SCREENWRITING

THE 8 TRAITS OF KILLER CHARACTERS
Dr. Leslie Kreiner Wilson, Ph.D.

• Screenwriter, AMI Films
• Executive Director, Americana, americanpopularculture.com
• MFA Program Director and Professor, Pepperdine
• Recent credits include *Twisted Sister* and *Extreme*
• Currently working on Christmas-themed projects
1) Flawed

- Weaknesses
- Morality Issues
- Values
- Spirituality
C. K. Dexter Haven: You’ll never be a first class human being or a first class woman until you’ve learned to have some regard for human frailty.
EVEN IRONMAN HAS ANXIETY

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Jules: Well there’s this passage I got memorized. Ezekiel 25:17. "The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of the darkness. For he is truly his brother’s keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know I am the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon you." I been sayin' that shit for years. And if you ever heard it, it meant your ass. I never gave much thought what it meant. I just thought it was some cold-blooded shit to say to a motherfucker before I popped a cap in his ass. I saw some shit this mornin' made me think twice. See now I'm thinkin', maybe it means you're the evil man. And I'm the righteous man. And Mr. 9 Milimeter here, he's the shepherd protecting my righteous ass in the valley of darkness. Or it could mean you're the righteous man and I'm the shepherd and it's the world that's evil and selfish. Now I'd like that. But that shit ain't the truth. The truth is you're the weak. And I'm the tyranny of evil men. But I'm tryin', Ringo. I'm tryin' real hard to be a shepherd.
2) Core Wound

- Circle of Being Moment (Syd Field)
- Achilles Heal (Homer, *The Iliad*; mother dips him in the River Styx holding his heel)
- Traumatic event before the story starts
- Can have a “save the cat” effect
For Your Eyes Only (1981)

Wife dies On Her Majesty’s Secret Service, 1969, sixth Bond film
THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI

BLU-RAY • DVD • DIGITAL
FRANCES McDORMAND WOODY HARRELSON SAM ROCKWELL

“A RENEGADE MASTERPIECE.”
— Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE
HOW COME,
CHIEF WILLOUGHBY
AND STILL
NO ARRESTS?

RAPED
WHILE DYING
Tom Provost, MFA

• Award winning writer/director:
  • The Presence
  • Under Suspicion

• Emmy nominated Editor:
  • The Celebrity Apprentice

• Graduate Screenwriting Professor
• Speaker/Lecturer: www.cinemalanguage.org
3) Proactive
3) Proactive

• Decisive
• Makes things happen
• Says “yes”
3) Proactive
3) Proactive

“Really dynamic characters want things, and aggressively go after them. They’re willing to take really aggressive action to get what they want, or protect what they want and what they care about. So if you have a really strong lead character, that character will generate plot, seriously. A great, active character is as good as a V-8 engine under the hood. It can’t wait to rev up and go.”

Joe Hill
The Master of Suspense weaves his greatest tale!

MGM presents

CARY GRANT
EVA MARIE SAINT
JAMES MASON

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

NORTH BY NORTHWEST

VistaVision
Technicolor

Co-starring JESSIE ROYCE LANDIS
Written by ERNEST LEHMAN • Directed by ALFRED HITCHCOCK
AN MGM PICTURE
• CLIP TO COME
• CLIP TO COME
• CLIP TO COME
• CLIP TO COME
4) How They Treat Others
4) How They Treat Others

• Kind
• Mean
• Empathetic
• Indifferent
• Etc.
• CLIP TO COME
Meryl Streep
Anne Hathaway
THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA
• CLIP TO COME
Andrea Baltazar, MFA

• MFA in Writing for Screen and Television at Pepperdine University
• Assistant Professor of Digital Media, Weber State University
• Writer/Director Recent Short Films
  • “Urban Uber”
  • “If the Shoe Fits” short films
• Professional Screenwriter & Amateur Crocheter
5) Make Your Villains, Villains

- Villains enjoy what they do
- The main advisory to your protagonist
  - A foil
  - Or even similar
Thanos
Hans Landa
Joker
Hans Gruber
6) Don’t Forget the Supporting Characters

• The supporting character can be the subtext of you protagonist
Andres Orozco, MFA

• Assistant Professor of Media Production, Pepperdine University
• Writer/Actor/Director
• Recent work includes *StrikeOut* and *Yo Soy Tu Niña*
7) The Character Is Universal
The Character Is Universal

• I can relate to this character

• Their struggle is my struggle

• Their emotions are universal
The Character Is Universal

• I can relate to this character

• Their struggle is my struggle

• Their emotions are universal
Universal Emotions

• #1 Heartbreak (love)

• Rejection

• Death

• Anger (Family)
8) Do the Wrong Thing for the Right Reasons
Do the Wrong Thing for the Right Reasons

- Forgettable Characters always do the right thing
- No Risk
- Fear Paralyzes them
- Everyone can do the right thing for the wrong reasons
Michael Starts by Doing the Right Thing
Accepts the Challenge
Accepts the Challenge
Character Is Changed Forever
Questions or comments?

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