Building The Character

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Name

Age

Location

Archetype/Personality Type

General Personality Notes (any idea you already have)

BACKSTORY

Upbringing (setting, income, family dynamics, vulture, values, etc)

Family Relationships (significant influence on character)

Friends (most significant friendship(s))

Adversaries (looms in memory as nemesis or villain)

The Ghost (single disastrous event that changed the character forever)

The Lie (flawed philosophy the character lives by because of the ghost)

GET PSYCHOLOGICAL

Motivation (powerful, primitive fear or desire drives the character)

The Want (what does the character wish to achieve in life. Something motivated by the motivation)

The Need (What does the character actually need)

Fear (greatest fear)

Flaw (character’s greatest flaw)

Value System (religious doctrine, personal philosophy, cultural norms, etc)

BRING THE CHARACTER TO LIFE

Physical Description (include any physical ticks or patterns)

Phobias

Pet Peeves

Insecurities

Key Relationships

Quirks

Contradictions

Habits

Job

Hobbies

Voice

Handling Emotions

Favorite Food

Vanilla or Chocolate

The 14 Archetypes

The Caregiver

More commonly referred to as the Mother in the past, the Caregiver is someone who selflessly and wholeheartedly supports those around them, often at their own expense. This archetype can be a parent, best friend, partner, teacher, mentor, guardian, sibling, etc.

The Caregiver usually isn’t the star of the show but supports the main character throughout, pushing them to give it their all. It is common to see a Caregiver as an accompanying character to the Hero.

Traits:

Compassionate, loving, caring, selfless, loyal, honorable, consistent

Pitfalls:

Too selfless, vulnerable from giving too much, lack of personal goals or growth

What to watch for:

Subvert expectations of your traditional Caregiver by making them care for or enable the antagonist. Try having them exploited to the point where they become bitter. Show a breaking point or at least a little bit of selfishness. A Caregiver can be so shallow that they become flat, so add some extra complexity to their story.

Examples:

Mary Poppins (Mary Poppins), Hagrid (Harry Potter), Samwise Gamgee (Lord of the Rings), Charlotte (Charlotte’s Web)

The Common Person/Everyman

The Common Person is the one that everyone can easily relate to. They are the ones who work with their hands, real salt-of-the-earth kind of folk. While they usually don’t have a higher education or experience outside of their everyday life, they aren’t necessarily clueless.

The Common Person seeks security more than grandeur. People get along with them easily, but they often lack the means to stand out and can easily fade to the background.

Traits:

Empathetic, hard-working, kind, virtuous, accepting, belonging, grounded, relatable

Pitfalls:

Lack of power or uniqueness, Unprepared

What to watch for:

It’s easy to write a Common Person as an Innocent, who you will learn about later. While blurring the lines between archetypes can be handled well, be careful about exposing how oblivious your Common Person is if they are the protagonist—and don’t just make them stumble around as an inept Innocent for cheap laughs.

Examples:

Bilbo Baggins (Lord of the Rings), Ron Weasley (Harry Potter), Anastasia (Anastasia), Leslie Knope (Parks & Recreation)

The Creator

Someone who … creates.

The Creator isn’t happy unless they are making or building something, usually working towards a single creation that consumes their every thought. They are compelled to always push the limits and leave a legacy. Their creation can be physical (an inventor) or divine (gods and creation stories). To the Creator, there is nothing that is more important than what they are trying to make, and they are willing to sacrifice themselves and others to reach their goal.

Traits:

Obsessive, imaginative, creative, driven, strong-willed, non-conforming

Pitfalls:

Single-minded, perfectionist, selfish, unreliable, egotistical, willing to sacrifice themselves or others

What to watch for:

The mad scientist is a bit of a cliché at this point, but those types of characters tend to be more tertiary stock characters. Creators are often more complex than mad scientists, even if they are all obsessed with a single goal: their creation. Be sure to explain the motivations of your Creators to make their obsession seem reasonable.

Examples:

Zeus, God, Dr. Victor Frankenstein (Frankenstein), Alexander Hamilton (Hamilton), Wednesday Addams (The Addams Family)

The Explorer

When you read about someone who isn’t satisfied with their life as it is, who wants to get out there and see the world, or who yearns for more than a “normal life,” then you’re reading about an Explorer.

