

# Story Engines – Examples of **Structure in Action**

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THE 7 STAGES OF **ANY GREAT STORY**:



## Me Before You by JoJo Moyes (Romance)

*Note from Nick:* I chose this story because, although classified as Contemporary Romance, one could argue it's a "Pure Romance" - although it does not have a happy ending. Specifically, it doesn't have elements of Thrillers, or Mystery, or anything else... it's all about the relationship between the characters. It focuses on internal struggles, rather than external forces, and is an interesting example of how "conflict" doesn't necessarily have to be against another person, and the "opposition" can indeed change from character to character, and from internal to external forces at any time.

The upshot being, if the Story Engines structure works here, it will work for any Romance (regardless of the addition of werewolves, historical context, murders, or anything else).

Enjoy!

*Preparation Phase:*

Twenty-six-year-old Louisa Clark lives with her working-class family. Unambitious and with few qualifications, she feels constantly outshone by her younger sister, Treena, an outgoing single mother. Louisa, who helps support her family, loses her job at a local cafe when the cafe closes. She goes to the Job Centre and, after several failed attempts, is offered a unique employment opportunity: help care for Will Traynor, a successful, wealthy, and once-active young man who was paralyzed in a motorcycle accident two years earlier.

*GCM #1:*

Will's mother, Camilla, hires Louisa despite her lack of experience, believing Louisa can brighten his spirit. Louisa meets Nathan, who cares for Will's medical needs, and Will's father, Steven, a friendly upper-class businessman whose marriage to Camilla is strained.

### *Reactive Phase*

Louisa and Will's relationship starts out rocky due to his bitterness and resentment over being disabled. Things worsen after Will's ex-girlfriend, Alicia, and best friend Rupert reveal that they are getting married. Under Louisa's care, Will gradually becomes more communicative and open-minded as they share experiences together.

### *GCM #2:*

Louisa notices Will's scarred wrists and later overhears his mother and sister discussing how he attempted suicide shortly after Camilla refused his request to end his life through Dignitas, a Swiss-based assisted suicide organization. Horrified by his attempt, Camilla promised to honour her son's wish, but only if he agreed to live six more months. Camilla intends to prove that, in time, he will believe his life's worth living.

### *Proactive Phase:*

Louisa conceals knowing about Will and Camilla's agreement. However, she tells Treena, and together they devise ways that will help convince Will to abandon his death wish. Over the next few weeks, Will loosens up and lets Louisa shave his beard and cut his shaggy hair. Louisa begins taking Will on outings and the two grow closer.

Through their frequent talks, Louisa learns that Will has travelled extensively; his favourite place is a cafe in Paris. Noticing how limited her life is and that she has few ambitions, Will tries to motivate Louisa to change.

Louisa continues seeing her longtime boyfriend, Patrick, though they eventually break up due to her relationship with Will. Meanwhile,

Louisa's father loses his job, causing more financial difficulties. Fortunately, Mr. Traynor offers Mr. Clark a position. Louisa realises that Will is trying to help her secure her freedom from her family. The two attend Alicia and Rupert's wedding where they dance and flirt. Will tells Louisa that she is the only reason he wakes in the morning.

Louisa convinces Will to go on a holiday with her, but before they can leave, Will contracts near fatal pneumonia. Louisa cancels the plans for a whirlwind trip. Instead, she takes Will to the island of Mauritius.

### *GCM #3:*

The night before returning home, Louisa tells Will that she loves him. Will says he wants to confide something, but she admits that she already knows about his plans with Dignitas. Will says their time together has been special, but he cannot bear to live in a wheelchair. He will be following through with his plans. Angry and hurt, Louisa storms off and does not speak to him for the remainder of the trip.

### *Conclusion Phase:*

When they return home, Will's parents are pleasantly surprised by his good physical condition. Louisa, however, resigns as his caretaker, and they understand that Will intends to end his life.

On the night of Will's flight to Switzerland, Louisa visits him one last time. They agree that the past six months have been the best in their lives. He dies shortly after in the clinic, and it is revealed that he left Louisa a considerable inheritance, meant to continue her education and to fully experience life. The novel ends with Louisa at a cafe in Paris, reading Will's last words to her in a letter, that tell her to 'live well'.

### **Who is the hero?**

Louisa

### **Who is the opposition?**

Will - initially in his whole personality, later in his just his emotional state. Later still, the opposition is Louisa's emotions.

### **What is the conflict?**

Louisa must teach Will how to live his life. Later, she must convince him not to die. Finally, she must accept his desires, even if it breaks her heart. The conflict is initially between Louisa and Will. Later, it is an internal struggle inside Louisa herself. Will resists the change at each step before finally accepting and reciprocating Louisa's feelings for him.

### **The Stakes**

Happiness: If Louisa can't make Will see how he's wasting his life, he will never be happy.

Life: Later, she realises that she loves him and must make him see how life is worth living - so that he will choose not to die.

Love: Finally, Louisa understands that she must give Will happy memories so that he can be at peace and they can both treasure the time they spent together. Her love for Will allows her to put his feelings first, even with no happy ending.

## **Tripwire by Lee Child (Jack Reacher – Thriller)**

### *Preparation Phase:*

The prologue describes Victor Truman "Hook" Hobie's carefully planned escape route in the event of somebody discovering his really big, well-guarded secret. His "early-warning system" consists of geographically-located "tripwires". The first tripwire is eleven thousand miles from home and the second tripwire is six thousand miles out. His response to their activation would be to tie up loose ends, cash in, transfer assets and flee the country. Over 30 years of quiet success have made him feel somewhat secure. But then the two tripwire alerts arrive on the same day.

