

Your Brain on *Story*

A Summary of Recent Research

by

Kendall Haven

Story Consultant/Author/Master Storyteller

www.KendallHaven.com

Kendall@KendallHaven.com

Your Brain on Story

*The Mechanisms of Story
Engagement, Participation, and Influence*

by

Kendall Haven

Story Consultant/Author/Master Storyteller

www.KendallHaven.com

Kendall@KendallHaven.com

Engagement: *Emotionally laden attention*

Engagement requires emotional involvement

Attention: *Dedicated mental focus over time*

Stories engage and hold attention

Transportation: *Voluntary vicarious and experiential insertion of self into the settings, events, and characters of a story.*

Relevance: *Implying close relationship or importance. “What does this story mean to me?”*

Engagement is the essential *gateway* to *influence*.

Influence: *Changing attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge, and behavior*

Influence = ultimate goal of your communications

Engagement doesn't guarantee *influence*. It makes it *possible*.

For over 150,000 years
story and **storytelling**
have dominated
human interaction and communication

150,000 years of storytelling dominance

to **communicate** and to **archive**
learning, wisdom, fact, knowledge,
values, beliefs, history, etc.

has **evolutionarily rewired** the human
brain to think in specific story terms.

The human brain is predisposed to think in **story terms**.

- To Understand
- To Make Sense
- To Remember

You turn incoming information into

story

before it reaches your conscious mind

with your **neural story net**

Your **Neural Story Net:**

A fixed, connected set of subconscious brain sub-regions that create and process specific story concepts and informational elements

The **MAKE-SENSE** Mandate

- If the brain can't **MAKE SENSE**, it won't pay **attention**
- Your brain has assigned the **MAKE-SENSE** Mandate to the **Neural Story Net**

The Research:

In order to make it **make sense**,

Listeners routinely:

- **change (even reverse) factual information,**
- **make assumptions,**
- **create new information,**
- **ignore parts of your presentation,**
- **infer connections and information**
- **infer motive, intent, significance**
- **misinterpret**

The Neural Story Net

- Lies **between** external world and internal mind
- **Distorts** incoming information in order to make it **make sense**
- The story they see & hear ***IS NOT*** the story you said

