

Plot That Story!

This is a long sequence of plot secrets I sent out to my email list. Please feel free to share with your writing friends. Happy writing -- from Alicia Rasley

So if you know anyone who would enjoy seeing the inside of this plotting blueprint, have them sign up here: [Get a free plotting article! http://bit.ly/AliciaRasleyStory](http://bit.ly/AliciaRasleyStory)

And here's a peek into [Plot Blueprint Mastery](#):

SUBJECT: [GIFT] Get Your Plot **HERE**

Hey, writers!

This email contains **1 confession. 1 question. And 1 email-list-only GIFT** that will take your plotting to the next level. Let's do this!

* The Confession: I've been working (in a secret craft-of-writing cave, for over a year, people!) on a true shortcut to great story and great plots, something I can teach you that will always, always, always work.

* The Question: Would you like to create GREAT plots every single time... *but also* fix the ones that have already gone horribly, terribly wrong? **I know, we writers tend to skip talking about plots that fail**, because it's negative, and we think if we only focus on being successful, then we won't fail. But we all know failure actually is part of our writing and learning journey.

So it's important to talk about the elephant in the plotting room: failure.



It's my belief that failure actually makes us more creative. In fact, it was by analyzing stories from my students and clients that had "gone wrong"... that I was able to come up with this shortcut I've been secretly creating. But we need to realize when the story has gone wrong, or failed to fulfill our vision.

This might seem like I'm asking a throwaway question. I'm not. **This is an honest question. Have you faced failure in making this story work?**

Actually, that's a good thing. That's when you realize that the plot won't magically work just because your page count keeps growing as you write out your idea. That's when you can ask yourself if you'd like to learn HOW to plot, and take control of the story idea.

If you have a plot that needs to be fixed, take heart. There really is a "blueprint shortcut" you can follow that works just as well for fixing plots as it does for creating them.

Do you want to learn to turn failure around and make this story work?

And now... to the best part...

* The Email-List-Only **GIFT** for YOU!: As I put the finishing touches on The Secret Course I Create in My Writing Cave, I wanted to share some of the course content I'm most excited about with the people who have been my students, fellow writers, and email friends for a long time (some since 1999).

Over the next few days, I'm going to send you some special emails.

I'll be teaching you a shortcut to plotting—the blueprint that works. And some of this wisdom, I've never taught before... anywhere.

I won't be posting these sneak-peek emails anywhere else. They're just for the writers on my personal list.

So if you know anyone who would enjoy seeing the inside of this

plotting blueprint, have them sign up here: [Get a free plotting article! http://bit.ly/AliciaRasleyStory](http://bit.ly/AliciaRasleyStory)

Keep writing!
Alicia

[Plot Secret #1] From Alicia— Don't force your genius to fail at what your drone brain can do well.

(Your plotting genius is your subconscious mind. Your plotting drone is your conscious mind. You need both... but at different stages of the plotting process. We'll talk about it!)

Hey, Writers!

How do good stories go wrong?

You can have the best idea in the world, but then, when you start to write it out, you realize it's not working. The excitement you felt while thinking about the story is gone-gone-gone.

The characters don't act and react the right way.
The events peter out after 30 pages, along with your inspiration.
-It just lies there, hopelessly dead.-

Boy, do I know what this is like. Years ago, I'd experience that rush of excitement with a story idea, flashes of brilliance as I visualized scenes and people... but then feel the letdown when I started to draft it out.

There's another story for the bottom desk drawer.

And my clients? I've seen hundreds of stories (remember I've been an editor and co-owned a small press, as well as a writing professor) that start with a real bang—even a real apocalypse in the first chapter—exciting, flashy, dangerous—and then the characters spend the next few chapters hiding out in a tunnel... because the author didn't plan past the flashy opening.

The reader (or editor, or agent) isn't fooled. After 5 minutes of reading, they feel tricked into a boring tunnel-story, where nothing really happens to the characters, but there's a lot of dialogue about "We gotta figure out what to do next." ;-)

Is this simply an IDEA problem? Or a SCENE problem? Or a CHARACTER problem?

No, it is not really any of those. It's something that underlies all of those.

Good writers with good stories OFTEN go wrong because they *don't know how to use structure*—the organization of plot events—to keep the story moving and the characters doing things that matter to the STORY and to the AUDIENCE.

You're not alone. Like I said, this happens all the time.

The answer?

It's all about your *subconscious* mind. (And the conscious mind too.)

See, the subconscious—the deep mind-- is all about

instinct,
intuition,
dreaming,
exhilaration,
imagination.

The subconscious is probably what invented your great idea and gave you those great flashes of exciting scenes and characters.

The subconscious provides the brilliance. It's absolutely essential to a good story. You know, it's sort of the Steve Jobs-inventor within us.

Unfortunately, the subconscious isn't so good at

- filling in gaps
- finding missing pieces
- putting things in order
- doing the work.

That's where the conscious mind comes in.

The conscious mind is the worker-bee of the brain, the part of the mind that actually gets things done and fulfills the brilliant promise of the subconscious.



(That's a drone, see. A worker bee.)

Here's the truth.

What happens when a story falls apart...

*is that we are trying to get the brilliant-but-undisciplined **subconscious** to do the work that the plodding and competent, worker-bee **conscious mind** should do.*

Truth is, we all have both of these mind-parts. What we need to learn to do assign them the job they're good at.

STEP #1: Get down all the brilliant material the subconscious has given us. This is called *genius mode*.

STEP #2 Turn the job over to the conscious mind to add in all the structure, organization, and logic that makes this into a coherent plot that doesn't drift off and doesn't get tangled up. This is called *structure mode*.

That means...

- The genius provides the excitement, the deep thoughts, and the powerful events.
- The structure provides the connections, the logic, the sequencing.

You've got the genius already! No one can teach you that. You write because you have powerful IDEAS.

Structure as a Story Blueprint, however—that can be taught. You can be taught to develop powerful events and deep characters within a powerful STORY.

So maybe you're thinking, *Hey, I already understand "structure."* I get it.

You might have an innate sense of what goes where and when. But be open over the next few emails, because I'm talking about specific ways to apply structure to create the powerful magnifying effect of your original IDEA. I'll dive into this in [Plot Secret #2].

But for now, just knowing that you can shift (starting today) from the brilliant subconscious to the logical conscious, in order to develop your IDEA into an ACCELERATED PLOT—that will help you see your story (and yourself as a writer) in an all new way.

