

## UNDERDOGS

## STARTING A COMIC WITH CONFLICT

January 8, 2014 — Made by Patrick Yurick

## Find the conflict.

Not every comic book story starts with conflict. Some creators look for places to start that are non-intuitive like the ending of a story. Check out your favorite comic. Open it to the first pages – what do you see? You will start to notice that almost all stories begin with conflict. Now sit down and take your own characters (or invent new ones) and imagine them in the same situation. What happens when you put these new characters in a similar conflict? What elements need to change to make sense?

I once went to a talk on writing with J. Michael Straczynski and he was asked about where to start. He said (I am paraphrasing) "picture a room with gunshots going off everywhere, your main character is in the center. What happens next? That's the beginning of your story." He was pointing out the general rule that if you don't know where to begin, start in conflict.

A great way to begin writing is to find a moment or scene that creates a problem for a set of characters. It can be really difficult at first to find this moment but do not be dismayed! The best artists have had a really difficult time finding the right problem to write their comics around.



In my first mini for *Hipster Picnic*, "Roommate Problems," The whole idea stemmed from this initial idea I had to the left. Steve walks in on Hawk eating an arm and immediately makes a disapproving face. Basically all conflict boils down to peoples' desires being at odds with one another's. In this instance, Hawk's unexplained desire to eat human flesh conflicts with Steve's desire not to be eaten. The remainder of the comic builds on that misunderstanding.



In this example Steve walks down the hall when he encounters a confusing scene: Hawk is in bed while an old man reads him a bedtime story. The problem is introduced only when Steve's characteristic need to protect Hawk as a parental figure is introduced into the scene. Steve is thinking, suspiciously, "Who is this old man? What is he doing in Hawk's room?" Another take on this is that Steve's symbolic weight as the "best friend" to Hawk could now be read as being threatened by this new interloper. In this case it is definitely possible to have compounding conflicts that directly call Steve into injecting himself into the situation and challenging it.

## Can't find the conflict? Word list!

When stumped there are a great many things you can do. One of the most beneficial is creating an associative word list. Try to think of your characters and their world. Start by writing any and all words that come to mind. This is similar to a brain map. At this stage it is very important that you be fast and loose rather than precise and accurate when writing. Don't judge yourself. If your story is a fantasy about elves in the mystical woods, write: "ELVES," "MYSTICAL," "SLUG," "BANANA," "PEANUT," "BUTTER," "ELVIS PRESLEY," "DEATH," etc. Try to write in a continuous stream for at least 10 minutes while filling your paper up with nonsense.

## Take a break.

Limit yourself to a five minute break so that your brain doesn't lose elasticity and connection to the story that you are trying to bring into the world. Try to get away from the computer or the notepad. Use the five minutes to stretch, go for a walk, or meditate and clear your mind. Pressure and anxiety brought on by writers block does not help you write better and in fact can deter the creative process by tuckering you out too quickly with negative thoughts. Clear your mind.

## Doodle.

Sit down with your word list and try to doodle the connections between different ideas. In the word list example

above there were the words "Elves" and "Banana"- so draw a couple different situations with an elf and a banana. The key to this step, just like the word list, is to make sure you are drawing loosely and quickly. Sketch as many thumbnails (ideas or pictures of situations) as you can in the span of 10-20 minutes. This should look like chicken scratch. Try to time yourself... if you are being too careful with your drawings stop and stretch out your hand while moving like a painter would on a canvas- fast and loose. Spend only one minute per doodle so that you have 20 different doodles in the span of 20 minutes.

#### Write.

Pick one of the ideas you generated and start writing! Do whatever is necessary get your idea out. At this point you can time yourself but it is more important to write about your inspirations in detail. If you hit a block put this exercise aside and work on another project (you can always come back to your notes later).

Congratulations! You have the initial notes to a real story!

Liked it? Take a second to support MakingComics.com on Patreon!



BECOME A PATRON

#### Related Posts:

1. [Starting Off Right: How To Troubleshoot Common Issues](#)
2. [How To Write An Outline For Your Comic](#)
3. [Why should one write a script when in the end they draw the comic as well?](#)
4. [How To Write A Story For Your Comic](#)

#### UNDERDOGS

Tags: [brainstorming](#), [first steps](#), [ideation](#), [Underdog](#)

## 13 Responses to "Starting A Comic With Conflict"



N. Kraken

January 8th, 2014

Killer suggestions. Thanks Patrick!

Random side note: Reporting in on my daily [warm up exercises](#): 2 days in a row under my belt. I'll be shooting for day 3 tonight. If I have time I might try to get the scanner up and running again and start posting my silly warm up pages on my blog for fun (I certainly haven't been posting anything else lately....)

