

Robert McKee's



THRILLER DAY

CHILE

--COURSE OUTLINE--

- I. A Brief History of the Crime Genre.
- II. The twelve Subgenres of Crime.
- III. Seven-Step Creative Process.
- IV. Clueing
- V. Interest Strategies.
- VI. The Psychological Thriller.
- VII. Creating the Antagonist.
- VIII. Protagonist/Antagonist relationship.
- IX. Story Structure and Sequence.
- X. Psychological content.
- XI. Going to the End of the Line.
- XII. Twelve Shades of Thriller Endings.
- XIII. Scene conventions of Crime/Thrillers.
- XIV. What thrills in the Thriller?
- XV. Screening SEVEN.

The Thrill in the Thriller

Conventional crime stories play upon the audience's conventional fears of lawlessness, violence, death. But the Thriller goes far deeper. It reaches into the audience's unconscious mind to arouse the gripping, irrational fear of a fate worse than death, a fate that would make you beg for oblivion.

The key to this intense terror is the writer's creation of an extreme offset of power between the underdog protagonist and the ruthless spirit of evil lurking within the antagonist. The greater this imbalance, the greater the thrill in the Thriller.

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DEFINITION OF THE THRILLER:

The Thriller is a sub-genre of "Crime" that borrows conventions from four related genres to tell its story from the victim's point of view.

DETECTIVE

Protagonist: Heroic or anti-Heroic professional
Antagonist: Powerful and/or clever criminals
Story Value: Justice
Inciting Incident: Discovery of a crime
Story Climax: Positive, Positive Irony
Audience Reaction: Mystery, suspense, rational fear

ACTION/ADVENTURE

Protagonist: Super Hero
Antagonist: Arch-Villain and/or physical world
Story Value: Justice and/or Survival
Inciting Incident: An attack or discover of pending attack
Story Climax: Positive
Audience Reaction: Rational fear

FILM NOIR

Protagonist: Tough yet vulnerable
Antagonist: Powerful, clever criminals, and a Femme Fatale
Story Value: Survival
Inciting Incident: The Femme Fatale draws him into a crime
Story Climax: Negative Irony, occasionally Positive Irony
Audience Reaction: Mystery, suspense, compassion or pity

HORROR

Protagonist: Non-Heroic and vulnerable
Antagonist: Possessed of THE SPIRIT OF EVIL with strength of epic proportions, or the power to break the basic controls of life.
Story Value: Survival, the fate worse than death
Inciting Incident: An attack by the antagonist
Story Climax: Positive, occasionally Negative
Audience Reaction: Extreme, irrational fear

THRILLER

Protagonist: Non-Heroic and vulnerable
Antagonist: Powerful, clever, with the spirit of evil
Story Value: Survival and/or Justice
Inciting Incident: Discovery of a crime
Story Climax: Positive or Negative Irony
Audience Reaction: Extreme but rational fear, suspense and pity

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Climax Examples

Negative Endings

CHINATOWN	Negative Irony	Protagonist outsmarted/ Overpowered
ARLINGTON ROAD	Negative	Protagonist outsmarted
SEVEN	Negative Irony	Protagonist outsmarted
DIABOLIQUE	Negative	Protagonist outsmarted
BASIC INSTINCT	Negative Irony	Protagonist outsmarted
THE NIGHT PORTER	Negative Irony	Protagonist overpowered
THE SPY WHO/COLD	Negative Irony	Protagonist outsmarted

Positive Endings

MISERY	Positive	Antagonist outsmarted/ Overpowered
PACIFIC HEIGHTS	Positive	Antagonist outsmarted
HAND THAT ROCKS...	Positive	Antagonist overpowered
PLAY MISTY	Positive	Antagonist outsmarted
SILENCE OF THE LAMBS	Positive Irony	Antagonist overpowered
SINGLE WHITE FEMALE	Positive	Antagonist overpowered
CAPE FEAR	Positive	Antagonist overpowered
FATAL ATTRACTION	Positive Irony	Antagonist overpowered
THE HITCHER	Positive	Antagonist overpowered
BLUE VELVET	Positive	Antagonist overpowered
DUEL	Positive Irony	Antagonist outsmarted
PSYCHO	Positive	Antagonist outsmarted
THE PACKAGE	Positive	Antagonist outsmarted/ Overpowered
DEAD CALM	Positive	Antagonist overpowered

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CLUEING

I. Gathering Information and Evidence

A. Various Visual Means

1. Observation/examination of the scene
2. Examination of victim
3. Reading narrative about the crime (letters, statements, voice messages)
4. Reading documents related to the crime (contracts, ledgers)
5. Reading maps
6. Examining photographs or film

B. Various Aural Means

1. Heard at scene
2. Heard from or by witnesses at scene
3. Heard from recordings
4. Interrogation

C. By Touch

1. Temperature of victim
2. Rigor of victim
3. Textures
4. Moistures
5. Objects hidden beneath surfaces

D. By Smell

1. Gases, toxic or safe
2. Body odors, human or animal
3. Scents of nature, flowers, grasses,
4. Scents of bodies of water
5. Perfumes, colognes, and the like
6. Residues of solids or liquids
7. Allergens

