



MASTERCLASS

# Writing *Crossroads*

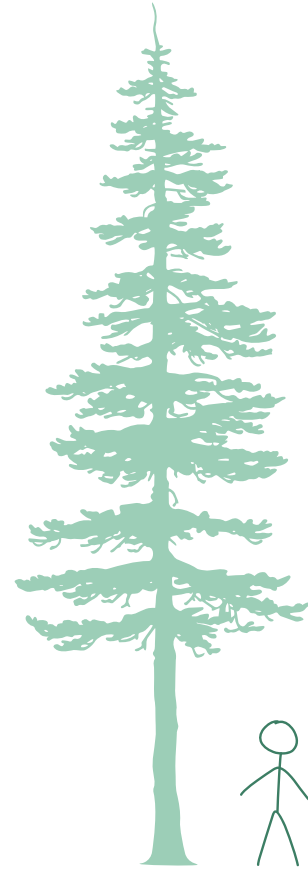
*Lewis Jorstad | The Novel Smithy*





## THE BIG IDEA

Your plot needs to be **more than just a string of cause and effect**, no matter how interesting those effects may be.



If a tree falls in the forest, *but it doesn't hit anyone*, who cares?

# In this workshop...

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1

We'll build a plot your readers can care about, with one simple shift

2

Plan the four big decisions that define your protagonist's story

3

And complete a quick brainstorming exercise to help you jumpstart this process

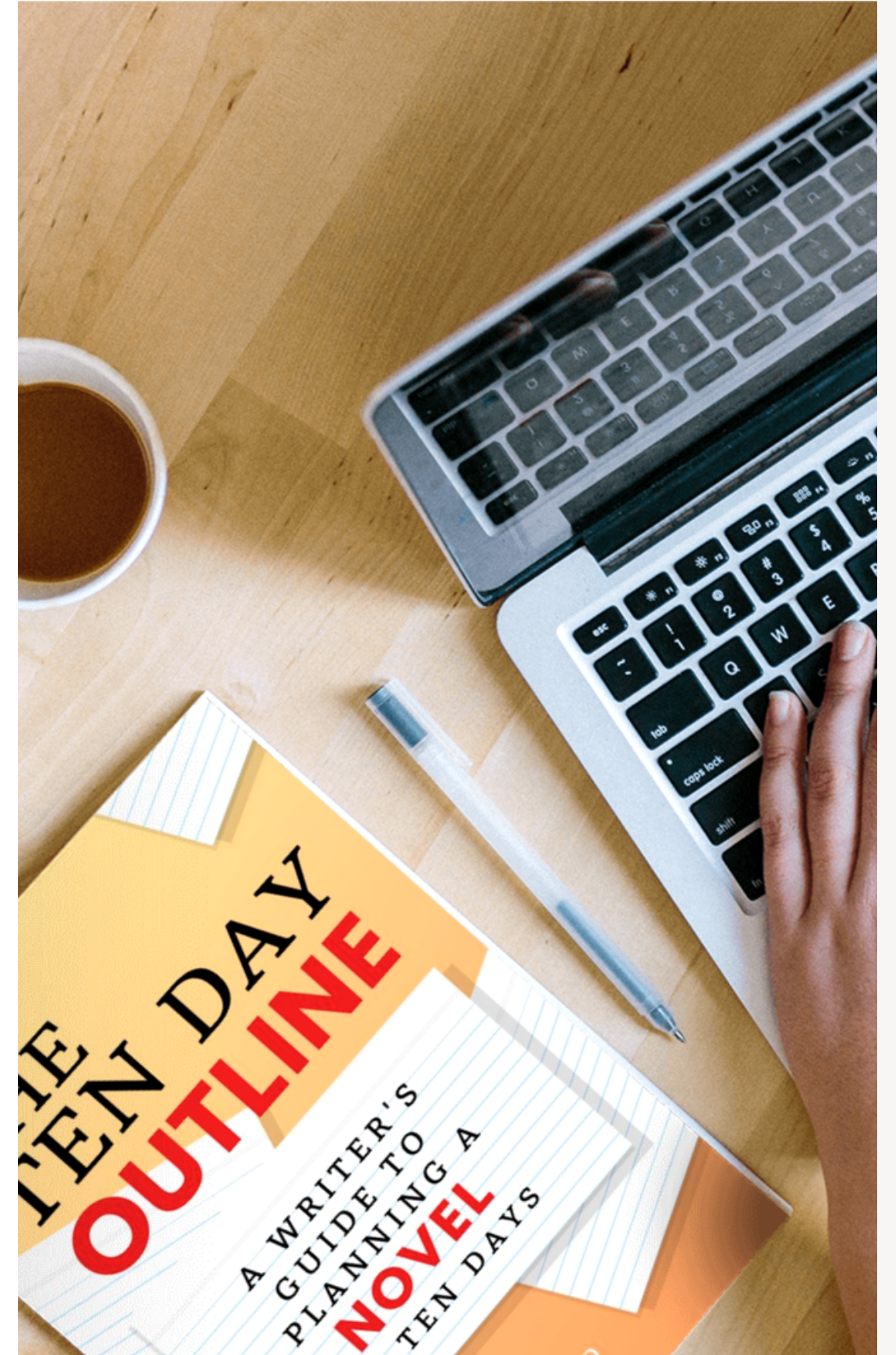
*Hello there...*

I'm Lewis! 🙌

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I'm the founder of **The Novel Smithy**, where I help passionate fiction writers master their craft and find their readers.

- Developmental editor for 6+ years
- Author of 7 writing craft guides
- Story nerd and dark fantasy writer





## KEY TAKEAWAY

Your protagonist's **decisions drive your plot**. As your central character, their choices define every beat of your story—especially your key moments.

*Why base your plot on...*

# Your Protagonist's Decisions?

Building your story around a few key decisions helps you:

- ✓ Give your protagonist agency and control in the story
- ✓ Links your plot and character development
- ✓ Creates stakes (and the very real risk of failure)
- ✓ Shows how your protagonist is changing as a person

Above all, it gives  
readers **a reason to care**  
about your story.





*Example*

## Fa Mulan

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- #1:** Sneak into the army, rather than see her father get killed.
- #2:** Prove herself as a soldier, rather than go home in disgrace.
- #3:** Apologize for who she is, rather than stand up for herself.
- #4:** Embrace her talents, rather than be someone she's not.



*The result of...*

## Decisions Before Plot

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By anchoring your story's most powerful moments around decisions, you show how your protagonist is changing over time in real, concrete ways.

At the same time, you also create **engaging shifts in your plot that feel earned.**





