

Go Big - Acting in a Faire Environment

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at the request of Saint Andrews Noble Order of Royal Scots

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The biggest challenge an actor faces in the task of acting in the environment of a full-blown Renaissance, Celtic or other themed faire is capturing the attention of the audience

The second challenge is keeping that attention.

The third is telling a story, no matter how short or long, no matter how simple and silly or complex and serious, that the audience understands and enjoys.

Consider: you are competing with all the sights, sounds, smells and attractions of a full blown summer faire. Add to this the fact that many of the patrons themselves are as elaborately costumed, bejeweled and accessorized as you might be in your capacity as a member of a guild expected to provide entertainment and education to the paying customers. To compete with this you must DO something large and interesting to turn eyes and ears your way. Once eyes are on you, those other attractions still beckon and your offering must continue to be the most interesting within eyesight and earshot. Once you have captured their attention and held it through your gig, you must deliver something that results in their enjoyment, whether that be a mild chuckle, a prolonged belly laugh, a knowing smile or a sympathetic tear.

The good news is that your audience very much wants you to succeed in entertaining them. While there are always cynics and grouches who will be critical and difficult or impossible to satisfy, the majority are rooting for you to give a good performance. Patrons want something exciting and interesting to happen, and they want to be transported by that action to that place where we all go when engaged by a good story - the Land of Suspended Disbelief:

"**Suspension of disbelief** or willing suspension of disbelief is a term coined in 1817 by the poet and aesthetic philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who suggested that if a writer could infuse a "human interest and a semblance of truth" into a fantastic tale, the reader would suspend judgement concerning the implausibility of the narrative.

"Suspension of disbelief is often an essential element for a magic act or a circus sideshow act. For example, an audience is not expected to actually believe that a woman is [cut in half](#) or transforms into a gorilla^[2] in order to enjoy the performance."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suspension_of_disbelief

Such suspension of disbelief is likewise needed for faire gigging to be successful. Your audience knows quite well that you are not a Renaissance courtier, soldier or housemaid, and that the terrible fate that has befallen you is made up nonsense. But engage them sufficiently and act out a tale that transports them and they won't think of all that; They will simply enjoy themselves and applaud your performance.

Let's consider each of the challenges in brief then discuss what we can do to meet them.



THE CHALLENGES:

Capturing Attention

When planning a gig or deciding how to perform it ask yourself "what would get MY attention"? No doubt you've been to faires yourself as a patron and can remember being overwhelmed by all the vendors, food, people and performers vying for your eyes and ears. What captured you in such a way that the rest was ignored as you were drawn toward a happening? Remembering these situations and considering them will help lead you to a better understanding of what you must do to gain the attention of others.

The simplest and most reliable method is to engage one or more patrons directly. You can just ask them to watch the goings on in a variety of ways. Draw them into the action by including them in it. "I ask you, good sir, is it right that I be treated thus?", etc. etc. You can do this in similar fashion to the audience at large, with a sweeping gesture and a loud cry - "Good people of <shire x>, A great tragedy has befallen me. Who will help me set things right?" Another way is to make the opening action of the gig as large, loud and dramatic as possible. A woman's scream is a classic attention grabber, as is a loud belly laugh or two people starting a heated argument.

The essence of capturing attention is to involve your audience in the action, either directly or by making your opening scene, action and dialog so compelling that they cannot possibly ignore it. In everyday life the average person will attend, even if involuntarily, to something dramatic happening; Think of how we "rubberneck" at accidents. But in a faire environment the average patron is alert to anything that stands out and is hoping that events will turn to an entertaining experience. We can capitalize on their desire to give their attention to something worthwhile.

Keeping Attention

Of course, having once gained the attention of your audience, you must keep that attention for the duration of your performance. The final scene and lines of your gig might be the most exciting and entertaining of the entire faire, but will be for naught if your audience moves on to the beer vendor before you are done.

The main way that the attention of the audience can be maintained is to continue to engage them throughout the action of your gig in much the same way as was done to get their attention in the first place. Depending on what is appropriate to the gig, performers can make statements and ask questions directly of audience members, whether rhetorical or intended to elicit a response. In other circumstances simply insuring that the action is broad and directed outward to include the audience is sufficient. Always keep in mind that if the audience cannot see your facial expressions, cannot hear or make out your speech or are not privy to important bits of action, they will not be able to follow along. Once they are not following the action their most natural reaction is to become bored or confused and to walk away.

