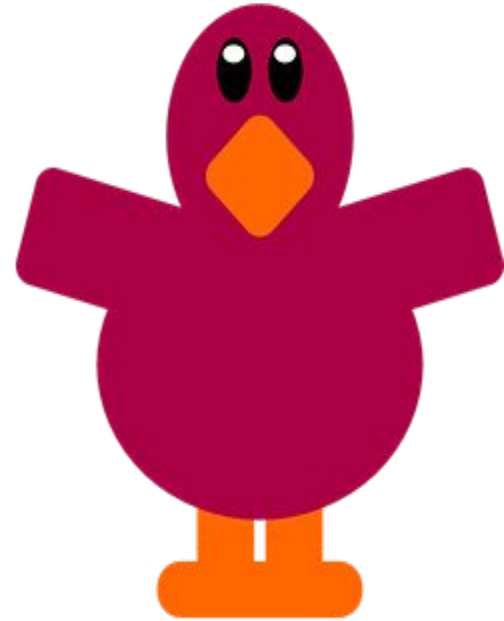
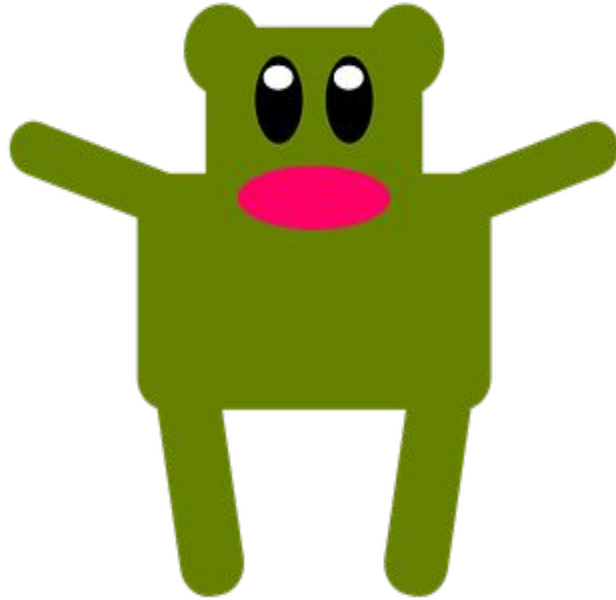
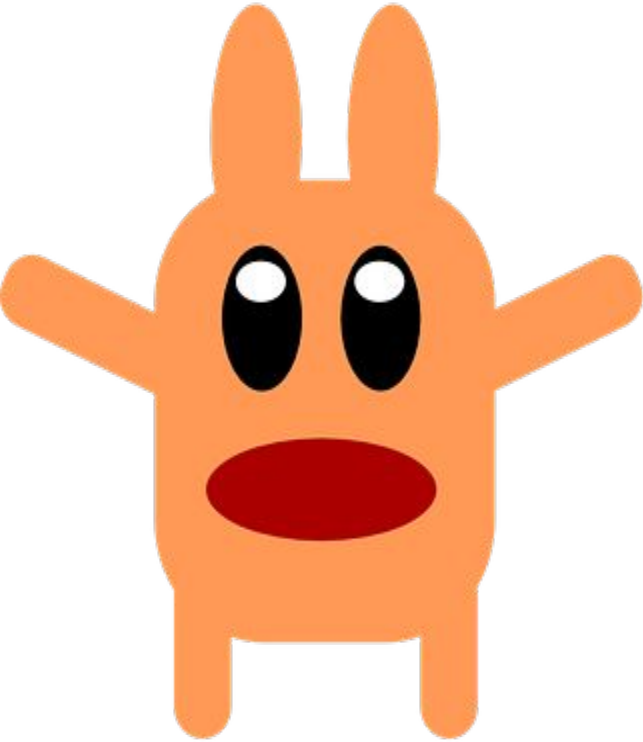


Character: Want, Need, Change



What Do All Main Characters Have in Common?

They want something.

At the very beginning of a story, the main character is dissatisfied. Sometimes this is very obvious, even to them, and sometimes it's not. But something is missing in his or her life.

Usually, bottom line, your main character wants love and acceptance. Except they don't really know it.

Your Main Character is Probably Deluded

Say your main character subconsciously wants love and acceptance, like most of us. But the difference between fact and fiction is sometimes a small one.

What does your character THINK that love and acceptance *looks like*?

Success? A new car? Getting the girl? Winning the race? Getting the promotion? Winning the money? Escaping from a situation?

Very often, the subconscious want is overlaid with a material objective.

For example: NEW CAR = SUCCESS = I AM MORE LOVABLE

Want Versus Need

Nobody said it better than the Rolling Stones: *You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you might just get what you need.*

Your job as the writer, is to identify the want and the need of your character and to make your character experience the story/adventure such that they get what they NEED in the end. Not necessarily what they want.

Example

What does Scarlett O'Hara want in *Gone With the Wind*? She wants to save her land and her legacy. But what does she need? She needs humility.