E. By Taste

1. Poisons
2. Drugs
3. Foods

F. Psychically

1. Reading perpetrator's mind
2. Reading witnesses' minds
3. Revelation by victim's ghost

G. By Scientific Testing and Analysis

1. Microscope
2. Lenses
3. Chemical
4. DNA
5. Blood/tissue

H. Lack of information as information

I. Confession: Forced or Voluntary

J. False Confession

II. Sifting the Information

A. Deduction

B. Induction

C. Direct observations by detective

D. Sort in Categories of information

E. Discredit information from witnesses

III. Uses of Information

A. Identification of victim

B. Identification of witness

C. Identification of perpetrator

D. Determination and proof of means

E. Determination and proof of motive

IV. Three Means of Concealment of Clues

A. By perpetrator

B. By Chance

C. By author

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Sample Plot Tracing

MISERY

ACT 1

Scene/Time	Scene	Value	Sequence
1. 1:20	Paul finishes novel	(+)	A
2. 4:05	Paul leaves hotel and crashes	(-)	A
3. 5:10	Flashback: Paul decides to write the good book	(+)	B
4. 6:30	Annie rescues Paul from car - INCITING INCIDENT	(+)	C
5. 7:35	Paul wakes, badly injured, nursed by Annie	(+/-)	C
6. 8:40	Annie explains why he's not in a hospital	(-/+)	C
7. 9:55	Annie explains his injuries	(-)	C
8. 12:10	Agent makes Sheriff suspicious	(+)	D
9. 15:10	Annie reveals her obsession and asks to read Paul's new book	(-/+)	E
10. 16:10	Sheriff checks out hotel		D
11. 18:30	Annie objects to swearing in his book, has tantrum, then apologizes	(-/+)	E
12. 21:10	Sheriff and wife search for Paul, but do not see his car as Annie drives by and sees them	(-/+)	D
13. 22:50	Annie happily returns with latest Misery and lies about weather Conditions. Paul begins to suspect that he is her prisoner	(-/+)	F
14. 23:35	Annie raves about his writing		

	and serves a lovely breakfast	(+/-)	F
15. 25:20	Annie introduces her pig and tells Paul she's on Page 300	(+/-)	F
16. 27:30	Annie says MISERY saved her from the worst time of her life	(+/-)	F
17. 31:40	Annie flies into a rage over death of Misery and tells him he is her prisoner. Paul finds the door locked.	(-)	F

ACT II

18. 32:30	Sheriff, State Police on hunt	(+)	G
19. 38:00	Annie burns Paul's book. She says she's on God's mission to save him	(-)	H
20. 38:20	Sheriff continues to search	(+)	G
21. 39:30	Paul hides his pills	(+)	I
22. 40:50	Paul devises escape plan	(+)	I
23. 45:45	Annie orders Paul to bring MISERY back to life, leaves for paper	(+/-)	I
24. 48:50	Paul picks lock, finds dead phone, but steals more pills	(-/+)	I
25. 54:20	Annie returns but he gets back to his room in time	(+/-)	I
26. 56:40	Paul tricks Annie and hides pills	(+/-)	I
27. 58:05	Sheriff discovers car and guesses that Paul has been kidnapped	(+)	G
28. 59:05	Paul starts to execute escape plan	(+/-)	J
29. 62:00	Annie rejects Paul's first draft's Inciting Incident	(-)	J
30. 64:30	Annie loves second draft's Inciting Incident	(+)	J
31. 65:35	Sheriff begins to read MISERY	(+)	K

32. 69:10	Paul's pill plan fails	(-)	J
33. 71:00	Writing, reading, exercise montage as Paul formulates new plan	(+)	L
34. 73:45	Annie says she loves him, thinks about suicide and drives off	(-/+)	L
35. 74:00	Paul steals knife from kitchen	(+)	L
36. 74:30	Sheriff finds clue in book	(+)	K
37. 76:45	Paul discovers Annie's murders	(-)	L
38. 77:20	Paul practices his knife move	(+)	L
39. 79:00	Annie returns and goes upstairs	(+/-)	L
40. 79:40	Annie discovers his plan	(-)	L
41. 82:20	Annie hobbles Paul CLIMAX OF ACT II	(-)	L

ACT III

42. 84:50	Sheriff finds lead to Annie	(+)	K
43. 85:30	Paul gives Annie the finger	(+)	M
44. 86:10	Sheriff gets second lead in store	(+)	K
45. 93:00	Sheriff pulls up, Annie drugs Paul and kills Sheriff	(-)	K
46. 95:25	Annie decides to kill them both. CRISIS: Paul conceives last plan. He persuades her to let him finish the book, then grabs lighter fluid	(+/-)	M
47. 96:30	CLIMAX: Paul prepares his trap	(+)	M
48. 100:40	Paul springs trap, they fight, she hits her head . (False Ending)	(+/-)	M
49. 101:45	She attacks again and he bludgeons her with lead pig	(+)	M

RESOLUTION

50. 103:55 Eighteen months later, Paul lunches
with his Agent, still "haunted" by Annie (+/-)

N

Story told in three Acts, fourteen Sequences, Fifty Scenes.