And you will never again face the brilliant story start that fails to live up to its promise. And that's a very good thing. See you in the next email!

Alicia

P.S. If you're interested in some writing advice, there are many articles on [my Story Journey website here.](#)

[Plot Secret #2] **3 Conflict Fails that Ruin a Good Idea**

There are 3 types of conflict, plus 3 ways conflict can fail you and your Very Good Story Idea™. (You know the story idea... the one that's so good you can practically see the trademarked action figures—or 5 star reviews—in stores now).

First, I define the three conflicts this way:

- External (the main plot problem—**the murder** or the election or the disaster)
 - Internal (the problem inside the main character, **like distrust** or obsession)
 - Interactional (**the problem between characters in the story**)
- It's that last one that you didn't expect, right? Internal and External conflict are commonly taught. But it's the Interactional conflict that helps my writing clients the most. ;-)

The truth is that you need all three. Some writers create stories with Interactional Conflict through sheer luck, quite honestly. And then one day, there they are, writing a book that doesn't have it... and they don't understand what went wrong.

I don't have time to go into everything you need to know about crafting outrageously good Interactional Conflict (it'll be in the course I've been secretly craft-of-writing cave, so you might want to check that out when the course opens).

But what I do want to talk about here are 2 Big Conflict Concepts.



#1 Conflict Is Like A Braid.

As a writer, you should carefully braid the External, Internal, and Interactional conflicts across your 3 Acts, allowing them to intersect all the way through the story. This is how you deepen the action of the plot. It's also how you stop relying on luck and start writing every single book on purpose, with forward momentum and direction.

#2 Three Signs Your Conflict Braid Has Totally, Utterly Failed...

After reading thousands of manuscripts as an editor, critiquer, judge, and publisher... here are the 3 types of conflict failure I can spot within 10 pages (and often on the very first page).

a) **No Conflict.** While we try to avoid conflict in our own lives, we don't want to do that when we're writing a great story.

In a story, no conflict = no stakes. There's no suspense, so no reason to follow what seem like inconsequential or inert actions that don't further the plot. That means **boooo-ring**.

The excuse I often hear for a low-stakes opening is, "But I'm supposed to start the story in the ordinary world!" (This refers to the first step of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey.) But in great story, **ordinary** does not mean **boring**. Truth.

Oddly, we writers often have "boring blindness," where something interesting to us is boring to the audience, and we're unaware that we've failed.

b) **Wrong Conflict.** The story, the character, and the conflict must **not only** make sense, they should also all go together in a way that is meaningful. None can be separated, and they escalate each other.

The most common "wrong conflict" issue I see is an external conflict which is just too big for the story, like a grisly serial murder in a cozy mystery, or childhood trauma in a romantic comedy. (Yes, this happens—I've seen this kind of mismatch frequently in submissions.)

This sort of mismatch between the story, character, and conflict can baffle even the most agreeable reader.

The best solution for this, in my experience, is learning a system of self-

checks, and having an outsider listen to the storyline and be brutally honest about where the story gets jagged because of the mismatch.

c) **Un-aligned or Broken Conflict.** This is when emotional drive, action, and even scene focus goes off the rails.

Un-aligned Conflict is when the conflicts don't hook up. Each conflict is a broken line that ultimately doesn't require the other, never impacts the character, or leaves the story unresolved... usually because the main character can't overcome the internal conflict in a way that allows resolution of the external problem, and so one of the two problems is just dropped.

External conflict: Asteroid coming to Earth! But the geologist heroine still is just worried (internal conflict) about getting her son into college. What? Doesn't she have something more immediate to deal with?

At this point, the writer might have to bring in a "deus ex machina" (god from the machine) or a coincidence to fix everything... which is unsatisfying to the audience!

In my experience, most writers don't even know this disconnect has happened. After all, a miracle happens and everything is "tied up" at the end, right? Maybe the main character wasn't really involved, and didn't change or grow, but that asteroid made a sudden turn and didn't hit the earth. So no problem, right?

(Problem. :)

Back to the course I'm creating in my cave.... All of the intricacies of conflict have been on my mind as I create ways for writers to solve these issues once and for all.

But I think it all starts here-- understanding that conflict is multi-dimensional, it's braided together, and there are many clues when you've failed (and when you've done it right).

There truly is a way to think about crafting your story in a way to maximize the right kind of conflict, avoid conflict failure, and find the "Plot Blueprint" that is flexible enough to work for this story, and the next, and the next.

It comes down to how the conflicts interact to fuel your plot events! That's a great thing to keep in mind: It's conflict which fuels the plot!

This is the FIRST thing you should know as you start to solve your

plotting fails (and imagine your future action figures).

See you tomorrow, when we'll talk about BIG PROBLEMS found in the 3-Act Structure....

Alicia

P.S. These Plot Secrets are from my new course and only available to my personal list. If you have a friend or critique partner who you want to invite along from the journey, just send them HERE. <http://bit.ly/AliciaRasleyStory>

Plot Secret #3] **Three Acts... You could still be getting it wrong.**

3-Act Structure. We've probably all heard about it and think we do it right.

But we don't.

In my decades of experience as a teacher and editor, I'd have to say that when writers hire me... the problem is almost always structural. And the solution is the 3-Act Structure, just not the way writers usually do it. Done right, it can make a plot work, gathering intensity and drama until it explodes into crisis and is finally resolved. Done just "almost right," you have a mess.

You probably know what the 3-act plot structure is, right?

- Act 1: Set up the setting, conflict, main character(s)
- Act 2: Increase the conflict to the point of no return
- Act 3: Explode the conflict and resolve it.

Many writers screw this up, and I think usually it's because they have the idea—the "set up"—figured out, but either (a) not much else or (b) nothing "bigger" than the Big Idea. ((You want your stories to escalate, right? No matter how **big** your idea, your plot must create scenes that are incrementally bigger than that. It's a worthy challenge.)

So often, my clients get through a few chapters—Act 1—and then lose steam, because they haven't figured out how to increase the conflict in a plausible and yet dramatic way, and then explode it into a climactic resolution.

Or worse...

They don't lose steam... they keep writing on... but what comes next is riddled with systemic, vague problems that they don't know how to fix.

How do you know what those vague problems are?

Or worse... They don't lose steam... they keep writing on... but what comes next is riddled with systemic, vague problems that they don't know how to fix.

How do you know what those vague problems are?

