

## Crafting a Page Turner -

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### Elements of a page turner

- A main character with a **goal** the reader **cares** about
- Scene structure that **builds**
- Secrets and surprises, **frequently revealed**
- **Escalating** stakes

### Start with an idea that intrigues YOU: the spark SUPPOSE... and what if...?

- *Suppose* a young woman, 9-months pregnant with her first child, throws a yard sale; and what if a woman from her past comes, talks her way into her house and she never comes out
- Suppose strangers who meet on a train agree to kill each other's wives...
- Suppose a struggling painter, disgraced by accusations of forgery, is offered a solo show f she'll copy a work that was stolen from a museum...
- Suppose a wife stages her own disappearance to make it look as if her husband killed her...

### A main character with a goal the *reader* cares about

Elizabeth Bennett

Clarice Starlin

Jason Bourne

### A flawed main character: Afraid of snakes...

--- Making it personal; Getting it right this time

### Your protagonist

Name:

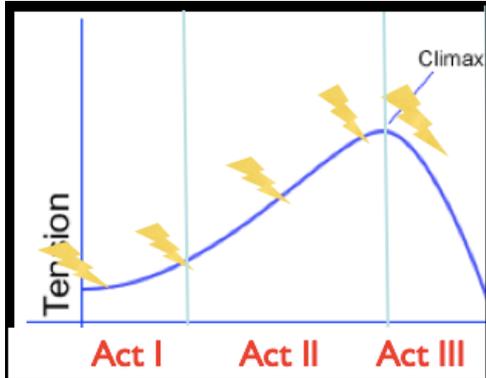
Strengths:

Flaws:

GOAL and why it matters

***Past experience that's driving them in the present:***

**Structure for forward momentum**



Major plot twists - conflicts & reversals  
Opening  
End of ACT I  
Middle of Act II  
End of Act II  
Climax – resolution

**The protagonist's journey**

**Your story**

- In the beginning: the goal
- Conflicts, setbacks, roadblocks
- Characters with competing goals
- Why it matters

**The easiest place to lose the reader is in Chapter 1**

- How to set the plot in motion
- *Ask an unanswered question*
- Make the reader NEED to keep reading

**Some openings**

- An incident that throws a character off balance and sets the story in motion

**The challenge of establishing narrative**

**Where NOT to begin**

- A crowd scene
- *Too much* establishing narrative (back story, weather, setting...)
- *Not enough* establishing narrative
- Rush to “drop the body” NOW
- The prologue Band-aid
- Stealing your story's thunder
- False advertising: bait and switch

***Scenes: The building blocks of plot***

SCENE: Action that takes at a particular time in a particular setting.

- Establishing narrative
- Something happens

- Something *changes*
- Moving on and trying to make sense
  - Mini story arc
  - WHERE TO BREAK

### **AN EXAMPLE - 9 *Dragons* by Michael Connelly**

Bosch's eyes adjusted to the dim light and he saw that he was in an empty bunk room that opened on a central passageway running the length of the hull. The only light came from the overhead hatch all the way down in the bow. Between Harry and that point were six compartment hatches--three on each side--going down the length of the passageway. The last hatch down on the left was standing wide open. Bosch got up and stuck one of the guns back in his belt so he would have a free hand. He started to move, the remaining gun up and ready.

Each hatch had a four-point locking system for storing and sealing the catch. Arrows stenciled on the rusting steel told Bosch which way to turn each handle to unlock and open the compartment. He move own the passageway, checking the compartments one by one, [...]. There was a putrid smell in each compartment that had nothing to do with the catch the vessel once hauled. This boat carried human cargo.

What bothered Bosch most were the cereal boxes. They were all the same brand, and smiling from the front of the package was a cartoon panda bear standing on the brim of a bowl that held a treasure of rice puffs sparkling with sugar. It was cereal for kids.

The last stop in the passageway was the open hatch. Bosch crouched low and moved into the compartment in one fluid stride.

It too was empty.

But it was different. There was no trash here. A battery-powered light hung from a wire attached to a hook on the ceiling. There was an upturned shipping crate stacked with unopened cereal boxes, packs of noodles and gallon jugs of water. Bosch looked for any indication that his daughter had been kept in the room, but there was no sign of her.

Bosch heard the hinges on the hatch beneath him screech loudly. He turned just as the hatch banged shut. He saw the seal on the upper right corner turn into locked position and immediately saw that the internal handles had been removed. He was being locked in. He pulled the second gun and aimed both weapons at the hatch, waiting for the next lock to turn.

It was lower right. The moment the bolt started to turn Bosch aimed and fired both guns repeatedly into the door, the bullets piercing metal weakened by years of rust. He heard someone call out as if surprised or hurt. He then heard a banging sound out in the hallway as a body hit the floor.

Bosch moved to the hatch and tried to turn the bolt on the upper right lock with his hand. It was too small for his fingers to find purchase. In desperation, he stepped back a pace and then threw his shoulder into the door, hoping to snap the lock assembly. But it didn't budge and he knew by the feel of the impact on his shoulder that the door would not give way.

He was locked in.

He moved back to the hatch and tilted his head to listen. There was only the sound of the engines running now. He banged the heel of one of the guns loudly on the metal hatch.

"Maddie?" he called out. "Maddie, are you there?"

There was no response

[...]

A physical pain shot across his chest, matching the pain in his mind. Sharp, deep and unrelenting. He started breathing heavily, and turned his back against the hatch. He opened his collar another button and slid down the rusting metal until he was sitting on the floor with his knees up. He realized he was in a place as claustrophobic as the tunnels he had once inhabited. The battery on the overhead light was dying and soon he would be left in darkness. Defeat and despair overtook him. He had failed his daughter and he failed himself.

### Unpack the tipping points

- Slow down
- A moment of introspection
- Beats
- White space

### See the forest for the trees: A scene-by-scene outline

Chapter 1 Scene 1	Saturday	Yard sale. Melinda shows up. Gets Ivy to give her a green glass swan; gets David to give her a house tour and follows him inside
Chapter 2 Scene 2	Saturday	Ivy talks to friend Jody on phone, Reminiscing about Melinda's odd intensity
Scene 3	Saturday	Ivy and David take a bath; Ivy gets a shard of green glass in her foot
Chapter 3 Scene 4	Sunday	Ivy and David have breakfast; neighbor Mrs. <u>Bindel</u> drags an agent wicker trunk out to the sidewalk; Ivy wonders what's in it and ends up taking it

### Edit to modulate the pace

- Read it aloud to yourself
- Assess tension and release points
- Find the conflicts and plot twists
- Are your scenes building? Hooking and grabbing?
- Are you hinting and revealing strategically?
- Sort viewpoints, timelines
  - Only zigzag in time if you have to
  - Assess placement of flashbacks
  - Eliminate unnecessary characters, narrators