

Heroes and Villains

The Generic Hero

The generic Hero is the protagonist or main character of most stories, although stories may also have multiple heroes in them (for example Lord of the Rings). The Hero is important in that we identify with him or her more strongly than with other character. We thus vicariously experience what the hero goes through, empathizing with their fears and exaltations. To identify with them means that they must be sympathetic in some way, and that the less attractive heroes have some redeeming feature with which we can connect. A common theme is that the hero demonstrates courage in overcoming external obstacles to their goal. This may also parallel an internal transformation where they also overcome internal obstacles, thus growing and learning.

The Classic Hero

The Classic Hero is the person who goes on a quest to achieve some good end that benefits other people in some way. Perhaps they are rescuing a maiden in distress or preventing a dastardly villain from ruling the world. We look up to the Classic Hero but may not fully believe their perfection. Nevertheless they are a clear ideal to which we can aspire.

The Tragic Hero

The Tragic Hero reflects more of the real world in that the slings, arrows and bullets that are thrown at them do not always miss. The classic Tragic Hero is doomed from the outset, yet they continue in their quest, perhaps achieving it just before they (tragically) die. The Tragic Hero may also fail in their quest, perhaps having bitten off more than they can chew. For the audience, the tragic hero may represent their fears for themselves, that despite their best efforts that they will fail.

The Accidental Hero

The Accidental Hero just happens to get in the way of excitement and adventure and is swept up, often protesting, in the action. Perhaps their car is hi-jacked by gunmen or they are in a plane that crashes on a desert island. Which ever way, they are thrust into the main storyline and somehow manage to succeed, either stepping up to the plate and taking unavoidable responsibility or bumbling through and succeeding despite their own protests and inappropriate actions. We associate more easily with the Accidental Hero as they generally represent the common person more than other heroes. Their plight is often a recipe for comedy as they stumble through the plot and we laugh at their naivety and slapstick.

The Super-hero

The Super-hero is an exaggeration of the classic hero in their abilities to succeed. In the modern genre they have super-human powers, such as Superman and the characters of the X-Men. In older stories, such heroes were mighty warriors or magicians. These powers could make them human, so they often are portrayed with very human weaknesses and go through life-threatening experiences just as other heroes. Thus Superman is weakened by green kryptonite. The Super-hero story often paints black-and-white caricatured characters in the same way that hero's powers are exaggerated. Thus this bad guy is truly evil and the henchmen are pretty stupid. The Super-hero represents our dreams in which we can fly and have super-human strength.

The Anti-hero

The Anti-hero is a hero that we do not particularly like. Their indifference or distraction irritate us and they seem determined not to be heroic, but when the chips are down they pull out the stops and deliver. Anti-heroes can be frustrating for the audience, but they do increase anticipation and excitement as we wonder what they will do next.

The Knight

The Knight is driven by the knightly code of honor that demands bold acts and confrontation of evil wherever it may be found. The Knight thus rescues maidens but does not woo them, preferring instead to preserve a distant purity. We tend not to associate directly with the Knight but they do represent the rescue that we often crave.

The Crusader

The Crusader is characterized by being driven by a powerful mission to which all other activities are subservient. The crusade often targets many others and may, for example, be to convert many people to a way of thinking. We admire the Crusader's fortitude in standing up to almost overwhelming odds. Through them we may realize that we can persuade others and change the world.

The Genius

The Genius is a highly intelligent person who uses their substantial brain-power to solve the problems with which they are confronted and decide what to do next. No problem is too big for them and they relish in conundrums and puzzles. Geniuses may play in supporting roles, but can also take on the leading role. They are often nerdy, lacking social skills, but making up for this with their towering intellect. Sherlock Holmes is a classic example. We may well envy their mental powers but are grateful that they are on the side of good.

The Leader

The Leader directs the troops, often from the front, who may contain other heroes, in achieving a critical goal. Their main skill is in inspiring and motivating others, although they also need to be able to determine which direction to lead their party. The Leader can represent a parent or teacher who tells you what to do. By ceding decision to them, you place your trust in their ability to choose and achieve the final treasure.

The Bold Adventurer

The Bold Adventurer is close to the classic hero although with the primary goal of excitement and stimulation more than achieving some end (which they may also need to achieve -- it is just that their personal satisfaction comes from the thrills of getting there). The Adventurer thus

steps into the unknown with a smile on their face and, whilst we might not follow them as we would the leader, we are drawn along with the story which promises non-stop excitement.

