

#10 How to Create Memorable Lead Characters

Jerry Jenkins and David Loy



“How to Create Memorable Lead Characters”

**The purpose of this transcript is to help you follow along with the lessons in the video. For this reason, the contents have not been extensively edited for grammar and punctuation.*

David: Hello and welcome to the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild and today’s live online workshop how to create memorable lead characters. I’m your host David Loy and this is one of the many features of The Guild that comes in response to you members expressing yourselves in the forum and letting us know what you want Jerry to cover in these live workshops.

So many of you have asked for more in depth teaching on character development and because this is such a complex issue, Jerry tells me he is going to dive deep on the most important aspect of this subject, Lead Characters. Let me introduce our writing coach, Jerry Jenkins. As you know, he is the author of more than 190 books, more than two thirds of

those being novels and his titles have sold more than 70 million copies. Welcome, Jerry. How are you doing today?

Jerry: Thank you, David. I'm doing well and I'm eager to jump into today's topic because it's a rich one and so crucial to writing a successful novel.

David: We are eager to hear what you have in store for us today. Given that 21 of your books have reached the New York Times bestseller list, it's fair to say that you should have a handle on this subject of creating memorable lead characters.

Jerry: You think so and frankly I'd like to think so, but the fact is as I've tried to emphasize in every one of these trainings sessions, these things never get easier. There's always more to learn and we all need to be reminded of these principles as frequently as possible, myself included.

David: Now I understand that you are planning to add a couple of fresh elements in today's teaching. Tell us about those.

Jerry: Yeah. I'm going to do 2 things today I haven't done before. The first is just fun and to add a little variety. 6 times during the session I'm going to break in with what I call a title quiz. I'll list character names from novels and you can test yourself to see how long it takes you to come up with the title. Now if it takes

more than 5 seconds after hearing the first 2 names and in many cases the first one alone, you are not widely read enough.

These are super easy even if you haven't read the novel or seen the movie. The point of this fun little exercise is to show how important great characters can be. We identify memorable stories by their characters. Great characters made up out of thin air actually become part of our collective history and language.

David: Now that sounds like fun. I'm looking forward to that. What's the second new element for today?

Jerry: For a lot of this training I'm going to use examples from my own novels, something I've done only in a very limited way before. Frankly something that I've hesitated to do this extensively until now and here's why. The whole point of the writer's guild is to teach, not to sell or promote my own works. I know some of that happens naturally because people look me up to see what I've done and of course I don't hesitate to mention new releases.

Except for the occasional short example here and there usually off the cuff because of a question or because something I'm teaching reminds me of an approach I took in a specific book, I haven't extensively delved into how and why I personally do what I do.

David: Frankly Jerry I'm glad to know that you are going to do that today because I think it'll really add something special to this training. In the forum and during Q & A sessions, at the end of these classes as well as in our long office hours feature. Member are often asking about problems that you faced and how you personally handled other writing issues.

Jerry: I'm happy to try this and I hope it proves instructive. As I prepped for this noticed one benefit of relying on my own experience is that I can speak to what the author was trying to do without having a guess because I was that author.

David: That's great and I know we are all looking forward to that.

Jerry: I should add that this means I will be doing a lot more reading to you today. I'll limit it to the first page or 2 of each novel I refer to except for the first one that a long one but I think it's important. Let me remind you that these sessions are always recorded and posted on our site usually it was in 48 hours. Not only will you be able to listen to this session anytime of the day or night but we also soon follow up in our archive a PDF version of a presentation so you'll have full access to the passages I read today too.

David: Good. That is definitely helpful. Let me remind members how to get their question answered today. As Jerry teaches the material be thinking of how what he's saying might apply to your writing. Make note of any questions you have and simply type them into the box or on your screen. We will be spending

at least 30 minutes dedicated to your questions at the end of Jerry's training today. Take full advantage of this opportunity that is available exclusively to you as a Guild member.

Be sure to stick around and hear the details about how if Jerry isn't available, excuse me, isn't able to get to your question live on today's broadcast how you can be guaranteed an answer within the next. Jerry is committed to helping you in this process, he always has been and always will be as a part of The Guild, and because you have taken time out of your day to join us Jerry will honor that time by guaranteeing an answer to one of you questions so stay tuned for those details.

As our topic is lead characters this is clearly a training session aimed at novelists, fiction writer. Jerry is there anything here for our members on the non-fiction side of the publishing street?

Jerry: Absolutely. I don't want to mislead because as you said this training center is on novel characters, people invented by the writer but there is much here for the non-fictional writer too because the most effective non-fiction piece whether a blog, a devotional, an article or even a full length book always tells a story. Let me say that again. Effective non-fiction always tells a story. Now it may be a true story, a parable or a made up anecdote to make your point.

When you are writing down fiction you make it crystal clear to the reader whether the anecdote that you used is real or

imagined. You do this by simple phrasing. Consider the various ways there are to begin a story and you should be able to tell immediately whether it's real or imagined. I'm going to read you 4 just opening phrases to stories that might appear on a non-fiction piece and you decide whether it's a true story or one invented to make the point.

Here's the first, "Consider a mother and let's call her Sue, whose preschoolers are testing her to the limit." Is that a true story or one invented to help make the point? Let me read it again so you can decide, "Consider a mother let's call her Sue, whose preschoolers are testing her to the limit." Here's another one, "My son had a college buddy Carl, not his real name, who lived a double life." What do you think? Real or imagined?

Here it is again, "My son had a college buddy Carl, not his real name, who lived a double life." I'll read the third example, "There once was a man who fell amongst thieves." Does that sound familiar? It will to many, "There once was a man who fell amongst thieves." True story or fictitious? Here's one more, "A friend from church told me of something that happened in her childhood that shapes her thinking to this day."

One more time, "A friend from church told me of something that happened in her childhood that shapes her thinking to this day." Real or invented. Clearly I have alternated between fiction and non-fiction for those 4 examples. It should be clear as a reader in each case because of that simple phrasing I

mentioned will you begin “consider a mother,” it’s obvious you’re inventing a story to help you make your point.

Will you tell a story related to someone in your family like your son who has a buddy? That’s plainly a true story even if you change the names of the characters as I did in the example. You probably recognized the way I started the first one is the way Jesus often begun his parables “there once was a man.” This is a little tricky because people of faith believe Jesus is a real person who actually told this and many other stories, so is the story real or made-up?

I can tell that Jesus parables were factious but then he actually told them. In other words, he used fiction communicate Truth with a capital T. When you say he is a pretty good model a part of you is fiction. Whenever someone responds to the fact that you are a novelist by announcing that they read only things that are true you can just say you are doing what Jesus did. It’s hard to argue with that.

My fourth example that begun “a friend from church told me,” it simply has the real truth to it. If it’s not true why attribute it to a real person? Regardless whether these vineyards are fictitious or true even though they are included in the case of non-fiction they each have a lead character in and if they won’t likely work. Some may have only one character but these lead characters need to grow and change too just like characters in a novel.

In fact, think of the story of the boy who cried wolf that story can be told in about one minute. In fact let me do that. “There once was a little shepherd boy who got bored watching the sheep, so to get attention he stood at the top of a hill and shouted down to the village, a wolf is attacking my sheep, help, help.” His parents and their friends came running with whatever makeshift weapons they could find, only to discover the boy laughing uncontrollably.

His mother scolded him and made him promise to never do such a thing again. A few hours later he pulled the same stunt and this time only a few others came with his parents. This time his father told him that at the end of the day he would have to go to bed without eating. The boy apologized and vowed never to lie again. An hour later a wolf attacked the sheep. The boy ran up the hill and shouted “A wolf is attacking my sheep. This time it’s real. Help, help” but no one came and several sheep were lost.

I did that in about 45 seconds. We’ve all told our kids and grandkids that story, no doubt. We all understand the obvious moral that someone who invents a crisis just to get attention might get no one to pay attention when he really does get in trouble. Some archaic versions of this tale have the boy himself also being eaten by the wolf. Talk about a hard lesson but regardless the boy in this story learns painful truth in a matter

of just a few hours in a story that can be told in a few seconds. His character arc is short but dramatic.

