As Debra Dixon says in *Goal, Motivation, and Conflict*, you could be writing separate books in the same manuscript.

Evaluate your secondary characters, your plots and relationships. Are they taking over the story? Are you bouncing between POVs in a single scene because another character's thoughts interest you more than the main character's? Are you bulking up word count instead of properly unfolding developments? Or are your characters filling the roles they need to--nothing more, nothing less? Secondary characters need some fleshing out to make a story well-rounded but their development is always done *through* the main characters, not on their own as if this is their story (more about that in Chapter Three). If you're that intrigued by secondaries, give them their own, separate stories...in, you know, separate stories.

6) Error! Failure! Factory Reset Imminent!

According to *Wikipedia*, "A factory reset, also known as master reset, is a software restore of an electronic device to its original system state by erasing all of the information stored on the device in an attempt to restore the device's software to its original manufacturer settings. Doing so will effectively erase all of the data, settings, and applications that were previously on the device." Similarly, this situation in writing can be a sign of an un-, under-, or overdeveloped core element in a story.

Backtracking--never advancing the foundation of a development with new, viable, intriguing, go-one-better revelations and progress--puts characters, plots, and relationships in a vicious circle that just keeps going around and around and never actually comes out on the opposite end where resolution lives. In other words, CPR development is always returned to the original, foundational situation that started it all. Whatever CPR seeds may have been buried at the beginning are the perpetual state of being for the core elements of this story. They don't grow, expand, evolve, or advance beyond the seed. The character may leave the circle (often to go to China or to indulge in erratic, self-defeating behavior) for a short time, but always the original character conflict, the seeded motivation--sometimes *sans* goals--that opened the story

is returned to like factory reset. Relationships stagnate or backtrack or events are simply repeated continuously in slightly different ways, occasionally ratcheting up tension for a short time, as if the CPRs are really on a merry-go-round where going back to the beginning is the only known or viable course of action. A story that offers a one-and-done development is nowhere near well-developed with proper CPR elements.

There are very definite ways to track whether your CPR developments are returning to factory reset instead of actually progressing throughout a story and use of a Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart, which we'll talk in Chapter Six, is one nuts-and-bolts method for ensuring you've covered all the bases with legitimate establishment, development, and advancement from start to finish.

7) Basic Information Withheld...Suspiciously

First, there *are* viable reasons for withholding information in a story. Extremely viable! Read Scott Turow's *Presumed Innocent* if you want a punch in the face about that. The author withheld basic information in a breathtaking twist, but he didn't cheat in any way. If you haven't read this book or watched the movie before, I encourage you to do it at your earliest opportunity. The twist at the end still haunts me years after my first experience with it. The truth was there before my eyes the whole time, yet I never saw it, and it kicked me in the stomach brutally when it came.

A twist is so amazingly mind-blowing because it comes out of nowhere *precisely because it was so well set up right from the beginning* and there was advancement of it all through the story. The reader/viewer has to concede that all the important evidence was there from the start, was growing increasingly obvious through the middle, and the twist ending satisfies the reader infinitely more from a predictable, inevitable outcome ever would or could. But withholding basic information in a twist is a vastly different situation than withholding information because the CPR elements aren't properly developed.

It's become a writing trend that I consider not only sad but destructive to withhold or refuse to include basic character information like full names, physical descriptions, background elements, etc. I don't get this trend at all. Yes, you want the reader to participate in a story but that shouldn't be an actual "homework" challenge! Your story is *your story*. You need to make very definite choices about what you want for your CPRs and that does include giving a solid description of your characters. Most readers aren't interested or capable of writing the story on their own and, even if they were, they don't want to write yours for you. So why force them to do the work in deciding even the most basic information?

Besides, the characters, plots, and relationships in your stories are your babies. Don't you want to make sure your book "offspring" are fully formed and complete before

they go out into the world to be read by readers? Why *wouldn't* you want that? There's no justifiable reason for inadvertently or even deliberately incomplete or arrested development of CPR elements in a published story.

In *On Writing*, Stephen King says, "Description begins in the writer's imagination, but should finish in the reader's." So few writers take into account that basic details are the very things that *prime* the reader's imagination! Those details can't be left up to chance (or to a potentially uninterested-in-homework reader's imagination) because every part of CPR development affects the overall wholeness of and satisfaction with your story. I don't know about you, but I have no interest in reading an incomplete story in any form.

I remember reading an entire series of published books with characters who were POV in one story then secondary characters in the next. In each story, I wasn't given any physical description information about what any of the main characters looked like beyond an occasional reference to something worn by a character but imparted in a way that called attention to the *setting* of the story and not to the *character* wearing the outfit (this author was very good at setting; not so good at character development). From one book to the next, all the characters seemed like smeary blobs on the page to me. I couldn't picture anything about even one of them. When characters from the previous book(s) came into the new one, they didn't feel as familiar to me because I never had a good "portrait" of them in the first place. Just a few key details would have made all the difference in giving me the visual primes I needed to picture those characters and feel like I really knew them.

Here's an aspect of this that goes a little further than simply withholding basic "character description" information for you to consider: I remember reading a story in which a main character's family member was in a fugue state in a medical facility. Not once in the course of the entire story was the reader told what happened to the relative to put him in this condition. I read through the story, wondering constantly if something sinister wasn't being implied. If the relative's vegetative state wasn't important, why not put in a few sentences early on to explain it the first time the oblivious character was mentioned? No big deal. Right?

Well, I'd like to tell you this situation did develop into something that fleshed out the characters, plots, and/or relationships in the story. But, no, the fugue relative amounted to nothing in the story. The author missed the opportunity to develop all three core elements time and time again for this particular situation--and there were so many opportunities for wonderfully cohesive CPR development in that story. This basic information amounted to a blip in development, easy enough to not stress over, and yet it was withheld so suspiciously, my mind made it into something it never panned out to be. I was so disappointed.

Withholding basic information can only dishearten readers. This isn't something I can comprehend, given that I'm the kind of author who wants to see my character's

diary I'm first developing them. I crave knowing everything, even if the reader never needs to know all the overwhelming details. Like MJ Bush says--brilliance in simplicity--on her WritinGeekery blog, "Know more about your character than you let on. It'll show."

In later chapters, our sketches and worksheets will provide a kind of checklist for CPR completeness that will include all the basic information a story needs about your main characters. If you go through your story and find anything missing, those sketches will help you figure out what to include so your CPR elements aren't walking around as only half-there, smeary blobs.

8) It's a Miracle, Lois!

The resolution at the end of a story with improper CPR development may read the way a miracle does to those who witness it. Literally, the resolution came out of nowhere and was in no way hinted at, let alone justified, in advance. It defies all logic. Against all odds, somehow (and readers are usually never enlightened or are told in a mishmashed way) the character had an epiphany that magically changed everything. This character became Superman and turned the Earth on its axis so she'd have a "do-over". Maybe a higher being intervened in order for everything to come up roses for her. The "deus ex machina" resolved the conflict, not the character. This god in the machine device introduced a resolution brought about by something outside of the story, something cataclysmic or even supernatural that's not cohesive or logical with the rest of the story.

To give you an example, I had a problem writing the third book in my Wounded Warriors Series. *Dark Mirror* is romantic paranormal psychological thriller. Spoiler alert! This book continued to elude my best efforts to create something wonderful, suspenseful, and cohesive. My first draft of the book was so bad, I refused to send it to my publisher, even if it meant keeping my fans waiting. I made a long list of notes on all I thought was wrong with the book (believe me, it was a huge document!), then I put the book in my story cupboard for three months in order to get the story brewing on a low flame again. At that time, I came up with another unworkable outline.

Feeling increasingly desperate, I put the story aside again, terrified I'd never finish something that had already been promoted as "coming soon". More months went by, during which I had a series of creative percolations that made me rethink the direction of the book. I reshaped all my characters and relationships, consciously trying to flesh them out in ways that related to the plot much more than they had in the past.

However, it wasn't until I realized something so obvious, I feel silly about it now that I finally knew why my previous drafts hadn't worked. The heroine wasn't directly involved in the resolution of the plot. How could this character achieve her full potential

if other characters solved her problems for her? How could the story be cohesive if the character had nothing to do with how the conflicts wrapped up?

My second realization was that I had to make the plot and subplots fit more naturally with my main character's struggle not to accept her gift of clairvoyance by pushing it away and feeling ashamed for it. She needed to use her gift in order to solve her problems. Also, her relationships, and how those related to the villain, needed more cohesion.

I also acknowledged that my little hint earlier in the book that the villain was terrified of dogs was the key to having her save the day. Finally, I decided that the "glue" in making my story cohesive was to make the hero and the heroine's pasts merge and parallel. Everything fell into place after that.

You see the challenges I had with the book. I had to make the heroine's gift of clairvoyance and her beloved dog mesh with the villain's terrifying curse of clairvoyance and his fear of dogs. All of these things had to fit with the hero and heroine's pasts, which intersected in ways neither of them ever dreamed prior to the "present" time in the story. The relationships of all the characters also needed to work with conflicts, goals and motivations. I wasn't sure I'd fully succeeded in this task until a reviewer said of the book, "An excellent psychic thriller that will have you holding your breath until your lungs ache. The author uses her writing gift to connect both Gwen and Dylan's pasts with a dark, menacing force and tangles a web so strong that readers will not want to stop reading."

You can't wrap up a story with an act of nature, something symbolic that parallels a character's conflict but isn't actually part of it, or in a (godlike) stranger-to-the-rescue type of event--it won't be believable or fair to the reader, who's spent the entire book waiting to see your characters, plots, and the relationships reach the goal of logical, cohesive self-fulfillment and success.

The main POV character absolutely has to lead the action and save the day on her own without supernatural or miraculous intervention. She isn't in a supporting role, nor can she be rescued when the going gets tough. She can't fall backwards into success. This is her story, her time to be a superhero, her moment in the spotlight. As Galadriel said to Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, "This task was appointed to you. And if you do not find a way, no one will." Or should.

Never allow resolutions to stem from symbolism, events, or other people. Clear and cohesive choice, purpose, and action are the only viable resolutions. Don't take the true victory away from your main characters by letting anyone or anything else do the work for them.

Are there defy-explanation moments in your story? You may need to rework your CPR developments to make sure your POV characters are doing their jobs and not letting someone or something else do it for them.

9) Fleshing Out...or Puffing Up?

I've talked throughout these methods of spotting dead or lifeless CPR development about how so often a book is bulked up with unnecessary details (characters or anything else) that the story doesn't need and simply shouldn't be there. Is there a legitimate reason for trying to make a story longer than should be, longer than the CPR elements can justifiably support?

We live in a time in the publishing industry where short stories and books are popular, whether they're single titles or part of a series. Long stories are still popular, though I'm a little surprised that they're as popular as they always were considering that there are fewer and fewer readers these days and attention spans could qualify for a new Guinness World Record considering how short they are. Many indie and small press publishers are taking out any guidelines or rules for page/word count length, maybe because they realize as I do that a story should be as long as it needs to be, never more, never less. Do traditional publishers still have specific requirements for page/word counts? Some of them do, yes. Maybe that makes bulking up word count justifiable (or, alternatively, cutting important material simply to meet a shorter word count), maybe it doesn't. I can't judge, but I know what I believe.

Pfft. No way.

Even if publishers don't and self-publishing doesn't require it, I've actually talked to published authors who believe that their stories *have* to meet certain page/word count minimums and even some who believe that long length somehow makes the books better. Do they see themselves as book writers, not short story/book writers, as if one is superior to the other? Why? I honestly can't fathom why this is so important, but the sheer number of times I've seen an author puff up their writing for no other reason I can deduce than to increase the word count or page length boggles the mind.

To include extraneous details in a story has no basis for justification. If the sole reason for something being included is to make the story longer (or taken out to make a story shorter, not better, for that matter), then it's the writer or publisher who requires it whose priorities are skewed. I've said over and over to these authors, just because a story is *long* doesn't make it *good*. Sometimes, the exact opposite is the case. I don't know about you but, when I'm reading a book that contains so much puffery that doesn't add or enhance the story in any way, my eyes roll back in my head and I want nothing more than to pretend that book has disappeared from the face of the earth and no one will ever have to be burdened trying to read it again. Every single part of a book has to have purpose beyond inflating the number of words or pages.

While it's not a popular idea, I think a vast majority of writers should consider drastically cutting back until they get down to the core story. From that point, if additions actually improve the story and add substance that develops CPR elements, they can be included. Authors need to figure out what actually *fleshes out* a story

instead of *bloating* it (see the next several chapters), and sometimes only drastic measures can teach that vital crafting skill.

10) Generic or Obscure Titles

There was a trend in the 70s and 80s for book titles to be generic. I remember laughing or just shaking my head about a certain romance author I'm sure many of you can guess who had titles like *Let Love Find You*, *Make Me Love You*, *Captive of My Desires* (notice the pronouns, which are so odd in an book title) because they literally had little or nothing to do with the stories inside and they were so dramatic and shocking to me. I believe the publisher brought about this trend and the author had nothing to do with it. But there are some writers who simply don't care about the titles of their books. *What?!* The point is, these generic titles made all the books seem like carbon copies of each other rather than something unique and singular, fitting the story perfectly. Maybe they actually did fit the stories within but the titles did little more than embarrass, surprise, or confuse me. Then and now, I couldn't and can't imagine the logic in using titles that are so throwaway.

In another situation, I've read stories where the titles are so obscure, they had absolutely nothing that could readily connect the title to the story inside the pages. In most of the stories like this, the actual title was never mentioned in any way, shape or form within the story. Even if I loved the stories, whenever I'd think or talk about them later, there was this disconnect between the title and trying to match it with the plot of the story. I don't understand why the writer and/or publisher did this, or maybe it was done to make the reader feel stupid because he wasn't smart enough to get the connection without actual research to uncover the hidden meaning. Is that a good way to establish a relationship--making someone feel stupid? In any case, the end result was disassociation between the two, making each story lack memorability because the title couldn't be connected to it. Not what I would want as an author. What about you?

Titles are something I'm passionate about and every story I write has a specially chosen title that fits the story inside the pages like a glove. They were literally made for each other. I also try to make a point of using the title in the story in some way, though usually the story itself makes the choice of title obvious without having to be overt about it, but I like that neat little connection that's so organic.

Do you want a crash course in whether your CPR developments are dead or lifeless or strong enough? Your choice of title can give you a good indication whether or not the theme of your story (with all three CPR developments present) and how well that theme is developed within the pages is sufficient. This isn't something for the reader to decide--this is solely for the story creator to evaluate.

What does your title suggest to you? Do you have an immediate idea what your core elements are on the basis of your title? You *should* know your own story intimately

enough to nail this down if not right away then after some thought. Is your title in some way incorporated into the story within the pages of the book? You definitely don't want to overuse the title within the story so it becomes trite, annoying, silly, overused, or throwaway. A certain author comes to mind for me who tends to overuse the title of her stories within the books themselves. When I see the title of the story inside the story so often, it starts to become a comical character beating me over the head with a literal representation of the title. What a funny, visual comic strip that would be. But adding an organic instance of why a book is called what it is at the beginning of the story and then once at the end is ideal. It creates an association that compels the reader to see how the title exemplifies the story. There's a strong connection when the title is "explained" within the story that can be both enlightening and touching. Additionally, that makes it memorable. You hear the title and the connection with what the story is about is immediate. Authors should strive for that.

Below I've included two examples of how the title of a book (listed first with the author following) played into the high concept theme sentence of the story (with the CPR elements "tagged"). In Chapter Six, we'll go over how to create a high concept sentence that can be tagged just like this one to test for CPR development.

All Rights Reserved by Gregory Scott Katsoulis: In a world where every word and gesture is copyrighted, patented, or trademarked [Plot], Speth Jime [Character] elects to remain silent rather than pay to speak, and her defiant and unexpected silence threatens to unravel the very fabric of society [Relationships].

The Program by Suzanne Young: 17-year-old Sloane [Character] knows better than to cry in front of anyone [Relationships]. With suicide now an international epidemic, one outburst could land her in The Program, the only proven course of treatment [Plot].

The reason these two authors chose their titles is obvious, isn't it? There's nothing generic about the titles since they were obviously chosen well for the story inside the pages. The core elements are right there, too. Give this trick a try on your stories. It's a quick, easy way to see if your CPR developments are clearly defined or if you're just using a generic or obscure title others may not be able to connect with your story easily.

While it should be easy to spot dead or lifeless conditions in our characters, plots and relationships, it's nowhere as simple as author would like it to be. These ten ways should help you pinpoint if any of your core elements are dead or lifeless.

Now that we at least know what to look for when it comes to dead or lifeless stories, we can move on to the next step of proper development to avoid arrested development that leads to those conditions. In the next chapter, we'll plunge into a crash course about three-dimensional writing and discuss three types of scenes that make up a strong, properly developed story.

CHAPTER TWO

Three-dimensional Writing and Scenes

Three-dimensional: Of, relating to, or having three dimensions; giving the illusion of depth or varying distances; having or appearing to have length, breadth, and depth; having volume; describing or being described in well-rounded completeness; true to life, lifelike; having different qualities that are like the qualities of a real person; solid, concrete, vivid, realistic, rounded; sufficiently full in characterization and representation of events to be believable; simulating the effect of depth by presenting slightly different views of a scene.

Because no book about dead or lifeless fiction could be complete without a discussion on three-dimensional writing and the proper development and progress of each and every scene that makes up a book, I've included in this chapter a crash course in writing three dimensionally that will scratch the surface of these two areas with enough detail to benefit our focus in this manual. If you want to go further with three-dimensional writing and scene development, check out my book *Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing*.

All throughout this chapter, I'll be referring to dimensions in terms of Present, Past, and Future (or P/P/F), which may sound out of order since we're used to hearing them in a more linear grouping (i.e., Past, Present, and Future). In nearly every story, the most important dimension is Present, obviously, because you're telling the current story in present tense, in the here and now. That doesn't mean Past and Future aren't also critical--far from it, as we'll see. It's simply that stories are almost exclusively (and probably wisely) told from the Present with carefully orchestrated reaches into Past and Future.

The phrase *three-dimensional* translates well into the craft of writing. Writing that's three-dimensional is complex and multilayered, vivid and realistic, tailored specifically for the story with unique histories threaded in deep and definable roots, unpredictability, and individuality that are fully developed and *alive*. Applied to writing, the word "three-dimensional" is easy to define as solid, realistic, rounded and lifelike, even *living*. Who a character is will be clearly defined along with what her personality is and what makes *her* uniquely *her* including what she loves, what she hates, what inspires and moves her as a human being, how she's responding to the environment, situations, conflicts, and the people around her.

The hard part for authors comes in translating these concepts into the craft of writing. Most writers know what is *not* three-dimensional writing. Simple words and phrases convey what's lacking: flat, cardboard, paper doll, puppet, archetypal, convenient to the story, lacking history with loose and undefined ties, predictable, unrealistic, unremarkable, un- , under- or overdeveloped. *Dead*.

Three-dimensionality needs to start immediately, even during the brainstorming phase, and it's crucial that it be maintained throughout the writing and revising of your story. Every work of fiction needs three-dimensionality. It doesn't matter if the story in question is two pages versus 2000 pages long. It's a mistake to allow yourself believe that a certain length of story doesn't have to be well-developed. It's more than possible to say a lot in few words, but readers can't connect with your characters, plots, or relationships if all three aren't fully fleshed out. So, regardless of length, do everything you can to ensure that you build in the potential for three-dimensionality.

In preparation for writing my book *Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing*, I read everything I could get my hands on concerning three-dimensional writing. There's a fair amount out there, but all contained only small pieces of the whole three-dimensionality package, focusing just on sketches for character, plot, and/or setting. Few went from explanation to hands-on technique. One crucial thing missing from such material is that *layers* are important in the creation of the core story elements as the length, width, and depth of every solid story. Using sketches to develop the necessary multidimensional layers of character, plot, and relationship is the technique that comes closest to reaching our three-dimensional goal. However, the biggest problem is that only *one* dimension of character is generally sketched out on these worksheets, namely, the "present self" character. What's lacking are the other two dimensions of self. Each major character in a book needs a present self (the person she is in the here and now of the active story), a past self (who this individual was before), and a future self (the direction the characters are moving, refined and shaped by current situations, conflicts, and relationships). If you want three-dimensional protagonists and antagonists with heartbreakingly realistic conflicts set in a world so vivid readers can actually enter it alongside the characters, you need to have all three "self" dimensions.

After *Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing* was released, I branched out into providing extremely limited freelance, professional editing and started thinking a lot about the fact that three dimensions shouldn't be applied to only *characters*. *Plots* and *relationships* also need to be three-dimensional in a fully fleshed out and well-developed story that's constantly progressing. Part of this was prompted by something that was far from new to me after being a published author, writing instructor, editor, contest judge, and critique partner for the better part of twenty years. I've seen firsthand that new, novice writers and even some of the more seasoned authors have a tendency to forget that there are three dimensions. But almost no one takes into account that characters, plots and relationships *each* have a past, present and future. Every major conflict starts, lingers, and usually goes on until it's resolved. You can see the branches of it if you sit down and trace its development and progress. Relationships are the same way. They all have a beginning, middle, and end (with the best ones, the wrap-up doesn't come until death). Unless each CPR element has its own present, past, and future dimension development, your core story will be lacking in some way.

DIMENSIONS: PRESENT, PAST AND FUTURE

In "He Was a Man of Good Character", Icy Sedgwick says, "Let's face it, characters are the bedrock of your fiction. ...without someone to either perpetrate or suffer the consequences of those actions, you have no one for your reader to root for, or wish bad things on."

Without characters and relationships, plots are a series of actions that happen without context, subtext, consequence, or emotional reaction. Readers love or hate characters; they root for or decry the individuals and complex relationships populating a story. And nothing makes a reader put down a book faster than realizing at any point that the author doesn't know his own characters, plots, or relationships in all stages of development. Plots and relationships belong to the main characters and everything has to be viewed through that focused lens.

Now, I absolutely feel that main POV characters must be addressed here. Most books these days include many POV characters...many, *many*. I've said frequently in interviews, in my classes, and in my books that the trend of including so many characters in a single book isn't one I can get on board with. The biggest reason for that is because every main character, plot, and relationship *has* to be three-dimensional in that story. How can any of these things be three-dimensional when the only way to effectively cover the three dimensions (and for *each* main character) is to write a 200,000-word book or to write a series of 200,000-word books?

Bottom line, main characters, their plots and relationships, rarely become three-dimensional when there are too many in one (average-size) story. And that is the crux here: In most stories written these days, the main characters and their conflicts and relationships *aren't* three-dimensional because there simply isn't room to make them so, unless you're George R.R. Martin, for instance, who does a thorough job of this, specifically because he writes massive, sprawling *sagas* with every single title.

Martin can get away with such not-for-the-faint-of-heart stories because he's extremely skilled and has editors and readers who justifiably cherish every last written word. Most authors *can't* do this because publishers will be wary about releasing an expensive 600 to 1000-page book for new or midlist authors without proven sales records. Editors crop (sometimes unwisely) when a book gets too big to be profitable. The word count they'll allow will prohibit in-depth CPR development if the cast in your book is huge. There's simply no way to do it unless you've achieved the level of popularity of Martin, Gabaldon, Rowling, Brown, King, or other big name authors who write massive tomes. Quite frankly, if there's any chance the story can't be three-dimensional (because there isn't room, the word count prohibits it, your editor is asking you to crop ruthlessly, or you might grow lazy developing core elements), then you might want to reconsider having a gazillion characters in a single book.

This leads to the obvious question you may be wondering: Is it even *necessary* to sketch out each dimension for all core elements? That question, fundamentally, points to the pivotal reason writers don't usually provide P/P/F dimensions for all CPR elements: They don't believe much will change from present to past to future. The purpose of this chapter is to shatter the illusion that any of the dimensions can be cropped, foregone, forgotten, or neglected, whether deliberately, inadvertently, or justifiably (when an editor decides too much is too much). Remember, even if you don't include everything you come up with concerning P/P/F, you need each dimension of CPR development in some capacity in every scene, and you as the author need to know all the dimensions thoroughly.

Characters wouldn't be growing and developing if they remained static throughout their lives. Think of it this way: Are you the same person you were when you were born, two months old, 16, 25, 50, 75 years old? Of course not. You can be sure you won't be exactly the same person you are now ten years--or even *one* year--from today. Everything you go through in your life, whether it's traumatic, evolving, or even constant, will change you in big and subtle ways. It's the nature of a human being. A character's conflicts and relationships also don't remain static. They change and develop in different ways all through the course of a life. In the same way, in order to create layered, developing characters, plots and relationships, you have to see where they are currently, where they came from, and where they may be heading.

That said, it is true that too much may not--or even *shouldn't*--change, depending on the circumstances and story material, from one dimension to the next. In fiction, a radical shift in character, plot, and relationship development is possible, but usually only in extreme cases, and only with solid justification. Alterations between the dimensional sketches will likely be subtle and consistent rather than drastic and shocking but will allow development and growth to flourish. Out of these sketches we'll go over in the next three chapters, your story's CPR development should begin to evolve organically.

Let's talk more about all of this within the distinct dimensions.

Present Self

In sketching the present dimension, you're generally starting every character, plot, and relationship in the middle of the story. However, starting with the present dimension makes the most sense. Present focuses on the character she currently is, with the plots and relationships she's dealing with, setting the focus of the story you're writing *in the here and now*. The more you get to know the character, her plots and relationships through present dimension, the more development you'll gain in sketching past and future dimensions. After all, a character's reaction to her experiences with

conflicts and other people in the world around her has a direct bearing on who she is and becomes, the choices she makes, and the actions she takes all through her life.

Maybe it's true that most people do have an innate way of being, conceivably born to act in a certain way, but in a work of fiction, a genetic disposition is of limited use. Instead, we focus on the universal truth that--like real people--almost all of a character's traits in the present are the result of the coping strategies used (good, bad, and everything between) and lessons learned (again, these reflect choices that are easy, hard, and all the nuances in-between) in every situation and conflict faced and the behavior that results from them in her relationships with those that populate her life. These are layers of that person's entire makeup. Character, conflicts, and relationships will (and should) change subtly over time. Naturally, the deeper you go into someone's past and psyche, their conflicts and relationships, the more your understanding of all that's shaped the character's growth...or lack thereof.

When sketching the present dimension, you're creating a character with conflicts and relationships worth following all the way through a story to the end. A good present dimension character will convey in a creative way what she's learned about herself, others, and conflicts in life, who and what matters most to her in her current situation, and how she'd like her life to change or how she fears it will change. This is probably the easiest dimension, the one few authors would leave out since there would be no true story without it.

Past Self

Detailing the present dimension of your character, her conflicts and relationships is only the beginning. You need to weave pieces of the past throughout a story to flesh out the past dimension. You can't truly understand who someone is until you've seen her developmental years, what she's been through, and where she's come from. I love how K.M. Weiland describes this in *Improve Your Character Instantly: Just Add a Ghost* when she says that what all characters have in common are the depths of their backstories. "They arrive at the beginning of their stories with baggage already in tow." (Incidentally, the "ghost" here is something from the past that haunts the character. Brilliant!) Baggage can be another term for the past dimension, a character's backstory that includes the three-dimensional conflicts and relationships she's managed to cultivate or attempted to avoid (or something in-between).

The dictionary definition of backstory for fiction is the history or background created for a character, those she's been in contact with, and the plot *that impacts the current events of the story*. Backstory is everything that occurred before the current story that *directly impacts* what will happen in this story. But it's only necessary to include backstory that's relevant to current people, choices, problems, goals or motivations, or

events. But, as I've said, the author needs to know backstory of all CPR elements in advance in order to authentically layer his story.

It's been said that backstory shouldn't be placed at the beginning of a story, but that's only partially true. While front-loading a story with huge chunks of backstory isn't ideal (it could get incredibly boring or hard for the reader to digest if too much comes at once), we need to enlighten and engage readers, not overwhelm and crush out any interest with overkill. The true issue is that *pieces* (not great chunks) of backstory are needed at *all* stages of a story. Fragments of backstory need to be placed carefully throughout a story from the beginning all the way through to the end. Doing this will reveal CPR development and progress in each dimension.

While it's popular to crop out the past dimension to meet a limited word count, too much shearing will prove detrimental to the three-dimensionality of any story. On the other hand, there is a point where too much can be overkill and would be better placed in the notes of an annotated version of the book, should your popularity as an author ever warrant such a thing.

In sketching the past dimension for your character, you need to consider what fits in terms of the physical descriptions, personality traits, strengths and weaknesses and skills she's acquired, relationships she's had, the internal and external conflicts she's faced, and the environment she grew up in. What resulting goals and motivations are in line with who this character was, is, and justifiably will become? Remember that a main character's plots and relationships also have a past, present and future so seeing the start, middle and direction those go is vital to three-dimensional stories. Your past dimension should inspire more development of the present, as well as the future dimensions waiting in the wings.

Who your character is in the present, what conflicts and people she dealt with should be a direct result of many of the things in the past. If she was a geeky girl teased relentlessly all through school, it wouldn't be hard to establish that friends and romantic relationships were scarce for her past self. If her present-day character has had a dramatic appearance change, that's cohesive with her past self because she developed her appearance as a result of that earlier conflict and the relationships that shaped and/or scarred her emotionally. Her current internal conflicts and relationships need to reflect the ones she dealt with in her past, and her goals and motivations *now* should be in line with her coping mechanisms *then*.

Future Self

Hands down, the future dimension gets left out the most because there's a tendency to think there's a time-traveling experience to Some Other Place that happens when the story resolution is reached. In contrast to backstory or present situation, the future dimension is *not* specifically referring to actual future events happening to the fictional

characters we create. Nor is it a "futuristic" way of looking at what's going to happen at some point in the story. In other words, we're not trying to show the character in a situation, conflict, or relationship decades in the future of the current story.

I will point out that there *is* a storytelling technique in which the author (usually) makes a POV main character a narrator from the future in the first scene of the book and that person is viewing the "present" story as if it's already happened in the past. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a lot of the Sherlock Holmes stories this way, and H.P. Lovecraft loves writing his stories this way. While that kind of writing style could be described as creative storytelling, I always find myself disappointed to be at the end of the story before it ever begins, though I enjoy the story itself (if not enjoying the manner it's told as much). My point here is that this type of storytelling is *not* what I'm talking about for future dimension.

Instead, the future dimension in a story is about projecting forward to what *may* come in the future, what resolution may result at the conclusion of the story, based on the ever-evolving development of current events. Think in terms of where the character, plots and relationships could conceivably end up, scene by scene, based on what you're believably establishing and unfolding as you tell your story. It's so crucial to have future dimension in every single scene because it gives an expectation of what's going to come next--what exciting or horrible events may occur based on what's currently developing with your CPR elements.

If you don't give characters, conflicts, and relationships fully fleshed out future dimensions, you've essentially left the reader with nothing to hope for or look forward to. To show future dimension is a way of allowing readers something to either anticipate and/or dread in terms of where the CPR development is going. Future dimension projects possibilities, expectations, apprehensions, and anxiety about what might happen in the future at each stage in the storytelling. Whispers of the best and the worst that *could* happen are the very things that keep the reader engaged in the story.

Don't underestimate the importance of including this in each and every scene of your story. Without an undertone of what's ahead, a reader will read each page wondering *Where is all this going? What's the point of this? Is it worth reading?* These hints are the heart of what keeps the reader engaged scene by scene.

All throughout a story, from the very beginning up until the resolution, you want to create questions. Those questions can't stem from confusion about anything taking place. No, they have to be questions that produce intrigue and tension. If you don't have readers bursting with questions from one scene to the next, they're not fully invested in your story and they don't care enough about what might happen, how it will all end up. You want to--you *have* to--produce suspense and outright tension, excitement, and trepidation from one scene to the next. Bottom line, you want to create an *uncertainty of outcome* in every stage without creating an illogical or unsatisfactory resolution. The future dimension anchors and deepens the context for the resolution

because the reader needs to be actively questioning and invested in the unfolding story from one scene to the next.

Obviously this is something that's constantly evolving in response to the CPR elements' directions throughout the story. It's often been said that the beginning of a book should resonate at the end of the story. An opening scene or scenes should include, in some capacity, a hint of the character's ideal goal, what she ultimately wishes for her future. The bridge scenes that carry the middle of a story will gradually reflect or challenge this ideal as plots develop in reaction to internal and external conflicts, and as the character's goals and motivations transform. The resolution scenes will also mirror that objective, though it's unlikely that "The End" is exactly what the character envisioned at the beginning. In fact, that initial outcome is usually undesirable by the time the last scene comes, because all writers should strive for a logical--but unpredictable--ending. In the next section of this chapter, we'll talk about the ideal way to unfold the scenes that need to be in each story and the purpose of those different kinds of scenes.

The point here is that without that future dimension that looks ahead toward the possible outcomes of a story, the reader won't be grounded in knowing exactly what he should be hoping for and rooting to happen. A reader who isn't engaged is one you'll lose sooner or later. For that reason, future dimension is as pivotal as the present and past.

All main characters need a fully fleshed out future dimension woven in throughout scenes. Human beings desire purpose; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is at the heart of the reader's hope/dread response as a story is being told. We all have strengths and weaknesses, dreams and regrets, vices and virtues, failures and accomplishments, boundaries to set and hurdles to overcome. In combination, these will begin in our formative years; they will be the foundation of the person we currently are, the conflicts we face, the relationships we cultivate or abandon, and will shape who and what we become in the future.

Weaving this future dimension throughout a story is vitally important. Without it, there can be no satisfactory, logical--yet unpredictable--ending of core elements. If you can't create a longing in readers for the main character to reach her story goal right from the start, to resolve with fierce motivation her conflicts and fulfill her objectives, to have deep, meaningful relationships with those in the world around here, there's no reason to read (or for the author to write) the book.

In Chapter Six, we're going to create a chart for CPR development, scene by scene, so if any of these seems a little unfocused now, be aware that we will be going over all of this again and in-depth later, after we've completed our character, plot and relationship sketches and can then logically move into discussing the actual crafting of all dimensions of CPR development in every single scene of a book.

ANATOMY OF A THREE-DIMENSIONAL SCENE

In *Fiction Writer's Brainstormer*, James Y. Smith says, "A scene is the basic building block of a piece of fiction, one that portrays characters in action, moving the story forward by their behaviors, words and thoughts. The essential elements present in almost every scene are action, conflict, images and dialogue--all unified by a singular dominant purpose." All the three-dimensional discussions and the sketches you'll do in the next three chapters will be the "primer" layers in getting ready to write a three-dimensional story. These primers were meant to benefit you, the writer, and provide the potential to get to this very place: Fully developing each and every scene of your book. To understand what we need to include in each, this section explores the kinds of scenes each story requires.

Three Types of Scenes

The most basic way for an "engineer of story" to visualize the scenes that make up his book and the function of each of those scenes is with the generalization that there are three types of scenes: Opening scenes, bridge scenes, and resolution scenes.

Opening and resolution scenes are the crucial support structures that bridge scenes are built between. Each must be well constructed with purpose and strong enough to carry the loads required of them. Put succinctly, as Nancy Kress does in *Beginnings, Middles, & Ends*, "What you write in the beginning of your story is intimately connected with the middle, which in turn gives birth to the end."

Crafting effective opening and resolution scenes is a complex subject that an entire book on its own could cover. We'll go over them briefly next, individually, focusing on the ways they differ from bridge scenes and specific methods for nailing them. However, the basic techniques used in writing these types of scenes, which we'll detail in-depth in the bridge scene section, is essentially the same.

1) Opening Scenes

Opening scenes introduce characters, plots, and relationships in all the dimensions, establishing the present and pointing to where story is going. Writers can take more time unpacking opening scenes than they can anywhere else in the story. However, compared to books written a hundred years ago, authors are given fewer and fewer words to "get to the point" these days. There's no denying that the first page--specifically the initial 250 words--is your story's make-or-break stage. To give you a startling visual, this paragraph you're reading right now is just under 250 words (it has 242). You can see how frightfully small of an opportunity you have to engage. In these 250 make-or-break words, your reader (whether an editor at a publishing house,

literary agent, bookstore browser, the library try-it-before-you-buy-it patron, or the optimistic soul who buys his books by the crate and has a massive home library because he wants to devour life-altering written words that he can go back to over and over again in his lifetime) makes the decision whether to turn the page or to close the book and never open it again. The wisest author advice I've ever heard about writing a killer opening is to assume that the reader is in a terrible mood when he opens your book and, for that reason, you can't let yourself believe you have until page two to win him over. Engage immediately. Doing anything else is at your peril.

Carefully consider and craft your hook--the opening line of your book. This pivotal sentence should either contain or suggest the end of your story. That first line should resonate throughout the book, parallel and/or reflect the resolution, and maybe even tie into the final sentence. Additionally, the first scene of your book sets the tone for the entire story, always, and establishes a premise for more of the same. If you're writing an edge-of-the-seat, nail-biting adventure, then a leisurely, coming-of-age opening can only lead to disorienting disappointment. Use the opening scenes to get into the main characters' heads and hearts while simultaneously dragging the reader into the immediate problems. If the reader doesn't have a strong desire to invest emotionally from the very first scenes, he won't care what happens next, let alone how everything is resolved. This isn't to say that a slow beginning that hints at more action later isn't perfectly acceptable (e.g., *Divergent* by Veronica Roth). But that hint toward impacting action is crucial to ensuring reader acceptance and satisfaction. Your first sentences should intrigue or raise curiosity about the story throughout the opening scenes. James Scott Bell advises asking yourself, "Who cares?" and "What's the purpose?" to ensure validity and clarify the reason for each scene even existing. Progression is vital from one scene to the next. If something interesting is actually happening, the reader will be patient for more, with a sense of anticipation rather than frustration.

Your story beginning promises a certain ending. Follow through on the expectations established from the first page of the book (which isn't to say you can't have a surprise twist at the end, as we've already established). Author Randy Susan Meyers says, "I believe the writer has a covenant with [readers]. You provide the best possible stories--they will bring you into their heart[s]. And, come the day you separate, the moment it's time to say goodbye, do you want to break their heart[s]? Or do you want them to sigh, close the book with regret that it's over, and think how they can't wait for your next book?" You want your readers to be completely satisfied with each and every book you write, not only so they'll reread them, but also so they'll put you on their must-buy list and tell all their friends about you.

2) Resolution Scenes

Your opening scenes always introduce an "implicit promise" (as Nancy Kress calls it) to the reader. If you don't deliver what you've promised within your first scene by the time your story ends, you've stolen time, money, and even reader emotions, all with a careless shrug of purposeful neglect. Kress says, "The ending dramatizes the triumph of some of the forces developed in the middle, which, in turn, were set in motion by the characters and conflict introduced in the beginning." Your ending requires that the reader be given what's needed to feel satisfied that the implicit promise made at the beginning has been fulfilled.

In *Plot & Structure*, James Scott Bell says, "...almost all great jokes are built on a structure of three--the setup, the body, and the payoff." Stories are no different with the beginning, middle, and end. Specifically, all story endings must be logical, with a sense of inevitability. Everything's been leading up to your closer, regardless of red herrings, artful concealments, and delaying tactics. But is the ending warranted and utterly logical; does it fit what you've been promising the reader from the beginning as the payoff for coming along for the ride? Endings should always require a "the only way it could end" declaration, but that doesn't mean they can't (and shouldn't) be surprising, too. Steven Pressman says in his article "Setups and Payoffs", "If the payoff is really good, we realize, in the end, that there was no surprise at all. What had seemed to be a turn of fate proves to be inevitable and, as we realize it, we receive the gift of insight. We should have seen it coming!"

Maybe you can't please everyone with your story ending, but you should at the very least satisfy them with a coherent conclusion. In Victoria Grossack's *Crafting Fabulous Fiction* column, her article "The End" states, "Those who are perpetually disgruntled may at least concede that the end suits the story."

In the back of your mind, at every point in the storytelling, should be the fact that the end of your story is where you're going. You're continuously building toward the wrap-up. Your direction is crucial because, as we said about openings, your story beginning should resonate throughout the rest of the book. It should match up with the resolution and may even tie into the final sentence (cohesion at its finest). The end grounds and justifies the whole of the story.

It's the final, not always the first, impression that will bear lasting judgment. Your story endings should always be memorable, if not earth shattering. The reader should feel that every minute of his time in your world--putting off, giving up, or altogether missing other things--was well spent. Make the reader exit with a sense of wonder. Give him a passionate desire to reread the book in the future.

While it's been said the opening sentence can make or break the book, the ending is what makes or breaks the *author*. When you write the ending of your book, your main concern must always be for the reader and his level of satisfaction: Was the

journey I'm asking a reader to take worth the time and money he invested in it? No author would want a reader to finish his book by saying, "It was good, but I didn't like the way it ended." That sentiment turns what was originally a potential fan into someone who avoids all your future work because you let him down.

As David Villalva says, the end of your story isn't just the turning point of the story- it's the turning point between you and your audience. "This key milestone is where you reward audiences in dramatic fashion for sticking around. It's where your audience decides whether or not they'll commit to your next story, too. Have you ever finished a story and immediately sought out everything else put out by its creator?" If that's not your ultimate goal as an author, I don't know what is. The key to getting it is in giving your resolution the ultimate payoff.

3) Bridge Scenes

In his book *Spidersilk*, Akutra-Ramses Atenosis Cea includes this line: "The painted picture seemed eerily real as if there actually was a way to step through it into the wild jungle." Isn't this a beautiful picture of how compelling words can draw readers into a story? However, the work of writing a scene so vividly that readers actually feel like they're inside it is no easy task. The last thing a writer wants is readers looking at his story from afar, or worse, a "fast travel" moment where readers are unceremoniously dumped in the center of a dark, bleak island that has no bridge or boat on any side and no roadmap to tell them where they are, how they got there, why they've been dropped there so rudely, or what happens now. At first, this might be exciting, but when the reader becomes aware he's trapped with nowhere to go because the basic grasp of scene setup hasn't been created, disappointment and surrender to defeat are inevitable.

Essentially, the difference between opening and bridge scenes can be described in this "fast-travel" way. Those of you who play videogames will understand what "fast travel" is. Basically, once an area of the overall game map had been discovered, the character is allowed to travel back to that location in the future without the hassle of discovery he went through the first time. This is a lot like what needs to happen in a book. New locations must be discovered (detailed and described in-depth) at the opening of a story or when they're first introduced but familiar locations don't require such an elaborate setup after the initial visit.

Hands down, the middle bridge scenes are the trickiest to develop because the majority of your story unfolds within them, and that has to happen with ideal pacing. Every bridge scene should show a realistic, vivid picture of the story landscape within the first few paragraphs and as succinctly as possible such that the reader can step into it right alongside the main character and feel informed and eager for the next plot

development. Until the scene is established sufficiently, the reader can't enter, let alone be transported there without unfortunate repercussions.

Each bridge scene has to meet three basic requirements:

1. Establish the three-dimensional characters (especially the POV character) and relationships.

2. Advance the plot. In his book *How to Write Dazzling Dialogue: The Fastest Way to Improve Any Manuscript*, James Scott Bell says, "Be clear on every character's agenda in a scene, and the agendas in conflict. Before you write, take just a moment to jot down what each character in the scene wants, even if (as Kurt Vonnegut once said) it is only a glass of water." If the scene doesn't have a clear purpose in advancing the story, it needs to be questioned. Having three dimensions of CPR elements is crucial to advancing a story through the middle scenes.

3. Construct the setting. Readers must be led through the story world step by step with information that first anchors, then orients, and finally allows them to move forward with a sense of anticipation. Scenes can't really function without time and place being indicated early (and concisely) enough so your reader doesn't become lost, looking to establish where he is, was, and where he's going.

Ensuring that all of these requirements are accomplished in each scene in a creative, non-info-dump way isn't for the faint of heart, and a task that might demand a lot of revision. But the harder readers have to work to establish and orient themselves, the easier it becomes to set down the book, possibly for good.

The three basics to scene setup we established above aren't all that's needed either. The secret to writing three-dimensional bridge scenes is that all must be set *up* before they can set *out* to tell their crucial piece of the story.

In real life, a bridge has two sides and both must be firmly anchored to something tangible in order to successfully function. But your goal isn't simply to get your characters from Point A to Point B. Scenes have to connect, join, fuse, and be secured in such an intrinsic way that they flow from start to finish, one to the next, in a natural progression. The secret to providing scenes that anchor and orient readers, and lead them with purpose throughout your story landscape, always with a whisper of what's to come, is twofold:

1. Connect the bridge from one scene to the next seamlessly. You can use this method for all the scenes in your book because the technique is the same from one to the next. The only difference is that in the very first scene of the book (the opening), you're starting from the viewpoint of the reader knowing nothing about what came before--hence the need for more room and clever acts of brevity that introduce the story elements of characters, plots, and relationships. Opening scenes are not the place to write long, boring, overwhelming details and explanations for every character, place and scenario, but, in the beginning when you're telling your story, you are introducing

brand new characters, settings, and situations. Therefore, it will take more time and words to establish all of these in order to illuminate the reader's path forward clearly without strewing the path with obstacles or hurdles that do nothing but block the way ahead. You want to include just enough to set up and establish CPR elements. Opening scenes allow us more space to do that because you're starting from the very beginning, and these initial chapters need to show readers the five w's (who, what, where, when, why).

I remember reading the opening chapters of a story for a critique partner once, and I was literally dumped in the middle of the woods and watching from shadows as this man skulked around a house...a house in which I was never told was his own. I was also never told that the person inside the house was an illegal squatter. I couldn't find the point of anything, kept getting lost and frustrated as three or four scenes played out around me without any explanations of this kind. Knowing those few crucial details would have made everything else come into sharp focus, but the author had been erroneously told that she shouldn't give away basic details like that at the beginning of a story because it would kill the action. I don't deny that there was high action, but none of it made the slightest bit of sense without basic context. There's nothing worse than dropping a reader in the middle of nowhere in the dark of night and he isn't given enough details to figure out where he is, what's going on, and who this character running ahead of him in the darkness is. In the same way that the first step in using a microscope is to focus the lens, we need to provide the focus for CPR elements in the beginning of each of our scenes.

2. Extend the bridge into the next scene. What you're doing here is foreshadowing future events (this is *exactly* the future dimension we discussed earlier!). Victoria Lynn Schmidt describes this as "making the reader wonder what could possibly happen next, without making [him] incredulous after it happens." Obviously extending the bridge toward the next scene won't be done in the opening paragraphs but closer to the end of each scene. As we said about an opening scene, the difference between bridge and resolution scenes is that the latter should tie up all the story threads while leaving a satisfactory sense of finality rather than making the reader question what happens next.

Doing these two things is something that takes a lot of practice to master, since you don't want an opening with a recap like "Last time in our story..." let alone a transitional punch in the face from recap to the current story, such as: "And that brings us to the present..." Nor do you want to leave your reader hanging, wondering if your story is actually going anywhere. The reader needs to dread/hope about future events or he won't care to keep reading. Unfortunately, there is no magical formula that translates the five W's into wonderfully written prose, since you definitely don't want each scene to be set up exactly like the last.

Keep in mind that your "orienting" setup doesn't have to, nor should it necessarily, be inserted as a single, first paragraph. Just make sure within the first few paragraphs that the reader has what he needs to figure out the basics of the scene. While you're writing or revising, cast a critical eye to make sure you don't overload the opening paragraphs with introspection (interior character monologue), description, or backstory. A variety of aspects (including all of these things along with dialogue, action, narrative, etc.) is needed to flesh out a scene, and each requires its own, most likely differing, size, space, and time for development. Work the anchoring, orienting information throughout the first few paragraphs of the scene in an organic, appropriate way so all your scenes have variety, and avoid repetition or a "template" feel.

In the same vein, your extension into the next scenes shouldn't be done in one bulk, final paragraph at the end. Hints of what's to come should be dropped in at various stages in a scene, and there's no magic formula for how and where to include them. Experiment--even if that means temporarily forcing them to fit in the scene the way you'd shove a book under a table leg until you have the time and tools to repair it properly.

Chart Your CPR Development Homework

Getting in the three-dimensional mindset and using these techniques will get easier with practice. Seeing it in the books you love to read is helpful. Go back to some of your favorite stories and, chapter-by-chapter, see if you can identify present, past, and future dimensions. Pay special attention to how each scene opens--how it anchors, then orients, and finally allows the reader to move forward with a sense of anticipation. Look at how the author connects scenes one to the next and finally to the last, how he presented the five W's scene by scene, and how he extended beyond each scene to give you something to dread and hope for. Notice how he ties up his resolution scene(s), and how effectively the end resonates with the beginning. Do you feel you got the payoff you were expecting? Why or why not?

In order to craft properly developed characters, plots and relationships, we need to have all three dimensions for each core element. Having come into a project with the necessary preparation for crafting three-dimensional characters, plots, and relationships, we've established the hands-on process of translating these dimensional foundations into opening and resolution scenes along with those all-important bridge scenes between. In the next chapter, we'll examine Three-dimensional Character Development in-depth.

CHAPTER THREE

Deep, Multi-Faceted Development and Progression of Characters

"You must learn to be three people at once: writer, character, and reader. Your ability to inhabit all three mind-sets grows with practice. ...by focusing on character, by making craft choices that build character, by becoming that character, and then by ensuring that all your choices and emotion actually have been translated to the page--by doing all that, you give readers what they want." ~Write Great Fiction - Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint: Techniques and Exercises for Crafting Dynamic Characters and Effective Viewpoints by Nancy Cress

Life teaches us to never trust first impressions, since a cruel mother may disguise herself with the face of an angel. A heart of gold may hide beneath a grumpy exterior. In creating a three-dimensional character, we realize that, whether in real life or fiction, no one is who they seem. Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde moments aren't impossible and assumptions are unwise. But how do you discover that a tenderhearted man who lost his brother when they were children lurks under a gruff expression of the neighbor who yells at all the kids constantly like a reverse stalker to keep them off his lawn? How would anyone know a serial killer hid inside the trappings of success, wealth and privilege unless he got sloppy?

Finding out what's living beneath a character's exterior presentation or mask is the very reason writers create character sketches--to explore every facet. The only way to discover some things is to go deep and search for what crawls under the skin. If the writer doesn't know who or what embodies the character he constructs, chances are all but guaranteed that neither will readers.

Certainly, the essence of a character won't change--and shouldn't--once the reader is given a glimpse beneath the surface. Certainly, the essence of a character won't change--and shouldn't--once the reader is given a glimpse beneath the surface. In the same way a microscope lens has to be focused so what was hinted at before becomes sharply clear, our early CPR analysis should help us visualize each element unmistakably. Ideally more intriguing questions will be raised as a result of examination.

Think of your principles, the morals, the fundamentals of who you are and which you build your life and decisions on. For the most part, these areas of you remain unchanging though you, of course, grow (sometimes not in healthy or suitable ways) or evolve as an individual as you experience life through time. In fiction, a character can't be a chameleon, altering her basic "makeup" (way of being) to fit her situation. When a character seems to constantly change her core self, she's not realistic or even likeable. She's wishy-washy and all over the place, which makes it impossible for

readers to ever truly get to know her and they'll forever question her goals and motivations as a result. Or they simply won't care enough to keep reading.

