INSPIRED BY LIMYAAEL

13 CQ AUTHORS SHARE THEIR TIPS FOR WRITING SCI-FI AND FANTASY

Plotting a Fantasy Novel, Part 1

How do you keep the pace and action moving while delivering some necessary exposition–and keep it engaging to read?

Melissa McShane: I try to make sure the exposition is delivered in an engaging, reasonable way: engaging in that it's intrinsically interesting, reasonable in that the information would naturally come out a certain way.

Having two characters sit down and tell each other what they already know so the reader will learn the information is both boring and unreasonable. Having one character drag information out of another character who's reluctant to reveal it is interesting and reasonable. Having that information dragged out while both characters are engaged in doing something else, like searching for treasure or sword fighting, is even more interesting.

Never have a character say something solely for the purpose of informing the reader. Exposition should be what happens when the characters are interacting about something else.

Matt Weber: Scene-sequel structure can help you ration your exposition; the basic idea is to structure your story as scenes of high action alternating with lower-key scenes where the characters process what's happened and decide what to do next.

I definitely don't follow this rigidly, but you want exposition happening during downtime, not during a pitched battle. If you want to explain the evolutionary origins of dragon breath, totally legit—just not in the middle of the fight with the dragon. (You can sometimes finesse this if you're playing it for laughs—make the expository interlude a joke at your narrator's expense. Even then, though, be careful.)

William Boyd: Characters live in the world. For them, "The Chirurgeon's Philter" is a commonplace type of soda pop. Introduce it as such. It's a disservice to the reader and the character when exposition is explained in a way that doesn't fit the character or the world.

That said, you don't want to confuse people. If you can, start with the familiar, and drop in details at a rate that you think they can handle. Hint at things and give them questions. In chapter 1, make them wonder what "The Chirurgeon's Philter" is. In Chapter 4, answer that question. By chapter 6, they should wonder why Sara Mandrake would want to drink the rotten stuff.

Sara O. Thompson: When I first started writing novels For Realsies, I took a couple of books and a couple of movies that were sort of similar to the kind of story I wanted to tell. Then I made outlines of all of them. I wanted to see what happened when and to whom, where were the clues dropped in and what was a red herring, and so on. If I took out the identifying marks (specific places, characters, etc.) I had a basic template for my own work.

Patrick Burdine: When I was writing horror scripts, I had a producer tell me that every ten pages someone needs to die. (A page of script equals about a minute of screen time). The next time you watch a lower budget film (and even many higher budget ones), you can almost set your watch by it for the first couple of acts.

As the character is progressing on their journey they should have high points and low points. The exposition is a revelation of the protagonist's character and should be shown through action rather than words as much as possible. You don't want to have a character be told there is a murderer stalking them, rather you want them to stumble upon the body of someone else who has run afoul of the fiend!

Basically, text exposition (texposition?) puts a barrier between the reader and the story and whenever possible you want to invite them to join the story.

I've found that for me, going back to the basics really helps me evaluate and move the story along. Each chapter is like a microcosm of story. It will have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

I like there to be a reversal in each chapter that keeps the reader involved and rooting for the protagonist. If one ends on a low note for the character, one of (if not) the next one will have a change of fortune through their own initiative or those of an ally. If they don't have any small successes the story just gets to be a drag and becomes a chore to read.

Creating Breathing Characters

How do you make secondary characters shine and reflect an aspect of the hero–without over-relying or over-focusing on the hero?

Merethe Walther: I think the most important part of secondary characters is to remember that they are people, independent of your character. They will have their own wants, desires, and issues. They will not always agree with your protagonist. They will sometimes do stupid things, or perhaps even fix a situations sans any help from your main character.

Envision them fully as people. Know their backstories, even if you never intend to write it in the book. Figure out how they would make decisions, and what would be their absolute limits one way or the other. But also remember that they are support characters. It's their job to help the hero, challenge them, give ideas, or even force the hero into action.

If their presence does not do these things, then they are cardboard cutouts; place holders.

Secondary characters can give interesting story dynamics, add to the quest—or even impede it—but they should have impact on the story as a whole, and should help your protagonist grow or mature in one way or another. If they don't do these things, then ask yourself, "Is this character really necessary?" If you can delete entire portions with them in it without losing your plot points, you might want to rethink their presence in the book.

[Melissa McShane](): All characters in a novel are the heroes of their own stories. If a novel were real life, each of them would be at the center of the action. Secondary characters may interact with the hero, but they have their own concerns and their own attitudes, some of which may conflict with the hero's goals and desires.

