SUPPORTING CHARACTER SECRETS

From the "Rear Window Theory" to Character Conservation...

A step by step guide to creating superb supporting characters from the writer of seventeen films...

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SCRIPT SECRETS

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SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

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BEST SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

There are very few one man shows in film.

In the theatre it's common to have someone like Hal Holbrook stand on stage doing two hours of Mark Twain's wit and wisdom, but a two hour monologue on film doesn't really work. Sure, they put Holbrook's Mark Twain stage show on celluloid, but it was never more than a stage show on film. There's little chance for drama or conflict if there's only one character.

Even films that seem like one man shows usually have a large supporting cast. Blake Edwards' "The Party" (1968) stars Peter Sellers as a small time actor accidentally invited to a big time Hollywood party. Though there aren't any other main characters in the film, the comedy comes from Sellers interaction with the other party guests. He's way out of his element, and the more he tries to blend in, the more he ends up sticking out like a sore thumb. Without those other party guests for Sellers to act off of there is no film. His comedy comes from his reactions to them and their reactions to him.

Take Ryan Reynolds and put him in a box in "Buried" and you have very little drama without the people on the other end of that mobile phone. Sure, you have a snake... but the real conflict comes from the people who have buried him alive and want him to make a video... or else. Even though he's alone in the box, the supporting characters create the drama and make the idea of a guy in a box for an hour and a half work.

"Phone Booth" is all about the supporting characters. Colin Ferral only thinks about himself when he answers that pay phone... but once he's on the line the story is all about his interaction with the other people on the street around him... as well as the sniper on the other end of the line. Movies like Chris Sparling's "Buried" and Larry Cohen's "Phone Booth" and Tim Manion's "Brake" may seem like one man shows, but they can't work without other characters to help create conflict and drama.

Supporting characters create the conflicts necessary to bring out the character in your protagonist. Supporting characters also help to show different aspects of your protagonist - they can be used to externalize emotional traits. In a hard edged action script, you may need a romantic interest to bring out your hero's more humane side. In "Shane" and "Road Warrior", the hero's relationship with a kid is used to expose his non-lethal side. Without the Feral Kid, Mad Max would be so focused on the plot problems that we may not identify with him. Supporting character can take a closed character and open them up for us.

A lone actor has no one to talk to, no one to interact with. You could have your protagonist talk to himself... but that may make him look crazy. Imagine Mad Max wandering the wasteland alone for two hours babbling to himself... How popular would that film have been? Mel Gibson would never have become a big star, and would probably be doing Australian soap operas or beer commercials!

This will sound obvious, but the purpose of your supporting cast is to support. They support the lead character, or sometimes the antagonist. They support the story. They support the theme. They support, they don't distract. That means the Supporting Characters will be integral to the story - organic. Not pasted on from the outside, but grown from the plot seeds of your central conflict. Coming up with a great minor character and forcing them into your story won't work very well. You want to create your supporting cast to fit your specific story.

But how do you create supporting characters who are integral to the story? Characters who help bring out the character of your protagonist without upstaging him? Characters who add to the script without distracting from it? How do you make sure all of your Supporting Characters have distinctive and individual voices?

In Roger Ebert's review of Richard Curtis' "Notting Hill" he says "From "Four Weddings and a Funeral" we remember the extended family and friends, in "Notting Hill" the circle includes his air-head sister Honey, his best friend Max and his beloved wife Bella, and his stockbroker pal Bernie..." Curtis has an amazing ability to populate his scripts with memorable supporting characters who seem to steal every scene they are in... without upstaging the stars. A good supporting character should not only support the protagonist, but support the theme and story as well. Because I'm primarily an Action and Thriller guy, I thought it would be fun to focus on comedy films in this Blue Book expansion. In

the original 48 page version I used "Notting Hill" and "Rear Window" as my primary examples, and they're back... along with the hit films "40 Year Old Virgin", "High Fidelity", "Hangover" and our new primary example - "Bridesmaids". In the Creating Strong Protagonists Blue Book we learned how to create "take charge" protagonists, but what about the other speaking roles? How do we create memorable supporting characters? Let's find out!

YOUR SUPPORTING TEAM

Even though we want all of our Supporting Characters to be individuals, we also want them to be team players. Though they all may have their own lives off camera, while they are on camera they are part of our story - and our story can't work without them. If the story *can* work without them, they aren't supporting the team... and we should bench them. There are also those Supporting Characters who want to be the lead - they keep trying to steal the movie! Also not a team player... and you may want to have a talk with them. What we want are *team players* on our supporting team - characters who help build the story.

Supporting Characters often help to show different aspects of your protagonist. In a hard edged action script, you may need a romantic interest to bring out your hero's more humane side. In a comedy script you may go in the other direction and use a supporting character to bring out the protagonist's serious side. You may have different supporting characters to show different aspects of your protagonist - or to demonstrate different possible outcomes to the conflict. Supporting Characters exist to help your protagonist get through the conflict in he story - and are necessary to tell that story.

Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo's "Bridesmaids" is the story of Annie Walker (Wiig), whose life has gone to hell. Her dream job, the little bakery called Cake Baby, has gone out of business... leaving her flat broke. Her boyfriend left her, her car is falling apart, she was forced to live with the roommates from hell, and her mom got her a job working at a jewelry store - which she hates. Oh, and all of that happened before the film begins - it is backstory for the protagonist. The film is a character study in the comedy genre about Annie hitting rock bottom in he life... and then learning to respect herself and fight to get back on her feet. This character study could fuel a million different stories, but this one is a comedy about Bridesmaids.

Annie has lost everything important in her life except her oldest friend Lillian (Maya Rudolph) whom she has known since they were kids. When Lillian's boyfriend pops the question and they set a wedding date, Annie adds the role of Maid Of Honor to her chaotic life... and now must plan the events leading up to a wedding where she will lose her last remaining friend to marriage. So the supporting characters in Annie's story are not just a random group of people, but the bridesmaids in the wedding party and the two men in her life and her mother. There are a three more characters in the story, but that's about it. All of the supporting characters are part of Annie's story.

STORY PURPOSE

Every character in your screenplay needs to have a *story purpose* - a reason for being there. Supporting characters aren't just thrown on the page to give our protagonist someone to talk to in this scene, or someone to kiss in that big scene on page 73; they are part of the story itself. Any character that can be removed from the story without harming it, *should* be removed from the story. You also should combine characters who serve the same story purpose into a single character - if the protagonist has two best friends who are there to support him, he may only end up with one. Combining two characters who serve the same purpose helps to better focus the story.

The raunchy sex comedy with heart is "Knocked Up" starring Seth Rogen and Katherine Heigl as a one night stand that reluctantly becomes a relationship. The film features the same writer (Judd Apatow), director and cast from 2004's raunchy sex comedy with heart, "The 40 Year Old Virgin". So let's take a look at the supporting characters in "Virgin" and how they support the story.

"40 Year Old Virgin" is both a workplace comedy (primary) and a male-lead rom-com (secondary), and it has a great comedy concept (title tells all). The story is about the guys at work discovering the protagonist Andy (Steve Carrell) is still a virgin at forty, so they decide to remedy that. They do all kinds of things, from speed dating to strippers to setting him up with that bookstore girl with the very healthy sex drive in order to deal with his virginity issue. Each situation is designed for comedy *and* deal with aspects of sex and romance - which are at the center of the story. If you take any single scene you can easily see the DNA of the movie.

The workplace is the center of the story, so let s look at Andy s co-workers:

1) David (Paul Rudd) who is obsessed with his ex-girl friend. He has never gotten over her, and the only thing he ever talks about is there time together.

2) Cal (Seth Rogen) with lots of theories about how to pick up girls... most of them seem left over from high school.

3) Jay (Romany Malco), a married guy who cheats on his wife. He's a complete horn-dog who sees every woman as a sex object.

4) A scary and sexually aggressive woman co-worker, Paula (Jane Lynch, stealing the show). She asks Andy if he'd like to service her.

5) The two adult immigrant guys, Mooj (Gerry Bednob) and Haziz (Shelly Malil), who offer grown up advice about romance - sort of. Both have been married so long, their sex lives consist of listening to the young guys tell stories.

Notice how each of these characters show a different side of male/female reltionships, so that they connect to the comedy concept of a forty year old virgin. If all of the supporting characters showed different sides of how to deal with strict corporate policy, they'd be perfect for some other movie dealing with *that* subject. The supporting characters are there to support this story - each serves a story purpose by illustrating a different theory on romantic issues... and in the case of the sexually aggressive woman co-worker a "worst case scenario" for losing his virginity. Every character in "The 40 Year Old Virgin" is *defined* by their viewpoint on romance, and their story purpose is to show those different aspects of relationships. When the protagonist is interacting with David (obsessed with his lost love) he's exploring a different aspect of romantic relationships than when he's in a scene with Jay (married guy who cheats). None of these six characters duplicate each other's point of view, so our protagonist can learn from each of them. He could end up *becoming* any of them, if he follows their advice - so each offers him a window on his own future.

ROMANTIC CHOICES

We also have two main women roles in the film: Beth, the nymphomaniac who works at the book store next door (the amazing Elizabeth Banks) and Trish, the nice woman his age who is a customer in the store (the also amazing Catherine Keener). These are two extremes - and both offer solutions to the "virgin problem". He can either have wild pointless sex or enter into a serious relationship. Lust or love? These characters also support the story - they're characters connected to the concept. Both have a story purpose. If you were to leave out the bookstore girl who symbolizes lust, our protagonist would have no choice but love. Without the lust choice, the story is over - why doesn't he just hook up with nice woman?

All of his buddies at work vote for lust... for different reasons And the comedy comes from various attempts at getting the virginity removed from our protagonist - the speed dating scene is like two dozen hell-dates in about five minutes of film. The night club scenes allow for similar terrible relationships - like the drunk girl who wants him to blow into the breathalyzer attached to her car's ignition... then crashes her car!

While these things are going on, Andy is pursuing the nice woman, Trish... and finds that her "go slow" theory works perfect - he never has to tell her he's a virgin if they aren't going to sleep together for twenty dates. It's the easy way out! And that means that his secret (he's a virgin) turns into a big lie - and that will eventually destroy the relationship. The twenty dates becomes a ticking clock creating suspense as he marks off each date. It s not only getting closer to the big day where he will actually have to sleep with Trish (which frightens him), every date is one more day that he hasn't told her his secret - that he hasn't been honest with her about his virginity. This allows the conflict to escalate until it explodes.

Another subplot in Act Two that helps to support the main plot is Andy's relationship with Trish's two daughters, Marla (Kat Dennings) and Julia (Chelsea Smith). Trish's house is a world of women, no boys allowed. Many of the scenes deal with Marla, the oldest daughter, who is both protective of mom and also becoming a woman. Andy ends up escorting her to the birth control clinic for a frank discussion of... sex. Every scene takes us back to the concept of the story and the comic premise. There are no subplots in "The 40 Year Old Virgin" that don't support the main plot. At the birth control clinic, Andy is surrounded by *kids* who know more about sex and male/female relationships than he does. Again, each kid represents a different point of view about sex... with Andy the lone virgin.

Well, almost. Because Marla discovers she has something in common with Andy - both are worried about having their first sexual experience. Each is dealing with the exact same issue. This bonds them together. Marla is a mirror image of Andy - except she's less than half his age!

Throughout Act Two, Andy bounces back and forth between the supporting character who symbolizes love and the supporting characters who symbolize lust (bookstore girl, strippers, night club girls). Each character serves the story - no character is just thrown in for a cheap laugh.

STORY DEFINES CHARACTER

If this were a story about a strict workplace environment, we'd have *different* supporting characters. Those characters would show us aspects of how to deal with the pressures of a strict workplace.

"Office Space" is also a workplace comedy (primary) and a male-lead rom-com (secondary) but it focuses on corporate bureaucracy - and each of its characters illustrate some aspect of that story... like Milton (Stephen Root) who lost his red stapler and gets transferred to the basement... and the two Bobs (Jon C. McGinley and Paul Wilson) who give the evaluations, and decide that the protagonist Peter (Ron Livingston) should get promoted because he doesn't give a damn. Plus we have bureaucrat Bill Lumbergh (Gary Cole) who needs a TPS report for every minute of the day and his burned out co-workers Michael Bolton (David Herman) and Samir (Ajay Naidu). Every character shows a different way of trying to survive that insane workplace.

Even when we cross into the romance story with Joanna (Jennifer Aniston) who works at the plastic restaurant Chotchkies, her life is all about wearing enough flair and trying to compete with uber-waiter Brian whose apron is covered with hundreds of buttons... because that is company policy. Smiling is company policy. Being cheerful is company policy. You will never get your piece of cake... unless you decide to fight the system and maybe even burn down your place of employment.

All of the supporting characters in "Office Space" have a story purpose for *that* story, but toss them into "The 40 Year Old Virgin" and they just get in the way. They would have no purpose in the story! Both are workplace comedies, but one looks at the sex lives of its supporting characters while the other looks at their relationship to their jobs.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

"Bridesmaids" takes place in the world of... bridesmaids! So each of the supporting characters have a story purpose for *that* story. We have our Bride and the other Bridesmaids... each of which gives us a different look at marriage and relationships.

1) The bride, Lillian (Maya Rudoplh), is Annie's best friend in the world - and as kids they dreamed of getting married. Lillian is taking a big step in life and wants Annie to be there to help.

2) Bridesmaid Rita (Wendi McLendon-Covey) has been married for ages and has three teen boys and claims her house is full of semen and she recently tried folding a blanket and it *cracked*. She is bored by her marriage and makes married life sound like some form of hell.

3) Bridesmaid Becca (Ellie Kemper) is a newlywed and loves being married. She is sugar and spice and everything nice, and has an idealistic view of marriage... like something from a 1950s movie.

4) Bridesmaid Megan (Melissa McCarthy) is single and man-crazy. She is unbelievably direct and seems to have no filters at all. At the engagement party when she finds out a tall man is *not* Annie's date she says: "I'm glad he's single 'cause I'm gonna climb that like a tree!" In the script she's described as a tomboy - which makes the man-crazy thing not slutty.

5) Bridesmaid Helen (Rose Byrne) is the *perfect* woman. Beautiful, elegant, organized, happily married - everything that Annie is *not*. If Rita's marriage is hell and Becca's marriage is some naive and hopeful heaven, Helen's marriage is *actual* heaven. Perfect. And she is the perfect wife... which makes her the antagonist of this story. We'll look at antagonists - the most important supporting character in any screenplay - in a later chapter.

But there are characters other than the bridesmaids, how are they connected to the story? What are their story purposes? We'll save some of the minor supporting characters for other chapters, but now let's look at the two men in Annie's life:

6) Ted (John Hamm) who is rich and handsome and perfect... and a perfect creep. He sees Annie as his "fuck buddy" - and she's not even the top of his FB list! She's #3! He's using her. Annie may fantasize about turning him into a boyfriend - but that is not going to happen. She hates herself after sleeping with him.

7) Officer Rhodes (Chris O'Dowd) who is the opposite of Ted - a poor goofy-looking cop... but really nice and honest and genuine. With Rhodes, what you see is what you get - and that kind of frightens Annie. He would be a good relationship for her - but she's in a self destructive cycle and isn't ready for him, yet.

While Annie deal with the romance (?) of being a bridesmaid at a big wedding, she also has these two guys who each symbolize a different romantic future for her.

In "The 40 Year Old Virgin" we get porno movies on the electronics store's big screen TVs, in "Office Space" we get Michael and Samir smashing their computers with a baseball bat in slow motion, and in "Bridesmaids" they soil their bridesmaids gowns after eating tainted food. Each uses a different aspect of their supporting characters which directly relates to the core story.

ROMANTIC ENDINGS

The harder you try to keep a secret, the harder it tries to get out. In "The 40 Year Old Virgin", once it's exposed that Andy is still a virgin, everything goes wrong. We're in Act Three territory, which is where the rom-com plot kicks in full force. Act One and Two in "The 40 Year Old Virgin" are workplace sex comedy with the rom-com material in the background, but now it comes to the foreground. By this point we know that Andy and Trish are the perfect couple and we want them to be together, but concept-related circumstances keep them apart. Andy has come to realize that love is more important than lust, which leads him away from Beth and into Trish's arms.

The movie gives us a series of rom-com scenes that bring the couple together only to pull them apart: Andy blows up and accuses Trish of forcing him to sell his action figure collection, then storms off... ending up at Beth's apartment, where she decides to show him a second use for the shower massager. He's ping-ponging between these two very different women - each illustrating a different aspect of male / female relationships. This is a big moment of truth for Andy - he can easily lose his virginity to Beth. But he would be sleeping with her out of anger at Trish. He has to choose between the two women, between love and lust. He decides he doesn't want lust... but his buddy Cal is more than willing to pinch hit for him.

When he returns to his apartment, where the old couple who live upstairs usually offer him dating tips, he finds Trish. They apologize to each other - Andy was afraid and lost his temper. For a minute it looks like they will live happily ever after.... Then Trish finds the big ol' box of porn that Cal gave Andy and thinks he's a pervert.

In a typical rom-com there is a race to the airport or race to stop a wedding scene - the reason for this scene is that it creates a deadline with consequences. If the protagonist doesn't stop the love interest from hopping that plane or getting married, they will be out of their lives forever. No more chance for romance. The protagonist will die single and lonely. Here we have an unusual twist on that scene, with an angry Trish driving away in her car and Andy trying his best to catch her on his bicycle. It's a crazy chase that ends up with Andy crashing into her car on his bicycle.. Then flipping through a billboard, There were two sides to that billboard, and they both hurt equally. Okay, what was on the billboard? As you can see, *everything* in a screenplay supports the story, even props.

Trish gets out of her car to make sure he's alright, she cradles his head, they apologize to each other, say they love each other, kiss, and live happily ever after. We end with a wedding and the entire cast singing a silly song.

EVERY CHARACTER SERVES A PURPOSE

Our protagonist wouldn't be ready for a serious relationship if it had not been for what he learned from the supporting characters. Each showed him a different way to deal with the situation. Each was a window into his own future and a different aspect of love and sex. Those characters weren't there by accident - each served a specific story purpose based on that unique interesting comedy idea about a 40 year old virgin.

Look at each of your supporting characters and ask: "What is the purpose of this character? Is he/she/it necessary to the story? Why is this character important? What is their function? Are there two characters who serve the same story purpose?" If so - get rid of one of them! Remember to highlight the differences between your supporting characters when you introduce them. The sooner we can tell who they are and what purpose they serve in the story, the better!

Your Assignment: Watch a movie - any movie of your choice - and figure out the story purpose of each character... and any characters that serve no story purpose at all.

Extra Credit Assignment: How does the world of the story and the occupations of the supporting characters help bring out the emotional conflicts of the protagonist?

REAR WINDOW THEORY

John Michael Hayes script for "Rear Window" has a bunch of brilliant supporting characters... many of them don't have a single line of dialogue, yet all are important. They tell part of the story by illustrating the theme and reflecting the protagonist's emotional conflict. Every character is critical to the story, even of we only see them through the apartment window for a scene or two. Your secondary characters aren't just people the hero encounters on their journey, they are a way to explore your theme and intensify your lead character's emotional conflict. They have a story purpose and reflect the emotional conflict of the protagonist.

"Rear Window" may be the first ultra-contained thriller. Though the protagonist isn't trapped in a phone booth or a coffin or the trunk of a car, he *is* trapped in his dinky little apartment. He is a photojournalist for a magazine like Life or Look who was injured in a race car accident (it hit him while he was standing on the side of the track taking pictures) and spends his time watching his neighbors across the courtyard. And those people across the courtyard are the focus of the film - as he watches them, he learns all of the secrets of their lives... and one of those secrets may be murder. The man living directly across from him may have murdered his nagging wife. She seems to have vanished, and the neighbor is cleaning saws and big knives and has packed *something* in some cases that he sneaks out with in the middle of the night. Did he kill her and chop her up? Or is there some innocent explanation? The protagonist is trapped in his apartment and has nothing else to do but figure it out... but the more he pokes his nose into other people's business, the more he's in danger of being killed. He can't exactly run away from the killer - he's stuck in a wheelchair with a full leg cast.

Though you might think those people across the courtyard could just be random characters and brainstorm a bunch of interesting types of people or maybe model them on the people across *your* courtyard or the neighbors that live on your street - that would not support the protagonist and the story and theme. Populating those apartments across the courtyard with potential murder suspect types - assassins and gangsters and drug dealers - might seem story-related, but is external and obvious... it doesn't support the *protagonist*. So we want to look at the protagonist's *emotional conflict* (character arc or other type of emotional issue) and find where it intersects with the *physical conflict* (plot problem) and use that as our starting point. So, instead of looking at the plot of the film, let's look at the characters...

In "Rear Window" L.B. Jefferies (Jimmy Stewart) is afraid to commit to his fashion model girlfriend Lisa (Grace Kelly). He sees his life as dangerous and hers as glamorous. This is the central emotional problem of the script. Every supporting character in the film talks about their marriages: specifically, the compromises required between vastly different people. Every character in this film is a reflection of the Jefferies/Lisa romantic conflict which is the emotional conflict of the story. This gives the supporting characters meaning within the story.

Now when we look at the plot we have Jefferies suspect that the man across the courtyard, Mr. Thorwald (Raymond Burr), has murdered his nagging wife in order to end their marriage. Mr. Thorwald (like Jefferies) travels for a living (he's a salesman, Jefferies is a magazine photographer), his wife (like Lisa) is confined to one place (Mrs. Thorwald is an invalid confined to her bed, Lisa is a fashion model confined to the New York fashion world). When Jefferies and Lisa look across the courtyard, they could be looking into a mirror... A nightmare reflection of their future? These two characters are not only connected to the protagonist, they are also connected to the story - as one is the potential killer and the other his potential victim. In a later chapter we'll look at Reflection Characters in movies where no one gets murdered, like "High Fidelity".

The two other people with who come into the apartment are Jefferies' cop friend (Wendell Corey), who is always with his wife. They have a quiet, solid marriage, and still go dancing together. Several times when Jeffries makes a panicked phone call to the cop, he gets the babysitter because the couple is out. This is a great marriage, and another possible future for Jeffries and Lisa.

And the insurance company nurse (Thelma Ritter), who has an explosive, passionate marriage. "When a man and a woman see each other and like each other, they ought to come together - Wham! - like a couple of taxis on Broadway." Where the cop and his wife have a quiet, loving relationship; the nurse and her husband fight and make up. Another potential relationship future for our protagonist and his fiance and when the potential murder weighs on the relationship - it seems the most likely future... unless the couple breaks up completely. As you can see, not only do these characters show different aspects of the protagonist's emotional conflict, they are also connected to the story. If you start with the

emotional conflict, you can create specific characteristics for each of your supporting characters so that you can be dealing with the *character issues* at the same time you are dealing with the *plot*. All of the elements are connected.

And when we look at every other supporting character across the courtyard - most of whom never speak a word we can hear - they are defined by their marriage and are reflections of Jeffries or Lisa:

1) The sad Older Couple with a dog as surrogate child. Comfortable with each other, but the thrill is clearly gone.

2) Miss Lonelyhearts, the old maid... what will happen to Lisa if he doesn't marry her?

3) Miss Torso, the popular girl with a dozen boyfriends... another future for Lisa is he doesn't marry her?

4) The lonely composer, a workaholic who doesn't have time for a relationship... just like Jefferies.

5) The busybody Sculptress who lives alone, offering advice to the others in the courtyard as a way to ward off loneliness.

6) Last but not least: the Newlyweds, who make love all day and all night.

Each one of these characters is a reflection of the central emotional problem, exaggerated for humor or drama. All of the secondary characters are tied to the theme of the film, and provide an emotional depth and richness of story. That is *their purpose* in the hero's journey. Always ask yourself why it's this *specific* character who the hero encounters? What is this character's contribution to the story beyond the plot requirements? What is their connection to the theme and the emotional issues your script is exploring?

OVER THE HILL

Because most of the examples in this Blue Book are going to be from comedies, let's look at, Richard Curtis' "Notting Hill". Hugh Grant has romantic problems in the film, he has met the perfect woman... but she's a big Hollywood star (Julia Roberts) and he's a bumbling book store clerk. Are they meant to be together? Romance is the center of the emotional problem in this film, and the supporting characters are all defined by their romantic lives:

1) Grant's sister Honey, who has a string of bad relationships.

