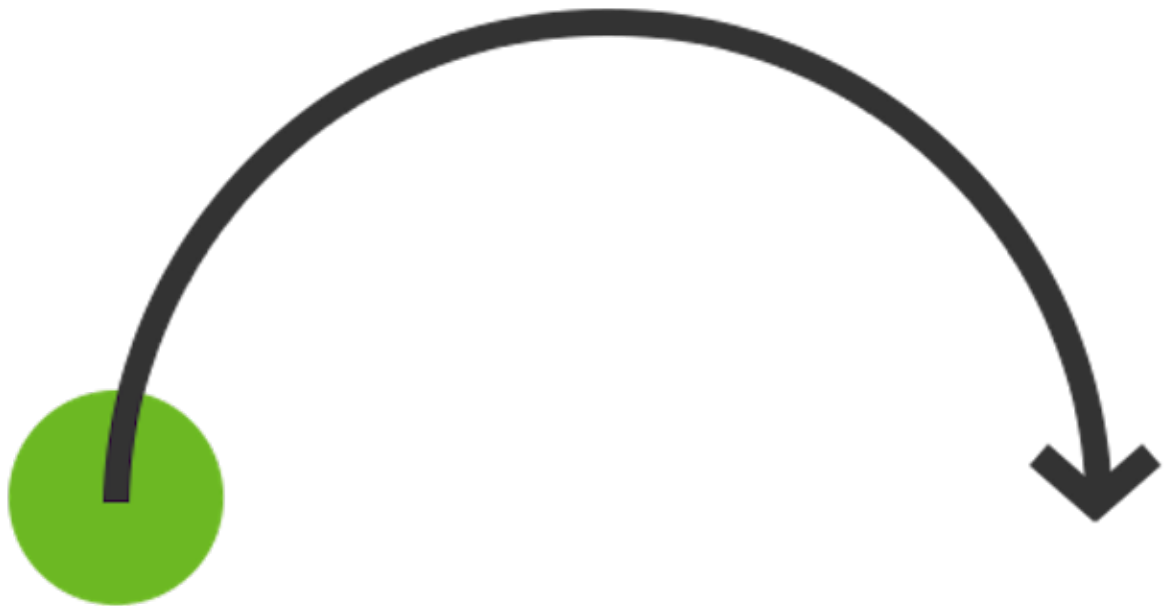


# Reader Question: Should you plot out the Protagonist's arc or just go with your gut?

[Scott Myers](#)

Some words of wisdom from legendary Hollywood producer Max Millimeter.



A tweet from @CaveDude21:

*Do you actually plot out the Protag's Emotional Arc, or just go with gut?*

I'm tempted to go to my default point: There's no right way to write. Every writer is different. Every story is different. But you know what? I'm going to pull legendary Hollywood movie producer Max Millimeter into this conversation to