The special nature of performance for film and television is that the most quiet and subtle actions and speech can be emphasized and amplified so that the audience misses nothing. In fact the watcher of a film is directed exactly where to look and what to listen to by the techniques of film making - shot selection, lighting, camera movement, audio enhancement, etc. Performers on the theatre stage lack these techniques and acting for the stage is different than film acting because of the need to direct the audience's attention through other means. But the faire actor has a much greater challenge than that - on an indoor stage little else competes for the patron's eyes and ears. In a faire, everything is competing with you and it is all very big, loud, interesting, enticing and sometimes delicious. The techniques for dealing with that competition are unique and special to this type of acting.

Telling a Story

Here is the crux of the matter and the challenge that will still lead to failure no matter how big and dramatic we act, how visually interesting our costumes or how convincing our characterizations. If we do not tell a story, an arc of logical action that has a beginning, middle and end, we will leave the patrons dissatisfied even if - perhaps especially if - they have stayed with us throughout the performance.

People love a good story. No matter how short or long, how simple or complex, whether tragedy or comedy or any of the variations of those, people respond to being carried along by the action and narrative of a story to a satisfying conclusion. Much theory has been written about why this is so, most of it recognizing that a story is an artificial construct that takes the chaos of everyday life and gives it structure, from a beginning to an end that makes sense. Life is not a story, and a story is not life. A good story transports us out of our everyday life and gives us a moment not bound to reality. So, having gained and kept their attention, tell your audience a good story with an ending that fits the action and they will be entertained and you will be rewarded.

Even the simplest and shortest of gigs still needs a story arc. In Saint Andrews the Highlander group does a gig simply called "The Letter Gig". In it, a young woman runs excitedly to a patron, with some friends in tow, and begs the patron to read to her a letter that she presses into the patron's hand. She says that the letter is from her beloved, far away and whom she has not seen for a long time, and that she cannot read and must hear what he has written. Her friends cannot read either and all are beside themselves with excitement to hear the lover's words. The twist in this performance is that the letter is a "Dear Jane"; He is writing to say he has found another love and will not return to her. The patron has the choice to read it as written or to change it to something endearing or just innocuous. The end of the story in this case can be different depending on what the patron chooses to do.

So the arc of this story goes:

1. A young woman has been pining for her long gone beloved, and receives a letter from him. She is illiterate and is frantic to know its contents. This is the beginning, even before the patron is engaged.

2. She begs a patron to read the letter to her. She reveals that he has not seen him in (months) and loves him dearly. The patron is now part of the story and we establish the anticipation of drama.

3. Her friends are likewise excited - they love their friend and want her to receive good news. The interplay between them applies pressure on the patron and the choice of what to do. The pressure on the patron and this the level of drama is increased.

4. It is revealed to the patron via the letter that it is bad news and he knows the young woman (at least her character) will be crushed by hearing the truth. He is faced with the dramatic dilemma common to all stories - his choice will determine the outcome.

5. Here the patron makes the choice that forms the climax of the "play" - he reads what is written or makes something up. The denouement unfolds based on that choice:

5a. The patron reads the letter as written. The young woman can be abjectly saddened and her friends can console her. We end the story as a tragedy and strive to engender the patron's pathos. She could also then wave off the anger and sadness and, her friends encouraging her, declare that she doesn't care for him anyway and so is not upset. Much can be made here about the inconstancy of men. Or instead she could - and here we have more audience involvement - then cast her eyes upon the patron (assuming it is appropriate) or another performer and begin flirting since she is now free of her commitment to the now-lost beloved. We choose to make the story a comedy.

5b. The patron makes up a love letter. The young woman is now beside herself with joy and effusive in her thanks. Her friends make much about the impending reunion and plans they will make for his return, their wedding, etc. For added audience involvement (again if appropriate) one of the friends could, now that love is in the air, begin her flirtation with the letter reader (or again, another performer), suggesting a possible double-wedding, etc. Again our ending is that of a comedy.

5c. Something else occurs, such as the patron refusing to say anything or making up nonsense. The performers here will have to be alert to this and alter their plans in some way that ends the action in a way that makes sense.

