

Slide 1: VILLAINS

- The hero is only as good as the villain
- A villain can be a man, a monster or nature itself
 - “Nature” can include animals, natural disasters, canyons, caves or oceans, storms & tornados
- A story can have more than one villain, but there must be only one ultimate villain
 - That ultimate villain is the one keeping the hero from achieving his ultimate goal
 - The ultimate villain is the one the hero battles at the climax of the story
- The villain cannot be “fate”
 - A story is when two opposing forces do battle. The only thing that can fight something as powerful as fate is something equally all-powerful
- We identify with human heroes
 - Heroes in myths are half-human
 - The gods themselves are given human traits, especially negative

Slide 2: COMEDIC & GRIM VILLAINY

Greek concepts of comedy and tragedy

- Comedy: the story has a happy ending
 - In comedic stories, the villain determines how dark the story will become
- Tragedy: the story chronicles the decline of a heroic figure as he falls from grace
 - In tragic stories, the hero determines how dark the story will become

Comedic Villains	Grim Villains
Easy to identify and openly “evil”	Charming, magnetic & manipulative, hiding in plain sight
Unwilling or unable to hide their flaws	Competent, especially in ways the hero is not
The odd one out or the loner (rules all & needs nobody)	Fits in well among peers, employs camouflage
Unwilling to follow an internal code of ethics	True to their own code of ethics
Doing evil for straightforward reasons (money or power)	Doing evil in pursuit of a complex goal, often one the reader can empathize with
Relies on henchmen	Employs specialists
Violent as the mood strikes	Violent according to a plan
Darth Vader, Wicked Witch of the West	Hannibal Lecter, Keyser Söze

Slide 3: YOU CONTROL EVERY ASPECT OF THE STORY

Read in your genre

- Learn what the current trends are from bestsellers
- Learn what has already been done to death
- Use it as a springboard for new ideas
- Learn the tropes and conventions so you don't disappoint your readers
- If you don't enjoy reading in your chosen genre, you have picked the wrong genre to write in.

Based on genre conventions, the writer decides:

- **What the villain can and cannot do**
 - Powers
 - Personal code
 - Wealth
 - Social circumstances
 - Political circumstances
 - Guilt load/conscience
 - Henchmen/collaborators/enablers
- **When the villain wins and loses**
 - There should be setbacks for the villain—he gets his own story arc
 - Phase one: Difficult backstory
 - Phase Two: Mistakes due to ambition or weakness
 - Phase Three: Descent into greater wrongdoing
 - Phase Four/Climax: Final commitment to evil
 - Final loss must be in the last quarter of the book and at the ultimate climax of the story—but you decide how much time you want to spend on the battle and on the leadup to the battle.
- **How many times the villain wins. He could:**
 - Publicly humiliate the hero
 - Harm the hero
 - Put obstacles in the hero's way
 - Steal something precious from the hero
 - Mislead or lie to the hero
 - Manipulate events from behind the scenes
- **How long the scenes with the villain are**
 - Length and frequency of battles
 - Length and frequency of scenes from the villain's POV
 - Length of time the villain spends taunting or scaring the hero

Slide 4: THE VILLAIN AND HERO ARE ALWAYS IN COMPETITION

- **Your villain should either want the same thing the hero wants, or want to stop the hero from attaining his goal.**
- **The villain and hero mirror each other**
 - The villain's values are the opposite of the hero's
 - The villain and hero test each other's strengths and weaknesses
 - Either they share the same strengths, but the hero's flaw undermines him and the villain has no such flaw OR
 - They have opposite strengths and the villain is stronger
- **Hero and villain must be logical opponents with a clear reason for their adversarial relationship**
 - Erin Brokovich the activist vs. the Pacific Gas & Electric corporation
 - Little Red Riding Hood, the young girl alone vs the Big Bad Wolf
 - Sherlock the brilliant detective vs Moriarty the criminal mastermind
- **It's logical that they would be competing on the same playing field**
 - Lincoln wanted to abolish slavery, the Confederacy wanted to maintain it, and the battlefield was the political arena
 - Americans wanted No Taxation Without Representation, Britain wanted to retain the system of "virtual representation," and the battlefield was Boston Harbor
- **They use their strengths to compete for a prize, or for dominance over the opposition (or both)**
 - The prize:
 - They both want the girl
 - They both want the presidency
 - They both want the treasure map
 - They both want to win the war
 - Dominance over the opposition:
 - One wants to run the corporation, one wants to destroy it
 - One wants to hide the murder, one wants to solve it
 - One wants to build a strip mall, one wants to build a neighborhood park
 - One wants to rescue the prisoner, one wants to execute him

Example 1:

Shelby is a small town girl attempting to start a grocery co-op with reasonable prices. She's plucky and has a good head for business, but she's broke and doesn't have a college degree, much less a degree in business. She has no cosigner, and she's having trouble drumming up support from the community as a result.