Suppose the hero wants to save the kingdom, but his best friend is only concerned with the safety of his family. The best friend's actions may not have anything to do with the hero's quest; in fact, if the best friend's family is in jeopardy thanks to the hero's actions to save the kingdom, the two characters will be at odds—generating some great conflict and revealing what the hero is like when forced to choose between an epic goal and the bonds of friendship.

[Matthew Cox](): What makes characters feel like people is having a sense of personality, background, and quirks for them. Anyone from a shopkeeper who gets two paragraphs in the entire novel to the main character's best friend who's at their side the whole way can be as (or more) memorable than the main character if the writer has constructed them to be a complete person. Do they have any habits? What motivates them? What events happened in that character's past to make them who they are during the time period of the story?

A writer could use secondary characters to take aspects of the main farther than that character lets themselves take it.

For example, if the main character is a knight who cannot show their fear of an upcoming battle, perhaps they have a younger sibling, romantic interest, or friend who

isn't held back by a code of honor and shows the fear the protagonist is holding back—then the protagonist can reflect internally at how they feel every bit as frightened as the secondary character but cannot show it.

In *Emma and the Banderwigh*, Emma and her brother are abducted by a mysterious creature who leaves them trapped in an impossible room with no doors. She is as terrified about their situation as her little brother, but her need to protect him overpowers her fear. Another character, Kimber, allows the reader to see Emma's nurturing side, as she tries to help the younger girl cope with desperate poverty and a poor excuse for a father.

[Catherine Schaff-Stump](): Secondary characters are the heroes of their own stories. To me, that's the first thing to think about as I write. I often start planning a book from the protagonist's POV, just to see how the instigator of the plot is going to set things in motion.

Regardless, if the protagonist sets things in motion, chances are good the tension of the interaction between the other character and the protagonist will complement each other and contribute to the story. While mirroring a theme in a subplot can be a thing, trying to figure out the secondary character's interactions with the main character isn't only to enhance the hero. It's to build a subtle, complicated plot.

Mind, it's important to note that the book is about the main character, so the secondary character's tension should be contained within the main plot, and perhaps it is in this way they are reigned in by the protagonist.

Female Protagonists Who Do Not Suck

> **When writing a female protagonist, what's your approach to giving her some very real and relatable flaws—and how do you make that flaw a struggle for her?**

[Melissa McShane](): If a female protagonist's flaws are connected in some way to her greatest strengths, they become real and challenging.

For example, if you have a character who can't stop meddling in her friends' lives, and she has the ability to see a short way into the future, you now have a character who has the ability to give in to her worst impulses. She might justify her meddling by saying she knows what her friends will do and therefore she can "help" them.

Overcoming this flaw would mean learning to accept that she can't fix everything and that her friends deserve to live their own lives free of her interference. The greatest challenge would be in making this character sympathetic—which is the case any time you give a character flaws that make her struggle with herself.

[Amy Bearce](): I think about what she wants and what she needs, and what would stand in her way, personally. Her emotional journey is to me at least as important as the outward one, if not more, so she certainly must have an internal flaw that needs to be worked through.

[Matthew Cox](): The vast majority of my protagonists are female. When creating my characters, I tend to assemble a whole bunch of notes on where they came from, how their life has gone up to that point, what they enjoy/hate/fear, favorite foods, favorite music, what sorts of things annoy them, etc.

In the case of my fantasy novels with Emma (Tales of Widowswood series), her main character flaw is that she's ten-years-old going on thirty. She's *too* brave and *too* smart

for her own good. (She's also a little too forgiving to those who've wronged her). Emma frequently charges off to deal with situations instead of thinking things over and getting her parents involved.

I think of my characters as living, breathing humans before thinking of them as "female protagonists," and try to give them realistic traits and shortcomings based on who they are, where they are, and the life they've led up to the point where the story takes place.

[Matt Weber](): I look for the flaws that might be sensible responses to the female experience in my character's world (I'm a man, FWIW).

I'm currently writing a young woman warrior in a pretty sexist society; men underestimate her and sexualize her, they're willing to believe she's dumb and get very angry when she makes them look bad. This particular character is smart enough to take advantage of those responses, but she's also got a chip on her shoulder; she's often rash, violent, or unkind, sometimes in an effort to prove herself and sometimes out of pure irritation.

She's grown up in a bourgeois home where women are sheltered from learning about sex, so she doesn't know much about it and covers that ignorance with bluster. She's also strongly drawn toward men who respect her abilities and women who are powerful and free, which isn't always the best impulse—some of them are working at cross purposes to her.

