Goals vs. Needs

Balancing a character's external goals with their internal needs can really help tie the theme together in your script, adding depth and resonance to the story.

A character's journey is usually peppered with wins and fails. The more fails, the more conflict, which is precisely what keeps us engaged. Watching characters continually succeed, on the other hand, can quickly get boring, but if each triumph was to come at a cost, the risk that the audience will lose interest will evaporate.

A great way to keep this balance is to counteract any win with an immediate failure so…

> **Any time a character has an external goal win, it should result in an internal need loss.**

> **And any time a character has an internal need win, it should result in an external goal loss.**

Let's put this into practice with an example:

Mary's **external goal** is to climb out of debt and find financial security via risky bets and high-stake deals.

Her **internal need** is to conquer her gambling addiction and the self-destructive behavior that stems from that.

In one scene, Mary plays a risky hand at a casino and wins big money. This is an **external goal win** as she's won enough to pay off a debt to an underground criminal. But the adrenaline from the win feeds her addiction and she celebrates by playing small change slot machines all night, resulting in her being late for an important job interview, which is an **internal goal loss**.

On the flip side, in another scene, Mary has the mental fortitude to resist placing a bet on a rare 'sure win' after receiving a hot tip form a gambling friend. It's a small **inner need win**. She's been able to say no for the first time in a long time. The down side is that the tip was real and she's just lost out on winning a significantly large amount of money that could have solved all of her financial problems, making this an **external goal loss**.

> In a nutshell, look for any wins that your characters have and see if you can turn them into poison chalices, taking what initially seems to be an advantage or positive, but which results in worse or negative consequences.

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