He goes from being a mean, mischievous kid to a remorseful victim of his own scheme and anecdote that took me that little time to read. That sort of a fictitious anecdote is often used in non-fiction books. If you're trying to write non-fiction without telling a story and you're finding it just comes off flat or didactic, you might want to rethink your approach and work stories in there because people are drawn to stories. Every story must have a great character in order to succeed.

David: Wow! We are off and running here. This is already outstanding content. I love how you just reminded us that if you're trying to write nonfiction without telling a story you might want to rethink your approach. Jerry, is it really true that characters are as important to the plots in the novels that have become our favorites?

Jerry: I certainly think so and I'm not alone. At the end of the year 2000 Reader's Digest listed what it considers the top 100 fictional characters of the 20th century. You can Google that if you would like to see the whole list but just to give you a bit of the flavor. Let me run down a baker's dozen of character names I think most of us recognize all from novels on that list. Jay Gatsby from F. Scott Fitzgerald 1925 novel The Great Gatsby is number one.

Holden Caulfield from J.D. Salinger, 1951 novel's *The Catcher in the Rye* is number two. He's the definition of an antihero if you're familiar with that novel. Sherlock Holmes ranks number six. Holly Golightly of Truman Capote 1958 novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is number 11. By the way setting aside his unashamed hedonistic lifestyle, I've long believed that Capote was the most brilliant writer of his generation.

In Cold Blood birthed the nonfiction novel genre won him peak of surprise and proved he could succeed in multiple genres. I believe Rick Bragg is our greatest living nonfiction writer. If you want to know why read his memoir *All Over But the Shoutin'* and I'll need to say no more. That's Rick Bragg, B-R-A-G-G. The book is *All Over But the Shoutin'...* Back to the list. Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone With The Wind* by Margaret Mitchell came in at 23. Winnie the Pooh number 29.

The Cat in the Hat, 39. *Peter Pan*, 40. *Big Brother* from George Orwell's 1949 novel *1984* is number 59. *Charlotte* from *Charlotte's Web* number 63. James Bond number 66. *Tarzan* number 79 and *Dr. Zhivago* number 84. If you've read any or all of these, the character name itself has taken you back to the reading experience and all it meant to you.

That leads me to our first two title quizzes. Now remember how this work. I'm going to read a list of fictitious character and you keep track of how many seconds it takes you to come up with a

title of the novel in which they're features. Ready? Katniss Everdeen, Peeta, Haymitch, Effie Trinket and President Snow. How long did it take you to come up with the Hunger Games?

Would you believe that Katniss Everdeen did not rank in the top 100 fictional characters of the 20th century? There's a simple reason for that. She's a product of the 21st century. The Hunger Games trilogy was released in 2008, 2009 and 2010. Onto title quiz two. This is an easy one but let me start with a clue anyway. These character is the newest on the list of the top 100 fictional characters of the 20th century.

It's hard to believe he's been with us that long, 18 years. I'll list 7 names from this novel but you should get in a nanosecond from the first one. Harry. Got it? Also Hermione, Voldemort, Draco Malfoy, Professor Snape, Professor Dumbledore, Hagrid. These are great character names and of course Harry potter should have come to mind instantly.

David: You're certainly right about that Jerry. Those name have become iconic. Let me just take a moment to tell our members as you catch your breath and prepare to teach the rest of the session. Let me tell the members about something new and exciting that's going to show up in their email inbox later today. We're going to gauge interest on a possible live event for guild members only. We're calling it a pop up event, a reception meet and greet type gathering.

Informal and again this will be for guild members only. Jerry is going to be in the Nashville area in early November. We're wondering how many members would like the chance to spend an hour or so with him in person. Watch for that email today and for future announcements about this possibility.

Jerry: That should be fun and I'm going to have to make my wife an honorary member. If it's limited to members only so she can come with me.

David: We would love to have Diane as well.

Jerry: I'm sure you would. All right. Let's get back to creating memorable lead characters and to do that you must create believable characters. Let me stipulate here that though I'll use male pronouns throughout the session, I always mean these collectively to include both men and women, heroes and heroines. That will just save me time having to interject the awkward his and her all the time. All right.

Regardless of genre, even if your novel is the most experimental futuristic fantasy your story must make sense. To be believable and credible and memorable, your lead character must feel real and feel knowable. You want to avoid types. This is like the typecasting we see in movies or TV where every character

seems to have come from central casting. Make your lead character unique and complex like real people are.

You also want to avoid stereotypes such as making your cop Irish and your medical examiner Asian and the computer tech using the ultimate single nerd. You get the picture. Believe it or not, you also want to avoid too much detailed description. This is one of the biggest surprises to new writers. If that surprises you, you're not alone. The fact is readers enjoy visualizing their own heroes. This is why movies made from novels are so often disappointing. They'll say, "I didn't picture him that way, or her that way."

We novelists can't compete with the theater of the reader's mind. I'm going to cover this a little more later on. You can reveal your character's general build, hair and eye color. Maybe one distinguishing feature but not much more and we'll get into the reasons why a little bit later. Now do establish important details early, like gender and age and race so this don't come as a surprise unless the surprise is an intentional plot twist.

I hate to read several pages of about a girl thinking about her problem or taking some action about it and assuming she's a high schooler only to find out she's 41 years old. This happens a lot. I read a lot of manuscripts and I'll be reading about somebody and I perform mental image. Then I find out they're African-American or they're older than I thought or younger

than I thought. Again, unless there's a story based reason for that surprise establish those things early.

Avoiding all those pitfalls we want instead believable, credible, memorable lead characters who feel real and knowable. How do you and I write characters like that? First you can live it, experience it yourself, draw from your own history. A lot of novels are autobiographical. Your character might be in mortal danger and the likelihood is that you probably haven't been in mortal danger, at least not the way he is.

Recall upon the way you felt the last time you came close to serious injury or death, or perhaps you recall when you mastered the courage to finally break to speak your mind in right or wrong. Transfer that emotion to your hero and then embellish it to full effect. Second, you can imagine it. In many cases I must in a sense become the character as I write old young, male, female. I imagine myself within every situation facing every dilemma and decision and I decide how I would react and what I would say based on what's happened to me, really what's happened to my character in this story thus far.

Frankly this is what I enjoy most about novel writing, getting to be all these dispirit characters. Third, research it. When writing about something wholly apart from your experience you must conduct thorough research. I can imagine myself as a woman. Imagine what it would feel like to lose your child. Imagine becoming so vengeful that I might want to kill

somebody, but to write about say a mother who lost a child due to someone's negligence or even worse, spite.

I'd have to interview someone who has endured such a tragedy or I'd have to read a lot of true accounts. I've seen countless movies and TV shows portraying homicide detectives. My father and 2 brothers were career cops and so I learnt a lot through osmosis but I wouldn't dare write a novel about murder and police prosecution without solid research, ride along, interviews, shadowing real detectives.

In my novel *The Brotherhood* my main character a rookie cop in Chicago approaches an apartment not knowing whether someone on the other side might fire a shotgun through the door. I could easily imagine his fear, but for how to properly handle the situation I had to conduct careful research. I used to sit with my dad and brothers and watch these police procedural TV shows and they would just laugh because they said nothing happens that fast. They got the weapons wrong.

They got the procedure wrong. They got the move wrong. I decided that when I finally wrote my first police procedural novel I wanted it to be right so that if I got any letters from the cops they would be wondering if I had been on the job with them sometime. Let me read you the first few pages of that novel and you determine whether I succeeded in providing enough realistic detail and in the process established my main character.

The novel begins this way, 1:58 am Friday December 16, “Want to take this one yourself Rook?” Boone Drake shot his partner a double take. The 911 dispatcher had broadcasted domestic disturbance in progress at a seedy apartment building on West Jackson Boulevard, in Chicago’s most dangerous district, Harrison, District 11. “Myself?” “I mean take the lead,” Jack Keller said eyes fixed on the pavement as he maneuvered the blue and white Crown Vic squad through icy streets. “I’ll have your back.”

