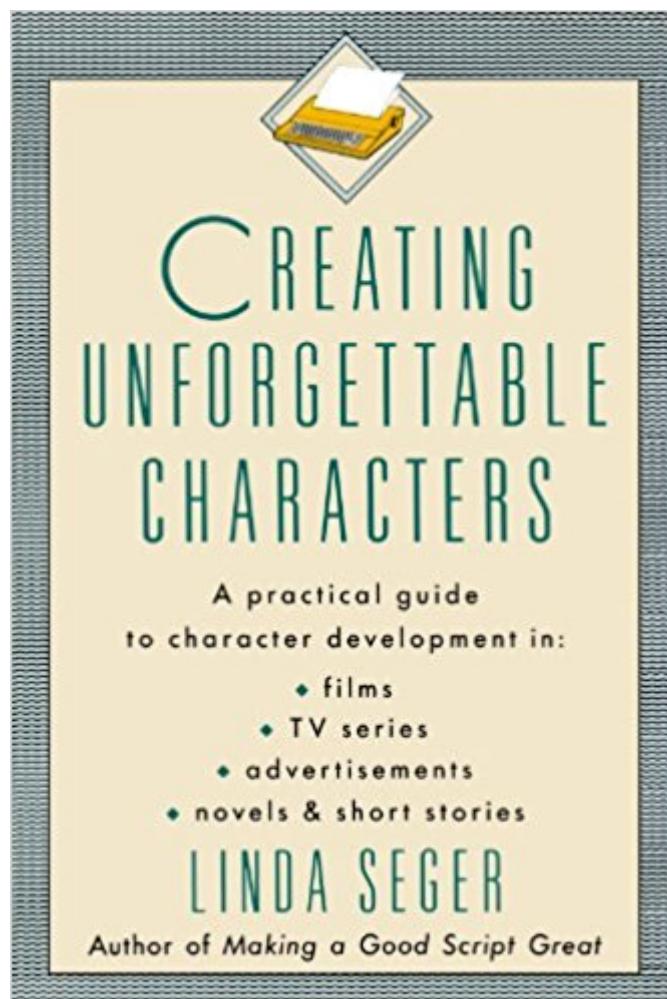


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Creating Unforgettable Characters: A Practical Guide To Character Development In Films, TV Series, Advertisements, Novels & Short Stories





Synopsis

In this book, Linda Seger shows how to create strong, multidimensional characters in fiction, covering everything from research to character block. Interviews with today's top writers complete this essential volume.

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Customer Reviews

Linda Seger is the author of *Making a Good Script Great*. She is married and lives in Venice, California.

This is one of the most detailed books on character psychology and development for storytelling that I've encountered. Most books out there seem to focus on plot. The holy trinity is premise, plot and characters. This book is a must have for anyone that takes writing seriously. It justly references another must have, "The Art of Dramatic Writing", by Lajos Egri. It's the one book that I would say really adds to Egri's work.

It's a decent book when it comes to learning about building character. Some of its insights are sort of common knowledge where as other can be found in superior script books that don't focus exclusively on character (McKee's "Story", Trottier's "Screenwriter's Bible"). The book is from 1990 so many of the television references aren't fairly dated. Seger also has a tendency to let quotes from other writers do all of the heavy lifting. The book would be strengthened if Seger infused some flavor and a voice of her own but instead the pros are fairly dry. A decent supplemental book on

screenwriting.

Good advice.

I don't know where to begin, but if you are ever interested in writing, this book is awesome! Seger really explains how to make these characters believable. I just read this book, and read another online book with her teachings in mind. With this, I could see exactly where the author got it right. I would highly recommend this if you want to start learning to write.-Abe's Cakes

Sad to say, I agree with "Thin" and "Forgetable". Probably worth the \$1.06 used price... maybe. Such a difference from Seger's earlier book, "Making a Good Script Great", which I liked very much. It seems like such a rehash of the obvious, after which we get painfully detailed exposition about what, for example, "Conflict is an essential element of almost all fiction writing" means (p.92). Do we need examples of conflict dialogue? Maybe?? I am not a novice screenwriter, so maybe I'm being too critical, but I have not learned one thing from this book. Sorry Linda.