The courageous Child

When children are cast into leading roles, we expect them to behave as children, seeking adults who will protect them from harm. Thus when a child steps forward and takes on the bad guys we are amazed and impressed. The Courageous Child perhaps represents something from our own childhood, where we played imaginary games of adventure, thus letting us recapture our youth for a little while.

The Whizz kid

The Whizz-kid is first a genius who usually knows everything there is to know about some subject -- often technology -- and usually more than the bumbling adults who are thrown into confusion by the amazing genius before them. The Whizz-kid invents prodigiously and comes up with amazing contraptions or other solutions to whatever problems they face. This prodigy perhaps represents some secret desires we have for super powers of the intellect. If we were to be like them (or at least have their brains) we could solve most of the problems before us at a single stroke.

The Silent Man

The Silent hero says little and does what is necessary with the minimum of fuss. They express little emotion, just getting on with what needs doing. They are often mysterious characters and we wonder why they do what they do. Nevertheless we admire their abilities and also their lack of demands on the people around them. Other heroes may be a bit full of themselves by comparison.

The Founder

The Founder begins things, often institutions or societies that become great, perhaps through taking on some of the greatness of the founder. In real life, company founders are often mythologized into heroic characters by the stories told of their vision and compassion. Founders are also associated with birth and creation, which reaches deep into our psyches.

The Martyr

The Martyr first offers self-sacrifice in the name of a greater cause or the safety of significant others. This putting of others before oneself is a characteristic of most other heroes and martyrdom is a potential and defining route for any heroic action. We may have great admiration for those who lay down their lives for their countries or their faiths, particularly in their ability to transcend our deep fear of dying and death.

The Savior

The Savior's noble goal is to rescue others from discomfort and distress. Whether it is a lost child or captured maiden, the savior's promise is of succor and salvation. The Savior plays directly to our need for rescue that echoes down from early childhood, where parents would save us from real or imagined ills.

The Noble Savage

The Noble Savage is a primitive being who, from their appearance, would seem to be little more than an animal and hence could be expected to be fierce and uncaring (and perhaps too primitive to understand care). Yet they also have a deep spark of humanity that perhaps exceeds our own, as they act with dignity and concern that is thrown into contrast against our expectations of them. Thus there may be a confusing juxtaposition, as we become the savage and they become the civilized being. Thus the Noble Savage surprises and teaches us.

The Gentle Giant

Something like the Noble Savage, the huge person would seem to be able harm us without difficulty, yet they act in contrast to their appearance (and perhaps deliberately so) in the way that they gently and delicately interface with the world around them. The Gentle Giant may not always be gentle as they mete out punishment to the villains, perhaps as they barge their way through on a rescue mission. We are grateful to them for not harming the good guys and thus place them on a heroic plinth.

The Rough Diamond

The Rough Diamond is someone who may appear as a villain and maybe does have villainous tendencies. However, they also have a heart of gold and may unexpectedly perform heroic acts, perhaps even surprising themselves in the process. The Rough Diamond, as with the noble savage and the gentle giant, reminds us that the world is not always as it seems and that goodness can be reassuringly found in even the most unexpected places.

Pearson's Heroic Archetypes

Carol Pearson, in *Awakening The Heroes Within*, describes twelve archetypes, each of which can go on a heroic quest. It is notable that some of these are not 'traditional' heroes in the sense of having archetypal strength of body or mind. Here are a few notes and interpretations on each of Pearson's archetypes.

Innocent

The Innocent, fearing abandonment, seeks safety. Their greatest strength is the trust and optimism that endears them to others and so gain help and support on their quest. Their main danger is that they may be blind to their obvious weaknesses or perhaps [deny](#) them. They can also become dependent on others to fulfil their heroic tasks.

Orphan

The Orphan, fearing exploitation, seeks to regain the comfort of the womb and **neonatal** safety in the arms of loving parents. To fulfil their quest they must go through the agonies of the **developmental stages** they have missed. Their strength is the interdependence and pragmatic realism that they had to learn at an early age. A hazard is that they will fall into the victim mentality and so never achieve a heroic position.

Warrior

The Warrior is relatively simple in their thought patterns, seeking simply to win whatever confronts them, including the dragons that live inside the mind and their underlying fear of weakness. Their challenge is to bring meaning to what they do, perhaps choosing their battles wisely, which they do using courage and the warrior's discipline.