Boone didn’t want to sound too eager but there was no way he’d turn this down. He had excelled in 23 weeks at the training at the academy and was just weeks into his 18-month period as a probationary police officer. Boone hoped someday he would look as comfortable in his gear as Keller did. The press described his partner as rugged or chiseled not bad for a man in his late 50s with a short crop of grey hair.

Boone took pride in being in shape and athletic but there was no hiding his youth. He couldn’t let that get in the way if he took the lead on this call. He tightened the Velcro on his bullet proof vest and ran his fingers across his Sam Browne Utility belt, including his 9milimeter Beretta. “It’s put up or shut up time, Boones,” Keller said as they neared the address. “Sure I’m in.” “Head full of all that training planning your approach?”

Boone couldn’t stifle a laugh, “All I can think of is the police acronym, professionalism, obligation, leadership, integrity,

courage, excellence.” Keller shook his head, “Big help if this guy comes at you what are you going to remember? You are going to remember your moves if he’s armed?” “Hope so.” “You hope so well so do I. I don’t want to have to put one guy in, I don’t have to ...” Sorry. “I don’t want to have to put one in a guy because you couldn’t subdue him.” “As long as I know you are there I’ll okay. You are bringing in the M4?” “That’s way too much fire power for inside. My 9 will be plenty.”

Once Keller skidded to the curb front blue lights dark to avoid attention, Boone grabbed his nightstick and his uniform cap and slid out. As he slipped the stick into the ring on his belt some druggies on the corner their breath illuminated by the street lights called out, “Five-oh!” Keller turned on them, “Shut up or you are next.” The gangbangers cursed the cops and flashed signals but quickly disappeared.

As Boone rushed to the front door it occurred to him that those types were the real reason he was a cop. It was about the gangs. It had always been about the gangs, Keller grabbed his sleeves and slowed him, “Don’t get ahead of yourself.” When Boone got inside and mashed the elevator button Keller passed him on his way to the stairs, “On the other hand, we don’t want to be waiting when someone’s in danger.”

They trotted up gear jangling and leather squeaking, Boone aware of Keller panting as they reached the 4th floor. An apartment door was open a couple of inches and an elderly

woman in a bathrobe peeked out hands clasped as if in prayer. She nodded towards the next apartment. Keller whispered to her to close and lock her door and back away from it. He unholstered his weapon and fell in behind Boone, who stepped before the next apartment. A man inside shouted, a woman whimpered.

Boone spread his feet, rapped hard and called out, “Police department. Open the door.” The couple feel silent. “Now.” Boone said laboring to sound authoritative. The man whispered the woman whined, “Open the door sir!” “He’s got a knife to my throat.” “And I’ll cut her if you try to come in.” “You don’t want to do that bro. Now open up and let’s talk about it.” The man swore, “Don’t do anything you’ll regret man. Come on now.”

The door swept over and then there the man stood, reeking of alcohol, the woman locked in the crook of his arm, a 6 inch steak knife at her Adam’s apple. Boone ran through all his training in an instance. He knew where to grab and where to twist, how to use his weight, the angles, everything. But when the man threw the woman aside and lunged at him everything left Boone. He threw an upper cut so vicious that when it caught the bad guy under the chin Boone feared he might have killed him.

The knife, which dragged a jagged tear under Boone’s shot packer but it did not damage his vest when flying. The man’s

head snapped back, his fist left the floor and when he landed he tumbled back and smacked his head against the firewalls. He dropped in a heap. The woman squealed and ran to him falling to her knees. Boone held her back as Keller radio for an ambulance.

All right, I apologize for the length of that selection but I thought it was necessary to make the point, the other ones were a bit shorter. I think you got enough back story there too and I hope the character was established in you. You want to follow him and see how his career goes, a lot more stuff happens. The scenes of chaos in my Left Behind series are imagined, of course I haven't lived through the rapture but I have been scared to death.

My wife and I were 30 blocks north of the World Trade Center on September 2001, imagine that. The fear of trying to get out in New York. My imagination must fill in the blanks when it comes to writing about the future, what would it be like to live through 7 years of tribulation? What if I were a new mother. Would I consider killing my own child rather than have fall into the hands of the enemy? Could a mother consider such a thing?

Citizens of Masada faced that very decision in 7380. They killed their own offspring, and then themselves, rather than fall into the power of the enemy and have their children brainwashed and their beliefs obliterated. Studying history can make you

make story decisions that result in credible, believable, heroic, unforgettable characters.

Here's how left Behind starts. Rayford Steele's mind was on a woman he had never touched. With his fully loaded 747 on autopilot, above the Atlantic en route to a 6 AM landing at Heathrow. Rayford had pushed from his mind thoughts of his family. Over spring break he would spend time with his wife and 12 year old son. Their daughter would be home from college too. But for now was his first officer fighting sleep, Rayford imagined Hattie Durham's smile and looked forward to their next meeting.

Hattie was Rayford's senior flight attendant, he hadn't seen her in more than an hour. Rayford used to look forward to his wife. Irene was attractive and vivacious enough even at 40, but lately he found himself repelled by her obsession with religion. It was all she could talk about. God was okay with Rayford Steel. Rayford didn't even enjoy church occasionally but since Irene had hooked up with a smaller congregation that was into weekly bible studies and church every Sunday, Rayford had become uncomfortable.

Her's was not a church where people gave you the benefit of the doubt, assumed the best about you and let you be. People there had actually asked him to his face what God was doing in his life. Blessing my socks my off had become the smiling response

that seemed to satisfy them but he found more and more excuses to be busy on Sundays.

Rayford tried to tell himself it was his wife's devotion to a divine suitor that caused his mind to wonder but he knew the real reason was his own libido.

David: I really enjoy hearing you teach and read from your own books. I know our members do too because it reminds us all that you've been in the same position that our members are in. You've been there so many times before. Now Jerry, what would you say to the writer who's worried his readers aren't going to connect with his hero and relate to him?

Jerry: That's a crucial issue because if the reader doesn't connect with your hero your novel won't work. It's a great character that makes the difference between a best seeing novel and a dud. That's why as you're planning your story you should take the time to reflect on what made you connect with your favorite character in the novels you most enjoyed.

You'll see patterns if you study carefully. I've learned a lot over decades of novel writing about those patterns and memorable characters. Here's some crucial guidelines for making your hero memorable. Make him believable because oddly you see memorable doesn't mean unreal. Too many novice writers believe that your hero has to be so much bigger than life to be remembered. He needs to be human enough to be believable.

Strange as it may seem, the definitions of fiction and nonfiction have flip flop these days. The highest compliment that can be paid to a novelist is that it's believable and fiction is supposed to be not true, right? Conversely bestselling none fiction is now what? Unbelievable. Stories of people dying, going to heaven, returning to tell about it. Try to sell that as fiction and it would be rejected as unrealistic. If you want memorable characters they have to be not only heroic but also believable.

Now to accomplish this, make readers care about your characters by making them feel both real and knowable. You may ask as so many have asked me, "How do I create characters that seem real?" First build them by mixing and matching characteristics from real people. People you know or are related to. I'm going to use one person's face, another one's hair, another ones build, another's personality, another one's gender, another one's character.

You get this conglomeration of people that make the shell of your character. You know who he is but when the chips are down and your hero faces a life or death situation, you know whose heart and soul your character should possess? Yours. You must add your core, be your main character because despite all those characteristics you borrowed from friends and relatives to build him, only you know him at the heart and soul and conscious level.

You have to decide what he'll do and why because it would be what you would do in that situation. Then remember that we writers are not to describe every detail and explain every.... This is another very common mistake I see in novice writing. Our job is to trigger the theater, the reader's mind. Give them just enough so that they can imagine it without you telling them everything.

Making characters real and knowable doesn't mean overwhelming the reader with description. You can't compete with the reader's imagination anyway. What's the harm if 1,000 readers had 100 different versions of what your main character looks like? Sure, all readers need to know your hero's gender and general size, maybe hair and eye color. Perhaps even the timbre of their own voice. It should also emerge whether your lead is athletic or strong or nimble enough to accomplish some difficult task that your plot requires, but you don't tell this. You show it in scene that displays his abilities.

