



PREMISE
HORROR

100
PLOT
IDEAS

DANCING LIGHTS PRESS

PREMISE: HORROR

100 Story Ideas

Dancing Lights Press

<http://dancinglightspress.com>

Copyright 2017 Berin Kinsman. All Rights Reserved.

The bearer of this electronic document has the express permission of the publisher to make copies for personal use.

WHAT IS A PREMISE?

A premise is the heart of a story summed up in a single sentence. It will provide a general overview of what happens, without spoiling anything. A good premise contains, explicitly or by implication, four key elements of the story: who the protagonists are, what the goal of the story is, the sorts of obstacles that need to be overcome to achieve the story goal, and who the antagonist is.

Each premise provided in this book is more than just a story hook or adventure seed. It is the beginning of a story, your story, that you can flesh out and develop to suit your specific needs. These can be used again and again by varying the details and changing the four key elements.

Protagonists

The assumption is that you already have player characters created, if not fully established. For that reason, elements of the premise should be tweaked to suit the abilities and personalities of the protagonists and not the other way around. Suggested character capabilities useful in completing the story goal may be listed, but if no protagonist possesses these traits then a supporting character should be inserted to compensate. Likewise, ties to background elements can either be retconned into a protagonist's history, or given to a supporting character who can ask for the protagonists' help, or can hire them to pursue the story goal on their behalf, as appropriate.

Story Goals

The story goal is the objective that the protagonists must achieve in order to successfully complete the adventure. It's the way you know that the story is over, and can help keep the players focused and the protagonists on the right track. In a simplified 3-act structure, Act 1 will have the protagonists learning about the story goal and deciding to pursue it. Act 2 will present a series of obstacles that need to be overcome in order to accomplish the story goal. Act 3 will have the protagonists face the final obstacle, defeat the antagonist, achieve the story goal, and earn their rewards.

Obstacles

Achieving the story goal shouldn't be easy, and the protagonists will need to overcome an escalating series of obstacles. These might be linked thematically, or tied into the sort of goal that needs to be achieved. Start with a simple obstacle early in the story, something that plays to the protagonists' strengths and will be relatively easy to defeat. Then think of the hardest thing possible, pushing the limits of their capabilities, and make that the final obstacle. Flesh out the middle with obstacles that are increasingly more difficult.

Antagonists

Each protagonist has a personal goal that they are trying to achieve, as well as a motivation for pursuing that goal. This might place them in opposition to, or into competition with, the protagonists. If the premise fits with an established antagonist, you should use them and tweak other elements of the premise to fit their personalities and abilities. Otherwise, you can create a new antagonist that suits the particulars of your desired story and overall campaign needs.

01

The protagonists set off on a journey, hoping discover knowledge and enlightenment but instead finding only misery and terror.

Protagonists

This premise does requires the protagonists have a background in science or exploration. If they don't, a supporting character will hire them based on some need for the skills they do possess. Find a way to make their core competence relevant to the expedition.

Story Goal

The objective is to get safely home from the journey. No matter what else happens along the way, once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end. If there was a purpose to the trip, or the antagonist was defeated, this is secondary to the story goal.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on discovering new things. The least difficult challenge will be the hardships of travel, and escalate in difficulty to include battling hostile forces trying to protect the source of knowledge. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist, who wishes to keep the knowledge hidden, possibly for good reasons, possibly for selfish ones.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to protect the secrets the protagonists are trying to uncover. Their motivation might be tied to preventing some horrible event that will occur if the secret is broken. It might also be that the antagonist wants to keep the knowledge and the power that comes with it for themselves. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist that can deceive and surprise the protagonists.

02

The protagonists are drawn toward something dark yet beautiful, as the antagonist draws them deeper into danger.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. The object of allure should appeal to something primal within them, regardless of who they are or where they come from.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonists to overcome temptation with some degree of finality. Throughout the story they will struggle and relapse, but by the finale it should be clear that they are done. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on resisting temptation. The least difficult challenge will be in saying no to something obviously harmful or undesirable, and escalate in difficulty to include protagonists doing things to hide their failure to resist, and doing odious things to fulfill their desires. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they attempt to break free from their grasp.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to seduce and corrupt the protagonists. Their motivation might be to destroy someone good and noble, to gather talented people to their side, or just because they like the protagonist. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist that the protagonists will be able to trust and even like initially.

03

The protagonists struggle with a dark secret, which the antagonist exploits, as they try to avoid losing everything that they have.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have either some collective secret that all share, or individual secrets that they hide even from one another. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character with a secret who will go to the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonists to protect themselves, more emotionally than anything else. This might mean keeping the secret, or revealing it on their own terms and getting it over with. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on keeping secrets hidden. The least difficult challenge will be lying to people the protagonists care about, and escalate in difficulty to include covering up information, lying to authorities, and destroying evidence. The final obstacle should be with the antagonist, as they prepare to reveal the protagonists' dirty little secrets to the world.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to use and manipulate the protagonists. They might have a secondary objective that they will enlist the protagonists to help with, or they might just enjoy torturing them emotionally. Their motivation is selfish and sadistic.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. A new character might lend some terror as the protagonists try to decipher why they're doing this. A recurring villain will have obvious reasons for toying with the protagonists and wanting to see them suffer.

04

The protagonists awaken in a strange dreamlike world and must figure out what's going on before they are captured by the unknown entities chasing them.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special abilities or and specific sort of background. The dream world should be bizarre so you can use existing fears, or go against what is familiar to them based on their back story, to create a terrifying and alien world.

Story Goal

The objective is to get out of the dream and back into the real world. Solving whatever else is going on and defeating the antagonist may be the means to that end, or may be secondary goals. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation in a bizarre and probably nonsensical. The least difficult challenge will be learning the rules of the dream world, and escalate in difficulty to include running, hiding, and fighting the creatures in that world. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they try to prevent the protagonists from getting back home.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to trap the protagonists in the dream world. Their motivation might be to use them for some purpose, or simply to torment them for fun. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist whose abilities and modes of operation are unknown to the protagonists and therefore more unpredictable and frightening.

05

The protagonists must prove their innocence when they are accused of committing a grisly murder by the antagonist.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have something in their history that would make them seem like a credible suspect. They should have some connection to the victims, no matter how tenuous.

Story Goal

The objective is to find the actual murderer in order to clear themselves of the charges. Catching the antagonist is secondary and not required to fulfill the story goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on finding evidence that clears their name. The least difficult challenge will be evading arrest in order for the protagonists to be free to move about and conduct an investigation. Things will escalate in difficulty to include interviewing people, running from law enforcement, and gathering physical evidence. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist in their creepy secret murder lair.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill and get away with it. Their motivation is that they're a sadistic psychopath. They may or may not be human, depending on the specific setting used. Allowing the protagonists to take the fall for the crimes suits their purposes, but murdering them if they get too close to catching the antagonist is a viable tactic. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist, if the killer has evaded capture in a previous story.

06

The protagonists get framed for the murder of an eccentric inventor, thrusting them into the weird underground world of mad scientists.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have no knowledge of the mad scientist community. The story hinges on the fact that this world is foreign to them, and the fear stems from not knowing what to expect.

Story Goal

The objective is to locate the real killer. Navigating the mad scientist community is a spectacle and a source of obstacles. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be avoiding the distractions and red herrings the mad science creates, and escalate in difficulty to include tracking the real killer, securing evidence, and evading the victim's friends and family who are seeking revenge. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the real killer while avoiding a confrontation with the vengeful and vindictive bereaved.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get away with the murder of the victim. Their motivation might have been personal or professional, jealousy over an invention or a relationship. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist so the protagonists can be surprised by the reveals as they learn about the mad scientist community.

07

A protagonist suffers a head injury, and wakes up convinced that they have been abducted by supernatural creatures.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special abilities or a specific sort of background. They are convinced that during the time they were unconscious they were taken away, so they might have been alone until the other characters found them unconscious.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonists to learn the truth, whatever that may be. Whether it is real or all in the mind of the “abductee” is up to you. Foiling the antagonist may be a means to fulfilling the goal, or serve as a secondary goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on proving or disproving that an abduction happened. The least difficult challenge will be dealing with the ridicule of non-believers and the “help” offered by sincerely motivated kooks. This will escalate in difficulty to include theft, threats, and actual violence from those trying to cover up the truth. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist to make them give up the answers.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to cover up the truth about what really happened. If the protagonist was abducted, they want to keep the existence of aliens a secret. If they weren't abducted, the antagonist wants to keep the reason for faking it a secret. Their motivation is to keep a larger secret.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. An existing character might have been laying ground work for the abduction in previous stories, gaining the trust of the protagonists. A new character will add to the mystery and intrigue of the premise.

The protagonists have a winning streak that improves their quality of life, but they discover that there are hidden costs.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists come from a poor or oppressed background. If they do not, use a supporting character that fits and have them approach the protagonists for help. Fame, fortune, or even a job with relative financial stability can be inciting incident here.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonists to avoid getting caught up in something that they cannot get back out of. Keeping the improvements to their lives, and defeating the antagonist, are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on the downsides of having a better life. The least difficult challenge will be strange, unfamiliar situations, and escalate in difficulty to include judgmental people, being asked to do unpleasant things to earn and secure the life improvements, and dealing with those willing to engage in violence because they feel the protagonists are unworthy or have done something immoral. The final obstacle should with the antagonist who will not allow them to back down from the deals they've made.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to make the protagonists beholden to them. Their motivation might be financial, part of a power trip, or purely sadistic. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist who can gain the protagonists' confidence early in the story before their true nature becomes evident.

09

The protagonists struggle to stay out of the way of a neighborhood drug dealer, who isn't what he seems to be.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have an established neighborhood where they live, work, and hang out. Someone may or may not have a drug problem, or engage in recreational or medicinal use. Drug dealers should fit the tone of the neighborhood, but will always give off a feeling of danger.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the mysterious drug dealer and stop his evil plans. The stated goal of avoiding him is not the final goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigating the drug deal to learn what he's really up to. The least difficult challenge will be avoiding being caught by the antagonist and his agents, and escalate in difficulty to include surveillance, burglary, and fights with henchmen. The final obstacle should be with the antagonist as the protagonists reveal the truth that they have uncovered.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to accrue power by getting people hooked on their "drugs". These may or may not be supernatural in nature, and the antagonist may or may not be a supernatural creature. Their motivation is to gather enough slaves, drones, or souls to accomplish some other big, nasty objective. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist, as not knowing what the antagonist is will increase the suspense.

