



CASTING A STORY

by Sylvie Kurtz

A writer shows her story through her characters--the way they act, the way they talk, the way they interact. These characters are not cardboard cutouts ordered from Central Casting. They serve a function--or else they shouldn't have a role and take up valuable space.

Two kinds of characters primarily people any story: those that oppose your main character's goals, and those that help him achieve his goals. By using opposers and helpers, you force your character through his arc. These supporting character who help and hinder create facets of your main story theme and reflect the soul of your story to show it at its most brilliant.

Every story needs a **main character**, someone with whom the reader will empathize and identify and through whose eyes the story will unfold. His outer motivation--his goal--gives the story boundaries. Once the main character has achieved (or lost) his desired goal, the story is pretty much over.

Stories should create an emotional journey for the reader. Emotions grow out of conflict and obstacles. And the people who create this conflict and these obstacles for the main character serve as opposition. An **opposition character** isn't necessarily a villain. An opposition character could have the main character's best interest at heart--like his mother. Opposition and main characters simply work at cross-purposes with each other. In-laws usually find themselves cast as opposition characters in family reunion stories. The third corner of a love triangle in a romance could also fill the role of opposition. Or a demanding boss, a jealous sister, a rival for whatever prize is the goal.

If the main character could figure out his problem all by himself, it's possible the story wouldn't even exist. **Helper characters** support the hero's journey. They might reveal his conflict, provide the voice of conscience, provide encouragement, or make him stop and face he has a problem and that he's going to have to do something about it. This type of character could show up as a sidekick, a mentor, or a best friend.

Now although a love interest could play the role of an opposition or a helper character, she also provides something extra for the main character. She sees past the main character's limitations to his best self--or as Dorothy says in Jerry Maguire, "I love him for the guy he wants to be, and I love him for the guy he almost is." She sees his true essence and becomes the true reward for overcoming his flaw or his fear. The outward goal may or may not matter any longer, because he's found something even better.

By choosing a supporting cast that opposes, helps, and holds your main character to his highest possibility, you can turn the rough stuff of an idea into a shining diamond.

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