The day of describing hair and eyelash lengths and curve of lip and shade of complexion as if it came from some color chart, the breadth of hands and fingers, that's long passed. Leave some of the fun to the reader's imagination. Now because you're telling a story, you have a story arc. Your story goes from point A on page one to point B on page 400 or 500 and getting there vastly changing in unpredictable ways makes the

experience for your reader. You have to nail this matter of character development that results in character arc.

A simple definition of character arc, like you story, a character begins one way and ends other. That is character arc. This is what makes a 700 page book interesting. Tracking the growth of the character. It's also what endears the character to your reader. Makes your reader identify with character. Character development maintains tension throughout your story. Tension keeps your reader turning the pages.

We readers want to see what happens next and this is intensified by wanting to see how our hero reacts and grows. Character arc means change and growth. That's character development. The greater the character arc the more potential your lead has to become heroic which translates into memorable and ideally unforgettable.

David: Jerry, real quick. I've also heard you refer to author arc if I'm not mistaken. What do you mean by that?

Jerry: Just as because a story must travel a long distance developing, growing as it goes from page 1 to the end, so a main character has to have a dramatic arc as well. All I mean by author arc is that if we writers do these things correctly that is create a story with impetus that takes us and our lead character to a dramatically different place at the end from where he was at the

beginning, we ourselves should somehow fundamentally changing in the process.

If we're not, if we haven't learned or at least come to grip with some universal truth we're trying to impart, we've likely failed with the story arc and the character arc as well.

David: Hearing your answer to that question, it sounds like author arc could be egressed from entire workshop in itself.

Jerry: I think you're right. Let's make a note of that.

David: Great I will do that right now. While I do that, let's let you get back to the topic at hand.

Jerry: All right. My bottom line here is that if we have a valuable story to tell the main reason it will be valuable and unforgettable will be because the main character will grow in a specific way, learn something new, and gain a new perspective. You know you've succeeded if something happens to you. If it doesn't it won't happened to the reader. If I've succeeded so far by now, you should want to know the best way to show this character development so your readers resonate with your lead character and thus with your message because your message comes through your character.

In fact if we do this right, we can avoid another huge mistake that too many writers make and that is overtly stating our message. You don't even have to have a character say it in on the nose dialogue. Now set terms new to you. On the nose writing or on the nose dialogue that means you're probably new to us so let me ask our producer Matt to paste into the chat box a link to my blog on the subject of on the nose writing. Now let's break for title quiz number three. Here are the characters.

Elizabeth Bennet, Fitzwilliam Darcy, Lady Catherine, Jane Bennet, eldest and the most beautiful Bennet sister and Charles Bingley. Now depending on your genre interest that may not have been as easy others but devoted of Jane Austen recognized *Pride and Prejudice*. Okay. Let's get back to qualities of great characters. Before we dive into how to portray your characters, let's take a few minutes to talk about the qualities that make great characters.

The point of character development is take the character from point A to point B, the very definition of character arc. Readers love classic qualities in their heroes. Things like a humble upbringing. Isn't it fun to see the underdog rise to the occasion? It doesn't have to be the richest or the most educated or the most privileged or even the most talented.

It's somebody who came from nothing, but because they had grit and character, they succeed. Also, they're like a hidden strength. We see a lot of this in movies and TV today.

Foreshadowing. Maybe the character's shown as a child who can really throw a baseball, or a football like an adult. That makes it make sense later when maybe he's on the battlefield, and he's asked to throw a hand grenade 100 feet further than anybody else could do it, and he pulls it off.

If you don't foreshadow that set that up by showing this hidden strength early, it won't make sense. If you have a heroine who learned to drive a stick shift truck on a farm at age 12, and drove tractors and combines, when she has to face a crisis and she has to actually jump onto a piece of heavy equipment and drive it, if you set this up, it makes sense. If you don't, then people are going to go, "How would she know how to do that?"

A compelling hero should be extraordinary, but also relatable. Readers want to be captivated. They want to be swept away, transported to an entirely new world. They'll not stand for a boring hero. Now, on the other hand, unless you're writing a fantasy, or a graphic novel about super heroes, don't make your lead character so otherworldly, that your readers can't adopt by with him, and see themselves in the same situations.

Now, your lead character must want something. Much of the story is going to be their struggle to get it. They'll be on a quest, a journey, a challenge. They have some obstacle, some problems, some change in the status quo. That's what Dean Koontz calls plunging your main character into terrible trouble as soon as possible. The definition of terrible trouble

changes with different genres. In a thriller, it might be a literal life and death situation. In a cozy or a romance, it might just be about trying to decide between 2 equally qualified suitors, but plunge them into terrible trouble.

Along with these external struggles, your lead character must have internal struggles too. Asking himself, am I good enough? How do I face my fear? How do I overcome this? Which means, he must also have weaknesses, flaws. Now, it's important the flaws are not irritating and disgusting. He can have a flaw of getting too angry. He can have a problem of fear, but not cowardice. If you say coward, he's not going to be an attractive character. He may look like a coward early because of his fear, but this is what the character arc is. He's going to go through all these obstacles that he faces, learn how to deal with them, so that in the end, he's ready to rise.

Lack of confidence may be a flaw, but that doesn't mean he should be. He could be a bumbler or a whiny or childish. People don't like characters like that. Think of Indiana Jones, the swashbuckling hero. Your impression of him is he's a past generation guy that could do anything. His flaw was, he was afraid of snakes. That's something we can all identify with. I should.

Your lead character should also have a moral code. Readers will have trouble identifying with the hero if they don't agree with his decisions morally. He may cut corners, cross the line at

times, but always based on a specific moral creed. He knows the difference between right and wrong. In fact, even at point A, he knows that by the time you get him to point B, he's developed the strength and power and skill to do something better.

Time for title quiz number 4. If you don't get this one by the 5th name, you haven't read the book. Okay? Ready? The characters are Lucy, Edmund, Susan, Peter, Aslan, the White Witch, and Mr. Tumnus. It shouldn't have taken you long to land on The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

Let's get into how we develop the main characters. We've talked about building them, and getting them in place, but how do we develop them? The best way I found to make a hero immediately relatable, is to create moments of vulnerability. Put your hero in situations where his character is tested or revealed or tested and revealed. Does he know service bus boys by name? Does he greet them? Does he ask about their families? What does that say about him?

Imagine what it subtly communicates to readers. I've been privileged in my life to do biographies for really famous people, and I found one of the most of the attractive qualities is that they'll treat a head of state the same way they treat an elevator operator. Would your hero notice if you were undercharged for breakfast? Would he make it right? Is he a generous tipper?

Would he stop, even if running late, and help a homeless person whose basket of earthly possession has tipped over?

These are what writing coaches call Pet the Dog moments, where an otherwise bigger than life personality, does something out of character. Something that might be considered beneath them. Readers remember those poignant episodes and those are what make the key moments later even more dramatic. It was George Bailey's sacrificing just travel the world dreams to take over the lowly savings and loan that made his standing up to the villainist Mr. Potter so heroic. Now, I have not mentioned the name of that work, but you know it already from the character's name, and what I just said. It's the classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*.

You want to turn your Jimmy Stewart into a George Bailey? Make him real. Give him a Pet the Dog moment. Make him a hero, and you'll make him unforgettable. Ready for title quiz number 5? This should be easy. Characters are Gandalf, Frodo Baggins, Aragorn, Legolas, Bilbo Baggins, Arwen. I'm sure you've already come to that, *Lord of the Rings*.

Let's talk about this crucial subject of back-story versus flashbacks. Flashbacks used to be all the rage, but now, readers expect to read chronologically. They don't want flashbacks that stop the story and jump into history. Back-story is everything that's happened to your character before chapter 1 that affects who he is today. That means all the good and bad stuff. You just

pick and choose from that and hint that, you don't go back and tell a story.

