

First Aid for Resuscitating a Dead Plot

By Stephen Wertzbauger

Plot is critical to the success of commercial fiction. But if your plot flat lines, your story will die a cruel and agonizing death. Fortunately there are three techniques that you can use to shock a dead plot back to life; these are characterization, suspense, and conflict. Consistently using these three techniques will breathe life back into any dead or dying plot.

Characterization is one of the most important, yet often overlooked techniques for breathing life into a dead plot. Who your characters are and how they react to events and circumstances drives a plot forward. There are two aspects of characterization, the outer life and the inner life.

The outer life of a character is the stock on the floor. It's what the other characters see and experience. Such details can include your character's physical appearance, how he dresses, where he lives, his profession, or lack thereof. Who does he associate with? How is his family life? Is he married, divorced, separated? Does he have children? Has he been in prison; why?

The inner life of a character is the stock back in the stock room. It defines how your character reacts to life. Such details can include spiritual beliefs, natural abilities, her morals and ethics, her identity: past and present, such as wife, mother, daughter, sister, lover. Other inner life details that you can use are her sexual preferences, including her attitudes toward sex and sexual roles, her motivations, attitude towards authority, habits, hobbies; the list is almost endless.

Although characterization is important in creating strong, healthy plots, a lack of anticipation and uncertainty in your story will drive a stake through the heart of your plot. Suspense provides that uncertainty and anticipation. How do you build suspense? One way is to give your characters an objective. Unmoving characters drag your plot to a grinding halt. Characters in motion create suspense.

But don't just give your characters something to do, give them a time limit; a Ticking Clock. Your character has 24 hours to save the world. Will she succeed or fail?

A third technique that will resuscitate a dead plot is conflict. Conflict creates tension and tension creates motion, which drives your plot forward. How do you create conflict? By throwing two dynamically opposite characters together and making them interact. The result? Conflict.

But don't just put two characters together, give them conflicting objectives. Character A is writing a story under an impossibly tight deadline that will make his reputation. Character B needs character A's help to choose the color scheme for their rapidly upcoming wedding. How each character reacts to the situation creates conflict.

Plot in commercial fiction is the beating heart of your story. A dead plot kills your story dead. Fortunately, however, you can use a variety of techniques to resuscitate a dead plot. Three of these techniques are characterization, suspense, and conflict. Using the techniques discussed will provide much needed first aid to any plot in danger of dying a miserable death.

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Write A Novel In A Month!

Review by Mervyn Love, WritersReign

Can this really happen? Well, after putting it to the test, my personal answer is 'Yes' and 'No'. I purchased this eBook at the beginning of July 2010. The author, Dan Strauss, who has written a number of books for

writers, gives a plan on how to tackle, what to many, would seem an unlikely task. He writes in an engaging and upbeat way and lays down exactly what you should be doing from Day 1 to the completion of your book. His premise is that by the end of a month you can have your book ready to send to a publisher.



This was exactly what I needed as, although I've written many short stories, I've never tackled a complete book as it seemed like a daunting chore to me. I had a children's' book in my mind which I wanted to get down on paper, and by following his plan and his methods I set about writing it. The plan, and all his other tips and shortcuts, were easy to follow, and I actually enjoyed the process which before had seemed onerous to say the least. And the result? After starting at the beginning of July the book was done by the end of the month! But...

Was my book ready for a publisher at this point? Well, actually, no. Why? Because I had not stuck entirely to the time schedule Dan Strauss sets out. Lost some Brownie points there, I know, but still, I kept going and did all the revision, corrections and so on. This took me another two months so that by the end of September my book was ready to send out. Being a children's' book it was shorter than your average blockbuster too, weighing in at just shy of 60,000 words.

So is writing a [Novel In A Month](#) pie in the sky? Well, if I'd stuck to the letter of Dan Strauss's law it could have been done much more quickly. And when I get to work on my next book the experience of doing the first one will be invaluable in completing it faster. Whether I personally could manage it in a month remains to be seen, but come on, be honest, even a book done and dusted in three months by someone who has never written one before is pretty good. Isn't it?

Find out more yourself here: [Novel In A Month](#)