

STORY GRID

# THRILLER STORY CHEAT SHEET



**The thriller is the Story form of our time because it concerns the individual coping with omnipresent and often difficult to even comprehend antagonism. The external becomes internal, forcing the protagonist to make fundamental choices to unleash critical gifts.**

**-Shawn Coyne**

# WHAT IS A THRILLER STORY?

An arc plot (hero's journey) external genre, the thriller combines the primal genres (action, horror and crime) into a disturbing and realistic modern catharsis that reaffirms the sanctity of the individual in mass society.

# WHAT IS THE CONTROLLING IDEA OF THE THRILLER STORY?

Justice (or Tryanny) prevails when the protagonist unleashes  
(or denies) his/her special gift.

WHAT IS THE GLOBAL VALUE AT STAKE ?

LIFE AND DEATH

# WHAT IS THE SPECTRUM OF THE GLOBAL VALUE?

**Life to Unconsciousness to Death to Damnation**

**Remember that the Story doesn't have to actually reach damnation...but the potential for damnation and the vehicle for damnation must be expressed. The cop who lets a victim die because he won't act is damned. (Redemption Stories concern a protagonist who is living in damnation.)**

## OBLIGATORY SCENES OF A THRILLER STORY

1. An Inciting Crime indicative of a master villain. There must be victims.
2. A Speech in Praise of the Villain (A scene must have a speech by one or more characters or a revelation that praises the cunning/brilliance of the villain)
3. The Hero/Protagonist becomes the Victim (a scene reveals that the villain makes his crimes personal. The Hero becomes the primary victim.)
4. Hero at the Mercy of the Villain Scene (this is the Core event of the thriller, the moment when the Hero unleashes his/her gift when all is lost)
5. False Ending. There must be two endings.

# CONVENTIONS OF THRILLER STORY

1. A MacGuffin: This is the villain's object of desire...what the villain wants.
2. Investigative Red Herrings (these are seemingly revelatory false clues that mislead the protagonist/investigator)
3. Making it Personal. The villain needs the hero to get his/her MacGuffin and thus must victimize the hero to get what he/she wants.
4. Clock. There is a limited time for the hero to act. To not act burns precious time.



# Thriller Sub-Genres

**Serial Killer:** *Red Dragon*

**Military:** *Seven Days in May*

**Medical:** *Coma*

**Political:** *Marathon Man*

**Legal:** *And Justice for All*

**Journalism:** *The Scarecrow*

**Psychological:** *Primal Fear*

**Financial:** *Numbered Account*

**Espionage:** *The Bourne Identity*

**Woman in Jeopardy:** *Sleeping with the Enemy*

**Child in Jeopard:** *The Client*

**Hitchcock:** *A Coffin for Dimitrios*

# Potent Internal Companion Genres

**The Maturation Thriller:** Harry Potter

**The Disillusionment Thriller:** The Silence of the Lambs

**The Redemption Thriller:** The Verdict

**The Punative Thriller:** Breaking Bad

**The Testing/Surrender Thriller:** Chinatown