The Inner Life of a Novel:
The Deconstruction of *Deadly Faux*

A writer's guide to how the novel was written, and the story physics that underpin those creative decisions.

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**Introduction**

Welcome to this little exercise in story analysis. Part tutorial, part coaching, part memoir. It is assumed that you’ve read the novel, *Deadly Faux*, which is the subject of this deconstruction. If not... I hope you still find value here, and that you opt to read it to see the principles discussed here at work within the story.

The goal of this ebook is simple: to provide a laboratory, a guinea pig of sorts, for the examination of storytelling craft.

Over the past four years I've deconstructed many stories on my website (Storyfix.com), but it seems that when it comes to my own work – the stories I know best, inside and out – getting this particular analysis onto the page has been challenging.

I think I know why, too.

It’s because I hesitate to hold my own work up for what some might believe to be the intention of modeling excellence. To seem to say, “look at my book, *this* is how it’s done.” Then again, anyone writing a book they expect others to read and enjoy – that’s me and you – is, like any artist, engaging with some level of hubris, so I'm in good company
in that regard. And when one writes “how to” books in the writing niche, this sort of comes with the territory.

Simply put, this is how one writer, someone who views craft as the highest arbiter of success, wrote his story. One novel, a story that for better or worse (your call) reached the finish line.

We’ll look at _Deadly Faux_ layer by layer across the grid of fundamental structure, applying specific principles as they manifest. And since the bones and infrastructure of the story have roots in the principles discussed in my writing books – _Story Engineering_ and _Story Physics_ – with which many of you are familiar, my hope is that you’ll see those elements of craft in play.

Then again, the whole thing may simply be a lesson in the possibility that you can do everything by the book (even when, like me, you actually wrote that book) and it still might not attain the results (attention, critical acclaim, sales and money... a career-maker) you were hoping for.

Writing is like poker. You can do everything right and still get busted.

That said... thank goodness the initial reviews for _Deadly Faux_ have been pretty good, and the author blurbs (endorsements), especially the one from James N. Frey (author of _How to Write a Damned Good_...
Novel), have surpassed what I or any writer, at any level, could possibly hope for. Later in the book, just for grins, I offer a short criticism of the novel, my way of dealing that it hasn’t exploded out there.

I hope you enjoyed the novel, I really do. But for now we have some work to do together.

The Structure of This Presentation

I will deconstruct the sequential architecture of Deadly Faux – major story beats, plot points, part-specific missions and the essence-driven narrative strategies I have introduced on my website. Any novel can be reduced to nine key sentences... if not unwieldy long and awkward sentences, then at least nine short narratives describing the respective moving parts of a story upon which it is built. There are many more, of course, but these nine are what bear the weight.

This is a generic model, it functions as a blueprint and an analytical tool (useful both before and after a draft) for virtually any story, including yours. (Click HERE to review this model; the linked post also takes you to a 9-sentences analysis of The Hunger Games, if you’re interested.)
Thank you for opting in to this experience. I hope it helps take you forward, and higher, on this storytelling path that we all share... accompanied by many... yet always alone with our creative choices.

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A Synopsis/Review of the Story

Because of my delay in getting this out to you, odds are some time has passed since you read the book. Some of you may not have finished it (it happens), or haven't started it yet, perhaps opting to read this deconstruction first.

If that's you, or if you'd like a refresher, or you'd like to how a story synopsis looks in print... here's a quick review.

*****

Wolfgang Schmitt, ex-underwear model, cynical copywriter and, lately, undercover and unlisted government agent, is back. The wisecracking hero from *Bait and Switch* (Signet, 2004) is biding his time, not sure how to spend the boatload of money he netted from his recently completed covert assignment with the FBI, who has him on notice that there may be more work where that came from. At least if wants to keep the IRS off his ass. If it's off the books and calls for a touch of seduction using a genetically-blessed chin, Wolf is their guy.

In Wolf's words, shit-storms come in threes. On the same day Wolf is visiting his slightly daffy mother in a nursing home, he learns the place is going under and is in search of a new owner. And that someone –
which will connect to this later on -- has made the significant cash in his off-shore account disappear.

If that isn’t enough to ruin one’s day, he soon learns that the promising new woman in his wife is actually a Fed, vetting him for his next undercover gig. He suspects the last two are somehow connected, and before long he’s in Las Vegas at the behest of a new set of government handlers who are trying to entrap a casino owner and his wife whom they suspect are in league with the organized crime factions. The IRS wants their cut, and the FBI wants another organized crime bust on their resume.

Wolf is brought in to pose as a personal trainer to the wife, Lynn Valentine, who actually wears the pants around the resort her father founded and, more recently, that she and her husband rule with cold resolve. She’s been manipulated to believe Wolf is actually a hit-man on contract to kill her husband with, to put it politely, extreme prejudice. Brandishing enough covert electronics to fill an aisle at Best Buy, his objective is to get her to incriminate herself in a murder-for-hire sting, and to follow through with the charade of actually killing the husband in the hope that the seemingly newly widowed Mrs. Valentine will expose the connection to the mob in return for copping a plea.
Straight-forward enough, if not nearly impossible to pull off, and probably illegal as hell. Which, Wolf knows, is why he's there. But if this is anything like his last gig, nothing is as it seems, which is certainly the case.

Besides, he has no choice, at least if he wants his money back. Because as he suspected, it’s been taken as collateral pending the successful completion of this assignment.

The backstory behind the mark in this sting operation is disturbingly dark. Three years earlier an East coast thug had tried to muscle in on Xanadu (the hotel/casino run by the Valentines), which resulted in his killing one of the Valentine’s twin daughters as leverage to cave to his wishes. Now, with the surviving daughter’s continuing health motivating the Valentines to work with this guy, the two have relied on Chad Merrill, Lynn's father's right hand man back in the day, and who still keeps an eye on everything, to keep them safe and manage the tenuous connection with the mob and the psychopath to whom they report. But Merrill knows more than he's letting on, especially about Wolf and his agenda.

When the shit hits the roulette wheel and Wolf’s communications go down in the shadow of the surviving daughter's kidnapping, he must move the pieces from his limited perspective as heretofore a pawn in the game, calling upon the instincts and legendary chops that made
his last assignment turn out far better than his Federal employers could have hoped.

In an ending that turns more than one set of gaming tables and exposes not only where his money went, but who is actually pulling the strings, Wolf adds one final twist that not only saves the operation, but puts him in the nursing home business in an even bigger way, all of it going down without his poor confused mother having a clue what her son even does for a living. Which, in his case, is probably for the best.
The Origins of *Deadly Faux*

(Note: this is the memoir portion of this ebook, and thankfully it's not all that long. If this doesn't interest you – every novel has a backstory within it, and about it – skip this section, the actual deconstruction follows.)

*Deadly Faux* is a sequel. As such, that defines its starting point: the return of the protagonist from the earlier novel in what is now, because there is indeed a second book with the same protagonist as the first, by definition a *series*.

At this point I have no clue what book #3 might be. So much for the *series* notion.

A dirty little secret behind *Deadly Faux* is the fact that it was written in 2006, on the heels of the critical (certainly not commercial) success of *Bait and Switch*. *Bait* had been the second of a two book contract with Signet, and for reasons that are complex (see the next few paragraphs), the book didn’t “sell through.” Which means, it didn’t earn its advance back (the drawback of a healthy advance, you’re judged on that metric, even if you sell tens of thousands of units and still come up short... which was precisely the case). I got to keep the money, but the downside is the publisher didn’t want to opt in for a
new contract, especially under new management, which was also the case here.

Which in turn meant the publisher said “no” to next novel, the one that is now entitled *Deadly Faux*.

The original title of the project was *Schmitt Happens*, which everyone involved seemed to love in the beginning (it got a small ovation when I announced at a signing for *Bait* at The Poisoned Pen in Scottsdale, so I thought I had a winner). When a few years later when I took the book back to market, everyone seemed appalled by the title; my new agent didn’t like the *Deadly Faux* title all that much, either – didn’t think people would understand the double entendre of the word “faux,” but the new publisher did.

The no-go on a new contract (it was a two book deal, the first being *Serpent’s Dance*, in 2003, then *Bait and Switch*, in 2004, occurred six months prior to the release of *Bait and Switch*. Not good. A bad day that would still echo in my life nearly a decade later.

Relative to the forthcoming publication of *Bait and Switch*, it meant that the publisher would do next to nothing in the way of promotion. While they’d taken out a quarter page add in USA Today for *Serpent’s Dance*, as well as my two books before that one, there was no advertising budget for *Bait*. Zip. They had bought premium shelf
space in the bookstores for all those earlier novels, they didn’t for
*Bait*. All of which meant that, at the moment the rep for Penguin sat
down with the buyer for Barnes & Noble and Borders, the size of the
*Bait and Switch* order was only a fraction of the prior books.

That’s the whole ballgame at the brick and mortar retail level: the size
of the order. The fate of your book, if you’re not a famous author,
depends on those 30 seconds between two people you'll never meet:
your publisher’s rep and the bookstory/chain buyer. The size of that
order defines the visibility of the book in the store. Paperback
originals never get major review coverage, so there is no pull in that
regard, you could write a Pulitzer Prize winner and it wouldn’t sell until
it won the award (to be clear, that certainly didn’t happen for me).

Shelf real estate is everything. And *Bait and Switch* had very little.
Which would impact the fate, nine years later of the book now known
as *Deadly Faux*.

Then something really cool happened. *Bait and Switch* was released
to stellar reviews. *Publishers Weekly* in particular flipped for it, gave it
a starred review, named it their lead Editors Choice (July, 2004) ahead
of other nods to Jeffrey Deaver and Walter Mosley, and at year-end
named it to two “best of” lists: Best Novels/Mass Market of 2004, and
Best Overlooked Books of 2004 (the only paperback so-named).
One would think that would be a boost to sales.

One would be wrong.

Penguin remained unmoved. Not an extra dime was thrown at it, promotion-wise, after those critical notices, because the author (moi) was dead to them.

The book had its run and then it went away.

My agents at the time, alarmed at suddenly having an author among the living dead, dumped me like a worn out shoe (we’d been together for 12 years, they loved me, they said, but suddenly they didn’t like the novel enough to believe it could latch on with this black cloud over my name)... interestingly, they liked it just fine before Penguin passed on it.

Several years of writer hell ensued.

I wrote a novel entitled *Whisper of the Seventh Thunder*, which was picked up by a small press run by a courageous fellow with a lot of vision (because the book challenged religious givens). Again, without major reviews and no bookstore visibility (because bookstores hardly ever – and this is still the case – pay any attention to small POD presses, even when they are legit business enterprises, rather than
the author’s own “company,” however legit), the book didn’t make a
dent. It did win the Thriller category in the 2010 Next Generation Indie
Awards, which, while rewarding, did absolutely nothing for the book’s
visibility. (Keep reading, that book has a happy resurrection
forthcoming.)

The people who knew me at Penguin were now history (the company
was purchased by an off-shore entity, who brought in new
management; they told my agents they were moving toward “chick lit”
rather than thrillers), but my editor there (Dan Slater, who had caught
on at Amazon as a major project development wiz) was a supporter
who was willing to help me find a new agent. Using the substantial
industry clout of his name, I received invitations to submit Schmitt
Happens to 11 major New York based literary agencies, most of whom
you’ve heard about.

I went zero-for-11.

Of those, five wrote a note saying, in effect, that both books (Schmitt
Happens and Whisper of the Seventh Thunder) were solid, and would
likely end up being published someday (they were right)... but my sales
track record, particularly of Bait and Switch (my USA Today bestseller,
Darkness Bound, had been long forgotten by now), despite its critical
claim, had basically made me a pariah in the business. Wouldn’t touch
me with surgical gloves. I needed to cool off, to go away and come back after everybody in the business who counted had retired or died.