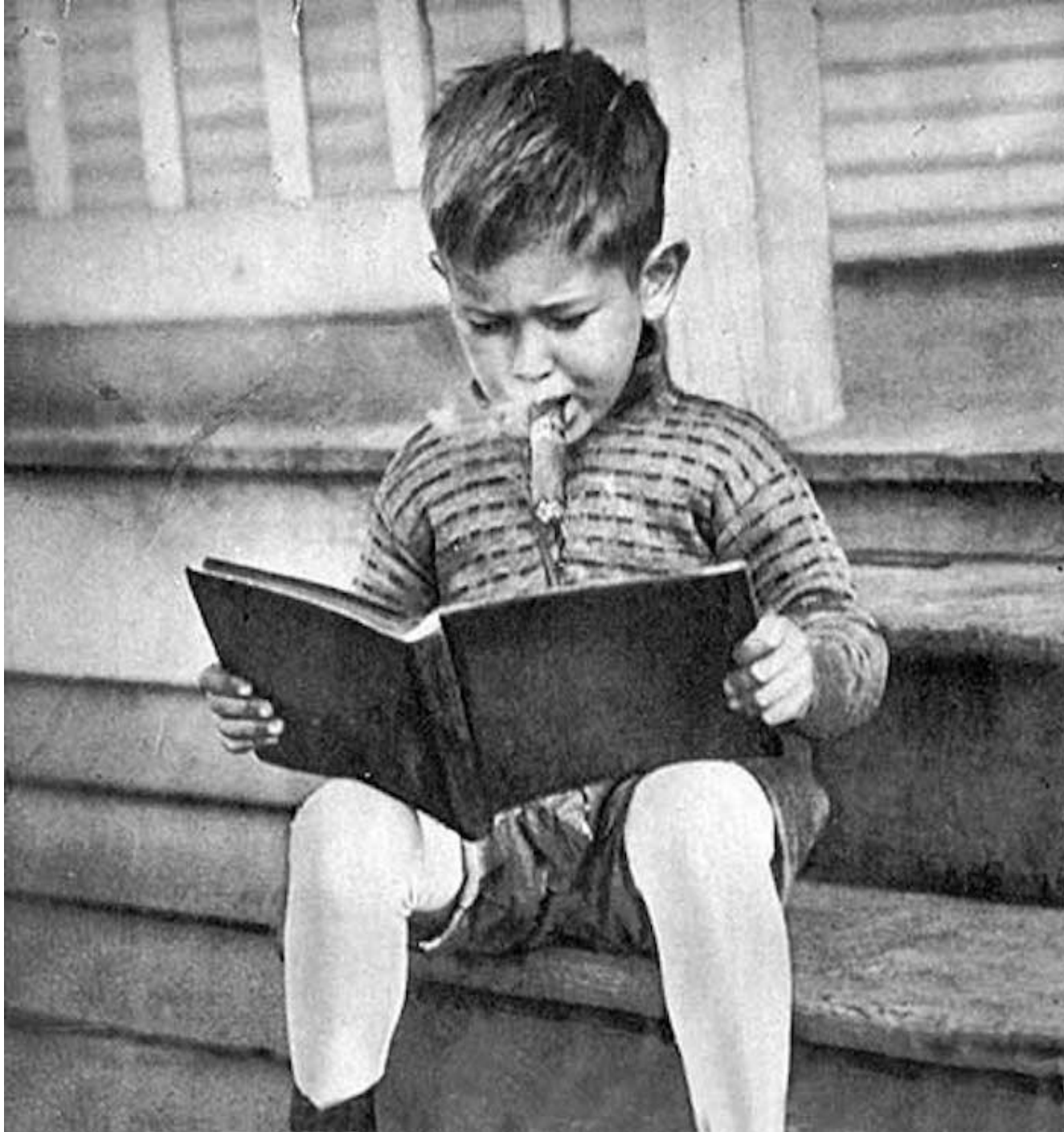
lend some, shall we say, *reality* to the conversation.

*Okay, first off, I gotta be frank. I hate that word "arc." You writers throw that around in meetings all the time, arc arc here, arc arc there, here an arc, there an arc, everybody's got a fucking arc arc.*

*Know what I think? Writers use that word 'coz it makes it sound like you got some deep insight into a big fat mystery what a character's about.*

*Bull shit! It ain't rocket science. It's about who a character is and what they go through. Boom! Easy peasy, let's get sleezy.*

*So arc that!*



Max Millimeter as a boy.

*Now let's say I got a story. And I got back-to-back meetings with two different writers to see who I'm gonna hire to write said story.*

*Writer A, she comes in and while she goes on about the Protagonist's arc, which as I just said drives me a little nutso, at least she's telling me what I wanna hear: The Protagonist starts out over here being one way, goesthrough some shit, then ends up over here being*

*another way. The story changes them, they're like a different person, you know.*

*Okay, so it's Writer B's turn, and he comes in, and let's say I'm tryin' to be real nice, meet him on his turf. I say, "So what about the Protagonist's arc?" And he says, "Well, you know, I've been doing a lot of thinking about that, and instead of laying it out for you, I've decided to go with my gut in figuring it out."*

*Now, you tell me: Who do you pick for that project, huh? Miss Here-Is-The-Protagonist's-Arc-All-Laid-Out-Beginning-Middle-And-End or Mister-Go-With-My-Gut-You-Just-Gotta-Trust-Me-And-My-Artsy-Fartsy-Process?*

*See what I'm saying?*

*Look, you wanna write a spec script and you decide not to figure shit out before you type FADE IN, be my guest, 'coz evidently you live in a world full of petunias and ponies, rainbows and ribbons la la la.*

*But you wanna live in my world, or better yet, work in my world, where it's deadlines and competition and I need a script yesterday and just bottom the freakin' line for me, yeah, you better damn well figure out your Protagonist's arc, or else it's bye-bye Hollywood, hello Radio Shack.*

*That still doesn't mean I like that word "arc."*

An additional point: The Protagonist is almost always the single most important character in a story. As their Want defines the shape of the Plotline, the story's *physical* journey, so too their Need defines the shape of the Themeline, the story's *psychological* journey. It is critical to determine what both of those are for you to be in touch with the structure and soul of the story.

As to the subtext of the question: "Do I have to do the hard work of figuring out the nature of a Protagonist's metamorphosis in Prep, before I write the script, or can I just type FADE IN and figure it out along the way?" A writer can choose to do anything they want. However I side with Max here: Work through this type of thing in Prep. Face it: You're either going to figure it out then or figure it out while writing the script. You're much better off working that out before you type FADE IN so you don't get lost, frustrated and quit before you get to FADE OUT.

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