The gig itself is extremely simple and takes only a few minutes to complete. But done right and rendered as a full-fledged story, it will be an enjoyment for all. If we also work outward from the single engaged patron himself to draw in as many passing people as we can to the center of action and build a larger audience, we will have done our job well.

So when we have surmounted all these challenges we give patrons a moment of enjoyment, ourselves the satisfaction of a job well done, and everyone a good memory of their trip to that faire.

Let's now turn our attention to the tools we can employ to succeed in this endeavor. Here's a quick list of the basic tools at our disposal:

1. **The Characters** are larger than life
2. **The Dialog** is clear and paced
3. **The Action** is given focus by everyone involved
4. **The Story** arc is simple and universal
5. **The Audience** is shown how and when to react



THE TOOLS:

1. **The Characters** are larger than life

While this may seem obvious at first we need to consider what it means to make our faire character "larger than life" when gigging. We each develop a character as our faire persona, and have many opportunities to act within the confines of our group or with other individuals. At these times we can act "normally", in the sense that we can talk at a conversational level, behave appropriately to circumstances and even be subtle in our speech and mannerisms. But once we take up the action of a gig intended to attract and keep an audience, our character must expand so that we can be seen, heard and understood by groups of people some distance away and surrounded by all the sights sounds and distractions normal to a faire.

What "larger than life" does NOT mean is that we scream or shout when it is not called for, wave our arms madly about or otherwise behave in an excessively exaggerated manner. Here is our mantra for becoming larger than life:

The behaviors and speech proper to my normal character must be seen and heard at a distance.

Above all this means that what we do when we act in a gig must still be appropriate to our regular character. How a large man playing a soldier behaves in normal circumstances is not how a small woman playing a shy housemaid does, so in a gig the shy housemaid should not suddenly become a brassy, loud-talking person with large open movements and gestures. She would still perform gestures like hiding her mouth or face with her hands, turning away from direct contact with others and speaking hesitantly and with painful embarrassment - but she must do so in ways that make it obvious to a person twenty yards away that she is a shy housemaid. This requires exaggeration of our movements,

facial expressions and gestures, but we must do this just to and not beyond the point at which we become a cartoon of our character.

We may feel odd or embarrassed at first when practicing this exaggeration. But keep in mind that the audience will not fault you for over-acting; they **will** however fault you for under-acting to the point where they cannot hear you, see your face or gestures, and don't understand what is going on in the performance. We can be confident that in the environment of a faire, which is already loud and overwhelming, no one will think it odd that we are performing in exaggerated ways. In fact we can be sure that the exaggeration is all part of the fun and is expected by our audience.

2. The Dialog is clear and paced

Unless we are performing a pantomime, our speech and dialog will drive most of the narrative of our story. Being heard and understood is a great challenge in the environment of a faire, for reasons already stated. The audience must hear and understand what we say, and what each person performing the gig says. These two requirements bespeak somewhat separate solutions.

For the first, being heard and understood, the actor must gain good control of their voice and breathing techniques so that they may be able to speak loudly and clearly without screaming (and hurting the vocal chords) and without becoming breathless. This is an area of great study and practice that can best be learned with coaching, and you might benefit from the resource links later in these notes for the Linklater vocal training resources. The key things to keep in mind are:

- a. Practice breathing deeply and openly from the diaphragm.
- b. Avoid constricting the throat - learn to open it and allow breath from the diaphragm to form the words.
- c. Use your whole mouth to form words - practice exaggerating the pronunciation of words with the entire mouth, lips, teeth and tongue.
- d. Pace your speech well - don't rush out a long sentence of words in a hurry without breathing at intervals.
- e. Take care of your throat - learn breathing and vocal exercises and practice them often.

The other half of this guideline is to perform dialog with others in your group in such a way that allows all of you to be heard and understood. We must trade off speaking and avoid talking over each other. More than one person speaking makes it difficult to understand in the best of circumstance; Outdoors at a faire with everything else going on makes it impossible. A cacophony of voices can be a device in your performance, meant to show conflict and chaos in group dynamic, but that is just a bit of the action. Normally we want to time our dialog so that only one person is speaking in any given moment.