Well, I've got the info! After decades of reading stories that started well then petered out, plots that didn't hold together, characters who stayed stubbornly passive, well, I'll just say, the problems aren't vague to me. They haunt me!

Here are the problems that can mess up your plot if you haven't figured how to develop it correctly across all 3 Acts. (Do any of these seem familiar? Maybe some vague doubt will be crystallized here so you can finally move forward to fixing the problem.)

ACT I

What We Think We've Done at the Start What Really Happens

Started the story with a big exciting "hook" **Generated no forward momentum after the big action hook**

Shown all the characters and how they interact **Confused the audience with too many names and people** who never fully implant in the reader's mind

Described the setting in lush and inviting terms **Created a travelogue with details that slowed down the excitement**

Jumped right into the **Didn't give the**

conflict with danger and drama **audience a reason to care** about the characters, action, conflict, or all three

And what's worse... you might not be able to fully grasp these problems yourself. You have to accomplish so much in the opening of the story, and it's hard to "live outside yourself" so you can see what the audience will enjoy (or will give up on).

But wait! Then things can get even more muddled up, if you don't know what you're doing in the middle part.

ACT II

What We Think We've Done in the Middle **What Really Happened**

Explained all that led up to the problem here **Stopped forward momentum dead** with all the background, backstory, "authentic" detail information

Deepened the understanding of the characters **Inserted dull scenes** where characters did a lot of thinking and feeling and psychoanalyzing

Put the character relationships into conflict **Made characters argue and fight but without much change** or growth, and often with nothing to do with the existing conflict

Added lots more plot events to keep the story moving **Complicated the storyline** with many minor actions, so the audience gets confused about what's important,

and thinks the plot and characters are “loopy”

About two-thirds of the way through your story, your audience might be wondering if your brilliant story idea was actually all that brilliant. (Did you ever put down a book near the end because you just finally give up? Why? You don't want your own audience to just give up.) But maybe the readers hang in there, hoping there will be a big “POW!” finish that will fix everything.

What We Think We've Done in the End What Really Happened

Excited the audience with a big action finish

Clashed with the rest of the story emotionally, as if you were writing a completely different story

Transformed the characters

Changed the characters suddenly without reason, so the transformation comes across as superficial and fake

Saved the day with unexpected events and reversals

Used a coincidence or “deus ex machine” to rescue the main character, so the audience is dissatisfied and incredulous

Added a great twist at the very end

Frustrated the audience with cheap “irony” and artificial “ambiguity” without laying the groundwork and created the thematic unity

I know, I know. I'm making it all sound so negative! But it's by seeing *what can go wrong* that we can figure out how to make it right.

Why can't we just have a Blueprint of the 3 Acts that makes our plots failsafe?

That's what I've been creating... so that you can know what each act ought to provide, and how to **actually KNOW you've accomplished that**, so that the finished story ends up as brilliant as the idea you started with! I like this concept of a Plot Blueprint so much, I'm actually naming my course that, fyi.

There are a lot of nuances to the Blueprint structure, such as **building a good superstructure first, and then developing your story by building that plot on several levels, step-by-step.**

I have to tell you, getting this first part accomplished can bring an enormous relief. There you are staring at this big exciting mess of a story... and I say, "Break it into 3 acts." And you do that, and suddenly you realize there's a structure there! It's not FINISHED, but it's FRAMED.

I am focusing on this in Module 2 of the Plot Blueprint course, how to build a good superstructure to take your plot through the 3 acts to create the experience and message you want.

That's why I like to zero in on that 3-act plot blueprint... so that you can start "framing," and know what each act ought to provide, and how to accomplish just that-- a coherent, well-structured plot.

Then you can hone your success with a basic evaluation process:

- o How is the problem set up in Act 1?
- o How is it intensified through Act 2?
- o And how is it resolved in Act 3?

And you do this evaluation in a way that eliminates the gap between what you HOPE you've done... and what you've ACTUALLY done.

Next up—We'll talk about the secret behind that 3-act structure... building the levels with the 3 turning points or major events in each act. (Are you sensing a pattern here? That number 3 is a magic number, I'm telling you!)

Alicia

P.S. My Plot Blueprint process will offer a realistic system that has you

approach plotting in this structural way that *builds tension and action while developing deeper characters*. **If you'd like to take your stories past what I'm showing you and teaching in these emails, stay tuned!**

[Plot Secret 4] 3 Acts X 3 = 9 Turning Points

Now this is the cleverest trick! Three acts, right? And you can break them down into three turning point scenes or events. Here's what that would look like:

3 Acts: 9 Turning Points

Act 1: The Start of the Journey

- a. Ordinary world (where the character/story starts)
- b. Inciting event (the event, however trivial it might seem at first, that starts the change)
- c. Call to action (the event which demands some response)

Act 2: Rising Action

- a. Refusal of the call (this isn't always a full refusal, but demonstrates some initial reluctance or wrong direction on the part of the protagonist)
- b. Reversal (when what the protagonist -- or reader-- believed to be true is reversed, like someone trusted turns out to be untrustworthy).
- c. Point of no return (when something happens or the character takes some action that turns out to block all retreat options)

Act 3: Climax and Resolution

- a. Crisis/dark moment (when the worst happens, and the character plunges into despair)
- b. Climax (when the character resolves/solves the external conflict/problem-- or fails, in a tragedy)
- c. Resolution (when the character resolves or fails to resolve the internal conflict, and order is restored to the story world)

Doesn't that look easy? Okay, I'll be honest with you. It's not that easy. But it's a lot more useful than just winging it and hoping all the events add up to some conflict and resolution. (In Module 3 of the Plot Blueprint course, I've got this outlined for the film *Casablanca*—with the video snips of each turning point.)

You can probably see from that outline how this takes the purpose of each act and *brings the story to life* through the action of important scenes. This is how the conflicts we discussed aren't just shown... they actually *happen* in the events of the three acts. We call them "turning points" because each one "turns" the plot in the direction of greater action and depth.

This is powerful stuff. The 9 Turning Point structure is what takes an underperforming story and makes it into a breakout story. And because this is so important to get right, I also call it... 9 Ways to Go Wrong.

Truth is, if you miss any of these 9 opportunities or fail to make the most of each, you'll end up with big holes in your plot. Very simply, your story will fail because you didn't fill in those holes with *powerful and eventful turning point scenes*.