Explorers are always pushing boundaries. Those boundaries might be physical ones—going beyond where they should—or unseen ones in society or themselves. They feel confined in their daily lives.

Traits:

Courageous, independent, nonconforming, driven, curious

Pitfalls:

Never satisfied, aimless, alienated and self-alienating, selfish

What to watch for:

Similar to the Outlaw, an archetype later on this list, the Explorer hasn’t been done to death—yet. But a lot of Disney princesses fall under this archetype, while being shared with others as well. If you are going to create an Explorer, be careful of repeating the same old “I’m so bored of being rich” cliché.

Examples:

Ariel (The Little Mermaid), Moana (Moana) Mulan (Mulan), Jasmine (Aladdin), Star-Lord (Marvel), Captain Kirk (Star Trek)

The Hero

The Hero is the character that rises to meet whatever challenge is presented in your book. They can be a reluctant hero who is resistant to their new role or someone born to wear a cape and fight villains.

Whatever their origins, the Hero is one of the most common archetypes in writing. They might wear spandex, chainmail, or just stand up to a schoolyard bully, but almost every story has a Hero.

Traits:

Strong, persistent, courageous, honorable, stands up for those who can’t stand up for themselves

Pitfalls:

Arrogance and hubris

What to watch for:

When writing your Hero, be careful of making them too good. They shouldn’t be untouchable, as that removes any form of suspense, nor should they go their whole lives without encountering a moral dilemma. A superhero who has to choose between saving their loved one or a bus of children makes for a much more compelling character than one who can easily accomplish both.

Examples:

Frodo Baggins (The Lord of the Rings), Joan of Arc, Harry Potter (Harry Potter), Captain Marvel (Marvel)

The Innocent/Child

Defined by their unending optimism and naivety, the Innocent, who is often a child or child-like, is morally pure in action and intent. They usually start from a good, comfortable place until a singular event radically alters their world, opening their eyes to a reality that was either blissfully ignored before or did not impact them until now.

Traits:

Honest, trusting, enthusiastic, open, caring, loving, sincere

Pitfalls:

Naïve, too trusting, unskilled or powerless, inexperienced, unaware, vulnerable

What to watch for:

The Innocent is usually the starting point of a character. They are someone who grows and changes throughout their journey. “Chosen One” cliches (i.e. The Innocent who then becomes incredibly powerful for no reason) can be easily mishandled, but the Innocent has so much room for growth (or a descent into darkness) that it is hard to make them into a cliché beyond the first act.

Examples:

Scout (To Kill a Mockingbird), Merry and Pippen (Lord of the Rings), Rapunzel (Tangled)

The Joker/Jester

The Joker or Jester is someone who can either purely provide comic relief or they can use humor to shine a light on some sort of issue.

This archetype is funny, either intentionally or unintentionally so. They live in the moment, don’t really plan ahead, and have a very casual attitude. When it comes to the plot, they don’t usually care about achieving the same primary goal that the Hero is working towards.

Rather, they march to the beat of their own drum and are proud of it.

Traits:

Fun-loving, humorous, likeable, surprisingly insightful

Pitfalls:

Superficial, obnoxious, impulsive

What to watch for:

One of the best subversions of the Joker is Fat Amy from Pitch Perfect. Fat Amy goes against the stereotype of the quiet, self-conscious overweight character and is instead one who is confident and loud. Amy owns her body while making a point about society’s view on other people’s bodies.

Examples:

Fat Amy (Pitch Perfect), Harley Quinn (DC Comics), R2D2 and C-3PO (Star Wars), Dory (Finding Nemo)

The Lover

Guided by their heart and emotions, the Lover is a character that can range from hopeless romantics to playboys. They will often change or sacrifice themselves in the pursuit of acquiring or maintaining love. To them, the person or thing that they love is the most important thing in their life, similar to the Creator and their creation.

It’s important to keep in mind that, despite the connotations of the name, Lover archetypes do not have to be consumed by romantic love. They can act solely for their love of their friends or family, often overlapping with traits found in the Caregiver.