Okay, they didn't say that... but they *meant* that.

This is why so many writers become alcoholics. I somehow avoided that fate... but I understand.

Within that year, shooting a little south of Slaters referral list, I end up with a New York agent who was quite enthusiastic about Schmitt Happens. Over the next year he leveraged personal contacts to submit the novel to a handful of major houses.

No takers, same story, similar polite notes and emails. Then the submissions suddenly stopped... he told me we needed to wait this out for a year or so, and/or start writing under a pen name. Vaguely familiar sounding. So I decided to cut those ties (nice guy, he tried) and – now three years later, after doing precisely what he’d suggested (would disappear from the writing grid), I would again seek new representation, this time for my writing craft books (this was in 2011) and the corpse of Wolfgang Schmitt, who was in a coma somewhere on my hard drive.

I launched [Storyfix.com](http://storyfix.com) in 2009. It took off nicely, and using that platform I was able to publish *Story Engineering* in 2011 and *Story*
Physics in 2013. Both writing books sold pretty well (the former won the non-fiction category in that same Next Generation Indie writing competition), at least within the limits of a narrow niche, and suddenly I had reinvented myself as a writing teacher/mentor/guru type, leveraging my 25 years of doing writing workshops and generally trying to figure this thing out.

I now had a platform, a key word for anyone seeking to publish non-fiction... and virtually meaningless for a new writer seeking to publish fiction.

Nonetheless, Wolf wouldn’t let me alone.

I began reaching out to regional agents (which means, they don't live in New York) with a national client base. Using a personal connection (absolutely the best way to find an agent, bar none), I aligned with my current agent, who jumped aboard with rewarding enthusiasm, both for the new Wolfgang Schmitt novel and Story Physics (Story Engineering was already out there... this made all the difference in this new push for both an agent and a new publisher for Schmitt, because it was well known).

It took her about a month to find a publisher for Deadly Faux. That’s amazing, not because the book was so wonderful, but because she is. It would have taken even less time, but we were going back and forth
with a major New York house and wanted to play that out (they ultimately passed). When *Schmitt Happens/Deadly Faux* did find a home, I had to go back into the story to modernize the technology, putting iPads in place of Blackberry phones, update the casino/Las Vegas landscape, among other nuances. I also got to do a little nip-tuck on the narrative... I don’t think there’s a writer out there who wouldn’t jump at the chance to change a few little things after the fact, if they could.

From the outset my new agent really didn’t like the *Schmitt Happens* title. And so I went on the hunt for a better title, landing on *Deadly Faux* at about the same time she placed the book with Turner Publishing, who would also republish my entire backlist (the rights to which had reverted back to me from Signet).

It was seven years from completed manuscript to the release of the book.

And now, as I write this, all four of the Penguin books are out there under the Turner imprint, with *The Seventh Thunder* (we shortened the title after I bought the rights back so Turner could re-release it) set for release in December 2014.

All we have control over is the manuscript and the quality of our efforts once it’s done. The only sure outcome is quitting.
Starting Point: An Initial Core Competency

The original idea for a story, the first glimmer or notion that turns into a story, nearly always falls cleanly into one -- and only one -- of what I call the six categorical core competencies of storytelling. It can seem like the story falls out of the sky into your lap, and it can seem like more than one of those core competencies arrive concurrently and fully formed, but that's not actually how it happens 99.99 percent of the time. Often, milliseconds after the first lightning bolt hits, another core competency becomes organically involved. It's possible to string together two or three really powerful visions for your story in about 15 seconds, one after the other, each from one of the six core competencies.

The trick is to get all six core competencies onto the page. That initial morsel of creative vision can be seductive and dangerous in that regard... if you talk yourself into believing it alone is enough.

Sometimes, after the story has been written, it's hard to remember that first moment of inspiration at all. With Deadly Faux, however, that one is easy to nail down: it was a sequel. Which means, the core competency I began with was character.
Wolfgang Schmitt was coming back for another caper.

Which means, as it always does, while the first vision of the story just comes to us, as if it is a gift from the universe... we are on our own to come up with the other five elements and realms within the six core competencies model. How we do that is up for grabs... and right there is where careers live and die.

Back to the notion of origins. The discussion of that last line is about 50,000 words long... been there, been crucified for that.

The hero of *Deadly Faux* was introduced in my 2004 novel, *Bait and Switch*. I hadn’t intended it to become series, even if only represented by a single sequel, but the response to Wolf was compelling. (Check out the starred review, which was what I was reading when the aforementioned first spark for *Deadly Faux* hit me, and in this simple way: *gee I should write another Wolfgang Schmitt book. The reviewer even suggested it, I should listen.*)

Thank you, Universe. Now what?

No concept or premise. Nothing to structure. Just a fictional character walking back into my head saying, “Dude, that was cool, let’s do this again.”
Once we allow ourselves to take that first story-notion seriously, the floodgates open for a torrent of creative options, the key to which is knowing what bucket (among the six categories of core competencies) to throw it into. Is it a concept? A theme? A scene idea? An opening line?

In my view, the greatest pitfall a writer can make is to follow up that first moment of story notion with the opening of a blank page on a computer with the intention of writing... a first draft. Without knowing anything about the story other than the aforementioned first spark of inspiration for it.

My opinion. One that has earned me great scorn and misunderstanding out there.

I’m fine with that, because a misunderstanding, it is. It’s a little like saying, “hmmm, think I’ll open a deli, because I really like turkey sandwiches,” and then marching into a bank for a loan. Without a location. Without capital. Without knowing how to run a deli.

If you know how to run a deli, then by all means proceed. But you rarely succeed by learning-as-you-go in complex endeavors, the writing of a novel occupying a top spot on that list.
This is where a certain percentage of readers read this as a call for the *outlining* of a story. An unfathomable blasphemy for some. A fog for others. Rather, it is a call to acknowledge you are in the SEARCH FOR STORY phase, rather than a “storyTELLING” phase... the difference being critical. **HOW** you search for your story is your choice, your business – and writing a series of drafts IS one way, a common way, and a LONG way to go about it – but I’ll tell you this: the more you know about the craft, either a) you’ll do some form of outlining, or b) you won’t need to, because the draft that spills out of your head will align with the principles to a great degree.

When writers like Diana Gabaldon and Wally Lamb and others say in interviews that they don’t know where the story is headed when they start,” well, they mean it, but it’s a HUGE yellow flag for new writers. Because, guess what, outliners don’t know where the story is headed either when they begin. Those proud organic writers have a claim to that hubris, because they really have succeed because of a combination of experience, intimacy with the principles of storytelling craft, and their story instinct. Like Michael Jordan shooting a free throw with his eyes closed (google it), this is a sticky wicket if you don’t know what you’re doing.

Interestingly, in my view, I’ve never recognized the name of a single author, and there are many, who have called me out on this issue... because they don’t understand what I’m really saying.
Do it however you need to do it. Have a blast. But there many ways to skin the story search cat, and to claim drafting is the only way is as irresponsible as the prevalent inaccurate take on my view of outlining.

*Deadly Faux* began, solely, with Wolfgang Schmitt, and the framework he brought with him from *Bait and Switch*. From there, I went into search mode doing what I always do – I think about it. Make notes. Create sequential charts that become blueprints, then beat sheets, then outlines. (See, it's every bit as chaotic and random as drafting with no vision in mind.) I admit to cheating that process, to jumping into a draft... but ONLY when the story is clear to me in my mind.

Do I discover new paths for the character and plot along the way within the draft I ultimately write? Absolutely. Are they major? Well, I've rethought my ending upon reaching that point in the draft... so yes, some have been major. But those changes are NOT a search for the story, the are the UPGRADING of the story, as built upon a foundation of structure that I already believe in.

So what did I have to work with when I began to search for the story that would be a sequel to *Bait and Switch*? Consider these, all of which were inherited from the previous novel:
- Wolf is/was a unfulfilled copywriter who, at the core of his being, wanted to do something more significant with his life that write printer videos for Hewlett-Packard.

- He had a fling with modeling, the only relevance being his potential to get noticed when he needed to, as a prerequisite to get his assignment handled. This was important to the backstory, because Wolf's looks were key to his initial discovery as a potential off-the-books operative.

- In the first story he had been recruited by FBI, working on behalf of the IRS, to entrap a wayward billionaire by seducing the guy's wife to invalidate a nasty pre-nuptial agreement, something that forced him to weigh the moral propriety of which against the prospect of more money than he'd ever dreamed of, all the while working at the behest of the government, which is for the public good, and therefore an easy rationalization.

- The sting operation would be off-book, a sort of financial "black ops" mission that could never exist officially.

- Wolf emerged with a truckload of money after his adventures in the previous book, which he had stashed in an off-shore account on the precipice of reinventing himself and a new life.
His relationship with his handler at the FBI was layered, but successful, and the door remained open for another chapter.

That’s it. From those bones I assembled a new framework for Wolfgang Schmitt to re-engage with the big bad world of billionaires in the crosshairs of the Feds, who needed a chin-for-hire to do what they could not admit to doing. It was all a product of an on-going “what if?” dialogue with myself, looking for choices that appealed to the available story physics in a compelling way.

The story needed to be vicarious, taking the reader on a thrilling ride into a world they would never experience.

The story needed to have arrogant, hypocritical villains the reader really wanted to see go up in flames.

It needed a high level of dramatic tension, stemming from the fact that nothing was as it seemed, either to the hero or to the reader.

Each and every one of these criteria were powerful story physics.

The CONCEPT for Deadly Faux, then, was identical to that of Bait and Switch. It’s in those bullets you just read. In terms of core competencies... that was one down, five to go.
Relative to concept in a sequel, the same is true of all the Harry Potter books and any other series... which helps illustrate that concept and premise are DIFFERENT things. Harry was the same kid, with the same backstory, and the same over-arcing goal, in every book. Yet the DRAMATIC PREMISE was different in every book.

Read that again... that's a nugget of gold that can slice ten years off your learning curve.

The concept for Deadly Faux, simplified, was this: what if the FBI recruited a suitable pawn to seduce the wife of a fabulously wealthy man, with a view toward entrapment via means that would be otherwise outside the scope of their charter. In other words, the bending of boundaries toward a noble goal. By not playing fair with the bad guys.

From that concept – from ANY concept -- a PREMISE must emerge at some time during the story development process.

As a coaching side note, this is one of biggest traps that await writers who don’t know the difference between concept and premise – there absolutely IS one, and it’s critical – and thus find themselves either without a concept (skipping it entirely in the rush to dive into premise, which without a concept is less than optimally compelling), or simply
trying to spin a concept into a story without the presence of premise (which translates to thin dramatic tension).

A story about what it was like to be on the Titanic on the night of its sinking... that is NOT a premise. It is a concept only.

Concept is the compelling notion – situation, time, place, person, opportunity – that becomes the STAGE upon which a story can emerge. *The Hunger Games* had a dystopian society and the “games” themselves... which were the landscape for the story, but not the dramatic story itself. They comprised the CONCEPT of it.

The secret sauce of a concept is this: is it *conceptual*. It is compelling. A reader, upon hearing it, feels drawn to it. Even before they have a clue about the characters or the plot.

A forbidden love story set inside the White House... that’s a *concept*. Not a premise. It is conceptual. It draws you in... before you know a single thing about it, other than this landscape.

A story of the First Lady carrying on with the President’s lead Secret Service bodyguard... *that* is a PREMISE. One built upon and derived from the conceptual landscape that makes it interesting (far more interesting, say, than the wife of a coffee shop manager carrying on
with the guy who delivers the morning paper, which is also a premise, but one built upon a much thinner concept).

Let’s expand on this further. Spy novels are, at their heart, compelling because they suck us into the world of spies. If you say, “I’m going to write a spy novel set in the 1960s about leaking secrets from the US space program to the Soviets... that’s a concept, not a premise. You still don't have a story, or a hero, or a villain, or even a plot (which is the essence of premise)... but you do have a compelling story landscape – a stage – upon which to spin and reveal a story.