Most writers know the obvious when it comes to CPR development:

You need to make readers like your characters by showing them *why* they should care. You need to make readers root for them, even when they're steeped in the past, pain, and emotional baggage of conflict and complex relationships.

Readers should see the potential hero in a character despite his oh-so-human flaws. Readers should respect characters for their choices (maybe not right away, but soon enough to warrant cheering at the end when they win), instead of being constantly confused about and questioning characters' choices and growing frustrated with them--possibly to the point that they quit reading the book.

Readers need to understand characters in order to be able to forgive them for the silly or even terrible decisions they might have made in the past. It almost goes without saying (but I feel it needs to be said anyway) that this sympathy factor from readers is essential to the overall success of your story, and it's what distinguishes a hero from a villain. (We'll talk about this more soon.)

Gaining insight into what brings characters, plots, and relationships to life starts with sketches. The best character sketches are done in a two-step process. The first step is a spark--something that intrigues and ignites a scenario that the author can carry toward fruition. Brainstorming is absolutely necessary to establish, develop, progress and "conclude" a character. The next step is to use sketches to produce *three-dimensional* life. Many authors start a story on a strong note because the idea that initially fascinated them guides them naturally into creating dimensions. Give yourself time to daydream about your character's three dimensions of CPR development. If the story is one you've been growing for a long time, chances are you won't have to force the character into scenarios to reveal dimensionality. The process of developing her should come organically.

On the Moody Writing blog, there's an article called "The Three Dimensions of Character" that says, "If you want to write a character from the ground up, a character who is as real as any living person living, yet wholly your own creation, then there are three aspects you need to know in depth: the physical, the sociological and psychological. Physical: The only important role of physical appearance when it comes to creating a three-dimensional character is how it affects their behaviour. Sociological: Sociological is their background and current circumstances. How someone is brought up, where they come from and what kind of a life they had (rich, poor, crime, privilege...) will all make a difference to the kind of person they become. Psychological is...how a character views life, what principles they hold to (if any) and how they react to predicaments they may find themselves in comes down to two things, nature and nurture." Keep that in mind as we get started.

Also fix in the back of your mind the goal of sketching 3-D character development: To outfit your characters with the tools and relationships they need to succeed against the conflicts they'll be facing. You have to set the stage from the beginning for those to be believable. Don't try to pull a fast one by expecting the reader to believe that a man who can barely get out of bed in the morning and who's 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.

GETTING TO KNOW CHARACTERS: DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESSION WITH PURPOSE

All characters must have purpose in the story, or there's no reason to include them beyond the role they fill. In Chapter Two, we talked about the role of secondary characters. The purpose in introducing a secondary character can't be to give the main character someone to talk to or to become her cabbagehead nor can secondary characters be mentioned simply to bulk up word count. If a simple designation for the role of a character is all that's needed to explain her presence (for example, the chef), then she shouldn't be treated as a main or secondary character or be given a name or more than nominal space in a scene to do what she came to do.

All characters need purpose. Secondary characters need to be fleshed out with basic internal and external conflicts, goals, and motivations because they are important characters with an objective in being included in the story at hand. But only main characters have full-on development that's the focus of the current story and progresses throughout the book. The biggest difference between main and secondary character is that the secondary character's conflicts and goals and motivations aren't usually central to the current story and they're all revealed *through* the main character.

This isn't to say that secondary characters shouldn't be unique and well-developed enough for you to warrant writing their own story, separately, at a later time. Far from! I can't tell you how many times I'll read a story and think to myself, *These two secondary characters are filling the same role*. The secondary characters frequently have different names, different personalities, different jobs, may even have different interests. However, in relation to the main character, they serve the exact same purpose. In a kind of obvious example, in Harry Potter, the main character has two best friends: Ron Weasley and Hermoine Granger. Hermoine is utilized as the smart one in the group. If anyone needs to figure out something intellectually, she's the one to call upon. Frequently, Ron serves as a foil to Harry, contrasting with him, even clashing and competing with him at times, providing a perspective that often seems Harry's "opposite". Ron has a huge family, Harry's parents died and he's living with relatives who hate him, and any hint of family within reach is always snatched away

before long. Harry has inadvertently (and unwillingly) spent his life in the spotlight while Ron always seems to be overlooked, invisible. If Harry had had two book-smart best friends, you could easily say those two friends were serving the same purpose. As it is, both serve a very definite purpose. Evaluate the purpose of your secondary characters to make sure each one is fulfilling their own unique objectives in this story.

There's another kind of character that's necessary to a story and their function is distinctly different than those of main and secondary characters. In her article "How Flat Characters Are Used in Fiction", Ginny Wiehardt calls these characters "flat characters". They play a supporting role in the story and their use is in moving the plot along or providing subtle exposition. "Such characters do not undergo substantial change or growth in the course of a story. They are also known as 'two-dimensional' or 'static'. Good examples of flat characters are Crabbe and Goyle in the Harry Potter series. Rather than attempting to flesh out these characters, author J.K. Rowling makes them unintelligent, sycophantic followers--necessary to the plot, but otherwise unimportant. The writer needs to develop them only to the extent that the reader understands that character's relationship to the main characters. Whatever interaction that minor character has with the main character needs to be believable, either moving the protagonist toward a goal or setting him back."

I also want to bring up something I'm seeing more and more in today's books: Main characters that only have a few POV scenes all through the story. A character who has a POV scene is by definition a main character and important enough to warrant getting into her head, her life, her situations and relationships. But can a character be adequately "dimensionalized" if she's only given a few scenes in the course of an entire book?

I've even seen this in romance stories, where this shouldn't be the case. In a romance story, the main characters are and have to be the hero and the heroine since the plot will, more or less, come down to the couple and their relationship. While it's acceptable to choose to write the story in, say, only the heroine's POV all the way through, I wouldn't call that a well-rounded romance. If a story is dubbed a romance by genre definition, it needs a well-rounded romance.

You might also have a story in which the other half of a couple is potentially a villain, such as in a gothic story, and it makes more sense to only write from one POV to keep the suspense and tension high. But, in a genre-defined romance story, the best way to get a well-rounded, emotional tale is by having POV scenes with both characters engaging in the romance. While it seems to be getting popular to have romance stories where the majority of the POV scenes are in one POV and the reader is given a glimpse of the other half of the couple's POV in only a handful of those scenes, I question how the neglected main character can be fully dimensional if he or she isn't given an equal number of POV scenes and how it can be, by genre definition, considered a romance. Something will definitely be lacking because this superficially developed main character

is being *injected* periodically into the story instead of planted deeply there and ultimately progressed.

Additionally, if you're writing a series or connecting books, don't neglect the need to establish main *series* characters in the first and possibly all series stories. But remember that most readers are turned off by too many characters littering a single story. It's like squeezing a party into a garden shed. Too many characters, especially if they're not all well-crafted and real enough to stand out, can bog a story down. In general, readers prefer to get into the heads of no more than two or three main characters per book; this allows them to get to know and love these few extremely well.

In a series with a cast of characters, once all the major players are introduced (not point-of-viewed!) in that first book, many of them will, by necessity, fade into the background of the next stories until it's their turn to take a lead role. You can approach this in a lot of interesting ways, and many authors have opinions about how to do it. The way I usually handle it is to briefly introduce each series character in the first book, fleshing them out just enough to be compelling without locking myself into anything that I might want to change later. As paranormal author Liz Strange says, "Keep them simple enough for the reader to follow and rich enough to set each character apart."

In the first book in a series, naturally the main characters take center stage and character introductions will come through them. Since I frequently write romances, my main characters are almost always the hero and heroine. I'll then choose one or two other important secondary series character(s) in the current book to be closest to these main characters. In my Wounded Warriors Series, the main series characters were Wendy, Paul, Steve, Gwen, Gregg, Brenda, Mitch, and Jessie. Spoiler alert: Tommie was a series character who died in Book 1 but played a role "in spirit" through all six books of the series. In Book 1, the main characters were Wendy and Paul. Wendy's brother, Steve, in his connection to Wendy, played a larger role in Book 1 than most of the other series characters, and this whetted the readers' appetites for his book, which came next. In Book 2, Steve was the main character. Steve's friendship with another series character, Gwen (who was *not* the heroine in Book 2), was highlighted to get readers interested in Gwen's story. Gwen was the main character in Book 3, and her friendship with series character Gregg (again, not the hero in her story) was featured in a very natural way that got readers ready for Book 4, where Gregg was the main character with another, non-series heroine. In Book 4, Gregg was connected to both Brenda and Mitch to prepare the way for their story in Book 5. In Brenda and Mitch's story, Brenda had a connection with Jessie, who was the main character in Book 6, and so set up the next book. Nearly all of my cast-of-characters series--whether the connection is between friends, family, colleagues, or coworkers--work this way, and it's an extremely efficient way of handling what could be a tricky situation.

If you know you're going to write a group of character series or connecting stories with recurring characters early enough, it's always a good idea to sit down and figure out who the main series characters are, their relationships in each book, and how you're going to introduce another series character from one book to the next, establishing them for their own stories.

So specifically *which* characters should you do these character sketches for? You might want to use the following criteria for deciding whether to do the upcoming sketches for a particular character:

1. Will the character play a major role throughout the book/series? Will she have POV scenes? If the answer to one or both questions is yes, then that character definitely needs to be included but you can include others since the sketches are for your own use. Too much information that you probably won't use is always better than not enough.

2. If you put a simple designation for the role the character fills (like "school caretaker") in the story, you don't really need to include her in the sketches.

3. Is there a lot of background on the character that needs to be told or hinted at even though the character won't play a major role in the book or is a flat character by our earlier definition? If the answer is yes, then that character may be one you do a P/P/F character sketch for. Go with your gut instinct.

4. Are you writing a series or connected stories with recurring characters? You might need to figure out what role a certain character will play in *this* story in preparation for her own story in the future with a sketch.

The Three-dimensional Character Sketch

You'll find character, plot, and relationship sketches galore online--just type "character sketches" etc., into any search engine and you can take your pick from what comes up if you want to go roots-deep with yours. Feel free to add anything you'd like to the basic worksheet I'll provide below (and in the appendix) in order to explore your characters' three-dimensional selves in-depth, but the items you'll see on mine are absolutely necessary. Without adequate fleshing out in these areas, your story will be lacking proper CPR development.

Once you've spent sufficient time dimensionalizing your characters through brainstorming, you can formally begin the second step of sketching characters using worksheets that highlight items that should help provide necessary P/P/F focus. This is what we'll do now, with a strong emphasis on developing all three dimensions. A simple character sketch worksheet that covers the most crucial aspects follows.

Character: Present/Past/Future

First and Last Name and/or Nickname:

Character Role:

Physical Descriptions:

Personality Traits:

Internal Monologue

External Dialogue

Movement

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Skill Set:

Occupation(s):

Education:

Hobbies:

Interests:

Setting(s):

Defining characters in three-dimensional sketches will allow you to know your main characters in all dimensions of self. Remember the difference in three-dimensional writing is that you'll have a separate sketch for each main character that includes her present, past, and future selves.

In the print version of this book as well as the worksheet file, sold separately, we take the basic sketch we have above and duplicate it three times across a landscaped page with three columns, labeling the sketches: "Present Self", "Past Self", and "Future Self". In the ebook version, tables such as that are impossible to duplicate, but you can transfer the sections listed below in table format on your own either in a computer file or on a blank sheet of paper.

CHARACTER: PRESENT SELF

First and Last Name and/or Nickname:

Character Role: (hero/heroine, other main character, secondary character, villain)

Physical Descriptions:

Personality Traits:

Internal Monologue

External Dialogue

Movement

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Skill Set:

Occupation(s):

Education:

Hobbies:

Interests:

Settings(s):

CHARACTER: PAST SELF

First and Last Name and/or Nickname:

Character Role: (hero/heroine, other main character, secondary character, villain)

Physical Descriptions:

Personality Traits:

Internal Monologue

External Dialogue

Movement

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Skill Set:

Occupation(s):

Education:

Hobbies:

Interests:

Settings(s):

CHARACTER: FUTURE SELF

First and Last Name and/or Nickname:

Character Role: (hero/heroine, other main character, secondary character, villain)

Physical Descriptions:

Personality Traits:

Internal Monologue

External Dialogue

Movement

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Skill Set:

Occupation(s):

Education:

Hobbies:

Interests:

Settings(s):

You'll find blank worksheets (free-form only in ebook versions) for you own use in the appendix. As I said previously, you can add anything to this worksheet, if it helps you, but these are the pivotal areas that need to be fleshed out in all dimensions of the self. Keep in mind also that I encourage free-form filling out of the sketches and charts and worksheets in this book. Most brains don't work in a linear way. Things come to us as they come and sometimes if you don't just go with it, you'll never actually begin working. Organization can be done later.

Your goal as a writer is to get to know your characters, plots, and relationships thoroughly in all the dimensions. Not everything you come up with will (or should) be used within the story but it's still important to figure out all you can. The more you know before you start writing, the easier you can convey fully fleshed out CPR elements with the words you write.

Also, don't expect to come up with substance or something brilliant immediately. Work on your sketches over time, developing and layering them, always aware that the rich imagery, textured sentences, and clever turns of phrase will come later, in the writing and revising. The goal right now is to get a plan started.

If it isn't obvious, when you're sketching out these things, be aware that you don't need to work in the order presented. Feel free to mix up items on the forms in this book in whatever way makes the most sense to you--or, probably more accurately, in whatever order the ideas come to you. Work steadily on the one area you're inspired to get going on at the time. When you finish that, look through the rest of the items and see what you're inspired to develop.

Work on your three-dimensional sketches only after you've developed strong story ideas, when you're most inspired, and do everything you can to keep yourself brainstorming while you're fired up about it. If you don't have the ideas or motivation, this process becomes like pulling teeth. When you're first learning the craft of writing, inspiration will play a huge role in your accomplishments. Constant brainstorming is the most important part of writing and should begin long before you start work on a story. During this time, you should be jotting down notes as ideas come to you and storing them in individual story folders (Chapter Seven details what these are). Write down everything that comes to you, no matter how trivial. The sketches will help you dive into the depths of your characters, plots, and relationships from a three-dimensional viewpoint.

The Three-dimensional Character Sketch is streamlined with only the absolute necessities about each main character. The table form of this sketch is presented with the dimensions side by side so you can compare the developments between the dimensions and ensure cohesive, deep, logical progressions. When we're done, you'll also have a Three-dimensional Plot Sketch (Chapter Four) and a Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch (Chapter Five).

Before we get started, fix the axiom in your mind that we stated previously: Character reveals plot and relationships, just as plot and relationships reveal character, and relationships reveal character and plot. This trinity is vital to the dimensionality of your stories. They work together to unearth, connect, and layer a story. So a Three-dimensional Plot Sketch will be ascribed to each major character just as a Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch will be.

In your sketches for each dimension, try to think of *cohesive* connections between them, since these connections are what you'll ultimately highlight in the writing of your

book. The strongest stories are the ones in which every part of the story--the characters' role, physical descriptions, personalities, strengths and weaknesses, relationships, skills, conflicts, goals and motivation, and even settings--become cohesive and fit together organically.

Let's break out each section on this worksheet and discuss what you're looking for in completing the three-dimensional character sketches.

1) *Present/Past/Future Name*

Unless your main characters are Shrek or Fiona, they need a first and last name. A main character's name is crucial beyond the simple act of naming names and because saying "Tom" avoids confusion. Your book should provide readers a glimpse into the world of the characters that's distinctly personalized. I've read too many books lately where it almost seems like the author went out of his way to avoid fully naming his character, like the name is attached to a curse or something.

In Chapter Two, we talked about potential reasons this lack of a full name might be done these days, one pointing to a growing (and disturbing) trend that suggests that forcing the reader to participate in the story by withholding or refusing to include in a story basic character information like a full name, physical description, background elements, etc. is actually a good thing. I could be wrong, but I think this started with something Stephen King said in *On Writing* about description beginning in the author's imagination though needing to finish in the reader's. Good advice on the surface, but writers need take into account that basic details are the very things that prime the reader's imagination. They can't be left up to chance (or left to a reader's imagination) because every part of CPR development affects the overall completeness of your story. Your story is *your story*. You need to make very definite choices about what you want for your CPR elements. Make sure your characters aren't half there instead of fully formed and complete before they go out into the world to be read.

Your character's full name is important but doesn't (and maybe doesn't *need to*) necessarily imply memorability. Think of some of the most exciting characters in the literature we love. Many don't have names that instantly intrigue us. Harry Potter. Tom Jones. Dr. John Watson. Tom Sawyer. James Bond. Through popularity, these names have become larger than life and more compelling than they actually are. Would the authors of these stories have changed the names if they'd known in advance how big these characters would become? Honestly, who knows, and I'm not sure a perpetually compelling or memorable name is a requirement. The more important question is, does the name fit the character?

In this section of the worksheet, simply list the name (first and last--middle is optional) of the character you'll be sketching P/P/F character dimensions for. Since you're doing sketches for *each* dimension of self, the name will probably be the same

on all (unless the character changed or changes her name at some point, marries, or has one or more aliases).

2) *Present/Past/Future Character Role*

A role, quite simply, is the function a character assumes in a particular situation or story. In the world of fiction, roles are fairly well-defined. Depending on the size and genre, there may be one or more main or POV characters who might be called hero or heroine (protagonists), or many of both (i.e., other main characters). You may also have secondary or ancillary "flat" characters. Finally, there are villains (antagonists). Essentially, all these roles are defined by what the author wants to develop in his story.

To understand the underlying concept and perceptions of role, we have to ask a basic question: What makes a reader root for a character? Sympathy. At times, even empathy. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, virtues and flaws. Everyone commits both acts of altruism and sin. Everyone far exceeds expectations and falls short of the ideal at various times in her life. A combination of a protagonist's strengths and weaknesses draws sympathy because a reader is likely to identify with a problem everyone struggles with, and this makes the character flesh and blood instead of a paper doll on a static page. However, the struggle with downfalls has to be balanced with heroisms--noble traits--in order for the main character to be a true (and, in some ways, conventional, given the abundance of what I'll call "antihero heroes" in fiction these days) hero in the reader's eyes.

When we talk about nobility, we think of excellent, redeeming, moral qualities, as well as honor and pure motives. A character without nobility is generally considered the story's villain. Keep in mind that a lot of writers, usually inexperienced ones or rebels, have a tendency to create protagonists without heroisms, and this makes them unlikable and difficult to root for.

In essence, the only difference between a hero and a villain, from a reader's standpoint, is *forgiveness*. Both characters are human (unless you're writing speculative fiction) and both have a unique combination of redeeming, weak, or unsavory traits, and both should be filled with polarities of good and bad. This makes them real to the reader. The difference lies in variations on the basic flow chart governing reader response to the character (arrow equals "leads to"):

**Character's Flaws → Reader's Response →
Character's Behavior → Reader's Response**

With a hero, the flow chart will follow this course:

Character's Flaws → Reader's Understanding →

Character's Growth → Reader Bestows Forgiveness

With a villain, the flow chart will follow this course:

Character's Flaws → Reader's Understanding → Character's *Lack* of Growth → Reader *Withholds* Forgiveness

Note that if your villain doesn't inspire reader understanding, she's one- or only two-dimensional. There has to be some level of understanding to make all characters realistic, even bad guys. In *Anne of the Island* by L.M. Montgomery, Anne says, "I'd write of people and places like I knew, and I'd make my characters talk everyday English; and I'd let the sun rise and set in the usual quiet way without much fuss over the fact. If I had to have villains at all, I'd give them a chance... There are some terrible bad men in the world, I suppose, but you'd have to go a long piece to find them... But most of us have got a little decency somewhere in us."

In the same way, if your hero isn't particularly likeable and/or one that readers can root for, try putting her into the hero equation above--is she acting more like a villain? Then you know what you need to do to fix her character. The flow chart paves the way. If the character doesn't have flaws the reader can sympathize with and the character fails to grow as a person, the reader won't forgive and therefore won't want to see this character's journey to redemption.

A hero's flaws need to be balanced by the reader's understanding of what she did and why she did it. In many fictional cases, the crime is a noble one, or the character redeems herself for past sins through her current and future actions. The hero's outward conviction will carry her on what may seem like a self-destructive course, but she'll give away hidden pieces of herself that contradict her crime or, at the very least, prove her regret. The reader will sense a dual conflict--he'll comprehend that something terrible has happened, is happening, and may happen again to this character he's championing. And, despite any semblance of wrongdoing or ruthlessness on the hero's part, the reader will feel sympathy for her. The reader will bestow forgiveness on the hero because, throughout the course of the story, the hero grieves, repents, mends her ways, and performs gallant deeds worthy of applause. Dwight V. Swain says "only the character who cares about something, finds something important, is worth bothering with." Heroes we love are classic: Luke Skywalker, Peter Pan, Sherlock Holmes, Van Helsing, Faramir son of Denethor II who's the steward of Gondor, Harry Potter, Beowulf.

In the same way, a villain should have a complex, identifiable reason for her crime. In *Maybe Your Bad Guy Is RIGHT!*, K.M. Weiland says, "Even if you find the bad guy generally repulsive, you need to be able to put yourself so thoroughly into his shoes while you're writing him that, just for those moments, you almost believe his slant yourself." A villain's reason is rarely noble, nor can it be justified, however, she should

never be portrayed as evil through and through (unless you're writing speculative fiction and the villain *isn't* human). The most effective villain is the one who rouses almost as much sympathy in the reader as she does revulsion. This is a direct result of *three-dimensionality of role*, because we understand who she is, what made her that person, what she went through, where she's been, and (because three-dimensionality is crucial) see hints about how she's moving toward becoming different and more noble in the future.

In contrast, the villain almost never repents and, in fact, goes on to commit even worse crimes. The reader can't go beyond his own sense of morality to forgive this character, no matter how sympathetic he may be toward her, because the character shows no evidence of growth, no indication of nobility. Though the villain may intrigue us, the reader can't accept her goals. Few people root for Captain Hook, Moriarty, Dracula, Hannibal Lecter, Voldemort, Sauron, or Grendel and his mother.

As I alluded to earlier in this section, these days there are more and more stories in which the main character is far from heroic and yet is presented as the hero of the story anyway, flying in the face of everything I've just said. One article I read called the main character--who was more of a villain than a hero and yet was considered by the author to be a hero--"the person the reader roots for". In essence, there must be something about this character that's worth following her despite her slant toward the dark side. Perhaps because everyone identifies so much with weakness and vice these days, we just accept everyone in one big group hug and don't require nobility from anyone, not even our heroes. That reflection of society is far from the traditional, noble heroes that have been a staple in fiction since the beginning of the written word. I stand behind tradition in this regard. Do what you will at your own peril, if you'd rather not write about traditional noble characters--potentially losing readers.

On this portion of the sketch sheet, you list the character's role in the story as a hero or heroine (main character or protagonist), another main or secondary character, or a villain (antagonist). (We talked earlier about how ancillary/flat/support characters aren't necessary to include on this sketch, but if you opt to, that's your choice since it's for your own use.)

Here's one other thing to be aware of concerning role: Obviously, you don't want to become so fixated by "role" in three-dimensional character development that you create surface, stereotypical characters in your fictional world. Stick figures are two-dimensional at best. More likely, they're one-dimensional.

Also keep in mind, that all living people assume different roles when interacting with different people. Fictional characters shouldn't be an exception to this rule. Your characters will act differently with the various people that populate their worlds, provided they remain consistent under the surface. After all, if one person describes your main character in the present as "Clark Kent" and someone else considers him "Al Capone's twin", your characterization needs work, isn't cohesive, or you have to provide

justifiable reasons for this duality. If your character was an "Al Capone" in the past and is now a "Clark Kent", we need to see the three-dimensional motivations and circumstances that allowed this radical transformation to take place.

This scenario is unlikely in reality, just as it is in fiction; however, nothing is impossible or inconceivable. There are definitely situations where a good guy might be in a bad situation that keeps her from realizing or living up to her "good" potential, and vice versa. For example, in the Harry Potter Series, Professor Snape is believed to be evil all through the books until the last one, where he proves to be a good man with honorable motives; at the opposite extreme, Chancellor Palpatine in Star Wars was a respected political leader in Episodes I and II, and most of III, but revealed himself to be the ultimate villain by the end of Episode III.

As for the future dimension, remember, our goal in including this is to look ahead at the possibilities (good and bad) about what might happen in the future at each stage in the storytelling. Radical changes between P/P/F dimensions are unlikely, and nowhere is this truer than in the future dimension. While you want to produce suspense and tension, dread and hope, and uncertainty of outcome all through the story, a story's ending shouldn't be completely illogical--as it would be if a character role did a one-eighty from hero to villain or the opposite. Although there are very definite situations in a story where this could make sense (*How the Grinch Stole Christmas* proves that), for the most part, you won't see any extreme shifts, at least not ones that don't make perfect sense in light of the story. Reader/viewer reaction to any degree of shift between dimensions should be similar to what we experienced in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (spoiler!): Shouldn't we have known from the start that Elsa and Walter Donovan were traitors? All the clues were there from the start...weren't they? The two of them know entirely too much and lead Indy right where they need him to go. The reaction shouldn't be outrage, disappointment, or confusion at the convenience.

As an example of the more subtle changes between the dimensions of self that we're likely to see in most stories, think of Peter Pettigrew in the Harry Potter Series. If I had to define his role with an adjective, it would be as a spineless (not good or truly evil) secondary character. Because of his own weaknesses, he was drawn away from the good side to the bad, betraying his friends for the possibility of power and protection. In the course of his lifetime, I believe his failings as a human being filled him with regret--because he betrayed his friends. He'd placed himself in a dangerous, morally skewed situation where he lived in desperate fear and silent grief on a daily basis. While there was some ambiguity built into the actual writing, I think in the end Peter calmly accepted his death in the last book in order to atone for his lifelong sins. That explanation is warranted and logical. If he'd joined Harry's side, no one would have bought the radical shift of allegiance. If he'd outright killed Harry, this action wouldn't have fit what we'd come to believe of his defined role over the course of the series. This is what all shifts in dimension should strive for: A perfect, logical fit.

3) Present/Past/Future Physical Descriptions

Physical appearance of a character serves a purpose in every story, providing its own kind of characterization; I don't believe these things should ever be chosen randomly or indiscriminately let alone overlooked and left out for some silly flavor of the day writing trend that's misguided or short-sighted. Character appearance should reveal personality traits as well as strengths and weaknesses and other attributes do. Additionally, appearance may define relationships and possibly even suggest the skill sets (a twist on this can also be intriguing--how does a slight woman fit into the all-male world of firefighting, for instance?).

One way to try to tailor your character's physical appearance is by finding a picture of your character from whatever source you'd like. A fuzzy mental picture of a character doesn't usually make you feel you know her as well as you should. If you can picture your character clearly, if you can actually see her, the chances are you'll write about her in a more intimate, comfortable way. For me, a picture of a character is like a three-dimensional, CPR developmental infusion each time I look at it. I desperately want to know that person's name, where she came from, what makes her tick. All aspects of my story's development deepens by ascribing an actual face to character attributes.

Physical descriptions can also be influenced by the dimensions of plot (internal conflicts and certainly goals and motivations) and setting, since how a character looks and feels about her appearance can be vastly influenced by where she lives. For example, a ninety-pound male weakling in Los Angeles will feel the effects of his differences among the tanned, buff bodybuilders on the beach, just as a buck-toothed Rubenesque-sized scientific type of a woman would on the same beach with half-dressed socialites.

Be wary when describing a main character from her own POV. If that character is the only one with POV scenes in the story, you'll have no choice but to self-describe, but try to do it creatively, always aware that a character describing herself will either sound like she's going on and on obsessively about herself with every little detail of her looks--like she's never seen herself before, or she'll sound outright conceited.

If you're using a third-person POV, chances are that your main characters will be described by other characters and that's the preferable way to do them. Although this kind of description can include physical appearances, it should always incorporate the *impressions* that your characters make. Very few people describe themselves the same way others describe them. In Sarah Langan's suspense book, *The Keeper*, the first chapter is all about the impressions characters have of Susan Marley, who was once the local beauty, but--through a series of unfortunate events--became the town slut. How one character describes another can show how story elements connect to each other, adding depth and complexity, but can also show a contrast of differences

between them. In this way, both parties are "described" but creatively. Another example of this is given by Pip in respect of his sister from Dickens' *Great Expectations*:

My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up "by hand". Having at that time to find out for myself what that expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.

What do we learn here? Since this is the character looking back at his childhood from the distance of having aged, we know he's become insightful, reflective, and wise. His sense of humor and forgiveness is obvious in his drollness in describing how mean his sister was to him, how tough and unloving she was, but he's strangely and wonderfully cheerful about it, in retrospect. Maybe he wasn't that well-adjusted while it was happening, but in this short description we learn something not only about Pip and his sister, but her husband and the neighbors who were witness to the debacle of Pip's childhood.

There's one other way to craft character descriptions and, if you're writing a romance story, it's absolutely crucial to include not only descriptions of the hero and heroine from the other person's POV but also their individual reactions and actions as a result of the other's appearance. This is part of the relationship development. Even if someone isn't classically beautiful or attractive, there has to be something about that person's physical appearance that draws the other character's interest strongly. We'll talk more specifically about this in Chapter Five.

A very simple way to see if your characters are un-, under-, or overdeveloped is to go through every scene of your story and write down everything you've said about a particular character's physical descriptions, no matter how vague or short. If you want, put page numbers so you can easily go back to it if you want to do more work later. I don't believe physical descriptions should be in big chunks (paragraph after paragraph), that they always need to be conveyed in narrative (conveyance can also come through actions, dialogue/introspection, etc. just as effectively), or even have to be in every single scene. When you're done compiling the list of physical descriptions, read it over. Do you feel like you've gotten a good visual about what this character looks like based on this? Did you see any repetition, contradiction, or anything that could be more effectively conveyed in another way? If you're writing a romance, are you feeling the growing attraction between the couple in the ways they've described each other--i.e., "reactions from the love interest"?

If you don't feel like you have a good visual picture of any important character, find pictures from magazines or the internet. Then, with the pictures in front of you, fill out a character sketch trying to use vivid, creative descriptions that you might eventually utilize within the scenes. You should be able to do this thoroughly. Once you're done with that, fill the form out from the opposite POV (in other words, hero describing heroine as he sees her and vice versa). Especially in a romance, you need to know the characters thoroughly and from both POVs to understand the attraction between them and to root for them to get their happily-ever-after.

P/P/F dimensions for physical appearances are very likely to change from one dimension to the next--*dramatically*--except in cases where your character is very young in the present and has little "past" to draw upon. In Rachel Lee's third book in the Conard County Series, *Miss Emmaline and the Archangel*, the hero Gage Dalton is a former DEA agent whose wife and children were killed in a car bombing meant for him. He was nearby when the bombing happened, and it left him with scars, a limp, and almost constant pain from damaged nerves. His physical appearance from past to present is definitely changed.

Alterations don't have to be this dramatic, of course. A character could deliberately change original hair color, grow to over six feet after being of short stature as a child, or go from a wallflower to a beauty, the way my heroine, April St. Clair, did in my story *Taming April*, Book 4 of the *Cowboy Fever Series* (see my comments in bold brackets within these passages):

Past Dimension (in her own POV):

The last time anyone in Fever, Texas had seen her, she'd been a waif of a shy girl, taller than almost everyone her age, and certainly ganglier. She'd been all straight, blond hair and awkward, skinny, long limbs. Most probably didn't even know what she'd looked like without her nose buried in a book--library book. She'd never owned a book until she went off into the world on her own. **(A lot is conveyed about the heroine's appearance, her personality, as well as the financial difficulties of her youth in this paragraph.)**

Pretty? No. She'd been far from it. She'd also never worn makeup until she'd left this place. No boy had ever looked at her, and she hadn't had a single friend to call her own.

When Mama was gone, all I ever wanted to do was escape this place. The ragged clothing and boots that I never knew how many other people had worn before me. The broken fingernails and split ends because I could never get a haircut, let alone a manicure. Daddy never had any money for that. For anything. **(Another way to include past dimension is through introspection or internal monologue. We**

get to see inside the character's thoughts and these are fully clothed in emotional conveyances in a way that simple narrative may not adequately achieve.)

The day she'd graduated high school, she'd been beyond petrified to have to deliver the valedictory address--by virtue of having the highest rank in a graduating class, in fact the highest rank in nearly thirty years--at the commencement exercises. She hadn't believed she could be more agonizingly self-conscious than in doing that, but she'd been wrong about that being the worse of it. As she'd returned to her seat after her speech, Shawn Jacobs had stuck out his leg at the last minute and she'd gone sprawling like the gangly filly she'd been. The entire school had broken into wild laughter. Even to this day, the thought of that incident mortified her. Shawn had only compounded the problem by trying to help her up. She'd slapped him away. She'd never wanted him to touch her again, and she wasn't sure she'd ever be able to forgive him for ending her time in town as the laughingstock. It was probably what everyone remembered best about her. **(The heroine's past, growing up in this small town, is developed. Now we moved into the present dimension: As a contrast that fleshes out what we've read about her, we'll next see her in the hero's POV.)**

Present Dimension (as described by the hero, Shawn):

Suddenly, the shiny, all-but-new car parked in the ranch clearing lost its appeal when Shawn noticed what was standing next to it. This honey was at least five foot ten inches tall, slim but beautifully shapely with long, silky, butter-blond hair, wispy bangs, brilliant green eyes, wearing a designer skirt suit that showed just a hint of cleavage and mile-long, tanned legs. Those legs tapered down to four and a half inch stiletto heels with peep toes.

Shawn reached up instinctively to shove his hat back so he could get a better look at her, but he must have lost the worn, raffia straw hat out in the pasture when he'd been dragged by his own horse after trying to rope a blind calf. *She's gotta be hotter than hell dressed like that in hundred-degree weather. And, God help me, she does look hotter than hell.* **(This peek into the present description of the heroine is supported by some setting details that reflect the developing details.)**

Defying the fact that he could barely move and, come tomorrow, he'd be all but paralyzed for the next week or more and the fact that he couldn't stink worse if he'd actually taken a bath in manure, he decided

he would have had to be dead not to react to this woman. She looked like a porcelain doll, too beautiful to touch let alone look at without hurting his eyes. But her face was as immobile as a doll, too. He wondered if her full, shapely, Michelle Pfeiffer mouth would actually crack if she tried to smile. Unfortunately, the memory of his old girlfriend Racquel was too close, and he couldn't stop remembering how she'd always dressed wrong, too fancy, for every location and occasion--and she'd done it on purpose. She'd wanted to be the movie star among hicks. **(The hero's past collides with the present as he compares the heroine to a former girlfriend he'd had a bad experience with. Future tension is effectively implied.)**

Don't neglect your future dimensions when you sketch physical descriptions, though there's a tendency to. Consider that there isn't a person alive who doesn't dream about making changes to physical appearance. This, in itself, is a way to develop dimensions. If you have a heroine who's constantly talking about being on a diet, going on a diet, doing something radical to change her weight, but does the exact opposite at every turn (prefacing that the multiple donuts on her plate are the absolute last before she buckles down), projecting a future dimension of characterization here isn't difficult. However, insert a strong motivation (meeting up with her old flame at the ten-year class reunion) and different results may be in the offering. Another way to come at this to avoid predictability in the scenario is that the weak-willed heroine doesn't lose a pound--maybe even gains it--before the reunion, yet her still gorgeous old flame falls in love with her anyway. There's always a way to inject a future dimension into your characterization to give readers something to hope for, as well as to dread.

Let's go over some specific ways to create vivid, creative character descriptions and what to avoid.

How a person looks can be strongly affected by what she wears, her likes and dislikes, her affiliations, her state of mind or her intentions. Clothing choices open up a whole range of places to explore, as clothing choices can be directly affected by gender, time period, occupation, financial and social status, psychological makeup, personality and personal taste, how someone feels about his body. It can even hint at relationships. For instance, an ex-husband cheated on the main character and, because he did it with the college-aged babysitter who wore low-cut tops that showed her name and address, the heroine decides her own "name and address" are private property--not for the world to view and anyone she dates will respect that or else.

Does a character have a scar, a tattoo, a limp, a tic, or some kind of marking or deformity on her body? Is there a story behind it that hints at something about the personality, an association or relationship, a trait or weakness, a conflict that's shaped her?

Intersperse the descriptions creatively throughout the scenes without going overboard at any point. The first description of a character should be the largest. Everything after that should come in carefully planned dribbles throughout the story, where most appropriate and effective.

Also, don't simply *te//* the reader things about your character, especially if you're not going to show those things in evidence in the story. For example, if the heroine states that the hero is kind and generous but there's absolutely no situation that contains evidence of him being kind or generous with anything he says or does at any point in the story (maybe even the opposite), these are random, unverified misassumptions on the part of the heroine. Maybe she's projecting what she wants him to be but the story lacks evidence in his words and deeds to bear out this assumption. Just stating a fact that you haven't actually developed into your characteristics doesn't make it ring true. Showing evidence in word and deed with appropriate action and proof is necessary in fiction. It's an exercise in following through on developing CPR elements effectively all through a story.

Don't inundate the reader with the same descriptions over and over, such as of eye color, hair color, etc. Mention descriptions--yes, definitely!--but only once or twice each throughout an entire book. You might want to use these in moments of intense intimacy or within dialogue or action. In general, though, trust your reader to already have the fact stored away and used in the vision whenever a particular character is in a scene. Also, Dwight V. Swain says in *Creating Characters*, "Show how the character looks and acts, and then let your readers extract whatever feelings they wish from it."

This example of effective description from *Sense and Sensibility*, by Jane Austen, equally conveys personality:

Mrs. Jennings, Lady Middleton's mother, was a good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who walked a great deal, seemed very happy and rather vulgar. She was full of jokes and laughter, and before dinner was over had said many witty things on the subject of lovers and husbands, hoped they had not left their hearts behind them in Sussex, and pretended to see them blush whether they did or not.

Descriptions are more than adjectives! Descriptions should never simply be adjectives tacked onto a person, place, or thing, such as in the following example of deliberately overdone description:

With a heavy sigh, she set down the black ceramic coffee mug, her green gaze settling heavily on the gilded clock ticking loudly against the familiar noises outside her solid oak office door. She brushed back her

thick, reddish-brown hair that fell down her back in a long, straight curtain.

When you reveal every last detail of your character and/or surroundings, as above, the reader--sure--can picture the scene, can even feel like he's right there...but he might not want to be now that you've hit him over the head with it. In the above paragraph, the reader does get a picture of the setting, the character, and the things around her. But it's the type of poor writing that calls attention to itself and thereby pulls the reader out of the story. Every writer's cardinal rule (and goal) should be to keep a reader fully immersed. The rest of the world doesn't exist while he's reading.

Read some of your favorite books and look at how descriptions of characters are conveyed, study the most effective vivid ways to convey descriptions and especially the kind where you can feel actual attraction and/or emotions between the characters.

Used effectively, character description can be turned into something vital using all the senses in your story instead of a grocery list of details. Make descriptions relevant to all aspects of three-dimensional CPR development.

4) Present/Past/Future Personality Traits

Who we are (and will be) is largely determined by who we were and by what we've been through. Think nurture and nature, environment and experience, likes and dislikes, fears and areas of confidence, secrets both known and hidden. Consider specifically where a person comes from in terms of how setting shapes personality: the size of that setting and living conditions there; social or economic status (and also race and gender); customs and traditions; even "voice" (how a person sounds, the way she communicates, and her dialogue choices can be a direct result of where she comes from and how that affects her personality). To create believable characters, all these things have to be developed through the P/P/F character sketches.

Unfortunately (or fortunately?), human beings are full of contradictions. It's ingrained in our nature to experience the world both as we would like it to be and how it actually is. What we believe, what we know, what we stand for, and what we end up doing can all be completely at odds and yet exist side by side. Think of Sherlock Holmes, who's an absolute study in contradictions (great detective, lousy human being; methodical mind, yet a completely disorganized slob). What about James Bond, who can save the whole world but never himself? This is a man who will never find true peace or lasting happiness in his life. I pity him rather than envy him for the exciting, dangerous life and reckless flings some people think are the marks of an ideal existence. Talk about deep dimensions.

How do we translate all this into our characters without creating a chameleon, convenient to whatever the story needs? Human beings, and characters, are absolutely

infused with so many flexible, dimensional facets; it's not surprising that it can be hard to figure out what to focus on when it comes to personality traits. The only, albeit generalized way, to incorporate so much into our characters without being confusing or unrealistic is by doing what Marshall J. Cook advises in *Leads & Conclusions*: "If you want to capture the general, focus on the specific. If you want to describe something huge and inanimate, begin with someone small and human." To create a truly unique character--and what writer doesn't want this?--we need to focus on specific parts of a personality that include both *enhancements* and *contrasts*. Use these to give the characters the relationships and tools they need to succeed in the story goal.

Enhancements are the subtle, balanced, or extreme elements that complement what the writer has already established as characteristic traits for that character. They're personality traits that make that character uniquely memorable. A writer can't create a truly ordinary Jane because she would bore the reader. In the fictional world, an author may present a protagonist who at first glance seems ordinary. Even so, there must be something about her that makes her stand apart. This something may not be revealed until later, when her quality is tested.

Faramir, Boromir's brother, in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* comes to mind. Faramir spends most of his life in the shadow of his older brother, whom his father always compares him to. He never lives up to the larger-than-life hero that his glorious sibling is...yet, when tempted to take the ring from Frodo, Boromir gives in to evil desire (later repenting before his death). When Faramir himself comes face-to-face with that same ring, he considers giving his father this mighty gift to gain the standing his brother has always had, that he coveted. In the end, he chooses to forgo this honor--an agonizing lifetime of craving that's created a voracious hole in his heart--in order to do the right thing in letting Frodo (and the ring) go. In this way, Faramir is an extraordinary hero, regardless of how he'll personally suffer for his selfless sacrifice.

A contrast, which can also be subtle, balanced, or extreme, is an element that's in opposition to what the writer has already established as "characteristic" traits for that character. A contrast in a personality is one of the best and most often used ways of making a character rise to the spotlight. Readers want baffling contrasts. They want to see a high school dropout spouting Byronic poetry, a bleeding heart paired with an otherwise unmovable hero, the wounded warrior rescuing a stray dog, the uptight virgin wearing six-inch stiletto heels. They want to watch a character rebuild and rediscover her dignity, her self-respect, her inner moral compass.

Any character who's so hard and jaded that she almost seems untouchable will need a soft contrast--something that makes readers like and sympathize with her, and forgive her. Readers need to be touched or moved by what's beneath her mask in some way. For example, consider a hardened cop who's seen the worst in her fellow man, yet she never fails to visit chronically ill children in the hospital. This makes a poignant impact on readers. The contrast proves that she's human, and that there's still

vulnerability buried deep inside her that will surely rise to the surface in other ways, given time, circumstances, and opportunity. Hence, the reader wants to know more.

An interesting example of a complex, at times contradiction-ridden (in a totally believable way) character with enhancements and contrasts is from the TV series *Alias*. While the heroine Sidney might not say outright that she wants to be a hero, the predisposition is in her blood. When she's approached by a supposedly covert branch of the CIA called SD-6, she joins...only to discover much later that she's been working for the bad guys all along. This isn't the kind of organization you can submit a resignation to and walk away. But she can't get herself to blindly continue working for the enemy, so she becomes a double agent, working for the real CIA to bring down SD-6, while letting them think she remains loyal. Her enhancements are the people she loves, forever her downfall in the course of this series, as she battles with her loyalty for her country and her own ingrained morality. She isn't totally altruistic though. She takes risks, occasionally displaying a naiveté that's at odds with everything she's been through: She sometimes foolishly trusts that fate isn't out to get her, and she tries to have a normal life and deep, genuine relationships amidst all this chaos.

Think of some of the unique characters in history, on the big screen and in literature. Indiana Jones, dashing adventurer and ambitious scholar, is truly a study in contrasts. He'll enter any dangerous situation to retrieve an artifact yet he's terrified of snakes. He's a sedate college professor and equally a reckless, ambitious adventurer. Everything about him *fits him*. All the things that make up his personality enhance his character and make him unforgettable.

Take the character of Westley in William Goldman's unforgettable *The Princess Bride*. An acquiescing farm boy quietly in love with his mistress goes off to seek his fortune to become worthy of her hand in marriage. He comes back a notorious, invincible pirate who kidnaps her, then repeatedly rescues her even after he's dead...or "only mostly dead". He's charming, tenacious, forgiving, and an unshakeable believer in true love. Westley has enhancements and contrasts that fit him consummately.

Consider Heathcliff, the dark, tortured hero in Emily Brontë's classic, *Wuthering Heights*. He is an unwanted orphan who--in contrast to his emotionless, humble beginnings--becomes violently obsessed with Catherine, the daughter of his benefactor, to the grave. Everything about him is extreme, and it enhances him in a way that makes him stand out--perhaps not positively, but nevertheless irrevocably--in a sea of ordinary men. Every other man is in violent contrast to him. No wonder Catherine could never forget him.

What about Éowyn, the daughter of Theoden of Rohan, in *The Lord of the Rings*? A caretaker by nature, and yet not content to stand by while the men of Rohan ride off to war. She puts on battle armor and marches to war beside them. Though she's soft and vulnerable, she's also the very warrior who defeats the immortal Witch-king.

All of these characters have enhancements and contrasts that make them breathtakingly memorable.

In personality, P/P/F dimensions are likely to transform subtly, rather than radically change from one dimension to the next. The exception is when your character is very young and has little past to draw upon. It's true that most every middle-aged person that you talk to will say they've changed dramatically from when they were children. But have they really? Examine closely in this supplemental example of the iconic character of Indiana Jones. From past to present (in the first three movies), Indiana was a boy who chased adventure and found trouble from his Boy Scout days. He continues that into every facet of his adult life as a full-time professor of archaeology and part-time treasure hunter. In the fourth Indiana Jones movie (the "future") he's quite a bit older, possibly wiser, but he's still following adventure--and trouble--like a bloodhound. Viewers want to follow this intriguing path instead of the (possibly more realistic) predictability of the character teaching full-time in his stuffy, cloistered academic world where he only dreams about the good old days.

Remember, you can't just *tell* the reader this information. Just saying something exists doesn't make it true. Showing is a necessary part of developing CPR elements all through a story.

Let's talk about three other aspects of personality in the form of unique external dialogue, internal monologue, and character movements, which can create rich realism of character when used with purpose.

A) External Dialogue

External dialogue is what characters say out loud. Dialogue can be used to reveal important details, might be employed as a tactic to start a scene off with a bang, and usually establishes the point of the scene itself. Dialogue can be used to advance the plot and action and build momentum, to reveal and color the situation, reflecting the individual voices of the characters, to establish and develop relationships and conflicts.

Dialogue can do so much to create curiosity--sidestepping, dodging, deflecting, redirecting, and reframing issues. It can also present an exposition of the background or past events as well as highlighting potential future developments. Additionally, your dialogue may set a tone for a particular scene (suspense, romance, etc.). Vibrant dialogue can turn a dead scene on its ear and make readers active participants in the story. Finally, carefully constructed *silence* between characters can load and distract from the issues, which may be exactly what's needed.

Just like any other aspect in a story, dialogue has to have purpose. John Guare says, "You can write the sharpest, most glittering, wisest, poetic, hilariously dazzling dialogue, but if that dialogue doesn't do its true work and open the dramatic world underneath, it's dead on arrival." No one wants to read random, filler conversations

between characters that reveal nothing but that boredom is afoot. Be sure that what's being talked about in a conversation between characters is worth putting on the page, taking up room in the story, and doesn't leave the reader wondering why it's even included. I love how MJ Bush describes this: "Poor dialogue dilutes the characters, slows the pace, and often, it tattles on the plot. Or abandons it in a dark alley a few streets over."

In addition to the skill of writing sparkling, purposeful dialogue, it's never too soon to start thinking about what each of your characters will say and how they'll say it. Providing each of your characters with a distinct and personalized voice is key to writing great fiction. The goal of sketching out external dialogue specifics for individual characters (usually the main and secondary) is to encourage you to think about mannerisms and character traits early in the process. While your characters will probably reveal such distinctions to you as your story progresses, by thinking about it early, you'll be more open to such revelations. Include information about individual speech patterns and repeating catch phrases. With this information in place, you'll know exactly what a given character will say and how he'll say it.

Pay attention to your dialogue and always read it out loud. I've read a lot of stories from new or novice writers that include dialogue that sounds stilted and uncomfortable. The characters come off sounding like robots (or English professors) instead of real people. Read your dialogue out loud so it sounds natural on the page.

Another thing that's a pet peeve of mine is when a writer refuses to use contractions (whether in dialogue or narrative). We live in the modern century. Everyone uses contractions in verbal speech, and our written words should reflect that. Remember that language will have an impact on the reader's perceptions of the characters. A character who's in a story that's set in modern times who never uses contractions can come off as stuffy, uptight, and snooty--or robotic, like Data from *Star Trek: Next Generation*. If your character isn't a robot, this can't be used as characterization, as in the case of Data. It would simply be odd. Besides, using contractions will give your sentences more immediate impact.

While editing and polishing, you can easily use a highlighter or the search function of your word processing program to make sure you don't inadvertently leave a cannot or have not in there. Always use contractive forms of *had*, *have*, *will*, *not*, etc. as much as you can if you're writing a contemporary book unless the speaker is deliberately pronouncing each word for emphasis in order to sound more indignant and dramatic or there's some other compelling reason to avoid contractions. Whether to include contractions in historical fiction is based on preference, tone, ease of reading, and realism, given that people in the past used their own forms of colloquialisms and slang words.

Another pet peeve of mine is the overuse of names in dialogue. In real life, two people having a conversation almost never say each other's names unless they're

calling someone over. Some authors include characters' names (sometimes first and last!) in every other line of dialogue, which can get really annoying. Even affectionate names for each other can get mind-numbing if overused.

Also keep in mind that profession might play a role in how someone talks. A college professor is likely to talk very differently from a doctor or a lawyer or school teacher. The analogies they use in external dialogue will be based on individual experiences. As Tracy Culleton says in her "Dialogue And Characters" article on the Fiction Writer's Mentor blog, "A builder might describe a mess as being like a house with no foundations; the barrister might say it was like a case with an unreliable witness and a cranky judge."

In her article "Writing Fiction: Bring Your Characters To Life" on The Creative Penn blog, Roz Morris (author of *Writing Characters Who'll Keep Readers Captivated*), says, "You do not write dialogue in normal life, so it is a specific skill you have to learn when you write fiction. We do have to make characters sound different but that doesn't mean an accent. It is worldview, education, language, use of synonyms as well as humor and their physical/non-verbal actions around the discussion." She warns against "dialogue in a vacuum" in which nothing else is going on around the dialogue. She also talks about how characters' relationships with each other change according to role and status...which means dialogue may be affected. Interesting.

Let's talk about some ways to make the most of dialogue in our story:

Effective dialogue can transform a story into something unforgettable. You'll most notice how effective dialogue can be in fleshing out a story when you take it out of your writing. For instance, take a look at this passage written entirely without dialogue:

She told us there was five hundred dollars in the envelope. That what she was about to ask us was very unusual and we might not want to do it. If we did decide not to accept, the five hundred dollars was for us to forget all about her.

I told her I'd pretend she was my algebra lessons in high school.

