

Michael Arndt

Eight Steps for “Setting the Story Into Motion”

1. *Show Your Main Character*

Introduce the audience to your main character. As most of the story follows their perspective, you need to establish him in the mind of the audience. In the case of *Toy Story*, this is Woody. He is a toy that comes alive when humans aren't watching.

2. *Introduce the Universe that They Live In*

Give your audience a chance to see the world that the protagonist lives in. In the case of *Toy Story*, we see that Woody lives in Andy's room with the other toys.

3. *Show Your Character's Grand Passion*

Show your character doing the thing that they love the most. What is their Grand Passion? In Woody's case, his grand passion is his place as Andy's favourite toy. He has the favoured position Andy's bed and the introductory playtime sequences always show him as the star of Andy's imagination.

4. *Show Your Character's Hidden Flaw*

Only boring protagonists are perfect. Show the audience your main character's flaw. Give them a flaw that comes out of their grand passion, that comes out of the thing they love doing the most. In Woody's case, it's pride. As Andy's favourite toy, he has a lot of pride about his place in Andy's bedroom. It is only natural that he gets his comeuppance.

5. *Hint at Storm Clouds on the Horizon*

Very subtly, hint to your audience that there is trouble out on the horizon. In the case of *Toy Story*, those storm clouds are Andy's birthday party. All of the other toys are afraid of being replaced. Only Woody, proud of his status as Andy's favourite tool, is unworried.

6. *Turn Your Character's World Upside Down*

Something comes into your hero's life and turns it upside down. It takes away their grand passion. In the case of Woody, the introduction of Buzz Lightyear changes everything. Because Buzz is such a cool tool, Andy and all of the other toys prefer him. Woody finds himself relegated to the Toy Chest while Buzz gets the preferred spot on Andy's bed. Woody has lost his greatest possession: his status as Andy's favourite toy.

7. *Add Insult to Injury*

If that is not enough, you have to add insult to injury. It is not enough to take away your protagonist's grand passion, you always have to humiliate him in the process. In the case of *Toy Story*, not only does he lose his place as favourite toy to Buzz, Buzz has no idea that he's a toy! As Woody loses favour, you can see his frustration at Buzz's cluelessness. He's being replaced by an imbecile! This step is important to show your character's frustration at a world that is completely unfair.

8. *Have Your Character Make the Wrong Choice*

This is the big one. Bring your main character to a fork in the road. At this fork, they have two choices: a right choice and a wrong choice. Of course the character makes a wrong choice. Having seen what he has gone through, we understand perfectly why he makes the wrong choice. We even WANT him to make the wrong choice. This wrong choice comes out of his grand passion and provokes a crisis that sets us on our way to Act 2. Let's take *Toy Story* again. In *Toy Story*, Woody, having been displaced and insulted by the deluded Buzz Lightyear, decides to try to knock Buzz behind the dresser so that Andy will have to take him to Pizza Planet. The plan goes awry, Buzz is knocked out the window, and the other toys blame Woody, leaving him no choice but to find and return Buzz to Andy's room. That leads us right into Act 2.

Michael Arndt wrote Little Miss Sunshine and Toy Story 3.

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