The main story begins with Jack Reacher working two jobs in Key West and bumping into a private detective who happens to be searching for Jack. Costello is working for a client named Mrs. Jacob, a name Reacher does not recognise.

### *GCM #1*

Later on, whilst Reacher is working his night job as a bouncer in a strip club, two very suspicious-looking men also make inquiries about his location. Reacher attempts to follow them but instead finds Costello murdered on the sidewalk.

### *Reactive Phase:*

Jack then flies to New York to find out why Costello was looking for Reacher and why he was killed for it.

Reacher arrives in New York searching for information on Costello and Mrs. Jacob and discovers that the dead detective's office has already been searched. Reacher gets the contact information for Mrs. Jacob and arrives in the midst of a funeral for his old mentor



and friend, Leon Garber. His daughter, Jodie Garber-Jacob is revealed to be the mysterious, divorced Mrs. Jacob.

Reacher and Jodie follow Costello's trail, uncovering information on her father's last project, an investigation for the elderly Hobie parents on their missing-in-action (MIA) military son, Victor Truman Hobie. The poor and elderly parents had given their life savings to a con man and gun runner named Rutter, who poses as a fake military liaison to families of MIA soldiers. All this mucking around instigates a response from Hobie. Reacher realises he has to protect Jodie from Costello's killers as well as other unknown hostiles. Reacher forces Rutter to refund the Hobies' money.

The investigation takes them to the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, MO and to the military Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii, a special facility that handles forensic remains of soldiers.

### *GCM #2*

They discover Hobie volunteered for the Vietnam War and was a skilled pilot of a helicopter that went down.

However, the truth that Hook Hobie is not who he says he is comes out, and it turns out that Hobie was actually a soldier named Carl Allen who stole Victor Hobie's identity after he died in the crash.

The helicopter had been sent with a crew to arrest Allen for fragging his commanding officer. Allen swapped dogtags with Hobie's body to sow confusion during his escape of the burning helicopter wreckage.

The crash and escape leave him with horrible burns on half his face and an arm sliced in half below the elbow. His prosthesis, a metal hook, is the basis for his new nickname.



## *Proactive Phase*

Reacher and Jodie discover Hobie / Allen's past. During and after the war, Allen gathered a fortune arranging illegal deals and moneylending, first as a street lender then as a corporate "last-resort" lender for companies financially rejected by banks, a "high-end loan shark". His business method is the same, however, whether in a dark alley or a corporate boardroom, terrorising clients with torture and killing of family members if they default.

Reacher and Jodie realize the reason Allen didn't liquidate and run when his tripwires were triggered is because he has been plotting a takeover of a multimillion-dollar company owned by Chester and Marilyn Stone.

## *GCM #3*

Hobie kidnaps and tortures Chester and Marilyn Stone to speed up the process, blackmailing them to sign over all the shares.

Jodie is the financial attorney assigned to handle the Stone company transaction and ends up captured with Chester and Marilyn. Allen forces Jodie to call Reacher and summon him to Allen's offices.

## *Conclusion Phase*

In the ensuing bloody mayhem Reacher sustains a bullet wound to the chest that should have killed him. A doctor explains that, due to the arduous physical labour he has done digging pools along with a high-protein diet, his pectoral muscle was so thick the bullet did not make it past his rib cage. Reacher is then visited (while convalescing) by the real Victor Hobie's parents to thank him for restoring their son's good name.

**Hero**

Jack Reacher

**Opposition**

Victor “Hook” Hobie

**Conflict**

Hobie wants to take over a multi-million dollar company, and is prepared to murder to get what he wants. Reacher wants to stop him at all costs.

**Stakes**

If Reacher fails, innocent people will die.

## **The Hound of the Baskervilles – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Detective Mystery)**

### *Preparation Phase*

Dr. James Mortimer asks Sherlock Holmes to investigate the death of his friend, Sir Charles Baskerville. Sir Charles was found dead on the grounds of his Devonshire estate, Baskerville Hall, and Mortimer now fears for Sir Charles's nephew and sole heir, Sir Henry Baskerville, who is the new master of Baskerville Hall. The death was attributed to a heart attack, but Mortimer is suspicious, because Sir Charles died with an expression of horror on his face, and Mortimer noticed "the footprints of a gigantic hound" nearby.

The Baskerville family has supposedly been under a curse since the era of the English Civil War when ancestor Hugo Baskerville allegedly offered his soul to the devil for help in abducting a woman and was reportedly killed by a giant spectral hound. Sir Charles believed in the curse and was apparently fleeing from something in fright when he died.

Intrigued, Holmes meets with Sir Henry, newly arrived from Canada. Sir Henry has received an anonymous note, cut and pasted from newsprint, warning him away from the Baskerville moors, and one of his new boots is inexplicably missing from his London hotel room. The Baskerville family is discussed: Sir Charles was the eldest of three brothers; the youngest, black sheep Rodger, is believed to have died childless in South America, while Sir Henry is the only child of the middle brother. Sir Henry plans to move into Baskerville Hall, despite the ominous warning message.

### *GCM #1*

Holmes and Dr Watson follow him from Holmes's Baker Street apartment back to his hotel and notice a bearded man following him

in a cab; they pursue the man, but he escapes. Mortimer tells them that Mr Barrymore, the butler at Baskerville Hall, has a beard like the one on the stranger. Sir Henry's boot reappears, but an older one vanishes.