10

A protagonist discovers that they have an identical twin, but their newfound sibling wants to be an only child.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special abilities or any specific sort of background. The discovery that they have a sibling should come out of the blue, having never been mentioned by any relatives up to this point in their lives.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the machinations of the evil twin. Saving them somehow, turning them good, and uncovering their full back story are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on spying on the evil twin. The least difficult challenge will be following and observing them, and escalate in difficulty to include verifying what the twin has told them, doing background checks, and avoiding traps that have been set for the protagonists. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as all secrets are revealed.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill their twin. Their motivation is a deranged desire to be the only one. They weren't happy to learn that they had a sibling. They might even be jealous, and looking to take over the protagonist-twin's life. This premise works best with a new, unfamiliar antagonist, so no one knows what to expect from them.

11

A protagonist sets off on a journey to find something they feel can change their life forever, but there is a heavy price to be paid.

Protagonists

This premise requires a protagonist to have a personal goal that they wish to fulfill. It can be something positive that they want to achieve, or something negative that they want to change. They have to be committed to attaining this personal objective.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonist to rethink their priorities and reconsider their current situation. They don't have to settle for their previous status quo, but they need to recognize the costs associated with change. Defeating the antagonist or meeting their personal goal are secondary considerations. Once the protagonist has accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on the search for something. It might be knowledge, a person, or a physical object. The least difficult challenge will be learning where to look, and escalate in difficulty to include the hazards of travel, people who don't want the thing found, and the problems associated with acquiring the things we desire. The final obstacle should be with the antagonist, who offers the protagonist what they want in return for a great sacrifice.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to corrupt the protagonist and come out ahead in the bargain. Their motivation might be purely business, but is probably tinged with some sadism as well as greed and selfishness.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. The scary part of dealing with a known entity is that the protagonist knows what they're getting into and does it anyway. A new antagonist will be able to gain the protagonist's trust and be better able to convince them that the deal is a good one and the complications aren't that bad.

12

A protagonist is transformed into a monster as punishment for some sin the antagonist believes they have committed.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have done something questionable that the antagonist is able to know about. If they have no secret sins, be sure to include a supporting character who has committed some immoral, unethical, or illegal act that can ask the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonist to be restored to normal. Proving their innocence or defeating the antagonist may be steps to achieving the story goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on the complications of being a monster. The least difficult challenge will be hiding from people, and escalate in difficulty to include evading monster hunters, discovering why the transformation happened, and learning how to reverse it. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to punish the protagonist. Their motivation may be based on a sense of justice, a thirst for revenge, or a justification for being cruel.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. Having a new character behind the premise will add to the confusion and fear as the protagonist try to deduce what has happened. Using a recurring villain shifts the emphasis from discovering why to figuring out who has done this.

13

The protagonists struggle with suppressed memories coming to the surface after reading passages from a mysterious old book.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any particular skills or abilities. You can tailor the memories to contradict what is known about the protagonist's back stories, or explain the discrepancies by retconning past events.

Story Goal

The objective is to determine why the protagonists are experiencing false memories. Learning to distinguish between reality and fiction, and defeating the antagonist, are a means to that end and not separate goals. Once the protagonists have an explanation, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on dealing with the impact of false memories. The least difficult challenge will be dealing with the guilt, shame, and horror of having possibly done something terrible. Things will escalate in difficulty to include figuring which memories are false and tracking down who put the memories there. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to make the protagonists question their reality. Their motivation might be to manipulate them into doing something horrible, to get revenge on them for some past deed, or just to torture them.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. A known foe will have understandable reasons to mess with the protagonists. An unknown entity will make the confusion of the false memories more terrifying until the antagonist's motives are discovered.

14

Suspecting that a supporting character is involved in something evil, the protagonists follow them and make a frightening discovery.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have a regular supporting character that they know well and feel they can trust. The idea that this person could be doing something terrible, or possibly betraying them, should have emotional impact.

Story Goal

The objective is to learn what's going on with the affected supporting character. Solving the mystery and catching the antagonist are secondary objectives. Once the protagonists have discovered the truth, the story can come to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will involve surveillance, and escalate in difficulty to include breaking and entering, searching various places, and confronting the affected supporting character. The final obstacle should involve saving the supporting character from the true antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to torture the affected supporting character emotionally. Their motivation is to punish them for some past transgression. They are making the character do something against their will, under threat of doing something even more horrible.

This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist. This will make it more challenging to figure out why the affected supporting character is behaving strangely and isn't willing to share what's happening.

15

A brutal serial killer is stalking the protagonists as they celebrate the holidays.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have friends, family, or coworkers to celebrate a major holiday with. Perhaps they don't, and they're just trying to fill the time and avoid loneliness. Any relationship problems in their back story can be brought out and exploited for emotional impact.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonists to survive the serial killer's attack. Catching the killer and ending up having a nice holiday are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have insured that they will live, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival but should have a holiday theme to theme. The least difficult challenge will involve hiding, and escalate in difficulty to include running, avoiding being trapped, and protecting other people from the murderer. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the serial killer.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the protagonists. Their motivation is that they're a serial killer and don't need a deeper motivation. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist, to increase the fear of the unknown.

16

The protagonists witness a kidnapping, and must do something before the kidnapper kills the victim.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special skills, or a specific sort of background. They only need to be in the wrong place at the wrong time to see something terrible happen. It does presume that they are the sort of people willing to take action and do something.

Story Goal

The objective is to save the victim from whatever sort of harm the antagonist plans to inflict upon them. Catching the kidnapper and understanding their motives are secondary considerations, but will contribute to completing the story goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on chases and time pressure. The least difficult challenge will be to follow the antagonist back to their lair, and escalate in difficulty to include avoiding death traps, finding the victim, and contacting the authorities. The final obstacle should be a violent and potentially fatal confrontation with the kidnapper.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to do unspeakable and grotesque things to their victim. Their motivation might stem from some ritual purpose, or be a personal act against the victim or the victim's family. This premise will work best with an antagonist that the protagonists are not familiar with.

17

The protagonists' social and professional lives are turned upside down as a murderer's grisly trophies are found among their possessions.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have relationships and careers that can be disrupted by scandal. For there to be an emotional impact to the story and genuine stakes, the opinions of supporting characters have to matter. The protagonists must have something to lose.

Story Goal

The objective is to prove that the protagonists have no connection to the murders. Catching the actual killer is a secondary objective. Once the protagonists have convinced people of their innocence, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be determining the who the victims were that the trophies belonged to, and escalate in difficulty to include managing appearances, investigating the murders for commonalities, and checking out suspects. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the real killer.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the protagonists. The planted trophies aren't meant to frame them, but to act as bait. Their motivation could be personal, based on a past encounter, or because they make challenging prey. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

18

A struggling store owner is bought out by a giant corporation, and the protagonists discover that location is everything.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special background or abilities. If the store owner is a supporting character that they already have a relationship with, it is helpful but not required.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the giant corporation from summoning a demon. This must be done on the site of the struggling store. Getting the business owner their store back is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have dealt with the summoning, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be researching the history of the site, and escalate in difficulty to include dealing with legal and illegal threats from the corporation, learning their real plans, and figuring out how to deal with a demon. The final obstacle should be facing the corporate cultists and stopping the summoning.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to summon a demon. Their motivation is to use it to further their corporate goals, perhaps to destroy a business rival. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

19

The protagonists investigate reports of a mythical creature living in a desolate neighborhood filled with abandoned buildings.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any particular sort of background or special skills. Familiarity with the neighborhood and its vacant building is helpful and can make the premise more personal, but not necessary.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonists to deal with the mythical creature. That might mean killing it, setting it free, or returning it to where it came from. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on protecting the innocent. That might be the creature, people menaced by the creature, or both. The least difficult challenge will be in locating the creature's lair, and escalate in difficulty to include keeping other people away from it, and learning why it's behaving the way it is. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist, whether that's the creature or someone who has summoned or imprisoned the creature.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to accrue more power. The creature is the antagonist, is may be weakened because it is the last of its kind, or because traveling into the world has weakened it. If someone is controlling the creature, they may have some other objective and plan to use the creature to attain it. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

20

After a freak plane crash in a remote location, the protagonists must protect the other survivors against a monster that is stalking and eating them.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a specific sort of background. They will need to have a plausible reason for flying over a remote location. Some sorts of fighting and survival skills will also come in handy. If they lack those abilities, a supporting character should be inserted to cover the skill gap.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the monster. Keeping the other survivors alive and acquiring shelter, food, and water are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, a rescue team will conveniently arrive and the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult challenge will be finding shelter and food, and escalate in difficulty to include running from the monster, fighting secondary threats like terrain hazards and predatory animals, and arguing about a plan of action. The final obstacle should be an epic battle with the main monster itself.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to eat the survivors, including the protagonists. Their motivation is that they are a hungry monster. That's all there is to it. Mindless killing machine. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist, because the protagonists will need to figure out its abilities and weaknesses through direct experience.

21

The antagonist goes to extremes to capture the protagonists before they can reveal a dark secret.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have learned something disturbing that they feel needs to be shared with the world, or at least the proper authorities. Alternately, a supporting character might have made the terrible discovery and can ask the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the information to the people who can use it. This might be an individual with a solution, a government agency that can take action, or a journalist who can reveal a hidden truth to the world. Stopping the antagonist is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on evading capture. The least difficult challenge will involve running and hiding, and escalate in difficulty to include avoiding traps, travel hazards, and fighting the antagonist's minions. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist prior to revealing the secret.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to keep their secret. Their motivation might be to avoid arrest, or to prevent their plans from being disrupted. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist, depending upon the nature of the secret and how the protagonists acquired it.

22

The protagonists attend a wedding, but the antagonist is determined to stop the union by any means.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have a mutual friend or supporting character that is getting married. The more familiar they are with the bride or groom, the more of an emotional impact the story will have.

