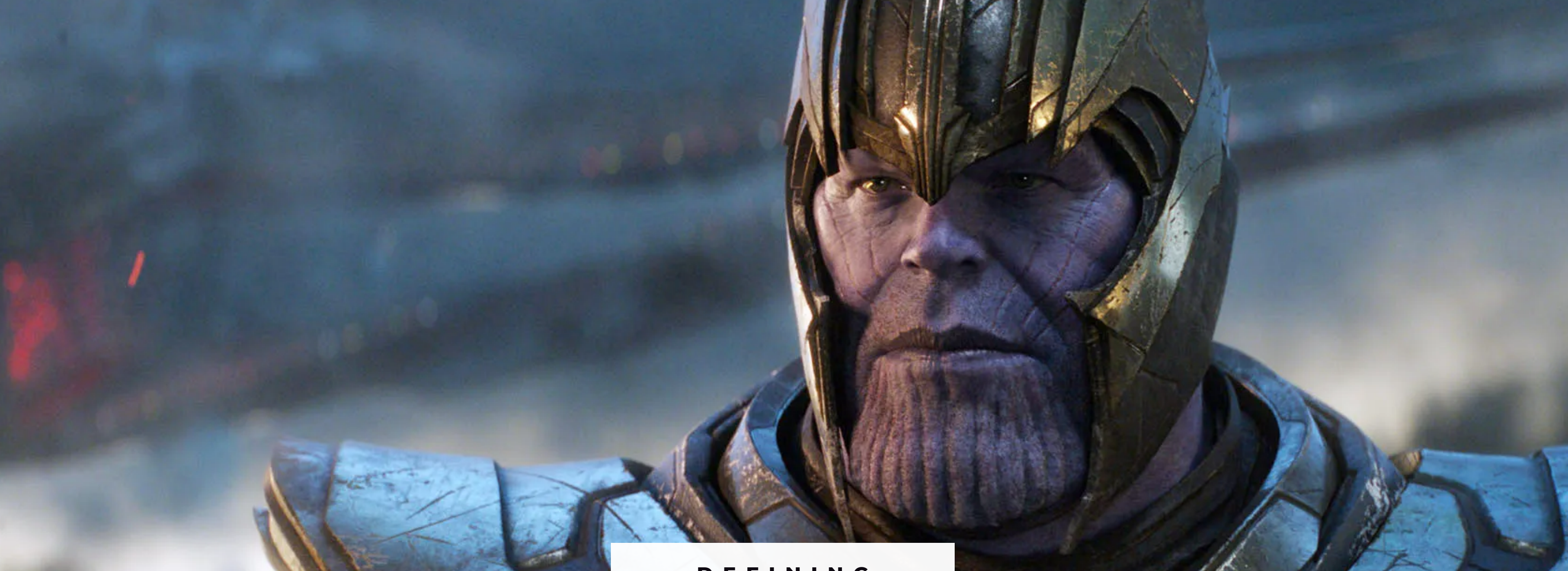CREATING

VILLAINS

a creative writing workshop

INTRODUCTION

- Defining Antagonists: Terms & Definitions
- Understanding Antagonists: Function in Story
- Creating Antagonists: Key Features
- Exploring Antagonists: Common Types
- Analyzing Antagonists: Activity
- Questions
- Contact Information

ANTAGONISTS

villains and other opponents

ANTAGONISTS

- The character who acts in opposition to the story's protagonist
- They try to prevent the protagonist from achieving their goal by:
  - Competing with protagonist for the same goal
  - Trying to stop the protagonist from reaching their goal
  - Creating a problem that the protagonist's goal is to overcome
- Antagonists create as much <u>conflict</u> as possible for the protagonist

ANTAGONISTS VS. VILLAINS

- Villains are evil characters who want to do bad things and/ or hurt people
- Antagonists are characters who work in opposition to the protagonist's goals
- Antagonists do not have to be villains
- Lector is a villain, not an antagonist; Darcy is an antagonist, not a villain

ANTAGONISM

- Any force or idea that opposes the protagonist and their goal
- Can be inanimate (like nature), a group (like society), or an individual
- If it is not one individual, it should be personified by an individual(s)
- Does not have to be human but they do have to be a specific character
- Character's role must be clear even if their identity is not
- Multiple antagonists should represent different aspects of the force/ idea

UNDERSTANDING

ANTAGONISTS

villains and other opponents

FUNCTION

- Designed to specifically attack the protagonist's flaw and force change
- Test the main character and push them to their breaking point by:
  - Attacking the main character
  - Threatening the thing they love most
  - Representing a dark version of protagonist
- The best antagonists cause <u>external</u> and <u>internal</u> conflict

PLOT

- The external action that shapes the story
- Created by the antagonist trying to prevent the hero from achieving their goal
- Should escalate throughout the story and increase the stakes
- Should not be random
- Target the protagonist's want, beliefs and weaknesses