2) Grant's best friend Max and his wife Bella who are deeply in love.

3) The stockbroker, Bernie, who hasn't had a date in YEARS.

4) Flatmate, Spike, who has a date and doesn't know what T shirt to wear. All of his T shirts have sexual slogans on them.

Where the "Rear Window" Theory really works in "Notting Hill" is a moment where Grant spends the night at Max and Bella's house after his break up, and catches a glimpse of them going up the stairs - laughing together - really in love. Instead of a clumsy expositional dialogue scene, we *see* how Grant feels through contrast with a pair of supporting characters. This makes him feel more alone, more heartbroken. The supporting characters bring out the characterization in the lead character.

There's a similar scene in "Liar Liar" that I use as an example in the Story Blue Book. In the courtroom, Jim Carrey witnesses Mr. Cole hugging his children, the way that he wishes he could hug his son Max... then Samantha drags them away, the way that his wife Audrey is dragging Max to Boston. The supporting characters' actions show us the pain inside Carrey's character. He sees his problems reflected in the problems of the supporting characters. They provide an illustration, so that we can *show* what the protagonist is feeling rather than have him *tell* what he's feeling in some OTN exposition. The supporting characters are an integral part of telling the story... they *support* the story.

In "Bridesmaids" even the smaller supporting characters are part of the "Rear Window Theory" - Annie works at a jewelry shop where there is a constant barrage of happy couples who come in to buy engagement and wedding rings - each is a reminder of Annie's failures in the world of relationships. Annie's Mother (Jill Clayburgh) has been divorced for over a dozen years, but is still hung up on Annie's cheating dad. She is completely focused on her failed relationship. Many of the other small supporting characters give us different examples and aspects of Annie's failed romantic life just because the story is *about* bridesmaids - they have to try on gowns, they have to have an engagement party, they have to have a wedding shower, they have to have a wedding - so the characters in these scenes will automatically be part of that emotional conflict that Annie is dealing with. This falls under the general heading of Unity - one of those ancient Greek theories of drama which we will look at in the next chapter.

Your Assignment: Your protagonist is a Doctor who fears becoming emotionally involved with his patients. Create five supporting characters who illustrate different aspects of this emotional conflict. Maybe other doctors or nurses or hospital staff members - whatever you want.

ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION

Think of your screenplay as a cocktail party you've crashed. You don't know a single person there. Now, if you are introduced to four people at once at the cocktail party, can you remember their names? Can you remember details about who they are? We don't want to confuse the audience... so introduce characters one at a time.

The best way to do this is to introduce each supporting character as they relate to the protagonist. It's like having a friend at the party who can introduce you to the other guests. That way, we not only get an introduction to the other characters, but we learn their relationship with protagonist while we're at it. You are giving us twice the information.

Your story is like a piece of string with one piece leading to the next. The protagonist leading to the supporting characters... they're connected! Introduce the characters when they become critical to the story... when they become part of the protagonist's conflict.

That means the supporting characters have to be connected to the central conflict. They can be connected to the protagonist or the antagonist... but if you have a scene where the protagonist goes to a lawyer for help, then you follow the lawyer home and show his relationship with his troubled teen daughter; you are creating an extraneous subplot and an unimportant character (the lawyer's daughter). Don't lose focus! Make sure your supporting characters are connected to the protagonist or antagonist. Part of the story, not just pasted on!

"Citizen Kane" is all about the search for the meaning of Kane's last words "Rosebud". While interviewing ex-wives and ex-friends, we dig into Kane's past, looking for "Rosebud"... finding out what the words mean at the end. Are there any characters in "Kane" who didn't know Kane? Only the reporter who is searching for the answer to the "Rosebud" question. Every character in the film is *connected* to the story.

"Garden State" is about a guy who returns home for his mother's funeral and has to make peace with his stern father... who blames him for her death. It may seem whimsical and scattershot, but the film is a journey with a definite destination. One story, one central conflict. A novel has room for a million subplots, but a screenplay has *one* central conflict, and every subplot grows directly from that central conflict. When you only have 110 pages, you don't have enough room for anything that doesn't directly relate to that streamlined story.

One conflict, usually one lead character... and all of the characters need to be connected to the central conflict... and the story. If the story is about a boy who comes home from college for his father's funeral only to discover that his father was murdered by his uncle... and his mother was an accomplice, you have three main characters that the conflict revolves around. The bulk of the story will be about those three characters, with the college boy probably in almost every scene because he's the protagonist. Any scene that includes two of the three will contain conflict and drama (because you have protagonist and antagonist). Since conflict is fuel for drama, every supporting character will be connected to the conflict in some way. By focusing on the conflict, you automatically remove extraneous characters and give yourself more time with the important characters. Less characters means more time spent on developing each of them. If your script has 30 characters, that's only about 3 minutes spent on each character... how well can you get to know someone in 3 minutes? More time for the audience to get to know the character means less confusion between characters ("Is that Karl or Sam? Her husband or the gardener?") Every character has to count!

The more removed your character is from that conflict the less important they are to the story. The Mother's hairdresser's boyfriend is a completely extraneous character. They may be the funniest character in your script, but they have nothing to do with the story you are trying to tell. The Mother's hairdresser is an important character only if the Mother gives him story information. Then the character has a connection to the story. If the Mother just gossips with the hairdresser, that character is completely unimportant - cut him! Save that character for your novelization... they take up too much time for the script version.

One of the problems I had with "Bridesmaids" was with the wacky roommates. Though their story purpose is to show how bad her home life is after the failure of her business, they have nothing to do with Love and Marriage and the *world* the story takes place in. They don't seem to belong in this story. Later in the story when Annie is kicked out and has to move back in with her divorced mother, we get the same story purpose but with a character who is tied to the Love

and Marriage world of the story. Her mother still hasn't gotten over the failure of her marriage over a dozen years ago. Why didn't they completely get rid of the wacky roommates and just have Annie forced to move in with her mom? That would have kept the story on track... and cut a few minutes off the running time. Those roommates seemed to violate the unity of the story.

IT'S ALL CONNECTED

Everything in your screenplay is connected to that main story strand, or it's unnecessary. Your story is focused - streamlined - for a screenplay. All of the characters have some connection to the conflict or are maybe one level removed. I've been at screenwriting conferences with the William Morris Endeavor Creative Executive who runs the Two Adverbs website, and one of the things he sees as a major problem with people's *pitches* is that they are often all over the place and have elements that don't seem to fit the story - a problem of unity. Some of the characters or scenes or subplots seem like they belong to some other story. The example that he uses is a Tod Browning silent film called "The Unknown" which stars Lon Chaney - and, though I haven't heard him talk about the film is years, I *have* seen the film recently, so here's my version...

"The Unknown" is about a carnival sideshow performer known as The Armless Man (Lon Chaney) because he has no arms. Obvious, right? But it's actually amazing. He eats, plays the guitar, smokes, and everything else *with his feet*. His sideshow act has him *throwing knives* at a Hot Carnival Chick in a sexy spangled bathing suit... with his feet! She stands against a wall, just like any Hot Carnival Chick in a knife throwing act, and he grabs the knives *with his feet* and throws them at her - doing the usual balloon popping and cigarette slicking. It's amazing! (Lon Chaney was an actor who puts DeNiro's weight gain and Christian Bale's weight losses for roles to shame. Chaney did *crazy* things in roles - like learning how to use his feet for everything so that he could play this role. Chaney was the ultimate actor - and no one else has ever topped his odd physical performances.)

The Armless Man is secretly in love with the Hot Carnival Chick (an impossibly young Joan Crawford). The Hot Chick confides in him - she tells him she hates men because they always put their *hands* all over her, grabbing her ass and tits, but the Armless Man doesn't do this... that's why she can confide in him. She spends much of her time in his trailer at the carnival, complaining about those handsy men - as if he's a eunuch.

The Armless Man's #1 rival for the Hot Chick is the carnivals' Strong Man - who has massive arms. He's always flirting with her - but when he tries to put his big arms around her she always pulls away. When he comes to the Armless Man for advice on how to approach the Hot Chick, the Armless Man (jealous and devious) tells him that she loves when men put their hands all over her. Even if she doesn't seem like it, that's really what she wants. So if she pulls away? Just keep trying to put your arms around her and hands on her!

The police come to the carnival to interrogate everyone because there have been a series of burglaries - a master safe cracker - and the towns these crimes have occurred in are the same towns the carnival has been to. But the master safe cracker has made a mistake - left behind his fingerprints. The police are fingerprinting *everyone* at the carnival. When they come to the Armless Man he waves with his feet and asks if they want his prints. The police laugh and say no. But no one in the Carnival has prints that match - and the police move on, looking for other suspects.

The Armless Man shares his trailer at the carnival with the Dwarf - they are best friends.

He trusts the Dwarf to undress him every night... takeing off his truss... exposing his *arms*! The Armless Man has arms - and is the master safe cracker! Clever! The perfect cover - the police never suspect a man with no arms of being the master safe cracker.

He tells the Dwarf that he loves the Hot Chick, and wants to hold her in his arms. The Dwarf tells him that can never happen - the minute the Hot Chick finds out he has arms, she'll hate him for lying to her. He can never marry the Hot Chick because when he takes off all of his clothes - she will see his arms. You can't exactly hide that from your wife. He wants to hold her in his arms... but can never do that. The love he has for her must remain unknown - hidden like his arms.

Okay - just from that part of the story, do you see how the armless element is connected to the story - is critical to the story. Every part of the story connects to it. The safe cracking? Hey - this is the perfect disguise! The romance? The reason why she confides in him is that he isn't trying to put his hands all over her! But he wants to put his arms around her! His rival - a man with huge arms! Those arms make him ultra-masculine. Everything in this movie from the safe cracking to the romance is about the *arms*. The idea has *unity*. The pieces all connect logically, no explaining to do

and no confusion as to why *this* character and not *that* character. Every piece relates to every other piece. Every character and subplot and scene is connected.

In "The Unknown" the Armless Man realizes the only way he can marry the Hot Chick (and share his fortune from all of these safe cracking jobs) is to have his arms surgically removed. But then, he will *never* be able to put his arms around her. Is it worth it? This is one twisted love story! Bring on the bone saws!

In the recent science fiction film "Robot & Frank" Frank Langella plays an old man with memory problems who lives alone in the family home. His adult children (Liv Tyler and James Mardsen) worry about him, and his son gets him a robot nurse. Frank *hates* the robot, which wants him to eat better and take up a hobby like gardening. But when he teaches the robot how to crack safes, the two become a criminal team! Frank was a burglar when he was younger, did a couple of stretches in prison; and going back to that life makes him feel young again. Planning "jobs" actually improves his memory. But after pulling a few jobs, the police suspect Frank is up to his old tricks... and the *robot's* memory becomes an issue. It is evidence against him, if the police pick up the robot. There are several other plot threads in the story which have to do with *memory* - it is all connected!

DISCONNECTED

The comedy film "The Watch" (previously "Neighborhood Watch") was a mess because none of the parts connected at all! The screenplay from Seth Rogen, Evan Goldberg and Jared Stern was a mess of ideas that never came together and had no theme to bind them. This is a great example of why you want your supporting characters to share a unity and theme with your protagonist and the main plot."The Watch" wasn't just a major box office flop (making Box Office Mojo's "Worst Openings" Chart on its way to a grand total of $34 million domestic on a $70 million plus budget before advertizing costs), the film had an amazing 16% positive rating among critic on Rotten Tomatoes... and only a C grade from the audience on CinemaScore. Nobody liked it! Why?

Ben Stiller played a suburban Costco Manager who was trying to conceive a child with his wife without success. When the night security guard of the Costco is brutally murdered the day he passes his citizenship test, Stiller decides to form a Neighborhood Watch Group to keep the streets safe and maybe find the guard's murderer. The members of neighborhood watch include: Vince Vaughn who is a contractor with a hot teen daughter that all of the teen boys want to deflower, Jonah Hill a loser who lives at home with his mom who wanted to be a police officer but the town's training cop turned him down, and Richard Ayoade who just moved to the town from England and doesn't have any friends - but fantasizes about a hot Asian housewife calling for help and then having wild sex with him.

Can you find any connection or theme between these four characters and the murder plot of the security guard? The film often seems like a bunch of different office assistants collided in the hallway on the way to the copy machine and they filmed a random 100 pages they picked up off of the floor. But when we add in the other supporting characters it gets even worse! Each character seems like they are from some other movie, and each scene seems to be from a different movie still!

1) Billy Cudrup is a strange next door neighbor who compliments Stiller on his skin and body... and invites him over some night.

2) Will Forte is the town's training officer who turned Jonah Hill down *and* the investigating officer on the dead security guard's case who thinks that Stiller may have done it.

3) R. Lee Ermy is an old hermit who lives in a shack surrounded by junk who is quick to pull a shotgun on anyone who sets foot on his property.

4) Johnny Pemberton is a skateboard kid who loves throwing eggs at authority figures then zipping away on his skateboard.

5) Doug Jones is an alien from outer space - part of an invasion team that wants to eat humans and trash the planet and leave.

6) Andy Samburg is a suburban guy who loves masturbating - both himself and other men in the neighborhood.

I could continue, but I think you have the idea - none of these characters seem like they are in the same movie. There is a big high school party scene where Vince Vaughn's daughter goes to hook up with her forbidden boyfriend which seems like a scene from a high school sex comedy and has an entire cast of characters that are separate from the rest of the film. There's also a suburban wife-swapping and orgy scene where Samburg's character pops up (sorry about that pun) and *that* scene has an entire cast of characters that are not a part of the rest of the film. Plus, there's a massive action scene at the end where the Neighborhood Watch and Stiller's wife take on an invading force of aliens in the Costco. Of course, I'm leaving out all of the small subplot scenes that also seem to have no connection to anything else in the film. "The Watch" has *no* unity at all! None of the supporting characters are dealing with the same issues or the same emotional problems or even the same story problems!

Look at your story idea and the supporting characters - are all of the pieces part of a whole? Are the elements all connected naturally and logically? Does it add up? Is there *unity*? Are each of the supporting characters connected to the conflict? You don't want any extraneous or unneeded supporting characters. You are telling a story, and the

supporting characters are there to tell that story.

Your Assignment: Remember that Doctor who was afraid of becoming emotionally involved with his patients? He has three medical cases he is working on... what are those three cases and how do they help illustrate his problems?

Extra Credit Assignment: When the Doctor leaves the hospital, what are three supporting characters he regularly comes into contact with who also illustrate his emotional problems?

INTRODUCTIONS

All of those tools we use to introduce our protagonist can also be used when we're introducing our supporting cast. Give us a distinctive introduction for each character that gives us as much information as possible in a single scene. Tell us how they relate, not only to the protagonist, but to the story itself. Every member of your supporting team is there to support the story, right?

Remember to highlight the differences between your supporting characters when you introduce them. The sooner we can tell who they are, the better! All of the techniques we use to introduce our protagonist can be used when we're introducing our supporting cast. Gives us a distinctive introduction for each character that gives us as much information as possible in a single scene.

In "The Professionals" (1966) Lee Marvin doesn't say, "we need another guy", he says: "What we really need is an equalizer. A dynamiter. A man with a delicate touch: to blow out a candle without putting a dent in the candle holder. And I know just the guy. He's not far from here... In jail." In this scene, Burt Lancaster's character is introduced by his specific talent and weapon. Later we find out he's a well dressed romeo who can con his way into *any* woman's bed, and that he's had a few brushes with the law. But this scene isn't Lancaster's character's actual introduction - that comes a few scenes earlier at the very beginning of the film.

"The Professionals" is a team film - a western where four specialists are hired to retrieve a kidnaped wife (Claudia Cardinale) for her wealthy railroad baron husband (Ralph Bellamy). She was taken by a Mexican bandit, Raza (Jack Palance) who has demanded a ransom of $100,000 - which was a fortune back then. The movie begins by introducing the four specialists in separate quick scenes...

Fardan (Lee Marvin) is a hard looking steel-haired veteran demonstrating a machine gun to a group of soldiers at least half his age - he's an aged-out soldier turned factory representative trying to earn a living.

Ehrengard (Robert Ryan) watches a cowboy attempt to break a wild horse, and when the cowboy can't get the horse to do what he wants he *punches* the horse in the face... so Ehrengard punches the cowboy in the face. The cowboy says, "You wanted him broken, didn't you?" Ehrengard answers, "Yeah, but not ruined."

Sharp (Woody Strode) rides up to a Sheriff's Office with a prisoner in hackles on a following horse. At the time of release, it may have been a big deal that Sharp is black and the prisoner in chains is white. Sharp gets off his horse and starts into the Sheriff's Office when the prisoner jumps off his horse, using his chains as a weapon to attack Sharp - but Sharp easily kicks his ass, then hands him over to the Sheriff for a bounty. All in a day's work.

Dolworth (Burt Lancaster) is introduced by a trail of men's and women's clothes leading to a bed, where Dolworth is making love to a beautiful woman... when there's a sound from the next room. "My husband!" Dolworth puts on his hat, then his underwear... and scrambles out if bed just as the Husband comes through the door. Dolworth tosses his clothes at the Husband and dives out he window... escaping in his underwear.

All of these intros are in the couple of minutes before the opening credits - and they give us a great snapshot of who these four guys are. Once they're a team, we get some verbal bios of each that give us a little more information - but these quick introduction scenes set up the characters. Some of the supporting characters are set up in scenes where they *do things* that define their characters. Railroad Baron Grant ignores a banker and a bunch of armed guards around a trunk with $100,000 in gold coins as he goes to greet Fardan - that isn't a lot of money to him. When the banker asks if he wants to count it, Grant asks if the banker counted it... and that's good enough for him. There is a goatherd who is introduced delivering goat's milk to the bandit's fortress... and making a special delivery to Grant's kidnaped wife - who has been drinking his goat's milk since she was an infant and her mother's breasts were dry. And my favorite character, Chiquita (Marie Gomez), introduced topless and washing herself among the men in the bandit camp - one of the guys - but also one hell of a woman.

Though you may not be able to come up with a great introduction scene for *every* supporting character, if you can find a way to give us a snapshot of the character with the critical information we need to understand them - you can fill us in

on the details as the story plays out. Often with supporting characters they aren't around long enough to take your time giving us information about them, so if you can give us a condensed version when we first meet them, great! But what if the characters don't have any dialogue in the entire film?

SILENT INTRODUCTIONS

In "Rear Window" the composer is introduced listen to the radio while shaving."Men, are you over forty? When you wake up in the morning, do you feel tired and run down? Do you have that restless feeling...?" He bolts across the room and shuts off the radio. The commercial obviously hits too close to home.

Miss Torso dances through her apartment, takes off her bra with her back to the camera... puts on a clean bra, and does leg lifts. She's defined by her physicality and her sexuality.

The older couple is introduced sleeping on the fire escape - head to foot. When the alarm clock goes off, they sit up to face each other. These folks are comfortable with each other.

The Sculptress is introduced glaring up at Miss Torso's apartment - the music is too loud for her. This character is defined by the way she involves herself in her neighbor's business - even telling a dog at one point not to dig in Thorwald's flower garden. The is an abrasive version of Jimmy Stewart's curiosity about his neighbors.

The Newlyweds are introduced moving into their apartment. The landlord wants to show them around, but they can't wait for him to leave. Thee minute they're alone they kiss passionately. Then thee Groom grabs his Bride and carries her across thee threshold. They kiss again... then thee Groom goes to draw the shades. They are introduced about to consummate their marriage!

Thorwald is introduced coming home from the outside world to his apartment. Mrs. Thorwald (an invalid) begins nagging at him immediately. He throws a newspaper at her and storms out of the bedroom. Our first glimpse at their relationship is a violent one. Their marriage is introduced on the rocks.

Each introduction highlights the differences between the supporting characters, giving the viewer as much information as possible in a single scene. We immediately know who these people are. Just like with a protagonist, make a list of important information about each of your supporting characters and then find a scene or situation that displays as many of those elements as possible.

MEET YOUR BRIDESMAIDS!

In "Bridesmaids" the future bride Lillian is introduced as Annie's best friend - both are "stealing" an exercise class in the park (run by Terry Crews) by hiding behind a tree and doing all of the exercises. When they're spotted, they pretend to be doing dance stuff - which is a great chance to show them goofing around together. When they get called out on that, they grab their stuff and run. Lillian is Annie's best friend - and the next scene has Lillian encouraging Annie to get back on her feet while they have a bite in a corner restaurant. They joke about men and sex in this scene - and we can see how comfortable they are with each other. This is the most important relationship in the story, and we learn that they've known each other since kids in subsequent scenes.

Each of the bridesmaids are introduced at the engagement party, and each is introduced in a way that gives us information about their characters that will play out over the course of the story. These are great "character snapshots" that help the audience get a handle on the characters quickly. Let's look at how each bridesmaid was introduced - then look at the actual introduction from the screenplay.

Lillian first re-introduces Annie to her cousin Rita, who kicks off the conversation talking about her three boys who do nothing but masturbate all day... and how disgusting all of that is.

```
They head over to RITA, 30's, a voluptuous, tired housewife.
```

And here's her opening bit of dialogue about her three boys...

```
                    RITA
        They are cute, but when they reach
        that age they're disgusting. They
         smell, they're sticky, they say
        things that are horrible and there
         is semen all over everything.
         They're disgusting. I cracked a
        blanket in half. Do you get where
                I'm going with that?
```

Next she's introduced to newlywed Becca and her husband.

```
BECCA, 30, cute and perky. She stands very close to her
husband KEVIN.
```

And her first bit of dialogue...

```
                    BECCA
         Hi, Annie! This is my husband
         Kevin. I love saying that. We're
                    newlyweds.
```

They finish each other's sentences and rub noses like Eskimos and are way too cute. When Becca mistakes the man standing near Annie as her date, and Annie corrects her, Becca's husband says "Rewind" and she re-introduces herself...

```
                    BECCA
        I'm Becca. This is my husband. You
            don't have a husband. Sorry.
```

See how these supporting characters are introduced by their connection to love & marriage? And how each makes Annie seem more alone? Next she is introduced to Megan, the groom's sister...

```
Annie and Lillian stand with MEGAN, 30's, tomboyish, looking
a bit odd in her floral dress.
```

Megan has no filters at all, so she kicks off the conversation with...

```
                    MEGAN
        It's going great. I'm on the mend.
        Just got pins in my legs. Believe
         it or not, I fell off a cruise
                    ship.
```

Cruise ship - which is where people go for romance, right? Once again someone thinks a total stranger near Annie is her date, and when Annie explains the tall guy is just some stranger Megan says she's glad he's single because she's going to climb him like a tree. And this leads to the introduction of our final bridesmaid, Helen, who has an entrance fit for royalty - and looks perfect!

```
In slow motion, like a goddess, the gorgeous HELEN turns and
looks right at Annie. Smiling. She's BEAUTIFUL. She walks
toward them, wearing a much-too-fancy, floor-length GOWN.
Everything about her is perfect. Annie swallows, straightens
her plastic beads.
```

Lillian explains that Helen is married to her fiance's boss - again a character defined by the Love & Marriage world of the story. But Helen isn't just any supporting character, she is the story's antagonist. So let's take a look at antagonists in our next chapter, but first...

Your Assignment: Remember our Doctor who fears becoming emotionally involved with his patients and those five supporting characters at the hospital you created? Come up with an introduction for each that focuses on their connection to the emotionally involved aspect part of the story.

ANTAGONISTS

Your protagonist has a goal... and something has to prevent her from obtaining that goal or your script will only be ten pages long! It doesn't matter whether you are writing a comedy, a thriller, a romance or a drama - if nothing stands in the way of your protagonist and their goal, you don't have a story. That makes your antagonist the most important character in your screenplay! They provide the conflict. Without conflict there is no story. So they are also the most important supporting character in your screenplay... even if it is a comedy about bridesmaids!

Hitchcock said, "The better the villain the better the picture" and that is true. Who can forget Alan Rickman's villain in "Die Hard" or "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves"? Who can forget suave James Mason in "North by Northwest"? Antagonists are often the most memorable characters in movies - and it's our job as screenwriters to create those characters. That big juicy role that a star might want to play. But how do you create a great antagonist? Do you need them even in comedies?

START WITH CONFLICT

Your antagonist creates the conflict in your script, and that conflict has to be something strong enough to carry your story for 110 pages. Something that can go the distance. So your antagonist has to create a problem so big that it will take the whole film for your protagonist to solve it. The antagonist isn't a couple of speed bumps between your protagonist and the goal - she's a towering brick wall. A hurdle your protagonist can't possibly overcome!