Caregiver

Caregivers first seek to help others, which they do with compassion and generosity. A risk they take is that in their pursuit to help others they may end up being harmed themselves. They dislike selfishness, especially in themselves, and fear what it might make them.

Seeker

Seekers are looking for something that will improve their life in some way, but in doing so may not realize that they have much already inside themselves. They embrace learning and are ambitious in their quest and often avoid the encumbrance of support from others. Needing to 'do it themselves', they keep moving until they find their goal (and usually their **true self** too).

Lover

The Lover seeks the bliss of true love and the syzygy of the **divine couple**. They often show the passion that they seek in a relationship in their energy and commitment to gaining the reciprocal love of another. They fear both being alone and losing the love that they have gained, driving them to constantly sustain their love relationships.

Destroyer

The Destroyer is a paradoxical character whose destructiveness reflects the **death drive** and an inner fear of annihilation. As a fighter, they are thus careless of their own safety and may put others in danger too. Their quest is to change, to let go of their anger or whatever force drives them and return to balance, finding the **life drive** that will sustain them. Living on the cusp of life and death, they are often surprisingly humble.

Creator

Creators, fearing that all is an illusion, seek to prove reality outside of their minds. A critical part of their quest is in finding and accepting themselves, discovering their true **identity** in relation to the external world.

Ruler

The Ruler's quest is to create order and structure and hence an effective society in which the subjects of the Ruler can live productive and relatively happy lives. This is not necessarily an easy task, as order and chaos are not far apart, and the Ruler has to commit himself fully to the task. The buck stops with them and they must thus be wholly responsible -- for which they need ultimate authority.

Magician

The Magician's quest is not to 'do magic' but to transform or change something or someone in some way. The Magician has significant power and as such may be feared. They may also fear themselves and their potential to do harm. Perhaps their ultimate goal is to transform themselves, achieving a higher plane of existence.

Sage

The Sage is a seeker after truth and enlightenment and journeys far in search of the next golden nugget of knowledge. The danger for the sage and their deep fear is that their hard-won wisdom is built on the sand of falsehood. Their best hope is that they play from a position of objective honesty and learn to see with a clarity that knows truth and untruth.

Fool

The goal of the Fool is perhaps the wisest goal of all, which is just to enjoy life as it is, with all its paradoxes and dilemmas. What causes most dread in the Fool is a lack of stimulation and being 'not alive'. They must seek to 'be', perhaps as the Sage, but may not understand this.

Villainous characters

The Mastermind

The Mastermind does not commit the crime, but is the brains behind the big event, whether it is a stealing, a scam or some other crime. They are typically brilliantly clever and master planners, allowing for every eventuality including being caught in the act. They may also leave a deliberate signature, such as a rose or some other symbol, to taunt the police and show that they cannot be caught. The hero who captures the mastermind must outwit them at every turn, including avoiding the snares and false trails that the mastermind leaves behind. Moriarty, for example, is the mastermind that is the nemesis of the brilliant Sherlock Holmes.

The Thief

The Thief steals, often from a remarkably secure environment, somehow overcoming the security systems that protect the wonderful treasures kept there. They are dextrous and agile, able to get past any defence. The lone thief may also be clever enough to be classed as a Mastermind. Thieves are seldom violent and their villainy is based in their lack of concern for the rights of property of others. When they are involved in combat, their agility and precision can make them very dangerous. The hero who defeats the Thief is a detective, discovering the clues that others miss and piecing together the jigsaw of how the crime was committed and how to find the Thief. The Thief story is thus a cerebral one, where the hero outwits the Thief's mental dexterity.

The Robber

The Robber is less subtle than the thief and may work in a gang with others. Where the thief is precise, the Robber is clumsy. Where the thief waits until people are away, the Robber will steal from the person's body. The hero who catches the Robber may do so by entrapment, into which the Robber walks unawares. Other methods of capture include basic police work.

The Thug

Below the Robber in the intellectual order of villains is the Thug, who gets what they want simply through physical violence. They seldom work alone, needing direction from elsewhere and may act as guards or a human battering-ram into the fortress where the treasure is kept. Defeating the Thug is relatively easy if you can dodge their heavy-handed blows. Their slowness and size makes them a simple target for a quicker opponent. Otherwise they can be easily outwitted ('Goodness, look at that!' -- whack!!).

