

Three-Dimensional Villains: Finding Your Character's Shadow



by Carolyn Kaufman, PsyD

PDF-format worksheets to accompany this article's exercises

If you've ever had to get up in front of a group of strangers and speak, you're familiar with the fear that you're going to embarrass yourself while all eyes are on you. Worse, all that attention seems to magnify your every quirk, and your flubs can feel like they overshadow what you get right.

Even when we're not on stage, stress makes us flounder. It's easy to live our lives according to our values and beliefs when everything is going right; it's a lot harder when we're under pressure and in the spotlight.

Carl Jung named the face we present to the world, the public façade we use to *hide* things we don't like about ourselves the *persona*. The flipside of the persona is the *shadow*, which is like a three-dimensional version of our physical shadows, packed full of things we're trying to hide, sometimes even from ourselves.

To become whole, each of us needs to *individuate*, or integrate, all of our archetypal parts into a cohesive whole. That includes the persona and the shadow.

In any story, the mark of a good villain is his ability to force your hero into the proverbial spotlight, where he will find ways to magnify and criticize the things your hero would most like to hide.

The Dark and Light Sides of the Shadow

Psychologist Carl Jung believed that in spite of its function as a reservoir for human darkness—or perhaps *because of this*—the shadow is the seat of creativity.

Author Ralph Keyes argues that most people never publish because they're not willing to find and face their shadows. Rather than acknowledge our fears about what we might find inside ourselves, we project the anxiety onto others and obsess about what *they* will think. Good writers push past the fear, Keyes says, in spite of the repercussions: "One reason so many good writers have such tattered personal lives is that they write as if they have no one to protect. Lucky for readers, not so lucky for writers."

Recognizing Your Own Shadow

Since the shadow is, by definition, upsetting to acknowledge, we shove our awareness of it down into the unconscious. That means that the only way to truly know what's in your shadow is to think about the things that infuriate you, disgust you, and horrify you more than anything else. If cruelty just makes you sick, Jung would say that cruelty is in your shadow.

Does that secretly mean you're a cruel person? No, but it does mean you'll have an awfully hard time accepting that you really *are* capable of the kind of cruelty that makes you so sick. (And before you insist you aren't, read a bit about Phillip Zimbardo's *Stanford Prison Experiment*.) Many, many people are riveted by true crime and serial killer stories because



Face Reality
Laurie Cooper

Laurie Cooper's painting *Face Reality* addresses racial issues; many see this woman's expression as shame or pain. No matter what the persona we've adopted has been, exposing what lies beneath and figuring out who we really are through individuation can be frightening and leaves us feeling vulnerable.

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they give us a way to indulge the shadow without actually acknowledging that the shadow is part of us.

If you're reacting to the last two paragraphs with skepticism or irritation, you've found the feeling that means you've touched your shadow. If you can't face it, Betsy Lerner says, "you['] think you can't write, but the truth is you can't tell. Writing is nothing if not breaking the silence."

And remember: writing about it is not the same as doing it.

Finding Your Characters' Shadows

Good characters have shadows, just like you do, and your characters' shadows should repel them as much as yours do you. What that means is that channeling your own shadow through your characters will help you create the kinds of villains that have made writers famous. If Stephen King had hidden from his shadow, *The Shining* would never have been written. The same goes for lots of other famous stories. Dante's *Inferno*. Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. *The Exorcist*. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. *Frankenstein*. *Dracula*.

Exercise: Find Your Hero's Shadow (and Your Villain)

If you like, you can download PDF-format worksheets to help you do the exercises below here.

Directions

For each part, work as quickly as you can. Try not to think too much about the answers; your unconscious does better work when you're not wondering if you're doing the exercise right or criticizing the answers you come up with. You can write as many answers as you like for each part, since there is no right or wrong number. You'll probably find, though, that coming up with at least five will help you get more out of the exercise.

Part 1. List the qualities and values that make your hero a hero.

Examples: Is he brave? Is she selfless? Does he speak his mind even when it will get him in trouble? Does she stand up for those who have no voice of their own?

- If you have trouble coming up with words for characteristics, try Sandy Tritt's Personality Components chart (scroll about halfway down the page) at <http://users.wirefire.com/tritt/tp8.html>.

Part 2. List the qualities and values that make your villain a villain.

- Don't worry about your hero, or shadows, or anything else we've talked about for now. Remember, it's important to come up with *at least* five qualities or values. Again, you may find Sandy Tritt's chart helpful.

