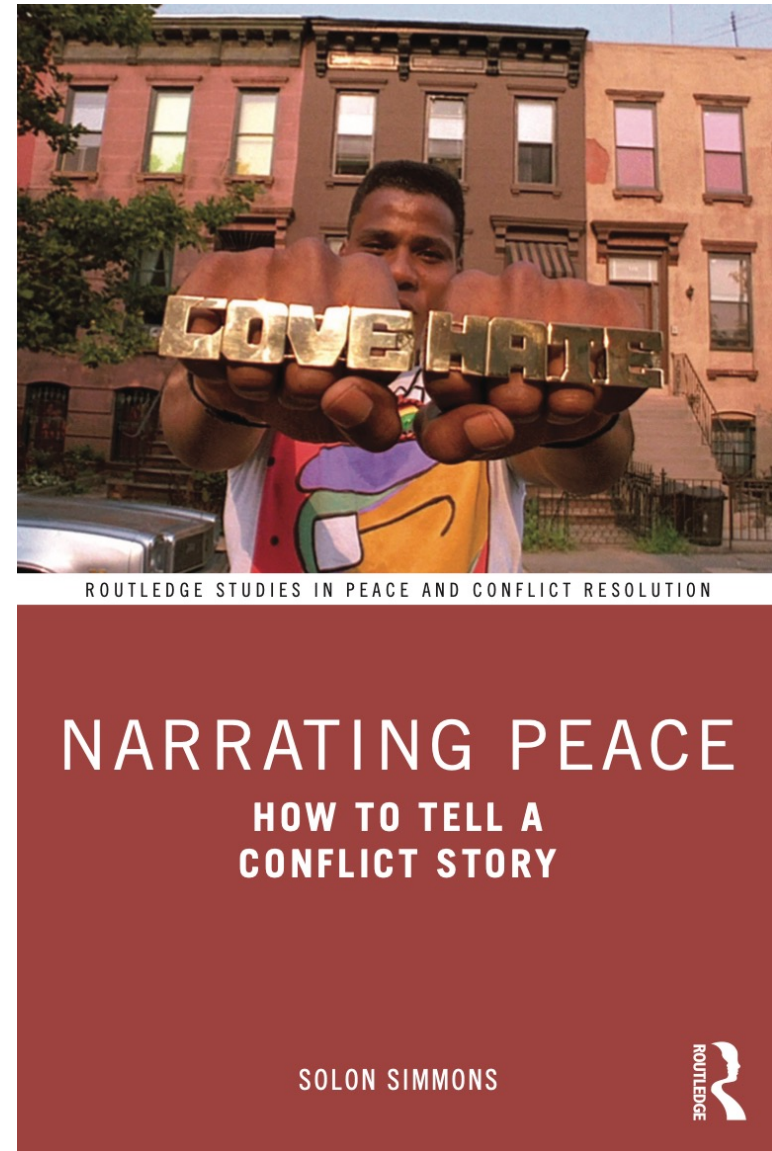


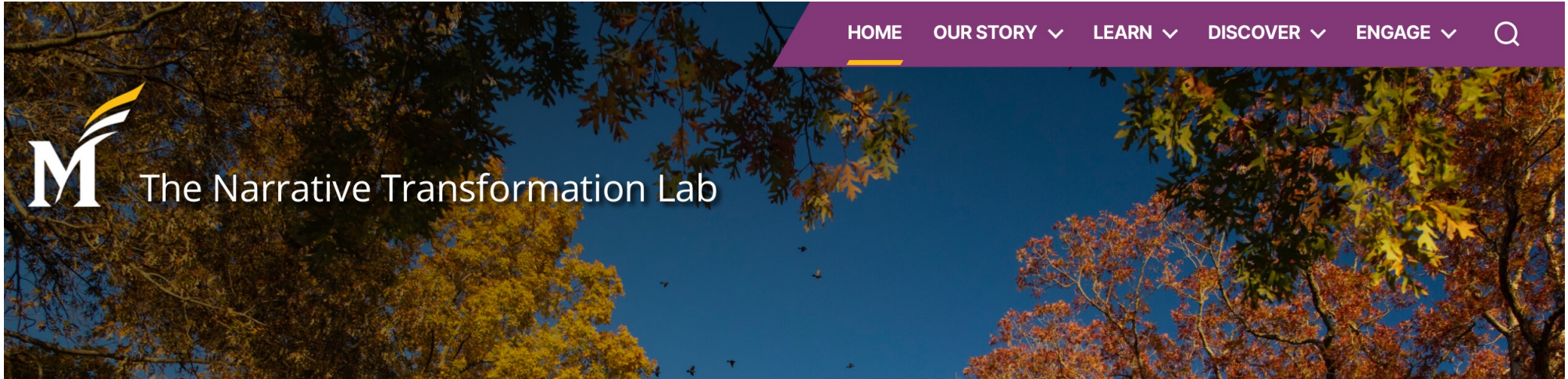
How to Tell a Conflict Story:

