Constructive Criticism: "Just Cause"

by Melanie Anne Phillips
& Chris Huntley

Death of a Mystery

Police Report

Sometimes, a misguided movie steps over the line, innocent audiences get burned, and someone notifies the Story Police. That's where I come in. My name is Payday and I carry a grudge.

The Crime Report

It was a slow day in the City of Angles (where everyone has an angle and leverages it to his or her best advantage) when suddenly the switchboard lit up like the hills behind my condo in fire season. Reports flooded in (like the hills behind my condo in the rainy season) of a film that was bilking the viewing audience out of its hard earned emotional investment.

As chief critic for the Burbank Story Police, I decided to use my considerable pull in the industry. I put my name on the list and obtained a copy of the film on video from the rental joint on the corner as soon as it was available. Settling back with a hot beer and a cold pizza, I plopped the tape into the slot and prepared to put myself in harm's way.

The Crime Scene

Bad movies are made every day. But this one had a cast, a budget, and came out when audiences were hungering for a good thriller. That made this case special.

According to eyewitness accounts, Just Cause starts out simple: a story of a man wrongly convicted of a grisly murder and the professor of law who reopens the case in an attempt to get him freed.

For a significant part of the film, the audience is suckered in by this plot-line. No clues are dropped to indicate hidden goings-on until the film is half over. Then, when it is least expected, the professor's wife fesses up to a dark secret that changes...well...nothing.

Inside this Issue:

Breaking Down Lolita
A Frontline Diary: Part One

by Mark Haslett

Whether you're creating your own story or examining the fine weave of a literary classic, using Dramatica is going to involve some analysis. The software itself is open to several tactical approaches for this purpose: character, plot, theme, or genre. Each approach can be addressed from two angles: storytelling or storyforming. However, this kind of freedom can leave writers trigger-shy if they're unfamiliar with Dramatica theory. Fortunately, a little analytical experience goes a long way to relieving this

The "Visible" Hero

What is a hero? What qualities make a character the "hero" of a story? Traditional story understanding uses heroes all over the place, but since they are so hard to "define," many different kinds of heroes exist without any clear way to distinguish between them. A writer wanting to create a slightly different hero finds itself in a quandary because so much seems to be implicit in a hero, yet so little is explicit.

From a Dramatica perspective, a Hero is a cultural storytelling convention. Like Dramatica archetypal characters, a Hero is a form of storytelling shorthand. EVERYBODY knows what a hero is (yeah, right) so a writer need not explore it too heavily to get on with the rest of the story. Unlike Dramatica archetypal characters (who are defined by their story functions), a Hero is a blend of many unnecessarily related story structures and dynamics. This blending is what makes defining a Hero in traditional terms a slippery business. So, instead of trying to do the impossible by sticking with traditional terms, here's a look at Hero through the Dramatica lens.

A "typical hero" has several common qualities, some of which are not even qualities of the character itself but of the type of story it is in. A Dramatica definition of a hero could be seen with the following qualities:

- Almost always the Objective Story Protagonist
- Frequently the Subjective Story Main Character
- Generally a Do-er
- Usually in a story whose Outcome is Success
- More frequently than not in a story whose Judgment is Good

It can be easily argued that traditional "heroes" are most frequently Physics Domain characters with Universe Objective Story Domains (though the reverse, Universe MC and Physics OS, is a very close second).

The issue of MC Resolve and heroes seems to have changed over time. It used to be that most all heroes were Steadfast characters (look at the Bible, Gilgamesh, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Homer [not Simpson], etc). In more recent years (19th and 20th century stories particularly), heroes have been allowed to Change and still maintain their heroic standing.

Dissecting a "hero" this way makes it easier to modify the different aspects of a Hero to create "anti-heroes," "nonheroes," "modern heroes," etc. Imagine the possibilities:

- A protagonist, Main Character, Steadfast, Do-er, Physics, Success character with a Judgment of Bad.
- A protagonist, Do-er, Physics, Success, Good, Steadfast, Obstacle character.
- A skeptic, Do-er, Physics, Success, Good, Steadfast, Main Character.

And so on. By changing only one aspect of a Hero, a writer can create a plethora of interesting Heroes. ❖

Dramatica on the Internet

Questions, comments, reactions, and subscriptions to this newsletter and Dramatica can be sent to us from most computer services via our Internet address:

Dramatica@Screenplay.com

Dramatica now has its own home page on the World Wide Web! The URL (Universal Resource Locator) is:

http://www.well.com/user/dramatic/

D–Mail:

D-Mail: *Speed* Violation?

QUESTION:

I recently downloaded and read the Dramatica constructive criticism of Speed, and I just had to write. I don't know if it was you who wrote that, but I strenuously disagree. Speed is described as having a conflict in its timelock/optionlock area.

However, Speed on the whole is quite clearly an optionlock film. The timelock device is only used twice: on the elevator and on the bus. The goal of the movie is not for Keanu Reeves and Jeff Daniels to save the bus — the goal is for them to figure out who the mad bomber is and stop him (optionlock). It just so happens that in the meantime they must deal with two bomb situations (timelocks). Therefore, Speed is a film that contains two minor (sub?) timelocks WITHIN its main optionlock.

Many films use these "false endings" to give the audience another jolt when they realize the ride isn't over yet. Alien, for instance, is an optionlock film, as they must find and kill the alien... or be killed themselves. However, a timelock is then established when Ripley decides to blow up the ship. She barely escapes with her life, but she has won... or so we think. Then, the alien turns up on board her escape vessel, thus reintroducing the original goal's optionlock.

I think the misinterpretation of Speed arises because the bus timelock sequence takes up such a large portion of the film, and was in prominent use on the posters and in the advertising. Most people were thus pleasantly surprised to find the movie was not strictly a 2-hour bus ride, and were caught completely off-guard by the elevator and subway sequences that bookend the film. Anyone who was paying any attention at all was not in the least confused when the film did not conclude once the bus exploded, because they remembered that the original goal was to put a stop to the mad bomber, an optionlock. Until that original goal is satisfied, no number of timelocks could possibly confuse an attentive viewer.

Now, if Dennis Hopper had been captured and/or killed, and THEN there was a long, drawn-out sequence that established a whole new optionlock goal, THAT would have broken the Dramatica "rules," so to speak.

I hope you will rethink your position on Speed. I saw the film several months before I ever heard of Dramatica, and the story never bumped for me once. I still think it's a great, fast-paced action film without any time/optionlock conflicts. What say you?

- PG

DRAMATICA RESPONSE: (PART 1)

Hi PG —

You are correct in seeing Speed as an optionlock story for exactly the reasons you have stated. I am also correct, however, in seeing Speed as a timelock story for exactly the reasons mentioned in the article. Since neither of us are the author, we have each looked at the work and decoded what we felt best represented what the author had intended. The reality is that the story, as presented in the movie, is actually either both timelock AND optionlock, or neither timelock NOR optionlock.

