

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About Building A Storyline

This is going to be shorter than most of the entries in this series I think. I'm watching Backlash 2004 and it has a Jericho vs. Christian/Trish Stratus match on it. This was part of the storyline the three had which turned Jericho face as he was in love with Trish but Trish turned on him for Christian, setting up a kind of a revenge feud. This is a good example of a well made storyline and I wanted to break it down to give you all an idea of how a good storyline is built.

Now to begin with, we'll start with how this story got going. As you may or may not remember, Christian and Jericho started hitting on Lita and Trish Stratus respectively. This went on for a few weeks and was almost instantly intriguing. Now why was this intriguing? In short, because it was something different. By that I don't mean something we had never seen before, but because it was something out of nature by Jericho and Christian. There's an expression in journalism that says "Dog bites man, not news. Man bites dog, news." In other words, we pay attention to stuff that is different.

Jericho and Christian had been jerks for months but now all of a sudden they were being nice. It got people's attention and you started wondering if it was because of feelings for the girls or because of some other reasons they had. The idea is that it made us want to keep watching because we had interesting people in these stories. That's a very necessary key. People like Jericho and Christian could read a phone book and somehow make it interesting. Throw in a couple of hot women and it's hard not to be interested.

Then we got the next step of the story, as Trish said that she was

starting to fall for Jericho. For a few weeks there was a relationship developing while Lita kind of faded away. The twist came soon after this, as Trish overheard Jericho and Christian talking about how this was all because of a bet between the two of them over who could get their respective lady in bed first. This makes sense as it's something evil that the two of them would do.

However, something very important is that we weren't told of it right up front. We had to wait awhile, which is something that makes a reveal all the better. We saw Jericho and Christian doing things and only after awhile did we find out that there was an ulterior motive to it. That's how you do a twist: not all at once before filling in the pieces later. You can do it that way, but it can cause more holes in a story. When you build up to it, the writers have had a better chance to fill in plot holes along the way.

Now once Trish was upset, Jericho revealed that he wasn't lying and actually did care for Trish. Trish of course didn't believe him, but Jericho kept at it. Through good storytelling, it became clear that Jericho really did have feelings for Trish and that he was sorry for his actions. Now THIS is where things get important: people can identify with that. Almost everyone has had their heart broken at some point and knows what it's like to want someone that you can't have for one reason or another. It builds sympathy for Jericho who is trying to change and is telling the truth after all his lies but it's not working.

Finally Trish seemed to come around but Christian wasn't happy. On Raw he hit Jericho in the head with a chair, saying that it was tough love. Trish was blamed for breaking up their friendship and changing Jericho, with Christian wanting the old Chris back. It's a natural story progression with the actions of each person connecting with other people and more actions spawning off that. That is what you call a story.

This leads us to Wrestlemania and a match between Chris Jericho and Christian. There was one very important thing about this match above all other things: it was good. You can have the best story in the world, the best promos in the world, the best build in the world and all that, but if your match sucks it brings things WAY down. See Dusty vs. Flair in 1985 if you want more details on that.

So anyway, the match at Wrestlemania was good and after Trish accidentally cost Jericho the match, Trish turned on Jericho after showing feelings for him in the previous weeks. This was a possibly nonsensical twist, but at the end of the day it extended the storyline and gave us another reason to side with Jericho. The idea here was that while Jericho wanted Trish, at the end of the day she wasn't someone worth wanting because she was actually evil.

We now had another reason to side with Jericho, because how many of you have had a crush on someone but they were a jerk and treated you like dirt? My guess would be more than one of you. Now how many people would love to have seen that person get what they had coming to them? This is a key part, as if you can't relate to a story, it's hard to get into it. So anyway, they had their rematch at Backlash, which was a handicap match involving Trish as well. Jericho won to even up the score, so we had a blowoff match inside a cage (note that the gimmicks built up over time: non-gimmick, handicap, cage).

Now the problem was that Christian got hurt in the cage and was out for months. They had a ladder match at Unforgiven for the vacant Intercontinental title which could have come earlier, but it was a good cap of to the feud, even though it was late. So at the end of everything, it was Jericho that came out with revenge as well as a championship, giving him something to be happy with.

Let's take a quick look at a few other reasons why this story worked.

Most importantly: IT HAD TIME TO BUILD. This wasn't a feud that was settled in about five weeks. It had several months to get things set up and for the characters in it to develop. That's one of the big problems in a lot of modern wrestling angles: everything moves so fast that there isn't time for something to develop. This story started in late 2003 and wrapped up in May. It had some twists and turns in it, but for the most part they made sense and followed a coherent path.

Second, it had a good conclusion. Jericho winning wasn't required, but it was definitive and there was no doubt as to who won. In other words, we didn't feel like we wasted our time with the story. It had romance, intrigue, twists and a conclusion, all tied together with good wrestling matches. Those are all parts of a good storyline. That leads me to the final part of this.

The feud was ENTERTAINING. Like I said, Christian and Jericho could do almost anything and it would be entertaining. Trish was great in the evil chick role and looked great in the part too. There was nothing in this angle that wasn't at least passable, which helped even more. The matches worked well too, meaning that in total there was nothing wrong with this storyline.

All of the parts worked and had the right people in the roles, which is what makes a great story.