Using Characters to Add Depth to Your Story

A NaNo-Prep Workshop
Brought to you by the NaNoLansing MLs

Characters and Character Development: Extremely Abridged Edition

- The Importance of Characters

- S.P. Sipal's 11 Techniques for Characterization - and Beyond!

- Resources

- Worksheets (Afterwards)

The Importance Of Character

- Directly effect and are affected by many aspects of story and writing:
  - Plot
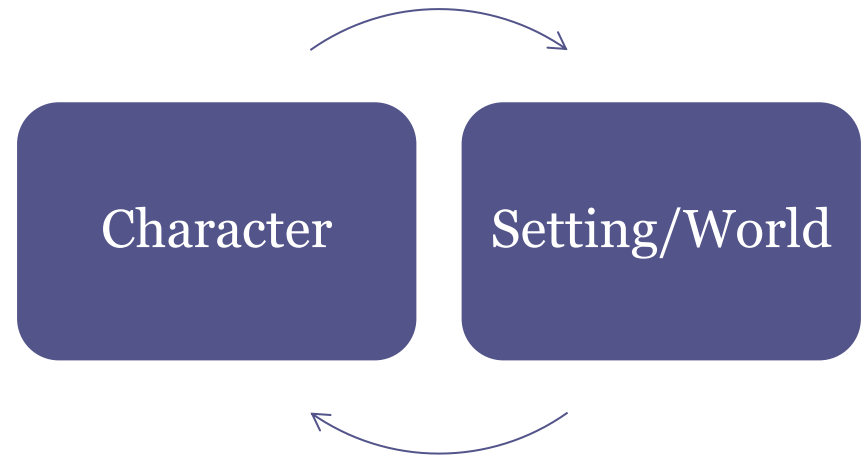 - Setting
  - Style
- What readers are looking for

The Integral Nature of Characters: Plot Edition

- Take advantage of duality

- "Is my plot in overdrive?"

Setting and World Building

- Characters are affected by their world, but may also choose the setting because of who they are

- "Every thing a place…"

- Setting = Distinct Character

| Character | Setting/World |

Style

- POV: 1st (naturally) but also 3rd

- "... the language of description takes on the flavor of the describer"

- Big Takeaway: Master characterization and you can control all three (MWUAHAHAHHA!!)

S.P. Sipal -
Lesson 1: Characterization

1. Employ a wide cast of characters
2. Plant a hook on every character
3. Firm up each character with a fully realized and carefully revealed backstory
4. Build a complete and complex world in which to place them
5. Plot wide-ranging, interesting situations which showcase the characters' various abilities and development
6. Challenge them with obstacles to overcome that force growth
7. Probe into the heart of your hero and make him go where it is scary
8. Know your character's internal logic: the rules, beliefs, and assumptions that guide their every move
9. Pitch your stakes high enough to show your characters at their best and worst
10. Give them loyal friends and dastardly enemies to increase the emotional tension
11. Embolden your characters with the power of touch, used to show strong emotions rather than to tell

Employ a Wide Cast

- "Each character has a purpose, and each one adds to the emotional depth and resonance for the reader"

- Illustrate themes or aspects of the world they inhabit

- Characters that can perform functions through their interactions

Where Do Characters Come From?

- Kress - "Four sources: yourself, real people you know, real people you hear about, and pure imagination"
- Orson Scott Card: (These four and about a billion more)
  - Ideas from the story
    - Who must be there?
    - Who might be there?
    - Who has been there?
  - ***Don't become a slave to an idea!!!

# A Hook for Each Character

- Allows each character to stand out and be unique
- Examples:
    - Another character (twins)
    - Animal counterparts
    - Physical description
    - Accent/speech
    - Character traits
    - Role
    - A concealing mystery or clue
    - Jobs
    - Family connections
    - Physical abnormality or impairment

Backstory

- Authors usually know more about their characters than is revealed in the story

- Characters need GMC: "Goal, motivation, and conflict"

- Strategic siphoning of the backstory

Backstory

■ Makes It Into Story
■ Scribbles on Character Sheets

20%

80%
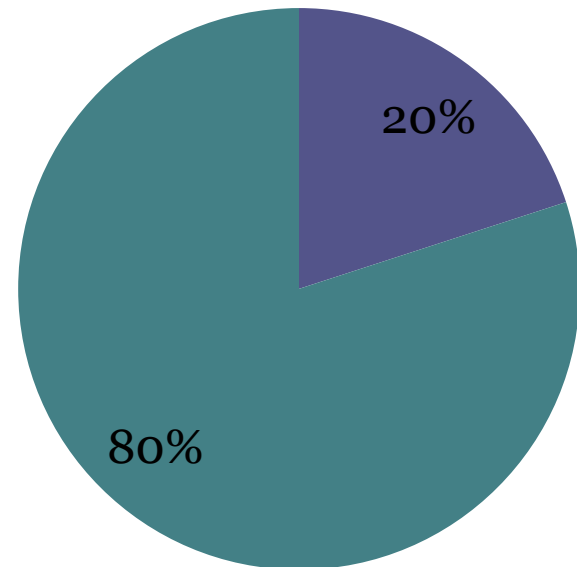
How to Reveal Backstory

- The Brief Detail

- The Inserted Paragraph

- The Flashback

- The Expository Lump

Obstacles and Heart

- Obstacles
  - Can be external or internal
  - Cause character to grow
- Heart
  - Characters facing their demons
  - Reveals true nature
  - Helps plot their journey
- Consider for secondary characters, too!