Here are a few things I watch for—and guard against!-- when assessing any of the turning points. Yep, these are the “fails” that will sink an otherwise promising story:

1. The scene doesn't have an important event.
2. The scene doesn't change the trajectory of the plot.
3. Maybe the big event happens “off-stage” and is just recalled later.
4. The characters don't encounter real conflict in the scene, just minor annoyances.
5. Most of the conflict takes place in the character's mind.
6. Each event sets up nothing for future events—it's “episodic,” not intensifying.
7. The drama peters out because this event doesn't follow up on the conflict of the last big event.
8. The brilliance of the original idea doesn't show because you've lost the thread of the plot.
9. You don't achieve your vision because the main events are out of sequence, maybe with the most important event happening too early or too late.

In Module 3 of Plot Blueprint, I talk about how your brilliant idea can be brought to life in the turning points- the action and interaction of the characters with the events.

This all adds up to **change**. You go from a 2-D plot to a 3-D story plot by fleshing out the superstructure of the acts with the framing of the 9 turning points. That develops the conflicts you've set up in the start of the story.

And then what? You deepen the change that happens because of these essential events by causing a change to the characters... and that deepens the plot into a story.

So let's talk about that next—what I discuss in Module 4 – the 3 (yes, of course, 3) aspects of deeper characterization:

- The Character Journey
- The Goal and Motivation
- The Heroic Strength/Flaw

Keep writing! I'll check in a few days with some character ideas!

Alicia

[Plot Secret #5] The Secret Failure of Conflict without Characters- from Alicia

We've been talking about how good plots fail—

- **Structure Fails** (and how the subconscious mind is simply no good at plot tasks like organizing events and filling gaps)
- **Conflict Fails** (the "braided conflict" concept and how even good conflicts fail if they don't intertwine)
- **The 3-Act Structure Fails** (the same 3 acts that everyone knows, and yet... they still fail when "what you *think* you've done is *wildly different* than what really happened" from the reader's perspective. Sob.)
- **The 9 Turning Points/Dramatic Events** (and 9 ways they can go wrong, too!)

And that leads us to the next topic.

Because even if you do ALL OF THIS RIGHT... I still see writers lose their way in the vague land known as "superficial, hollow, implausible, and weak world... where ultimately nothing really matters."

Ouch! If you've ever gotten the feedback on a scene or entire story that "this just doesn't... work for me" (or you get lots of conflicting feedback and reasons why it, well, just doesn't work....) THIS EMAIL COULD SAVE YOUR BACON—OR AT LEAST YOUR INSPIRATION!

I have some really good news.

At this point, if you're doing everything right structurally...

- if your conflicts intertwine and pull the plot forward...
- if your events are sequenced for maximum growing drama...
- and the story still doesn't quite work...

You probably have only one big problem. I call it **Conflict without Character.**

It's like fire without burning. Bleeding without pain. Sex without love. This exciting event just happened, and then we're on to the next exciting event.

There's lots of exciting, but in the end, it just doesn't feel like it matters much.

How – and how much-- the plot/event/conflict matters to your character IS EVERYTHING.

Let me give you an example.

My sons were both very much into film when they were kids, and it was next to impossible to rip them away from action films. (Even if I'd ban the bad stuff, they'd just go over to visit a buddy who had HBO!) I remember they'd judge the movies by the number of explosions and machine gun bursts in the first act. (I know, I know. But they're both grown and good guys now. Well, I admit, one is a fiction writer while serving in the military, and the other majored in screen-writing and works in the film industry! Where did I go wrong???)

These films were pretty interchangeable, with plots revolving around, you know, explosions, and any deaths were inconsequential because they happened to paper-thin characters.

I was starting to think that all these action films might make them really callous—until we went to Blockbuster (yeah, it was that long ago), and they picked out a film, *Simon Birch*. Hey! On the case, there were no mean men with machine guns... just a picture of a little boy who was never going to grow very big. But you could see in his face that Simon

had pluck and pain and hope and humor.

My boys took it home and started the tape, and they—who had just stonily watched Arnold mow down a line of security guards!—saw Simon sacrifice himself to save a school bus-full of his schoolmates.

Both my boys were crying, “Don’t die, Simon! Don’t die!”
The one death of little Simon affected them... while all the explosions and machine gun volleys hadn’t.



Why?

Because, of course, they *cared* about Simon.

And why did they care about Simon?

HERE’S THE SECRET...

It’s because *the author had made them care*. (The film, btw, is based on a novel by the character-oriented writer John Irving. That’s a writer who can make you care.)

And how had the author made them care about some unknown little kid in some nowhere little town?

He made Simon into a *person* who cares deeply about the unfolding events. He created emotion and point-of-view out of paper and film—a *character* out of what might just be a role.

Simon matters because he cares profoundly.

He has a **journey** to make (he believes he has some purpose and that’s why God gave him dwarfism),

and he has a **goal** (to help his friend Joe find his biological father),

and he has a **strength** (incisive intelligence) that all too often becomes a **flaw**, as he alienates even the local minister with his cutting questions.

There you have it, the basic building blocks of characterization:

1. Journey that matters deeply
2. Goal that affects others
3. Strength that becomes a flaw

Those are the 3 qualities the author can give to characters to make them come alive.

(And that's what Module 4 of my Plot Blueprint course is about—deepening the story by deepening the characters.)

Here, then, is the BOTTOM LINE: Good plots fail, even if they have great structure and turning points and conflict, when...

- **conflict comes without characters who care deeply**
- caring is not **deeply embedded** within the character's journey, goals, and strengths
- and conflict and caring does not play out in **every single event, scene, and turning point.**

Getting this right instead of wrong is a pretty high bar, right?

Sure... but you can do it... you just need to CARE. And of course, you need to make the audience care. (That might be harder, but it's easier if it starts with YOU caring.)

Next time, we'll go into those three essential character elements, and see how they can generate more tension and intensity-- and caring-- into your plots and events.

Keep writing! You can do this! It's not easy... but nothing good comes easy.

Alicia

P.S. Okay, I've opened the Plot Blueprint course. [You can sign up for](#)

[the course anytime if you like!](#) But I'll have a couple more plotting previews in the next few days, so watch your email.

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[Plot Secret #6] The Character Change that Creates AMAZING PLOTS

You have an intriguing plot idea. WOO HOO!

But...with shallow, inadequate, generic, dull, unrealistic, or over-the-top characters?

Your story's gonna suck. Bummer.

