Mary Robinette Kowal's Find a Plot worksheet

Part 1

1. **Write down gee-whiz idea -** This doesn't have to be a complete sentence, but just a nugget that you want to build a story around.

    a. Magic rainbow snake

2. **Where does it happen?** - general scenic location.

    a. Asgard

    b. Bedroom

    c. Spaceship

3. **Characters who would be there (general list).** (Look for characters that aren't as obvious — look for people across the socio-economic spectrum, because any event affects people differently depending on the resources they have.)

    a. Pilot

    b. Talking cat

    c. Cat's wrangler

    d. AI

    e. Rival cat

    f. Navigator

    g. Cruise director

    h. passengers

4. **From the list, pick three you want to focus on.** (Important to trust yourself as an audience member, because the first person you need to please is yourself.)

5. You've picked the three you want to spend time with. **What do they want?** This doesn't have to be huge. It can be a small, in the moment, goal.

    a. Talking cat wants alone time with her magic rainbow snake.

    b. Cat wrangler wants to read

    c. Cruise director wants audience to be enchanged by talking cat

6. Pick the want that is most compelling to you. That character who has it is your main character.

7. **List what MC character has at stake.** "Stake" is a word a lot of people misunderstand — it is how your character defines personal failure. Note: It should NOT just be the inverse of the "want" For instance, if your main character wants a pocket watch, the stake shouldn't be "they don't get a pocket watch." That leads to mono-dimensional characters.

    a. Talking cat is worried that rival cat will steal the one sunny spot

    b. Cat wrangler needs to pay for cancer meds for the other cat

c. Cruise director's relationship is on the line

8. **Choose the primary stake for your MC character**.

9. Go back to what the MC character wants. **What is stopping the character from achieving their desires?** Why can't they have what they want?

    a. Talking cat can't find her magic rainbow snake

    b. She has to correct the captain about his navigation plans

    c. The litterbox is stinky

    d. The rainbow snake button is broken

    e. Her wrangler is reading and she can't get their attention

10. **What is the most interesting thing standing in the way of your POV character?**

11. What is your MC's plan to get what they want?

    a. With her wrangler, she'll explain higher math and a better path through the wormhole.

    b. She has to remind him that she's sapient

    c. Draws a flight path in

    d. Gets his attention by climbing antique furniture that's' 100% forbidden

    e. Puts on her best frock

12. W**rite up 1-3 sentences summing up the decision you have made for your POV character**.

    a. A sapient button-using cat on a spaceship wants to have intimate time with her magic rainbow snake, but realizes that the captain's approach to the wormhole will render them into tiny shreds of matter. Knowing that the captain will forget that she's sapient, she puts on her best frock. She has to get her wrangler to take her, and her button board, to the bridge where she explains the problem and the solution to him.

13. **Identify the MICE quotient element** based on the conflict you've most connect with.

Milieu – Environment-centered story (entering/leaving specific, often exotic, location). Examples: Gulliver's Travels. Parts of Hunger Games (enters capital, enters game grounds, leaves game grounds, leaves capital). Are they trying to escape a place or travel somewhere?

Inquiry– Mystery-centered story (a question the MC & reader both try to discover). Examples: Sherlock Holmes, Matlock. Are they trying to answer a question?

Character – Internally-driven story (character dissatisfied with themselves). Examples: Most romance rom-com movies, Finn's arc in Star Wars 7? Are they unhappy with themselves? Are they trying to change something about themselves.

Event – Externally-driven story (something happened to disrupt status quo/cause chaos). Examples: Most sci-fi or action movies (Armageddon, Jurassic Park, Rey's arc in Star Wars 7, etc.) Are they trying to change the status quo? Are they trying to create a new "normal" around them

14. Looking at the MICE quotient, use that to determine where the story begins and ends and explicitly add both to the 1-3 sentence summary.

    a. As a sapient button-using cat on a spaceship is about to have intimate time with her magic rainbow snake, the entire ship bucks. She realizes that the captain's approach to the wormhole will render them into tiny shreds of matter. Knowing that the captain will forget that she's sapient, she puts on her best frock. She has to get her wrangler to take her, and her button board, to the bridge where she explains the problem and the solution to him. Course corrected, she returns to her stateroom, kicks off her frock and has an intimate time with her magic rainbow snake.