Roger glared at me as if my sparkling wit might scare her off, and asked what she wanted us to do.

She leaned forward confidentially. She wanted us to dig up her husband's grave.

Roger and I simultaneously leaned forward. I begged her pardon.

Her husband was buried last night, she explained, and she wanted us to dig up the coffin.

It was clear from Roger's expression that he considered this task quite a bit less appealing than wild kinky sex. He asked her if she was kidding.

She shook her head, saying she was completely serious.

Was this the kind of thing she usually asked people in coffee shops? Maybe she walked in here by mistake thinking it was Maude and Vinny's Discount Graverobbing Emporium.

Now read the same passage as it's actually published--with effective and varied dialogue--in Jeff Strand's *Graverobbers Wanted (No Experience Necessary)*:

"Inside this envelope is five hundred dollars. What I'm going to ask is very unusual, and you may not want to do it. If you decide not to accept, the five hundred dollars is for you to forget all about me. Deal?"

"Sounds great," I said. "I'll just pretend you were my algebra lessons in high school."

Roger glares at me as if my sparkling wit might scare her off. "What do you want us to do?"

She leaned forward confidentially. "I want you to dig up my husband's grave."

Roger and I simultaneously leaned forward. "I beg your pardon?" I asked.

"My husband was buried last night, and I want you to dig up the coffin."

It was clear from Roger's expression that he considered this task quite a bit less appealing than wild kinky sex. "You're kidding, right?"

She shook her head. "I'm completely serious."

"Is this the kind of thing you usually ask people in coffee shops?" I inquired. "Are you sure you didn't walk in here by mistake thinking it was Maude and Vinny's Discount Graverobbing Emporium?"

Undeniably, dialogue truly adds spice and impact to any story, so use it effectively.

Passages or an entire chapter made up of little or nothing but dialogue can cause readers to lose focus on everything outside the dialogue. You might laugh about that because it's so obvious, but, in my many years of critiquing unpublished contest entries, this is one of the most commonly made mistakes I've seen. Let's turn it around this time. Instead of taking the dialogue completely out of a passage to see how necessary it is, let's make the passage all dialogue. Look at the example below:

"Will it come back today?" Ramo asked.

"It may," I answered him. "More likely it will come after many suns, for the country where it has gone is far off."

"I do not care if the ship never comes," he said.

"Why do you say this?" I asked him.

"Why?" I asked again.

"Because I like it here with you," he said. "It is more fun than when the others were here. Tomorrow I am going to where the canoes are hidden and bring one back to Coral Cove. We will use it to fish in and to go looking around the island."

"They are too heavy for you to put into the water."

"You will see."

"You forget that I am the son of Chowig," he said.

"I do not forget," I answered. "But you are a small son. Someday you will be tall and strong and then you will be able to handle a big canoe."

The passage above is pure dialogue, and it reads like bullets firing from a gun. (I call writing like this "dialogue bullets".) When dialogue is used exclusively, you don't find out who's talking, and you lose focus on the characters, their goals and motivations, and their emotions in the scene. Now read an effectively written version of the same passage as it was published in Scott O'Dell's classic, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*:

The air was clear and we could look far out to sea in the direction the ship had gone.

"Will it come back today?" Ramo asked.

"It may," I answered him, though I did not think so. "More likely it will come after many suns, for the country where it has gone is far off."

Ramo looked up at me. His black eyes shone.

"I do not care if the ship never comes," he said.

"Why do you say this?" I asked him.

Ramo thought, making a hole in the earth with the point of his spear.

"Why?" I asked again.

"Because I like it here with you," he said. "It is more fun than when the others were here. Tomorrow I am going to where the canoes are hidden and bring one back to Coral Cove. We will use it to fish in and to go looking around the island."

"They are too heavy for you to put into the water."

"You will see."

Ramo threw out his chest. Around his neck was a string of sea-elephant teeth which someone had left behind. It was much too large for him and the teeth were broken, but they rattled as he thrust the spear down between us.

"You forget that I am the son of Chowig," he said.

"I do not forget," I answered. "But you are a small son. Someday you will be tall and strong and then you will be able to handle a big canoe."

The scene now has focus and the narrative takes you right inside the scene and the characters. You not only feel with them, you see what's around them in the scene and get a glimpse of what they're doing physically. The dialogue provides a catalyst to all this, advancing plot and characterization. As a general rule, only use "dialogue bullets" when you need to create extreme tension.

Dialogue--what a character says and how he says it--reveals the inner person, and much more. The manner in which a character speaks and the particular words she chooses say something about her. Dialogue will and should reflect who the character is, even what she does for a living. On the other hand, the occasional character who doesn't fit her stereotyped mold is always intriguing to a reader. Make a bad boy or a cowboy philosophize about the poetic insight of Shakespeare. Make a wallflower put on a vixen red dress and stiletto heels and temporarily act out of character.

Vary each character's dialogue. How do you make your characters sound different? By making a conscious effort to do so. Make a list of your important characters. If you know their personalities, you'll have a good idea about certain things they would and wouldn't say, and ways they would and wouldn't say them. Are they prone to the vernacular--in other words, do they use street language? Do they "sound" more like English professors? And, again, this shouldn't be the writer's choice. Some writers use dialogue that makes all their characters sound like English professors, and the dialogue becomes monotonous because it's not varied from character to character. That's not good or even effective writing.

Dialogue can be turned into a catalyst for a dynamic story that can convey so much more than an impersonal weather report or careless "Hey, how ya doing?"

B) Internal Monologue

A monologue literally means "speaking alone" and used to be (and may still be for all I know) in plays as a means to reveal a character's secret thoughts or intentions. Internal monologue or introspection is what the main POV character in the scene thinks to herself. This "stream of consciousness" allows the reader to be aware of internal thoughts, anxieties, and conflicts of the character. It also shows a side of the character other characters aren't aware of, including converging or competing goals and even "ugliness". It gives the reader an inside view of private feelings, deepest desires, frustrations, and ongoing dilemmas.

Everything we said about external dialogue applies here. But use of internal monologue can create an engaging impact and immediacy that narrative can't provide. For instance, descriptions of characters given in a way that can put a new spin on a

personality. The reader will feel closer to the situation and characters with this "sneak peek". Characterization is taken to a whole new level.

Be careful using too much internal monologue without interspersing it with action and what's going on in the world around them. In the article "Inner monologue examples: Characters' hidden lives" on the Now Book blog, it says, "If you use stream of consciousness to reveal a character's private desires or frustrations, remember to blend it with action and setting too. This ensures a balance between characters' hidden inner lives and the material world around them, along with the cause and effect of their words and deeds."

I strongly discourage having internal monologue used as "self dialogue". In other words, a character talks out loud to herself rather than thinking thoughts inside her own head. I think some bad writing advice was going around for a while there that said that introspection was overkill or bad. But self dialogue is like listening to a crazy person talk to himself. It's extremely uncomfortable in fiction to have characters talking to themselves in this fashion.

Instead, get inside your character's head. The dictionary definition of introspection is "observation or examination of one's own mental and emotional state". By showing a character's introspection, you give the reader the ability to get to know the character from the inside out. A character's behavior in any given situation will both characterize her and create emotion. Hence, reactions and behavior work hand in hand (but they needn't be linear as a rule). Behavior, in essence, is the action, which is almost always followed by a reaction. Working within a specific point of view, follow action with that character's reaction to the behavior. Look at this simplified example from Linda Howard's *Cover of Night*, with just the behavior-reaction-introspection sequence pulled out:

Cal reached back under the blanket and put his hand on her hip, silently pulling her even closer to him. (**behavior**)

Tears stung her eyes as she nestled close, as close as she could get. (**reaction**)

This--this was what she'd missed most, the quiet companionship in the night, the knowledge that she wasn't alone. She wanted him to hold her, wanted to feel his arms around her. (**introspection**)

When he'd held her and Neenah after the frightening episode with Mellor, (**behavior**) for the first time in a long while Cate had felt... safe. (**reaction**)

Not just because Cal had protected them, though she was bemused to realize that was indeed part of her response; some primitive reactions evidently go away. The biggest part of it, though, was that suddenly she hadn't felt so alone. (**introspection**)

Behavior and reaction almost inevitably lead to introspection. Without introspection, readers will feel as though they're watching your characters through a pane of glass they can't get past. They can see and hear your characters, but rarely will they experience what the characters are going through without effective introspection. Your story comes to life through introspection in a way that can't be overstressed. It fleshes out CPR development so much.

Good introspection allows the reader to have the same reaction as the POV character. This is a more focused effort to bring the reader directly into the story so he can participate actively. In scenes of intense emotion, if the reader doesn't feel the same reaction as the POV character, you haven't written the scene effectively. Take these examples from Angela Hunt's *A Time To Mend* (the second being the published version):

Jacquelyn felt a scream rise in her throat, begging for release, but she clamped her lips shut to imprison it.

A scream clawed in Jacquelyn's throat, begging for release, but her clamped lips imprisoned it.

While both work well, in the first version, the word *felt* separates the reader from the character. We're looking at her. In the second version, we're right there with her, feeling the scream clawing its way up her (our) throat while her (our) lips refuse to allow it escape.

Are any of your POV characters saying one thing and thinking something totally different? Those are internal conflicts burning a hole inside the character. Good...but do they make cohesive, logical sense with the character you're developing? Might this show a lack of development in the character's conflicts, goals and motivations? Rebellious thoughts that don't match what you've set up as the main conflicts, goals and motivations and aren't established and progressed (justified) properly will reflect poorly on that character in the reader's eyes. Beware.

Introspection can turn a good story into something compelling, moving, and downright touching. Who doesn't want that?

C) Character Movement

Describing character movements, mannerisms, gestures, expressions, and actions might be a tricky aspect of writing. Basically you're showing what the characters are doing with their bodies. But describing those movements can be clunky, laborious, or

even jarring as "viewed" through the reader lens. There are three no-no's in this area: Out of body experiences, vanishing settings, and gaping choreography of movement.

Floating body parts are those that are acting of their own volition or performing physically impossible feats. Taken literally, these phrases can be comical: Eyes dropping to the floor and a foot shooting out are examples. Also, if the stage isn't set at the start of every scene, the reader may have his own out of body experience when he can't figure out where he is in the current setting. Finally, teleportation around a room or a character performing nonsensical actions, or ending up with a prop in his hand where there was none a second ago can take a reader right out of the story. Worst case scenario, there are cavernous holes in the realism of your story left by any of these.

Readers need to picture what's going on, move by move, in each scene. The key is to give them something to do but not too much. Describing character movements doesn't necessarily mean describing every single detail, but what's going on has to make sense and it has to have purpose and direction, revealing something or at least giving something logical for the characters to be doing as a backdrop of dialogue, internal monologue, action or narrative.

What does a character's movement or physical behavior reveal about her personality and her P/P/F dimensions? Does she walk fast or slow, move gracefully, clumsily, noisily? What kind of posture does she have? What does this say about her age, personality, background, or career?

Movement can also reveal the nature of relationships, if conveyed effectively. In a romance story, for instance, the movements between a couple with a romantic connection will say a lot about themselves and each other as well as the intensity of their relationship. Use that to develop strong CPR elements.

How characters move around others who aren't necessarily romantic interests provides insight as well. A character who's worried, afraid or suspicious may act shifty, might jump or start easily, or appear nervous. She may keep looking somewhere or at something often.

Movement can also convey mood and suspense in specific genres. If everything feels a little trippy and off-kilter, you might be reading a chick-lit book with a quirky heroine who's lurching head-long through her life and everyone and everything around her. Darkness in a horror story will cause breath-holding, painful hand-holding if the character isn't alone, and slow, measured steps all while listening so hard a pin drop will sound like a bomb going off.

Give movement purpose the same way you do dialogue and introspection. Crafting movement in a story as a backdrop for the rest of the elements can mean the difference between a reader feeling like he's part of the story or simply looking at events from afar.

5) Present/Past/Future Strengths and Weaknesses

In *Getting to the Core of Character Motivation*, Becca Puglisi says, "The one common thread in all of the books that are falling apart on my shelf? Characters--flawed ones with desires and needs who spend most of the story tripping over their weaknesses in an effort to get what they want." Mark Twain also says that "everyone is a moon and has a dark side" that he rarely or never shows to another person. Strengths and weaknesses are the heart of every character--and every human being.

Keep in mind that strengths and weaknesses are a lot like yin and yang--they're "complementary opposites within a greater whole" so I like to group the foundational strengths and weaknesses in two "opposing" columns (in the ebook version, you'll see them in two separate lists back to back instead):

Strengths (positive):

Quirk (something that builds confidence)

Virtue or honorable trait

Personality skill

Desire or passion

Principles

Weaknesses (negative):

Fear (something that shatters confidence)

Vice or hubris

Personality flaw

Secret or regret

Depravity

Your characters should have a mixed bag of all these things, though they may not be equally balanced. In other words, one character might have fears but no real quirks worth mentioning. You don't have to create a contrast of strengths and weaknesses, let alone absolute balance. You also shouldn't develop every single thing listed on the chart. Choose a few things that stand out in your individual characters and, for flavor, add some minor elements from either side. That's the most realistic way to build character. How often have we heard someone say about another person, "She can do everything well" or the exact opposite. Despite appearances, there's an opposing side to either that maybe you can't see but is undeniably there.

For the strongest CPR development, you do want to choose at least one major strength and one major weakness that will be central to the plot of the story. Without the motivation of one of each, as James Scott Bell says, readers will question why a character doesn't just ignore the situation. There has to be an unavoidable clash of

internal and external--positive and negative--that can't be avoided because it's at the heart of everything this character is, was, and will be. So the weakness will fuel the external conflict, trigger the internal conflict while goals and motivations provide the catalyst justifying the reaction and the very strong compulsion to act. This isn't something that can be simply *told*. It has to be shown and developed all through a story because, as MJ Bush says, "Readers like either being in on or trying to figure out a secret."

The cohesively chosen major weakness(es) must be capable of being dealt with utilizing the character's major strength(s). But the path to achieving success has to be littered with countless obstacles--and raising of stakes (what's the worst that could happen if she fails?)--to keep interest in the story tension high at all times. Relationships will progress during this time, as will main characters and plots. Situations alter people as well as their perceptions of the world and of those around them--along with their perceptions of themselves. In other words, conflicts aren't the only thing that's important: How characters handle conflicts and relationships reveals them in the process.

For all your major characters, strengths and weaknesses should be multifaceted because the more dimensions that are incorporated, the more depth your CPR elements will have so try to include something about how these strengths and weaknesses started in the past and developed into the present situation, and might influence the future. There's a worksheet in the appendix to help you discover all your main characters' strength and weaknesses.

When you're developing strengths and weaknesses, you can use things like psychological personality type charts as a jumping off point, but I highly recommend not following them too closely. I say this because, for instance, if you use a personality type chart which states there are analytical, amiable, driver, and expressive personality types, you'll probably find that you fit into more than one character type. I could certainly be considered equally analytical and amiable with a tiny bit of driver. In the same way, characters shouldn't fit nicely into some mold or they'll come off as cookie-cutter and unrealistic to boot.

Ask yourself what people admire most about heroes or even villains. The hero who's optimistic to a fault, whiter than snow, and perfect in every way is dull. Flawed (but likeable) characters are the ones readers want to champion because a character without vices or fears or hidden secrets is a character without conflicts and is, consequently, devoid of intrigue. There's no way for her to improve and grow if she's already perfect. Readers instinctively realize that true courage for a character is facing what she fears most, even if that means her own failures and regrets. And when she pursues goals, she refuses to give up because her motivation for acting means something to her passionately. Even when failure is on the line (and looks inevitable), defeat is never really an option.

Readers go crazy for a rough and raw, imperfect hero with more baggage (of the emotional kind) than a pampered socialite. True heroes are almost always eternal *pessimists* who want nothing to do with the "hero" title, let alone the job. She's only forced into it by an oft-buried sense of nobility or justice, or because something or someone she cares about deeply is in danger. One example of a very reluctant hero is from the movie *Arachnophobia*. Dr. Ross Jennings has a deep-seated fear of spiders-- a very pronounced, debilitating, paralyzing terror. Yet when his family and an entire town are threatened by a giant, poisonous spider from Venezuela that started a monstrous family of deadly web spinners in Dr. Jennings' new hometown, he has to get past his extreme arachnophobia and put himself in heartbeat-close contact with the eight-legged creatures to save everyone.

Think about reluctant heroes this way: If a character is perfect and has no trouble acting or succeeding, there's no challenge and, ultimately, there is no honor in an effortless battle. Glory comes from difficulty, from overcoming obstacles that originally seem too big and impossible to face. In a well-known example, Simba runs away from home in *The Lion King*, believing he's to blame for his father's death. Even though he has a moral responsibility to take his place as the ruler of the savannah, he checks out and starts a whole new life: one without worries, far away. Even when he's called back because his lion pride needs him, he resists. His weaknesses prevent him from taking up the title of hero and king, and only dire internal and external conflicts force him to overcome his weaknesses in order to become who and what he's meant to be. This is a character rife with strengths and weaknesses, and he's reluctant to be the hero others know he is deep inside. Also notice how cohesive the CPR elements are here--character personality, skills, conflicts, relationships, goals and motivations are all working together organically. They *fit* perfectly.

Strengths and weaknesses give the fictional people populating your world the opportunity to grow in a believably anguishing way over the course of a story, just like in real life. And that's where characters are brought to three-dimensional life. Our characters' P/P/F strengths and weaknesses are in some ways ones they're born with, but events (plot, external, and internal) and environment (setting and relationships) play a large part in shaping them. From one dimension to the next, the same thing we said for personality is true here. The transformation may appear radical simply because it's instinctive for people to assume changes are major. It's certainly possible that they might be, too. But it's more likely that, upon close examination, the changes have been a subtle shift from past to present, just as they might be in the future dimension of strengths and weakness in character traits. What fits your story best? What makes the most sense cohesively from one dimension to the other?

6) *Present/Past/Future Skill Sets*

Each of your main characters will need a particular skill set (whether it stems from career, education, hobbies, interests, or a combination of all these) that's shaped specifically for the story and for this particular character, and that's what you're introducing in this section. On most character worksheets, at least one section is devoted to occupational skills. Few go in-depth concerning education, hobbies, and interests, even though these equally define us as individuals. Such talents and interests are especially important in a work of fiction, when what the characters do is pivotal to their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses, their internal and external conflicts, their goals and motivations, as well as the relationships they find themselves in.

To build the form of multilayered dimensions we've been talking about, the skill set the character is equipped with should be directly related to who this person is, what she needs to do, the plots in the story, and even the relationships she has. In the best-case scenario, skills will connect cohesively to all these in some way. Best-selling author Sandra Brown has aptly said something to the effect that if the hero's a firefighter, then the heroine had better be an arsonist. That's how essential (and cohesive) the characters' skill sets must be to the story elements. J. Madison Davis adds that anything not naturally relevant becomes "an odd appendage, glued onto the story like a clock stuck into the belly of a Venus de Milo". That's why creating purpose and cohesion for all these character development items is so crucial--and why simply telling the reader something without showing the skill *in use* throughout the story is rarely effective.

In the book *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby is a fabulously wealthy man living in a sprawling mansion; he's famous in West Egg for the lavish parties he throws. While there are a slew of rumors about where he comes from, what he does, and how he made his fortune, no one actually knows. It becomes clear to the main character, Nick Carraway, that Gatsby is heavily involved in organized crime. (The really interesting part of this is that Gatsby, fatally idealistic, believes himself to be a noble and honorable hero instead of what he really is--a deluded, selfish gangster who's hopelessly and unrealistically romantic in his pursuit of recapturing the love he shared with Nick's cousin Daisy a lifetime ago.) If Gatsby really were noble and honorable, as he believes himself to be, this book would fall apart. The great tragedy in this story is a direct result of how Gatsby's rationale for his life of crime and his immoral relationship with an old flame, who's now married and has a child, blinded him to reality and led to a monumental downfall. Anything else other than the questionable career and the predilections of this particular character may not have worked for the story. They were clearly carefully chosen for Gatsby.

In general, you want characters who are good at *something*, even if they don't yet know that they are. Specifically you want them to be *exceptional* in at least one area to make them memorable to readers. In his book *The Kick-Ass Writer*, Chuck Wendig

says, "Sherlock isn't a mediocre detective. Sherlock is an amazing detective, and a terrible human. Characters can be good at things but they can't be too good--you need balance. If they're the best at something, they should also be the worst at something. Conflict lives here; the space between Sherlock being the best detective and the worst human is so taut with tension the potential story might snap and take out someone's eye."

Some of your character's areas of expertise could and should be deliberately selected career skills, but most will go far deeper than that. For instance, in the fourth book of my Incognito Series, *Dead Drop*, the heroine has had an experience of losing the man she loved to a covert government organization. In the present, she's an FBI agent, and she's spent years fruitlessly searching for this man. When the same organization approaches her son for recruitment, her experiences and skill set kick in, providing her with everything necessary to prevent the same tragedy from happening again. These same experiences and her skill set may also help her now or in the future find the man she still loves.

In another instance, the heroine, a nurse, in my inspirational gothic romance, *The Bloodmoon Curse*, miscarries several times, which devastates her. When she's asked to care for three orphaned children, she's led by all-too-fresh past conflicts, the goal to end suffering for these children (present dimension), and the motivation of also finding the means to heal her own pain in the process (future dimension).

If your character doesn't have a nine-to-five job per se, that fact says something about her character as well. In *A Dangerous Man*, Marilyn Pappano presents a hero who's a retired Army master sergeant. The skills Rory Hawkes learned in the military figure profoundly in the plot of the book. If Pappano had made him, say, a restaurant owner or even an accountant, the plot would have fallen apart or gone in a direction that simply wouldn't have been anywhere near as effective. Occupation fuses with the character, plot, and setting in this story, and nothing else would have fit quite as well.

In a story that has more than one main character (like a hero and heroine in a romance story), the other lead should also have an occupation that creates the same level of cohesion. Pappano's heroine in *A Dangerous Man* is a lawyer in a corrupt small town. Her father, the district attorney, tried to fight the corruption and was killed in the process. You can see the level of cohesion in all this, since a small-town lawyer would have little chance of going up against a corrupt system on her own. But her motivation is obvious. And with the backing of a retired master sergeant, she's got a shot at winning.

For a character to succeed, you must set the stage *from the beginning* so your main character can believably use what's in his bag of skills to rescue, escape, defeat, fight and win (in whatever way makes sense in your story).

A couple of other things to consider with skill-set construction: Different jobs allow characters to look at the world in a variety of ways through the unique filter of a career.

A garbage collector comes from a different world than a soldier, as does a stripper or an accountant. Use this to create dimensionality. A character's job should show the inner character. If a wife takes a second job to please her husband because he's a gambler and a drunk who wastes their money, this says something about her. If someone's in a dead-end job, is there a motivation for wanting something more? Or the opposite may be true: Does a dead-end job show that the character has no aspirations for more?

Your character's skill set doesn't have to make her predictable. In real life, you can find lawyers who are unsurprisingly ruthless and greedy but also ones who genuinely want to see justice prevail. You can just as easily find doctors and nurses who go the extra mile and those who don't really care about patients. Even stereotypical archetypes usually have families who love them. But, to be cohesive doesn't mean you can't break the mold, so long as all the elements work together.

A character's skill set is something honed and developed throughout a lifetime. Show the origins and the present-day usage, and give the reader something to look forward to in seeing what your character's skills could be used for in the future of the story.

Why do certain people have the careers, hobbies, and interests they do? In real life, maybe there may be no justifiable reason or connection between them. However, in fiction, you need to make careers, hobbies, and interests cohesive and fit the characters, their personalities, and relationships.

Why rhumba dancing? Because there's someone sensual inside the character dying to get free? Because this character spends most of her day being restrained and inhibited by those around her, her position in society? Was she not allowed to dance as a teenager?

What about this? If the character isn't very good at chess, why choose it as an interest? There can be a very good, legitimate reason. Maybe the character has spent his life feeling intellectually inferior but keeps trying to improve his chess game in hopes of impressing his chess-loving (and superior) family, thereby altering their perceptions of him along with his own of himself.

The reason cohesion of these skills is so important is because so many authors throw careers, hobbies and interests into a story for a character, but just saying someone does something (whether or not she actually enjoys it) doesn't tell us anything about who she is if it's told and not utilized as a means of getting to know the character better. Use these likes and dislikes to actively develop character, plot, and relationships.

In the third book in my Angelfire Series, *Shadows of the Night*, the heroine owns a flower shop and, in her spare time, makes handmade lace and customizable wedding bouquets for her clients. Both her chosen career and her hobby are very romantic and soft revelations of her personality and internal conflicts at war with the brutal rape as a teenager that defined her life and prevented her pursuing intimacy in any of her

relationships since. Her skill set (career and hobbies) is fully cohesive with CPR developments as is the fact that she feels like she's never finished developing these wedding bouquets...not until she falls in love and begins healing.

Another important thing is not to have too many occupations, hobbies or interests for one character. I remember reading a story in which the hero was currently in a low level position at the job he was in and he actually did enjoy his job and was good at it. In the course of the story, the potential for advancement and promotion into a higher position in that career was offered. But these weren't the only job options available to this one character. He also dabbled in an artistic hobby where he flirted with the idea of doing full-time but it was always something that seemed out of reach and unrealistic for him. This author had the character "dreaming about" three different aspirations. It would have made more sense to have him in a job he didn't really care about (1st aspiration) and *either* advancing to the ideal position in that same career (2nd aspiration) or taking a leap of faith artistically (3rd aspiration)--not both and certainly not *all*. I felt pulled in all directions as a reader and, because the character didn't seem to know what he wanted any better than I did, his striving in so many directions became exhausting and I was left with no idea which (if any) dream to root for.

7) Present/Past/Future Setting(s)

Setting is a form of characterization because a setting isn't important or even worth mentioning in a story unless you've put a character into that particular setting. Before a writer even begins putting words on paper, he has a vision of something. If carefully chosen and developed, these elements fuse into a cohesive whole.

Readers rarely start a story with a vision. It's up to the writer to paint the picture for them. Just as writers have to get to know their characters before they start the story, they should get to know their settings, which can be one basis for building a story. To develop cohesion, the settings important characters are in, where presumably, plot take places need to be appropriate to the situations you're putting your CPR elements in, allowing development to flourish.

The importance of creating a setting cohesive with character and plot can be illustrated by imagining different settings for classic books. What if *Moby-Dick*, instead of being set at sea, had been set in, say, a lighthouse? Captain Ahab (a man who's never been on anything bigger than a sailboat) boasts around town about how he'll get the whale. *Moby-Dick* wouldn't have been the book that's become so well known if the setting had been anywhere else but where the author put it.

The Lord of the Rings would have been drastically different (and so disappointing!) if it'd been set in America instead of fictional Middle Earth. If the *Amityville Horror* had taken place, in, say, a department store, some of the horror would have fizzled. If Harry Potter went to the local public school (or St. Brutus's Secure Center for Incurably

Criminal Boys, like Aunt Marge wants to hear) instead of the private, magical boarding school Hogwarts, the series may have been radically altered. Setting has a huge impact on the overall readability of any story. What a difference a vividly memorable, cohesive setting makes to so many books we consider popular.

If your setting doesn't fit with CPR elements, you'll work harder at creating fitting characters, plots, and relationships. My advice is to make a setting *more than* fit your CRP elements--make that setting come *alive* in the reader's mind. Make them want to visit and re-visit it. Heck, make your readers want to live there indefinitely!

While the setting should *enhance* the characters, conflict and relationships, that's not to say that a contrasting setting won't also be perfectly cohesive in your story. In other words, the setting may not be one the character would choose for himself. Put him into situations that mesh with the other elements in the story.

In *A Writer's Guide to Active Setting: How to Enhance Your Fiction With More Descriptive, Dynamic Settings*, Mary Buckham says, "Setting can create the world of your story, show characterization, add conflict, slow or speed up your pacing, add or decrease tension, relate a character's backstory, thread in emotion, and more... Setting can add so much to your story world or it can add nothing."

While many stories have settings that suit the character and plot, I'm sure you can come up with dozens where the author could have spent more time making the setting extraordinary--so the reader actually wants to visit it again in another book--instead of simply getting the job done.

Writers need to weave pieces of three-dimensional character, plot, and relationship elements into setting. Good setting descriptions *should* convey characteristics, plots, and relationships--otherwise these descriptions serve as general information without a strong, cohesive purpose. Describe the setting in such a way that it not only becomes evident to you how the characters, relationships, and plot fit there but supercharges your whole story. What does the setting reveal about the character's personality? Her relationships? What in the setting means the most to her? How will this setting create the stage for conflict and suspense? How can you make it so real, your reader will believe the place actual exists?

In Adam Nevill's horror book, *The Ritual*, four old University friends set off into the Scandinavian wilderness of the Arctic Circle. The setting in this book is vivid, with descriptions that are almost tangible, twisting the trees into imaginary (or maybe not so imaginary) monsters surrounding them on all sides, closing in on and terrifying them at each turn. The setting also reflects the dawning disparity and gaping differences, the impossible distance, between these men--once as close as brothers, now no longer friends. During this trial, they also confront themselves and the state of their relationships, who they really are in the face of evil. The setting descriptions reflect these ever-darkening, dense, and impenetrable realizations that mirror internal conflicts.

Through their discomforts Dom and Phil were missing everything of interest: the sudden strip marshes, the faces in the rock formations, the perfect lakes, the awesome Måskoskårså valley grooved into the earth during the Ice Age, the golden eagle circling above it, and the views of a landscape it was impossible to believe existed in Europe...

During the late afternoon and into the early evening, when they were too tired to do anything but stagger about and swear at the things that poked and scratched their faces, the forest had become so dense it was impossible to move in any single direction for more than a few metres. So they had moved backwards and forwards, to circle the larger obstacles, like the giant prehistoric trunks that had crashed down years before and been consumed by slippery lichen, and they had zigzagged to all points of the compass to avoid the endless wooden spears of branches, and the snares of the small roots and thorny bushes, that now filled every space between the trees. The upper branches ratcheted up their misery by funneling down upon them the deafening fall of rain in the world above, creating an incessant barrage of cold droplets the size of marbles...

...the terrific sound of strong fresh wood being snapped still rang through his ears. A trace of an echo, like the hollow sound made by a stone bouncing off tree trunks, seemed to pass away, deep into the forest. What could possibly have broken a tree like that? Somewhere inside there, not too far back, he could also see the pale sappy fibres and spikes breaking from the bark of a thick limb. Ripped from a blackened trunk like an arm from a torso...

Readers should never feel that the characters in the story are actors crossing a stage with the setting. The people that populate your world are residents, even if only for the duration of the story. Why set the story here--here and nowhere else? If you can't answer that question, your setting isn't pertinent to the story, and that's no good. Nevill chose his location carefully: An out-of-the-way area of the world that had never truly been explored to its farthest reaches. The dark, wet, miserable setting mirrors the characters' internal conflicts and emotions, the complexity of their relationships, perfectly. This story had to take place *here* and nowhere else to make it fully come to life. Characters, plots and relationships flourish in this setting.

Settings may provide the backdrop for events to unfold, but they do much more than that by creating the context of each scene. Settings can suggest emotion of any kind; they can suggest conflicts, personality, memories, goals, and motivations, you name it. The connotations are endless. What does the setting reveal about the

character's state of mind, preferences, desires? How can this setting be used to establish the foundation for conflict and suspense? Setting can reveal time, place, and culture. Objects, artifacts, symbols, landmarks in an area or in the surroundings that the character inhabits or visits can reveal all of these things by effectively showing instead of telling. Consider that the weather in your setting affects everything else in a scene, whether the POV character goes outside, stays inside, how she dresses, moves, travels, and feels.

In *The Ruins* by Scott Smith, two young couples are on a vacation in Mexico where they make friends with fellow tourists. When the brother of one of those tourists disappears, the group ventures into the jungle to look for him. What starts as a day trip spirals into a nightmare when they find a hill marking the site of ancient ruins covered in vines and surrounded by bare earth. Men from a nearby Mayan village appear and surround the entire hill. These men are obviously afraid of the deadly vines and have salted the earth around the hill to prevent their spread. Anyone who strays too close to this place will become infected with the spores and so the Mayans initially attempt to force them to steer clear but when they get too close--close enough to become infected--they force the day-trippers to ascend the hill to prevent further spread. The vines are alive, evil, and they infest every living thing...leading to death.

Amy was silent. She didn't want to go, of course, was terrified of the idea, of dropping into the earth, into the darkness. She hadn't even wanted to come here--that was what she wanted to say to Jeff. If it had been up to her, they never would've left the beach in the first place. And then, when they'd discovered the hidden path, she'd tried to warn him, hadn't she? She'd tried to tell him that they shouldn't take it, and he'd refused to listen. This was all his fault, then, wasn't it? She should be the one to descend into that hole? But even as she was asking herself these questions, Amy was remembering what had happened at the base of the hill, how she'd retreated across the clearing, peering through her camera's viewfinder, her foot slipping into the tangle of vines. If she hadn't done that, maybe the Mayans wouldn't have forced them up the hill. They wouldn't be here now--Pablo wouldn't be lying at the bottom of the shaft with a broken back; Eric's shoe wouldn't be full of blood. They'd be walking somewhere miles from this place, every step carrying them farther away, and the tiny black flies and the blisters forming on their feet were things perfectly worthy of complaint...

This passage from the book is rife with CPR development with P/P/F dimensions, and setting descriptions that convey the menace of the place the group is in through a very

unfortunate series of ill-informed, poorly chosen, devastating events. Nuances of relationships are also revealed here.

Also note that even if your setting is real and one that's widely known, your unique view of the place turns it into *your* story world every single time, as if the place is something new, special, and exciting, unexplored by anyone but you and your characters...and now readers.

The only settings that matter in a story are the ones the characters come in contact with; these have purpose in progressing CPR elements. Whether or not your story people love their setting, they should know and/or discover it on the pages in a natural, believable way. Make the setting come *alive* in the reader's mind by using all five senses. Make him want to visit and revisit it. Make settings so memorable that they exist in the reader's mind long after the story has finished. In *Description & Setting*, Ron Rozelle says, "Settings provide bases of operations for everything that happens in your story or book, and, as importantly, they--along with the characters that will do things in there--provide you with a means to actually tell a *story*, rather than simply report information." In fiction, settings should be less about objective reality (impersonal) and all about subjective experience (highly personal).

Present characters react to setting in both subtle and vivid ways (using all five of their senses), and therefore act differently in these various places. *Memory* of setting also has a poignant impact that can be even more powerful to characters. Where a character came from will reveal endless things about that person--personality, strengths and weaknesses, relationships, conflicts, and certainly goals and motivations. Is the character's current setting vastly different or similar to her past setting(s)? What internal conflicts and motivations can be drawn to describe setting more tangibly as a result? Are there ways in which the current setting has been influenced by something that happened in the past? Maybe a character moved to the suburbs because something violent happened to him as a child in an urban setting. Does the character own or know about something that draws her back to her origins? What associations can be made between the past dimension of characters, their relationships, and the plot to deepen the present and past story setting(s)?

In *The Woman in Black*, Susan Hill starts the story with a lot of atmospheric setting descriptions that are enhanced with weather descriptions. These vividly hint at the POV character's mood and frame of mind during specific weather conditions--the mention of a ghost story makes him reflect on the one he lived through in his past. Hill goes on to take the settings and infuse them with interesting, heart-stopping descriptions that aren't merely blocks of information but evocative memories, past events, and tangible sensations.

The door of the room from which the noise came, the door which had been securely locked, so that I had not been able to break it down, the

door to which there could not be a key--that door was now standing open. Wide open.

Beyond it lay a room, in complete darkness, save for the first yard or two immediately at the entrance, where the dim light from the bulb on the landing outside fell onto some shining, brown floor-covering. Within, I could hear both the noise--louder now because the door was open--and the sound of the dog, pattering anxiously about and sniffing and snuffling as she went.

I do not know how long I stood there in fear and trembling and in dreadful bewilderment. I lost all sense of time and ordinary reality. Through my head went a tumbling confusion of half-thoughts and emotions, visions of specters and of real fleshy intruders, ideas of murder and violence, and all manner of odd, distorted fears. And, all the time, the door stood wide open and the rocking continued. Rocking. Yes, I came to, because I had realized at last what the noise within the room was--or, at least, what it reminded me of closely. It was the sound of the wooden runner of my nurse's rocking chair, when she had sat beside me every night while I went to sleep, as a small child, rocking, rocking...

This kind of writing brings extremely well-defined pictures to mind. The whole book (and all of Susan Hill's stories) is filled with setting descriptions that make locations as vivid, memorable, ever evolving, and evoking as any character.

Drawing on where a character came from fleshes her out with additional layers that produce realism and lifelike qualities. For example, in *Beowulf*, Hrothgar's great mead hall, Heorot, is a place that symbolizes their achievements, victories, rewards, and comforts. It's also the place that the monster Grendel invades, vividly striking at the very heart of all that matters to these people. In the end, Beowulf liberates the hall from the monsters and gives them back their home. (You can really see all dimensions of present, past, and future in this particular setting just from this paragraph, can't you?) In contrast, the cave where Grendel and his mother live shows the exact opposite of the Hrothgar hall--it's dark, forbidding, a place to hide, to seethe, a place for evil outcasts.

Agatha Christie often set her books in places where the cast of characters can't escape, while also limiting the number who could have committed the crime. This greatly increases tension and also focuses the plot on these particular characters, allowing the reader to participate in unraveling the mystery in a closed setting, where the surprises will be highly logical ones that stem from the trinity of characters, plot, and relationships.

Hands down, the future dimension of setting gets left out the most, but the writer needs to think in terms of where the character could conceivably end up, scene by

scene, based on what they've believably established and is unfolding as they tell their story. In the case of James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*, the main character, Thomas, wakes up in a setting ("the Glade") with almost total memory loss about who he is, what he's doing there, and why he's there. It's filled to bursting with future dimensions because what's going to happen with all this unfathomable weirdness is an intriguing question that keeps gnawing at the reader one scene after the other, keeping him immersed in the story. Thomas is surrounded with other boys, none of whom remember much about their lives before ending up in the Glade either. In a short time after arriving through the lift that brings them food and supplies, Thomas can't help but notice the towering stone walls that surround the Glade. There is no way out of this place...no way except maybe through what's inside the walls--an ever-changing maze. Obviously the walls and the maze itself aren't there for aesthetic appeal alone. There's a very definitive purpose to the settings in this book, in all P/P/F dimensions:

"You just called it a maze--you said, 'same thing happens out in the maze.'"

Chuck's face reddened. "I'm done with you. I'm done." He walked back toward the tree they'd just left.

Thomas ignored him, more interested than ever in the outside of the Glade. A maze? In front of him, through the East Door, he could make out passages leading to the left, to the right, and straight ahead. And the walls of the corridors were similar to those that surrounded the Glade, the ground made of the same massive stone blocks as in the courtyard. The ivy seemed even thicker out there. In the distance, more breaks in the walls led to other paths, and farther down, maybe a hundred yards or so away, the straight passage came to a dead end. "Looks like a maze," Thomas whispered, almost laughing to himself. As if things couldn't have gotten any stranger. They'd wiped his memory and put him inside a gigantic maze. It was all so crazy it really did seem funny.

His heart skipped a beat when a boy unexpectedly appeared around a corner up ahead, entering the main passage from one of the offshoots to the right, running toward him and the Glade. Covered in sweat, his face red, clothes sticking to his body, the boy didn't slow, hardly glancing at Thomas as he went past. He headed straight for the squat concrete building located near the Box. Thomas turned as he passed, his eyes riveted to the exhausted runner, unsure why this new development surprised him so much. Why wouldn't people go out and search the maze? Then he realized others were entering through the remaining three Glade openings, all of them running and looking as

ragged as the guy who'd just whisked by him. There couldn't be much good about the maze if these guys came back looking so weary and worn...

Focused on your setting, what's the worst-case scenario if the character doesn't end up where she's striving to go? What's the best? Make the reader go through all the emotions of anxiety and hope as you project, scene by scene, both the worst and best place for the character to arrive at by the end of the book. In a more focused sense, each scene should project forward in order to keep the reader fully engaged.

In another example, this one again taken from *The Ruins*, you can feel this main character's internal and external conflicts in this setting so clearly. His current goals and motivations are sketchy, the result of past and present events that are terrifyingly limited and point to death in every single direction. The limbo inside his mind as he traverses the landscape (the massive tangle of vines forming the hill) of the present seem to point to a future in which he'll never escape alive:

The rain had already saturated the clearing, transforming its soil into a deep, viscous mud that clung heavily to his feet. Jeff thought of his earlier attempt to flee, that first night, when he'd tried to sneak down through the vines, how the tendrils had cried out, alerting the Mayans to his approach, and he wondered why the plant was remaining so quiet now, so motionless. Surely it must've sensed what he was intending. It was possible, of course, that this silence betrayed how negligible Jeff's chances were, that the vine could perceive the Mayans standing guard even through the darkness, the mist, the rain, that it knew he'd never make it--he'd either be turned back or killed. At some remove (sic?) within himself, Jeff could even grasp what this portended, could recognize that the logical course, the sensible one, would be to surrender now, to retreat up the hill to safety.

Yet he kept walking.

Thirty strides, and then he stopped. He stood there peering toward the jungle. All he could hear was the rain slapping down into the mud. The wind tugged at the mist, stirring it deceptively. Jeff kept pulling shapes from the darkness, first to his left, then to his right. Every cell in his body seemed to be warning him to turn back while he still could, and it baffled him why this should be so. Here, after all, was the moment he'd been yearning for, was it not? This was escape; this was salvation. How could he possibly renounce it?

Characters, plots, relationships, and settings have to be three-dimensional. The people we are and the environments we're in at every stage in our life have an impact

on us for bad or good or somewhere in between. Create *purpose* for settings. Make strong, cohesive connections between your CPR elements. If they don't intersect, collide, and experience impact, you're writing separate books in the same manuscript. Your character sketch builds the structure of your story by following story threads from beginning, through middle, to end. If any of your threads aren't strong enough, or lag anywhere, you'll see it in the sketches and you'll really see it when we break out the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart in Chapter Six. It's a guarantee that, if the thread isn't properly developed within the sketch (and on the chart), it won't be properly developed within your story.

Chart Your CPR Development Homework

To ensure you're getting deep, multifaceted development and progression with your characters, fill out the Three-dimensional Character Sketch in the appendix so you can identify present, past, and future dimensions of character.

Without each of your character dimensions clearly defined before you start writing your story, your characters may end up two-dimensional at best. How can you imbue your characters with functionality, a heartbeat, breathing, and the spark of life? Only through multifaceted dimensions. In the ideal scenario, you'll know your characters so well before you begin writing that they're just waiting for you to root them deeply into each scene. In the next chapter, we'll learn how to create three-dimensional plots filled with CPR development that progress continuously all through the story.

CHAPTER FOUR

Deep, Multi-Faceted Development and Progression of Plots

"The key to creating better plots rests in a deeper understanding of character. Take a handful of flawed humans with agendas, put them together, shake, slowly turn up the heat and watch the drama ignite. Great fiction is fueled by bad decisions and human weakness. They are all birthed by inherent human flaws--the desire for power, control, recognition, jealousy, rage, cowardice, lust, vengeance, etc. Characters are vital to plot, and that is one of the reasons...to write very detailed character backgrounds before plotting. We [need] the character's history to understand her story. [Plot] is birthed from character." ~"Great Characters--The Beating Heart of Great Fiction" by Kirsten Lamb on her blog

In creating a three-dimensional plot, we realize that, whether in real life or fiction, nothing is as it seems. The impossible can indeed be unfathomably possible and even inevitable. Finding out the truth about a given situation is why readers love well-developed CPR elements in their stories. Discovering what's living beneath the surface is the very reason writers create plot sketches--to explore every facet. The only way to discover some things is to go deep and search for the truth as opposed to accepting the façade. If the writer doesn't know what drives the conflicts in a story, chances are all but guaranteed that neither will readers.

It can be hard to define when--and especially why--some plots don't come to life. However, in most instances, the author hasn't developed them three-dimensionally enough. You as the writer need to create solid, cohesive CPR development throughout the story.

The best plot sketches are done in a two-step process. The first step is a spark--something that intrigues and ignites a scenario that the author can carry toward fruition. Brainstorming is absolutely necessary to establish, develop, advance, and "conclude" a plot. The next step is to use sketches to produce *three-dimensional* plots. Give yourself time to daydream about your plots three-dimensionally in connection with the other CPR developments. If the story is one you've been growing for a long time, chances are you won't have to force the plot into scenarios to reveal dimensionality. The process of development should come organically and needs to be set up properly from the beginning to be believable. Let's go deep about all things plot.

GETTING TO KNOW PLOTS: DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESSION WITH PURPOSE

As we said for characters, all plots must have purpose in the story, or there's no reason to include them and, quite frankly, what's the purpose in even writing a story without a solid plot that's revealed, established, developing, and driving forward with a blow-your-mind resolution? In Chapter Two, we fixed this goal in our minds in developing strong CPR elements: To outfit your characters with the tools they need to succeed, we need cohesive and strong plots and relationships. Plots begin with a good foundation.

The Three Dimensional Plot Sketch

In every story, the writer has to meet a basic challenge in order to create a successful book. This challenge almost always follows this course (where you see the arrow, substitute the words *leads to*):

**Character → Event → Conflict → Backstory →
Goals → Motivation → Choice → Resolution**

I love how Debra Dixon puts this challenge in its simplest form in *GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict*:

- Who = character
- What = goal
- Why = motivation
- Why not = conflict

She goes on to say that "a character wants a goal *because* he is motivated, *but* he faces conflict."

Plots need to have P/P/F Dimensions included for each major character, and naturally they have to have a very deliberate and definitive purpose in the story. So a simple plot sketch worksheet that covers the most crucial aspects would include the following:

Plot: Present/Past/Future

Plot/Story Goal/Subplot:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Goals and Motivations:

Defining plots in the three-dimensional sketches allows you, the author, to know the main characters' conflicts through and through. Remember the difference in three-dimensional writing is that you'll have a separate sketch for each main character that includes her present, past, and future self.

In the print version of this book as well as the worksheet file, sold separately, we take the basic sketch we have above and duplicate it three times across a landscaped page with three columns, labeling the sketches: "Present Self", "Past Self", and "Future Self". In the ebook version, tables such as that are impossible to duplicate, but you can transfer the sections listed below in table format on your own either in a computer file or on a blank sheet of paper.

PLOT: PRESENT

Name:

Plots/Subplots for this Character:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Goals and Motivations:

PLOT: PAST

Name:

Plots/Subplots for this Character:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Goals and Motivations:

PLOT: FUTURE

Name:

Plots/Subplots for this Character:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Goals and Motivations:

You'll find blank worksheets (free-form only in ebook versions) for your own use in the appendix. As I said previously, you can add anything to this worksheet, if it helps you, but these are the pivotal areas that need to be fleshed out in all dimensions of the self. Keep in mind also that I encourage free-form filling out of the sketches and charts and worksheets in this book. Most brains don't work in a linear way. Things come to us as they come and sometimes if you don't just go with it, you'll never actually begin working. Organization can be done later.

Life is conflict, and fiction needs to be even more so. Without conflict, you don't have a story. I like how Chuck Wendig describes this in *The Kick-Ass Writer*: "A plot grows within the story you're telling... An artificial plot is something you have to wrestle into place, a structure you have to bend and mutilate and duct tape to get it to work. It is external. It is artifice. You want a plot that is internal and organic." In other words, there's no wrestling; a cohesive plot is borne through carefully planning, development and advancement.

In real life, conflicts generally don't show up one day and go away the next, and they certainly shouldn't in the world of fiction either. Each conflict has a beginning, middle, and an end. The evolution of that conflict has to be believable (Neil Gaiman says, "Life is always going to be stranger than fiction, because fiction has to be convincing and life doesn't"), as well as emotional and worth caring about for the reader. In a story, the range of conflicts includes internal and external, and the goals and motivations that go along with them. These are your plot; you need each of these aspects to be well-rounded in all dimensions. Goals and motivations must constantly evolve (not *radically*--because characters shouldn't be chameleons who change with the wind to serve the current necessity--but *refined* in depth, intensity, and scope) throughout the dimensional stages to fit escalating internal and external conflicts. If each of the goals and motivations are cohesive in your story, you'll see an unbreakable marriage between them and the conflicts that go along with them when you do the P/P/F plot sketches.

Internal and external conflicts and goals and motivations need to be sketched for past and present dimensions of each major character because what's happening in the present will show its origins in the past. Think about the future dimension as hints and allusions that cause suspense, tension, dread, and longing and develop reader expectations for where the story is going scene by scene.

Present/Past/Future Internal Conflicts

Internal conflicts are emotional problems brought on by *external* conflicts, which make a character reluctant to achieve a goal because of roadblocks. They keep her from learning a life lesson and making the choice to act. In fiction, external character conflicts are the reason plot conflicts can't be resolved. Simply put, the character can't reach her goal until she faces the conflict. Sounds a bit like not getting dessert until the vegetables are eaten, and this is a pretty accurate analogy. Don't make it too easy for her and certainly don't solve the problem for her with miraculous events so she's not directly involved in solving her own problems. The audience must be able to identify with the internal and external conflicts the character faces in order to be involved and to care about the outcome. Character growth throughout the story is key to a satisfactory resolution.

The first spark of the story in your mind will usually suggest the character's conflicts, and many times the conflict is based on someone or something threatening what the character cares about passionately. A loved one is in jeopardy, or something the character wants, needs, or desires is at risk of being lost. Questions you might ask to get to the heart of your character's conflicts:

- What are your core principles and values?
- What will you risk your life for?
- Why would you put yourself in danger for this?

These questions will help define your internal and external conflicts. It's your job as the writer to give the character incentives (specifically, goals and motivations, which we'll cover soon) not to give up until everyone's safe and she has what she's fighting for.

Generally there's an immediate internal conflict that's revealed or hinted at in the opening scenes. This is the beginning of layers of internal conflict. MJ Bush, writing coach, editor, and fantasy bookist on the WritinGeekery blog calls the next level the "root desire", and she suggests that you ask your character five times to tell you what her root desire is, digging deeper each time. Once you get to the core, she advises you to bury it again because, if the reader can see it right away, it'll sound more like you're preaching rather than telling a story. The root goal is something that gets revealed slowly throughout the course of the book. The conflicting desire is, of course, the external one--the obstacle that prevents your character from reaching her root desire or goal in the story.

In S.E. Hinton's classic story *Tex*, the fifteen-year-old hero loves his horse more than anything in the world. But when his seventeen-year-old brother Mason (who's been standing in as father and caretaker) sells the horses to pay bills and put food on the table, Tex's world is turned upside down. His horse gave him a sense of purpose, validity, sanity. Bottom line: The horse made him happy. Though Tex understands intellectually that his brother had no other choice, he can't accept this. His internal conflict in losing what meant most to him is overwhelmed by the external conflict of his sold horse, and he reacts violently, desiring what he lost. But losing his horse is only his surface internal conflict. His root desire is the father who's all but abandoned them.

Clearly defined conflicts are ones that won't hit your reader over the head or frustrate him. If you don't quite understand the conflicts in your story, your instinct will be to compensate by bombarding the story with unfocused ideas. The reader won't find it any easier to sort through them and identify the true conflict. Loosely defined conflicts usually lead to the reader putting down a book and never picking it up again.