### *Reactive Phase*

Holmes sends for the cab driver who shuttled the bearded man after Sir Henry and is both astounded and amused to learn that the stranger had made a point of giving his name as 'Sherlock Holmes' to the cabbie. Holmes, now even more interested in the Baskerville affair but held up with other cases, dispatches Watson to accompany Sir Henry to Baskerville Hall with instructions to send him frequent reports about the house, grounds, and neighbours. Upon arrival at the grand but austere Baskerville estate, Watson and Sir Henry learn that an escaped murderer named Selden is believed to be in the area.

Barrymore and his wife, who also works at Baskerville Hall, wish to leave the estate soon. Watson hears a woman crying in the night; it is obvious to him that it was Mrs Barrymore, but her husband denies it. Watson has no proof that Barrymore was in Devon on the day of the chase in London. He meets a brother and sister who live nearby: Mr Stapleton, a naturalist, and the beautiful Miss Stapleton. When an animalistic sound is heard, Stapleton is quick to dismiss it as unrelated to the legendary hound. When her brother is out of earshot, Mrs Stapleton mistakes Watson for Sir Henry and warns him to leave. She and Sir Henry later meet and quickly fall in love, arousing Stapleton's anger; he later apologises and invites Sir Henry to dine with him a few days later.

### *GCM #2*

Barrymore arouses further suspicion when Watson and Sir Henry catch him at night with a candle in an empty room. Barrymore refuses to answer their questions, but Mrs. Barrymore confesses that

Selden is her brother, and her husband is signalling that they have left supplies for him.

## *Proactive Phase*

Watson and Sir Henry pursue Selden on the moor, but he eludes them, while Watson notices another man on a nearby tor. After an agreement is reached to allow Selden to flee the country, Barrymore reveals the contents of an incompletely burnt letter asking Sir Charles to be at the gate at the time of his death. It was signed with the initials L.L.; on Mortimer's advice, Watson questions a Laura Lyons, who admits to writing the letter in hopes that Sir Charles would help finance her divorce, but says she did not keep the appointment. Watson tracks the second man he saw in the area and discovers it to be Holmes, investigating independently in hopes of a faster resolution. Holmes reveals further information: Stapleton is actually married to the supposed Miss Stapleton, and he promised marriage to Laura Lyons to get her cooperation.

## *GCM #3*

They hear a scream and discover the body of Selden, dead from a fall. They initially mistake him for Sir Henry, whose old clothes he was wearing.

## *Conclusion Phase*

At Baskerville Hall, Holmes notices a resemblance between Stapleton and a portrait of Hugo Baskerville. He realises that Stapleton could be an unknown Baskerville family member, seeking to claim the Baskerville wealth by eliminating his relatives. Accompanied by Inspector Lestrade, whom Holmes has summoned, Holmes and Watson travel to the Stapleton home, where Sir Henry is dining. They rescue him from a hound that Stapleton releases while Sir Henry is walking home across the moor. Shooting the animal dead in the struggle, Sherlock reveals that it was a perfectly mortal dog - a mix

of bloodhound and mastiff, painted with phosphorus to give it a hellish appearance. They find Miss Stapleton bound and gagged inside the house, while Stapleton apparently dies in an attempt to reach his hideout in a nearby mine. They also find Sir Henry's boot, which was used to give the hound Sir Henry's scent.

Weeks later, Holmes provides Watson with additional details about the case. Stapleton was, in fact, Rodger Baskerville's son, also named Rodger. His now-widow is a South American woman, the former Beryl Garcia. He supported himself through crime for many years, before learning that he could inherit a fortune by murdering his uncle and cousin. Stapleton had taken Sir Henry's old boot because the new, unworn boot lacked his scent. The hound had pursued Selden to his death because of the scent on Sir Henry's old clothes. Mrs Stapleton had disavowed her husband's plot, so he had imprisoned her to prevent her from interfering.

The story ends with Holmes and Watson leaving to see the opera *Les Huguenots* starring Jean de Reszke.

## **Hero**

Sherlock Holmes

## **Opposition**

The perpetrator of the crime – later revealed to be Stapleton

## **Conflict**

Sherlock must solve the mystery of the murders and the legend of The Hound. Stapleton tries to hinder him at every turn.

**Stakes**

If Sherlock does not solve the crime, justice will not be served and more people will die.



## Childhood's End by Arthur C. Clarke (Science Fiction)

*Note from Nick:* I chose this particular example of science fiction as it really exemplifies how the structure is used, even in more complex “epic” work.

Many Science Fiction works can contain elements of Mystery, Romance, or Adventure (cynically, one might call certain works “A Mystery in Space” or “A Romance in Space”) in which case, the examples above will suffice - with spaceships added, of course :)

In this case, however, Arthur C. Clarke gives us an example of Science Fiction that transcends such labels - and considers the impact of the ideas explored in terms of their effects on humanity as a whole, and the evolution of the species.

The book itself was expanded from a short story of Clarke's, with a prologue and new material sandwiching the old story perfectly. It's interesting, in that the “short story” section followed the Story Engines structure perfectly, and the full novel does too - albeit in a slightly different way.

There is no “good vs evil” here, no space battles - the real struggle is more internal, more existential.

And the fact that it follows the Story Engines structure is a great example of how your work doesn't need to be constricted by it - indeed, it can help you let your imagination run wild, all the while knowing you're keeping the narrative driving forward.

I hope you pick up a copy!

