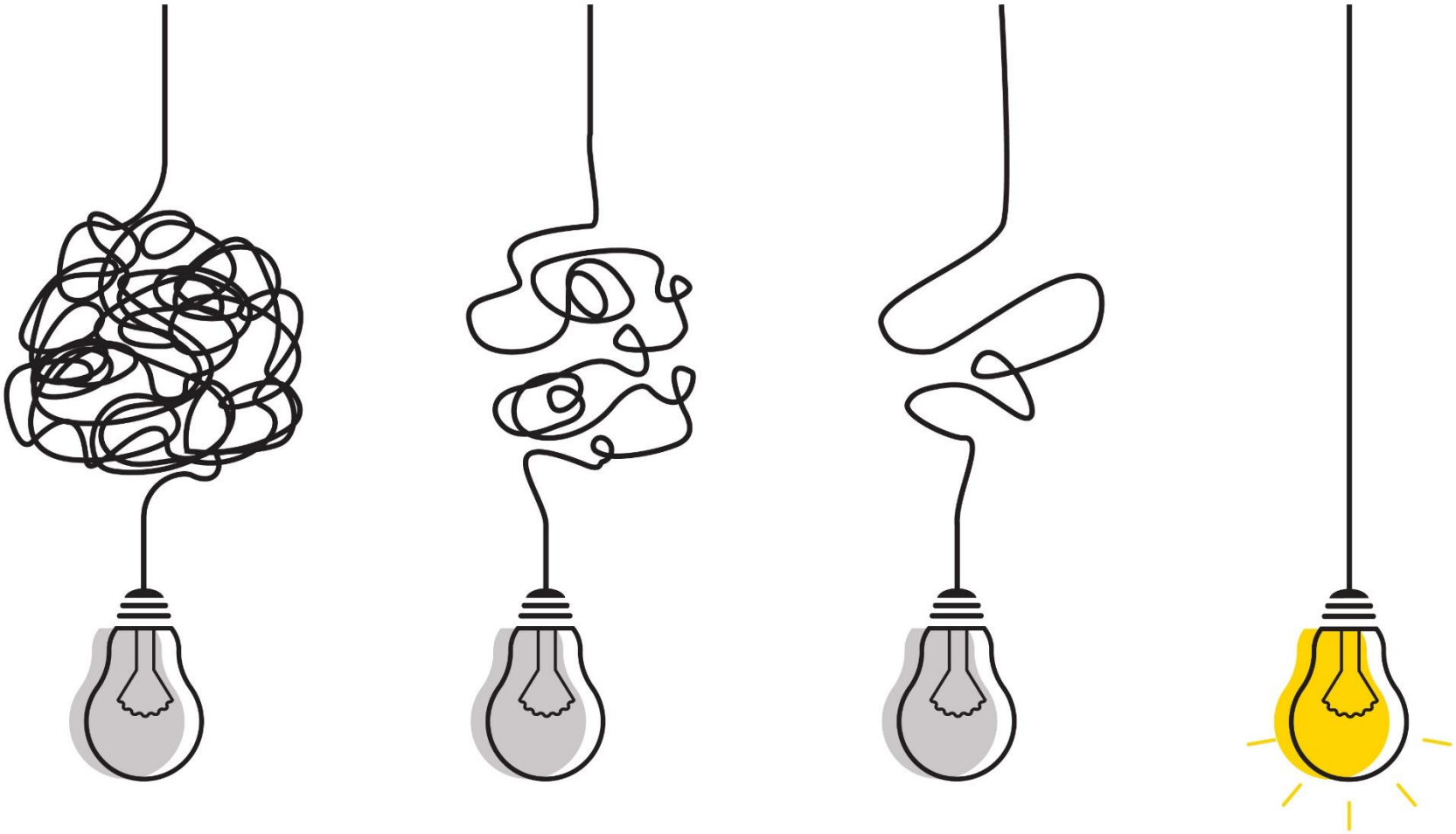