You make those flaws into struggles by putting her into situations where they cause problems. She mouths off to a man and starts a fight she can't win; she gets close to a female role model who betrays her. I suppose the trick there is just making sure the problem is grounded in reality—you don't want to send the message that women *always* get smacked down when they oppose men, or that they *always* betray each other. Make it about the decisions, not the demographics.

Sara O. Thompson: When I actually thought about how I do this, I realized that I just write real people. Between being a writer and performing improv, I know very well that presenting the truth is the key to writing any character. What's the reality for this person? And just staying with that reality in an honest way lets the humanity (or whatever) be genuine.

A.W. Hill: I'm inclined to write only about fully "actualized" people. I have zero interest in cyphers or characters who are "finding themselves," as honest or sympathetic as they might be. Damaged or flawed, yes, but absolutely authentic. My perfect female character would probably be Joan of Arc!

Merethe Walther: I love a strong, well-written female protagonist! But sometimes, creating a female character who is both tough and relatable is hard to accomplish.

Many people think that in order to write a strong woman, she has to be either a cold-as-ice martial arts master dominatrix or a mama bear defending her babies. Your protagonist can absolutely be these things, of course! But that's not all that women represent. Female strength isn't merely derived from a depth of love for our families, or the uncanny ability to pull off a completely un-ironic resting bitch face.

Male characters aren't just strong because of their physical strength; they are defined by the actions they perform. Their strength is written in their choices and in knowing that there is a line that they absolutely refuse to cross, even when it's hard. Even when it hurts them. The same is true of your female characters!

When I write a strong woman, she's a woman who tries her best to reach her goals, and then sometimes loses sight of them because of her own insecurities; maybe she uses humor to deflect pain; maybe doesn't speak up for herself when she should, or starts to question what kind of person she really is. But at the end of the day, she will absolutely not cross "that line" because her strength is in her convictions—not just the façade of being an emotionless robot who knows kung fu.

Write your biggest fears into her and put her into situations that make her question her devotion to the cause. Then show us what she's willing to do—or not do!—in order to reach her destination.

Plotting a Fantasy Novel, Part 2

How do you launch the reader into your story without weighing them down with exposition—and make them curious?

[Merethe Walther](): One of my favorite writing expressions is, "Start late, get out early." For the most part, this pertains to script writing, but I think it qualifies for all writing as well.

Everything your reader "sees" should have purpose. There are a *lot* of facts that you, the author, will have, but that doesn't mean that your reader needs it. Don't give us two paragraphs talking about your YA protagonist's seriously bad relationship with her parents. Bring us into a scene with them arguing—into the action. Show us the hint of the relationship, then pull us out before we can fully piece together the "why."

Leave a careful trail of breadcrumbs for your reader to follow. If you're giving pages' worth of information, your reader will not be entertained and they will not feel intrigued enough to stick around—you've already told them everything they need to know! Tell us the rules of your world with action, not just exposition. And then get out of the scene.

Leave your reader wanting to know more of your world without spilling all of its secrets in one—or a few—lump paragraphs scattered throughout the book. Give the information like it's a secret on a "need to know" basis, and tie it into the action as much as possible.

[Matt Weber](): I think I'm relatively unusual among sf and fantasy writers in that I have the opposite problem—I don't do enough exposition, and that sometimes leaves readers confused. I like to plant seeds and wait a good long time for them to grow; I like reminding readers that there are things they still don't know about.

So my typical approach is to start the action with only enough exposition to let them understand what is currently happening. If there's something confusing about the action (why is the sky green? why is everyone offering condolences to John?), that's a plus as far as I'm concerned—that is a hook in your reader that you can use to pull them along to the explanation... by which point you've already planted a few other hooks to keep them going.

[Matthew Cox](): Most of my books are science fiction, but that genre, like my fantasy novels, is also vulnerable to authors feeling the need to dump bucketfuls of world-building on the reader early on. In my Emma novels (Tales of Widowswood series), which is my fantasy setting, I also use the main character's age as a facet of introducing the reader to the world.

As a ten-year-old, Emma isn't too world-wise, so a lot of the world-building can occur as Emma herself learns about the world she lives in. The best world-building is done by demonstrating or having the character interact with the world or a situation that brings the reader into that aspect of the world instead of dictating it to them. For example, in *Emma and the Silk Thieves*, she meets two non-humans during a holiday and they have a brief conversation about the differences.

