

Such a Character

In my journey through the wonderful world of authorship, I heard a comment about building characters for your book and it brought me up short. It seemed the teacher was indicating that once you come up with a new character, you would begin by filling out a detailed background so that you have a fully developed individual. When writing my fantasy and adventure stories I gather a team and go off on the adventure. During our trek, new friends and many new enemies join in the excitement. By the end of the adventure I have either fallen in or out of love with each of them, and I am amazed at the people I met along the way.

I wonder what my adventures would be like if I molded my characters in stone before the adventure began. (*Once I wrote the pervious sentence, I knew I had to reconsider my angst. The character profile is developed like the story and can grow throughout the novel's creation.*) I realize that each new character that touches the pages of my novels has their essential or core attributes worked out in my head. They may be new imaginings and grow as the novel unfolds but they had purpose and focus from the beginning.

Maybe it is best to say that whether we create them at the beginning or the end, our characters should have the depth and breadth represented by a character profile.

	<i>Don't miss an issue!</i>
Make sure you get every issue of Monthly Conversation. Send us an email to Newsletter Editor and we will be happy to include you on our mailing list!	
<i>Have an idea or article for the newsletter...</i>	
Be sure to email the editor and we will do our best to get you published... It is all about sharing the word...	



There is value in this process. By identifying major and minor characters we build life and depth into our stories.

r.e.joyce

*As an author, would you like to put your name up in lights!
What a great place to start! Send us your article, poem or short story so that we can put you up in our Monthly Conversation.*

We were approached by a rather dusty old gentleman who stated flatly in a west Texas drawl, that he “found the scrolls while looking for gold”. His only requirement was to be left alone and that any reward could be left at the Western Union station for his eventual return to civilization. They were parchments dating far back in history, and they told wonderful tales that filled our staff with excitement. Our happiness was so great that we chose to pen a name commensurate to the event. These are the transcription of the works we have been given under the name of *r.e.joyce*. We hope you rejoice too



Today's Encouragement

Don't chisel perfect sentences into stone, or try to. That's no way to write a first draft...

Don't even think that you're writing; think that you're dancing, or conducting a symphony, or chasing moonbeams, or soaping windows. Don't be a slave to grammar or syntax, or even to meaning. Write to the sound of words, not to their logic – not at first.

Be guided by rhythms, hues, textures, game theory, astrological charts, whim. Be bold, be devilish; be outrageous. Forget about readers; tickle *yourself*. Should doubts, misgivings, or disgust arise during this honeymoon phase, shoo, shoo them away. If they persist, consider the possibility that bride and groom (artist and subject) aren't truly meant for each other. However you manage it, try, at this juncture, to have at least *some* fun.

[Peter Selgin](#),

[By Cunning & Craft: Practical Wisdom for Fiction Writers](#)



How To Build A Character

How well do you know your characters? Are you as intimate with them as you should be?

Coming up with a character is easy. You give them a name, an occupation, and a reason for visiting your story. Developing that character into a living, breathing, vital aspect of your manuscript, one that successfully propels your story forward, is another phenomenon entirely.

There are a few things that are an absolute for me when I develop a character. The most important is a name. As I begin writing a new manuscript, I make a cast list. All the main characters are there, as well as all the secondary characters. Everyone who is going to make an appearance in the story is named and accounted for.

A couple of rules that I like to follow when it comes to developing character names – One, make the name pronounceable. Two, especially for secondary and tertiary characters, make their name fit. If you're writing a story about white slavery, an unhappy stripper named Tatiana will convey the message more effectively than an unhappy stripper named Jane.

Where do the names come from? I'll admit, there have been the times, (in the past, of course, cough, cough,) I've been in a pinch and looked to my reference bookshelf. I pick a first name and last name at random. Problem is, when you've been working on a manuscript for four straight months with the same bookshelf of reference material, you're going to duplicate yourself. I was caught by one of my readers. I'd used Richard Curtis and Curtis Richard. For shame. Now, I use every available resource. Magazines like Maxim and FHM always have great names. There are websites that use algorithms to mix and match names to degree. You get the drift – finding sources to pull from is easy.

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Character Profile Basics

Here is a solid listing of the various character parts to develop your profile.

