

HOW TO CREATE FANTASY VILLAINS WITH BELIEVABLE MOTIVES

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No matter who your villain is, it's your job as the writer to make them interesting and unique. Make them believable. Your readers don't necessarily need to like the villain, but you want the readers to *understand* the villain. Here are some things to keep in mind and some questions to ask while creating your villains.

First, find a goal to motivate them.

Every character needs one, no matter if they're the hero, a minor side character, or the big baddie. So, what does your villain want? In fantasy that could be as simple as wanting to obtain that priceless magic artifact before anyone else, or as broad as wanting to purge the world of what they see as the inferior race.

Questions:

- What does your villain want?
- What is their overarching goal?
- What hinders them from getting to their goal?

Second, establish their moral code.

The most interesting villains will have complex backstories that explain why they're acting the way they are now. You know how a main character has a wound or ghost—something that happened to them in their past, a defining moment—well, villains have the same thing! Maybe they lost a loved one during a battle with a wyvern. Maybe they were corrupted by greed for power like the one ring. Maybe they were killed and now, as an undead person, are seeking revenge.

Questions:

- What happened to your villain to make them be this way?
- What is their wound or ghost?
- Did they try to be good at one point and it backfired?

Third, since this is fantasy-based, explain your villain's relationship with magic.

This is key, especially if you've created a unique magic system that you want to explore and show off. Normally villains have a twisted view of the magic system you've created—either they want more of it and will do anything to obtain it, or they want to squash people who have it for fear of an uprising. Magic is often related to power or the lack thereof, so if you explain the relationship with magic, you'll explain their relationship with power as well.

Questions:

- What is your villain's relationship with magic?
- How do they use magic?
- Do they have to give anything to harness the magic?

Fourth, make sure your villain has weaknesses.

It's more fun that way and gives the hero the chance to exploit those weaknesses. Those weakness—and your hero's attempt at exploiting them—can also be a great motivation for your villain throughout the story. Perhaps the villain who only does fire magic and was thwarted by the heroes, learns some water-based magic by the end.

Questions:

- What is your villain's weakness?
- How does that weakness show up in their actions?
- What does the villain do to cover up said weakness?

Fifth, make the villains evolve and stack up with the main characters accordingly.

Your villain isn't just sitting in their lair waiting for the hero to return and twiddling their thumbs. No, they're actively trying to thwart the hero—whether that be fighting them, sending spies or minions after them, or learning new tricks to defeat them. Make sure your villains learn new abilities or gain new allies just like the hero does, because your villains are people, too. They'd see your hero as a threat, and they'd act accordingly. Allow your villains to grow and change and learn from their mistakes.

Questions:

- What kinds of abilities would your villain most want to have?
- What kinds of abilities would be the worst for your heroes to face?
- What did your villain learn from their most recent encounter with the hero?

Sixth, make the personality fun, interesting, unique.

Your villain can't be 100% evil, 100% of the time, so give them some good qualities too. Maybe they're funny or charming or clever. Give them a good personality trait—maybe they're exceedingly loyal...which means they'll kill anyone who looks at their love the wrong way.

Questions:

- Is your villain more of a magnetic person?
- Does everyone hold their breath when they enter the room because they're more unpredictable?
- Do they have a particularly terrifying presence?



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