When dealing with adult or older protagonists who would know more about their world, I think the best advice I can give to authors is to respect the readers' intelligence.

Show things happening with enough context for the reader to understand why they happened instead of having "the narrator voice" sound like fantasy wikipedia explaining everything literally. Spread out the worldbuilding in small doses while other

things are happening. Work them into a scene like adding seasonings a dash at a time while stirring the stew. Make the scene build the world so the reader is gaining an understanding of how your setting works while things happen.

[Catherine Schaff-Stump](): There is a moment of dramatic tension that occurs that propels a reader into a story, and it generally has to do with when your main character's desire runs headfirst into the thing that keeps them from meeting the desire.

Regardless of how much world-building you do or don't do, regardless of however much backstory or contextualizing your plot needs, that moment of dramatic tension should propel a reader into the scene, and then curious enough to read the rest of it. It should also propel you into wanting to write the rest of the scene, and the book.

You may have to dig around in the character's background a bit, to discover what that desire is, and why the character might have a personal, internal obstacle that keeps them from getting there. Eventually you'll find the right starting point.

[William Boyd](): Set a scene. Immerse the reader. Your first words need to be an introduction to something happening— details can wait; you need to breathe life into your story first, then give it form. Don't dwell too much on the world, don't introduce too many characters, don't drop too many concepts.

Those first pages are precious, and they're all about essence. Focus on a small set of characters, action, and enough scene to set a mood. Lastly, finish your introduction with a hook. People need a reason to read further. Give them that reason.

Exposition and world-building can be hinted at here, but you probably want to save the meat and potatoes for later. Give someone a taste of your world, not the run of it.

[Jamie Ayres](): What you want to do is start right before the action. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is a great example. *Spoiler Alert* Prim gets picked at the reaping, and Katniss takes her place. That's where the action starts. The author doesn't start at

the moment her name gets called. That would be confusing. It starts the day of the reaping so we have a few pages to get familiar with Katniss, know what the Hunger Games are, know the odds of her getting picked and how she protected her sister so Prim's name is only in the drawing once, whereas Katniss's is in it about twenty times.

So we know the stakes, we know what the games are, and we know she'll do anything to protect her little sister. This makes the moment when Prim's name gets called even more powerful, in a way it wouldn't have if we didn't know the circumstances leading up to that event. *But*, that's all in the first 20 pages. Prim's name gets called by the end of the first chapter. We have a little setup, but the inciting incident happens at the end of the first chapter.

I took a cue from Collins when I rewrote the beginning of *18 Things*. The original version had too much set up. Now, when you get to page 15, you know that my MC's best friend is dead. You know the story will be about grief and having the faith to go on. Before page 30, you know there will be a boy who will help her move on. And a few pages later, you know there will be a bucket list involved, and maybe you'll laugh a little instead of crying so much.

[Patrick Burdine](#): It is a little bit cliché, but there is a reason that virtually all movies start with action. You want to establish the stakes early, and hang that Sword of Damocles over the head of your protagonist.

Exactly what it is that makes the blade so dangerous to your protagonist will vary a bit depending on genre. For horror or action it might actually be a physical danger. For a fantasy epic it might be a threat or intrigue which endangers the Kingdom. A more dramatic, family-based story might introduce the family and their bond and reveal the potential cracks there which the inciting incident will pressure.

That being said, I am in the camp that says plot is really there just so the characters can reveal themselves, and hopefully, at the same time reveal something about the reader.

The plot, as engaging as it may be, is really ever only a backdrop for your protagonist's journey. An interesting and fully-formed protagonist will respond to this journey and hopefully grow into a resilient survivor, a great hero, or a stronger family.

[A.W. Hill](#): I've never attended a writing workshop or had any proper training in plot development. I'm a bootstrap writer who one day, relatively late in life, simply decided to do a novel and haven't stopped since. There are probably a thousand things I do wrong, but as I seem to keep getting published, they must be outweighed by what I inadvertently do right.

One thing I've always known intuitively is that the first page of a book is the most important, and the first paragraph make or break. I suppose that what I go for could be described as "intellectual titillation." An opening to which the reader responds, "I don't know what the hell he's doing, but I need to find out."

I quite often open with dialogue. My second novel, *The Last Days of Madame Rey* (Counterpoint Press) opened with the line, "Let me tell you, boy, about the men who truly run this world." My current novel-in-progress, *Ministry*, is told in the first person by a 13-year-old girl, and opens this way:

When I found Daddy, his face was blue as the alley snow piled around him. His eyes were frozen puddles with the color gone under the ice. He was a building nobody lives in, with windows nobody looks out of. That was the thing struck me most: the nobodyness and nowhereness of him. Dead people, I saw, have no name or address in the world.