In *Deadly Faux*, the landscape was conceptual: the world of billionaires. A place we don’t get to go, a culture we don’t know much about, a dark alluring way of life that chills and repels as it seduces. A place for a hero to confront evil, do battle with bad guys, forcing him to dig deep for solutions and ways out of tight jams.

This was by intention. It was the seizing of a powerful realm of story physics (as would be that White House idea) – delivering the VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE of navigating the world of mobsters, billionaires and off-the-books Federal law enforcement. Something you and I will, dare I say, never experience for real.

An issue at this point leans into THEME, which is another of the six core competencies buckets: what *kind* of story are you writing?
*Deadly Faux* was a story designed to entertain, while creating a voice for a world view that calls out the bullshit, puts it in its place, and shows us a character that may or may not be the embodiment of what you and I would do in these tense, ambiguous situations.

And still, with all these targets in play... there was no *story*. Not yet. Just a pretty cool place to tell one.

So, concept in hand, I needed a PREMISE. Which is, in essence, the story that will unfold upon the conceptual landscape already created.

Now – quick look back here – not every story relies on “high” concept as that landscape. But still, in my view, the presence of something compelling remains the secret sauce of storytelling.

Is *Downton Abbey* high concept? Not in the least. But, we are taken into a time and place, into a culture that is not within our reach, and we find it fascinating, especially when all those layered characters begin to act out upon it.

*Downton Abbey* IS conceptual, if it is anything at all.

There are other decisions a writer needs to make, explore and consider before or early within a first draft. These are best made with
some awareness of the story you are about to tell, and will be tested as a draft. How you achieve that awareness – through drafting or as a product of outline – is your choice. One isn’t better than the other, unless it works for you.

I wrote *Deadly Faux* using a combination of first person narrative/POV and third person omniscient narrative/POV, presented as alternating or recurring discreet chapters. Why?

First, once again, *Deadly Faux* is a sequel. The prior book (*Bait and Switch*) used the same back-and-forth narrative POV dance, each with its own chapters (never mix POV or voice within a single scene, best not to try it within a single chapter, either, even when the scenes are separated by white space). It made sense to adopt the same approach, since Wolf would once again be telling this story through his own eyes, with some behind-the-curtain exposition included to make the story more dramatically intense for the reader.

Old schoolers would say this is risky. Maybe even heresy. But this is one of those old school rules that should stay buried with your grade school composition teacher. I first noticed the technique in a few Nelson DeMille novels, and found it engaging.

As for research for the novel... no, I didn’t go to Las Vegas for this, though I have been there several times. The research aspect these
days is quick and easy, and explained in two words: go online. You’ll have what you need before you could pull into the library parking lot.

As for the need to experience a place for yourself before you can write about... knock yourself out. That’s over-romanticized b.s, in my opinion, but hey, it’s deductible if you ever publish the story.
The Story in 9-Sentences: A Breakdown of the Structural Beats

A quick note here, so this will makes sense. The scene numbering shown here does NOT always coincide with the chapter numbers in the book. How can this be? Because there can be multiple scenes within any given “chapter” (which is the case frequently).

The following refers to SCENES by their scene number, and are summarized and correlated to PAGE NUMBERS in the SCENE LOG that follows this section. Most do align with the chapters, but that’s not the point. A little confusing, I get that, though perhaps not as confusing as referring to a given scene as “the third scene of Chapter 21.”

Here then, are the major foundational, weight-bearing elements of *Deadly Faux*, summarized according to the 9-Sentences model described earlier.
Element 1 (of 9): Opening Hook

The recently deceased Elmore Leonard, one of the modern greats, often spoke of his “rules for storytelling” (you may want to Google that one), all of which served him. Many of which serve all of us. Some of which are simply his opinion, as evidenced by a preponderance of successful novels that do precisely the opposite of what he advises.

Such is the art of dealing writing truisms. I prefer to stick to principles, not rules. Rules are breakable. Principles... mess with them at your own peril.

I heard Leonard about these ten points in the year 2000 at an annual mystery/thriller conference called Bouchercon, just weeks before my first novel (Darkness Bound) would be published by Penguin-Putnam, under their Onyx paperback imprint. The Publisher, Louise Burke, was in attendance, personally bringing me the first copy off the press, putting it into my clammy shaking hands over lunch with my wife and me.

Every writer remembers the moment when they hold their first published book in their hands for the first time. Few admit it, but it's right up there with being in the delivery room with a pair of scissors.
Louise was sufficiently smitten with my wife (as most are) that she invited us to sit with her at the Penguin table at the Conference banquet, where Leonard would hold court with a Keynote address.

I recall one of those ten rules clearly, because I recognized it as, well, an opinion of his. Something that is not only not a rule (just his opinion), but (in my opinion) risky advice. It was this: never write a Prologue.

Right up there with what some people still put forth: never buy a Chevy. Yeah, that’s a rule to live by, all right. Some would tell you never to write in first person, never to write in present tense, never to write another vampire novel because we’re all sick to death of them... don’t listen. Just consider.

In my third novel, Serpent’s Dance, I dedicated the Prologue to Elmore Leonard. Few got the joke.

In Deadly Faux, I used a Prologue as the HOOK.

Why? Because backstory was critical to the opening context of the narrative. I needed to give the relationship between the two factions of the story’s antagonists – Nick Mancuso and Phillip Valentine – some teeth. Not only to show what Wolf would be up against, but to set up
the motivations of each, which was critical to how the story would end. To show that these guys were worthy of our fear and loathing.

I couldn’t have written the Prologue, or a first chapter with this same content (semantics, that), without knowing how the story would end.

Those who claim to write drafts without knowing how their story will end – those writers and their books are everywhere out there – seldom add the inevitable postscript: once you find the ending that suits you, the best available resolution crafted in full awareness of the story that leads up to it, then you need to go back and retro-engineer the seeds, forces and foreshadowing of that ending into yet another draft.

And when you get to that draft, you do know how the story will end. By any other name, it’s just the process of searching for and finding the story.

Or, you can figure it out before you write a draft in the first place.

Do what you have to do... but that’s how I do it, how I did it in Deadly Faux, and it illustrates one of the benefits of knowing everything you can (especially the key story points) before you write a draft. Because my first actual draft, after a couple months of story planning, became THE story, not the search for story.
Tweaked it, certainly (mostly playing with dialogue), for about an hour or so. Then it was final.

Why was my Prologue a hook? The answer to that is a function of story physics.

A Prologue asks a question as it makes promise to the reader. The promise is that this (whatever comprises the Prologue, and the normal OMG! conclusion of one) will come back into the story in a meaningful way. The question(s) is, what does this mean? As the reader encounters a building series of story elements, they may (and should) harken back to that Prologue and ponder if and how the story beats might ultimately connect.

Because of the Prologue in *Deadly Faux*, the reader has a sense of the dark storm Wolf is unwittingly walking into. Phillip Valentine (one of two key roles in the Prologue) is fully introduced later (three years later, to be precise, upon Wolf's arrival at Xanadu), and when it happens we already know he runs with a bad crowd. And later, when we see his true role in the story (if you read it you know Phillip turns out not to be the villain we thought he was), we summon a massive amount of empathy for him... a twist for the reader, because they’ll have spent three quarters of the novel fearing and hating the guy.

This, too, would be impossible to pull off unless you understood the
entire arc of the story you are writing. However you go about it, through pounding on an outline until it’s bulletproof, or a series of drafts.

There is a specific piece of foreshadowing in the Prologue/Hook, something that comes back into the story and pays off (with what some readers have told me was, for them, an audible cry of “Nooooo!”) in Chapter 19, which was in essence the First Plot Point.

You may remember that one. It was when Phillip was taken into the desert in the dead of night, forced at gunpoint to dig up what would be... well, if you read the book, you know what it was.

Even I freaked out at that one.

It was linked to, and foreshadowed within, the Prologue/hook.
Element 2 (of 9): Part 1 Quartile Narrative Arc

The first quartile (Part 1) of a story has specific missions to accomplish, all of them connected contextually: to setup the story, and specifically, to setup the mechanics of the Most Important Moment in the story, which is the First Plot Point/ FPP (that being the culmination of Part 1, leading into the Part 2 quartile.

Those missions are:

- introduce the protagonist/hero, including his/her pre-FPP life and whatever drama already exists, his/her worldview;

- position the hero as someone the reader can and will empathize with (including, as a recommended option, someone the reader will like, though anti-heroes are valid, too) and root for, once you throw a bomb into their live (a NEW goal, quest and need, the CORE story you are telling) at the First Plot Point.

- foreshadow that which will benefit from foreshadowing;

- put the mechanical ramp up of the First Plot Point into play, as necessary (for example, if the CORE story is commenced at the FPP with an airplane crash, in the Part 1 scenes you would show arrival at the airport – preferably with an argument
already opened up – checking in, and perhaps an off-stage look at bad weather, drunk pilots, air traffic control technical problems... whatever tells the reader that something scary is about to happen to the flight).

- The goal of the entire quartile being this: to earn the empathy of the reader through exposure to the hero and her/his life – to cause the reader to ROOT FOR THE HERO – not just in this Part 1 context, but more importantly, following the launch of the CORE DRAMATIC STORY at the First Plot Point, which will escalate from there.

Successful authors know that the core story does NOT begin, in full at least, at the hook. That the hook invites people into the context of the setup.

Optimally the CORE DRAMATIC STORY launches – shifting from setup mode to an it begins now mode, or at least a things just changed mode – at the FPP. New writers often make this mistake/assumption. They skip the setup phase. Your Part 1 narrative is when you introduce and put the pieces into play, including the hero PRIOR to the moment when the drama begins. Part 1 is where you EARN the reader’s empathy (make them ROOT for the hero) though characterization and vicariously feeling what the character feels.
In *Deadly Faux* I used 16 scenes (not counting the Prologue, but including the First Plot Point scene) over 79 pages (85 counting the Prologue) to get the first quartile Part 1 segment done. We see Wolf in his life before this story sucks him in. We learn about his mother, which connects to his discovery that his money is missing. We see he has a new woman in his life that interests him, and I use that to create the scene where it all crashes down on him – the woman isn’t who she seems, and a new Federal “handler” appears to tell him what he must do to get his money back.

Which is a key *inciting incident* within Part 1. It serves to *setup* the story, not actually launch it.

Wolf now has a *problem*, and there are huge stakes (his money, and even his mother’s living situation, because he needs the money to take care of her), and an opportunity. A journey to take, a quest to embark upon. And clearly, because of the Prologue and the scenes at the end of Part 1, the reader is well aware that there are bad guys and danger ahead of him.

If you refer to the book, you’ll see that there is a major divider here, the end of Part 1 (literally) and the launch of Part 2. Page 80 is, in fact, a “*title page*” for the next section of the book.
Do your “parts” need to align with the structure this literally? Not at all. They did in this book because, well, that was the way the story was unfolding. Had the structural context shifted from the Part 1 setup to the Part 2 response AFTER Wolf arrived in Las Vegas, I STILL Would have (for the reader) created a curtain between his leaving Portland and traveling to Las Vegas, and I would have arranged for it to appear at approximately the 25th percentile.

Why? Because 2000 years of storytelling experience and the application of variations and story physics show us that this is what works best for the reader. It optimizes the reading experience.

The four parts of the story, in a structural sense, are for YOU, the writer. Because they ask you to change the context and mission of each part, which may or may not align with your chaptering strategy.

Which ultimately serves the reading experience.

You see, it never was, or is, a formula. More accurately, this model is a guide toward pointing to the structure for your story that will work best.
Element 3 (of 9): the First Plot Point

The FPP is when Wolf leaves Portland and heads to Las Vegas to assume his fake identity (his “faux” identity as a deadly hit man disguised as a personal trainer). His adventure has begun.