He might just reference some character might say, "I didn't think you'd do that since Detroit." Then the character goes, "I don't want to talk about Detroit." The reader does. We want to know what they're talking about. A little bit of that can come out as you go. That's back-story, it's not a flashback. Back-story can be intimate and personal, and therefore exciting. It can be made up of those things your character doesn't want anyone else to know about.

It can show your hero was once a victim or that your villain was once heroic. The anecdote to a long boring telling flashback is a careful layered seasoning of back-stories dash tearing there throughout as you're building up your plot. I often say this about research too, it shouldn't be the main course. It should be seasoning. You don't want a main course of salt. You want salt dashed on the really good stuff.

Now whether you're an outliner or a pantser, you need to know all about your lead character. How much of a character to reveal and when to reveal it. Now, if that term outliner or a pantser stopped you, let me explain that if you are new to us. Outliners are people who outline a novel before they write it. Pantsers are those of us who write by the seat of our pants. I do that. Steven King does that. He says, "I like to put interesting characters in difficult situations and write to find out what happens."

For me, it gives me an out when people write and say, “Why did you kill off my favorite character?” I could say, “I didn’t kill him off, I found him dead.” Outliners like to know all, and they often talk about their characters. I like to learn about them as I go, and reveal what’s crucial to the reader. Let your reader know your hero the way you got to know him, and enjoy the surprises and revelations as they impact the story.

After we break for our last title quiz, I’ll read you from one of my novels, to show you how I used back-story to establish a character. Title quiz number 6. The characters are Scout, Atticus, Jem, and Boo. Got it? That’s right, one of the great novels for the last 60 years, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Let’s move to the first couple of pages of my novel, *Hometown Legend*. The movie of which was also my son’s directorial debut, years ago. I agonize over how to tell this story, which character to tell the story. I had the story in my head completely, but I didn’t know whether to tell it from the girl’s standpoint. You could see through there, she’s a cheerleader, and her boyfriend is the football player.

Could have told in his point of view, he was the outsider, the hometown legend who came to become famous in that town. The head coach would have been an interesting way to tell it, but somehow the assistant coach of this high school football team spoke to me. I could hear his voice, and so I settled on

him. You'll notice that he has an interesting different kind of voice. Let me just give you a bit of that.

Book starts this way. Name's Cal Sawyer, and I've got a story. Starts about 13 years ago when I was 27. Course, like most stories, it really starts a lot a years before that, but I choose to tell it from Friday, December 2nd 1988, when I'm sitting with my kindergarten daughter Rachel in the stands of my old high school. We're watching the state football championship in Athens City, Alabama, almost as south as a town can be without being ocean.

Estelle, Rachel's ma and my wife, is in the hospital dying of the colon cancer. I'm hoping Rachel doesn't know while knowing that she does and wondering what in the world I'm going to do when the time comes, if you know what I mean or I think that you do. Rachel's about to see something just as bad, and even one tragedy is an awful thing for somebody her age. But don't let me get ahead of myself.

By the time we were sitting there, I was already a broken-down ex-football player with a blowed-out knee who nobody remembered but me. Well, maybe not exactly nobody. I suppose some recollect that I played 3 years under Buster Schuler, the coach out there that night. I played on one of his state champ teams, made all-state, and even rode the bench for

Bear Bryant at Alabama before tearing up my leg and coming back to marry Estelle Estes.

Yeah, that Estes. Her grandpa Benton Estes founded the American Leather Football Company in Athens City. I came back hoping to assistant coach with Schuler, but when you marry into a factory family you work there and coach junior league football if you have time, which is what I did, but I never missed watching a high school game. Not with Buster Schuler on the sidelines.

He says I was the best he ever coached. I don't know if that's true or if he's just saying it but I know he was the best I ever played for, including the Bear, but they might have also been twins. Buster played at Bama years before I did, only he didn't get hurt and he did well and all he ever wanted to do after that was be just like Bryant.

Now, I've set up the fact that there's going to be a tragedy here, so the reader hopefully has tension there and is staying with me. You're learning back-story about this guy. He's talking about something happened quite a ways back. You see how he's established with that back-story. Let me show you how you can use dialogue to convey back-story. This will be our last little sample here and then we'll be ready to move in to the question and answers.

I'm going to read from a novel called Rookie that I actually wrote a lot of years ago. It's been probably 25 years ago when I

wrote this. This is a fun book because it's a story about a kid who becomes a major league baseball player at the youngest age ever, but without a bionic arm or a miracle. Got the idea from my son playing catch with him in the yard. He was doing play by play, and he wasn't just saying Dallas champ as he goes back and makes the play, wanting to be a big leaguer when he grows up.

He was saying the youngest player in the history of the Chicago Cubs who used to play and that's what gave me the idea. It has the best endorsement I've ever gotten on a book. The great hall of fame picture Nolan Ryan his endorsement is so good they put it on the front cover. He says, "Great story, but I don't care how young Elgin Woodell is, I'd still pitch him inside." I love that.

This story was also actioned by Jason Alexander, the guy who played George Costanza on Seinfeld. He never got the movie made, but it was fun to get to meet him and have breakfast with him out in Hollywood, and find out if he's a fan of at least one of my books. That was fun. Let me read you quickly from Rookie. It begins like this. What made Elgin Woodell a legend, is not the stuff of magic or fantasy.

There were other reasons that within 4 years, he felt they'll restate him in the National League whenever the Cubs came to town. But the love of his mother played a major role. "You're not going to go barefoot in Chicago," Miriam Woodell told her

pale 10 year old on the trail way bus from Helensburgh. “And you’re not going to say not going to go up there neither.” “Either, mama,” he said, turning from the window to face her. “You mean either.” She pursed her lips, “Thank you Mr. Know it All.”

Miriam’s red hair hung heavy and dark from sweat as she shook her head, but she was not really upset. It was she who had taught him to read when he was 4. She watched him devour baseball books and school texts ever since. Elgin scampered over his mother into the aisle and dug an aluminum bat out of his bag overhead as the driver casually glanced at him in the mirror. “There’s no room,” Miriam began.

He climbed over her again to sit by the window. “I just want to hold it. Daddy told me.” Miriam’s freckles realigned with the narrowing of her mouth. “If you’re going to play with that thing, you can go sit by yourself.” Her son let the bat slide between his knees. “You shouldn’t have said that mama. You know, I’d rather sit with you than even feel a bat.” It was the highest compliment Miriam could hear from him.

She fought a smile, and hugged her son. She wasn’t much bigger than Elgin, but when she held him, she felt a strength borne of ownership and responsibility. “Elgin,” she said, “Just don’t.” “I know,” he said, closing his eyes. His moist arms were cool against hers. “Don’t talk about daddy.” You see that back-

story there that hints at something that we learn about what happened to these people before chapter 1.

What is it that she doesn't ... Why doesn't she want to talk about daddy? Who is he? There's also foreshadowing the very first and very opening where it says, that within 4 years, he feels they're restating him in the National League. If you're thinking and watching, paying attention. He mentioned that he was 10 years old at the time this incident happened and that was in 4 years he did so, a 14 year old is going to become a big leaguer. That should build tension and keep the reader.

In summary, to create memorable lead characters, make them real, make them relatable, plunge them into trouble fast, intensify the character arc, in other words, turn up the heat, so your reader is thrilled by the change in your hero from page 1 to the end. Your lead character and your novel will be more than memorable. They'll be unforgettable. I look forward to watching you make that happen.

David: You know Jerry, I do as well. Thank you for teaching everything that you have today. It's clear, I can already tell by the comments that are coming in since you've started, the people are finding value. They're being helped tremendously. Thanks again for your time and your expertise today. We've hit the timing mark just about on the nose. Let's get to 30 minutes of ... at least 30 minutes of questions, and we already have so many great ones that have come in. Let's move into that.

If you haven't already, type your question into the box on your screen and we will start answering those just in a couple of seconds. Our primary focus for today's question is going to be on Jerry's presentation and about how this topic of creating memorable lead characters, how that relates to you. Keep that in mind. Again, stay with us to find out how you can guarantee an answer to one of your questions from Jerry even if we do not get to it live in the next 30 minutes. Let's get going with questions, Jerry.