Reply



Patrick

January 9th, 2014

Thanks man! I appreciate the support. This was a great article to work on (it was the first one written for Making Comics!)

Reply



Devin

January 9th, 2014

Do it!

Reply



Sylvie

January 9th, 2014

Go for it! Some of us wana be comicbook makers want to see anything from any one that starts. Then when you go mainstream WE can brag "Ho so and so? I knew they would make it. I saw one of their first drawings." Go for it I plan to do the same.

Reply



Patrick

January 9th, 2014

I totally agree. Keep it up!

Reply



N. Kraken

January 9th, 2014

Thanks for the encouragment people! Ok, I resurrected the scanner and have posted my first batch of daily warm ups. I appreciate the notion, but I doubt I'll be one of those that "goes mainstream", but I'm ok with that. I'm in it for the pure enjoyment of drawing and the community that MC is building. 😊

Reply



N. Kraken

January 9th, 2014

Hmm.. wish it were possible to edit comments, or at least preview.... but anyhow, I had an erroneous trailing backlash on my link. Here's the (hopefully) correct version [the first batch](#)

Happy MakComIng!

Reply



Adam

January 10th, 2014

N. Kraken, these are awesome. And kudos to you for being the first to post your progress!

I'd like to talk about you doing this on an upcoming podcast in the next week or two. Would you be alright with that? One idea we have for the podcast is to highlight the progress of visitors to the site when they post things they've learned, practiced, and implemented from the site. If you're in, let me know.

Reply



N. Kraken

January 10th, 2014

Ya of course! I'd love it. I'm in! 😊

Reply



Adam

January 10th, 2014

Sweet! I'll get a hold of you soon.

Reply



Christine

February 5th, 2014

Hi, I'm new to writing comics and I'm a little scared in how to approach my comic's first few pages. I began to map out my comic wishing for the first book to end with my character gaining her powers at the end. But I'm beginning to wonder if I should've pushed this part further ahead in the story instead of making the first four introductions to the characters and the aliens.

My comic is a weird mixture of fantasy and sci-fi to be honest, because I wanted to make a magical girl series but with the weird twist of aliens and sci-fi. I have been reading a number of magical girl and sci-fi comics in order to get a feel of what I want. But I feel that I may be pacing the story a little slow. I introduce the character in the first chapter, the second I introduce the main character to one of the valuable characters in the story (who is alien) the third chapter I introduce her support character and future companion as well as the alien council. The fourth chapter I introduce her to the conflict, the council speaking of terminating or destroying earth. The fifth chapter picks up where fourth left off and the main character taking the mantle. Now towards the end of the fifth chapter and volume 1 of the book. I was going to show the main's characters transformation and the beginning to the conflict. Should I have combined 2, 3 and 4 and push her magical transformation ahead in the story giving the battle in the first volume or keep it as it is.

Reply



Devin

February 5th, 2014

Hey Christine, thanks for the question. In my experience the story is always served best by getting to the action as soon as possible. My advice? Try and gradually reveal the information about your world/conflict while making sure that the minute-to-minute story is exciting. Also, remember that less is more, so let the audience have questions. Explain only what you need to, and try to show information rather than tell it.

That's my two cents, but maybe one of the writers around here will be more helpful. Just remember, there's no "right way."

Reply



Patrick

February 6th, 2014

I wrote this all out before, but it deleted the comment! Argh - anyway I will be brief. There are two new articles coming out soon that I wrote that pertain to this question. The first is on drafts, and the importance of drafts. Anne Lamott says it way better than I do so I will refer to her: "Shitty First Drafts" <http://wrd.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/1-Shitty%20First%20Drafts.pdf>

The second article that you should look out for is about how to assemble your editorial team for your project.

Basically all of this is to say: write it all out. Know that the first draft is going to suck. Don't place the burden squarely on your shoulders to be the judge of what to keep "in" your first draft and what not to. If you assemble a group of people to edit your work they will tell you what to do when moving from draft 1 to 2. So just write it all out. Or as Anne says (better than I do):

"The first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing that no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later. You just let this childlike part of you channel whatever voices and visions come through and onto the page. If one of the characters wants to say, "Well, so what, Mr. Poopy Pants?," you let her. No one is going to see it. If the kid wants to get into really sentimental, weepy, emotional territory, you let him. Just get it all down on paper because there may be something great in those six crazy pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational, grown-up means. There may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, that is so beautiful or wild that you now know what you're supposed to be writing about, more or less, or in what direction you might go — but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and a half pages."

[Reply](#)

## Leave a Reply

XHTML: You can use these tags: <a href="" title=""> <abbr title=""> <acronym title=""> <b> <blockquote cite=""> <code> <del datetime=""> <em> <i> <q cite=""> <s> <strike> <strong>