Foreshadowing
Give us a hint...

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A Definition

• Foreshadowing: The literary device foreshadowing refers to the use of indicative words/phrases and hints that set the stage for a story to unfold and give the reader a hint of something that is going to happen without revealing the story or spoiling the suspense. Foreshadowing is used to suggest an upcoming outcome to the story.
Foreshadowing Spectrum

- Levels of obviousness
  - “He vowed that day to get even no matter what - even if it took until the end of the book he’d make Angela pay!”
  - “His warm smile left him. He took a deep breath and spat.”

- Levels of detail
  - “It would be a night to remember.”
  - “If anyone touches this button, Mr. Bond, my entire plan will be ruined in a spectacular special-effects driven orange-fireball montage of destruction and I will be defeated.”
Clues in a Mystery

- “I see dead people.”
  - Plot point + extra meaning/foreshadowing
    - Plot Twist
    - Makes sense at the end. (Sixth Sense!)
- “Penelope’s perfume bottle was not where she left it.”
  - Important detail or red herring?
    - Misdirection is as important as direction
    - Options, puzzles, angles
Prophecy

• Mystical
  • MacBeth
    • Arc: “fair is foul and foul is fair”
    • Detail: “Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him”
    • Surprise: “Fear not, Macbeth. No man that’s born of woman Shall e'er have power upon thee”
  • Dreams/Ghosts/Seers/Prophets/Ancient Texts
• Contemporary
  • The Cornetto Trilogy
    • Shaun of the Dead / Hot Fuzz / World’s End
Beware Spoilers

• Foreshadowing has to be delicate and often obfuscated or it will spoil the suspense instead of adding to it.

• “If anyone touches this button, Mr. Bond....”
  • No biggie. Low level mystery
  • The question becomes “how” and “who”

• “Dr. Acula is here to see you, detective, about those mysterious murders you’re investigating.”

• Movie Previews - amirite?

• Blurbs, Covers and Marketing Material
  • Gotta give a little, but not too much.
Meta Foreshadowing

• First Person Narrator
  • Is going to be alive at the end

• Historical Fiction
  • Napoleon is going to have a bad time at Waterloo
  • Dances with Wolves: Kevin Costner’s new Indian way of life won’t last long
Seeking Attention

- Foreshadowing often draws attention to itself with contrasting style and mood to signal an important clue.

- “Tommy was ever so happy. He loved life and Stephanie and knew in his glowing heart they’d be happy forever. Little did he suspect the misery to come.”

- Change in mood is startling and thus a memorable foreshadowed clue.
Nothing to See Here

• Foreshadowing often obscured
  • “Pat spent a year with his aunt in Perth to recover from an unknown ailment, many people believed to have been caught a loose woman.”
    • Small detail slipped in casual dialog, long description, etc.
  • The important detail is not the disease, but the place.
    • Later explains how Pat knew about Australian Toad Venom
  • Often requires the reader to make connections
    • Perth = Australia
  • Pay off in the end
    • Reader involved in the story
      • Feels smart for figuring it out beforehand
      • At least it makes sense*
Makes Sense: Plot Twists

- Foreshadowing lets the writer justify later event and prepare the reader for “unexpected” twists.
- OR NOT - Surprise Plot Twist
- “I saw that coming” vs. “I didn’t see that coming”
  - If too drastic a turn, the reader can feel cheated and lied to — you lose trust
- Deus Ex Machina
- A foundation of expectation and possibility is vital to be fair to the reader
  - No matter how hard the turn, the reader should be somewhat prepared for it
    - Crying Game, Fight Club, Soylent Green
Chekov’s Gun

• “One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep.”

• Foreshadowing is A Promise You Make to the Reader
  • If you break your promise, you suck (and lose the trust of your reader)
    • The tipped bottle was the key to the whole mystery
    • Somebody pushes that button
  • Even red herrings should be tied up
    • Wrong answer, move along
    • His surly look was due to his palsy not malice.
Common Tropes

• The Weather
  • Storm Coming / Change in the Weather

• Brief disassociated glances at a characters, objects, details, etc which haven’t been attached to the story yet.
  • Cook in Hunt for Red October
    • Lamp-shaded in Kiss Kiss Bang Bang

• End of Chapter Teaser
  • They’d found a safe place... or had they?
Writing Foreshadowing

- Know what you’re saying
  - Theme
- Know where you’re going:
  - Waypoints and ending (at least)
- As you’re building up the story toward an end, clues will naturally fall into place
- Good device to intentionally add spice to an otherwise bland but necessary chapter.
- Symbolism offers rich menu for foreshadowing
Q & A / Work Session

• What’d I miss?

• Really? You want to talk about that?

  • Well okay... whatever.
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• www.johnnyworthen.com