



MASTERING PLOT, ACTION, AND PACE WITH STACKED FUNNELS

PLOTTER?

PANTSER?

IT DOESN'T MATTER

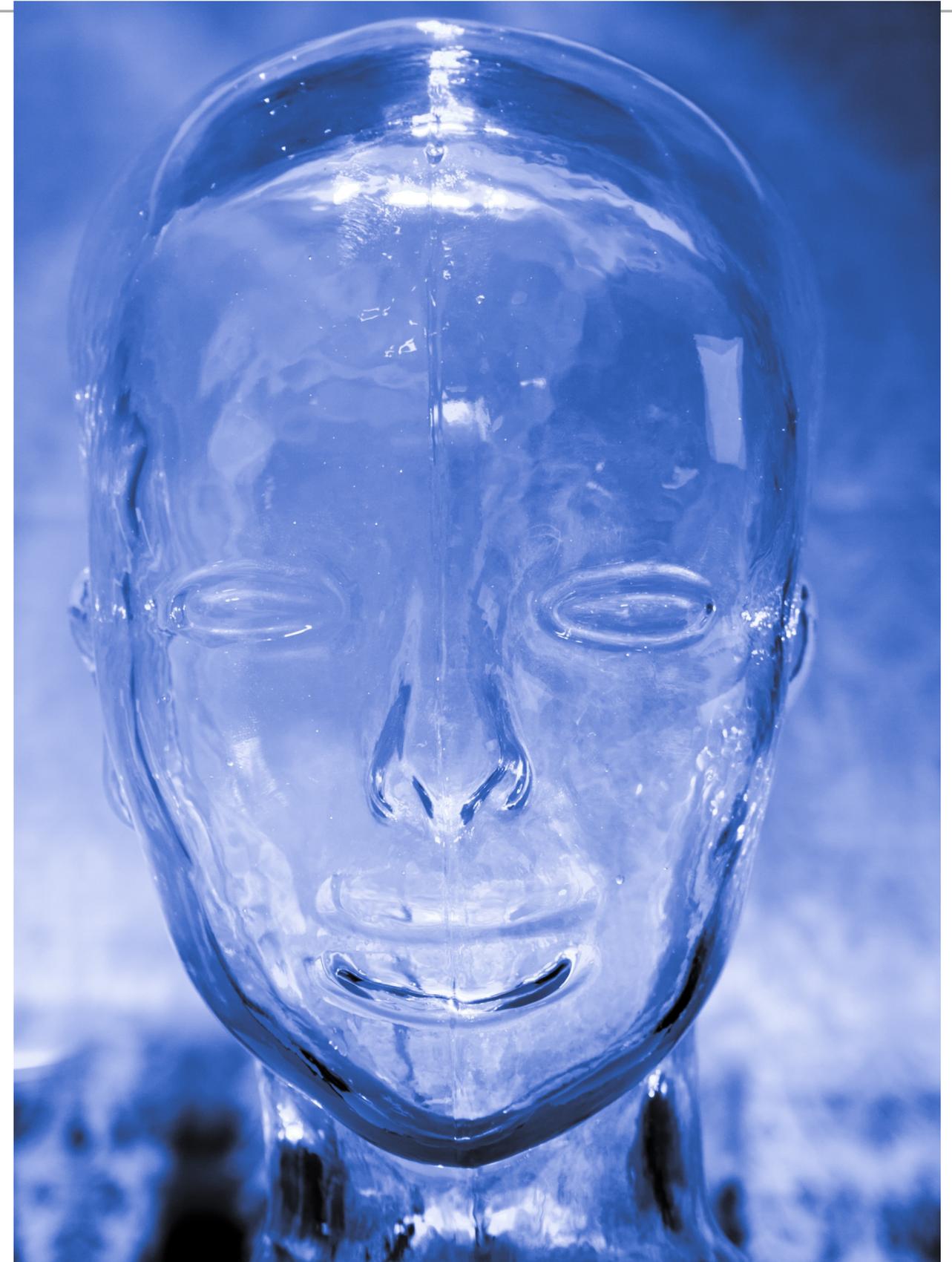
AT LEAST NOT AS FAR AS THIS AS
SYSTEM GOES.

PROCESS IS A BIG DEAL.

