

story waves

with Kelly E. Keough

Your Secret Sauce Recipe: Add the Special Ingredients of Conviction

Sprinkle the SPICE

Character spice is the most important ingredient when start to craft a story because it will intuitively point the way to writing a strong premise. Choose at least one CHARACTER SPICE TRAIT that correlates with the story's overall action (WIN, ESCAPE, RETRIEVE, STOP).

For ex., ask: What does my character want? Is it to win, to gain freedom, to amass money, or stop crime? Then, using spice analogies, describe your character, showing their unique quirks and traits. Next, put these traits into motion, making the character flavorful, unforgettable, and most of all—in constant conflict with the antagonist. Blend the main character's traits as you would blend spices, giving them at least two main spices to describe their inner/outer behavior or appearance.

Add spice to taste...

- Compare/Contrast your protagonist and antagonist using the spice analogy, creating a symphony of traits, hitting the low, mid, and high notes of the ensemble, and infusing the cast with as much "opposite" energy as possible to drive your central conflict.
- Every day or Exotic? Describe your character's spicy embodiment as whole, crushed, or finely ground. Ask: Is this character an everyday spice like pepper, an exotic spice like saffron, or a colorful spice like turmeric?
- Adding spice to character builds a foundation for a strong story premise using opposing forces of the desires/weakness of your protagonist and antagonist.

Sift in the FLOUR

Sifting in the flour builds a character's conviction and keeps the story engine running. Describe your character's pure conviction that is only found in the grinding of the bones, deep inside, that no one can see. Conviction is the glue, the glutenous flour, which holds the character together emotionally on the inside, against all odds, even when they're losing on the outside or have lost all spiritual or material hope. What are the grains of wisdom or intellect or actions your main character has

that no one else has to make the impossible possible? What's the storyline of them digging deep, creating a character of transforming adversity into victory? Or is the character gluten-free and falls apart?

Add the FAT

Adding the fat allows you to give your main character a weakness/need from their past. Reveal the main character's toxic backstory, which is a reservoir of human trauma fueling addictive behaviors and or bad habits that ignite and lie dormant until fired up by a search for the truth. Or do they still hide from the fat? Do the same for the antagonist, villain, or supervillain. When the main character decides to "lose the fat" they can change their mind and beliefs and reach their goals.

Dollop with CREAM

Adding a dollop of cream is necessary to create a complex character and the story behind their birth. They were born for a reason. What is it? Tell the main character and antagonist's dark or light "mother" story, enveloping each character in a shadowy cave of starving for love or bathed in the stark light of truth. Reveal their dark or light connection to the black or white Madonna. Show and describe nurture vs. nature's inner and outer conflicts and the possible upward healing journey of ascension or the downward disintegration to dust.

Shake the SALT | VINEGAR | ACID

Shaking the salt, vinegar, acid is a necessary evil of revealing the deep emotional wounds of the past. It's important to plant the seeds of your main character's arc through alchemical transformation. Shake the healing salt crystals on the main character's opened wounds (fat/cream) and then, through the sharp sting of truth (salt | vinegar | acid) arising out of your central conflict (between main character and opponent), your main character experiences a necessary pain that catalyzes their step-by-step transformation and character arc.

Pour the SUGAR

Pouring the sugar is for your audience as much as it is for your main character. Everyone wants to experience sweet redemption. Show the sweet change of heart that comes, paradoxically, through the main character's embracing and accepting the broken romantic promise after a long resisting of life's bitterness. Twist this beat, and pouring the sugar could be a "false romantic win" scene early on that can be paid off later in the story.

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