### *Preparation Phase*

In the late 20th century, the United States and the Soviet Union are competing to launch the first spacecraft into orbit, for military purposes. When vast alien spaceships suddenly position themselves above Earth's principal cities, the space race ceases.

### *GCM #1*

After one week, the aliens announce they are assuming supervision of international affairs, to prevent humanity's extinction. They become known as the Overlords.

### *Reactive Phase*

In general, they let humans go on conducting their affairs in their own way. They overtly interfere only twice: in South Africa, where sometime before their arrival Apartheid had collapsed and was replaced with savage persecution of the white minority; and in Spain, where they put an end to bull fighting. Some humans are suspicious of the Overlords' benign intent, as they never visibly appear. The Overlord Karellen, the "Supervisor for Earth," who speaks directly only to Rikki Stormgren, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, tells Stormgren that the Overlords will reveal themselves in 50 years, when humanity will have become used to their presence. Stormgren smuggles a device onto Karellen's ship in an attempt to see Karellen's true form. He succeeds, is shocked, and chooses to keep silent. Humankind enters a golden age of prosperity at the expense of creativity.

### *GCM #2*

Five decades after their arrival, the Overlords reveal their appearance, resembling the traditional Christian folk images of demons: large bipeds with cloven hooves, leathery wings, horns, and

tails. The Overlords are interested in psychic research, which humans suppose is part of their anthropological study.

### *Proactive Phase*

Rupert Boyce, a prolific book collector on the subject, allows one Overlord, Rashaverak, to study these books at his home. To impress his friends with Rashaverak's presence, Boyce holds a party, during which he makes use of a Ouija board. Jan Rodricks, an astrophysicist and Rupert's brother-in-law, asks the identity of the Overlords' home star. George Greggson's future wife Jean faints as the Ouija board reveals a star-catalog number consistent with the direction in which Overlord supply ships appear and disappear.

With the help of an oceanographer friend Jan Rodricks stows away on an Overlord supply ship and travels 40 light-years to their home planet. Due to the time dilation of special relativity at near-light speeds, the elapsed time on the ship is only a few weeks, and he arranges to endure it in drug-induced hibernation.

Although humanity and the Overlords have peaceful relations, some believe human innovation is being suppressed and that culture is becoming stagnant. One of these groups establishes New Athens, an island colony in the middle of the Pacific Ocean devoted to the creative arts, which George and Jean Greggson join.

The Overlords conceal a special interest in the Greggsons' children, Jeffrey and Jennifer Anne, and intervene to save Jeffrey's life when a tsunami strikes the island. The Overlords have been watching them since the incident with the Ouija board, which revealed the seed of the coming transformation hidden within Jean.

Sixty years after the Overlords' arrival, human children, beginning with the Greggsons', begin to display clairvoyance and telekinetic powers.

*GCM #3*

Karellen reveals the Overlords' purpose; they serve the Overmind, a vast cosmic intelligence, born of amalgamated ancient civilizations, and freed from the limitations of material existence. The Overlords themselves are unable to join the Overmind, but serve it as a bridge species, fostering other races' eventual union with it.

As Karellen explains, the time of humanity as a race composed of single individuals with a concrete identity is coming to an end. The children's minds reach into each other and merge into a single vast group consciousness. If the Pacific were to be dried up, the islands dotting it would lose their identity as islands and become part of a new continent; in the same way, the children cease to be the individuals which their parents knew and become something else, completely alien to the "old type of human".

For the transformed children's safety - and also because it is painful for their parents to see what they had become - they are segregated on a continent of their own. No more human children are born, and many parents die or commit suicide. The members of New Athens destroy themselves with a nuclear bomb.

*Conclusion Phase*

Jan Rodricks emerges from hibernation on the Overlord supply ship and arrives on their planet. The Overlords permit him a glimpse of how the Overmind communicates with them. When Jan returns to Earth (approximately 80 years after his departure by Earth time) he finds an unexpectedly altered planet. Humanity has effectively become extinct, and he is now the last man alive. Hundreds of millions of children - no longer fitting what Rodricks defines as "human" - remain on the quarantined continent, having become a single intelligence readying themselves to join the Overmind.

Some Overlords remain on Earth to study the children from a safe distance. When the evolved children mentally alter the Moon's rotation and make other planetary manipulations, it becomes too dangerous to remain. The departing Overlords offer to take Rodricks with them, but he chooses to stay to witness Earth's end, and transmit a report of what he sees.

Before they depart, Rodricks asks Rashaverak what encounter the Overlords had with humanity in the past, according to an assumption that the fear that humans had of their "demonic" form was due to a traumatic encounter with them in the distant past; but Rashaverak explains that the primal fear experienced by humans was not due to a racial memory, but a racial premonition of the Overlords' role in their metamorphosis.

The Overlords are eager to escape from their own evolutionary dead end by studying the Overmind, so Rodricks's information is potentially of great value to them. By radio, Rodricks describes a vast burning column ascending from the planet. As the column disappears, Rodricks experiences a profound sense of emptiness when the Overlords have gone. Then material objects and the Earth itself begin to dissolve into transparency. Jan reports no fear, but a powerful sense of fulfillment. The Earth evaporates in a flash of light. Karellen looks back at the receding Solar System and gives a final salute to the human species.

## **Hero**

Humanity – the human race – as personified through the eyes of Stormgren, then later Rodricks.

## **Opposition**

Initially, the opposition is seemingly Karellen and the Overlords as a species. Later, it is revealed that Humanity is its own opposition and the Overlords are required to help them reach their full potential.

