The Plot Outline Exercise

– from *Advanced Plotting*, by Chris Eboch. Get the whole book at [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com/Chris-Eboch/e/B001JS25VE/), [Barnes & Noble](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/s/-Chris-Eboch-?store=allproducts&keyword=+Chris+Eboch), or [IndieBound](http://www.indiebound.org/search/book?searchfor=Eboch%2C+Chris)

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Follow these steps to make an outline of your manuscript. Focus first on making notes; save the actual editing until after you have detailed notes about what changes you need to make.

Write a one or two sentence synopsis for your manuscript.

What genre is it? What is it (briefly) about? This might be the equivalent of your thirty-second pitch with your “hook,” but don’t worry about making it pretty. The goal is to give yourself something you can refer back to as a reminder of what the manuscript is really about. Here are a couple of examples:

The Mad Monk’s Treasure is a romantic suspense novel set in the dangerous New Mexico desert. Erin, her best friend Camie, and love interest Drew head to the desert to search for a lost treasure, but they face dangers from nature, wild animals, and criminals out to steal the treasure.

The Eyes of Pharaoh is a mystery novel set in ancient Egypt, for ages nine and up. When their best friend disappears, Seshta and Horus spy on merchants, soldiers, and royalty, and fall into a dangerous trap as they uncover a plot against Egypt.

The Well of Sacrifice is a middle grade adventure set in the waning days of the Mayan civilization. A Mayan girl battles the evil high priest who is trying to take over the city.

In these examples, the first sentences identify the genre, setting, and age range. You probably have those things firmly in your mind, but it doesn’t hurt to have this reminder, especially those keywords suspense, mystery, and adventure. That reminds me that I shouldn’t spend too much time exploring the history and culture of ancient Egypt, for example; the mystery should come first.

The second sentences in each synopsis summarize the plot in a few words. This is tricky when you have several important characters and two or three hundred pages of plot twists. But before you do anything else, spend some time trying to identify the plot at its most basic, core level. Usually that comes down to identifying the main character (MC) and what he or she is trying to achieve. Depending on the type of novel, your primary focus may be on the internal or on the external journey.

I could have written the second sentence for The Eyes of Pharaoh like this instead: When Seshta’s best friend disappears, she has to choose between finding him and preparing for the contest that could launch her career as a dancer.

That would focus more on the main character’s internal conflict, instead of her external challenges. That is also an important part of the novel, and if I felt it was important enough, perhaps I’d add another sentence to the synopsis. But once again, this is a mystery, and above all else I wanted to make sure I had an action-packed plot. Seshta’s emotional journey adds depth to the novel, but it’s not what I want readers to notice most.

If you’re having trouble identifying your plot in a sentence or two, think about how your ideal reader might briefly describe the plot in casual conversation. For example, I might imagine a 10-year-old saying about The Eyes of Pharaoh, “It’s this great mystery story where they have to follow these clues and investigate people.” He’s not going to focus on the main character’s personal choices or emotional journey.

You can be a little flexible with your synopsis length, if you really need to, but this isn’t an exercise in packing the maximum amount of information into a rambling, run-on sentence. Rather, this is an attempt to distill your idea down into its most basic form. You’re not trying to impress an agent or editor; this is just for your own use. It doesn’t have to be pretty, but it should be simple.

Define your goal.

Do you want an action-packed page turner? A novel that explores an issue and makes people think? A laugh-out-loud funny book for reluctant reader boys? A literary masterpiece in the style of books that win major awards? There is no right or wrong answer, just your personal goal for this manuscript. As with the synopsis, the goal is to give you a simple reminder you can refer to when you’re making decisions about what to add, cut, or change in the manuscript.

Outline.

If you hate outlining, don’t be intimidated by the word. If you do outline, you can do this exercise with your outline, before you write your first draft. However, it’s fine to write a draft of the novel first and then worry about outlining. You can even write two or three or ten drafts before you try this exercise. You don’t need Roman numerals or subheads, just a brief description of what happens. The outline is simply a record of what you have written.