The current villain:

Ray is a talented and celebrated actor with a big ego and gambling debts. He's handsome and charming, and he's looking for somebody he can charm into paying his bills for him, somebody who will also overlook his playboy lifestyle.

- Is Ray the right villain for this story?
 - No. His strengths aren't mirrored in the heroine. They aren't in competition for the same goal or for dominance. The heroine has nothing that the villain wants, and vice versa.

Example 2:

Farthingale is a young mouse, but his sense of adventure is always driving him to take risks in the meadow, rushing out to snatch the sunflower seeds and popcorn that the humans at the ballpark drop under the seats, despite the traps the humans set out. But when Farthingale hears the park manager telling a fan that the old park will be closed down, the young mouse must find a new place for his colony to live, somewhere with enough food and sufficient shelter to protect them from the coming winter.

The current villain:

Cinnamon is a siamese with elegant cream fur and ruddy-brown ears and paws. She's a terrific mouser and a fearsome guardian at the Shady Oaks retirement home, particularly the dining room, kitchen and cellars. She is a strong, swift cat with sharp claws and teeth, and she leaves scratches on the baseboard next to her basket every time she kills a mouse.

- Is Cinnamon the right villain for this story?
 - Yes. The cat's determination and willingness to act mirror the mouse's, and they both have a stake in the outcome. They are in direct opposition and striving for dominance. And they are logical enemies competing on a logical playing field.

Memoir:

- **An interesting aspect of human nature is the refusal or inability to identify what one actually wants.** Your villain, as well as your hero, will either not know, or will attempt to hide the truth of what they want from themselves.

Slide 5: VILLAINS ARE PEOPLE TOO

- **Like heroes and secondary characters, villains have:**
 - Jobs
 - Meals
 - Habits
 - Default argument tactics
 - Sleep
 - Housing
 - Routines

- **Your villain should have less screen time than the hero**
 - “People stuff” gets a brief mention only when it directly pertains to the story

Example:

Kaiser Novák strolled into the banquet hall, his gaze cutting to his spymaster and then away again. The man was standing too close to Madame Anais, the Prime Minister of Duvorkenstan, a country the Kaiser’s forces currently occupied. Kaiser Novák had no reason to trust Anais. The citizens of Duvorkenstan were secretly planning a revolt. Not only that: it was rumored that the spymaster and Anais were lovers.

The kaiser took his seat at the head of the table and settled his napkin on his lap. He signaled for the first course, but as the wine was poured, he offered his own glass to Madame Anais. When he saw the spymaster pale, the kaiser knew: the wine had been poisoned.

- Why it works:
 - The dinner serves as a demonstration that the villain is callous and willing to kill Anais based on rumours alone.
 - NOTE: Dinner and coffee shop scenes are generally to be avoided, because people are just rehashing things that already happened or discussing things that will happen soon.
 - The dinner scene is moving the story forward by providing concrete evidence of deception—we aren’t just listening to the kaiser mentally monologue about his suspicions.

Slide 6: THE VILLAIN SHOULD BE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE HERO

- **The villain has more resources, more allies, and more advantages.**

Example 1:

Perry is a kindhearted older man who lives in a small, low-rent apartment near a playground. He’ll share whatever he has with anyone in need, but he hates conflict. One day, he sees a lost child crying and tries to comfort her. He asks where her mother is.

Villain option 1:

Rochelle, a wealthy woman and the child’s stepmother, who is largely uninterested in being a parent and is texting on her smartphone nearby, not noticing the child’s distress.

Villain option 2:

Sandra, a young helicopter mom from an upscale suburban neighborhood, who likes posting pictures on Instagram of her darling daughter in princess and fairy costumes.

- Which is the better villain for our hero’s story?
 - Sandra is:
 - Young, whereas Perry is a senior
 - From an upscale neighborhood, whereas Perry is in a low-rent apartment
 - A helicopter mom, whereas Perry hates conflict
 - Invested in social media popularity, whereas Perry lives alone and quietly

Example 2:

Delia is a stylist at a small-town beauty salon. She recently got her license, and has big dreams of making a name for herself. She takes photos of her clients when they request unusual haircuts, and has built a portfolio. She is about to apply for a big-city job at a salon, but needs a good reference from her current employer and before and after shots that show her true level of skill. But as she is about to start her shift, she notices pain and shaking in her wrist, and she's having a bit of trouble opening and closing her hand.