## **Conflict**

Sections of the human population want more freedom and creativity. They want to learn where The Overlords come from and their purpose on Earth. The Overlords want to curb this and refuse to allow technological advancement, space travel, or to offer more information about their motives. Stormgren, Rodricks, and their sympathizers rebel against the rule of The Overlords to discover the truth they have been hiding.

## **Stakes**

Initially, humanity rebels to save their growth as a species and regain their creativity and freedom, which has been lost and may never return. Finally, it is revealed that if The Overlords fail in their task, humanity is doomed. The human race must ascend to the next level of evolution.

## The Sword of Shannara by Terry Brooks (Fantasy)

### *Preparation Phase*

The Ohmsford family of Shady Vale in the Southland takes in a half-Elven child named Shea. He takes the name Ohmsford and is raised as a brother to the family's son, Flick. Becoming inseparable, the brothers run the family inn.

### *GCM #1*

A druid named Allanon appears in the Vale and seeks out Shea. Allanon informs the adopted Ohmsford son that he is the last descendent of Jerle Shannara, the legendary Elven king, and that he is needed to wield the magical Sword of Shannara in order to defeat the Warlock Lord, a deadly enemy from ages past.

### *Reactive Phase*

Shea doesn't believe what he's been told and he hesitates in deciding whether or not to join Allanon. That hesitation is nearly his undoing, as a Skullbearer appears in the Vale and attempts to kill him and Flick. The brothers flee the Vale and take refuge in the nearby city of Leah where they find Shea's friend [Menion](#), the son of the city's lord. Menion decides to accompany the two, and he travels with them to Culhaven, to meet with Allanon. While at Culhaven, they are joined by a prince of Callahorn, Balinor Buckhannah, two elven brothers, Durin and Dayel Elesseidil, and the dwarf Hendel.

### *GCM #2*

The party sets out for Paranor. But along the way, Shea falls over a waterfall and becomes separated from the group.



### *Proactive Phase*

Allanon spurs the group to continue to Paranor. Once there, the party gets into a battle with minions of the Warlock Lord and find that the Sword of Shannara has already been removed. The party then learns of the Warlock Lord's invasion of the Southland, and decide to split up to do what they can to stop it.

Disguised by Allanon, Flick infiltrates the enemy camp and rescues the captive Elven King, Eventine Ellesedil, at the same time, in Kern, Menion saves a woman named Shirl Ravenlock and falls in love with her. They organize an evacuation of Kern before the Northland army reaches the city.

Balinor returns to Tyrsis to activate the Border Legion only to find that it has been disbanded. Balinor is then imprisoned by his insane brother Palance who has taken control of Callahorn's rule. His advisor, Stenmin, has driven Palance insane with drugs, making him his pawn. With help from Menion, Balinor escapes and confronts both Palance and Stenmin. Practically cornered, Stenmin stabs Palance as a distraction and flees.

Now commanded by Balinor, Callahorn's reformed Border Legion marches out of Tyrsis and engages the Northland army at the Mermiddon River killing many Northlanders before being forced to pull back; the Border Legion retreats to Tyrsis and make preparations for defense. During the siege of Tyrsis, Hendel and Menion come upon Stenmin and some of his supporters. Hendel is killed, but Menion kills Stenmin. After three days, the Border Legion is beaten back from the Outer Wall of Tyrsis as a result of treachery—the wall falls when the traitors destroy the locks on the main gate, jamming it open. At the defenders' last stand on the Bridge of Sendic, the Northlanders abruptly break and run.

In the Northland, Shea's adventure continues. After being captured by Gnomes, Shea is rescued by the one-handed thief Panamon Creel

and his mute Troll companion Keltset Mallicos. Journeying to the Northland, they reach the Skull Kingdom, where the insane Gnome deserter Orl Fane has carried the Sword of Shannara.

## *GCM #3*

Infiltrating the Warlock Lord's fortress in the Skull Mountain, Shea reaches the sword and unsheathes it. He learns about its true power, the ability to confront those with the truth about their lives.

## *Conclusion*

Infiltrating the Warlock Lord's fortress in the Skull Mountain, Shea reaches the sword and unsheathes it. He learns about its true power, the ability to confront those with the truth about their lives. The Warlock Lord materializes and tries to destroy Shea, but the youth stands his ground and confronts his enemy with the sword. Although immune to physical weapons, the Warlock Lord vanishes after being forced to confront the truth about himself: he had deluded himself into believing that he is immortal, but this is impossible. The Sword forces him to confront this paradox, and it kills him.

Keltset sacrifices himself to save his companions during the Skull Kingdom's destruction. In the south, the Northland army retreats after the Warlock Lord's downfall. Allanon saves Shea's life and reveals himself as Bremen's centuries-old son, before disappearing to sleep. Peace returns to the Four Lands. Balinor takes up his country's rule, while Dayel and Durin return to the Westland, and Menion returns to Leah with Shirl. Shea and Flick reunite and return to Shady Vale.

## **Hero**

Shea Olmsford. (There are many other characters, as is common in fantasy, but this is, without doubt, Shea's story.)

**Opposition**

The Warlock Lord and his army

**Conflict**

Shea must recover the legendary Sword of Shannara and use it to defeat the Warlock Lord before the enemies' armies can enslave the people of the Southland.

**Stakes**

Literally, the fate of the world. The Warlock Lord wants to enslave the great races under his control and bring darkness to the world.

