

Breaking Down Bad: Secrets to Killer Villains

Heroic & Villainous Terminology compiled by C.T. Charles for *Sunshine State Romance Authors, Inc.*



HERO

In fiction, the hero is often simply an ordinary person in extraordinary circumstances, who, despite the odds being stacked against him or her, typically prevails in the end. In some movies (especially action movies), a hero may exhibit characteristics such as superhuman strength and endurance that sometimes makes him nearly invincible. Often a hero in these situations has a foil, the villain, typically a charismatic evildoer who represents, leads, or himself embodies the struggle the hero is up against.



VILLAIN

The villain is a bad guy who is **the embodiment of evil who fights against the hero**. The mad scientists, the corrupt executives, the evil witches and wizards, the corrupt politicians, the mortal aspects of pure evil, and, more often than not, the people (or otherwise) that instigate the conflict and the story.

The difference between a villain and an antagonist is that villains **don't need to have redeeming characteristics**.

ANTI-HERO

An anti-hero is a **protagonist** who doesn't display traditionally heroic traits and are willing to do evil in order to achieve their goal(s). The reader must truly root for the character; we must be drawn to him despite ourselves. Perhaps his motivations are impure, his choices unconventional, but ultimately he must possess a certain allure that ignites our sympathy and engages our interest. The anti-hero is complex and unknowable, and because of that, he is fascinating in ways a pure hero or villain could never be.

ANTI-VILLAIN

An anti-villain is an **antagonist** who isn't purely evil nor entirely unsympathetic -- a character who doesn't seem to deserve being cast as the villain, perhaps cast arbitrarily as the villain because they are **not the focus of the story** but merely present a foil to the central figure.

PROTAGONIST

The protagonist is **the main character** in a story, novel, drama, or other literary work, **the character that the reader or audience empathizes with**. Well-written protagonists are round characters. They should be the most interesting, complex characters in your book or story.

ANTAGONIST

The Antagonist is the bad guy who **instigates the conflict of the story**. The Antagonist is completely dependent on the Protagonist for its existence. This is because he or she **exists for the purpose of opposing the efforts of the Protagonist**. They don't have to be a Big Bad, an Anti-Villain, or even morally objectionable in any sense (though they often are); they merely have to oppose the Protagonist.

VILLAIN PROTAGONIST

An interesting twist on conventional storytelling is to **make the Big Bad the plot's protagonist**. Sometimes (but not always), this **villainous main character** will even get the Sympathetic POV, but it is not necessary for a villain to be sympathetic for them to be this trope. They simply need to be a villain whose morally reprehensible actions (however well-intentioned) are in no way glossed over *or* justified within the context of the story. **We are seeing the story from the Big Bad's point of view**. Since the mid-2000s, this has been a very popular trope with made-for-cable TV series, such as *The Shield*, *Deadwood*, *Breaking Bad*, *Weeds*, and *Dexter* being but a few examples.

Antagonists don't wake up and decide to be evil; from their point of view, *they* are the good guys and the heroes of a story are the antagonists. These are generally characters that **have some redeeming characteristics and try to do the right thing**, but ultimately go about it in a **morally misguided** way with horrible consequences.

THE BIG BAD

The term "Big Bad" was popularized in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It is **the cause of all bad happenings in a story**. A Big Bad could be a **character** with Evil Plans or it could be a **situation**, such as a comet heading towards the Earth.