

HOW I BECAME A SUPER VILLAIN is a thoughtful and sometimes humorous exegetical analysis of the rarely touched on subject of comic book super villains. Comic fans and academics alike will enjoy this interesting dissection of this uniquely modern character.

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# How I Became A Super Villain

*A Portrait of a Uniquely  
Modern Character*

Brian Miller

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## Preface

What is a Super Villain? I'd like to think that since I'm writing a book about Super Villains, I would come armed with some background on the issue, but then again there is always room for discovery. We can ask; are Super Villains simply traditional villains as found in any other genre of literature? Are they just your run of the mill antagonist equipped with super powers, or are they something unique to this modern world of ours? I will suggest that Super Villains are unique in both form and function. This book will be my dissertation, my exploration into who or what the Super Villain is; and from the characters what may we divine about ourselves.

As I am one for the dramatic it may seem *après pout* to make claims that this book will rage against the ivory tower intellectual machine that opposes new ideas that might invade their bastion of elitism. I would like to be able to suggest that anyone with a doctorate will laugh at both my topic and my conclusions. I'd like to be able to say that! Unfortunately, by the time you get through this introduction my use of vocabulary should imply that I spent a lot of time hanging around those elitists. In fact I count myself blessed to be able to play at that intellectual level. It is also hard to argue the point when I have chosen to write a book about the philosophical exploration of a literary genre, and its creation of characters unique to modern culture; by topic choice alone I am pretty far from Joe Six Pack. So, I think it may be a little early to call out the establishment on

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this one. I'll wait for the scathing reviews before I start swinging the battle axe of righteous indignation.

Where I will go out on a limb, is that my choice of topic is a rare one when considering the vast preponderance of non-fiction intellectual work available in today's market. Comic books as both a form of art and literature are ideas that are slowly gaining ground; a graphic novel has won a Pulitzer, and comic books as a whole have a larger place in mainstream popular culture. Even literary critics must concede that Shakespeare was pop-fiction at one point. But, for all my bolstering about how my topic is so divergent from the mainstream of philosophical inquiry, my arguments and the way in which I construct them will feel very traditional. The unique nature of my argument will not come from the originality of how I construct it, but in its eventual conclusions.

Moving on; this book is dedicated to the intellectual fan-boys and girls out there that always saw something deeper in those comic books they collected, but never enumerate those insights without fear of sounding like a 50 year old virgin at a Star Trek Convention. You know that guy who even creeps out the people in the Klingon costumes.

Now, before anyone can ask the inevitable question, "Why are you writing about Super Villains and not Super Heroes, they are ... etc?" I have a two fold answer, first the rather parochial response is that I like the villains better and it's my book. The second reason is that Super Heroes are less unique; they are an evolution of earlier concepts derived and refined from many classical literary heroes. But I digress; it is simply that the unique concepts that surround the Super Villain warrant a fully conceptual dissection. There are volumes of scholarly work done on what it means to be a hero, both in the real world and in fiction. An endless exploration of what it means to stand for truth and justice and all that's right in the world. But what about the bad guy, where are his volumes of scholarly work, where's the love? So that is the second reason as to, "Why discuss Super Villains?"

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Because, no one else has done it, and the conclusions we arrive at may teach us something about whom we are.

Now to get down to specifics, if I'm going to take you on a path to understand the Super Villain I should at least tell you what my dastardly plan is. For crying out loud I wouldn't be much of a Super Villain if I made you wait to the end to find out my nefarious scheme. I have to get it right up on the table so everyone can see.

The first four chapters of this book are really going to be about discerning the definition of, what it truly means to be a Super Villain. In chapter one I'll pick out some characters who we may want to call candidates for the title of Super Villain. If you're a real avid reader of comic books, and familiar with comic lore you might be able to skim this chapter for the names of the characters I chose. For the most part chapter one will be a short synopsis of the character's histories, personalities, and their thoughts on what makes the perfect first date. Two reasons for doing this: first, is to have actual examples of familiar characters to compare to my argued points. Second is that by examining the characters' behaviors and histories we may find historical consistencies that bind them together.

Once armed with a few characters that can provide contextual examples for the study of "Super Villains" and "Super Villain Like" characters; we then must create a system for reaching a conclusion of what exactly defines a true Super Villain. In this case we are best aided by a discussion that begins with a broad topic and works its way to a very specific standard. For this reason I will begin with metaphysics hence chapter two is going to examine free will and possibility theory as it relates to the Super Villain. I know a few people just went blank and I think a guy at Barnes and Noble's just had an aneurism<sup>1</sup>. So now my intrepid readers; there is no need to fear, at the start of this chapter I will

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<sup>1</sup> If someone wouldn't mind putting the book down for a moment and calling an ambulance it would be appreciated.

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outline the basics of each topic covered along with some scholarly opinions on the larger subject, as to give some prior insight before I get onto my discussion. It is my hope that in doing this I may elevate the discussion and in part educate my readers.

In chapter three I will move from a discussion of the metaphysics to the mental world of the Super Villain. Specifically this chapter will focus on understanding the psychology of the Super Villain. I will begin by outlining the common psychological disorders of the Super Villain in their traditionally defined format, and then in their “Super Villain States”. The reason for this is that certain traditional psychological conditions may not precisely fit with the Super Villain psyche, and for this reason a new format for the diagnosed condition will be warranted. Now it may very well be that not all Super Villains share the same psychosis, but their may very well be a collection that most Super Villain personalities are based on.

In chapter four I will become ambitious, by attempting to ascertain an ethic of the Super Villain; it will be a search for a moral code common to those most often thought to have no moral code. To accomplish such a goal, I will begin by analyzing and building an understanding of what motivates a Super Villain. This should provide adequate grounding to determine a value structure, and meta-ethic that will bolster the Super Villain’s position. These goals accomplished, we will then be able to tie in our finding on the Super Villain metaphysics and psychology to build a more complete picture of who the Super Villain wants to be. Finally, I will wrap-up with observations about the unique nature of the Super Villain ethic, and a few realizations this brings to light.

In Chapter Five I will focus on what I would like to call personal conclusions. This chapter we will take our realizations of the Super Villain: metaphysics, psychology, and ethics; and form this into a cohesive concept of what these characters are, and quite possibly can tell us about ourselves. For some readers these practical conclusions of the Super Villain chapter may hold revelations of a great morale truth. For other readers there may

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some insight into how these characters suggest we perceive the world to work, or possibly desire the world to work. And inevitably there will be those who find nothing of value at the books conclusion, but it is my hope that those individuals are few and far between.

In the end if nothing else we will have a better understanding of who these wholly unique characters actually are.

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