**Give Every Character An Adjective ... from *Your Screenplay Sucks!***

In case I've not mentioned it, and even if I have fifty times... when you're approaching screenwriting, above all, remember two words.

Actor. Bait.

Actor bait is what you're writing. Actor bait is *all* you're writing. Every single thing *every single person* does in film and television is an effort designed to put an actor in front of a camera. That's it. No actor: no movie. No P&A. No back end.

In case I've not mentioned it, actor bait starts and ends with *character*.

On many levels, screenwriting is incredibly complicated, especially on the character level. Then again, nothing could be simpler. How can this paradox *be*? Welcome to the world inside my head! Aren't you glad you don't live there...?

According to Marshall McLuhan, education is all about entertainment. *Voilà* entertainment... soon to be followed by education. Enjoy now. Learn later.

**FOR THE BIRDS video**
**https://vimeo.com/168651740**

What a delightful little story about an adorable hero versus an irritated passel of identical unpleasant feathery jerks who in no way have his best interest at heart! I say, "Right?" You say, "*Right*!"

Not so fast, pilgrim.

Those pea-brained intolerant birds are <u>not</u> identical. Well, eleven are, but there are... four... who are, dare I say, unique. They certainly *look* alike. Except for the scratch marks on their beaks, there's no way to tell them apart... as far as appearance.

Which hip-checks me over to something writers do that drives me crazy!

Beginning screenwriters always describe what someone *looks like*, as if that will matter *in the slightest* to an actor! Yeah, *right*. I can hear it now, agents being phoned from luxury hotel suites, or Riva Super Aquaramas, or well-appointed offices all over the world, and being commanded, "Get. Me. This. Part! I can't *wait* to devote months of my life to this character, because he's *really good looking!*" Or, "I woke up this morning dying to play a rough-hewn heart surgeon with an unruly shock of raven hair who's sporting a torn tee shirt, artfully frayed bluejeans and a world-weary smile on his face! That's exactly the kind of meaty role that will at last win me an Academy award! Tell Netflix I'll cut my quote!"

Does that *ever* happen?! Fuck, no.

A dress on a hanger doesn't give an actress *anything to do*. Wardrobe, during the filmmaking process is, sure, essential. But, what attracts actors to roles is, not surprisingly, "character." Not what the characters *wear*! Or what they *look like*! Jeepers! Yet, so many scripts I see spend their precious

character-description time yakking about somebody's outfit or super hot looks.

Nip over here if you want to never again write a clichéd female character introduction!

**https://twitter.com/femscriptintros**

Rant concluded, shall we return to FOR THE BIRDS and the task at hand, character? Yes, let's.

Did you notice that the four bluebirds beside the hero... two on his left and two on his right, each have separate and distinct personalities? Very separate. Very distinct.

One word sums up each character.

Chipper.
Bully.
Snob.
Neurotic.

Okay, so they're not all adjectives. Ehhh, nobody's perfect.

Now, watch the movie again and look at those four birds, especially when they're introduced. From left to right: chipper, bully, snob, neurotic. *Everything* they do and how they do it flows from that one word. Once you see what the unnamed writers did, it's pretty cool, and crystal clear.

An actress will attach to a script that describes her character as "bully" waaaaay faster than "super-sculpted killer abs."

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The wonderful thing about animation is that you cannot, in any way, stretch your imagination to believe an actor created that performance. Nothing is real. Everything you see and hear was built by the filmmakers. It cannot be some actual person who just happened to be captured on film. Unlike an actor in a movie, where you can think, "Well, a lot of this surely came from him," the animated character's character is 100% provided by the men and women behind "the camera." Also mostly true with live action. But when mesmerized by a flesh and blood actor, it's harder to realize that some screenwriter created this feast.

You can give your characters an adjective in a five page short, a sixty page pilot, or seven hour limited series.

Do that, then. Give your character an adjective and stick to it. Only one, but a good one! Find the PERFECT adjective and your troubles will evaporate like a summer rain in Key West. You can write a whole movie about someone who's ambitious, or moody, or cowardly, funny, generous, conscientious, brilliant, hard-working, dauntless, enthusiastic, gregarious, silly, loud, nasty, relentless, unlucky, quiet, resilient, chatty, generous, mean, serious, lazy, resourceful, tenacious, wise, shy, nervous, polite, brave, cowardly, and on and on and on and on and on!

This "one adjective" thing will work for every character in your story. Except, probably, your heroine... Because by the end, she will have changed. Character change is what fiction's all about! So, for her, you have to come up with... *two* adjectives! Who she is at the beginning and who she becomes by the end. Two words. Tough duty, I know.

You can absolutely write a seventeen page character bio, and I am in no way steering you away from that opportunity to learn about your character, but you can also use the solitary adjective. In every scene. In every line of dialogue. In every possible way, *your character can be ruled by that one word*. It becomes a drum you pound every chance you get.

When you're assaulted by a note, when doubting your process, or if you're overwhelmed, you can always fall back to that one word! And it will help! One Adjective is a simple concept but sometimes simplicity can be genius.

With that in mind, let's hear from some geniuses.

"Simplicity is the final achievement. After one has played a vast quantity of notes and more notes, it is simplicity that emerges as the crowning reward of art."
Frederic Chopin

"Focus and simplicity... once you get there, you can move mountains."
Steve Jobs

"The simplest things are often the truest."
Richard Bach

"Don't make the process harder than it is."
Jack Welch

"The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak."
Hans Hofmann

"Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity."
Charles Mingus

Can you pick the right adjective for each character? If not, go back to the drawing board.