In Ron Bass' "My Best Friend's Wedding" Cameron Diaz is the perfect antagonist. Julia Robert's goal is to break up Dermot Mulroney's wedding so that he will marry her instead. The fiance is the character who gets in the way of that goal... and that makes her the antagonist. If Diaz had been stupid, or plain looking, or not very nice she would just be a couple of speed bumps... but she's perfect! She's pretty and witty and radiant and the nicest character in the whole film. How can Roberts possibly get past her? As you can see, just because a character is the antagonist doesn't mean they have to be a bad person with an evil plan to destroy Cleveland. They just have to be the biggest barrier possible to the protagonist achieving their goal. Not the second biggest, not the third biggest... they have to be the impossible hurdle.

The conflict your antagonist creates also must escalate - things have to keep getting worse, or your script has "flat-lined". If things are just as bad on page 90 as they were on page 30, you have sixty pages of time-killer. Story is *change*, and if nothing has changed for sixty pages, there's no story. That means either antagonist must be raising the ante, or your protagonist must be doing things to avoid the conflict which only make it worse (or both).

In "My Best Friend's Wedding" every time Julia Roberts comes up with a scheme to destroy Cameron Diaz (like the karaoke bar) it backfires and just makes things worse. Things must always get worse before they can get better... and that means your antagonist must be active rather than passive. They'll have a goal, too. In fact, if you were to see the story from the antagonist's point of view, the protagonist would be the one who prevents them from achieving *their* goal. That means your antagonist's motivation must make sense to the audience, and their plan must be exactly what the audience would do if they were the antagonist. A good villain is smart, clever, and cunning. They do everything for a reason and don't make silly mistakes.

In the Action and Thriller genre the Villain is actually driving the story. The villain is going to do some evil deed and the hero must stop him. In my book "The Secrets of Action Screenwriting" I use "Die Hard" to demonstrates how the hero is somewhat interchangeable in action scripts... but the villain's plan is the key to the story. If you remove John McClane from "Die Hard" you still have Hans robbing the Nakatome Tower on Christmas Eve... and Officer Al Powell would end up being the hero. If you remove Powell's character, the two FBI Agents might be the hero... or maybe Holly Genero. Somebody has to stop Hans from robbing the safe and blowing up all of the hostages! The most important part of any Action or Thriller script is the Villain's Plan, and the most important character isn't the hero... it's the villain!

With the Villain driving the physical story, the Hero is often defined by the emotional aspects of the story. If we did remove McClane from "Die Hard" and made Al Powell the Hero, the focus of the story would change. It might be about a new father having to make decisions that put his duty as a police officer against his role as a new father - do I want to save the day but leave my son without a father? Heroes and Villains - Protagonists and Antagonists - are the most important characters in any story. Usually the Antagonist provides the physical (visual) problem that forces the Protagonist to deal with their emotional problems... and "Bridesmaids" is a great example of that.

Because Annie's main problems are emotional and internal in "Bridesmaids" we need supporting characters and an antagonist to bring them to the surface and turn them into drama that we can see. So every one of Annie's problems - a loser romantically, low self esteem, financial failure - are where Helen is most successful. By putting Helen in the scene, Annie looks even worse! Helen shows Annie all of her failings - an antagonist that highlights the protagonist's problems. Add to this that they are fighting for the love and attention of the Bride, Lillian. In direct competition throughout the film. Will Annie *lose*?

DO WE NEED AN ANTAGONIST?

There doesn't have to be a human antagonist, but there does need to be some tangible (visual - so that the audience knows it's there) obstacle. Usually that's a person, because it's much easier to create conflict if your obstacle can talk back to your protagonist. Easier to create drama when your protagonist and antagonist can face off in a scene.

There are three kinds of conflict: Man against Man, Man against Nature, and Man against Himself. The first two are common in film because we can *see* the conflict. The last is tricky, but can be used in a script if the conflict can be made visible to the audience...usually through a *symbolic antagonist* - which we'll look at in a later chapter.

In "The Perfect Storm" the *weather* is the antagonist, it's a Man against Nature story. But they forgot to make the weather a character. The closest we got was that giant wave. The weather was the antagonist in "Twister" - and each tornado was given a distinctive "personality". The twin tornadoes, the tornado that chases them across the farm, the one that lifts livestock like in "The Wizard Of Oz" . But some silly Hollywood executive thought it would be a good idea to have Cary Elwes as an *evil* meteorologist in a black van... some weird idea of a human antagonist. This might have worked if Elwes had created the twister, or was controlling it, or was talking people into driving into the twister's path... but in the film he was just kind of silly. Antagonists don't have to be people, but they have to be tangible. Since we could already see the tornadoes, Cary Elwes' character was redundant. An evil meteorologist?

Your conflict has to be something that can be visually expressed. We have to be able to record it on film. That leaves out some moral and ethical conflicts (Man against himself), because they are all about what people *think* - and we can't see that. You *can* make some moral and ethical conflicts visual through symbols. You can also make some choices visual by creating situations where physical actions show moral decisions. If two people are running away from an escaped tiger, and one trips and falls... does the other go back to rescue them (and put his own life in peril for a stranger)? By creating a situation where *physical actions* show decisions we can explore some internal conflicts.

In the Weitz brother's "American Pie" the main conflict is man against himself: our protagonist can't get a girl because he's a geek. We can *see* him not getting the girl. But there are antagonistic characters in the film: the popular guys in high school who ridicule the protagonist for his failures, plus the *competition* between the four guys to lose their virginity by graduation night makes his buddies rivals (kind of low key antagonists). If you can't find a way to *show* the internal conflict, the audience has no way of knowing it exists. In "Bridesmaids" Annie's conflict is man against himself, so we have Helen as a physical antagonist to bring out Annie's problems... and create scenes that we can *see* where the two battle each other for Lillian's affection.

In most romantic comedies the thing that keeps the couple apart is a romantic rival. This is true in "My Best Friend's Wedding", "Philadelphia Story", "My Favorite Wife", and practically every other romantic comedy script. But in Jeff Arch's "Sleepless in Seattle" what keeps the couple apart is geography - there's an entire country between them! What prevents the protagonist from reaching their goal is distance - something tangible. Hank's son even shows the distance on a globe in one scene. The conflict is Man against Nature, and Arch found a clever way to make that conflict tangible!

Adventure movies use the man against nature conflict. In the classic "Treasure Of The Sierra Madre" they must battle heat and mountains and isolation from society... as well as that group old bandits that don't need no stinking badges. In the 50's Chuck Heston movie "Naked Jungle" he has to fight an army of carpenter ants that destroy everything (and everyone) in their path - which leads right to his plantation! In "Jaws" we have that man-eating shark that is attacking Amity. In Robert King's "Vertical Limit" the mountain is the antagonist. It's what keeps Chris O'Donnell from rescuing his mountain climbing sister. There's also an element of Man against Himself, using the mountain as a symbol for O'Donnell's fears that he's no longer good enough. Again: the mountain is something tangible. Just make sure we can *see* the goal and *see* the obstacle. If we can't see it on film, it isn't there.

Your Assignment: For your script, figure out of your story is Man Against Man, Man Against Nature, or Man Against Himself. Then figure out who or what is the antagonist, or how the conflict is shown *physically*. Remember - it's a movie! We need to *see* the conflict... and that usually means there will be an antagonist.

THAT'S MY MOM - THE ANTAGONIST!

One thing to consider about the conflict your antagonist creates: Movies are a mass market medium - will *millions* of people want to pay to see this conflict and it's resolution? Is the conflict big enough to fill the screen? Big can work two ways: it could be as big as an asteroid about to hit earth... or as big as your first broken heart. Physically powerful or emotionally powerful. Alvin Sargent's "Ordinary People" has no asteroids - but it has a family destroyed by the death of the protagonist's brother. The antagonist is the mother, who loved the brother more and blames our protagonist for his brother's death. That's a pretty big conflict! Your brother is dead, your mom hates you, and maybe you *did* cause his death! So a mom can be an antagonist!

It's a misconception to think that an antagonist has to be a bad guy or evil or even not nice. The antagonist can be the nicest character in the screenplay - they just have to come between the protagonist and their goal. In the comedy "Ted", Mark Wahlberg has a talking teddy bear from his childhood - who grows up to be an immature party animal! Wahlberg's romantic relationship with Mila Kunis hits a roadblock named Ted - not much chance they can get married and settle down as long as Mark has this party animal buddy who calls in the middle of the night because the guy who played "Flash Gordon" is at a party somewhere. Ted is funny and irreverent and a loyal friend - but he gets in the way of Mark's romantic relationship and basically prevents him from growing up. That makes him the antagonist. A *fun* antagonist!

Your Assignment: Remember our Doctor who fears becoming emotionally involved with his (or her) patients? Come up with an antagonist for that story, and a motivation and reason for the antagonism. We want our antagonists to make sense, and not just be some arbitrary Snidley-Whiplash villain.

FIGHT TO THE DEATH

The protagonist must battle the antagonist and vanquish him. Battle doesn't necessarily mean a steel cage match to the death with chainsaws and tire irons, but it does mean that only will one can survive. Ted will lose his stuffing and The Wicked Witch will get dowsed with water and melt and Lillian will pick Annie over Helen as her best friend. If we have a conflict, there needs to be a series of battles and a winner.

In Kevin Wade's "Working Girl" the antagonist is the scheming, back-stabbing boss played by Sigourney Weaver. Melanie Griffith is the smart secretary who came up with a great business idea... and her boss stole it! This film is about the class system in America: Weaver is from the best colleges, while Griffith is a working class high school graduate. Your protagonist and antagonist are also part of the theme - they may be two sides of the same coin. Their *differences* are what's important. By the end of "Working Girl", Griffith and Weaver face off in a board room... and only one comes out with the account. In a way, it *is* a steel cage match. Griffith must "destroy" Weaver (in the business world) in order to resolve the conflict between them.

We have to want the protagonist to succeed in his quest to destroy the antagonist. In "Ordinary People" Mary Tyler Moore was such a cold manipulating bitch, you wanted Tim Hutton to stand up to her. You wanted Donald Sutherland to snap at her. You wanted them to tell her that she was a bitch. You wanted her to be hurt and alone at the end of the film. The audience got their wish! Remember - we're creating an emotional experience within the audience. We want them to cry or laugh or scream. When the antagonist is vanquished, we want them to cheer. The protagonist has been successful. The bigger the villain's destruction the better the movie! In "Secrets Of Action Screenwriting" I talk about exploding villains like in "Leon: The Professional", but not all explosions need to me literal - you can metaphorically explode the villain as well. Whatever resolves the conflict in a way that tells the audience this conflict is going to happen to this protagonist ever again (unless there's a sequel).

Whether you outline or freewrite - you are heading towards the ending of your story, the resolution. You should have a pretty good idea of what that resolution is and how it happens before you type Fade In. Since that resolution is all about the antagonist (or force of antagonism) - this character is tied to the end of your screenplay and it's important to know who the antagonist is and how they will be vanquished before you get to that critical scene. Usually your entire screenplay will be building to that scene - don't believe me? Let's look at "Bridesmaids"...

TWO TO TANGLE

When we talk about the Protagonist and Antagonist battling it out, you may be thinking that is only something that happens in action screenplays - but even a comedy screenplay needs a series of battles between these two characters. At the engagement party in "Bridesmaids" about 22 minutes into the film, Annie makes a toast to her friend Lillian... and then Helen (Antagonist) makes a toast designed to top her. This begins a toasting "duel" where protagonist and antagonist each try to out-do the other... and it's one of the comedy set pieces in the script. From this point on, Annie and Helen are in a battle to the death - and we have several scenes of *direct conflict* plus other scenes which are fueled by the conflict even though the scene itself may not have them physically competing against each other.

After Lillian suggests Annie and Helen do something together in order to bond, there is a great scene where they play the most violent game of tennis ever recorded on film! Each tries to *slam* the other with the tennis ball. It's full contact tennis!

The non-contact battle scenes have Annie trying to do something special and memorable... but on her (low) budget. Every time she tries to out-do Helen, she fails miserably. The Bridesmaid's Dinner at the crappy Brazilian restaurant, then trying on gowns at the designer store... except it is by appointment only and Annie doesn't have one. Of course, Helen *knows* the owner of the shop and gets them in without an appointment.

Later they battle over the Bachelorette Party. Annie, trying to one-up Helen by using her childhood friendship with Lillian wants to go to Lillian's parents' summer cabin. It's cheap, it's full of memories of their childhood... and Annie *hates* flying, so they can drive there. Helen fights back by calling or e-mailing each of the Bridesmaids and suggesting they go to Las Vegas instead. She turns the others against Annie's plan, and subtly turns them against Annie. How much fun can you have in a cabin? One-by-one the other bridesmaids call Annie to say they like Helen's idea more.

This leads to the scene on the plane where all of the bridesmaid *except* Annie are up in first class, and Annie feels as if she has been dumped by the group. In trying desperately to get back in with the group, and not be forgotten by Lillian (who is sipping champagne with Helen); Annie screws up big time and completely ruins the Bachelorette Party for *everyone*. Helen becomes the "winner" when Lillian tells Annie she is no longer the Maid Of Honor and Helen will take that role from this point on. Annie has been defeated and destroyed by the antagonist.

The Coup De Grace: at the Bridesmaid's Dinner Annie suggested a Paris theme to the Bridal Shower because ever since they were little girls Lillian has dreamed of going to Paris. Helen thinks it's an awful idea - so cliche - and says that she can easily come up with something better. But when the disgraced Annie shows up at the Bridal Shower that Helen has planned... it's a Paris theme. Add to that, Helen's gift to the bride - a trip to Paris for a custom fitting of her bridal gown (with Helen). This is the last straw for Annie - she hasn't just lost to Helen, she has had her nose rubbed in it in front of the others. Annie self destructs at the Bridal Shower and manages to get banned from her best friend's wedding.

No shots fired, no explosions, no fist fights (though it gets close at times) but the Protagonist and Antagonist battle it out in a series of scenes of direct conflict. Just because your script is a comedy or drama or romance or musical or whatever doesn't mean there won't be an antagonist (or force of antagonism) and scenes of conflict between them and the protagonist.

Your Assignment: Come up with four scenes of direct conflict between our Doctor and that Antagonist you came up with - and make each scene as dramatic and exciting as possible! This is a hospital - people's lives hang in the balance!

DOUBLE CROSSING FRIENDS

You can have a loveable antagonist. Your antagonist can even be your hero's best friend like Ted... But since the protagonist is going to square off against the antagonist to resolve the conflict, they may not be friends for long. Unless the antagonist is lying to your hero's face, all the time he wants to take his place - a back stabber!

Scripts with double crossing friends work because there's a lot of *emotional content* in the conflict. If you find out the guy who has been ruining your life is your best friend, you want to cry and beat him up at the same time. In my cable movie "Hard Evidence" the hero's best friend ends up as the villain. In order to do that, I had to have a surrogate villain - a guy who could *personify* the conflict - a guy our hero could go into the steel cage with and fight to the death. That way I could continue to have the best friend seem like a best friend... until the hero discovers the truth. When the best friend character is revealed as the antagonist, the hero must go into the "steel cage of conflict" with him... and stomp him!

The other way the protagonist's best friend can be his worst enemy is if he gets into trouble and brings our hero along for the ride. In Mardik Martin's "Mean Streets" our hero (Harvey Keitel) has a cousin with a hair trigger temper (Robert DeNiro). DeNiro is the funniest character in "Mean Streets", always pulling pranks and having a great time. But DeNiro keeps getting Keitel deeper and deeper in trouble. DeNiro borrows money from a local hood, then refuses to pay. DeNiro keeps insulting the local hood, until the hood decides to kill him... and Keitel is caught in the cross-fire! You might think that DeNiro is the antagonist - he's the guy that comes between Keitel and his dream of owning a restaurant. But that local hood is really the villain. We *know* the local hood is dangerous. We *know* that if DeNiro keeps taunting him, the guy will pull out a gun and start shooting. Which makes the best friend not the antagonist, but kind of a magnet pulling the protagonist towards the antagonist. Oddly, DeNiro is kind of like Ted!

Just as your protagonist can't be all good and always right - or they will be unbelievable characters, your antagonist can not be all bad. In the revised Protagonist Blue Book we look at "Character Shading" which creates details that show different aspects of your characters... and yoiu will need to do the same with all of your supporting characters including your antagonist. In "Bridesmaids" Helen is the perfect woman whose life is completely together - unlike Annie's. *Except* for Helen's relationship with her step-sons, who hate her. She tries to joke about it in an early scene, but we can see that this is her big failing in life... and the thing she works at pretending doesn't bother her. Later in the film, she confesses this problem to Annie - and this humanizes her. No character is perfect - even if they are supposed to be. Make sure your antagonists are human... because that makes them believable.

No matter what genre you're writing, you'll probably need an antagonist (or force of antagonism) to stand between the protagonist and their goal. That antagonist can be the nicest character in the film, the hero's mom, his best friend, even the love of his life! But they must be something we can see. If you can't see a conflict on film, it doesn't exist! That's why we have antagonists.

THE CONTRAST KEY

Your supporting characters should be in contrast to your hero. The reason for this is for one to bring out the character in the other. If the supporting characters are too much like your hero, we'll have trouble telling them apart, and they won't naturally bring out character in each other. My pessimism comes to surface in the presence of someone who is overly optimistic. My neatness comes to surface in the presence of a slob. If everyone in the room is acting too serious, I can't help but come up with jokes.

The hero of my film "Night Hunter" (1995) is the last of the vampire hunters... A not-quite-human sub-species born and raised to kill blood suckers. He roars into town on his cycle, armed with his sawed off shotgun, killing tools, and an ancient book listing all the known vampire families. Cutter is a tortured man. A loner who lives by night, can't trust anyone, and kills for a living.

Because my theme was "belief", I needed to populate my script with skeptics and different aspects of "belief". My sidekick was the ultimate skeptic, a reporter for the World Inquisitor tabloid who regularly covers alien abductions and Elvis sightings. I tried to infuse her dialogue with that Ben Hecht / "The Front Page" style sarcasm and machine gun fast delivery. She also brings Cutter out of his shell... as she begins to believe in vampires, he begins to believe in trusting others again.

I also had a police detective who was a lapsed Catholic... he'd seen so much pain and violence, he was no longer sure that God exists. When Cutter explains that vampires are real, the detective says he's not superstitious. But as the story progresses and he sees the vampires with his own eyes, the detective has no place to turn... except to his faith. He pulls his dusty old crucifix from his desk drawer and goes into battle against the bloodsuckers. But my lead vampire was the ultimate skeptic - he pulls the crucifix from the detective's hands and says that *he's* not superstitious! Then puts the bite on the policeman! Each character in the script contrasted the character they shared the most scenes with, so that each would bring out the character in the other. We'll look closer at pairing supporting characters with different viewpoints in a moment.

Theme is often a great way to create supporting characters - let each one illustrate a different aspect of the theme so that all they have to do is show up and we are exploring your screenplay's theme. This also allows each character to have a different point of view and a different way of seeing the over-all story and the scene-by-scene situations. We want to find the things that make our supporting characters *different* than each other.

In "Bridesmaids" we learn how Annie feels about herself through her relationship with the two men in her life, and specifically Officer Rhodes. We'll take a closer look at Rhodes in a moment, but there's a great scene where Rhodes aks Annie why she quit working in her bakery, and she says she never wants to bake again. Rhodes says he *loves* being a cop, and jokes that if he wasn't a cop he would still dress up in uniform and go out and shoot people. His love of his job contrasts with her disinterest in her past job.

Her present job - working at the jewelry store - allows for another supporting character to contrast Annie with - Kahlua, the flirty, perky saleswoman. Kahlua is the perfect sales person... which contrasts with Annie. There's even a scene where Annie's boss Don-Don compares the two women as a way to prod Annie to change her negative attitude at work... but the job is the jewelry store is designed to bring Annie into contact with people who she contrasts with - from the Asian Couple who come in shopping for engagement rings and are totally in love, to the teen girl who wants a Best Friends Forever necklace right after Annie and Lillian have a major rift in their relationship. The job brings her into contact with supporting characters who bring out Annie's character and emotional problems.

BUDDY CONTRAST

Buddy cop films depend on the contrast between characters. In Shane Black's "Lethal Weapon", Riggs is a young suicidal loner who will take any risk to catch the bad guys. Murtaugh is an older family man who always proceeds with caution. If you made a list of every one of Rigg's character traits, they'd be the exact opposite of Murtaugh's. The contrast between the two characters creates the friction which leads to comedy and suspense. It's what defines these two characters. The more polarized, the stronger the characters become. Felix's character always comes to the surface whenever Oscar is around. In fact, "The Odd Couple" could get a laugh just by having Felix walk into he living room with Oscar on the sofa. That's a "character laugh" that comes from *knowing* that Felix will disapprove of *something* that Oscar is doing. That's how well these characters are defined - we know how they will act before they do anything.

If Hugh Grant is a fussy neat freak in "Notting Hill", his flatmate is a complete slob. This creates conflict, and highlights the differences between characters. It's the *differences* that define your characters. Make them different from each other. The more different, the more interesting the relationships. The more contrast, the more character we can see. Each character highlights the traits of the other characters.

The way we bring out Grant's loneliness in "Notting Hill" is to put him in a scene with a couple who are deeply in love. Without a single word of dialogue, we know what Grant's character is feeling. We are writing Emotion Pictures! This is a variation on the "fish out of water" version of contrast - we have surrounded the character by those most unlike him. But this also works the other way - Grant's solitude makes the lovers' relationship even more intense. There's an added dimension to this - another, deeper, layer of characterization - because Bella is Grant's ex-girlfriend. That really could be him carrying her up the stairs, whispering, giggling. We don't know anything about Grant and Bella's history, we aren't given any details about their relationship, but we *feel* the history. The audience projects all of their lost loves and "relationships that might have happened" onto this incident. We can't help but project our emotional history into this situation... we've been set up! Curtis gives us an emotional situation that's universal. We've all been there.

Make a list of character traits for each one of your characters and make sure they are the opposite of the character they will spend the most time with. If your lead character is a shy romantic, his room mate is a swinging bachelor... both aspects the same emotional conflict, yet still opposites. Each one of your supporting characters can be used to illustrate different aspects of that emotional conflict, from your major supporting roles on down to those waiters and cab drivers. Screenwriting is distilled writing - each character should serve to tell the exterior conflict (plot) and the interior conflict (theme) simultaneously. Using contrast brings out the character in your supporting characters, and helps keep your theme in every scene. If you use your script's theme, the contrast between characters becomes a way to explore issues... A relationship of difference demonstrated by juxtaposition.

Your Assignment: Our Doctor's five supporting characters at the hospital - what are the differences between each of them? I think that should end up *20* differences between characters if my math is right.

OPPOSITES REACT

Even though "Bridesmaids" runs over two hours (*really* long for a comedy) there were many deleted scenes, including an entire subplot where Annie goes on a blind date with overly-perky bridesmaid Becca's brother, played by Paul Rudd. Though his character is mentioned in the film, he never made it into the final cut. Rudd pops up in many of our example films ("Forty Year Old Virgin", "Office Space", etc) and was at one time connected to one of my scripts - the studio remake of a hit 1980s horror flick; so it's only fair we talk about a movie that he *starred* in...

Writer-director Neil LaBute's indie film "The Shape Of Things" opens in the art gallery of a sprawling California college town. Punked out art student Evelyn (Rachel Weisz) hops the rope surrounding an exhibit in order to photograph the statue's fig leaf covered genitals. She's angry that the college would deface the sculpture's manhood with this plaster pastie... and plans to spray paint graffiti genitals on the fig leaf as a protest. Without a word of dialogue, her character has been established - she's angry, wild, has strong beliefs and is completely anti-authority.

Enter pudgy, shy college student Adam (Paul Rudd); working part time as a museum guard. Even though he's off work in five minutes, when he sees Evelyn hop over that rope he is compelled to cross the room and politely ask her to return to the public side of the rope. He tries to make it a suggestion, to avoid any direct confrontation with the woman. She refuses to move. Adam becomes flustered, "I've never had anyone not step back. I've only said it like four times, every time they've done it - step back." Now his character has been established - he's a weak-willed authority figure who keeps his emotions in check. Adam is the exact opposite of Evelyn, and we all know that opposites attract.