## Hillbilly Elegy by J.D. Vance (Memoir)

### *Preparation Phase*

J.D. Vance, the author, looks back at his upbringing and journey through life as a way of trying to shed some light on the history and poverty of Appalachian Kentucky, the culture in which he was raised. He talks about family traits like love, loyalty, and a tendency toward violence and verbal abuse.

### *GCM #1*

Vance's mother, a woman with a mean temper and a drug problem, tries to kill him while they are in a car together. He escapes and she chases him through the neighbourhood before being arrested.

### *Reactive Phase*

Vance is left to deal with the fallout from that event, living with his grandparents and lying to the court so that his mother does not go to jail. An uneasy truce plays out over several years as he lives sometimes with his mother and her succession of partners/husbands and sometimes with his grandparents. His grades are effected by the chaos and he almost flunks out of high school.

### *GCM #2*

Tired of the life that he is living, Vance joins the Marine Corp.

### *Proactive Phase*

Vance's life is radically changed by his decision to join the Corp. He grows into the man that he always wanted to be through the discipline and culture of Corp life. He begins to break free of the culture that has dominated his early years, finding the strength to

stand on his own. His relationship with his mother is still difficult, but he learns to forgive her and help when and where he can. When he gets out of the Corp, he goes to Ohio State University and graduates.

## *GCM #3*

Vance applies and is accepted to Yale Law School.

## *Conclusion Phase*

Yale completes Vance's transformation and leads him down the path to finally, once and for all, escape the poverty and culture of his childhood. He marries his law school sweetheart and works to help those still trapped in the culture he left behind.

## **Hero**

J.D. Vance, the author of the memoir

## **Opposition**

The culture and constant cycle of poverty in Appalachian Kentucky and Ohio that has governed Vance's family for generations

## **Conflict**

Vane is fighting to find a way out of the culture in which he is raised

## **Stakes**

If Vance can't find a way to break that cycle of poverty, then he and his descendants are doomed to repeat it just as the generations before him have done

## Dracula by Bram Stoker (Horror)

### *Preparation Phase*

Jonathan Harker, a newly qualified English solicitor, visits Count Dracula in the Carpathian Mountains on the border of Transylvania, Bukovina, and Moldavia, to provide legal support for a real estate transaction overseen by Harker's employer, Mr Peter Hawkins of Exeter. At first enticed by Dracula's gracious manners, Harker soon realizes that he is Dracula's prisoner.

### *GCM #1*

Wandering the Count's castle against Dracula's admonition, Harker encounters three female vampires, called "the sisters", from whom he is rescued by Dracula. After the preparations are made, Dracula leaves Transylvania and abandons Harker to the sisters. Harker barely escapes from the castle with his life.

### *Reactive Phase*

Harker makes the long journey back from Budapest. Dracula has long since made the journey aboard the Russian ship, Demeter, which runs aground off the shore of Whitby, England, after the death of its crew. The ship's cargo, 50 boxes of Transylvanian soil, is distributed to estates previously purchased by Dracula to serve as his lairs.

Soon Dracula is indirectly shown to be stalking Lucy Westenra, who is holidaying in Whitby. As time passes she begins to suffer from episodes of sleepwalking and dementia, as witnessed by her friend Mina Murray, the fiancée of Jonathan Harker. When Lucy begins to waste away suspiciously, Dr. John Seward invites his old teacher, Abraham Van Helsing, who immediately determines the true cause of Lucy's condition. He refuses to disclose it but diagnoses her with

acute blood-loss. Despite Van Helsing's best attempts, Lucy falls victim to Dracula and dies.

Following Lucy's death and burial, the newspapers report children being stalked in the night by a beautiful lady. Van Helsing, knowing Lucy has become a vampire, confides in Dr. Seward, Lord Godalming, and Quincy Morris, Lucy's former suitors. The suitors and Van Helsing track her down and, after a confrontation with her, stake her heart, behead her, and fill her mouth with garlic. Around the same time, Jonathan Harker finally arrives from Budapest, where Mina marries him after his escape, and he and Mina join the campaign against Dracula.

## *GCM #2*

Harker tracks down the shipments of boxed graves and the estates which Dracula has purchased in order to store them, identifying the enemy and his lairs.

## *Proactive Phase*

The vampire hunters stay at Dr. Seward's residence, holding nightly meetings and providing reports based on each of their various tasks. Mina discovers that each of their journals and letters collectively contain clues to which they can track him down. She tasks herself with collecting them, researching newspaper clippings, fitting the most relevant entries into chronological order and typing out copies to distribute to each of the party which they are to study. Van Helsing conducts research along with Dr. Seward to analyze the behaviour of their patient Renfield who they learn is directly influenced by Dracula.

They also research historical events, folklore, and superstitions from various cultures to understand Dracula's powers and weaknesses. Van Helsing also establishes a criminal profile on Dracula in order to better understand his actions and predict his movements. Arthur



Holmwood's fortune assists in funding the entire operation and expenses. As they discover the various properties Dracula had purchased, the male protagonists team up to raid each property and are several times confronted by Dracula.

As they discover each of the boxed graves scattered throughout London, they pry them open to place and seal wafers of sacramental bread within. This act renders the boxes of earth completely useless to Dracula as he is unable to open, enter or further transport them.

## *GCM #3*

After Dracula learns of the group's plot against him, he attacks Mina and feeds her his own blood to control her.