Traits:

Devoted, compassionate, caring, protective

Pitfalls:

Obsessive, willingness to sacrifice themselves, scared of loneliness, jealousy, lack of own identity

Stereotypes:

Starstruck women who get weak in the knees the second they see a man is a tired cliché that I think we can all get over, though I know there are romance readers out there who might have my head for saying that. That said, if you want to create a unique Lover, focus on non-romantic love.

Examples:

Luna Lovegood (Harry Potter), Belle (Beauty and the Beast), Romeo and Juliet (Romeo and Juliet), Edward Cullen (Twilight)Want to know more about the Lover archetype?

The Magician

The Magician is an archetype that can apply equally to both heroes and villains.

Even if they don’t wield literal magic (though they can, depending on your genre), the Magician is so skilled that it almost seems inhuman. Magicians also search for more power for themselves rather than to help someone else. It’s important to note that Magicians and other archetypes who seek “power” aren’t necessarily magical or supernatural. Power, in this article, can refer to knowledge, political capital, wealth, physical or mental strength, etc. Magicians have an abundance of their power and strive for more.

This doesn’t mean they must be good or bad, but all Magicians continually seek more.

Traits:

Intelligent, powerful, disciplined, omniscient and/or omnipotent, intuitive, perceptive, clever

Pitfalls:

Arrogance, hubris, selfishness

What to watch for:

We don’t need more villains who are evil for the sake of being evil. I think we’re over the evil genius or super villain who just wants to watch the world burn without relatable motivation. The Marvel Cinematic Universe has been better at subverting the stereotype of an evil Magician lately. Look at Thanos; he is evil and seeks ultimate power but is someone we can empathize with at times.

Examples:

Hermoine Granger (Harry Potter), Doctor Strange (Marvel), Regina George (Mean Girls), Sherlock Holmes (Sherlock Holmes)Want to know more about the Magician archetype? Click here to continue our character archetype masterclass.

The Orphan

While not always an actual orphan, the Orphan is a character who is taken from a state of unimportance or poverty and dropped into one of excitement or grandeur. This message resonates very well with readers, since the excitement of these life-changing events is something most of us yearn for.

Beyond that, Orphans are looking for a group to belong to, a sort of family to create or join in lieu of the family they never had or lost.

The Orphan can overlap quite a bit with the Common Person or the Innocent, so be mindful of that when using this archetype. You can draw on the strengths of the other archetypes, just watch out for their shortcomings.

Traits:

Survivalists, empathetic, determined, driven

Pitfalls:

Lack of access to resources, underdeveloped from their isolation, unconfident

What to watch for:

Take a look at the Innocent and Common Person archetypes to better understand clichés to watch for and how to make a unique Orphan. Orphan archetypes, especially in speculative fiction, can easily fall into the “Chosen One” cliché if not written well. Bear in mind that the Orphan often transitions to other archetypes over the course of their character arc.

Examples:

Simba (The Lion King), Harry Potter (Harry Potter), Annie (Little Orphan Annie)

The Outlaw/Rebel

When society is broken, the Outlaw or Rebel leads the charge against flawed leaders and power structures.

Characters who fall under this archetype are unapologetically themselves and inspire others to join them. They might be the public head of a rebellion, a charismatic outsider, someone who works in the shadows, or just someone whose style mimics that of My Chemical Romance (don't worry, I love Welcome to the Black Parade, too). More than anything, the Outlaw wants change and nothing will stop them.

Traits:

Natural leaders, courageous, inspiring, strong, charismatic, virtuous, resourceful

Pitfalls:

Obsessed with their goals, uncompromising, lacking resources and means of power, lawbreaker, fanatic

What to watch for:

The perfect “bad boy” image. Though some romance readers will crave this, most stories won’t benefit from a strong, beautiful, perfect Outlaw. Make them flawed. The Outlaw hasn’t seen as much spotlight as the Hero, but that doesn’t mean you are immune to clichés and stereotypes.

Examples:

Robin Hood (Robin Hood), Han Solo (Star Wars), Katniss Everdeen (The Hunger Games), Tally Youngblood (Uglies), Starr Carter (The Hate U Give).