Statistics:

Name:
Age:
Nationality:
Socioeconomic Level as a child:
Socioeconomic Level as an adult:
Hometown:
Current Residence:
Occupation:
Income:
Talents/Skills:
Salary:
Birth order:
Siblings (describe relationship):
Spouse (describe relationship):
Children (describe relationship):
Grandparents (describe relationship):
Grandchildren (describe relationship):
Significant Others (describe relationship):
Relationship skills:

Physical Characteristics:

Height:
Weight:
Race:
Eye Color:
Hair Color:
Glasses or contact lenses?
Skin color:
Shape of Face:
Distinguishing features:
How does he/she dress?
Mannerisms:
Habits: (smoking, drinking etc.)
Health:
Hobbies:
Favorite Sayings:
Speech patterns:
Disabilities:
Style (Elegant, shabby etc.):
Greatest flaw:
Best quality:



Intellectual/Mental/Personality Attributes and Attitudes:

Educational Background:
Intelligence Level:
Any Mental Illnesses?
Learning Experiences:
Character's short-term goals in life:
Character's long-term goals in life:
How does Character see himself/herself?
How does Character believe he/she is perceived by others?
How self-confident is the character?
Does the character seem ruled by emotion or logic or some combination thereof?
What would most embarrass this character?

Emotional Characteristics:

Strengths/Weaknesses:
Introvert or Extrovert?
How does the character deal with anger?
With sadness?
With conflict?
With change?
With loss?
What does the character want out of life?
What would the character like to change in his/her life?
What motivates this character?
What frightens this character?
What makes this character happy?
Is the character judgmental of others?
Is the character generous or stingy?
Is the character generally polite or rude?

Character Profile Basics

Here is a solid listing of the various character parts to develop your profile.

Spiritual Characteristics:

Does the character believe in God?
What are the character's spiritual beliefs?
Is religion or spirituality a part of this character's life?
If so, what role does it play?

How the Character is Involved in the Story

Character's role in the novel (main character? hero? heroine?
Romantic interest? etc.):
Scene where character first appears:
Relationships with other characters:

1. Character's Name: -- (Describe relationship with this character and changes to relationship over the course of the novel).
2. Character's Name: -- (Describe relationship with this character and changes to relationship over the course of the novel).
3. Character's Name: -- (Describe relationship with this character and changes to relationship over the course of the novel).
4. Character's Name: -- (Describe relationship with this character and changes to relationship over the course of the novel).

How character is different at the end of the novel from when the novel began:



Do You know someone who would be interested in reading our little newsletter?

Please have them simply send us an email so they can get every issue of *Monthly Conversation*. Send us an email to [Newsletter Editor](#) and we will be happy to include you on our mailing list!

How to Build...Continued

Since I generally write series novels back to back, I'm intimately familiar with my main characters and the people they work with on a daily basis. Secondary characters that are making their second or third appearance are simple to keep up with. But the new primary and secondary characters need defining, and I need a new list of tertiary characters and one-timer throw-in names.

My very first step is to build the list of names. In my new book, there is a big cast of secondary characters. A big cast. My list has sixty-eight new character names on it.

I know I'll use up at least twenty-eight right off the bat. I have a new character who has a whole team behind her, so there's another nine. See where I'm going? I never want to be left out in the cold when it comes to naming my characters.

Unfortunately, as well intentioned as I am with my cast list, there are characters who pop up unexpectedly and announce, "Hey, I'm here. This is what I'm going to do to wreck havoc on your story. But I need a name, please." Hence, the pre-built characters list.

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Poppy's Pantry

A Cookbook made with
giggles and grins

By r.e.joyce

Monthly Recipe Adventure

We have begun a yearlong cooking adventure to create a cookbook that is - fun.

We would love to have you participate in this adventure.

Each month we are going to include a new recipe being developed in our test kitchen. (Location of the test kitchen is kept secret - even from Poppy... We believe it is somewhere under the pile of dishes he forgot to do...)

Your task, if you wish to participate is to:

-  Try the recipe and comment - help us make it better and add a family story or two to the adventure.
-  Take a picture of your completed dish and send it in as a jpg file...
-  Or add a recipe of your own and become part of the cookbook!

All proceeds of Poppy's Pantry and Grandma's Cupboard will be donated to North Texas Children's Hospitals.