Knowing Your Character

- Characters = People

- "You must know the internal logic for each character if you're going to properly motivate your people to act honestly in your story rather than simply following the orders of the author-puppeteer."

- Character bios anyone?

"What Is A Character?"

- "A Character Is What He Does"
- Motive
- The Past
- Reputation
- Stereotypes
- Network
- Habits and Patterns
- Talents and Abilities
- Tastes and Preferences
- Body

Stakes and Emotion

- High stakes → Strong Emotions → Strong Character Actions
- Stakes:
  - Be as high as appropriate to story
  - Show best and worst of character
  - Allow readers to experience a range of emotion with/for character
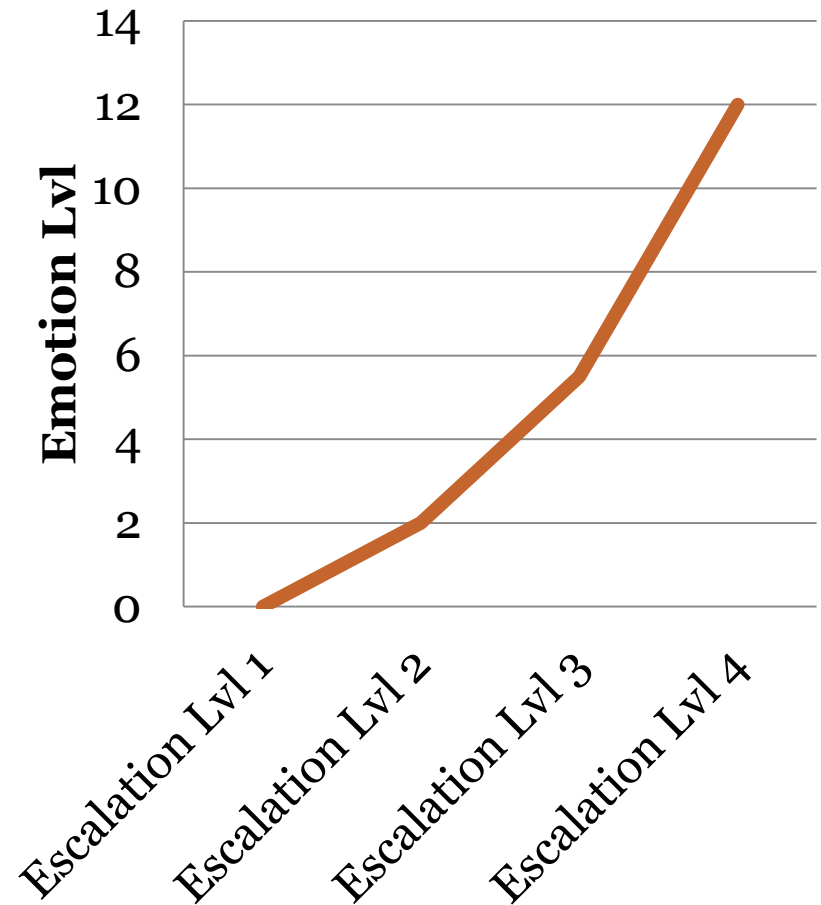
Emotion (cont.)

- Even when it's ugly, those emotions make the story real
- Ways to Convey Emotion:
  - Actions
  - Dialogue
  - Bodily sensations
    - Touch
    - Bodily reactions
  - Thoughts
- Emotions can be:
  - Straightforward
  - Deceptive (social mask)

I just feel so angry, all the time.
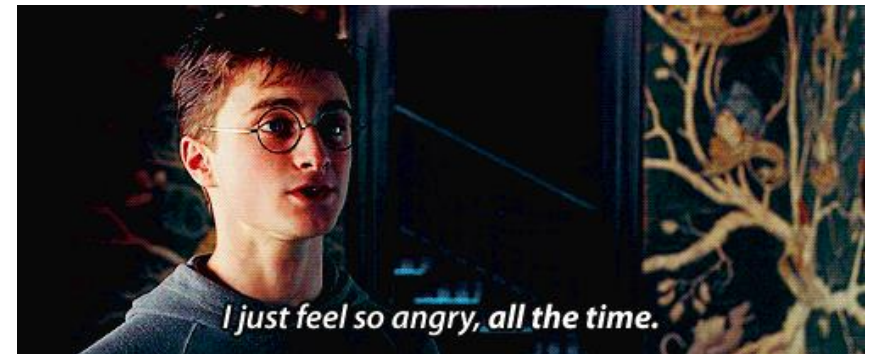
One more thought…

- What type of story are you writing?

Last Comments/Resources

- *Characters & Viewpoint* by Orson Scott Card

- *A Writer's Guide to Harry Potter* by S.P. Sipal

- *Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint* by Nancy Kress

- *Careers for Your Characters* by Raymond Obstfeld and Franz Neumann