

Plot vs. Story

<http://blog.writingacademy.com/category/writing-tips/structure/>

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One of the things that every writer needs to know is the difference between story and plot. It's very easy to confuse the two and many people often do. So what is the difference between story and plot?

To put it simply, "plot" is the sequence of events that happen. On the other hand, "story" is what the work is all about. Story is, essentially, how the character changes.

I'm going to illustrate these concepts with the following three examples.

Rocky

Plot:

The champ, Apollo Creed, needs a new opponent when his scheduled opponent pulls out due to injury. In a decision of promotional genius, Creed gives a title shot to down-on-his-luck journeyman Rocky Balboa on the country's 200th anniversary. Rocky goes on to shock the world by going the distance with Creed in a competitive fight.

Story:

Rocky, the underdog, overcomes great odds to find love and self-worth in going the distance with the champ.

The Godfather

Plot:

Michael Corleone, the son of Mafia kingpin Don Vito Corleone, returns home from the war. In a meeting with other mob bosses, Don Corleone refuses to get into the heroin business. Someone attempts to murder Don Corleone who is shot several times in the attempt. Don Corleone's top man, Tom Hagen, is abducted and an ultimatum is issued to Sonny, the oldest Corleone son. Sonny retaliates by killing the son of another mafia boss.

Michael, the lone Corleone son who stayed away from the family business, volunteers to kill a mob boss and a corrupt cop to avenge his father and succeeds in doing so. Michael is sent to Sicily for his protection and Don Corleone is distraught to learn that Michael has taken up the family business. Sonny is gunned down at a toll booth. Don Corleone meets with the mob bosses and agrees to back the drug trade in an effort to end the mob war.

Michael returns from Sicily and takes over the family business. He promises to his girlfriend Kay that he will legitimize the family business within five years. Michael attempts to get into the casino

business and is forced to resort to tactics even more brutal than his father's to get his way. He also confronts his older brother Fredo, who was passed over because of his weakness, and warns him to never again take sides with anyone against the family.

Vito passes away from a heart attack. Michael arranges for the murder of the heads of the Five Families. This completes Michael's rise to power as the new "Godfather" and finishes his revenge against those who attacked his family.

Story:

The movie is about the corruption of Michael Corleone as he takes over the family business replacing his father after his death.

Sling Blade

Plot:

Karl Childers, a simple, bordering on retarded man, is released from the psychiatric hospital where he was committed for the murder of his mother and her lover. He wanders back into the town he was raised and befriends a young boy named Frank. Karl becomes a kind of father figure for Frank and moves in with him and his mother Linda and soon meets Linda's abusive boyfriend Doyle. Realizing that Doyle's abusive behavior will bring unending misery for Frank, Karl kills Doyle and turns himself in. He is returned to the psychiatric hospital from which he was released at the beginning of the movie.

Story:

A simple man bonds with a young boy, becoming the father figure and protector the boy never had.

Final Thoughts:

As you can see from the examples above, plot is almost always more complicated and long winded than story. Plot is nothing more than the logical progression of events that is used to tell the story. Story is what the movie (or book, etc.) is about. Very rarely are the two ever the same.