Examples: Vengeful, dishonest, power hungry

Part 3. Next to each quality or value you've written for your hero, write the exact opposite quality.

Examples: Let's say that some of your character's heroic traits are charm, intelligence, confidence, and a good sense of humor.

Ex 1. Quality: Charm - Depending on just what you imagine your character's charm to be like, opposing traits might be things like rudeness, pushiness, abrasiveness, clumsiness, or crudity.

So depending on which "opposite" feels right to you, you might put:

Heroic Trait		Opposite Quality
Charm		Rudeness
	or	
Charm		Pushiness

Ex 2. Quality: Confidence -Opposing trait possibilities might include insecurity,



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narcissism, fearfulness, embarrassment, or shame, which leaves you with:

Heroic Trait		Opposite Quality
Confidence		Shame
	or	
Confidence		Insecurity

Ex 3. Value: Honesty - This time we'll use a value rather than a personality characteristic or quality. Values that are in opposition to honesty might include deceitfulness or dishonesty

Heroic Trait		Opposite Quality
Honesty		Deceitfulness
	or	
Honesty		Dishonesty

Part 4. Add a Behavior

Beside the positive qualities and values you've written *for your hero*, to the right of your list of the *exact opposite* qualities you wrote in Part 3, write an example of a *behavior* (not a thought or feeling) that demonstrates the opposite (non-heroic) quality or value.

Ex 1. (Note: The examples are simple for the sake of space, but you can write as much as you like, or give examples of more than one "opposite" or "behavior.")

Heroic Trait	Opposite	Behavior
Charm	Rudeness	Telling crude jokes
Confidence	Insecurity	"Fishing" for compliments
Honesty	Deceitfulness	Burning a letter that "tells on" your character

Part 5. Compare Your Hero's Shadow (the Opposite column) to your Villain's Characteristics

Check the second list you made, the one in which you wrote down the qualities that make your villain a villain, and see if any of them match your hero's Opposite traits, values, or behaviors. Since the Opposite qualities and behaviors are your Hero's shadow, they should be personified by your villain.

If you don't see a lot of overlap, it's time to start thinking about how you can incorporate the "dark sides" of your hero's qualities into your villain. In most cases, that means you need to think of ways in which your villain can manipulate or force your hero to express or embrace the shadow qualities you've listed under "Opposite."

Villains Should Personify Heroes' Shadows

A good villain is always the dark side of your hero; the greatest danger your hero faces should be that under the right pressures and given the right circumstances, your hero could embrace the very qualities that make the villain a villain—and at some point in the story, she *should* start to do exactly that, even if she does it by accident.

If your villain's qualities are truly the things your hero hates most—especially if they scare him—he'll do anything to bring the villain down, even if that means becoming the villain. Remember, shadow qualities are the things that infuriate you the most, that make you the sickest. We're drawn to fight the things we hate, which means that your villain can become your hero's nemesis *only* if the villain's character and behavior really arouse an obsessive drive in your hero.

The Line Between Hero and Villain is Thinner than You Think

What makes the hero different from the villain, in the end, is choice: the hero chooses not to *become* his shadow, and instead acknowledges and *incorporates* his shadow qualities into the rest of his personality.

In many cases the villain *is* a fallen hero, someone who would have been just like the hero if he'd been able to resist the draw of evil. Even in real life, the more we hate someone or

something, the more likely we are to become the very thing that we hate. Consider the irony of killing someone to stop murder, as in the cases of fanatics who kill doctors who perform abortion. There's irony, too, in the venom of those Christian anti-gay-rights activists who insist that "God hates gays." (So much for "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so...") Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of those rare heroes who never swayed from practicing what he preached. He believed so strongly in peace he refused to hurt others in his pursuit of it.

Consider the words of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb" and the scientific director of the Manhattan Project responsible for the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when he saw what his creations had done: "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds." Though some believe that the "Little Boy" and "Big Man" bombs dropped in Japan ended WWII, even Oppenheimer viewed the deaths as unconscionable as all the others. For years after, he was a vocal opponent of the development of more nuclear weapons.

Examples

Fiction is filled with examples of heroes and their personified shadows, some more obvious than others.

Star Wars

In the Star Wars saga, both Anakin (episodes I-III) and Luke Skywalker (episodes IV-VI) are seduced by the Dark Side of the Force. Anakin succumbs and embraces his Shadow to become Darth Vader; he later tries to talk Luke into doing the same thing. Though Luke is tempted, in the end he not only resists but is able to redeem Anakin as well.