****** Applying **effective story structure**
to your information
minimizes that distortion

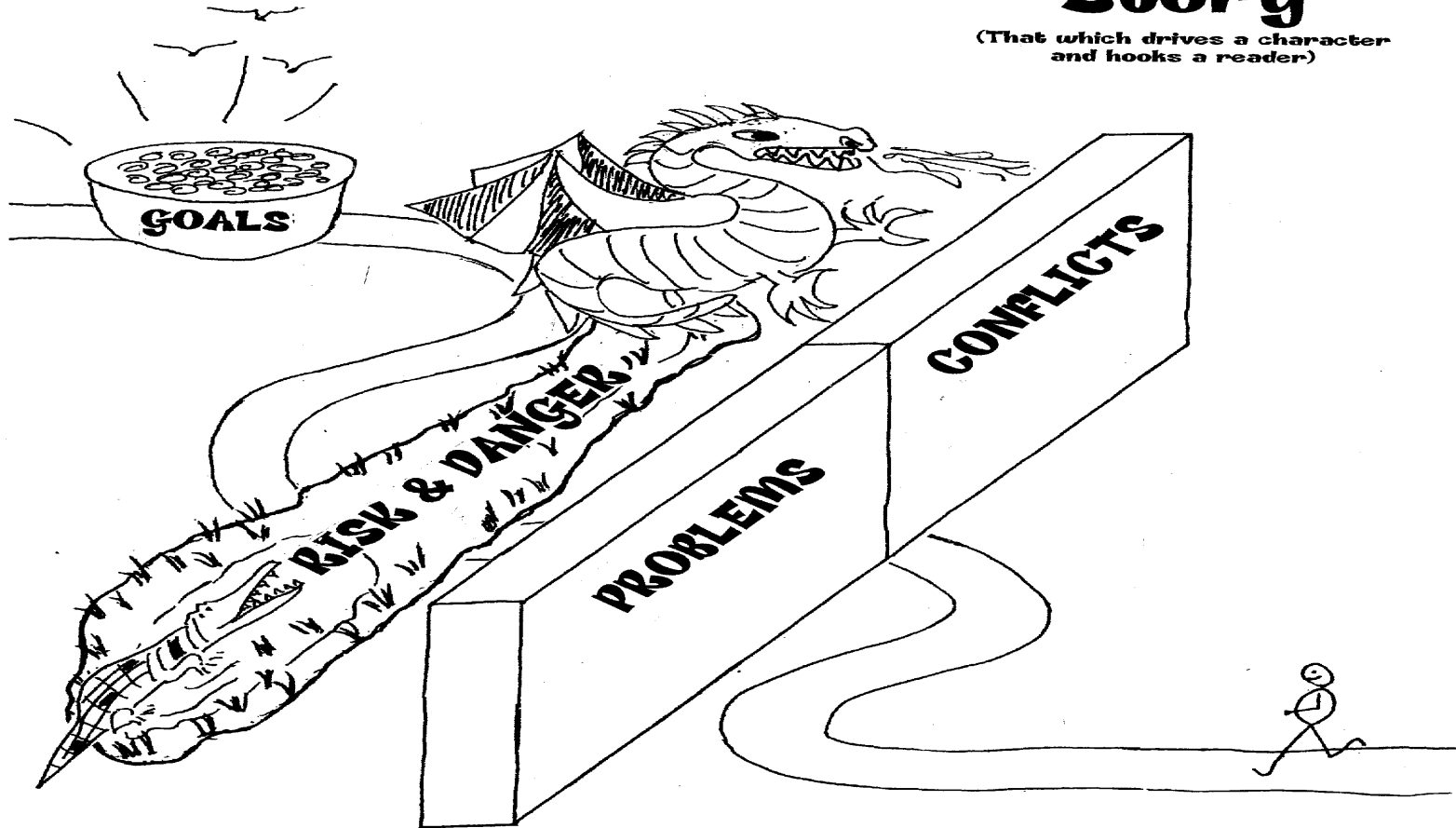
Your
Story Mind
in... *Action!*

Person #1: “Where’s John?”

Person #2: “Well....I didn’t want to say anything. But...I saw a green VW parked in front of Carol’s.”

The Core of a Story

(That which drives a character
and hooks a reader)



The *Eight Essential Elements* of the Story Structure

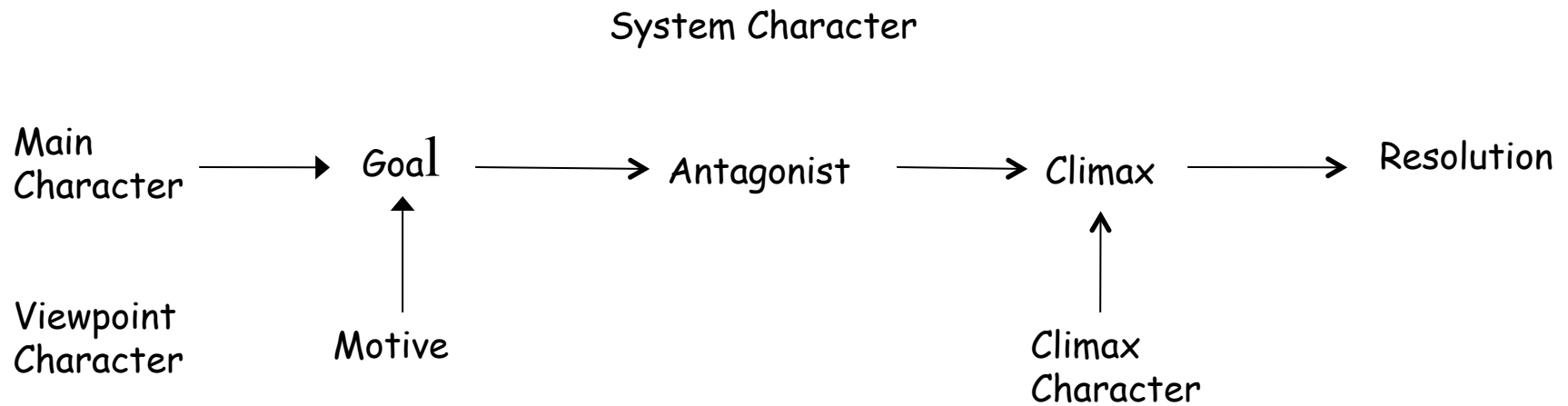
1. **Characters:** The characters that populate essential character positions in the story.
2. **Traits:** Selected elements of character description used to control receiver attitude toward story characters.
3. **Goal:** What a character needs/wants to do/get in a story.
4. **Motives:** The drivers that make a goal important to a character.
5. **Conflicts & Problems:** The sets of obstacles that stand between a character and an established goal.
6. **Risk & Danger:** The likelihood of failure (risk) and the consequences of failure (danger).
7. **Struggles:** The sequence of events a character undertakes to reach a goal highlighted by the climax scene (confrontation with the last & greatest obstacle) and the resolution scene.
8. **Details:** The character, sensory, scenic, and event specific descriptors used to create, direct, and control receivers' story imagery.