There are different flavors of First Plot Points, and this one illustrates the kind that has been setup to the extent required, then the story flips into a completely higher gear. Like turning an ignition key. An FPP is always a transition to a new context (the hero begins a new or elevated quest of some type), but in this case it isn't an OMG surprise insertion of something (also a valid FPP), but rather, the simple act of getting started on the quest after the setup chapters have (when done right) whet our appetite for it.

The CORE STORY has fully launched with Wolf going to Las Vegas. He wasn’t in harm’s way in Portland, but he’s certainly at risk the moment the wheels touch down in Nevada.

The optimal location for a First Plot Point is the 20th to 25th percentile. A shorter Part 1 may not allow you the space to cultivate reader empathy and/or put the required story mechanics into play, a longer setup may simply make the reader impatient for something to happen.

Let’s see how I did in Deadly Faux:
The page total for the entire novel is 333 pages, so let's do the math:

- The First Plot Point (the FPP, on page 86 counting the Prologue) occurs at the 25.8 percent mark. Just over the wire.

Was that coincidence? Luck? Bad luck? Editing? Or story planning?
Do those two or three extra Part 1 pages make any difference?

Doesn't matter. I like to think of it as that extra squeeze or two you give the gas pump after it clicks off the first time. If you spill gas you’ve gone too far. Otherwise, there’s simply more fuel in the tank.

Sometimes when you shoot for something, visualize it, that’s how it turns out. What does matter is that, in coming that close, it was the product of intention, because I honor the power of story physics and the structure that optimizes it. So I proactively craft a story along the lines of this model. If it would have hit the 27\textsuperscript{th} percentile I would have trimmed to get it back to 25, in an effort to mop up any spilled gas.

Why? Because -- and this is the one that the nay-sayers aren't getting or willing to accept -- a story just works better when it falls into these parameters. We stretch them at our own peril.
We’ve all put down novels because nothing much is happening by the time you reached page 100 or so (maybe you threw the book against the wall at that point, I know I’ve done that). Chances are it’s because the FPP wasn’t yet in play, or if it was it wasn’t strongly rendered. What’s for sure, though, when this happens, is that the inherent power of story physics haven’t been optimized.

Books get rejected all the time for just this specific reason.

You *should* master and honor this principle of FPP placement. Everything, including your shot at publication, depends on the power and placement of your FPP. Because in my opinion, the First Plot Point is the most important moment in any story. If you get feedback that your story is too short on dramatic tension, nothing happens quickly enough, it’s too boring, or the reader never really got on board with your protagonist – common reasons for rejection all – then this may explain it.
Element 4 (of 9): the Part 2 Narrative Arc

Entering the second quartile now, we know that Wolf has a goal, and he’s in a risky covert situation. He has specific things he needs to do: establish credibility with Lynn Valentine, earn her trust, create the mechanics of his fake planting of a drug that will kill her husband, move that agenda forward, all while working smoothly and covertly with his undercover FBI handler (Renee), for whom he still has sexual tension, while generally staying out of Phillip Valentine’s way.

Meanwhile, the growing tension between the Valentines and Mancuso needs to emerge, the threat of which makes Wolf’s job all that much harder.

And – this is critical – the reader’s empathy all the stronger.

Remember, the CONTEXTUAL MISSION of Part 2 scenes is to show your hero RESPONDING to the new story quest (not the hero’s life quest, that’s just prior/existing context for the story quest) launched at the FPP. To show him immersing himself in it (on some stories this is where the hero is running away or hiding or seeking help… point being, this is NOT where the hero begins fixing things and solving problems. Part 2 is where the hero discovers that what is happening is more complex, more threatening, than even at the First Plot Point revelation of it).
The FPP shows something *happening*. The Part 2 scenes that follow it generally, contextually, show the hero *reacting* to whatever it was, for reasons that have consequences either way (stakes).

Part 2 of *Deadly Faux* gives us the dangerous, deceptive dance between Wolf and Lynn Valentine, in context to Wolf's two missions: to set up the Valentines for a fall at the behest of the FBI, and the viability of his cover story goal of being Lynn Valentine's killer for hire.

Of course, by definition the FIRST PINCH POINT resides smack in the middle of the second quartile, with the mission of – if only for a moment – focusing on the source and nature and threat of the primary antagonistic pressure thus far in the story. It puts the villain center stage for a moment, to remind us what threatens the hero.

If you were running from a bear, beginning at the FPP, then the Pinch Point would be showing the bear jumping out at you from behind a rock. The Pinch Point is all about the bear.

The Part 2 Pinch Point is found in Scene 28, almost exactly in the middle of that quartile (Part 2 arcs from Scene 18 to Scene 37). It shows Phillip Valentine showing Wolf who the real boss is, face to face. He's not a guy you want to mess with, especially on his own turf.

Yet, messing with him is precisely why Wolf is there.
Element 5 (of 9): the Mid-Point

Scene 37 changes everything. It is the “mid-point” context shift of the story, straight out of the manual on story structure. It resides on page 183, which is at the 55th percent mark of the 333 total pages in the novel.

The optimal placement of the mid-point is the 50th percentile.

This should give those who want to rain on the structural paradigm great pleasure. But for me, it only reinforces one of the very best aspects of this principle – this is not an exact science. It’s not a science at all, it’s an optimal shape for a story, one that, when used to balance the narrative across its natural arc, serves to help optimize the inherent story physics.

Every single plotting model out there calls for ups and downs, highs and lows, ins and outs – the graphic representation of it looks like a stock market report – and this is no different.

A novel needs a major contextual shift in the middle, or close to it.

For me this wasn't (and never is) a specific page to shoot for. Rather, as I plan my stories, I notice where the story is and what scenes are in place to get it there, and if I’m too far off the mark I know that the
story physics (the forces that make it work) will suffer for it. So I do the rearranging and cutting at the outline stage, and if the narrative of a draft takes me too far adrift, I look to cut what I can.

It always amazes me how the story wants to cooperate in this regard. Like staying in a lane in a car, or in an approach pattern in an airplane about to land, or if you’re chipping onto a green after three fairway shots – all of these being a few of the analogies I’ve used to absolutely drive some readers bat-shit crazy – you get comfortable with it, because (as is the case in all of those examples), it’s the best and safest and most effective way to execute.

Earlier in the story Wolf had sent a wine glass from the restaurant where this whole thing began to his techie friend from his old life. The results of fingerprinting return to him now (at the Mid-point marker), and he learns that Renee, his old near-girlfriend and now his FBI “handler,” isn’t who she claims. She’s a total fraud. She has a record and is a known consort with organized crime factions. Which means, Wolf isn’t really working for the Feds at all, he’s been duped and is a shill for mobsters who really do want Phillip Valentine taken out.

Everything changes here. The context is completely different, his quest takes a radical turn toward a new goal. The pressure elevates, he must now kick into a more proactive attacking mode to make sense of this, and perhaps get something productive out of it, not necessarily
for himself, but for that young girl (the surviving Valentine daughter) and his friend (Sherman Wissbaum), who really is FBI (from his prior assignment) and is already scrambling to find out what is going on.

Simply a plot twist? Yes, but in the same way turning 21 is simply a birthday. The entire story spins in a new direction because of the midpoint.

Wolf first order of business from this point on is to bring Sherman up to date. He can’t leave, there is too much at stake on all sides.

After the midpoint, the hero kicks into a proactive attack mode, armed with the new information, opportunities and/or threats revealed at the midpoint.
Element 6 (of 9): the Part 3 Narrative Arc

Things are happening fast now (escalating tension and pace in the second half of a novel is a proven strategy to keep readers engaged). Phillip Valentine’s body is discovered in his room (this is startling news to Wolf, because he knows he didn’t kill him), and the police swoop in. Sherman Wissbaum (the real FBI agent from his prior caper) arrives to get him out, after which Wolf confronts Renee about her true identity.

This is where Wolf could have, perhaps should have, caught a plane home.

But instead he confronts Renee with the truth about her criminal self, she cops to it and, instead of shooting him or fleeing, makes him another offer. A true devil’s deal.

Wolf, sensing a way to keep the original Federal objectives alive, plays along. Takes her bait. There is another faction who wants control of Xanadu, and with his help Renee plans to profit from it happening.

But the threat mounts when the reader (in a third-person narrative insert) learns that Renee has notified that dubious third party about Wolf’s new patsy role, and the plans to take him out as soon as he’s made his contribution.
This is the SECOND PINCH POINT (optimally located in the middle of the Part 3 quartile; in this case, at the end of Scene 43, on page 225 of 333 pages, which is the 67th percentile mark. Late, because the midpoint itself (which is the initiation of Part 3) was a bit late in showing up (55th percentile, versus the target 50th percentile). Which puts this Second Pinch Point right on its target, residing squarely in the middle of Part 3.

Phillip Valentine is dead. Lynn Valentine has just shot herself, and is also dead. His mother has been snatched from the nursing home Wolf put her in, and was intending to buy. Sherman Wissbaum, his true FBI relationship, is missing and may be dead. And Caitlin Valentine, the surviving daughter, is suddenly missing, as well, no doubt to be used as leverage by the bad guys to make Wolf do what they want him to do.

Fiction is conflict. And more conflict. All this was by design.

In another of a series of unexpected twists (because much is happening behind the curtain of Wolf’s awareness), we learn that Lynn Valentine had given Wolf power of attorney over the disposition of her assets in the event of her death, which made no sense to anyone except Wolf: she knew her daughter was at risk, and that Wolf would do the right thing to keep her safe.
That, and getting his mother back, was now the focus of his ongoing quest in this story.
Element 7 (of nine): the Second Plot Point

Wolf learns two things that change the story: someone has taken his mother out of the nursing home back in Portland. Someone – it could be any one of four entities – intends to use her as leverage to manipulate him.

And then he learns that Lynn Valentine is dead. She’d shot herself in the head in her suite just minutes earlier.

Just another story twist? Most of the time your KEY story twists are, in fact, one of these major story milestones.

This Second Plot Point alters Wolf’s path in the certain knowledge that he is no longer a shill or even a bit player, he’s at the core of a plan that’s bigger than what he’s been told. He must take drastic action now, not only to save his mother, but to make sure Caitlin Valentine (Lynn’s daughter) doesn’t meet the same fate as her sister at the hands of mobsters.

The goal is to make the reader care and root for the hero. The stakes now include the life of an innocent little girl. Call me manipulative (aren’t we always manipulative as storytellers? We should be...), but nothing says empathy like putting a little girl in harm’s way.
Complicating matters is the fact that Wolf knows he’s alone with this. Sherman Wissbaum is off the grid, perhaps dead, while his former Federal bosses have turned out to be mobsters. Renee is playing everybody for an exit strategy, and meanwhile he isn't sure what they want from him. But they took his mother and they have the girl, which means he has no choice but to play this through.

Like last time, he’ll have to resolve this without help. The hero’s calling is screaming at him now.

Phillip Valentine is dead. Lynn Valentine has just shot herself, and is also dead. His mother has been snatched from the nursing home Wolf put her in, and was intending to buy. Sherman Wissbaum, his true FBI relationship, is missing and may be dead. And Caitlin Valentine, the surviving daughter, is suddenly missing, as well, no doubt to be used as leverage by the bad guys to make Wolf do what they want him to do.

Which, as it turns out, could be significant. Because Lynn Valentine had given Wolf power of attorney over the disposition of her assets in the event of her death, which made no sense to anyone except Wolf: she knew her daughter was at risk, and that Wolf would do the right thing to keep her safe.
That, and getting his mother back, is now the Part 4 (resolution) focus of his ongoing quest in this story.
Element 8 (of 9): the Part 4 Narrative Arc

Wolf meets with each of the three remaining players in this “clusterf**k that defines his circumstance. (You may not like the word, but my hope, my bet, is that you enjoy the vicariousness of situation in the same way you like the way a killer roller coaster makes you scream... even when you know you’ll live through it.)