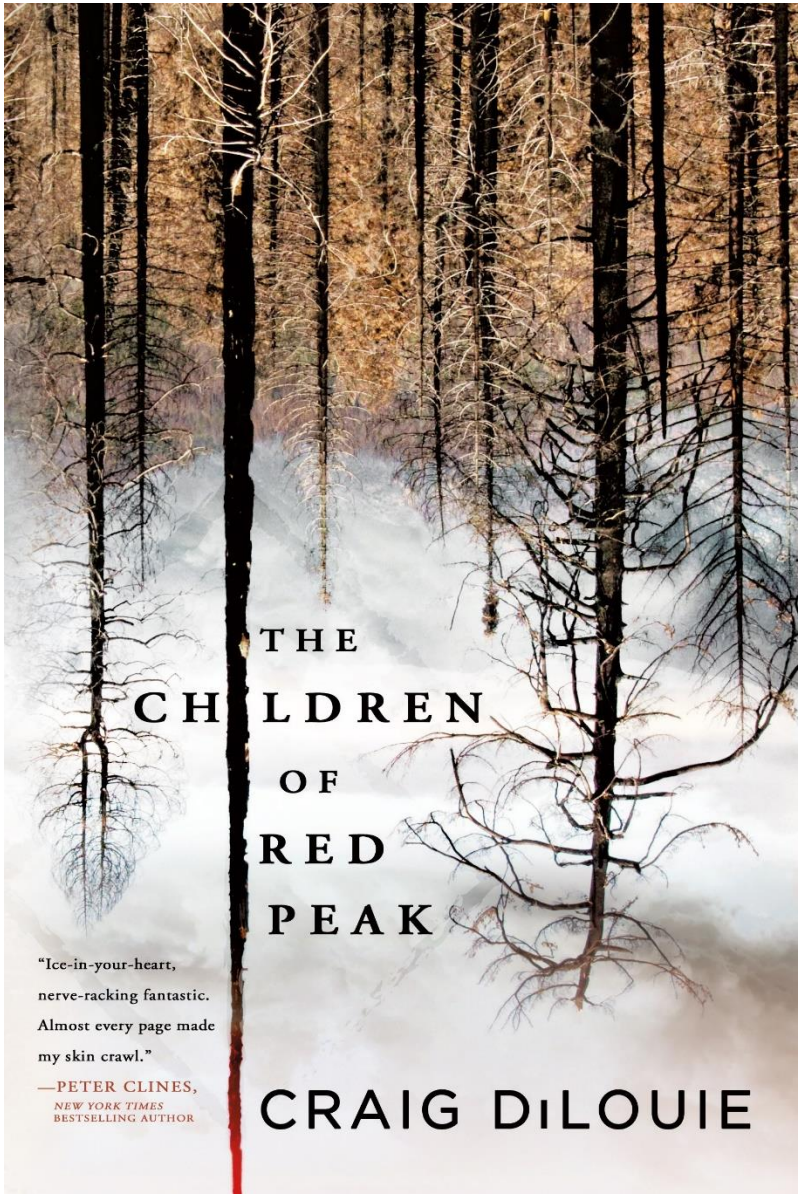
PLAN AHEAD

