GOALS, STAKES & OUTCOME

Every story should have a central conflict at the heart of it that is easily summarized in a one-sentence logline. A strong scene has a central conflict too. This doesn't mean only one thing happens in a scene or only one character has a goal in each scene. It means the point of view character for each scene has a reason for being there and he is earning his page time.

Think of a story or scene goal as having a **subject, object, verb**, and **outcome**.

The **subject** is the point of view character.

The **verb** is the motion toward or away from the object.

☐ Get rid of it	☐ Obtain it	☐ Hold onto it	☐ Release it
☐ Reach it	☐ Escape it	☐ Win it	☐ Lose it
☐ Evade it	☐ Capture it	☐ Kill it	☐ Save it
☐ Avert it	☐ Allow it	☐ Reveal it	☐ Hide it
☐ Change it	☐ Don't change it	☐ Tell it	☐ Not tell it
☐ Define it	☐ Obscure it	☐ Prove it	☐ Disprove it
☐ Evaluate it	☐ Decide it	☐ Obey it	☐ Defy it

The **object** is the target or focus of the words and actions.
☐ Person
☐ Place
☐ Thing
☐ Information
☐ Situation
☐ Physical Task
☐ Mental Task
☐ Need
☐ Want
☐ Emotion
☐ Belief
☐ Prejudice
☐ Rule

For every struggle there is an **outcome**.

☐ Succeed/Fail ~ The character gets it and finds out he doesn't want it.
☐ Succeed/Fail ~ The character obtains it, but it doesn't work.
☐ Succeed/Succeed ~The character gets what he wanted or needed and it worked.
☐ Succeed/But ~ The character obtains it, but needs something further.
☐ Succeed/But ~ The character obtains it, but it caused further difficulty.
☐ Fail/And ~ The character fails to get it and is forced to try again.
☐ Fail/Succeed ~ The character fails to get it and realizes he didn't need it after all.

The goal of the antagonist, or antagonistic forces, is to keep the protagonist from obtaining the object and make the verb challenging. He may have his own goal and stakes constituting a subplot.

Friends and foes provide stumbling blocks and step ladders to keep the characters moving toward and away from the object and make the verb more difficult or easier. Friends and foes can have conflicting goals and stakes constituting subplots.

Once you have the subject (character), the verb, the object, and the outcome, there is one more component. The **stakes** provide the "or what?" This is the price they pay if they fail and/or the prize they win if they succeed. There are story stakes for the overall story problem, personal stakes for the protagonist, and potentially personal stakes for the antagonist, love interest, friends, and foes.

Common story stakes include:

☐ **Basic need:** Life-sustaining necessities (food, clothing, shelter) rest on the outcome.
☐ **Emotional**: The healing or prevention of a personal or global wound rests on the outcome.
☐ **Familial**: The bonds of a family are maintained or broken based on the outcome.
☐ **Financial**: The financial status of a person or group rests on the outcome.
☐ **Future:** The health and success of a character's future rests on the outcome.
☐ **Global:** The control of the world or worlds rests on the outcome.
☐ **Hierarchy**: The continuation or destruction of a system rests on the outcome.
☐ **Imprisonment:** An individual's or group's freedom from incarceration rests on the outcome
☐ **Justice:** The righting of a personal or global wrong rests on the outcome.
☐ **Liberty**: An individual's or group's freedom from tyranny rests on the outcome.
☐ **Materialistic:** An object or asset is lost or gained based on the outcome.
☐ **Mortal:** Actual life and death of one or many rests on the outcome.
☐ **Organizational:** The success or failure of a group, company, government, etc. rests on the outcome.
☐ **Planetary**: The health and life of the planet rests on the outcome.
☐ **Personal:** A character's sense of self is healed or broken based on the outcome.
☐ **Professional:** The livelihood of one or many rests on the outcome.

☐ **Psychological:** The sanity of one or many rests on the outcome.
☐ **Relationship:** The success or failure of a relationship rests on the outcome.
☐ **Reputation**: The integrity of one or many is lost or gained based on the outcome.
☐ **Safety:** The safety and security of one or many rests on the outcome.
☐ **Societal:** The cohesion of a society rests on the outcome.
☐ **Spiritual:** The beliefs or core values of one or many rests on the outcome.

Providing stiff opposition and high stakes equals high tension.

Movement toward and away from the scene and story goals creates satisfying S-curves readers enjoy cruising, or racing, through to reach the story's end. It adds the requisite tension to keep the reader turning pages.