Our first one is from John. John says, "Novel, I have 3 characters in the first scene. One is the main character. One of the other two is important but the third is a minor character with an important role late in the novel. The question is, I'm not sure the reader will know which is the main character in scene 1. Is this a problem?"

Jerry: It is a problem. It's interesting that you ask it that way because that tells me you sense it's a problem. That's a good rule of thumb, if you are writing your novel, and you're wondering, is this working? It's not working. If you're wondering if the reader will understand, the reader will not understand. If you're wondering if it's boring, it's boring. Trust yourself. That's what's going to make you a novelist. What you want to do especially early, is to have focus on one character and that's your main character. Then your reader won't have any question.

You didn't have any question when I read from my beginnings, even though they had 2 characters in a lot of these things. Cal Sawyer had his daughter there, but she wasn't the main character in the football stadium. The cop had his partner there, but the rookie cop was clearly the main character. In the Rookie, it's the kid who's going to be the star of this book. His mama is important, but the story is being told through that view.

I'm only guessing, but my guess is you probably named these characters too. You name 3 characters in that first scene, the reader's going to say, "Now, who's who? What's what? Do I need a program to keep tracking these people?" I've seen a lot more than that. I've seen people in the first 2 pages had 8 or 9 people mentioned, because they feel like they need to tell the guy's brothers' names and their aunt and uncle that lived upstairs.

You need to let that stuff evolve and especially Carly, get that main character on stage, and feature him. You may need, you said that one's important, I would definitely leave that minor character out of that opener. If he's important late, he'll show up and be important. Good question because you're recognizing it and I'm affirming you need to make it crystal clear to the reader who the main character is.

David: Thanks for kicking us off with a great question, John. Glad you're here. The next question comes from Rebecca. Rebecca

says, “How does an unpublished writer gain access to say a...for shadowing purposes, do you have any tips on best practices for field research?” As an aside, Rebecca also added Jerry, that her son loves the book, the Brotherhood, he’s listening with her right now.

He was so excited to hear you reading it. He loves ... well, I won’t ruin that. She mentions a crucial plot, so I won’t read that part, but she says that he loves the whole series.

Jerry: Cool. Believe it or not, it’s not really hard to connect with a police for me now. It may be harder, I don’t know if it’s harder or easier, in a small town. It might be easier, they might get a real kick out of this. Fronting, you don’t tell them you’re an unpublished writer, you say, I’m a writer, and I’m doing a novel about this, and I need to do some hands-on research, and see it now. You also need to clarify with them. You’d go to the police chief, if it’s a small town, and just talk to him.

If it’s a bigger department, they might have a communications specialist or a PR person, or somebody like that, and you just say, “I understand that there are limitations in this, that I can’t get in the way, I can’t ... if I’m told to stay in the car, when something’s going down, I’ve got to stay in the car,” etcetera et cetera. You make sure they know you’re a professional, and that you won’t be a hindrance. There might even be a time when they get a call and say, “I got to drop you off because I’m going to this and you’re not coming with me.” That’s fair.

When I talk about shadowing cops and riding with them, I didn't go up to that apartment with that cop because they didn't know what was going to happen, and they certainly weren't going to get a civilian killed or injured. People love to tell about their profession. You may get some turn downs, but I would ask. I would knock on doors. If you're going to be in a big city, that's even a better chance because they've got 10,000 cops. They've got a communications director, and they've got PR people, and they do this all the time.

Now, not a lot of people do it. If they did, there'd be a mess of every guy on the behead somebody in the back seat. Probably what they do, is give you half of a shift. I've got 4 hours, from midnight to 4 in the morning and in a place that's got a lot of bad things happening at that time of day. It was really fun and interesting to do. Just ask, you'd be surprised.

David: Let's keep moving. We've got another solid question. So many great questions are coming in. This next one is from Patricia. Patricia says, "Is tension in the character presented by having him do something foolish, or something that the reader knows is wrong?"

Jerry: A little of both. I wouldn't have the character do something that's so foolish it makes him look like an idiot. Maybe there's a way through dialogue, or through using an alternate perspective where the reader knows something that the main character doesn't. That's always a fun thing. Like maybe you

describe a scene where somebody tells a friend of the main character something, like we're going to ... I don't want to make one up.

They tell him something that you know is true. Maybe they even saw this happen, so in the next scene, you've read that person talking to the main character, and he totally misrepresents that truth. Maybe he even just flat-out lies. Misleads the main character. The main character assumes he can trust his friend, assumes it's true, and so he sets about. Maybe he says, "I think you ought to come here and help this person", and he knows that that person is up to no good, and it's an ambush.

Any time you've got the reader going, "Oh brother, is he going to do this?" Then wanting to know what happens. Does he get caught? Does he get ambushed or does he see through it? That's tension. Anything you can set up where people ... you have something that needs to be resolved. You've just set up a situation where the guy's got to go somewhere and do something. The reader wants to know, can't wait to get there. I want to find out what happens at that point.

Don't string them along too long. The new series on TV and stuff like that have taught us that, you may have a long arc of a story setup that may not be complete till the end of the season, but in every episode you've got to have buildups and setups and pay offs that are satisfying to the viewer, so is same thing with the reader.

David: Thanks Patricia for that question. Let's keep moving. We've got another one from Dwayne. Dwayne says, "Is author arc something developed over a career or is it something that can be revealed in a single manuscript? Does this refer to our growth circumstances in the story or personal growth over an extended period of time?"

Jerry: I think it's both, and I think it can be in a single manuscript because most ... a rule of thumb for most novels if you're writing for an adult audience, it's going to be somewhere in that 100,000 word range, so 80 to 120,000 words. You're writing about characters who change. Something, the character is vastly different at the end than they were at the beginning. That's the story. That provides the tension. If you're doing that, and it's important, and it's a real message, it should change you too.

Now, if you write a whole novel and feel like I'm the same person I was when I started, the book might work, but it will work a lot better if you'd say, "Wow, I got the point too." I've written an awful lot of novels over the years, and people often say, use the wrong terminology with me, they say, "Well you crank them out? I wish I could crank them out." They don't crank out. They become like bad teeth being pulled out. I learn on every one.

When I'm reading these samples, even I can remember when I wrote that, I can remember what I was thinking about at the

time, and why I put that in there, and what reminded me of that. This is all fiction, but there's a carnal of truth to almost every anecdote you heard today, because I know these people. I know them from somewhere. I've heard a story. It changes me as the character realizes things and changes too.

David: Thanks Dwayne. Jerry, so many people are commenting about how today's material has been so meaningful to them. Karen, Debra, Linda, and several others are just saying thank you, so just passing along that whatever it was that you ... the time and effort you put in to creating this material, is clearly having a solid impact on our members.

Jerry: I appreciate it.

David: Yeah, absolutely. Let's keep moving along. We've got more questions to get to. The next one is from Donna. Donna says, "I know it is not good to over describe a character, but what if the characters are unusual looking?"

Jerry: That's the perfect place to trigger the theater of the reader's mind. If they're unusual looking, you might only have to hint at that or you just tell. If the person has a growth or if they get a scar, or they've got some sort of handicap or a limb that they drag because of some injury. You just say that, but you don't

just describe it. This is the difference between showing and telling. So many people want to tell.

They back up and they look at the character and they go, when he came into the room, he was dragging his right foot because he had polio as a kid, and he had a scar between his eyes from an auto accident he had when he was 16. The way to show that, is have the character come in, and have some other character maybe say to another, "That guy really is amazing. He doesn't seem embarrassed about the leg that doesn't work, and even that scar."

Then the other one says, "You know the scar came from this." They talk about it rather than you describing it other people talk about it and the reader gets the picture. The difference is, even if they're unusual, if you give them that tag, so that every time you mention, people imagine that unusual look. Maybe they're extra tall, or they've got red hair or whatever. Once you establish it, the reader will go off with a knack.