I'm not trying to be cute when I say this. Here is my reasoning:

The purpose of either lock is to provide the audience with a way to gauge the limits (or scope) of a story. Since all meaning comes from context (change the context and you may change the meaning), a story's limit is one way an audience has to get a handle on the story's meaning. It also acts as a way for an audience to tell when (or where) a story is completed. In this way, the limit provides an audience a way to measure the progress of the story AS IT EXPERIENCES IT. This is a very important point. If the audience is misled for a significant period of time as to what the scope of the story is, then all of its interpretation of the events get messed up. Sometimes that is what the author wants. My sense in Speed is that the author was not intending to confuse the audience in that way.

A story's limit is not the only measure of a story's scope — there are all sorts of them (we call them "appreciations" in Dramatica). Another aspect of the

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article's commentary on Speed was its lack of a clearly identifiable Obstacle Character (OC). Had there been an obvious OC, then the relationship between the OC and the Main Character (MC) would have helped clue in the audience as to what was going on as well. Since the Subjective Story elements were not very evident, they served to confuse the limit issue rather than clarify it.

Back to timelock v. optionlock: The opening sequence in Speed in which we are introduced to the bomber could easily be interpreted as "the setup" or prologue. The story then truly begins when Keanu gets the phone call and the timelock is in place. At that point (and, in fact, not until two-thirds of the story is already over) there isn't any other indication that the bomber is planning any long term terrorism. In fact, I believe that the bomber indicates that he just wants to get what is owed to him — indicating that he is not a Unabomber type with a long term agenda, but is using the bus with its hostages as a means to an end. The key word here is "end" as in "over" as in "limit."

The entire sequence after the bus is gone seems to be more of a Subjective Story conflict resolution (Keanu, Dennis, and Sandra are practically the only people in the ending) but since there really isn't a Subjective Story to speak of and the Objective Story really isn't over, it substitutes as the conclusion to the Objective Story.

IF the author had planned the story to be an optionlock, it would have made sense to make some clear indications as to that effect, or NOT to have severely confused the issue by including an IN YOUR FACE, no nonsense timelock.

I honestly cannot say which was the intention.

I hope this clarifies what I was talking about in the article. Please let me know if this clarifies the issue or obscures it even more.

DRAMATICA RESPONSE: (PART 2)

Hi again, PG —

There are a few other points regarding Speed that I neglected to cover in the first response.

LIMITS VERSUS GOALS:

The purpose of a limit is simply to establish a restriction on time or conditions that allows an audience to determine whether or not a goal has been achieved (Outcome). Change the limit and the status of the Outcome may change. Forget or ignore the limit and there IS no Outcome. Timelocks establish that a goal must be met "by a certain time." Optionlocks establish that a goal must be met "within certain conditions" or "before a certain condition." If the goal is met within the limit — great. If the goal is not met within the limit then the Consequences come into effect.

(NOTE: When you have a story that has a limit of a timelock, the available options will seem to be a constraint within that limit. For example, as time runs out your options seem to get more and more "limited." Conversely, when you have a story whose limit is an optionlock, time can be seen as a constraint within that limit. For example, even though you only have a certain number of options, time may seem to be running faster and faster because of the approaching consequence — think of The Monkey's Paw.)

In Speed, a timelock is clearly established early on in the film: The passengers of the bus must be rescued (goal) before 11:30 AM (timelock) or else they will die (consequence). Before I go on to optionlock, however, I do wish to concede a fairly major point. Though this timelock is CLEARLY established, it is hardly made much of in the film. There were only a handful of references to this limit once it was established and the timelock is ultimately "blown off" in importance — the bus blows up BEFORE the limit is up when it drops below 50 m.p.h.

If the goal in Speed is to figure out who the mad bomber is and stop him, then an optionlock limit would establish that he must be stopped "before a certain condition." What is that condition (before he kills again?...before he kills the people on the bus?...before he gets the ransom money?...before Keanu gets a life?) and how is it established? My feeling is that the story supplies many POSSIBLE answers to this question, but does not offer any particular one.

So we, as the audience of Speed, are left with a choice between seeing the limit as a clearly established but vastly underdeveloped and ultimately ignored Timelock, or as a much more likely but completely undefined or unspecified Optionlock. Not much of a choice, really.

FALSE ENDINGS [AND OTHER MISDIRECTIONS]

In your note, you mention that "many films use these 'false endings' to give the audience another jolt when they realize the ride isn't over yet." If the false ending is merely there as a jolt before the "ride" is over, then we're not dealing with a Dramatica story at all and the concept of a limit is more or less irrelevant. If the false ending is merely a form of storyweaving

misdirection, however, then it's merely a matter of storytelling slight of hand and is well worth practicing.

I agree with the example to which you refer. Many films, including <u>Alien</u>, use this technique. The false ending in <u>Alien</u> is a good use of this technique and serves a dramatic purpose. If you recall, Ripley is the type of character that addresses problems linearly and directly. The one time she slips up (remember going back for the cat?) it allows something to go on behind her back. If the filmmakers had the alien show up without some sort of goof-up on her part, the scare would have been bogus and the story's argument would have been severely undermined.

The other common use of "false endings," sometimes referred to as "red herrings," is to temporarily breakaway from the main story in an attempt to briefly "fool" the audience. (We group false endings, false starts, red herrings, and other forms of misdirection all in the same category of storyweaving techniques that the audience, when all is said and done, should NEVER mistake for essential parts of the story's meaning.) It becomes a serious story problem if your red herring (false ending) begins to take up a lot of story time because, by definition, it really isn't going anywhere. Rule of Thumb: If you use red herrings, don't set up fishing trips to go catch them.

The fact that the movie <u>Speed</u> spends such a large percentage of its time (50%+ — probably more like 60%-70%) concerning the rigged bus indicates that the bus segments are integral to the meaning of the story. And as such, it needs to help establish and is constrained by the story's limit. If, however, the time limit placed on the bus is merely a false ending/red herring, then it is a MISuse of this technique.

ONE LAST WORD

Don't get me wrong. I thoroughly enjoyed <u>Speed</u> for the most part. The comments made in the constructive criticism were meant to be just that: constructive criticism. I think the story would have been even more enjoyable had either an optionlock or timelock been MORE clearly established (and adhered to). I think the story would have benefited even more so from establishing and developing a clear Obstacle Character to Keanu's Main Character.

The issue with <u>Speed</u>'s limit is one of clarity. If you want to see a story where a timelock is clearly established and constantly reinforced — then intentionally ignored, go and see <u>Die Hard With A Vengeance</u>. There isn't any ambiguity about them breaking the timelock, nor is there much question that the author(s) seemed to do it intentionally. What IS debatable is the net effect upon the audience and whether violating the story dynamics was worth surprising a few people in the audience.

D-Mail: Main Character [MC] Problem

Question: "What I guess I'm asking is this: when Dramatica asks us to define the MC's [Main Character's] problem, is it asking what the MC's "psychological need" (sorry, a Truby term) is?"

The simple answer to your question is, "Yes." The expanded answer, however, is more dependent on the context in which the MC problem is seen. A "need" frequently is seen to indicate some form of "lack" on the Main Character's part, and even more frequently seen as a "need FOR" something. This is only ONE of the possible contexts in which the MC problem can be seen and most closely ties to the idea of "START" as the direction of the MC's personal growth.