Villain option 1:

Leo is a high school student who was until very recently considered a nerd. But he started running for an hour every day before school, changed his glasses for contacts, looked at TikTok videos to learn what kids his age considered trendy outfits and started paying attention to social media posts. He's been growing his old, geeky haircut out and has come into the salon to get a trendy new cut just in time for the school dance tomorrow night.

Villain option 2:

Bernice is the wife of the town mayor. When she says jump, everyone asks "How high?" She's in her late fifties now, gets Botox quarterly, and is deeply embarrassed at her inability to drop the fifty pounds she put on after she had her son. Her husband will hold a press conference in an hour and a half about some allegations of misconduct that could get him thrown out of office, and it's vital that his wife stand with him to lend credence to the innocent image he's trying to project.

- Which is the better villain for our hero's story?
 - Bernice is:
 - Older and in a position of authority, whereas Delia is young and unknown
 - Established and powerful, whereas Delia is a nobody
 - Already a celebrity figure, whereas Delia is trying to make a name for herself
 - Rich and trying to hold onto her wealth, whereas Delia is poor and trying to improve her circumstances
 - Invested in hiding the truth about herself and her life, whereas Delia is trying to reveal the truths about herself
 - Under a time crunch that makes it impossible for her to find someone to fix the haircut before it's too late

Slide 7: VILLAINS DON'T IGNORE THEIR OWN WEAKNESSES

- **You can't have a villain conveniently overlook a fatal flaw in themselves or their plans**
 - Once again: the hero is only as good as the villain
 - Characters must always act at the top of their intelligence
- **A well-organized, well-protected villain makes the story interesting.**
 - Example: (Setting is Medieval fantasy.) The Evil Warlord Verguz wants to make it impossible for the hero to invade his stronghold. What are some things he should have ready in order to protect himself?
 - Soldiers
 - Weapons
 - Boiling oil

- Watchmen
 - Strong walls and drawbridge
 - Food enough to last through a siege
- To beat him, your hero must have:
 - A secret way in
 - A band of allies
 - Weapons
 - Map
 - First aid kit
 - Spies inside the palace
- **What's it like if the villain ignores his weaknesses?**
 - What if Verguz sent all his soldiers out of the fortress because someone in the hero's party taunted them?
 - What if Verguz didn't put watchmen on the wall?
 - What if Verguz' archers ran out of arrows?
- **Memoir and Biography "villains" also hide their weaknesses through manipulation and lies**

Example:

Mom or dad will have:

- A way to shut down conversations
- A way to confuse you or make you feel like something is your fault
- A way to distract you from their own shortcomings
- Other family members who are "on their side"
- A way to bribe you into forgiving and forgetting (clothes, candy, more tv time, etc.)

Slide 8: THE VILLAIN SHOULD NOT BE EVIL IN ALL RESPECTS

- **Take positive personality traits and use them in wrong ways, or for wrong reasons**
 - The baseball coach who was a brilliant pro player is still a great player, but yells at his students and expects too much
 - The wizard who won accolades for creating brilliant new spells pushes his research too far and becomes addicted to dark power
- **The villain must be competent enough to obtain a measure of power**
 - Buffoonish villains still have some things they do well, such as safe-cracking or code breaking
- **The bad guy should have more than one admirable trait.**
 - Making him pure evil in all aspects but one turns him into a punchline

Example:

Baron Chauncey crumpled the letter requesting an audience and tossed it into the fireplace. That widow was still whining about the change in the tax laws. If she wanted a break, she would have to do more than complain. Her pretty daughter, for example, might persuade him. Smiling, Chauncey leaned back in his chair and contemplated his secretary, Albus, who was scribbling away in his corner under the drafty window. The man was a fool. Didn't even duck when someone threw a boot at his head.

Tad heard a soft mew and glanced over at the basket in the corner, a soft smile touching his lips. The little calico would give birth soon. He would have to find good homes for her kittens. As a boy, his only friend had been a stray cat, a female he'd named Mittens. A cat, at least, would never let you down. Pity the calico couldn't hold a quill.