That's because great plot doesn't happen without great characters. **In fact, great characters ARE my go-to Plotting Tool. ;-)**

Let's dig into this.

Now, it takes three full lessons in Module 4 of the Plotting Blueprint (yes, launching soon, I promise!) to teach this character method....

But let me give you the basics RIGHT NOW!

It all starts with 3 "character aspects" you MUST BUILD into each of your main characters.

1. **Journey:** The character is on a story-worthy journey. This provides the process or progress that moves this person through the events of the plot and causes the character change.
2. **Goal:** The character has a story-worthy goal, and this goal provides motivation and reason for dealing with the plot events, even when things get dangerous.
3. **Strength:** The character has a story-worthy strength, some intense quality or skill that makes it possible to deal with the conflicts and obstacles that arise during the plot events.

Let's try that with an example, Katniss in *Hunger Games*.

Journey: She starts out a victim, and ends up a victor, right? And she moves from slavery to freedom along the way.

Goal: At first, she is motivated to protect her sister. Then, once the game starts, her goal is the most basic one: Survival.

Strength: She is knowledgeable about the woods, hunting, and the game itself. And as the story goes on, she develops the strength of making

alliances with others. These strengths combine to give her the ability to survive the conflict of the game and whatever tricks the game-designers throw at her.

It all looks easy when you're looking at a successful story that already has these 3 character elements.

...It's a totally different game, when it's your own book, and you can't tell if what you're doing is "good enough."

THE PAINFUL TRUTH...

I've spent *years* as an editor for publishers, judging stories and selecting a few (very few) for publication. And I kept seeing the same character-plot mistakes in all the stories that didn't quite make it.

(My real job wasn't really to accept great stories—it was to reject all the others and save the managing editor the trouble.)

And here's the thing: **Many authors gave me easy reasons to reject them ... they missed the mark with undermotivated characters who leached all the "special" out of the plot.**

The 3 Character Aspects are the first step in never being rejected (IMHO), and absolutely essential to having a publishable plot. **FIXING CHARACTER ACTUALLY FIXES PLOT.**

LET ME PROVE IT TO YOU...

I want to show you what it looks like to take an ordinary story and use my 3 CHARACTER ASPECTS to turn it around. Let's do it!

- **STORY:** Murder Mystery / Police Procedural
- **VICTIM:** Former mayor of the town who was impeached after some scandal years ago.
- **PROTAGONIST:** Josh, the homicide detective.

THE WEAK VERSION...

- **Journey:** Josh has been on the job 30 years and is ready to retire later this year.
- **Goal:** Josh wants to solve the murder, because he's getting paid to do it.
- **Strength:** Josh has a lot of work experience solving murders, so he knows how to do this.

While this might sound realistic... is it compelling? Juicy? Better than the thousands of other detective stories the reader will find on Amazon? Better than a Law & Order re-run? Is it really story-worthy?

When you read about Josh, what events do you expect to happen? Pretty

much the same events you've read or watched a thousand times, right? What we have here pretty much ensures a boring plot. Let's fix it.

THE "STORY-WORTHY CHARACTER" VERSION...
You're about to see how character creates plot.

Story-Worthy Journey: Josh is unappreciated at his job after 30 years and is being eased into retirement, and he secretly worries that maybe it's true and he's just mediocre. This murder is his last chance to know for himself he's actually a good cop.

He has to solve this murder—his last case—or realize that he is just some cop who worked for a long time, and now is almost gone. His journey is from self-doubt to pride, towards knowing that his legacy reaches far beyond departmental politics and dimwitted bosses.

Story-Worthy Goal: Josh's goal is solving the murder of the former mayor, but it's not just another murder to him. I'm deepening his motivation here to add in some... guilt. Turns out he was the one who investigated the scandal that got her impeached. So now he's worried that his superiors were hiding some corruption, and his investigation actually set her up to be killed.

Story-Worthy Strength: What sets him apart from the other detectives is, while he tries to hide it, he's emotionally very intelligent and can empathize (and gain insight and trust) with even the toughest thug.

--

This time, what events do you expect to happen? What scenes can you brainstorm?

Which of the two versions of Josh do you think would lead to a stronger 3 Act Structure and more dramatic 9 Turning Points?

Learning to use these 3 Character Aspects deeply... will automatically lift the plot from pretty boring and generic, to something fresh, exciting, unique, and compelling.

What do you think? Look at your own plot, and think about how sharpening the three character aspects can sharpen and deepen the story.

Alicia

PS Thanks for asking for more details on my class! I'll be happy to spill the beans in my very next email.

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[Plot Secret #7] Is your plot good enough yet? From Alicia

Hi, again!

The trick to plotting *isn't* just what I've shared in the last few emails. (But what I've shared is absolutely where you should start.)

Nope. It's *not* just knowing about the 3 acts, 9 turning points, and 3 character aspects (Journey, Goal, and Strength).

If there is a trick to plotting, it is this: **Your story depends on how *how masterfully you do these things-- how nuanced, how deep your plotting becomes.***

It's easy to treat all these plotting insights like a checklist.

- Act 1, Check!
- Turning Point 3, Check!
- Character going on a journey, Check!

...But that's not how *story* works, and I don't want to leave you with the impression that these emails are your Golden Ticket to instant writing chops, ninja-level story shaping, or the bestseller list. (I wish!)

Nope. It's *not* good enough that you have an Act 1, as if any Act 1 will do. It's *not* good enough that you have an event at Turning Point 3, or that your Character has a Journey, as if any old event or journey will work.

Not. Good. Enough.

Anyone who can follow instructions can make a serviceable plot. But to make a great STORY...

You must be *masterful* at plotting. And **there is a world of plot mastery *beyond* what I've shared with you over the last few weeks.**

Those deep insights are about interconnecting everything I've shared with you into a unified, seamless plot that *rivets* your audience.

What does that world look like, you ask?

