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Worldbuilding Ep. 011: Seven Steps to Thinking, Breathing, Bleeding, Scheming Heroes and Villains that Will Tell You the Secrets of Their World!

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Next Episode: We Start Looking at Setting

Worldbuilding Episode 011 Show Notes

Today is our first step on the road to bringing your maps, settings, worlds to life with great characters. I've distilled a process down to seven steps that anyone can use to not only invent deep multidimensional characters, but to find new details and nuance about their world as well. Stare at your map, and think about who lives there, who fights there, who suffers there. Think about the quests and trials and tribulations that the citizens of your world experience. By the end of this of this episode you'll have a process to help you develop the richly imagined characters that you'll want inhabiting your invented worlds.

Our Goal: to create **clearly defined characters** who are **seeded with conflict** and who have strong unified **thematic values** (**controlling ideas**)

The Seven Steps to Thinking, Breathing, Bleeding, Scheming Heroes and Villains

Step One: Decide on your setting and consider the time, space, scope and liquidity of the world

Character design will be greatly affected by the time, space, scope and liquidity of your world. The following characters will have different needs, fears, anxietites and motives because of the nature of their respective worlds: an aristocrat in a tightly ordered feudal society; a cop in an economically rundown city; a rogue in a high-technology empire, or a demigod in a land of mythic beings.

Characters are products of their environments just as environments are aspects of the characters' psyches, experiences and perspectives. Both character and setting are unified in the design process. In some ways, you can say that character is environment and environment is character:

Batman and Gotham City
Malcolm Reynolds and Serenity
Monk's San Francisco
Frodo and Middle Earth
Sherlock Holmes and Victorian England
Seven Samurai and feudal Japan
John Dunbar/Dances With Wolves and the American frontier

Use yourself as an example. What are the conflicts of your own life that are the effects of the world you live in? What thematic values could you derive from this world and its struggles?

Step Two: Find the value, the controlling idea, that will govern the character's existence

Punisher, Batman and Dirty Harry: justice
Holmes: logic
Monk: obsession and order
Malcolm Reynolds: belief in a cause
Jack Bauer: devotion to a cause
Spider-man: obligation and responsibility
Macbeth: overriding ambition
Hamlet: vengeance and life's meaning
Clarice Starling: saving the lambs (the innocent) and slaying the demons
Atticus Finch: morality in an evil and unjust world
Oedipus Rex: fate and family demons
Sawyer (*Lost*): selfish self-destruction

In order to find the thematic values, you will have to absorb the details and the conflicts of your world

Step Three: Find the opposite of the character value or an inversion/mirror of the character value, and create an opposing character from that value

Step Four: Make a list of conflicts (in the big four conflict categories) for the hero and then a separate list of conflicts for the opposing character

Step Five: Create the backstory *around the conflicts* from step four (and leave room for mystery and future inspiration), then do the same for your opposing character

Step Six: Create the matrix of character relationships for the hero, then a matrix of character relationships for the opposing character, focusing on how the controlling ideas of each relating and subordinate character connects with each other

Step Seven: Devise at least one image or symbol that characterizes or defines an ESSENTIAL TRAIT of the character (you can do more later)

These notes will be fleshed out in the coming weeks, and I will be adding a short glossary of terms used in these notes to help guide you through. I've been working on my serial, *TITANS*, which is the sole reason why I've been late with the shows and notes. Hope you enjoy this episode! And let me know in the comments box or the forum how this works for you…

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Comments

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2 Comments so far

1. adamant March 17, 2007 6:00 pm

   Malleable/Predestined > Liquidity 😃

2. Doug Hagler July 20, 2007 2:42 am

   I was thinking of 'malleability', as well as 'reactivity' as possible alternatives to 'liquidity', which is probably fine as well.

   Regardless, I'm really enjoying listening to the podcast. I think there are a huge number of good ideas that you go over, and it is already proving helpful in my own writing. So, bravo.

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- Episode 14 will be up tomorrow afternoon
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