

Top 10 villains

"There's a largely inescapable rule about storytelling: the better the villain, the better the hero. There's a reason why Batman needs the Joker, or Indiana Jones needs all those Nazis - it's because without them to truly test his or her resourcefulness and skill, the hero would face a new adventure, stroll through that new adventure, and would probably be texting his mates the whole time.

Villains define the heroes. Sometimes those villains, like the Joker, have been set up as the perfect counterpoint to the good guy. Sometimes they're set up as the personification of a primal fear that lurks within us all. But the great villains, the truly great villains, exist beyond the page. They live on after you've closed the book..

1. Voldemort ([the Harry Potter series by JK Rowling](#))

But of course. How could such a list be compiled without the daddy of modern-day villains? He's everything a bad guy should be. He spends the first few books as a sinister figure in the background, always threatening to emerge... and then when he finally does return he's as evil as everyone has been saying. It's so satisfying when the reality lives up to the myth, isn't it? A truly great character, fuelled by hatred and bitterness, following an incredibly powerful agenda of ethnic cleansing. Classic.

2. Christopher Carrion ([The Books of Abarat by Clive Barker](#))

The Prince of Midnight in Clive Barker's Abarat, Carrion is a terrifying vision of a man whose nightmares swim in a glass collar that surrounds the lower half of his face. While he is prone to killing the odd henchman for failing him, there is something more to Carrion than mere evil - something incredibly sad and broken.

3. The Other Mother ([Coraline by Neil Gaiman](#))

Some villains are bad. Some are scary. And some, and thankfully these are few, are truly terrifying. The Other Mother is one such villain. At first, she's

the perfect substitute for Coraline's real mum, who is just too busy to pay attention. The Other Mother is her exact duplicate - apart from that creepy buttons-for-eyes thing, of course. But as Coraline spends more and more time with her, the cracks begin to show, and she discovers that this wonderful alternate life could have some serious downsides.

4. Mrs Coulter ([His Dark Materials by Phillip Pullman](#))

This was a hard one. Mrs Coulter: hero or villain? Certainly, she displays some redeeming characteristics as Phillip Pullman's classic trilogy unfolds, but for the most part she is power-hungry and cruel, and seeks to sever the link between children and their souls. I'm pretty sure that means she deserves to be on this list.

5. Sauron ([The Lord of the Rings by JRR Tolkien](#))

I'm not entirely sure that The Lord of the Rings could be classed as children's literature, but The Hobbit certainly was, so Sauron gets his place. You all know him by now. Big guy. Wears armour. Turned into an eye. The Monocled One lusts after power for power's sake, and will crush anyone and anything who stands in his way. There's a whole lot of allegory going on here that impresses people who like allegories, but I just like the crushing bits.

6. Rictus ([The Thief of Always by Clive Barker](#))

More of a henchman than the evil mastermind of the piece, Rictus appears to young Harvey Swick with an offer to take him away from his drab and boring life. Delivering Harvey to Holiday House, where his boss Mr Hood makes wishes come true, Rictus never ventures too far from the reader's mind. And as Harvey realises that not everything is as it first appears, we find ourselves awaiting the return of Rictus with dread- and not a little morbid anticipation.

7. The White Witch ([The Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis](#))

No prizes for guessing that Her Imperial Majesty Jadis, Queen of Narnia would be sitting high and mighty somewhere on this list. Besides having the striking look and cold arrogance requisite of any great villain, she also knows just how tempting Turkish Delight can actually be. Cruel and vindictive, she commits the unforgiveable sin of never allowing Christmas to brighten the dark days of her hundred year winter. She secured her place in my top 10 years ago, when I saw the 1979 animated movie. Cutting Aslan's hair like that while he lay on the slab, doing her best to rob him of his dignity... oh I still hate her...

8. Count Olaf ([A Series of Unfortunate Events by Lemony Snicket](#))

The books are amusing little jolts of oddball eccentricity, but the villain that the three Baudelaire children have to foil, time and again, resonates on a far more sinister level. A master of disguise with an army of nasty friends behind him, he is always watching and always plotting.

9. Archie Costello ([The Chocolate War, Beyond the Chocolate War by Robert Cormier](#))

Poor old Jerry Renault. If only he'd sold the chocolates like all the other boys, he'd never have become the prime target of the Vigils, Trinity High School's secret society of students. Led by Archie, a highly intelligent master manipulator, the Vigils set out to ruin Jerry's life. He's bullied, intimidated and beaten up while Archie looks on in quiet, reserved amusement. Fascinating, corrupt, sadistic and yet utterly mesmerising, if Archie Costello was a real person you just know he'd be a politician by now.

10. Dolores Umbridge ([the Harry Potter series by JK Rowling](#))

Here we are, at number 10, with the most hateful of all the villains on this list. I would rate Dolores a more potent bad guy than even He Who Must Not Be Named, because she is a villain who can also exist in the real world. She's that passive-aggressive, condescending, patronising, conservative old witch that we've all met in our lives and had to bite our tongues whenever she simpers. One of Rowling's greatest triumphs is to make this odious little woman live and breathe. I can remember reading those pages and feeling

my hate for her burn and grow. She loves pink cardigans and pictures of kittens and oh, how she loves her rules...