Poppy's Pantry Recipe Listings

#	Recipe	Main Ingredient	Meal Course	Occasion / Holiday	Season
1	PP r.e.joyce Apple Pie		Dessert		Fall
2	PP Cranberry Runaway		Garnish	Thanksgiving	Fall
3	PP Slow-Cooker Pot Roast	Beef	Main		
4	PP Irish Soda Bread		Bread		
5	PP Piggy in the Pot	Pork	Main		
6	PP Chicken and the Piggy	Chicken	Main		
7	PP Texas Beef & Bean Chili	Beef	Main		
8	PP Spicy Stuffed Peppers	Beef	Main		
9	PP Picante Brunch Quiche	Eggs	Breakfast		
10	PP Burger in a Sombrero	Beef	Main		
11	PP Sweet and Savory Beef Stew	Beef	Main		
12	PP Gastronomic Gobbler	Turkey	Main		
13	PP Thanksgiving Piggy	Pork	Main		
14	PP Chili Piggy Dressed for the party	Pork	Main		
15	PP Skillet Pork Chop Dinner	Pork	Main		
16	PP Pork Chop-Apple-Bean Packets	Pork	Grill		
18	PP Poppy's On-ends	Beef	multi-use		
19	PP Poppy's Italian Song Sauce	Beef and Pork	Main		
20	PP Peppered Pork Medallions in Tangy M	Pork	Main		
22	PP Poppy's Mac Surprise		Main		
23	Chris 20130910 Best Ever Cheese Cake		Dessert		
24	GC Broccoli Casserole 20130910	Broccoli	Side Dish		
25	GC Cream Cheese Rollups		Dessert		
26	GC Frenchy's Sweet Surprise Breakfast	eggs	breakfast		
27	GC Grandma's Italian Baked Garlic Bread	Bread	Garnish		

Have a recipe to add...

We would love to include your favorite receipt in our Cookbook. The tradition of gathering around the table to enjoy good food and good friends is at the center of living a good life.

Feel free to contact us at bill.joyce@vismgt.com and submit your recipe. Let's work together to expand the fun of this wonderful tradition.

Poppy's Pantry



What is in the pot is Love!

Chili Piggy

Dressed for the party

Tender pork simmered with tomatoes and rice sprinkled with cheese. This dish will dance on the tongues of your guests and become a favorite any time of the year.

Ingredients

- 🍴 1 tablespoon Vegetable Oil
- 🍴 1-1/2 pounds boneless pork chops cut to bite sized pieces (use family style pork chops and cut off the bone to save a few dollars).
- 🍴 1 cup chopped onion.
- 🍴 1 cup chopped green pepper.
- 🍴 1 clove garlic, minced.
- 🍴 1 can (14.5 oz) Stewed Tomatoes, undrained.
- 🍴 1 can (14 oz) reduced-sodium chicken broth or use chicken bouillon cubes in the rice boil.
- 🍴 1 tablespoon Chili Powder.
- 🍴 1-1/2 cups instant white rice, uncooked.
- 🍴 1/2 cup shredded Cheddar Cheese (1/2 cup = 2 oz)
- 🍴 Chopped green onion or chopped fresh parsley, optional



Directions

- 🍴 Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Cook pork pieces 6 minutes or until golden brown, turning as needed. Remove from skillet; cover to keep warm.
- 🍴 Prepare rice as normal using the broth or your own style of flavoring.
- 🍴 Add onion, pepper and garlic to skillet. Cook 3 minutes, or until tender. Stir in tomatoes with their liquid and chili powder; bring to a boil.
- 🍴 Stir in rice; reduce heat to low.
- 🍴 Fold in pork pieces into mixture. Sprinkle with cheese; cover. Simmer 5 minutes, or until cheese is melted.
- 🍴 Serve in bowls or plate other vegetables for a full meal experience. Top each serving with chopped green onions or chopped fresh parsley, if desired.



This serves four nicely.

Be sure to make leftovers - this is great for **Micro-Munchies**

How to Build... Continued

What works for me is to name my secondary characters off the bat, but leave some of the tertiaries for later. That way I can satisfy my spontaneity gene and grab a name at random a few times through the book. Now that I'm a little wiser, I only take it from the proscribed list of tertiary character names, rather than inventing off the top of my head.

But what's in a name? There needs to be more to make a character come alive.