PREMISE

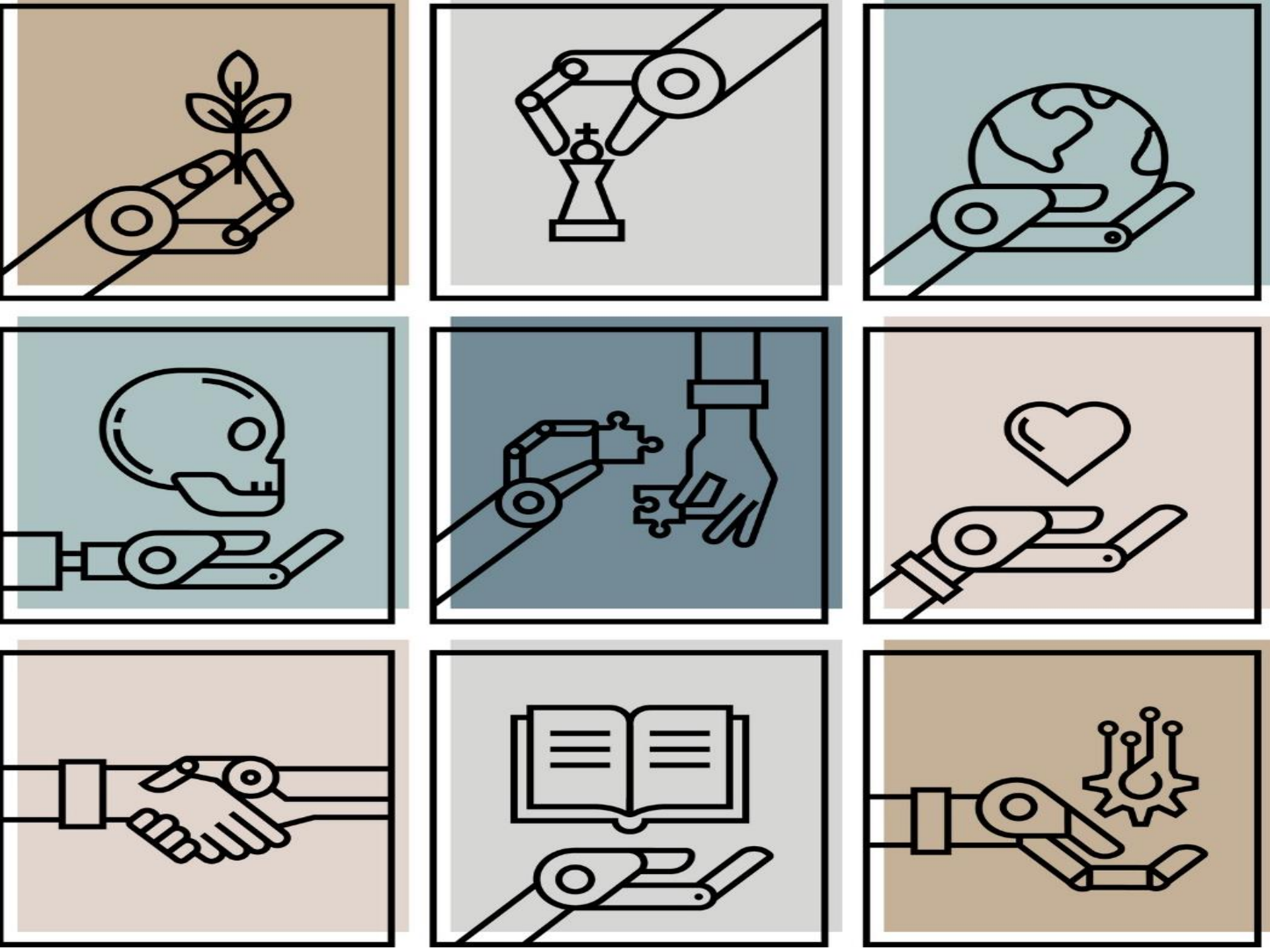


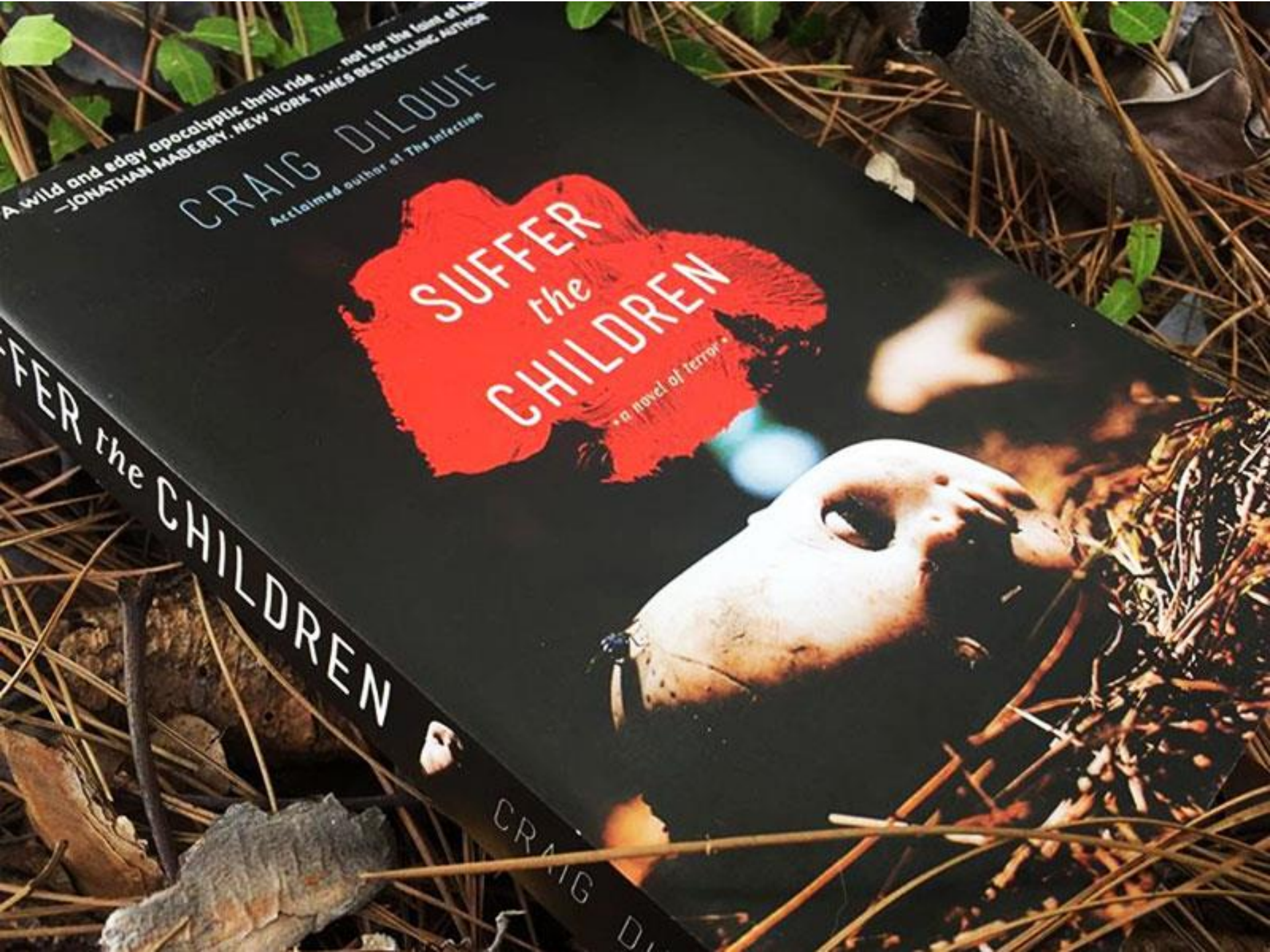
Premise/Theme: The survivors of a doomsday cult's horrific last days reunite to confront their childhood and the entity that appeared on the final night.

IT and Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House* meet the Jonestown massacre in this psychological horror novel about memory, trauma, belonging, and faith.