- For a Start/*Change* MC, the MC needs to fill that internal need by beginning to do something, or be something, new to them (like starting to accept oneself).

- For a Start/*Steadfast* MC, the MC's personal problems stem from external forces or conditions that must adjust to accommodate the MC — external forces or conditions that need to BEGIN (like holding out for others to accept you).

You can also have "needs" that are better understood as a "need to NOT" do or be something. These types of needs more closely resemble the idea of "STOP" as the direction of the MC's personal growth.

- For a Stop/*Change* MC, the MC needs to satisfy that internal need by ceasing being or doing something that is causing problems for them (e.g. stop accepting the unacceptable, or stop nonaccepting things out of hand).

- For a Stop/*Steadfast* MC, the MC's personal problems stem from external sources that need to cease for the MC to be at peace (e.g. holding out for one's nonacceptance to end).

NOTE — The four examples are based on the assumption that the story is supposed to end up successfully or good for the MC. If the story is a failure or bad, then changing or remaining steadfast and stopping and starting will not be seen as leading to a resolution of the Main Character's problem. ❖

5.

Storyweaving Tips:
One way to use Dramatica to create scenes

by Mark Haslett

There's a problem all authors face in writing their stories. It's a question that assaults writers page after page: *What Happens Next?* Even with a clear idea of what your story is about, you still need to invent the events that make it up and put them into some kind of order. How can you tell what events will suit your story? How can you know if the order you choose for them will add up to the meaning you want?

Dramatica, especially the Dramatica Pro version of the software, can help with this problem. Developing a single storyform for your story in Dramatica gives you enough information to create an outline of that storyform. This outline will suggest the kinds of events you should explore and the order in which you should explore them to create the story you intended.

Your Storyform is the skeleton of your story, describing the argument at its heart. A Storyform includes both details of *what* your story is about and *how* it will explore its topics. A complete Storyform can actually provide a framework for writing twenty-eight key scenes in your story. These twenty-eight scenes constitute a minimum number of scenes for exploring every aspect of your story's Plot.

These twenty-eight scenes are the simplest way of turning a Storyform into an outline for your story. Why the number twenty-eight? This happens to be the number of Plot points which are inherent to a Storyform. Complete stories generally contain more scenes than this, adding scenes which dwell strictly on character or theme, or develop sub-stories. Twenty eight is the number of scenes necessary for a bare-bones outline of a story's complete Plot. They are easy to develop and are a great place for any story to begin. Other scenes can be added later if they are found necessary.

This approach to creating scenes is not a hard and fast rule to which Dramatica users must adhere. There are many dramatic moments that can create the foundations of your scenes. This method is simply one way of creating that foundation by drawing directly from your Dramatica storyform.

To perform this simple trick, the first step is to get Dramatica down to a single Storyform for your story. Double check it, of course, to make sure you're dealing with all four throughlines in the way you want. Next it is advisable to fill in all the storytelling illustrations for your appreciations. Illustrating your argument is the best way of getting to know it, and only knowing your story's argument will allow you to properly design your scenes.

When you've done that, however, you're ready to create these twenty-eight scenes. In your Dramatica Pro software, open the Dramatica Reports for your story's storyform. Call up and print out the **Plot Sequence Report** for your story. This report provides an act-by-act description of the concerns that will pop up in each of your story's throughlines.

When I say "act-by-act," I'm speaking in the four-act sense used in Dramatica. Dramatica looks at Plot from a structural point of view, seeing four-acts at work marking off a story from its beginning to its end. The traditional point of view sees stories in terms of three dynamic acts which are capped off by a *denouement* or *author's proof*. These two points of view come up with different numbers of acts in a story because they are looking at different things.

The whole truth of the matter is that authors need to see both points of view. Both are needed to create the twenty-eight scenes of this Dramatica scene outline. Fortunately, authors can get both a three-act and a four-act appreciation of their stories from the **Plot Sequence Report**.

To see how, let's look at an example. Your Plot Sequence Report might read as follows:

Plot Sequence Report for "Your Story"

THE OBJECTIVE STORYLINE

The Objective Storyline deals with the kinds of activities the objective characters will be engaged in, act by act. In "Your Story," act one deals primarily with Understanding, act two with Learning, act three with Doing and act four concentrates on Obtaining.

This paragraph lists the four concerns that will be most important in the Plot of your Objective Story, and the order in which they should be explored. Understanding, Learning, Doing, and Obtaining constitute markers which describe how the Objective Story will develop.

Plot, as it applies to story, describes sequence. The plot of the Objective Story, then, can be seen as a progressing sequence, or a *road* if you will. The four-

act appreciation of this road describes the *signposts* which this road passes. So from this point of view, the Objective Story's road starts at act one, or the first signpost, then continues past the next two acts until it arrives at act four and concludes, having reached its final signpost.

To get a three-act appreciation from the four-act point of view presented in this report, concentrate on the three journeys *between* the signposts. For example, in the above report, the first *journey* will take the Objective Story from Understanding to Learning. In other words, the first dynamic act would deal with an Understanding which developed until finally the characters began Learning. And the second dynamic act would be about the characters Learning more and more until they come to Do something. The third dynamic act then would deal with the characters Doing and Doing until something was finally Obtained. The concluding *denouement* would deal with sorting out the effects of that Obtaining.
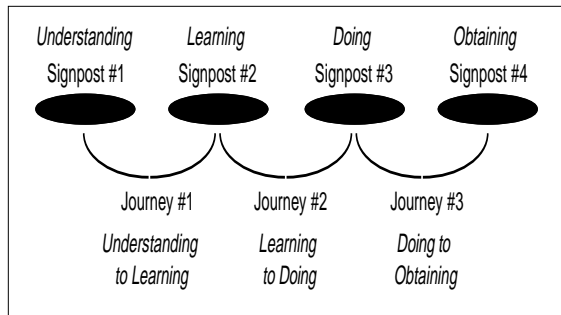
You can see from this example how the three and four-act appreciations of a story coexist. The four-act appreciation concentrates on the *topics* being explored, while the three-act appreciation concentrates on the actual *explorations*.

It is also important to see that the above example only deals with the Objective Story. This act-by-act breakdown is repeated for the other three throughlines of the story by the **Plot Sequence Report**. The only difference is each throughline deals with different topics.

The reason why is because what we see along the road of the Objective Story is not the same as what we see following the road of the Main Character, or any other throughline. Since the four throughlines have separate points of view on the story, they see different signposts. Each has four signposts and between the signposts exist three journeys.

The audience synthesizes the four throughlines together in their experience of the finished story. For them it is as if all four were being explored simultaneously. For this reason, they all stretch from the story's beginning to its end. This does not mean that they are all present in every scene, however. The author must know which specific throughline is being covered at any given point of the story, otherwise the throughlines may become confused.

If we count all these journeys and signposts suggested by the **Plot Sequence Report**, we find that we have seven different pieces describing how each throughline will progress. We know what each piece is dealing with, we know the perspective from which they are coming, and we know the order in which the pieces will appear in each throughline.