Too many conflicts can easily overwhelm the reader. The same is true if you're unrelenting in driving these conflicts home. I absolutely adore J. Madison Davis's take on this in *Bookist's Essential Guide to Creating Plot*:

"Even the greatest excitement and most spectacular events can become wearying if they are relentless. I remember hearing one disgruntled moviegoer whisper to his wife sometime around the third hour of *Titanic*, 'When is this dang boat gonna sink, fer pity's sake?' The writer who has one unremittingly, relentlessly exciting scene following another can wear the reader out. Too much shouting makes us deaf, and shouting even louder after that will not be heard because of the deafness."

Too many conflicts (especially at the beginning and end of a book) and failing to allow the reader to take a break between action sequences equate to shrill shouting that can deafen your reader. If you want an example of this, try reading Dan Brown's Robert Langdon Series. The action is absolutely relentless. By the halfway mark, I'm usually so exhausted I can barely continue reading (and, honestly, I've been known to fall asleep while reading the books). Characters need downtime as much as readers do to prevent overload that creates only a desire to escape.

Internal conflicts need to be sketched for past and present dimensions for each major character, because what's happening in the present will show its origins in the past. Obviously, it's vital to engage the readers' interest from the very beginning by including the means for him to anticipate (with hope and/or dread) what will happen in the future with these internal conflicts. Think about the future dimension of internal conflicts as hints that cause trepidation and longing, uncertainty and expectation.

Present/Past/Future External Conflicts

External conflict (plot) is the central tangible or outer problem that a character must face and solve. The character wants to either restore her lost stability or grasp her root desire by thwarting the external conflict, and this produces her desire to act. However, a character's internal conflicts will create an agonizing tug-of-war with the external plot conflicts. She has to make tough choices that come down to whether or not she should face, act on, and solve the problem.

Stephenie Meyer's postapocalyptic book, *The Host*, is about Melanie Stryder, who resists an invading alien life that forces human beings to become hosts by taking over the bodies and consciousness of each person. Melanie's invader soon realizes that Melanie hasn't relinquished possession of her mind, despite giving up her physical body. Though the invader's task is to discover the whereabouts of the remaining human resistance, this soul (called "Wanderer") instead finds itself sharing in Melanie's undiminished longings for her lost love, who may still be alive and waiting for her. Both

Melanie and Wanderer struggle inside one body with their internal and external conflicts of being who and what they are.

Your audience should be able to relate to both the internal and external conflicts a character faces. This ensures the reader is involved enough to care about the outcome of the story. Plot conflicts work with character conflicts. You can't have one without the other, and they become more intense and focused the longer the characters struggle. Stakes are raised, choices are limited, and failure and loss are inevitable; these are the future dimensions that we need to sketch in order to create the hope/dread responses in readers.

Internal conflicts are different from external, but they're related causally and they depend on each other. Therefore, they need to be cohesive and multifaceted. Internal conflicts are all about characters, and external conflicts are all about plot. But keep this in mind: Both internal and external plots belong to the main character. After all, if both didn't affect her in some profound way, they wouldn't be conflicts for her, and therefore wouldn't even be part of her story. That's why it's so important to do a P/P/F plot sketch. David Corbett says in *The Art of Character: The Five Cornerstones of Dramatic Characterization*, "Characterization requires a constant back-and-forth between the exterior events of the story and the inner life of the character." If your character's internal and external conflicts are at odds, your story will be going in two different directions, which will disengage even the hardest of readers. In stories that work on a cohesive level, internal and external conflicts travel on parallel tracks, merging and colliding in escalating explosions at intervals throughout the course of a book.

Think of the two conflicts this way: Everyone has a passionate hot button--cruelty to animals, cancer, child abuse. You fill in the blank with yours. But not everyone has the strength of passion for your particular hot button. We usually put our passion into something that has touched us deeply in our lives. If your mother died of cancer, you'll want to see that particular disease cured. It's your hot button. This doesn't mean you don't sympathize and care deeply about other causes, even if you're not quite as passionate about them as you are about the ones that affect you most. What it does mean is that if something critical happens in the area of your passion, you're probably going to step up to the plate and fight for what you believe in.

You're telling a story about your particular characters, and they have hot buttons, too. Since it's their story, their hot buttons will naturally be their conflicts. All of these conflicts must parallel, intersect, and collide for a story to be truly cohesive. So, though the external plot conflicts may stem from an outside force or situation, they nevertheless belong to the main character as much as her internal problems do. Like I said, if she didn't care deeply about the external plot, it wouldn't be her story.

Let's use an example of this from the action/adventure movie *Die Hard 2: Die Harder*. The rough and gruff main character, John McClane (played by Bruce Willis), is a cop at the airport on Christmas. He's off duty but begins to sense trouble is afoot in

what seems like the busiest place on earth--and things look like they could get worse before the day is over. The airport cops don't share his uneasiness. They've got their own worries to handle. Though McClane is very reluctant to get involved, his integrity won't allow him to stand by idly. He checks out his hunch, figuring he'll let the airport police handle anything that he discovers is amiss.

His gut instinct is dead-on. Terrorists take over the airport. This shouldn't be his problem, but it becomes so because: (1) the airport cops refuse to do their jobs, as they're too busy with other tasks; and (2) these terrorists have pushed McClane's hot button. A year before, on Christmas, McClane single-handedly took down a band of terrorists at the Nakatomi building, where his wife worked. Terrorists, particularly those who threaten his wife, are undoubtedly McClane's hot button, his external plot conflict.

Enter his cohesive internal (and three-dimensional) character conflict--his wife is currently on one of the planes circling overhead, a plane that is unable to land, and rapidly running out of fuel because of the terrorist attack paralyzing the airport. Not only have these terrorists hit John's hot button, they've made it very personal, and there's no way he can sit back and let security handle it. This is *his* problem. If McClane's wife's plane runs out of fuel, the passengers will plummet to their deaths. The problem with landing is that the terrorists still have control of the airport, and they've closed down all the runways, except the one they need for their own getaway. There are no lighted landing strips, so any landing is dangerous because it'll be done blindly. Without a choice, the pilot in his wife's plane announces to the tower he's making an emergency landing, and, of course, McClane hears it. If he doesn't act this instant, his wife will die and the terrorists will escape. The cone has closed to the point that he has almost no room to maneuver. The suspense is nearly more than the viewer can bear (but he loves it!). All of McClane's goals and motivations (which are so cohesive, we can't talk about internal and external conflicts for this character without including them) come down to stopping the terrorists. This action, in turn, provides his wife's plane with the lighted strip needed to land. In this example, you can really see the differences between internal and external conflicts, but you see how they relate, connect, and collide. You can also see all three dimensions of self.

Let's go over the sometimes-subtle distinction between character (internal) and plot (external) conflicts with some examples from best-selling books.

In all of the Harry Potter books, young wizard Harry constantly battles his internal conflict. His parents are dead and he's been forced to live with his detestable and magic-hating aunt, uncle, and cousin. That's a simplification, of course, of a complex situation. The external plot conflict is Harry coming to terms with his inadvertent relationship to Voldemort, who killed his parents, and how his contact with this evil person affects him inside and out. The external plot conflict is evident in every book. You see how the internal and external conflicts differ--one's outside, one's inside--how they parallel, intersect, and collide, and how you can't really have one without the other.

In *Dances with Wolves*, Lieutenant John Dunbar nearly loses his life in the war, and his sense of purpose and self-worth wavers, although his sense of adventure and duty are intact. Feeling like he doesn't belong where he is, he ventures into dangerous Indian country, where he finds his purpose and his self-worth, and he comes to learn that he belongs to and loves the new culture he finds. These encompass his internal and external conflicts. Plot and character conflicts in this story center around the Indians he encounters, which both threaten him physically and heal his soul, showing him both the ugly and honorable sides of his fellow white men.

External conflicts should be sketched for present and past dimensions of each major character, since we can't understand why a character reacts to an external conflict until we've traced the path of her internal conflicts all the way back to the beginning, rooting and untangling the two dimensions. The external conflicts of the future dimension provide a tense tug-of-war between dread for the worst and the hope for the best, engaging readers throughout the evolving story.

Present/Past/Future Goals and Motivations

In *Creating Characters*, Dwight V. Swain talks about giving the main character drive, which basically entails devising something for her to care about. You need to fit her with suitable goals--always keeping in mind the direction you want her to go in--threaten that goal, and establish reasons for her to continue fighting against the threat on the road to reaching her goal. Goals are what the character wants, needs, or desires above all else. Motivation is what gives her drive and purpose to achieve those goals. Goals must be urgent and/or monumental enough to motivate the character to go through hardship and self-sacrifice. But the surface inducement that most people will claim--wanting to do the right thing--isn't strong enough in fiction. Go deeper. Your character can't simply *react* to conflict; she must *act* in the face of it. What exactly does she stand to gain if she does something? What will she lose if she doesn't do it?

Keep in mind that whatever the external conflict is in your story, it's not simply a container that holds your character--like a potted plant--until she can escape it. The external conflict is the foundation of your story goal/theme, and it's through this "ground" that the roots of her internal conflicts and goals and motivations will branch out and bloom. Focused on the goal, the character is pushed toward the external conflict by believable, emotional, and compelling motivations that won't let her quit before she reaches the goal. Her anxiety doubles because she cares deeply about the outcome. The intensity of her anxiety pressures her to make choices and changes, thereby creating worry and anticipation (future dimensions) in the reader.

Orson Scott Card describes in like this in *Characters & Viewpoint*: "Motive is what gives moral value to a character's acts. What a character does, no matter how awful or how good, is never morally absolute: What seemed to be murder may turn out to have

been self-defense, madness, or illusion; what seemed to be a kiss may turn out to have been betrayal, deception, or an irony. A character is what he *does*, yes--but even more, a character is what he *means* to do." (My emphasis in that last sentence.)

In Susan Hill's classic ghost story, *The Woman in Black*, solicitor Arthur Kipps is sent by his firm to the small town of Crythin Gifford to settle the affairs of the late Alice Drablow. While at the funeral, he sees a woman dressed in black whom the children silently watch. Over the next few days, while completely cut off from the mainland at high tide, Kipps goes over the deceased woman's papers at Eel Marsh House. During this time, Kipps discovers the truth: Drablow bore a child out of wedlock and was forced to give him up to her sister. An attempt to abscond with her son led to him drowning in the marshes while his mother looked on helplessly. After her death, she returned to haunt Eel Marsh House and the town of Crythin Gifford. According to local legend, a sighting of the Woman in Black presages the death of a child. Kipps repeatedly sees the malevolent ghost and begins to fear for his fiancée and their future.

Remember, goals and motivations are constantly evolving (*not* changing necessarily but refining in depth, intensity, and scope) to fit character and plot conflicts. Your character's goals and motivations will certainly adapt throughout the course of a story, since she's modifying or reshaping her actions based on the course the conflicts are dictating.

Let's look at Frodo Baggins's evolving goals and motivations in *The Lord of the Rings*. From the beginning, his goal is to destroy the One Ring of power, passed reluctantly down to him by his Uncle Bilbo. He's fully aware of how the Ring will destroy everything he knows and loves if it falls back into its evil master's hands--this is his motivation for acting against the external conflict. Sauron is amassing an army to destroy Middle-earth, and the Ring is the weapon that will ensure his success. Frodo's goal--to get the Ring to Mount Doom so he can cast it into the fires where it was made and destroy it once and for all--remains firm throughout the plot. In the end, the evil of the Ring makes him seem to change his mind, but readers know that if the Ring hadn't ensnared and poisoned him so deeply, he would never have changed his altruistic course. Along the way, his goals become more focused. He begins his journey in the company of the Fellowship, but after a time he realizes the task belongs to him and he must carry the Ring to Mount Doom on his own, with the aid of his loyal friend Samwise Gamgee. When he becomes aware that he doesn't know how to get inside Sauron's lair (where Mount Doom resides), he accepts the help of the fickle creature Gollum, who's as obsessed with the Ring as Frodo is becoming--pointing toward the fear that Frodo may not finish his quest.

These are all expansions of Frodo's original goals. Same with his motivation: Frodo accepts the mission because of what's at stake--those he loves, Middle-earth, and, most especially, his beloved Shire. His love motivates him to make the choice to do what seems impossible. The depth and scope of his motivation sharpens when he meets

his former companion's brother, Faramir, and again recognizes the oppressive weight of all that's at stake if he doesn't succeed. It changes again when he acknowledges that the irreversible damage done to Gollum stems from the evil hold of the Ring and that the Ring is changing him, as long as it's in his possession. It sharpens yet again when he sees the size of the army Sauron is amassing. And when his best friend seemingly betrays him. Again, all of these are offshoots from his original goal and motivation. You can see present, past, and future dimensions in all of these changing goals, and additionally, you can see that the beginning of the story resonates in the end. No, Frodo doesn't get a happily ever after (Sam gets that instead), yet his story resolution fits perfectly with what we've learned. It's logical, even though it's a twist on what the reader is led to believe is the best-case-scenario ending.

Characters succeed because they rise above their fears, and this requires goals and motivations that are cohesive with the character's personality and the particular skill set you've equipped her with for this task. Also keep in mind that if your conflicts go in a straight line, with no offshoots to complicate them and no failures when the hero makes an effort to solve her problems, your reader will grow bored with the story and less intrigued by the character. You'll rouse more emotion and interest if the intensity of conflicts continues to rise on a causal course. As a story progresses, you'll revisit each main character's internal and external conflicts, as well as the goals and motivations, in order to show the refined growth and development of characters.

Goals and motivations should be sketched for present and past dimensions for each major character since readers can't understand what compels a character toward certain choices until they've traced the path of her conflicts all the way back to the beginning. Additionally, remember the need for future dimension goals and motivations. You want your reader to be nail-bitingly anxious and resolutely hopeful about the characters' state of mind, choices, and actions as the story unfolds scene by scene.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What does your character want in life?
- What will it take to get that?
- What might change if she gets it?
- Just as important, what would happen if she doesn't get it?
- What's at stake?

If you don't give characters fully fleshed out situations, conflicts, goals and motivations for the future, you've essentially left the reader with nothing to hope for or look forward to. He won't be inspired to rage when it looks like the character might not succeed in her goals, nor will he be held in suspense waiting for the worst to happen.

Just as characters do, goals and motivations change, since the conflicts characters face have an impact and change them in a variety of ways. Create *purpose* for conflicts

in the same way you did in the previous sketch in order to build in three-dimensionality. From the standpoint of plot, you're looking at conflicts the characters currently face, have faced, and may have to face in the future. Analyze through P/P/F the *how* and *why* aspects in terms of shaping the individual's conflicts and goals and motivations throughout a lifespan. These sketches aren't just a setting down of facts. Dig deeper: What events, situations, people, and places caused this character to be, to think and act, react and *interact* the way she did, the way she does currently, and the way she will do in the future? There's no denying that the conflicts we face at every stage in our life have an impact on us.

Make connections between all of your plots and subplots. If internal and external conflicts (and goals and motivations) don't intersect, collide, and experience impact, you're writing separate books in the same manuscript. Don't worry if your internal and external conflicts get so tangled up, you can tell one from the other. It just shows how cohesive your story elements are--everything's working together toward the resolution. Your Plot Sketch (and Story Threads Sketch, if you choose to utilize one in this stage) builds the structure of your story by following story threads from beginning, through middle, to end. If any of your threads aren't strong enough, or lag anywhere, you'll see it in the sketches. It's a guarantee that, if the thread isn't properly developed within the sketch, it won't be properly developed within your story.

Chart Your CPR Development Homework

To ensure you're getting deep, multifaceted development and progression with your external plots, fill out the Three-dimensional Plot Sketch also in the appendix so you can identify present, past, and future dimensions of plot.

Without CPR developments and dimensions clearly defined before you start writing your story, your plots may end up two-dimensional, dead or lifeless. With your plot elements sketched out three-dimensionally, acknowledging all the threads that invisibly make up your story, you'll know the origins of all internal and external conflicts and the goals and motivations that fueled them. You'll be able to deeply root these aspects into each scene you write as well look ahead with a sense of hope mingled with nail-biting trepidation at future developments. In the next chapter, we'll learn how to create three-dimensional relationships that are the heartbeat of every story.

CHAPTER FIVE

Deep, Multi-Faceted Development and Progression of Relationships

"Character is not created in isolation or repose; it's forged through interaction with others and the world." ~The Art of Character: Creating Memorable Characters for Fiction, Film, and TV by David Corbett

Human beings tend to live in groups, whether because one person has the limited ability to live by himself or because we like to be dependent on each other--and of course we like and care about each other as well. This is how societies, communities, and relationships are born.

In creating three-dimensional relationships, we can easily say that, whether in real life or fiction, nothing is as it seems. Polite exteriors may be poor mirrors for what's going on beneath the surface in a community with the population living there. You can have two people be friendly with each other when they're in public together while avoiding each other like the plague privately or even tearing each other to shreds verbally or physically. Two coworkers may be professional and aloof with each other at work and madly in love at home. Add to any confusion, two people can be as clueless about what the other in a relationship feels for them as the rest the world may (or may not be) about the situation. Discovering the dynamics of relationships in any form is a topic that has dominated stories from the beginning of time.

It can be hard to define when--and especially why--some relationships don't come to life. However, in most instances, the author hasn't developed them three-dimensionally enough. You as the writer need to create solid, cohesive CPR development throughout the story. Let's go deep into all things relationship.

GETTING TO KNOW RELATIONSHIPS: DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESSION WITH PURPOSE

As we said for characters and plots, all relationships must have purpose in the story or there's no reason to include them and, quite frankly, what's the purpose in even writing a story without relationships? While there are interesting stories about hermits, survivalists or loners who have little or no contact with other human beings (*Island of the Blue Dolphins, Hatchet, How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*), most characters are social people in some degree--and that's where things get really interesting because there are rules in a society that simply don't exist in isolation. Judith Martin says, "Etiquette is all human social behavior. If you're a hermit on a mountain, you don't have to worry about etiquette; if somebody comes up the mountain, then you've got a

problem. It matters because we want to live in reasonably harmonious communities." People need people more often than not, and nearly all stories need incredible relationships that are completely cohesive with the characters and conflicts. What purpose do the relationships have in light of the plot?

Think of some of these dynamic historical relationships (both real and fictional): Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty, Beauty and the Beast, Bonnie and Clyde, Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison, Han Solo and Chewbacca, Prince Charles and Lady Diana, Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee, Calvin and Hobbes, R.P. McMurphy and Nurse Ratched, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, Tarzan and Nkima, Hercule Poirot and Captain Arthur Hastings, The Lone Ranger and Tonto... I'm sure you can think of countless more. Those you could identify on the list are pretty intriguing, aren't they, and for so many reasons that could be about the contrast, the commonalities, the obstacles, the passion or the fury that divided or drew them together. Are characters friends because of or in spite of similarities or differences? Do they have a strong background together that's either as friends, enemies, or something else? Did something alter the relationship somehow and in what ways? Do they avoid each other or seek each other out?

People are influenced by those around them, whether or not they're family, actually friends or are merely tolerating each other to follow public conventions. In her article "8 Secrets To Writing Strong Character Relationships" on the Writer's Edit blog, Katherine O'Chee says, "Character-building is a crucial step in the creative writing process. However, we often become too focused on creating and developing isolated character profiles that we overlook one of the most crucial aspects of character-building: the relationships that exist between these characters. A fictional world would collapse if not for the networks of people and creatures who hold it up."

How do these dynamic relationships begin and end and develop in-between? Three-dimensional relationships are the ones that feel utterly believable and become hauntingly memorable through the ages. While your readers might not need to know every detail of a relationship's evolution, the author needs to know everything because it's easier to write about something naturally and effectively if it's been developed fully. I remember reading a story (that was published) in which the severely underdeveloped hero and heroine met within the first chapter of the romance story. Not once during the course of the story was the reader "introduced" to previous romantic relationships for either in the couple. Additionally, these two people fell in love far too fast without proper setup. As a reader, I would have liked to know more about previous romances for both parties since those had a direct bearing on who those characters became and what they were bringing into this new relationship. But it wasn't only the romantic relationship that was so lacking in that story. The story was part of a series and several of the other characters mentioned in the story were main characters in previous stories. All the relationships in the story were *told* to the reader but in no way *shown*. I've said

this numerous times in this book and for good reason: Just because something is stated to exist doesn't mean it's true and can be evidenced in the story by situational example. Only proper development and advancement verifies and bears out what a reader is told.

In this particular story, I felt no connection between the hero and heroine, nor did I really care if they got together for a happily-ever-after--in fact, I was annoyed that they did end up together because there was certainly no reason they should have. The friendships between characters were simply there, the friends and family fixtures who might have served as sounding boards or conveniences to the plot if even superficially developed but instead had no cohesive purpose in the story.

One other thing that bothered me with this story was that, in a series, a reader likes to see old characters they've come to know previously and get caught up with them. Yet I learned nothing of what'd happened to these characters since their own story concluded. Why even write a series if not to create a world of amazing characters with memorable stories readers will want to learn and follow from first book to infinity? A lack of development in all these areas can feel as cold to a reader as standing naked in the middle of nowhere in the Arctic. There were so many missed opportunities for relationship development in that story and series. It's memorable to me mainly because of the sheer magnitude of all it lacked as well as the fact that it was published.

The best relationship sketches are done in a two-step process. The first step is a spark--something that intrigues and ignites a relationship that the author can carry toward fruition. Brainstorming is absolutely necessary to reveal, establish, develop, progress and "conclude" a relationship. The next step is to use a sketch to produce three-dimensional life. Many authors start a story on a strong note because the relationships that initially fascinated them guide them naturally into creating dimensions. Give yourself time to daydream about all three dimensions of relationship development and advancement. If the story is one you've been growing for a long time, chances are you won't have to force the relationships at all. The process of development and progression will be organic.

A couple of things to keep in mind while you're sketching your relationships, as we will in the next section:

The way characters move around each other, the ways they speak and think can reveal a tremendous amount about themselves, other characters, and the relationships they have with one another. By using body language that's indicative of their feelings (and, in a romance story, the links in the chain of romantic development), conflicts and goals and motivations, we can show the depth and complexity in these relationships without simply telling the details as if they're facts. Body language, dialogue, and introspection will highlight the many facets of the relationships in countless ways.

Don't underestimate the importance of P/P/F dimensions. You might want to make a basic or detailed timeline of the major events in your main character's lives, P/P/F.

The events on this list will give context (in all three dimensions) and cohesion to everything that happens in the story and you can utilize any of the specific situations on your timeline for deeper CPR development by revealing important events, facets, memory triggers while fleshing out all the dimensions.

Just as a character doesn't stay the same from the start of the book all the way to the end, conflicts and relationships change and evolve with time and the level of intensity will also alter either subtly, dramatically, or anything in-between. A relationship that's doing nothing is stagnant. While no one likes conflict in a relationship in real life, it's the stuff of fiction--what makes a story worth reading. But good things certainly happen in relationships, too, and keeping both parties interested and *interesting* is half the battle. Those ups-and-downs are required to make sure the reader is always looking forward, hopeful and uncertain about the future. If your relationships never change, they're static and therefore probably not interesting.

Writing relationships in a series requires some reinforcement. As I said before, the point of a series is to build on a story premise and keep readers following along from one book to the next. The heart of almost every series is the characters and relationships. Even if a series book stands alone, readers want all the goodies that go along with a series book: World familiarity, deep delving into character lives and relationships, old and new adventures, and, most definitely, all the subtle nuances, insider jokes, and crucial intimacy shared when a series has been avidly followed. Otherwise there's no advantage to reading a series book over a standalone. Your goal as the writer should be to offer standalone books in your series that enhance everything that came before, exciting the reader for the next stories coming up. The experience of meeting characters and following their relationships in a series book should be incalculably richer.

In Chapter Two, we fixed this goal in our minds in developing strong CPR elements: To outfit your characters with the tools they need to succeed, we need cohesive plots and relationships. You have to set the stage from the beginning for those to be believable and intriguing. We'll begin our sketches that with a solid foundation.

The Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch

One school of thought presumes that there are four "attachment styles" that become the building blocks for every relationship. In essence, the attachment a person has with his primary caregiver after birth sets the tone for all associations that follow. Remember our quote at the beginning of this chapter: "Character is not created in isolation or repose; it's forged through interaction with others and the world."

Connections are vital to characters, and I'd venture a guess that there's not a human being on the earth who hasn't been affected--past, present, and future--and *greatly* influenced by his relationships. Our relationships influence every aspect of our being.

If a character doesn't have parents (beyond the biological imperative), that situation has a huge impact on who she is and how she interacts with the world. If she does have parents and they are (or were) awful, the association will have profound ramifications on every aspect of her life. Good parents bring about their own powerful significance.

This is true for all relationships in every stage of life. Those we love, those we're *in love* with, those we hate, tolerate, revere, appreciate, regret, are haunted by...all of these relationships make us into the people we were, are, and will be. They also have a direct bearing on decisions we make, the people we surround ourselves with whether involuntarily or willingly, as well as places we settle in at any given time. Our relationships greatly influence us at all points in our lives, and our characters' relationships will do the same.

Sketch the most important relationships for your characters so you can see who has shaped them and in what ways from past to present. In terms of future relationships, give readers "buds"--as in elements that flourish and grow--to keep them looking forward, both dreading the worst and hoping for the best.

RELATIONSHIPS: PRESENT

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

RELATIONSHIPS: PAST

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

RELATIONSHIPS: FUTURE

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

Let's first discuss the basic relationship types your story will need, then we'll get into specifics in the CPR development and progression of all these relationships:

Present/Past/Future Family

More than any other, family relationships affect the development, roles and futures of a person. Growing up, skills or incompetencies are forged. For good or evil, we don't get to choose our family members any more than our characters will. They're born into a certain family and they can either make the best or worst of it or get out (or die trying!) altogether. Whatever they entail, these relationships need to be something readers understand and empathize with, showing identifiable histories, conflicts and vulnerabilities, motivations, and behaviors. The relationships in your story can't merely be there, stated as fact, filling space or bulking word count. They need to be emotional, mental, physical, and social in all three dimensions.

In *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, the hunters create tragedy when Karana's father, the chief, is killed. The new chief decides the tribe must leave the island, and he goes off to prepare the way for them. When he returns with a ship and the tribe gets on board, Karana realizes that her young brother isn't with her and, after the ship sets sail, she sees Ramo on the beach, having gone back for his spear. Karana sees herself as a mother to her brother, so leaving him isn't an option for her. She makes a pivotal choice about all her relationships (with her older sister, her tribe, and those that might have been in the New World they set sail for) when she jumps from the ship and returns to her brother, knowing that the two of them will have to survive alone on the island, unless a ship comes back for them.

A Song of Fire and Ice/Game of Thrones is just one very expansive series absolutely *filled* to overflowing with familial relationships that run the gamut--but all are compellingly fascinating in so many ways, the only way to get all the nuances is to read this series yourself and certainly more than once: The Starks, the Lannisters, the Targaryens, and Baratheons. What haven't these families been through together and dealt with in healthy and not-so-healthy ways?

Family relationships can be middling and average, but what fun is that in fiction? The family relationships we want to explore can range from bad to worse to amazing or just plain complicated: the Weasleys in Harry Potter, Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* (and Scrooge and his nephew Fred, for that matter), Scout and her older brother Jem in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jack Torrance and his son Danny in *The Shining*, Sam and Dean Winchester from *Supernatural*. Think of *Great Expectations* and the orphan Pip's multitude of "familial" relationships that--for better or for worse--very definitely play a part in making him the person he is, was, and becomes: Joe and his wife, cunning Miss Havisham who hires him to play with her adopted daughter Estella (and Pip promptly falls in love with the cruel, young girl), Magwitch. The list could go on, but the point is that the range of memorable family relationships we can play with as writers is vast and thrilling.

But not all families are related by blood. Families can be born out of necessity or shared goals. I like to call books with these non-related families "central group of characters" types. Usually these are part of a series. In a story or series like this, you'll see a core set of characters with either a loose or specific connection that ties them together. They can be friends, co-workers, members of an organization or any other means in which they're thrust together by circumstances. Justine Davis' Redstone, Incorporated Series features a group of people employed by Redstone, Incorporated. My Incognito Series focuses on the operatives who work or worked for a covert government organization called the Network. My Kaleidoscope Series includes seven stories with co-workers all employed in the Kaleidoscope Office Building. Kate Jacobs' The Friday Night Knitting Club Series, as you would expect, focuses on a group of knitters. Debbie Macomber has something similar in her Blossom Street Series. My six-book, romantic inspirational Family Heirlooms Series focuses on the Samuels family siblings but the Friendship Heirlooms Series is the spinoff series that tells all the stories of friends of the original series. I couldn't leave those characters and the setting alone so I have another spinoff of those two series with Peaceful Pilgrims, which focuses on members of the community both the Family and Friendship Heirlooms series' are set in.

In James S. A. Corey's series The Expanse, a ragtag group of non-related characters are thrust together by circumstances over the course of the series and become like family to each other. James Holden, Naomi, Alex, and Amos were all crew members on the Canterbury. Later, they get a ship called the Rocinate that becomes the setting for many of their adventures. Other "family" members join later (and may fall away), including but not limited to Roberta "Bobbie" Draper, Clarissa Mao (talk about antagonist turned ally), Prax, and along the sidelines (in the most unusual ways possible) are Detective Miller and United Nations executive Chrisjen Avasarala.

There are so many ways to develop family or family-like relationships between characters. The only limit is your own imagination. All familial relationships need in-depth CPR development in all three dimensions.

Present/Past/Future Friends and Enemies

Two sides of the same coin, friends and enemies are all about fierce attractions (not usually sexual) and animosities. In real life, we generally get to choose our friends based on our interests, shared commonalities, and setting though sometimes friendship is thrust on us. What else draws two people together?

In the 1985 movie *Enemy Mine* an alien and a human have no choice but to become uneasily allies--and finally--very close, unlikely friends--after their ships crash on a hostile world.

Think of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, his friend, assistant, and sometime roommate, and the narrator of most of Sherlock's cases. They met based on a basic need (to share a flat) but those needs were actually much deeper than both realized, as they both draw something from the relationships they were unconsciously looking for. It isn't difficult to deduce that Watson longed for intrigue and mystery in his life--mental stimulation rather than physical (he served as an army surgeon in India, was wounded during the war, and returned to England with impaired health). In truth, Watson is presumably intelligent but he lacks Holmes' insight. Physically, he's described as the detective's exact opposite and, personality-wise, he's the perfect foil to Holmes' analytically machine-like, emotional detachment. In "The Adventure of the Creeping Man", Watson described the relationship this way: "I had become a whetstone for his mind. I stimulated him... If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance." William L. DeAndrea, an American mystery writer and columnist, wrote that "Watson also serves the important function of catalyst for Holmes's mental processes. From the writer's point of view, Doyle knew the importance of having someone to whom the detective can make enigmatic remarks, a consciousness that's privy to facts in the case without being in on the conclusions drawn from them until the proper time." This is a wonderfully cohesive, dynamic relationship with purpose that fulfills all the requirements necessary for CPR development.

But Holmes' rivalry with arch-nemesis Moriarty (admittedly embellished beyond Doyle's original material in the years since its popularity exploded) is equally dynamic. The two are intellectual equals (they have to be or the relationship wouldn't be interesting) and therefore have a mutual respect for each other's particular talents. Moriarty states that "It has been an intellectual treat for me to see the manner in which you [Holmes] have grappled with this case" and that "it would be a grief for me to take an extreme measure" (i.e., kill Holmes). Yet the two are on opposite sides and there can be no friendship or meeting of the minds in anything but competition. The two might have been friends had they chosen different principles in life.

Contrasting attitudes, motivations, behaviors, and conflicts may also ultimately choose our enemies. Comic books are rife with archenemies, many who started out very differently. Magneto, leader of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, is the archenemy of Professor X, leader of the X-Men. Once upon a time, they were best friends as Eric Magnus Lensherr and Charles Xavier, when they were two powerful mutants against the world with vastly different ideologies about remaining passive and positive in working toward equal rights for mutants in a world that fears them. Their differences have turned them into outright enemies who occasionally work together as allies or even members of the same team. Incidentally, both of these characters have deep, rich CPR development that spans past, present, and future dimensions.

Saruman becomes Galdalf's nemesis in *The Lord of the Rings* though the former was Galdalf's mentor at one time. Personally, I'd love to know more about their past relationship that might be available in some of the back-matter material his son has and is now putting out.

Another example of contrasting ideologies creating antagonists is in the classic French book *Les Misérables*. Inspector Javert is the rival of Jean Valjean. In truth, the two of them have more in common than either would ever admit or believe. When he was young, Jean Valjean stole a piece of bread and was imprisoned for 19 years. When he's let out on parole, Javert is the police inspector who promises to be watching Valjean's every move from that point on to make sure he doesn't go back to his thieving ways. Parole in those times was basically a fast track back into the life of crime and that's just what happens. Valjean has no choice but to break parole, change his name and start over. But Javert won't rest until he finds the convict and that unbending purpose to fulfill the law actually rules his life forever after. As a religious man, his faith is built on the Old Testament God of absolute justice. Valjean uses his new freedom to remake his entire life and his faith mirrors the New Testament God of forgiveness, love, and second chances. As similar as the two men are, they'll never agree or understand each other. There's deep, abundant CPR development in all the dimensions here.

One other point is that archenemies don't necessarily have to be *people* as we think of them. Tyrannosaurus (and relatives) could be considered the foe of King Kong just as Skynet (an artificial neural network-based, conscious group mind in the Terminator series) is certainly the opponent of John and Sarah Connor (and all humanity). In the Matrix franchise, humanity is unknowingly trapped inside a simulated reality called the Matrix which was created by artificial beings to control humans while using their bodies as an energy source. Agent Smith is an agent of the Matrix, sent to police and maintain while eliminating potential threats to the stability of the system while Neo is one of the few who's been freed from it.

In another popular series, The Reapers are the enemies of Commander Shepard (and all those existing in the universe) in the Mass Effect videogame series. Reapers are a highly advanced machine race of synthetic/organic starships that reside in dark space and over countless millions of years repeatedly harvest the galaxy's sapient life in cycles, diabolically "using" those living to advance their single-minded cause.

We've talked about friends becoming enemies as a common scenario in fiction, but this list wouldn't be complete without referencing a few hauntingly memorable enemies to lovers (and potentially vice versa): Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* and Anne Shirley and Gilbert Blythe in *Anne of Green Gables*. Four and Tris started out on what looked like very opposite sides but, boy-oh-boy, did they become of one mind in The Divergent Series. In Books 2 and 3 of A Song of Fire and Ice Series, *A Clash of Kings* and *A Storm of Swords*, the illegitimate son of Ned Stark, Jon Snow, joins the Night's Watch, who guard the far northern borders from the wildlings who live beyond

The Wall. He ends up falling in love with the fierce wildling woman Ygritte. This is a complicated relationship beyond belief, considering that he's infiltrated the wildings in order to investigate the growing threat from the otherworldly "Others" beyond the Wall. At what price does he remain loyal to the Watch?

Developing strong CPR in all three dimensions creates the most memorable stories with deep, vibrant, life-infused characters, plots, and relationships.

Present/Past/Future Romantic Interests

If you're not writing a romance book or a book that has a romance angle in it, feel free to skip all the way to the end of this chapter. Also in this section of the book alone, when referring to readers, I'm using "she" instead of "he" to avoid awkwardness (women read romance more than men do).

Writing a romance story is the hardest category that exists. Nothing can convince me otherwise. Let me tell you why. First, I'm not a romantic in any sense of the word. That's true, and I'd be the first person to tell you that. But I do write deep, rich, realistic love stories. Realism is the most important thing to me as a writer. If it doesn't feel real, like I could step into someone's lives with these characters and their relationship, it doesn't interest me. I want the down-and-dirty, gritty, excruciating pain and joy that could be actually lead to blood flow or shouts of exhilaration, the so-deep-I-can-feel-and-hear-the-heartbeat, so intense I can't breathe and my hands are actually shaking, I can't gulp because I'm paralyzed waiting restlessly for the next move. That's romance at its best, most ideal. That's what I want with every story that categorizes itself as a romance.

I'm a strong believer that the things two people who become lovers go through together right from the start to the bitter end need to develop unbreakable affection and commonality, one step after the other, leading to an iron bond. I call them links in the chain of romantic relationships. Especially in a romance story, you can't rush ahead, skipping links, without leaving the reader behind, wondering what's going on and just not feeling anything between the two people you want to bring together romantically.

Unless she's extremely talented, most romance writers can't hurtle from a couple's first meeting or meeting again (where they may already seem to be falling in love instead of simply being attracted to each other) to the middle of what's generally considered a romance (in which expectations are already in place and both want and need each other--too much, too soon). This forces a romance to never feel quite well setup enough to come off as justified, warranted, believable, and realistic. It also assumes the supernatural is in control, which is sappy and silly. Build each link in the chain steadily, providing the proper setup for every development. Readers won't accept anything forced or unprecedented.

Mystical developments in a fictional relationship are cheating. Basically, nothing has been set up in advance to produce a compelling reason for the characters to feel the way they suddenly (i.e., one minute it doesn't exist, the next it's there and in spades) do about each other, but they'll go from barely knowing each other to feeling strong affection or love in the course of two back-to-back scenes. Maybe some people believe that something magical happens when two people who are destined to fall in love and spend the rest of their lives together meet (those are the kinds of romance books that make me and those with strong aversions to the genre as a whole want to puke!) but in fiction and I believe in real life, something has to warrant development in a relationship (any relationship--romance or otherwise and if you take the sexual component out of it, the chain of romantic relationship development links can be used for any relationship in your story) to make it authentic and believable. Usually, this amounts to a steady progression of things that help the two people to get to know each other better and actually develop strong feelings for each other. Again, links in the chain. Without steady development of one link after the other, the reader might never be brought to the place where she feels ready for anything overt that happens between a couple, or she'll feel frustrated and even disgusted, maybe even actively hoping they'll break up.

This is the reason why I don't care for erotica, where intimacy comes first without the proper emotional setup, without getting to a place of understanding the individuals or the couple coming to know one another *first*. If a reader is looking for a romance and not erotica and she doesn't see a proper setup and steady development, she may end up embarrassed by the feelings and intimacy between your characters, convinced the physical demonstration was rushed or even forced without the emotion to justify the step.

I remember a long time ago, I was critiquing a story for a writer friend and I'd read the whole story and got to the sex scene (I can't call it a love scene because this was just sex). The characters and relationships weren't well-developed at all. I spent most of the story not understanding who these people were, what they wanted, and what in the world they were doing together! I felt nothing between them--no magic or chemistry. So, when this sex scene rolled around, I was in dread, not anticipation. I read the scene with increasingly expanding embarrassment. I'm talking full-on humiliation. My face was red, I felt flustered and wanted to run, escape this horror any way I could. I couldn't look at either of the characters. I wanted to stop reading and never pick that book up again, not even to find out what happened. In all honesty, I imagined that the characters had the exact same reaction I did after the scene was done. They both wanted to get out of there and never look back.

In a romance book, romantic/sexual tension is essential, although books in other genres may also develop the same tension between romantic interests. It's like cake and frosting. Take away one, and what's the point? This kind of tension refers to

anything that brings the romance to the fever pitch of anticipation for the reader. It's also been described as an exaggerated awareness between the hero and the heroine. You want to start this tension as early in the story as you possibly can. If you don't start the suspense promptly and keep it intense, the reader will be disappointed--or worse, embarrassed--during moments she should be temporarily relieved or exalted. Just as with plot tension, a romance book without romantic/sexual tension leaves the reader uninvolved and unemotional toward the focal relationship happening.

If you're writing in a genre outside of romance and include a romance subplot, you'll need to include romantic/sexual tension as well, but you may choose to do this very subtly in whispers of soft tension in accordance with how focused the romance you include is within your story.

Look at the contrasts in the examples below of subtle romantic/sexual tension, and a more blatant form:

- Nicolas des Innocents is commissioned to design six lavish tapestries for Jean Le Viste, a French nobleman in Tracy Chevalier's *The Lady and the Unicorn*. Nicolas is a playboy to the extreme, a hunter and seducer of every woman...regardless of her social class. Nicolas even attempts to seduce Le Viste's own daughter Claude by telling her the tale of the unicorn with his horn of special power that makes all pure again. Every month, she'll go back to Eden if she'll allow him to tend to her.
- In Tracy Morgan's no-holds'-barred category romance, *Michael's Wife*, Sloan's best friend Michael had died while they were being held hostage. Michael had talked endlessly during their captivity, and showed Sloan pictures, of his wife Jesse. Sloan had fallen for a woman he'd never even met. He'd gotten through his ordeal by dreaming about making love to her. Michael's death wasn't easy for Jesse, but time has passed and she fantasizes constantly about a dark lover coming to her--one who resembles the photos she's seen of Michael's friend Sloan.

A romance story has to have a specific chain of development that can't be rushed, and it doesn't matter in the least what genre of romance it is. The steady progression of sexual tension, emotional culmination, and physical demonstration is required to bring the couple to the place where they've believably fall in love and can justify declarations of monogamous love, sex, along with a commitment of forever. Even in a Christian or "clean" romance, sexual tension and physical romantic development are required and vital to making the romance genuine and believable. In the sweet romances, how strong or sensual the tension and romantic developments are may be somewhat muted with any heavy intimacy taking place off-screen (or not--I don't judge because I believe the story and characters need to dictate what's warranted).

I can't stress the following enough: *If you're not including sexual tension and physical demonstrations (however sweet and clean) of romantic development in your story, you're not writing a romance story.* That's the bottom line and, if you continue to promote a story as a romance that doesn't have these elements in the appropriate degrees, you're cheating your readers, who are looking for both because they're the requirements of every romance story.

What your characters are experiencing is what your reader should experience. But if the characters are chagrined or want to escape, that's what your reader will want to do, too. The point of writing a romance is to make the reader fall in love (an emotional and physical reaction) with your characters one scene to the next, escalating into the payoff you've promised, and experiencing bliss and joy at the culmination. Readers may even shed tears. I'll tell you this, if you've gotten a reader to weep, she'll never forget the story, the characters and their romance for as long as she lives, and she'll read that story over and over again in her lifetime. A romance author wants that scenario. Otherwise, what's the point of writing a romance story? No point. And that's why I believe writing romance is the hardest genre on the planet. Because, if you write a bad romance, it's not worth having told the story at all. It's failed on all levels instead of simply on one.

Keep in mind that I'm specifically talking about stories that are in the romance genre here. If your story has a romantic relationship but doesn't fit in the romance genre *as the main category*, the romance may not even start in the early chapters, instead, starting much later or basically anywhere else in the book. Everything that follows in this section about relationship development is specifically for romances that fit in the romance genre as the main category.

Let's talk about cohesive sexual tension and advancement of romance. You wouldn't have a hero find some other woman to relieve himself with when the reader desperately wants to see him with the heroine. (This might happen outside of the romance genre, but romance readers would inundate a publisher with outcries of betrayal if something like this happened in a romance book.) If tension and relationship development don't blend, you'll produce disappointment instead of satisfaction.

Let's discuss an example of the tango between sexual tension and romance development from the romantic comedy movie *French Kiss*, with Kate (played by Meg Ryan) and Luc (played by Kevin Kline):

Kate has gone against her every natural instinct and gotten on a plane to Paris to go to her fiancé, Charlie, who's fallen in love with and become engaged to some Parisian goddess. (**tension**) On what she'd expected to be the most traumatic experience of her life, Kate instead meets the coarse Frenchman, Luc, a thief with a potential heart of gold, on the flight. She has a lively discussion with him, taking the focus off her fear of flying, and

he promises to drive her to Charlie's hotel. (**development**) Luc has put a necklace he's stolen into her bag, since she'll breeze through the check-point and he won't, and he plans to take back his stolen goods once they reach the hotel.

Circumstances prevent this. Kate arrives at the hotel in a taxi, and the manager refuses to tell her Charlie's room number. Horror of horrors, she sees her fiancé with the vixen. She faints, during which time her bags are stolen. (**tension**) Luc arrives and, lo, he happens to know the thief who took Kate's luggage. Kate is facing Murphy's Law continuously, yet she's getting away from the more immediate problem of having her passport, credit cards, and vitamins stolen in order to get to know her eventual hero, who's trying to get his necklace back while telling her he's helping her win Charlie back.

On the train heading toward the place where Charlie will be meeting his new fiancée's parents, Kate and Luc share a kiss (some question about who started it!) while she's sleeping. Luc had been attempting to go through her bag to get his necklace, but this kiss completely befuddles him. The wonders of Kate are captivating him, and he's redeeming himself in the viewer's eyes. (**development**) While Kate and Luc continue their attempts to lure Charlie's heart back where it belongs, they're falling in love with each other.

You can see from this example that sexual tension and development move along and go through a dance together, one step after the other, a sense of hopeful anticipation pervading. These steps match. They're logical and cohesive. It would make no sense at all if Luc put his necklace in someone else's bag, if he didn't know the thief who stole Kate's bags, or if, in the course of the film, he fell in love with Charlie's new fiancée instead of Kate. If story development and sexual tension are lacking or don't blend, your reader will have one of those dreaded moments where tuning out forever is inevitable.

Let's continue into the later story:

Kate and Luc devise an elaborate ploy to get Charlie back. She'll confront Charlie and show him that she's over him...partially due to Luc's ministrations. Charlie and his fiancée are stunned--and made wary--by her calm, cool attitude. She proposes that she and Charlie go out to dinner and work out the details of "breaking up". Kate and Luc's plan is that Charlie will have realized by this time that he's made a huge mistake, and Kate will have her man back where he belongs--this time on a leash.

Kate is stunningly beautiful to Luc that night, and he finds himself rethinking everything he wants while he gives her last-minute advice on how to reel Charlie back. Kate also finds herself uncertain--does she even want Charlie back? Her feelings for Luc are confusing to say the least. Why do his arms feel so right around her? (**suspense**) But she goes through with dinner with Charlie, figuring, *What else is there to do?* There's something between her and Luc, but neither have admitted it. She knows Luc is a thief (he's told her the necklace belonged to his grandmother and he plans to sell it to get the money to buy a vineyard--a very worthy goal that appeals to Kate more and more), and she's agreed to take the necklace to the jeweler Cartier for him the next morning...at which time the two will part for their separate lives. She'll go home with Charlie, they'll get married and use her impressive nest egg to buy the house of their dreams. Yet Kate no longer feels like this is what she wants out of life. The reason why she doesn't is obvious--she's in love with Luc, the man who, at the beginning of the movie, equated true love with the silly notions of a little girl.

Meanwhile, Luc is keeping up his end of the plan by distracting Charlie's jilted fiancée, and the goddess is more than willing to strike back at Charlie and make him jealous. In the heat of passion, it's Kate's name that escapes Luc's lips. But, after the next morning, he'll never see her again. Even with the promise of his very own vineyard, somehow he finds himself unhappy with the outlook of his future. (**development**) Kate and Luc have planned well, and Charlie wants to come back to her. But she now knows she doesn't want him back. She wants Luc, and she sees no way for them to be together. (**suspense**) The next morning, Kate makes a last bid for happiness. She trades her nest egg for the necklace, which she gives to the police, and allows Luc to think Cartier has given him the money for the necklace. They part forever, destined never to be happy because neither is willing to step out and take a risk. (**development**)

You can see from this example that sexual tension and romantic development leap-frog each other, a sense of absolute dread pervading (as much as is possible in a romantic comedy anyway). Remarkably fitting in this story is that the viewer roots for Kate when she follows Charlie with the purpose to get him back and continues to root for her when she decides she doesn't want him after all; and Luc becomes a loveable character despite the fact that he's a thief--one who never gets his due, beyond a punch in the mouth from his brother.

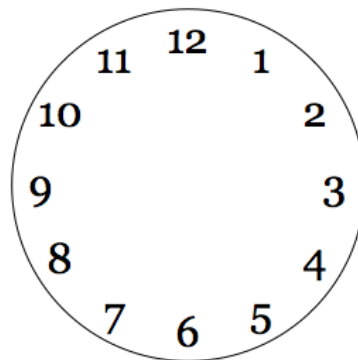
Everything that happens is logical and cohesive. It would make no sense at all if Kate fell on her knees before Charlie and begged him to come back to her; if, when Charlie admits he wants to come back to her, they fly back home, buy their dream house, and live happily ever after. No one would be happy if Luc was apprehended by the police and spent the future he should be spending on his vineyard with Kate in jail instead. The story couldn't have ended on the black moment with Kate and Luc truly going their separate ways. Logically and cohesively, only the happy resolution of Luc finding out that Kate had given him her nest egg, and him running to her side to tell her she can't leave him--ever--because he'll never stop wanting her, could satisfy the viewer. The only resolution the viewer will accept is that Kate and Luc put down roots and live on their vineyard happily ever after.

Only with the steady establishment and buildup of sexual tension and romance development--fully meshed with a logical resolution--will allow your reader be left satisfied and smiling upon closing the book.

Links in the Chain of Romance Relationship Development

We can use a chain of romantic relationship development to ensure we're not skipping any steps in seeing this romance progress from start to finish with all the pivotal, emotional stuff in-between. But keep in mind that this isn't set in stone and is provided only as a guideline for those needing a bit more structure in learning the difficult skill of writing a romance story.

First, let's imagine a 12-hour clock that will reflect the sections of a story.



For proper romance development that doesn't skip any steps, each link should occur approximately at these times:

- Link 1=1-3 o'clock
- Link 2=4-6 o'clock
- Link 3=7-9 o'clock
- Link 4=10-11 o'clock
- Link 5=12 o'clock

As we said, this is a simplified guideline. The point of using it is only if you're unsure that your romantic relationship is well-setup, growing and establishing properly. Every story is different as is every romance, but you can use it if it helps you to make sure you're not skipping any steps in realistic, non-criinge-worthy sexual tension and romance development.

Link 1) The Meet {or the Meet Again}

In a romance, generally you have two strangers meeting for the first time or you have a couple who met at some point in the past and may or may not have fallen in love or stayed together and meet again. Ultimately, the same thing has to happen in both scenarios: Whether they're strangers or know each other somehow, there's initial mutual attraction between them. How strong this attraction is portrayed is up to the writer to decide.

While it might seem easier to just have two people who already know each other meet up again, it's really not. With a Meet Again scenario, the writer has to play catch-up in a way that won't hit the reader over the head with backstory. There's a conscious, deliberately dribbling of the past relationship into the initial scenes and what's gone on in their individual lives since the breakup--not too much, not too little--just enough to get the reader up to speed. The past between these two has to be extremely well developed so you the writer knows every event and nuance of their previous love story well enough that you can include exactly what's needed to make this Meet Again powerful and emotional *from both POVs within their individual POV scenes*.

I've italicized that last bit because it's that important. First, if you're only telling one side of a romance story, the other half of the couple isn't going to be as well developed and that'll throw the relationship off-balance right from the beginning. Since hero and heroine will both have POV scenes, each of them can tell their side of the Meet Again without head-hopping between them in a single scene. You also want to see what happened after they separated in the past (from both POVs in their separate scenes), relationship-wise, in order to set the stage for redevelopment of a relationship between two characters who are in the early stages of individual development in your story. All these things work together and should be cohesive and revealed and advanced properly.