- **An admirable act, skill, profession or hobby is not the same as an admirable trait**

- Admirable hobbies win the villain points and mask his true character:
 - An older literature professor reciting Japanese poetry and translating it on the fly
 - Masks his pursuit of college girls
 - A wealthy matron running a home for poor orphans
 - Masks her use of those orphans as free labor in her townhouse
 - A politician contributing to charity
 - Masks his mishandling of campaign funds
 - A pedestrian helping a cyclist who was hit by a car
 - Masks the fact that the pedestrian often drives after drinking heavily
 - A nurse working in the ER
 - Masks the fact that she abuses her own children

- **Humor and charm are irresistible traits**

- A charming, funny bad guy must fight a hero who is entirely virtuous, or extremely skilled
- Lex Luthor vs. Superman
- Loki vs. Thor

- **Memoir and Biography “villains” are most compelling when they are people first and enemies second.**

- Making them real people with positive traits does not make the wrong things they did any less wrong. It makes the problem itself bigger and the hero more admirable for addressing it.

Example 1:

Annabelle's father was autocratic, distant and often cold to his family. He worked long hours and was dismissive in conversations. But he paid the bills and made sure there was food on the table, and he helped put all three of his daughters through college.

Example 2:

Annabelle's father was autocratic, cold and distant to his family. But he paid the bills and made sure there was food on the table, and he helped put all three of his daughters through college.

His own father had worked in the coal mines and died young, leaving him to raise his five younger siblings in a poor part of town. He learned the value of money, and since his own mother was passive, he dominated his younger siblings to keep the family together. Annabelle's own mother was passive. She was determined to break the cycle.

Slide 9: THE VILLAIN MUST HAVE A VERY GOOD REASON TO DO VERY BAD THINGS

- **Build a “sympathetic antagonist”--a bad guy whose motives are somewhat understandable**
 - Unless the villain is an alien or robot, readers will expect the villain to have at least some sense of right and wrong, and to feel human emotions

Example:

Zengo finally had the plans to the B-49X warp drive. He was already through the atmosphere and into space, and if he could make it past the moon base he could engage the cloaking device and the freedom fighters would never catch him. Several warlords would pay top dollar for these plans. And if a small part of Zengo's nearly nonexistent conscience regretted the thousands of freedom fighters who would die in a massive bomb strike—his mother, sisters, girlfriend and baby daughter among them—when the warlords gained the power to fly their massive death cruisers all the way to this tiny, gold-rich planet halfway across the universe . . .

Well, mothers, sisters, girlfriends and baby daughters died. Zengo wouldn't be there to see the entire planet become a radiation-poisoned wasteland.

- **Backstory/origin stories can provide motivation.**
 - **You** need to know it in as much depth as you know your hero's story
 - **Your reader** needs only enough to make the villain's acts and motive make sense
 - Reveal the villain's backstory in bits only as necessary

Example 1:

Chartreuse had grown up in her famous model mother's shadow, watching photographers photograph the celebrated Pauline as she strutted down the runway. Chartreuse had played in her mother's dressing room, tried on her shoes and jewelry, and used her mother's makeup to hide the bruises when her mother slapped or pinched her in fits of pique. She had grown up enduring the pitying looks from other models, the gifts from her mother's admirers along with a request to “Go play somewhere else, sweetie”.

All this went through Chartreuse's mind as she crept backstage and stole her understudy's favorite faux pearl earrings.

Example 2:

Chartreuse stared down at the faux pearl earrings in the velvet box. Her mother had owned some just like them, so well-made they'd fooled high society. She'd slapped Chartreuse hard enough to leave a bruise, just for trying them on.

That understudy knew nothing about the modeling world, how competitive it could be, how petty. She might as well learn the lesson now.

- **The villain should have a strong but flawed moral argument: is the reason the villain is committing the act justifiable in a limited way?**
 - No one sees himself as a villain.

Example 1:

Raynard liked to hear them scream. When he'd burst from his mother's womb, his entrance was heralded with his mother's agonized screams, and even as a newborn, the sound had thrilled his soul. He looked down on the crowd now and thought of how delightful it would be to hear the sound of their screams as the ceiling opened and tons of boulders dropped onto their heads, crushing them with cracks and meaty squelches. Did that make him evil? Oh, yes. How he delighted in evil.

Example 2:

Bobby flicked on the overhead bulb, locked the basement door and crept down the rickety wooden steps, and Calla followed him. She still wasn't sure they were doing the right thing. But it was too late to back out now, and anyway, if she wanted to get into the same college as Bobby, her grades weren't good enough for a scholarship. And she had to get into the same college as Bobby. If she wasn't with him, he might find somebody else, and she'd given him so much. The best of who she was. She couldn't bear to have him leave her now.