So begins the rom-com from hell. In a typical rom-com like Richard Curtis' "Notting Hill" world famous movie star Julia Roberts might fall in love with a private, stuttering small time bookstore owner like Hugh Grant, and even though they're opposites they can still live happily ever after. The differences in their characters compliment each other. But fasten your seat belts, this is a Neil LaBute movie.

OPPOSING CHARACTERS

Though it would be nice if everyone got along with each other in the real world, that would make for an unbelievably dull movie. Actually, life would be pretty dull if we all agreed with each other - what would we talk about? What makes Evelyn an interesting character in "The Shape Of Things" is that she doesn't act the way society wants her to act. She sees a rope designed to keep the public away from an exhibition, she hops it "To see what would happen." Adam finds her fascinating - he's never met anyone who does exactly what they want without considering the repercussions. She is fearless, and he's a man who lives in fear of almost everything. She has qualities that he desires, so they begin dating.

As in "Notting Hill" the couples' lifestyles are in direct conflict. Adam is bland, Evelyn is bohemian. Adam plays it safe, Evelyn loves to take risks. Adam finds her lifestyle exciting compared to his life. Adam might be shocked when Evelyn first suggests that they videotape their lovemaking session - but it's the kind of thing he's always dreamed of doing. Evelyn sees safety and predictability in Adam, things that aren't present in her life. A stable relationship may not have seemed important to her before, but she comes to appreciate having someone she can depend on. They complete each other - and that can only happen if each has traits that the other doesn't have. Adam is the positive pole of the magnet and Evelyn is the negative - they can't help but be drawn to each other. If they were similar, they wouldn't find each other attractive.

Adam's best friend, Philip (Frederick Weller) is also very different than Adam. Where Adam is studious, Philip is a party animal. Where Adam is neat and orderly, Philip is the opposite. Philip is a lady's man, Adam is shy around women. They make a perfect team because Adam can use Philip's natural abilities with women to help him find a girlfriend and give him dating advice. Philip needs Adam to help him get through college. Adam never goes anywhere without his book bag, Philip keeps losing his.

Philip's fiance, Jenny (Gretchen Mol), is his opposite - quiet, studious and serious. She's the kind of nice girl a guy can settle down with. He's the kind of man-child a nice girl dreams of domesticating. Philip wants to get married in scuba gear underwater, Jenny is hoping to talk him out of that idea (in the most non-confrontational way).

Not only do Adam and Philip need each other as characters, the story needs them to be opposites to provide drama. In a The same is true for the romantic pairing of Adam and Evelyn and the pairing of Philip and Jenny - because the couples are so different their relationship is a series of adventures and disagreements. Put the four of them together on a double date and a lively discussion about art and society is sure to follow... then get personal, then get really ugly. If they all agreed with one another, there would be nothing to talk about and no chance for a dramatic scene.

Though the obvious opposing characters in "Bridesmaids" are the perfect bridesmaid Helen and the complete mess Annie, there are other pairs of characters in the story who are opposites, like Officer Rhodes and Ted - the two men in Annie's life. Each is completely different and show different aspects of male-female relationships. Ted is rich and handsome and sex - things that Office Rhodes is *not*. Rhodes is dependable and nice and funny - things that Ted is not. Between the two is the perfect man, but stories are about creating choices for your protagonist and the Ted Or Rhodes choice is great for demonstrating how Annie feels about herself - and what her priorities are. Her relationships with these two men help us understand Annie.

YEAH, ALIENS AGAIN

Every time I come to some chapter about individual characters in a book, I always end up using James Cameron's "Aliens"... and I'm sorry if you have already read portions of this chapter in one of the other books. I swear, I will find a new example soon! There are a dozen Space Marines in the film, plus Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), plus Bishop the android (Lance Henrickson), plus Paul Reiser's corporate weasel Burke... yet we have a pretty good idea who all of them are. Each character is shown through their relationship with another character who contrasts with them. Because conflict is the fuel for story, by pairing all of the characters with their opposites Cameron ends up exposing character through conflict, plus creating a character arc for each of them. As the are forced to work with each other through the crisis (the aliens), we learn more about the characters as their relationships evolve. When android hating Ripley first meets Bishop she freaks:

> RIPLEY
> You never said anything about an
> android being here!

> BISHOP
> I prefer the term "artificial person"
> myself. Is there a problem?

As the crisis intensifies, Ripley and Bishop are forced to work together. When the team needs someone to remote land the shuttle, Ripley realizes the right man for the job isn't a man at all - it's Bishop. As the aliens take out team members one-by-one, Bishop, Ripley and Newt are the three left standing.. By the end of the film Bishop save her life, creating an emotional moment when she puts her hand on his shoulder and says, "You did okay, Bishop." A simple line, but given emotional power from the set up 90 pages earlier. We have seen the relationship between these two grow over the course of the film - we have seen them set aside their differences and actually become friends. So when Bishop gets torn in half, we forget he's an android... we even forget he's an actor... Bishop has become our friend just as he's become Ripley's friend. Had they not been opposites, there would have been no room to grow... no chance to create a relationship or expose character.

MIRROR CHARACTERS

Adam and Jenny in "The Shape Of Things" have an interesting backstory that becomes increasingly important as the story goes on. They were in the same class, liked each other, but each was too shy to ask the other out. When Adam introduced Jenny to Philip, it was a love connection. Adam and Jenny were too much alike to be attracted to each other - both are quiet, conservative, and a little bit bland. In any argument, they are probably on the same side... and not fighting too hard, since they are both weak-willed characters. Two positive poles of a magnet - they just aren't attracted to each other.

Philip and Evelyn are the opposite. Both have strong personalities and are wild and unpredictable. They are too much alike to like each other. Whenever they are in a scene together they are fighting for domination. Like negative poles of the magnet, they push each other away. They decide that they hate each other, and Evelyn forbids Adam hanging out with Philip. He must chose between his girlfriend and his best friend - and picks Evelyn.

As Adam spends more time with Evelyn he becomes more confident, more aggressive, more like the woman he loves. Some of these changes are physical - he loses twenty-five ponds, gets contact lenses, gives his stodgy wardrobe to a thrift store and begins dressings to fit into Evelyn's world. To see the gradual changes in his attitude LaBute uses his mirror character, Jenny. As Adam experiments with his life, Jenny becomes the "control". We see Adam's changes in a series of scenes that pair him with Jenny (who is having relationship problems with Philip). They begin very much alike, but as Adam succumbs to Evelyn's influence they become different. She's still the quiet good girl, but Adam is slowly becoming an attractive risk-taker. Eventually Adam has become so different from Jenny that she begins to find him attractive... and vice versa. This throws a monkey wrench into all of the relationships in the story, creating even more drama.

The best way to show change in a character is through a series of scenes with the character most like them. As one changes, we have their mirror character to compare them with - sort of like "before" and "after" pictures in a weight reduction ad. A mirror character creates a point of comparison. We'll take a closer look at Mirror Characters in the chapter on Symbolic Characters.

REVEALING CHARACTERS

The best way to reveal character is to pair them with their opposite. We learn more about who Adam is through his scenes with Evelyn and Philip than through his scenes with Jenny. Conflict pulls character to the surface. Two characters who are alike have little to talk about, two characters who are different will discuss and debate issues. The more opposite the characters, the more we can learn about each of them.

In "Aliens" Ripley also has a relationship with steely calm Marine Hicks (Michael Biehn) which helps expose both characters. Ripley is the civilian, Hicks is the ultimate Marine - lots on contrast between the two. Ripley is scared, Hicks is always cool. We would never know that Hicks has a sense of humor if it weren't for his relationship with Ripley. Initially Hicks objects to taking Ripley along on the mission, but as the conflict intensifies, their relationship grows. A key moment is when Hicks shows her how to use the pulse rifle - Ripley has gone from baggage Hicks thought he'd have to carry to an equal.

Hicks and Hudson (Bill Paxton) are also paired in some scenes to show character. When they're introduced both are in uniform and almost impossible to tell apart ("Yes, Hicks?" "Hudson, sir. He's Hicks.") but when the conflict erupts we can see that these two are very different characters. Hicks is always cool and quiet, Hudson develops a motor-mouth when he's scared.

    HUDSON
    Well that's great! That's just
    fucking great, man. Now what the
    fuck are we supposed to do, man?
    We're in some pretty real shit now!

    HICKS
    Are you finished?

We can see how calm Hicks is by comparing him to how panicked Hudson is. They bring out the character in each other whenever they are together... so Cameron keeps throwing them together in scene after scene. We may not know anything about Hudson's life back on Earth, but his behavior creates a fully fleshed out character. We really know him. When he's screaming "Game over man! Game over!" we laugh - but we also feel his panic. We care about him. Both Hudson and Hicks are real people because we've learned about them a little bit at a time as their relationship has developed over the course of the script.

Because Evelyn and Adam are so different, we learn about each of them through their relationship. Character is exposed through the story itself rather than through pasted on "character scenes" that serve no story purpose. You can pair your protagonist with a very different character to bring out drama and character or pair two different supporting characters, it's all about revealing character through *relationships*.

RELATIONSHIPS

What is the relationship between your protagonist and the supporting characters? Your protagonist will have some sort of relationship with each of the characters in your script. That relationship may also be connected to theme.

Many of your supporting characters will have relationships with each other. They may have known each other longer than they have known your protagonist, or know each other only through your protagonist. They may hate each other or love each other or be past lovers or ex-friends or any of the millions of other relationships people have with each other.

But what are these relationships? If a character is your protagonist's ex-wife he's going to treat her much differently than if she's the protagonist's ex-boss or a woman he's always had a crush on but never dated or a woman who has always had a crush on his but he's never been interested in or his best friend's girl who used to be his. The relationship between characters tells us how they will act around each other, what they will reveal and what they will conceal. If you don't know the relationship, you don't know what happens.

If two characters are meeting each other for the first time, you might think they have no relationship... but what are the circumstances of their meeting? If a woman meets a man in a bar they will have a different sort of relationship than if she meets him while interviewing him for a job or if she meets him while interrogating him as a murder suspect or if she meets him in a fender bender on the 405 freeway. All of these meetings might lead to a romantic relationship between the woman and the man, but each will be a very different kind of romance based on how they met. They relate to each other differently depending on the circumstances of their meeting.

Do they know about each other before they meet? There are six degrees of separation between all of us, so there's a good chance your protagonist knows something about most of the characters she'll meet *before* she meets them. They may have a friend in common, or an enemy in common, or run in the same social circles, or know about each other from work or media or reputation. That will create a preconceived idea of who the other person is that will influence their relationship. I call this the "blind date syndrome" - you think you know who someone is from a third party, but really you only know how that third party sees them... and your relationship will change as you get to know them yourself.

Which is another aspect of relationships - they change and evolve. Your protagonist may start out not trusting a character and learn to trust them as the story progresses... which will change their relationship. This change isn't all at once - like an on-off switch - it's a gradual change that comes in small increments. The relationship between Lillian and Annie in "Bridesmaids" begins very close and with each conflict tears farther and farther apart. In each scene their relationship changes - at times they become closer together and other much farther apart. It's a changing, living thing. Look at how your characters' relationships evolve throughout the story.

In "Bridesmaids" the newlywed Becca and the long-married Rita are almost complete opposites. Becca is idealistic and excited at the idea of being married - she can't wait to have kids and spend the rest of her life with her husband. Rita is a marriage burn out - who never has sex with her husband anymore and isn't excited by him and is grossed out by her kids. These two opposite characters are naturally paired in the screenplay. They sit next to each other at the Bridesmaid's dinner and in several other scenes. When they have a conversation there is built in conflict and comedy.

A great relationship between protagonist and supporting character is between Annie and Officer Rhodes. This relationship goes back and forth - on again and off again. Each scene takes the relationship in a different direction - they have a great date, and then she does something to screw it up. She makes him a carrot cake as an apology, but he's still angry at her and leaves it on the front porch for the raccoons to eat. The great things about this relationship is that it helps us see how Annie feels about herself.

By showing character through relationships we can learn about characters while on the run - as the story unfolds - and when the relationships and situations change we can show other aspects of the characters... and even show character change (and character arc). That makes "character through relationships" a great tool for material with lots of action or heavy plotting.

Look at all if the relationships in your screenplay:

1) How do they evolve? How do they change?
2) How does the STORY change the relationship?
3) How does the interaction between characters change the relationship?
4) How does the conflict change the relationship?
5) How does the conflict test the relationship?

You should be able to chart the changes in each of the relationships in your screenplay - with pivotal scenes where the relationships are tested and explode into dramatic situations. We want to show the emotions involved in the various relationships in your screenplay... and how those relationships evolve.

CREATING SUBTEXT

"Aliens" establishes that tough babe Vasquez thinks her commander Lt. Gorman is a fake... they all do, but she really digs into him. Once it's established that Vasquez thinks Gorman is a wimp - once we know there's a conflict between the two - the script just has to put them in the same room and we have a dramatic situation. If Gorman orders her to do something and she says "Yes, sir" there's attitude and drama in the exchange because it has been previously established that Vasquez thinks Gorman doesn't know what he's doing. Instant subtext! Subtext is the difference between what a characters says and what they do or mean. It's an additional layer of meaning in your screenplay. There's more on subtext in the Dialogue Blue Book.

Vasquez and Gorman's relationship evolves throughout the script - hitting highs and lows. Nothing could be lower than when Gorman crashes the Armored Personnel Carrier - trapping them on the alien planet.

       VASQUEZ
He's fucking dead!

She grabs Gorman by the collar, hauling him up roughly,
ready to pulp him with her other fist.

       VASQUEZ
Wake up pendejo! I'm gonna kill you,
you useless fuck!

Hicks pushes her back. Right in her face.

       HICKS
Hold it. Hold it. Back off right now.

Vasquez releases Gorman. His head smacks the deck.

Vasquez is aggressive, Gorman is ineffective (mostly because he's unconscious in that scene). But the script keeps throwing the two together, and each brings out the character in the other. This pays off when Vasquez and Gorman are trapped in an air duct together as an army of alien warriors approaches. She gives him the "power greeting" she only shares with a chosen few to show her respect. Gorman returns the greeting and hands her two grenades, keeping two for himself. When the creatures descend upon them, the two who were once enemies die together... as friends. Opposites who have become more alike as the story progresses, similar to the way Adam becomes more like Evelyn as "The Shape Of Things" continues.

CREATING DRAMA

"Aliens" makes the action situations dramatic by creating conflicts and friendships between characters *first*, then letting those play out in the action scenes. If two characters who dislike each other have to work together to survive, that's *drama* within the action scene. If two people who are pals are in a situation where only one can survive, that's drama in an action scene.

Movies are about *dramatic* situations. Without the dramatic part, it's just stuff happening to people we don't know and don't care about. If you create relationships between characters and have the story test those relationships, drama and character become integral to the story itself. LaBute creates conflicts between characters, then pairs the characters who are least alike and forces them to deal with each other.

Establish the differences between your characters early so that every scene with those characters has built-in drama. Adam and Evelyn are introduced as opposites in the first minute of the film, making everything that happens in their relationship interesting and dramatic. Will Adam eventually become confident enough to stand up to Evelyn's demands that he give up his friendship with Philip? And what will happen with his escalating relationship with Jenny? By making over Adam in her image, has Evelyn created a monster?

Your Assignment: Remember that Doctor and one of the supporting characters at the Hospital you created? Show the changes in their relationship... in a way that highlights the Doctor's fears of becoming emotionally involved with his patients. Give us four or five steps that illustrate gradual changes.

SYMBOLIC CHARACTERS

Film is a visual medium, a *dramatic* medium, and that requires conflict that we can see. That seems "easy" (as if *anything* is easy in screenwriting!) when you are writing an action or thriller screenplay but what should we do when we have a story where the conflict is more internal and emotional? Well, the first thing I'd suggest is to write it as a novel... but if you want to write a screenplay you'll need to use Symbolic Supporting Characters. You can use Symbolic Supporting Characters even in big action flicks, but you'll probably *need* to use them in a small character oriented drama or subtle comedy where the conflict may be more internal.

If I were to make a list of top 5 internal conflict movies of all time, "High Fidelity" would be on it. "High Fidelity" began as a novel by Nick Hornby, but there are lessons we can learn from the adaptation... methods of dramatizing internal conflict so that it can be seen on the screen. First - the movie does something completely unusual. It's not Voice Over, it's not Narrated, the protagonist actually talks to the audience throughout the film. It's as if we're his best friend, or maybe his shrink. He spends the whole film talking to us - even when other characters are present. It's not a Woody Allen aside - it's the whole danged film! Though this gives us a way to know what the protagonist is thinking, it isn't *dramatic* and film is a dramatic medium. See, we need a way to *show* that internal conflict - to turn thoughts into something concrete.

"High Fidelity" is about a typical Hornby man-child struggling with responsibility. Society wants Rob (John Cusack) to grow up - to put on a suit and tie and get a real job - but he just wants to run his little Chicago record store. Champion Records specializes in *vinyl* - because records have a more realistic sound quality than CDS. Rob loves making Top 5 Lists and compilation tapes of *his* favorite songs to give to people. He is the king of his little universe instead of participating in everybody else's universe. "You guys are snobs!" a customer tells him. "You're totally elitists. You feel like the unappreciated scholars, so you shit on the people who know less than you." "Which is everybody," Rob answers. At Champion Records Rob is king - no reason to join society when you're king, right? Rob's own mother thinks it's time for him to find a real job and grow up - but Rob is happy just the way he is...

Until his girlfriend Laura (Iben Hjejle) pulls the plug on his existence and moves out.

Now Rob is going through one of those What Does It All Mean? things - reassessing his life. He's broken hearted and depressed - but both of those are *internal* conflicts. Why does he have such bad luck with women? Why is his life in constant turmoil? The struggle is going on inside Rob, but we can't see that and film is a visual medium. So we need to find ways to dramatize that conflict - to externalize it. On film, if we can't see the conflict, it doesn't exist. So all of the characters in the script end up symbolizing different aspects of the conflict within. You must have a conflict we can see in your script. You must figure out ways to *show the struggle*.

That means you need to *dramatize* emotional conflict - to turn what happens in a character's heart and mind into actions (and interactions with characters) that demonstrate this emotional conflict. The best way to do that is to create characters which are symbols for Rob's problems.

CONTRAST CHARACTERS

The reason why Laura left him was because he's self-centered and refuses to grow up. He's irresponsible. I've done tips in the past on contrast, and that's the tool we're going to use to illuminate these problems within Rob. Laura didn't just leave Rob, she left him for another man - Ian (Tim Robbins). Ian is a symbolic antagonist - he has all of the qualities that Rob is lacking. Ian is a caring, nurturing therapist who cooks and provides a shoulder for Laura to cry on. He's understanding, he's mature, he has a real job. Ian used to live in the apartment above Rob & Laura, but he's since moved into a much nicer apartment... which is where Laura goes to when she moves out of Rob's place.

After Laura leaves Rob, he embarks on a massive project - reorganizing his record collection. Not alphabetically, not by year, he's organizing it "autobiographically" - based on when *he* first heard the song. Talk about self-centered!

On film, you have to find ways to *show the conflict* - so "man against himself" conflicts won't work on their own. You need to have something physical the protagonist can struggle with - that may be a "personification" of the conflict like Ian. He's a symbolic antagonist. The reason why Laura moved out is what Rob *isn't* - but you can't show what a character *isn't* - so you create a character who *is* those things. Instead of Laura just moving out, she moves in with Ian (the anti-Rob).

Laura makes $60 thousand a year - she has a grown up law job. Ian is a therapist who makes enough to move into a better neighborhood. Rob's record store is so successful that he has to borrow $5 thousand from Laura and hasn't been able to pay it back.

Ian is a symbol of what Laura wants Rob to become.... just without the ponytail and karate class pictures. Even in though Ian is in very few scenes, his *character* is present from the very beginning. He is Rob's rival for Laura's love. Ian is all of the things that Rob hates - because they are the changes Rob *knows* he needs to make in himself. He's fighting those changes... and he's fighting Ian for Laura's love. If your hero's character arc is to grow up you need someone who *has* grown up so that we can see the struggle. Rob is in a battle with Ian for Laura's love. Remove Ian and how can we see the battle?

The same method is used in "Bridesmaids" with Helen as the "perfect woman" with a perfect life... while Annie's life is a mess. Though Helen *does* physically compete with Annie for the Best Friend role in Lillian's life (so we do have an external conflict), this isn't some big battle of the bridesmaids where they physically attack each other. Their conflict is more subtle, and all of the conflicts and supporting characters in "Bridesmaids" are there to service the *Annie* story. Her life is a mess and this wedding is going to be the catalyst that gets her off her butt and back on her feet.

Your Assignment: A Contrast Character for our Doctor.

MIRROR CHARACTERS

Another method to bring conflict to the surface would be to have a mirror character - someone else who has the exact same emotional problems as Rob in "High Fidelity". You know how we can't stand people who have the same flaws as we have? Mirror characters are a way for Rob to struggle with his surrogate self and come to realize his own faults.

Rob has two connected internal problems - his relationships with women and his anti-social attitude. Both are symptoms of his refusal to grow up. In order to create a way for Rob to struggles with these two aspects of himself, we give him a pair of employees.

Dick (Todd Louiso) is shy and paranoid around women. He is afraid of becoming involved in a relationship for fear that he'll get hurt. He mirrors Rob's relationship problems - his broken heart, his fear of being hurt in a relationship, and his weird paranoia that he's just not worthy of any of the women he's gone out with. Though we get to see this aspect of Rob first hand in his flashback relationship with Charlie (Catherine Zeta Jones), the character of Dick allows us a reference point throughout the film.

Barry (Jack Black) insults customers, comes to work late and is fun and totally immature. Barry is about as anti-social as you can get. He's an exaggeration of Rob's flaws. Rob is a music snob - Barry actually chases off customers who don't have his taste. Rob isn't ambitious enough to change his life, Barry isn't even ambitious enough to show up at his slacker job on time. Barry has a dream of fronting a band - but is afraid to do anything about it. He's rather be a minimum wage slave than take a chance on doing something better. Those are all Rob's flaws! As Rob struggles to turn Barry into a more responsible employee, he's really struggling with his own flaws. Can he see himself from Laura's and realize that he needs to mature?

Mirror characters can work two ways - you can use them as the unchanging "control" in order to show how your protagonist is changing... or you can have them change in order to show how your protagonist is stuck in a rut. "High Fidelity" uses the mirror characters as a catalyst for Rob's change. All three are stuck in the same rut, stuck in the same store... but Dick and Barry begin to mature - leaving Rob behind.

Dick forces himself to overcome his fears of relationships by asking out Anna (Sara Gilbert), a customer who likes the same music as he does. Barry puts his anti-social behavior on hold long enough to talk to a musician about forming a band. Up until this point he has insulted any musician who approached him. When he stops being anti-social, Barry lowers his walls of self defense and is able to access his dreams. This is the lesson that Rob needs to learn.

There's a great scene in the movie where Rob suggests the three of them go out to a club, but Barry says he can't - he's got to write lyrics for his band, and Dick says he can't - he's got a date with Anna. Rob is left alone in his store while his mirror characters move on with their lives. This scene ends with a great moment - as Rob is locking up he sees Dick and Anna across the street kissing. Talk about rubbing it in! Rob realizes what he doesn't have by seeing his mirror character obtain it. That acts as a catalyst - Rob realizes he must change in order to be happy. He must get over his fear of relationships and lower his defensive walls and take a chance on his dream.

One of the interesting mirror relationships in "Bridesmaids" is between Annie and Megan. Megan is introduced as a complete mess - yet she's on the mend. She's working to put her life together while Annie's is still falling apart... But at that time, Megan seems like a complete crazy loser - each has an opposite trajectory. Annie feels like she's doing much better than Megan, but while Annie is rejecting the good man she has met (Rhodes), Megan has reached a point where she's ready to start a relationship with that guy in the seat next to her on the plane... who may or may not be a Sky Marshal. Later in the film when Annie has hit rock bottom, it's Megan who comes over to get her out of her funk with a pep-talk and slap-fest.

Your Assignment: A Mirror Character for our Doctor... and three scenes where they drift apart to show changes in the Doctor's character.