Story Goal

The objective is to insure that the wedding happens. It might not be in the place and time originally printed on the invitation, but there should be a happy ending following the screaming and terror. Saving the other guests is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on keeping the happy couple safe. The least difficult challenge will involve running and hiding, and escalate in difficulty to include avoiding disasters like fire and explosions and getting into fights with the antagonist's agents. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to stop the wedding, up to and including killing the happy couple. Their motivation is revenge for a failed relationship, maybe with one of the betrothed, maybe because they hate wedding in general.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. If there's a failed relationship already established in your canon, this can build on that. Otherwise, it can be equally terrifying for this to come out of the blue, with the protagonists having to work out what's happening and why.

The protagonists return to their home town and find people they know behaving strangely.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have a reason to return to their home town, presumably after an extended absence. They might be attending a reunion, visiting family for a holiday, or getting an award for being famous natives. The relationships with and knowledge of the supporting characters can be reconnected for any people not previously introduced in your canon.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist. Saving the town and its supporting characters is a secondary consideration, and will probably happen as a result of meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on mismatched expectations. The least difficult challenge will be people not doing what you'd expect, and escalate in difficulty to include normally friendly and gentle people trying to kill the protagonists and each other. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist and learning why they're doing this.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get revenge on the protagonists. Their motivation is that they have failed find success and happiness, so they are taking it out on the protagonists and the people of the town.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. If there is a childhood friend that has previously appeared, or been referenced, in the canon, they can be used. It also works if the antagonist is someone that they don't even remember, but is someone that's been adjacent to their life for years but has gone unnoticed.

24

The protagonists visit an old house that during their childhood was rumored to be haunted, and make a startling discovery.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have some details of the past fleshed out. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character who can be a substitute for the background requirements and ask the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the haunted house. Defeating the antagonist or exorcising the entities within the house are secondary considerations, but may meet the story goal. Once the protagonists have gotten out alive, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on being trapped in a building with malevolent forces. The least difficult challenge will be reliving childhood traumas, as the antagonist watched them grow up and remembers them. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include avoiding traps, overcoming fear, and fighting various creatures and animated objects. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist prior to getting out of the building.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to scare the protagonists. Their motivation is to feed on their fear, guaranteeing their continued existence on this plane for several more years.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. The foe might be a person who terrified the protagonists when they were children, who is now a bona fide monster. It might be an entity that has been in the area for decades, watching people as they pass the house while going about their lives.

25

The victims of a racist murder spree come back from the dead on the anniversary of the killings to get revenge on the entire town.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or background knowledge. If they were somehow involved in the prior spree, this can be a sequel. Otherwise, some basic knowledge that this atrocity happened some years ago is handy, along with a feeling that the town hadn't done all it could to prevent the atrocity.

Story Goal

The objective is to the dead back to rest. This could mean fighting them, appeasing them, or reversing their resurrection using magic. Saving the people of the town is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on dealing with the angry undead. The least difficult challenge will be in understanding that this is connected to the past tragedy, and escalate in difficulty to include a lot of fighting and dealing with racism. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

There are two possibilities with this story. The first is that the antagonist is a survivor of the original killing spree, who has raised the dead in order to take revenge. They feel that the town could have done more to prevent it from happening, so everyone must pay.

The second is that the antagonist is the mastermind behind the original tragedy, who has somehow evaded justice for the crime. The angry dead are specifically after that person, but will kill anyone that gets in their way. This antagonist will be using the attack of the risen victims to cover up a second racist killing spree.

26

A recently retired school teacher is kidnapping teenagers, making them fight each other to the death when they fail to answer questions correctly.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a particular sort of background. Knowing the missing kids or their families will create an emotional tie that can give the premise more of an emotional kick.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist. Saving the kids is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have put an end to the fights and brought the antagonist to some sort of justice, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be finding that all of the students had the same teacher and all had poor grades. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include being captured, being made to fight students, and evading elaborate death traps. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill his former students. Their motivation is their belief that the teenagers are lazy and disrespectful will cause the downfall of civilization. The antagonist is saving the world!

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. It might be a teacher the protagonists had when they were in high school, giving it an additional layer of emotional impact.

The protagonists discover that a supporting character has been living a double life as a Satanic serial killer.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have a supporting character that they are familiar with and trust implicitly. This should be someone who has had access to the protagonists' homes and family, so they the reveal makes them feel violated and unsafe.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist. Securing the protagonists' own safety and understanding the entirety of what the antagonist has done are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have dealt with with former friend, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation and pursuit. The least difficult challenge will be discovering the truth and learning about past crimes. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include tracking down the antagonist's hiding place, discovering their current plans, and keeping other supporting characters safe. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the former supporting character during a ritual sacrifice.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill. Their motivation is to search Satan and gain rewards for demonstrating their faithfulness. This premise will work best with an established character, who makes the leap from gentle, friendly supporting character to devious and manipulative antagonist.

A clan of vampires offers to help the protagonists battle a zombie outbreak, but they have an ulterior motive.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any specific sort of background of special skills. Knowing that supernatural creatures like vampires and zombies exist might be a bonus, as will the abilities required to deal with them.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the zombie outbreak. Putting an end to the vampires is a secondary objective. Coming to terms with the idea of teaming up with vampires should be treated as an obstacle, not a goal. Once the protagonists have ended the outbreak, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on fighting zombies. The least difficult challenge will be hiding from large crowds zombies, and escalate in difficulty to include understanding that the vampires can be trust for the duration of the crisis. The final obstacle should be delivering the final blow to the zombies, either a final battle against the horde or the delivery of some cure that stops the spread and kills the existing creatures.

Antagonists

The actual antagonists in this premise are the mindless zombies. The vampires should be creepy, and might be the antagonists in a past or future story, but they are sincere about teaming up. It's not only against their best interests for all of the humans to be wiped out in a zombie apocalypse, the zombies are killing the vampires as well. It should be the vampires that have the resources required to defeat the zombies, forcing the team-up.

29

A serial killer's past victims visit the protagonists in their dreams, giving them clues to help catch the antagonist.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special sort of background or any particular skills. If a protagonist has an established psychic sensitivity, or if there is a connection to the serial killer or the victims, that should be incorporated into your story.

Story Goal

The objective is to catch the serial killer. Locating the bodies of the victims and preventing future killings are secondary objectives. Once the protagonists have dealt with the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation and tracking. The least difficult challenge will be in finding the bodies of past victims and collecting the evidence at those sites. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include locating the antagonist's hideout and figuring out their current plans. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they stalk their next victim.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill people. Their motivation can be anything from anger to frustration to being the victim of abuse themselves. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A lawyer renowned for representing high-profile murderers uses the ghosts of his clients' victims to frighten witnesses and tamper with evidence in order to win cases.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a specific type of background. Familiarity with the lawyer, in the context of defending horrific killers, might be useful but isn't required.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist. Exposing his methods, getting him disbarred, and freeing the enslaved spirits of the victims are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have insured that the antagonist has dealt with, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation and fighting spirits. The least difficult challenge will be determining who the hostile spirits are, and escalate in difficulty to include figuring out who is controlling them and why. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as he uses the ghosts to insure victory in his current case.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to win court cases. Their motivation is to gain a reputation as a lawyer so good that they can get obvious mass murderers off the hook. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists race against time to stop the antagonist from committing mass murder.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have a specific background or particular skills. There has to be some reason why they're trying to stop the antagonist, but that could be as simple as them being the ones who discover the plan.

Story Goal

The objective is to prevent mass murder. Stopping the antagonist and foiling other aspects of the evil scheme are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on doing things in a hurry. The least difficult challenge will be getting from place to place on time, and escalate in difficulty to include engaging in chases, gathering information, and keeping track of the antagonist's movements. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they are about to launch their attack.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill large numbers of people. Their motivation is to spread terror, which might further another goal, appease a supernatural patron, or simply insure that their name will be remembered forever. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists try to have a normal existence as the antagonist keeps injecting horror and madness into their lives.

Protagonists

This premise requires that the protagonists either want to walk away from dealing with horror, or have established boundaries between their personal and professional lives. They might simply wish to keep their loved ones isolated from knowledge of the monsters that roam the world.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist. Having a normal life and keeping the horror from bleeding over into the peaceful side of their existence are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have foiled the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on having the horror come into the previously safe and mundane areas of the protagonists' lives. The least difficult challenge will be explaining to people that monsters exist, and escalate in difficulty to include keeping darker secrets, saving innocent people and fighting off hostile creatures. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist in front of the previously innocent supporting cast.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to ruin the protagonists' lives. Their motivation might be revenge for past defeats at the hands of the protagonists, a desire to terrify innocent people, or just to cause as much chaos and disruption as possible because they think it's fun. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

When the protagonists discover a cavern hidden beneath the basement of an old house, they accidentally unleash an ancient evil lurking there.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have a reason for poking around an old house. It might be their new home, or the home of a supporting character that they're helping to renovate.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist. Saving the lives of the supporting characters and preventing the destruction of the house are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have put down the ancient evil, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on learning what the antagonist is. The least difficult challenge will be researching the history of the house and the property it's built on. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include keeping supporting characters calm, fighting supernatural phenomena, and understanding what the antagonist wants. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist, to either kill it or seal it back up.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get free. Their motivation is to be loose in the world to kill people, eat people, spread evil, or any number of things depending on the type of creature it is. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist whose capabilities and weaknesses are unknown to the protagonists.

The protagonists encounter a photographer whose pictures are stealing the souls of people close to them.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have a regular supporting cast. They should be established enough that changes in behavior will be noticeable. Some event taking place where a photographer might be hired is also useful to tie the premise together.

Story Goal

The objective is to free the stolen souls and restore the victims to normal. Stopping the photographer is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have put an end to the soul theft, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be in determining what is wrong with the victims, and escalate in difficulty to include narrowing the list of suspects and realizing what exactly has happened. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist to convince them to release the trapped souls.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to gather souls. Their motivation is to use those souls for some other purpose, like appeasing a dark god, using them as a source of magical power, or extending their own life.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. If the photographer has appeared previously as a supporting character, they can be turned into the antagonist.

The protagonists are caught up in a terrorist attack, but the antagonists have a darker, more supernatural purpose.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have a reason to be in a place where terrorists might attack. This could theoretically be anywhere, but heavily populated places like airports or large stores, or places with emotional impact like hospitals or school, will amp up the horror.

Story Goal

The objective is stop the terrorist from killing everyone. Understanding what they're doing and why is a secondary objective. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on surviving. The least difficult challenge will be in hiding from the terrorists, and escalate in difficulty to include fighting them, discovering their real plan, and saving hostages. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the main antagonist and halting the ritual.