Seven pieces from four throughlines gives us twenty-eight different pieces which collectively cover the entire Plot of your story. For this outline we are going to turn each of these pieces into a scene and create twenty-eight key scenes to propel your story from beginning to end.

Having printed out the **Plot Sequence Report**, then, you have most of the information you need to create these scenes. Next you'll need twenty-eight 3"x 5" cards or their equivalent. If you can, get them in four different colors (seven cards each) to match the four different throughlines. Then begin transferring the information from the report onto the cards in the following manner:

First, label one set of cards as the Objective Story set and number them 1 through 7. Then, using cards number 1, 3, 5, and 7 create the Objective Story *signposts* by writing the number and name of each signpost on the appropriate card (Signpost #1 on Card 1, Signpost #2 on Card 3, etc.).

Next, create the Objective Story *journey* cards by using cards 2, 4, and 6 to hold the journey information. Write the number of the journey and the name of the preceding signpost, then draw an arrow pointing to the right and the name of the following signpost.

When you're done, the cards should read something like this:

- OS Card #1 Objective Story Signpost #1: Understanding
- OS Card #2 Objective Story Journey #1: Understanding to Learning
- OS Card #3 Objective Story Signpost #2: Learning
- OS Card #4 Objective Story Journey #2: Learning to Doing
- OS Card #5 Objective Story Signpost #3: Doing

- OS Card #6 Objective Story Journey #3: Doing to Obtaining
- OS Card #7 Objective Story Signpost #4: Obtaining

Repeat this procedure for the other three throughlines, using a different color for each throughline. When you're done you will have a 3"x 5" card for every signpost and journey in your story.

Encoding your Signposts and Journeys

Now that you have twenty-eight cards holding your twenty-eight potential scenes, it's a good time to think about how these might actually reflect your story. Just as you first arrived at a storyform for your story and then illustrated it, you should now illustrate your Storyformed scene outline.

Write just a sentence or two about how you will establish each signpost and each journey. Write your notes on the 3"x5" card for each scene. We don't necessarily need to know how many characters will be in the scene or what they're going to say or do. Just give an indication how the scene will establish that Objective Story Signpost 1 in your story is *Learning* (or however it appears on your Plot Sequence Report). Do this for every one of the twenty-eight scenes, encoding the signposts and the journeys for all four throughlines.

When you get an idea down for every one of your twenty-eight cards you'll be ready to move on to the next step. By this time you should also have a terrific handle on your Storyform. Using the four throughlines to look at your story from beginning to end really takes you into the crevices of your story. This is the kind of work that really makes an idea into a story.

Creating the order of your outline

The next step is to create an overall order for revealing these pieces in your story. Dramatica doesn't tell you how to do this, however. This is where you as the author begin to take over. Your storytelling emphasis is going to determine how you want this order to proceed.

In one sense, all four throughlines of a story may be thought of as cameras in different positions broadcasting the same sporting event: "Your Story." Each camera has a different angle on the events as they unfold. Each of these cameras gets a good view of some things but only part of what is happening overall.

If we were invited into the "master control room" for this broadcast, we would see the director *punching up* one camera shot and then another. The purpose is to assemble the best shots from each camera into what

the viewers get as the final program. So it is with authoring a story. As director of your story, you will be making decisions about when to transition from one throughline to another, trying to feature the best material to create an overall impact.

You'll want to keep this kind of attitude as you arrange these cards into an overall order, going from card #1 to card #28. This order needs to be the best you can find for conveying how you want your story to feel. It's through creating this order for your scenes that you will *punch up* the best "angles" for your audience to see what you want them to see at any given moment of your story.

There are some important guidelines to doing this, however, and breaking them could rob your story of its meaning. For example, if Journey #2 of a throughline ended up coming before Signpost #1 no one could understand that progression through your plot. A story cannot be ordered in a completely random way and still make sense.

The following guidelines will serve to keep the dramatics in your story in the proper alignment as they unfold. Other than following these, however, choosing a scene order is entirely a matter of personal choice.

Guideline #1

Over the course of the story, the scenes in any given throughline must occur in the proper order.

This means that Signpost #1 must occur in the mix before Journey #1 and Journey #1 will occur before Signpost #2, even if there are other scenes from other throughlines which come in between.

Guideline #2

All scenes from all throughlines numbered either Signpost #1 and Journey #1 must occur before any scene numbered Signpost #2, #3, or #4 or Journey #2 or #3 from any throughline occurs.

In other words, all the *ones* must finish before a *two* can occur. Likewise, all the *twos* must finish before a *three* can occur, and all the *threes* must finish before any Signposts #4 can occur.

Here's why:

OS Card #1
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Understa Lea

OS Card #3
Lea

OS Card #4
Learning

OS Card #5
Do

OS Card #6
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OS Card #7
Obta

In each throughline, Signpost #1 and Journey #1 constitute an *Act* from both a dynamic and a structural point of view. Now the word "Act" is used differently by writers from different writing backgrounds and different points of view. For this scene outline, we have already encountered a three-act and a four-act appreciation of story. At this point we will combine these two points of view and define what we mean by "Act" for the rest of this article as follows...

An Act is one complete Dramatic Movement.

A Dramatic Movement is simply the exploration of an issue until there is nothing left to say about it without repeating yourself. Signpost 1 and Journey 1 in each throughline start with an issue and carry it as far as it can go before it is time to go on to the next issue. This creates three Acts in each throughline, followed by the fourth Signpost. The fourth Signpost in each throughline is where events are summed up. It describes the destination that was ultimately arrived at, which is commonly referred to as the *denouement*.

Simply put, the last Signpost confirms for the audience how events turned out in each of the four throughlines.

When an audience experiences a story, it can *feel* when an Act is over. Each Signpost represents an *Act Break*. Because each Act Break focuses audience attention on a new concern, each Act Break seems to move the Plot in a new direction, which is why authors consider these to be key points where the plot turns.

Since each throughline is supposed to be a different camera angle on the same story, it is important that they stay in sync. What is happening in Act 1 in the Objective Story throughline is directly related to what is happening in Act 1 in the other three throughlines.

So, when you are choosing your scene order, you'll want to make sure that all of the Signpost and Journeys from Act 1 are concluded before any of the throughlines advance to Act 2.

Completing this procedure gives you an outline of your entire story in twenty-eight scenes. Each throughline is described by these scenes, from beginning to end.

If it feels necessary, more scenes can be added to extend the development of your story. There is nothing magical or especially effective about the number twenty-eight. Starting with these twenty-eight scenes will give your story a structure with which to work. Reviewing and revising these will lead you to discover any points where more scenes might be appropriate.

These twenty-eight scenes are just the bare minimum of scenes necessary to explore the plot contained in your storyform. As such, however, they are presented entirely in terms of Plot. Nothing is expressed in this outline, as it stands, about your story's theme or its characters.

What about all those appreciations you developed by answering questions in the Dramatica Query System? Those also need to be explored in your story's scenes. That doesn't necessarily mean adding *more* scenes, however. It is possible to explore every single appreciation in your storyform and still have only twenty-eight scenes.