You tell me that a character is deformed, really looks strange, and remember the story of the elephant man. The elephant man has often been done, portrayed on stage in plays without any special effects. The character might hunch over and drag a leg but people are in ... the story is they're repulsed by his face. I think it was ... I'm forgetting the name now. The guy who played the younger brother on ... David Hyde Pierce played him on stage and didn't use any facial ... he didn't use a mask or any

kind of makeup like that but because of the way people reacted to him, we all had our own view of what that face must look like.

That's what you want to do in a novel. If people are repulsed by somebody's look or they're always commenting on it you can give the reader the idea of what it was or who it got there but let them fill out the details in their mind.

David: All right. We've got just about 20 minutes left maybe just a little bit less time for you to get your question in and hopefully answered as well. Type it into the box on your screen and we're going to keep rackling through these as fast as possible. The next one, Jerry comes from Carol. Carol says, "Hey Jerry and team. I'm writing a historical novel loosely based on my aunt who left Russia under the Bolshevik revolution as a 19 year old.

I've looked at birth order characteristics but I don't want to be locked into a type. How can I break out of that while remaining true to the character?"

Jerry: I think by just asking that question you do it. Interestingly you look at birth order characteristics, it's a big thing with me too. If a person is a first born they do certain things certain ways, if they're baby or the other ... a good friend of mine is Kevin Leman who writes about these. An expert in birth order. He told me one day he said, "Watch this." A waitress comes by and

puts our plates down on a table and they make noise when they hit the table. Bang, bang, clack, clack.

He says to her, “How many siblings do you have?” She says, “Three.” He says, “You’re the youngest, aren’t you?” She goes, “Yes. How’d you know?” Then a busboy comes by and he goes ... somebody forgot, they didn’t have the spoon or something. He came by, he didn’t hand him the spoon. He set it down next to him and it didn’t make any noise. Kevin said, “How many siblings in your family?” He says, “Three.” He says, “You’re the oldest?” He goes, “Yeah.” He could tell by the way he puts things on the table.

Now you don’t want to do it in a clichéd manner where everything they do is ... if she’s the first born she’s authoritative and she’s a know-it-all or she’s the smart kid in their family or whatever. That’s the way to break out of this. Is to have somethings go against nature. When you’re looking for characteristics of somebody who leaves Russia under the revolution at 19. You weren’t there, you’re not that age.

You couldn’t identify it fully but once you’ve set the scene based on your research now imagine that’s you. How would you feel? Would you be scared? Would you be lonely? Would you be hopeful? Would you ... whatever you are as we talked about that needs to the heart and soul of the character. If your aunt left Russia under the Bolshevik revolution she’s probably quite old now, I’m assuming, if I got the timing right.

Obviously, anything you got that's real first hand search will help but I think if you inject yourself in there and as I said being aware that you don't want to have a type. Go against type for certain things to make it not a cliché.

David: Jerry, real quick. I want to remind everybody that especially for workshops like this, this is why we do the transcript. Jerry read the first couple of pages from several different novels that he wrote and sometimes just listening to those is a little bit overwhelming. You might not see exactly what he was talking about or you might need to back and listen to this again but also take advantage of being able to read through the transcript once that is posted inside the guild as well.

We want to make sure that you have every opportunity to grasp the full content that Jerry was presenting today. Jerry there's an interesting idea that's come in from Debra. Matt if you could put Debra's comment or question on the screen that would be great. She says, "I'm wondering if within the guild we could share our work histories to help each other." This goes back to the research question that you were addressing earlier.

For example Debra says, "I'm a nurse and another writer might need some medical information check for their novel." Debra currently needs to check her male character's work as a home builder with someone from that background. Perhaps someone else in the guild has that background. What do you think about of this idea Jerry?

Jerry: I love that idea. I think it's one of the great benefits of the forum as ... We hadn't thought of that but it's a great idea. We've had other things on the guild where people list their blog address so people can trade ideas. Some groups have formed of people different that write science fiction or write historicals or whatever but to say here's my expertise, that's fantastic.

One thing I've learned is that when I read general market novels and they start writing about an area that I really am familiar with like newspaper business in the '60s and '70 or sports that I've ... I was a sports writer. I still write a lot of books that are sports related or faith related matters because a lot of my books are in the inspirational market. If they don't those details right, it ruins the whole thing for me.

I read a football book where the writer said that a cornerback caught a touchdown pass. If the cornerback caught a touchdown pass, it was an interception because a cornerback is a defensive player. They write about the newspaper business and they talk about what the managing editor said or did or what the executive editor said or did. I know the difference between those two roles and what they would say or do and if they get it wrong it's just jarring.

I remember reading a novel about a couple who had to take in a young girl and the little girl wanted to go to vacation bible school and they were not church going people. They were a

little freaked out about this. They said we're going send her to vacation bible school if we can afford it. You know you don't pay to go to vacation bible school. Little things like that.

You know if Debra if you're a nurse, I'm sure anytime you read a book and they talk about the nurse on duty doing something or doing this or that or. Assigning somebody else something and you say that just that wouldn't happen that way. It's not how we do it. You want those details to be right. I'd say this is a great idea and that people should really take advantage of it.

Don't assume you know. Don't build a nurse character based on something you saw in TV and movies or you just thing it happens. Ask her. Say if a character has this trauma in the night, how do they get a nurse and not have to wait a half hour. What would really happen in this situation? It's great.

David: It really is. Great idea, Debra. Thanks for sharing that with us and another example of how Jerry you are continuing to improve and modify everything related to the guild. We want to make sure that this is exactly what members need and that it meets the struggles or that desires that they're having in their writing journey right now. Continue to think and share on these ideas. Debra, I'm going to get with the team and figure out how we can best facilitate this. Whether it's a new discussion thread on the forum or what else it might look like but this is an excellent idea.

All right Jerry, another question came in from Dave. This is a specific question about his book and I love it when we get specific as to what people are writing about. Dave says, “I show a character who adores a cheerleader but loses out to the school’s top ball player who eventually marries that cheerleader. Then he abuses her and my lead character watches the downfall and their marriage crumbles.

My problem is that I feel my lead is too much of an observer. He is empathetic but then destroyed when the cheerleader commits suicide. Somehow I feel I’m missing something.” Any advice for Dave in this journey?

Jerry: Yeah. Your hesitation here, you’re misgiving is well placed because you don’t want your main character to be a reactor. You want him to be proactive. If things always just happen to him he loses the cheerleader. He watches the abuse. He’s empathetic and then is destroyed when the cheerleader commits suicide. That’s a really dark story and if I’m attracted and empathetic to him as a character, I want to know how he grows and changes to whatever.

Maybe this is back-story. Maybe when you start chapter one this is the guy who’s an adult and maybe mid 20s or late 20s and hasn’t married yet but he’s met somebody. The reason he wants to get this right is because of this haunting memory he has that in the past he was a reactor. He failed in what he wishes he’s done. He might have no control over the fact that she chose

the other guy but maybe he keeps in touch with her and that becomes an issue in that marriage.

The guy's mad at her because she's still taking to this other guy and he know his intentions are good. He's just being a friend. He realizes I don't want to violate a marriage and be a confidant to the wife, but he sees this abuse. Now, a hero is going to for a while not know what to do. Maybe he's smaller, weaker, doesn't have any power over this guy, but he can't let this stand. Somehow he's going to grow and develop and have a lot of losses along the way, but finally get his backbone and fix this.

He's either going to step between them at some point or get him arrested or get her safe. That's the satisfying story. That's what radios want to do, they want to see him come full circle. If in his past he has a friend who committed suicide because he didn't act, that's going to be your story arc. Is how do we get him there to where that's not going to happen in the future.

He sees and views the situation he moves in and says, "This may be embarrassing, it may be scary, it may be ... people are going to think it's the wrong thing to do but I'm not going to let this happen again." That's why, because of my back-story I hope.