This is more of a challenge when we are improvising our performance instead of reciting previously written lines, and it takes practice to become good at it. The timing necessary for good improvised dialog can only come from practice with our co-performers, learning how they pace themselves and

what cues they give off that tell you they are going to speak or are done speaking. But a few general guidelines can help:

- a. **LISTEN** to the performer speaking - meaning to actively pay attention to what they say, not what you are about to say next.
- b. **SPEAK** deliberately and clearly to the end of your lines - don't trail off in volume or tone.
- c. **GESTURE** or move in such a way that indicates you want to start or stop speaking - visual clues help our co-actors give and take the spotlight for lines.

In short, the exaggeration of our character discussed earlier comes into play with how we say our lines as well. Normal conversation is somewhat random; we talk over each other, we stammer and hem/haw, our volume and tone goes up and down, we repeat ourselves, but we end up understanding each other nonetheless. Performance is not conversation, even if it is a performance OF conversation. A good pace and clarity in speaking our lines is essential.

3. The Action is given focus by everyone involved

This is a tool and technique that is related to the previous guidance about paced dialog, but is expressed with our bodies; At any given moment in the performance the main action is usually focused at one point. Someone is giving a speech, or two or three people are engaged in dialog or an argument. No matter where the focus of the action is, everyone in the performance - as well as any of our fellow guild members who may be acting as spectators - must do everything we can to direct the audience's attention to that action.

A simple example may help:

- a. A man and his wife are arguing. At this point their argument is the most important part of the action for the audience to hear. This section of dialog will help the audience understand all subsequent action.
- b. As the man and his wife deliver their lines, all other actors in the scene give THEIR attention to the couple. They do this by pointing their bodies toward the couple, focusing their eyes on the couple and, where appropriate, giving subtle clues as to their reactions to the speeches spoken by the couple.
- c. As the focus of action and dialog shifts to other actors, those now not the focus of attention shift their bodies and faces and actions to let the audience know where the main focal point of action currently is in the "play" at that time.

In short - if you are in the gig or even a spectator to it, then if you are not performing the most important action at a given moment you need to give the audience every clue as to where they should be looking and what they should be listening to so as to follow the action of the "play". Be open and obvious as to where the center of action and dialog are by how you position your body and focus your own attention. Avoid any movement or other business that distracts from the central focus of the

narrative. Instead, be a funnel that directs anyone looking at YOU to what they must pay attention to so that they understand the currently most important thing to give their attention.

4. The Story arc is simple and universal

As was stated earlier, no matter how well we speak or act in our performance, if we cannot tell a tale - no matter how simple - we will end our gig with a dissatisfying thud, instead of the applause and cheers we want. In the context of faire acting we improve our chances for success in this area by making sure the story we intend to tell is relatively simple and is of a theme that anyone of any time and place can relate to and understand.

We can do this by designing our gigs so that they tell the most basic of tales common to all human experience, even to the point of being simplistic. Given the challenges of outdoor faire acting we cannot expect to perform a complex play with multiple story lines and intricate plot twists. We need to pick a basic theme and plotline and render it in simple language and action to ensure our success.

The most basic plotlines are outlined here in *The Seven Basic Plots of Storytelling* by the English journalist and author Christopher Booker: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seven_Basic_Plots

Also peruse The 36 Dramatic Situations for ideas: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thirty-Six_Dramatic_Situations

Another excellent resource for identifying the devices of plotting fiction is **TV Tropes** - take note of this entry that identifies all the plot devices in a "Dear John/Jane" scenario, that is the basis for "The Letter Gig" mentioned earlier: <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DearJohnLetter>

While our gig plot might not fit cleanly into these categories, studying them can help inform how we choose our story lines. The key point here is not to make our story lines fit these patterns, but rather that the story line we choose to enact be relatively simple and of a type that is universal to most people. We are acting in an broad environment with many distractions - it will not serve us to try to tell a subtle or overly complex tale. We need to enact a story that is easily understood by most or all of our audience.

5. The Audience is shown how and when to react

This aspect of faire acting is a challenge because we need to offer a variety of clues and incitements that will direct our audience so that they know how they should react to our performance at any given moment. Some performers dislike this idea because they believe that the action itself, absent any obvious clues, should focus and direct the reactions of the audience. But actors in broad outdoor theatre can counter that in such an environment we need to manipulate the focus and reactions of the audience as much as we can so as to give them the best experience possible.