## *Conclusion*

Van Helsing is able to use hypnotism at the hour of dawn and put her into this trance to further track his movements. Mina, afraid of Dracula's link with her, urges the team not to tell her their plans out of fear that Dracula will be listening. After the protagonists discover and sterilize 49 boxes found throughout his lairs in London, they learn that Dracula has fled with the missing 50th box back to his castle in Transylvania. They pursue him under the guidance of Mina.

They split up into teams once they reach Europe; Van Helsing and Mina team up to locate the castle of Dracula while the others attempt to ambush the boat Dracula is using to reach his home. Van Helsing raids the castle and destroys the vampire "sisters".

Upon discovering Dracula being transported by Gypsies, the trio attack the caravan carrying Dracula in the 50th box of Earth. After dispatching many Gypsies who were sworn to protect the Count, Harker shears Dracula through the throat with a kukri, while the mortally wounded Quincey stabs the Count in the heart with a Bowie knife. Dracula crumbles to dust, and Mina is freed from her curse of

vampirism, as the scar on her forehead disappears. Soon after, Quincey dies from his wounds.

**Hero**

Jonathan Harker

**Opposition**

Count Dracula

**Conflict**

Dracula wants to expand his reign of terror from Transylvania to England; in the process he targets Harker's friend, Lucy, and his fiancée Mina. Harker wants to stop Dracula to save the lives of those he loves.

**Stakes**

The lives of Harker's fiancée and friends are at stake, never mind the lives of the innocents in London that Dracula decides to target. If he is not stopped, he can create an army of vampires that would eventually overrun the earth.

## The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Literary Fiction)

*Note from Nick:* I chose this particular story because there is no obvious “good vs evil” going on, and its debatable who the hero actually is (and who the opposition is). Unlike more obvious choices (like Nineteen-Eighty-Four or The Handmaid’s Tale, which were close runners-up) the reader is left to decide for themselves whom to sympathise with, if anyone.

There is some external action in this book, although most of the conflict and stakes come from an internal struggle - which is why I wanted to show you how this works in less “obvious” story arcs.

As I’m sure many reading this will have studied this novel TO DEATH at school, I hope the storyline is familiar to you. If not, definitely pick up a copy - at less than 50,000 words it’s a quick read and a definitive piece of literary prowess.

### *Preparation Phase*

The main events of the novel take place in the summer of 1922. Nick Carraway, a Yale graduate and veteran of the Great War from the Midwest—who serves as the novel’s narrator—takes a job in New York as a bond salesman. He rents a small house on Long Island, in the fictional village of West Egg, next door to the lavish mansion of Jay Gatsby, a mysterious millionaire who holds extravagant parties but does not participate in them. Nick drives around the bay to East Egg for dinner at the home of his cousin, Daisy Fay Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, a college acquaintance of Nick’s.

They introduce Nick to Jordan Baker, an attractive, cynical young golfer with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. She reveals to Nick that Tom has a mistress, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the “valley of ashes”, an industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York

City with Tom and Myrtle to an apartment Tom keeps for his affairs with Myrtle and others.

At Tom's New York apartment, a vulgar and bizarre party takes place. It ends with Tom breaking Myrtle's nose after she annoys him by saying Daisy's name several times.

### *GCM #1*

As the summer progresses, Nick eventually receives an invitation to one of Gatsby's parties. Nick encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself, an aloof and surprisingly young man who recognizes Nick from their same division in the Great War.

### *Reactive Phase*

Through Jordan, Nick later learns that Gatsby knew Daisy through a purely chance meeting in 1917, when Daisy and her friends were doing volunteer services' work with young Officers headed to Europe. From their brief meetings and casual encounters at that time, Gatsby became (and still is) deeply in love with Daisy. And even more, he became obsessed with the idea of her, and the ideal of living in the world he saw her living in, as the fulfillment of all the possible dreams he could ever have.

Gatsby spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of Tom and Daisy's dock, across the bay from his mansion, hoping one day to rekindle their lost romance. Jordan confides in Nick that the only reason he bought the mansion is that it was across the bay from Tom and Daisy's home.

And Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and wild parties were an attempt to impress Daisy and raise her curiosity about her "anonymous" neighbor across the bay. Gatsby had hoped that one day curiosity would have brought the unsuspecting Daisy to appear at his doorstep, and thereby he'd be able to present himself as a "new

man", now of wealth and position, and now able to join her at her side and within her world.

That however never played out, and although Tom had been invited (as a guest of Jordan's) to a Gatsby party and had attended more than one of them, both he and Daisy had (for different reasons) never responded affirmatively to an RSVP to attend as the Buchanans (Mr. and Mrs.).

The deeper reasons behind this fact are expanded upon later in the story by Daisy. His research of Nick, who has so fortuitously rented the small cottage next door to Gatsby's mansion, results in a wholly new approach to his problem of how to introduce Daisy to the "new" J. Gatsby.

The whole purpose of the "invitation" to Nick to attend a Gatsby party was to develop a relationship with him so that Gatsby could later ask Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy.

## *GCM #2*

Nick invites Daisy to have tea at his house without telling her that Gatsby will also be there. After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy reestablish their connection.

## *Proactive Phase*

They begin an affair and, after a short time, Tom grows increasingly suspicious of his wife's relationship with Gatsby. At a luncheon at the Buchanans' house, Daisy speaks to Gatsby with such undisguised intimacy that Tom realizes she is in love with Gatsby. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is outraged by his wife's infidelity.

He forces the group to drive into New York City and confronts Gatsby in a suite at the Plaza Hotel, asserting that he and Daisy have

a history that Gatsby could never understand. In addition to that, he announces to his wife that Gatsby is a criminal whose fortune comes from bootlegging alcohol and other illegal activities. Daisy realizes that her allegiance is to Tom, and Tom contemptuously sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby, attempting to prove that Gatsby cannot hurt him.