Lord of the Rings

In the Lord of the Rings trilogy, the Ring essentially draws each character's Shadow to the fore; Gollum is consumed by his and the evil in the Ring, and when Frodo carries the Ring, he nearly falls prey as well.

The Matrix

In the Matrix trilogy, Neo has to *become* Agent Smith and acknowledge, embrace, and overcome his own shadow to defeat the machine world.

Se7en

In the film *Se7en*, Mills not only becomes wrath, in so doing he becomes the killer he's pursued, thus falling prey to his own shadow.

The Prestige

In *The Prestige*, Angier becomes a murderer to avenge the accidental murder of his wife. (You'll notice he has to kill off his own moral side to do it.)

The Wizard of Oz

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wicked Witch is wicked because she wants revenge on Dorothy for killing her sister; instead, Dorothy becomes a killer by killing the witch.

Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are actually sociopolitical propaganda (see Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*), so Cinderella and Snow White epitomize the "good girls" moral path while the villainesses epitomize the "bad girls" path.

- Snow White: If Snow White embraced the kind of vanity the Queen did (her shadow), she could become just like the Queen.
- Cinderella: If Cinderella indulged herself in self-pity and a sense of entitlement (her shadow), she could easily become like her wicked stepsisters and stepmother.

How Heroes Fall When Villains Push

The trick to moving your hero from the side of good into the gray area between good and evil is to have your villain push your hero's proverbial buttons. Marriage is the most important thing in the world to your hero, and the very concept of divorce outrages him? The villain will try to find a way to damage the relationship by introducing temptation or doubt into that relationship.

The hero's most obvious reaction will be rage, and probably not just at the villain, but also at herself and her spouse for being affected. The more the relationship is damaged, the more hurt and anger will be involved and the less likely the couple will be to repair that relationship, which causes the likelihood of divorce to skyrocket. If the divorce happens, a part of the foundation on which the hero bases her life and identity has been destroyed, and unless she's able to acknowledge and incorporate the new, uglier parts of herself, she's on the way to becoming a villain herself.

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References & Additional Resources

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- ✎ Lerner, Betsy. (2000). *The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers*. Riverhead Books: New York.
- ✎ Keyes, Ralph. (1995). *The Courage to Write: How Writers Transcend Fear*. Owl Books: New York.

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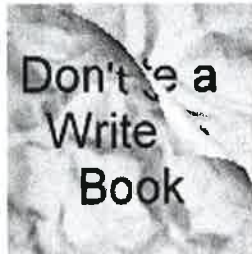
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Creating Villains People Love to Hate

by Lee Masterson



Every story has a bad guy.

There wouldn't be much conflict for your protagonist to overcome if there was no antagonist to stir the pot.

Yours might be the evil villain who opposes everything your hero (or heroine) does. He might be the treacherous double-agent from the past, or the psychotic evil scientist, or maybe just the "other woman" fighting for your hero's attention.



Who ever your villain is, making sure he is believable is far more difficult than simply creating a character who does bad things to hold up your protagonist's progress.

Your job here is to make your villains credible, logical, and believable, but not likeable. You want the reader to understand what they're doing that is such a negative thing for your hero.

But it's more involved than just explaining their adverse actions. Your readers need to understand why the antagonist is doing what he does, and why he believes his actions are justified and rational.

Basically, you need your villains to be real, three-dimensional people.

Unfortunately most "bad guys" are shown as being shallow, narrow-minded creatures whose only ambition is to be as evil as possible. This approach to an antagonist loses the respect of your reader for two reasons:

1 - You lose any emotional impact your story had if your readers can not completely believe the threat to your hero is real, or threatening enough. It also lowers the reader's esteem for the hero who they know can only beat this unthreatening villain.

2 - A completely evil character equates to a totally weak character to a reader. If your villain's only motivation is evil, this does not give him

enough depth of character to become real in your reader's mind. Giving your bad guy only one driving motivator is not enough - especially if you choose a lightweight surface motivator like "evil" or "greed".

Think about when you created your protagonist. Most likely you created someone you admired, a character with strength and integrity. I'm guessing you took the time to get right inside your hero's head and understand what made him tick.

Your villain is no different.

In order to be considered a worthy opponent, you must portray your antagonist honestly. You must be able to get inside his head, too, and learn what drives him to act the way he does.

Remember here that no one sees themselves as mean or evil or bitchy or insane or stupid. Your villain won't either. To him, his actions and his logic are perfectly justifiable.

Show your readers this side of your villain's logic and you intensify your story's suspense factor. Show that your antagonist is quite capable of winning the battle and make sure that it seems as though the outcome of your plot is uncertain.