The Conflict Management
Academy

20 February, 2025

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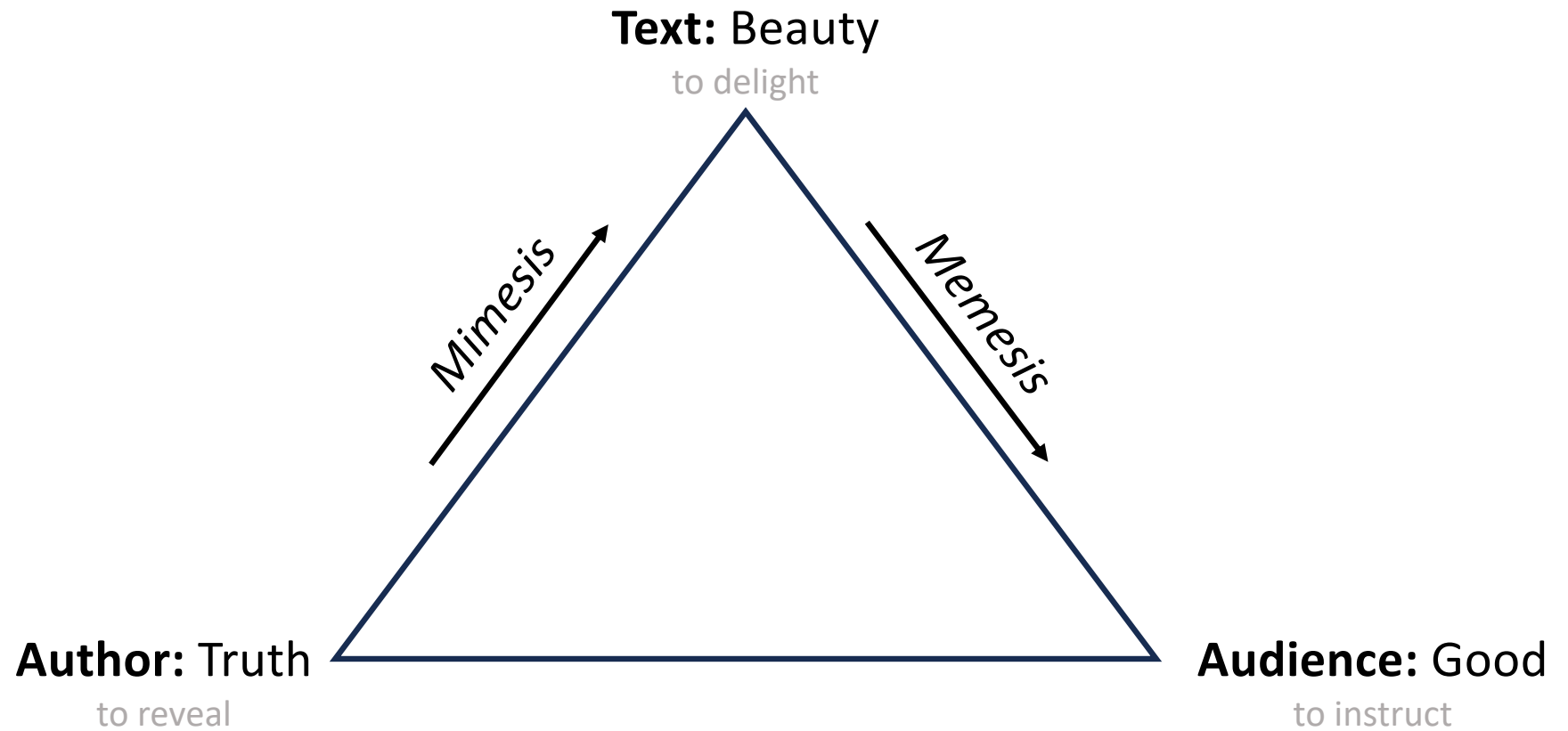
Tell your story, change the world.

<https://tntlab.carterschool.gmu.edu>

Narrative Design Tools

Lessons from Story Grammar

Origins of Meaning: Prodesse et Delectare



Adapted from M.H. Abrams (1953) and Dawkins (1976)

The Frye-White Hypothesis



Northrop Frye



Hayden White

Our moral judgment about any objective situation is an outcome of an implicit story that naturally falls into some combination of four basic plot types: satirical, romantic, tragic, or comic.