The Ruler

The Ruler is in charge, either through legal, emotional, or military means. They are responsible for others—from one person to a kingdom—and can either rule with an iron fist to benefit themselves or be viewed as compassionate.

The biggest fear for a Ruler is some sort of threat to their control that can force them to lose their power or cause harm to those they are protecting.

Traits:

Powerful, stable, high status, access to resources, charismatic

Pitfalls:

Controlling, out of touch, disliked, many enemies, greedy, fear of losing their position/status

What to watch for:

Just like a villain who is evil for the sake of being evil, a villainous Ruler whose entire personality is just greed gets old quickly. Oppositely, a benevolent Ruler who knows everything is just a wealthy Sage.

Examples:

Nurse Ratched (One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest), Mufasa (The Lion King), Peter Pan (Peter Pan), King Arthur, The Queen of Hearts (Alice in Wonderland)

The Sage

The Sage, also known as the Mentor, is similar to the Magician in many ways but has different motivations. Whereas the Magician wants to further themselves—whether for malicious reasons or not—the Sage wants to help out. They are powerful or knowledgeable like the Magician, but Sages are the ones who pass their knowledge to a pupil.

Parents and teachers are examples of realistic Sage characters though, like their mystical counterparts in speculative fiction, they have a tendency to be vague about their teachings.

Because you can’t learn from a lesson unless you work to first understand what the lesson is, right?

Traits:

Wise, caring, patient, insightful, rational

Pitfalls:

Passive, cautious, arrogant, isolated

What to watch for:

Seeking out all-knowing masters, especially those who end up dying to the villain (only to be avenged by their new pupil) is bordering on tiresome. If you’re going to go with this trope, mix it up a little. Also, like other powerful archetypes, be sure to add a flaw to Sages to keep them interesting.

Examples:

Professor McGonagall and Dumbledore (Harry Potter), Gandalf (Lord of the Rings), Hannibal Lecter (Silence of the Lambs), The Oracle (The Matrix), Obi-Wan Kenobi (Star Wars), The Ancient One (Doctor Strange)

The Seductress

One of the archetypes that leans more towards the villainous, the Seductress uses their means of power—their intellect, wits, body, leverage, etc.—to get what they want. That doesn't mean they need to be evil.

The staple of a Seductress is their tendency to make promises that always come with a catch. The strings attached to what they offer will benefit them more than whatever they are giving up. This archetype is usually used to highlight that something is too good to be true, but a well-written Seductress can shine a spotlight on the dangers of greed and ambition.

Traits:

Manipulative, charismatic, amoral, independent, clever, survivor

Pitfalls:

Isolated, unfulfilled (even if they don’t know it), standoffish, selfish

What to watch for:

Just from the name, you can tell this archetype is based on the stereotype of a woman who seduces and dupes a man to get what she wants. It’s 2021—your Seductress isn’t confined by gender, sex, age, motive, or means. There are many avenues of power (political, economical, magical, etc.) that a Seductress can use to get what they want.

Examples:

Black Widow (Marvel), Mystique (X-Men), Sirens (The Odyssey), Mephistopheles (Faust), Lucifer (Supernatural)

16 Personality Types

Sentinels

ISTJ - The Duty Fulfiller/Logistician

Serious and quiet, interested in security and peaceful living. Extremely thorough, responsible, and dependable. Well-developed powers of concentration. Usually interested in supporting and promoting traditions and establishments. Well-organized and hard working, they work steadily towards identified goals. They can usually accomplish any task once they have set their mind to it.

ISFJ - The Nurturer//Defender

Quiet, kind, and conscientious. Can be depended on to follow through. Usually puts the needs of others above their own needs. Stable and practical, they value security and traditions. Well-developed sense of space and function. Rich inner world of observations about people. Extremely perceptive of other's feelings. Interested in serving others.

ESTJ - The Guardian/Executive

Practical, traditional, and organized. Likely to be athletic. Not interested in theory or abstraction unless they see the practical application. Have clear visions of the way things should be. Loyal and hard-working. Like to be in charge. Exceptionally capable in organizing and running activities. "Good citizens" who value security and peaceful living.