Think of it as the equivalent of a photo album of your vacation. If you try to remember what happened on your vacation, you might get confused about what you did on each day, and you might even forget some of the highlights. A chronological photo album, with just one photo per event, helps you keep your thoughts organized while triggering memories of each event. Writing an outline after you finish a draft of your novel helps you see what you have so you can step back and look at the big picture.

For every chapter, write a sentence describing what happens. If you have long chapters with multiple scenes, you may want to do this for each scene rather than each chapter. If you are doing this exercise on paper rather than the computer, leave plenty of space after each chapter summary for your notes — at least three or four blank lines. This is where you will be making notes about what changes you need to make in the manuscript. While you are making your chapter/scene notes, you should also:

Make a note of the number of pages in each chapter.

For each scene/chapter, list the emotions you’ve portrayed. Underline or highlight the major emotion.

Keep track of your subplots by briefly mentioning what happens in each chapter where that subplot appears. Use a different color of pen or highlighter for each subplot. For example, you might use a purple pen to keep track of the romantic subplot and a green pen to track a subplot with the main character’s father.

Analyze Your Plot

Now that you have an outline of your manuscript, including the main action, subplots and emotions, you’re ready to analyze your plot. You’re not going to start editing yet, just analyzing and making notes. This exercise will guide you through that.

The Plot Outline Exercise is designed to start big and then focus in on details. If you look over all the questions in advance, you might start to feel overwhelmed. The key is to take things one step at a time. Consider each question individually and spend time on it. If you read a question and immediately think, “Oh, that part is fine. I’m happy with that,” slow down. Take another look at your synopsis and goal, and then look through your outline carefully with that question in mind. Have you really done all you can, or are you just in a hurry?

In a similar vein, you may be tempted to dismiss certain questions because you feel they don’t apply to your manuscript. That’s fine — it’s your story and you ultimately make all decisions. If you have a good reason for doing something unusual, such as starting with the focus on someone other than the main character, go for it. Rules can be broken, if handled well. But before you immediately dismiss the question, consider it seriously. Be sure that you really made an intelligent decision based on your specific goals, and aren’t just trying to skip a question because you don’t want to go through the work of major revisions. Our minds can be sneaky about trying to convince us to take the easy way out.

Don’t plan to do the entire analysis in one day. Instead, you might look only at the Conflict questions on one day, tackle the Tension questions the next day, and spend separate days on Subplots and Secondary Characters and Theme. Or you might even need several days to get through one section.

Don’t make revisions on your manuscript as you answer these questions. Instead, identify trouble spots and use your outline to make notes about the changes you need to make in each scene or chapter. Otherwise, you may spend days making major changes to increase your conflict, and then based on a later question decide to cut a character or subplot. You’ll save time by planning your changes in advance before you start your revisions.

The Fine Tuning section is a bit different. That’s where you look at everything from logic to language use. You may want to make your major revisions before you dive into Fine Tuning, though I recommend that you at least glance over those questions before you revise. One or two of them may trigger the realization that you need to make a major change in something like your point of view.

When you do get to the Fine Tuning section, don’t rush through that either — you might need to spend an entire revision session on one question in order to get the most out of it. The results will be worth it.

If you are having trouble visualizing how this is supposed to look, you’ll find an example at the end of this section, after the list of questions.

Analyze Your Plot Outline for Conflict:

\* Put a check mark by the line if there is conflict in that chapter. For chapters where there is no conflict: can you cut them, interweave them with other chapters, or add new conflict? The conflict can be physical danger, emotional stress, or both, so long as the main character (MC) is facing a challenge. — See the article on [Characters in Conflict](#CharactersInConflict)

\* Where do we learn what the main conflict is? Could it be sooner? Is there some form of conflict at the beginning, even if it is not the main conflict? Does it at least relate to the main conflict? The inciting incident — the problem that gets the story going — should happen as soon as possible, but not until the moment is ripe. The reader must have enough understanding of the character and situation to make the incident meaningful. Too soon, and the reader is confused. Too late, and the reader gets bored first. — See the articles on [Plotting Like a Screenwriter](#PlottingLikeAScreenwriter), [The Hollywood Touch](#TheHollywoodTouch), and [The Promise of the First Chapter](#ThePromiseOfTheFirstChapter)

