Twitter Thread by Vida Cruz, magical dog mom ■■■ ■■



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@laviecestmoi



I want to talk about how western editors and readers often mistake protags written by BIPOC as "inactive protagonists." It's too common an issue that's happened to every BIPOC author I know.

> Writing tip: let\u2019s talk about the INACTIVE PROTAGONIST. I\u2019ve seen a lot of amazing books lately with incredible plots, intricate worlds, and just really great writing with one recurring issue, which is the inactive protagonist. I think it can get tough when you\u2019re writing (1/10)
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> — Briston Brooks (@briston_brooks) January 26, 2021

Often, our protags are just trying to survive overwhelming odds. Survival is an active choice, you know. Survival is a story. Choosing to be strong in the face of the world ending, even if you can't blast a wall down to do it, is a choice.

It's how we live these days.

Western editors, readers, and writers are too married to the three-act structure, to the type of storytelling that is driven by conflict, to that go-getter individualism. Please read more widely out of your comfort zone. A lot of great non-western stories do not hinge on these.

Sometimes I wonder if you're all so hopped up on the conflict-driven story because that's exactly how your colonizer ancestors dealt with people different from them. Oops, I said it, sorry not sorry. Yes, even this mindset has roots in colonialism, deal with it.

If you want examples of non-conflict-driven storytelling google the following: kishoutenketsu, johakyu, daisy chain storytelling/wheel spoke storytelling. There was another one whose name I forgot but I will tweet it when I recall it.

Anyway, I think there is a space in literature and beyond for stories about radical acceptance or that have a radical acceptance aesthetic. Accepting the things you cannot change but dealing with them in your own way. No pyrotechnics but plenty of potential for drama.

What you want in a story is drama. Conflict does not necessarily equate to drama. Conflict is driven by two or more forces colliding. If a protagonist decides to let the force wash over them instead, that does not mean the protagonist is inactive.

Once again, I repeat: SURVIVING IS A DECISION. BIPOC based in Western countries do it all the time. Us third worlders do it all the time. But of course if you grew up white in a Western country, being mired in hopeless systems will be hard for you to grasp.

And if you're a BIPOC author, listen: you may be already as good, if not better, than most of the competition out there. You keep getting rejected not because your story sucks but because white editors do not know how to read your work. Keep trying.

Last but not least, we don't just need diverse demographics for everything, WE NEED DIVERSE STORIES. Get your colonizer heads out of your asses and seek out other traditions. End rant.

I found the other storytelling structure! It's called Robleto and is of Nicaraguan origin.

Thank you for coming to my TED Talk. ■

One last! Another type of story that everyone loves (or pretends not to love) but no one will publish in the west is FLUFF. YES THAT'S RIGHT, FANFICTION FLUFF. SUCK ON THAT.

It has been pointed out several times so I will amend the thread to say: all my points apply for disabled, neurodivergent, and chronically ill protagonists, too. Our way of showing agency is DEFINITELY different from yours so please be mindful of that.

Okay so this thread blew up in a completely unexpected way, so:

Hi, I write fantasy fiction with a Filipino flair and many of my protagonists are just actively trying to survive ■ you can get a copy of my work here:

https://t.co/hCK8uspghp

I'm also gonna teach a class on retellings courtesy of Clarion West in April, so if that's your jam, go sign up! BIPOC can apply for scholarships :)

https://t.co/awSu7y5674

Lastly, I co-organized FiyahCon Fringe, which is all about giving a platform to global perspectives in different aspects of literature and SFF—and I'm gonna do it again this year, bigger and better! If you like the work I do, here's one way to show it ■

https://t.co/7c21iqwMgz

Oh yes! I am a freelance book editor with @DarlingAxe so if you have a book that people keep telling you has an "inactive protagonist" and other problems, you can request for me—my schedule is wide open. I'm very thorough!

https://t.co/yPxghYAuQO