ESFJ - The Caregiver/Consul

Warm-hearted, popular, and conscientious. Tend to put the needs of others over their own needs. Feel strong sense of responsibility and duty. Value traditions and security. Interested in serving others. Need positive reinforcement to feel good about themselves. Well-developed sense of space and function.

Diplomats

INFJ - The Protector/Advocate

Quietly forceful, original, and sensitive. Tend to stick to things until they are done. Extremely intuitive about people, and concerned for their feelings. Well-developed value systems which they strictly adhere to. Well-respected for their perserverence in doing the right thing. Likely to be individualistic, rather than leading or following.

INFP - The Idealist/Mediator

Quiet, reflective, and idealistic. Interested in serving humanity. Well-developed value system, which they strive to live in accordance with. Extremely loyal. Adaptable and laid-back unless a strongly-held value is threatened. Usually talented writers. Mentally quick, and able to see possibilities. Interested in understanding and helping people.

ENFP - The Inspirer/Campaigner

Enthusiastic, idealistic, and creative. Able to do almost anything that interests them. Great people skills. Need to live life in accordance with their inner values. Excited by new ideas, but bored with details. Open-minded and flexible, with a broad range of interests and abilities.

ENFJ - The Giver/Protagonist

Popular and sensitive, with outstanding people skills. Externally focused, with real concern for how others think and feel. Usually dislike being alone. They see everything from the human angle, and dislike impersonal analysis. Very effective at managing people issues, and leading group discussions. Interested in serving others, and probably place the needs of others over their own needs.

Explorers

ESTP - The Doer/Entrepreneur

Friendly, adaptable, action-oriented. "Doers" who are focused on immediate results. Living in the here-and-now, they're risk-takers who live fast-paced lifestyles. Impatient with long explanations. Extremely loyal to their peers, but not usually respectful of laws and rules if they get in the way of getting things done. Great people skills.

ESFP - The Performer/Entertainer

People-oriented and fun-loving, they make things more fun for others by their enjoyment. Living for the moment, they love new experiences. They dislike theory and impersonal analysis. Interested in serving others. Likely to be the center of attention in social situations. Well-developed common sense and practical ability.

ISTP - The Mechanic/Virtuoso

Quiet and reserved, interested in how and why things work. Excellent skills with mechanical things. Risk-takers who live in the current moment. Usually interested in and talented at extreme sports. Uncomplicated in their desires. Loyal to their peers and to their internal value systems, but not overly concerned with respecting laws and rules if they get in the way of getting something done. Detached and analytical, they excel at finding solutions to practical problems.

ISFP - The Artist/Adventurer

Quiet, serious, sensitive and kind. Do not like conflict, and not likely to do things to generate conflict. Loyal and faithful. Extremely well-developed senses, and aesthetic appreciation for beauty. Not interested in leading or controlling others. Flexible and open-minded. Likely to be original and creative. Enjoy the present moment.

Analysts

ENTP - The Visionary/Debater

Creative, resourceful, and intellectually quick. Good at a broad range of things. Enjoy debating issues, and may be into "one-up-manship". They get very excited about new ideas and projects, but may neglect the more routine aspects of life. Generally outspoken and assertive. They enjoy people and are stimulating company. Excellent ability to understand concepts and apply logic to find solutions.

ENTJ - The Executive/Commander

Assertive and outspoken - they are driven to lead. Excellent ability to understand difficult organizational problems and create solid solutions. Intelligent and well-informed, they usually excel at public speaking. They value knowledge and competence, and usually have little patience with inefficiency or disorganization.

INTJ - The Scientist/ Architect

Independent, original, analytical, and determined. Have an exceptional ability to turn theories into solid plans of action. Highly value knowledge, competence, and structure. Driven to derive meaning from their visions. Long-range thinkers. Have very high standards for their performance, and the performance of others. Natural leaders, but will follow if they trust existing leaders.

INTP - The Thinker/Logician

Logical, original, creative thinkers. Can become very excited about theories and ideas. Exceptionally capable and driven to turn theories into clear understandings. Highly value knowledge, competence and logic. Quiet and reserved, hard to get to know well. Individualistic, having no interest in leading or following others.