

Hooks That Don't Let Go

Main Points

- The right story problem should complicate *everything* else
- Inciting incidents should be layered
- Readers care most when they feel they have something to learn
- Try to create tension with a crucible or closed environment



Concept Testing

- **External - Can the problem sustain the entire novel?**
 - Can your problem build? Intensify/complicate?
 - Is there a real-world consequence to this problem that will occur if my character doesn't face it or if they fail? Think specific, impending.
 - Is there a clear-cut deadline, a ticking clock counting down to the consequence?
 - Your character should not have the opportunity to just give up; to stop without a personal cost.
- **Internal - Can the problem force your protagonist to make their inner change?**
 - Will the problem's impending consequence force the character to face their misbelief (what they THINK keeps them safe, but keeps them from their goal)?
 - Whether they achieve their goal or not, will the consequence cost them something big EMOTIONALLY?

3 Event Inciting Incident

- **A Long Standing Social Problem** - The protagonist has a long-standing personal/social problem (often tied to an internal flaw they're in denial about). This is already simmering before the story begins.
- **Intimidating Opportunity** - An intimidating or tempting opportunity appears that seems to solve (or dramatically improve) that problem.
- **Unforeseen Conflict Arises** - Pursuing the opportunity immediately creates unforeseen conflict with another person (or force), raising the stakes and forcing the protagonist to engage.



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Continuous Tension

- Tension = Conflict
- Conflict pulls readers' attention because it tells our brains we have something to learn. We are wired to avoid conflict, but also how to intake stories of others who have dealt with undesirable situations. Evolutionarily, stories are a way to 'learn' without risk.
- Simulate situations that are socially/emotionally/physically undesirable. Readers will read to find out how the protagonist deals with those issues so they don't have to learn the hard way.
 - Enemies trapped together
 - Experiencing a character's fear (even in a small way)
 - Experiencing a character's embarrassment
 - A change in relationship
 - Being surprised (good or bad)
- **Only works if you get readers to care about your character first!** When they are invested in your character, they will care about their situation.

Crucibles & Closed Environments

- **Crucible** - A crucible bonds people together through relationships and their environment. The key is that your characters are more drawn to the crucible than they are to escaping it. Their motivation to continue to oppose the other character is greater than their desire to run away.
 - Business partners that hate each other but love their business
 - Loveless marriage where parties depend on, are trapped by, or are drawn to each other
 - Family ties (for good or bad)
- **Closed Environment** - This is where the location is a place the characters can't leave, but the drama itself comes from another source. The characters aren't necessarily drawn to the environment, but are restricted by it. It serves as a limitation that heightens tension.
 - Deserted island
 - Office building in a hostage situation