THAT'S WHY ANY WRITING SYSTEM
NEEDS TO WORK WITH YOURS

PROCESS IS INDIVIDUAL

- ▶ Has to do with how your brain best processes creative information
- ▶ Not an either/or situation. Most of us exist on a creative spectrum
- ▶ More plotter = works better with creative information organized before hand
- ▶ More pantsner = works better organizing creative information as it comes in



HOW TO USE THIS SYSTEM WITH YOUR PROCESS

- ▶ Plotter - Organize ahead of time. Use each tool in order and fill every line and you'll have a detailed plan of how to craft your story
- ▶ Middle Way - Keep track as you go. Plot as much as you want ahead of time, and track surprises, changes, and "pantsed" areas as needed
- ▶ Pantser - Use as an editing tool - Write story first, then fill out the tools to check for gaps, plot holes, logic gaps, inconsistent development and other issues. Make a plan to tackle during edits
- ▶ This is not a quick fix system. Can take hours or days

THE THREE KEYS TO CRAFTING COMPELLING STORIES

- ▶ 1. Set the expectations of your reader early, and utilize a system to ensure that those expectations are met by the end of the book – PROMISES
- ▶ 2. Create a relatable set of dilemmas that your audience can invest in, regardless of your characters' backstories or their worlds – DILEMMAS
- ▶ 3. Set up a connected flow of actions and consequences that pull your reader through your story instead of pushing her along – FLOW

▶ PROMISES – DILEMMAS – FLOW

DILEMMAS – ACTIONS

- ▶ Actions are decisions
- ▶ Decisions are conflict brought to life. That's why people hate making them
- ▶ Decisions are relatable. We can't avoid them. No matter how crazy your story gets, if the focus remains on decisions, the audience will follow you
- ▶ Decisions lead to consequences, which lead to more decisions, which lead to more consequences...On and on until the end of the story



FLOW

Set up a connected flow of actions and consequences that pull your reader through your story instead of pushing her along

FLOW – THREE ACT STRUCTURE

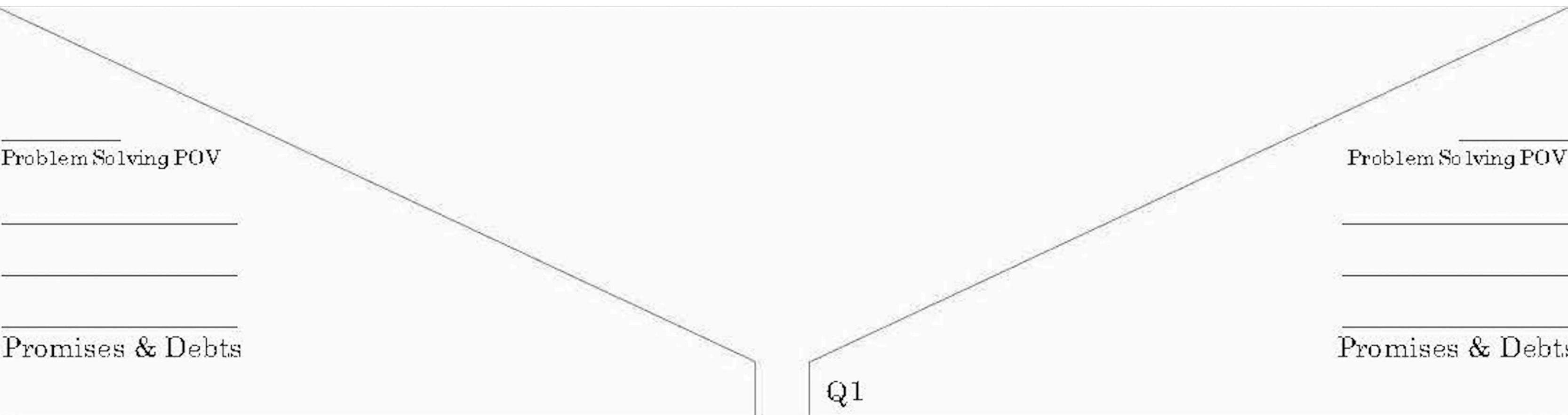
- ▶ Familiar. Flexible. Popular.
- ▶ Each act comes with a message that readers subconsciously look for
 - ▶ Act One - Adventures are a universal experience
 - ▶ Act Two - We can change our ways, grow, and become better
 - ▶ Act Three - Our truth is our strength

