

Straw men (DOG EAR)

Written by Administrator

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You've carefully considered your hero, his background, driving factors and idiosyncrasies.

You've come up with your world, be it an isolated Turkish village on a volatile border, the hold of a star-bound colony ship, or perhaps a Brooklyn slum of 1923. You've given it life, made it real.

You've developed your plot, the twists, surprises and mysteries.

And with all that, suddenly you decide that your antagonist can be cut out of cardboard and propped up. After all, what more do you need than some frothing villain shouting "Seize them!" or "Throw every resource into their downfall" or whatever?

You've made a *Straw Man*, a two-dimensional bad guy for your hero to be heroic against. Straw men are easy to put together – just find an overused aspect of that character-type and use it in place of imagination. In this, religious leaders are fat, southern hypocrites. Military leaders are buzz-cut red-baiters. Super-spy villains are gloatingly urbane. And worse, they all share the trait of being incredibly stupid.

At their worst, they don't seem to have any primary goal (other than to obstruct the hero from his heroics). They will scream, lose their tempers and even sacrifice mooks in pointless displays of their evilness. They have no dimension, not reason, and no background.

Employing them in your story does nothing but cheapen that story, making it juvenile and immature. Sure, you might have researched 12th century Constantinople, but if your ruler is going to scream, "I want their heads!" instead of focusing on matters of state and trade, congratulations, you've just turned your historical fiction into a cartoon.

If I had to give a good example of a non-straw villain, I'd have to point to an old favorite, the Cardinal Richelieu from the *Three Musketeers*. He wasn't focused on four low ranking musketeers; he was trying to disgrace the queen by the purloining of her jeweled studs owned

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by her lover to maintain the king's standing. That the musketeers got in his way did not turn him into a beard-tugging maniac. No, he just kept doing his cardinal chores, maneuvering his spies and dealing with church business. He gave his minions (Lady de Winter and Comte de Rochefort) assignments that made logical sense, which they did to the best of their abilities). And finally, in the end, once the musketeers had won, he didn't go into a vengeance-seeking tizzy. He actually gave a commission to D'Artagnan in droll reward for besting him.

He felt powerful, strong and in control. He made logical sense. And in beating him, the musketeers felt all the more powerful and realistic.

Don't make us hate your villains. Make us understand and respect them. Your story will be better for it.

[>>>ABOUT THE CLOSEST I COME TO VIOLATING THIS IS WITH MAHROCHEIR, AND STILL, HE JUST WANTS TO BE THE PERSIAN TREASURER OF TYRE. THE HERO MEANS NOTHING TO HIM. CHECK IT OUT HERE!<<<](#)