THEME



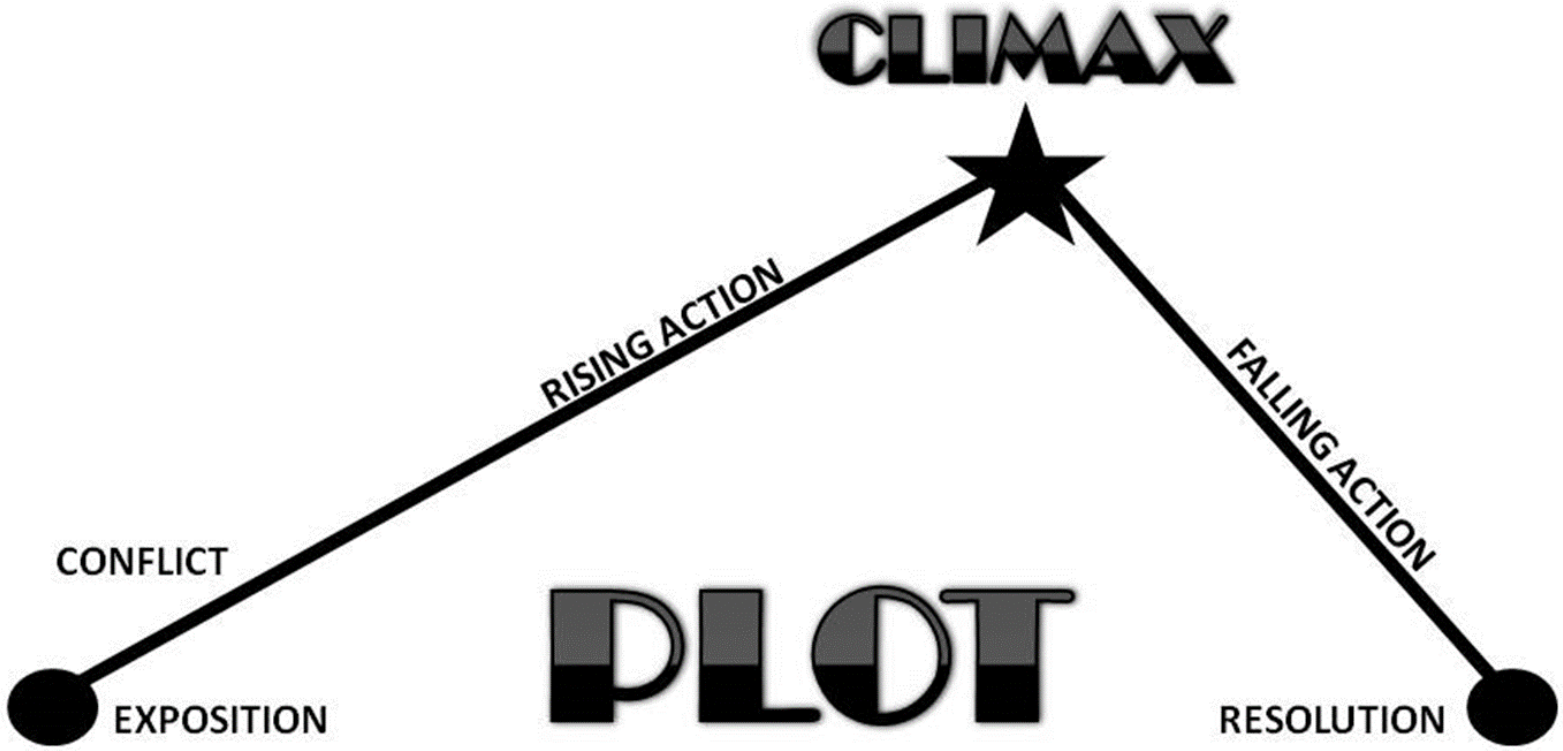

A wild and edgy apocalyptic thrill ride . . . not for the faint of
—JONATHAN MABERRY, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
CRAIG DILOUIE
Acclaimed author of The Infection
SUFFER the CHILDREN
• a novel of terror •
FFER the CHILDREN
CRAIG

SUBJECT	THEME
Love and heartbreak	Love conquers all, but some people lose
Life and death	We don’t know what comes after, so live life to the fullest
Good and evil	If you are good to other people, good things will happen to you
War and peace	We can condemn war while loving those who fight them
Coming of age	Giving in to peer pressure to be likeable can make you dislike yourself
Power	Power corrupts, so it should be limited
Individual and society	A society is only as good as how it treats its minorities
Order and chaos	If you try too hard to control events, you’ll end up losing all control

How to use theme

- Find it as early as possible
- Express it as a single sentence
- Internalize it and let it speak through the story
- Can be explicit at beginning, via Ally character, or via protagonist around final transformation
- Avoid making an argument
- Should relate to central conflict and character arc
- Can be framed as a question aimed at reader
- Be prepared for different reader interpretations