FLOW – FUNNELS

Allows you to track string of connected action and consequences

Options narrow until at the bottom your characters are forced to face a dilemma

Facing that dilemma (Vital Question) is an explosion point that leads to the next funnel



FLOW – A COUPLE OF NOTES

- ▶ Tracking flow of actions and consequences is not the same as outlining scenes
- ▶ Some decisions may take one scene. Others may take several to fully develop.
 - ▶ This is the core of your story—its foundation. There may be scenes that are not tracked here. This will depend on
 - ▶ Word count
 - ▶ Pace & Drive
 - ▶ Your unique voice

ACT ONE

- ▶ Someone's going along their usual business when something unusual happens and now they are in a situation they've never been in before
- ▶ The flow of action doesn't really get started until your character makes the first decision that leads to a tangible and limiting consequence
- ▶ She will act out of a desire to protect her Ideal Self (even if that self is harmful)
- ▶ Level of success and failures will vary based on story but she will need to make some mistakes
- ▶ Most promises & debts made here
- ▶ Ends with facing the first Vital Question

ACT ONE – THE BOURNE IDENTITY

- ▶ Wakes up - doesn't know who he is or what he's doing shot in the middle of the ocean
- ▶ Decides not to kill anyone on board and work on the crew. Consequence is he gets enough money to go to Switzerland
- ▶ Decides to fight the cops when confronted. Consequence is he needs to hide from the authorities
- ▶ Decides to go to the bank to look for answers. Consequence is he attracts more attention
- ▶ Decides to duck into embassy. Consequence is he get into a fight & is on the run for real

ACT ONE – BRIDGET JONES' DIARY

- ▶ After hearing Mark Darcy say mean things about her she decides to journal her way out of being single. Consequence is she buys a journal and has to start holding herself accountable for her actions
- ▶ Decides to flirt with her attractive boss, Daniel. Consequence is he flirts back with her
- ▶ Decides to sleep with Daniel. Consequence is they get into a somewhat serious relationship

ACT TWO: BEGINNING

- ▶ After facing the 1st Vital Question your characters know they can't make their problems disappear, so instead they work to minimize the damage the problem will have on their world and ego
- ▶ They move to what they see as their problem solving strength - Reason or Instinct
- ▶ Mistakes keep happening though because your characters are treating them as if they are ordinary, and they're not. They're extraordinary
- ▶ It isn't until they are forced to face the 2nd Vital Question that they break down and accept the truth

ACT TWO (BEGINNING) – BOURNE IDENTITY

- ▶ Decides to offer Marie 20k for a ride to Paris. Consequence is they talk and bond.
- ▶ Decides to tell her the truth about his situation. Consequence is he sleeps well for 1st time
- ▶ Decides to invite her into his Paris apartment. Consequence is they're both there when he's attacked by an assassin
- ▶ Decides to take Marie with him when he runs from the scene. Consequence is they're both involved in a manhunt

ACT TWO (BEGINNING) – BRIDGET JONES' DIARY

- ▶ Decides to go on a weekend getaway with Daniel. Consequence is she tells him she loves him
- ▶ Decides to accept his non-answer when she says that. Consequence is she starts to have doubts and fears
- ▶ Decides to investigate when she gets a suspicious feeling at Daniel's house. Consequence is she finds a naked lady hiding in the bathroom

FLOW – MIDPOINT

- ▶ Does not need to happen in the middle of your story. Can happen early or late. Depends entirely on the needs of your story
- ▶ The midpoint is when your protagonist come to three life-changing realizations
 - ▶ Her strengths are not solving her problems
 - ▶ Life will never be the same
 - ▶ There is no going back, only forward
- ▶ These realizations are what cause your characters to move away from their ineffective traits and embrace new, more effective ones

MIDPOINT EXAMPLES

- ▶ **The Bourne Identity** - Midpoint happens in the hotel room after the assassination attempt. His instincts aren't working. Violence isn't working. Running isn't working. Instead he starts strengthening his connection with Marie, and starts thinking things through
- ▶ **Bridget Jones' Diary** - Midpoint happens right after finding the naked lady in Daniel's bathroom. She realizes she's been needy. She's been desperate. She's been willing to settle for second best. She knows she can't do any of those things and be happy