In the world of faire gigging, I come down solidly on the latter of these viewpoints. We are acting in the most open, broad, distracted and exaggerated of performance environments and because of this we need to help our audience not only to know where the action is focused (see the section above) but also

we need to let them know when a bit of business, or an entire scene or the play as a whole has been completed and requires their acknowledgment.

In short, we must let the audience know "when to clap".

The simplest and most obvious technique for this is to do what we want the audience to do. We applaud, or laugh, or gasp or boo at the appropriate moment, which usually impels the same from the audience. If we are very bold about it we will do those things while looking directly into the audience and obviously encouraging them to follow suit. But even if we maintain the fourth wall and not acknowledge the audience we can have this effect on them by reacting to the action in an exaggerated way. If a situation in the performance would cause our character to laugh or gasp, we can do so in the "larger than life" way described earlier and by doing so cue the audience toward the appropriate response.

A slightly more subtle approach is to organize our performance in such a way as to have clear dramatic markers in the action and give a beat of time to them so as to allow the audience time to absorb them and react. If a sequence of action ends in a line or bit of business that is intended to elicit a laugh, all the performers should pause very briefly, react as their character would to that action, then take up the next sequence after the pause or after the audience has finished reacting. Think of that pause as a "rimshot" - the "ba-dum-DUM" that underscores and emphasizes the end of the bit, even if the bit is not a joke. In the tradition of Commedia delle'arte acting (which we will briefly discuss below), **actual** "rimshots" were used in this manner; All the actors not on the stage at a given time would use simple instruments like drums, horns and other noisemakers to accent the action with sound.

Here is a small example with my notes for when particular beats should be included for comedic effect. It is from Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* - from an early scene. Hortensio has disguised himself as a musician so as to gain access to his love, Bianca, sister to the "curst" Katherine. He is told to instruct Katherine first, and returns to her father Baptista with his lute broken over his head and hanging about his neck.

BAPTISTA

How now, my friend! [BEAT] why dost thou look so pale?

HORTENSIO

For fear, I promise you, if I look pale.

BAPTISTA

What, will my daughter prove a good musician?

HORTENSIO

I think she'll sooner prove a soldier [BEAT]
Iron may hold with her, but never lutes.

BAPTISTA

Why, then thou canst not break her to the lute?

HORTENSIO

Why, no; for she hath broke the lute to me. [BEAT]

I did but tell her she mistook her frets,
And bow'd her hand to teach her fingering;
When, with a most impatient devilish spirit,
'Frets, call you these?' quoth she; 'I'll fume
with them:' **[BEAT]**
And, with that word, she struck me on the head,
And through the instrument my pate made way;
And there I stood amazed for a while, **[LONG BEAT]**
As on a pillory, looking through the lute;
While she did call me rascal fiddler
And twangling Jack; with twenty such vile terms,
As had she studied to misuse me so.

In this example we simply give emphasis to a punch-line by allowing the silence following it to give the audience a moment to absorb the joke and, if we are lucky, laugh at it.

These techniques and others can be of great help to us in reaching our goal - which is simply an audience that enjoys our performance. The simple treatment I have given them here is not sufficient - acting is after all a profession all its own and requires a lifetime of study to do well. But even though we are not professional actors we can employ their tools and tricks of the trade to a degree and by doing so achieve our own amateur measure of success. What I have tried to provide here is an abstract overview of the techniques I believe are most useful in meeting the challenges specific to acting out-of-doors, in large spaces with a thousand distractions vying for the attention of our patrons.



THE RESOURCES:

In this section I will endeavor to find a number of online and other resources you can employ to aid you in your study and practice in those traditions and techniques I believe will help you with acting in a faire environment.

COMMEDIA:

In my opinion, the Renaissance stage tradition of **Commedia delle' arte** gives us the best historical, tried-and-true Western acting model for what we want to accomplish in faire acting. The acting troupes of this tradition would travel from village to village, erect simple outdoor stages and perform broadly-acted, simple and well-known stories using stock "bigger than life" characters that were often masked and costumed so as to emphasize the character's attributes, attitude and intent.

Anything you can watch or read on the topic will help, but here a few to get your started.