In other words, he's dead. A bit of a downer, but you can't look away.

Writing Flawed Characters

> *How do you give a character some significant flaws– whether that's selfishness, perfectionism, insecurity, vanity, etc–and have them realistically struggle with those flaws?*

[Sharron Riddle](#): I try to think of my own flaws, and I exaggerate them, or behaviors of others that really irritate me, and I give them to my characters.

My favorite flawed character that I've created, Van, is in my book *Sin*. Van is vain and arrogant and clueless. He doesn't struggle with his flaws until he meets Sin, and is intrigued that she doesn't fall at his feet like most girls do, and she defies him whenever he tells her to do something. He begins to see himself through her eyes, a view of himself which is very hard for him to accept. So, I think it helps when your flawed characters can see how others really think of them.

In the case of Van, he finds himself intrigued by a "mere druid", and eventually he falls in love with her strength of character and self-sacrificing nature—all characteristics he looked down upon before her.

When he realizes she won't tolerate his attitudes, he is forced to make a choice—change his ways or lose the girl he loves. So that is the key: creating high stakes for your flawed characters that force them into moving forward or remaining as they are, and the price they must pay for either choice.

[A.W. Hill](#): This is a bigger challenge than many writers acknowledge. We love our characters, and fear that significant character flaws may render them less sympathetic, when in fact the opposite is true. A big part of my typical second draft of a novel is going back and deliberately inserting flaws in places where the character/s may come

across as too idealized. I'm a very tidy writer whose manuscripts often need the literary equivalent of a hair-mussing.

[Jamie Ayres](#): When creating characters that are interesting, they don't necessarily need to be likable (think John Travolta in *Pulp Fiction*). They should be compelling and inspire the reader to want to read more. The hero/heroine should definitely have some significant flaws because nobody is perfect and you want the readers to identify with your characters.

This is why it's so important to know your characters. Imagine their personalities and spread their quirks/flaws throughout the whole thing. I often pull from my own life or people I've known when I think of how to have them realistically struggle with those flaws. So start with what you know, then add your own twist to it.

[William Boyd](#): Write what you know. It's my theory that we as humans carry within us every character flaw in some measure. We all have some level of greed, anger, envy. Take a look inside yourself and identify those characteristics. We're wired to fight our flaws—we look at anger as something to overcome.

What would your anger look like if it was turned loose a bit? What would that anger look like if it was being expressed by Lord Fauntleroy III, heir to estate of Camden? How would it be different? Identify the emotion like another character, and then have Lord Fauntleroy react to that character internally as he would to any other. Like the little devil on his shoulder, his anger whispers in his ear.

[Amy Bearce](#): For realistic flaws, I think about my character's strengths and then push them until they become a weakness. A dedicated warrior pushed too far can become an obsessive one. A perfectionist might start rigidly avoiding risky or emotional behaviors. A desire for justice can distort into a painful lack of mercy. I think many of our flaws are rooted in our strengths.

Ways To Make The Reader Hate Your Hero

> *How can you create situations where other characters call your protagonist out on his or her flaw?*

[Matthew Cox]: This depends quite a bit on the plot, the setting, and the flaw itself. If the protagonist of the story is some enchanted warrior who has an Achilles heel of some rare element sapping all her power, and all of her adversaries always seem to have that "rare" element, it gets old pretty quick.

For less physical/magical traits—personality flaws rather than intrinsic, physical issues like having a 'superhero weakness'—it depends on how obvious it is. For an antagonist to exploit that flaw, they'd have to know the character well enough to realize they had it.

Of course, in some cases, the character can become their own worst enemy. Going back to Emma, her brashness has gotten her into trouble on more than one occasion when she tries to take on more than a ten-year-old should. At one point, she nearly gets her mother killed when she forces a confrontation with a wizard and her mother rushes in to help.

For example, a character's flaw could be fear-based—and perhaps they keep finding other things to do than "resolve the thing" that the whole story cruxes on. Their friends/companions could take issue with that avoidance, and try to push the character toward facing that fear (perhaps igniting conflict with their friends).

Maybe the "chosen one" isn't happy at all about being chosen. In my novel *The Eldritch Heart*, Princess Oona is quite upset at being expected to end a war that has plagued her kingdom since before her birth. She can't bear the thought of conquering the other kingdom, killing so many people. When her father demands she marry for a political alliance, it's too much for her.