# The Four Crossroads Method

The turning points of your plot. These scenes mark key decisions on the part of your hero that tell readers who they are at that point in the story, while pushing your plot forward.

Unlike traditional story structures, this method puts your protagonist first. **Your plot doesn't just happen to them.**

**Instead, their decisions define your plot.**

# The **First** Crossroad

## *The Decision to Engage*

### **Plot Development:**

Your core conflict has upended your hero's normal life, and **they're given a choice.** Here they make a decision that embroils them in your plot, ending Act One.

### **Character Development:**

A chance for your protagonist to show **what they value most, and who they are.** They're still firmly entrenched in their harmful belief, and this decision reflects that.

# The **Second** Crossroad

*The Decision to Learn*

## **Plot Development:**

During Act Two, your hero has struggled to adapt to their new situation. Here they face **the culmination of those trials**, and will use everything they've learned to succeed.

## **Character Development:**

Your hero has started to recognize their lesson, but their harmful belief lingers. This is a hinge point, where they struggle to reconcile the two **and end in the middle.**

# The **Third** Crossroad

## *The Decision to Regress*

### **Plot Development:**

A dark moment. Here your hero's past failings return to haunt them. **The rug is pulled out beneath their feet.** This crossroad is a crippling defeat, and ends Act Three.

### **Character Development:**

Your hero faces another test, but this time they return to their harmful belief. **They make the wrong choice** and are punished for it, triggering a period of deep reflection.

# The **Fourth** Crossroad

## *The Decision to Change*

### **Plot Development:**

Your finale, where you stage a final face-off against your core conflict. Your protagonist **calls on all of their allies, lessons, and skills to triumph**, resolving your story.

### **Character Development:**

A final test of their lesson. This crossroad **proves they've changed** based on the decision they make. Often this involves sacrifice, or it may be simply fighting for their new belief.