The Sneak

The Sneak is known for their dishonesty and general lack of values (it's not that other villains lack them -- it is more that the sneak has even less). They will work for whoever pays them. They thus make good double-agents -- as long as your offer remains the most attractive. They are often very cowardly and will squeal easily under pressure. Their tendency for lying, however, makes what ever they say difficult to believe. The Sneak is defeated first by never trusting them wholly and then by buying them off.

The Trickster

The Trickster is a mischievous character who is not what might first be envisaged. They often have their own agenda and may be the main Villain or a distraction that adds confusion to the story. Tricksters sometimes play tricks simply to entertain themselves so they can marvel at their own ability and domination over others. They also may set traps to ensnare the unwary and ply false trust to lead the naive astray. The Hero is always on guard and defeating the Trickster demonstrates intelligence as well as bravery or skill. The Trickster reminds us not to trust people and that not all is as it seems. Their deviousness and the uncertainty of their actions shows that sometimes people behave in unpredictable ways and for unknown reason.

The Knave

The Knave is a higher-class rogue who has uses his aristocratic position to get what he wants, including favors from a lady. He may promise much in return, but in fact gives nothing. The hero defeats the Knave by exposing his deception. He may also have to battle the Knave who, lacking honor, may again use deceptive methods here.

The Assassin

The Assassin is a dark and secret person who kills to order. Their killing is not the open murder of others but a hidden delivery, perhaps with poison or distant rifle. When up-close, they prefer the dagger, which may be hidden before use and closely controlled in action. Defeating assassins is difficult as they are very skilled in their art. When they do not wish to be found they can be almost invisible. Sometimes it is easier to defeat the person who commissioned the Assassin.

The Lovable Rogue

The Lovable Rogue is a sympathetic and attractive character who is steeped with charisma. They somehow balance selfish acts with sudden and unexpected generosity and kindness that endears them to us. We (and story characters) thus have a love-hate relationship with them as we wish that they would improve the integrity. In some ways we also envy them their freedom as they make their own rules in the world.

The False Hero

The False Hero is a deceptive person who seeks to usurp the glory of the real hero, either by claiming to having done what the hero did or otherwise claiming some other greatness that overshadows the hero. The False Hero often seeks the same end as the Hero, such as the hand of the princess, making it a zero-sum, win-lose game. In the end, they may have to fight to prove who is the true hero, and where perhaps the underhand, non-heroic methods of the False Hero exposes reality.

The Bad Boy

The Bad Boy is a naughty child who does wrong. The Bad Boy may know what they are doing and be well on the road to evil, or they may be going through a phase and are still redeemable. We all know Bad Boys of some kind, and perhaps we recognize ourselves in some of the variants. Because they are children, they may evoke some sympathy, particularly if they have not yet gone completely bad.

The Evil Genius

The Evil Genius is a very clever person who has turned their ingenuity to selfish and harmful means. They are often also Mastermind, getting others to do their bidding. They may also work for another, such as the inventor of dastardly devices. The audience may be aghast at the perversion of a good mind and at the bad that can be done by it. Like a gun, a brain can do good or evil.

The Nemesis

The Nemesis is the exact opposite of the [Hero](#), seeking to beat them at their own game. Where the hero is a Genius, the Nemesis is a Mastermind. Where the hero is a Warrior, the Nemesis is also likely to be a fighter. Moriarty, for example was the Nemesis for Sherlock Holmes, matching his intellect and cunning. The Nemesis scares the Hero and the audience perhaps more than any other villain as the hero's defining characteristics are cancelled out.

The Psychopath

The Psychopathic villain has the classic symptom of psychopathy, being a lack of empathy for others, combined with a cunning that manipulates people in unbelievably callous ways. The Psychopath may thus appear to be good, right up until the moment of betrayal (making them very difficult to detect and defeat), after which they show no remorse at all. Psychopaths scare us as they indicate that anybody might fall into the same category. More than others, they trigger the anger and [retributive justice](#) of [betrayal](#).

The Fanatic

The Fanatic is single-minded person whose crime is seldom of the traditional variety (robbery, etc.). They may well driven by religion or some other ideology that gives them the fervor to carry out their mission. The Fanatic is difficult to defeat as they typically put their mission above their own safety and will fight like a Madman.

The Traitor

The Traitor is the archetypal betrayer, seeming to be on your side but eventually betraying you to the enemy. Their reasons may be that they are spies, they are bought by the enemy or that they are actually good, but they are blackmailed into their treachery. Defeating Traitors may occur if they are detected before their treacherous act, but is usually afterwards, when they may be caught as they try to hide or escape