



Billy Oppenheimer @bpoppenheimer

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In 1991, Pixar struck a deal with Disney to make the first computer-animated movie.

At the time, Pixar co-founder Ed Catmull explained, “We didn’t have any storytellers among us.”

Catmull and most of his employees were computer scientists.

To learn how to tell a good story,

The team attended STORY—a 3-day storytelling seminar taught by screenwriter and story consultant Robert McKee.

The Pixar team left the seminar, one Pixar employee said, “as true believers [in] McKee’s doctrine that...character emerges most realistically and compellingly from the choices that the protagonist makes in reaction to his problems . . .

This became the law of the land at Pixar.”

Essentially, McKee teaches that the beating heart of a good story is a character who wants something and has to overcome a series of problems to get it.

Guided by this principle, the Pixar team wrote a story about a toy named Woody who wants to keep his position as a boy named Andy’s favorite toy.

“Woody’s world is rocked,” Catmull writes in summing up the plot, “when a shiny new rival, a space ranger named Buzz Lightyear, arrives on the scene and becomes the apple of Andy’s eye.”

That problem would become the beating heart of “Toy Story,” which released in 1995 and was a critical and commercial sensation.

Following the success of Toy Story, Pixar returned repeatedly to McKee’s principle. One of Pixar’s character designers said, “We really really followed McKee almost to the letter of the law.” The former Head of Pixar’s Creative Development team added,

“Our movies are very conventional, in terms of story conventions like character arcs. If you look at all of our movies, there’s a protagonist who...goes on a journey and comes out the other end a better person . . . or rat . . . or fish.”

Takeaway 1:

For more, I write a weekly newsletter ()

I first read about the Pixar team attending Robert McKee's seminar in "The Cowboy, the Spaceman and the Guru: Character and Convention in the Screenwriting of Toy Story" ()

I also quoted from "Creativity, Inc." by Ed Catmull ()

And "John Lasseter" by Richard Neupert ()

And "Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting" by Robert McKee ()



<https://bloomsburycollections.com/book/toy-story-how-pixar-reinvented-the-animated-feature/ch3-the-cowboy-the-spaceman-and-the-guru-character-and-convention-in-the-screenwriting-of-toy-story>