### *GCM #3*

When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes on their way home, they discover that Gatsby's car has struck and killed Tom's mistress, Myrtle. Nick later learns from Gatsby that Daisy, not Gatsby himself, was driving the car at the time of the accident but Gatsby intends to take the blame anyway.

### *Conclusion Phase*

Myrtle's husband, George, falsely concludes that the driver of the yellow car is the secret lover he recently began suspecting she has, and sets out on foot to find him. After finding out the yellow car is Gatsby's, he arrives at Gatsby's mansion where he fatally shoots Gatsby and then himself. Nick stages an unsettlingly small funeral for Gatsby in which none of Gatsby's associates or partygoers attend. Later, Nick runs into Tom in New York and finds out that Tom had told George that Gatsby was Myrtle's secret lover and that Gatsby had killed her, then gave George Gatsby's address. Nick breaks up with Jordan, and, disillusioned with the East, moves back to the Midwest.

### **Hero**

The real hero – or perhaps anti-hero – of the book is Gatsby. Nick provides the narrative and provides the satire and criticism of Eastern High-Society (eg, he is “the voice” of the book but does little to drive the action).

## **Opposition**

Tom – the husband of Gatsby’s love interest. Ostensibly, this story is “Gatsby vs Tom”, but one could argue it’s actually “Gatsby vs Gatsby”. Another reason this book is so interesting!

## **Conflict**

Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy, who is married to Tom. Everything Gatsby does is designed to bring him and Daisy closer, as he believes she will love him if she knew he was now a “man of wealth and position”.

Her marriage to Tom prevents him from achieving his goals, despite them having an affair, and later Gatsby increases the conflict by insisting that Daisy renounce all love for her husband, which she refuses to do. It is essentially Gatsby vs Tom for the love of Daisy - and later Gatsby’s own internal conflict that doesn’t allow him to be happy.

The conflict is further escalated when the reader understands that the three members of the love triangle (Daisy, Tom, and Gatsby) are, at their hearts, undeserving of true love.

## **Stakes**

Gatsby has staked his entire adult life and fortune on proving his love for Daisy. If he cannot make her love him, his life is for nothing (and indeed ends up that way).



## Liar! by Isaac Asimov (Short Fiction – 30 pages)

*Note from Nick:* Asimov wrote hundreds of short stories over his long career, and this is the first one to feature Susan Calvin - a robopsychologist who later features in many of his works.

This story, again, is particularly interesting because it eschews the traditional “Good vs Evil” conflict for something much more subtle. And, over the course of its 30 pages, achieves an incredible level of empathy with the reader, with notes of bitterness and revenge and unrequited love.

All this is carried forth by the action, which is driven forward by the Story Engines structure, and packs so much into its short word-count that it leaves one wondering “I wonder what his novels are like?”

**Hint:** they’re excellent.

### *Preparation Phase*

Alfred Lanning, Milton Ashe, Peter Bogert, and Susan Calvin are introduced and discuss a “glitch” in the robot assembly line. One robot, RB-34 (Herbie) has developed telepathic powers. The roboticists argue over what to do about the situation. Susan Calvin successfully argues that she should interview Herbie to find out what happened.

### *GCM #1*

During their first interview, Herbie reads Susan Calvin’s mind and informs her that her love for her colleague, Milton Ashe, is requited and that Ashe has the same feelings for her. Calvin’s cold demeanour vanishes and she embraces the robot.

## *Reactive Phase*

Bogert, Ashe, and other roboticists continue to investigate Herbie's powers. Herbie tells Bogert that Lanning will soon resign and that Bogert will replace him as Director. Bogert confronts Lanning. Calvin discusses her findings with Ashe, convinced that he truly loves her (although she does not yet let on).

## *GCM #2*

Milton Ashe confides in Susan that he is getting married. Susan realises that Herbie lied to her about Ashe's love for her.

## *Proactive Phase*

Calvin confronts Herbie. Herbie admits to lying, but says that "I had to". Lanning, Bogert, and Ashe arrive - each realising that Herbie has been lying about other matters too.

## *GCM #3*

Herbie is unable to answer his masters' accusations or questions. He reveals he was only following the First Law of Robotics which prevents him from doing harm to humans, so he interpreted that as telling humans what they wanted to hear. His telepathic powers allowed him to see human anxieties and fears, and he was thus compelled to dispel them.

## *Conclusion Phase*

Herbie is rendered mute - unable to tell his masters' what they want to hear without harming at least one of them under his interpretation of The First Law. Calvin exposes the paradox of Herbie's predicament, stating words to the effect that "If you do not answer, you do harm. If you do answer, you do harm". Herbie is forced into a

catatonic state, and essentially killed. Calvin's final words are "He deserved it... Liar!".

## **Hero**

Susan Calvin

## **Opposition**

First, Lanning (who wants to destroy the robot). Later, Herbie – when Calvin realises the robot has been playing them against each other, albeit unintentionally.

## **Conflict**

Each of the characters have motivations of their own – Calvin is in love with Ashe, Bogert desires Lanning's job. The conflict is brought to a head when it is discovered that Herbie has been lying. Calvin must then use her skills as a robopsychologist to "defeat" Herbie and undo the damage.

## **Stakes**

Calvin must discover the cause of Herbie's telepathy, otherwise the entire stock of robots and the company's future are at risk.