In a fit of panic and of not feeling strong enough, tough enough, or capable enough, she runs away from everything she's expected to do… and sets in motion a whole chain of events she never expected.

Again, depending on exactly what the flaw is, the circumstances of the story can be arranged to force the character to confront that flaw head on in order to progress to the resolution of the primary plot point... or maybe they can't, and they fail.

[Sharron Riddle](): There has to be a "dark moment" when your flawed character has pushed too hard, or your other character has had enough and they finally call the flawed one out on their behavior. Or their bad behavior can put them in a bad situation they must be rescued from, which makes them do some soul-searching.

I love writing flawed characters, because they are the most interesting. They tend to have the biggest character arcs, even if they remain flawed.

Subplots

> ***How do you arrange and design your subplots so they feel interconnected?***

A.W. Hill: Wow, this is probably my greatest challenge, as I'm what critics refer to charitably as a "discursive writer," which often means that I leave the plot entirely for pages at a time. It is constant effort for me to discipline myself (a birch rod or cat o' nine tails helps in this regard), because I'm a Gemini honeybee who likes to dart around from flower to flower.

What I try to do, at a minimum, is makes sure that my subplots are connected thematically to the main idea, and that, moreover, they are interesting in and of themselves.

Andrew Buckley: Once upon a time, 98% of my writing was shot directly from the hip with no planning whatsoever. If writing a story was a bank heist, the safe would turn out to be uncrackable, I'd forget to book the getaway driver, and at least one of my associates would shoot me in the back.

After I finished my first book, the value of planning became very apparent and I proceeded to plan future stories with such intricacy that nowadays I could complete the bank heist blindfolded, with both hands tied behind my back, while suspended upside down in tank full of piranha fish.

These days I plot subplots the same way I plot character story arcs along with the overall story and theme. I break elements down by acts and then beats so I know where sub plots need to emerge or resolve within the story. Voila! The safe is cracked, we're halfway to Cuba, and not one piranha fish was harmed in the process.

Character Introduction & Interaction

How do you write a great introduction for a female protagonist? And can you give us an example you admire from another fantasy book?

Andrew Buckley: I have only one book series with a female Protag (*Havelock*) but the MC, Eliana, is meant to be an extremely able, smart, sexy, and dangerous woman. It was important that her introduction covered two main bases: 1) She's not someone to be messed with. 2) She's always the smartest person in the room. I think it's important, whether it's a male or female protag to establish the character's main characteristics and/or flaws in the introduction.

I found placing my MC in an impossibly dangerous and almost hopeless situation, having her address it with cool calculation, and then work her way out of the problem grounded her as a dominant force to the overall story.

Mute & Non-Speaking Characters

How can you write non-speaking characters with care–and have them communicate effectively, and act in a context?

Nina Post: I love non-speaking characters. I think it's because of my great affection for Bill Irwin's expressive circus character Enrico in *Northern Exposure*, and all those Sunday mornings I spent with my parents at an airplane-themed restaurant, watching Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton films.

Non-speaking characters can stand out in a book's cast. I focus on the things they do, the actions they take, and how they respond to another character's distress or frustration or other emotion. I also focus on how they communicate through gestures, facial expressions, and other methods, like drawing.

My books are in the third person, so that's how I write my non-speaking characters. You might want the internal perspective of first person with a non-speaking character, but with my non-speaking characters, I show their loyalty, humor, playfulness, intelligence, perseverance, etc., with actions, behavior, and visual details, not through direct access to their thoughts in their own POV. But it depends on the character and your preference. You could do both.

It says a lot about *other* characters when they interact with non-speaking characters. Is the other character comfortable with it? Not everyone would be. Does he make fun of it? Is he able to effectively communicate in ways that don't involve talking?

Don't be afraid to put non-speaking characters into different or unexpected roles, including a leadership role (or, as Limyaael mentions, the hero). Nick Andros in Stephen King's *The Stand* was the leader of the group all the way to Nebraska, and the head of the Free Zone Committee. The bigger the role, the more you learn about *showing* character through action and behavior.

I've never created a villainous non-speaking character, but regardless of the character's alignment on the good/neutral/evil spectrum, it's a great creative exercise, especially if you tend to lean heavily on dialogue. And it's a wonderful opportunity to create unforgettable characters in the process.

If you liked this booklet, send a friend a link so they can get their own copy!

https://curiosityquills.com/limyaael-signup/