PLOTTING



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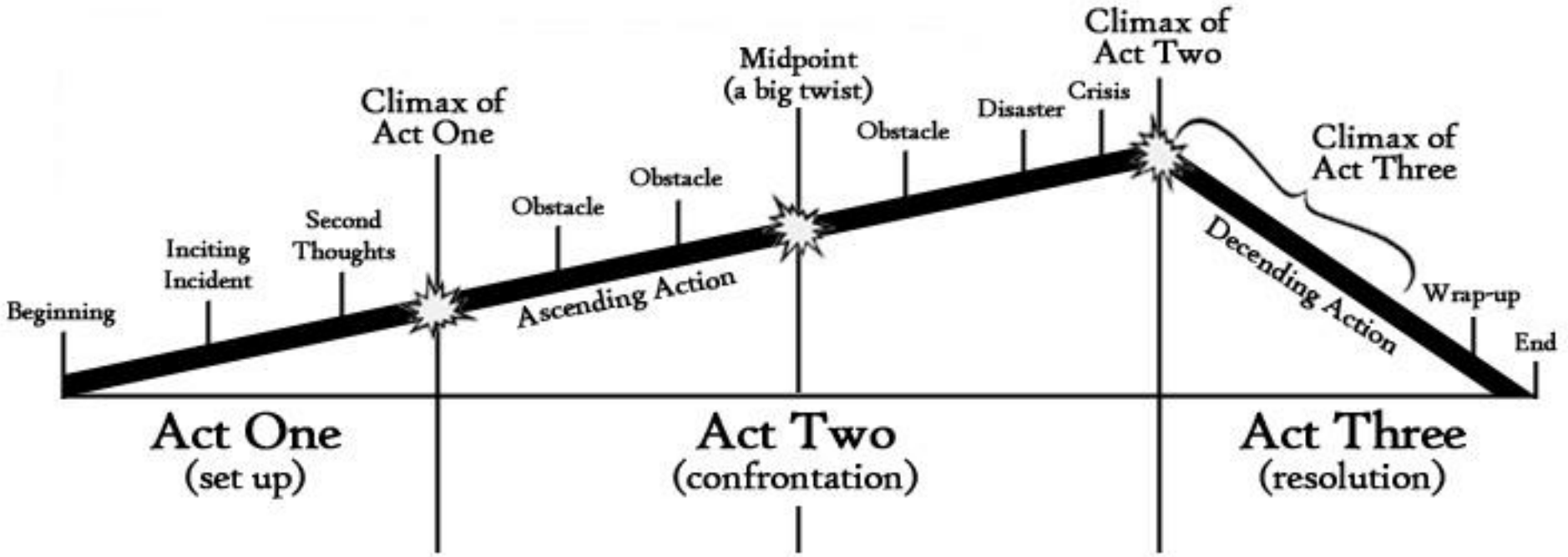
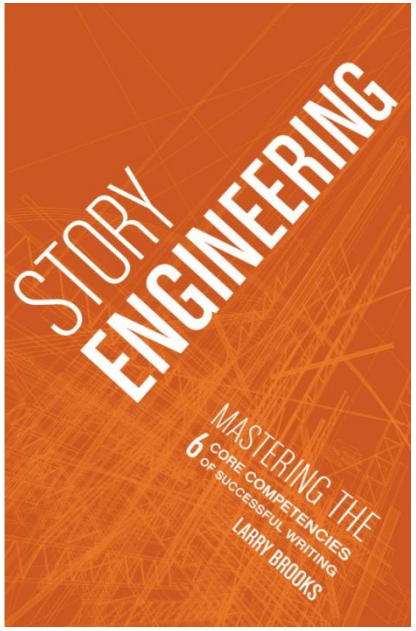
Three-Act Structure





0%	**Setup**	**Opening scene**	**Orphan**
	Hook reader Introduce hero Establish stakes Foreshadow	**Hooking moment** **Setup inciting incident** (OPTIONAL) Major plot twist - does not establish hero's need and quest	Establish demons
25%	**Response**	**First plot point**	**Wanderer**
	Retreat, regroup Doomed fight back Opposition reasserted	MUST define need and quest. Opposition defined Actions to come flow from this point **First pinch point** Antagonistic force asserts itself	Reacts and runs Unsuccessfully strikes back Failures related to character flaws
50%	**Attack**	**Midpoint**	**Warrior**
	Hero proactive Shows initiative Opposition pushes back	New knowledge creates new context Must be game changer Hero empowered **Second pinch point** Antagonistic force hits back hard **"All hope is lost" lull**	Attacks the problem Overcomes flaws
75%	**Resolution**	**Second plot point**	**Martyr**
	Beyond plot point: No new information No new characters Problem resolved (for good or ill)	Final injection of information Game changer once again Last piece of puzzle	Risks all Conquers inner demons Must be catalyst Never rescued or passive
100%		**Final resolution sequence**	

0% **Setup**

Hook reader
Introduce hero
Establish stakes
Foreshadow

25% **Response**

Retreat, regroup
Doomed fight back
Opposition reasserted

50% **Attack**

Hero proactive
Shows initiative
Opposition pushes back

75% **Resolution**

Beyond plot point:
No new information
No new characters
Problem resolved
(for good or ill)