Appreciations develop your story's theme and characters. Their development flavors your story's structure and your story's structure comes from its plot. Richly written scenes (which are the best kind to have in your stories) will develop your plot, theme, and characters simultaneously. Using this outline to create the scenes for developing your story's appreciations is a good way to marry your theme and character to your story's plot. This will lead to richly written scenes. Let your intuition guide you with these choices. Consult your theory exploratorial for information on any particular appreciations.

Reaching the point of choosing where to add the appreciations to your outline brings you to the question of "*How can I get more out of what happens next?*" You will find that is a different consideration than wondering just "*What Happens Next?*" With twenty-eight scenes jumping out of your Storyform as soon as you complete it, Dramatica may change forever the way authors feel when faced with that problem. ❖

OS Card #1	OS Card #2	OS Card #3	OS Card #4	OS Card #5	OS Card #6	OS Card #7
Objective Story Signpost #1	Objective Story Journey #1	Objective Story Signpost #2	Objective Story Journey #2	Objective Story Signpost #3	Objective Story Journey #3	Objective Story Signpost #4
MC Card #1	**MC Card #2**	**MC Card #3**	**MC Card #4**	**MC Card #5**	**MC Card #6**	**MC Card #7**
Main Character Signpost #1	Main Character Journey #1	Main Character Signpost #2	Main Character Journey #2	Main Character Signpost #3	Main Character Journey #3	Main Character Signpost #4
OC Card #1	**OC Card #2**	**OC Card #3**	**OC Card #4**	**OC Card #5**	**OC Card #6**	**OC Card #7**
Obstacle Character Signpost #1	Obstacle Character Journey #1	Obstacle Character Signpost #2	Obstacle Character Journey #2	Obstacle Character Signpost #3	Obstacle Character Journey #3	Obstacle Character Signpost #4
SS Card #1	**SS Card #2**	**SS Card #3**	**SS Card #4**	**SS Card #5**	**SS Card #6**	**SS Card #7**
Subjective Story Signpost #1	Subjective Story Journey #1	Subjective Story Signpost #2	Subjective Story Journey #2	Subjective Story Signpost #3	Subjective Story Journey #3	Subjective Story Signpost #4

problem.

Dramatica Analysis Strategies

In the hope of providing such experience, I present this article. It's based on notes I took analyzing my way to a very strong storyform for Lolita (the story in the Stanley Kubrick film of the Vladamir Nabokov novel). Though it is a complicated story to figure out, I began my expedition determined that either Lolita would break down or I would break down. You'll see what happened.

My diary reads as follows:

Day 1: The Research

First things first... In order to analyze a story accurately, you have to experience it. I caught Kubrick's Lolita today at a revival-house and took some initial notes. I know these will come in handy when I attempt the breakdown. Major pieces of the storyform revealed themselves as the story unfolded. I already have informed guesses of who the Main and Obstacle Characters are, as well as to where the Objective and Subjective arguments lie. The more refined points of the story are still swimming around in my head, having just seen it. Until I can get some analytical distance, these points will remain grouped too tightly to see clearly. I'll give the story time to settle and start my analysis tomorrow.

Day 2: The Assault Begins!

Identifying the four throughlines of a story is the most important step to arriving at a good storyform that describes it. Then, answering the eight dynamic questions and a combination of the structural questions (about Domains, Concerns, Ranges, Problems, Stipulations, etc.) will lead the software to a single storyform. I feel confident in this battle plan because it has always worked for me before.

When the Lolita screening ended, I had a firm grip on one throughline: I knew the Main Character was Humbert Humbert (the writer played by James Mason). The presentation of Humbert completely invites the audience's empathy. His passion for Lolita immediately grips the audience, giving you a point of view through which to experience everything that follows. A Main Character is the character through whose eyes

and heart the audience experiences a story. Humbert fulfills this role nicely in Lolita.

Now that I see where one throughline lies, I want to identify the other three that remain unknown at the point. Who is Humbert's Obstacle Character? Who consistently forces him to confront his personal problems when he tries to avoid them? Generally, if I'm analyzing a story, I imagine seeing through the eyes of the Main Character. The Obstacle Character usually appears as an especially important person in the Main Character's field of vision. The Obstacle Character's impact on the Main Character is so strong that it eventually forces the Main Character to choose whether to Change or remain Steadfast in regard to his central problem.

One character impacts Humbert from beginning to end more than any other, and the story is named after her: Lolita. She is an obvious candidate for the story's Obstacle Character. "However," my experience warns me, "be careful of jumping to conclusions." The Obstacle Character is often not the obvious choice.

> *[Humbert's] passion for Lolita immediately grips the story, giving you a point of view through which to experience everything that follows.*

If I look for other candidates, then the other man whom Lolita loves stands out with some potential: Claire Quilty. Quilty also seems to have a consistent impact on Humbert's behavior in the story. He is attacked by Humbert in the film's opening scene and pulls the strings from behind the scenes throughout Humbert's entire relationship with Lolita. Perhaps Quilty is actually the Obstacle Character in Lolita.

How can I confidently choose one over the other? If I can manage that much, I'll quit for lunch and resume my analysis this afternoon.

I have the Main Character clearly defined. I can probably determine Humbert's Resolve (meaning whether he Changes or remains Steadfast). If I determine Humbert's Resolve, that will give me a clue about where to look for the Obstacle Character. Since the Obstacle Character of a story always has the opposite Resolve of the Main Character, I can look at how Lolita and Quilty relate to Humbert and maybe use the process of elimination.

Who is Humbert? What's his character? Humbert is filled with desire for Lolita from the moment he sees her and this desire defines his nature for the rest of the film. A resolve of Change would require that he no longer be driven by the same thing at the end of the story as he is at the beginning. As Lolita closes,

Humbert is still obsessed. That's why he hunts down his "rival," Claire Quilty, in the final scene. The film doesn't even bother to play the scene out before rolling the credits, indicating that we can just expect more of the same from him. This means Humbert is *Steadfast*.

The Obstacle Character will therefore be a Change character, forced to change by Humbert's impact. With this dynamic in mind, I see that it describes Humbert's relationship with Lolita. Humbert drives Lolita out of his life due to his obsession.

Any complete story explores the relationship between the Main and Obstacle Character in the Subjective Story throughline. Their impact on each other develops over the course of the story and results in the Main Character's Resolve. Humbert has no such impact on Quilty. In fact, he can't even get Quilty's full attention by shooting him in the leg. That also shows the Subjective Story in Lolita is Humbert's relationship with Lolita, their "love story" if you will.

I suspected as much immediately. It's important, however, to always double check your assumptions. You can be easily fooled going with your intuition because stories and authors are notoriously tricky. In a logical and an emotional sense, it is important to know why you make certain distinctions when creating or analyzing a story using Dramatica. Now that I have double checked my initial conclusions, I'm ready for lunch.

Day 2: After Lunch

Let's assess my situation now. I've got three of the four throughlines identified: the Main Character, Obstacle Character, and the Subjective Story. I've also determined the Main Character Resolve to be Steadfast. Not a bad start. Now I need to identify the fourth throughline in Lolita (which is also the Objective Story)? What is it that has brought together all of these various characters?

