

Character Development

Tales from the Pub

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Well, it had to happen. I mean, in a place like this, it's more or less expected. I'm just surprised it took so long, well, not as long as that I suppose. After all I've only had the job of bartender on a permanent basis for about six weeks.

It started the way it usually does in bars, with someone bumping into someone else who spills his drink down the cleavage of the girlfriend of a guy who pulls a knife and stabs someone else who had nothing to do with any of the proceeding.

Things started to go down hill from there. The first someone was Judas Goat, the God of Treachery, I had just served him his Pink Gin Fizz and as he turned away from the bar he bumped into Bob, the God of Mountains, Now Bob is about eight feet tall and built like a granite shit house and Judas Goat is barely five six and built like a pipe cleaner. He would have been dead on the spot if it wasn't for the fact that Bob's drink, a Black Russian if memory serves, had disappeared between the ample, indeed glorious, cleavage of Syble, the Goddess of Children, who had just turned to ask him if he had seen the planning permit for the creation of the world. She shrieked a word you wouldn't think the Goddess of Children should know. Her boy friend, Mal, the God of Bad Luck, turned to see what the trouble was and as bad luck would have it, Rupert, a minor deity from the Department of Little Known Gods walked past at just that moment on his way to the little God's room.

Well, it was a perfectly natural mistake. Mal, who was mad as hell and ready to jump anyone who insulted his girl, took a swing

at Rupert with his dagger. And as everybody knows, you don't last long as a minor God if you're not fast on your feet, Rupert jumped back and only suffered a cut to his nose. Being a minor God, Rupert, who has an ego like a Mack truck and is ready for a fight at any time leapt for Mal's throat. It was hard to say who would have come off the worse for wear, that question will have to go unanswered, for just as Rupert leapt, Syble spun around to tell Mal it was just an accident and poor Rupert was swatted from the air by that magnificent 44DDD breast and landed on a table where there was a poker game going on.

This is where things really get a bit out of hand. On the table was a pot of thirty five thousand pesetas, a corned beef on rye and someone's grand mother.

The table collapsed. Somebody stepped on the corned beef on rye, grannie took off with a large part of the pot and three aces fell out of the sleeve of the dealer.

The other two of players each had three aces in their hands, throwing their cards down on the table top on the floor they started to accuse the dealer of cheating. Then they looked at each other, then at the cards on the table, then back at the dealer who was by this time half way out the back door, then back at the cards. One of them laughed, smiled at the other and said, 'Bugger it, grab the money, will you, and we can go to O'Flanigans and have a drink.' The other one bent down to scoop the money into a bag and was kicked in the head. 'Cheat me will ya', the first one said as he grabbed the bag and ran. He had only made it halfway to the door when a hand shot out from under a table and grabbed him by the ankle causing him to slide head first into the wall.

Judas Goat crawled out from under the table, picked up the bag of money and perched himself on a stool at the bar, 'Give me another Pink Gin Fizz, will ya. Geeeee, For a moment there I thought there was going to be trouble.' As he reached for his drink a hand the size of a VW landed on his shoulder and lifted him off the stool.

'Watchya wanna spill ma drink for?' Bob asked in a voice like the tectonic plates under San Francisco letting go.

'Shit...I...you see...I was pushed...Yeah, that's it, yeah, I was pushed.'

Bob pulled his other fist back. Judas could clearly see the lichen on the knuckles and was wondering how hard the wall behind him was when Bob was momentarily distracted when a table hit him in the head. He turned around to see Mal, who was standing on a chair so he could

look Bob in the eye.

‘What you want?’

‘You poured a drink all over my lady.’

‘This’, Shaking Judas in front of him, ‘Pushed me.’

‘No, no, no,’ Judas whimpered, ‘s’not my fault. I was pushed.’

Mal swung his fist at Bob who swung Judas up to block the punch and in a roundhouse motion spun right around to knock Mal off the chair with a Judas to the side of the head. The impact tore Judas from his grip, who continued across the room to slam into the far wall.

Syble, breast heaving like an iceberg approaching the Titanic, sidled up to Bob and said ‘Oohh, Bobby, you are such a God, how would you like to come back to my place for little night cap?’

Okay, ‘Tales from the Pub, What’s it all about?’

Well, I’m building characters, from scratch as it were. And as I write what is commonly, these days, referred to as speculative fiction I tend to mix scifi and fantasy.

Writing such little stories allows one to play with characters. In other words, put them through the ringer and see how they hold up.

I never know how the story will turn out as it is not planed. I just want to see what develops. Often the story will be the back story of a character. The back story is that character’s life before he or she wound up in a novel.

That back story, being the characters past history, may or may not be told in the novel.

I hear you ask, “If you’re not going to use it in the novel, why bother?”

Well, for a number of reasons. One is that, as a writer of fiction, I am asking readers to suspend their disbelief for the time they are reading my story, so it has to be believable, for at least as long as it is being read.

This leads to a second reason for such character development. Everyone has a past that makes them what they are today. The characters in a novel are no different, They need a past to be real. They need that past so I know who they are, what motivates them today.

Another reason is that if the character has a defined past then it is easy to keep them in character for the length of a novel.

If your character is portrayed as a person with little education through fifteen chapters of your novel then opens the sixteenth chapter with him quoting Einstein’s theory of relativity, correctly, then there has to be a reason he can. Otherwise the readers suspension of belief collapses in a heap.

I keep a data base of characters, I know how old they are, the colour of their eyes and hair, how tall they are, their religion (if any), their parents names, whether or not their parents are still alive. Some of my characters have quite extensive biographies. Some only have a sketchy outline, if the character becomes more important or I need to give him more back ground during the story I make sure that I update that characters data base card so I don't contradict myself in later chapters.

A word of caution. If you opt to use this system you have to remember that the data base is not cast in stone, if need be you can alter your characters bio, taking care not to cause conflict with what you have already written.