

Protagonist
By Danny Cove

Hello, my name is Max Destroyo. Seriously? That name is just so...terrible, and pretentious. It's like the writer took maybe five minutes to come up with it. I mean, come on, man, am I a human being or a cyborg? Honestly, I'm not really sure because the writer didn't develop me enough. Anyways, like I said, my name is Max Destroyo, and...I just feel like I'm dying whenever I say that. The "Max" part isn't bad, but "Destroyo?" What, was "Explodo" already taken? Seriously...

In any case, I have recently come to the conclusion that I am a fabricated, written character. How do I know this? Well, my lack of body is a great indicator. Most real, living people don't exist solely as words on a page. Most of them have things like hair and arms and a mouth, none of which my writer took the time to develop in me. What's my hair color, bud? That's right, intangible, because that's a real color. And don't get me started on my mouth, or, more specifically, my voice. Did my writer research and build a psychological profile or historical background for me, factors which are extremely necessary for building a character's unique voice? Of course not, that'd be far too much work! I suspect that the writer thought of this earlier in the day, and then later in the afternoon, after a big meal and a nap, sat down to write out the story organically. Let me tell you now: you don't develop a character organically and expect him to have a unique voice right off the bat. It takes pages and chapters, sometimes even whole volumes, to develop the voice of an organic character, and I have the sinking feeling I don't have that much time.

Okay, now let's pretend there's a segue between that paragraph and this one. I'm also supposed to tell you that I'm quite sarcastic. Okay, now that's just bad writing. If I have to tell you about a personality characteristic as bluntly as that, then that's just laziness. Where's the subtlety in the writing, the fine art of allowing the audience to come to conclusions on their own? When I say things as bluntly as "I'm quite sarcastic," it's like I'm taking control of their perspective of me, and that's too much control in the writing process. But I'm not the writer here, and certainly neither is my own writer.

You know, I think I should just take a deep breath and relax. I'm not normally this angry, after all. I think I'm just frustrated. I mean, how would you respond if you just found out that your entire existence is tied up with a short story with a 1,200-word limit? And what word are we on now? 463? That means my life is over one-third over now. I'm the equivalent of a guy in his late twenties or early thirties, and reading this page probably took less than three minutes. Maybe if I slowed down, I could extend my life just a little...bit...long...er...

It doesn't really matter. What is the purpose of trying to extend my life if my whole purpose is to be the narrator for one, single story? I mean, if I'm lucky, maybe I'll get the story expanded into a book, and if I'm extremely lucky, maybe even a series of books. But even then, when I reach the last word of the last sentence of the last chapter of the last book, my existence will draw to a close. As the last stroke is drawn on the page, so my own life ends. It's true of any character in any work of fiction: when the last story about them ends, they die. They don't live forever, don't keep going. The grim reaper waits upon that final letter, and though a shadow of them may live on in the reader, the core of them has ceased to be.

What will that be like for me? At the end of this story, will the last word hurt, like a knife in my back? Will it be eerie and disturbing, like hearing the last of the dirt tossed upon your casket? Yeah, I got morbid there. Sorry about that. But will I die and go on to a fictional

afterlife? Or will I simply cease to be? These questions plague me. It'd help if I could remember what it was like before I formed through the writer's words. But how could I remember from before I existed? If that were somehow possible, perhaps it would undermine the real value of my purpose here.

I don't think I blame the writer so much anymore. I mean, sure, he didn't really do any sort of character development, but he at least created me, bringing me here for a purpose, though I just passed the two-thirds mark and I still don't know what that is. Is that what life is like? Trying to find your purpose, your reason for being here? Are we here simply for our stories, or is there some deeper, more true purpose for our existence? I can understand if I was placed here to oppose some evil mastermind, or some brooding supervillain. Or maybe, on a lower key, a minor antagonist. But where is that antagonist for me to rail against? Maybe...maybe the antagonist of my story isn't so much a person, but more a state of being. Am I here to fight against my impending death at the end of this story?

I think I just wish that my purpose would extend beyond the end of this story. If I'm lucky enough to be the protagonist – and I think it's safe to assume that I am, here – then I'll make it at least as far as the story's climax. If I'm *really* lucky, there may even be some falling action, but that's like walking that last green mile before the executioner's chair. I know death waits for me at the end of the falling action. So it all goes back to my core question: am I only here to complete a single story? Man, I wish I existed like the audience and the writer. At least for them, there's the possibility of living on, not to mention having a body. I mean, what if I wanted to be a runner and run forever? Thank God that's not true, because I just don't have the energy for *that*.

Enough of the reveries, I think. Back to reality! Er, I mean, back to fiction! So what's this story supposed to be about? I only have about a hundred words left, so I don't think I'll be able to accomplish much. Hey, hey, hey, I just thought of something devious, yes, yes, a way to get back at the writer for not giving me characteristics: instead of actually *doing* anything, I just wasted his entire story on this one, single monologue. Take that, writer! You wanted a story and all you got was rambling nonsense! Oh, now I'm sad. And there, ladies and gentlemen, is more bad writing.

Sixteen words left, I should make them count. But how should I end this? How about...