It has something to do with what happens to the girl, Lolita. Everyone certainly has an eye on her in this story. When looking for the Objective Story point of view, it is helpful to conceptualize the characters in the story only as descriptions and exclude their names entirely. This story has the writer/professor, the attractive young girl, the girl's mother, the mother's friends, the TV/Stage writer, the people at the hotel, the people at the hospital, and the man the girl eventually marries. That has everybody in the story. What scenario has brought them all together?

That's a tough question. Is it about Humbert finding a way to be with Lolita? I'm sure many people would describe Lolita that way. However, "Humbert pursuing Lolita" really describes the Main Character throughline. Only a few other characters are even aware of the carnal nature of Humbert and Lolita's relationship. The Objective Story involves all of the characters.

Lolita's Objective Story throughline is certainly affected by Humbert's pursuit of the girl. The other characters are concerned with other things (such as the mother's desire for a complete and picturesque family). When you consider what the rest of the characters are concerned with in this story, the pursuit of the girl by the writer is only a force which helps push the story along. It is much more illustrative of the Main Character and Subjective Story throughlines than the Objective Story.

Lolita is heavily weighted toward the Main Character. More emphasis is put on the way the story appears from the Main Character throughline than from any other point of view. If I'm going to get a grip on what the Objective Story is all about, I'm going to have to loosen my brain cells and think a little more abstractly. This way, the hints of the Objective Story that sneak past Humbert's domination of the film can be identified and assembled into a single Objective Story.

It may be that the Objective Story explores a Domain rarely used in our culture, such as Mind or Psychology. Stories which adopt these less-used Objective Story Domains stand out as unusual.

Our culture has a serious bias toward writing Objective Stories that fall in the Physics and Universe Domains. It's more comfortable for us to deal with external things Objectively and internal things Subjectively. We generally find it difficult to conceptualize stories that Objectively deal with fixed attitudes (Mind) or ways of thinking (Psychology). If Lolita happens to explore either of these Classes in its Objective Story, it would explain its unusually *slippery* feel.

If I determine which Class the Objective Story Throughline occupies, I may get a sense of how to look at the Objective Story in Lolita. My sense of the other three throughlines will help me name the Objective Story Domain by process of elimination.

Each story throughline explores one of the structural Classes in the Dramatica structural diagram. The four throughlines of every story are Main Character, Obstacle Character, Subjective Story, and Objective Story. The four Classes are Universe, Physics, Psychology, and Mind. These eight pieces will be matched

in some specific order to create the four Domains of Lolita.

Psychology is the Class of manipulations. Physics is the Class of activities. Lolita is a story especially concerned with manipulations and illegal/immoral activities. Universe is the Class of situations. Mind is the Class of fixed attitudes. Lolita is also a story about a relationship which involves fixed attitudes, obsessions, and sticky situations. In fact, the relationship between Humbert and Lolita (which is the Subjective Story) is marred by one big situation being that Lolita is too young for Humbert to legally "date." I will speculate that the Subjective Story is Universe and see how the rest of this stacks up.

Day 2: Late Evening, I See A Ghost!

Putting the Subjective Story in Universe makes the Objective Story automatically fall into Mind. Mind is the dynamic pair of Universe. A Mind Objective Story Domain means that the conflicts in the Objective Story all center on fixed states of mind such as prejudices, unchanging attitudes, fixations, and obsessions. These kinds of problems certainly pop up in Lolita. Humbert can't leave the girl alone, the mother can't leave the Humbert alone, and the girl is determined to feel more freedom in her life. I may be on to something.

If the Objective and Subjective stories are occupying Mind and Universe, that means (by elimination) that the two Character Domains are Physics and Psychology. Either the Main or Obstacle Character would be a character of manipulations and the other would be seen in terms of activity. Lolita is shown as pretty manipulative. Humbert gets in trouble because of his lascivious activities. How about putting Lolita into Psychology and Humbert into Physics?

At a very instinctual level, that arrangement feels pretty good. Unless I double check my choices and make an argument for this arrangement, I might find out later on that I have just jumped to a conclusion. What *fixed-attitudes* are the problem at the heart of the Objective Story? How is Humbert's problem primarily an external activity? What way of thinking or manipulations describe Lolita's impact in this story? How is their relationship captured by an unchanging external situation?

My arguments would go something like this: Humbert is a Physics character. His activities pursuing Lolita cause problems for him. He maneuvers, marries, absconds with, and fights in order to be with her. Lolita is a Psychology character. Lolita's manipulations trouble Humbert because they are always aimed at giving Lolita more freedom (even allowing her to be taken away by Claire Quilty). Their Universe Class Subjective Story explores the situation of a having a grown man in love with a very young girl in a world where this is unacceptable. In the Mind Objective Story, the fixed attitudes (especially pertaining to how Lolita should be raised) cause problems for all of the characters and provide the Objective Story battleground. That kind of sounds like an accurate analysis of Lolita.

But I have to be honest with myself. This arrangement falls apart when I describe these Domains in more detail. First, in the Objective story, none of the characters actually have *fixed* mindsets at all. Lolita's mindset changes constantly, as she hates her mother and loves Humbert at one moment and loves her mother and hates Humbert at another. The mother's thoughts evolve as well: first she has to find a new husband, then she has to be true to her original husband, etc.

> *I narrowly escaped the fate of chasing down a "ghost storyform" — a storyform which seemed like it could fit, but was actually an inaccurate way to describe Lolita.*

The problems between these characters don't really come from stubbornly unchanging mindsets. They come more from just the ways these characters think than any specific mindsets. People want to *seem* certain ways to each other: sophisticated, attractive, smart, or (in the case of Quilty) like someone else entirely. They want to *change* each other as well as themselves. They want to figure out how to make a family work. They want to figure out how to make their affairs work. The only truly *fixed* attitude in the story comes from Humbert who pushes everything aside for his obsession with Lolita.

The Psychology Class describes "ways of thinking" which seems to describe the Objective Story Domain better than the Mind Class. The Main Character Domain is thusly booted out of Physics to make room for the Subjective Story (which also feels good because Humbert's problems really seem more internal than external). Humbert is driven by a fixed attitude concerning Lolita; his Domain will fit much better as Mind.

This gives me an Objective Story of Psychology, a Subjective Story of Physics, a Main Character of Mind, and an Obstacle Character of Universe. That feels great in a number of ways. Humbert is more moti-

vated by internal problems than by activities. Lolita is also more accurately described as the character whose problems have more to do with her *situation* than her *manipulations*. She *is* manipulative although that is more a description of her role among the Objective Characters rather than descriptive of her greatest impact in the story. Her situation of being an adult minded young woman in a little kid's body captures her impact on Humbert, on Quilty, and everyone else. When it comes to identifying the Obstacle Character, it is really all about considering the Obstacle Character's **impact**. Lolita has an impact just through her presence — she didn't *manipulate* Humbert or Quilty into instantly falling in love with her.