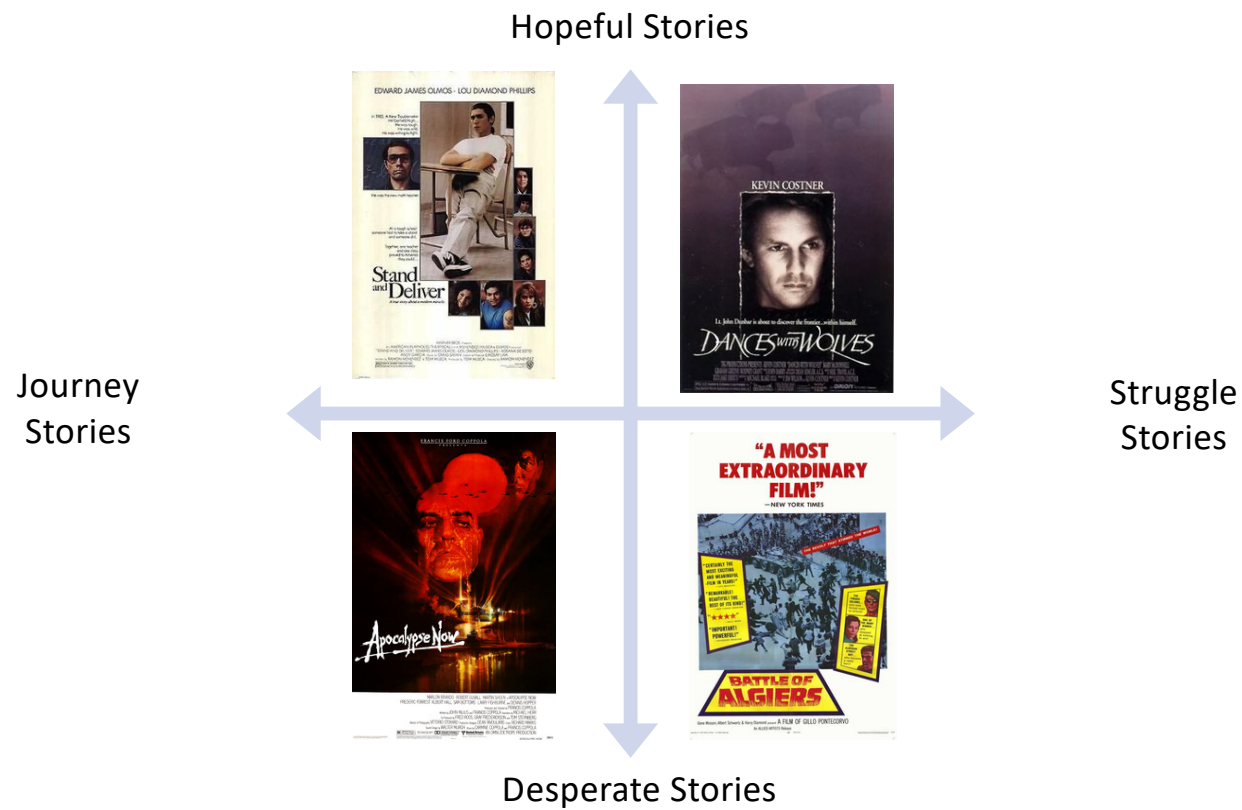
Post-Plot Pressure!

	Problem Must be Solved	Power Must be Overcome
Plight Resolved	COMIC JOURNEY <i>The Disruptive Problem is solved; we build on that solution</i>	ROMANTIC STRUGGLE <i>The Dangerous Enemy is defeated; we consolidate our victory</i>
Plight Unresolved	TRAGIC JOURNEY <i>The Disruptive Problem is not solved; we need to grow</i>	SATIRICAL STRUGGLE <i>The Dangerous Enemy is not defeated; we plan our attack</i>

