

Creating Characters that Readers Love,
Hate and Generally Can't Stop Watching
By
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Characters that invoke strong emotional reactions in the reader are a critical building block of something all writers want to create, a page turner. So let's talk about heroes, villains and every character in between the two.

We love to see characters we admire overcome obstacles. Readers want to love your characters. So you must make them sympathetic. That doesn't mean they feel sorry for poor Jane because her boyfriend is such a jerk, or because John's boss treats him like dirt. For writers creating a sympathetic character means someone the reader can identify with, someone that makes her say, "I've felt that way" or "I can understand why she's doing this, because I would do the same thing". Or maybe the reader wonders, "What would I do if his happened to me?" Heroes don't have to be perfect. In fact they should never be perfect. Not if they're going to hold a reader's interest. Flaws not only make characters multi-dimensional, but those flaws can be used to enhance the plot. Complications caused by your heroine's stubbornness, cynicism or

too trusting nature will not only make her more sympathetic, but will greatly enhance the plot.

A famous literary agent once said, “Only trouble is interesting.” He’s so right. The cliché “People you love to hate” sums this up beautifully. Millions of women watch soap operas to track the outrageous antics of the villains, and see them get some of their own medicine. Yet even villains should be sympathetic, i.e. the reader should understand why he does what he does. Now the reader may not approve, or want this type of person as her new BFF, but villains with clear motivations, goals and beliefs are sympathetic. In fact, you might even create a villain that causes readers to think, “Hmm, maybe under some circumstances I might do that!” Sometimes readers will admit that villains do things they’ve felt an urge to do, but of course morals, ethics and self-control keep most of us from acting on terrible impulses. But don’t we love reading about the trouble these villains cause for our heroes?

Even secondary or minor characters should add full flavor to your story. They are not there to steal the show, so to speak. But make them interesting in their own right. Give them speech patterns, attitudes and idiosyncrasies that not only make them come alive, but add to the plot or story. Don’t toss in an interesting character just because the taxi driver, sales clerk or mail carrier you met intrigues you as a writer, and made you say, “I’m gonna put him in a book!”. All your characters should be there for a reason. Still keep your eyes

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and ears open for all the wonderful material you can use to make your characters come alive.

So get out there and watch daytime television, people watch in the shopping mall or restaurant or even research interesting real life characters. Your stories will contain characters that make the reader want to see what they are up to on the next page.