No, her grades wouldn't cut it. She needed power, right now, before it was too late. And Bobby had already demonstrated what he could do with magic. She looked down at him, kneeling on the dirt floor with a piece of chalk to draw a wide circle. The neighbor's cat was in the crate next to him. She felt sorry for it. But at least they weren't killing a person. And Bobby would do the actual killing part.

- Why Example 2 works:
 - Callousness is more realistic than sadism, because we know firsthand what it's like to live in a world where people don't care that they're hurting us
 - True evil begins in the mind and heart, and it starts small
 - The "MacDonald triad": three behaviors that are early indicators of later violent tendencies are prolonged bedwetting, fire-setting and cruelty to animals
 - Build tension by having the villain talk himself into what he's about to do
 - The villain's arc is the story of how it gets easier and easier to talk himself into doing evil.

Slide 10: THE VILLAIN SHOULD ACTIVELY PURSUE HIS GOALS

- **Avoid overly complex master plans**

- Your villain wants to get what he wants as quickly and easily as possible
- Cleverness is demonstrated not in planning, but in problem solving

Example 1:

Bellamy mentally reviewed his next steps. Cinderine would probably move into the rental house next Thursday, based on her work schedule, which he'd paid a hefty sum to someone at the company where she worked to get hold of. She didn't have many worldly possessions to move, thanks to the fire he'd set at her last apartment, so it wouldn't take her more than, say, two hours for her to load everything into her old car and from there into the rental house. Perhaps he should bleed her brake lines to control the timing of her arrival? Bellamy made a mental note to consider the merits of the idea. At any rate, once she was moved in, he would contact the person he'd bribed at the bank to call her and tell her the place was about to be foreclosed, and that she should call the owner, who was, in fact, Bellamy.

That's when Bellamy would show up at her door with a bouquet of roses and tell her that if she moved back in with him, all her problems would be solved, and that she would get her cat, Mr. Biscuit, back from the creepy neighbor boy with the chalked pentacle in his basement.

- **Why it doesn't work:**

- The problems the villain has to solve are not clearly outlined first
- The villain's goal is not clear right up front
- The solutions the villain chooses are the equivalent of using a jackhammer to pound in a nail
- The solutions will not get the villain what he wants in a quick and easy way

Example 2:

Bellamy would get Cinderine back. It was only a matter of time. The problem was her inheritance. She could afford to rent a house, and as long as she could afford housing, she had an alternative other than Bellamy.

What he needed was to get his hands on the guy who owned the house she planned to rent. If the offer was high enough, he'd sell the house to Bellamy, especially if he could stay on as a paid manager. Cinderine wouldn't know who really owned the house until it was too late.

- **Make the villain fight hard until the final defeat**

Example 1:

Bronwyn knew, when Alphonse stumbled out of the burning factory, that all of her careful planning had been for naught. Her dream of a new life with Alphonse's brother Heath was shattered. Alphonse would tell Heath all that Bronwyn had done, and then it wouldn't matter how much she loved Heath. He would never forgive her.

Bronwyn slumped to the ground and stared at the flames as they rose higher and higher, waiting with a sense of growing despair and lethargy for Alphonse to tie her hands and lead her off to jail.

- Why it doesn't work:
 - Bronwyn didn't do all she possibly could to succeed, including make a backup plan if the fire didn't work
 - Bronwyn sat and stared as things went wrong, rather than remain active and resourceful

Example 2:

Bronwyn watched in rising fury as Alphonse stumbled out of the burning factory. No! At this rate, all her plans would be ruined. She hid in the mouth of a nearby alley and fumbled in her handbag for the little pistol at the bottom. She'd never shot someone before. But she'd already passed the point of no return, and Alphonse must not be allowed to speak to Heath.

With trembling hands, Bronwyn raised the pistol and aimed it at Alphonse's chest. Her finger brushed the trigger. She took a deep breath, then fired.

Slide 11: THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

- The first encounter must:
 - Happen by the end of the second chapter, preferably by the end of the first
 - You can put off the meeting with the villain if you first have the hero experience persecution from the villain
 - Happen after you meet the hero
 - Happen in real time, not in a flashback
 - Be conflict, rather than an introduction
 - You can start with the hero and villain being allies, or even friends, but there must be heavy foreshadowing that this will not last
- The villain's plan must already be in motion when the story starts