The Four Plots: The Novels



The Four Plots: The Films



The Cobb-Hardy Pivot



Sara Cobb

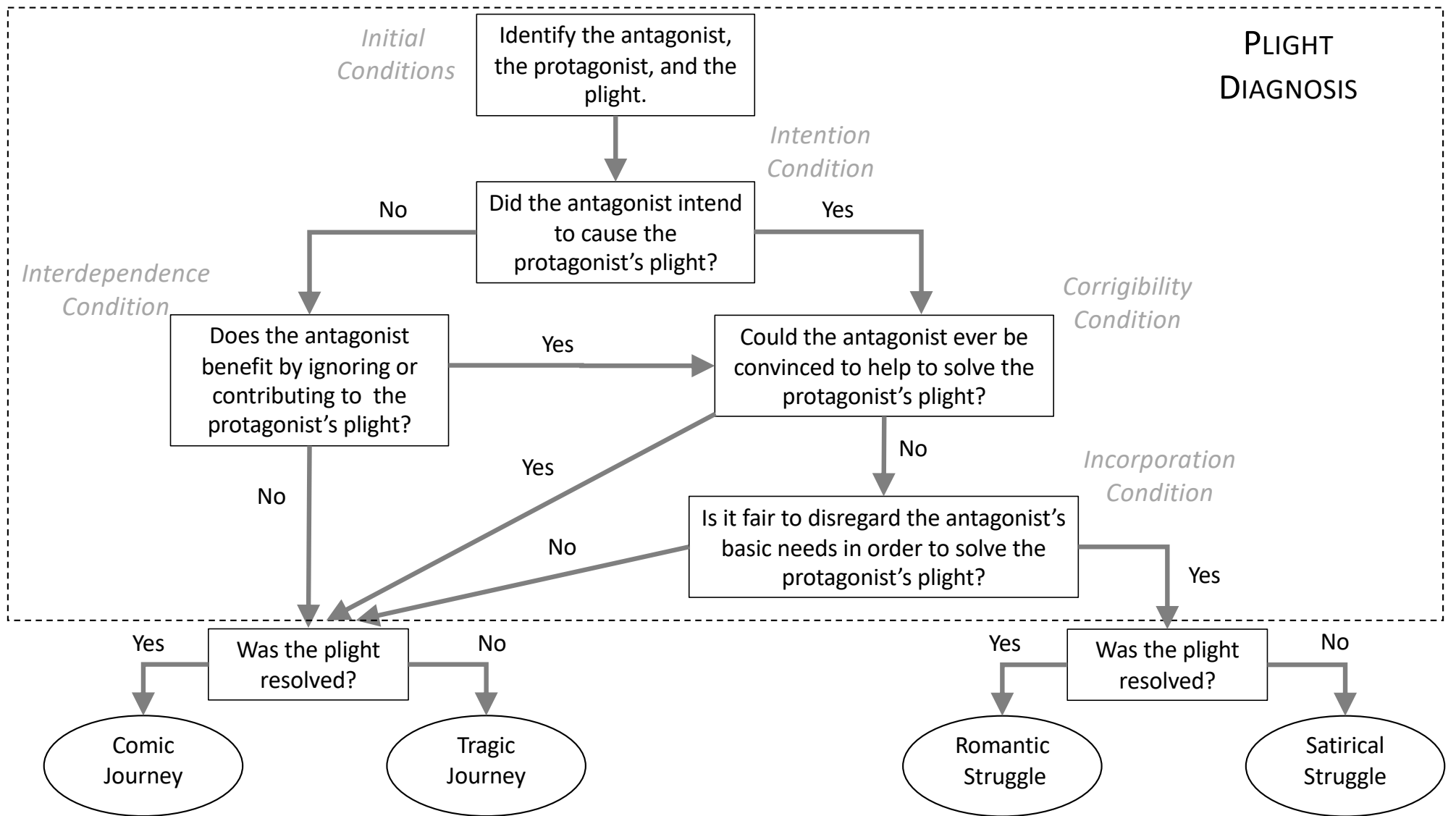


Samantha Hardy

Mutual use of the tragic plotline creates a space in which both sides of an escalated conflict can calmly consider new strategies and positions

