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# Scum and Villainy: Creating the Perfect Villain

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By Jonathan Williams | June 7, 2017 | Main, Screenwriting 101



I've written before on [how to create 'likeable' unlikeable characters](#), but while a lovable anti-hero is all well and good, there's nothing I enjoy more than a good villain. As a DC Comics fan, it's the argument I always pull out when debating DC vs. Marvel with like-minded nerds. Sure, Loki is great, but it doesn't get much more dastardly than the Joker. Likewise, horror films are a breeding ground for iconic villainy – as are all the best Disney films, believe it or not.

Villains can also be incredibly tricky to develop. It's very easy to fall into the immense pool of clichéd mustache-twirling arch-villainy. It's easy to come up with someone truly awful, after all. Nazis, Zombies, Witches, serial killers – the list goes on. But as bad as all these are, without a hint of something *more*, these archetypes make for trite, boring antagonists.

It's not enough to simply create something that terrifies or disgusts your audience. The Nazis did terrible things, yes – but falling back on that fact *alone* is more often than not a cop out for engaging in any meaningful character development whatsoever. The best cinematic Nazis (Hans Landa and Amon Göth, in case you were wondering) *work* so well because there's *more* to them than the swastika. Their evil comes in many twisted, layers – each trickier and more nuanced than the last.



Developing your villain requires the exact amount of careful thought and consideration as your protagonist – if not more. As a general rule of thumb, the best villains represent one of two things: the reverse side of your character, or the absolute worst version of your hero's own inner psyche.

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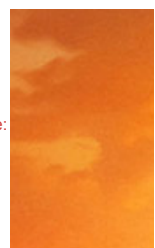
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Like any character, an antagonist should have a clear goal. The key difference? Unlike your protagonist, they'll do just about anything to get what they want. Regardless of how brutal or immoral

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When thinking about your villain or antagonist, it's a good idea to start with the opposite side of the coin. What type of character would be the complete opposite of your protagonist? Sometimes it helps if your protagonist and antagonist have the same goal in mind. This way we can see the two different means of achieving the same thing from two vastly different perspectives. In *Beauty and the Beast*, both Beast and Gaston want to win Belle's affections yet they both go about it in completely opposite ways. Gaston shows off his machismo while Beast learns to shed that version of him and reveal his softer side to Belle.

Another way to go about developing your villain is to create the worst version of your protagonist. In these stories, we see what would become of the protagonist if he achieves his goal. In *Coraline*, the titular young hero finds she's got more than she bargained for when she discovers the dark underbelly of her wonderful new family. These stories allow the protagonist to achieve their goal early on, only to discover that there is a darker side that allows them to realize the thing they needed most.

The important thing is to completely flesh out your characters. Simply giving them a scar or a wonky eye to make them look the part isn't what makes us fall in love with a great villain. Think of Batman. The Joker exists as the complete opposite of Batman and everything he stands for. For all of the Dark Knight's justice and order, the Joker stands for chaos and anarchy. And every Batman villain follows a different, similar psychosis – shining a mirror on Bruce Wayne in a different sort of way.

What makes us love these characters is not simply that they're cool or stylish, but that they touch us as individuals. They tap into our fears, and show us our worst possible selves. Many begin from the a sensible position – often one shared by the hero themselves. It's the perversion of these ideals in opposition to the hero's journey that makes for a compelling contrast.

And in the same way that "likeable" unlikeable character demand our empathy, a good villain needs an element of humanity. A sliver to latch on to, even relate to at times. Sometimes this humanity is what gives an antagonist an added layer of haunting relatability. A great villain takes something buried deep within us all and exposes it, pushing it to unfathomable and unimaginable ends. We love the Joker because within us all is a desire to lash out against authority. Sometimes in developing our villains, we must delve into the deepest and darkest parts of ourselves. We must search for the things that terrify us and keep us awake at night. We must own up to our worst tendencies, and let our antagonist run wild with them.

Villains represent our darkest fears and our deepest desires. By giving those fears and desires life, we create a ruthless presence and an unstoppable force for our protagonist. The ego, versus the id. Pair that with superior resources and a dastardly plot, and you've got yourself a conflict worth exploring. And last but not least, remember that even the most nefarious villains are the heroes of their own story. No one sees themselves as the bad guy. Embrace this fact. Explore it. If you dig deep enough into your villain's point of view, you might just unearth something truly twisted.

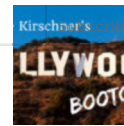
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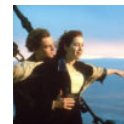


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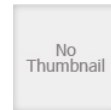
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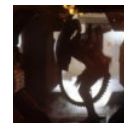
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