

## Character development

### Chas McKinney

While working full-time and chipping away at grad school nights and weekends, Chas McKinney was a clean-shaven number-cruncher in the Parks Finance office. If you caught him away from his desk, he was probably explaining the company's pro forma sheets to an intern or swapping out the five-gallon jug on the water cooler. People saw him as a pleasant, useful fixture at Five Worlds. Not fast-tracked or flashy, but solid.

Chas was smart, respectful, and always just a little overdue for a promotion.<sup>1</sup> The kind of analyst who would wait his turn rather than leave the company. His laid-back attitude earned him friends but made him easy to overlook when opportunities arose.<sup>2</sup>

Now he's homeless. His hair's rain-soaked and overdue for a cut, so he combs it back. The beard he never meant to grow is obsessively trimmed—scissors are a one-time purchase, shaving supplies aren't. He's hungry most of the time. He misses his almost-purebred Corgi, Penny. Tells himself she's being fed at the shelter. That thought comes often. It helps.<sup>3</sup>

He wants his dog back. But first, he wants his life back.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Chas's pleasant, collaborative work ethos should be revealed through action or dialogue. There may be a backstory moment when he solves a problem at Five Worlds, but his skill and contribution are ignored or credited too late.

2 "Laid back" suggests a tendency to cooperate rather than confront. That brings necessary vulnerability to a protagonist.

3 This moment beautifully shows a hidden emotional need. Repeating the thought signals both longing and self-soothing, again earning reader empathy.

4 While this is clear and poignant, it's a direct statement; a "tell." One way to instead "show" would be to bring a stray dog or a lost collar into the story. Deidra or another character could remark about Chas' emotional response. That might be worth a line or two of dialogue to deepen both characters.



Palmtree Resort, the abandoned timeshare complex he stumbled into during a hurricane, is the opposite of everything he knew. The people there have been hurting longer, deeper.<sup>5</sup> He becomes part of their world. He's fed, then he learns that the food comes from petty crime. He's obliged to help.<sup>6</sup>

His relationship with Deidra changes things. She's trying to be a good big sister to Morgan. Chas believes she still wants to do good. He believes all three of them can find someplace better, once the economic hurricane passes through.

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<sup>5</sup> Homeless people living in the ruins of a timeshare resort (and at a dark time of their lives) are certain to have experienced pain. If you feel that any character needs further development, consider writing a brief vignette or dialogue snippet to reveal that pain or a coping mechanism.

<sup>6</sup> This line amplifies Chas's internal conflicts and his role as a protagonist who adapts under pressure.