The Incident

Focus on the Antagonist

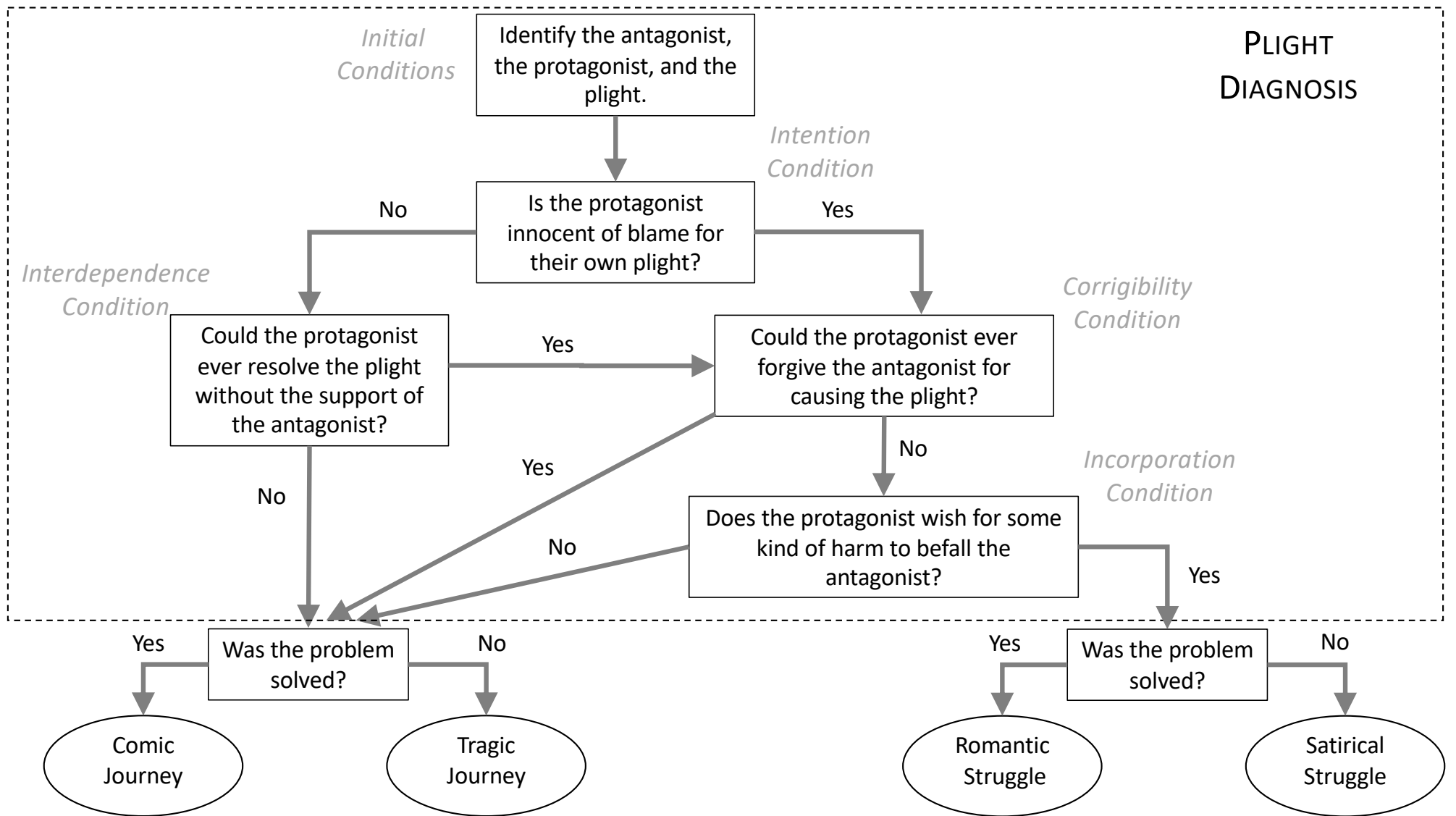


Symbol Development: Antagonist Focus (Them)

Dramatic Element	Collaborative Journey Stories Problematizing Techniques	Adversarial Struggle Stories Politicizing Techniques
Act (Events Depicted in the Story)	Is their participation in events in admirable and attractive?	Is their participation in events in contemptible and ugly?
Agent (Types of Character)	Do they perform roles in predictable, likeable, and familiar ways?	Do they perform roles in surprising, disagreeable, and unfamiliar ways?
Agency (Ways of doing things)	Do they use acceptable and reasonable tactics/technologies?	Do they use unacceptable or shocking tactics/technologies?
Scene (Context and environment)	Is their context is familiar, productive, mundane, and comforting?	Is their context is strange, unhealthy, foreign, and threatening?
Purpose (Character State of Mind)	Are they are motivated by the full range of normal human concerns?	Are they are motivated only by power, money, thrill, and domination?