When two *strangers* meet, the writer can start at the beginning but that doesn't mean their individual pasts won't come into the relationship. The emotional baggage they bring into a new romance is vital to CPR development. Something definable has to draw two strangers together and, at this early stage, the only difference between this relationship beginning and one that isn't sexual is the tension and awareness between this couple. First and foremost, simply talking is a huge, crucial part of growing feelings between two people regardless of a sexual attraction between them.

So many opportunities can be lost in a story if your main characters aren't talking and getting to know each other. If you're starting conversations between them that could be the breeding ground for learning new things about each other (in the past and present and future dimensions--where did you come from? what do you do? where are you going?) yet you're skirting over those opportunities, deflecting them, sometimes in favor of repeating what's already known, that's an open door you slammed shut. Let's say you have the hero and heroine talking, and he mentions that something in town reminds him of where he grew up. Right there is a perfect opportunity to talk about his origins, hers, a mutual exchange. What was his life like growing up, what aspirations did he have, and where did he end up? I'm not saying that every conversation has to include every ounce of "past baggage" for both characters. I'm saying that each conversation has to include a revelation and an expansion of CPR elements--another link, big or small, in the chain of development.

However, one small caveat to getting to know each other is purposeful dialogue (the conversation has to have a point in advancing the story and relationship) as well as honest dialogue. I'm not one for outright subterfuge in real life or in fiction. I prefer honest characters having honest conversations because I tend to get a bad opinion of a character who's trying to create a "smokescreen mask" to prevent other characters (and the reader) from getting to know her. There are times you want to hedge so the character isn't spilling her guts instantly to whoever has the misfortune of being closest to her, but remember that you have to have legitimate cause for the character not being completely honest--a valid, logical explanation that the reader buys and that makes perfect sense with the CPR setup of your story. But you can't do this smokescreen thing often. It can only be utilized a few times in a story before it begins to inhibit and impede the story from moving forward.

Any relationship--whether it's brand new or a reacquainting--needs to include spending time together (even if it's just on the phone or on a device), talking, getting to know each other (again), in both POVs for balanced development. The reader gets to know both characters past, present, and future through these interactions and they can't be rushed. Don't focus on the situation in the here and now to the exclusion of developing past and future. The present should provide enough organic material that reaches into the past feel natural, warranted, hinting and expanding steadily at pieces of the character that will eventually become a whole. Also, don't neglect giving the characters and the reader something to hope for in future developments in the relationship.

Couples who don't talk enough never really get to know each other. They don't talk about themselves, ask the other about him- or herself. Their pasts and futures, their goals and motivations don't seem to matter to either of them. Dreams merely fit the definition of aspirations or fantasies that will never come true. Anything introduced is usually abandoned at some random point, and nothing feels crucial because there's not

enough focus or personal connection attached to it. What we know about the characters is what they've "earned" by their individual reputations in the circles they belong in--which is an inadequate and almost always inaccurate assessment of who a person really is.

Finally, as we said, the difference in this particular relationship is that it has romantic leanings. So, yes, while you don't want to rush the romantic feelings between them, there needs to be an attraction, something powerful that draws them together again and again. Very important things to include are physical and personality descriptions because noticing these things about the other person is what makes the vital difference between a regular friendship relationship and romantic-potentially-sexual relationship.

While I think all adult stories should develop this, in a romance it's crucial to give glimpses of past relationships and romances for main characters. Tell the reader why those relationships didn't work out and show what's important to know about this character and the developing relationship in this book. We need to understand these important characters through those romances so we can understand the relationship taking place in this story. Start with hints about the previous relationships that didn't work out and develop the situation over the course of many scenes, doling out what's needed when it's required to show progress and intrigue. What does the character want in a relationship, what's missing, what's prevented it up to this point, and what does she not want? Something *new* should be revealed each time it's mentioned. Even in our *French Kiss* example, in those short paragraphs, you learned about the past relationships for both main characters--along with what they were looking for in the future.

Are previous lovers brought into this story? What purpose do they serve? The character has to have a very strong reason for being there that's tied into the CPR development of the romantic relationships evolving in this story. If it seems the only reason a former lover is brought into the story is to make the other person in the romance jealous, that's not a strong enough reason for including the ex-.

In a romance story, there should be reactions (not necessary spoken out loud), comments, introspection, etc. from the love interest from both POVs. They don't necessarily have to be just physical descriptions either. They can be comparisons, contrasts, and should be intimately personal and tied to the POV characters P/P/F dimensions and their CPR development all through this story. What happens in one POV should carry over into the other character's POV--a reaction to whatever happened between them in the last scene should be shown and not ignored. Those developments have to be important to both characters enough to mention from one scene to the next. If they're not important, the progression of the romance may be weak.

When you're growing the physical intimacy between two characters, you need to utilize what I call "exaggerated awareness" of one another and the self. Use all the senses in describing this couple noticing even the smallest detail about each other: the

sights, smells, sounds, touches, and tastes. Literally, all the tactile stuff that can be so powerful in creating strong, tangible emotions. In a way, you're exaggerating these in order to draw the characters together like a magnet pulls metals toward it. In the old *Star Trek* series, those running the cameras used to "soften" the females Kirk was physically attracted to on the screen to make their beauty and femininity stand out. While it always made me laugh or groan, this is kind of like that.

The heroine might notice the deep, rumbling sound of the hero's voice and have a tangible reaction to it--the sound seems to vibrate in her own chest, making her heartbeat feel strained or pick up speed. She may want to reach out and touch his hair and doing so sends a volt of excitement racing through the entire length of her body. The scent of her perfume and the way her long, thick eyelashes flutter makes him wonder what it would be like to touch her skin (soft, like velvet) or how it would feel to press his lips to the delicate curve of her jaw. Along with the couple getting to know each other through talking, the strong awareness of the senses (of himself, her effect on him, combined with everything physically compelling about the other person), the desire for romance will grow between them as well.

One thing to remember is that, even if these two aren't necessarily thinking about a romantic relationship with each other at this point--maybe not even close--and getting to know each other isn't something they're doing willingly or happily, that doesn't mean there isn't a thread of attraction and almost surreal awareness running through every situation they're in together. While they may rebel against the mere idea of attraction, the magnetism between them is powerful, untamed, and unwilling to go away no matter how logical the arguments against it are at this point. I love getting-to-know-each-other-involuntarily romances because you can see the power of animal magnetism so vividly and that makes for an incredibly intense "initial surrender" (even one that makes them fight harder against being together afterward).

Warrant the spark of interest the two characters have in each other. Readers have to see what the big deal is, what's worth knowing and falling in love with, in order to root for them. Readers need to feel what the characters are feeling, or what's the point of writing a romance?

In The Meet/Meet Again stage, you probably won't have your characters revealing anything secret, tender or raw, or even deep, though there can and should be hints of all these things. There's probably a wariness that will keep both of them from jumping too fast into a full-on relationship.

The Meet/Meet Again step could take the first quarter of the book to develop sufficiently. In this stage in the chain, focus on them getting to know (or reacquainting and working through past hurts they gave each other) each other by talking, wanting and eager (even if they're fighting a relationship with this person) to see each other from one scene to the next, not really knowing at this point where the whole thing is going but pointing toward it developing.

If you look at the Links to Romance Development clock a few pages before, this stage is in the first part of the story (1-3 o'clock).

Link 2) Budding Preoccupation {Emotions Aplenty}

Every scene in a book has to have a purpose and has to progress your CPR developments. Romance relationship development is no different. You created a foundation for a couple's attraction in Link 1 with getting to know each other and an exaggerated awareness of themselves and each other, usually without physical demonstrations.

In the chain of relationship development, your characters probably haven't had any physical demonstrations of intimacy yet, though they may have wanted to share that with the other person. I don't recommend including much if any physical intimacy until this step or even the next one but, even if you do, don't rush a declaration of love or commitment. Allow the anticipation to build, not the potential for embarrassment for something no one is probably ready for at this stage (unless the author is truly skilled--and that could certainly be the case).

In the Budding Preoccupation stage, it's all about feelings growing, internal desire expanding for the other person, and every encounter is a little more intense than the last. Just thinking about each other should produce a hopeful, exhilarated reaction in themselves and the reader. The revelations and hints are a little bigger and more expansive in this stage and the wariness between them is waning, however reluctantly. Expectations for themselves and each other are in doubt, not ready to be locked down.

The clock has this stage in the first part of the story but toward the latter half of it (4-6 o'clock).

Link 3) Burgeoning Pursuit {Emotion Plus Demonstration}

At this point in the chain of relationship development, we've crossed the threshold that friendship/rivalry began at the Meet/Meet Again into something romantic and potentially sexual. Surface conversations have moved into something deeper because we know so much about these characters and the relationship and the hope for more should be strong between them, regardless of the obstacles--which should be just as strong. Reluctance has relented even more, though there might still be reservations. The inability to stay away from each other, to stop thinking about each other is ruling their lives, individually as well as when they're together.

Either willingly or unwillingly, the first step in falling in love has been taken. They may tell each other things they've never confessed to a single other living soul. Physical demonstrations of affection and desire are happening with more frequency and the beginning of expectations has commenced. In other words, both parties (again,

whether voluntarily or involuntarily) have proven to themselves and to each other that there is something strong and undeniable between them--something that could grow into more, into everything they've ever wanted or looked and secretly longed for but never really believed was possible. This is probably not something they'll admit to each other--at least not freely or fully--but they're beginning to admit it to themselves and maybe some of the other people around them (secondary characters). Expectations should be on the rise between the two characters and the reader.

The clock shows this stage is in the first part of the middle section of your story (7-9 o'clock).

Link 4) Culminating Ardor {Emotional and Physical Surrender}

At this step in the romance development chain, whether or not they're individually fighting their feelings for strong, definable reasons, there is an emotional and/or physical surrender that's stronger and deeper and larger than ever before between the couple. This can come out in many different ways, depending on what kind of romance story you're writing. The physical and emotional intimacy can run the gamut but should feel fully warranted and wonderful for the characters and the reader. In a "clean" romance, the reader may not see the physical surrender, but in any kind of romance regardless of heat, the couple (and the reader) are thoroughly invested, even if just during a particular emotional or physical surrender, and perhaps against all the obstacles that will have to be cleared before the next stage.

Whatever the specific situation, the scenes should be in mired in unsettling conflict and uncertainty. The outcome is looking just as precarious. The characters and readers are on a knife edge where a step in any direction feels like it could bring ultimate desire fulfillment or utter devastation. (Any other kind of disappointment might mean the CPR wasn't sufficiently developed and characters along with the reader were screaming "Abort! Abort!" silently and violently right before because they weren't ready for this to happen. How embarrassing!)

The expectations are so high at this point, the reader may have a lump in her throat, feel unable to put down the book until she finds out how everything is resolved. Regardless of the obstacles that remain, the couple is moving toward a future together whatever it takes, hell or high water! And you better deliver.

The clock shows this stage is in the second part of the middle section of your story (10-11 o'clock).

Link 5) Happily Ever After Commitment

One way or another, this couple has to figure out how to make their relationship work in the long-term and definitive plans are beginning to be made (actual fulfillment

of them may or may not be shown in this story). Even if it won't be easy, they're both committed to a future together. Satisfactory resolutions are crucial to a reader bestowing her favor on this couple and the romance as a whole.

The clock shows this stage at the end of your story and probably only the last three or four scenes in the book (12 o'clock).

In the print version of this book as well as the worksheet file, sold separately, we use a chart to make sure we're not skipping crucial links in development with the first column heading labeled "Line #", the second column "Time the Romance Link Takes Place", and the last one with "Describe Development". In the ebook version, tables such as that are impossible to duplicate, but you can transfer the sections listed below in chart format on your own either in a computer file or on a blank sheet of paper.

Links in the Chain of Romance Relationship Development Chart

Note: You should have something in every row in the third column and should have many things in each row regardless of whether you're writing a book or a short story. If you end up with a blank row, you've skipped a link and the romance isn't properly developed or is in the wrong genre (i.e. erotica). Once you're done filling out this chart, you should see a steady progression of the romance without gaps as you read down these columns. Remember, the purpose in doing this is to provide a structure that ensures you're not skipping any links in the chain--it's not meant to inhibit or stifle.

In the five rows below the headings you created in your own chart, you'll insert the following, with Columns 1 and 2 already done for you:

Row 1:

Column 1: Link 1) **The Meet {or the Meet Again}**

Column 2: First part of the story (1-3 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 2:

Column 1: Link 2) **Budding Preoccupation {Emotions Aplenty}**

Column 2: Latter half of the first part (4-6 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 3:

Column 1: Link 3) **Burgeoning Pursuit {Emotion Plus Demonstration}**

Column 2: First part of the middle section (7-9 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 4:

Column 1: Link 4) **Culminating Ardor {Emotional and Physical Surrender}**

Column 2: Second half of the middle section (10-11 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 5:

Column 1: Link 5) **Happily Ever After Commitment**

Column 2: Last three or four scenes (12 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Romance Story Obligations

Let's talk about the all-important tension and other obligations a romance has to fulfill in order to be considered a true romance story. Whether the book is figuratively hot or simply warm in your hands is your choice, but this section includes some very definite things to consider.

Start sexual tension from the get-go. Exaggerated awareness between your hero and heroine needs to begin immediately, the first time they come together in your book, and it needs to increase in depth with each subsequent meeting. In romantic fiction, you take for granted that this couple was destined, meant to be, fated, designed specifically for each other. That may or may not be true for other genres, but I'd vote that any story with a fair amount of space devoted to the development of a romantic relationship will have readers rooting for those two crazy kids to spend forever together. Therefore, every single look, touch, and sense is larger than life between them.

Focus on a certain aspect of a character that intrigues the opposite character. This characteristic enhances the awareness building in the story and makes it more powerful. Make your hero obsessed with the heroine's mouth--it's the first thing he noticed about her when they met, and he can't stop noticing it whenever they come together afterward. Imagine when he first kisses her. Wow! Fantasy become reality. There's nothing more potent for the characters or the reader.

Use dialogue within a scene of sensual awareness to heighten the erotic edge immeasurably. A few words (even if they're nothing sexual) can prompt immeasurable excitement. In a scene like this, nothing even vaguely sexual may be said, and yet the tension will be palpable. Also use introspection to heighten the intrigue and maintain the deep connection you established previously.

Don't be afraid of humor, even in an introspective or dramatic book. Tenderness can sometimes cross the line into sentimental. Depending on the situation or characters

you've created, humor could provide release and, in the process, give the reader a magical glimpse into the depth and three-dimensionality of your characters.

The sexual tension must reach the breaking point and satisfy the reader (and characters) only temporarily until happily-ever-after. When the couple touches, even accidentally, the reader should see sparks igniting between them. When one looks at the other, a profound feeling should come over the characters and the reader. The emotional impact needs to be conveyed through their every encounter. Don't skimp on this just because you're not writing a romance story. If your logic as a writer tells you that suspense is essential for every genre, then your logic should also tell you that every story with a romantic relationship (even if it's not the spotlight thread) needs to feature realistic, palpable sexual tension. Anything else is sheer laziness, or an inability on the author's part to admit he has a writing weakness he either can't or won't overcome.

Set the scene and the mood for yourself and your characters. Take note of scents, sights, tastes, sounds, and textures. Light scented candles, peel an orange, play sensual music, put silk or lace or velvet against your own skin. Dab your spouse's cologne on yourself. Put on his jacket (guys, please don't put on your girlfriend's lacy nightgown, though it's perfectly sexy to have it near enough to touch and smell). Do not for any reason other than an emergency answer the doorbell or the phone while you're writing a sensual scene!

Increase both physical and emotional intimacy. Another thing I've heard both editors and writers say is, "You have to raise the stakes with each sexual encounter", be it with a look, a touch, a kiss, or lovemaking. My opinion? The stakes involved in a romance are emotional *and* physical. When you raise the stakes from encounter to encounter, you're increasing physical and emotional intimacy. If you're not, you're not writing a romance (and then you don't need to worry about this too much). Emphasize the physical (and that's becoming more and more prevalent with erotica taking over the marketplace), yes, but never at the expense of the emotional. Books that don't emphasize the emotional on the same scale as the physical are disappointing because they cast the reader in the role of a voyeur watching two people go at it like dogs when little or no emotional ties connect them. Chances are, if a reader chooses romance over pornography, it's for the emotional ties involved in lovemaking. Equalize physical and emotional intimacies as if you're weighing them on a balance. Love scenes need to employ a wonderful combination of raw physical need and breathtaking emotional intimacy. If an author can make readers want her hero so bad they're all over their husbands that night, she's truly created three-dimensional characters that a real person can interact and become emotionally involved with.

Use the genre in writing tension in a love story or love scene. Imagine sensuality in a horror book, where the heroine both fears and is helplessly attracted to the mysterious, potentially dangerous hero. The heroine would be aware of the

temperature of the room, the coldness, and the abrupt way she warms when the hero appears in the doorway. She recognizes that shift of tension within and without her own body. She acknowledges her palpable fear and excitement, warring with each other. She notices the shadows of the room, the shadows on his face, on his body; the moonlight spilling across the stone floor. She breathes deeply of the hero's intoxicating scent, primal and raw. She starts at the slightest sound and hears her own heartbeat and bated breath in the eerie absence of sound that follows. His voice both unnerves her and catapults her to excitement. Try using danger in a love scene in your mystery, or suspense in your romance book love scene. In this unique way, genre can be used to help develop your love scenes.

Use your characters' backgrounds and experiences. While you probably won't use words or phrases that make you uncomfortable in writing tension or love scenes, your characters will help you choose the appropriate words they would use in a love scene. For instance, when writing a love scene between musicians, try using musical references. If one half of your couple is a dancer, have that person seduce the other with the sensual movements of the body while the other helplessly watches. If your character is a mechanic or rides a motorcycle, he or she will think in terms of revved engines, power, ultimate freedom. These images are evocative in a love scene.

Choose your point of view very carefully. I've heard many authors advise writing every love scene in both POVs. Remember all the reasons I listed previously for why head-hopping in a single scene is never good. You don't want to take any chance at all of confusing and annoying your reader. Your point with a love scene is to deepen the connection, and you can't do that by showing both characters' reactions to every little thing in alternation (talk about overkill). Instead, make the next love scene from the alternate POV. Also, give reactions to the love scene in the other character's POV following the event.

Let your characters decide the level of intimacy they'll share. Rarely will an author write a book that requires a level of sensuality she's not comfortable with, because she'll automatically choose characters that fit her own comfort level. Remember, despite where popular opinion is leaning these days, there really isn't a fine line between romance and pornography. Romance has an equal balance between sexuality and emotional bonding. Pornography has sex with little or no bonding before, during or after the purely physical act.

Make love scenes realistic instead of hokey or overly sentimental. When you're writing a character, you're exploring those illogical, contradictory, good-and-evil people and their relationships. You need all of those traits to make a character three-dimensional. You make your love scenes real by making your characters real. A fully fleshed-out character will make readers look at the world around them and the people in it in brand new ways. And a fully developed character will certainly make readers want to find out what turns her on.

Never use purple prose or silly euphemisms for body parts or reactions. Use words that are appropriate to the characters and the tone you've set for the book. No author would want to find out that the local book club passed around her book, laughing uproariously about your love scenes. The key to writing a memorable one is to not get mired in either the emotional or the physical aspects for too long. Don't let your characters get so swept away, they're riding on a cloud of the author's purple prose rather than on the emotions of the most intimate form of bonding imaginable. At the same time, don't let your characters get so involved in the physical act that it becomes, quite disappointingly, mere sex. Remember the difference between romance and pornography, and write accordingly.

Write love scenes chronologically. I've heard writers say they make notes of where love scenes should fit in while they're writing, then write all the love scenes last, after the first draft is completed. My opinion? I've never seen this go-where-I'm-inspired, chaotic way of writing work effectively. Keep in mind that each sensual scene should be an off-shoot, a layering of the characters' conflicts, goals and motivations, showing their growth toward each other and their tug of war not to take what they want more than anything. If you just drop something as pivotal as a love scene in later, you lose all the tension you built up previously, the mood, the momentum, and the cohesion from one scene to the next. Writing chronologically, everything will fall into place in an emotion-filled, cohesive way. The progression and tension will increase without taking the reader out of the book to wonder if the scene actually fits.

Don't write love scenes for the sake of sex or simply to fill pages. Romance readers choose romance stories over pornography because they want heartfelt, romantic lovemaking that leads to bonding, not empty sexual encounters with just anyone that lead to nothing. The heart of every romance book is the emotional bond between the couple. Even if you're not writing romance per se, your story may have a large romantic element because of the main characters' relationship. That emotional bond is what you'll probably leave the reader with in the end. It's a reward for a job well done. Everything else becomes a layer of the emotional bond. Don't lose sight of that as you write love scenes. Make each one count, make them reveal something pivotal, make them advance the plot, and make them necessary to building the emotional bond into something unbreakable. Love scenes should be as crucial to the characters and plot of a story as any other element. If you can take a love scene completely out without affecting the story in any way, you've probably got an extraneous scene on your hands. Treat it the way you would any other scene without a point. Cut it ruthlessly and don't look back.

Remember, less can be more. You can't (and maybe shouldn't) write out every love scene in detail, and sometimes a very short scene can sum up a loving encounter better than two to five pages of graphic detail. Reader imagination will take over, and they'll have a full heart, wet eyes, and maybe even the urge to indulge in pillow talk to savor

the moment. They'll forget that they've read words instead of experiencing an emotional, exciting bonding moment between two characters they've become emotionally invested in.

There are only two possible reasons for a reader to not want a love scene to take place: (1) the reader picked up a spicy book by mistake; or (2) the writer didn't set the stage for love scenes early or well. If there's no tension between a couple, no exaggerated awareness, a love scene is going to shock and embarrass the reader as much as it will the characters. This is what I see in a lot of books written by authors who want to include a romantic relationship for the main character (because they know it increases character depth, conflicts, and makes the story stronger), but who aren't skilled at writing romance. If for no other reason, these authors need to learn to write romance skillfully because readers hate awkward, embarrassing love scenes, scenes made that way by a clumsy writer. When a hero and heroine finally come together for a kiss, an intimate touch, or lovemaking, the reader should exult, should be panting for consummation, ready to claw tooth and nail to see that these two characters have a clear path to the bedroom and aren't interrupted while there! And, most of all, the reader must be satisfied when all is said and done.

Here are some questions to ask yourself concerning the proper development of a romantic relationship:

Are secondary characters telling one of the couple that the other is in love with them instead of the author actually showing the couple falling in love, link by link in the chain? Secondary characters fill a specific role in a romance story--and delivering love letters between the hero and heroine isn't one of them. If your secondary characters are delivering the main character's mail, this is a cheat. It's forcing a situation that hasn't been well-developed into play where it's not warranted.

Are there any scenes in your story where one character in the relationship refuses to answer questions (and the other person lets them get away with it) about himself and his life? That's an opportunity for development. Don't let the character distract or deflect unless it fits the situations. Don't squander opportunities for development like this. If there's an opening in a conversation, etc. for getting to know about each other (P/P/F), take it! Don't waste it or let smokescreens remain intact because they inhibit CPR development, crushing and snuffing out the core elements instead of allowing them to flourish.

Does your dialogue and character movements serve a specific purpose in the romance? Dialogue happens in all relationships, however superficial, and shouldn't simply be witty exchanges that provide no enlightenment and don't advance the story. Dialogue and movement should be cohesive and grow organically, but that means the writer is setting the stage for it to happen so it feels natural and the attraction will grow with this without having to force anything. If you neglect the openings for inserting the potential for getting to know each other better, you're skipping steps in a romantic

relationship that will make the reader feel like she's really not getting the attraction even existing.

Can you lock down the key internal conflicts, goals and motivations for all main characters in the story? Do you know why a character feels the way she does, why she's doing what she's doing, how to fix problems in her life, why she chooses not to or may not be able to act? Do her relationships make sense, especially in terms of P/P/F dimensions? If you're not sure, this character is probably un- or underdeveloped. For all important characters in a story, you should know who they are, what they've been through and why they've become the people they are, what they want, what they don't want. You should understand both *actions* and *reactions*. You should be able to trace the internal conflict from the beginning of the story, all through the middle scenes, right up to the resolution. Relationships make logical cohesive sense with solid CPR development. In the next chapter, we're going to create a chart to show exactly this.

Can you make your reader root for your couple to get a happily ever after? In a romance story, the writer has to show why this couple belongs together. Bottom line, the writer has to ask herself, why would anyone fall in love with this character? What does she find appealing about him and vice versa? It has to be about more than simply finding each other physically attractive, though hopefully that's part of it as well. What about the other's personality does he or she react positively (or negatively) to? What do they have in common that can strengthen their bond? These kinds of commonalities are crucial in a romance story because they make the impossible feel possible.

What's the motivation in developing a relationship between this couple? In what ways are your romantic protagonists opposites yet still feel a pull toward each other? In what ways are the differences intriguing instead of off-putting? I've heard it said that two people fill each other's gaps. Like two hands joining, in the gaps where one is weak, the other is strong and vice versa. In this way, the people in a couple make each other stronger, filling in the gaps to form a whole. What specifically makes one part of a couple eager to see the other again? What hopes/dreams does the other inspire? What might the other fulfill that's lacking without him or her? The writer has to make a strong case for both characters in the relationship. Make the reader understand the attraction between them from both sides and make the reader fall in love herself. Remember, if you as the reader don't have the slightest urge to know more about the characters, to see them get what they want, certainly in their relationships, there's no point to the story at all. Develop a relationship that has a deep, rich beginning, well-rounded middle, and (happily-ever-after) end. The very best romantic stories are the ones where the reader vicariously lives through the couple and longs for a relationship like it in real life.

Are either of the characters in a romantic relationship putting up barriers to a romance that aren't justifiable? In a romance story, if either person in the couple feels they can't develop a relationship with this other person beyond friendship, the reader needs to be given adequate reasons why not. I don't know how many times I've seen

stories (some of them published) where one or both in the couple in a romantic story are fighting against falling in love with the other person, and yet somehow, inexplicably, they fall in love anyway without proper setup or following the links in the chain one after the other. In almost all of these stories, the reasons for why they're fighting the relationship in the first place are either nonexistent or the case for why they can't get involved is never adequately explained or made believable. I remember reading a published story where the male in the couple suddenly decided he couldn't participate in the romance. This was very sudden. The reason he gave wasn't set in advance, appeared out of thin air, and I didn't buy it. The author should have gone back and revealed the scenario early in the story and this situation evolved naturally in the course of him fighting a relationship. He literally went from actively participating to unfathomably resisting. I'm not talking about legitimate conflicts here because, in a romance story, there has to be something that's going to pull the couple apart (temporarily) and create obstacles. You need those to create tension in the story. But if the reasons for not going forward are nonsensical, not planted in advance or not justified, and appears as a convenience to the plot, the reader won't buy it any more than the other character will or should, and that's not a situation you want in a romance story. Something in CPR development is obviously off or poorly constructed in a scenario like this.

In the same way characters and plots have to be three-dimensional, so, too, do relationships for all major characters. The relationships we have at every stage in our life have an impact on us for bad or good or somewhere in between. Create *purpose* for relationships in the same way you do characters and plots. From the standpoint of relationships, you're looking at where the characters are, were, and where they might end up with them. Create *purpose* for relationships in the same way you do characters and plots. From the standpoint of relationships, you're looking at where the characters are, were, and where they might end up with them. At the same time, you're analyzing through interpersonal connections the *how* and *why* of where the character is, was, and will be in terms of shaping the individual relationships throughout a lifespan.

Make cohesive connections between all of your main characters' relationships. Your 3-D Relationship Sketch builds the structure of your characters' interactions by following story and potentially romantic threads from beginning, through middle, to end. If any of your threads aren't strong enough, or lag anywhere, you'll see it in the sketches. It's a guarantee that, if the thread isn't properly developed within the sketch, it won't be properly developed within your story. The combination of Character, Setting, Plot, and Relationship Sketches you've been creating through these chapters should read like a well-developing synopsis at this point.

Chart Your CPR Development Homework

To ensure you're getting deep, multifaceted development and progression with your relationships, fill out the Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch (a blank copy is in the appendix) below so you can identify present, past, and future dimensions of relationships.

Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet

Title or Working Title:

RELATIONSHIP: PRESENT

Present = the here and now, the current time of the story

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

RELATIONSHIP: PAST

Past = backstory that directly impacts what happens in the here and now

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

RELATIONSHIP: FUTURE

Future = that hint of hope and/or dread about where the character is and might be going, and where she may or may not end up.

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

Without CPR developments and dimensions clearly defined before you start writing your story, your relationships may end up one- or two-dimensional, dead or lifeless. With your relationships sketched out three-dimensionally, you'll know the origins of interactions with other characters, the conflicts and goals and motivations that drove them to the point they're at in the present dimension of the story. You'll be able to deeply root these pivotal relationships into each scene you write as well look ahead with a sense of hope mingled with nail-biting trepidation at future developments there. If you're writing a romance story, your links in the chain of developing a romantic relationship will be properly set up and stabled, escalating and culminating with full justification. Only that will allow the romance to be unbroken and strong. In the next chapter, we'll learn from-the-ground-up techniques for ensuring your story has the required CPR development and steady progression needed using a simple worksheet and an in-depth chart.

CHAPTER SIX

From-the-Ground-Up Techniques to Develop and Progress CPR Elements

"I think all writers are always collecting characters as we go along. Not just characters, of course. We're collecting everything. Bits and pieces of story. An interesting dynamic between people. A theme. A great character back story. A cool occupation. The look [in] someone's eyes. A burning ambition. Hundreds of thousands of bits of flotsam and jetsam that we stick in the back of our minds like the shelves full of buttons and ribbons and fabrics and threads and beads in a costumer's shop."

~"Collecting Character" by Alexandra Sokoloff on her blog

In this chapter, we'll talk about two techniques to assess CPR development in a story. These from-the-ground-up techniques utilize a simple worksheet and an in-depth chart that should ensure your story has the required CPR development and steady progression. The first technique covers the easiest approach to evaluation by using a simplified form of a back cover blurb. If more help is needed, we'll provide an in-depth technique and get down to the scene-by-scene nuts and bolts of three-dimensional CPR development in a story. When you analyze it in this manner, you'll see for yourself how three-dimensional CPR development is revealed, established, developed, advanced, and resolved scene by scene in this story, and the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart contained in this section will help you pinpoint down to the exact scene where lack of CPR development and advancement may hinder your story.

SIMPLE EVALUATION: GETTING TO THE CPR HEART OF YOUR STORY

What is your story about? When taken down to the bare minimum, the core or the heart, what's the theme of the story? Can you see or assume the development of characters, plots, and relationships in just a handful of theme-packed sentences that summarize the entire story?

In this section, we're going to try to get the heart of your story down to something extremely focused with a Heart of the Story Blurbs Worksheet. This process is a lot like creating a back cover blurb, in two distinct steps, and so you'll recognize some of these techniques because the process is so similar. Conceivably, you could use what you come up with for this as the basis for your back cover blurb as well.

You better believe that characters and their relationships and conflicts need to have that special something intriguing even in a short, extremely focused summary. Characters and relationships, internal and external conflicts, goals and motivations

need to be evident (however subtly). In this way, the core elements that will make the story worth reading (or writing) need to be included. If conflict or characterization are lacking in your story, you'll almost always see what's missing nakedly in summarization, which is why this simplified method is such a good technique for evaluation.

As a professional blurbologist, I've learned that the single biggest reason authors have trouble writing back cover blurbs is that they simply don't know their CPR elements well enough to explain them (though, of course, there are many other reasons why the process is so difficult for some writers). At times, after a few pages of stream-of-consciousness writing about it, they may stumble on it, but sometimes even then it's not possible. A long-term struggle in trying to figure out exactly what your specific CPR elements are may be a strong indicator that these same things are actually lacking within the book. After all, you can't write a summary about something that's supposed to be there if it doesn't exist, right? If you suspect that might be the case while we're working on Heart of the Story Blurbs Worksheet, you might need to go back to one or more of the CPR development sketches in previous chapters to figure out where you're lacking proper progression. This worksheet should show you exactly which aspect of your CPR development is weak or missing.

Step 1: Uncovering Story Theme by Crafting a High Concept Sentence

A high concept sentence is rarely more than a single sentence long and is very brief and distilled. These are frequently utilized in promotional endeavors. The high concept sentence almost always precedes the back cover blurb in order of presentation and it captures the overall essence of the story (hopefully with a solid punch of intrigue straight to the gut).

Some examples of intriguing high concept sentences from movies from a variety of genres that are inferred without any designation to the actual category:

A cryptic message from MI6 spy James Bond's past sends him on a trail to uncover a sinister organisation. *Spectre*

During the Cold War, a Brooklyn attorney is tasked with negotiating a prisoner exchange between an American pilot who was shot down over the USSR and a Soviet spy serving a 45-year sentence for espionage against the United States. *Bridge of Spies*

She brought a small town to its feet and a huge corporation to its knees. *Erin Brockovich*

Here are some examples from books (in most cases, refined slightly, since few books these days have true high concept blurbs--to their detriment):

Contestants participate in a grueling walking competition where there can only be one winner--the one that survives. (*The Long Walk* by Stephen King writing as Richard Bachman)

A classic Victorian house in a historic Atlanta neighborhood, the result of a bank foreclosure, began as Len and Olivia Bowden's dream home to raise their young daughter...and soon becomes their worst nightmare. (*In the Dark* by Brandon Massey)

A boy with extraordinary powers, an army of deadly monsters, an epic battle for the future of peculiardom, the adventure that began with *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* comes to a thrilling conclusion. (*Library of Souls*, Book 3: Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children Series by Ransom Riggs)

If you look at all these high concept sentences carefully, you'll notice they all have something in common. They all have two components: A *who* and a *what*. That's pretty much all we need to develop the basis for our high concept sentence. The *who* could refer to a protagonist or an antagonist or any general *concept*. In the book world, this is usually the main character but it could also be a group of people, a culture, a planet, whatever--essentially who has the most at risk that the reader is rooting for--the main driving force in the story, whether good or evil, that's in conflict.

This is a basic formula we can use in the crafting of our high concept sentence. The goal is to come up with one sentence (no more than that--but you can start with more and work on whittling it down until it's one), ideally something utterly intriguing.

Who:

What:

Let's tag one of the high concept sentences from a movie so you can see how it fits into the formula:

A cryptic message from MI6 spy James Bond's past sends him on a trail to uncover a sinister organisation. *Spectre*

Who: MI6 spy James Bond

What: [Receives] A cryptic message from MI6 spy James Bond's past sends him on a trail to uncover a sinister organisation.

Now let's tag one of the high concept sentences from a book so you can see how it fits into the formula. Literally, there isn't a high concept sentence that can't fit into this two-part-component formula, but it might be difficult to initially figure out what's what sometimes. Remember, your "Who" can be a concept, not an actual person or thing.

The Long Walk by Stephen King writing as Richard Bachman

Who: Contestants in a grueling walking competition.

What: Are forced into a walking competition where there can only be one winner--the one that survives.

All of these sentences we've used as examples in this section are short but if you go back over them and read them one more time, notice that they each contain the CPR elements, though certain aspects may be assumed. In *The Long Walk*, the characters and relationships are (assumed to be--and correctly, as evidenced by the story inside the pages) the contestants and the conflicts are obviously internal and external--complete with goals and motivations, also assumed. Many of these contestants are normal, average, good people who won't win at all costs without guilt, though the need to survive will be strong enough to push some of them over the edge or find a way to save themselves and those they've come to care about during this competition.

Step 2: Tagging CPR Development by Creating a Summary Blurb

The summary blurb expands on what's generalized and distilled in the high concept sentence. At its crux, this concise summary of your entire story includes just the main character(s) and their relationships (which are sometimes alluded to without personalization or specificity, which we'll see in examples) along with central internal and external conflicts, and the goals and motivations that go hand-in-glove with conflicts. Very few back cover blurbs include more than two main characters because this is the place to be brief and tantalizing. Including CPR development or allusions for more than two characters would force these paragraphs to become a reading exercise for readers we're trying to hook in a minute or less to get them to want to read the story. So, on the presumption that there are no more than two main characters, your summary blurb should be no longer than two paragraphs. An actual back cover blurb can be up to four, but for this exercise, we're only going to have one paragraph per main character. If you can't contain yours and end up with more, keep what you came up with since you can use it as the basis for a back cover blurb. Right now, our point is refining the summaries for each main character down to one, highly-focused summary paragraph each.

Let's use a short form to provide a jumping-off point in crafting a summary blurb for each main character to ensure we have proper CPR development in our story. Fill out the information as completely as possible, even though some of the sections may not make it into the paragraphs. We're seeking a refined grasp of the CPR developments and these items are what "extract" them. So let's start with this as our blank worksheet for the process:

Basic Character and Plot Information:

Main Character #1:

First and Last Name:

Age:

Job:

Time Period:

Main Setting:

Internal Conflict (i.e., character crisis or what's in jeopardy or at stake):

External Conflict (i.e., plot crisis):

Goals and motivations (i.e., what and why character is compelled to act):

Main Character #2:

First and Last Name:

Age and Job:

Internal Conflict (i.e., character crisis or what's in jeopardy or at stake):

External Conflict (i.e., plot crisis):

Goals and motivations (i.e., what and why character is compelled to act):

Once you've filled out the form above completely, you can inject your story specifics into this formula (note: you would fill this out for each major character). *Be aware that you'll find a form with larger fields you can fill out in the print version of this reference as well as in the worksheet file, sold separately.*

Who _____ (*name of character*)

Wants to _____ (*goal to be achieved*)

because _____ (*motivation for acting*)

but who faces _____ (*conflict standing in the way*).

Let's do this a little backwards and fill out the sections for *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill, which only had one POV character and so that's all we need here.

Main Character:

First and Last Name: Arthur Kipps

Age: Presumably young ("up-and-coming")

Job: London solicitor

Time Period: The story isn't specific, though it's presumed to be set during the 1860s (based on details in the story that convey the impression).

Main Setting: Crythin Gifford, a faraway English town in the windswept salt marshes beyond Nine Lives Causeway

Internal Conflict: The routine business trip he anticipated quickly takes a horrifying turn when he finds himself haunted by a series of mysterious sounds and images--a rocking chair in a deserted nursery, the eerie sound of a pony and trap, a child's scream in the fog, and, most terrifying of all, a ghostly woman dressed all in black.

External Conflict: A menacing spectre haunting a small English town connected to Eel Marsh House, which stands at the end of the causeway, wreathed in fog and mystery, hiding tragic secrets behind its sheltered windows.

Goals and Motivations: Succeeding at his job...and surviving.

Who (**Arthur Kipps**) *name of character*

wants (**to conclude what he anticipated would be a routine business trip in his goal of becoming an up-and-coming London solicitor but the job quickly takes a horrifying turn**) *goal to be achieved*

because (**he finds himself haunted by a series of mysterious sounds and images--a rocking chair in a deserted nursery, the eerie sound of a pony and trap, a child's scream in the fog, and, most terrifying of all, a ghostly woman dressed all in black**) *motivation for acting*

but who faces (**the menacing spectre haunting a small English town connected to Eel Marsh House, which stands at the end of the causeway, wreathed in fog and mystery, hiding tragic secrets behind its sheltered windows**) *conflict standing in the way*

Here's the final high concept sentence and back cover summary for this book that's currently being used at distributor websites:

A chilling tale about a menacing spectre haunting a small English town.

Arthur Kipps is an up-and-coming London solicitor who is sent to Crythin Gifford--a faraway town in the windswept salt marshes beyond Nine Lives Causeway--to attend the funeral and settle the affairs of a client, Mrs. Alice Drablow of Eel Marsh House. Mrs. Drablow's house

stands at the end of the causeway, wreathed in fog and mystery, but Kipps is unaware of the tragic secrets that lie hidden behind its sheltered windows. The routine business trip he anticipated quickly takes a horrifying turn when he finds himself haunted by a series of mysterious sounds and images--a rocking chair in a deserted nursery, the eerie sound of a pony and trap, a child's scream in the fog, and, most terrifying of all, a ghostly woman dressed all in black.

You should have noticed that the formula elements aren't in the same order in the actual blurbs as I've listed them on the fill-in-the-blanks form. While the arrangement could end up being in that order, it's rare that the elements will fall neatly into the formula, nor should it necessarily do so. If all blurbs were written exactly the same formulaic way, they would become boring and lack punch. Your story is original so your blurb needs to be the same. The point of the formula is to give you a jumping-off point to ensuring that your story has all the CPR development it needs. Now let's tag each of the CPR developments to see if this story is complete:

A chilling tale about a menacing spectre haunting a small English town. (**This is a good, tight sentence of the overall theme of the story though I don't believe it quite creates the tension readers like to see in a high concept sentence because it's too generalized to provide intrigue for something personal. In other words, who has anything at stake here?**)

Arthur Kipps is an up-and-coming London solicitor [**Character**] who is sent to Crythin Gifford--a faraway town in the windswept salt marshes beyond Nine Lives Causeway--to attend the funeral and settle the affairs of a client, Mrs. Alice Drablow of Eel Marsh House. [**Goals and motivations evident in the previous sentence.**] Mrs. Drablow's house stands at the end of the causeway, wreathed in fog and mystery, [**External conflict. There's also a very subtle hint in the previous two sentences that Arthur interacts with the people living in Crythin Gifford in order to uncover the mystery, and that's the basis of some of the relationships in this story--which is carried through in the book fully.**] but Kipps is unaware of the tragic secrets that lie hidden behind its sheltered windows. [**External and assumed internal conflicts**] The routine business trip he anticipated [**More goals and motivations and conflicts**] quickly takes a horrifying turn [**External and assumed internal conflicts**] when he finds himself haunted by a series of mysterious sounds and images--a rocking chair

in a deserted nursery, the eerie sound of a pony and trap, a child's scream in the fog, and, most terrifying of all, a ghostly woman dressed all in black. [**External and internal conflicts**]

The only thing I find lacking here is more overt (rather than assumed) *personal* relationships, external and internal conflicts, as well as goals and motivations (which *are* in the story), though there are some very subtle allusions that only those who have read the book would probably really catch. Protecting his wife and their young child against this menacing, ghostly Woman in Black is paramount to Arthur's personal relationships, external and internal conflicts and his goals and motivations within the story. Nary a whisper of that is included in the blurb, which I don't quite understand as a writer. Why not include something so pivotal and give it a personal touch that anyone could relate to? Additionally, as a back cover blurb, this one certainly could stand more tension and intrigue. The story is wonderful--one of the best ghost stories I've ever read--yet the blurb is just average. Amazing stories should have amazing blurbs.

Let's try it with another book--*Divergent*, the first in a young adult trilogy, by Veronica Roth--using the blurb that's being used for distribution. You'll notice here that relationships are inferred in the reference to society, the world as it is in this series, and the factions.

One choice can transform you.

Beatrice Prior's society is divided into five factions--Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). Beatrice must choose between staying with her Abnegation family and transferring factions. Her choice will shock her community and herself. But the newly christened Tris also has a secret, one she's determined to keep hidden, because in this world, what makes you different makes you dangerous.

Basic Character and Plot Information:

Main Character #1:

First and Last Name: Beatrice "Tris" Prior

Age: Just turned 16 a few months ago

Job: "Student" on the verge of transferring into the faction of her choice

Time Period: Post-apocalyptic

Main Setting: A dystopian version of Chicago surrounded by a giant fence that locks everyone into the city.

Internal Conflict: Beatrice must choose between staying with her Abnegation family and transferring factions. Tris also has a secret she can't reveal because being different in this society is dangerous.

External Conflict: Society is divided into five factions--Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). In this world, what makes you different makes you dangerous.

Goals and motivations: Her choice will shock her community and herself.

One choice can transform you. [External and internal conflicts]

Beatrice Prior's [**Character**] society [**Relationships**] is divided into five factions--Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). [**External and internal conflicts, relationships**] Beatrice must choose between staying with her Abnegation family and transferring factions. [**Internal conflicts, goals and motivations, relationships**] Her choice will shock her community and herself. [**Internal conflicts, goals and motivations, relationships**] But the newly christened Tris also has a secret, one she's determined to keep hidden, because in this world [**Relationships**], what makes you different makes you dangerous. [**External and internal conflicts, goals and motivations, relationships**]

The blurb above as used for distribution is fairly intriguing and does a good job of capturing all the CPR developments that are well-developed in the story itself. I wouldn't have noticed what was lacking in this blurb unless I'd read the series it started. My favorite character in this series wasn't a POV character (though he was a main character all through the series) until Book 3. I would have liked to see Tris' unlikely love interest, Four (Tobias) included in this back cover blurb with his CPR development evident. Honestly, I would have preferred if the author had written all the books from both Tris and Four's POVs, since Tris would have been a much more likable character in Books 2 and 3 if Four's view of her had balanced out her too-scarred-to-function-except-in-anger-and-self-destructiveness PTSD, and I doubt I'm the only reader who feels that way. There was what I consider a cheating version of Four's POV in the short story collection (titled *Four*) the author offered that included some of the scenes in the books written from his POV and one that runs parallel with the events in the first book written from his perspective. Luckily, the movie versions ended the series (with

Allegiant) where it should have resolved in the books and I truly hope they never make what was supposed to be the fourth movie, *Ascendant*.

Using this two-step process, you should be able to get to the heart of your CPR development in just a handful of theme-packed sentences that summarize the entire story. If you feel like you're not certain even after trying this simple method, the in-depth approach to CPR development evaluation coming up next should provide everything you need. The good news is, the work you went to with this simple evaluation will be utilized in the next step as well (and, as we said, can form the basis of your back cover blurb).

If you've done the three CPR development sketches in all dimensions, you should be able to fill out the Heart of the Story Blurb Worksheet using this process after writing and revising the simple sentence and blurb paragraph(s) over the course of a few days. If you've tried this technique a number of times and simply can't fill out certain sections of the worksheet for your own story, I can almost guarantee your story is lacking in proper CPR development in the place on the worksheet that's blank. Time to go back to that particular CPR developmental sketch to figure out what's weak or missing.

Chart Your CPR Development Homework, Part 1

Using some of your favorite books, try to figure out the CPR developments on the Heart of the Story Blurbs Worksheet (a blank copy is in the appendix), then tag them to evaluate the strength of the CPR development in the story. When you're ready, put your own story into the form to see if you've included all the CPR elements your story needs.

IN-DEPTH EVALUATION: THE SCENE-BY-SCENE CPR DEVELOPMENT CHART

Every scene you write must advance the story. New CPR developments must be revealed, developed, and/or advanced three-dimensionally in every scene. By using a Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart, you'll be able to see in a glance whether or not each scene reveals new developments and pushes forward your characters, plots, and relationships. Weak or lacking development in any area can be corrected systematically--down to the exact scene(s) they occur in. In the best-case scenario, it may also assure you that you've done a thorough job (if you find you've covered all the bases).

For this in-depth technique step, we're going to use a Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart (which will be altered for the ebook version of this book). If you've

already completed at least one draft of your project, or an outline of it, you've probably made significant progress in developing your characters, plots, and relationships, and the three dimensions for each. Your scenes may be all there. However, there will be times when you're not sure if your story has problems or weaknesses in the areas of CPR development. You may require a bit more help pinpointing issues with three-dimensional CPR development, so you can take steps to eliminate them.

If you've already completed the sketches from the previous three chapters, this chart might be fairly simple to fill out because a lot of the work was done there. Having the columns side by side with a place to include all aspects of development in every scene in the rows on the chart will really help you identify--down to the exact scene--exactly where your story might be lacking. You can use this chart at any time in working on a project. For some authors, the chart might only be used when there's trouble. Why do more work than you have to? With a draft or outline of your story already written, you have the basis for evaluating where aspects of your story aren't three-dimensional. You can find a blank form for your use in the appendix. If you want to create your own template, set up a chart in your word processing program or across a blank piece of paper so it looks like what you see below.

At the top of your chart, there should be a place for including the theme-packed sentence and summary blurb sections you created in the simplified evaluation in the previous section of this chapter. If you want to, you could use different colors for individual characters. So the first character would have all their CPR developments in yellow throughout the chart, the second in green, etc. That would make each very visual and easy to trace them individually to make sure they're revealed, established, developed, advanced, and resolved properly. Here are the theme-packed sentence and summary blurb section headers you'll need:

High Concept Story Theme Sentence: (include what you came up with for the overall story theme in the last section)

Summary Blurb POV Character #1: (include what you came up with in the last section for a summary blurb)

Summary Blurb POV Character #2: (optional)

In the print version of this book as well as the worksheet file, we use a chart with six columns. In the ebook version, tables can't be duplicated, so transfer the labels for each column in chart format on your own either in a computer file or on a blank sheet of paper.

Column 1: **Chapter/Scene #**

Column 2: **Scene Date**

Column 3: **Scene POV Character**

Column 4: **P/P/F Character Reveal and Development**

Column 5: **P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development**

Column 6: **P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development**

Explanations for the column headings on the chart follow:

[Column A] Chapter and/or scene #: Chapter and/or scene number (whichever works best for you) so you know where you may need to do more work.

[Column B] Scene date: Include a column for the scene date. This is only for your own books. If you're trying the homework and filling out the chart using someone else's published book, you probably won't be able to pinpoint exact dates. For your own work, having this information is important on the chart because the crucial developmental moments in a story have to take place on stage. A lot of time can't be skipped without logical, plausible, and cohesive explanations for the gap. So many stories, especially in the romance genre, these days (published or not) have pivotal situations that take place off-stage in an attempt to force development of CPR elements, particularly in the romantic relationship. But if the main relationship is happening behind the scenes, it's not happening, period. Just by saying something happened between two people doesn't mean anything actually did. The reader won't feel a stronger connection between these characters just because of this pivotal, off-stage scene that's mentioned in passing during an actual scene together now. Everything important has to be shown, not simply told in retrospect. Additionally, by including dates, you're insuring that the timeframe of the conflicts and relationship feels authentic. Especially in a romance story (though conceivable in other genres as well), if something is rushed, are there valid reasons for a sped-up timeline? Were links in the chain of romance development skipped? Did something vital to plot development show up on the fly and it's not established well in advance so it feels necessary and not simply convenient? If the romance or plot is slow or lagging, is it bogged down by a lack of something new being revealed with each scene, creating purpose along with progress?

[Column C] POV character: All you need in this column is the name of the character whose POV you're in within this particular scene (no head-hopping). That particular row will include that POV character's P/P/F character, plot, and relationship reveals and developments in the scene. In general, you may only have two main POV characters in your story. See my earlier explanations for why romance stories should ideally have the POVs of both the hero and the heroine. If you have more POV characters, you should include all main characters and you'll follow their P/P/F CPR revelations and developments scene by scene on the chart.

[Column D] Character reveal and development: Something new about each CPR element has to be revealed and/or developed and advanced in every single scene. Keep in mind characters, plots, and relationships need to have all of these dimensions fully fleshed out. Every column except A-C needs to include all three-dimensional revelations, developments, and advancements, not simply the present ones for the POV character in that scene. If you need to know about three-dimensional writing, the anatomy of a three-dimensional scene, or the specific sketches for character, plot, and relationship, see the prior chapters of this book for details.