Antagonists

The goal of the main antagonist is to perform a blood sacrifice. This is the leader of the terrorists, and the main cultist in charge of performing the ritual. Their motivation is to serve their dark master in exchange for some sort of favor or power.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. If there is an established cult or terrorist organization in your canon, use them here. Otherwise, a new and unknown group will create greater challenges for the protagonists.

The protagonists find bodies everywhere they go, but the victims are all fictional characters whose existence in the real world can't be confirmed.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special background or skills. If some of them have favorite fictional characters, or some association with fictional character, those should be incorporated into the story.

Story Goal

The objective is to discover where the bodies are coming from. Why they look like fictional characters and what the antagonist is up to are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have solved the body mystery, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will come in verifying the identification on the bodies, and escalate in difficulty to include tracking down the antagonist and preventing additional murders. The final obstacle should include a confrontation with the antagonist in their secret lair.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to murder fictional characters. They've been selecting victims with a resemblance, redressing them and providing them with fake identification. Their motivation is to brag that they've defeated amazing, powerful people. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists have to stop a disgruntled government employee from using a supernatural creature to assassinate a politician.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any sort of special skills or a particular sort of background. It is helpful if they have connections within the government, to get them close to the premise. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that can ask the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to foil the assassination attempt. Stopping the antagonist or uncovering the misdeeds of the target politician are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have prevented the killing, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be identifying the suspect and determining their connection to the occult. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include locating the antagonist, determining their specific plan, and fighting lesser supernatural creatures. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist during the assassination attempt.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the politician. Their motivation is to get revenge on the person they feel has done them wrong. Whether these slights and offenses are real or all in the antagonist's head is up to you. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists learn that a killer is planning to attack a summer camp, but they are mistakenly thought to be the predators.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special sort of background or particular types of skills. A sketchy reputation that makes it plausible for someone to think the protagonists are criminal, or capable of doing illegal or immoral things, is helpful.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the killer. Clearing the protagonists' names and smoothing things over with the authorities are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have stopped the attack, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on tracking and hiding. The least difficult challenge will be following the antagonist and moving around the property without getting caught. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include not getting arrested, working out the antagonist's specific plans, and avoiding deathtraps. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist in full view of the authorities.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill a lot of teenagers. Their motivation might be to get revenge, to satisfy some sadistic urge, or to appease a dark entity that they worship. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

People have been dying and disintegrating into dust, and the protagonists have to prove that the victims are all connected to the antagonist.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special skills or type of background. Being in a position to witness one of the deaths, or to at least hear about the victims, is a bonus.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the killings. Catching the antagonist and disrupting their master plan are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be in finding connections between the victims and the antagonist. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out how they're dying, and why the antagonist is killing them. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist, who tries to kill the protagonists in the same manner as the earlier victims.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to feed on the life force of other people. Their motivation is to gain, or retain, immortality. They have set up a situation where they have access to a steady stream of victims. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

40

A health food store employee has been doing something disgusting to the food, and is about to unleash a horrific plan unless the protagonists can stop him.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or any particular type of background. They might shop at the store, know someone who has eaten food that was tampered with, or be asked for help by a suspicious employee.

Story Goal

The objective is to prevent the antagonist from executing their master plan. Saving people already affected is a secondary objective. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on discovering the antagonist's endgame. The least difficult challenge will be proving that the food was tampered with, and escalate in difficulty to include fighting the affected customers and locating the antagonist's hideout. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as their victims turn into monsters.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to turn health fanatics into monsters by putting mutagens into their food. Their motivation is a dislike of pretentious people who think they're better than the antagonist. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

41

The protagonists head into a creepy abandoned building to rescue the antagonist's victims and return them to safety.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a specific type of background. They will somehow have to know that there are hostages within the building and be in a position to go in and save them.

Story Goal

The objective is to get the victims out of the building. Learning all of the secrets of the building and defeating the antagonist are secondary objectives. Once the hostages have been rescued, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on exploration. The building is huge and the layout is confusing. The least difficult challenge will involve lack of light and avoiding the basic dangers found in old, crumbling buildings. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include traps, the building's strange inhabitants, getting lost. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as the protagonists struggle to find their way out.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to create a community within the building. People who go in are only able to leave with great difficulty. The antagonist's motivation is to create a cult based around the building's original purpose. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

42

The antagonist is plotting to kill the protagonists' romantic partners.

Protagonists

This premise requires at least one protagonist to have a happy relationship. If not, a supporting character that is established to be in a relationship might come to the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to save the love interests. Capturing the antagonist is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have assured the safety of the romantic partners, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on protection. The least difficult challenge will be in finding a safe place to stash the targets. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include tracking the antagonist, avoiding traps and ambushes, and getting the loved ones to cooperate. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they come to kill the romantic partners.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill people the protagonists care about. Their motivation is possibly revenge for some past defeat at the hands of the protagonists, or possibly just to torment the protagonists for daring to be happy and not bitter and alone. This premise can work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist by tweaking the motives.

43

A protagonist has a vision of the antagonist committing mass murder, and has to figure out a way to stop it.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some sort of psychic sensitivity. They may have been exposed to something that has temporarily given them second sight, or some trauma might have led to them having these visions.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist. Doing so will automatically halt the plan for mass murder somehow. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action. The least difficult challenge will be discovering the murder plan, and escalate in difficulty to include learning the means the antagonist plans to use and when and where it will take place. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist at the scene of the planned attack.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to specifically kill people who do good things for the world. This might be medical researchers, teachers, firefighters, or something else. Their motivation is to bring about darkness over the Earth by destroying hope. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists go on vacation, but the other tourists aren't what they seem to be.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have both a reason and the means to take a vacation. It should be somewhere that they have never visited before, and a place that is presumed to be safe.

Story Goal

The objective is to get out of the vacation spot alive. Stopping the antagonists and uncovering the whole truth of the situation are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have escaped, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult challenge will be escaping from the initial attack, and escalate in difficulty to include running, hiding, and fighting bands of other tourists. The final obstacle should be to confront the main antagonist as the protagonists make their escape.

Antagonists

With the exception of the protagonists, the tourists and the people living in the vacation spot are all supernatural creatures. The goal of the main antagonist is to keep this information a secret. Their motivation is to maintain this place as a safe haven. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

45

A suicidal military veteran tries to exorcise his personal demons by raising one, and the protagonists have to deal with the results.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special background type or a specific set of skills. If they have military experience or knowledge on how to deal with demon it might come in handy.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the raising of the demon. Getting the veteran the help and counseling that he needs are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have handled the summoning situation, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on research. The least difficult challenge will be to identify that who the antagonist is, and escalate in difficulty to include figuring out where they gained knowledge of the occult and sorting out what they plan to summon. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they summon the demon.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get rid of their personal pain. It could be physical or emotional in nature. The antagonist's motivation is their sincerely held belief that the summoned demon will take on that pain in return for being released. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A rapidly aging antagonist preys on teenagers, thinking they hold the secret to curing his ailment.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some knowledge of strange medical disorders. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that does, in order to provide the protagonists with the information they need to achieve the story goal.

Story Goal

The objective is put a stop to the killing of the teenagers. Capturing the antagonist or curing their illness are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on rescue. The least difficult challenge will be narrowing down the possible suspects, and escalate in difficulty to include connecting the teenagers to the antagonist's condition. The final obstacle should be escaping from the antagonist as he tries to steal the protagonists' life forces.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to use mad science to cure their rapid aging. It might be some made-up medical condition, the result of magical immortality wearing off, or a curse that has been placed upon them. Their motivation is to not die and stay forever young. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A protagonist has dreams of an alternate past, and realizes that the present is slowly changing to match it.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have a fairly established and flesh-out past history. This will make the changes to reality more prominent and disconcerting. It can be retconned, but that won't have the same level of impact.

Story Goal

The objective is to stabilize reality and restore it to the familiar status quo. Defeating the antagonist and dealing with the ramifications of the changes are obstacles and not separate goals. Once the protagonists have fixed reality, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on dealing with changes. The least difficult challenge will be supporting characters acting differently, and escalate in difficulty to include discovering the antagonist, getting into the dream world, and keeping current reality from changing even more. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist where reality is snapped back into place.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to transform the world to suit their vision of it. Their motivation is dissatisfaction with the status quo. They are programming people via broadcast dreams to believe that the world works differently, and the more people who believe if the faster the world changes to suit. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A drug-addicted police officer gains the ability to warp reality to match his addled perceptions, and the antagonists have to stop him.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any specific background or special abilities. Knowing the police officer prior to his transformation, and familiar with the mind-expanding drugs that some occultists use within the setting, can be useful.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the cop. This might mean getting him help, removing his powers, or otherwise removing him from the scenario. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, reality snaps back to normal and the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on the violations of physical laws happening around the antagonist. The least difficult challenge will be performing normal tasks in a topsy-turvy reality where things are twisted and gravity is subjective. The challenges will escalate in difficulty to include rescuing innocent people, physical transformations inflicted on the protagonists, and figuring out what the antagonist is trying to do. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they make one final attempt to stop him.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to protect and serve people, but in their altered state of consciousness they see that very differently. Their motivation is to save people from the monsters the antagonist sees all around. The mind-expanding drugs allow other people to see things the way they see them, and give the antagonist the powers to wield the weirdness as a weapon.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. If there is a recurring police officer character, use him. If there are drugs that occultists use to expand their minds, incorporate them and give the cop an overdose.

The protagonists discover that someone in a retirement home is actually a serial killer who mysteriously disappeared 20 years ago.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have knowledge of old serial killings, including the methods and the way victims were selected. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that has the appropriate skills knowledge and is willing to help the protagonists.