The Character Arc

Focus on the Protagonist



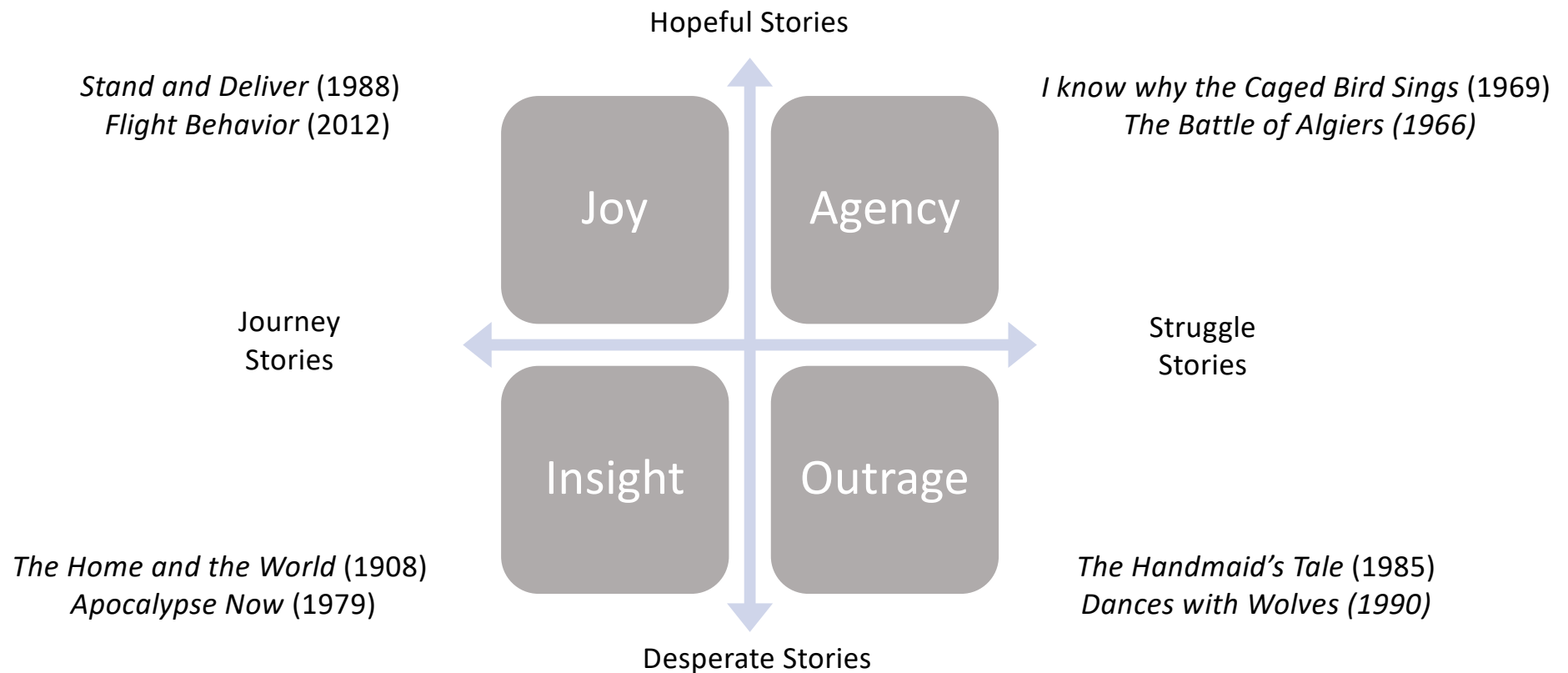
Symbol Development: Protagonist Focus (Us)

Dramatic Element	Collaborative Journey Stories Problematizing Techniques	Adversarial Struggle Stories Politicizing Techniques
Act (Events Depicted in the Story)	Is our participation in events in contemptible and ugly?	Is our participation in events in admirable and attractive?
Agent (Types of Character)	Do we perform roles in surprising, disagreeable, and unfamiliar ways?	Do we perform roles in predictable, likeable, and familiar ways?
Agency (Ways of doing things)	Do we use unacceptable or shocking tactics/technologies?	Do we use acceptable and reasonable tactics/technologies?
Scene (Context and environment)	Is our context is strange, unhealthy, foreign, and threatening?	Is our context is familiar, productive, mundane, and comforting?
Purpose (Character State of Mind)	Are we are motivated only by power, money, thrill, and domination?	Are we are motivated by the full range of normal human concerns?