Humbert and Lolita's Physics Class Subjective Story is also appropriate. The traveling and clandestine maneuvers which allow them to sleep together are what their relationship is mostly about. These activities are how their relationship is played out. They argue over going on trips, performing in plays, talking on the phone. The "Doing," "Learning," "Obtaining," and "Understanding," (which are the four Types below Physics on the structural chart) appear in the plot of Lolita, centering on the relationship between these two characters.

Back to the Objective Story, the problems which all the Objective Characters face are caused by their different ways of thinking. The daughter and her mother always manipulate each other. The same is true of the professor, yet he cannot contend with the behind the scenes manipulations of the TV/Play writer. All of these characters have competing ideas of how Lolita should be raised. In an analytical sense, this story explores problems which arise from the way these people think. That's why it's so hard to see the external situation or activity that brings all these characters together: there isn't one.

Ahh. All four throughlines have been identified. I narrowly escaped the fate of chasing down a "ghost storyform" — a storyform which seemed like it could fit, but was actually an inaccurate way to describe Lolita. Having survived, I'm calling it a night. I've made a lot of progress, but more needs to be made tomorrow or I may never get Lolita properly under control.

(The frontline diary of Mark Haslett's encounter with Lolita will continue in the next issue of Dramatica Storyforming.) ❖

Death of a Mystery (page 1)

Still, there is an effect. Up to this point, the wife's actions were believable. In light of this additional exposition, however, her previous responses are all wrong! Her story suddenly doesn't ring true.

Until this happens, the story is no more than a typical whodunit; well acted with little real surprise or suspense. The "actual" murderer turns out to be another convict incarcerated in the same prison as the wrongly convicted man. This happy coincidence leads to the poor, misunderstood man's release. End of story...only there's still forty five minutes left in the movie.

Based on everything the audience has seen, that should have been the end of the movie. Sadly, instead of a denouement and an ending, we learn of a hidden agenda that the perpetrators of this film had intended all along. Moments after the pardon, a quick series of events clearly demonstrates that the freed man truly IS the killer. The viewing public suddenly is expected to reevaluate all it has previously seen in a whole new context.

In Story, this is called an emotional investment scheme and it works fine in theory. However, there is a price to pay for using these types of schemes. If you embezzle funds by misleading the audience, you'd better be able to pay them back come dividend time. Otherwise, you will get caught with your hand in the cookie jar and the Story Police will be called in.

Just Cause bumbles this scheme so that parts of the original story that previously worked suddenly *become* coincidental in the new scenario. If we try to stick with the first story, what follows doesn't make sense. If we accept the new story, the old story doesn't make sense. Either way, the audience loses its investment in the story and its feelings get hurt.

The Charges

I had no option. Based on the evidence I had witnessed, I had to charge Just Cause with violating the public trust, creating a conundrum, and squandering the audience's emotional investment with no return at all. It wasn't a pretty sight.

The filmmakers were just unclear about which of the two stories they really wanted to tell. By the end of it all, of course, I knew what could have been done to save them. But that's 'cause I have Dramatica enhanced 20/20 hind-sight.

The Lineup

The crime is almost tragic when you consider the wasted talent. <u>Just Cause</u> stars Sean Connery as *Paul Armstrong*, college law professor. Kate Capshaw portrays *Louise Armstrong*, his wife and a former prosecutor from Dade County, Florida. Lawrence Fishburne is *Tanny Brown*, Chief of Police in the small Florida town where the murder occurred. Blair Underwood plays *Bobby Earl Ferguson*, the convicted murderer. Ed Harris fills the role of *Blair Sullivan*, a serial killer also on death row.

The Evidence

By all accounts, these suspects were involved knee-deep in two incompatible stories.

Story #1

In a nutshell, the first story is about Paul Armstrong, a law professor, who is asked to take on a case to save Bobby Earl, a convicted child molester/killer, from death row. Paul's wife, Louise Armstrong, *encourages* him to take the case so he does. When Paul gets to the town where the crime took place, the local police are shown to be bigoted, narrow-minded bullies who had beaten a confession out of Bobby Earl and railroaded his conviction. Tanny Brown, the local police chief, acts as Paul's Obstacle Character by forcing Paul to constantly consider his motivations for trying to free Bobby Earl. Through a series of convenient coincidences, it is revealed that Bobby Earl is innocent and that the "real" killer, Blair Sullivan, is also on death row. He just happens to give Paul enough clues and self-incriminating evidence to warrant Bobby Earl's release from prison. Justice is served by a happy ending.

Story #2

The other story in <u>Just Cause</u> involves a young, hungry D.A. (Louise Armstrong before she married Paul) in Dade county who has been charged with being soft on crime because of her penchant for plea-bargaining. A juicy case involving the attempted rape of a white woman by a black man (Bobby Earl) comes to her desk. She decides to take it to court. When it is discovered that the arresting officer was the alleged victim's high school sweetheart, the case threatens to fall apart and the D.A. asks for a twenty-four hour recess to try and save the case. Nothing materializes

> *By all accounts, these suspects were involved knee-deep in two incompatible stories.*

and the case is thrown out of court. The extra time, however, has allowed the men in the community to get themselves riled up. When Bobby Earl is released, he is caught by the crowd, mutilated, and nearly beaten to death. As a result, Bobby Earl loses his scholarship to college and hospitalized for three to six months recovering from his injuries. He blames the D.A. for his ruined life. Eight years later he finds himself on death row for a crime he committed. He develops a plan to get free by making a deal with another death row felon — Blair Sullivan. If Blair helps Bobby Earl get out (so that Bobby Earl can exact revenge on Louise Armstrong), Bobby Earl agrees to kill Blair's parents.

Then Story #2 uses Story #1 here to setup…

After Bobby Earl's release, he follows through on his agreement with Blair by killing Blair's parents. He then goes about trying to exact his revenge on Louise Armstrong by kidnapping her and her daughter. Paul and Tanny find out, catch him, and kill him.

I look at the evidence and scratch my head. Never mind the stretches in logic. Never mind Paul's stupidity. Never mind the obvious biasing going on. The two stories don't fit.

Oh, sure, Story #1 is *supposed* to be the deception hiding the truth in Story #2. But it just doesn't add up. If Louise felt responsible for what happened to Bobby Earl in the past, how could she be so dishonest with her husband? And why isn't Paul more than mildly annoyed at her deception? If, on the other hand, Louise didn't feel responsible for Bobby Earl, why did she withhold so much when she found out about Paul's new case? If Bobby Earl had such a grudge, why didn't he go gunning for Louise earlier? If Blair Sullivan really *didn't* kill the little girl, how was he able to tie the location of Blair's murder weapon to a specific bible reference — both letter and verse? And on and on.

Reconstruction of the Crime

The real tragedy here is that a simple truth was ignored: the audience wants to believe in the story being told. Unless there are hints that things may not be what they seem, an audience will buy into a story as long as it makes sense. If you want to turn the tables later, everything the audience has accepted must make even *better* sense in the new view, otherwise the audience will stick with the original story.

The audience is investing a lot when it starts to buy a storyline. It cannot just switch all of its emotional attachment to some other account any time it's asked to without a good reason or, at least, a clear map. An author's job is to usher the audience confidently through whatever complications his story throws at them. One slip and the audience can get lost.