Story Goal

The objective is to unmask the killer. Solving old cases and bringing the killer to justice are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on thinking like the killer. The least difficult challenge will be identifying the serial killer from their method of operation. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include determining who the next victim will be and figuring out which of the residents of the retirement how is the killer. The final obstacle should be confronting the antagonist as they try to claim their next victim.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to pay homage to the original serial killer and continue their legacy. The actual antagonist isn't a resident, but a maintenance man working at the facility. Their motivation is based on a deep admiration of the original killer's work, based on far too many hours of research. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

50

A group of high school students make a pact to murder each others' parents, but the protagonists discover there's something more behind it.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a particular type of background. Knowing the students or their parents can make the premise more personal and chilling.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the kids from killing. Defeating the antagonist might accomplish that, but by itself is a secondary consideration. Getting the kids help is also a separate goal. Once the protagonists insure the remaining parents are safe this, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be discovering the first parents murdered, and escalate in difficulty to include learning of the pact and finding out the actual antagonist who gave the teens the idea. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get teenagers to commit murder. Their motivation is to corrupt youth and spread evil and misery. The antagonist is some sort of malevolent trickster who can convince people that bad deeds are good ideas. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

51

The protagonists must escape from a mental institution and the antagonist who put them there.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have done something that makes their commitment plausible. It might be a genuine mental issue, or merely something that corrupt authorities can spin to make them look dangerous and unstable.

Story Goal

The objective is to escape from the institution. Proving that they have been wrongfully imprisoned and defeating the antagonist are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have broken out, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on surviving and escapism. The least difficult challenge will be getting through the abuse of a corrupt institution. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include creating a plan, gathering resources, and avoiding getting caught. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist during the escape.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get the protagonists out of the way. Their motivation might be to get revenge for a past defeat, to keep them from interfering with a larger plan, or to destroy their credibility because they know too much already. This premise will work best with a returning antagonist, but a new foe could be working with an old enemy.

A protagonist must find a way to be with the person they desire, even though their relationship violates the taboos of society.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have a relationship that is outside the norms of the society they live in. That doesn't mean that the relationship has to be creepy; it might be that the social norms are somehow oppressive and bizarre.

Story Goal

The objective is to find a way for the romantic partners to be together. Changing the rules of society and opening the hearts and minds of the oppressive authorities are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have found a way to have a relationship, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on sneaking around and avoiding detection. The least difficult challenge will be finding ways to meet up. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include facing nasty rumors, having the relationship exposed, and violence from people offended by the relationship. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist prior to bringing down the oppressive rules or running away to a safer location.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to enforce their rules. Their motivation is to maintain order and/or power. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists lose their special abilities, and struggle to survive without them against a powerful antagonist.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have special abilities that provide them with a unique advantage. It is these abilities that allow them to do what they do, and the protagonists should have become too dependent upon them. Losing the abilities should have an emotional impact, not just fear for their safety but possibly confusion as to who they are without those powers.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist without the special powers. Regaining the lost abilities is a secondary consideration, although that should happen once the antagonist has been handled. Once the protagonists dealt with the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on creative problem solving. The least difficult challenge will be adjusting to doing things differently. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include investigation, combat, and dealing with emotional distress. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist either prior to or while in the process of regaining the special abilities.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to remove the protagonists as an obstacle to their personal goal. Their motivation is to accomplish that personal goal, but inflicting fear and distress on the protagonists is a nice bonus. This premise will work best with a returning antagonist.

The protagonists must investigate a series of brutal murders that resemble a killing spree that took place 50 years ago.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have research and investigation skills. If they lack those abilities, a supporting character can be inserted to help them.

Story Goal

The objective is to find the killer. Solving past crimes and saving potential victims are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have captured or killed the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation and research. The least difficult challenge will be noticing the resemblance between the past and present killings. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include locating clues, narrowing down suspects, and finding the antagonist's lair. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they are about to claim their next victim.

Antagonists

The killer is a supernatural creature that needs to not just feed but gorge itself every 50 years. It might be the antagonist directly, or it might be under the control and direction of the antagonist. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

The protagonists run afoul of a human trafficking ring that has been smuggling more than just humans.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities or particular type of background. A connection with human trafficking or law enforcement might make this premise more personal, and the emotional impact more profound.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the traffickers. Saving the humans and ending the monsters are secondary considerations that are likely accomplished anyway by meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have dealt with the antagonist and their minions, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on combat. The least difficult challenge will be dealing with the basic thugs working for the traffickers. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include rescuing human victims and battling supernatural monsters. The final obstacle should be saving a group of victims from the main antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to make money by spreading human misery. Their motivation is to increase their power and influence. They are a supernatural being of some sort, and human trafficking is satisfyingly evil to them. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

The protagonists discover the body of a young woman who went missing decades ago on another continent.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special background or skills. Knowledge of famous cold cases is helpful but not necessary. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character who can help.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the antagonist's evil scheme. The body is bait for a trap. Solving the murder and catching the antagonist are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have gotten to safety, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult challenge will be locating the antagonist's lair based on the clue found on the body. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include solving puzzles and surviving death traps. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist just prior to escaping.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to match wits with worthy opponents. Their motivation is a combination of boredom and sadism, with the bottom line being a need to be entertained. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Someone has pulled off a complex heist and stolen all of the bodies from the city morgue, and the protagonists have to solve the crime.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have either law enforcement authority or expertise with criminal operations. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character who can ask for their assistance based on their relevant expertise.

Story Goal

The objective is to catch the robbers. Figuring out why they need the bodies or how they pulled off the heist are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have captured the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be following the obvious clues. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include questioning hostile suspects, getting into fights with underlings, and dealing with the distraught families of the stolen deceased. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the main antagonist and his unholy experiments.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to continue the work of Dr. Frankenstein. This is why they hired a crew to clean out the morgue. Their motivation is to fulfill a contract with a government black ops organization. The dark group needs soldiers who are obedient, can't leak information, and can be easily disavowed. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists are having contradictory memories and have to work out what is real and what has been put into their head.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have established backgrounds and experiences, in order to recognize that some memories have been changed. It can be retconned if necessary, but it's better if the audience can recognize the discrepancies without having to explain them.

Story Goal

The objective is to learn why they are having false memories. Catching the antagonist and stopping their larger plan are secondary considerations that will probably be resolved by completing the story goal. Once the protagonists are able to purge or at least recognize the false memories, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on staying calm and sane. The least difficult challenge will be not acting on obviously false memories. It will be like acting on things that happened in a dream, being mad at people for things they didn't do or following up on events that never happened. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include dealing with relationship issues, avoiding legal problems, and determining when the false memories began. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist in order to have their real memories restored.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to drive the protagonists insane, or at least convince others that they are not mentally stable. Their motivation is to test their techniques before using them on world leaders to destabilize governments.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. A known antagonist will have obvious reasons for using the protagonists as test subjects. A new foe may have chosen them for specific qualities, and their lack of a personal motive will make things even more disorienting.

The protagonists are invited to appear on a television show, which turns out to be an elaborate trap.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have done something worth talking about on television. That is a pretty low bar, but could cover their direct experiences with canonical events or as subject matter experts for some recent event that they weren't involved in.

Story Goal

The objective is to escape from a television-based alternate reality. Stopping the antagonist is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have found a way back to the real world, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on the horrors of television logic. The least difficult challenge will be working out that they're in a world based on TV. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include reenacting famous scenes from television shows, given a dark and deadly twist. The final obstacle should be confronting the antagonist back in the real world after they've escaped.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to make the real world over to be more like television. Their motivation is to make the world a better place, because they find television far more appealing than reality. They've done this using wishes, or a deal with a demon, or some other supernatural means. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

A man awakens after five years in a coma, but he may have brought something else back with him.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some connection to the man in the coma. This can be retconned to give him some role in their back story. It's easy to explain why he hasn't been mentioned before, as he was in a coma for a long time.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat whatever supernatural entity follow the supporting character back from wherever their consciousness was while they were comatose. The well-being of the supporting character and contemplation of life after death are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have beaten the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on fighting a supernatural force. The least difficult challenge will be not hurting the possessed supporting character. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out the entity's goal, fighting cultists who begin following the entity, and determining how the antagonist can be stopped. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist, either to banish it or destroy it.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to establish a new power base in the waking world. Their motivation is to become a deity. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

After being hurt by the antagonist, the protagonists set out on a mission of vengeance.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have lived through something horrific. The antagonist has either evaded justice, or is beyond justice because they're supernatural in nature. The protagonists have to be willing to take things into their own hands, no matter what they entails.

Story Goal

The objective is to get revenge on the antagonist. This might mean getting evidence to have them arrested, capturing them, or killing them. Avoiding the consequences of taking the law into their own hands is a secondary consideration. Once the protagonists have gotten payback for what the antagonist did, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on dealing with trauma. The least difficult challenge will be dealing with the pain and loss the antagonist has caused. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include evading the authorities, tracking down the antagonist, and preventing the antagonist from committing more atrocities. The final obstacle should be the confrontation with the antagonist that provides some sort of emotional closure.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to escape. Their motivation is that they really don't want to be imprisoned or killed. They need to be free to spread fear and death another day. This premise will work best with a returning antagonist, but you can have the deed that pushes the protagonists toward vengeance compressed into the first act of your story.

The protagonists realize that defeating the antagonist will require a significant personal sacrifice.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have something that they care deeply about, in order to make the sacrifice meaningful. This also means that they must have an emotional stake in defeating the antagonist, to be willing to give up something to care about in order to win.

Story Goal

The objective is for the protagonists to make a sacrifice. Any other nominal story goal is a secondary consideration, and will be achieved once the sacrifice is made. The premise only works if the sacrifice automatically achieves the objective. Once the protagonists have given up something meaningful to them, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on the theme of costs and prices to be paid. The least difficult challenge will be managing time conflicts, and supporting characters needing the protagonists' time when they need to be fighting the antagonist. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include issues with relationships, jobs, and other commitments competing for priority against the escalating threats of the antagonist. The final obstacle should include the sacrifice being made, in and around confronting the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to acquire something. It may be the item of sacrifice, but is probably something else. Their motivation is to get something for nothing, or with as little effort or personal sacrifice as possible. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A community divided by partisan politics has to come together to battle a supernatural threat, but one side has a dark secret.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some understanding of a cultural or philosophical divide in the community. They individually support one side or the other, or be neutral in the dispute. Having opinions, though, makes the premise more personal and the events to follow more frightening.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the supernatural threat. Getting the two sides to come together, putting the community above sides, or creating a change of heart are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have stopped the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on cooperation. The least difficult challenge will be keeping the two sides from attacking each other. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include coordinating defenses and counterattacks against the antagonist. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as their true motive becomes clear.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to wipe out the opposition. Their motivation is to make their side the dominant force in the community. They summoned the force in the first place, and have been working to hide that fact. Any cooperation has been positioned to insure their opponents suffer more casualties while making the antagonist look like the hero. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A protagonist inherits a bar from a long-lost relative, with a strange clientele and an excessive amount of secret rooms and passages.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have established family relationships, even if they are strained. The long-lost relative can be reconnected, but it's more interesting if the inheritance becomes a point of contention with relatives already in the canon.