\* Where do we learn the stakes? What are they? Do you have positive stakes (what the MC will get if he succeeds), negative stakes (what the MC will suffer if he fails), or best of all, both? Could the penalty for failure be worse? Your MC should not be able to walk away without penalty. — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory), [Tips on Plotting Your Novel](#TipsOnPlottingYourNovel), and [Characters in Conflict](#CharactersInConflict)

\* What is the MC’s flaw? Do you use this throughout the story to add complications and make challenges more difficult? Should the character make a bad decision or lose hope at one or more points? — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory), [Tips on Plotting Your Novel](#TipsOnPlottingYourNovel), [Characters in Conflict](#CharactersInConflict), and [Plot Turning Points](#PlotTurningPoints)

\* Is the main conflict resolved at the climax, and is the climax at the end of the book? — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory), [Plotting Like a Screenwriter](#PlottingLikeAScreenwriter), and [Plot Turning Points](#PlotTurningPoints)

\* Do you end fairly quickly after the climax, while wrapping up any loose ends and leaving the reader satisfied? You don’t need to end immediately after the climax, as many readers like to bask in a happy ending, but don’t ramble on for dozens of pages after the dramatic ending, and don’t end in the middle of nothing happening. You should end with something dramatic, meaningful, and appropriate to the story, whether exciting, funny, touching, or sad. — See the article on [Plotting Like a Screenwriter](#PlottingLikeAScreenwriter)

\* What’s the timeframe? Can you tighten it? Can you add a “ticking clock,” where the MC has limited time to succeed?

\* Does anything need to be cut, added, or moved? If you have a minimum or maximum length, work on that here. — See the articles on [Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#AddMoreMeatToYourManuscript) and [The Hollywood Touch](#TheHollywoodTouch)

Analyze Your Plot Outline for Tension:

\* Does each scene fulfill the synopsis goal? Does it advance plot, reveal character, or ideally both? — See the articles on [The Hollywood Touch](#TheHollywoodTouch) and [How to Write Vivid Scenes](#HowToWriteVividScenes)

\* Does each scene have a goal, such as a shorter term goal that helps lead to the final goal? Can you make the stakes higher for any scenes? — See the article on [How to Write Vivid Scenes](#HowToWriteVividScenes)

\* Mark plot twists. Do you have several surprises/reversals? If not, can you add some? — See the articles on [Plot: Not Just Another Word for a Hole in a Graveyard](#PlotNotJust), [Plotting Like a Screenwriter](#PlottingLikeAScreenwriter), [Plot Turning Points](#PlotTurningPoints), and [Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#AddMoreMeatToYourManuscript)

\* Is the antagonist actively thwarting the hero throughout the book? If you don’t have a human antagonist, could you make the book stronger by adding one or more, even if they’re minor characters? Or could one of the other secondary characters take on an antagonistic role — perhaps a parent interfering with a child’s plan, or a difficult classmate, teacher, coworker, or boss? Even a friend can cause trouble, if that friend has different needs or goals from your MC. — See the articles on [Characters in Conflict](#CharactersInConflict), [Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#AddMoreMeatToYourManuscript), and [On the Edge of Your Seat: Creating Suspense](#OnTheEdgeOfYourSeat)

\* Does your MC attempt to make progress toward his/her primary goal in every chapter, or are some chapters only subplot? If you have chapters that are purely subplot, can you weave them into other chapters with plot, or add plot progression within those chapters?

\* Does the tension vary but ultimately rise over time, with the situation worsening? Can you increase the complications so that at each step more is at stake and there’s greater risk or a better reward? If the tension stays the same, the story will feel flat, even if the tension stays high. This is a common cause of sagging middles. You want ups and downs with an overall sense of increasing trouble. — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory), [Plotting Like a Screenwriter](#PlottingLikeAScreenwriter), and [Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#AddMoreMeatToYourManuscript)

\* How many emotions do you have in each chapter/scene? Can you add ups and downs? You want strong emotion, but you also want variety. For example, your MC could feel happy anticipation, then anxiety that things aren’t going as planned, followed by a shock, which causes humiliation, then anger, then despair. That’s much more dramatic than just having a character angry for a whole scene. — See the article on [Characters in Conflict](#CharactersInConflict)