RESOLVING INTERNAL CONFLICTS

In "High Fidelity" Rob has a Top 5 List of dream jobs - and two of the jobs are producing records. Of course, he's stuck in a rut working at his record store. Producing records would involve working with others, and he's too anti-social for that.

The next day he hears a music tape made by the Skateboard Kids who hang around outside his store, likes what he hears, and goes out and signs them to his record label. Record label? What record label? The great thing about the Skateboard Kids is that they were supporting characters who were established early in the film, and the audience had no idea their story purpose was to be the thing that changes Rob's life. They begin as pests - problems in Rob's life... and end up becoming the solution in Rob's life. Even the smallest supporting characters will have a purpose in your story.

Rob has stopped being anti-social long enough to figure out that he has the connections to start his own label. He's going to put out a CD (not a vinyl album) and put his music knowledge to good use. Instead of just talking about music, he's going to *do something*. This is the first step in Rob's maturing process, which ends with him winning Laura back and asking if she'll marry him.

"I've started to make a tape in my head for Laura. Full of stuff *she'd* like. Full of stuff that would make *her* happy. For the first time, I can sort of see how that's done." Rob has been transformed from a guy who only thinks about what is important to him into a guy who thinks about what is important to others. He's learned what love really is... and grown up. We *see* this happening through the use of symbolic characters.

Symbolic Antagonists - DIFFERENT than protagonist - contrast the protagonist to show what they need to become, what they need to learn, or (sometimes) the protagonist's attributes.

Mirror Characters - SIMILAR to protagonist - have exaggerated versions of the protagonist's flaws, so that the protagonist has to deal with those flaws externally. Sometimes a Mirror Character contains the protagonist's attributes, and can be used to show the protagonist taking the wrong road and getting into trouble.

Symbolic Characters are a great way to take an internal struggle and dramatize it. To take a "man against himself" conflict and turn it into situations where different aspects of that self are represented by different characters - so that we can *see* the struggle.

Though Story Purpose and Contrast and Mirror Characters and these other tools help us keep our Supporting Characters on track and also give them *some* personality, we want our Supporting Characters to be unique and interesting and even entertaining. Some of my techniques for making characters interesting and unique pop up in the Protagonist Blue Book, but there are still many other methods - so let's take a look at them!

SUPPORTING ATTITUDE

In the Dialogue Blue Book we looked at how attitude and background effect a character's dialogue - and how that dialogue can be used to show differences in character. Attitude and background also show themselves in every other part of a supporting character. The basic intersection between who a character is under their skin and how they behave is probably their attitude - which comes out in both dialogue and actions.

Because I write in coffee shops all over Los Angeles, I come into contact with many "baristas" who must all act basically the same - they ask for your order and then prepare it for you... but each barista is an individual. They are very different than each other and the way they behave shows us their differences. One barista is unbelievably upbeat about everything and is the most sincerely positive person I have ever encountered. She will find the silver lining in any cloud. If you've just lost your job of 15 years, she'll say, "That's great! Now you can spend more time with your kids and family!" If you spill your coffee, "We just started a new pot, so your new cup will taste fresher!" Though both of those examples focus on her dialogue, *everything* she says and does is positive and upbeat. If she is cleaning up a spill she does it in a positive and upbeat way. Her attitude is what defines her as a character... and as a person.

Another barista is all about himself, so if you order an iced tea with melon syrup, he'll say, "I like the berry syrup." No matter what you say to him, his responses are always focused on himself. If two hundred people just died in a plane crash, he'd find the way to make that about him. "Yeah, a tragedy that all of those people died, and the news report pre-empted my favorite show, 'Ice Road Pizza Deliveries'." Again this extends to his actions - his basic attitude of being self-centered is what controls just about everything in his life. When the boss asks him to take out the garbage, he doesn't just object to doing the job, he objects using reasons that match his character.

Then there's the barista who seems to hate me. But don't feel left out - he probably hates you, too. He seems to dislike *every* customer, and dislike his job. Helping you is taking him away from all of those things he'd rather be doing... and he lets you know that with his attitude. Everything is a chore. When I order an iced tea *without* sweetener, he makes a big deal of how much work it is to cross off the sweetener on the drink cup. He is all attitude!

There are pessimist baristas, and needy ones who seem to want your approval, and baristas who see everything as a dig at them, and ones who *must* one-up you to show their superiority, and people who just don't have the time for you, and ones who think everything is sexual (if you know what I mean, that's what she said), and servers who are confused by almost everything, and ones who think their time is more important than yours, and people who are ultra-efficient and very detail oriented, and baristas who are amazed by almost everything, and ones who worry about the most unlikely things you can think of, and people who think everything is a question, and baristas who...

Each of these attitudes and traits are things that come through in dialogue and actions, interactions with others... and help define these characters in my life. They may be bit parts, but they are *individuals* and every barista acts differently. Like good supporting characters, their *character* is what sets them apart from each other and the protagonist. When we look at all of the bridesmaids in "Bridesmaids", each is an individual. You couldn't take a line written for optimistic newlywed Becca and give it to burned out housewife Rita - each sees the world differently.

All of your supporting characters need to be different. They need to have different strengths and weaknesses. Different 'looks'. Different personalities and ways of handling problems. Different "voices", vocabularies and speech rhythms. The audience should be able to instantly tell one from another, even if they are all dressed the same like our baristas.

Your Assignment: Even though our five Hospital Employees have a different *story purpose* - I want you to add an attitude to that. Five different (and interesting) attitudes for the Hospital Employees surrounding our Doctor who is worried about becoming emotionally involved with his patients. Guess what? Having an attitude that is at odds with a character's Story Purpose makes them even more interesting!

BARISTAS & BARBERS

Mark Brown's "Barbershop" is a lot like "It's a Wonderful Life". Both films are about guys in their communities who are going broke, feel unappreciated, and are living in the shadows of their successful fathers. In both films, they feel like they are going broke because their fathers gave away services out of the kindness of their hearts... and the sons want to be smarter businessmen. Both films have antagonists who want to foreclose on the businesses (this fuels the story). Both are feel good movies about community... with 56 years between them.

"Barbershop" is a movie that I wish had lasted longer. There were characters who I wanted to learn more about and relationships between characters that I wanted to explore more. Each of the Supporting Characters in the film is an individual with their own distinctive style of speech. You could cover the character slugs and know *exactly* who is speaking.

OUR CHARACTERS:

1) There's our protagonist Calvin (Ice Cube) who owns the Barbershop and is always looking for a get rich quick scheme that will allow him to sell the shop. Calvin lives in his father's shadow and is scrambling for the light. He needs to find a way out.

2) There's Old Eddie (Cedric The Entertainer) who has an opinion on everything - usually a wrong one. He never stops talking.

3) There's Terri (Eve) who is worried that her boyfriend is cheating on her... and that someone has been drinking her apple juice, too. Everyone is taking from her.

4) There's Dinka from Nigeria (Leonard Howze) who is the ultimate romantic, secretly in love with Terri. He writes her poetry, and sees everything in the world through long-stemmed rose colored glasses.

5) There's Jimmy (Sean Patrick Thomas) the college student who knows everything - Mr. Trivia. Knowledge is his power - he hopes to leave the neighborhood for a good job and a life in the suburbs.

6) The only white barber, Isaac (Troy Garity), accuses Jimmy of being more white than he is... and that would be easy, because Isaac has his bling-bling jewelry and his do-rag and tries to act Black. He uses more street slang than anyone else in the barbershop.

7) Ricky (Michael Ealy) is a quiet ex-con with rage simmering below the surface... and he doesn't like Isaac pretending to be Black. Ricky may have a gun in his locker, but he's a loyal friend to Calvin. He is a man of his word who would rather go to jail than give up his pals JD (Anthony Anderson) and Billy (Lahmard Tate) who borrowed his truck to steal an ATM from a convenience store. The great thing about Ricky's character is that when he does say something, you realize he may be the most intelligent and well-read person in the barbershop. By the end of the film he calls know-it-all Jimmy on a couple of his trivia answers.

Each of these characters has a distinctive voice, an individual attitude, different relationships with the other characters and a character arc that is weaved through the film. Each character is an individual - cover their character slugs and their individual vocabularies would give away who was speaking.

One thing I liked about the film - it didn't judge any Supporting Character except Keith David's gangster (and we get to see him dancing with his bodyguard - so maybe there's a good side to him that didn't fit in the story). The guy who sells stolen stuff - used as a running gag - is also shown as someone who serves the community. When the AC broke down in the barbershop, he got the freon to fix it. The kid who gets a haircut and runs without paying turns out to be okay. None of the characters in the film were cliches. Everyone was struggling with some sort of moral question, or was more that they seemed. They were *people*. Individuals.

They might have all been barbers, but each had a different outlook on life. Different strengths, different weaknesses,

different ways of expressing themselves, different attitudes.

Your Assignment: For fun: Five different strengths and Five different weaknesses for our Five Hospital Employees. These things may never pop up in the story, but often knowing these things about your characters helps them become real to you... and helps *tint* their actions, dialogue, and reactions throughout the story.

INDIVIDUALS IN THE GOLDEN AGE

One of the great things about movies made in the Golden Age Of Hollywood (1930s & 1940s) are the supporting characters - they had all of these great character actors on studio contract and it made sense to put them in as many films as possible... and that meant writing great little roles for them. All of these roles were interesting individuals, and watching Golden Age films like "Captain Blood" and "Red River" you can see how they did it.

"Captain Blood" (1935) is based on a pirate adventure book by Rafael Sabatini about Dr. Peter Blood, who takes no sides in war - his job is to help the injured. When he treats a rebel fighting against the government of England, he's arrested and put on trial. Blood tells the judge he's a doctor, not as rebel. Neutral. The judge sentences him to *death* for saving the life of a rebel. Instead of death, they ship all of the convicts to the British colonies in the Caribbean as slaves to work on plantations. Blood and his slave pals all get whipped and mistreated... and Blood has now taken a side - with the rebels. Oh, he's bought by plantation owner's niece Olivia DeHaviland - she buys him just to piss off her uncle. Blood insults him.

The supporting characters are so well written and well played that they become real people - like friends of yours. There's a slave-pirate who always quotes the Bible... but always finds ironic passages to quote, so he comes off funny instead of as a zealot. There is a tough guy, always itching for a fight. The guy who always has his flask of booze - even in sword fights he's taking a nip now and then. All of the bit-part slave-pirates have *personalities* and their own little goals.

The colony's Governor is a great character - this fey, flamboyant guy in a powdered wig always complaining about his gout. The Governor's doctors both have distinctive personalities. The guy in debtor's prison who sells Blood the boat... and gets swept up in the escape, becoming one of Blood's pirates by mistake. Every single minor character is an individual in this film. They have a distinctive attitude and distinctive style of dialogue and distinctive world view... and each has a distinctive background.

And all of the great character actors under contract at Warner Bros play these roles as if they're competing for an Oscar. If a character is only in one scene, they do everything in their power to be the most memorable character in that scene. You end up with all of these amazing actors playing amazingly well defined characters - written so vividly that they come alive on the screen.

I've always wanted to take over programming at TCM for a week and do a festival of great character actors in bit parts. You would see several movies with completely different stars in different genres and wonder why these films are on the same program... then you'd notice some guy like Ned Sparks is in every movie. Who is Ned Sparks you are probably asking? Well, he's this guy who played bit parts in a lot of movies who had a very distinctive voice - and you'd recognize his voice from a couple of cartoon characters who swiped it. I think most people know the cartoons more than the real guy whose voice the imitated. But "Captain Blood" has all of these great bit part players (but no Ned Sparks) playing the pirates - the guy in the background of some shot not only has a well written character, the actor playing that character is trying to make sure you remember him!

"Red River" (1948) is basically "Mutiny on the Bounty" on a cattle drive, with John Wayne as an obsessed, nasty, mean, and probably out of his mind Dunson with Montgomery Clift playing the protégée turned mutinous Matt. But the real stars of the show are about 1,000 head of cattle and the well written supporting characters. The movie is about a cattle drive, and you get to see actors on horseback driving a herd. There are shots where you see at least a thousand steers interacting with the stars, and one kick ass shot that 360s around John Wayne on horseback showing steers for as far as the eye can see. Almost every shot in the film has a thousand steers in the background - if not the foreground with the actors. And there's another great shot from inside Walter Brennan's chuckwagon as they ford a raging river (for real) behind and ahead and surrounded by cattle. No special effects, no cardboard cows or CGI - this film is filled with real cattle.

There are all of these cowboys, secondary characters, and each of them has a real character and distinctive character traits. There are all kinds of great gags in the film designed to show the characters of these minor characters. They have an Indian on the crew who always wins at poker because they can't tell when he's bluffing - his face never changes expression. Walter Brennan loses his false teeth to him in a poker game, and a deal is made that the Indian will loan

Brennan his teeth for meals, but afterwards they must be immediately returned. From this point on, every time there is a meal scene in the film it is followed by Brennan returning the teeth... sometimes just in the background of a shot. Always gets a laugh!

There is a character named Dave who has a wife he's always talking about. Dave's life is defined by his marriage - and when all of the cowboys are talking about what they will do with their money once they get paid (a great scene for showing the difference between all of these secondary characters) Dave's dream is to buy his wife a pair of fancy red shoes. They live in a shack in the middle of nowhere, but he thinks his wife would love to own a fancy pair of shoes.

There is another cowboy with a sweet tooth who is always licking his finger and sticking it in the sack of sugar on the chuckwagon... and that guy's sweet tooth not only extends to other aspects of his character, it creates a plot event later in the film when he accidentally knocks over a bunch of pots and pans while trying to sneak some sugar... and starts a stampede that kills some of the other supporting characters we have grown to love... and he has to live with this throughout the rest of the film. (There is even *another* plot caused by the stampede that concerns his character... his sweet tooth changes the direction of the *entire story* at least twice!)

The great thing about these little things that make each of the cowboys into individuals is that we feel like we know them, and care about them, and when things happen on the cattle drive to them we can relate. It's like we are on that cattle drive with them.

Like our baristas, each has a different Attitude, Vocabulary, Thought process, Background, Goals and Fears, and Knowledge (or lack of knowledge).

Another film by Charles Schnee, the co-writer of "Red River", with great supporting characters is "The Bad And The Beautiful" (1952) ... for which he won a Best Screenwriting Oscar. It's an epic story of behind–the-scenes Hollywood, and *every* character no matter how big or small is extremely well drawn. One of my favorites is Gus, a very low end agent. The film tells three stories about boy-genius producer Jonathan Shields (Kirk Douglas) - as three famous people who vowed never to work with him again prepare to turn down a new offer to work with him and bring his career back from the ashes. Though many of the characters are involved in all three stories, Gus The Agent is only in the second one - the story of Georgia Lorrison (Lana Turner), the daughter of a famous actor... who comes from a family of famous actors. Modeled after the Barrymores. Georgia is just a kid in the first story, but in the second tale she is a young woman... with alcohol and substance abuse problems. The pressure of being a Lorrison is too much for her, so she's a drunk and a slut who earns a living as a movie extra and playing those one-line roles without names like "Waitress #2". Her agent Gus (Sammy White) is in a couple of scenes with her and maybe has a couple of lines in the whole film... but is one of my favorite characters in the film.

Gus may be the worst agent in town (Gloria is not his least successful client, but his *most* successful) but he makes up for it with loyalty. He is *supportive*. When she has an audition across town, he picks her up in his beat up old car with a suitcase containing a change of clothes. He takes her to a gas station restroom, where she changes for the audition, then drives her to the studio. When she gets a screen test, he runs lines with her again and again - always being supportive and encouraging. I don't know whether he really believes in Georgia, or is just doing his job, but he's there for her. There's a great scene where her screen test is being shown to the studio brass, and Gus sneaks her into the projection booth so that she can see herself on the big screen. He gets the projectionist to open the window so that she can hear the discussion afterwards... and when all of the studio guys are saying that she stinks, Gus is ready with a stiff belt from his flask for her. He's there for her. Good or bad. He's going to support her career. Much of this is just through his actions - he can be the shoulder for her to cry on or the one who protects her or just putting his hand on her shoulder or the larger things like running her lines and chauffeuring her from place to place. There's a great scene when Shields signs her despite her bad screen test... and Gus bursts into tears. He's in the background of the scene - but his tears of joy always make *me* cry when I see the film. His loyalty pays off.

Counter to Guys is Lila (Elaine Stewart) who is the scheming starlet who sleeps her way to... well, Jonathan Shield's bed. The great thing about her character is that she is a counterpoint and symbolic antagonist to Georgia. Where Georgia sleeps with men because she's emotionally fragile and is looking for love and acceptance, Lila sleeps with men to get ahead - she is calculating and conniving and one other word that begins with a C. Where Georgia is looking for love, Lila is *using* love (sex) to advance her career. The first time we see her, she is in movie star Gaucho's (Gilbert Roland) new sports car, and there's some clever double entendre dialogue between Gaucho and Shields about the sports car... which is

really about Lila's performances between the sheets. Later Lila is in a scene on set, where she is an extra playing the sort of role Georgia used to play, who is jealous of Georgia... how come she is a star and not me? Lila implies that it's because Georgia is probably sleeping with Shields. Her last (of three) scenes in the movie is after Georgia's first starring role turns her into a major success and Shields throws a party in her honor... but doesn't attend. She grabs a bottle of champagne and drivers over to his house and pounds on the door until he comes downstairs and answers. He tells her to go back to the party - he wants to be alone. Georgia says she loves him, and they embrace... and the shadow of a woman drifts over their faces. Lila coming downstairs. Lila stops halfway, looking as if she just got out of bed (but not sleeping) and in about three brief lines *destroys* Georgia. Where Georgia is hard on the outside but soft and emotional within, Lila is the opposite. Three scenes, and this character makes one hell of an impression. A distinctive, well developed, and completely individual character.

How are each of your characters different? What makes them an individual? Make sure every character has a different attitude that sets them apart from the other characters.

Your Assignment: Come up with the unique backgrounds for five different characters, then write a line or two of dialogue where they ask you for a ride to the airport. Let their attitude and character come out - even though all five are asking the same thing.

BACKGROUND & POINT OF VIEW

A sister to Attitude. Some people see the world through their own specific frame of reference and background, and this comes out in their dialogue. Often where a character comes from or what their experiences are not only effect word choice and vocabulary, but how they see the world. In my HBO World Premiere movie "Crash Dive", one of my terrorists was a goatherd and saw everything as "flock management", and used words like "stray", "gathering", "heeling", "shedding", and "wearing" in his dialogue. His rural background also colored his responses and reactions to situations. His dialogue was filtered through his character. The key to using words the audience may not be familiar with is to put them in a sentence where the context makes the word's meaning clear.

Factor in your characters' backgrounds and frame of reference when creating your Supporting Characters and writing their dialogue and actions and reactions. A college professor who grew up on a farm in the midwest will see the world differently than a college professor who was born to a wealthy family in Upper Manhattan or one who grew up in the deep south or one who grew up in the late 60s in Berkeley... and those differences will be apparent in how they phrase things, their vocabulary, and how they see the world. Put five people with five different backgrounds in the same situation and they will experience five different things. They may even think five different things have happened! There's a "Rashomon Effect" where the same event can be completely different to each person who experiences it,

When you create your Supporting Characters accentuate the differences between each supporting character. Is one a cowboy in western garb and another a flashy dresser in a $2,000 Italian suit? The cowboy will have different speech patterns than the clothes horse. The cowboy will listen to different music, have different points of reference, and use a different approach to problem solving than our man in Armani.

Each of the terrorists in my HBO movie "Crash Dive!" was given their own weapon and their own unique point of view. A bad guy team. The female, Bolanne, wore a form fitting black suit with a bandoleer of throwing knives. One villain had a garrotte, another used a matched pair of pistols, and there was that brutish ex-goatherd used a club and saw everything as "flock management". Each villain had a distinctive weapon, look, and personality. Each had their own way of looking at the world, their own unique point of view.

Even if you have five college students, they don't all have the exact same background. Find the things in their past that make them different and unique. One is a poor kid on an academic scholarship, one is from a wealthy family and four generations when to this college, one is on athletic scholarship, one had to work his butt off to keep his grades up to get in, one is only here because his high school girlfriend is here... there are *hundreds* of different backstories for some character in college. Maybe even thousands. If you have five college student characters you can easily come up with five unique backgrounds - and maybe even five backgrounds we have never seen before. Once you come up with the background, there are character elements involved - does the sports scholarship student worry that he's only here because he can play football? Does he want to be taken seriously as a student? Or does he *know* he's just here to play the game? Is he looking to be discovered and go pro? Or is he looking for an education? Or is he looking to make connections so that when he *isn't* drafted into the NFL he can get some mid-level management job just based on playing some college ball?

For every college student background, there are hundreds of characters and motivations based on that background, then hundreds of subplot stories that deal with those elements... that's *thousands* of possible characters! Just because someone is the college student on an athletic scholarship doesn't turn them into a cliche - that's the starting point and our job is to dig deeper and deeper and find the unique characters by going through all of the variables. Hey, and we haven't even gotten to *character* elements - he may be fast on the football field, but he speaks slowly and deliberately (maybe because he's afraid of looking like a dumb jock so he chooses his words carefully)... maybe he's Gay, maybe he's shy, maybe he's got substance abuse problems, maybe he's an animal lover, maybe he's a she in men's clothes... the possibilities are endless!

When you write a scene you need to see it from each one of your characters' individual point of view. To put yourself in their shoes and make the decisions they would make. These are not the decisions that *you* would make. The fussy art expert drives differently than the Grand Prix driver, and even *thinks* about driving differently. Everything the character is will tint their decision making process. If I have three characters in a scene, each of the three will see the scene's

conflict differently, and find different ways to deal with it.

You should be able to read your script from each individual character's point of view and make sure that it is consistent... and unique to that character. This is something I often do in rewrites - do a read-through for *each* character and make sure they are consistent and unique. If there is a line of dialogue that some other character might say, I always try to find the way to make it more character related. If there is an action that some other character might do, I try to find the spin that makes it unique to *this* character. We want each of Supporting Characters to be individuals and specific characters.

Your Assignment: Five characters witness the same auto accident. Write five different witness accounts of what happened, each from someone with a different background... and have that background influence what they witnessed. Bonus points if we learn something about each character from the accident reports.

CHARACTERES AND DOG JUICE

In my Killer B Class I explain my "Theory of Dog Energy" and how it applies to writing budget friendly scripts. The theory is that all dogs have the exact same amount of energy no matter the size. For a normal sized dog, like a Retriever or a Shepard, that's the perfect amount of energy to run the dog... but a really big dog barely has enough energy to move (which explains St. Bernards) and really small dogs have *lots* of extra energy (which explains Chihuahuas). A low budget script has to have the same excitement value as a big budget script... you just have less money to accomplish that.

This theory also works with characters. In order to be memorable to the audience everyone in the script has to have the minimum basic requirement of character... the same amount of character no matter how big or small the part is. This is easy when you are dealing with lead characters who have 110 pages to meet their minimum requirements, you can spread it out. A little character here, a little character there. You can be subtle... show character through actions or show gradual changes in reactions to similar situations. Lead characters can take a while to get to know... you have the time to peel back layers and show us different, conflicting aspects of the character.

But when you have a Supporting Character who may only be in a couple of scenes, the character is going to have to come on strong, in concentrated doses, in order to meet the minimum requirements. Patrick Shane Duncan ("Mr. Holland's Opus", "Courage Under Fire") says that the less time a character spends on screen, the broader (bigger) that character has to be to make an impression on the audience. With a small character, you don't have the time to build character... they have to come fully assembled. They also have to come on strong enough to leave an impression... or the audience will forget who they are. They aren't on screen long enough to be subtle. The smaller the character the more exaggerated or quirky they need to be. This is important when we are dealing with Supporting Characters because even if a character is only in a couple of scenes they still need to make an impact - they still need to have *character*. Seem like a human being instead of a cardboard cut out.

Are your small characters big enough? If they only pop up in two scenes, is there enough *character* in the first scene so that the audience can easily remember them in the second scene? Do all of your characters meet the minimum requirements? Let's look at some methods for creating memorable Supporting Characters, whether they are in twenty scenes or two scenes.

QUIRKY & ECCENTRIC

A fun Supporting Character building tool is to ask yourself: What makes this character Eccentric or Quirky? Wait - is there a difference between those two items? I think so - Eccentric means something that is not situated at or on the geometric center; while a Quirk is an unpredictable or unaccountable act or event, a sudden sharp turn or twist. I think of Eccentric as being something character related - something that comes from within. There are logical reasons why an eccentric character is off center. I think of Quirky as more external and physical rather than emotional. A character quirk may not have an obvious motivation.