ACT TWO: END

- ▶ This is where characters stop fighting the surface effects of the problem and do the hard work of growing
- ▶ Switches to the problem solving method she formerly thought of as her weakness (Reason or Instinct)
- ▶ Still makes mistakes (sometimes less, sometimes more) but now learns from them
- ▶ May even see hope for a better future...just don't let her fulfill it. That has to wait until after she's answered the 3rd Vital Question

ACT TWO (END) – BOURNE IDENTITY

- ▶ Decide to be strategic as they find out more about Jason's life and the people after him. Consequence is they find out more info through old phone records
- ▶ Decide to follow those leads. Consequence is they find out he's an assassin and Marie freaks out
- ▶ Decide to go somewhere that Marie feels safe. Consequence is another assassin follows them there
- ▶ Decide to kill him. Consequence is he sends Marie away to someplace that she'll *actually* be safe

ACT TWO (END) – BRIDGET JONES' DIARY

- ▶ Decides to quit her job and find another one. Consequence is she takes one as a television reporter
- ▶ Decides to talk to Mark Darcy at a dinner party. Consequences is he apologizes to her for being nasty
- ▶ Decides to interview one of his famous clients on tv. Consequence is it gives her a real win at her job & puts her in a good mood
- ▶ Decides to invite Darcy in to dinner when he shows up at her door. Consequence is he's there when Daniel shows up and the two men get into a fight in the street

ACT THREE

- ▶ This last question was the hardest for your protagonists to face and it's knocked the masks off their faces
- ▶ They realize they can't solve their problems by hacking away at them from the outside
- ▶ They instead accept that their True Selves are capable of weathering the coming storm and face their problems without armor
- ▶ Instead of having to answer a question at the end of the act, the protagonists will face the sum of all the consequences that they have accumulated so far

ACT THREE – BOURNE IDENTITY

- ▶ Decides to call Treadstone project directly. Consequence is they agree to meet him under his terms (but not really)
- ▶ Decides to put a tracker on CIA van. Consequence is he follows it to their local safe house
- ▶ Decides to sneak into building. Consequence is he is confronted with traumatizing memories and realizations about his old life

ACT THREE – BRIDGET JONES' DIARY

- ▶ She turns down Daniel's invitation to spend Christmas with him. Consequence is she spends it with her father, near Darcy's parent's home & sees him
- ▶ Decides to make a grand romantic gesture when she finds out he didn't actually cheat on his wife. Consequence is she makes a fool of herself
- ▶ Decides to go with her friends to Paris for New Year celebration. Consequence is Darcy shows up and stops her before she can go

FLOW – FINAL RECKONING

- ▶ Lots of different names for this but I like reckonings because they are active. Moments are passive. This isn't something that is happening to your characters. This is something they are doing
- ▶ This is where we get to see who your characters have become. We get to see what they're made of
- ▶ Not always "bleak" or "dark". If complex decisions and emotions have brought your character here, don't be afraid let complex emotions lead them home
- ▶ This is where you fulfill the audience contract. This is what they showed up for—catharsis

FINAL RECKONING EXAMPLES

- ▶ **The Bourne Identity** - Decides he doesn't want to be "Jason Bourne" anymore. But he has done some terrible stuff in his past, so he can't just walk out. He has to fight his way out.
- ▶ **Bridget Jones' Diary** - Decides to stay with Darcy, but he finds her journal and all the nasty things she's written about him. She's certain that he's left because of that, and follows in her underwear, ready to apologize and win him back.

FLOW – RESOLUTIONS

- ▶ Some stories need a bow on top
- ▶ Have all aspects of the audience contract been delivered?
- ▶ Do you need/want to do a victory lap to drive that sense of satisfaction home?
- ▶ Do you have plans for your characters after this book?
- ▶ Do you need a small cliffhanger to bring the readers back to next in a series?
- ▶ Does it benefit the theme of your story to show that the final victory was not short-lived?

RESOLUTIONS – EXAMPLES

- ▶ **The Bourne Identity** - He finds Marie running her own shop on a Greek Island, and they get the promise of a life together
- ▶ **Bridget Jones' Diary** - She discovers it was misunderstanding and he was just getting her a new journal for a present. They kiss



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