\* Do the MC’s emotions escalate over time? As the tension rises, the emotions should get stronger as well. — See the article on [The Unity of Character and Plot](#TheUnityOfCharacterandPlots)

\* Are the most important and dramatic events written out in moment-by-moment detail, so we feel like we are in the scene? Save summary for less dramatic sections where you want to convey information quickly. — See the article on [How to Write Vivid Scenes](#HowToWriteVividScenes),

Analyze Your Main Character:

\* Do you have a single MC? Can the reader identify the MC at the start of the story? Does the story maintain its focus on that character throughout? If you have several MCs, is that the best choice for this story?

\* Is your MC well developed, so he or she feels like a real person? Does she have strengths and weaknesses that play into the plot? Does she have quirks that make her interesting and well-rounded? Is her personality and behavior consistent throughout the manuscript? Will your readers like and identify with the character to some extent? — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory), [Tips on Plotting Your Novel](#TipsOnPlottingYourNovel), [Characters in Conflict](#CharactersInConflict), and [The Unity of Character and Plot](#TheUnityOfCharacterandPlots)

\* If you have several MCs, are they all equally well developed? Do they each have a consistent, major role in the manuscript?

\* Does your MC control the story, staying active and making decisions? Does he solve the problem at the end? Avoid having an MC who is simply a victim throughout the story or who is rescued by outside forces at the climax. — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory), [Characters in Conflict](#CharactersInConflict), and [Plot Turning Points](#PlotTurningPoints)

\* Are you in your MC’s point of view (POV)? If not, is that the best decision? Would you be better off switching viewpoint so the reader feels closer to or farther from the character? If you have several viewpoint characters, is each viewpoint strong, consistent, and appropriate? If you are trying to use omniscient viewpoint, are you truly omniscient, or are you really awkwardly jumping between viewpoints? — See the article [On the Edge of Your Seat: Creating Suspense](#OnTheEdgeOfYourSeat)

Analyze Your Subplots and Secondary Characters:

\* Look at your subplots. Are they woven evenly throughout the manuscript? Do you need to give more attention to some or space them out more evenly? — See the article on [Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#AddMoreMeatToYourManuscript)

\* If you have a lot of secondary characters, can any be combined or eliminated? Do you have more than one secondary character filling the same job? For example, if the MC has two best friends who are essentially the same and are both supportive, either eliminate one or change her so she has a different role. — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story and Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory)

Analyze Your Plot Outline for Theme:

\* Do you touch on your theme throughout the manuscript? Are there places where you can add references, perhaps oblique, to set it up better? — See the articles on [Developing Your Idea into a Story](#DevelopingYourIdeaIntoAStory) and [Message, Moral, Meaning: The Theme](#MessageMoralMeaningTheTheme)

\* Look at your character arc. Does the MC experience an epiphany? Does she see herself differently at the end? How will she behave differently now? (This might not apply to novels that are part of long series, such as mysteries, where the MC can’t change too much in a single book. Still, a minor epiphany, insight, or change of view can add emotional impact to your ending.)

Fine Tuning:

For this section, you need to look at the manuscript itself, rather than just the outline. You may want to make your major revisions to characters, plot, and content before you tackle these details. Depending on how much revision you had to do based on your notes from the previous sections of the Plot Outline Exercise, you may even want to make another outline and answer the earlier questions again, before you start polishing. Deal with the big picture items first before you start fine-tuning.

\* Do you have a strong, dramatic opening? — See the articles on [The Hollywood Touch](#TheHollywoodTouch), [The Promise of the First Chapter](#ThePromiseOfTheFirstChapter), and [Hook ’Em Fast](#HookEmFast)

\* Look at cause and effect. Does each scene lead logically to the next? Are they in the proper order? Are any redundant? If you cut the scene, would you lose anything? — See the article on [How to Write Vivid Scenes](#HowToWriteVividScenes)

\* Do you have transitions between scenes, so the reader always knows how much time has passed, where the characters are, who’s on stage, and who the POV character is (if you have multiple POVs)?

\* Is your POV consistent?