That uncertainty doubles your suspense again, and gives you the perfect opportunity to showcase your hero's qualities as well, thus creating a stronger protagonist just by displaying the comparisons.

Put more simply, your villain has to be good about being a bad guy, but it forces your hero to be even better.

Your readers will be turning page after page to find out if your hero is actually good enough to overcome the monster you forced them to care about, in a twisted kind of way.

Remember *Silence of the Lambs*?

If you can actively portray your villain in his own Point Of View as being an intelligent, logical, complex creature with the capacity to be understanding and reasonable, who does what he does because his reasons are sound to him, then you are on your way to creating a pretty believable villain.

But when you can also show your villain's complex, devious, misguided nature from your *hero's* Point Of View, you know you've created a truly memorable bad guy, and you will have strengthened your protagonist's character and your plotline at the same time.

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How Not to Create a Villain

by Anne Marble

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Villains aren't as important to the romance novel as the hero and heroine, but in many stories, they are crucial. The villain's actions can drive the hero and heroine to succeed against all odds, force them to make difficult decisions, even drive them apart for a while. However, romance writers walk a delicate tightrope when creating villains. If your villain is dull, the readers won't be all that interested in your story, even if your hero and heroine are wonderful. On the other hand, if the villain is too interesting or has too many scenes, he might distract the readers from the hero and heroine -- and they should always be the main focus of a romance novel.

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Even if you aren't writing romantic suspense novels, your story might still need a villain. Try to imagine the "poor relation" plot without a wicked relative who forces the heroine to work for nothing. The conflict won't be as strong without someone to oppose the heroine. A domineering mother-in-law or spoiled cousin can be just as much a force of evil as a crime lord. In fact, I think most drug dealers would quail if they met the evil relatives from Alison Lane's Regencies.

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Why should you work so hard on your villains? A good villain won't save a faltering story. However, a fascinating villain can make an already good story great. For example, the evil Lionel Kersey is a great addition to Mary Balogh's *Dark Angel*. Similarly, many romances fail to make the grade because the villains don't measure up. Alice Alfonsi's *Eternal Sea* might have been a keeper for me because of its charm, yet I couldn't get over the grade for me because of the over-the-top conniving villains.

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There are some common mistakes many romance writers make when creating villains. If you avoid these errors, you're well on your way to creating villains your readers will love to hate.

Villains Who Take Over the Novel. Have you ever read a romance where you remember the villain more than you remember the hero and heroine? Or where you had to flip through several pages about the villain's childhood memories. Something probably went wrong with those stories. That's not to say you shouldn't create compelling well-characterized villain. However, if the villain is forceful and fascinating, the hero and heroine must be even more so.

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Another thing that can detract from the main story line is the infamous "villain sex scene." Some writers use this to emphasize the villain's evil. This technique doesn't always work. Keep in mind that many readers hate villain sex scenes and will skip over them. They don't turn to romances to read about villains whipping servants or having threesomes, they are looking for a love story.

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Obvious Villains. Don't you hate figuring out who did it by the end of Chapter Three? So do your readers. I once read a romantic suspense novel where the victim was killed on an island. There were only two other adults on the island at the time -- the hero and his employee. Romance readers know the hero didn't do it, so the suspense was lacking. If your story rests on a mystery, there must be more than one possible suspect. Also, the additional suspects shouldn't be obvious "plants" inserted to take attention away from the real villain.

If you're having trouble with this, read the novels of Agatha Christie and other famous mystery writers to learn how to fool the readers while playing fairly. For an even better learning experience, try reading an Agatha Christie novel after finding out the identity of the killer. You'll get great tips on how to conceal information right in front of the reader's eyes.

Clichéd Villains. The conniving other woman, the evil mother-in-law, the wicked twin sister. Some villains have been used so often that they have become recognizable character types. These characters still have a lot of life left in them, but only if you flesh them out. Make them into real people rather than one-dimensional obstacles with attitude. Many readers like Mary Spencer's *Dark Wager* because the "other woman" character was more than just a clichéd nemesis. Anne Stuart went a step further in *To Love a Dark Lord*; in that novel, the "other woman" was a sympathetic character with a wonderful secondary romance of her own rather than a villainess.

Romantic suspense also has its share of tried and true villains -- the serial killer, the drug dealer, the stalker, the psychotic ex-husband. They have been used so often I'm surprised they don't form a union and start marching in protest, demanding fair treatment. If you're going to use one of these villains, make him (or her!) different. This doesn't mean that your villain should stay up nights thinking of new ways to kill people. Instead, give him a life outside the villainy. For example, why not make him a devoted family man?