Chad Merrill tries to empower Wolf to a like-minded purpose: do whatever it takes to protect Caitlin Valentine. But he’s clear, he won’t hesitate to toss Wolf under the bus if it serves that purpose.

Bradley Pascarella (Mancuso’s on-site lieutenant), realizing that Wolf holds the keys to Xanadu, tries to reason with him using his checkbook and some vaguely veiled threats.

Renee, who Wolf now knows isn’t an FBI plant, but rather, a criminal, shows up to inform him she’s actually working for a rival organized crime family, who was trying to take down the Valentines so they could snatch Xanadu from the clutches of Lou Mancuso’s organization. With Wolf now the guardian of Lynn’s estate in that regard, he’s in a position to make that happen. She isn’t precise on her role in either his mother’s or Caitlin’s disappearances (preferring that Wolf remain intimidated by either possibility), but she certainly isn’t above leveraging the implication that she can make those problems go away
if he’ll play it her way – in other words, if he’ll screw the Mancuso faction at her behest – and she’ll make him a rich man in the process.

Wolf digs in, with the realization he’s in a highly risky, no-win situation. Either way he goes – at least until someone from the FBI returns to the scene – Xanadu ends up with criminal ownership, with no guarantee that either his mother or Caitlin will be returned safely.

He comes up with this own plan, putting the screws to both sides to return the missing mother and girl first, and then he’ll allow the legal swap to occur... promising both sides the trophy.

Which means, he needs an end game that has teeth. With Chad Merrill’s help, he extorts the return of the women on both sides, and before they can react he manipulates each side into destroying the other, which was likely in any case, but without the safe return of the hostages.
Element 9 (of 9): the Climax and Resolution

Wolf calls a meeting. The bluff is played on both sides. With outside help waiting to rescue both women as soon as the opposition folds, Wolf has to play his hand with steel resolve.

Meanwhile, this triggers two other factions to close in: Chad Merrill, seeking to protect Caitlin Valentine, and the Feds, wanting to arrest anybody that can at this point.

After it goes down, it is revealed to Wolf that nothing about any of this was as it seemed, from his point of view. Both Lynn and Phillip Valentine are very much alive, as is Sherman Wissbaum. The game was to move Wolf into a position of proactive attack on both sides of the mob, in a way that the Feds could never pull off, something that leveraged the equity in his successful insertion into the mix.

In a sort of Epilogue context – six months after the fact – Wolf shows up at Sherman Wissbaum's FBI office to claim a little known IRS law, offering to reward anyone turning in a tax fraud scheme with 25 percent of the recovered taxation. Which makes Wolf about eight million dollars richer, not to mention the money he took out of the operation when, out of gratitude, Lynn Valentine paid him the original fee that was part of the sting operation.
It’s clear the Feds may call on Wolf again. And he’s fine with that... he’ll protect his retirement fund a little better next time, and meanwhile his mother will be comfortable within the confines of his latest investment, a plush nursing home that treats patients like the human beings they are.
Postscript – Author’s Take on How All This Really Worked

The reviews for the book are good, and several author stepped up to endorse it with high praise. So am I completely happy?

Not really. I wanted a bestseller out of this. I didn’t necessary expect that to happen, but with a small publisher the odds are long no matter how well received the book.

In looking back, I think I see why this book earns a smile and a nod (this is what happens when I know the reader and force a reaction out of them), and nothing much more.

The book is pure entertainment. It isn’t particularly strong on theme, it doesn’t make you ponder your life or your world view, it doesn’t touch you at the core of your soul. Those are often the hallmarks of a breakout bestseller (not the bestsellers written by A-list authors – most of those are entertainments, too – whose name is the primary factor in the sales department).

The book is largely unimportant out there. Fun, yes, for many. An interesting plot, with an ending out of nowhere... that too. I’m happy with that, mission accomplished on that front.
Will there be another Wolfgang Schmitt book? I hope so. The character and the conceptual landscape are as strong as many bestselling franchises, so why not. I should go for it.

And yet, I feel this need to write a more important novel. Whatever that means. A love story, perhaps, from a male point of view that dissects gender role models and expectations within the give and take of relationships. The nature of chemistry and romance in the real world.

Who knows. I’m glad you liked Deadly Faux, if you did... and get it if you don’t. It’s not everyone’s genre cup of tea.

In either case, though, in context to this ebook, I hope the story helps clarify the principles of storytelling.

What follows here is the Scene Log, with occasional notes (in red typeface) to cull out the scene MISSION, which is a critical context for successful scene writing.
Deadly Faux Scene Log

One note about this, or any “scene log.”

It’s really an outline, by any other name. This document, even with the red-inked asides I’ve offered, model what a complete outline can look like. The whole novel is here, with every milestone and every nuance defined in context to (granted) a deeper well of awareness and the blank page of further exploration and the consideration of other options, which can only manifest at the full manuscript level.

Thing is – and I’ve said this many times on Storyfix – when you get an outline to this level, when it all works, rarely do you shift much upon actually drafting a manuscript. Most changes from that point are enhancements, a ecstatic execution that often exceeds your vision for the nature and effectiveness of the scenes you’ve planned.

Here’s the outline for Deadly Faux:

*****

Prologue opening (six pages of narrative PRIOR to Chapter 1, not numbered by page (the publishers chosen pagination scheme).
See the section for this Prologue (Element 1), for a description of content and a discussion of the strategy (mission) and rationale for it.

What follows are the scenes, by Chapter number. Sometimes there are multiple scenes within a given chapter; those are described after a line break in a new paragraph within the Chapter description.

Part/Quartile One

1. (4 - 8)

Wolf’s opening rant, his world view, his voice; his mother’s nursing home (some backstory), wants to buy the place so he needs money.

I’m enlisting the reader’s affection here, through his somewhat cynical voice and point of view. Wolf isn’t big on bullshit, which fuels much of what he decides and does in this story, and in his life. Introducing the hero is one of several non-negotiable missions of the Part 1 quartile.

2. (8 - 10)

In rationalizing this investment (the buying of his mother’s nursing home), he goes to check his account. But the money is GONE. He’s dry. They’ve been drained. The money (from his prior caper) has been stolen.
Quick conflict injected into the story here, a motivating, driven NEED for Wolf to pursue an explanation and a fix for this.

3. (11 - 14)

Still upset, he must go out on a date with his new girlfriend, in which he has invested high hopes. This will be the second of three shit-storms (the first being the missing money) coming his way this day.

That woman is a key player, so she needs to enter the story with the same deception that she turns out to embody. This is an example of the mission of the scene (introduce the girl) being cloaked in a stand-alone context that reads like a short story, compelling and vicarious (we've all been on a first date with someone we have hopes for) in its own right.

4. (15 - 17)

Has a run-in with a couple of loudmouth jerks in the men's room, which he as no idea will lead to something completely unexpected.

Men, in particular, will relate to this vicariously. Story Physics in play.

5. (19 -21)
At the table the altercation escalates, but his date reveals she is no
who she’d represented herself to be. Wolf knows he’s being played... again.

A continuation of the scene... I feel it’s good to keep scenes and
chapters short, leaving each transition moment with a prompt to keep
reading. Hence, this “scene” actually gets three separate sections of
exposition as it unfolds (setup... confrontation... outcome).

6. (23-28)

The newly arrived FBI handler, Duncan Stevens, introduces Wolf to the
new caper, the one that will get his money back, and then some.
Key inciting incident here. This is the “outcome” of the entire scene
strategy... this is the primary MISSION of the scene itself.

Could have been much shorter, but then it wouldn’t have been as much
fun. The scene allowed me to deeply characterize Wolf, which is a
good reason to honor a scene’s mission using a highly creative
dramatic treatment, even if it’s a little longer road to get there.

7. (28 - 33)

3rd Person/omniscient POV narrative
Intro to Xanadu (the casino) and the major players there (Lynn, Phillip and Merrill) with a preview of the contextual dynamics between them.

Necessary background and set up for the place where the story will unfold from this point forward.

8. (35 - 39)

Wolf ponders this new situation and opportunity. Drives to Seattle to meet the FBI agent who handled him on the prior case, someone he has learned to trust. Sherman Wissbaum isn't aware of this new project, but promises to check it out.

Scene mission: Wolf puts a backup resource in play... or so he believes (this will come back as a key plot twist later). The Part 1 setup now has multiple layers: two from Wolf's POV, one (for now) from the Valentine's.

9. (41 -44)

Driving home, Wolf learns Wissbaum (the FBI agent he calls him Sherlock, who was his handler in the prior book) already has his back.
Before he goes home, he drops in on another resource from the prior caper (last book), a guy who can get things done off the books. Wolf had stealthy lifted a glass from the restaurant when Carolyn was exposed as an FBI front-woman out to seduce him; now he has a way to check her fingerprints to see if any part of this story is true.

10. (45-47)

Back home, Carolyn (she says her real name is Renee) pays an unexpected visit, urging him to join the team, that she'll be there for him the whole time. She's playing the sexual chemistry card, but Wolf is immune... once burned, it's all about the money now.

This is the machinery of the plot kicking in.

11. (48-52)

The discussion continues, sans pajamas this time. Renee provides some details about the case and his role as Lynn Valentine's hired assassin to avenge her husband's infidelity and assume control of the casino empire, all the while gathering enough evidence to implicate the whole lot of them under Federal racketeering charges.
If he succeeds, he'll get his frozen assets back, plus another million dollars. What she doesn't tell him is that he'll have to survive the ruthless Valentines, and perhaps her, for that to happen.

It is critical to the exposition that the entire “pitch” to Wolf, a description of his mission and role, be presented clearly, and from the deceptive mark’s point of view. The more we know about the fraud he is attempting to perpetrate, the stronger the tension in doing so.

12. (53 - 55)

More explanation, with Renee clarifying.

Again, extending a scene over multiple sections, to keep the reader engaged (sort of like cutting to a commercial – in a TV show – at a critical moment; we have DVRs now, so we fast forward straight back into it, which is similar to simply turning the page to the next chapter in a book; things pick right back up.

Short chapters are better, especially in this genre.

13. (58 -61)

More details of what Renee is proposing.
Wolf pushes back, not tipping his hand. He needs to vet this because he knows his life, as well as his money, is on the line. And that is this business, nothing and nobody is what it seems to be on the surface.

3rd Person omniscient POV narrative

In Las Vegas now, we get deeper background in the Valentines, the casino, and the dark path that led them to this impasse, where we enter the story.

With that in place, we now meet Lynn in her surviving daughter’s room. She’s visited by her assistant, who clearly has been in charge of finding and hiring Lynn’s new "trainer," which only these two women know is a cover for his real reason for being there -- to kill Phillip Valentine at Lynn Valentine’s behest and pleasure.

We’re still in Part 1, by the way... still setting up the situation that Wolf is about to land in.

Tricky stuff here. The reader needs to believe that Lynn is actually a bad guy, the person who is hiring Wolf to kill her husband. We learn at
the end of the story this isn’t true, so I needed to walk the line here, to keep the dramatic tension high.

Is it okay to fool the reader? Absolutely. Happens all the time. You just can’t cheat to make it happen.

We then learn that the assistant is none other than Carolyn/Renee (her undercover name here is Nicole), in her role as an FBI mole inserted into Lynn Valentine’s life. The whole thing rides on her. And at this point, she's everything she promised Wolf she would be.

The scene ends by revealing that this entire exchange has been covertly heard by Chad Merrill, the veteran casino operations/security head who has been Lynn Valentine’s guy for years (we met him earlier as he and Lynn covertly observed Phillip Valentine giving a new employee orientation in one of the rooms, the new hire bent over a sink).

