

## Plots, plans, and party crashers

Most writers plot out their books to some degree. Some go with a loose sketch; others know exactly what happens from A to Z. I'm glad I'm not the former, I envy the later. I fall somewhere in the middle.

For me, plotting a book is just like writing one—some parts are inspired and I can't write fast enough, other times I'm completely and utterly stuck, and I wonder if pounding my head against the nearest wall will shake loose some ideas. Tempting to try, but I've always managed to resist that urge. I've had a concussion before. Not fun.

My ideas come to me in bits and pieces, parts of dialogue and chunks of chapters. Then comes the "sitting/pondering/staring at the computer" part of the writing process. Or what comes to me at 4 a.m., or in the shower, or driving home from work. The subconscious mind is a wonderful thing. It works 24/7. I don't work 24/7 (though my husband would be the first to dispute that claim). The human gray matter has to go through all kinds of contortions to determine how a book gets from beginning to end, where the main characters make their entrance, what turns a snooze-fest of a plot into a page-turner of a novel.

First there's the struggle to get what's in my head onto the screen. But mainly my problem is that I'm still working out the guts of the story while I'm writing it. I know the beginning, some scenes scattered throughout the book, and I know the ending. The trick is to come up with the story to link all of those together while staring down the barrel of a tight deadline.

But sometimes you end up tossing it all out the window.

Say you're happily writing along, everything going according to plan. Character A is behaving perfectly. Then Character B—or even a character you've never met before—suddenly enters the scene. Everything changes. Dang it! So much for your plotline, right?

Wrong. It's become my experience that this is a *very* good thing. It means that your story is taking on even more of a life of its own. It means that your muse is in residence, and she's just vetoed your plan, staged an intervention, whatever you want to call it, to keep you from doing something stupid that you'll regret later.

Whenever this happens to me, I've learned to run, don't walk, after the interfering Character B. That character knows what they're doing and why they're there even if you don't. The key here is to go with the flow. Some of my most fun characters have come into existence by crashing my plot party. In a book, party crashers are always welcome. For me, they're either being pulled into a dark alley, or pushed out of a bar. I've learned to pay attention to these people. They're worth watching and listening to—and they'll keep your readers turning the pages.