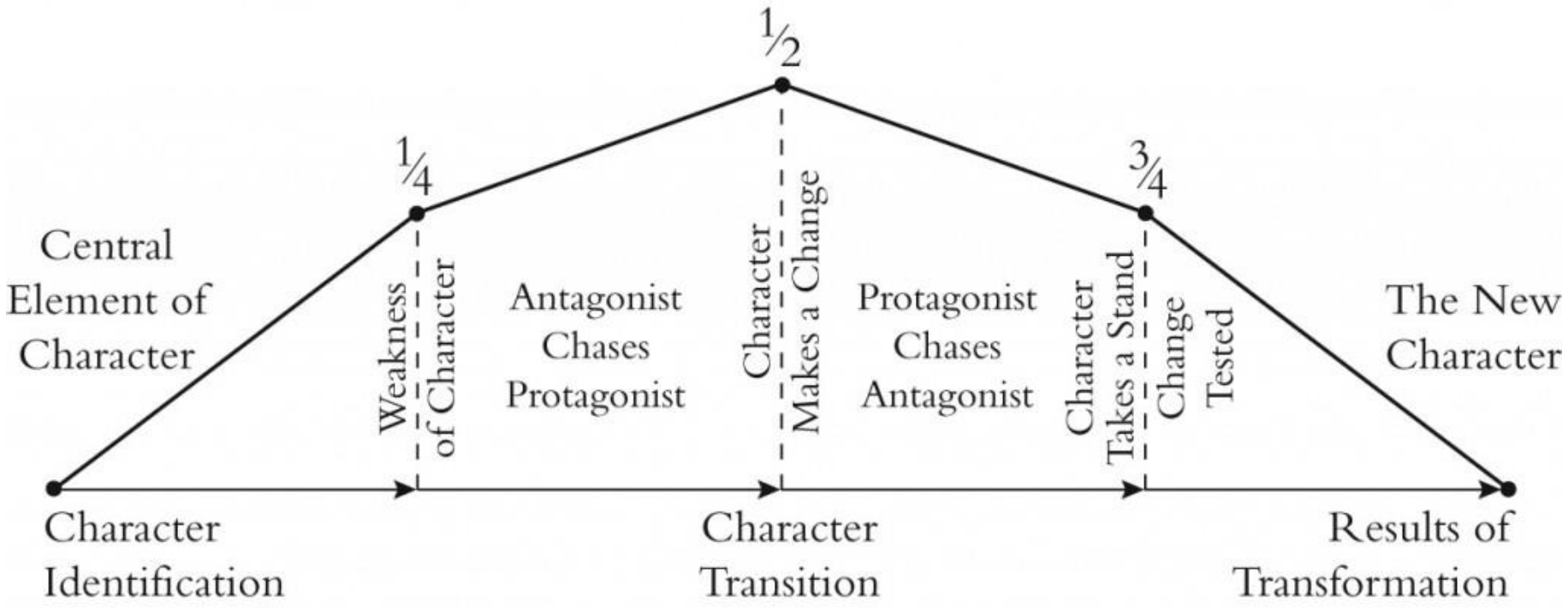
100% **Final resolution sequence**

CHARACTER ARC

THE NORMAL
Character starts in one state (sympathetic, likeable, but flawed)

CONFLICT
Character grows through conflict (obstacles, adversaries, increasing difficulty)

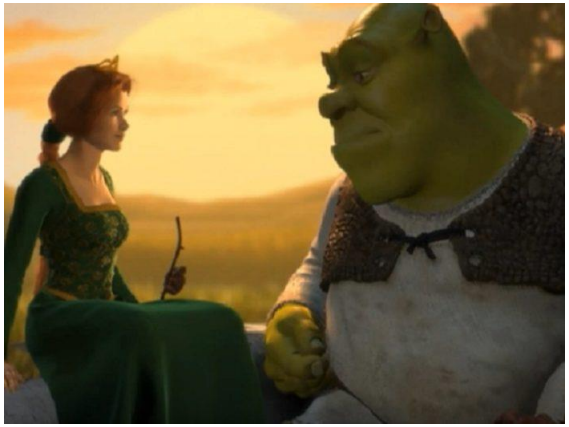
NEW NORMAL
Character reaches a new state, hopefully one that's better



Character Arc

CHARACTERISTIC MOMENT
Character arc begins with introduction scene. The MC is likeable but has a troublesome trait.

THE LIE/MISBELIEF/FLAW
The MC believes a Lie about themselves, resulting in them being an incomplete person. We see symptoms of this Lie and that the MC resists change. The Lie typically stems from the Ghost or Wound, this is where the Lie lives, something that haunts the MC.



WHAT MC WANTS AND NEEDS
MC wants something but can’t have it. Usually something external, and usually the wrong thing. What the MC needs is to correct the misbelief or flaw (internal).

INNER CONFLICT

The MC should be propelled to pursue what they want, eventually getting closer to what they want but further from what they need. Meanwhile, the MC is given the tools to defeat the Lie, find it hard to continue believing it, and take action.