I have a scientist character in one of my screenplays who uses hand sanitizer after she touches *anything* - and that makes her eccentric. A scientist who is afraid of germs makes sense - she knows what a problem germs might be. So she breaks out the Purel every time she shakes someone's hand or touches a foreign object.

In the 1982 version of "The Thing" written by Bill Lancaster,a group of scientists and civilians and military guys work at an isolated Science Outpost in the Antarctic. Nauls is the base cook, and has his headset on all day long listening to MoTown tunes (probably making him a little eccentric), but instead of *walking* from room to room at the outpost... he *roller skates*. The whole roller skating thing has no logical connection to the character. Yes, people *do* roller skate - but it's not part of being a cook or living at an Antarctic Scientific Outpost or any other logical aspect of the character. It's a quirk.

Though that may seem a little arbitrary to you, it's just a way to differentiate between weird little things people do that seem like an outgrowth of what we know or assume about them, and the weird little things that don't seem to grow from what we know about the character. Both work, but I think you can go too far with the quirks and end up with characters who are a bunch of strange mannerisms that don't add up to a human.

JUST A LITTLE ECCENTRIC

At every single day job I have ever had, I was the eccentric one. I was the employee who was not at the geographic center. Since I was stuck doing a day job, I always tried to make it fun. At Safeway Grocery Stores when I was behind the register I had a bag of candy for the kids, and some prizes for various games I played with the adult customers. "Guess the weight of your purse, win a plastic harmonica!" I was also the "Human Price Check" - I tried to memorize the prices of every item in the store, so if someone got an unpriced item in those pre-computer days I would know how much it cost - and was always correct. I also *juggled* items as I bagged them sometimes - even though I wasn't a very good juggler. You can get a long ways with a flourish. But whenever possible, instead of doing the completely boring version of my job I did the fun version... and people would often choose to stand in my line instead of one of the other checkers.

What is that thing about your character that's odd and unusual and fun? What makes them eccentric? How about an L.A. lawyer who doesn't drive? He rides a bicycle wherever he goes. Or maybe has a chauffeur? Back in the days when I worked at a warehouse, a fellow employee got popped with a DUI and had his license suspended. Since I lived near him, I because his chauffeur. Though it was really more like car-pooling, I always had him sit in the backseat of my car and wore a little cap that made me look like a chauffeur. It was fun! There's a series of novels by Michael Connolly about a lawyer who gets popped for enough DUIs to lose his license - and he hires an ex-criminal to be his driver. Matthew McConaughey played him in the movie "The Lincoln Lawyer". To add to this character's eccentricities - he doesn't have an office, he works out of the back seat of his car. This makes Mick Haller a very unique lawyer character in print and on film - we're used to Perry Mason and Della Street heading back to the office.

I like to think of eccentric behavior as a character at war with the expectations of their place in life... or at war with themselves. An eccentric behavior may give us a clue to the character themselves, in a fun and interesting way. Though all of the bridesmaids in "Bridesmaids" are eccentric, Annie the protagonist often seems like she is at war with herself and her own best interests. When she spends the night with Officer Rhodes and the next morning he's ready to fix her breakfast - she splits! She is looking for a nice guy, finds one, and does everything she can to push him away.

The other bridesmaids have their eccentricities, which all spring from character. Becca and her husband had their honeymoon at Disneyworld and she suggests a Pixar themed Bridal Shower. Rita wants to have the Bachelorette Party in Las Vegas because she has a new tube top she wants to wear and wants "Balls in her face". When they are talking about Bridal Shower themes, Megan suggests a Fight Club theme - where they beat the crap out of the Bride. Megan also steals a bunch of puppies in a later scene... and they become fixtures in all of her remaining scenes, including the big pep-talk scene an hour and a half into the film where she beats up Annie. Yes, we expect strange characters in a comedy - but Nauls isn't the only eccentric character in "The Thing" - all of the characters are eccentric and/or quirky!

QUIRKY

Sometimes the only way to add Dog Juice to a supporting character is to give them some quirk that sets them apart. A Hell's Angel who listens to classical music and loves opera? A hitman who collects vintage Barbie Dolls? A tough prosecuting attorney who dances like Fred Astaire? Finding the thing that makes a character a little weird helps make the character distinctive and different. Take your character, find the most unusual thing he or she might do, and make it their thing. Quirks are a surface aspect to the character - it doesn't usually add any depth. But they can make your character seem interesting and be memorable.

But remember, just being quirky is not characterization. Many writers make the mistake of thinking they can combine two opposite traits and end up with a character... too many Tarantino movies! A contract killer who is a badminton champ or a beauty queen who collects samurai swords sound like interesting characters... but they are all surface. They are manufactured, rather than real. There is no depth to them, and if you try to figure out how a contract killer could ever become a badminton champ you won't find a logical answer. Those two things don't fit together. Quirky characters are attractive because they're flashy... but all they are is flash. Great packaging with nothing inside. With characters, it's what's inside that counts. Quirky characters are basically a collection of traits - an empty suit. Remember, we are in the emotion picture business, and real emotions require realistic characters.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't use quirks - just don't *only* use them... unless you have a character that is only in a scene or two and you are just adding juice to a bit part. When you are dealing with Supporting Characters who are in many scenes, you'll want to create a three dimensional character that makes sense... and then maybe add a quirk. Sometimes a quirk is a great addition to a fleshed out character because it *is* something that is not obviously character and story related. It shows some aspect of the character that we don't see. Maybe Nauls in "The Thing" was a roller skating champ as a kid? A quirk used this way can give us another dimension to a character and hint at a life off screen. Quirks are one of those tools you won't use all of the time, but it's good to know you have it in your character toolbox in case you do need it.

Your Assignment: Your Homicide Detective needs an eccentric element *and* a quirk. One will come from the character as we know them, one will be an external that you "paste on". What are they?

SUPPORTING STORIES

Some of your supporting characters will have a relationship with your protagonist that extends beyond the plot. Maybe not that waiter in scene #27, but a character who is in multiple scenes with your protagonist will be developing some sort of relationship with him as the story progresses. Their relationship has an arc. If the protagonist changes, his relationship with those around him is bound to change. Think of all of your supporting characters as little stories with your protagonist. Each story has a beginning, middle, and end.

In "Rear Window", each of the three main supporting characters symbolizes different viewpoints... almost like the little Angels and little Devils on a cartoon character's shoulders.

Thelma Ritter's insurance nurse is the little Devil. When Jimmy Stewart thinks that a murder has been committed across the courtyard, she says, "A murderer would never parade his crime in front of an open window," then asks if she can borrow the binoculars to get a better look. "Where do you suppose he cut her up? Of course, the bathtub. That's the only place where he could have washed away the blood." She is always pressing Stewart to investigate the crime... even if she laments that we've become a race of peeping toms.

Wendell Corey's detective is the little Angel, the voice of reason. Always coming up with a rational explanation for Mrs. Thorwald's disappearance. "Did you ever own a saw? How many people did you cut up with it? Or the couple of hundred knives you probably owned in your lifetime? Lars Thorwald is no more a murderer than I am." He is always telling Stewart to forget about what happens in other people's homes.

Grace Kelly is the swing vote. She's "no expert on rear window ethics". Stewart's character arc follows the emotional conflict of two different types of people trying to bond in a romantic relationship, but Kelly's character arc follows the external conflict... the plot. At first she doesn't believe that Thorwald would kill his wife, but as the evidence mounts she changes from the detective's point of view to the insurance nurse's... and Stewart's. "Let's start from the beginning again, Jeff. Tell me everything you say, and what you think it means." Once she believes Thorwald killed his wife, Stewart's position solidifies. The little Angel and little Devil becomes meaningless... her vote is all that matters. Stewart becomes even more determined to catch the killer before he can escape.

Each of these three supporting characters has a relationship with the protagonist which impacts the course of the story.

In Patrick Duncan's "Mr. Holland'd Opus", the protagonist has a relationship with several of his students. We see the relationships grow and change as the story progresses. Remember the football player who needs an easy A but can't even play the drums? In each of the "student stories" in "Mr. Holland's Opus" we see the protagonist learning a lesson by teaching it. Each one of those student characters stories has the same end - the concert for Mr. Holland at the conclusion of the film.

In "Road Warrior" the closest Max gets to romance is his relationship with the Warrior Woman. It's hate at first sight. She thinks he's a self-centered jerk who only brought back the wounded Scout for a tank of gasoline (and she's right). Later in the film, she's against giving Max any fuel to get the truck rig because she thinks he'll just split and never come back (she's half right - but Max has given the Feral Kid the music box at this point and is on the road to recovering his emotions). When Max returns with the truck, then risks his life to help defend the fortress against Wez and the gang, she touches his shoulder and says, "I was wrong about you." This is a big moment in the film. At the end, she is on the crew defending Max's tanker truck and is shot. She falls off the top of the tanker and becomes tangled in the barbed wire on the side of the truck. Still alive. Max looks back, sees her hanging there... and for a moment they look into each other's eyes. Then she dies. An entire relationship spread throughout the story.

In "Bridesmaids" Annie has changing relationships - supporting *stories* with each of the Supporting Characters. We looked at her relationship with the Antagonist, Helen, which is one of the most important relationships in any story... but we didn't look at the resolution to that conflict. Every supporting story is going to have some form of beginning, middle, and end - it's not critical that you resolve all relationships (better if you don't) but the antagonist "supporting story" will usually be resolved one way or the other because it's the main conflict. Annie has reached the point of no return - she has alienated just about everyone in her life including her mother, and has no where else to go. Usually at this point the

protagonist makes the move to resolve the conflict, but "Bridesmaids" pulls a fast one and has Annie working to resolve her relationship with Office Rhodes... and a new physical conflict kicks in so that *Helen* comes to Annie looking for a solution. The two must resolve the conflict between themselves and work together in order to resolve this new physical conflict (runaway bride). We'll talk more on the runaway bride element in the Plants & Payoffs chapter coming up!

Many of the Supporting Stories in "Bridesmaids" are between the supporting characters. When we looked a pairing different types of characters earlier I mentioned the Becca and Rita relationship - and that story is threaded throughout the screenplay. Becca is young and naive and a newlywed, and Rita is the long-married woman with three teenaged boys. Rita slowly works at corrupting Becca - and when they are first sitting together at the Bridesmaid's Lunch, Becca does not drink alcohol... that changes the longer she spends with Rita!

There's another kind of corruption in the Helen and Lillian relationship. Lillian is Annie's best friend and both are working class gals who have done alright for themselves. But Lillian's fiance is Helen's husband's right hand man - so the two begin spending time with each other... and Lillian moves from working class woman to the country club under Helen's tutelage. This gradual evolution of Lillian's character comes to a head in a huge argument with Annie, where the punchline has to do with bleaching portions of her nether-regions. Lillian has been made-over to become more like Helen... and that is a story that runs through the main story and supports the main story.

Take each one of your key supporting characters and give them a story with your protagonist that has a beginning, middle, and end. It might only be three scenes. But every scene your supporting character shares with your protagonist is telling that story. Think of each character's relationship to your protagonist as a little story that helps to illustrate the theme of the big story. Also think of each character's relationship to each other. There's a great scene in "Bridesmaids" where the two men in Annie's life - Rhodes and Ted - come face to face and Annie must decide which can she will get into... which future she will choose for herself. But Officer Rhodes and Ted get a chance to look each other over and exchange a few words. They have a story between themselves that is *part* of the main story... yet also could stand on its own. There are small stories between your protagonist and the supporting characters and between various supporting characters. We'll call that device a subplot.

SUBPLOT PRISM

You know how a prism splits a beam of light into its elements? Subplots do the same thing with the main plot. Each subplot usually explores a different aspect of the main plot, giving your script more scope and allowing you to really dig into your theme. Subplots can keep a story from seeming too linear, and at the same time add to that main plot by showing us alternative world and stories that serve to *comment* on that main story. We want to keep our subplots as splinter breams from the main plot... yet make sure that each has a life and trajectory of its own. That way the subplots can "open up" our story and give us all kinds of different viewpoints on the subject at hand, without taking us too far off course.

In "Rear Window", even though Jefferies' relationship to the people across the courtyard is strictly voyeuristic, each of those characters has a story with a beginning, middle, and end that takes place while Jefferies is watching them.

The Composer is married to his work. "He lives alone, probably had an unhappy marriage," is how Jeffries describes him. He keeps plunking around on a song, but can't get it right. The music "is enchanting," Lisa says, "almost as if it were being written especially for us." "No wonder he's having so much trouble with it," is Jeffries' reply. The composer keeps having problems with the song. Later he comes home drunk and slaps thee sheet music off the piano in a rage. In one scene, he's vacuuming, hits a few notes, goes back to vacuuming. When he finally gets past his "composer's block" he has a big party at his apartment in celebration. The composer has an entire story with a beginning, middle, and end which intersects the Jefferies/Lisa story in may ways.

Miss Lonelyhearts has a sad story. She gets all dressed up for a date... but no one is coming. She *pretends* to have a romantic evening. It's a sad dress rehearsal... and she ends up breaking down in tears. Later in the film she works up thee nerve to go out to a bar. She comes home with a much younger man. She's looking for romance, he just looking for sex. He attacks her, she slaps him... Finally kicking him out of her apartment. She alone again. Maybe more alone than ever before. Miss Lonelyhearts becomes even more depressed and tries to kill herself with sleeping pills. An entire story with a beginning, middle, and...

"Rear Window" ends with Jefferies and Lisa together, and obviously committed to each other... Jefferies emotional problems resolved. But so are all of the supporting characters: Miss Torso finds love when her geeky boyfriend returns from the army, the workaholic Composer finishes his song and plays it for Miss Lonelyhearts - the possibility of romance for both of them, the Newlyweds take a break... the honeymoon seems to be over in more ways than one, the Older Couple gets a new puppy which seems to rekindle their relationship, the Sculptress finds peace alone in her backyard. And, of course, Thorwald gets to be the one confined to a room all day like his invalid wife.

Your Assignment: Our protagonist is like Jimmy Stewart in "Rear Window" - but we are going to change the story! In the original short story by Cornell Woolrich there was no Lisa character and no romance - the protagonist was an invalid living at home with a servant (who became the Nurse in the film). In real life, Woolrich had a leg amputated after a serious infection... so let's have our version of Jimmy Stewart be a marathon runner who has his leg amputated after an infection and will never run again. There is *still* going to be a murder across the courtyard, but Thorwald and his Wife will be different characters. A quick character bio of Thorwald and his Wife... and FOUR other characters across the courtyard that will help tell the new story of our runner who can no longer do what he loves. Show different sides, and try *not* to have any other amputees or physically challenged people (if you can).

PLANTS AND PAYOFFS

The short version of the Supporting Story. You plant a conflict for your supporting character and pay it off at the end. The great thing about plants & payoffs is that audiences love them. They always cheer at the payoff scenes. It's a little victory... almost a punchline. That's one of the reasons I keep re-using "Aliens" as an example - the supporting character pay offs are great!

In James Cameron's "Aliens" every single character is given a little story that pays off at the end. The cowardly commander who tries to fight the war from the armored vehicle ends up showing courage by sacrificing himself on the front lines so that the others can get away. Vasquez, who hates the commander and makes fun of him throughout the film, is at his side - showing that she respects him. Ripley hates androids, won't even sit at the same table as Lance Henrickson's character - but he's the one who dies trying to save her at the end. The supporting character's conflict is planted early, and paid off at the end.

In Jeb Stuart and Steven E. DeSouza's "Die Hard" one of the payoffs is an actual punch-line. The obnoxious reporter who will do anything for a story, including put McClane's children in jeopardy, finally comes face to face with Holly McClane. He asks her one of his typically obnoxious questions, and she punches him in the face. What a great payoff!

Reggie VelJohnson's patrol cop character hasn't been able to unholster his gun since killing that kid... but at the end he's the one who draws and fires to save McClane. Plant and payoff. In my book "Secrets Of Action Screenwriting" we look at all of the plants and payoffs in "Die Hard" - and how the end of that film is a cavalcade of payoffs!

"Bridesmaids" has some great plants and payoffs, starting with a joke from Lillian's Father at the engagement party where he says he can't afford this wedding which really isn't a joke, and leads to Lillian's break down and the runaway bride ending. Megan also has a nice bit of plant and payoff with the guy sitting next to her on the airplane that she accuses of being an Air Marshal... and after several odd conversations about where he might be hiding his gun, the bit pays off when he really *is* an Air Marshall. Another great plant and payoff - almost a running gag - has to do with Annie's car's defective tail lights. It's the way she meets Officer Rhodes (he pulls her over) and becomes part of their relationship throughout the film until a later scene after the horrible Bridal Shower where those defective tail lights get her rear-ended on the way home... and her car is smashed up and will not run. An additional plant and payoff here is the mechanic that Rhodes knows who will give her a discount - Bill Cozbi. After spending most of the movie avoiding getting her tail lights fixed, after the accident she takes her car to Bill Cozbi... and when her divorced Mom drives her to pick up the repaired car, Mom and Cozbi hit it off and they begin dating! Mom gets over her bitter divorce from a dozen years ago!

One of thing that bothered me about "Bridesmaids" was a pair of "guns on the wall" (plants) that were set up, but not used in the resolution of the problem. Though you don't need to payoff everything you have planted (more on this in the upcoming Story Secrets Blue Book revamp), there are times when the audience *expects* a plant to payoff because it is the *most logical* thing to happen - and when it doesn't payoff it just seems wrong. We've been given information that can help resolve the conflict, and when it is not used... and something else happens... it's confusing. It's a promise that is unfulfilled.

Cake Baby. Only a couple minutes into the film, Annie and Lillian walk down the street and stop at the sight of Annie's closed bakery, Cake Baby. Annie's baking is a major story-thread throughout the screenplay. The thing that knocked her down was her bakery closing, and her boyfriend (who worked there) leaving. It was her dream... that just fell apart. The most important element of Annie's character. When she is pulled over by Officer Rhodes, he recognizes her from the bakery - where he used to buy chocolate eclairs. There's a *great* scene where Annie feels down in the dumps and makes herself an amazing cupcake from scratch... then just eats it.

The event that creates a big problem in her relationship with Rhodes is that after they sleep together she wakes up the next morning to find that he's bought baking supplies so that they can cook something together - which *he* thinks is a great thing because he's doing something with her that she loves... but *she* thinks is forcing her to deal with her failure (the bankrupt bakery). She revisits the closed bakery at one point and someone has defaced the sign. After she has ruined everything and wants to make amends with Officer Rhodes she bakes him a carrot cake (which is the payoff to a scene

where they eat a bag of baby carrots while sitting on the trunk of his patrol car). After she delivers the carrot cake, Rhodes (still angry) ignores it... and a family of raccoons eats most of it. Eventually he rescues what's left of the cake and has some...

But when we think of weddings, what do we think of?

And that plant is never paid off. Annie has *nothing to do with* the wedding cake, or even the giant cookie she tears apart at the Bridal Shower. The fact that Annie bakes amazing cakes, and her shop was called Cake Baby, are never connected to the wedding element of a film called "Bridesmaids". Though that may have been on purpose because someone thought it would be too obvious - it *is* obvious and the audience has had almost two hours to *expect* her baking skills to be part of the resolution at the end of the film. A character plant like this is almost like a super-power. If you create this amazing super-power for a character, then *don't* use it, the audience will feel cheated. Annie's super-power is baking cakes - she should have done *something* using that super-power to save the day at the end.

Runaway Bride. Annie's *other* super-power is that she is Lillian's best friend. As part of the war with Helen, at the Bridal Shower Annie's gift to Lillian is a collage of all of the things from their childhood and past - playing on the relationship to try and win back Lillian's love. Helen tops this with a trip to Paris - Lillian's dream - that she only knows about because Annie told her. Earlier in the film when Annie is planning the Bachelorette Party, she wants to hold it at Lillian's parent's summer cabin - again playing on their past relationship. So when Lillian gets cold feet and splits and Helen comes to Annie for help finding her, we *expect* Annie's past relationship with Lillian to hold the clues to where the runaway bride might be hiding. The reason why Helen comes to Annie is because Annie has that super-power... but is that how they end up finding Lillian? No.

Again, maybe someone thought using this super-power would be too obvious... except instead of using Annie's history with Lillian to solve the problem we get answers out of left field... making Annie *unimportant* in the resolution of this problem. After a bunch of shtick Annie and Helen get Officer Rhodes to help them, and Rhodes triangulates Lillian's last cell phone call... and the call was coming from inside the house! Actually, the call was coming from Lillian's apartment - which is the first place anyone with half a brain would have looked for her. Helen didn't need Annie's help - she could have just gone *to the place Lillian lives* and she would have found her.

Earlier I mentioned the film "The Bad And The Beautiful" which has a similar scene where an actress doesn't show up on set for the first day of filming on a movie where she is the star... and no one can find her. But the producer knew her father, and in an earlier scene first met the actress as a teenager when she was hiding out in her father's condemned mansion... so he goes there - and finds her. Drunk, depressed, scared. But his "super-power" was knowing the actress when she was a teenager and knowing where she went when she was feeling depressed.

Even if Lillian wasn't hiding out at her parent's summer cabin, the resolution to the runaway bride should have been something that Annie knew about Lillian from their shared past. The whole film plants it - but never seems to pay it off. Quite frustrating! If you give your character a super-power, give them a chance to use it!

The most common type of Supporting Character plant and payoff will be the kind used in "Aliens" and "Die Hard" where a pair of characters have an issue that is a subplot issue a few times in the film and finally resolved (or not) by the end. Vasquez hates Lt. Gorman and thinks he's a fake and useless... and by the end of the film they die in each other's arms. The great thing about using character plants and payoffs is that with very little screen-time you can create a mini-story that packs a real emotional punch.

Your Assignment: We're writing a western. Give each of your supporting cowboys a plant (conflict) early that will be resolved in the end shoot out scene so that they can help save the day. These don't have to be big things, just stuff that will have the audience cheering.

CHARACTER CONSERVATION

I've spent much of my career writing films for cable and video which require scripts with casts limited to around 15 speaking roles for budgetary reasons. If this sounds easy to you, grab your latest script and start counting characters. I just read a friend's script that had over 30 speaking roles, and it was a quiet drama! Sometimes Supporting Characters can be a "crutch" to avoid writing about your protagonist by cluttering the story with subplots, and sometimes all of these Supporting Characters can be a way of avoiding the fact that you have no Act Two... or not enough story. Instead of digging deeper into your story, you've gone wider with subplots... and created a mess! A script that goes all over the place but never gets anywhere.

My friend John Hill ("Quigley down Under") says that "Screenplays are simple stories about complicated people". You don't want a story so complicated that the audience needs to take notes, and you don't want so many characters that the audience needs flash cards or something to keep track of them all. You want to dig deeper into character instead of going wider. It's the quality of the character and the depth of the character that is important, not the quantity of characters. I have a Script Tip in rotation on this subject that uses "Once upon a Time in Mexico" as the (bad) example - a movie that has 37 main characters in it's 102 minute running time... which gives us only 2 minutes and 45 seconds per character! The script I read with 30 speaking roles fighting for their place in the spotlight was *not* better than a script where we spend more time and learn more about a handful of people.

"Bridesmaids" probably has too many characters, but we only have *four* bridesmaids in addition to our protagonist. We have our Bride, we have the two men in Annie's life. I mentioned earlier that Paul Rudd was in scenes that were cut from the scene - he played a *third* man in Annie's life (Becca's brother) and was in a subplot that was the worst blind date you can imagine - but his character was just another negative romantic relationship in Annie's life, and Ted basically already has that role. That made Rudd's character into almost a duplicate - he shared the same Story Purpose as John Hamm's Ted - and the story didn't need him. Beware of duplicate characters!

The key to condensing your cast is to take each character and ask yourself: "Why is this character important? What is their function?" Those Waiters and Cab Drivers will instantly disappear. Other characters may be tricky. Many of the 30 speaking role in my friend's script were "necessary" because each gave the protagonist a critical piece of information. My question: why didn't the protagonist discover these bits of information on his own? Not only does this lower the cast count, it boosts the protagonist's involvement in the story and removes a bunch of exposition!