David: All right. About 10 minutes left. I'm going to issue a challenge to all members right now very quickly, Jerry. Judging by the number of questions that have come in verses the number of people that have been with us at some point throughout our

time together today, there's a lot of people that have not asked a question and this is just a great opportunity. Don't let this opportunity miss you, where are you struggling, there's still time for you to send that in and then again at the end we're going to give you some details as to how you can guarantee that that question gets answered even if it's not live during our broadcast today. All right let's keep moving we've got one from Louise. Louise says, "How do you reveal race early in the story without sounding dumped in?"

Jerry: Yeah that's ...you have to be sensitive and careful but unless ... as I said before unless you want it to be a surprise. It's the wrong thing to surprise people with. Sometimes ... I happened to ... my middle son and his wife adopted a couple of African-American kids. There're just certain realities about them, and their features, and their hair, and their skin and all of that stuff that's just part of the normal process of life now in that family.

I think anyway actually I just don't want to be offensive but I don't think this is because when my kids are out to a restaurant or something and they have a black waitress wait on them, it is not unusual for my daughter-in-law to say, do you have a hand for what to do about his skin here because his skin is drier than normal that's just the truism about black kids and adults too.

Just something like that. If the character ... you're opening the story and maybe she's worried about dry skin or something that she's doing and maybe it reminds her of somebody who

commented on her one time. Somehow in there you work in the fact that if a white rater doesn't know that, that that could be anybody. Somehow you do have to work in the fact that somebody has noticed that she's different or she's a minority or whatever.

There should be subtle ways to do it without just saying so and so is African-American or Indian or whatever it is. You definitely don't want to try to do some dialect because that's a cliché and also it can be offensive because whereas maybe back in slave days a lot of black people talked the same way, that's certainly not true today. You can have people in all ends of the spectrum of education and how they speak.

It's a tricky one. I would say do it in the most subtle way possible and make it matter of fact because I think that's the message we want. We don't expect people to pretend our grandkids are all the same color. We've got an Asian and we've got the 2 black kids and we don't want to pretend that they're all the same but not make a big deal out of it either. I'd say be subtle.

David: Thanks Louise for that question. We've got another one that came in from Jeanine. Jeanine says, "Is there a main novel character Jerry that you can think of who is a reticent personality in the beginning but who becomes a hero in the end? I'd like to read a successful story with that that embodies the qualities you listed."

Jerry: I can't off the top of my head, but I know they exist. What you have to be careful of is there are too reticent early readers care if they change. I think what you want to do is put that character on the page and have them be a victim of something because they're a reticent personality. They know they should speak up, they should speak up. They wish they were brave enough too. They wish they had any power but who cares about them.

You're sympathetic to them and you're like, "Yeah, boy if I was in that situation, I think I'd say something or I wish I would or maybe I'd be scared too." Then as the story continues they start building up backbone because they're going to change by the end. They're going to be the person who will not sit back and let things happen to him.

Just don't have too much to start with because then again your character is a reactor rather than proactive. Maybe they're a victim of something. There's a blustering relative who's bossing everybody around and abusing people maybe. She's not abused because she's invisible but she wishes she could do something about this. At school some other thing happens but there's not such a distance between the abuser and her. It's just a kid a year older or somebody in her class who is bigger and whatever. In little ways she starts learning how to take charge and do that.

When we talk about character or probably the most dramatic character arc ever is Christmas Carol where Scrooge starts out being a Scrooge. In the end he's the most generous guy in town

giving away turkeys and money and stuff like that because he's seen the light. That's the epitome of character changing character arc and it would be fun ... I agree with you, it would be fun to see a character who just goes from being invisible nobody because so many readers love that.

There are introverts. There's a big thought life happening there. They're wishing they'd say and do things that they don't do but if we just see one grow into a hero and that'd be a fun one. Good luck with that.

David: Absolutely. All right. We've got time for at least one maybe 2 more questions. The next one comes from Karen. Karen says, "Jerry given that you described yourself as a pantser about how much non-writing time do you spend developing a main character, and how much developing secondary characters?"

Jerry: Zero. I don't develop characters in non-writing time. I might have an idea for a character and it's usually I have a little history I'm thinking. For instance in Rookie I knew that the boy had an estranged father who had been a superstar baseball player because that's where the gene comes from. He can throw and hit and all that stuff because his father was great, but his father screwed everything up by being alcoholic and he had all this potential but he threw it away. His parents are divorced and in fact his father is in prison so I got that.

Now that's not character realm that's just circumstances. When they start talking on the bus on the way from Hattiesburg up in

Chicago, you get that feeling that there's that. She doesn't want them to talk about daddy. He wants to hold the aluminum bat and says to him, "Don't do that," and, "Sit by yourself if you're going to do that." He goes, "No. I want to sit with you," so you know they're close. That stuff all comes out of dialogue and dialogue and comes out as it develops.

If you're not a pantsier, it's not going to work out for you. You'll start doing that and stuff will go off in rotter trails and you will wish you had an outline. Most pantsiers wish they have an outline at some point and most outliners wish they were free and wildlife like us pantsiers. It has to work for you and you're usually either one or the other.

I don't spend too much time doing that it's more I think about, if this happens what else might happen. I don't want to be disingenuous and say I just sit down on a blank page and say, "All right. Here's the next character let's see what happens." I've got a gem of idea and I'd think I know where I want to go but I let the characters tell me and I let the story tell me. It's often very different at the end than I thought it was going to be, but it's not predictable and it's serendipitous because that's how it is if you don't plan it. You don't know in advance.

David: All right. We've got one more question but before we get to that, I want to go and have our producer Matt drop the link into your chat box that's on your screen right now. Click on that link and make sure you're signed into the guild and go and retype your

question again. If you have not had it answered by Jerry yet, type it again right there one question per person please. Jerry has offered to make sure that everybody gets their one question answered who did not have the question answered live during our time today.

Click on that link. Make sure you're logged in. If you're not logged in, it's not going to work. Most of you have done this before but just remember to do that crucial step before you go type your question. Jerry is going to get an answer to each of those at some point over the next several days. All right, Jerry our last question comes from Kelly. Kelly says, "I'm having a hard time creating a memorable bad guy. What are some of the best ways to do that?"

Jerry: That is something that I had hoped to get to today, if we had time. I've got a really good bunch of teaching on that and I call it how to write a good bad guy. I'll give you just a couple of thoughts to whet your appetite. We will do a class to just do that. Basically the problem with most villains is that the writer makes them bad just... They're bad because they're evil. They're bad because there's the villain and that isn't in real life.

You know people in real life who are cranky, or mean, or nasty or deceitful or whatever. If you know them very well you know why because they had some big disappointment in life or they had some big unfair in their mind thing happen to them and they don't care what anybody says, they're going to do things

their way. Your villain has to have motivation and the villain doesn't see himself as a villain.

They have a goal and ... so often I see these movies or TV things where it's just the villain is skimming to reap everybody off. That's all they care about that's all they want to do. That isn't in real life there maybe a few people like that but they're one dimensional. The interesting villain is the one who believes his way is right and he's doing the right thing. He's diametrically opposed to the good guy and he will break the laws to get his way but he still thinks he's right.

If you can get your reader sympathetic in some way to the villain and go, "Well at least I can see why he feels that way and why he's doing that." That will make your bad guy memorable.

David: All right. That's all the time we've got for today. Jerry, thank you again for this outstanding session, amazing material and you're right. We have, I think the next couple of potential topics for future workshops already mapped out. We've covered a couple of those today that we'd love to hear you expand on even more so.

Jerry: Unfortunately, since I've written so many books the idea of reading a little bit from 1 or 2 of them at least for each session will be easier. It will take me years.

David: That's exactly right. All right. We're going to wrap up right now, make sure that you've clicked on that link in order to ensure that Jerry will answer your question. Again, as a reminder one per person please. That will certainly help him to make sure that we get to everybody. You can see on your screen right there that we do have a manuscript repair and rewrite that is releasing next week. Then another Masterclass is releasing the first week of November.

Mark your calendars for those. You'll be receiving email updates as always through the guild as well. Thanks for taking time to join us today. Hope you have a great afternoon. Thanks Jerry. We'll talk to you again next time.

Jerry: Thank you.

To watch or listen to the session, [click here](#).