

THE WRITER COMMUNITY'S
INTRODUCTION TO

The Basics of a Story



1

The Plot

What to Focus on

- A plot needs to have a full and satisfying arc
 - Exposition - characters, setting etc. are introduced
 - Rising Action - main character is in crisis and events happen which lead up to climax
 - Climax - main character faces the conflict
 - Falling Action - story works towards the end
 - Resolution - the story is concluded & conflicts are resolved
- Inciting Incident
 - Campbell's term for the inciting incident is the 'call to adventure' - it is the event that sets the character's journey in motion and hooks the reader

1

The Plot

What to Focus on

- Inciting Incident
 - Even if you are doing a series, you want to make sure you wrap up the main inciting incident by the end
- Emotional Impact
 - The ones that stick with you are the ones that make you feel something, even if that feeling isn't so great (feel something about them or something about the situation)
 - Bringing someone to tears etc. any kind of emotional investment from readers is a victory for the author

2

The Characters

Character Development

- What makes a character flawed, but likeable?
 - Flaws the reader can relate to
 - Fear is a good driver of flaws
 - Showing the roots of their flaws - give them a backstory
- How important is it that we like a character?
 - Characters need full arcs - they need to grow
 - Not just the MC but ALL prominent characters
 - They don't need to be all likable, all of the time
 - For the MC, we don't need to like them straight away, but we do need to be invested in them by the middle and cheering them on at the end

2

The Characters

Character Development

- Character's impact on the story
 - The characters must shape the story, they cannot just be passive
 - They need to influence the narrative, the reader must feel that story is a result of the characters actions not the other way around
 - Characters need to impact the overall quality of the story
- Redemption arcs can fall short so easily by not being realistic - they should never be a straight line. Need peaks and valleys because people are complicated, they don't always choose the right path.
- Redemption Trifecta:
 - View of self
 - View of World
 - Stakes

2

The Characters

Character Development

- The arc progresses as each of these change: conflicting old and new. Perception of these three points creates the inner conflict that drives the arc and makes a redemption believable.
- All three don't necessarily have to change, but often do and make for more compelling arcs.
- These changes are often inspired by:
 - Drastic change to the character's circumstances.
 - A positive influence in their life.
 - Character being confronted with the consequences/reality of their current beliefs.
- Development is most effective through points of decisions, where the character is forced to choose between actions their old self would take and actions the person they're growing into should choose

2

The Characters

Character Development

- In order to be a true redemption arc, the character should have to face the consequences of the event they are being redeemed from. They should have to make amends. This is why last minute self-sacrifice does not always feel as satisfying for the reader/viewer.
- Consistent characters are key to unplanned foreshadowing and satisfying pay offs
- Lie VS Truth
 - The lie is something they believe about themselves, their world, or situation; a misguided or skewed view they begin with
 - The truth is the reality of these things that they come to understand, accept, and or face

2

The Characters

Character Development

- A character's development can be demonstrated by illustrating the progression from believing their lie to believing their truth and its impact on them
- Want VS Need
 - Want: goal, aspiration, desire that the character has that is either not necessary or wrong for them
 - Need: destiny, the right goal from them
- A character leaving their want(s) behind for their need(s) is another aspect that can demonstrate growth over the course of their arc

3

The World

World Building is not just for Fantasy!

- When setting your novel in the real world (past or present), even though you are not ‘creating’ a world, you are still immersing your readers and characters in a ‘setting’ that you must create
- Always keep your world consistent and believable, even if you are making it up; could base it on historical and real world elements
- Make sure you follow all the rules you lay down - you can’t ignore the rules just to get your MC out of trouble
- Not all has to be explained -some can be ‘implied’ (iceberg model)

3

The World

- Make sure you avoid the ‘White Room’ through lack of description
- However don’t get so over descriptive that you risk boring the readers or writing ‘purple prose’
 - It is nice to let the reader’s imagination do some of the work to avoid taking readers out of the story with setting descriptions
- Make sure you use the 5 Senses
 - Use 2-3 Senses in every scene plus have the character notice something in the room
 - The smell of people - their smell defining their characteristics - a soldier smells of leather and steel

4

Books to Help

- Save the Cat! Writes the Novel by Jessica Brody
- On Writing by Stephen King
- Story Genius by Lisa Cron
- Emotional Craft of Fiction by Donald Maas
- Romancing the Beat by Gwen Hayes
- The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler

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