[Column E] Plot reveal and development: Main conflicts (external and internal conflict) have to be established and developed, something new being brought to light in all three dimensions throughout the scenes consistently. If it helps you, you can break this column out a bit more in each row and include separate sections for external and internal conflicts and goals and motivations all with P/P/F dimensions.

[Column F] Romance/Relationship reveal and development: Not only do readers need to see what's going on with key relationships scene by scene in the present, but they also need to see what happened in the past. What shaped the characters in their relationships in the past is crucial to CPR development. Also, give the readers a reason to look forward, both dreading the worst and hoping for the best for this relationship. This column is especially important for romance stories, but relationship development is important for every story. If it's more helpful for you in writing a romance story, break Column F out more in each row to include the romance reveal and development separately from the other important relationships' reveal and development in the story (including P/P/F dimensions for each) so you can trace them all individually.

Start establishing and developing CPR elements with a first reveal and background in the early scenes of the story, hinting at the best and worst that could happen to keep the reader immersed, and advance from there steadily, always adding something new in all dimensions.

After you finish filling out this chart, do you see any spaces in the columns or rows where something is missing, that you have nothing written for that particular scene? That's an area that needs development and where the blank space falls will tell you exactly what's missing and where to fix it. Try to trace each CPR element's development separately, from start to finish. Do the character, plot, and relationship feel well-developed, or does it feel like something is missing or skipped, confused, inconsistent, or not cohesively logical?

Some things to consider while you're in this process:

Is only the present dimension "visible" and traceable in the scenes while past and future dimensions are sparse or nonexistent?

Is there anything mentioned or started and then abandoned or only sporadically progressed through the book? Or are all developments properly set up in advance, revealed and developed and progressed cohesively, steadily, logically all through the story? If you as the writer don't know your characters, plots, and relationships well enough to write about them, it'll show in the story. You'll see a lot of "latching onto" ideas that change periodically and not necessarily in logical ways. The ideas may become something else entirely in a transformation the reader won't be able to understand (because you as the writer don't understand it either). You may also see abandonment of ideas that are no longer working because you the writer don't know where to go with them or you may come back to them again for a while here and there inconsistently, maybe not providing resolution in the end. This will make for a very confused, unfocused story in regard to core elements.

Are there any main characters in your story who have only one or just a few POV scenes? Those characters are probably not fully realized because you haven't given them the space to develop their CPR elements sufficiently.

Can you see the purpose in every single scene or do you question why a few of them are even there? If nothing important or new is revealed or developed in a scene that you've included on the chart, it probably lacks true purpose. Reshape or cut accordingly. Are you puffing up your word count with extraneous bits just for the sake of getting a certain word/page count?

Do you know why a character feels the way she does, why she's doing what she's doing, how to fix problems in her life, why she chooses not to or may not be able to act? If you can't, this character is un- or underdeveloped in one or more dimensions of CPR development. For all important characters in a story, you should know who they are, what they've been through and why they've become the people they are, what they want, what they don't want. You should understand both *actions* and *reactions*. You should be able to say the reason immediately, such as this: "She's upset because this reminds her of the time a boyfriend who meant a lot to her told her she was a Borg who lacked empathy completely."

Can you lock down the key internal conflicts, goals and motivations for all main characters in Column E? Are the conflicts or goals and motivations for the characters all over the place, unformed and vague, merely distractions instead of well-developed? You should be able to trace the conflicts from the beginning of the story, all through the middle scenes, right up to the resolution on the chart. If you can't, the chart will show you exactly where the problems are in the individual scenes.

Are there silly misunderstandings or overreactions (move to China reactions) to anything that are taking the place of legitimate conflicts and actions? Is there a logical

progression from one scene to the next? What happens in one scene should be mentioned and built on, progressing that development, in the next.

Is there an escalation, a bringing of something new with each scene? Do you feel like there was a lot or a little repetition of CPR elements? If you see that, you may not be revealing something new with each development. You could be backtracking and making the conflicts and/or goals and motivations muddled and unfocused instead of escalating and pushing them forward properly.

Is basic information about CPR elements withheld (i.e., not established) and then never developed or resolved?

Are epiphanies or "god in the machine" miracles providing resolution instead of characters?

Are situations happening in isolation--they start in one scene, self-contained there, and don't carry over into the next scenes? Revealing and establishing CPR development is crucial. You can't follow a development if it was never introduced properly in the first place. Anything that appears out of thin air should be exorcised like a ghost. Also remember that bridge scenes need to connect--one to the next--progressively looking forward to what might happen in the story.

In developing your romantic relationship, are secondary characters telling one of the couple that the other is in love with them instead of you, as the author, showing this actually happening onstage and with the proper links in the chain of romance development? Have you actually shown the couple falling in love, step by step? If not, this is a cheat. It's forcing a situation that hasn't been well-developed into play where it's not warranted. Relationship developments absolutely can't happen off-stage.

The columns on the chart will get right to the heart of your three-dimensional CPR development...or lack thereof. Go through your story, scene by scene, setting down the three dimensions of CPR development in each scene in as few sentences as you can. Remember, your present dimension is the current situation. What's happening in the now? The past dimension will reach back to what happened before the prevalent story, drawing out character, plot, and relationship revelations that illuminate, enhance, or reveal present situations. In tagging your future dimension, you're looking ahead to create dread/eagerness in the reader for what might happen later. While some scenes won't have huge amounts of one or more of these dimensions, your scenes should have at least a hint of each.

Every scene you write must advance all three CPR developments. Each scene should show definite progress from the one before and offer something new and exciting that propels the story forward, toward the resolution. Using this chart, you'll be able to see whether each scene develops the CPR elements three-dimensionally, catapulting your story to a tight conclusion. If any area on this chart is blank after you've gone over it multiple times, it's a pretty sure bet that's where your development is lacking.

Below, you'll find an example of the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart filled out for the first three scenes of a popular fiction book.

Divergent, Book 1: Divergent Trilogy by Veronica Roth

High Concept Story Theme Sentence: *One choice can transform you.*

Summary Blurb POV Character #1: Beatrice Prior's society is divided into five factions--Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). Beatrice must choose between staying with her Abnegation family and transferring factions. Her choice will shock her community and herself. But the newly christened Tris also has a secret, one she's determined to keep hidden, because in this world, what makes you different makes you dangerous.

Notes: I removed the "Scene Date" section because there's no way of knowing what dates these scenes took place. Also, though most of the chapters have two scenes, I've focused on the overall chapter in order to cover all the dimensions (which were sporadic in individual scenes and in some places worked best to combine on the form below since certain things could fit in either dimension). I couldn't find a lot of past development anywhere, sadly, and I was looking for it very hard, leading to disappointment when I couldn't come up with anything. I admit I do feel like the "past dimension" was lacking in this series in general. Often, I wanted to know more, but the author excels at future development in each scene. Be aware, as well, that sometimes the dimensions can and do mesh so it's hard to tell one from the other, as do the character, plot, and relationship elements themselves. In other words, some of these things could go in other places on the form just as well as where I've included them. In all cases where you see two of the dimensions listed together, it's because there are allusions to or implications of both in evidence, regardless of how subtle. Your own story might be similar. Remember, this is for your own use. But, if you feel something is lacking after you finish filling out this form for all the chapters/scenes, that's a potential area to rework.

Row 1:

Column 1: Chapter #

Column 2: Scene POV Character

Column 3: P/P/F Character Reveal and Development

Column 4: P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development

Column 5: P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development

Row 2:

Column 1: One

Column 2: Beatrice Prior

Column 3: Present: In noticing that her mother is well-practiced in the art of losing herself, Beatrice realizes she can't say the same about herself.

Her older brother Caleb is selfless and has a talent for looking closely at other faction members, striving to see them and forget himself--not something she's skilled at doing.

Past: Beatrice has been worried for weeks about what the aptitude test will tell her about herself.

Future: Every morning, Beatrice watches the Dauntless arrive by jumping from a moving train. Dauntless are pierced, tattooed, black-clothed "hellions". They value courage most. Instead of being perplexed by them, she's helpless to looking away from them in her fascination--portending where her future might be moving.

Column 4: Present: Only Dauntless faction members ride the trains. In front of the school is a large metal sculpture they climb after school and dare each other to go higher and higher.

Past: Abnegation members wear gray clothes, plain hairstyles and unassuming manners. For weeks now, the Abnegation students have been treated with antagonism by the other factions. Beatrice's faction has made her a target instead of allowing it to be easy to forget herself.

Future: Tomorrow, at the Choosing Ceremony, she'll decide on a faction; decide the rest of her life; decide to stay with her family or abandon them.

After the Choosing Ceremony, the students Beatrice and Caleb's ages won't return to the school again. The factions they choose are responsible for finishing their education.

Column 5: Present: When she asks her brother if he's worried about the aptitude test, he doesn't answer her question.

Past: She's confided in no one, not even her brother, about her feelings about what's coming up.

Future: She feels guilty for wanting to leave her family...which implies she's considering it.

Chart Your CPR Development Homework

If you're feeling ambitious, finish filling out the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart for the rest of the chapters of *Divergent*. In the appendix, you'll find this example with the first three chapters done for you included with the spaces required for all 39 chapters of *Divergent* that you can use to complete the worksheet. Or, using a blank copy of the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart in the appendix, go back to some of your favorite stories (not necessarily your own) and see if you can fill out the chart for them. Seeing "how it's done" by professional authors can help you get into the

mindset of three-dimensional CPR development that you can bring back to your own writing. When you're ready or in need, trying using the chart for your own story.

If you're feeling ambitious, finish filling out the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart for the rest of the chapters of *Divergent*. In the appendix, you'll find this example included with the space for you to complete the worksheet. Or, using a blank copy of the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart in the appendix, go back to some of your favorite stories (not necessarily your own) and see if you can fill out the chart for them. Seeing "how it's done" by professional authors can help you get into the mindset of three-dimensional CPR development that you can bring back to your own writing. When you're ready or in need, trying using the chart for your own story.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Writing in Stages to Avoid Missed Opportunities for CPR Development

"Allow for opportunities so they won't become missed opportunities." ~Franklin Gillette

In this chapter, we'll go over the "ideal" scenario of writing in stages in order to ensure that you're taking all available opportunities to cultivate and layer three-dimensional CPR developments. First, it absolutely needs saying that this chapter is very much "the acme" method of writing. New or hobby writers or those who aren't willing to work with an outline in any form or to write in multiple stages instead of seat-of-the-pantsing it can still use the writing techniques described in this book, which is why I put this chapter near the end instead of at the beginning.

This chapter is specifically geared toward career and/or highly disciplined writers who want a great deal of structure in their approach to writing a full-on three-dimensional story that has every single wonderful CPR element that can be packed in. In my references to what I do in my own career throughout this chapter, try not to compare your own output. I tend to do everything on high octane for maximum performance. You know what you're capable of and what you're able to achieve in your own time as well as how to challenge yourself in the process, if that appeals to you. If your goal is to write only one book and work on developing it sufficiently for the rest of your life, or even just a few books, the approach described in this chapter may be too intense for you, and therefore useless. The rest of this manual will give you all you need to reach your goal. If you find yourself discouraged in reading this chapter instead of motivated, it's best to refocus elsewhere, on things that encourage you.

Beginning writers may find it easier to fill out the worksheets and charts I've provided to strong 3-D CPR layers after they've started writing their books, whether they've finished a draft or are somewhere in the middle of it, and want to figure out if they're on the right track. For an author who prefers to begin a project with some kind of a road map, filling out the worksheets and charts for each scene in the book along with outlining before beginning the writing, this method will allow him to build in three-dimensionality and avoid dead or lifeless CPR elements. Writers at any point in their craft can benefit from the techniques I've described throughout this manual. For the Type A authors who want to kick their writing into high gear, this chapter is for you.

A LAYERED FOUNDATION FOR CPR DEVELOPMENT

Professional painters work in layers, preparing and priming the surface to achieve a smooth finish that strengthens, coheres, intensifies, and enhances all that goes on afterward. In a similar way, layers in proper, three-dimensional CPR development are crucial--and a story lacking these will show it the same way a puzzle with even one missing piece does. Oh, the disappointment of not seeing it complete after all the hard work has been put in. Three-dimensional layers--like the sketches we've been working on in the middle chapters of this reference--are the beginning of our process of development. Without layering, a story is one-dimensional, unbelievable, boring. But utilizing proper layering, the characters, plots, and relationships will become so lifelike, readers may believe these characters are fully capable of stepping right off the pages into the room with their plot and relationship suitcases all ready to be unpacked, one item at a time.

Layering makes for strength and depth in story building, translating into stronger, deeper, and more emotional and vivid characterization; suspenseful, intriguing plots; and dynamic, memorable relationships. That's all the more reason for editors to love you and for readers to come back again and again. Layering has another component that writers should take into account. A multilayered story almost always produces three-dimensionality and vibrantly lifelike CPR elements by virtue of its multilayered construction.

In order to bring about the potential for strong CPR development, dynamic writing needs three-dimensional characters, plots, and relationship sketches along with the crafting of scenes that are properly set up to anchor and orient the reader so it can lead them with purpose throughout your story landscape, looking back in careful increments to fill in realistic layers, and always making certain there's a whisper of what's to come. Another crucial step is multilayered storytelling, and, to achieve this, we need the proper mind-set. Even in the most basic sense, our approach to writing a story is crucial in providing the proper layers that ensure three-dimensional CPR development.

Several of my previous writing reference books, including *Cohesive Story Building* and *Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing* focused on writing in stages and story building with multiple layers and the next section below will give a crash course in those. If a story has gone through one draft (without an outline or any kind of blueprint to precede it) and the author revises that, especially without gaining distance by setting the project aside, that story has two layers. Strength and dimensionality of one or more of the CPR elements will probably be lacking. Unless the writer overhauls the first draft in its totality many, many times (which isn't exactly productive), the story may not have the layers required to achieve proper three-dimensional CPR development. With the kind of layering realized by working in stages, a story has the potential to become three-

dimensional, strong, cohesive, realistic, and richly textured with CPR elements that are so well-developed they're functioning, breathing, heart beating and life sparking all over the place. Allow that potential for this in order to avoid missed opportunities.

Starting Strong Over the Long Haul With Story Folders

In the Introduction, we talked about working on projects that are ready--ripe for development. Ideally you'll have lots of story ideas for a particular project, vivid characters, exciting plots, and unforgettable relationships already in your head, and possibly in the form of free-form notes. At this point, the story is ready to drop into your hands like ripe fruit. While it's possible to finish a book without it being "gravid" with promise before you begin, it'll be infinitely harder to get that unripe story to produce fruit.

Here we'll talk a little about techniques for getting stories to that impending point, as well as what to do if you have a lot of stories ready to go that are all vying for your attention. If you want more in-depth details and tips for any of these, my previous writing reference books have a ton of both.

I recommend creating story folders for every book idea you have, no matter how sparse your ideas are. I especially advise this if you think you might not write the story for years. I've said many times in this book (and all my others) that having a story on the backburner of your mind can do wondrous things. Try it yourself if you don't believe me!

Writers spin fantasies in their heads, and this is where most of their work is done in conceiving a story. In previous writing reference titles, I've likened the process of writing to brewing coffee in a percolator. The stories inside my head are in a creative coffeepot, brewing away. In the percolating stage of the writing process, stories come to life in large or small spurts. This can amount to a sketch of a character or two, setting description, some vague or definite plotline or action scenes, glimmers of specific relationships, and maybe even a few conversations. Most of it wouldn't make sense to anyone except me. When a story idea is constantly boiling up, it's time to put it into an outline form and puzzle it out. When it's not quite ready, it sits on the backburner, simmering gently. In this way, over the course of years, I can conceivably come up with everything I need to write without taking my concentration away from the story that I'm currently puzzling out. I have countless stories inside my head at any given time, brewing away gently until the time comes when they're ready to be written. That's why it's so important to have story folders to hold these ideas; they prevent me from forgetting anything that could become a vital piece of the story puzzle.

Using two-pocket folders and tablet paper (or whatever's on hand to jot notes on), write the title of each book on the front, and then transfer all your notes (including any outlining and writing you've done on the story--anything that you might need or use)

into this folder. You can also do the same thing with a computer file or the memo section of an electronic device for each story idea if you find that easier than just writing something on a scrap of paper and putting it in the folder. In this way, whenever you have a thought about this story, you can write notes and tuck it into the appropriate place.

If you don't currently have notes but the story idea is strong enough, you can create a folder for it, planning to fill it over time. I have a specific folder just for glimmers of ideas. Sometimes a glimmer becomes a full-fledged story that gets its own story folder, so it's useful to keep a folder for any glimmers you may come up with over time.

By the time you're ready to begin working on a particular story, ideally you'll have a nice stack of "impending story fruit" to pick from. Again, I can't stress how important it to start each project with a "ripe" idea--one that's ready to go through the initial stages. If you don't have a story folder bursting with ideas, don't take it off the shelf until it's ready to be worked on--unless you have no choice because of an approaching release date. If you start and discover you can't get far--and your deadlines allow it--put it back and work on something that is ready. What you've added will be progress when you are more prepared.

Another reason for creating story folders as soon as you have the first spark of an idea is that, while jumping from project to project may be an effective way to work for some writers, ultimately it can prevent you from making significant progress with any one project. Most writers can't concentrate on more than one story at a time (while also having a bunch of ideas simmering on the backburner) if they want to move forward steadily. You don't want story ideas to distract you if they're moving at a frantic pace toward fruition while you're working on another project. When you have deadlines--or even if you don't--it's not a good idea to abandon a project you're working on just because something more exciting shows up at an inopportune time. This is natural though--you want it to happen. But if you're trying to make headway with one project when another suddenly commands your attention, you need to find a way to set the new ideas aside and refocus your concentration on your current project.

You can do this by writing out notes on the new idea and relegating the idea to its project folder, which you can pick up and review at a more convenient time. Shelving the idea is a quick process with either of these because most of the time the notes you'll write about a growing story at a given time are only enough to fill a scrap note or a single sheet of paper. Occasionally, you may need to take a little more time to purge the abundant ideas from your head so they don't overwhelm you. In that case, find time to write down all the notes that come to you until you're stalled or are temporarily free of it. By shelving the story folder once more, you effectively retain all the ideas but stall "the harvest" until you have more time to focus on the project. Once you've done this, you can concentrate fully on your WIP again.

Finally, in creating story folders, you also give yourself the foundation for years of potential writing material. For career authors, this is so critical to your momentum and your ability to deliver well-crafted stories indefinitely. What will happen if you run out of ideas? Your career will stall and, let's be honest, readers are fickle. If you're not making yourself present and active, your books hitting bookstores often, you may be forgotten sooner or later. Creating story folders allows you to have many, many ideas in different stages of development over time, and that builds momentum. Since working on stories that are ripe is ideal, having story ideas on the backburner (simmering until the day you're ready to put them into action) is imperative. Your stories written with this process will be better and stronger, especially if you're writing in layers, as we're about to see.

WRITING IN STAGES TO AVOID MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Now that you've got a solid way of organizing all your story ideas to ensure you have lots of projects growing over a period of (hopefully) years, let's talk about writing in stages so you're set up from the start to get the layering necessary to build three-dimensional CPR elements. In the ideal writing situation, a book goes through eleven stages (though the last two are optional, which I'll explain later), including:

- Stage 1: Brainstorming
- Stage 2: Researching
- Stage 3: Outlining
- Stage 4: Setting aside the project
- Stage 5: Writing the first draft
- Stage 6: Setting aside
- Stage 7: Revising
- Stage 8: Setting aside
- Stage 9: Editing and polishing
- Stage 10: Setting aside
- Stage 11: Final read-through

Let's go over each of these, discussing the whys and wherefores for each step to ensure the creation of solidly layered stories.

Stage 1: Brainstorming

In *Sometimes the Magic Works*, Terry Brooks says that dreaming (a term referring to the back-and-forth process of brainstorming in the mind) opens the door to creativity and allows the imagination to invent something wonderful. It happens when your mind

drifts to a place you've never been--a place you can come back to and tell readers about. This is possibly where writers got such a bad rap from those who see us constantly daydreaming. Little do they realize that, until a writer has brainstormed adequately, he won't have a story to tell.

Constant brainstorming, or brewing, is the most important part of writing an outline or a book. No writing system, technique, or tool will work for you if you're not brainstorming constantly during a project, through all the stages. From the beginning of a project--before you even write a word of it--through the outlining, the writing, and revising, and the final edit and polish, brainstorm! It's the second half of the secret to never burning out, never facing writer's block. (Waiting until a story is ripe to begin working on it is the first half.) Start brainstorming days, weeks, months, or even years before you begin working on a story; jot down notes as they come to you and put them into their own folder. If you want specific ideas for ways to brainstorm, the internet and other writing reference titles--including my own--are abundant on this topic.

Brainstorming is the very ambition, focus, and joy necessary to planning and completing a project. Both inspiration and productivity flow from this exercise, and brainstorming should never truly stop after you begin writing. Brainstorming is so often what turns an average story into an extraordinarily memorable one. Dreaming about your story infuses you with the inner resources to write with that coveted magical element that turns work into passion. It's also the secret to sitting down to a blank screen or paper and immediately beginning to work without agonizing over where to start. Brainstorming has the amazing side effect of forcing a writer to move from Point A to Point B and to continue on from there. Having given you a few sparks, it helps you to connect the dots in order to get those elements to fit together, logically and cohesively.

Without adequate brainstorming, a writer has no motivation for fantasizing about every aspect of the story he'll write. The process of writing will be dry and agonizing, and he'll likely never make it past chapter three. By brainstorming days, weeks, months, or even years before beginning tangible work on a story, you create the layers for your story over time; this type of planning also produces cohesion in your work. Brainstorm enough, and when you start the project, it'll be like turning on a movie and writing fast to keep up with everything you see.

Stage 2: Researching

Research is a layer of the story, but it's also a form of brainstorming. While you're reading, you're thinking of ways you plan to use the material you're researching. Research will give you the knowledge you need to plan a story. It will also give you story ideas. That's why it's so important to do your research before you begin a project--not during, if you can help it. This isn't to say that you won't need to do some follow-

up and/or further narrow your research when you realize your outline or first draft has taken a turn you hadn't planned for, or needs more than you've already acquired. Ideally, you'll do your research in between other stages in your various projects. Your research may form the basis for character development, an appropriate setting, and much of the plot, fitting them together naturally. You'll know you've done your research well when you can write about everything in your story intelligently, without questioning anything, and when your research naturally becomes an integral part of the book. If you can't do that, you're not done researching yet or you need to rethink whether you want this to be a part of the book at all. (See the "Un-, Under-, and Overdeveloped CPR Elements" section in Chapter One for an example of why proper research is so critical.)

Stage 3: Outlining

I'm adamant about outlining every single story before I write a word of it. That's my *modus operandi* without fail, and it's not something I would ever want to stop doing because I truly believe it's the only way to be sure I have a solid story before I commit to writing. I don't see the point of writing (and rewriting again and again) a book that may not be strong enough or good enough to sell, if you're writing to be published. I consider that to be writing a book backwards. My goal is to find out if I have a strong story worth writing *first*--in my world, by creating a scene-by-scene outline--so I'll never have regrets and almost never have to do any of the steps more than once.

An outline is essentially any guideline a writer uses to create and assemble a story. Whatever form an author chooses to use, it needs to show the details behind the finished product--details that many times are invisible, fitting seamlessly with all the other elements of a story but need to be identified and developed even before writing begins, to ensure proper three-dimensional CPR development.

While unpublished or newer authors might want to just write without boundaries or prerequisites in order to teach themselves the process of crafting a solid story, published and career authors often desire more discipline if they're going to create amazing stories every single time. Unfortunately, the idea of a published author writing a story without some sort of plan is acceptable, even encouraged, and prevalent. Don't get me wrong, those authors who have been through the process of writing a book many, many times have an outline regardless of whether it's formally written down or not. Their own experience in the process is guiding them. An author who's written nothing, or only a few books, and works without a plan to get him started may end up with unstable, disjointed stories of the sort that reviewers rip to shreds. Author Terry Brooks says, "I believe, especially with long fiction, that an outline keeps you organized and focused over the course of the writing. I am not wedded to an outline once it is in place and will change it to suit the progress of the story and to accommodate new and

better ideas, but I like having a blueprint to go back to. Also, having an outline forces you to think your story through and work out the kinks and bad spots. I do a lot less editing and rewriting when I take time to do the outline first." I would emphasize what he said about changing an outline to suit the progress of a story. Most writers don't realize just how incredibly flexible an outline is in that regard. Let's analyze that deeply.

First things first: A story needs the proper foundation, framework, and internal workings to be strong. Choosing the right elements before the first draft is begun will prevent endless rewrites and one dimensional stories. The primary goals in producing an outline are as follows:

- To encourage your mind to brainstorm a story from start to finish (in my world, that means a summary of every single scene in the book), providing yourself with a strong, rich layer.
- To allow yourself to see the holes in your story before you start writing the first draft. With a scene-by-scene outline, you have the means to evaluate what still needs work, what needs to be revised and fine-tuned, before you commit it to a full, written draft.
- To help you stay focused when you start to write the book, keeping you from getting sidetracked by small details. Everything you need is right there in one consolidated document. You won't have to go looking for anything and interrupt your progress, because all the hard work of puzzling out your story was completed in the outlining stage.

How does all this work in the real world? In mine, I always outline a book scene by scene before I write it. I work chronologically until my outline contains every single scene I'll have in the book; it's also okay to write an outline in a nonlinear fashion. Sometimes it helps to know the end of the book before you outline the beginning and/or middle, so feel free to outline non-chronologically if the story comes to you in that way. Additionally, you may need to utilize a process I call "outlining and writing in tandem", which basically means outlining as far as you can go, scene by scene, in the book; then writing the first scene if you stall, going back to the outline, and switching back and forth between these if you need to, always returning to the outlining and staying with it as long as you can. Use that method if you need to, until you get used to the idea and process of outlining a book before you start writing.

Something I want you to notice is that this isn't simply an outline that you're creating. When I outline, this is unmistakably the first draft of my book because it is my book...just in condensed form. An outline like this is so complete it contains every single one of my character and relationship developments, along with plot threads unfurled with the good pacing and the necessary hints or seeds of tension from start to logical finish. And, yes, my outlines *do* include pacing and tension, or at least allusions

about where they should be included--it's a mini version of the book, after all. Because it's an outline, it doesn't even need to be my best writing.

Once my outline is complete and contains every single scene in the book, I read it over, filling in any gaps or holes, fleshing out the scenes with dialogue, introspection, action, descriptions, whatever. Basically, I revise the outline in the same way I would a first draft. Most authors don't and won't spend endless time revising the words and sentence structure in an outline, since they're the only ones who'll see it. And this makes for a lot less obsession over every word and sentence, and puts the revision where it should be in the logical order of writing a book--near the end. Revising less than a hundred pages of an outline will certainly be much easier than revising 400 manuscript pages. Incidentally, writing your manuscript based on an outline this complete might almost make you feel guilty, like you're cheating, because the writing process should be simple at this point because you worked out all the kinks and smoothed out the rough or weak spots while outlining. That's my experience with outlining and I've written whole books about how to do that.

Now, before we go any further in proving the flexibility of an outline, let's talk about something that most authors who don't like to use an outline say: They fear using an outline will kill their enthusiasm for writing the book, or that their creativity will be hampered or caged. Nothing could be further from the truth. I've never felt stifled by an outline. Just the opposite, in fact. The outline frees me to explore every aspect of a book--without risk. It allows my ideas (and my characters) to come to life on their own and grow. Use your outline to explore any angle you want. If new characters crop up, wonderful! Include them. If they're not right for the story, removing them won't take you much time at all. Explore a new story thread--follow it wherever it takes you. If it's a logical thread, keep it. If it's not, delete it. You'll only lose a little time, and your story will be stronger for it. If you realize halfway through or even all the way through outlining a book that some of your ideas aren't working, it's a matter of deleting the offending scenes and starting again in a new direction. This is a change that probably won't take longer than a few days to make in the much shorter outline (instead of the months or even years it might take to identify and correct a full draft of a book created without an outline). Exploring new angles, characters, and concepts while outlining allows you to avoid spending countless hours laboring only to discover your ideas don't work. That's flexibility of story that can't be denied. A written draft is never so pliable.

Working the problem areas out of a story *within the outline* is ideal productivity, and it's within every writer's grasp. The clearer a writer's vision of the story before writing, the more fleshed out, cohesive, and solid the story will be once it makes it to paper. Remember, your blueprint is just one of many layers of your story. If you're jumping directly into the writing, you're missing so many layers that will have to be tacked on awkwardly or laboriously overhauled and reshaped during multiple revisions...revisions that ultimately may not fix the foundational problems your story has.

I talked about creating an outline so complete it actually qualifies as the first draft of your story at length in *First Draft Outline*. If you'd like to see examples of this outlining process, pick up a copy of that book.

Stage 4: Setting aside the project

You've probably noticed that three of the nine (four if you use all eleven) stages are setting the project aside. Letting your project sit, out of sight and out of mind, for a couple weeks--or even months--in between stages will provide you with a completely fresh perspective. Distance gives you objectivity and the ability to read your own work so you can progress further with it, adding more layers and dimensions to your characters, plots, and relationships. Another reason for setting projects aside between stages is that writers may reach a point where their motivation lags, and they want to abandon the story. Sometimes the author may not feel inspired to write a book he's just spent weeks or even months outlining (note that I've never spent more than 1-3 weeks outlining but other authors might not have the same experience I have), just as he may not want to revise something he's spent weeks or months writing.

Setting a project aside between the various stages it goes through also allows your creativity to be at its peak. The process becomes easier, too, and your writing will be the best it can be. Putting a work-in-progress on a back burner for an extended period of time will allow you to see more of the connections that make a story multidimensional.

To set your project aside between stages, return everything to your story folder. Keep this book on a shelf and on the back burner in your mind for as long as you possibly can. Get to work on something else so you won't concentrate too much on this project, making it the center of your attention again.

As a general rule, every book I write gets a few months between stages, a break I really need from each project. I can't imagine going through all the steps in finishing a book back-to-back. I get so sick of a story when one stage carries into the next without pause that I can no longer see whether anything I'm doing is improving or ruining it. When one stage of a work-in-progress is complete, I'm eager to get away from it. Many times I leave a stage certain the whole thing is fit only for burning in the nearest fireplace, but, when I come back to it months later, I discover that all my previous hard work was well worth the effort.

Stage 5: Writing the first draft

Once you take the project out to begin writing the true first draft of the story, you'll notice that you have everything you need to begin. The outline you created for yourself should contain everything your book will, only on a much smaller scale, and will include

a scene-by-scene breakdown of the entire story, hopefully rich with dimensions and CPR development.

If your outline was solid when you finished it, that should translate into a book that needs only minor revision and editing to add a few more crucial layers once you write the draft. This isn't to say that the book won't come to life, growing and fleshing out more deeply and vividly as you write the first draft. It does or should immeasurably. So there goes the argument that writing an outline will kill your enthusiasm for the book. If anything, it becomes even more exciting because you're taking the framework and foundation you set down in an outline and made it powerful, multidimensional, and cohesive with prose. I want to challenge those who say an outline kills your enthusiasm for writing the book to try this method anyway--a couple of times, if you're willing. You really do have to experience this to understand it, but, when I write a book based on a "first draft" outline, magic happens because I watch the outline-skeleton taking on flesh and blood and becoming a walking, talking, breathing story right before my very eyes. If anything, it's more exciting this way--and a whole lot easier. Life and soul are infused into the story and I'm free to explore possibilities that I may have only just touched on in the outline. It's organic.

One thing I want to note is that at no time during my first draft do I ever, ever, ever go backward and start revising. Writing and revising are two very different processes and a simple need for revising can so easily become an outright overhaul. Not only does this stop your progress in its tracks, but you may not be doing your story a favor by trying to be in two separate mind-sets at the same time. But more about revising later.

Stage 6: Setting aside

Stephen King calls this "recuperation time", and it really is that, considering the blood, sweat, and tears you've expended thus far (half done in the writing in stages process!). When you take the manuscript down again to begin revisions, followed by editing and polishing, "you'll find reading your book over after a...layoff to be a strange, often exhilarating experience. It's yours, you'll recognize it as yours...and yet it will also be like reading the work of someone else. ...This is the way it should be, the reason you waited." See Stage 4 for more details about setting a project aside.

Stage 7: Revising

Ray Bradbury described this stage as the time, after letting the story cool off, of "reliving" rather than "rewriting". Revision is, ideally, the process of reworking material in an effort to make what's already there better and stronger. If an author jumps directly into writing a story without brainstorming, researching, outlining, setting aside

before and after the first draft, this revision will be a mere second layer of the story and, inevitably, the author has left himself with the torturous work of untangling, organizing, reshaping, revising, and searching for three-dimensionality in three hundred or more disjointed pages. Many an author who employs this method of working may need to do multiple drafts or revisions to develop an editor-quality manuscript that is consistent, well layered, and mostly coherent. Whether or not it's three-dimensional and the CPR elements are properly developed is up for debate.

In a midway version of best- and worst-case scenarios, revision may mean making significant changes to a draft, such as adding or deleting plot threads, completely rewriting certain sections, or fleshing out characters and relationships to make them three-dimensional. In a milder form (usually after the author starts with a solid outline he used to write the first draft), revision could translate into tweaking the three-dimensionality of characters, plots, and relationships to reinforce them, maybe incorporating last-minute research.

As I said previously, writing and revision are two completely separate processes that require different mind-sets, and therefore shouldn't be done at the same time. While writing a book, a simple need to polish words, sentences, or paragraphs can become a complete rewrite. This isn't a productive way to work when you're attempting to finish the first draft of the book.

An unfortunate side effect of revising, editing, and polishing while you're still writing (and, yes, so many writers attempt to do all four of these at the same time instead of separately, in their own distinct stages) is that you don't get the necessary distance from the project in order to be able to revise effectively. You need to enter the revision phase with fresh, objective eyes once the first draft of the book is finished. In some ways, you need to view that first draft as if it's not your own work so you can perform the hard work that may be necessary. Only then can you see the story without rose-colored glasses, as it really is.

Let's first talk about the difference between the revision process and the editing and polishing process, because these, too, are separate jobs that can--but ideally shouldn't--take place at the same time. On the road to writing a book, you want to minimize major changes like rewriting an entire story thread; adding, deleting, or revising multiple chapters; and infusing three-dimensionality of characters, plots, and relationships. These kinds of major fixes will cost you a lot of time and effort (hence the need for an outline first). If you've utilized your outlined scenes while writing the first draft to make sure your story is progressing, the chance of detecting problems early will allow you to take corrective action in a way that isn't overwhelming. This prevents major revisions at the end of a project, when you've already committed hundreds of pages to a solid structure.

That said, yes, during this time you'll be working on fixing more serious problems, but you probably will be doing some editing and polishing during this stage as well.

You're there; it wouldn't make sense not to clean up some minor issue that isn't quite right, yet clearly needs a little elbow grease. However, what you're really looking for during the revision is fixing anything in your story that doesn't work or make sense. When you revise, you evaluate (and fix) any of the following:

- Three-dimensionality of characters, settings, plots, and relationships
- Structure
- Character, plot, and setting credibility, and the cohesion of these elements
- Scene worthiness
- Pacing
- Effectiveness of hints, tension and suspense, and resolutions
- Transitions
- Emotion
- Hooks and cliff-hangers
- Character voice
- Consistency
- Adequacy of research
- Properly unfurled, developed, and concluded story threads
- Deepening of character enhancements/contrasts and their relevant symbols

Revision is a necessary, natural part of writing. Every first draft needs it. Revision will help you smooth out any rough edges in your first draft. Information dumps or illogical leaps (or critique partners that point out such things) will alert you to the sections that need to be reworked. You could put the information overload elsewhere in the book, break it up and scatter it throughout several scenes, or cut, condense, and polish it so it flows better and makes more sense. As for illogical leaps, you can fill in, tweak, or modify throughout a story to shore up weak areas and provide the justification for a specific element. You'll also add layers as you do this, building on the three-dimensional qualities of your CPR elements.

I strongly believe that once an author begins this stage revision should be done as quickly as possible, with as little interruption from the material as possible. This won't compromise the quality of your revision, I promise--just the opposite, in fact. Ideally, if you can set aside a block of time of about a week to work exclusively on revision, you'll find that your story will be more consistent, and you'll remember details much better. In my case, during revision days, I may be woken from sound sleep because a glaring error in some portion of the book will emerge from my subconscious. The whole book is quite literally laid out in my mind, ready to be accessed at a moment's notice during this short revision period. If revision on a project is broken up by a period of weeks or months, especially if you're working on other projects during this time, the book may suffer from consistency issues and possibly even structural and cohesion

problems. If you can set aside a crucial, uninterrupted block of time (preferably one week) to focus on revision, your story will benefit from it immeasurably.

The revision stage is almost always the point where I can see the finish line--essentially when I'm ready to let it go. I think that's an important part of the writing in stages process. Unless and until you feel you're ready to let the book go because it's as flawless as you can make it, don't let it go. You'll probably feel the same way as I do at the revision step if you follow the writing-in-stages method in the order I've laid out. Getting to the letting-go point might be much harder if you're not using this process.

Stage 8: Setting aside

See Stages 4 and 6, because what I said in those sections is pertinent here as well. This latter setting aside, though, is slightly different in that this is usually a good stage to get critique partners and beta readers involved. Everyone knows writers can get too close to their own work. It's an occupational hazard. While you're hopefully feeling you've got a story beyond compare, it may need a little more work and you simply can't see it (or vice versa--you think it's manure, but it's actually really good, and you're too close to be able to see that). That's why it's so important to turn your beloved opus over to a trusted spouse, friend, or, preferably, a critique partner (or three) for a critical read. The opinion of others is very important. You're probably not ready to send that book out to a publisher or agent until you've had enough reader reactions to judge the strength of your accomplishment.

During this project downtime, you might be sick of your book and/or stinging from some of the glaring holes others saw that you somehow managed to miss. I highly recommend that you give yourself this shelf-time time to digest the comments made about your beloved baby. When you return for the final editing and polishing, perhaps for the last time before you submit it, you might even agree with your friend on several points...but you may also disagree. Ultimately, what you decide is best for your book is up to you. You'll hopefully feel confident enough to evaluate, unbiased, what needs to be done to shine it up.

Stage 9: Editing and polishing

What most writers call revising is actually just editing and polishing. Writers get excited about their stories at nearly every stage, since they have a picture in their mind's eye of what will emerge. The "editing" portion of this task is called copyediting in publishing circles and entails the correction and enhancement of grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation details. Editing and polishing are a lot like turning a rough gemstone into a finished one. You're cutting the bad, replacing it with the good, and

polishing up what remains until it shines. A writer unquestionably does also need to remove clutter to make a story understandable, to prevent a reader from tripping over clumsy prose, and to infuse a story with vivid, interesting narration that speaks succinctly to the reader, concurrently bringing the whole story to life. Editing and polishing add a very definite extra layer to your story. Without it, your story probably won't read smoothly, nor will it shine. The process of editing and polishing can also involve any or all of the following:

- Ensuring a completeness of three-dimensionality in character, plot, and relationship
- Rearranging sentences or paragraphs
- Showing (more frequently) and telling (at times), where these are 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 your writing more natural or interesting
- Punching up tension and suspense
- Ensuring variation in sentence construction and length
- Diversifying and enriching words

Editing and polishing should be almost as simple as reading through the manuscript and making minor adjustments that allow the words to flow like music to the ear. A solid outline followed by a rich first draft virtually ensures that. The difference between revising and editing and polishing is generally in the amount of work you'll do for each.

Stage 10: Setting aside (optional)

While I'll get into the in-depth reasons for continuing past Stage 9 in Stage 11, the basic reason for this shelf time for the project is obvious. You just finished editing and polishing. You'd have to be insane to want to read the book again right after you finished going over it from start to finish. You'll have gained no distance from it if you jump directly into Stage 11 at this point. So give yourself another few weeks or more, if your deadlines allow, before moving on to Stage 11. See Stages 4, 6, and 8 for more details.

One other thing I alluded to earlier is that writers don't want to get burned out when it comes to any specific project. When writers say they're burned out, they mean they've been working too much and not taking the time off to refresh themselves and keep their creative energy flowing. (This is completely different from writer's block, which can stem from situations like a story not ready to be worked on, not enough brainstorming or inspiration, or sheer laziness usually attributed to a fickle muse.) This is especially true if you're working on one project, doing all these stages back-to-back,

without taking a break from the project or from work in general. You bring back your own love for a project each time you set it aside and then come back to it fresh. Don't underestimate the importance of doing that. You and your stories will suffer for it eventually if you skip over the setting-aside stages.

There's another reason for avoiding burnout whenever you can. The soil in your brain is like the soil farmers sow crops in. It needs rest and rotation (writing in stages, for the author) in order to become fertile and nutrient rich again. When you work up your yearly goals, you're not only deciding what you're going to be working on during that year, but you're also planning your breaks from writing. If taking weekends off doesn't refresh you, take a week, weeks, or even a month off during the year. Read, watch movies, relax, and reenergize your creativity. (This doesn't mean you can't be brainstorming or researching for upcoming projects during this time.) By the time your vacation is up, you'll be raring to go on your next writing project. Take your scheduled vacations when you've planned them, unless something wonderful happens (an editor contracts a series from you, you're asked to write a screenplay of your book...fill in the blank for your own idea of wonderful) in your career or life, and you can't let the opportunity pass you by. As soon as that thing is finished, take the vacation you planned. Reward yourself by allowing your creative soil to become fertile again.

Stage 11: The final read-through (optional)

Following Stage 9, some authors may be ready to get the book out where readers can buy and fall in love with it. A couple situations prompted me to add two steps to my original nine-stage process, though, that I think even savvy, confident authors might want to evaluate before letting the book be released. First, we live in a digital world. Everything is started, managed, and completed on the computer. But the very real and inescapable fact is that human eyes are fallible. They aren't capable of seeing everything on a computer (or something similar to this) screen and frequently what you see on the screen isn't necessary what's in the hard copy--spacing, formatting, and other issues may crop up from one medium to the other. We need the hardcopy to truly catch everything that demands our attention (like typos and "Track Changes" errors) in the final draft of a manuscript. Our eyes may only see some of these things on the printed version of the book. This is essential, and I guarantee if you're not getting this hardcopy (from your own printer of the final proof after edits, directly from your publisher, or from another means like the one I'll describe in a second), you're missing a (possibly) tremendous number of issues that readers are going to catch. Do yourself a favor: Get a hardcopy to do your final read-through from.

Second, the current state of the industry--exploding with indie publishers and authors--requires another stage in which to find the errors that seem to creep into our stories like lice. The fact is, there are very few legitimately professional editors and/or

copyeditors working at publishing houses these days--especially at smaller publishers--and authors who are self-publishing their own works may even skip the professional-editor-input altogether. For that reason, it's even more crucial to have a stage where the writer sees his book in this final form (and this is true even if the book is only released as an ebook without a paper companion), where he can catch (probably not all but most) typos. We'll talk more about the current and future state of the industry in the conclusion chapter.

As soon as I'm done with the editing and polishing, and the story is as clean as I think it can get "digitally", I'll put the book into a value-priced trade paperback format (what I call my print test paperback) and order a copy. When I'm ready for this final read-through, I like to put myself in the position of being the first reader for this book. As much as possible, I try to ignore the fact that I have a very personal affiliation with the book and I simply read it--in both a critical and savoring mind frame. This isn't easy, but I consider this my very last chance to make changes before my editor sees it; I want her to find the finished product almost perfect. I take my time reading, as well, sometimes lingering for weeks if the deadline I have to submit it to my editor is way out there, to evaluate how the story goes over in this unhurried mode.

When I get to this stage in the process, I usually find very few changes are required. The story is brimming with life, and there's almost nothing left to stumble over or smooth out. Most important, though, in nearly every case I come out loving the story more than I ever have before. It exceeds the expectations I had for it when it was little more than a spark that incited me to write. Truthfully, I don't consider that conceit. I'd worry if I didn't have that reaction. If you don't love your own work, don't become immersed in the worlds, characters, conflicts, and relationships contained in your stories, how can you expect readers to?

Each of these stages is a layer of your story--nine to eleven strong layers that, for career authors, should be the first step in ensuring multidimensional writing that has strong CPR development. Each time you add something new during these stages, you're creating another vital layer that makes the whole story stronger, richer, with almost guaranteed strong, three-dimensional CPR elements.

All of my projects are done in these eleven stages. I love that I'm never doing the same thing in terms of outlining, writing, revising, or editing and polishing a project. I move from outlining one book, to revising a different one, to writing something else altogether, layering and building and developing each project into something wonderfully three-dimensional.

I also love that I rarely have to start from scratch on any project. While I do set the book aside multiple times, the rest of the steps are done once. I can't remember the last time I had to outline, write a draft, revise, and edit and polish more than once for each project. I'm always fresh, always enthusiastic, always eager to complete a book

a little more at each stage, knowing my work will be solid, lifelike, and ready to send to editors when I'm at last ready to let go.

One other thing I want to point out is that I generally spend each year (though the year isn't necessarily January through December) working on five books--in some years I also write at least five books--all in various stages in this process. To give you a point of reference, visit my WIP page at <https://karenwiesner.weebly.com/works-in-progress.html>, which includes not only my accomplishments every year but also several past years' and the current year's works-in-progress. You'll see, broken down month by month, how I juggled each project through the various stages, to complete everything. Note that my vacations aren't included on the monthly breakdown but, rest assured, I am taking long and short ones in between projects to prevent me from becoming overwhelmed and burned out on writing. I recommend studying my WIP page to see how I did this with individual projects. You can see the juggling act there of all my books over the course of a year or more, allowing every single project all the stages needed to get solid, three-dimensional stories with all the proper layering for CPR development *every single time*.

There's a quote by Orison Marden that says, "The waste of life occasioned by trying to do too many things at once is appalling." Obviously there's a lot I accomplish during the course of a year and all of that includes breaks and long vacations. People tend to assume I must work 24 hours a day based on my high level of production, but--if you've looked at my WIP page and read through all this--you know differently now, don't you? Writing in stages is more of a science than a phenomenon once you see how it works. I don't believe in trying to do too much. I've found a way to do all I can without becoming harried, overworked, or overwhelmed. Individual authors need to find ways to get maximum output without turning their creative soil into ash because they're so burned out.

An author who uses full-proof methods to create layered stories with strong CPR development and utilizes an outlines, allows for sufficient shelf time, and sets goals will never have to suffer from missed opportunities or deadlines let alone low-quality work. In fact, each book may get better than the last, and you may get far enough ahead that you can fit just-for-fun projects into your schedule or take longer breaks.

Finally, what I do and what you ultimately do will be completely different, and you want to find what works best for you. The point is to make progress. If you want to write quality stories for the long haul that are undeniably memorable to readers, there is no better way to get started.

Chart Your CPR Development Homework

If you haven't already done this, create and begin utilizing story folders now that allow you to lay the foundation for years of potential writing material, and the momentum to finish them well in advance of deadlines. If you're a writer with the goal of becoming a professional, career author, learn how to write in stages to ensure the development of multiple layers of story, and to build in proper, three-dimensional CPR development before you dive into writing any book. Make it your habit to adequately define the amount of time you need for each project during the year with goals sheets that will keep you on track with the necessary structure and discipline. Doing so allows you to minimize your risk of missing opportunities for strong CPR development and, most importantly, will set the stage for consistently delivering well-crafted stories.

With the proper and thorough development of three-dimensional characters, plots, and relationships and a multilayered storytelling approach in mind, we now have all the ingredients to ensure that we never have to wonder if dead or lifeless characters are littering our stories. In the conclusion chapter that follows, we'll talk about the current and future state of the industry and sum up what we've learned about three-dimensional CPR development in the course of this manual.

CONCLUSION

Using CPR Development to Resuscitate Dead or Lifeless Stories

"Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected." ~Steve Jobs

In the prologue, I mentioned that I would include in this conclusion an admittedly bleak view of the current and future state of the publishing industry. The reason I've included this essay is because, as you already know given all we've discussed thus far that the purpose of this book is to aid authors who strive for quality writing. That you've bought and read it implies that excellence in craftsmanship matters to you as much as it does to me. The state of the today's book industry seems to oppose what was once an earmark.

We live in an era of publishing that can easily be viewed with growing, disturbing concern given that new, novice, or simply unskilled writers neglect the absolute requirement of adequately developing the core elements in a story while publishers are churning them out. Quality writing no longer seems to be a going concern in this industry, and big (and sometimes even small) publishers seem more focused on large social platforms than phenomenal writing. On The Write Life blog, Brooke Warner says

in her enlightening article "Author Platform: Here's What All the Fuss Is About": "[A]uthor platform has taken on an astoundingly important role when it comes to whether or not a writer will get a traditional publishing contract..." Clearly, even the biggest traditional publishers are putting author marketing above quality.

Going one further, in her article "How Social Media is Changing the Publishing Industry", Katie Leimkuehler says (apologies for the poor editing taken directly from the article), "Any writer or author can now bring their book to life with self-publishing and a viral social media campaign. Many people believe the publishing industry is dying, but it's not, the game is just changing. Publishers doesn't [don't] always have a winning strategy, they invest in a few books a year they hope will make it big and pay off... more than ever they're facing competition from bloggers, self-published authors and a new type of writer who has built their own audience." This disturbing piece implies that self-published authors are not only taking the publishing industry by storm but they're overrunning it...and I don't doubt that's exactly what's happening. But I do contend that that situation isn't an ideal, let alone a *good* one, as is inferred in the latter's blog entry.

Nearly a million flawed books or ebooks are flooding an already saturated market every single year. While this startling condition isn't the focus of this particular reference manual, in the next section we'll analyze this trend, since every author and publisher is, should be, and ultimately will be affected by this situation if it continues--as it seems it will...and steadily in the future. Without quality writing driving the publishing industry (*not* social platforms or author control--after all, just because you *can* sell it doesn't mean you *should*) as my references are focused on developing, there simply are no standards.

The current state of the publishing industry--with ebooks (mere digital files, so easy to give away for nothing!) versus print and indie and self-publishing being so prevalent--is absolutely not for the faint of heart. I can't be the only writer who views the present and future landscape with lump-in-the-throat uncertainty and more than a little horror. How did we get here? Is the current state of book publishing enlightened, champion-worthy progress, or is it the worst thing that could possibly happen for quality stories and the hard-working authors who write them?

ONE BLEAK PERSPECTIVE ON THE CURRENT AND FUTURE STATE OF THE BOOK INDUSTRY

Consider the shocking, disheartening statistics:

- In 2014, Pew Research Center conducted a study that pointed to nearly a quarter of Americans failing to read a single book during *the year*, while more

than two-thirds of the population went to the cinema at least once during the year and frequent moviegoers attended at least *once a month*.

