

Throughline is originally a theater term developed to give actors a broader understanding of their motivation at any given moment in a performance... not just looking at the present moment, but looking at the decisions and materials that lead to the moment, and the repercussions afterwards.

Basically, a throughline is a fancy way of saying “arc,” as in story arc (although just to complicate matters, I often prefer the term thread.)

You can make a throughline or thread for just about any element in a story: an action thread, a McGuffin thread (McGuffin being a focal point, usually an object, pursued by the MC—a term popularized by Hitchcock in screenplay land), or an emotional thread for a specific character or relationship.

As a means to track the progress of a certain element through the story, threads of this nature are usually a bit more specific than other throughlines (compared to say, a broader view throughline of the story's overall conflict or stakes).

In terms of unpredictability, once you know the progression of a story element—where it starts, a general sense of its direction, and where it ends up—you can weave the thread into the main outline and look to the surrounding material for opportunities and inspiration to add unpredictability.

However you accomplish it, just remember always to stay two steps ahead of the reader. If the reader figures out the story and gets ahead of you, you and the story are sunk.

Use a Throughline to organize a story element, and chart its progress *through* the narrative.

Which story should I write?

Writers should be writing. As I acknowledged earlier, there is no substitute for experience. *If you're paying attention, you could* learn as much (possibly more) writing a few comics than you could reading a bunch of “how to write” books. So there's definitely merit in being carefree and energetic enough to run with an idea.

In order to complete the Core Concept of the story, I need to pause and jump ahead to something else. Not only do I have to jump ahead to something else, but I'm NOT jumping to the next thing in my list (Characters and Character Arcs), but instead to the Main Antagonist Force.

Before we go any further, take a breath. If you're a bit lost with all this jumping around, don't worry, that's kind of the point I'm making.

Remember I said earlier (back on page thirty-five), the story itself dictates the order of the elements we define first. And though we may organize ourselves and approach the process in a linear fashion, in execution, this is often not the case. This bouncing around from one concept to the next is fairly typical during the discovery process.

As you read through the guide, focus on understanding what we're discussing. Don't worry about the order or timing. As we go over more material and you see the complete outline breakdown, the pieces will fall into place.

(OK, cut and paste, part deux!)

When discovering and developing your story, remember your Chinese proverbs, a tree that is unbending is easily broken.

Main Antagonistic Force

There's no story without conflict.

You need to discover and define your sources of conflict as early as you can. And chief among these is what I refer to as the *Main Antagonistic Force (MAF)*.

I like this term better than main *villain* or main *opponent*, because sometimes the Main Antagonistic Force is abstract—like a natural disaster, a zombie plague, a killer comet, a hostile environment (Earth during the dinosaurs era), a reactor on a ship set to go off, or a curse of bad luck. Sometimes the Main Antagonistic Force is larger than its individual agents, which directly harass the hero. The mafia in the Punisher and the Umbrella Corporation from the *Resident Evil* series are two examples that come to mind.

- Kai tries to contact Military headquarters to report in, but there is interference and the comm network is down due to a hack attack.
// The hack attack is foreshadowing a subplot and part of the logical mechanics to the climax. //

7. The Plan—1st Act Turn

- Refusing to accept his situation, Kai puts himself in a vulnerable position (maybe climbs up a cliff for better reception). Something attacks Molly/Kai. Molly is Kai's only way out.
// This could be a mutant creature or possibly (and maybe more likely) another clan. //

8. End Act 1 Decision

- Kai chooses to go with Molly.

Act 2A: (approx. 50% of the story)

9. Plan in Action

- Molly takes Kai on a trek to see a Mentor character to be deprogrammed.
- Molly presses her effort to gain sympathy from Kai to the rebel cause.
//She secretly wants to use Kai to stop the Bad Clan AI. //

10. Core Concept Spotlight

- Kai and Molly must move through various clan territories, meeting and dealing with old acquaintances.
// Needs more development. //
- *// All I really know at this point is I want to capture the theme by having nothing go right for Kai and Molly. Adversity that is really going to test their wills. //*