Story Goal

The objective is to recapture the creature that had been trapped beneath the bar. The quirks and needs of the bizarre regular customers are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have contained the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on exploration. The least difficult challenge will be discovering the containment chamber and accidentally releasing the creature. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include getting lost in the tunnels, discovering things in the secret rooms, and learning about the weird people that frequent the bar. The final obstacle should be confronting and containing the creature.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get free after being locked up in the containment chamber for a long, long time. They can't get out of the bar, but they can create havoc throughout the maze of tunnels and chambers throughout and underneath the building. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

The author of a controversial book on religion comes to town, and his fans begin exhibiting bizarre behavior.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some knowledge of the bestselling book and its author. They may have read the book, or just absorbed the hype by osmosis because everyone else is talking about it. If they don't, a supporting character should be able to bring them up to speed.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist and their cult. Exposing their plan to the world and saving lives are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have taken down the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on persuasion. The least difficult challenge will be not getting swept up in the pseudo-religious fervor and resisting the charms of the antagonist. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include arguments with friends, conflicts with protesters who find the antagonist's book blasphemy, and the more aggressive of the antagonist's followers. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to build a loyal cult. Their motivation is personal wealth and power. They have been using local cult members to kill off protesters and others who speak out against the antagonist. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A rich man obsessed with antique jewelry hires the protagonists to acquire a particularly rare and valuable piece.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have the skills or appropriate background to handle this sort of deal. It could be as complex as brokering a meeting and haggling on price on behalf of the client, or just picking it up and transporting it.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist's plan. Destroying the artifacts or taking out the antagonist are secondary considerations, but will likely happen as a result of meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have halted the evil scheme, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on mundane tasks. The least difficult challenge will be acquiring the piece for the antagonist. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include others trying to steal it, learning what the artifact is, and figuring out what the antagonist plans to do with it. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they prepare to use the artifact.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to gain unbridled magical power. Their motivation is to take over the world. The rare and valuable piece of jewelry is an ancient mystical artifact, which is why both good guys and bad guys will be after it.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. The important thing is for the protagonists to not realize that the client is the antagonist until the last possible moment in the story.

After their plane crashes on a private island, the owner makes the survivors fight to the death.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any specific sort of background or skills. Having a reason to be flying over an ocean that ties plausibly into the character's history and career is useful. Any sort of fighting abilities will come in handy as well.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive. Saving other people and taking down the antagonist are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have insured their safety, a rescue team will conveniently arrive and the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action. The least difficult challenge will be running and hiding. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include fighting other survivors, facing death traps, and evading the antagonist's armed and dangerous minions. The final obstacle should be getting to a safe zone, where the antagonist will unexpectedly be waiting to confront them.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to be entertained. The whole island is set up for this sort of battle royal, and the plane crash may have been a fortunate accident or a planned event. Their motivation is sadism tinged with a touch of boredom and privilege.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. A known foe might be some rich person the protagonists have never met, but have heard of. An unknown antagonist will have taken pains to keep his name out of the media precisely so he can get away with this sort of atrocity.

Attendees at a business convention come down with a strange disease, and the protagonists have to stop them from leaving and spreading the illness.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities or a particular type of background. Knowledge of infectious diseases will be helpful, as well any sort of leadership or crowd control experience. A good reason to be attending the convention should be created, based on the types of things the protagonists are into.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive until the quarantine is lifted. Saving lives and finding cures are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have made it to the designated time, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on dealing with fear and anxiety. The least difficult challenge will be remaining calm in a crisis. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include people freaking out, halting attempts at escape, and getting attacked by crazed convention attendees. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist to prevent mass murder shortly before the quarantine lifts.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to test a biological weapon. Their motivation is sell it to evil organizations for a large sum of money. It initially presents as a hemorrhagic fever, leading to the building being locked down until arrangements emergency medical assistance can arrive in force. After a couple of hours, however, the sick people go into a murderous rage and begin trying to kill one another. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

An unseasonable cold snap covers the protagonists' town, but the cause is more nefarious than climate change.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a specific sort of background. Experience working in cold weather will be useful, as will and sort of knowledge about meteorology or demonology.

Story Goal

The objective is to close the portal. Defeating the antagonist and saving the town are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have put an end to the supernatural blizzard, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult challenge will be finding cold weather gear. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include difficulty traveling, keeping the townspeople from panicking and rioting, and fighting off ice demons. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as the protagonists attempt to close the portal.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to destroy the town. Their motivation is equal parts personal vendetta and deranged psychosis. They have opened a portal to a frozen hell, which is spewing forth the unseasonable storm along with icy demons. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

70

The protagonists have to clean up after a recent monster rampage, and discover a piece of information that changes everything.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have survived a monster attack. This could have been in a previous story, or you could begin immediately after the attack and handle it in flashbacks. The protagonists will know all about the monster, its capabilities, and its weaknesses based on the recent attack.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop a recurrence of the monster attack that they only barely survived. Stopping the antagonist and saving the community are secondary considerations, and will probably be accomplished by meeting the story goal anyway. Once the protagonists have halted the next wave of attacks, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action. The least difficult challenge will be stopping opportunistic looters raiding the damaged buildings. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include rescuing trapped people, recognizing the signs of a new attack coming, and realizing that the last monster was not a random occurrence but the result of ritual summoning. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they prepare to launch the next attack.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to unleash more monsters. Their motivation is to destroy the world because they're an insane nihilist. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists learn a secret about the antagonist's past, and the antagonist will kill to protect it.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities. There has to be some plausible reason, likely connected to their background, why they'd discover a dark secret that the protagonist has been keeping. It might be an accident, or an unexpected find while doing research on another topic.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist. Exposing the secret and avoiding getting murdered are secondary considerations, but they'll be achieved by meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have taken care of the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action. The least difficult challenge will be discovering the secret. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include hiding what they know from the antagonist, getting the information to the right people, and avoiding the antagonist's attacks. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist that somehow thematically ties to the secret.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to prevent their secret from coming out. Their motivation is to avoid capture, imprisonment, and having their larger plans ruined.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. If the character is known, they might be a supporting character who have now been bumped up to a villain role. An unknown antagonist could be someone the protagonists never would have noticed, if they hadn't come across the secret.

The antagonist discovers an ancient artifact, and the protagonists have to learn what it does before it can be put to ill use.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some knowledge about powerful magical artifacts. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character with the appropriate skills and knowledge who can be called upon for assistance, or who might be the one who finds it instead and asks the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to prevent the artifact from being used. Stopping the antagonist and saving the lives of innocents are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have dealt with the magical artifact, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on magical research. The least difficult challenge will be identifying what the item is. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include what it does, how and when it could be used, and piecing together the antagonist's plan. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they are about to put the item to ill use.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to use the artifact. Their motivation is to gain some sort of power, either by charging up the item, taking power into themselves, or summoning some nasty supernatural creature that they can control with the artifact. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A protagonist falls in love, but discovers that the new romantic interest isn't entirely human – and neither is her large, extended family.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities. Some background on their romantic life might provide some context for this new relationship, but isn't necessary.

Story Goal

The objective is to resolve the relationship. That might mean accepting that the new romantic interest isn't human, or breaking up with them and moving on, or killing them. Dealing with the family and the logistics of dating a non-human are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have sorted out the relationship status, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on discovery. The least difficult challenge will be figuring out that the new romantic interest is different somehow. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include dealing with their strange family, learning what the love interest actually is, and figuring out all of the ramifications that come with that. The final obstacle should be with the antagonist, while making a final decision about the relationship.

Antagonists

There are three ways to go here. The first is to have the romantic interest be the antagonist, either planning to harm the protagonists all along or turning dangerous once they've been found out.

The second option is to have a separate antagonist who already knows that the love interest is part monster, and has been hunting them with the intention of destroying them. This antagonist will assume the protagonists are bad guys, too.

The final option is to have a member of the romantic partner's family be the antagonist. They will go after the protagonists because they don't approve of the relationship.

74

A local man is found to be responsible for several murders, but his victims might not have been human after all.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a particular type of background. Some connection to either the killer or the victims will be useful for story purposes, and will add some emotional investment to the premise.

Story Goal

The objective is to clear the accused murderer's name. The protagonists have to prove he didn't kill anyone. Finding the actual antagonist and saving future victims are secondary considerations, but will dovetail with the story goal. Once the protagonists have proved his innocence, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be locating the accused. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include examining the victims, locating clues, and determining who did do it. The final obstacle should involve a confrontation with the antagonist that will somehow prove that the accused man is innocent.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill non-human creatures living among us. Their motivation is to save humanity from some imagined invasion. The creatures are benign and have been living disguised as humans for a long time. Framing the accused was an accident, but it allows the antagonist to stay free and keep killing. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

75

The protagonists track a monster to a museum when a bus load of kids show up for a field trip.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have been tracking a monster already. This can be a continuation of an earlier story, or be compressed into the first act. Some knowledge of what the creature is will be necessary as well.

Story Goal

The objective is to capture or kill the monster. Saving the kids and avoiding excess destruction within the museum are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have taken down the creature, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action. The least difficult challenge will be running and hiding within the museum. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include keeping kids out of harm's way, rescuing kid hostages, and getting into fights with the monster. The final obstacle should be a final battle with the monster in the most dramatic possible location within the museum.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to escape from the pursuing protagonists. Their motivation is to be free to kill and eat people at its leisure. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A meat locker full of bodies is discovered, but as the morgue thaws them out to identify them they start moving around.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities or any particular type of background. A plausible reason to be at the location when the meat locker is opened, or cause for someone to call them to the scene, should be tied into the character's existing history.