CHARACTER

- Antagonists serve as a mirror or foil for protagonist
  - Mirrors reflect dark similarities
  - Foils highlight important opposites
- Challenge protagonist's beliefs and weakness
- Force action, to make choices that cost the hero
- The best antagonists take the worst thing that could happen to a character and make it worse

THEME

- The antagonist connects the story's conflict to its theme
- Reformed in the debate about and outcome of the characters' choices
- Reflected in the beliefs, methods and actions
- All supporting characters should flesh out the theme and add layers of conflict
- Uniting these elements helps create satisfying stories

CREATING

ANTAGONISTS

villains and other opponents

MOTIVATION

- Can be active or passive (usually the opposite of the protagonist)
- Motivation doesn't have to be deep but should be strong
- Compelling backstory can help, but isn't required and can be problematic
- Explains their "stop at nothing" approach / attitude
- Their action should be unpredictable but not random
- Bonus points if the motivation is relatable, human and/ or sympathetic*

MORALITY

- Can range from black and white evil to many shades of gray
- There needs to be a clear logic we can follow
- Defines their methods and approach to attacking the protagonist
- Character-specific codes are interesting and compelling
- Morality doesn't mean lack of empathy; Antagonists can feel remorse
- Bonus points if there is nuance and contradiction in the belief

POWER

- Can be all powerful or normal people
- Should be more powerful than the protagonist
- Need to appear unstoppable or undefeatable at the story's start
- Power can come from money, magic, abilities, intelligence, resources
- Too little power reduces tension; too much weakens stakes
- Bonus points if the antagonist is adaptable so their power escalates

PERSONALITY

- Antagonists don't need to have a strong personality – but it can help
- Includes humor, charm, charisma, being cool, etc.
- Reflect key aspects of protagonist
- Actions speak louder than words; remember to show, not tell
- Show the "villain at rest" so we can see how they treat enemies vs. allies
- Bonus points if there is contradiction or distinct trait

FLAW

- While your antagonists should appear unstoppable at first, they aren't
- Their flaw or weakness is the key to their downfall or change
- Can be simple, superficial or complicated, mysterious
- Can be related to their motivation
- Weaknesses make antagonists more compelling and more human
- Bonus points if it's tightly tied to protagonist's arc and growth

EXPLORING

ANTAGONISTS

villains and other opponents

VILLAINS

KILLMONGER

- Traditional bad guys who want to stop hero
- Usually a "man vs. man" conflict
- Includes masterminds, zealots, criminals, monsters, corrupt officials, bullies, etc.
- Compelling backstories and distinct personalities help
- The more related to theme, the better

RIVALS

CERSEI LANNISTER

- Any nemesis or adversary who competes with the protagonist for the same goal
- Don't have to be evil, but often are "bad"
- Should serve as a mirror or foil for the main character to bring out story's theme
- Tactics often define their "evilness", not goal

TRAITORS

PETER PETTIGREW

- Includes false friends, fake allies, frauds and other characters who join team "bad" or were there all along, but hiding
- Needs to be another source of antagonism unifying the story before they turn/ are revealed
- Make sure the reveal of their betrayal is satisfying

ANTI-VILLAINS

- Any antagonist who isn't a villain
- Can include authority figures, romantic interests, family and any character who challenges the protagonist but isn't evil
- Miscommunication is often at the root of conflict
- Common in character-driven stories

MIRANDA PRIESTLY

THEMSELVES

JAY GATSBY

- In the best stories, the protagonist is their own worst enemy
- They hold themselves back and cause their own problems
- Audiences are more likely to relate to and sympathize with character's inner turmoil
- Problems are personified in other characters

ANALYZING

ANTAGONISTS

villains and other opponents

ACTIVITY

- Select one of your favorite antagonists and break down their character in terms of motivation, morality, power, personality and flaw.

- Then consider what makes them especially effective in terms of the story's plot, character and theme.

Motivation

Personality

Morality

Flaw

Power

ANTAGONISTS

villains and other opponents

REMEMBER:

- The best antagonists don't have to be evil – they have to cause the protagonist the most conflict by <u>threatening the want</u>
- They need to be <u>more powerful</u> than the protagonist in a way that hurts
- Their actions need to force the protagonist <u>to act</u> and these actions must <u>have costs</u>
- The outcome of these actions will force the protagonist to <u>change</u> and express the story's theme

WRITING ADVICE

- Study your favorite villains and what makes them effective
  - Why are they interesting?
  - How do they increase the story's tension and stakes?
  - What makes them an effective threat against the protagonist?
- Consider story's audience, genre, world and tone
- Adjust power and personality if stuck
- Avoid clichés and research harmful stereotypes

QUESTIONS?

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

Please fill out our survey!

THANK YOU!

for more help, visit our website or schedule an appointment!

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WC ONLINE