Which is a bizarre side effect of limiting your cast: Every character needs to be critical to the story. If there's a way to tell the story without that character, delete them! When I design a script, I take a ruled 5x8 card (15 lines) and jot down my major characters. I'll probably have a protagonist, and antagonist, a sidekick, a mentor, a love interest, a henchman, plus a half dozen other characters required by the story. If I can combine characters, or eliminate some minor role, I do it then... before writing the script. I always try to leave at least one line on the card blank, in case of emergencies. This builds stronger characters through conservation. And the great side effect of this is that I have to bring characters back - I have to make sure that character on page 17 isn't just some walk on who does his job and we never see him again, that character must be critical to the story... and come back. All of the characters must be part of the story... not just some background character, some extra, that I gave a line to.

Focusing on the conflict is important, too. If the story is about a boy who comes home from college for his father's funeral only to discover that his father was murdered by his uncle... and his mother was an accomplice, you have three main characters that the conflict revolves around. Since conflict is fuel for drama, any scene that doesn't include one of those three characters is going to be pointless... and any scene that includes two of the three will contain conflict and drama. By focusing on the conflict, you automatically remove extraneous characters.

Stage plays usually have limited casts. Hecht & MacArthur's "The Front Page" only has three main characters, plus the escaped convict and the other guys in the press room... that's a limited cast. "The Glass Menagerie" also has a limited cast. Anthony Schaffer's "Sleuth" only has two characters (or maybe 3, if you count the fake cop). The fewer the number of characters, the closer you get to the conflict. The more focused the story.

This is *not* about numbers - your screenplay may have 30 speaking roles and be *perfect*. It's about making sure

every character is there for a reason and not just some filler or time-killer or part of some subplot that is really just a stall to avoid focusing on the main story. Often screenplays with many characters are padded and flabby. If your script has a bunch of Supporting Characters and all of them are required to tell the story? Not a problem.

Are all of your characters part of the story? If you can remove any character and it doesn't change the outcome of the story - get rid of them! They are wasting valuable screen time that would be better used by your protagonist or some other important character.

Your Assignment: Count the speaking roles in your latest screenplay.

ANOTHER PIECE OF MY HEART

Your Supporting Characters need to see the world through their own eyes, not *your* eyes or *the story's* eyes - they don't know what needs to happen later in the story, they only know what their character knows! They see the world through their own eyes - based on their character.

I read a horror script recently where a piece of a victim's heart is missing... but he has no lacerations. Removing the piece of heart killed him, but how was it removed? In the script, there's a supernatural explanation... and that's exactly what the Medical Examiner says. He takes one look at the victim and says that this is the work of demons. But would a Medical Examiner really say that? If an M.E. discovered a piece of a victim's heart had "disappeared" from inside the chest, wouldn't he naturally consider it as a *medical* problem? Some weird rapid deterioration of the heart muscle, maybe an enzyme, something... (you'd have to do research to find possibilities)... To the Medical Examiner this would be a *medical* mystery. A big one, too! This is the cause of death! Everyone would be wondering what kind of disease eats away at the heart muscle this quickly. He would call the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, wonder if this will make the Medical Journals and give him some notoriety. From the Medical Examiner's point of view, the story might turn into "Contagion" or some Robin Cook style medical thriller. His point of view, his knowledge, his experience determines the outcome of this scene. But the writer of this script gave everyone his own point of view - a guy writing a horror script.

Part of seeing a scene from an individual character's point of view requires research. The screenwriter is the brains of the film. You have to know what your characters know so that you can think the way they think. For my HBO World Premiere Movie "The Base" I read Tom Clancy's non-fiction "Marines" book for tech knowledge, plus a book written by a Marine Reckon guy about his exploits in Viet Nam. This gave me both the tech knowledge that the character would have, plus an insight into the way they the character sees the world.

Plus I came away with lingo, a bunch of first hand experiences for my character (stolen from the guy who wrote the book), and I could use the way the real Marine handled the experiences from his book as a model for the way my made-up Marines would handle the experiences in my script.

Given the exact same situation, each character will see it differently. In "Bridesmaids" when Helen wins the battle and gets them to go to Las Vegas for the Bachelorette Party, Rita likes Vegas because she can wear her tube top and have male strippers thrust their private parts at her face... and Becca likes Vegas because there are puppet shows. That's the same Vegas!

You have to think like your characters think, not the way you think. It sounds crazy, but you create your characters then they have to have minds of their own. Not your mind, *their* mind. You may think it's your script, but each of your characters thinks its their script. Guess what? Your characters are right!

INSTANT IDENTIFIERS

There's this great scene in "Hot Fuzz" where Nick Angel (Simon Pegg) is trying to have a conversation with his CSI girlfriend Janine (Cate Blanchett) at a crime scene - except she is dressed in scrubs, cap and face mask like all of the other CSI team members and he keeps mixing her up with some other team member... and pouring out his heart to some *guy* dressed exactly the same as she is dressed! It's a funny scene, and points out a common problem when you have five doctors, or five CSI folks, or five Marines, or five of *any* kind of character that dresses and acts exactly the same. How the heck can we tell them apart?

On "Steel Sharks" I had to create a Navy SEAL team which Admiral Billy Dee Williams would send deep into enemy territory via Gary Busey's submarine. The problem here: the entire team would be dressed in identical uniforms, and then put on camouflage face paint... How can we tell them apart?

Whenever you have five soldiers, five bank robbers, or five doctors who all will be dressed the same, it's important to give each one a little something to tell them apart. An "accessory" that instantly identifies them... and gives them character or exposes their character,

Let's take five bank robbers dressed in identical blue suits and ski masks. Which is which? Give one a boutonniere, another a gold crucifix, a third gets a stop watch on a lanyard around her neck, a fourth wears dark glasses *over* the ski mask, the fifth wears a red cowboy bandanna around her neck. Now the audience can tell them apart at a glance. A visual way to tell them apart. Jim & John Thomas' "Predator" uses "accessories" to help the audience tell all of the commandoes apart.

Each "accessory" is also a great way to show character. In my script for "Steel Sharks" I had a deeply religious character who always wore a crucifix, touching it sometimes during the mission. It was his touchstone, a great way to show his character, and was a physical way to tell him from the other guys when they were all dressed alike. The tough, stern S.E.A.L. who would become the hero's mentor and surrogate father as the script progressed, wore a necklace of every bullet that ever hit him. This was a great symbol of the character's hardness, his invulnerability, and a way to instantly identify him. I had one of these "accessories" for each supporting character. A way to tell them apart and tell us about their character.

The more alike the characters look or dress, the stronger the accessory must be. Our five bank robbers in ski masks require big flamboyant accessories. The SEAL team in uniform and camouflage make up require big accessories. When we don't have the instant visual reference point of clothing style to tell characters apart, we need that something extra. Some physical thing that each will have that makes them an individual. In the Secrets Of Action Screenwriting book I have a whole chapter on Team Action Scripts like "The Expendables" and how each character will have their own special weapon, their own style of dialogue and their own special talent. Now that we're getting scripts for Female Expendables and Expendables In High School and Expendables Meets Step Up, finding the ways to keep your team members separate and individuals - even if they are all dressed exactly the same - becomes even more important.

You may have never heard of the comedy film "Top Secret!", but it was the follow up film to "Airplane!" written by Zucker-Abrahams-Zucker and Val Kilmer's *first* starring role in a film. The story is a mix of Elviis musicals, Cold War Spy movies, and "Casablanca" with a little "Wizard Of Oz" thrown in for good measure. Once the Elvis-like Kilmer character is on the run in East Germany, he hooks up with the underground... which is a team of Supporting Characters who are only in about a third of the movie. All are French for some reason (the "Casablanca" homage) and have silly names.

DuQuois - The #2 guy in the underground is a cliche French guy, always wearing a beret, striped shirt, and smoking a cigarette.

DeJaVu - "Have we met before monsieur?" He always repeats himself, living up to his name.

Chocolate Mousse - Huge black guy, always smoking a cigar... that he often *eats* while its lighted. Always has a machine-gun, and in one scene he reaches off camera and his hand comes back with the machine-gun. Plucked from thin

air!

LaTrene - He never walks into a scene, he *dives* into a scene! Head bandaged, bleeding... he can dive into a scene from nowhere.

Each of these characters has a distinctive look and personality. If you haven't seen "Top Secret!" it's not quite as good as "Airplane!" but still has more jokes per minute than the average film. By the way, recently researches clocked "Airplane!" at an average of three laughter producing jokes per minute! That's 264 jokes - which gives you an idea of just how funny your comedy script needs to be.

Make a list of your Supporting Characters. Does each one have a special skill? A unique strength? What is his or her weakness? What weapon or tools are they comfortable using? What is their attitude? Do they have a distinctive style of dialogue? How do they dress... and what part of their wardrobe sets them apart from the other characters in the script? What character is their opposite? Do they have a "touchstone" or a "twitch" (a physical object symbolizing their emotional conflict)? Make sure that each supporting character is unique and distinctive so that we can easily tell therm apart.

Your Assignment: Our hospital has four Nurses who all dress exactly the same - give each an "accessory" that will not only help us tell them apart at a glance, but will also gives us some clues to their character.

SUPPORTING SIGNATURES

You're watching "Seinfeld" and Jerry's door bursts open and a character comes hurtling into the apartment like a runaway train, arms flapping to slow them down. Which character is that? Is it Elaine? George? Newman? Jerry? George's Mom?

That entrance is Kramer's signature. An action that distinguishes his character... but also helps to illustrate the force of nature that is Kramer.

I used to work with a guy who wore cowboy boots with metal reinforced soles that click-clacked when he walked. Actually, he didn't walk as much as speed-march. You could hear him coming from across the store. Click-clack-click-clack-click-clack. Here comes Robert! You'd know he was coming before you saw him. That's a good signature. I'll let you figure out why a guy would want to make that much noise when he walked.

How about a character who leans against the wall all the time... as if he can't support himself on his own?

In the last chapter I mentioned LaTrene in "Top Secret!" who dives into every scene.

I wrote this one down on a 3x5 card for future use: A guy who just can't leave on his primo exit line. He can come up with the perfect zinger to leave on, but once he gets outside the door he just has to come back to check out how the line went over.

In my script for "The Base" there's a character who does slight of hand magic to make money magically appear in his hand to pay for drinks. I needed a little thing to make him distinctive and memorable and the bar magic worked well with his character.

In Robert Towne's "Chinatown" Jake Gites is always shown smoking a cigarette and blowing smoke. The smoke is his signature. There's a shot late in the film where we see the backyard of the Mulwray's house... a puff of smoke comes from off camera and we know that Jake is there. We don't see him, but that cigarette smoke has become his trademark. The audience connects the signature to the character.

Giving a character a signature action is a great way to give them identity and some insight into their character... plus get a great reaction out of the audience. "Hey, it's that guy again!"

Your Assignment: Character signatures for those four Nurses.

OTHER VOICES

A major problem in many scripts is that all of the characters sound and act the same. Though all of your characters are aspects of your protagonist, they should be *different* aspects. Each needs to have their own individual point of view. Their own "voice". Each needs to be an individual - and even though they may all be some aspect of you, they also need to be themselves... and different than you.

All of your Supporting Characters need to be different. They need to have different strengths and weaknesses. Different 'looks'. Different personalities and ways of handling problems. Different "voices", vocabularies and speech rhythms. The audience should be able to instantly tell one from another, even if they are all dressed the same.

You should probably plan all of these things before you begin writing your script because different characters handle situations differently. If one of your characters is a Grand Prix racer, it'll probably change the outcome of your car chase if he's driving. Or create an interesting scene if he ends up in the backseat, and your fussy art expert is driving. These are two very different scenes, aren't they? Every character handles a situation in their own way, so you can't just plug a character into a situation or swap one character with another without changing the outcome the situation. The Grand Prix racer evades the bad guys, but that fussy art expert is liable to total the car! A change in the outcome of the car chase changes every scene which comes after it.

DIALOGUE DIFFERENCES

Though all of your characters are aspects of you, they should be *different* aspects. Each needs to have their own "voice". The reader should be able to instantly tell one character from another, even if they have the character slugs covered. Though I go into this in depth in the Dialogue Blue Book, let's spend a moment or two on how your Supporting Characters *speak*.

There are probably fifty ways to say "hello" and "goodbye". Fifty ways to say "yes" and "no". Make sure each of your characters use different words... words that are indigenous to their characters and help expose character through word choice. This goes beyond dialect and accent. We aren't talking about a "y'all" or an "eh?" at the end of sentences, we're talking about the way those sentences are formed. An exaggerated example of this is Yoda in the "Star Wars" movies who has the wackiest sentence structure of anyone ever put on film. He talks backwards.

Everyone has a different vocabulary. Everyone uses pet words and phrases. Before writing a script, I make a "character sheet" with basic character information on all of the Supporting Characters: attitude, mask, goal, the character's dark secret, *and* a list of pet words and phrases. I also try to give each character a different speech rhythm (which influences sentence structure). They may not sound like Yoda, but each character has a *different* way of speaking.

In "Bridesmaids" Megan's idea of sexy-talk is telling the Air Marshall that she has steam coming from her undercarriage. There's a great scene where Annie and Ted are in his car and she wants him to pull over right now... and Ted says that he can't pull over because it's "too gravelly" and it will ruin the finish on his tires.

Two screenwriters are having a conversation: Ben Stein and Quentin Tarantino. Write the scene. Tarantino is a fast talker, a machine gun staccato who slides from subject to subject without a moment's rest. Ben Stein is an East Coast intellectual, a slow talker who considers every word before he speaks it. See how their rhythms and speech patterns will influence their conversation? Given their different backgrounds and vocabularies, they could be discussing the same film without using the same terms. Different people speak differently. Cover the character slugs on your dialogue and see if you can tell who's talking based on vocabulary, speech patterns, attitude, and world view/point of view. If you can't cover the character slugs and still know who is talking, you may be using the same voice (your voice) for every character. Let each character have his or her own voice! Let them speak for themselves.

Your Assignment: Four different ways for your four nurses to say "yes" and "no" and "hello" and "goodbye".

Extra Credit Assignment: Slang Terms

Your script is about the waiters and waitresses in a restaurant.

Come up with the slang terms for all of these:
Empty Table.
Romantic couple.
Slow eater.
Dropped silverware.
Sloppy eater.
Menus.
Abandoned plate filled with food.
People with lots of kids.
Dropped food.
Unclean silverware.
Busboys.
The hostess.
Guy who sits alone.
Regular customer.
Older couple.
Diner who substitutes a lot.

Attractive loner.
Busy hour.
Dead hour.
Late night diners.
Complaining customer.
Heavy tipper.
Non-tipper.
Today's special.
Multiple bottles of wine for one table.

Hope you had fun doing that! Think of how each of your Supporting Characters speaks, and what makes them sound different in similar situations.

Five characters might be describing the same event, but their tone and viewpoint will shade that description, making all five different. The differences will give us clues to their lives and motivations.

MY FAVORITE CUSSWORD

Dumb but true story: My favorite cuss-word seems to be "shit". In my script "Dark Salvage" I had four main characters saying "shit" at sometime in the script. When they were dejected, or mad, or frustrated, or hurt, or any of the other places where people us foul language. They all four used the same four letter word. This was a red flag. It's *my* favorite swear word, not the characters!

So I came up with three alternative swear words and gave each character their own form of cussing - based on their character. I just used the replace function, plugging in the three new cuss-words depending on which character was doing the cussing. My favorite new cuss-word was "kitty crap". It became really funny when it was plugged into some of the sentences. It took normal lines and gave them character. Every time I come across a word or phrase used by more than one character, I find alternatives that help display character... and make the dialogue more interesting and fun as a side effect.

Your Assignment: Five cusswords for Five Nurses! Points for creativity! If you can create something original like "kitty crap" even better!

INDIVIDUAL HUMOR

Every character in your screenplay should have their own sense of humor. Not your sense of humor, *their* own individual sense of humor. The big problem with Woody Allen movies is that all of his characters sound exactly the same and tell exactly the same style jokes. When a new Woody Allen movie comes out, if he isn't starring you always wonder who will be playing Woody in this one - Alan Alda? Owen Wilson? Jesse Eisenberg? Alec Baldwin? Larry David? Hugh Jackman? All of the characters usually sound like Woody Allen, with the skill of the cast making each seem different. The problem with that - our screenplays are submitted "naked", so when a development executive reads our script they won't give each line the delivery of some skilled actor. They just read what is on the page... and that means *the characters* must sound and act different than each other. You don't have Hugh Jackman giving the lines *his* individual spin.

So your characters should all use different styles of humor, which will be an aspect of their character. One character may be sarcastic, another may use innuendo, another might have great zingers. One of the best things about the TV show "Friends" is that each character had a very distinctive type of humor. A "Chandler line" has a much different style of humor than a "Phoebe line" or a Joey line". You can actually cover the character slugs on a "Friends" script and know exactly which character belongs to what line. Each of the characters has their own style of humor - which helped to make the show a hit because if sarcastic humor doesn't make you laugh, maybe dumb guy jokes or space-case humor does. If one line isn't funny to you, the next one will be. And with different people having different senses of humor - this is a great way to appeal to a large audience. Also, one type of humor often triggers another type of humor - so character-based comedy builds from line to line, situation to situation.

Three of my favorite stand up comics are Wendy Liebman, Steven Wright and Louis Black. Liebman is the master of the last minute reversal. She makes a statement, then tacks on a couple of words that change the meaning of everything she's said so far. Her humor is based on a twist at the end of a sentence. "I'm a writer... I write checks... Mostly fiction." "I found a gray hair, and that completely flipped me out because it was the first one... on my chest." Wright creates bizarre images through wordplay - I love the idea of being so drunk you use your car keys in the front door of your house... and it starts up! "I almost had a psychic girlfriend but she left me before we met." "I spilled spot remover on my dog. Now he's gone." Black begins calm and then gets so steamed up by his stories he can hardly contain himself. His humor is all based on how really stupid the world can be. "Thanksgiving used to be Thanksgiving, and it was its own holiday, not Christmas Part 1. When I was a kid, you ate, and you drank, and you passed out, and nobody woke you up and said, Let's go shopping!" Each of these comics requires a different kind of joke. You couldn't swap their material - their delivery and persona are based on a specific type of humor. Each of your characters needs a sense of humor that fits their persona, their character... and a great example of that is the hit film...

THE HANGOVER

One of the unexpected hits of 2009 was Jon Lucas & Scott Moore's "The Hangover" which spawned a financially successful sequel in 2011... and probably helped spawn our main example film "Bridesmaids". It's a great example of an ensemble comedy where each supporting role is a distinctive character. If you are one of the few who didn't see the film, it's about a groom and his two best friends and his fiance's brother who have a bachelor party in Las Vegas... get drunk... and the next morning they can't find the groom. And no one can remember what happened the night before, but there's a live tiger and a baby and a chicken in their hotel room. This begins an odyssey where the three must find the missing groom before the wedding the next day - and hijinks ensue.

The groom is missing for most of the film, and the three who search for him have very different personalities and very different styles of comedy - a weirdo, a whiner, and a wild-man. The great thing about these three is that there is basic conflict between any two of them, and conflict creates comedy. Put two of them together and you have friction that leads to funny dialogue and actions... put all three together and it zings back and forth consistently. Different types of humor not only appeals to different types of audience members, it also tends to *build* and create character-based comedy.

INTRODUCING COMEDY

You want to find a scene or situation to introduce your supporting characters that gives the audience and reader information about their character - what makes them unique and different and an individual - and in a comedy screenplay you want to demonstrate their sense of humor as well. If they have several aspects to their sense of humor and type of comedy, you want to find a scene or situation that highlights the one element that is not shared by any other character. The sooner the audience and reader can understand what makes this character unique, the better. We don't want them to be thinking "Now who is this guy?" for the rest of the screenplay, we want the character to be an old friend they are happy to see again. Though "The Hangover" is an ensemble comedy, each of the characters does a great job in supporting the story...

The first character we are introduced to is Alan (Zack Galifiankis) who is the weirdo. He says and does inappropriate things, often speaking in non–sequiturs or saying things that are just plain odd. We meet him as he is being measured for a tuxedo - and freaks out when the tailor measures his inseam, accusing him of trying to grab his shaft. Alan to say and do inappropriate things throughout the rest of the film.

In that scene along with Alan and the tailor is the groom, Doug (Justin Bartha) who is the film's straight man - though his style of humor is to dryly point out the reality of the situations when those around him have different reactions. When he mentions to Alan that the tailor was just getting a measurement, his delivery gets another laugh in the scene... which makes you wonder why his character was excluded from the group in "Hangover 2" - and makes the sequel seem even more like a cut and paste job. Then Alan does something else inappropriate that gets a laugh - he gives Doug a big hug while only wearing a jockstrap. Um, why was he wearing a jockstrap in the first place? This gives *Doug* a laugh with his reaction.

But Doug's real intro scene comes next, when his soon-to-be-Father-In-Law (Jeffery Tambor) loans him his prized vintage Mercedes contestable for the trip to Las Vegas. This scene shows how responsible Doug is - he is being trusted with this car, and all of the rules that go with it (like putting Armorall on the tires when they get to Vegas) and not letting Alan or Phil drive the car no matter what (Alan is sitting on the driveway licking his dog during this conversation). So Doug is the dependable one...

Before even showing up on screen we know that Phil (Bradley Cooper) is the wildman - the completely irresponsible member of the group. Whenever there is some dangerous and forbidden thing - Phil wants to do it. His funny introduction scene demonstrates this - he is a school teacher collecting money for a class field trip... except once the students leave all of the money goes into his Vegas gambling envelope! When he is leaving the school, a few students try to talk to him but he cuts them off and says he's off the clock so they do not exist. Phil says and does all of the things we might say and do - if we had absolutely no self-censorship or conscious. He's the one who always gets the group into trouble and no one knows that more than...

Stu (Ed Helms) is the group's whiner - always complaining and panicking. Sarcasm is his form of comedy. Stu is introduced in a scene with his overly controlling girlfriend Melissa (Rachael Harris) who wants to make sure he uses his Rogaine... even though he has a full head of hair. As his girlfriend lectures him on staying away from Phil and out of trouble, Stu assures her that they are *not* going to Vegas but going to the wine country... and that his friends are responsible and adult once you get to know them. That's when they pull up outside in the car and Phil calls for "Dr. Faggot" to come out. Once Stu gets into the car and they are headed to Vegas, his sarcasm comes out full force - when a drinking Phil insists that he can drive the car perfectly even though he's been drinking, Stu responds that he was always the groups Designated Drunk Driver.

Each of the introductions finds a way to display the character's style of humor and give us a quick snapshot of the character so that we know who these people are and how they will react when things go wrong - and that's exactly what happens once they get to Las Vegas. The story uses an In Media Res opening (which we look at in the expanded version of Blue Book #6) so we know from the opening minute that they will lose Doug in Las Vegas and that there is no way the wedding is going to happen - which creates some suspense and anticipation for how that happens.

JUST CAN'T HANDLE VEGAS

At the hotel desk each gets another moment to show their different comedy styles - when they find out their room has two beds, and Alan says he'll bunk with Phil; Phil *volunteers* Stu to pay for a luxury suite - but Stu argues that Melissa checks all of his credit card bills and will hurt him if she discovers how much he spent. Alan asks if this was really Caesar's palace, and Doug gets to be counterpoint to all three and find the logical solution to the hotel room problem - they will split the cost of the room and pay cash, keeping it off Stu's credit card bill. The best part of finding the comedy in each character is that even lines that were not intended to be funny can be given an amusing delivery - Doug's patient and logical responses to the other three contains enough cynicism to get laughs from lines that don't seem funny - but the situation makes them funny. The characters provide the laughs - which is why you want to make sure your supporting characters utilize different types of humor.

Phil has a surprise for the group... and takes them all up to the roof overlooking Las Vegas. Stu complains that this against the law and worries that they may get busted, Alan has a prepared speech that is very weird... and ends it by slicing open his palm so that they can become blood brothers. Each character reacts to the rooftop in their own way and adds their own type of humor to the scene, then they all toast drinks in the setting sun of Las Vegas and....