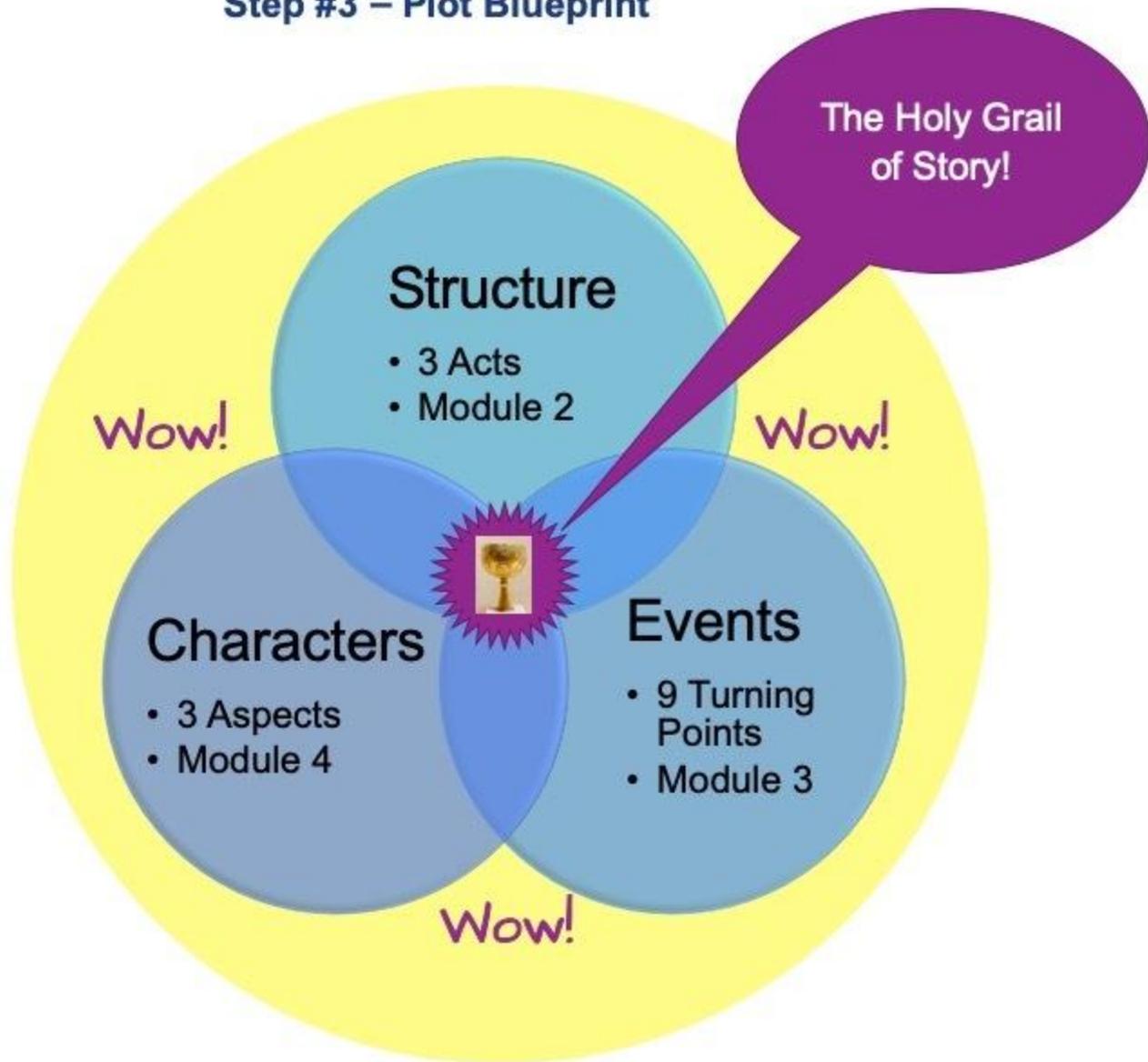
Here's a peek into [Plot Blueprint Mastery](#):

- How do you **force** your character to change and grow within every single turning point?
- How do you **tie** the plot change to your character's emotional risk?
- How can you **leverage** time in order to unify and intensify your 3 Acts?
- How and when should you **link** the end of a turning point to your story category or genre?
- How do you **plunge** your character into a new reality, creating believable psychological change? (And when and how does this despair spark dramatic action?)
- How do you **weave** EVERYTHING together, so that your final turning point has Restoration, Reinforcement, and Resonance (3 advanced techniques that create repeat readers, and a damn fine story too)?

When you do it right, it looks like this.

Alicia's Story Blueprint Theory

Step #3 – Plot Blueprint



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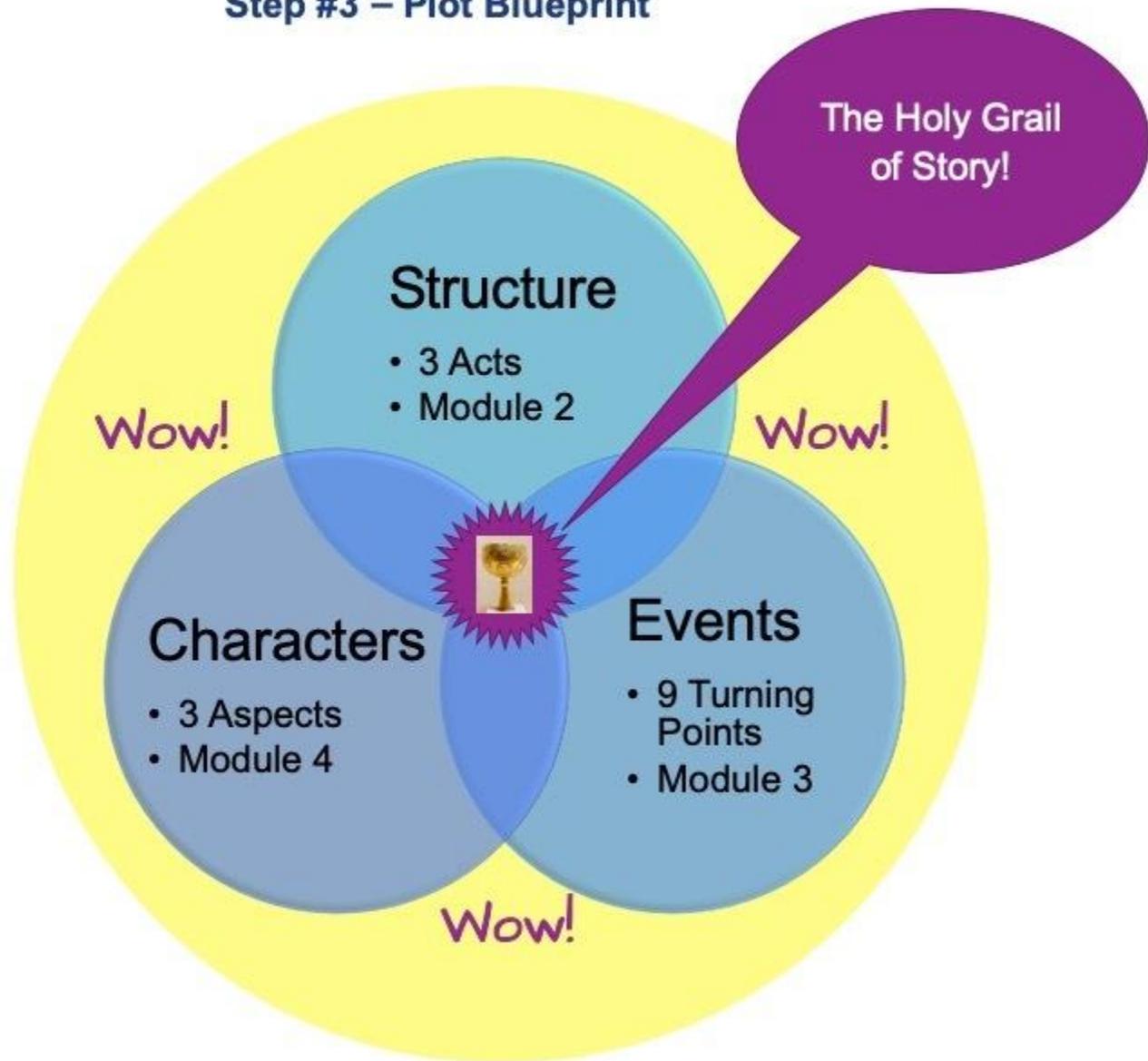
(You should hear an angel chorus singing now....)