American Conservatory Theatre - Taming of the Shrew - 1976 - Petruchio meets Kate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdqOHvcD-VU>

Watch this short sequence of when Petruchio and Kate first meet and take note of how the tools and techniques I have outlined are utilized. I have yet to see another current production of any play that remains this true to the tradition of Commedia.

American Conservatory Theatre - Taming of the Shrew - 1976 - Full Play on DVD

(This link to the DVD of the full play on Amazon will benefit Saint Andrews:)

http://www.amazon.com/Taming-Shrew-Broadway-Theatre-Archive/dp/B00006G8HO/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1426042779&sr=8-1&keywords=american+conservatory+theater+taming+of+the+shrew

If you watch the entire play you will see every technique named here in action and so much more. It's also a beautiful production of Shakespeare's well-known treatment of the battle-of-the-sexes in the classic Commedia tradition with some stellar performances. A young and very buff Marc Singer is Petruchio to Fredi Olster's excellent Katherine.

An excellent short history of the Commedia tradition on the website of a modern Commedia troupe called Faction of Fools

- <http://www.factionoffools.org/history>

A good online (PDF) study guide of Commedia that traces it through modern times and provides exercises

- http://www.humanracetheatre.org/commedia_dell%27arte_aug_7_screen.pdf

VOICE:

Kristin Linklater is widely recognized as a world-class vocal coach. Here is her quick list of voice do's and don'ts for actors:

<http://www.backstage.com/advice-for-actors/voiceover/kristin-linklaters-list-of-vocal-dos-and-donts/>

Freeing the Natural Voice by Kristen Linklater

(This link to the book on Amazon will benefit Saint Andrews)

http://www.amazon.com/Freeing-Natural-Voice-Kristin-Linklater/dp/0896760715/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1426459936&sr=1-2&keywords=freeing+the+natural+voice

Linklater Voice Training

A series of Youtube videos of Kristen Linklater leading vocal training classes (Start with 001 and continue)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaKih48Vjyl>

Eric Armstrong is dialect, voice, speech and text coach based in Toronto, Canada, where he normally teaches full-time at York University's Dept. of Theatre. **This page from his web site The Voice Guy offers a set of 10 basic exercises for the voice, breath and pronunciation.** He has an extended set of advanced exercises too.

<http://voiceguy.ca/the-warm-up-series/the-basic-warm-up-series>

This site offers 26 tongue-twisters for enunciation exercise, each one beginning with a letter of the alphabet for memorization:

<http://plays.about.com/od/activities/a/enunciation.htm>

POSTURE AND GESTURE:

Beyond the physical techniques of Commedia addressed above, there are other traditions in the world that can offer us additional understanding and tools:

Michael Chekhov is an actor and acting teacher who's acting training includes sessions on "**Archetypal Gestures**" - **physical movement that embodies universal human actions, thought, desire and intent**. I can only find the three following video exercises, but they give a good introduction into just how much an actor can do to make a broad gesture meaningful:

Smash/Lift - <https://vimeo.com/108423982>

Push/Pull - <https://vimeo.com/107929660>

Reach - <https://vimeo.com/107929660>

19th Century stage acting in Europe and America was characterized by dramatic body positions and gestures. **This page gives a brief overview of the technique with pictures and two video examples:**
<http://19thcenturyacts.com/gestures.html>

The postures and gestures of Baroque-period opera and theatre are another tradition that can inform our understanding of faire acting. Here are links to two online resources offering explanation and examples of these techniques:

Baroque Gestures - <http://www.baroquegestures.com/index.html#>

What is Baroque Opera? - <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-baroque-opera.htm>

For contrast, Kabuki is a traditional Japanese style of theatre that uses techniques of exaggeration and stylistic approaches to costuming, characterization and performance. Here's a good one-page overview with video examples:

<https://sites.google.com/site/utnarukami/kabuki-theatre-3/kabuki-acting-traditions-techniques>

STORY AND PLOT:

The same links I provided above for quick reference here:

The most basic plotlines are outlined here in *The Seven Basic Plots of Storytelling* by the English journalist and author Christopher Booker:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seven_Basic_Plots

Also peruse **The 36 Dramatic Situations** for ideas:

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<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DearJohnLetter>

Now good my fellows, go forth and be...

MASTER THESPIANS!