Some characters are so big and bold, they parade right out of your mind onto the page with no effort. Some need to be coaxed a bit. For the reluctant characters, there are a few absolutes that must be answered before they get to show up in print. The first things I decide on are age, hair color and eye color (subsequent to race), height, weight, and level of education.

While it's generally easy to define a character by social class and educational status, I have the joy of writing books that are based in Nashville, Tennessee. This is a southern town, and there are many colloquialisms here that can be misinterpreted by outsiders. Brilliant, well-educated people here use terms that Yankees would deem dim-witted at best. I try to be especially careful when I dip into that particular well. It's a unique issue that's been written about by many more capable writers than I. Suffice it to say you need to be aware if you're writing regionally specific characters.

Back to building a character. Age, looks, race, education and socio-economic status are first. Those are the main ingredients for me. Now it's on to the spices. I can't say that I do the same thing for each character. Some have more information on them than others. Some I know how they walk, what they wear, how their hair is styled, whether they are straight or gay, who their family is. Some I just have a mental picture of who they are. If they are a one-timer, I try to be cognizant of their surroundings, so the character can help me set the scene.

One of my writer buddies, Jennifer Brooks, came up with a brilliant idea while writing a book with an omniscient POV and several main characters. The BMW's (my critique group) were having trouble keeping all of them straight, and we badgered her to do something about our inability to "get" who was who. (Many times, POV problems are a result of not knowing your characters as well as you should. If you know exactly how your character will react in a certain situation, what they'll say, how they'll feel, your POV will fall into place.)

Have you ever been sent an email survey by one of your friends, the kind that has a huge list of questions that either you or said friend must fill out? They ask detailed questions that are meant to show how much you really know someone. My friend, in all her brilliant glory, decided to fill out the survey as her characters. Since many of her characters are in relationships or strong friendships, she allowed the characters themselves to ask the questions of their friends and lovers. It gave her a stronger grasp of who each character is and how they can be presented in the story to help us, the readers, keep them straight. It worked wonderfully.

How to Build... Continued

Another quick note on character building. One of the most important questions I ask each of my characters is, “What do you mean to the story?” A tertiary or one-time, one-scene character can steal the show. Let me rephrase that. They should steal the show. I try to make my one-timers feel special. Give them something important to do or say. You should never have a character who doesn’t advance the story in one way or another.

Sometimes, even these tricks aren’t enough to really give you a sense of who your characters are. Since we’re talking crime novels here, let me point out that victimologies are vital to the success of your book. If you don’t have a victim, you don’t have a crime, and you don’t have a book. Making sure your victims are as well developed as your speaking characters makes a big difference.

I tried something a little different in my first manuscript. I had several girls who were killed. They were all in different states, and they shared a physical resemblance. I was struggling with their deaths, mainly because it’s so hard to kill someone in a book, no matter how gleefully we might go about it. There was one that I felt so close to, it hurt me to kill her. My protagonist was struggling with the issue, just as I was. I had him on a plane, desolate, looking at the MISSING posters that accompanied each girl’s disappearance. I envisioned him getting off the plane, going into his office and tacking up the MISSING posters. Hmmm.

The next thing I knew, I was up to my, ahem, elbows, in imaginary dead girls. There are a couple of glossy color magazines here in town, so I went out and bought them, looked to the society pages, and cut out pictures of girls that fit the killer’s profile. I then mocked up the MISSING posters. Based on actual fliers from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website, they each had a picture of the victim, all her particulars, where she was last seen – all the information I needed to use to drive the story and build the plot.

Since that worked so well for me, and my second manuscript had the same kind of situation, so I took the time and picked out my victims. In the manuscript, these pictures go in a dossier for the antagonist to peruse. They go in a dossier in my files as well, so I can experience what my character experiences as he looks at them.

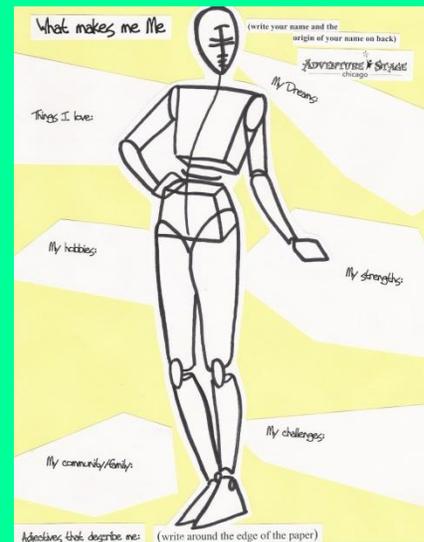


Figure 1
http://www.adventurestage.org/pages/learning_guides/28.php

How to Build... Continued

This has been one of the most successful tricks I've learned. Dead characters deserve as much respect as living characters. Bringing them to life makes it harder to kill them off, but the goal is to create believable, sustainable characters for your readers. And you'll stay away from being gratuitously mean to them, which is the goal.

