Question: Where to start when developing a story?

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As always, my advice is: Begin with your story's characters.

Reader question from attatt:

> When you write a script, do/did you usually start with a character, a specific plot point, or a specific ending you want to reach?

Curious how others write because I tend to have plot point ideas out the yang, then have to connect the dots and find a successful ending.

In thinking about it, I guess I've started scripts from

characters, plot points, and endings, as well as geographical locations, themes, and titles. I remember reading that the Coen brothers wrote the movie *Miller's Crossing* beginning with a single image: A hat being tossed over a creek.

So I think the answer to the first question is this: You can start generating a story from anything.

But there's an implied second question in your post per the ending paragraph: "How do I connect the dots between plot points?" And actually even a third question: "How do I find a successful ending?"

Sure, it's great if you've got a creative mind and brainstorm up a... well... storm. But if you end up with "plot point ideas out the yang," and no discernible path from here (FADE IN) to there (FADE OUT), what good is your creativity?

So let me give you a short answer: **Characters**. Your characters should tell you where the plot should go. And in particular, your Protagonist and Nemesis.

Let's consider 8 questions. If you can answer these questions, you should be on the path from your story's beginning to ending.

1. Who is your Protagonist?

Determine which character is the most important one to

your plot. Typically it is their goal (see questions 2 + 3) that establishes the backbone of the Plotline, the story in the External World (the realm of action and dialogue).

Also it's their transformation, going from a Beginning Emotion State to and Ending Emotion State (if a positive one typified by four movements: Disunity — Deconstruction — Reconstruction — Unity) that dictates the arc of the Themeline, the story in the Internal World (the emotional / psychological realm).

2. What does the Protagonist want (Conscious Goal)?

This is the Protagonist's External World goal, something they are typically conscious of. It is an end point that requires action and effort.

3. What do they need (Unconscious Goal)?

This is the Protagonist's Internal World goal, something they are typically unaware of. It emerges from within their core essence, an authentic part of their 'self' that, as a result of the journey, emerges through the Deconstruction — Reconstruction process in Act Two.

Together the Protagonist's want and need create the drive toward their destiny, what I call *Narrative Imperative*. And this should steer you straight toward your story's ending, especially when tied to the character arising in question #4.

4. Who is keeping them from their goal?

This is the story's Nemesis, the character (or characters) who provides opposition to the Protagonist. They have their own interest in the P's goal, generally hoping for a different outcome.

Typically the P and N will be joined in some sort of 'final struggle' in the story's third act, giving the story a big event to build to.

Now answer the next four questions:

5. What is the story's beginning?

If you understand where the Protagonist is in relation to their Ordinary World (the world they have lived in up to FADE IN), the nature of their want and need, and the problem this disjunction between want and need signifies, then you should be able to have a pretty good answer for this question.

6. What happens at the end of Act One?

You need to have a big plot point that transitions the Protagonist out of their Ordinary World and into the Extraordinary World of Act Two and beyond.

7. What happens at the end of Act Two?

A major setback for the Protagonist, an All Is Lost moment which causes the P to doubt their ability to go

on.

8. What is the ending?

Again if you've figured out your Protagonist and Nemesis, and whatever Final Struggle they engage in, then you've pretty much got a cue on your story's ending.

This is a severely truncated approach to the story development process. And by all rights, I should insert a big list of caveats including the fact that sometimes there are multiple Protagonists, sometimes the Protagonist doesn't change, they change others, etc.

But most mainstream Hollywood movies have these two narrative features: A single Protagonist and the transformation of the Protagonist. By grounding your thinking in the Protagonist's transformation journey and their relationship with the Nemesis character, you've got a good shot at creating a spine to the story's structure.

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