But... here's what happens when you *don't* level-up your plotting and create a beautifully connected plot/character dynamic. It looks like this -- very much the same, but kind of "boring and callous," missing the internal

connections and power that make the story a reader favorite.

Alicia's Story Blueprint Theory

Step #3 – Plot Blueprint



Plot Blueprint Mastery is your Golden Ticket (woo-hoo, finally a ticket!) beyond the mediocre plot to the Holy Grail of story.

Interested?

Want to get your plotting mastery on?

The doors are OPEN!

[Blueprint Your Plot with Alicia Rasley](#)

(<http://bitly.com/plotblueprint>)

This is a one-of-a-kind immersive course, complete with all the lessons that give you a shortcut to years of experience (both writing and editing), 4 full workbooks, an online writers' group, and 4 private, 1-on-1 sessions with me. This takes you all the way through plotting your story, from the first idea through the super-structure and the internal framing and the design of character development.

And you won't do it alone. I'll be there with you at each step. After two decades of editing, writing, publishing, and teaching, I've got enough experience to help you figure out and fix the plot problems that come up, and intensify the insights you get along the way.

So if you know you have a great story idea, but developing it seems insurmountable... well, this course is for you. With both system and sensitivity, the Plot Blueprint process lets you build your own story in an effective and efficient way. You can move from just imagining a good story to actually mastering it.

If you're interested, check it out. I'd love to see YOU become a Plot Master!

Alicia

P.S. Here's the course link again. <http://bitly.com/plotblueprint>

[Blueprint Your Plot with Alicia Rasley](#)

Please [email me if you have questions](#).

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SUBJECT: Will a [Plot Blueprint](#) save your story plot?

Dear Writers,

[I put all the amazing Plot Blueprint goodies at the bottom. Feel free to check it out first!]

This is an email about TRUTH. Truth is, looking back, I was always pretty darn good at writing-- sentences, paragraphs, dialogue... **just not plot.** And this is important for you to know, because you should know I had to LEARN to plot. And that means that I can teach it.

Frankly, there's this *air* that many experts and teachers wear, that they're just awesome at everything, right from the cradle. "**Born brilliant, that's us.**" **LOL.**

But generally speaking, most of those who were born with story genius, *can't teach it worth a darn.* They tell you their process, which basically boils down to: *Start by being a story genius,* and then they say, "Okay, see how simple it is? Go do!"

And what happens?

Well, you follow the process (like, for PLOT) taught by this person who—literally—is so good she doesn't need a process!

Those *Geniuses from the Cradle* have NO idea how to organize, troubleshoot, think around corners, and (more importantly) teach others how to do this, because they didn't have to develop these muscles.

They just created a story and revealed it to great applause, and took a bow.

Yeah, they're naturals. They didn't get stuck and study for years, and put a zillion plot pieces together, and then find the shortcuts that help every single writer, every single time.

TRUTH: When it came to complex plotting, across genres, I didn't succeed so easily.

I had to work for it. I had to study all kinds of literature, and get a graduate degree in literary analysis. And I had to write and write and write dozens of stories, in different genres and in mixed genres.

I had to judge and edit hundreds of manuscripts from other writers. And I had to teach thousands of students, showing AND telling by synthesizing their stories, seeing around corners, and solving their knottiest plot problems.

And after couple decades of loving plot and thinking about it all the time

(even in the middle of the night, ask my husband!)... something *beautiful* happened.

I developed shortcuts that *always* worked, even for writers who *weren't* naturally genius at plot.

Psst... I even created ways of finding and refining plot that **blew the minds of multi-published writers, each and every one** *very good at story already*, and they were the first to tell me **I had to create a course to teach others what I'd taught them.**

So here it is...

The Plot Blueprint, a Masterclass for those who want to jump over years of struggle, the writing, the re-writing, and the plot angst.

What do you get when you take The Plot Blueprint?

My brain in a box! You get...

- The techniques I had to pioneer and master to write stories that got published and won awards.
- The methods I used to deepen a good plot of my own, one that ended up a bestselling story.
- The insights and ways to level up a plot that works effectively every single time, in every single genre.
- The path forward that honors your personal story vision... and makes it even better.
- The course you can use for every single story you write, from first draft, to second draft, and all the way to last draft.

You get *all of this* without the sweat I experienced, the gnashing of teeth, or the scrapping of entire stories—sob— because “it turns out they just don’t work.”

Instead, [I make it easy for YOU to become a plot genius.](#) Cross my heart.

So, what’s inside the Plot Blueprint Box?

YAY! Let’s take a look inside at all the goodies you will have at your plotting disposal! (And you can decide how this might be the best thing you do for your inner storyteller.)

* * *

Welcome to the Plotting Blueprint.