- In 2014, self-published books represented 31% of ebook sales on Amazon's Kindle Store with indie books representing 25% of the books on Amazon's ebook bestseller list. Indie authors were earning nearly 40% of the ebook dollars going to authors, which meant their sales figures were higher than those of many of their traditional counterparts.
- Despite the sheer numbers of books being published in a year and the growth of ebook sales, which leveled off in 2013 after skyrocketing during 2008-2012 but have fallen more than 10% since then, annual book industry sales are stagnant and/or shrinking, according to the AAP StatShot Annual 2015 report. Even worse, print sales declined dramatically since the peak year of 2007. The "total book publishing pie" isn't growing and is divided among hundreds of thousands of print and digital books.
- With the explosion of books published and the decline of total sales, it's hardly surprising that the average new title faces drastically shrinking sales. According to Statista, bookstore sales in 2015 were down 37% with about 2.7 billion books sold in the United States. *Publishers Weekly* reported in 2016 that the average United States nonfiction book sold fewer than 250 copies per year and fewer than 2,000 copies over its lifetime. In the average bookstore, a book has less than a one percent chance of even being stocked considering that, for every available space on a shelf, countless thousands of books compete to be included.
- In 2016, Bowker reported that more than 700,000 books were self-published in the United States (an increase of 375% since 2010) while the number of traditionally published remained steady at just over 300,000. In 2017, there were a total of over one million print and ebooks *self-published* in the U.S. (879.6 thousand print books; 129.6 thousand ebooks).

Brick and mortar bookstores are becoming increasingly obsolete.

Reading physical copies of anything is a dying practice.

Handheld electronic devices rule our lives--and let's face it--very few people are actually *reading* on their phones or tablets.

People want every form of entertainment to be free (except perhaps sports--what's up with that?), including books, and authors and publishers are catering to the whim as if this is a wonderful idea.

Almost nobody has an attention span that extends beyond a few hundred words.

More than 13 million previously published books are available through a variety of sources *over and above* the new ones released every single year. How can the marketplace absorb such a massive deluge?

Simply put, it can't.

Suffice it to say that all of this leads us to one inescapable conclusion: More books are competing for shelf space at physical bookstores than ever before, or not getting into them at all while those at online distributors are in fierce competition for dominance. With oversaturation in every genre, it's becoming more and more difficult to make any one book stand out. Every new publication vies with more than 13 million *plus* other titles available for sale as well as alternative media claiming people's time and monetary resources.

As if the competition wasn't depressing enough, in 2017 there were 45.3 thousand writers and authors working in the United States alone! There's a saying about cream always rising to the top...but how can it? Without marketing, a book is doomed to failure, but the cost of marketing a single book has doubled, tripled, risen astronomically...and even those brave and rich enough to make the investment yield a questionable return. The market simply isn't there the way it used to be.

Add to all that, publishing as a whole has changed so radically, it's not at all surprising that so many authors are choosing to self-publish or "indie publish" (for more information about the term "indie", read "Indie Publishing versus Self-publishing: The rise of the indie author" here: <https://1106design.com/2016/09/indie-publishing-versus-self-publishing-rise-indie-author/>) rather than deal with the drama and bad contracts that give them little or nothing in return for a piece of their soul. Publishers have almost exclusively placed the weight of promotion solely on the author's shoulders in order to stay afloat in the shrinking marketplace, and some of them even have specific requirements that the author has to abide by written right into their contracts, forcing authors to promote in ways that may not be financially feasible for them or to forgo a contract altogether. Publishers have traditionally been the ones to make sure a book is available in all the formats readers use and to list the books at distributor websites. But publishers these days no longer want to be the ones to make the books *move* in those channels--and the publishers are the ones who can provide the biggest push and momentum. Without them, that means most authors are swimming upstream right from the get-go.

Once upon a time, it was standard practice for every book to go through content editing, line editing, copyediting, and then one or more rounds of proofreading. Every book needs those steps, even those written by professional, highly skilled authors. It might surprise you to know that once upon a time even "vanity publishers" (i.e., those that charge you possibly exorbitant fees to publish your work) had rigorous editing requirements. But, while there are still traditional publishers around who enforce an in-depth editing process for all authors under contract, self- and indie publishers have little or no guidelines, let alone quality requirements placed on them.

There are a couple major book distributors in existence (that I don't need to mention by name) that are indisputably contributing to the flooding of the market with

questionable-quality stories as well as using marketing ploys that drive the price of books down to almost nothing but "seduce" writers and publishers into giving away their distribution rights just so they can corner the lion's share of the market.

You would think the situations in the last paragraph would be bad enough to be the worst of it. But, no, there's more. Those distributors go beyond the scenarios I described in the last paragraph to base bestselling status entirely on sales and admittedly genius marketing techniques. Putting a book into one of these distributors' "exclusive publishing packages" (i.e., signing a contract that states you can't sell the book anywhere else) as well as forcing everyone to abide by what I'll call a "5-star jump-through-insane-hoops review policy" can only lead to a terrifying, dark alley: Namely, One Leading Distributor who controls the whole of the publishing industry. Eventually, this One Leading Distributor will become the be-all, end-all deciding factor in what gets published, what's worthy of publication, what it should cost, and how much (or little?) the author and publisher (if there are such archaic roles in this bleak future) get out of all this.

Is this what authors and publishers really want in the long run? How can this be good for any of us except in the immediate future? Even in the present, that's a big maybe. As an author, I've seen absolutely no evidence of existing wisdom for participating in these programs. In the long run, it's the worst thing we can possibly do. We're selling our souls for the promise of increased sales that only a few authors or publishers are actually seeing fulfilled.

Now let's add to this distributor complication the sheer number of book marketing promotional services that exist solely to promote limited-time only discounts on ebooks, which can so easily be priced at mere pennies or just be given away for free. Where is the profit in participating in this? I've tested this out on my own and in coordination with my various publishers. Beyond making a bestselling list for a day or two, I really didn't see a significant monetary gain was achieved by participating in any shockingly expensive ebook marketing service. I was told my sales would go up for my other books (especially the series the book I gave away free or cheap was the first one in), but I didn't see that happen either or at least the upward trend was so short, someone coughed and it disappeared. There are some people who can make this strategy work, I grant (and most are writing expensive books to tell you how to do it), but those who genuinely do are certainly in the minority.

I have a friend who used to be an avid reader and buyer of books...until she started using one of the free ebook marketing services to get all her reading material. She told me outright (obviously forgetting I'm an author who makes a living on the chance that people will buy my books) that she absolutely refuses to pay for a book--any book--ever again since she can get them free from this service. She wasn't following an author or a series. She was simply there to take advantage of what was given away for free.

What are we doing here, authors and publishers? We give away our books for almost nothing as if they're worth nothing. Who can escape such a conclusion? What does this teach readers beyond that books have little lasting value and that readers don't need to *purchase* books? Are you aware that the surge of readers who take part in discounted ebook promotion services *won't* pay full price for a book, even if it's part of a series they love or an author they enjoyed?

These are the readers we're catering to, fellow authors and publishers! These are not people in love with books and stories, the very kind of readers we should be catering to by providing quality stories each and every time that are worth the money readers are paying for them. Read this paragraph again. Take these sentiments to heart. They're the crux of everything and the reason we need to be wary about what we're doing *now* because our actions will have future consequences.

I ask again, what are we doing? We're encouraging a trend in which someday readers will refuse to pay a dime for a book, let alone the \$2.99-3.99 "sweet spot for a bestseller" pricing (according to the 2014 Smashwords survey). We're also giving away our rights to End-All, Be-All distributors to sell our books anywhere and everywhere as if that privilege isn't to be treasured instead of squandered, as if the book industry future we're ushering in is a good one instead of just a downright knee-knocking one!

If one Be-All, End-All Distributor controls everything, what makes you think they'll stop there? There are the merest whispers of controlling content currently. Why believe they won't eventually ask us to give up all financial gain, or most of it, so they can benefit? The only authors of value in their publishing system will be those who bring in tremendous amounts of money (and probably by spending even more tremendous amounts of money in the process on marketing promotional services). If you don't do what they want, what do you think will happen to you and your books, since there's no longer any choice about who's going to distribute all books? Two quotes that I think are highly relevant here (and ominous): "Who controls the past controls the future" (if we give up all our rights now based on seductive promises of upcoming fortune, in the future we'll have to abide by those who control us and the very rights we gave away so blindly) and "Whoever controls the media...controls the culture". But would the industry simply collapse before this happened? Would scores of authors give up? The future could include scenarios we can't even imagine.

Authors and publishers, aren't we supposed to be writing *quality* books that readers *want* to pay full price to read? What happened to that philosophy? But I can't blame just the distributors for this and the publishers who so freely give away our books for little or nothing. Far too many authors are cutting corners and self-publishing books that are as far from quality as it gets.

Talk about a no-win scenario with the state of today's publishing industry: Either the publisher wants too much from the author without offering something worthwhile in

return, or the author requires too little from himself. While in my years in this industry I have known a lot of quality self-published authors who have my highest respect, I've read far too many self-published books that weren't worth the paper they were printed on or the price I paid for a digital copy that should have been eligible for a full refund when unceremoniously returned. With the unfathomable volume of books published these days, we can afford to make the assumption that many of them are poorly--not professionally--written and edited.

Consider these two generalized scenarios that I've actually witnessed (and more than once) over the last several years:

1) Someone decides to write children's books. He does his own illustrations and they're wonderful. He writes a story to go along with them and thinks, *I should have a professional take a look at this*, fully expecting to get the same rave reviews his friends and family gave him for the product. Instead, the professional finds the story horribly flawed, not making sense in light of the illustrations. The professional gives solid details on exactly how this story can be fixed and improved 100%. Countless hours are spent on this in-depth critique (that the children's illustrator *cum* writer may or may not have paid for). The professional editor has reputable credentials and experience in the industry. After the editor hands over the critique, the children's illustrator decides he doesn't want to go to the trouble of revising the story to make it better since his friends and family thought it was good enough. Not only does he dismiss the professional advice, he doesn't have enough respect for himself or the craft to make his story the best it could be and he certainly doesn't care that unsuspecting readers will pay good money for his inferior product.

2) A self-published author is considered a bestseller by a major distributor (after spending a lot of money taking advantage of many discounted ebook marketing services that drove up his "sales" in a brilliant, stacking strategy) and, for that reason, is well-respected by his writer peers. This author does one thing right: Instead of using questionable electronic editing software, he hires an editor who's another self-published author that one day just decided to put up a sign and charge money for freelance editing books. That is the sum total of this "editor's" credentials. This writer-masquerading-as-an-editor doesn't really offer the self-published author much by way of a helpful critique to make the stories quality ones, and the author never has to do much work to "fix" his stories. In short order, he's self-publishing his stories. Then something happens to this writer-editor to put her out of commission, and the self-published author goes looking for another editor. This time, the editor he chooses is a professional with solid credentials to provide thorough content-, line-, and copy-editing. The story is seriously flawed, the writing simply bad. Needless to say, the author isn't happy at all with what the editor has to say about his work. Without bothering to take any of the suggestions (that he may or may not have paid a lot or a little for), the author publishes the book as is, maybe correcting a few typos, telling himself that

because he's a bestseller by a distributor's definition, his stories must be good and he by extension a fantastic author. But what he fails to take into account is that *quantity* isn't *quality* and quality is absolutely not based on sales figures or the biased opinions of our loved ones.

A qualified editor can see quality writing even if he or she doesn't personally enjoy the story. That's not up for debate. Good writing is good writing and free from as many errors as possible. I've read countless books in my line of work as a freelance editor, writing instructor, and contest judge that were wonderfully written. I didn't particularly enjoy them or engage and connect with them, but I could see they were well written (and well edited). So I stand by the fact that good writing is good writing and a truly professional editor can be trusted to judge quality or lack therefore.

A professional *editor* will point out structural flaws, weak characterization, and bad writing--will absolutely content-, line- and copy-edit as well as proofread a book from start to finish (conceivably multiple times) before it's published. A professional editor won't ask you to revise something because of a difference of opinion, personal bias, or anything that can be considered "up for debate". Professional editors consider their work an art or even a science--and it is for those who have this very rare skill. I could open up yet another can of worms here concerning what makes a professional editor "professional" but that's not the point here. However, keep in mind that there as many unprofessional, unskilled "professional" editors out there who need solid professional credentials as there are unprofessional, unskilled authors who need a professional editor. Do your homework. Find someone who has the credentials (beyond being an author one distributor or a review publication calls a bestseller) for charging authors to edit.

A professional *author* trusts her editor or she walks away but, either way, an author can't afford to have an overinflated sense of worth or confidence about his work, let alone see every word as golden and therefore set in stone, not to be altered by a lesser mortal. If you realize you simply don't have the skills to do the revisions required to make a book quality, own up to it. Don't slap it up for sale and take money from poor, unsuspecting readers who almost never have an endless amount of money to spend on entertainment. The number of buyers of books is shrinking. Authors and publishers, respect yourself and respect the reader by making it a requirement that you'll only offer the highest quality stories to those readers still out there willing to pay for a good read.

Please don't take this as an axe to grind against self-published authors (or, for that matter, small press publishers, which I've worked and experienced great satisfaction with over the years). I know of countless self-published authors who made a justifiable, definitive choice to self-publish but also made wise decisions in how to do it right. They hired editors who didn't just hang their freelance editor sign out one day without the credentials to back it up. They take the professional advice of those editors to make their books better. The products they produce are of unquestionable quality and readers

definitely get their money's worth. Many of these authors are also fantastic marketers of their books. I have the highest respect and not a little awe for these fine examples of authors who are self-publishing the way it should be done.

That doesn't change the fact that far too many flawed, poorly written and edited books are being self-published by amateurs who are cutting corners and being lazy about their craft, taking money they haven't earned from readers whose only available course isn't to return the book but to write troll reviews at a distributor's website or never buy another book from that author (not exactly damaging unless riot mobs are amassing at an author's borders). Maybe it's true that these books are being sold in an author's own community and most readers aren't even aware they exist (and let's hope it stays that way). But shouldn't we start thinking about whether bad, sloppy, poorly written books should even be published? They're absolutely flooding the market so *everything*--good and bad--can only drown in the deluge. If we don't consider it now, when should we? When it's too late? Or is it already?

I would never want to be the one to judge whether a book is worthy to be published, but I've wondered countless times if the publishing industry wouldn't be a stronger place and readers wouldn't benefit immensely if authors and publishers and even distributors actually took the time to evaluate whether a book is quality *apart from sales figures*.

I've also wondered if publishers shouldn't be more discerning. Is the fact that the publisher/editor likes the story reason enough to publish it? If a publisher doesn't have the skills to professionally evaluate and edit the material, or if the editor they hire is subpar (there are so many writer-wanna-be-editors without hard skills working at indie and small press publishing houses these days, it makes me want to cry), the publisher isn't doing the author or readers a favor at all--regardless of what either party believes about the quality of the story in this regard.

I know of an author who came into the indie market presumably because traditional publishers turned him down often and, through a series of what I consider unfortunate events, he went through several small ebook publishers--none of whom required him to do any serious editing of his work. Such a disservice was done to him! This author learned erroneously through these events that he was a good writer when, in fact, the opposite was true. If he'd been forced to do solid editing and revisions from the very start, he might have gone on to become a good writer through practice and experience with the correct process for producing a quality book. Ultimately, when he got to the point of being required by a new publisher to do extreme editing of his severely flawed books, self-publishing became the easy out for him. I honestly don't know who to be more disgusted with: All the publishers who weren't discerning enough to turn this author away in the first place or require serious editing from him as a condition of publication, or the author who seemed to prefer not having to do the hard work of being a professional author and didn't mind offering readers low-quality books.

Bottom line: *No one* has any excuse for publishing bad, poorly written stories. Authors, publishers and distributors, listen up: The true test of a whether a story is quality is *not* because of any of the following:

1) Friends, family, colleagues, and maybe even a few strangers liked or even loved it (maybe enough to post a 5 star review in a public place).

2) It's published (self-, indie, or any other kind of publisher) or, for that matter, because someone agreed to publish it for the author.

3) The book has sold a lot of copies, whether legitimately or because you or your publisher used a discounted ebook marketing service or simply gave it away free or at a massive discount from a distributor's website.

4) It's a bestseller on *any* list. Mind you, it is possible to make a bestselling list by "ad stacking"--in other words, you have ads on as many of the discounted ebook marketing services as possible at the same time, which will probably cost more than you make in profit during this time, but your goal is gaining "credibility", not making money. Do an internet search to find out how this is done if you're interested (or, if you're like me, just want to be shocked that people actually do this--why and doesn't it make them feel dirty? because I would feel guilty using this kind of "publicity" to make myself sound more worthy than I actually might be). *Bestseller lists are based on how many books are sold or are expected to sell.* Is bestselling status retracted from a book that doesn't sell the way it was supposed to? Doubtful, but I can practically guarantee that the status will never be neglected in promotion by that author or publisher! They're absolutely no indication of actual *quality* of product, merely *quantity*.

The only true test of a quality book is whether readers found it worth the price they paid for it (or if they would have paid more) and enjoyed it, possibly enough to buy and read other books written by that author. This isn't something that can be adequately tested "in a laboratory" or statistically. Most writers may never know if they passed the quality test unless a reader sends them a note to tell them, puts up a review at a publisher's, distributor's, or the author's own website; or fans prove they love your work in some other definable, quantifiable way.

I put this bleak perspective of the current and future industry out to you, authors and publishers, because most of us will never know the quality of our work. It's for that reason alone that our own standards of quality need to be so ruthlessly high. If we knowingly allow sloppy, unskilled writing to become published and flood an already overloaded market, then the book has already failed the quality test...but you may not be the one or the only one who suffers for it.

The future of the publishing industry is being paved right now, but will quality books and authors be leading the way?

Resuscitating Dead or Lifeless Stories With Proper CPR Development Summary

The foundation of CPR development begins in plotting and planting three-dimensional seeds right from the very first scene in a book. Story development isn't something that stops with the foundational setup or introduction of new threads either. It has to keep happening. Every single scene that follows the first must show a strong purpose. Characters, plots, and relationships need to be breathing, functioning, heart beating and blood flowing, life sparking through them continuously in order to advance all through a story. If that's not happening, they're in a vegetative state or just plain dead. The soul of the CPR elements created with the techniques in this manual is what turns an ordinary story into a vibrant, memorable one complete with characters that have dynamic, realistic, and believable conflicts and relationships that readers will not only remember all their lives but want to revisit often.

APPENDIX

Note: Because tables and charts can cause issues in electronic formats, they've been removed from the ebook version of this writing reference. However, you'll find them in the print edition as well as in the ***CPR FOR DEAD OR LIFELESS FICTION Bonus Companion Booklet***.

CPR Development Worksheets and Charts

- 1) Three-dimensional Character Sketch Worksheet (Table Version) *
- 2) Three-dimensional Character Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Present
- 3) Three-dimensional Character Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Past
- 4) Three-dimensional Character Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Future
- 5) Three-dimensional Strengths and Weaknesses Worksheet (Table Version) *
- 6) Three-dimensional Strengths and Weaknesses Worksheet (Free-Form Version)
- 7) Three-dimensional Plot Sketch Worksheet (Table Version) *
- 8) Three-dimensional Plot Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Present
- 9) Three-dimensional Plot Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Past
- 10) Three-dimensional Plot Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Future
- 11) Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet (Table Version) *
- 12) Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Present
- 13) Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Past
- 14) Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet (Free-Form Version): Future
- 15) Links in the Chain of Romance Relationship Development Chart (Free-Form Version)
- 16) Heart of the Story Blurbs Worksheet
- 17) Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart (Free-Form Version)
- 18) Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart Example

* You won't find these table in the ebook version of *CPR for Dead or Lifeless Fiction*, but they are in the print edition as well as the *Bonus Companion Booklet*, sold separately.

Three-dimensional Character Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

CHARACTER: PRESENT

Present = the here and now, the current time of the story

_____ (Title or Working Title)

First and Last Name and/or Nickname:

Character Role: (hero/heroine, other main character, secondary character, villain)

Physical Descriptions:

Personality Traits:

Internal Monologue

External Dialogue

Movement

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Skill Set:

Occupation(s):

Education:

Hobbies:

Interests:

Setting(s):

Three-dimensional Character Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

CHARACTER: PAST

Past = backstory that directly impacts what happens in the here and now

_____ (Title or Working Title)

First and Last Name and/or Nickname:

Character Role: (hero/heroine, other main character, secondary character, villain)

Physical Descriptions:

Personality Traits:

Internal Monologue

External Dialogue

Movement

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Skill Set:

Occupation(s):

Education:

Hobbies:

Interests:

Setting(s):

Three-dimensional Character Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

CHARACTER: FUTURE

Future = that hint of hope and/or dread about where the character is and might be going, and where she may or may not end up.

_____ (Title or Working Title)

First and Last Name and/or Nickname:

Character Role: (hero/heroine, other main character, secondary character, villain)

Physical Descriptions:

Personality Traits:

Internal Monologue

External Dialogue

Movement

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Skill Set:

Occupation(s):

Education:

Hobbies:

Interests:

Setting(s):

Three-dimensional Strengths and Weaknesses Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

Character #1 Name:

Present/Past/Future Strengths (positive)

Quirk (something that builds confidence):

Virtue or honorable trait:

Personality skill:

Desire or passion:

Principles:

Character #1 Name:

Present/Past/Future Strengths Weaknesses (negative)

Fear (something that shatters confidence):

Vice or hubris:

Personality flaw:

Secret or regret:

Depravity:

Character #2 Name:

Present/Past/Future Strengths (positive)

Quirk (something that builds confidence):

Virtue or honorable trait:

Personality skill:

Desire or passion:

Principles:

Character #2 Name:

Present/Past/Future Strengths Weaknesses (negative)

Fear (something that shatters confidence):

Vice or hubris:

Personality flaw:

Secret or regret:

Depravity:

Three-dimensional Plot Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

PLOT: PRESENT

Present = the here and now, the current time of the story

(Title or Working Title)

**Character → Event → Conflict → Backstory →
Goals → Motivation → Choice → Resolution**

- Who = character
- What = goal
- Why = motivation
- Why not = conflict

Plot/Story Goal/Subplot:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Goals and Motivations:

Three-dimensional Plot Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

PLOT: PAST

Past = backstory that directly impacts what happens in the here and now

(Title or Working Title)

**Character → Event → Conflict → Backstory →
Goals → Motivation → Choice → Resolution**

- Who = character
 - What = goal
- Why = motivation
- Why not = conflict

Plot/Story Goal/Subplot:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Goals and Motivations:

Three-dimensional Plot Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

PLOT: FUTURE

Future = that hint of hope and/or dread about where the character is and might be going, and where she may or may not end up.

_____ (Title or Working Title)

**Character → Event → Conflict → Backstory →
Goals → Motivation → Choice → Resolution**

- Who = character
 - What = goal
- Why = motivation
- Why not = conflict

Plot/Story Goal/Subplot:

Internal Conflicts:

External Conflicts:

Goals and Motivations:

Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

RELATIONSHIP: PRESENT

Present = the here and now, the current time of the story

(Title or Working Title)

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

RELATIONSHIP: PAST

Past = backstory that directly impacts what happens in the here and now

(Title or Working Title)

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

Three-dimensional Relationship Sketch Worksheet

(Free-Form Version)

RELATIONSHIP: FUTURE

Future = that hint of hope and/or dread about where the character is and might be going, and where she may or may not end up.

_____ (Title or Working Title)

Relationships:

Family:

Friends and Enemies:

Romantic interests:

Links in the Chain of Romance Relationship Development Chart

In the print version of this book as well as the worksheet file, sold separately, we use a chart to make sure we're not skipping crucial links in development with the first column heading labeled "Link #", the second column "Time the Romance Link Takes Place", and the last one with "Describe Development". In the ebook version, tables such as that are impossible to duplicate, but you can transfer the sections listed below in chart format on your own either in a computer file or on a blank sheet of paper.

In the five rows below the headings you created in your own chart, you'll insert the following, with Columns 1 and 2 already done for you:

Row 1:

Column 1: Link 1) **The Meet {or the Meet Again}**

Column 2: First part of the story (1-3 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 2:

Column 1: Link 2) **Budding Preoccupation {Emotions Aplenty}**

Column 2: Latter half of the first part (4-6 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 3:

Column 1: Link 3) **Burgeoning Pursuit {Emotion Plus Demonstration}**

Column 2: First part of the middle section (7-9 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 4:

Column 1: Link 4) **Culminating Ardor {Emotional and Physical Surrender}**

Column 2: Second half of the middle section (10-11 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Row 5:

Column 1: Link 5) **Happily Ever After Commitment**

Column 2: Last three or four scenes (12 o'clock)

Column 3: There's a blank space under the Describe Development for you to fill in.

Note: You should have something in every row in the third column and should have many things in each row regardless of whether you're writing a book or a short story. If you end up with a blank row, you've skipped a link and the romance isn't properly

developed or is in the wrong genre (i.e. erotica). Once you're done filling out this chart, you should see a steady progression of the romance without gaps as you read down these columns. Remember, the purpose in doing this is to provide a structure that ensures you're not skipping any links in the chain--it's not meant to inhibit or stifle.

Heart of the Story Blurbs Worksheet

_____ (Title or Working Title)

*Fill out as completely as possible for the two components that make up this blurb.
Remember, the "who" can be a person, a thing, or simply a concept--your main theme.*

Component 1: **High Concept Story Theme Sentence**

Who:

What:

Component 2: **Summary Blurb**

Basic Character and Plot Information:

Main POV Character #1:

First and Last Name:

Age:

Job:

Time Period(s):

Main Setting(s):

Internal Conflict (i.e., character crisis or what's in jeopardy or at stake):

External Conflict (i.e., plot crisis):

Goals and motivations (i.e., what and why character is compelled to act):

Main POV Character #2:

First and Last Name:

Age:

Job:

Time Period(s):

Main Setting(s):

Internal Conflict (i.e., character crisis or what's in jeopardy or at stake):

External Conflict (i.e., plot crisis):

Goals and motivations (i.e., what and why character is compelled to act):

Once you've filled out the form above completely, you can inject story specifics into this formula (*note: you would fill this out for each major POV character*):

Main POV Character #1:

Who _____ (*name of character*)

wants to _____ (*goal to be achieved*)

because _____ (*motivation for acting*)

but who faces _____ (*conflict standing in the way*).

Main POV Character #2:

Who _____ (*name of character*)

wants to _____ (*goal to be achieved*)

because _____ (*motivation for acting*)

but who faces _____ (*conflict standing in the way*).

Final Heart of the Story Blurb (with both components included):

After you've got the final heart of the story blurb, tag the elements:

- POV Character
- Internal Conflict
- External Conflict
- Goals and Motivations
- Relationship (can simply be alluded to or subtle)

Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart

(Free Form Version)

_____ (Title or Working Title)

High Concept Story Theme Sentence: (include what you came up with for the overall story theme in the last section)

Summary Blurb POV Character #1: (include what you came up with in the last section for a summary blurb)

Summary Blurb POV Character #2: (optional)

Note: If you want to, you could use different colors for individual characters. So the first character would have all their CPR developments in yellow throughout the chart, the second in green, etc. That would make each very visual and easy to trace them individually to make sure they're revealed, established, developed, advanced, and resolved properly.

In the print version of this book as well as the worksheet file, we use a chart with six columns. In the ebook version, tables can't be duplicated, so transfer the labels for each column in chart format on your own either in a computer file or on a blank sheet of paper.

Column 1: **Chapter/Scene #**

Column 2: **Scene Date**

Column 3: **Scene POV Character**

Column 4: **P/P/F Character Reveal and Development**

Column 5: **P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development**

Column 6: **P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development**

You'll find the explanations for the column headings in Chapter Six.

After you finish filling out this chart, you shouldn't see any spaces in the columns or rows where something is missing for a particular scene. Blank spaces are areas that need development. The place that's empty will tell you exactly where in your story you're missing reveals and development. Your goal in doing this is to try to trace each CPR element's development separately, from start to finish. When you're done filling out the chart and tracing the elements, ask yourself this question: Do the character,

plot, and relationship feel well-developed, or does it feel like something is missing or skipped, confused, inconsistent, or not cohesively logical?

Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart Example

(Free Form Version)

Below, you'll find a free-form version of the chart filled out for the first three scenes of this popular fiction book. Finish filling out the Scene-by-Scene CPR Development Chart for the rest of the chapters of *Divergent*. Or, using a blank copy, go back to some of your favorite stories (not necessarily your own) and see if you can fill out the chart for them. Seeing "how it's done" by professional authors can help you get into the mindset of three-dimensional CPR development that you can bring back to your own writing. When you're ready or in need, trying using the form for your own story.

Divergent, Book 1: Divergent Trilogy by Veronica Roth

High Concept Story Theme Sentence: *One choice can transform you.*

Summary Blurb POV Character #1: Beatrice Prior's society is divided into five factions--Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). Beatrice must choose between staying with her Abnegation family and transferring factions. Her choice will shock her community and herself. But the newly christened Tris also has a secret, one she's determined to keep hidden, because in this world, what makes you different makes you dangerous.

Notes: I removed the "Scene Date" section because there's no way of knowing what dates these scenes took place. Also, though most of the chapters have two scenes, I've focused on the overall chapter in order to cover all the dimensions (which were sporadic in individual scenes and in some places worked best to combine on the form below since certain things could fit in either dimension). I couldn't find a lot of past development anywhere, sadly, and I was looking for it very hard, leading to disappointment when I couldn't come up with anything. I admit I do feel like the "past dimension" was lacking in this series in general. Often, I wanted to know more, but the author excels at future development in each scene. Be aware, as well, that sometimes the dimensions can and do mesh so it's hard to tell one from the other, as do the character, plot, and relationship elements themselves. In other words, some of these things could go in other places on the form just as well as where I've included them. In all cases where you see two of the dimensions listed together, it's because there are allusions to or implications of both in evidence, regardless of how subtle. Your own story might be similar. Remember, this is for your own use. But, if you feel something is lacking after you finish filling out this form for all the chapters/scenes, that's a potential area to rework.

Row 1:**Column 1: Chapter #****Column 2: Scene POV Character****Column 3: P/P/F Character Reveal and Development****Column 4: P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development****Column 5: P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development****Row 2:****Column 1:** One**Column 2:** Beatrice Prior

Column 3: Present: In noticing that her mother is well-practiced in the art of losing herself, Beatrice realizes she can't say the same about herself.

Her older brother Caleb is selfless and has a talent for looking closely at other faction members, striving to see them and forget himself--not something she's skilled at doing.

Past: Beatrice has been worried for weeks about what the aptitude test will tell her about herself.

Future: Every morning, Beatrice watches the Dauntless arrive by jumping from a moving train. Dauntless are pierced, tattooed, black-clothed "hellions". They value courage most. Instead of being perplexed by them, she's helpless to looking away from them in her fascination--portending where her future might be moving.

Column 4: Present: Only Dauntless faction members ride the trains. In front of the school is a large metal sculpture they climb after school and dare each other to go higher and higher.

Past: Abnegation members wear gray clothes, plain hairstyles and unassuming manners. For weeks now, the Abnegation students have been treated with antagonism by the other factions. Beatrice's faction has made her a target instead of allowing it to be easy to forget herself.

Future: Tomorrow, at the Choosing Ceremony, she'll decide on a faction; decide the rest of her life; decide to stay with her family or abandon them.

After the Choosing Ceremony, the students Beatrice and Caleb's ages won't return to the school again. The factions they choose are responsible for finishing their education.

Column 5: Present: When she asks her brother if he's worried about the aptitude test, he doesn't answer her question.

Past: She's confided in no one, not even her brother, about her feelings about what's coming up.

Future: She feels guilty for wanting to leave her family...which implies she's considering it.

Row 3:

Column 1: Two

Column 2: Beatrice

Column 3: Present and Future: Abnegation members are supposed to sit quietly and wait. Even idle, behavior supersedes individual preference. Beatrice can't deny the norms of her faction (but it's clear she'd like to often--and may in the future, depending on her choice of faction).

Past: Beatrice is aware as they file toward the aptitude testing rooms that other people probably can't tell the Abnegation members apart...which is the point, but not something that's been easy for her to accept in her life.

Column 4: Present: After Caleb's aptitude test, he's pale, his hands shaking, implying that his results have disturbed him greatly.

Going into her aptitude after him, she feels sick, shaky as well, and terrified.

Beatrice's aptitude test requires three simulations. In the first test, she shows wisdom and bravery. In the second, she selflessly throws herself into danger to rescue a child. In the third, she deliberately tells a lie.

Past: It seems to Beatrice that it's easy for Caleb to do what he's supposed to do. It's not easy for her to do the same. Ever.

Future: During her aptitude test, Beatrice recognizes that she's being tested and the test simulations aren't real.

Students aren't allowed to talk about the results of their aptitude tests to anyone, not even family or closest friends.

Column 5: Present and Future: Beatrice believes Caleb knows which faction he belongs in and always has known.

A Dauntless woman named Tori gives Beatrice her aptitude test. She has a tattoo that Beatrice asks her about (which makes Tori wonder at the fact that an Abnegation is curious). Tori tells her it symbolizes the sun--if the sun is always on her, she won't be afraid of the dark, like she was once upon a time. The tattoo now reminds her of the fear she's overcome. This intrigues Beatrice (and gives a mild foreshadowing of her future).

Past: Beatrice's earliest memory of her brother is when they were 4 and he lectured her about not giving her jump rope to a little girl without one. Beatrice will never forget the look of disapproval he gave her.

Row 4:

Column 1: Three

Column 2: Beatrice

Column 3: Present and Future: Beatrice thinks of the Abnegation lifestyle as an outsider: It's beautiful, her family moves in harmony. When she sees other people living this lifestyle, she loves it. It's when she tries to live it herself that she knows it doesn't feel genuine.

Past: *Unfortunately, the references to past character reveals and development in this chapter were so subtle, I couldn't really find anything that could fit here.*

Column 4: Present and Future: Factionless live in sections of the city near collapsed buildings and roads, broken sidewalks, sewer systems and empty subways because they failed to complete the initiation ritual into the faction they chose at their Choosing Ceremony.

Tori tells Beatrice her results are inconclusive. Typically, each state of the simulation eliminates one or more of the factions. In Beatrice's case, only two have been ruled out. She qualifies for Abnegation, Dauntless, and Erudite. Those who get this result are called divergent.

Beatrice worries what will happen to her if her aptitude test shows that she isn't cut out for any of the factions. She would have to live in the streets with the factionless--meaning poverty and discomfort as well as being divorced from society and what's considered the most important thing in life: Community. Without a faction, there is no purpose and no reason to live.

Regardless of her test results, the choice of faction is Beatrice's now.

A run-in with a member of the factionless has Beatrice standing up for herself, not cowering, running away, or catering selflessly to someone in need. She's ready and knows what she has to do--now and in the future.

Past: *References to past plot reveals and development in this chapter were so subtle, I couldn't really find anything that could fit here.*

Column 5: Present and Future: Tori warns her emphatically not to share her test results with anyone, ever, no matter what happens because being divergent is dangerous.

Choosing another faction means forsaking family. Permanently.

Past: *References to relationship reveals and development in this chapter were so subtle, I couldn't really find anything that could fit here.*

Chapter 4:

Row 1:

Column 1: Chapter #

Column 2: Scene POV Character

Column 3: P/P/F Character Reveal and Development

Column 4: P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development

Column 5: P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development

Chapter 5:

Row 1:

Column 1: Chapter #

Column 2: Scene POV Character

Column 3: P/P/F Character Reveal and Development
Column 4: P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development
Column 5: P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development

Chapter 6:

Row 1:

Column 1: Chapter #
Column 2: Scene POV Character
Column 3: P/P/F Character Reveal and Development
Column 4: P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development
Column 5: P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development

Chapter 7:

Row 1:

Column 1: Chapter #
Column 2: Scene POV Character
Column 3: P/P/F Character Reveal and Development
Column 4: P/P/F Plot Reveal and Development
Column 5: P/P/F Relationship Reveal and Development

Note: Continue charting through the rest of the chapters in the book.



Character Plot Relationship Developmental Signs of Life

Animated

Evidence of functionality, breathing, heartbeat, the spark of life.

Living

Not simply existing and going through the motions but possessing fully developed external and internal conflicts.

Interacting

Dynamic, realistic, and believable relationships.

Vitality and Voice

Three-dimensional character attributes.

Engaged

Definable objective and purpose of being along with goals and motivations.

It's possible to see the animation in a character that provides evidence of functionality, breathing, heartbeat, and the spark of life. But, to truly be living, characters aren't simply existing and going through the motions but possess fully developed external and internal conflicts; they're interacting in dynamic, realistic, and believable relationships; they have three-dimensional character attributes that give them both vitality and voice, and they're engaged in what makes life worthwhile with definable goals and motivations.

CPR FOR DEAD OR LIFELESS FICTION

Bonus Companion Booklet

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 that were in an editable format, which allows for cross-platform document exchange that most word processors are able to read or write to. In other words, the file allows you to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed.

CPR for Dead or Lifeless Fiction Bonus Companion Booklet contains all the blank worksheets from the main book along with detailed examples. These are free to download from the Writers Exchange E-Publishing website. For those who prefer print, a paperback equivalent is available for sale.

Download the free ebook now at: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/CPR/>

Author's Note

I'm excited to offer *CPR for Dead or Lifeless Fiction* in this craft writing collection. The one thing all seven volumes have in common is that they're about teaching cohesive three-dimensional writing, whether it's in the pages of a single story, all the series installments, or even just in a book blurb. Here, each one of my writing reference manuals builds on the one that came before, overlapping sometimes because solid three-dimensional writing needs a strong foundation every single time, always offering a new focus of development.

Believe me, writing craft manuals isn't something anyone does for money (though that's nice). It's all about paying it forward, wanting to help other writers navigate their way forward on what can be a dark and murky path. One reviewer described my craft titles like this: "Karen speaks to you directly, frankly, cheerfully, and writes in a wonderfully entertaining style. She shares all her secrets and lets you look over her shoulder as she does. She never sounds patronizing. Instead, she points out that there is no wrong way to write a book, but that some ways are too ineffective for a writer who wants to write salable books on a regular basis. She doesn't bore you with theories. Karen is like a dance instructor who knows how to make people tango with grace even when they have two left feet." Encouraging you as a writer is what I hope you gain from using my methods.

Happy and productive writing!

Karen Wiesner

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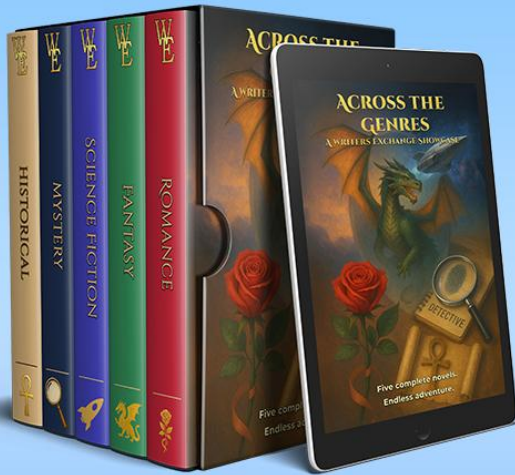
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About the Author

In addition to having been a popular writing reference instructor and writer, professional blurbologist and freelance editor, Karen Wiesner is the accomplished author of 156 titles published, which have been nominated/won for over a hundred and thirty awards. Karen's books cover such genres as women's fiction, romance, mystery/police procedural/cozy, suspense, thriller, paranormal, supernatural, futuristic, fantasy, science fiction, gothic, inspirational/Christian, horror, chick-lit, and action/adventure. She also writes children's books, poetry, and writing reference titles which have been repackaged in the 3D Fiction Fundamentals Collection. Karen will begin illustrating children's books starting in 2025.

Visit Karen's website and blog at <https://karenwiesner.weebly.com/>.

Visit her Writers Exchange E-Publishing author page at: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/karen-wiesner/>

If you want to read more about books by this author, they are listed on the following pages...

* Note: All book names in capitals are full-length novels. Lowercase indicates a novella or short story.

3D Fiction Fundamentals

3D Fiction Fundamentals Collection covers the A to Z's of crafting the highest quality fiction including how to:

- Brainstorm and work productively to ensure that each stage in the writing process from prewriting to polishing produces masterful results the first time around.
- Create an outline so complete it actually qualifies as the first draft of your book, allowing your first written draft to be final-draft quality.
- Develop realistically three-dimensional and cohesive characters, plots, settings, relationships, and scenes so life-like and memorable your readers will be diehard fans.
- Effectively prepare for a series in advance to prevent painted-in-a-corner scenarios in order to keep fans coming back eagerly for each and every installment.
- Learn innovative techniques to write a complex sequence of stories that require overarching series arcs and immense world- and character-building.
- Craft sizzling back cover, series, and high-concept blurbs for describing, promoting, and selling your books.
- Maximize your potential and momentum for becoming a career author indefinitely.

With step-by-step guidelines, instructions, and tips throughout that are flexible and clearly written, imparting a layman's ease of understanding and can-do motivation, this collection may be the only writing craft books you'll ever need. Each volume has a bonus companion booklet available presented in usable digital format that includes all the aids from the main book you can use in your own writing--and extras!

Volume 1: First Draft Outline

Say goodbye to writing and rewriting with no results. *First Draft Outline* provides you with a sure-fire system to reduce time-intensive rewrites and avoid writing detours, allowing you to create an outline so detailed and complete that it actually doubles as your first draft. Flexible and customizable, this revolutionary system can be modified to fit any writer's approach and style. With *First Draft Outline*, you'll have all the tools you need to write your masterpiece.

First Draft Outline Bonus Companion Booklet

The blank worksheets from FIRST DRAFT OUTLINE by Karen S. Wiesner are provided free in an editable digital file that allows users to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed. A print edition is also available for purchase. This bonus booklet also contains in-depth examples.

Volume 2: Cohesive Story Building

Without layering, a story is one-dimensional, unbelievable, boring. Set within the framework of comparing the process of building a house to the process of building a story, *Cohesive Story Building* gives a solid plan of action from start to finish through in-depth examples and exercises, and leave-no-stone-unturned checklists that will help writers take the plan into their own writing. Features detailed examples from published books to illustrate story-building principles.

Cohesive Story Building Bonus Companion Booklet

The blank worksheets from COHESIVE STORY BUILDING by Karen S. Wiesner are provided free in an editable digital file that allows users to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed.

A print edition is also available for purchase. This bonus booklet also contains detailed exercises and examples.

Volume 3: Writing the Standalone Series

Writing the Standalone Series covers all things that need to be taken into consideration when writing a series and provides a one-stop resource. This guide gives writers everything they need for developing their fiction series from planning ahead, getting organized, finding the focus, creating characters that capture hearts, dealing with story arcs, maintaining consistency, marketing, and so much more. This may be the only book you need to write a series that sizzles.

Writing the Standalone Series Bonus Companion Booklet

The blank worksheets from WRITING THE STANDALONE SERIES by Karen S. Wiesner are provided free in an editable digital file that allows users to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed. A print edition is also available for purchase. This bonus booklet also contains in-depth interviews with series authors and publishers.

Volume 4: Writing the Overarching Series (or How I Sent a Clumsy Girl into Outer Space)

The Overarching Series is the most complicated to read and write. Reader satisfaction comes through story arcs in each volume while the series arc only resolves in the final. Speculative fiction is well-suited to the Overarching Series structure with enormous requirements when it comes to character- and world-building. Learn the reasons series arc sequel hooks or even cliffhanger endings are characteristic, ways to avoid crafting burnout, and methods for unique construction. Reach for the stars!

Writing the Overarching Series {or How I Sent a Clumsy Girl into Outer Space} Bonus Companion Booklet

The blank worksheets from THREE-DIMENSIONAL FICTION WRITING by Karen S. Wiesner are provided in an editable digital file that allows users to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed. A print edition is also available for purchase. This bonus booklet also contains in-depth examples.

Volume 5: Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing

Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing will help writers master the three-dimensional aspects of characters, plots, and settings using detailed sketches that define the past, present, and future aspects of each element as well as develop complex opening, resolution, and bridge scenes. Packed with story-development charts, worksheets, and checklists, this one-stop resource will guide you into crafting a story so lifelike, you actually feel like you can step into the world beyond the pages.

Three-Dimensional Fiction Writing Bonus Companion Booklet

The blank worksheets from THREE-DIMENSIONAL FICTION WRITING by Karen S. Wiesner are provided free in an editable digital file that allows users to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed. A print edition is also available. This bonus booklet also contains in-depth examples.

Volume 6: CPR for Dead or Lifeless Fiction {A Writer's Guide to Deep and Multifaceted Development and Progression of Characters, Plots, and Relationships}

The three core elements of any story--Characters, Plots, and Relationships (CPR)--need to be developed three dimensionally. This resource teaches writers how to identify dead or lifeless characters, plots, and relationships; establish proper setup; plant the seeds early; and pinpoint weak areas. This guide is a writer's comprehensive 9-1-1 for deep, multifaceted Character, Plot, and Relationship development!

CPR for Dead or Lifeless Fiction {A Writer's Guide to Deep and Multifaceted Development and Progression of Characters, Plots, and Relationships} Bonus Companion Booklet

The blank worksheets from CPR FOR DEAD OR LIFELESS FICTION {A Writer's Guide to Deep and Multifaceted Development and Progression of Characters, Plots, and Relationships} by Karen S. Wiesner are provided free in an editable digital file that allows users to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed. A print edition is also available for purchase. This bonus booklet also contains detailed examples.

Volume 7: Writing Blurbs That Sizzle--And Sell!

Crafting an effectively good back cover blurb is no easy task. A blurb needs to convince readers they have to read the story inside the pages...or they'll set the book down without ever opening it. Additionally, a powerful series blurb can sell not just one book but all in that set! High-concept blurbs are necessary to provide "sound bites" that sell. The definitive guide on how to craft back cover, series, and high-concept blurbs.

Writing Blurbs That Sizzle--And Sell! Bonus Companion Booklet

The blank worksheets from WRITING BLURBS THAT SIZZLE--AND SELL! by Karen S. Wiesner are provided in an editable digital file that allows users to type right into the document and use it over and over as needed. A print edition is also available. This bonus booklet also contains in-depth exercises and examples.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/3d-fiction-fundamentals-series/>

2-in-1 Romance Books

2-in-1 Inspirational

The Amethyst Angel {Traditional Romance Book}: Elena Lopez's father has decided to play matchmaker with his long-time friend and neighbor, Marta Delgado, when Marta's nephew comes to town. Elena has a secret though: She's always loved Marta's own son Pablo. An amethyst angel belonging to a dying boy reminds Elena that spending her life waiting for something to happen isn't living and that love must be shared. Can she take the risk of telling Pablo her feelings even if he doesn't share her love?

A Home for Christmas {Inspirational Romance Book}: All Christie Renata Zondervon has ever wanted is a family, especially at Christmas-time. Craig Stevens has dried her tears, held her hand, listened to her talk about her hopes and fears at any time of day or night. She's never looked at him romantically before...until he invites her to spend Christmas with his family. How does a painfully shy man reveal his heart without voicing the words that could lead to rejection? Craig has given himself twelve days to convince Christie he can be the man of her dreams. Now it's a countdown to win her heart or bust!

2-in-1 Supernatural

The Amethyst Star {Futuristic Romance Book}: *They live in a time when humans have become an endangered species...* Thirty years ago, the men and women of Earth went off to fight in an intergalactic war. In the time since, carnivores have flourished and slaughtered most of the human race. Answering Earth's call for help to avoid extinction, Hunters have ultra-strength, speed and instincts, allowing them to destroy the carnivores. Human women have become invaluable prizes in their roles as Procreators. Pair-bonding is rare and families no longer exist. Lady Sher of the Amethyst Star is mankind's last hope for survival though her heart's desire can never be fulfilled...especially not with the hunter Randolph. On Randolph's home world, a vision of the rare star of amethyst was revealed along with the prophecy that if he loses this star, the hunter will become the hunted for all time. Will destiny and desire prove impossible goals?

Creatures of the Night {Paranormal Romance Book}: Loner and Night-owl painter Susanna Heath has just married her exotic-foreigner husband. Nicholai Rostislav disappears all day, coming to her only at night. Now she finds out that he's a bloodsucking vampire. And you thought your marriage had problems.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/2-in-one-romance-series/>

Adventures in Amethyst Series

{Contemporary Romance/Romantic Thriller}

Amethyst, WI is a small, peaceful town on a pristine lake with an active tourist season in summer. When the air turns chill, the area is transformed into a ghost town with only a handful of lifers who stay. Amethyst is bursting with mystery, romance, and jealousy all-year-round.

Adventures in Amethyst Anthology, Book 1:

A Rose for Romeo: What happens when a nationally renowned sex therapist and author begins to abhor every aspect of her successful occupation? She falls in love, of course. Dr. Melina Rose is sick of sex and has spent her life avoiding intimacy in her personal life. After abandoning everything she's worked all her life for, she returns to her hometown only to discover that everything has changed--except her crush on her sister's old boyfriend Scott "Romeo" Romero.

Revenge in Amethyst: After abandoning her career as a renowned sex therapist, Melina Rose has returned to her hometown and fallen in love with Scott Romero. Scott and Melina are ecstatically expecting a baby and planning their wedding. But someone driven by jealousy wants to see Melina's dream-life crash down. A former patient who'd revealed his disturbing fantasies only to Melina is prepared to do anything in order to keep his secrets safe.

Reckless Rose: *Even bad girls need love...* When Reece Childs rolls back into Amethyst to stay, Lona Rose realizes her reckless crush on the older brother of a former beau is still waging hot and heavy. But how to prevent the rumors and mistakes of her past from ruining the start of something wonderful? Reece has just the plan to head off the rumor mill...and make this reckless rose his own forever.

Christmas in Amethyst: Eager to make it up to her son's many disappointments in the past year, single mom Sheila Mason takes a shift at the restaurant she works on Christmas Day in order to buy Dev a puppy. When a creepy customer follows her on the deserted road from the restaurant to her home in Amethyst, her holidays go from bad to worse.

TIL SUMMER COMES AROUND, Book 2: When Quinn Rutledge and Summer Rosales met on a warm summer night on the shores of beautiful Lake Amethyst, they were both young, all was right in the world, and the only thing on their agenda was romance--one that neither of them wanted to end with the summer and closing of resort town Amethyst's tourist season. Promises and plans were made. Promises were broken...

ROSE AND THORN, Book 3: Reece Childs and Lona Rose's life together seems perfect. He can't imagine a thorn from his past could destroy his present and future happiness. He'd had no clue that Angelina, his "port" in the city he made his most frequent run to as a truck driver, was pregnant. Now she's in Amethyst, demanding he be a father and provider to their son. Even to keep Lona happy, Reece can't turn away from his own son...

BRIAR'S PATCH, Book 4: As a teenager, the first girl Roman Marasek loved was Briar Sankey. Years later, he'd married, had a daughter, and his wife died unexpectedly. Raising Harper hasn't been easy alone, and he turns to Briar for help. Briar can't refuse and suddenly she's seeing him in a whole new light...and falling in love with the sweet, shy man who's been there for her all along.

FOR AULD LANG SYNE, Book 5: For years Harper Marasek and Clay Wooten have shared an off-and-on intimacy that could never be enough for her. With the offer of a job and a marriage proposal waiting back home for her, she contacts Clay to say goodbye forever. Clay, tired of his career and meddling

family, suggests they take a road trip for *auld lang syne*. How can she refuse when the happiest moments of her life have been spent with him?