The **essential elements** of story structure:

- Control ***engagement***
- Feed essential information to the ***NSN***
- Control the ***Make Sense Mandate***
- Create ***emotional involvement***

Story *Influence*

The Main Story Line

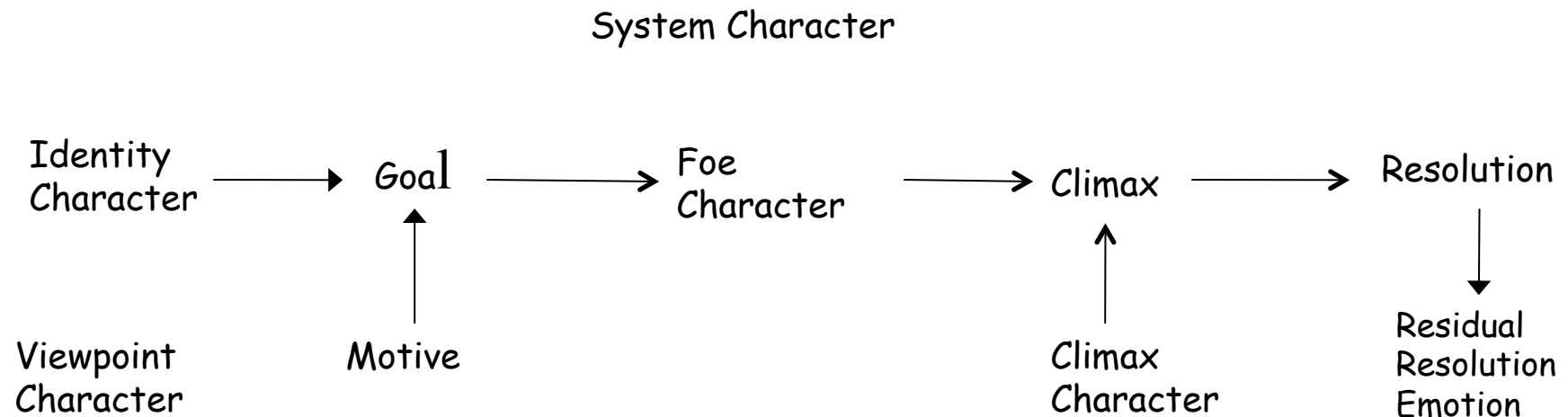


- **3 Characters** (+ 2 supporting characters)
- **2 Events**
- **2 Concepts**

Four key questions define a story's **Influence Potential**

1. Who is this story really about *for me*?
2. How *bad* is the ending of this story for that character?
3. Who can I *blame* for it?
4. Who has the *power to change* the ending if it was bad?
(or who gets the credit if it was good?)

The Story Influence Line



- **3 Key Characters** (+ 2 Supporting Characters)
- **2 Events**
- **2 Concepts**
- **1 Lingering Emotion**

$$IP = RRE (D_i - D_f)$$

Where:

IP = Influence Potential (-60 to +60)

RRE = Audience's Residual Resolution Emotion
(-4 to +4)

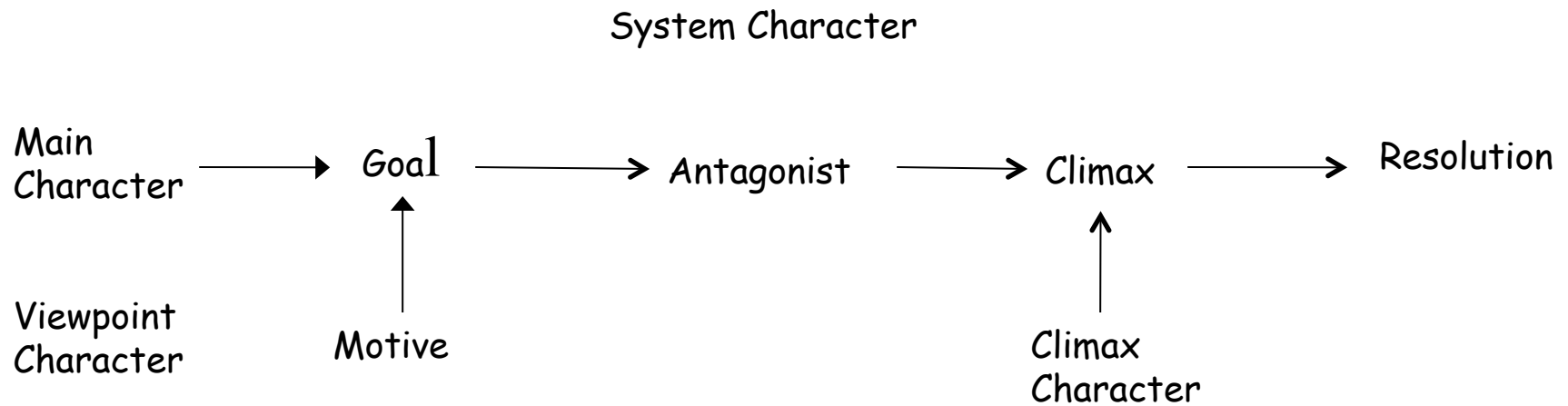
D_i = Score for the Identity Character
(0 to +5)

D_f = Score for the Foe Character
(0 to -10)

The elements of the **Influence Model**:

- Create *relevance*
- Complete *transportation*
- Create *identification*
- Create *meaning*

The Main Story Line



- **3 Characters** (+ 2 supporting characters)
- **2 Events**
- **2 Concepts**