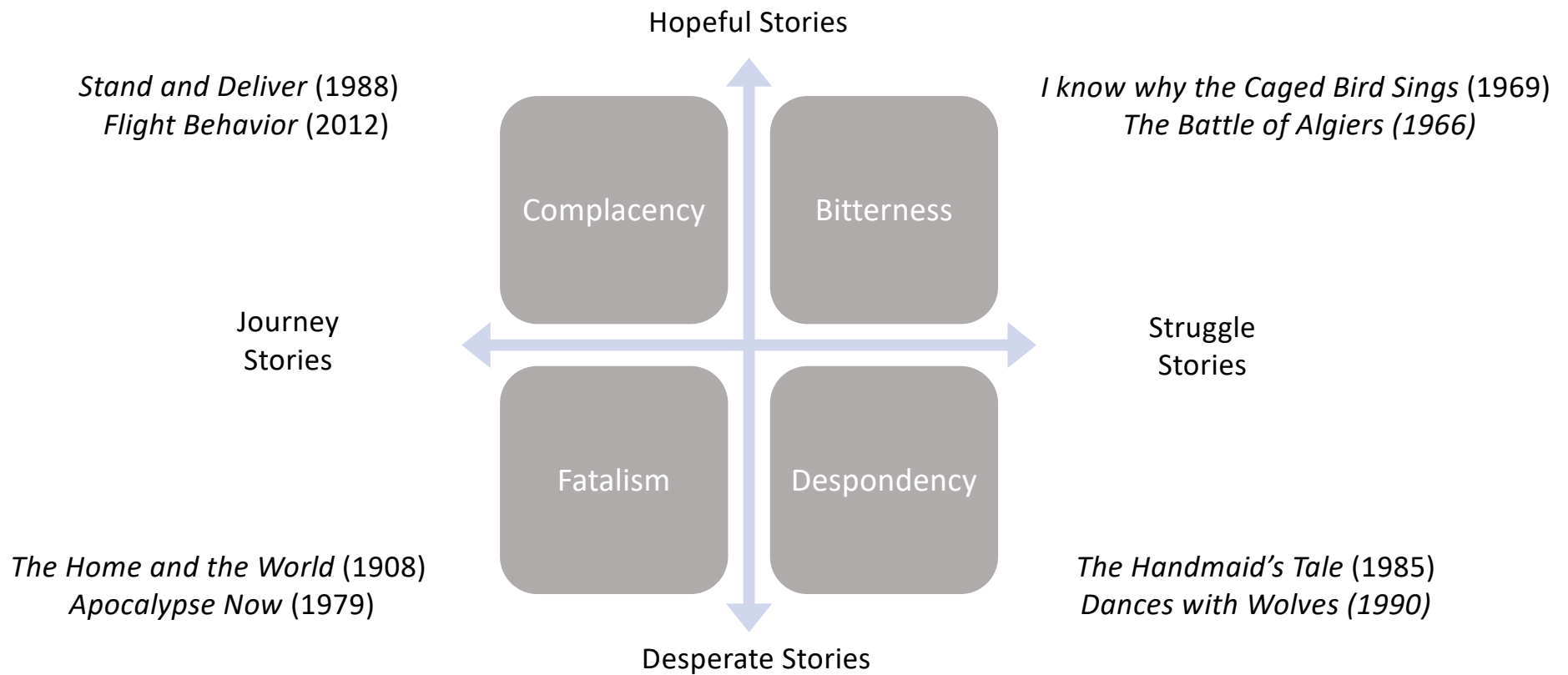
Discursive Pitfalls

Reader response and audience reaction

Active Forms of Post-plot Pressure



Passive Forms of Post-plot Pressure



Implications for Practice

Reflections on Game Theory

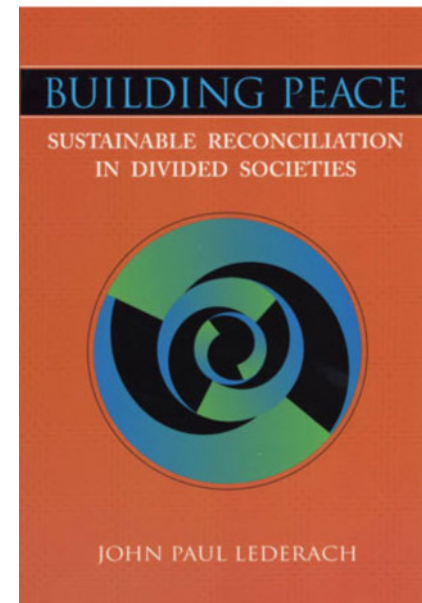
A Just Peace: Escalation & De-escalation

“If you want peace, work for justice.” (Si vis pacem, para iustitiam.)

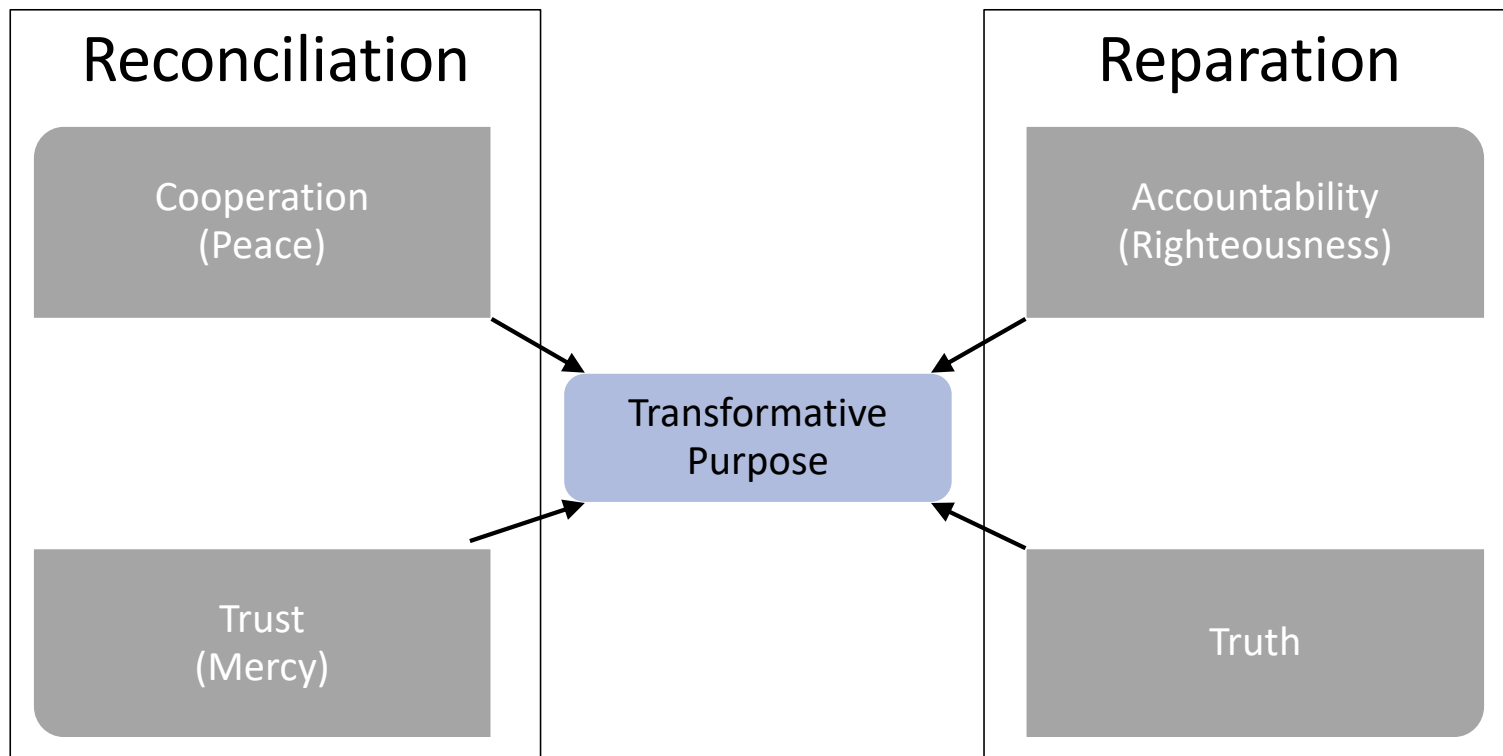
Pope Paul VI Message for the Celebration of the Day of Peace, 1972