\* Do you include all the clues your readers need for the story to make sense and feel believable? — See the article [On the Edge of Your Seat: Creating Suspense](#OnTheEdgeOfYourSeat)

\* How long are your chapters? Do you have any unusually long or short ones? Should you make changes?

\* Where are your cliffhanger moments? Do they match chapter breaks? If not, should they? Can you add more cliffhangers? For most types of novels, you don’t want too many chapters to end happily. Even if the character has just had a success, keep tension high by having him looking toward the next challenge. — See the articles on [Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#AddMoreMeatToYourManuscript) and [Hanging by the Fingernails: Cliffhangers](#HangingByTheFingernailsCliffhangers)

\* Can you expand your strongest scenes for more drama? — See the articles on [The Hollywood Touch](#TheHollywoodTouch), [How to Write Vivid Scenes](#HowToWriteVividScenes), and [Hanging by the Fingernails: Cliffhangers](#HangingByTheFingernailsCliffhangers)

\* Check for accuracy. Are your facts correct? Are your characters and setting consistent? If you include details of seasons, days of the week, or times of day, you may want to make a calendar to ensure that you don't have a full moon on one night and a crescent moon the next, or a week’s worth of activity between Monday and Wednesday

\* Do you use your setting to add color and drama? — See the articles on [Tips on Plotting Your Novel](#TipsOnPlottingYourNovel) and [Add More Meat to Your Manuscript](#AddMoreMeatToYourManuscript)

\* Do you have dynamic language: Strong, active verbs? A variety of sentence and paragraph lengths? No clichés?

\* Do you show rather than tell? Do you avoid words that explain emotion (angry, joyfully, with annoyance) and instead let the reader see the character’s emotion through their actions, gestures, dialog, and thoughts? — See the articles [On the Edge of Your Seat: Creating Suspense](#OnTheEdgeOfYourSeat) and [How to Write Vivid Scenes](#HowToWriteVividScenes)

\* Do you bring your scenes to life with multiple senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch)?

\* Look just at your dialog. Does each major character have a unique voice that is consistent throughout the manuscript? (Try reading just that character’s dialog aloud.) Is the dialog lively and interesting, often advancing the plot and increasing tension? Is it believable — but not realistic, since real conversations are often too rambling and dull when put on the page? Can you trim the dialog to improve the pace, cutting out the boring “How are you?” parts and getting to the good stuff? — See the article on [Five Revision Passes](#FiveRevisionPasses) (ok, seven maybe. . .)

\* Do you have a balance of action and dialogue, with just enough vivid description to set the scene? — See the articles on [The Hollywood Touch](#TheHollywoodTouch) and [Five Revision Passes](#FiveRevisionPasses) (ok, seven maybe. . .)

\* Do you vary your paragraph and sentence lengths, using shorter paragraphs and sentences to bring out the drama of action scenes? — See the article on [Hanging by the Fingernails: Cliffhangers](#HangingByTheFingernailsCliffhangers)

\* Finally, edit for spelling and punctuation.

As you use the Plot Outline Exercise, you may come up with additional questions. Make notes on anything you want to cover when you use the exercise with future manuscripts. You can download a copy of the Plot Outline Exercise from my Kris Bock website ([www.krisbock.com](http://www.krisbock.com)) to more easily edit it to suit your own needs.

An Example of the Exercise

As an example of how the Plot Outline Exercise might look, here is an outline of the opening scenes of my unpublished middle grade novel, The Mountain, featuring a 12-year-old boy who runs into mysterious people while hiking in the woods. For the purpose of this book, I’ve used italics instead of colored pen for the subplot.

Chapter 1, 12 pages: Jesse plans a fishing trip while dealing with family secrets. Conflict — yes. Emotions — Jesse is angry and resentful. Subplot — family secrets.

Notes: Delete opening scene and start the next day when Jesse is ready to leave. Bring his father into the scene, showing the distance between them. Trim chapter to get Jesse out of the house and into the woods quickly — move scene with Becca to later in the book.

Chapter 2, seven pages: Jesse goes hiking, follows tracks, and meets a woman in the woods. Conflict — tension, but no major conflict. Emotions — confidence, then curiosity.

Notes: Cut scenery to get to action sooner. Have Jesse briefly get annoyed at family secrets while hiking. Increase conflict by having him notice blood on the trail.