Villains with Unbelievable Motivations. Nobody wants to read an entire novel only to find out that the villain was plotting against the hero the whole time because the hero stole away his prom date 20 years ago. If your villain is scheming and planning and committing crimes, he needs a good reason to go to all this trouble. A stolen prom date just doesn't cut it. In other words, like the hero and heroine, the villain must have a believable motivation.

Unlike the hero and heroine, the villain is more likely to be led by dark motivations. Revenge is a possible motive for villains, but only if the villain is going to all that trouble because he was wronged in a big way. Greed, anger, jealousy, and the lust for power make great motivations as well -- especially when combined. A greedy villain is not necessarily believable, but a greedy villain who is secretly in love with the heroine is both more believable and more interesting.

Unnecessary Villains. Just because you're writing a romance novel, that doesn't mean you need a villain. Powerful main characters can create plenty of conflict on their own. Sometimes, a villain contradicts the overall tone of the romance. For example, *Simply Magic* by Kathleen Kane started out as a charming paranormal romance until one of the secondary characters turned out to be a psychopath. This didn't mesh at all with a plot full of humorous incidents. If you're writing a romp or a light romance, you probably don't need a villain. You can combine suspense and comedy, but you must recognize that it's a difficult balancing act. If you do need to have a villain, avoid the impulse to make him dark and threatening. There's nothing wrong with a comic villain. In *Assault with Intent*, mystery writer William X. Kienzle lightened up the case with a team of inept criminals.

Even if you do decide to have a villain in your story, make sure that not everyone hates your heroine. Sure, readers will become sympathetic to a heroine who insulted by the hero's mother, given the cut direct by Lady Fussbudget, and mocked by the dandies. They will start rolling their eyes in disbelief, however, if this antipathy is found in the hero's valet, her own maid, the footmen, and Lady Fussbudget's poodle. Surely someone out there must like her besides the hero.

Utterly Evil Villains. Some villains are simply too evil. Not only does he make life miserable for the hero and heroine, he also beats and rapes the servants, kicks the dog, and on top of that, refuses to recycle. Not only is this unrealistic, it is often trite. Female villains can be over the top as well. Romance novels suffer from a surfeit of overly evil sisters, stepmothers, mothers-in-laws, and cousins. Resist the impulse to turn your romance novel into the "Dysfunctional Family Feud." The heroine's mother in Carla Kelly's *With This Ring* was obnoxious but believable because we've all known women who spoil one sibling while neglecting the other.

Don't be afraid to make your villain sympathetic. Persuading your readers to feel sorry for the villain won't make your main characters less important. Some writers have created villains who were so sympathetic they ended up starring in their own novels. These range from Roland Otton in Patricia Veryan's *The Dedicated Villain* to Reginald Davenport in Mary Jo Putney's *The Rake*.

Villains Who Talk Too Much. This one is a classic cliché. The villain captures your main characters, but instead of getting them out of the way, he goes into a spiel about how bright he is because he outwitted them all. This, of course, distracts him so much that the hero and heroine are able to get away. Today's readers are wise to this technique; after all, they have seen parodies of it in everything from *Get Smart* to the "Austin Powers" movies. If it's necessary to reveal information to the reader, weave it into the story instead of relying on this device.

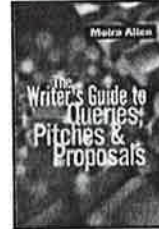
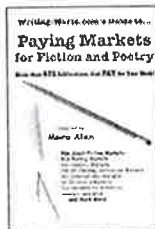
Weak Villains. Imagine this scenario. You've been reading an exciting, suspenseful novel, and

you're close to the end. The hero is confronting the villain. You're expecting a big payoff. But instead, the villain turns out to be a huge wimp who caves in quickly. Yawn. Will you be as likely to buy that writer's next book? Probably not. After all, would Darth Vader give up without a good fight? Neither should your villain. Villains should offer a worthwhile challenge to your hero and heroine. Readers will feel cheated if the villain gives in too easily.

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Anne M. Marble (amarble "at" sff.net) has published articles in *Gothic Journal* and *Writer's Digest* and is a columnist for the At the Back Fence column at All About Romance (AAR). In her "spare time," she moderates ΛARlist, a busy list of romance readers sponsored by AAR. Just about everything she writes includes a romance element, even if it's a fantasy novel about a lord and a countertenor. Her day job involves editing articles for the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*.

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