SE7EN

Scene-By-Scene

SEVEN

Act I

Sequence 1 -- "Somerset's World"

Scene 1 - SOMERSET'S APARTMENT -- Neutral.

Scene 2 -- DOMESTIC MURDER SCENE -- Neutral.

Scene 3 -- STREET -- **Inciting Incident of Subplot** -- Negative.

Scene 4 -- SOMERSET'S APARTMENT -- Neutral.

Sequence 2 -- "The Killer's World"

Scene 5 -- JOHN DOE'S APARTMENT -- Neutral.

Sequence 3 -- "The Crime"

Scene 6 -- MILL'S APARTMENT -- Neutral.

Scene 7 -- STREET AND GLUTTON'S HOUSE -- **Subplot** -- Negative.

Inciting Incident of Central Plot -- Negative.

Scene 8 -- TRIP TO MORGUE -- **Subplot** -- Negative.

Scene 9 -- MORGUE -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Scene 10 -- CAPTAIN'S OFFICE -- **Subplot** -- Negative.

Central Plot -- Ironically Positive.

Act I Climax

Act II

Sequence 4 -- "The Link"

Scene 11 -- LAWYER'S OFFICE -- **Central Plot** -- Negative.

Scene 12 -- SOMERSET'S OFFICE -- **Central Plot** -- positive.

Scene 13 -- GLUTTON'S HOUSE -- **Central Plot** -- Positive.

Scene 14 -- DETECTIVE'S OFFICE -- **Central Plot** -- Negative.

Scene 15 -- SOMERSET'S/LIBRARY -- **Central Plot** -- Positive Irony
Subplot -- Positive

Sequence 5 - "The-Team"

Scene 16 -- MILL'S CAR -- **Central Plot/Subplot** -- Positive Irony

Scene 17 -- DETECTIVE'S OFFICE -- **Subplot** -- Positive

Scene 18 -- MILL'S APARTMENT -- **Subplot** -- Positive

Sequence 6 -- "The Red Herring"

Scene 19 -- MILL'S APARTMENT -- *LATER* -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Scene 20 -- LAWYER'S HOME -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Scene 21 -- LAWYER'S OFFICE -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Scene 22 -- FORENSIC OFFICE -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Scene 23 -- PRECINCT/STREET/SLOTH APT -- **Central Plot** -- Negative

Sequence 7 - "Mill's World"

Scene 24 -- STAIRWELL -- **Subplot** -- Negative

Scene 25 -- HOSPITAL -- **Central Plot** -- Negative

Scene 26 -- SOMERSET'S APARTMENT -- **Subplot** -- Negative Irony

Scene 27 -- COFFEE SHOP - **Subplot** -- Positive Irony

Sequence 8 - "The Near Miss"

Scene 28 -- DETECTIVES' OFFICE -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Scene 29 -- LIBRARY TO BARBER SHOP -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Scene 30 -- DOE'S HALL/STREETS -- **Central Plot** -- Positive Irony

Act II Climax

Act III

Sequence 9 - "The Killer's Mind"

Scene 31 -- DOE'S HALL/STREET -- **Central Plot** -- Positive Irony
Subplot -- Negative Irony

Scene 32 -- DOE'S APARTMENT -- **Central Plot** -- Positive Irony

Sequence 10 -- "Losing Faith"

Scene 33 -- LEATHER SHOP -- **Central Plot** -- Negative Irony

Scene 34 -- BROTHEL/PRECINCT -- **Central Plot** -- Negative

Scene 35 -- BAR -- **Subplot** -- Negative Irony

Scene 36 -- CROSS-CUT BEDROOMS -- Neutral

Sequence 11 -- "The Truth of the False Ending"

Scene 37 -- PRIDE'S APARTMENT -- **Central Plot** -- Negative

Scene 38 -- STREET/PRECINCT -- **Central Plot** -- Positive Irony

Scene 39 -- PRECINCT -- **Central Plot** -- Positive

Subplot -- Positive

Act III Climax

Act IV

Sequence 12 -- "The Bonding"

Scene 40 -- DA'S OFFICE -- **Central Plot** -- Positive Irony

Scene 41 -- LOCKER ROOM -- **Subplot** -- Doubly Positive

Sequence 13 -- "The Killer's Trap"

Scene 42 -- STREET_/HIGHWAY -- **Central Plot** -- positive

Scene 43 -- FIELDS -- **Central Plot** -- Doubly Negative

Subplot - Positive Irony

Act IV Climax