Story Goal

The objective is to find the antagonist. Stopping the rising bodies and saving innocent lives are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have taken out the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be finding out who put the bodies in the meat locker. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include learning who the bodies are, where the antagonist is hiding, and what their plan is. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist and their army.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to perfect a new cryogenic process. They have been kidnapping people to use as unwilling test subjects. A side effect of the process is that the revived subjects suffer brain damage that makes them violent and disoriented. The antagonist's motivation is to create shock troops that can be stored until needed and then unleashed on an unsuspecting populace, a technology they plan to sell to corrupt governments and terrorist organizations. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

77

The protagonists go on a camping retreat, but a slasher is stalking the campground.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some reason to go on a campaign retreat. It might be a company function, a family reunion, or any similar function with a lot of people in attendance.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the slasher. Saving lives and escaping the camp are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have taken out the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on things found in teenage slasher movies, except this time the victims are adults. The least difficult challenge will be getting around in the dark. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include crafting makeshift weapons, avoiding ambushes, and tracking the slasher. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the slasher prior to the arrival of outside help.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill everyone in the camp. Their motivation is that they are warped by some past trauma and express their feelings through violence. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A private rehab center for celebrities has been programming the patients to be brutal assassins.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or particular type of background. Having a reason to be in or around the rehab center, or to interact with troubled celebrities, should be tied into the protagonists' history somehow. A supporting character can be introduced to ask for the protagonists' help based on their abilities and reputations.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop an assassination. Deprogramming the celebrities and stopping the antagonist are secondary considerations that will likely be resolved automatically if the story goal is met. Once the protagonists have prevented the planned killing, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action. The least difficult challenge will be in figuring out that celebrities have been brainwashed. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out who the target of assassination is, surviving attacks from celebrities sent to stop the protagonists, and learning and where the hit is to take place. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist who has brainwashed the celebrity assassin, as a way to recall the killer.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to assassinate someone important. Their motivation is that they are being paid, and the money will go toward further mad scientist brainwashing research. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists have disturbing dreams of a shared past life, and the events begin repeating in the waking world.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a particular type of background. What they experience in the past life dreams should somehow parallel their history in the present, as should the relationships between the real- and dream-versions of the characters.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist from altering waking reality. Catching the antagonist and setting the world back to normal are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have halted the process of changing the real world, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on the difficulties of dream logic. The least difficult challenge will be figuring out what the basic rules are, based on what has happened in the dreams compared to what is happening in the waking world. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out who the antagonist is, doing battle with surreal dream creatures, and locating the source of the reality-warping power the antagonist is using. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they try to make the changes permanent.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to reshape the world to suit their vision. Their motivation is to rule a world that works exactly the way they desire it to. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

After surviving a car crash during a terrifying storm, the injured protagonists take shelter for the night in an abandoned church.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have a reason to be traveling by car or bus through an unfamiliar area. It could be for personal or professional reasons, perhaps returning home from a previous story.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the night. Defeating the antagonist and getting to their intended destination are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have managed to not get killed by the effects of the storm or the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult challenge will be getting to the church through flying debris, high winds, and downed power lines. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include avoiding the dangerous parts of the crumbling church, tending to the injured, and dealing with the antagonist's attacks. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill the intruders. Their motivation is to keep their activities inside the church a secret. The antagonist is either the leader of a cult possessing some supernatural power, or a supernatural being that is venerated by the cult. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The antagonist makes a bet with the protagonists, with the lives of the supporting characters as the stakes.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonist to have an established cast of supporting character that they are emotionally invested in. If they don't, key types of characters (a lover, a mother, a child) can be retconned in, but it won't have the same impact as a character already in your canon.

Story Goal

The objective is to beat the antagonist. Saving the supporting cast is a secondary objective that will be achieved by meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have won the bet, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on a specific sort of competition. It should be something that the protagonists are at least minimally competent at. The least difficult challenge will be things the protagonists are established to be good at, and escalate in difficulty to include things outside their comfort zone and skill set. The final obstacle should be a head-to-head competition with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to humiliate and demoralize the protagonists. Their motivation is a sadistic need to win. This premise will work best with a returning antagonist who knows the protagonists well and has some preexisting grudge against them.

The protagonists thinks they are doing a good deed, but it unexpectedly benefits an evil antagonist.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities or a specific type of background. They do need to have good intentions, and perhaps a bit of misplaced trust or naivete that allows them to be manipulated and taken advantage of.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist. Saving their reputation and making amends for accidentally aiding and abetting a bad thing are secondary considerations that will likely be resolved by meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished made the antagonist accountable for their misdeeds, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on unintended consequences. The least difficult challenge will be in apologizing for the accidental problems caused the protagonists' actions. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include being aware of how even good deeds can have negative impacts, and dealing with the guilt and horror of hurting people when the protagonists were only trying to help. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as the protagonists try to correct the largest mistake they've made before it does widespread, irreparable harm.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to get the protagonists to do terrible things. Their motivation is to discredit and demoralize the protagonists, which should decrease hope and increase fear and despair within the community. This premise will work best with a returning antagonist who has suffered defeat at the hands of the protagonists before.

The antagonist has been stealing donated organs, and the protagonists have to stop them to save the transplant recipients.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some connection to a hospital, a doctor, an organ donor, or a transplant recipient. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character that has the appropriate background and can ask the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to recover the organ in time. Catching the protagonist and figuring out why the antagonist wants the organs are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have gotten the donated organs to the intended recipients, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on pursuit. The least difficult challenge will be in locating the antagonist. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include difficult chases, vehicle races, and saving the organs from accidental destruction. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist in his secret laboratory.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to resurrect a loved one who died from organ failure using healthy organs. Their motivation is to bring back the person they care about. It's mad science and Frankenstein stuff all the way down. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A horror movie fanatic turns to the protagonists for help when scenes from his favorite films begin happening to the people around him.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have and special skills or a particular type of background. Knowledge of horror movies can help, because it increases the impact of the premise if everyone gets the references; a protagonist can be the horror movie fan, rather than a supporting character. A reason for the fan to turn to the protagonists to help, based on their history and background, will also make the story more plausible.

Story Goal

The objective is to catch the antagonist. Saving people and validating the horror fan's pet theories are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have stopped the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on reenacting scenes from horror movies. The least difficult challenge will be catching the obvious references to avoid the dangers they present. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include fighting monsters, avoiding death traps, and saving innocent people from slaughter. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the main antagonist as they try to kill the horror movie fan.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to reenact horror movie scenes in real life, complete with grisly murders. Their motivation is to prove to the horror movie fan that they know more about the genre. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists awaken in the back of a moving semi-trailer and have to figure out why they're there and how to escape.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any sort of special skills or a particular type of background. For this premise the protagonists don't even need to know each other.

Story Goal

The objective is to get out of the trailer. Defeating the antagonist or figuring out all of the details of what's happening are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have gotten out of the trailer, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on escape. The least difficult challenge will be figuring out that they're in a moving trailer, separated from the truck. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include finding a light source, looking for clues and useful items, and piecing together random foggy memories of their abductions. The final obstacle should be getting free from the vehicle.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is unknown, which is what should make this scary. Their motivation is equally mysterious. They kidnapped random people and put them in the trailer, taking them far from their home town. This premise will work best with a completely unknown antagonist, who in this premise may never be seen.

The protagonists get trapped within a military-enforced quarantine zone, but it's not a disease that they're trying to contain.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a particular type of background. They simply need to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Any sort of combat abilities will be useful.

Story Goal

The objective is to get out of the quarantine zone. Revealing the truth to the world or defeating the antagonist are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have gotten away, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult challenge will be finding somewhere to shelter in place. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include not getting caught in the crossfire, not getting trampled by panicked crowds, and figuring out what is actually going on. The final obstacle should be a massive combat scene as the protagonists find a way out.

Antagonists

There are two main groups of antagonists in this premise. The first are alien invaders trying to conquer the area, and they're killing people with reckless abandon. The other is the military, who are not only trying to defeat the aliens but attempting to keep the world from learning what's really going on.

Children have been disappearing, and the protagonists discover a dark version of a storybook wonderland has been claiming them.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some familiarity with books and movies where children travel to a magical fantasy world, usually via bad weather or old furniture.

Story Goal

The objective is to rescue the kids. Defeating the villain and exploring the fantasy world are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have brought the children back to the real world, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on search and rescue. The least difficult challenge will be finding the children. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include fighting animated objects, talking animals, and evil witches. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as the protagonists take the kids and escape.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to keep the children in the fantasy realm. Their motivation is to somehow use the kids to secure their power base. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

An abusive antagonist learns that he doesn't have long to live, and plots to take the protagonists out with him.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have a bully in their lives. It might be an antagonist or just a rude, cruel, and willfully ignorant supporting character. If they do not, be sure to include a supporting character who has this sort of person in their life who can ask the protagonists for help.

Story Goal

The objective is to survive the antagonist's plan. Taking down the antagonist or stopping the plan are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have lived through whatever sort of attack the antagonist is trying to pull off, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival. The least difficult challenge will be learning that the antagonist is planning to kill a lot of people. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include discovering that the antagonist is dying, figuring out how to get to safety, and diffusing whatever situation the antagonist has set up. The final obstacle should be confronting the antagonist as they implement this murderous plan.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill all of the people they don't like. Their motivation is final revenge before they die. This premise will work best with a returning antagonist who has an established relationship with the protagonists.

Everyone wants the recipes that a popular new restaurant is using, but the protagonists may have found the answer too late.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any particular type of background or special skills. They should find themselves with an opportunity to dine at the hot spot restaurant, on the night that things go horribly wrong.

Story Goal

The objective is to defeat the antagonist. Finding out what's in the recipes and surviving the situation are secondary considerations that will be resolved when the story goal has been met. Once the protagonists have taken down the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on combat. The least difficult challenge will be noticing that the diners are acting funny while the protagonists wait for their own food. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include fighting the kitchen staff, the other patrons, and the occupant of the storage room. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to keep their secret at any cost. Their motivation is to maintain their reputation and save their restaurant. They have been using supernatural creatures in their ingredients, which are delicious but ultimately disgusting, and eventually cause the people who eat them to go mad. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Users of an exclusive dating app begin turning into suicide bombers, and the protagonists have to stop the killings.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonist to have any special type of background or specific sorts of skills. They should know a supporting character who has been using the dating app and begins acting strangely.