Chapter 3, scene one, six pages: Jesse helps Maria. Conflict — tension, but no major conflict. Emotions — Jesse gets schoolboy crush on the older Maria.

Notes: Include Maria’s brother Rick in the scene and have them acting nervous to increase sense of mystery. Include a cliffhanger moment with Maria asking Jesse to promise not to tell anyone he’s seen them, and end chapter.

Chapter 3, scene two, five pages: Jesse fishes and then goes back to Maria. Conflict — none. Emotions — proud of his abilities.

Notes: Include more varied emotions. Have him remember fishing with dad and ponder the family secrets. Have him wonder more about these strangers. Include first scene from next chapter when Shaw shows up, to end on a dramatic moment.

Outlining the book this way showed me several important things about the opening chapters. First of all, after some conflict in the first chapter, I had two chapters, one of them very long, with no major conflict. Since this is a suspense novel, I needed to increase the conflict. I also needed to pick up the pace, deleting some of the description. I had a good scene with his little sister Becca in the first chapter, but it didn’t need to be there. I could get Jesse into the woods more quickly by moving that scene to the next time he is at home. And I needed the strangers in the woods to be more mysterious early on.

I also noticed that I dropped the family secrets subplot through much of the book, because Jesse is not at home most of the time. I needed to find ways to include that, if only by having him think about it.

Your format may be different — for example, you may want to make columns for Chapter Number, Number of Pages, Conflict, and Emotions, so you don’t have to keep writing the words. You may choose to do this as a computer document, a spreadsheet, or with handwritten notes on paper (just remember to leave plenty of room for notes after each chapter.) You may have more notes on each chapter and you may find a different way to organize them. Do what works for you.

The Plot Exercise for Outlining

Not everyone can write a detailed outline before they start writing a manuscript. Not everyone wants to. (See [Plotting by the Seat of Your Pants](#PlottingByTheSeatOfYourPants), by Susanne Alleyn, later in this book.)

I used an outline for my first novel, The Well of Sacrifice, but I didn’t wind up following it at all. I was inspired to write the book by the idea of a Mayan girl being thrown into a sacrificial cenote and surviving. I thought I would start the book with that scene. But then I decided the reader would need some background — they needed to know about her brother, and about the savages who were making raids on the city, and about why the city was in such trouble.... The scene with the sacrificial well wound up in Chapter 20.

As I learned more about writing and developed my skills, I started to use outlines more effectively. When an editor from Aladdin was interested in my Haunted series about kids who travel with a ghost hunter TV show, he wanted to see outlines for the second and third book along with the completed first manuscript. Those outlines weren’t too hard, because I already had a well-developed concept and characters, and I could use the first manuscript to judge how many chapters, scenes, and plot twists I needed.

When I decided to write my first novel for adults, I started with an outline because I wanted to make sure I had enough material to fill 85,000 words, instead of the 35,000 I was used to for children’s novels. I developed a detailed, 15-page outline that acted as a guide when writing the book. Because the outline covered everything from the major action to the character arcs and subplots, I turned out a draft so solid that my critique group members said it felt like a book “off the shelf.” (Actually, I count the outline as the first draft, and I edited each chapter before sending it to the group, so they really saw the third draft. But regardless, I saved myself an enormous amount of time by doing much of the plot editing before I ever started writing the manuscript.) As you can see, I have become a believer in outlines.

If you prefer to start with an outline, or if you think you might like to try that for a change, you can use the Plot Outline Exercise before you start writing your first draft. You won’t be able to address every question, but you’ll have the answers to many of them in your outline.

You can look at each scene for conflict, adjusting those that don’t have enough. You can study your character arcs and decide if you want your characters to change more. You can check your subplots to ensure that they are properly balanced throughout the manuscript. Use your colored highlighter for this. In one outline, I highlighted a couple of important secondary characters, including the MC’s sister. I realized that she appeared at the beginning and the end, but not much in the middle, so I figured out ways to include her in some of those middle scenes.

Whether you’re an outliner or a “seat-of-the-pants” writer, I hope you’ll find the Plot Outline Exercise helpful at some stage of your writing.