The last moment of the scene is Merrill picking up the phone, presumably to tell someone else about the status of this operation.

These peeks behind the curtain of awareness of certain characters, giving the reader superior point of view, is a powerful way to ratchet up tension and conflict. The reader knows more about the prevalent threats than the characters do.
16. (75 - 79)

Wolf narrating the nature and inner dialogue of his transportation from Portland to Las Vegas, where he would disappear into his dual-faux identity as trainer/assassin-for-hire.

He has a new mission. The setup for his mission is in place.

The real story starts here.

The First Plot Point — the moment when the dramatic sequence and exposition fully launches, after it’s Part 1 set up — is when Wolf steps onto that private jet bound for Las Vegas. He’s in.

Which is right out of the book on structure and the contextual objective and expositional content of scenes that comprise Part 1 of the story (out of its requisite four parts).
PART TWO

17. (83 -85)
Six Weeks Earlier

Phillip gets summoned to a remote parking lot when Chad Merrill, using video surveillance of the Valentine's daughter, sees a note pinned to her nightie while she sleeps in her room unaware.

A setup for the darkest scene in the novel. If the reader feels the march into danger, that makes the actual payoff all the more visceral.

18. (87 -90)

Intro to Lou Mancuso, the batting cage thug we met in the Prologue, and the guy who has summoned Phillip to the parking lot, where he is whisked into the night in a helicopter.

Getting closer to something that’s obvious going to be really scary.

19. (91 - 97)

In my mind (the author's, so it counts for something here), this is the most horrific scene in the novel, designed to enroll the reader in this
emotional roller coaster ride the Valentines are discovering they are on.

Phillip is taken to the desert and, at gunpoint, forced to dig up a barrel, while Mancuso narrates his agenda. Inside the barrel is a father’s worst possible nightmare, the preserved body of his kidnapped daughter, who disappeared three years earlier.

His remaining daughter’s safety depends on Valentine’s willingness to give Mancuso what he wants: control of Xanadu.

Someone asked me, “what kind of monster are you, to write a scene like that?” Made my day.

20. (99 - 101)

Wolf narrating again. This is his initial arrival and greeting at Xanadu, the opening curtain of his undercover role.

Tapping into the story physics realm of vicarious experience. Imaging being Wolf, walking into this place and this situation.
21. (103 -106)

He meets Chad Merrill, who takes his luggage and escorts him to a back room to be strip-searched.

Intro of a key character here, in Chad Merrill. He’s a major story catalyst later, and (again) care needs to be taken with how he's positioned, especially from Wolf’s point of view.

22. (107 -110)

Short scenes of his experience in checking in. While playing his first hands of Xanadu blackjack, he is told someone wants to buy him a drink: his new "handle," his recent ex-almost-girlfriend, then known as Caroline.

Major step forward in Wolf’s journey here. His sexual chemistry with Renee remains a factor for him.

23. (111 - 115)

They catch up from within this new undercover context. He has more questions that she's willing to answer, explaining her cover here is working as Lynn Valentine's personal assistant, which puts her in the
center of everything Lynn is up to. Which is the point of the whole sting.

Her name now, her undercover identity, is Nicole.

In his room he finds deep background on his new identity, which he is told to study, memorize, and destroy.

Deeper into the darkness for Wolf. Getting closer to his decision and action points. The creation of a sense of anticipation for the reader makes the vicarious experience, and the reading experience, all the more intense.

24. (117 - 119)

Next morning he meets his new personal training client (that’s his cover identity here, at least on the surface), Lynn Valentine, in the gym. She's haughty, and hot, with very little acknowledgement that his true mission here is to kill her husband for her.

He needs to feel the power of this woman, feel an attraction to it, as well as a fear of it.
Still in the gym, she explains the expectations and parameters of his role. It is a joust between them, part sexual chemistry, part master and servant. At the end of a lot of double entendre, she finally says it, acknowledging why he’s really there.

They decide to further this conversation in the spa, under the audio cover of falling water.

Again, spreading the scene into a *sequence*.

In the spa now, soaking in what amounts to a cave behind a curtain of falling water. It’s hot in here between them, literally on several counts. Lynn Valentine wants what she wants, when she wants it.

Wolf is hoping his FBI handle, Sherman Wissbaum, can hear the whole thing go down over the stealth phone app.

*Vicarious experience, for sure.*
27. (129 - 133)

It’s physical now, though more whispered double talk and agenda than crossing any darker lines than that.

The deal between them, as she frames it, is sealed and underway.

28. (135 - 138)

My favorite opening chapter line here: *Men can rationalize anything.*

Three scenes within this chapter, the first two transitional. The third is Wolf’s first encounter with Phillip Valentine, who enters his field of vision in the gym. It’s all posturing and dick swinging here, setting the context for their relationship going forward.

This, by the way is the FIRST PINCH POINT.

29. (139 - 144)

After some intimidation tactics designed to serve notice that Phillip will be watching every move Wolf makes, none of which should come too close to the no-fly zone with Lynn (Phillip’s wife), Wolf speaks his sudden dread into the bugged mobile phone in the hope that someone out there will hear.
Wolf walks it off, ponders it all. (These types of scenes need to be short and to the point, as much to catch the reader up on the hero's frame of mind as anything else.)

He is later visited in his room by ex-girlfriend-now-Lynn's-fake-assistant, Nicole (Renee, now using her undercover in-house name; this character ends up having three names in this story -- my wife chewed me out for that, said it was hard to follow -- but in retrospect they are sequential, never over-lapping, and they mark her role in the story, which, as you now know, turns out to be huge). She wants to talk about paying him, which of course is a dicey topic given the stealth state of his off-shore account, and the admission on the part of the Feds (and she's supposedly one of them) that they've taken it as leverage.

After his somewhat scary encounter with Phillip Valentine, Wolf is rethinking all this. If a wave is too big, he'll happily walk away.

Renee leaves him with the bottle of doped testosterone and instructions on how to get into Phillip's room and swap it out within his
regular stash, which he injects every other day. Her description is confusing, as if this is really going to kill the guy... but Renee clarifies that this is the version that Lynn believes. The poison in the testosterone, of course, is as phony as both of them are. And like them, will mimic a desired reality for a limited amount of time.

A key moment of plot machinery here. A plot can never sit in one place for long, you need to move it forward constantly.

32. (155 - 159)

Sherman arranges a meet, but sends proxies instead (at a saucy Vegas show). Working through the woman over a mobile phone, Wolf is told his money has been located, and that he should proceed with the testosterone swap despite his doubts. He signs off by giving Wolf a new account number in a Swiss bank, and instructions to get something audible on the record from Lynn Valentine.

Another example of trying to create a fun and creative vessel to deliver on an otherwise simply expositional mission for a scene. When you do that, characterization becomes the primary upside.
33. (162 - 166)

A check in between Wolf and Lynn, where she tells him: a) she’s attracted to him, b) he’ll never have to fear her, and, c) unless he screws up, in which case she'll bury him.

He wasn’t expecting this. Might change how he plays things.

Meets the Valentine’s daughter (the twin of the dead girl in the barrel, but Wolf doesn’t know about that yet), feels a protective sense for her.

A VERY important moment, because Caitlin (the daughter) turns out to be the Maltese Falcon pivotal thing in the whole story. But... you’d never guess it, with this treatment. A strategic approach.

34. (167 - 174)

Lynn visits Wolf in his room, delivers some cash and ANOTHER bottle of lethal testosterone... because she doesn’t trust Nicole (who delivered one earlier). She informs him she’s fired Nicole, and that she has trust issues, perhaps with him, too. Gives him a little test to pass. Wolf, in return, promises he has backup, and if anything happens to him there will be consequences.

Moments after she leaves, he realizes his phone is missing.
The plot thickens.

35. (175 - 178)

Sherlock (Wolf’s stealth FBI handler) sends him a new phone via messenger, assures him it’s still a go, Lynn is just being careful.

36. (179 -182)

Wolf goes into Phillip’s room to switch out his stash of testosterone. But when he sees a picture of the twins (seeing Caitlin, realizing her twin is dead) he now knows what the backstory is, and changes his mind. Sherlock will have to come up with another idea.

Wolf is wrestling with his moral compass the whole time.

37. (183 - 186)

Wolf ponders it all, safely back in his room. The so-called "poison" (which he didn’t leave behind) wouldn’t work anyway, it was part of the sting, so he hadn’t sabotaged the mission. But he didn’t trust Lynn Valentine, and as long as he did things her way, instead of his, she had control of the outcomes. That’s what he’d just changed.
He gets a voicemail from his friend in Portland, Blaine, his uber tech genius resource. He had run the prints on the wine glass from the restaurant the night this whole thing began -- his girlfriend, Renee, who became his contact here at Xanadu, Nicole... was not who she claimed. She was a criminal, on the FBI's most wanted list and the subject of an organized crime search.

The entire mission was fraud. He'd been hired by the mob, not the Feds. If he hadn't taken this to Sherlock -- who definitely was a bonafide Fed - he'd be alone in this darkness.

The game had changed, and the bad guys were everywhere.

He decides to leave immediately. But before he can, the local police arrive with an arrest warrant... Wolf is being arrested for the murder of Phillip Valentine.

This is the all-important MID-POINT milestone. The context of the story is radically different now (a “plot twist” in over-simplified terms). It defines the rationale and extent of his forthcoming actions and decisions.
PART THREE

38. (189 - 198)

A peek at the real reason Nicole is MIA, having been sent out of town to get her out of the way. Upon returning, she learns that Phillip Valentine is dead. Much to Wolf’s shock and dismay, as well.

Wolf tells her he knows she was in on framing Wolf for the murder, maybe she was even responsible for tipping the cops to it.

Then he drops a bomb: he knows who she is, her true background as a mobster operative, sent here to get rid of Mancuso and his control over Xanadu. Something he wants, as well. She admits to setting up Wolf as the fall guy for Phillip’s death. Maybe there’s a common goal here.

They make a deal. A deal with the devil, which is what each believes the other to be.

He’s on the offensive now, taking things into his own hands. This is the target context of Part 3 scenes: a hero who is proactive and on the attack.
He's taken away by the cops, jailed. Learns what they believe to be true, relative to his complicity in a murder. If this was a frameup all long, it has worked.

But not so fast... Sherman Wissbaum's FBI lawyers come to bail him out, using a D.C. judge's order to make it happen.

The game continues, with different rules and stakes now.

Or so he thought. Turns out a rival mob faction killed Phillip, and now they want to Wolf on their team.

Bradley Pascarella, who had been Mancuso's man on the job site, senses the shifting landscape, he's making a play. He has a lucrative, take-it-or-die proposition for Wolf to consider.

They joust about the terms of their new arrangement, including what Pascarella wants from him.
Wolf meets with the newly-agendized Renee/Nicole. She enlists him to work with her on a new sting (his second such offer in the past 12 hours), using a tape that Merrill will cough up showing Lynn Valentine actually placing the toxic vial of testosterone that killed her husband. She, too, explains Renee/Nicole, has been bought by the Germanos.

Wolf realizes he needs to get Sherman back up to speed on this, and quickly.

Someone in the restaurant had been watching them while covertly recording the entire conversation using a hidden directional microphone.

Turns out that audio had been piped directly to Chad Merrill.

Meanwhile Renee/Nicole sends of a thinly veiled email to a player yet to arrive on the scene. Someone who will clean up this mess for good... including Wolf.

Using behind the curtain point of view to raise the tension level for the reader.
Wolf confronts Lynn, wanting to get paid. She says he didn’t deliver, that there’s a tape proving he didn’t do the drop of the lethal vial, that someone else did it. (Renee/Nicole had claimed Lynn had done it, but Wolf sits on that for now.)

Wolf keeps the game alive by suggesting he knows who has that tape, and how to get it.