## KEY TAKEAWAY

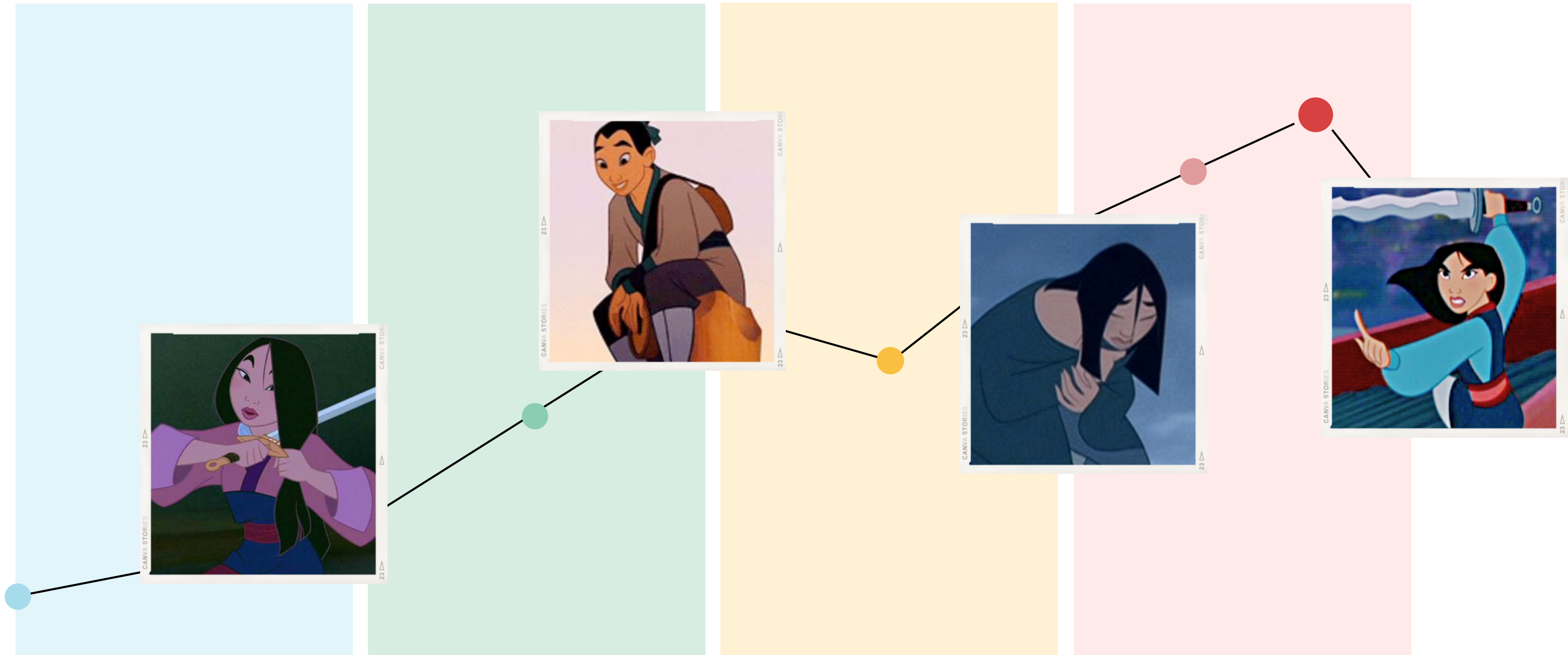
Each of these crossroads **represents one, pivotal scene in your story**, and focuses on an active decision your protagonist makes, linking your plot and hero.