The story puts her in some very rough situations and she indeed earns a new humility that she never had.

But she doesn't really get what she wanted anyway, does she?

Still, love and happiness elude her.

Example

What does Anna Karenina want? She wants to get out of her oppressive marriage and to live a freer life with her lover.

The story makes her pay DEARLY for that choice and she ultimately loses what she really *needed* which was her own independence.

Love, happiness and social acceptance elude her.

Example

What does Dorothy Gale want in the Wizard of Oz? She wants a couple of different things. At first, she wants to run away from home and live a life of adventure, but once she arrives in Oz she realizes she wants to go back home.

But what does Dorothy need? She needs to learn two things: One, that she can overcome anything - with the help of her friends and two, to appreciate her family and her life back in Kansas.

The adventures in The Wizard of Oz make Dorothy earn her way back home by teaching her what she needs in order that she can get what she wants.

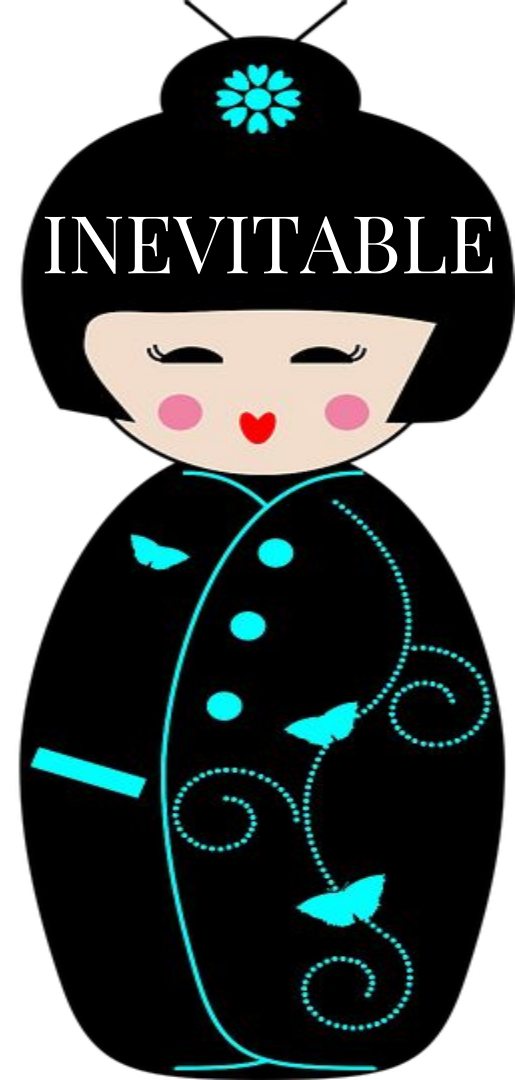
The TENSION Between Conscious Want and Subconscious Need is the Stuff Stories Are Made Of!

Stories are not about events. Stories are about people experiencing events.

And because people are notoriously unfathomable, illogical and emotional, there's no telling what we'll do. Especially when we are fictional. And *especially* when we can't seem to get what we want.

Give your character a tangible and achievable want: the girl, the job, the money, the relationship, the success, etc. BUT DON'T LET THEM GET IT.

Not until they have well and truly changed and earned what they wanted in the first place. Which, once they change, they may not want now anyway.



Your Character MUST Change

Have your life experiences changed you, over time? Of course they have.

When we read a book, even a novel that sprawls over decades, we are, in many senses, dealing with time in a very compressed way. Events and people are a bit larger than life.

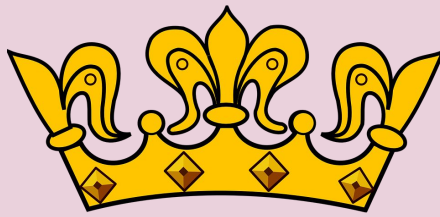
While in real life, change comes slowly - if at all - for most people, generally speaking, fictional characters undergo *dramatic changes* from who they were on page one and who they are on page 300.

Exercise:

Write about 100 words describing what your character WANTS just before your story begins. Just let your character talk, and remember, they aren't as insightful right now as they will be by the end of the story.

Now let's do this again. Write about 100 words about how your character feels about that same want - but this time at the END of the story. Now what have they got to say? Something a bit different.

Even if you are still shaping that second act, the big adventure, know right now that the connection between the adventure of the story and the way your character reacts to it and changes because of it is an intimate one.



The Golden Rule

Put Yourself in the Shoes of a Reader!

Why would YOU read this book and not the one right next to it, or one click away?

QUESTION:

What will a reader notice right away, by flipping through the first few pages?

ANSWER:

Pristine (error-free), entertaining writing that makes putting the book down next to impossible.

The Writer's Oath

We herewith and heretofore swear to tempt our readers to stay up late, miss their bus stop, say “one more minute” at dinnertime, pack this book with them everywhere they go and otherwise be so addicted to our story that they can’t wait to read our next book!

We are the storytellers!
Huzzah!