

THE WRITER COMMUNITY'S
INTRODUCTION TO

Character Arcs



1

The Lie your Character Believes

- Why do we need a lie?
 - The lie is what the character arc revolves around
 - Your hero needs to start out lacking something internally
 - He is harbouring a misconception about himself or the world
 - Often your hero doesn't know he has a problem
- Toy Story lie - your own worth is in being the favourite
- Over the course of the story your character will undergo a positive change which will make them uncover the lie
- This lie determines their want/goal and they make their decisions based on this lie
- Without this lie there would be no change and so no story

1

The Lie your Character Believes

- How do you find the lie?
 - This is something you can decided at the beginning and build the plot around it
 - It often ties into your central themes
 - Sometimes it comes later, if you find you dont know what your lie is, you can:
 - Examine the plot and see if the lie is evident in the conflict
 - Look at the characters actions and reactions and see if you can pick it up from the fear, hurt or guilt they show. Do they have any secrets or do they feel shame over something they have done?

2

Creating a Flawed Character

- Why does your character need flaws?
 - Makes them relatable - nobody is perfect and no one likes reading about perfect characters either
 - Humanizes them - especially good with antagonists
 - Makes you understand their backstory by revealing emotional wounds - your backstory also helps explain the character's flaws
 - Creates outer conflict - there is no story if people get on all the time
 - Creates inner conflict, their flaws give them an internal struggle
 - The flaws are a force for change and emotional growth and it then completes the character's arc

2

Creating a Flawed Character

- Three types of character flaws
 - Minor Flaw - imperfection that makes the character memorable and individual
 - Major Flaw - noticeable hindrance that impairs them
 - Fatal Flaw - this flaw brings about the characters own downfall and, often, their eventual death
- Examples of Flaws
 - Blunt
 - Stubborn
 - Proud
 - Jealousy
 - Spoiled
 - Shallow

2

Creating a Flawed Character

- Examples of Flaws
 - Arrogant
 - Dishonest
 - Disloyal
 - Impatient
 - Pessimistic
 - Reckless
 - Too kind
 - Submissive
 - Co-dependent
 - So honest, it blinds them
 - Constantly overlooking others' wrongs
 - Accepting blame when it isn't theirs
 - Peacekeeping to the extreme

3

Writing a Compelling Arc

- This lie is just one part of your character arc
 - You also need to give your character goals and motivations
 - You need to give them internal struggles - linked to the lie
 - You need to give your character a backstory/ ghost
- Emily Rooke - Lie, Want, Need, Ghost
 - Toy story lie - Your only worth is in being the favourite
 - Woody wants to get rid of Buzz, he actually needs a friend
 - Ghost? Well I suppose that would be the fear that all forgotten toys end up in the bin or hidden in the closet
 - What are they for your characters?

3

Writing a Compelling Arc

- Most great arcs are positive character arcs
 - In a positive character arc the character goes through a transformational change throughout the story
- You can have flat and negative character arcs too
 - In a flat arc the character does not have a lie they believe, they already know their inner truth. However it is the world they struggle against
- A negative character arc shows the protagonist become the villain
 - Star Wars 1-3 and Anakin's descent into the dark side

3

Writing a Compelling Arc

Write Your Novel from the Middle by James Scott Bell

- The book asks what ‘deaths’ the characters are fighting against:
 - Physical
 - Professional
 - Psychological
- It then goes on to describe The Golden Triangle of transformation
- Pre-story psychology
 - Who is the character at the start of the book?
- Mirror moment
 - Most important moment and the first thing to define

3

Writing a Compelling Arc

Write Your Novel from the Middle by James
Scott Bell

- Mirror moment
 - Character looks at themselves and wonders what kind of person they are? what are they becoming? if they continue on this path how will they change?
 - OR the character can look at themselves and consider the odds against them? At this point there is no way they can avoid certain death. Do they accept they are going to die?
 - How does the character see themselves in the middle?
- Transformation
 - Who is the character at the end?

4

Writing a Redemption Arc

- What is a redemption arc? To put it simply it is where the villain becomes a hero over the course of the book
- He starts off flawed and as the book progresses he atones for them
- Famous one is Zuko in Avatar - The Last Airbender
- Key elements of a redemption arc
 - The character begins the story on a destructive path
 - The first few scenes need to establish them as flawed
 - You must give them a weak spot, and it can't be small - this will be key to their redemption

4

Writing a Redemption Arc

- Key elements of a redemption arc
 - As the story progresses you must give them opportunity for repentance - a challenge or decisive action that stops them from being a true villain (Darth Vader - he faces this choice, watch his son die or betray the dark side)
 - You then need to have acceptance from the other characters that this transformation has taken place
- The important part is to find the weak point that will force your character to change
 - Tied to their inner struggle and Connected to core values
 - For Zuko it is compassion and Vader it is love for his son

DID YOU FIND THIS USEFUL?

FOLLOW

@THE_WRITER_COMMUNITY

& THE FOUNDERS:

@MEGANBETHDAVIES

@SKYEHORN_AUTHOR

@AUTHOR_S.ALEXIS

@RAELYNNFRY