*A1: Setup*

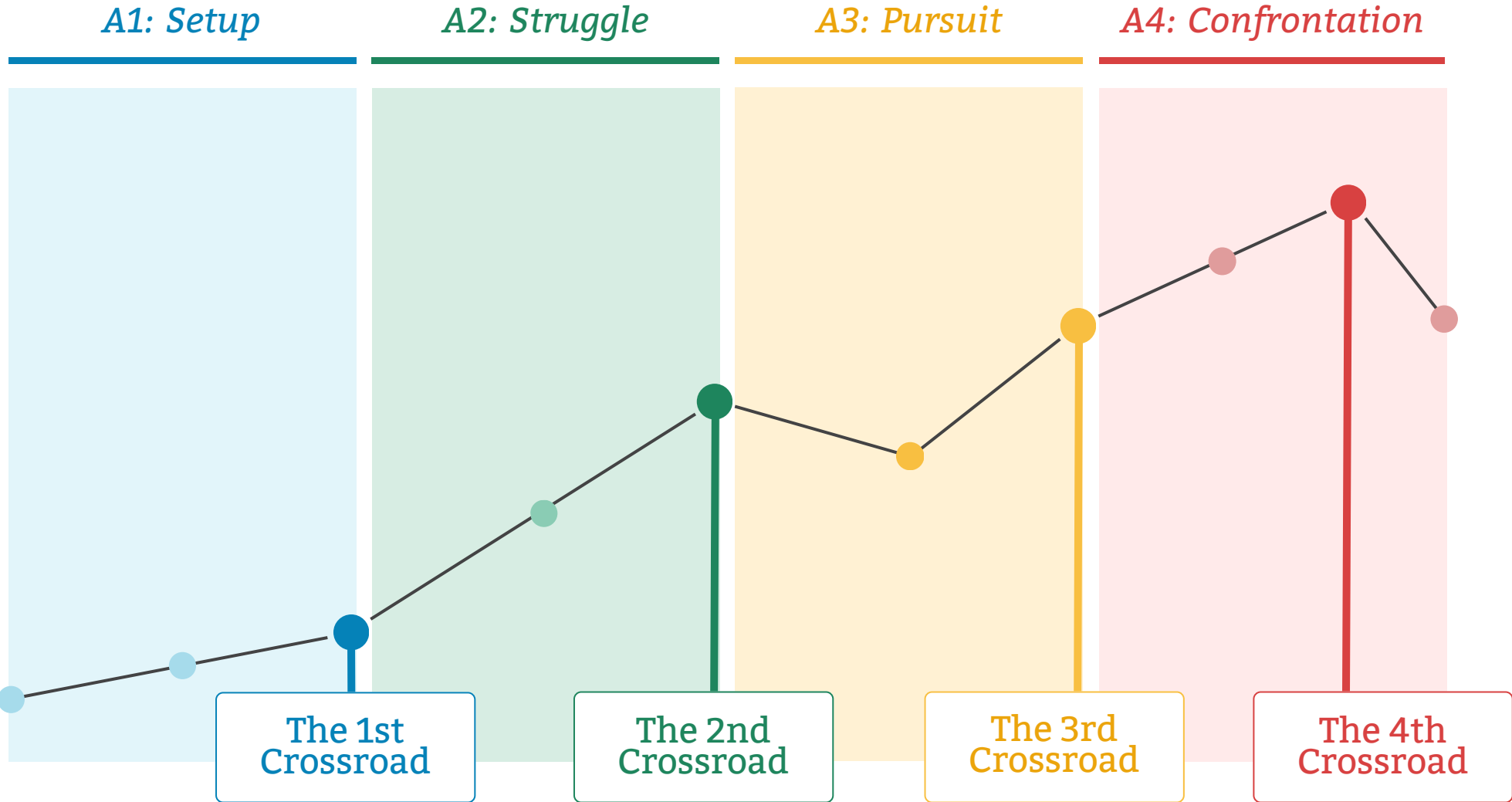
*A2: Struggle*

*A3: Pursuit*

*A4: Confrontation*



# The Four Act Structure



Of course, these do play nice with the rest of your plot!

# Q&A



## KEY TAKEAWAY

Your crossroads show your protagonist changing as a person. But, **what belief are they changing from?**