Creating two compatible stories in one is a tall order. It means creating a complex web of events and relationships that work well in two completely different contexts.

If one is not such an ambitious storyteller, one might hint constantly that something hidden is really the meat of the story. Revealing these hints as the story unfolds prepares the audience for the emotional switcheroo. This method has two approaches: 1) give the audience more information than the characters, or 2) have the characters speculate about the bigger meaning that might hide around the corner.

The one thing you *don't* want to do in this kind of scheme is give the audience the same information as the characters and then expect the audience to get the hints while accepting that the characters don't. Sadly, *this* is the tact employed in Just Cause.

> *Revealing these hints as the story unfolds prepares the audience for the emotional switcheroo.*

How might things in Just Cause have been handled to avoid violating the audience? Let's reconstruct the crime and see.

Reconstruction Exhibit A

Imagine Bobby really is innocent - not of everything, but just of killing the young girl. In prison, he runs into the actual killer, Blair. This one coincidence then becomes the real beginning of the story. Blair wants his parents killed in retribution for his childhood. Bobby wants revenge on Paul's wife because it was the incident in Dade county that ruined his life and led him to death row.

Bobby is ex-Cornell. Blair was a child prodigy. Not surprising that the two of them would figure out a way to get each other what he wanted. Bobby writes to Paul's wife, not to Paul, and plays on her guilt to get her to influence her husband to take his case. Knowing Paul is likely to refuse if she tries to pressure him, Louise writes back to Bobby and suggests that his grandmother could deliver a letter to Paul. Then Louise need only influence Paul to take the case.

The rest of the story plays as is.

As for exposition, if we wanted a *complete* surprise, we could play the story as it is until Paul is told by Tanny that his wife was the prosecutor. When Paul confronts his wife, she tells him how Bobby had written her and they had determined to approach him through the grandmother. Paul would be angry, of course, but if Louise illustrated how he had declined other requests she had made in the past, he would have to reluctantly agree that this was the only way he would have taken the case.

At this point, the audience is still as sure as ever that Bobby is innocent, but now has a very clear understanding of what motivates Paul's wife and why Paul's involvement is not a coincidence.

Then, continue the story from here as it originally was until after Bobby is acquitted and Blair calls Paul on the phone. Now he admits that he did indeed kill the girl, but that he and his partner still had some unfinished business with Paul. Paul asks who the partner is (and in this case everybody would be suspect from the audience point of view) since the partner could be anyone on the outside.

Blair won't name Bobby Earl as his partner until he is sure Bobby has killed his parents. Bobby has to kill Blair's parents before the Blair's execution or Blair will finger Bobby for other crimes he has learned about. Each would be blackmailing the other. When Paul finally confronts Blair and pretends that his parents are still alive, Blair spills the beans about Bobby Earl.

The rest of the story unfolds as it did.

Reading over these last few lines, I felt I had made a pretty strong case for improving the logistics of Just Cause. *This* presentation allows for all of the same key events while convincing the audience to invest in the story and does this without violating its innocent trust. Still, a good story does not live by plot alone. Suppose the authors of the piece were really most concerned with the story's message? A lot of Just Cause is designed as a biting commentary on guilt, innocence, and the letter of the law.

One bad apple spoils the bunch and, in this case, either an inconsistent plot ruined the message or a schizophrenic message scuttled the plot. Could Dramatica find a way to save the theme as well? I chased the last of my pizza with a final swig of suds and went to work.

It wasn't long before I came up with a thematic reconstruction by changing the backstory between Bobby Earl and Louise Armstrong.

Reconstruction Exhibit B

Imagine Bobby Earl is guilty of the original crime in Dade county and Louise was equally convinced of his guilt even after her case fell apart. Maybe her public outrage that Bobby Earl's crimes were being dismissed because of a technicality encouraged the locals to "punish" him anyway. By the time Bobby Earl had recovered and went looking for her, she had moved away and married Paul. Before Bobby Earl could track her down and while he was still recuperating at his grandmother's place, he commits the crime for which he is tried and convicted. While in jail, he finds out where Louise is and that she is married to Paul Armstrong, a strong opponent of the death penalty. Although it takes him eight years, Bobby Earl eventually works out a plan that might get him free long enough to exact revenge on Louise and her family.

Bobby contacts Paul (via Bobby's grandmother) hoping for two things: the first is that it will possibly cause a rift between Louise and Paul, and the second is that Paul will be swayed to help free him.

This slightly altered backstory can be revealed late in the game, but it will require modifying Louise's behavior.

Let's say things at the Armstrong household aren't all peaches 'n cream. Louise is sick and tired of Paul's "lecturing" her about crime and the death penalty. She thinks his academic view of law is out of touch with the real world. Her day-to-day dealings with street scum and crime don't align with Paul's loftier visions of justice.

When Louise finds out that Bobby Earl has "coincidentally" asked her husband to work for his defense, she is suspicious. She tries to convince Paul that he shouldn't help Bobby Earl but withholds information concerning the Dade County case. That case is not something she is terribly anxious to discuss with Paul because it is likely to create more friction between them. Instead, Louise reminds Paul that he hasn't practiced law in twenty year and is so out of touch with the "real world" that he may end up doing more harm than good.

Paul views Louise's argument as a challenge and decides on the spot to take the case. Dismayed, Louise starts to tell Paul of her history with Bobby Earl when he makes some callous remark that shuts her up. She decides to hold back the information until Paul asks for it.

To Paul's annoyance, Louise and daughter accompany him to Florida. She says she just wants to visit her parents. He thinks she wants to be there if he fails. She really wants to be nearby to protect him since she feels he is getting in over his head.

The story progresses as it did originally.

By the time Paul confronts Louise with her previous involvement with Bobby Earl, he is furious with her. An ensuing, "Why didn't you tell me?" argument follows. Paul's callous remark to Louise is thrown back at him.

When Paul gets Bobby Earl set free, it is a hollow victory. Bobby Earl's subsequent kidnapping of Louise and daughter is the natural crisis point to this new version of the story. Then when Paul and Tanny save them from Bobby Earl, it is truly the bittersweet ending that seemed to have been originally planned.

So that's the story - both of them. It was clear that in this case, plot and theme didn't mix. Still, Dramatica had proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that either crime could have been prevented, if only... I closed the book on my investigation and referred the case to be held over for trial in Dramaticourt.

> *Be on the lookout for future movies committing the same crimes. You should be able to recognize them by their fake "fakeouts" and bumbling deceptions.*

The Indictment

<u>Just Cause</u> was accused of violating the public trust, putting immediate effect above overall results, and failing to present a cogent reality populated with intelligent characters.

The Verdict

Guilty, guilty, guilty!

The Sentence

To remain in release on video where all the world can see this cinematic charlatan for what it truly is, forever and ever.

All Points Bulletin

Be on the lookout for future movies committing the same crimes. You should be able to recognize them by their fake "fakeouts" and bumbling deceptions.

Before we close, this warning: wherever you are, whatever you're doing, watch the films...keep on watching the films! ❖