(This isn’t just a course, guys. This is a complete VIP Plotting Seminar, that

you can take from your home office, living room, or back porch.) While most courses only teach you a piece of the puzzle, you're about to get the Whole Jigsaw:

MODULE 1 – Jumpstart Your Plot (Yes, this is all about YOU.)

While most courses dive right into theory and more theory, how-to and more how-to (followed by tons of examples that make things look instantly easy until you sit down alone to write your own story)....

Instead, I start at the very center with YOU, YOUR audience, and (most importantly) the story YOU want to write.

If you put plot before any of that, you can end up with generic plotting that is full of cobbled-together pieces added for the sake of "doing it."

Your vision of your story *should* come first, your best writing approach *should* come first, and even delighting your audience *should* come first, so that you can harness the plot instead of the plot harnessing you.

Here's you'll get to do in Module 1...

- Craft the Power Paragraph that will drive your plot because it...
 - captures your story's uniqueness,
 - gets to the heart of your audience, and
 - reveals the super power that makes *you* the perfect person to tell this story.
- Identify your personal way to create, conceptualize, and organize, so that you never fight your writing process, ever again.
- Create a troubleshooting plan 100% specific to your personality and brain, so that you're plotting at your full potential.
- Build grit and resilience over your inner critic, so that nothing stops you mid-way through writing. Listening to your inner critic leads to weaker plotting, frankly. Don't do that. (As for *outer* critics—those doubters around you—you have my encouragement to completely ignore them. They're probably jealous of your creativity and drive!)

MODULE 2 – Three Acts Like You've Never Known Them

You may think you know all about the three acts of story. But you haven't begun to pull out the power of the Beginning, Middle, and End until you learn my secret weapons.

Here's what's inside the Three Acts module:

- Learn to interplay your plot like the masters do, and use the intersections to create a story so compelling even you can't put it down.
- Plunge your character directly into action in a way that guarantees maximum crisis (the recipe for all great stories).
- Create a Secret Internal Conflict and place it at the center of each act to not only challenge your characters... but also create scenes your readers will tell their friends about.
- Rock your characters' world *authentically*, and use world-building to powerfully create Forces of Transformation (this is the juice that causes books to be turned into movies).
- Use the strategy of Ascending Risks to create plot events that feel dangerous in the very best way.
- Plot the Three Acts in a way that will corral your great ideas and turn them into a comprehensive whole. That will give you the certainty that YOU CAN DO THIS! You can write this story and make it work!
- Brainstorm right through the problem parts in coaching calls with Alicia, who has filled more plot holes than a gravedigger!

MODULE 3 – Plot the Nine Turning Points like a Well-Organized Dervish (conflict and drama alert).

With 3 turning points per act, in each act a crisis is set up, intensifies, and explodes-- but only if you do it right.

- Craft impending excitement even in the quietest of stories by pushing the character's (and maybe the audience's) psychological buttons.
- Harness the Point of No Return (maybe the most important turning point of all) to close off every exit and force your characters into the explosion that you've been building the entire story. You'll do this by using what I call... the Jolt of Motivation that restarts the character's inner drive.
- Twist the knife into the character's (and audience's) heart, by using setup and payoffs anchored in their deepest fear. This is essence of riveting pacing. And you do want that, right?
- Intensify the Inevitable External Event that you MUST include to resolve the external conflict in the end. It must be super-dramatic to fulfill your story promise and force a lasting change on the characters.
- Nail your Resolution scene by displaying the Disordered World, restoring it to some order, and showcasing the transformation the plot has brought. This escalation of conflict and consequence is the difference between a beginner's book and a master's book.

MODULE 4- Alicia's Secret Weapon: Your Story, Your Plot, Live or Die with the Characters

You would think that a course on plotting wouldn't really be talking about characters, but it turns out that without characters, no one has a problem to solve, and no cares about a plot.

- Nail the character aspects of Journey, Goal, and Strength to effectively and emotionally fuel your unique plot.
- Level up your character's story journey, by charting the tumultuous plunges into danger with each act and in every single turning point. This way every step puts the character in greater psychological risk. (And this adds to the reader's experience.)
- Drive your characters to confront and survive the plot obstacles with the Character Goal, by determining what they want and why it's **bad** for them.
- Amp up the motivation by knowing what the characters *can't tell you*, and then use this information *against them*.
- Pummel your characters with plot problems based on the Strength that Becomes the Flaw, to keep them off-balance enough to screw it all up and bring on disaster. (Character perfection is annoying and a complete plot-stopper.)

Every module has (of course) video, audio, examples, and the exact action steps for you to take so that by the end of The Plot Blueprint, you'll have... [Wait for it...wait for it....]

A plot that is so strong, so dynamic, so fulfilling for the audience that you can confidently write, script, narrate (whatever story form is your great love) and tell that story, knowing: This. Story. Works.

Big promise. And seriously, *what if you're not sure* if you're really on the right path?

Let me tell you about the BONUSES!

Bonus #1: FOUR one-on-one, 30-minute personal calls with book consultant Alicia Rasley. (Valued at \$1000 when hiring me outside the course.)

I call this, "Me and you being brilliant together!"

Bonus #2: Blueprint Plot Workbooks that Rock Your Story. (Valued at \$47.) These are comprehensive workbooks for each module. These aren't just your mother's workbooks. You'll actually use them to help you create an actual plot. (Not to mention there's some great clip-art.)

In a world of video courses that have no support and no workbooks, I want you to know that you are fully supported with both personal interaction and workbooks that will guide every step of the way through the plotting process.

Bonus #3 – The Plot Blueprint Forum. (Valued at \$447 for the year.)

A student-only private forum, so you can ask questions and get answers, debate plot options, and experiment with alternative events.

Bonus #4– Monthly Live Zoom Q/A Sessions. (Valued at \$997 for the year.)

This is where you get the benefit of group questions as the opportunity to get feedback on exactly what you're working on now.

That's over \$2400 in bonuses. And here's the best news. The cost of the Plot Blueprint Masterclass is less than hiring me for one hour as a consultant. (And you get two full hours of personal consultation with me in this offer.)

The Plot Blueprint is all yours for \$497.

[Will I see you on the inside?](#)

To be fair, I need to let you know the deadline. It's Sunday 19 May at midnight ET. After that, the doors close so that I can focus on my students.

This is the charter class, and the investment will never be that low again. So that's it. The doors are open. YOUR TURN! And if you think this course is what you've been needing, then I can't WAIT to see you on the inside.

Alicia

P.S. Don't wait, okay?