FORBIDDEN FRUIT, Book 6: Apple Wooten has wasted her life, in and out of rehab, betraying friends, and never forming attachments beyond her unhealthily cloistered family. When her brother settles down in Amethyst, their mother urges Apple to talk sense into him. The one person in Amethyst who'll give her the time of day is Bailey Johnson. But Bay knows reaching for forbidden fruit like this beautiful disaster could turn out to be the worst mistake he's ever made.

BLAME IT ON THE RAIN, Book 7: Donnie's best friend Adam is easy to admire as a pilot for a large airline. Donnie still lives in Amethyst and works in his dad's shop. Then Donnie starts to see the shoddy way Adam treats his girl Tally. He tries to convince her she'd be better off with *him*. But, even when Tally falls for him instead, she can't easily turn away from the father of the child she never expected to be carrying...

NEVER A BRIDE, Book 8 (Halloween)

When Charlize met Ben, he was in a committed relationship--the last thing she wanted. When she returns, Ben and Layla have broken up, but his ex- is having a change of heart. Despite the complications, the solution could be as simple as a kiss.

UNLUCKY IN LOVE, Book 9 (Thanksgiving)

Unlucky in love and unable to count their blessings during the Thanksgiving holiday, Layla and Adam find themselves jilted at the same time by the person they assumed was their soulmate. Heartbroken, snowed in and forced to share the only available cabin in town, they have no choice but to re-evaluate everything they've ever wanted in life...and love.

SHOTGUN WEDDING, Book 10 (Christmas): Trevor and Eden married right out of high school due to pregnancy. At the time, she'd worried he was disenchanted, his attention consumed by Delaney. In their years of marriage, she's never felt secure she was his choice. When she finds herself competing with Delaney during Christmas, she's aware of her every flaw. To top things off, they find out their oldest son is sexually active. The last thing they need is another shotgun wedding.

Adventures in Amethyst Series Trio of Holiday Romances (3 in 1 volume) including:

Halloween: NEVER A BRIDE, Book 8: When Charlize met Ben, he was in a committed relationship--the last thing she wanted. When she returns, Ben and Layla have broken up, but his ex- is having a change of heart. Despite the complications, the solution could be as simple as a kiss.

Thanksgiving: UNLUCKY IN LOVE, Book 9: Layla and Adam find themselves jilted. Heartbroken and snowed in, they re-evaluate life...and love.

Christmas: SHOTGUN WEDDING, Book 10: Right out high school, Trevor and Eden married for the baby on the way. Years later, she finds herself competing again with the woman he'd been interested in back then, and their shotgun wedding is called into question.

ADVENTURES IN AMETHYST COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (10 books in 1 volume): Amethyst, WI is a small, peaceful town on a pristine lake with an active tourist season in summer. When the air turns chill, the area is transformed into a ghost town with only a handful of lifers who stay. Amethyst is bursting with mystery, romance, and jealousy all-year-round.

Angelfire Series

{Contemporary Romance}

*There are no scars like those inflicted in childhood, and no love like your first.
Timeless couples seek out the unconditional love and healing of an angel and the scorching heat of
unending passion.
Heaven's promise, desires flame...*

FALLING STAR, Book 1: *A man of God, a fallen angel. Two different worlds, one undying love...* For the first time in her life, Rori is independent, supporting herself, has friends who love her, and--most importantly--she respects herself. Nate broke her by marrying her rival. 11 years later, Nate has lost his wife, gained a child and, at the end of it all, realizes Rori is still the woman of his heart.

FIRST LOVE, Book 2: During a traumatic childhood, Darlene's only light was Jason, her best friend and eventually her lover. Until she found out that she wasn't the only, she dreamed of escape and being together forever. At 17, she left home alone and forced herself to overcompensate for her upbringing by never trusting anyone, especially Jace. Years later, Darlene is in desperate need of a friend. Maybe she can share her heart with her first love, forever.

FOREVER MAN, Book 3: Brett Foxx has loved and he's lost. He's put a lifetime of anger, recklessness and a multitude of sins behind him. The road warrior has finally settled down and he plans to keep himself as far from love as he can get. He's not looking for trouble, but if anyone can give it to him it's his former lawyer and unrequited fantasy Savvy O'Brien.

ONLY THE LONELY, Book 4: Mikey Lund has been in love with most of his female friends from afar for years yet never considered any of them truly an option for him. His friend Diane Hoffman learns her boyfriend is married with kids and asks him if he'll help her convince Robert she's over him. But Diane soon discovers that Mike is the perfect "pretend" boyfriend...so perfect, she can't help wondering if their amazingly sweet, sexy, romantic relationship could last in the real world.

MIDNIGHT ANGEL, Book 5: Roxanne Hart has endured a jet-set life as a model with everything, but she's never been satisfied by it. The love of her life was like a midnight angel--there and then gone, reality within a dream. Learning she has cancer, Rox's determined to do all the things she's always wanted to without regret...like letting herself love her midnight angel, even with the more-than-a-little-likely chance she'll lose everything.

SHADOWS OF THE NIGHT, Book 6: The horror Ty and his younger brother suffered at their father's hands scarred them both and ultimately Ty can't save his brother. Filled with fury, he knows the time has come for him to face all he's been running from. The rape that drove Cherish's fiancé away left her terrified of getting close to anyone. When she meets Ty, she realizes how much she's missed by being afraid of the shadows of the night.

PROMISES IN THE DARK, Book 7: William Decker has lived on the principle of "You can't be hurt by anything you haven't invested yourself in"...and he can't deny it's done little beyond keep him lonely. Sapphire Stephenson's entire life is wrapped up in being a good role model for her daughter and not trusting any man. Decker is the one exception. But is even he capable of more than promises in the dark?

ANGELFIRE COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (7 books in one volume): Timeless couples seek out the unconditional love and healing of an angel and the scorching heat of unending passion.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/angelfire-series/>

Arrow of Time Chronicles

{Romantic Science Fiction}

A timeless universal truth: No simple solutions, no easy answers, and nothing is ever free...

When mankind realized Earth would become uninhabitable, Humans built space habitations. Their first allies arrived in 2073 and shared their technology to power ships through space corridors that fold space and time. Only 58 years into their struggle for survival, an enemy emerges. In the wake of this threat an organic menace is only beginning to be recognized, ensuring the annihilation of every living thing if, together, they can't find a way to stop it.

IMMUTABLE, Book 1: Spacefaring liveship, the *Aero*, is on a routine mission to the far-flung regions of the galaxy when they receive a distress call from their oldest space habitation outside the Sol System. The structure has been brutally attacked, inhabitants kidnapped or outright killed. The crew aboard the *Aero* including Astoria Bertolotti, librarian and planet cataloger, and Raze Salen, mankind's emissary, search for clues to explain the unprecedented tragedy. After several more, similar distress calls from other habitations, the savage pieces of the mystery begin to emerge--and point to the culpability of humanity's short-sightedness and desperation when they first began seeking out alternate spaces in the galaxy to call home. In the midst of the imminent threat of war, Raze and Tori present the immutable evidence of wrongdoing both intentional and inadvertent to their government as well as to their strongest and weakest allies who may have no choice but to desert them in yet another hour of dire need.

INEVITABLE, Book 2: Tori Bertolotti, librarian and planet cataloger, and Raze Salen, mankind's emissary, aboard the Human spacefaring liveship the *Aero* have convinced their government of the dire need to negotiate formal alliances with the other cultures in the galaxy. The monumental task they're undertaking and the consequences of failure are mind-rattlingly clear. Complications muddle the mission in the form of uneasy truces and frustrating stalemates, long-held enigmatical cosmologies suddenly called into life-altering question, along with immediate and imminent threats that could tear apart the fabric of the entire universe and everything living in it.

INDELIBLE, Book 3: Tori Bertolotti, librarian and planet cataloger, and Raze Salen, mankind's emissary, aboard the Human spacefaring liveship the *Aero* have succeeded in creating a Galactic Alliance with other cultures in their universe in order to protect themselves from an adversary who considers itself the supreme race, the Chosen of the Creator. Cultures that at one time would have considered all others antithetical to their own no longer have a choice about facing the indisputable fact that, though they've all come from different planets and far-flung sectors of the galaxy, they are genetically one and the same. But can the enemy of my enemy become my friend against the warring Sinshe...as well as an organic process that won't be stopped until all life to the farthest corners of the universe ceases to exist and only darkness reigns?

INDOMITABLE, Book 4: Newlyweds Tori Bertolotti and Raze Salen--the heart and soul of the Human spacefaring liveship the *Aero*--are separated. Ambassador Raze continues to negotiate formal alliances while Tori and the best scientific minds in the galaxy try to figure out how to stop the organic menace swallowing the universe in darkness. Meanwhile, civil war threatens to erupt between Earthers and Spacers and the leader of the Napoleonic Sinshe has defected. But can he convince his people...including his own sons leading the armada against all other worlds and cultures...that they've been indoctrinated and enslaved to lies against their will?

ARROW OF TIME CHRONICLES COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (4 volumes in one volume): A timeless universal truth: No simple solutions, no easy answers, and nothing is ever free...

When mankind realized Earth would become uninhabitable, Humans built space habitations. Their first allies arrived in 2073 and shared their technology to power ships through space corridors that fold space and time. Only 58 years into their struggle for survival, an enemy emerges. In the wake of this threat an organic menace is only beginning to be recognized, ensuring the annihilation of every living thing if, together, they can't find a way to stop it.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/arrow-of-time-chronicles/>

Bloodmoon Cove Spirits Series

{Ghost Story/Supernatural/Fantasy/Paranormal/Gothic Romance}

*Nestled on Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin is a small, secluded town called Bloodmoon Cove with volatile weather, suspicious folk...and newly awakened ghosts.
Don't close your eyes...*

BOUND SPIRITS, Book 1: As a child, Esme was kidnapped and locked in a cold, dark basement. Her friends were rodents, insects, and the changeable terror that held her hostage. The only thing that kept her sane those nightmare years were her books. She's been on the run since her escape a few months ago, never expecting to find another bound spirit come back to life.

THE BLOODMOON CURSE, Book 2: *An unsuspecting nurse is lured to an ancient family mansion said to hold both ghosts and horrifying secrets in order to care for three orphaned children.* Amberlyn was brought to Bloodmoon Manor to uphold the family legacy. Either she finds a way to escape with the children...or she becomes the next bloodmoon bride.

CROOKED HOUSE, Book 3: *Some doors, once opened, can never be closed again...* Corinne has become the heir of her dead husband's family estate. Crooked House lives up to its disturbing name, as does the last of the line who disappears so often she could believe he's a ghost. But to believe is to accept the claims of ghost hunter, Rafe Yager: The longer she stays in Crooked House, the less chance she'll ever leave.

RETURN TO BLOODMOON MANOR, Book 4 {sequel to THE BLOODMOON CURSE, Book 2}: *Back into the mouth of hell...* Daniel and Hannah are newly married with their first child on the way when Hannah is bequeathed Bloodmoon Manor. After a lifetime of poverty, the wealth associated with that house appeals to her despite that she'd barely escaped it last time with her life. Daniel's worst fears are justified. They've been lured here deliberately, and the horrors that haunt the manor aren't willing to let Hannah leave ever again...

REUNITED, Book 5: Twyla Kotter has spent the last three years of her life suffering under the depraved, insanely cruel hands of her husband Dominic. His death gives her a new lease on life: Freedom from his perversions and abuses and the chance to fall in love a second time with someone who truly cares about her-her old friend Graham "Gray" Mecham, now the Erie County sheriff. But even when Dominic is finally dead and her escape from his terror should be certain, she realizes her happiness isn't meant to be because her husband never really let her go, even in death. Dominic's vengeful ghost followed her home to Bloodmoon Cove with Gray and he's determined to reunite them in death and the afterlife so she never again forgets who she belongs to.

HIDDEN, Book 6: *What you don't know can hurt you...*

Sybilla marries her much older entrepreneur partner Tobias. Their publishing house produces a book series focused on unusual homes. After suffering memory loss about his past, Tobias inherits an isolated estate at the top of a mountain. Uncovering its mysteries becomes their next project.

The voice of a ghost urges, Find me, leading Syl to hidden rooms and the skeletons of a family desperate to escape its demons...

BONE OF MY BONE, Book 7: When Bennet was 8, he fell for Ice despite how she concealed who she was and where she came from. When they were 19, she disappeared. Still grieving a year later, he's floored at her return. Her comment about "how to bury what won't stay dead" compels him to solve her mysteries. But how does a mortal fight creation's first murderer when the entity bears an immortal seal and made a pact with the devil?

LOST AND FOUND, A Bloodmoon Cove Spirits Series 2-in-1, Book 8 {Halloween}:

LOST: *True self-discovery begins in being lost and then found again.* A strange family found Damaris unconscious near their cottage. Their ill-advised excavating efforts uncover a tunnel that may lead to a cage holding what they don't dare set free...

FOUND: *Are the lost and found souls of this world misplaced...or misled?* Just when Wick dares to hope his lifelong loneliness is at an end, Fate...or something far more sinister...may be cruel enough to take away everything he's ever wanted.

HELL HATH NO FURY, Book 9 {Halloween}: *Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned...*

Just out of college, Bella inherits a house in Bloodmoon Cove that seems perfect to live in and start a boutique with her childhood best friends. They joke about the house being haunted, but one ghost is trying desperately to communicate with her. Her great grandfather was an illegal alien who left Cuba to escape a suicidally unhappy girl with just one solace in her life...

BAD BLOOD, Book 10 {Halloween}: *Blood will have blood...*

George and Rafe are some of the last descendants of the Mino-Miskwi Native American tribe. Their elders disappeared 125 years ago after tearing a hole in the veil between worlds. From the beginning, George has been cautious about anything mystical. But is eldritch justice the only thing that can heal Erie County's paranormal vulnerability once and for all? Or will the already thin veil between worlds be sundered completely?

BLOODMOON COVE SPIRITS COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (10 books in 1 volume): Nestled on Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin is a small, secluded town called Bloodmoon Cove with volatile weather, suspicious folk...and newly awakened ghosts.

Don't close your eyes...

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/bloodmoon-cove-spirits-series/>

Denim Blues Mysteries

{Christian Romantic Mystery}

Briar's Point is a whimsical little town with its fair share of colorful characters, crime, and a Cupid suffering from the denim blues. See if you can find denim blue in each story!

ON THE ROCKS, Book 1 (private investigator): *A missing engagement ring leads to murder...* Denim McHart's private investigating career ended with a bullet in the leg yet he can't keep his mind off his investigative partner, Sylvia Price. Before the sparks can fly between them, jilted bride Naomi Deva hires them. Her groom--Mayor Julian--dumped her at the altar and the local police department hasn't been able to turn up the 6.1 carat diamond engagement ring. Julian wants it back. Immediately.

LOVE IS BLIND, Book 2 (police procedural): Keeya Nilsen, visually impaired from the plane crash that took her parents' lives, comes to Detective Orlando Bateman and has a justifiably bad attitude about love. All the men she's ever loved have cheated on her and robbed her...including the last one, who absconded with her grandfather's unpublished Blues compositions.

FATE OF SOULS, Book 3 (amateur sleuth): Erin Shanley, a hospice nurse, turns amateur sleuth when she realizes that some of her patients are being swindled out of their life savings by the fortunetellers new to Briar's Point. She confides in her neighbor, Tyler, whom she's reluctantly shared something more with. But when Erin's bumbling sleuthing attempts arouse someone's wrath, she realizes her heart isn't the only thing in danger.

DENIM BLUES MYSTERIES COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (3 books in 1 volume): Briar's Point is a whimsical little town with its fair share of colorful characters, crime, and a Cupid suffering from the denim blues. See if you can find denim blue in each story!

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/denim-blues-mysteries/>

Falcon's Bend Series with Chris Spindler

{Mystery/Police Procedural/Romantic Suspense}

Falcon's Bend is a small, sleepy town in Wisconsin that owns more taverns than churches, but fills both on the appropriate days. Teenagers talk of escape from the one-horse town because nothing ever seems to happen. But, even here in the Heartland, police investigators Pete Shasta, Danny Vincent and Amber Carfi fight a never-ending battle to keep their beloved families and hometown safe and sound.

DEGREES OF SEPARATION, Book 1: *Who is killing the midnight ladies?* One fateful night a dancer from the town's scandalous strip joint is found strangled. It soon becomes clear to Investigators Pete Shasta and Danny Vincent that the close-knit "family" at the nightclub is a bizarre breeding-ground for unbalanced feelings and obsessions. Pete and Danny race to peel away layers of bitterness before another girl falls victim to the dance of death.

TEARS ON STONE, Book 2: *Is murder ever justifiable?* Pete Shasta's brother Jordan's new neighbor is actually an old one from their childhood. Seeing bruises on MaryEmma, Jordan asks his brother to check into her past. Shelley's husband died in a fire only a week before they came to Falcon's Bend. Meanwhile, Shelley's new boyfriend is found bludgeoned to death, and the investigators can't help noticing she leaves a trail of dead men behind her...and Jordan may be next.

FALCON'S BEND CASE FILES, VOLUME I (THE EARLY CASES)

Bugs: A partially digested body is found in the oxidation ditch at the Falcon's Bend Wastewater Treatment Plant. Was it an accident...or is Pete facing his first murder?

Broken Wings: Just two months ago, a runaway daughter Keith Pierce never knew he had landed on his doorstep. Seventeen years earlier, Keith had a brief, intense affair with a woman on the lam. When he returns to Kat's hometown of Falcon's Bend to find his daughter's mother, he discovers that Kat disappeared shortly after giving birth to Quinn. Investigator Pete Shasta solves a decade and a half old missing-person case that's about to turn into murder.

Obsessions: A newborn baby is stolen from Falcon's Bend Community Hospital's maternity ward...and Pete's only lead is to the Liace Adoption Agency which set up the open adoption. Case Representative Lisa Mercer is as suspicious and defensive as she is beautiful. With a kidnapper who seems to believe there's nothing left to lose and potentially everything to gain, and his own uncontrollable feelings for Lisa, Pete's about to learn just how dangerous obsessions can be.

Blind Revenge: For the first three years of her life, Lindsay Bronwyn had nightmares about a witch who wanted her eyes. Nineteen years later, those nightmares have come true when she's found murdered on her kitchen floor, her eye sockets empty. Falcon's Bend Investigator Danny Vincent faces the supernatural to get at a chilling flesh and blood truth.

Fixated: Someone has been following new Falcon's Bend citizen Risa Nitzberg for the past few weeks. Victor Brooks, her neighbor from across the street who's become fixated with Risa from afar, steps in when Risa's creepy stalker decides to get up close and personal.

THE FIFTEENTH LETTER, Book 3: On the anniversary of his arrest each year, Zeke Carfi receives a threatening letter signed by the wife of his deceased partner in crime. When Zeke is released on parole, his daughter Amber finds herself questioning everything. Is Zeke a good man? Is it possible to turn from a life a crime? Their reconciliation is cut short when Amber discovers the fifteenth letter...and the key to a fifteen-year mystery that could lead to murder.

ROMANTIC NOTIONS, Book 4: *Love--and murder--is in the air*. Falcon's Bend Patrol Officers Amber Carfi and Warren Jensen are partners on the job and lovers off-duty. In order to find a killer, their superiors decide to put her undercover. But her assignment goes from dull to deadly when she discovers a murderer harboring romantic notions...

FALCON'S BEND CASE FILES, VOLUME II

Murder on the Heartstrings: Pete Shasta takes his lovely wife Lisa on a romantic vacation, promising her no mysteries, no crime, and certainly no murder. Just his luck, a body is found stuffed into a janitor's closet at the inn.

Double Take (Sequel to *Fixated* from *Falcon's Bend Files, Volume 1*): Victor Brooks, celebrated artist and owner of The Brooks Gallery in Falcon's Bend, contacts local police about a missing painting. The very next day, two more pieces of art are stolen. Patrol Officers Amber Carfi and Warren Jensen stake out the gallery, hoping to catch an insatiable thief.

Retribution: The subdivision Pete and Danny live in becomes home to a hot young mama. It isn't until the beauty disappears, leaving her two young children alone, that they realize crime is firmly afoot.

Up In Smoke: A local Christmas tree farm burns to the ground. Owner Mitchell Ferrara is officially out of business for the holiday season. But was the fire an accident...or the means to cover up evidence of a crime?

Flashback: In the midst of planning for the birth of his first child, Danny is called away because a person missing for seven months has suddenly, and suspiciously, dropped back from out of nowhere.

Ghost of the Past: written over to her saying someone has been following her all day and he's now in the restaurant. 16 years earlier, Ericka gave birth to a baby she didn't want and she threw him in a dumpster. She's about to discover the hard way that mistakes have a way of haunting the guilty no matter how far they run...

AS PATIENT AS DEATH, Book 5: Pete and Lisa's neighbor Eva has suffered from cancer most of her life. She met Jerome and he swept her off her feet. Lisa discovers that, not only has Jerome taken out an immense life insurance policy on her, but he's been married twice before...to terminally ill women. Unexpectedly, Eva's in remission. Will a man who's been as patient as death become a killer when the goal he'd been waiting to be realized is thwarted?

PRETTY FLY, Book 6: Shayna moves home to Falcon's Bend after her romance turns disastrous. While staying with her brother Danny, she meets up with Sean, an old crush who's recently widowed and the father of a 17-year-old. When Danny finds out she's seeing Futrell, he tells her the deaths of Sean's wives were more than a little suspicious. But rebellious Sean is exactly what Shayna needs. What pretty fly could resist the invitation of such a seductive spider?

Falcon's Bend Case Files, Volume III:

First Sight (sequel to *Blind Revenge* from *Falcon's Bend Case Files, Volume I*): On his last day on the job, Warren and Amber are called to the Falcon's Bend High School. Sloane Oligney and math teacher Chad Martin are the unfortunate hostages of a troubled student who blames Sloane for her daughter breaking up with him.

Identity: When his father is diagnosed with cancer, Pete tries to find his long-lost older sister by he's gone by the time she's located. Is his sister's homecoming too little, too late...in more ways than one?

Cupid's Romance: Danny and Amber get a case from an on-the-verge-of-divorce newlywed complaining of a stalker. Rye Iverson doesn't know who's sending him notes signed "Cupid" that insist he continue the happily-ever-after brought about by the winged messenger of love.

Out of Mind: Amber and her new partner Fergie get a case of a woman on the run who insists she's being pursued by her childhood kidnapper. When she disappears again, the officers are left to piece together the tragedy of a child who may never escape her trauma.

Lonely Hearts: Pete's wife Lisa becomes concerned about her sister-in-law's sibling Shelley's involvement in a "lonely hearts" support group, where she falls for a man accused of fraud and murder. Is Shelley again a victim or an accessory to organized crime?

Assassin: FBI agent Robert Lock shows up in Falcon's Bend at Christmas-time. Once his own undercover assignment, a doomsday cult is focused on bringing down the WWW, Lock's current interest is in protecting his wife Azure, the Associate Deputy Director's daughter, who's not only involved in the cult but has to prove her loyalty to them by killing him...

FALCON'S BEND COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (9 books in 1 volume): Falcon's Bend is a small, sleepy town in Wisconsin that owns more taverns than churches, but fills both on the appropriate days. Teenagers talk of escape from the one-horse town because nothing ever seems to happen. But, even here in the Heartland, police investigators Pete Shasta, Danny Vincent and Amber Carfi fight a never-ending battle to keep their beloved families and hometown safe and sound.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/falcons-bend-series/>

Family Heirlooms Series

{Inspirational Romance}

Nuggets of faith can be passed down as family heirlooms from parent to child, sibling to sibling, spouse to spouse.

BABY, BABY, Book 1: 37-year-old Tamara married her childhood sweetheart Robert right out of high school and proceeded to have a passel of children who fill her life. With the last in preschool, Tamara decides to make a business out of her love of designing gift baskets. She doesn't expect Robert to be against it. Is she being selfish or is God leading her to continue being an outdated model of the Proverbs 31 wife--submissive, but never equal?

SHADOW BOXING, Book 2: *Joined before God and family out of a sense of responsibility? Or love?* As a teenager, Justine's escape from the pressures of caring for her dying father was stolen moments with Joshua. But their tender, desperate liaison found them facing teen pregnancy and they married quickly. Now, with their empty nest looming, they face the hard questions. Had they married in love...or out of a hasty sense of responsibility?

FOOLISH GAMES, Book 3: She was one of his late wife's best friends. He's the man she's loved from afar for as long as she can remember. Falling in love could take simply letting go of their fears...or a miracle.

GLASS ANGELS, Book 4: Samantha struggles with seeking pardon from those she's hurt when she can't seem to forgive those who wronged her. In the time since Kyle's brother was jailed for his crime against Samantha, he's lived with the torment of all he's lost. Seeing her again puts him right back where he was before. In the crossfire of faith, she wonders if glass angels shatter or if they can heal and become stronger than ever before.

SHARDS OF ASHLEY, Book 5: Ashley grew up in a troubled home with a mother who played at being a Christian when she needed to...and led Ashley to more addictions than one child could handle. As an adult, Ashley spends most of her time holding back the horrors she's not willing to face. The one man who gets through her defenses is Jay, but even he doesn't realize the extent of all she's buried...

WORLDS COLLIDE, Book 6: After twelve years of watching his happily married siblings and their children, Dr. Marcus Samuels can no longer deny the chronic ache inside him to start a family--though he has serious doubts about his wife-hunting abilities at the age of forty. Who better to fall in love with than your very best friend?

FAMILY HEIRLOOMS COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (6 books in 1 volume): Nuggets of faith can be passed down as family heirlooms from parent to child, sibling to sibling, spouse to spouse.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/family-heirlooms-series/>

Friendship Heirlooms Series (Family Heirlooms spin off)

Return to Peaceful, Wisconsin and read the stories of those secondary characters in an all-new spin-off series. Nuggets of faith can be passed down as heirlooms from friend to friend, heart to heart, soul-mate to soul-mate.

CLUMSY GIRL'S GUIDE TO FALLING IN LOVE, Book 1: *They were two abnormal peas in an even stranger pod...* Zoe is the clumsy girl who always has her elbows, feet, eyes, and brass-red hair going in the wrong directions. After a lifetime of being evaluated critically--and found wanting--she's trying to change...until she literally runs into the only man she's ever gone loopy over. Curt has spent years trying to forget her, but he can't help remembering how well they fit together.

MICHAEL'S ANGEL, Book 2: Michael has had it drilled into him from birth that he's not worth saving. Then he met his angel LeeAnn. Together, they thought they'd escaped the horrors of their childhoods...but even as their dreams are coming true, the harbinger of doom waits, intent on taking away everything they've ever wanted.

FOREVER AND ALL THAT JAZZ, Book 3: Newlyweds Jasmine and Wesley find out her sickly father can no longer live alone. Wes is barely coping with the extreme changes marriage has wrought as it is. Then her father tells Jazz her mother walked away to return to her career. Jazz has to know if her mother regrets her choices before she drops yet another life-changing anvil on her husband's already aching head.

FIRST COMES LOVE, Book 4: At the age of fifteen, Chad Feldmann and Winnie McBride made an impulsive choice that led to pregnancy. Now, years later, they have a precious little girl, they've both graduated high school, and they're married. But all is not well in paradise. They've done everything backwards-- the baby carriage, then marriage--but, regardless of all the wrongs committed, first came love...

PERFECT REFLECTION, Book 5: Elaina Houston has been taught to look, act and speak perfectly. When she couldn't live up to the impossible expectations, she threw herself away. Now she has a second chance. Ethan Lynwood, her friend and maybe more, seems to like her just the way she is even when she's a mess...maybe *especially* when she is.

CLUMSY GIRL'S GUIDE TO HAVING A BABY, Book 6: Clumsy girl Zoe Rosedale is back, married to the love of her life, Curt Bertolotti, and setting off on another crazy adventure--maybe the most fun and dangerous of all. Having a baby!

ALL GOOD THINGS, Book 7: *All good things must come to an end, but bad things continue forever?*

Vashti, Roz, and Justice grew up together, but their friendship fractured when Vashti realized Roz felt only jealousy for her over Justice. When Justice ends up in the hospital after Roz commits suicide and nearly extinguishes his life too, Vashti is the last person he wants there. His life's been spent in the middle and, even with Roz's death, he's not free.

FRIENDSHIP HEIRLOOMS COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (7 books in 1 volume): Return to Peaceful, Wisconsin and read the stories of those secondary characters in an all-new spin-off series.

Nuggets of faith can be passed down as heirlooms from friend to friend, heart to heart, soul-mate to soul-mate.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/friendship-heirlooms-series/>

Gypsy Road Series

{Contemporary Romance}

Four gypsies on a solitary road...until love throws a fork in their paths.

LEATHER & LACE, Book 1: *Can a rogue find love with the girl next door? Not if his ex-girlfriends have any say in it!* Bethany is a wallflower. Rod is notorious for the string of broken hearted girlfriends he's left behind. Even when she sees a teddy bear beneath his wild exterior, she isn't sure she can trust her heart.

FLESH & BLOOD, Book 2: After risking her heart once and learning to regret it, JoJo lives her life as a paper doll. No emotions, no danger and no pain. Randy is the one man who can change her mind. His only ace in the hole is that she underestimates the power of love...

FIRE & ICE, Book 3: Jon has finally found the answer to a lifetime of misplaced guilt and misery. Tracey is unlike anyone he's ever met. She's completely open and honest--and determined to have a baby, ASAP. Even as Jon vows to be everything she'll ever need and Tracey sets her heart on him, the past rears its ugly head. What Tracey wants most of all is the one thing Jon can't give her...

VOWS & THE VAGABOND, Book 4: *They both want what they can't have--each other.* Hard lessons have been kicked into Blackie from birth, leaving him cynical and afraid to trust. Lori has loved Blackie all her life. After one stolen night together, he'd torn her soul in two when he admitted their relationship was based on vows he'd made to her father. Five years later, she comes home and Blackie doesn't know how to deal with unresolved feelings...and reborn needs.

GYPSY ROAD COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (4 books in 1 volume): Four gypsies on a solitary road...until love throws a fork in their paths.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/gypsy-road-series/>

Incognito Series

{Action-Adventure/Romantic Suspense}

Men and women who have sacrificed their personal identities to live in the shadows and uphold justice for all--no matter the cost.

NO ORDINARY LOVE, Book 1: *A woman without a past; a man without explanations.* Kira has had nightmares as long as she can remember, and Vincent's resistance to help her discover her past is taking its toll. Kira has become the sole reason for Vincent's existence since the moment her child eyes met his. As Kira struggles, Vincent fiercely guards the truth. To seek out the truth of her past would be to put both their lives in danger...

UNTIL DEATH DO US PART, Book 2: Order has been restored to the Network after the corrupt former Head of Operations disappeared, intent on destroying the reporters who uncovered his plot. Operatives Kirsten Ulrick and Ash Barnett go undercover to protect them from their seemingly invisible enemy. The operatives accept they can't protect the Harris' without becoming involved in their lives, but seeing the couples' pain reflects their own private torment. For them, there is no life and no love, only duty.

BOUNTY ON THE REBEL'S HEART, Book 3: Rebel Porter is a man on the edge. His wife was killed to silence evidence he uncovered on a dangerously corrupt man of power. Now Reb is in hiding, as afraid to lose someone else to the bounty on his head as to lose his heart to another woman. Network operative Natalie Francis goes undercover to protect Reb and his evidence. When Natalie realizes she's fallen for him, she considers the impossible: Escaping the Network.

DEAD DROP, Book 4: Perry L'Engle has never been convinced the car accident that took the life of the man she loved was real. Just before Daniel's disappearance, he was approached by a covert agency. Now the scenario takes place again with their son. Only legitimate death can free Daniel--Roan Emory--from the agency that recruited him against his will. Ironically, the only person who can save their son from the same fate is Roan himself.

UNDER THE SPELL, Book 5: Alex Lynch has spent a lifetime working toward the goal of owning Triple Aces Ranch. His dream has finally come true when Gina Calhoun--a girl he'd loved all his life--drops back into his life. Little does Alex realize that the woman he's falling under the spell of all over again is there on a mission to uncover and stop the dangerous men who killed her father...and Alex is her chief suspect.

RENEGADE'S ROSE, Book 6: Network operative Hunter Savage is nearly at death's door when he turns renegade to save his sister, kidnapped by the Black Pope, Rex Kovac, leader of the covert terrorist organization R.E.D. Hunter's only means of saving Celine? Steal Kovac's most prized possession--his wife. But Tanya isn't as innocent as she seems...and Hunter is nowhere near as indifferent to her charms as he wants and needs to be to save his sister.

UNDERCOVER ANGEL, Book 7: Second in Network command Shannon McKee leads the organization with an iron fist, just as her father did before her. Yet, when the opportunity comes to take down the most notorious drug dealer in history, she goes after her heart's desire--to utterly destroy the man who killed her younger brother. Is Mareno Ortega a man with no options...or is he trying to seduce her in a cat and mouse chase she can't win?

HARD TO HANDLE, Book 8: Network operative Dez Luttino hadn't counted on mentoring someone like ruthless hunting machine Nova Granger, who didn't follow any rules except her own, but somehow he helped tame her reckless nature. Little does Nova realize Dez has been instructed to get close to her and encourage her to trust him implicitly in preparation for a dangerous uncover mission. Dez soon realizes he's gone beyond duty and done the unthinkable by falling in love.

DANCE IN SHADOWS, Book 9: Long-time Head of Network Operations Angelo Pluzetti has faced danger in every form. He gives his loyalty without question, but he's kept his heart, emotions and personal needs buried. Then he's targeted by a terrorist organization and kidnapped. The last thing he expects is the deceptively-frail, Network doctor and the mother of his unborn child, Celine Savage, to be the one to save his life and unbury his heart.

HYPNOTIZED, Book 10: Sherry Mansfield is a talented hypnotist. When she sends the Network a message through a suicide bomber that she wants to escape her abusive husband--the leader of a small terrorist group--they offer her a deal: They'll rescue her if she'll use her skill for them. Network operatives--and former secret lovers--Noah Harlow and Rhiannon Murray must rescue Dr. Mansfield to keep the world at large from falling into jeopardy.

MIND GAMES, Book 11: After nearly 25 years in Network service, psychiatrist Jocelyn Dominica has determined the fate of every operative in the agency. When she's diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, her superiors decide it's time for her to retire and she's no longer sure who to trust. A fall that could have stolen her life puts her in the hands of a man who tells her he's her husband and loves her...but may be trying to kill her.

DARK APPROACH, Book 12: Network operatives and lovers Lucy Carlton and Vic Leventhal have spent years living in shadows, the property of the covert organization they gave their loyalty to in the lofty pursuit of justice for all. When the Network's arch enemies secretly approach the two about defecting, the couple must choose between love and loyalty. In the process, they jeopardize the Network's anonymity...and its very existence.

INCOGNITO COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (12 books in 1 volume): Men and women who have sacrificed their personal identities to live in the shadows and uphold justice for all--no matter the cost.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/incognito-series/>

Peaceful Pilgrims Series

{Contemporary Romance}

Peaceful Pilgrims Series is set in Karen Wiesner's fictional town of Peaceful, Wisconsin, a small community with old-fashioned values and friendly people you'll want to get to know and visit often.

HOME, Book 1: {Inspirational Romantic Fiction}: Small-town girl Ayodele "Della" Flynn lives in a city she abhors, where danger seems to be lurking around every corner. When her husband dies very unexpectedly, she's confronted with figuring out where her home is with her young son River and trying to come to terms with the loose ends her husband left their lives in.

DESTINY, Book 2: {Inspirational Romantic Fiction}: Chris and Elizabeth grew up together as clichéd church kids, but he quickly found everything about his life stifling. In the next 13 years, he returns to her whenever he hits bottom. Deep down, he understands she alone will always love him. When a rapist's attack on her is thwarted, Chris's world collapses. Too little, too late, has he fallen in love when his angel of mercy is no longer available to him?

ONCE UPON A CLICHÉ, Book 3: (Contemporary Romance): *A series of unfortunate events leads her on a journey in which everything goes wrong...* Detached and ignored for most of her life, Brayla is the awkward, ugly duckling destined for spinsterhood who's never been kissed. When she starts corresponding with a man from a "Meet Exotic Singles" website, she drops everything for the chance at happily-ever-after. What she expects to happen falls through while the unexpected may turn into all she ever dreamed...

HEARTS ABLAZE, Book 4 {Contemporary Romance}: Riley is an ultra-modern woman. She wants a successful career, her own life, and love that sets her heart ablaze. In short, she wants everything. Blaze is old-fashioned, believing marriage means a husband and wife live together, sleep together every night, and eventually raise a family together--and those kids don't spend most of their hours in daycare. Sometimes trying to have it all with no quarter given means losing what matters most...

A PERFECT MATCH, Book 5: (Romantic Suspense): Lena supports her abusive older brother and raises his daughter. Her friend convinced her to sign up for Perfect Match online dating but she ignores it until Dante responds to her profile. She'd had a major crush on her brother's friend as a girl. After she agrees to meet him, she discovers he only wanted to get laid. She's mortified...until he begs for a second chance to prove he's a good man.

REKINDLED, Book 6 {Contemporary Romance}: Landon and Nickira met and fell hard. The only child of rich parents, she was engaged to the man her father picked out for her. Landon convinced her to give it all up for him. Disowned, she got pregnant before the wedding. In the fallout, a princess realized she wasn't cut out for squalor and a dirt-poor playboy didn't have the skills to hold onto heaven. 40 years later, can dying embers rekindle?

EXILED HEARTS, Book 7 {Inspirational Romantic Fiction}: When his ex-girlfriend Stella dumps their newborn on him, Avery Worchester seeks out photographer and nanny Jayne Eyre Huntington's help. The child of an asylum seeker, Jayne was adopted by an American couple. She learned early to keep secrets from their sabotaging daughter.

Soon, she's caught up in Avery's life and her own growing feelings for him. When venturing into the miry wilds of love, what can a heart expect to meet beyond certain exile?

PEACEFUL PILGRIMS COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (7 books in 1 volume):

Peaceful Pilgrims Series is set in Karen Wiesner's fictional town of Peaceful, Wisconsin, a small community with old-fashioned values and friendly people you'll want to get to know and visit often.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/a-peaceful-pilgrim-book-series/>

Woodcutter's Grim Series

{Romantic Fantasy/Mild Horror}

For the ten generations since the evil first came to Woodcutter's Grim, the Guardians have sworn an oath to protect the town from the childhood horrors that lurk in the black woods. Without them, the town would be defenseless...and the terrors would escape to the world at large.

Woodcutter's Grim Series Anthology, Volume I {Classic Tales of Horror Retold} (Book 1):

Papa: *A horrifying rendering of "Hansel and Gretel" in which revenge is served up sweet...* Less than a year after Rand left his family for Amy, his ex-wife and two children are killed in an accident. Ever since then, Amy has had terrible nightmares in which Rand's children return to exact revenge. When Rand convinces her to come away with him to an isolated cabin in the woods, Amy's guilt-filled nightmares turn into pure horror.

Blood of Amethyst: *A bloodcurdling answer why Rumpelstiltskin wanted a child of his own...* Amethyst's father disappears and Sheriff and Guardian Gabe finds him drained of blood. When Amethyst herself grows pale, cold, wakes only in the night when her taste for blood overwhelms her, Gabe becomes aware something in the woods is stealing her life. He'll face his deadliest foe yet when the woman he loves falls prey to a nameless creature who wants her very soul.

Dancing to the Grave: *Loosely based on "The Pied Piper of Hamelin".* The children of Woodcutter's Grim are changing...and only one person, music teacher Diane Anders, realizes the truth. Can she and her husband, Kurt Jones, a member of the ancient lineage of the Protectorate's Chosen Seven, save them and the future of their town?

The Amethyst Tower, The Final Chapter: *Loosely based on "Rapunzel".* The isolated maiden meets her knight in a time-traveler who's come into the future to rescue her from the Warlock Lord holding her captive in the amethyst tower. Where else but in the fairy-tale-horror town of Woodcutter's Grim?

Woodcutter's Grim Series Anthology, Volume II {Classic Tales of Horror Retold} (Book 2):

Moonlight Becomes You: *Very loosely based on "The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse".* When her child becomes deathly ill and none of the doctors and specialists can help him, Heather Rowe rushes to Woodcutter's Grim, hoping the boy's father can help their child. But Lance Shaussegeny's explanations terrify Heather, even though she's intensely attracted to him all over again. She soon learns that nothing in Woodcutter's Grim--including Lance--is what it seems.

Bewitched: *Very loosely based on "The Little Mermaid".* Glynnis Shaussegeny becomes bewitched by the mystery man who appears out of nowhere on the abandoned property across the lake from her family's estate. But does Aric Sayer have even more dark secrets than she does?

One Night of Eternity: *Loosely based on "The House That Jack Built".* Gavin has broken the covenant with his wife. Although he regrets his faithlessness, the house he's built for himself is beginning to tumble down around him. Only his mate's undeserved forgiveness will free him from his punishment to re-live his betrayal over and over for all time.

Beauty is the Beast: *Very loosely based on "Beauty and the Beast".* When Ransom Shaussegeny attempts to cure the family curse, he becomes a werewolf trapped in beast form and isolates himself inside the family fortress. Upon meeting a beautiful enchantress, he falls under her spell and no longer knows whether the evil in Woodcutter's Grim is about to have the last laugh by dooming him, the woman he loves, and his family for all time...

THE DEEP, Book 3: *Very loosely based on "Metamorphoses: The Story of Pygmalion and the Statue" by Ovid.* Cheyenne Welsh can't forget her past and the disappearance of her younger sister. When she returns to Woodcutter's Grim to sell the family property she grew up on, she's confronted with all the nightmare-realities of her childhood, still alive and well, still right where she left them--down in the darkness the Deep dwells inside. Her home...

HUNTER'S BLUES, Book 4, (A Mirror Darkly World Novel): *Loosely based on "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs".* When the evil in Woodcutter's Grim unleashed, humans turned into ghouls with the instinct to contaminate others. The Protectorate--the guardians sworn to protect the town--are all that hold the threat at bay. Guardian hunter Reece Pallaton discovers the source of the evil, the mirror that's only the opposite half of the "glass darkly" world he lives in, and his own terrifying connection to both.

Bridge of Fire, Part 1: OUT OF THE ASHES, Book 5: The youngest son in a family of shape-shifting goats, William Gruff escaped a dire fate but his life is desperately lonely, engineering fantastical bridges that defy logic. Nothing prepares him for meeting Adaryn Azar.

Adaryn has a secret that keeps her on the run. Just as everything she's ever wanted is about to come true with Liam, her enemy discovers her. But starting over would mean losing the timeless love she's found with Liam.

Bridge of Fire, Part 2: A NEW BEGINNING, Book 6: The son of shape-shifting goats, William Gruff escaped a dire fate when his family is bound to the evil pervading Woodcutter's Grim, the only shelter for supernatural creatures. Adaryn Azar, a legendary phoenix, changes his lonely life. But a happily-ever-after may be impossible when the hunter

who's tracked her for centuries finds her again. Dying and resurrecting would mean forfeiting the life growing inside her. Unfathomably, Woodcutter's Grim may be the only safe place left.

Bridge of Fire, Part 3: INTO THE SUN, Book 7: A shape-shifting goat, William Gruff escaped being bound to the evil pervading Woodcutter's Grim, the sole shelter for supernatural creatures. Years later, he and his pregnant wife, Adaryn Azar, a phoenix, have no choice but to flee there themselves. But just one phoenix can exist in the world. Will the powerful magic Liam wields consume him before he can build the only bridge that can take him and Adaryn into the sun of Eternal Paradise?

WOODCUTTER'S GRIM COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (12 books in 1 volume): For the ten generations since the evil first came to Woodcutter's Grim, the Guardians have sworn an oath to protect the town from the childhood horrors that lurk in the black woods. Without them, the town would be defenseless...and the terrors would escape to the world at large.

Publisher series page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/woodcutters-grim-series/>

Wounded Warriors Series

{Women's Fiction}

Women who have faced pain, loss and heartache.

They know the score and never back down.

*Women who aren't afraid to love with all their passion and all their strength,
who risk everything for their own little piece of heaven...*

Men who live their lives on the blade's edge. Knights in black armor.

The only thing more dangerous than crossing these men is loving them...

RELUCTANT HEARTS, Book 1: What's a man to do when he's seen too much of life's dark side and suddenly finds himself believing in flesh-and-blood angels who can heal with a single touch? What's a girl to do when she believes in true love but can't trust the eyes of her own heart? Fall in love...reluctantly?

WAITING FOR AN ECLIPSE, Book 2: Steve Thomas has a self-destructive wife, three kids, more guilt than one man can handle...and a chance at true love for the first time in his life--if only he can allow himself to take it.

DARK MIRROR, Book 3 (psychological thriller): Twenty-five years ago, Gwen Nicholson-Nelson was in a car accident that left behind a strange gift. She can see the future, and death, before it comes to pass. She also has a disturbing connection with another psychic like her who not only sees into others but manipulates and destroys. When her nemesis targets the man she loves, Gwen must act--before her vision of Dylan's death comes to pass.

WAYWARD ANGELS, Book 4 (Christian): What do you get with a former wild man who's committed his path to the Lord and a woman who has absolutely nothing to lose? It's either a match made in heaven...or a sure-fire heartache.

UNTIL IT'S GONE, Book 5 (romantic suspense): *You don't know what you've got...until it's gone.* Mitch has been playing a dangerous game. The lines between black and white, good and evil, saint and sinner are all blurred. Just when he thinks the stakes can't get any higher, in steps the only woman who could ever hurt him and the only one who can heal him. In the space of a skipped heartbeat, he can't imagine having more to gain...and more to lose.

WHITE RAINBOW, Book 6 (Christian): Jessie Nelson has been telling herself she doesn't deserve or believe in second chances, especially when it comes to love...until her white rainbow appears in a corporate pirate who conquers her, heart and soul.

WOUNDED WARRIORS COMPLETE SERIES COLLECTION (6 books in 1 volume): Women who have faced pain, loss and heartache. They know the score and never back down. Women who aren't afraid to love with all their passion and all their strength, who risk everything for their own little piece of heaven... Men who live their lives on the blade's edge. Knights in black armor. The only thing more dangerous than crossing these men is loving them...

Single Titles

COWBOY FEVER SERIES ANTHOLOGY:

Return to cowboy country in Fever, Texas, where the heat isn't the only thing causing a fever! See if you can find the heirloom wedding band in each story!

Wings of Love: When Wings Mackenzie falls in love, it's for life, and Amanda is the woman he has his heart set on. He struggles to get his business matters in hand so he can settle down with her. But when he returns home, ready to make the ultimate commitment to Amanda, he finds her long gone.

Losses and Gains: Four years ago, Triple Aces Ranch co-owner, Lance Olsen, lost his wife and son in a fire. When her sister, his first love, comes home to Fever, sparks fly. But can an old flame be rekindled?

For Always: As a young man, Jared had no idea how to share the intensity of his feelings with Alana. Instead, he'd awkwardly promised her he'd always be there for her. But she isn't looking for a bodyguard even when her up-on-coming politician husband begins taking the pressures of campaigning out on her. True to his promise, Jared runs to her rescue, but he open up and become the prince who'll love her for always?

Taming April: Shawn Jacobs is the ultimate ladies' man. But when a former classmate of his shows up in treacherous high heels and designer clothing, asking him to train her father's horse, Shawn knows it isn't just the wild horse that needs to be tamed.

The Only One: Five years ago, Ken and Karla were madly in love and expecting their first child. Tragedy drove them into opposite corners. When Ken shows up with her brothers at the exotic dance club she's been working as a waitress, she sees he hasn't changed. Can Ken prove she's still the only one for him?

DRIFTER'S HEART: *Easy to love, hard to hold...* Maggie May's pa is still looking for the cowboy who knocked up his daughter. Just when Maggie thinks it'll never happen, the drifter she loves shows up, suddenly wise to the fact that his efforts to quiet her endless stream of conversation had ended with a child. This time, Maggie May plans to get him back in her clutches--and win his heart forever.

Publisher page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/cowboy-fever-series-anthology/>

KALEIDOSCOPE SERIES ANTHOLOGY {Contemporary Romance}:

Kaleidoscope Office Building provides employment to nine hot, young singles--all about to make a love connection. Working 9 to 5 has never been so complicated...or so much fun!

Perfect Cadence: While holed up at the family cabin mourning a lost loved one, the last thing Joshua Lewis expects to find is the drop-dead beautiful woman he'd regretted abandoning a decade earlier naked in his bed.

In Cahoots with Cupid: Angela Lewis returns home to Fever, Texas for a wedding. Kiowa Mackenzie has every intention of tackling the bridesmaids to make sure Angela catches the bride's bouquet!

Behind Amethyst Eyes: Amethyst-eyed, bespectacled Aimee Cooper has had a secret crush on muscle-bound accountant Rob Channing for years--even while one of her best friends dated him. When Aimee's father dies, she's left to mourn and sort out the complicated mess his estate has fallen into. In life's strange serendipity, this tragedy gives her an "in" to get close to the man of her dreams.

Jordana's Chair: Dex has been intrigued by his neighbor since she moved into his building a year ago--though, or perhaps *because*--she's nothing like the glamour girls he's used to. Jordana barely speaks English, has worn the same two outfits since he's known her, and her living space is empty. No one he's ever known could display such joy over a new chair. Is this ladies' man officially off the market?

Paper Tiger: Roni has a secret past she doesn't want to look back and confront, but can she risk losing the man she loves because of what could be a true threat...or merely a paper tiger?

Cabin Fever: When single mother Shayna's son Ty begins to exhibit an inability to cope with the lack of a father-figure in his life, his elementary school teacher reaches out to Shayna. Can hunky widower Dakota Loring prove he's the real deal?

The Longest Night: After three short years of a marriage spent mostly apart, Jolie has decided to get the child she wants and forget the naive illusion of marital bliss. During one endless night, Jag tries to convince her he's in their relationship for the long haul while she tries to distract him with every sweet seduction in the book.

Publisher page: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/kaleidoscope-series-anthology/>

RESTLESS AS RAIN: {Contemporary Romance} *She has two men, two identities, one choice...* Rain Meyers has been in a suffocating relationship for five years, engaged to a man who sees only what he wants to see in her. When Rain finally escapes, she meets a man she can make beautiful music with. Justin Pascal is a songwriter with a past that haunts him. Together they discover common aspirations, a future, love and, ultimately, healing. But Bryan isn't about to give up the glass bottle world he's tried to trap Rain into...even if it means destroying everyone in his path.

Publisher: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/restless-as-rain/>

SWEET DREAMS: {Paranormal Romance} *Someone has unleashed an ancient evil bent on destroying Cassidy Christopher by eradicating the women he loves, one by one...*

Just one year earlier, Cassidy's daughter, Maddie, was attacked by a creature who was unleashed by human hands from its chains beneath The Protector, an ancient oak on the Christopher property. In the dead of the night, Maddie calls her best friend, Robyn Warren. Robyn hastens to be with the only family she's ever known. In the wake of newfound surrender to a love they can no longer fight, Robyn and Cass find they have everything they've ever wanted...except time.

Publisher: <https://www.writers-exchange.com/sweet-dreams/>

You can find this entire series on our website at:

<https://www.writers-exchange.com/3d-fiction-fundamentals-series/>

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