Wake up the next morning in the trashed hotel room with a tiger and a baby and no memory of what happened the night before and no sign of Doug. Alan is walking around the room with no pants or underpants on, Stu is obsessed with his missing tooth - how can he show himself in public as a dentist with a tooth missing? And Phil thinks every new strange thing - like the tiger in the bathroom - is a cool symbol of their previous night of debauchery... if they could only remember what happened? When they leave the room to see if Doug is downstairs eating breakfast, Phil wants to leave the baby in the hotel room closet, a panicked Stu thinks that's not a great idea because there's also a tiger in the room, and Alan wants to name the kid... Carlos.

By the 27 minute mark they realize that Doug isn't just down at the hotel restaurant having coffee - he has vanished - and they decide to retrace their steps from the night before to try and find him. This scene takes place at a poolside table with that baby, and displays each's character and sense of humor. Alan masturbates the baby as a joke, Stu panics like crazy coming up with all kinds of (funny) worst case scenarios, and Phil says they should all calm down and be *proud* of drinking so much they blacked out. "Can't you find the fun part in anything?"

CHARACTER FROM CONCEPT

Once we kick into Act Two and the meat of the story - the search for Doug - all of the things in their pockets take them on that quest to retrace their steps from the night before and discover just what the heck happened. Because concept and theme and character arc are often tied together, the concept of searching for a lost item is reflected in all of the supporting characters and subplots of the story. This is the basis of my "Thematic" theory - that all of the aspects of a screenplay are connected... including those characters who are not the protagonist.

So when we look at the supporting characters in "Hangover", they have also lost something and are motivated in the story by trying to find that lost item. Let's take a look at the characters, what they have lost, and their quests in the story...

1) Our three leads have lost the groom, Doug.
2) They have also lost their memory of the night before.
3) Stu has lost his tooth... and wants to know how that happened.

There are two items they find in their hotel room that were lost by others...

4) The baby that wasn't so much "lost" as "left with" - except after a period of time the baby's mother wonders where the boys are.
5) Tyson's tiger - and Tyson tracks them down and demands they return the tiger.

And other things that are lost as part of the story:

6) Mr. Chow has lost his purse with $80,000 in it.
7) Mr. Chow has also lost his clothes... but found a jack handle in the trunk of the car.
8) The cops have lost their police car, and get it back at gunpoint.
9) Black Doug has lost his freedom... kidnaped!
10) Alan has also lost *his* purse (satchel) and can't find it.

These and other subplots and supporting characters have lost something important to them and are on a quest to find it - just like our three lead characters. All of the elements of the story are connected. The story is finding all of these lost items - including Doug.

Each of our three leads (and many of the supporting characters) go through emotional conflicts in the story and come out the other side as changed people. Phil must become the responsible one (he is the least responsible of the three), Stu becomes angry and wild and must eventually take control of his life (instead of worrying what his fiancé wants him to do), and Alan ends up saving them financially when he proves to be a calm and calculating genius at cards (earning their respect - when they began by thinking he was a weirdo). The three leads come together as a team to save Doug.

SITUATIONS

Once we have our unique characters with different types of humor, we need only to create a situation and all three have a specific comedy reaction... and we get three "jokes" instead of one. Here are some of the situations in the movie, and you can imagine how each of the three reacts - and how these different reactions build on each other and snowball as the situation unfolds:

1) Waking up with a tiger in the bathroom.
2) Watching Jade breast feed her baby.
3) Sitting in the police station, waiting.
4) Tazer demonstration subjects.
5) Naked Mr. Chow springs from the trunk of the car.
6) Finding Mike Tyson *singing* in their room.
7) Getting the tiger back to Tyson's house.
8) Watching the security tape of themselves at Tyson's house.

And many many more! Each situation is a chance for each of the different characters to use their different senses of humor.

CONCLUSIONS

Act Two ends when they "find Doug" - kidnaped by Mr. Chow to be traded for his purse. From that moment on, the three come together to get the money to by Doug back... even though when they trade the $80,000 for Doug and remove the hood they discover it's "Black Doug" instead of "their Doug" ("I'll be your Doug!") and the conflict isn't actually resolved. But once they "find Doug" they are in resolution mode and eventually find their Doug and then have to race to the wedding.

Through out the story, each has had a distinctive and different sense of humor tied to their characters - and this has usually allowed a single situation or line to result in at least three laughs... and three different kinds of laughs. The concept of three different kinds of comedy plus a straight man may seem modern, but we can look back to the Brothers Marx for the same theory of combining different kinds of comedy so that the sum is greater than its parts. Groucho was clever and cutting verbal comedy, Chico was malaprops and puns and misunderstandings, Harpo was pure visual comedy (elegant, rather than pratfalls), and Zeppo was the straight man of the group. Each type of comedy built upon the other making the four funnier than any one of them separately (though Grouch had a great solo career). Find a specific kind of humor for each of your characters and make sure that each appeals to a different sense of humor - so if one character's style doesn't make an audience member laugh, another's will tickle their funny bone. If all of your characters have the same type of humor, you are missing a chance at hundreds of laughs!

Your Assignment: You are creating a sit-com about two couples who share a house - that's four characters and four different types of humor. What are they?

SUPPORTING NAMES

Okay, we have our Supporting Characters and they have individual characters - but what do we call them? Should we just do a George Foreman and name them all "George"? I think that might be a little confusing! We want names that fit the characters, no matter how much screen time those characters may have. So here are some tips and techniques for naming names.

Make sure that none of your Supporting Characters have names that start with the same letter, to avoid confusion. Make sure that all of your names have a different sound to them. CONNERS and COOPER are going to be easily confused, as are BOBBY and TOMMY or KAPLAN and CHAPMAN. On screen TOMMY and TAMMY look entirely different, but on the page it's hard to tell them apart. Though TOMMY and BOBBY start with different letters, the names have a similar sound and might be easily confused. You are creating distinctive characters, so start out by giving them distinctive names!

In "Bridesmaids" we have Annie and Lillian and Helen and Rita and Megan and Becca. Though some of those names sound a little similar (Helen and Megan) the similar sounding names end up being completely opposite types of characters, so there is less confusion. Ted and Office Rhodes - no way to confuse those two names! One of the things about a character's name is that it's going to end up "shorthand" for that character, so try to find a name that gives us an image or feeling for who the person is.

IMPROPER NAMES

In my script "Show Of Force" I had a bunch of pilots onboard an aircraft carrier, how to make them distinctive? The primary characters were easy, but what about PILOT #4 and PILOT #7? There were a lot of dog fight scenes, so these pilots were an important part of the story even though they only had a handful of lines each. At first I gave them names like KAPLAN and BRIGGS, but then my script was filled with character names. Add a half dozen pilot names to the cast and you're giving the reader "name overload". How many names can anyone remember? It becomes confusing - is BRIGGS an important character or just PILOT #7?

So I decided to give all of my primary characters actual names, and all of my pilots nick-names like JOKER and HOLLYWOOD and TEX. The reader instantly knows who are the important characters and who are the bit parts, but this also gives those bit parts some character. After changing the character slugs I went back through the dialogue and made the lines conform to the "characters". TEX may only have a half dozen lines in the script, but he's a distinctive character now.

Your Assignment: Five nurses, Five names!

FEEL LIKE A NUMBER?

A variation on this tool can be used when you have a squad room full of cops, a hospital full of doctors, or any other situation where you have the urge to use a number in a character slug. COP #4 and COP #5 look exactly alike on the page. They may not be important characters, but why not give them a little character? MUSTACHED COP and BALD COP gives us a quick picture of the character - but that also limits casting. Plus, it's just an external, not really character related. So instead of a number or a physical trait, I prefer to use a *character* trait like HIPSTER COP or FUSSY COP or PARANOID COP which gives them some character and helps us tell them apart at a crowded crime scene. We aren't talking deep characterization, here, we're just talking surface that some bit part actor can play. We can give the exact same line of dialogue to HIPSTER COP and FUSSY COP and PARANOID COP and get three different line readings. We're likely to project a personality onto FUSSY COP that we wouldn't project onto the antiseptic COP #5. Always try to use an adjective instead of a number! We don't want any of our characters to feel like a number when they are supposed to be three dimensional human beings.

By the way - if there's some way to use *contrast* between the character's occupation and the adjective you use to describe them, that gives them a little bit of depth. AGGRESSIVE COP is kind on an expected character, FUSSY COP is something unusual and interesting.

Your Assignment: Five Bank Robbers, no numbers.

AND YOU ARE?

I ran into a big problem on my recent script "Hard Return" - too many characters! My hero and sidekick were members of a five person Marine squad who have to protect a team of five scientists on a dangerous mission. That's ten characters! There is no way that a reader can keep track of ten major characters... all of the names ran together! Was RUSSELL a scientist or a Marine? What about VOUGHT and FARMER? Half of the characters were hard as nails and the other half were cowards, but it was too easy to confuse all of these folks. Ten characters!

My solution was to find ways to distinguish them. The obvious way was to use rank with all of the Marines, and to use Dr. with the scientists. The lead characters slugs are standard names CABOT (hero) and LISA (love interest) and SHECKLEY (sidekick), the other four scientists became DR. SIMAK instead of SIMAK, and the last three Marines were given ranks like LT. RUSSELL and PVT. FARMER...

But a strange thing happened. I had a female Marine named Betsy Burdon. Calling her SGT. BURDON made it impossible to tell that she was a woman. Hey, she's a gung-ho Marine, and her dialogue wasn't exactly feminine. How could I make it plain to the reader that she was a she? Call her by her first name? So I did a Search & Replace to change BURDON to BETSY, and when I added her rank it added a ton of character! SGT. BETSY conjures up images of a cheerleader with an automatic weapon, and I decided to go with that. I gave her one of those four word character descriptions that contrasted the idea of a peaches and cream cheerleader and a gung-ho Marine. What a character! And every time you read her character slug, you get that cheerleader-with-a-gun image! Just like my pilot named TEX, by altering the name I ended up creating a personality and a *character*. That's what we want - a group of great *characters* in our screenplays.

Think of your character slug lines as a regular reminder of who your characters are. If you can find a way to sneak in a description, or a reminder of who the Supporting Character is, you can use your slug lines as character building tools.

Though in "Bridesmaids" most of the walk on characters have bland names like MAN and TALL MAN, that script was co-written by the star - a known comedy actress. We probably aren't famous and probably don't have the connections she had, so we want to make sure our MAN stands out and has some personality.

EXTRAS! EXTRAS!

We've looked at numbered characters like COP #7 and NURSE #23, but we haven't looked at Extras, yet. Extras are non-speaking roles that are usually in the background of scenes, and if they *do* speak their lines tend to be some variations on "Peas and carrots" (which results in mouth movements that appear to be dialogue - "Peas and carrots" results in your mouth moving in almost every way a mouth moves while speaking). Crowds in crowd scenes, those people in the bar or café, folks on the street who really have nothing to do with the scene. Most of the time you don't even have to mention these people, if you write a scene on a public street the reader will just imagine that it's more crowded than the streets in "I Am Legend"... but sometimes these pesky extras become part of the scene, so let's take a look at them.

First - if your extra character is an expected part of the background where ever your scene takes place, you don't even have to mention them unless they mange to stumble into the story or one of your characters stumbles into them. We expect there to be other people in the world... but when your characters *literally* run into them on the street you can ALL CAPS them even though they may never appear again... or not. This is a judgement call, and usually Extras don't get capped, but there are times when they interact with a character where you want to make sure the reader gets that this is a *person* and then you cap them.

When your crowd *does* talk - and says something that we are going to understand - the best things to do is either write it in the action line as: The crowd begins chanting "Rudy! Rudy!" *or* you can treat it as dialogue and have:

CROWD
Rudy! Rudy!

Either method works, it depends on how important that chanting crowd is to your story. You don't need to have the crowd reacting as a crowd would in the screenplay - if a man is making a speech in front of an auditorium filled with people, you don't need to write their reactions unless those reactions are something unexpected.

The President wraps up his speech and takes a bow.

CROWD
Take it off! Show us your chest!

If the crowd disagrees with the President or agrees with the President - it probably doesn't matter unless that is a turning point in the story.

Beware of too many crowd scenes! Obviously, if your screenplay is about a Rock Star or a Baseball Team or some other person who spends most of their lives in front of crowds, those crowds are part of your story. But sometimes a writer will have a couple go to a rock concert on their first date and a baseball game on their second date and a big party in a public park on their third date - and that's a lot of extras! Though I don't think anyone would turn down a great screenplay based on too many extras, they may notice things like this and mention that they'll have to be changed for budget if the film is ever made. In my career writing films for cable networks, there's usually one crowd per movie - but you can keep going back to that crowd numerous times. So if they go out on a date to a rock concert - they can follow that band for their second and third dates. If you have a scene in a crowded bar and a scene in a crowded restaurant, you may want to combine those and have them go back to the same bar a few times in the script (and get rid of the restaurant). In "Hard Evidence" a romantic dinner in a crowded restaurant was rewritten (by me) to become a walk along a romantic pier at sunset *after* dinner. That not only removed a location with lots of extras in favor of a location that was much more beautiful on film, it also got the characters off their butts and onto their feet to make the scene more action-visual oriented.

Sometimes you will have a Featured Extra in your story - a character who is an important part of the story but doesn't have any lines. My "Complex" screenplay has a pair of Supporting Characters: a married couple where the wife does all of the talking. Her husband is a Featured Extra - his character name is Capped and he is treated just like any other character in the scenes... he just never gets a chance to speak! I also have a character in "Android Army" that doesn't

have a single line of dialogue, but that was an experiment on my part to see if I could create a whole character without using dialogue. So far, most of the people who have read the script never noticed that this character didn't speak. Everyone thinks he *must* speak because he's such an important part of so many scenes! But most likely your Featured Extras will end up like the husband who doesn't speak - a Supporting Character who is important to the story but never speaks. I don't remember if the Security Guard at the jewelry store in "Bridesmaids" ever speaks, but he's talked about by others in a couple of scenes. He *has* to be in those scenes, and has to be doing things - but doesn't speak.

Most of the time Extras are Background - just like the wall of the set - and don't need to be mentioned or described. But sometimes those Extras take a step forward and become part of the story, and you will mention them and maybe give them some shared dialogue if it's important.

CONCLUSION

Remember, each supporting character should have his/her own character arc. Each supporting character should have a special talent or knowledge. Each supporting character should have their own set of tools that they are comfortable with. Each supporting character should speak differently, so that if you were to cover the character headings in dialogue, you could easily tell them apart just by speech patterns and pet words and phrases. Each supporting character must have a different look, so that you can tell them apart at a glance.

Make up a list of character traits for each supporting character. Contrast each supporting character with the Hero, and make sure there's plenty of contrast between each supporting character and the other members of the team, too. Remember: the more similar they are, the more different they must be!

Great Supporting Characters do more than just support the protagonist, they support the story, theme and plot. Look at the gals from "Bridesmaids" - each is fun and different and gives us a different aspect of love and marriage.

AFTERWORDS

When I first decided to release the Blue Books on the Kindle, Nook, and other e-book platforms; two things occurred to me: they would no longer be blue... and since they would be less expensive to purchase in electronic form is there some way I could add material to them to make them even more of a bargain? Charge less, get more! That's why I'm a whiz at business! Though this Blue Book was rewritten and expanded, in addition to that I decided to add some of my daily Script Tips that contain some additional information on the particular subject of this Blue Book (which is actually gray). Since each Script Tip is only removed from the vault and put up on the website about every year and a half (soon to be once every two years), being able to read them whenever you want is a nice bonus. There are also some articles that originally appeared in Script Magazine, and the "Hangover" article that was written just for this Blue Book. Like the Visual Blue Book I did some integrating of tips into existing material instead of just loading them all up at the end and I also added material pertaining to the main film example to make them unique to this book. That way, I can focus on material that is nowhere else in the Blue (gray) Book. Though this one isn't as long as the Visual Blue Book (a monster!) it's almost 44,000 words long - which is about 175 pages. Not bad for a booklet that began with only about 40 pages of material!

More Blue Books are on their way - whenever I find time to expand the old version between screenplays. Hope this one helped you make your Supporting Characters distinctive and interesting.

Good luck and keep writing!

HELP ME, HELP YOU!

I never set out to write screenwriting articles and books, I'm a working pro screenwriter with a couple of producers wondering where their script is... But back in 1991 I complained to the editor of a screenwriting newsletter that no one writing for them had ever sold a script that got made... and ended up being an unpaid writer for them. Now I had to figure out how to explain how screenplays worked and why they sometimes didn't work. Suddenly I found myself writing about writing for a bunch of publications including Writers Digest and Movie Maker and the Independent Film Channel Magazine. Oh, and Script Magazine. Some written advice I gave some fellow pro writers ended up becoming my book "The Secrets Of Action Screenwriting" and the Blue Book series followed. Once I began looking at how scripts worked (or did not) I couldn't stop writing articles – and now have a website and a blog and about 7 books worth of screenwriting articles on my hard drive.

If you liked the information in this Blue Book and want more - for *free* - check out my Script Tip of the day at <a href="http://www.ScriptSecrets.Net"> http://www.ScriptSecrets.Net <a/> - there are 380 of them in rotation, and when I get to 500 I'm putting it on automatic and going to the beach.

I also have a blog where I chronicle my adventures in Hollywood and talk about my favorite films and generally complain a lot. http://sex-in-a-sub.blogspot.com Don't let the title fool you, there is no sex involved, it's a terrible note I got from HBO on my "Crash Dive!" movie. You can read about it on the blog.

You can also follow me on Twitter at http://www.twitter.com/wcmartell every once in a while I might say something funny, and I often post links to articles from my vault.

And if you could do could do me a favor and write a review of this Blue Book at Amazon, that would be great. I'm not asking you to lie and write a good review if you didn't like it – be honest! Any problems you had with the book will be used to improve the next version (which you will probably plug right into your skull). But if you *did* like the book, if you would be so kind as to tweet your friends, FB status them, mention it on message boards, Google Plus your circles, and call everyone in your cell phone contact list at 4am while drunk and tell them you liked it; that would be great! The Blue Books have always been a word of mouth thing – no advertizing, people who like them tell their screenwriting friends. So if you liked it, please don't keep it a secret!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William C. Martell just handed in the first draft for the studio remake of a classic 1980s horror film, and has written 19 films that were carelessly slapped onto celluloid: 3 for HBO, 2 for Showtime, 2 for USA Net, and a whole bunch of CineMax Originals (which is what happens when an HBO movie goes really, really wrong). He's been on some film festival juries, including Raindance in London (twice - once with Mike Figgis and Saffron Burrows, once with Lennie James and Edgar Wright – and was called back to "jury duty" in October of 2009). Roger Ebert discussed his work with Gene Siskel on his 1997 "If We Picked The Winners" Oscar show. He's quoted a few times in Bordwell's great book "The Way Hollywood tells It". He has written a column for Script Magazine since 1991, and is now "Editor At Large" (which he suspects may be a dig at his weight) and has a column in every issue. His USA Net flick HARD EVIDENCE was released on video the same day as the Julia Roberts' film Something To Talk About and out-rented it in the USA. In 2007 he had two films released on DVD on the same day (one from Lions Gate, one from Sony) and both made the top 10 rentals.

His book "The Secrets Of Action Screenwriting" is an industry standard. Last year a copy of his book THE SECRETS OF ACTION SCREENWRITING sold on e-bay for $999.00 – he didn't make a cent off the deal.

Mr. Martell has been interviewed in Variety (February 24, 1997), featured in The Hollywood Reporter's first Writers Special Issue (February 1994), was the cover interview in The Hollywood Scriptwriter (October 1996), and was interviewed in the first issue of ScreenTalk Magazine (Denmark). Entertainment Today (March 23, 2001) named his website ScriptSecrets.Net the Best On The Web for screenwriters... and his blog was selected as one of the best by Bachelor's Degree Org.

Past students of Martell's big two day class have sold scripts to Miramax, George Clooney's Section Eight Productions, Joel Silver Films, and the amazing Steve Robinson took what he learned in the class and wrote the winner of the Nokia International Short Film Competition, "Have I Passed?".

Mr. Martell has taught screenwriting courses at Sherwood Oaks College in Los Angeles, for Project Greenlight in Los Angeles, at the Cripple Creek (Colorado) Film Festival, the Ft. Lauderdale (Florida) Film Festival, the Temecula (California) Film Festival, several times at the Santa Fe Screenwriters Conference along side Oscar winners William Kelley (WITNESS), David S. Ward (THE STING), and Oscar nominees Chris DeVore (THE ELEPHANT MAN) and Mark Medoff (CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD), twice at the Las Vegas Screenwriting Conference along side Steven Katz (SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE), Shane Black (LETHAL WEAPON), and Ross LaManna (RUSH HOUR), and three times taught classes at the Sacramento (California) Film Festival.

Mr. Martell's book, THE SECRETS OF ACTION SCREENWRITING has been called: "The best book on the practical nuts-and-bolts mechanics of writing a screenplay I've ever read." - Ted Elliott, co-writer "The Mask Of Zorro", "Shrek", all of the "Pirates Of The Caribbean" movies.

"William C. Martell knows the action genre inside out. Learn from an expert!" - Mark Verheiden, screenwriter, "Time Cop", "The Mask" and TV's "Smallville" and "Falling Skies".

"This book is dangerous. I feel threatened by it." -Roger Avary, Oscar winning screenwriter, "Pulp Fiction".

"My only complaint with SECRETS OF ACTION SCREENWRITING is that it wasn't around when I was starting out. The damned thing would have saved me years of trial and error!" - Ken Wheat, screenwriter, "Pitch Black" and "The Fly 2".

"Finally a screenwriting book written by a working professional screenwriter. Bill Martell really knows his stuff, showing you how to write a tight, fast screenplay." - John Hill, screenwriter, "Quigley Down Under".

Mr. Martell was born in the same hospital, in the same month, as Tom Hanks. Many believe they were switched at birth, and Bill should be the movie star. He lives in Studio City, California, and can be found most afternoons at some coffee shop writing some darned new script on his laptop.

THE BLUE BOOK SERIES

All are coming to Kindle, Nook, and other e-platforms soon!

#1 YOUR IDEA MACHINE -- How to generate great ideas and create that killer concept. High concepts, hooks, clear concepts... and how to create them! 170 pages!

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#3 STRUCTURE IN ACTION: THE MATRIX -- Learn basic script structure. 3 Acts, Strange Structures.

#4 SECRETS OF STORY: LIAR LIAR -- How stories work, subplots, elements, theme. using LIAR LIAR.

#5 FORMAT BASICS (under construction) ***

#6 HOOK 'EM WITH YOUR FIRST TEN PAGES -- Top tips to grab readers! Your first ten pages, your first *page*, your first *word*!

#7 CREATING STRONG PROTAGONISTS -- Prevent passive protagonists! Top tips! Characterization. Creating interesting lead characters.

#8 VISUAL STORYTELLING SECRETS -- How to show character without dialogue. Show don't tell. How to make your screenplay more visual.

#9 DESCRIPTION -- It's 50% of your screenplay... Top Tips to make sure it's pulling 50% of the weight! Description (really "Action") needs to be as exciting to read as it will be to see on the screen.

#10 DIALOGUE -- Learn the secrets of creating sparkling dialogue! Individualized dialogue, subtext, realistic sounding dialogue, banter.

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#12 SUPPORTING CHARACTER SECRETS -- Creating memorable supporting characters. Individualizing characters. More!

#13 ACT 2 SECRETS -- Get rid of the Act 2 blues with these top tips! Why Act 2 is the *easy* act to write! Midpoints. Character conflict Act 2s vs. Plot conflict Act 2s.

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The Next 6 Blue Books to be expanded into Kindle/Nook versions are: SUPPORTING CHARACTERS, ACT 2, HOOK 'EM WITH YOUR FIRST TEN PAGES, STRUCTURE, STORY, and OUTLINES. Look for them in early 2012!

THE SECRETS OF ACTION SCREENWRITING – revised for 2011. The screenwriting book recommended by Oscar winners and screenwriters of mega-hit movies. "The Secrets Of Action Screenwriting is the best book on the practical nuts-and-bolts mechanics of writing a screenplay I've ever read," Ted Elliott, co-writer of the "Pirates Of The Caribbean" movies, "Shrek", "Mask Of Zorro", and many others.

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WRITE IT, THEN FILM IT – how to write a low budget and ultra low budget screenplay. Hundreds of tips and techniques on writing for a budget, from "Confined Cameos" to limiting locations and character. Whether you are writing an art house indie a Made For TV Movie or a B movie slasher flick, these are the practical production oriented writing lessons you won't find anywhere else.

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