# Their Two, Opposing Beliefs

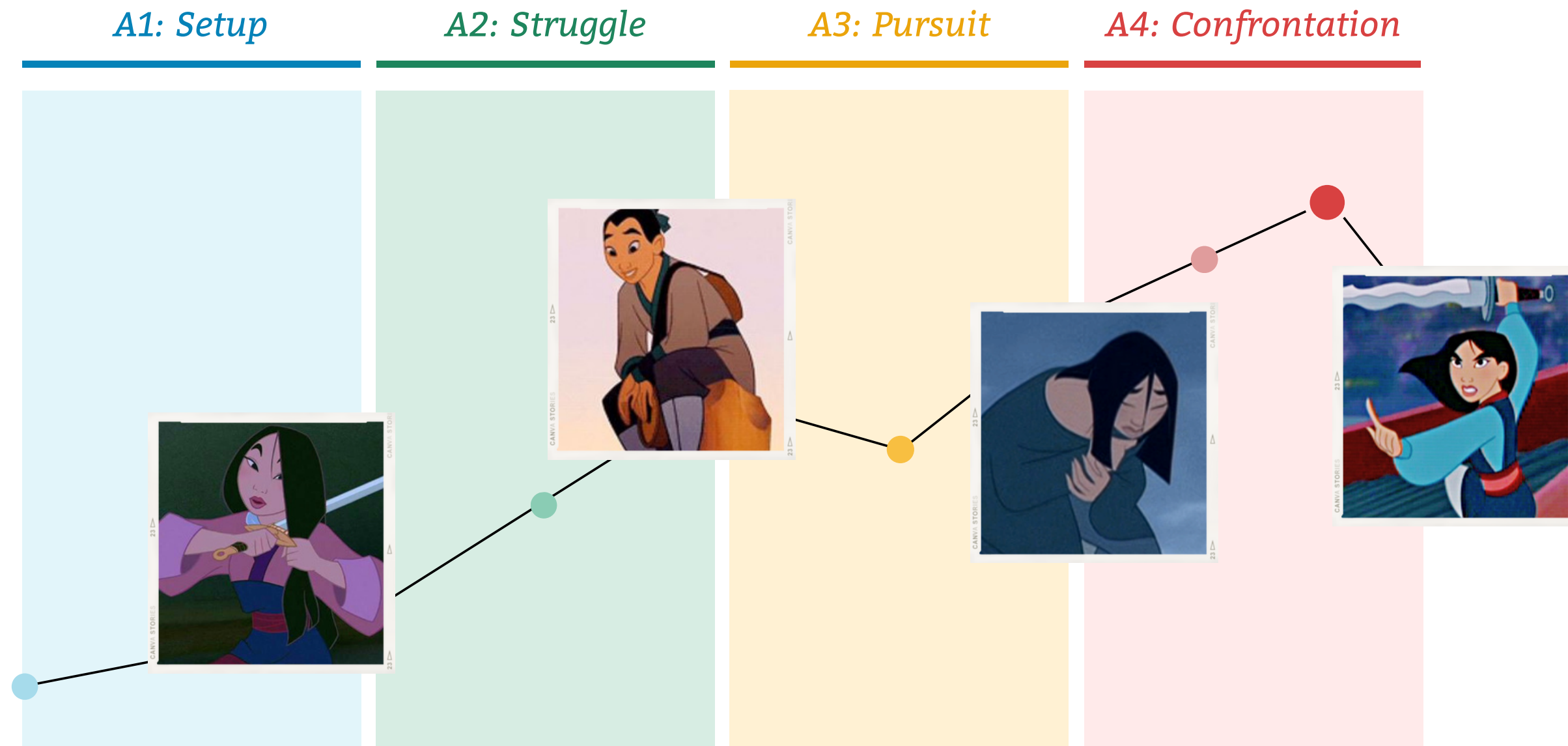
Beliefs are the hardest parts of ourselves to change, and thus the most rewarding for readers to read about.

## **Their Harmful Belief:**

The flawed belief preventing them from making the right decisions. This creates a barrier between them and what they desire.

## **Their Lesson:**

The truth, mental shift, or new belief they need to learn. This will allow them to find happiness, healing, or success.



A daughter will always be less valuable than a son.



I'm no different (and no less worthy) than anyone else.