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.”

(Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, 1958)



Narrative Insights from Conflict Resolution



חסד-ואמת נפגשו; צדק ושלום נשקו.

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. **Psalm 85:10**

When Resolution Fails: Prisoner's Dilemma

Strategy for the prisoner's dilemma [\[edit \]](#)

Two prisoners are separated into individual rooms and cannot communicate with each other. The normal game is shown below:

Prisoner A \ Prisoner B	Prisoner B stays silent (<i>cooperates</i>)	Prisoner B betrays (<i>defects</i>)
Prisoner A stays silent (<i>cooperates</i>)	Each serves 1 year	Prisoner A: 3 years Prisoner B: goes free
Prisoner A betrays (<i>defects</i>)	Prisoner A: goes free Prisoner B: 3 years	Each serves 2 years

It is assumed that both prisoners understand the nature of the game, have no loyalty to each other, and will have no opportunity for retribution or reward outside the game. Regardless of what the other decides, each prisoner gets a higher reward by betraying the other ("defecting"). The reasoning involves analyzing both players' **best responses**: B will either cooperate or defect. If B cooperates, A should defect, because going free is better than serving 1 year. If B defects, A should also defect, because serving 2 years is better than serving 3. So either way, A should defect since defecting is A's best response regardless of B's strategy. Parallel reasoning will show that B should defect.

Axelrod on the Evolution of Cooperation

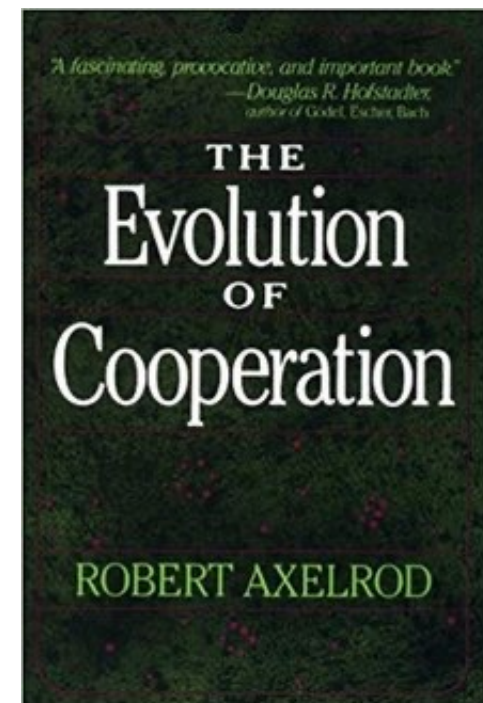
The Four Habits of Highly Successful Gamers

Nice

Retaliating

Forgiving

Non-envious (just)



Acting on the Four Basic Plots

	In Cooperation	In Struggle
In Success	COMIC: BE NICE Enter each new situation as if it were a "Journey"	ROMANTIC: BE JUST Never "Struggle" for its own sake
In Failure	TRAGIC: BE FORGIVING Always be ready to pivot to "Journey" mode	SATIRICAL: RETALIATE Never be afraid of a "Struggle"

Narrating the Curve of Conflict

