



Villains

Doing a bad guy the right way: my thoughts on villains.

by Naomi Hughes 2 years ago 66 Views ▾



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Some of the most common problems I see as an editor relate to the villain. I actually think villains are as important as main characters.

10:14 AM - Dec 21, 2015

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Misconception: Villains must be Truly Evil.
Nope! They just need to have a goal that conflicts with the protagonist's goal.

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Misconception: Readers should hate the villain.
Some of the best endings are when the villain loses... but you kinda wanted them to win.


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Some of the best villains are sympathetic. You *get* why they want what they want. If not for the protagonist, you might even cheer them on.




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Villains should have layered personalities. They should have a goal, motivation, and conflict, just like the main character.




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Ideally, villains should have their own character arc--usually a negative one. But we should see them struggling, see potential for change.

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An important thing to think about when crafting a villain: what do they want, & why do they want it so strongly? That humanizes them.

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Personally, my favorite villains are the ones that you desperately *want* to turn good, because you care about them.




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Personally, Rumple (from OuAT) and Loki are some of my favorite bad guys. The flair! The flaws! The vulnerabilities!

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A "Truly Evil" bad guy that was actually pulled off well (in my opinion) was Dark Knight's Joker. Layered personality, flair, backstory.

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Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

You loved the Joker... but were also truly terrified of him, and convinced that he was evil and irredeemable. That's SO tough to pull off.

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Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Another note: though the Joker was "Truly Evil," he wasn't blandly, purposelessly evil. He had reasons, motivations, something driving him.

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In most villains' minds, they're the protagonist of their own story. Maybe a darker, grittier story, but still the hero.

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Oh! And one element of villains that I always, always adore the most is their vulnerabilities. Show them wavering! Show us what they love!

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I think layered, sympathetic villains are so great b/c they make readers think about why they identify w/ a "bad" guy & "bad" choices.

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Another thought on villains: if you have a corporation or computer program, etc. as your antagonist, make sure you humanize them somehow.

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It's tough to identify with a faceless villain, and very easy to fall into the trap of having a "blandly evil" antagonist.

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So if you have a computer program for a bad guy, give it a personality. If you have a corporation, show us one particular, humanized leader.




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Some of the most frustrating endings are when the protagonists wins only because the bad guy is dumb or short-sighted.




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Make your bad guy awesome, so that your good guy must become even MORE awesome to win the day.

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(And I say "guy" just because I only have 140 characters--there are some truly awesome lady bad guys out there!)

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