- 1. Milieu – What problems exist with your MC's environment? - **Ship is vibrating apart and gravity is wonky**
- 2. Inquiry – What questions does your MC have? - How to course correct?
- 3. Character – What challenges your MC's self definition? - Will people see me as the feline overlord that I am or as a pet?
- 4. Event – What disrupts your MC's status quo?
- (The goal is not to come up with plot complications for the main story, but to find a subplot. Ideally that subplot will not be the same MICE quotient element as the main plot thread.)
- From that list, pick the one that excites you most.
- Brainstorm ways in which your MC might try to resolve their problem.
  - All the claws
  - Climbing furniture
  - Landing on feet
- Pick the one that excites you most.
- What is its MICE quotient element?
- Where does that conflict start and end? Exits her stateroom. Ends when she returns to her stateroom
- Nest it inside the primary conflict in your existing thumbnail
  - NO MORE THAN 150 WORDS PER THUMBNAIL.

    b. As a sapient button-using cat on a spaceship is about to have intimate time with her magic rainbow snake, the entire ship bucks. She realizes that the captain's approach to the wormhole will render them into tiny shreds of matter. Knowing that the captain will forget that she's sapient, she puts on her best frock. <m>She has to get her wrangler to take her, and her button board, to the bridge. She has to use her claws and let her wrangler carry her at times, to get through. At one point, she must climb an antique and bit the button board to hold it while her wrangler clambers up. where she explains the problem and the solution to him. Course corrected, she is able to walk through the corridors now that gravity is restored and return to her stateroom,</m kicks off her frock and has an intimate time with her magic rainbow snake.

As a ship approaches a wormhole, a sapient button-using cat on a spaceship is about to have intimate time with her magic rainbow snake when the entire ship bucks. She realizes that the captain's approach to the wormhole will render them into tiny shreds of matter. Knowing that the captain will forget that she's sapient, she puts on her best frock and goes to the bridge where she explains the problem and the solution to him. Course corrected, she is able to walk through the corridors now that gravity is restored and return to her stateroom kicks off her frock and has an intimate time with her magic rainbow snake as the ship passes safely through the wormhole.

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2. She realizes because her cat ears hear the vibrational frequency inaudible to humans that are specific to bad approach. The captain's approach to the wormhole will render them into tiny shreds of matter.
3. Knowing that the captain will forget that she's sapient, she puts on her best frock and goes to the bridge
4. Get the captain's attention.
5. where she explains the problem and the solution to him.
6. He implements solution
7. Course corrected,
8. she is able to walk through the corridors now that gravity is restored and
9. return to her stateroom kicks off her frock and has an intimate time with her magic rainbow snake as the ship passes safely through the wormhole.

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2. goes to the bridge with giant troubles navigating space that underscore problem.
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    a. What the principle action of the scene is. What it's doing to advance the plot threads
    b. Where it takes place - stateoom
    c. Who is present - Wrangler and cat
    d. Time of day & mood - Evening. Frustrated

e. What does your main character want? - Sexy funtimes

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The spacetime continuum outside of Elsie's stateroom fluctuated with the corruscating collors of a wormhole viewed through an HLX-1 drive. Elsie stretched, grooming her calico fur, and sauntered over to her button board and hit the important words with quiet deliberation. "Quiet. Sleepy. Fun" She licked her paw. "Magic rainbow snake."

Her human wrangler looked up from her book. "Hey– if you're going to have sexy funtimes, I'm going to put my headphones in.

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