At the end of the day, **good stories**  
**are about change.**



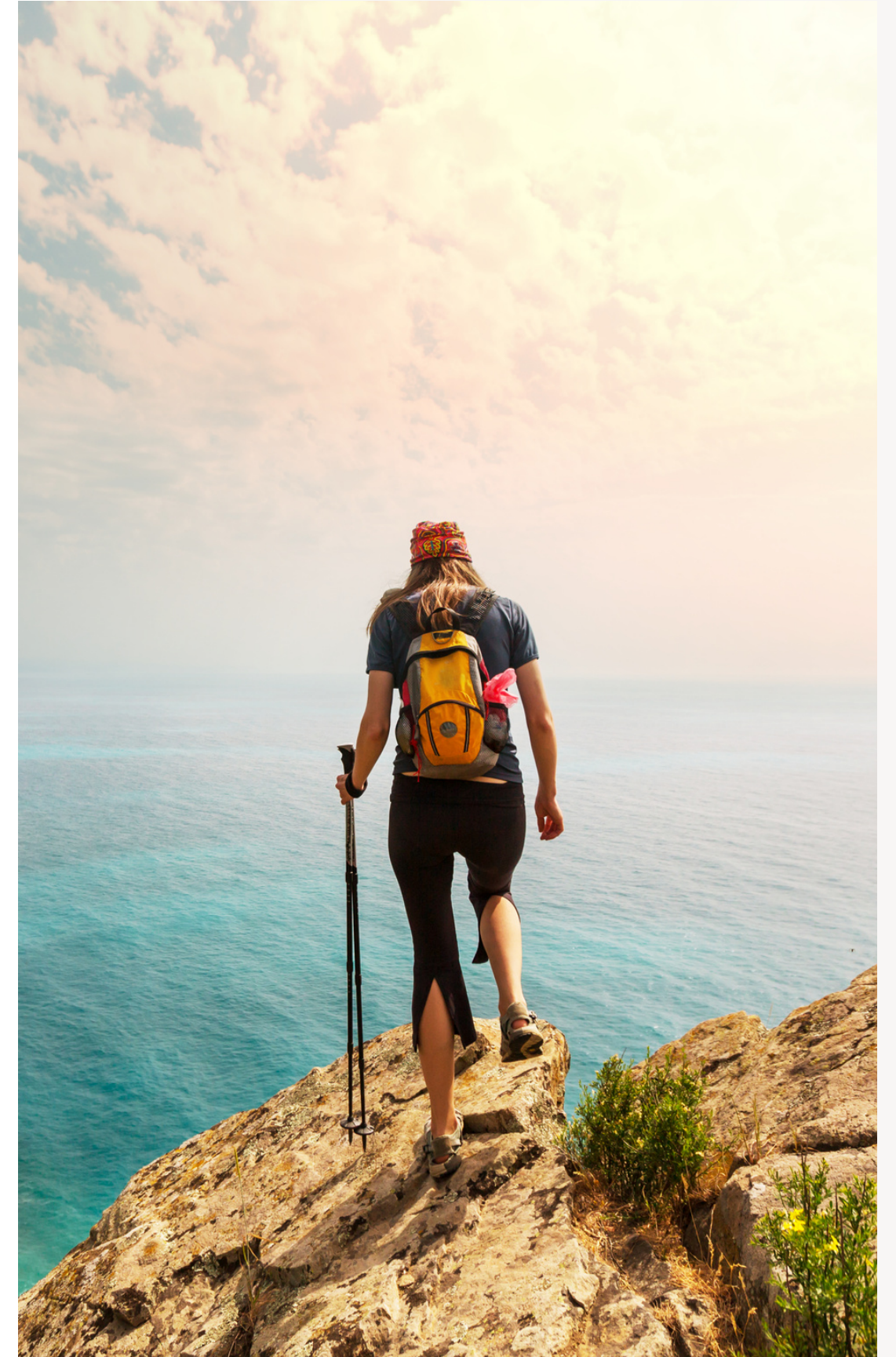
*How to create crossroads...*

# For Your Protagonist

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You may already know a few of your crossroads by instinct. These are often the biggest set pieces of your story!

**But if not, ask:** What decisions could your hero never make *(or so they think)*?



*Your Homework?*

# The “I Could Never” Prompt

Once you’ve discovered your protagonist’s harmful belief, set a timer for thirty minutes and brainstorm.

**What do they believe they could “never do” at the start of your story?**

Use this as a jumping off point to craft their four crossroads.

# Want to stay in touch?

Grab my free character interview workbook, *50 Questions to Ask Your Protagonist*:

[thenovelsmithy.com/  
50-questions](https://thenovelsmithy.com/50-questions)

