

# Character Development

## Exercise: Switch

### Protagonists

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After all, every character is the Protagonist in their own story.

In a recent [Create a Compelling Protagonist online class](#), a question came up: Could we use some of those same character development tools we're studying with other characters, specifically the Nemesis? Yes, indeed, with an exercise I call: Switch Protagonists.

That is, you can work with every character in your story as if *they* were the Protagonist. Indeed, from their experience, they **are** their own Protagonist. And this includes the Nemesis.

Indeed, we do many of those exercises in another Craft class: [Write a Worthy Nemesis](#). For example, take some key questions we ask about the Protagonist:

- What is the character's Conscious Goal (Want)?
- What is the character's Unconscious Goal (Need)?
- What does the character Fear the most?
- Who or what Opposes the character?

Now direct them toward the story's antagonist figure. Go deeper. When delving into your Protagonist, think about what their Shadow dynamic is, aspects of their psyche they try to repress, avoid, or ignore representing dark, negative instincts and impulses.

Are there ways in which your story's Nemesis reflects the Protagonist's Shadow, a kind of physicalized projection of the Protagonist's Negative Self?

If the Protagonist and Nemesis align in this regard, you have a specific and powerful psychological connection between the two that demands resolution, pointing the narrative toward the plot's Final Struggle.

This is one of the reasons I like working with character archetypes because when you do the switch Protagonist exercises, it can give you a whole different outlook on character relationships. For example, here is the character archetype lineup (in my view) of *The Silence of the Lambs*:



Looking at *The Silence of the Lambs* with Clarice Starling as the Protagonist.

**Protagonist:** Clarice Starling

**Nemesis:** Buffalo Bill

**Attractor:** Catherine Martin (the kidnap victim)

**Mentor:** Hannibal Lecter (yes, as crazy as it sounds, he's her Wisdom figure)

**Trickster:** Jack Crawford, Dr. Alex Chilton

Let's switch Protagonists and look at the world through Lecter's eyes:



Looking at *The Silence of the Lambs* with Hannibal Lecter as the Protagonist.

Protagonist: Lecter

Nemesis: Dr. Chilton

Attractor: Clarice

Mentor: Buffalo Bill (Lecter uses the clues he gets re BB to help him escape)

Trickster: Crawford (using Clarice to get info from Lecter, fake offer of Anthrax Island)

How about Buffalo Bill:



Looking at The Silence of the Lambs with Buffalo Bill as the Protagonist.

Protagonist: Buffalo Bill

Nemesis: Clarice

Attractor: His female self (this is who yearns to become)



Mentor: Moths (represent transformation, he wants to change into a female)



Trickster: Catherine (ally as kidnap victim, enemy when she snares his dog)



So yes, you can do similar exercises and character work with any and all characters by switching Protagonists. Bear in mind, they don't actually change their respective narrative functions, but the exercises allow you to look through their eyes as the Protagonist of their own story and that can deepen your understanding of them immensely, including your Nemesis.

That's critical because you need to find the humanity in any Nemesis character or else they are little more than a

stereotype.

Remember: Even Bad Guys have mothers!

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