In the preface, Linda Seger observes: "The concepts within this book relate to the creation of all fiction characters and are based on the principles I've discovered as a drama professor, a theater director, and script consultant.... For this book, I've interviewed over thirty writers who have articulated and affirmed these concepts; these include novelists and writers for film." Her how-to book comprises ten engaging chapters, each concluding with a case study on a well-known screenscript such as "Ordinary People," "Gorillas in the Mist," and "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." The chapters also provide a detailed application checklist to guide the reader during the character-creation process. Some of the highlights of the ten chapters are as follows. Chapter 1: Researching the Character. "Research can take longer than any other part of scriptwriting." Seger quotes William Kelley, writer of *WITNESS*: "I researched the Amish for seven years, and Earl and I wrote the script during the 1980 writers' strike, which lasted about three months" (p 17). Chapter 2: Defining the Character: Consistencies and Paradoxes. "Shaping the clay of your character is a six-step process." One of these steps is "adding quirks, the illogical, the paradoxical" (p 46). Chapter 3: Creating the Backstory. "Finding the backstory is a process of discovery. The writer needs to work back and forth constantly -- asking questions about the past to understand the present" (p 62). Chapter 4: Understanding Character Psychology. Seger quotes Barry Morrow, writer of *RAIN*

MAN, "Half of writing is psychology. There's a consistent core, or a consistent unity to behavior.... Every action has motivation and intention" (p 63). This chapter includes an insightful section on "how inner backstory defines character," citing Freud and Jung's theories. Also a section on "how abnormal behavior defines character," citing Woody Allen's HANNAH AND HER SISTERS among others.

Chapter 5: Creating Character Relationships. Seger notes that "some of the most successful films and television series have featured two stars, not one" (p 91), citing examples of THE AFRICAN QUEEN, ADAM'S RIB, LETHAL WEAPON among others.

Chapter 6: Adding Supporting and Minor Characters. Seger notes that "many of the best stories are memorable because of their supporting characters" and quotes James Dearden, writer of FATAL ATTRACTION: "Within the context of reality, you can make your little characters interesting...keeping people's eyes moving and their ears flapping and their brains working. It's those little details that make something come alive" (p 145).

Chapter 7: Writing Dialogue. "Great dialogue has conflict, emotions, and attitudes. It also has another essential component: the subtext. Subtext is what the character is saying beneath and between the lines. One of the most delightful examples of subtext comes from the film "Annie Hall," written by Woody Allen. When Alvie and Annie first meet, they look each other over. Their dialogue is an intellectual discussion about photography, but their subtexts are written in subtitles on the screen." Subtextually, "she wonders if she's smart enough for him, he wonders if he's shallow; she wonders if he's a shmuck like other men she's dated, he wonders what she looks like naked. Both understand the subtext of their conversation" (p 148). I found this chapter the most instructive of all.

Chapter 8: Creating Nonrealistic Characters. Examples cited include "E. T.," "King Kong," "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Superman," and "The Phantom of the Opera."

Chapter 9: Beyond Stereotyping. Example of stereotyping: "Blacks are often portrayed as comical or as perpetrators of crimes" (p 197). "A character type is not the same as a stereotype. The doddering father or the braggadocio soldier are character types, not stereotypes, because the portrayal is balanced with other images of fathers and soldiers" (p 198).

Chapter 10: Solving Character Problems. "Writing good characters is a complicated process. Getting stuck happens to even the best of writers. Turning to some of these problem-solving techniques can lead to breakthroughs that can help make your characters work." Yes, indeed. This outstanding book merits high priority on the aspiring screenwriter's craft-study list.-- C J Singh

I have purchased a number of screenplay development books, but Creating Unforgettable Characters, by Linda Seger is by far the best one of all. If you are a film and tv buff that loves to write, this is for you.

Before I read this book, I have to admit - my characters were all pretty lame. Then, hey, I read this book, and boom! Ok, so they still need work, but this book made me understand how to keep characters exotic, good, and believable. The first part of this book didn't interest me as much, because it was advising on how to make sure your characters are good on their background - of people who live in this world. This wasn't 'really' helpful for me, because I write fantasy in other worlds, but I picked up a few helpful things. Then came a section on Dialogue, which was good too - at the time I was reading it I didn't realize it, I thought it was a bit dull, but then I realized I had started taking the advice unconsciously. But then came along the next part of the book, and I could hardly wait to pick it up each time. It explains greatly how to make sure your characters aren't hollow, and how they should respond in situations according to their attitudes and past life. This book I highly recommend to any author who feels his characters aren't to their full potential (or if they don't want to admit that, this book was fun to read as well).

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