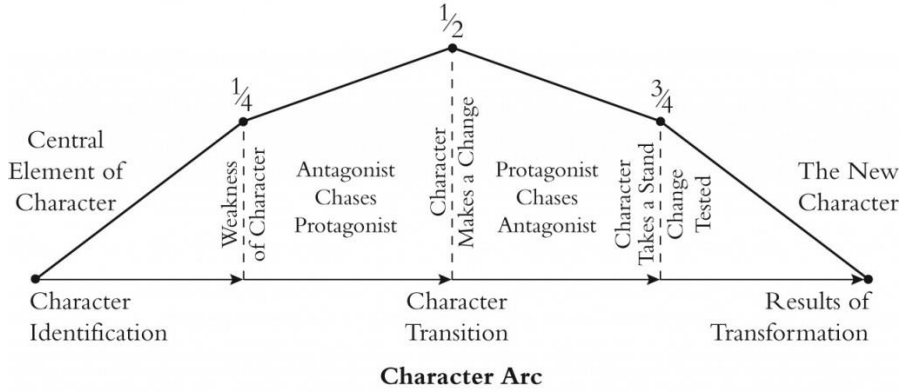
FALSE VICTORY/ALL HOPE IS LOST

The MC appears to have victory in hand, but then appears to be defeated. What MC needs is blatantly spelled out, typically by an Ally. At turning point, MC rejects want and commits to need. Old self dies, rebirth.

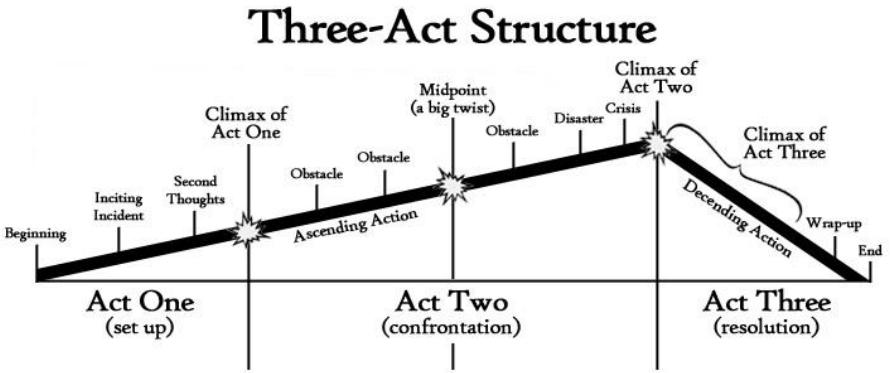
RISING STAKES, CLIMAX, RESOLUTION

With the stakes jacked to the max testing the MC's new self and resolve, the MC goes all in to defeat the antagonist and the Lie. The resolution reveals the new Normal.

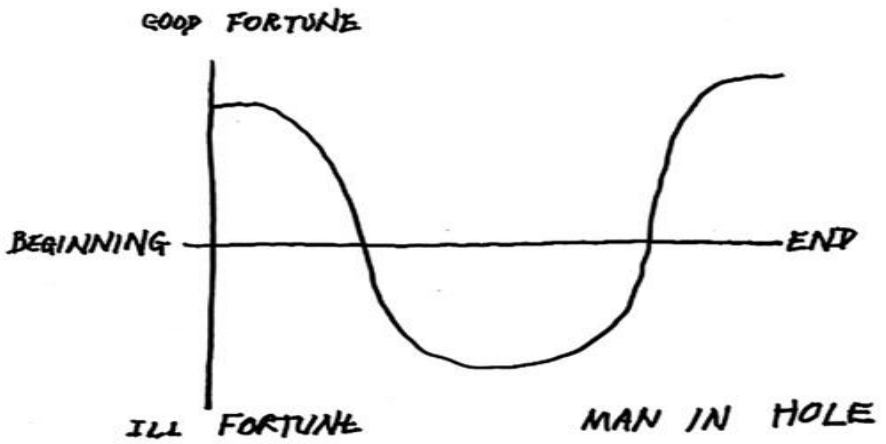
Character



Plot



Emotion



ADVICE

“Read and read to find out what kind of writer you want to be. Write and write to find out what kind of writer you are.”

—Colson Whitehead

Rules are made to be broken but know the rules and know the risks of breaking them.

Success in commercial fiction is about the right book at the right place at the right time.

Writing is a long game.

If you are always writing, you are a better writer than you were last year and will be a better writer next year.