Wolf meets with Chad Merrill, who he knows possesses more knowledge about what has happened, not to mention duplicity, that anyone had suspected.

Merrill comes clean. He’s working for, and on behalf of, Lynn Valentine. She wants out, a new life. To make that happen, the outside players have to be taken down. All of them. Wolf can be helpful in getting that done. Merrill has the video showing that Wolf didn’t kill Phillip, he’ll turn it over to him if he’ll agree to keep this ball in play.
Wolf does just that. He tells Chad Merrill who he is (truthfully), and that he's all-in to take down the newly-reveal mob faction that's trying to take over Xanadu. If nothing else, that little girl (Lynn’s daughter) deserves a better fate.

46. (239 – 243)

The video Merrill is using as leverage shows Lynn Valentine planting the deadly vial of testosterone, after Wolf failed to do so (meaning Nicole was telling the truth). Renee wants Wolf to get the video from Merrill and then turn it over to Bradley Pascarella, the front for the new mob faction that wants to take Lynn down.

Everybody is in line to be betrayed in this story.

Wolf isn't sure how he'll make sure Phillip's killer – Lynn or someone else – comes to justice, but he knows he needs to keep the momentum going on the mob extortion to give Sherman Wissbaum time to wrap his Federal team around this and swoop in.

And of course, the return of Wolf's stolen funds depended on this outcome.

While contemplating this, Wolf gets a phone call from the nursing home, with news that totally rocks his world.
His mother is gone. Someone checked her out, with no forwarding information. With no other family in a position to do this, Wolf has to narrow it to two choices: the FBI wants her for leverage to keep on the job, or the mob wants her for the same reason.

Then, to really make his day, he learns that Lynn Valentine is dead as a result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

This is the SECOND PLOT POINT.

The whole story was just slammed into a higher gear, escalating the stakes and shifting the nature of the antagonism. Wolf has to go to a higher level to save his mother, incriminate the bad guys and make sure Lynn Valentine’s daughter gets out of it unscathed. Not to mention, him, too.

Part Four
Chad Merrill summons Wolf for a meet off-site. More bad news now – a body with Sherman Wissbaum’s identification has been found in an auto wrecking yard outside of town. Wolf’s last shot had been stuffed into the glove box of a 1998 Honda Civic and crushed to the size of an in-room refrigerator.

Merrill tells Wolf that Lynn Valentine had given him power of attorney (Wolf, not Merrill, because she didn’t trust Merrill, even though she should have) over the disposal of the hotel, and that he has been instructed to preside over the sale of the property to the enemies of Lou Mancuso, to facilitate the return of her daughter should they take her for leverage (which they did, or at least that’s the assumption).

Merrill explains that the new bad guys had leveraged the threat to kill Caitlin if this didn't happen, something for which there was dark precedent. Wolf, an unlikely candidate for power of attorney, was someone Lynn could trust, and in return Lynn had made provisions for his original fee and a sizeable bonus to be paid upon completion of the deal.
The rival mob gang, of course, had a different vision for the outcome. Which is why they snatched Wolf's mother. Nobody can locate Caitlin, either, and the assumption is they have her, as well.

Who took whom remains unclear. It is now Wolf's mission to find out the truth, and make it right.

48. (253 – 257)

Wolf meets with Bradley Pascarella, who has been Lou Mancuso's on-site eyes and ears since he took over the majority share. Wolf has something he wants – the truth about Renee, who is working for the Germano family, sworn enemies of the Mancuso organization and now in the hunt for Xanadu.

Wolf shows Pascarella the video on a DVD, provided by Chad Merrill. Only there was a surprise in store – it shows that Renee had entered the suite to replace what Lynn Valentine hadn’t known was a fake vial of poison with a very real lethal dose. Turns out it was her, Renee/Nicole, who killed Phillip Valentine after all.

As Lynn’s power of attorney, Wolf and Pascarella now had common ground. And he would need his help to entrap the Germano gang before anybody signed away anything of value, and more importantly, after he’d leveraged that power to secure the safety of his mother and
of Caitlin Valentine. (Wolf, of course, doesn't realize that Pascarella has already switched alliances, from Mancuso to Germano).

49. (259–264)

Lou Mancuso himself is brought in to work out a plan. Wolf will summon the Germano's to the negotiating table, waving his power of attorney to make it happen. Meanwhile Mancuso will “procure” Renee herself and force her to tell him where Wolf’s mother and the girl are. Concurrent with the meeting Mancuso’s guys will extricate the hostages, and with word given that this was successful, Wolf will leave the room and Mancuso will finish the negotiations with the Germano team... his way. It’s critical that Wolf demand that the highest players in the family are in attendance.

In return, Wolf gets his money back in full from the Valentine estate, he signs over Lynn’s interest in the property to Mancuso is a sweet stock deal that funds Caitlin’s future, and his mother and the girl are set free. Nobody, it is assumed, will ever set foot in Las Vegas again.

Wolf, meanwhile, is hatching a plan of his own. The mantra of “know thy enemy” prevents him from visualizing the happy family outcome that Mancuso had put on the table... he’s still very much on his own to make this horrific situation go away.
Remember when I mentioned earlier that the original title was *Schmitt Happens?* Before that got changed I needed to work it into the narrative (always a good idea to put the title into play somewhere), and it appears in this chapter, on page 267, in a line of dialogue from Wolf as he squares off with Renee, now going by her real name, Charleen Spence.

She denies being part of the kidnapping of Caitlin Valentine, which certainly mucks up the strategy put forth by Lou Mancuso.

Wolf not knowing who is lying and who isn’t resides at the heart of how he decides to resolve this thing: by taking *everybody* down at once.

Then again, Wolf doesn’t believe her. He tells her that the first team to bring the girl, and his mother, back to safety gets Xanadu. He tells her to set up a meeting... the same meeting that was Mancuso’s idea.

She leaves quietly. He has her.

Wolf gets a note about the meeting -- it’s on.
He calls Pascarella with the news. When he hints he won't be there, though, Pascarella clarifies that he will if he wants to see his mother again – they'd had her along. One side has his mother, the other the girl.

52. (275 – 277)

Wolf mentally prepares for the showdown (short passage).

Chad Merrill calls to tell him he has reason to believe it was Renee/Charleen who arranged Caitlin's abduction.

Wolf arrives at The Palms, where the meeting would go down.

53. (279 – 284)

Wolf meets with the Germano family, with Renee/Charlene in attendance. He recognizes her Germano Jr. boyfriend as the guy who was impersonating the FBI agent back in the Portland, in the restaurant on the night this whole thing began.

They deny having Caitlin. Wolf's response is to ask for their help in finding her, because his position was solid – no girl, no hotel for them.
Of course, he knew they weren’t the ones holding his mother, which made this position viable.

They are leaving town that night to return to wherever goons go. He has to get Pascarella up to speed, they have about an hour to find and retrieve the girl. And with Renee/Charlene with the Germanos, she would not be available for the water torture required to obtain that information.

54. (285 – 290)

We see that someone is on a private jet, rigging it with explosives.

Renee/Charlene receives an interesting call from Pascarella, a game changer. He has the girl after all. He wants a job with the new regime, he’ll help them take out Mancuso and he’ll turn over the girl (a condition of Wolf playing ball as power of attorney for Xanadu), if they’ll allow me to remain there to help run the place.

Renee/Charlene calls her Germano boyfriend to extend the offer before he boarded the jet. She would remain behind to make sure the transition went smoothly once all the cards had been played.

55. (291 – 295)
Wolf intercepts her. The news has just hit – a small jet had exploded shortly after takeoff from McCarron. Renee/Charlene was completely and totally on her own, holding several bags.

He tells her to be at Xanadu in the morning, where everything will be resolved. Tells her that, despite everything, he still cares about her, that he'll protect her when it begins raining arrest warrants, via him facilitating a deal with his Federal friends.

Women. They'll believe anything if you say it with stars in your eyes.

56. (295 – 303)

Wolf recruits and intimidating muscle head to provide the illusion of security at the meeting.

All the key players arrive, including Renee/Charlene, much to the shock of Chad Merrill and Bradley Pascarella. Wolf had also summoned a news crew to this press conference, promising a world-shaking revelation about corruption leading all the way to the Gaming Commission. Other stations had caught wind, resulting in crews from five different stations – including Fox News – for this party. The police, too, who would be very interested in this outcome.
It was working better than Wolf had envisioned. Now he just had to pull it off.

(Note: all of this is 100% the hero’s risk-taking, bravado, courage and keen intellect, kicking in under pressure, without full revelation to the reader. Hopefully the reader is totally with Wolf... rooting for the hero is the magic of any ending.)

Wolf has arranged help in Portland, who are waiting for his call. He tells Pascarella that he’s about to blow the lid off the whole thing... he needs to reveal her location now and hope that his guys can get his mother to safety before he takes the podium.

That happens. But he’s not done. Not even close.

With his mother now safe, he tells Pascarella he’s going to begin a presentation about the sale of Xanadu. He’s going to stall, biding his time, and the audience will squirm. This gives Pascarella less than ten minutes to produce – safely – Caitlin Valentine and turn him over to more of Wolf’s recruited assets. If word doesn’t reach the stage in time, he’ll blow the lid off of everything, under the assumption that the girl is already dead. All bets off then, guns blazing, whatever. Everybody is going down.

57. (305 – 310)
Wolf stalls. Then the call comes... he excuses himself, puts the press conference on hold.

The call is from Caitlin. She's safe. She's with the police. Pascarella had come through.

Pascarella quickly departs the scene.

Before he can go back to the stage to finish this, a policeman shows Wolf his badge. Wolf is under arrest for the murder of Phillip Valentine, and is quickly escorted from the premises, leaving a room full of reporters completely befuddled.

58. (311–315)

Pascarella sprints to his office to get his hard disk and disappear.

He's interrupted by Merrill, and a heavily armed cadre of police. He's arrested for the same thing.

59. (315–320)

Wolf is in a holding cell. But Sherman Wissbaum – alive and well – comes to his rescue. He's been working behind the scenes, making
sure the assets Wolf needed to back his bluff were in place. And in the meantime, his forensic people had recovered his money, it was safely back in a new account. Things needed to be sorted out, but it was over.

Third person narrative summarizes how all the pieces had come together, including many facets of which Wolf was unaware. His role had been vital, because the bad guys had ways of vetting everyone, and Wolf had a clean resume. Chad Merrill had been pulling the strings, recruiting Sherman Wissbaum into the unfolding play (including the fake rumor of his death) to keep Wolf fully engaged, with no backdoor and plenty of stakes in the balance.

60. (321 – 327)

Now it is Wissbaum who explains the FBI's response and role in what had happened. Everybody had been played, including Wolf... just like last time. But the good guys had prevailed, and the Agency remained clean, with some nice busts to show for it. Of course, they are grateful to Wolf for his assistance. Once again, he had gone above and beyond.

It is revealed that both Phillip and Lynn Valentine were very much alive. Their fake deaths had been part of the sting, designed to move
the players into a position of vulnerability, in the confidence that Wolf would make a play to take them down. Which he certainly did.

Turns out there was a postscript, a personal touch from Lynn Valentine to Wolf. A deposit had been made to his new Cayman back account... the money Lynn had promised him in the first place, back when everybody was playing somebody else.

61. (329-333)

An epilogue-like context here.

*Six months later*...

Wolf shows up at Sherman Wissbaum's FBI office, accountant in two. Turns he he's unearthed a somewhat obscure whistleblower feature in the tax law, wherein if anyone basically rats out a tax fraud, and the IRS ends up collecting, such a person would be given a reward in the amount of twenty-five percent of the take. Which in Wolf's case in a cool $8 million.