Story Goal

The objective of the premise is to defeat the antagonist. Shutting down the app and stopping attacks are secondary considerations that will be resolved automatically by meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have accomplished this, your story is over.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will involve investigation. The lowest level will be figuring out what the mind-controlled supporting character is doing, and escalate in difficulty to connecting other attacks to the app and finding the antagonist's location. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist before they can launch the next attack.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to use mind-controlled bombers to inflict terror. Their motivation is a political ideology that they want to advance. They created the app to make money to support their cause, then realize that they could use mind control and increase the size of their terrorist force. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

An unknown, invasive plant has started popping up all over town, and the more people try to dig it out the more aggressively it spreads.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a particular type of background. Some knowledge of botany is helpful, but a supporting character can be introduced to cover those skills.

Story Goal

The objective is to find and destroy the main antagonist, a sentient root plant. Saving people and property are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have taken out the antagonist, the other plants will begin to die and the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be figuring out what does and doesn't harm the invasive plant. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include buildings and vehicles being completely covered and inaccessible. The final obstacle should be finding where the growth began and battling the antagonist.

Antagonists

The antagonist is a sentient plant creature from outer space. The goal of the antagonist is to cover the Earth, supplanting all other life forms. Their motivation is nothing more than biological imperative. This premise will work best with a brand new antagonist.

A protagonist has an opportunity to get out of a bad life situation, but it may mean joining the antagonist on the dark side.

Protagonists

This premise requires at least one of the protagonists to have established back stories that keep them in oppressive, unproductive, or less than fulfilling circumstances. The opportunity to rise out of the situation should have an emotional impact.

Story Goal

The objective is to overcome temptation. Defeating the antagonist and rising above the bad situation are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have rejected the antagonist's deal, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on emotional, moral, and ethical conflicts. The least difficult challenge will be identifying who the actual antagonist is. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include resisting the temptations of easy answers, getting help for loved ones, and gaining success because of the terrible things the protagonists would have to do to get those rewards. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist, who will not be happy that their offer is rejected.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to corrupt one or more of the protagonists, getting them to compromise their values and do something horrible in return for a substantial reward. Their motivation is to spread their own evil values. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

A protagonist develops the ability to see the future, and must decide whether or not to use it for personal gain.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special abilities at the start of the story. A background where family members have prophetic abilities, or some established reason for people to gain these powers, will help to tie this premise more closely to your canon.

Story Goal

The objective is to prevent a gruesome tragedy. Stopping the antagonist and saving peoples' lives are secondary considerations that will likely be handled by meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists have averted the coming disaster, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on interpreting visions. The least difficult challenge will be understanding that something bad is going to occur. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out when and where it will happen, who is involved, and what steps can be taken to avert it. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they implement their deadly plan.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to generate mass destruction and loss of life. Their motivation isn't essential here, and not understanding why they're going to do this hideous thing can add to the suspense. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists receive a letter from a dead man dated 20 years ago, begging them to stop a murder they claim will take place tomorrow.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or a specific type of background. If they're not logical reason why someone would send them this sort of message (i.e. they're members of law enforcement) that can serve to make it even more creepy.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the murder. Figuring out the origin of the letter and capturing the antagonist are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have saved the intended victim, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be figuring out who the intended victim is. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include determining the location of the murder, racing against to to be in the right place, and overcoming traps set by the killer. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the killer as they attempt to murder the victim.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to murder someone. Their motivation can be anything, but what you decide upon should influence the obstacles in the investigation. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

A therapist turns serial killer and begins stalking former patients, convinced that they are all serial killers.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or abilities. There should be a connection in their back stories to either the therapist or the former patients, possibly one of the antagonist's first victims.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist. Whether their claims are true or not, and saving innocent lives, are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have accomplished captured or killed the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action and investigation. The least difficult challenge will be figuring out the connection between the victims. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include avoiding death traps, uncovering the antagonist's motive, and preventing additional murders. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they move in for their next kill.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to stop other serial killers. Their motivation is to bring justice to people they feel have avoided it. Whether or not the victims are serial killers, or the therapist is completely delusional and unhinged, is up to you and might be left ambiguous to create some additional chills. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Four brothers come from another country to visit the protagonists, whom they are convinced have murdered their parents.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or abilities. It's best if the protagonists have never been to the country that the antagonists come from, to add to the confusion and make the initial attacks seem random.

Story Goal

The objective is to catch the real antagonist. Convincing the brothers of their innocence is a secondary consideration that will be resolved when the story goal is met. Once the protagonists have found the truth and stopped the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on action and investigation. The least difficult challenge will be discovering why the brothers are trying to kill them. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include surviving more elaborate attempts, finding a safe place to regroup, and figuring out who has given them false information. The final obstacle should include a confrontation with the brothers and the real antagonist.

Antagonists

At the start of the story, it will seem that the brothers are the antagonists. They are victims of deception. The goal of the real antagonist is to frame the protagonists for a brutal killing. Their motivation is to evade the wrath of the brothers.

This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist. An established antagonist will have a reason to set up the protagonists, possibly because of past encounters. A new foe might have selected them for a reason, based on resemblance to other people who are credible suspects in the parental killing, possibly as a matter of convenience.

At a local university, a young student appears to be preying on older professors.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any sort of special skills or abilities. A connection to the university, possibly to the antagonist or the victims, will be helpful to tie the premise to the established canon.

Story Goal

The objective is to unmask the antagonist. Stopping the murders and capturing the antagonist are secondary considerations that will likely be resolved from meeting the story goal. Once the protagonists are able to prove who the killer is, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be finding the link between the killings. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include figuring out that the obvious suspect isn't the real murderer, surviving attempts to halt the investigation, and piecing together the identity of the real antagonist. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as they attempt to eliminate the original suspect.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to kill a specific list of professors on campus. Their motivation is to get revenge on people they feel have harmed their own academic career. The antagonist is a former peer of the victims, long since discredited and shamed out of academia for their bizarre theories. They have framed a struggling student who has had classes with all of the professors and therefore has motive. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

Members of the wealthiest family in town are murdered one by one, and the protagonists become convinced the killer is a vengeful ghost.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or abilities. They should have some knowledge of the wealthy family and their history. If they do not, a supporting character can be inserted to fill in the gaps. Some experience with the occult will also come in handy.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the murders. Catching the antagonist and saving lives are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have done what's required to end the killing, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be learning the history of the family and the house. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include dealing with hostile spirits, sorting through human suspects, and surviving attempts to halt the investigation. The final obstacle should be a confrontation with the antagonist as the house burns down or is otherwise destroyed.

Antagonists

The antagonist is a lesser heir to the family fortune. Their goal is to kill off everyone who might inherit before them. Their motivation is that they feel they are the only one truly worthy, because only they have inherited the ability to command supernatural entities the way their ancestors did. Controlling spirits to eliminate enemies and business rivals is how the family got rich in the first place, so the lack of occultism in the current relatives is seen as a betrayal. This premise will work with either an unfamiliar or returning antagonist.

The protagonists walk out the door and into the past, reliving the town's biggest tragedy.

Protagonists

This premise requires the protagonists to have some knowledge of the town's history, especially the biggest event to ever strike there. Information about the time period is also useful. If they do not, a supporting character can be inserted to fill in the gaps. No other special skills or abilities are necessary.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the disaster and save the town. Figuring out how they got sent into the past and getting back to their own time are secondary considerations that will be resolved once the story goal is met. Once the protagonists have averted the tragedy, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on investigation. The least difficult challenge will be blending into the past time period. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include piecing together how the disaster will occur, figuring out who is behind it, and not being discovered as time travelers. The final obstacle should be preventing the tragedy from happening.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to rain down death and destruction on the town. Their motivation is unknown, both in the past and present. In the present day, they aren't even seen as the antagonist, because the tragedy was attributed to a completely different cause. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.

00

After an apparent terrorist attack, the protagonists have to survive while they figure out what happened.

Protagonists

This premise does not require the protagonists to have any special skills or knowledge. It actually works best if they do not have any sort of first responder-type background, as it will increase the uncertainty and horror of the attack.

Story Goal

The objective is to stop the antagonist before they can strike again. Saving lives and keeping people calm are secondary considerations. Once the protagonists have dealt with the antagonist, the story comes to an end.

Obstacles

For this premise, obstacles will center on survival and investigation. The least difficult challenge will be figuring out that who or what carried out this attack is still at large. Challenges will escalate in difficulty to include lack of communications, dealing with panicked people, moving through dangerous areas filled with debris, downed power lines, and open gas lines, and tracking the antagonist. The final obstacle should be a battle with the antagonist as they prepare for their next attack.

Antagonists

The goal of the antagonist is to generate fear and panic. Their motivation is that they feed on it, which makes them stronger so they can move on to generate even more fear and panic in their next attack. This premise will work best with an unfamiliar antagonist.



DANCINGLIGHTSPRESS.COM

GENRE STRUCTURE

HORROR

FOR WRITERS AND ROLEPLAYERS

Download your copy of Genre Structure: Horror now!

A genre is a category of art or entertainment determined by stylistic criteria. It began in ancient Greece with the intention of having a concrete, absolute classification system for literature, poetry, and plays. Over time the term has come to be applied, with separate contexts, to fiction, film, television, music, and virtually every other creative endeavor known to man.

It's also become a lot less rigid and far more subjective than the Greeks probably ever imagined. What's considered a convention for a specific genre today might be an element that didn't exist within that category in the past, and might be less relevant or even missing from the genre in the future? Some genres fade away, while new ones are created, based on what rises up in the zeitgeist and what falls from the popular consciousness. A work can also fit into more than one genre, making the whole system even more confusing.

Genre has its purposes, though. It's a shorthand form of communication that allows you to present the general idea of a specific work. It's a broad bucket of tastes and ideas. If you say something is within the horror genre, you know whether or not you tend to like that category of things or not. You know what sorts of elements are possible, and what may or may not be present. It doesn't mean you will or won't like it, or that specific elements will be there or not. It means that you are familiar with the concepts common to works within that genre, and those concepts resonate with you enough to influence your choices.

The horror genre encompasses stories that evoke suspense, dread, and fear. There is usually an element of violence, and often unexplained and unexplainable elements as well. Characters are placed off-balance as they learn that things exist that should not. Aspects of the world, or at least some people in it, are not what they have been led to believe.

The purpose of this book is to help you to develop and tell horror stories more effectively. Whether you're running a tabletop roleplaying game, writing a novel or short story, or crafting a screenplay or game, the information presented here can help you with your creative work. Enjoy it, make use of it, and have fun creating your own tales of terror with it!