I also make my setting, Nashville, a character unto itself. I know people have received those constructive rejection letters that claim the reader didn't get a good "sense of place". Make sure your setting is a character just like your protagonists and antagonist, and you'll never hear that again. Get to know your characters, and they'll never let you down.

J.T. Ellison

<http://jtellison.com/how-to-build-a-character/>.

J.T. Ellison is the *New York Times* bestselling author of thirteen critically acclaimed novels, including *What Lies Behind*, *When Shadows Fall* and *All The Pretty Girls*, and is the co-author of the Nicholas Drummond series with #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Catherine Coulter. Her work has been published in over twenty countries. Her novel *The Cold Room* won the ITW Thriller Award for Best Paperback Original and *Where All The Dead Lie* was a RITA® Nominee for Best Romantic Suspense. She lives in Nashville with her husband, where she appreciates fine wine and good notebooks. Visit JTEllison.com for more insight into her wicked imagination, or follow her on [@Thrillerchick](https://twitter.com/Thrillerchick) or [Facebook.com/JTEllison14](https://www.facebook.com/JTEllison14).



Reveal Your Character!

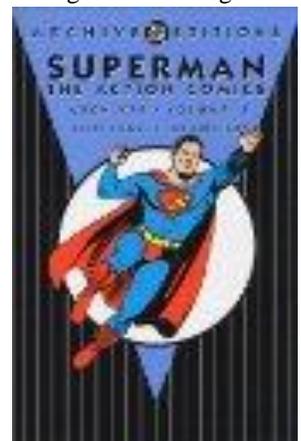
Have you ever been so involved in a story that you imagined yourself as the protagonist? Or have you ever read a book where you relate so strongly to a character that you think the author may have used you for inspiration? Or maybe you've just had one of those days where you'd love to be your favorite fictional hero. - ([LINK to Quiz](#))

Let AbeBooks fuel your fantasy with our fun quiz, "What Literary Character Are You?" Using your responses to the quiz questions, we'll let you know which fictional character from literature you most resemble. How's that for fun?

Think you know your friends? Make sure you do by having them complete the quiz and reveal their character too. Learn more about yourself by revealing your character now...

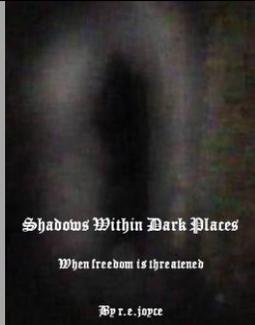
You are **Superman**. You are a hero who fights for justice and you have a strong sense of right and wrong. You stand up for the down-trodden and fight evil with all your strength. You are unafraid of death and to some you may seem mysterious.

The superhero Superman was created by American writer Jerry Siegel and Canadian artist Joe Shuster in 1932. Also known as the mild-mannered Clark Kent, Superman has been adapted throughout the years and has become an American cultural icon. The character came to life through movies, most notably acted by Christopher Reeves.



Interesting meetings and other important happenings for authors		
Meeting with Link	Key Topic	Date & Time
South Arlington Creative Writing Social Club	Check Meetup link for topics	<i>Every Monday</i> starting at 6:00pm
Euless Library Writer's Support Group	Author Critique Group	<i>Every Third Tuesday</i> starting at 7:00pm

Have a meeting you want to advertise that will help our members and advance their writing dreams? Please contact our [Newsletter Editor](#) and we will review and post as appropriate.
Remember Monthly Conversation belongs to you.

<p><i>Seeking Book-Buddy to join my Fantasy Adventure...</i></p>		<p>I would love to have someone, interested in epic fantasy, have a read. This is my third fantasy novel and has just reached the point of being “done.”</p> <p>I would love to have a support author who would take an initial look at this tale. Please contact me at bill.joyce@vismgt.com if you are interested.</p>
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