Wolf, who had been known to publish a bit of political commentary, discloses he's been offered ten grand to tell this entire tale, including the off-the-books nature of the FBI's involvement, to the public.
He’s passing, of course. The unspoken between them makes them both smile, it’s a win-win. The IRS reward will go down, and the FBI will keep Wolf on file in case his chin is required in a similar context going forward.

Meanwhile, Wolf has a nursing home to help run, with a little help from his friends.

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Wait, there’s more...
The Original Prologue

One of the first suggestions my new agent gave me – the one that ended up selling the book to a publisher – was that the Prologue needed a haircut. It worked, she said, but as a hook it was a little wordy, it would be more powerful and frightening if I could cut it by 10 (or more) percent.

No writer likes to hear this. Especially five years after writing it. Then again, the novel hadn’t sold in those five years, so I decided that maybe I should pay attention.

And so I grabbed my carving knife and went to work.

It’s always amazed me at how easy it is to streamline a chapter once you understand precisely – that’s the key – what the expositional mission of a scene should be. William Goldman once wrote that we should enter our scenes at the last possible moment, impossible to do until you completely own what that last moment will be. The entry into the scene is where the majority of the editing went down.

The original Prologue (shown below) was 1,931 words in length.
The edited version, the one in the published novel, is 1,766 words in length... about a 10 percent shrinkage.

I hope you agree, the edited version is better. I show it to you here, before and after, to encourage you to tighten your scenes as much as possible, especially within a Prologue or a tense opening scene of any kind.

Original Prologue (before edit)

Las Vegas, Nevada

It was a few minutes before midnight when Phillip Valentine emerged from the side door of the hotel-casino he ran with an infamous resolve. For a guy who survived on four hours of afternoon sleep and a regimen of macrobiotics, Maalox and testosterone injections, the darkly handsome and impeccably coifed Phillip Valentine was always ready for his next close-up. Each crease was perfect, sharp as the steak knife he once used to terminate the employment of a cheating Pai Gow dealer.

Or so the rumor held.

An Armani-clad bodyguard the size of a refrigerator kept a respectful step behind, beady eyes scanning the perimeter with bird-like shifts of his head. No one looked back at him. Not tonight, not ever. He didn’t sense, much less see, that two men
in black were emerging from the cover of bougainvillea planted near the door.

As was protocol, the big man opened the rear door of a Towncar waiting at the curb. Valentine got in, sliding to the far side. Neither noted that this was a different limo than the one normally at their disposal. Shit happened in this business, and Phillip Valentine had learned not to sweat the small stuff.

It was then that the bodyguard felt the cold muzzle of a gun touching the back of his neck. Right before something foul and all-consuming was irrevocably clamped over his mouth.

The door slammed shut, and in that instant Phillip Valentine knew he was in trouble. This was confirmed when the barrier behind the driver raised – definitely not protocol, even in this business where everyone had something to hide.

The car bolted into the false sun of the Las Vegas night. Everything with a button or a handle was locked down. The windows were tinted black on both sides, a coffin lined in Corinthian leather, a concession to the kinkier preferences of celebrities who often rode here. He checked his phone, only slightly alarmed to see the words No Service, probably the result of a short-range signal blocking device similar to those found in his casino.

Someone had an unhealthy sense of humor. If they thought they could intimidate him with cheap old school theatrics they
were sorely mistaken. Phillip Valentine and his business were untouchable, and everyone knew it. Those who didn’t were soon made to comprehend the consequences of their misjudgment.

Following a thirty-minute diversionary ride through the city, the car passed through the hallowed gates of the Scotch 80’s community, home to the mayor and a plethora of old money Vegas names, many of whom had swapped favors with Phillip Valentine.

The door swung open to reveal two shaved skulls mounted on dock piling-necks, both wearing satin warm-ups straight out of a gangsta rap video. They climbed in from both sides, one holding Valentine’s wrists while the other tied a nylon bag over his head. As they led him away he began to hear a noise that repeated every few seconds, a sharp cracking sound not unlike a gun firing. Metal kissing something solid. Frustratingly familiar, yet elusive without a visual reference. They stopped near its source and the bag was removed. He was standing on a tennis court behind a massive house with Tuscan pretensions, facing a neon-blue swimming pool fed by an illuminated waterfall tumbling over synthetic rock.

He again heard the clanking sound and turned. Behind him was a batting cage paralleling the court, at one end of which
was a pitching machine. A stocky man in his sixties stood astride a portable rubber home plate in an awkward batting stance, shorts too tight and too short, thick legs black with coarse hair. Sweat flew from his face as he swung the bat, an action which, despite the resultant line drive, lacked any semblance of athletic grace. It reminded Valentine of his golf buddies who, after years of lessons, still swung as if they had stowed a bag of tees in their rectum.

“You a baseball fan, Phillip?”

The guy had east coast city hair, shaped and fixed with enough product to lube a small motorcade. Valentine had never seen him before, which, along with the fact that he was all of five-six, made him nervous. The shorter the caricature, the bigger the bat. Phillip Valentine, who was a proud five-foot seven himself, knew this all too well.

Valentine remained silent.

“Greatest game in the world,” said the batter without removing his eyes from the pitching machine. “You got, what, two girls, right? Twins. Ten or so. Got their mother’s looks.”

Something twisted in Valentine’s stomach.

The next pitch was fouled away, which seemed to piss the little man off. He regrouped quickly, reassuming the stance.

“I got two boys. Nolan and Ryan. After the greatest professional athlete in history.”
“Jordan and Gretsky might not agree.”

“No disrespect. But shit, seven no hitters? Fifty-seven hundred Ks? Excuse me all to hell, nobody comes close.”

“Who the fuck are you? I know everybody in this town.”

Valentine suddenly sensed a slight movement beyond the cage. A bulky figure sitting in shadow, watching them.

A swing and a miss, followed by a spitting profanity.

“I’m new. And who the fuck I am don’t matter,” said the host. “What the fuck I want, now that matters. You know what I want, Phillip? You’re a smart guy, I’m betting you do.”

He did indeed. He had been fielding offers from shady operators for years. Lately the usual suspects had been presenting what appeared to be squeaky-straight deals, easy financing for off-shore properties that promised mutually satisfying returns, with a few discreet spiffs on the side. So far he’d heard nothing that interested him.

He knew all that was about to change.

The stocky little gnome of a man emerged from the cage, pausing to press a button on a remote control hanging next to the entrance, the machine winding down to an eerie, idling silence. He then held the netting open as one of the thugs went behind the cage to a guy sitting in what Valentine now realized was a wheelchair. The occupant, about the same age as their
host, had distant eyes and was soft about the chin, wearing penny loafers and a Lakers jersey. Baby Huey in NBA knock-offs.

The wheelchair was pushed inside the batting cage. The chubby fellow sitting in it smiled, happy to be here. Clearly, nobody was home.

“Check this out,” said the host, holding the remote up so Valentine could see as he cranked the dial. “Ryan threw, what, ninety-nine? Hundred on a good day? Clemens and Randy, too, back in the day. Those guys, they got fitter as they got older. And you know what? They got smarter, too. Like you and me.”

“Is there a point somewhere on this horizon?”

The host pursed his lips, as if considering options.

“Point is, nobody hits a hundred-twenty mile-an-hour fastball. It hits you.”

The man in the wheelchair was mumbling the theme from a McDonalds commercial. Two all beef patties and a sesame seed fastball.

Valentine closed his eyes, comprehending the point.

“They say you’re one tough sum-bitch, which I respect. So in a roundabout sort of way, this is all your fault.”

“Of course it is.”

The man’s expression went blank as he pressed a button on the remote. A moment later a blur of white flashed from the far end of the cage with an audible buzz. The ball, more like a
bullet now, struck the wheelchair-bound man’s temple. It sounded like a watermelon hitting the pavement from three stories.

“Jesus!” yelled Valentine, involuntarily stepping backward. The other goon caught him, two strong hands gripping his face to force his gaze back toward home plate. The wheelchair guy’s head hung limply to the side, his eyes rolling back to reveal only white. His tongue protruded, searching for words.

The little man leaned close, his voice softer than before, his breath stale bourbon and garlic.

“So far you’ve turned down four offers to avail yourself of my services. You get one more. I suggest you take it.”

Another ball exploded from the machine, this one hitting the fallen man’s mouth, imploding teeth while nearly severing the wagging tongue. The ball came to a rest a few feet away, stained with spots of blood.

The host stared down at it, biting at his lip. He hesitated as he gathered his thoughts.

“Skip and I were kids in the old neighborhood. Back in the day. I promised his mother I’d take care of him, and until the day she died I did that. I always do what I say I’m gonna do.”

He looked up at Valentine again.

“You seeing a point on the horizon now, Phillip?”
“You sick little fuck...”

The man with the remote control shrugged.

The next ball crushed an eye socket. The fellow in the wheelchair no longer moved.

“Skip’s mother expired yesterday.”

The two men locked gazes.

“I’ll send a card,” said Valentine.

“No, listen, you got it wrong. I cared for him like a baby brother. Fed him, got him laid, paid his medical bills. Even put him in a pricey bullshit school for the learning-impaired. Bastards did nothin’. I figured, his mother dead and me having wiped his ass all these years, he owes me. So this morning over waffles, I ask Skip, you wanna help me make a point today? An important point? He said sure.”

Valentine closed his eyes as the next 120-mile-an-hour knuckleball crushed the dead man’s throat.

“Sooner or later,” said the man with the bat, “everybody says sure.”

Valentine, struggled to free his head from the grip, which had tightened.

The host didn’t notice, nodding slightly with his gaze still on the newly dead guy. Then his attention snapped back to his captive guest.
“The point is this, you smug little prick. If I’d do this to someone like Skip here, innocent as a fucking kitten, someone I’ve loved and protected since I made my first buck... if I would do this to him...”

He paused, his head cocking like a dog that had just heard its name called.

“... then imagine what I’d do to someone I don’t even know, and already don’t think I like. I mean, if it gets me what I want. You feeling me now, Mr. Phillip Big Shot Valentine? I think you are.”

The next ball impacted Skip’s shattered skull with a squishing sound and an ensuing arc of crimson. The host then shut down the machine, commencing an ominous quiet against the soothing backdrop of falling water.

Valentine couldn’t breathe.

The thug released his hold on Valentine’s head. As a personal touch he added a slight shove, strong enough to put Valentine on his knees.

“I got your girls. You know the drill - no cops, no press, blah fucking blah. You sweat it a while, then you get to write the ending.”

He withdrew a photograph from the pocket of his shorts and tossed it to the ground in front of Valentine. It was wrinkled and moist, landing face up.
“Have a nice day.”

The stumpy little man walked away, hands pocketed, whistling Skip’s McDonalds jingle.

Phillip’s twins were smiling directly at the camera, little brunette femme fatales in training, wearing matching UNLV cheer-leader outfits. They were sitting in the back seat of the same car that brought him here.

“You’re dead!” screamed Valentine, but the man wearing the shorts and batting gloves didn’t turn back. He just raised a nonchalant hand to wave as he disappeared into the house.

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A few final thoughts...
Thanks for participating in this exercise. I hope you found some gold on these pages, if only a few useful nuances that manifest in the journey of a story from idea, to concept, to premise, to story plan, and then to a draft that hopefully makes its way to readers.

If you found value here, I’d be honored if you’d share this experience with your critique group, writing organization or your writer friends.

Here’s the link to *Deadly Faux on Amazon* (either Kindle or paperback) if they’re interested. Reading the novel is key the value of this ebook.

If you’d care to comment on this ebook, go here to the *Deadly Faux Deconstruction Ebook page* on Storyfix.com.

If you’d like to take a shot at *Bait and Switch*, the book that preceded *Deadly Faux* in this series, click *[HERE]*.

If you have questions or comments, you can reach me at *storyfixer@gmail.com*, or through my website, *www.storyfix.com*.

I appreciate your support. I wish you well with your writing... may the craft always be with you.

Larry Brooks

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