

Bad Boys

Writing Dark Heroes to
Die For

*Thank you all who attended!
You were wonderful
participants! Best, Kim*

KimFalconer.com

Northern Rivers Writers' Centre

August 1, 2011



Set Intentions

in 6 words or less



- What do you want to get from this workshop?
- Define *dark hero*

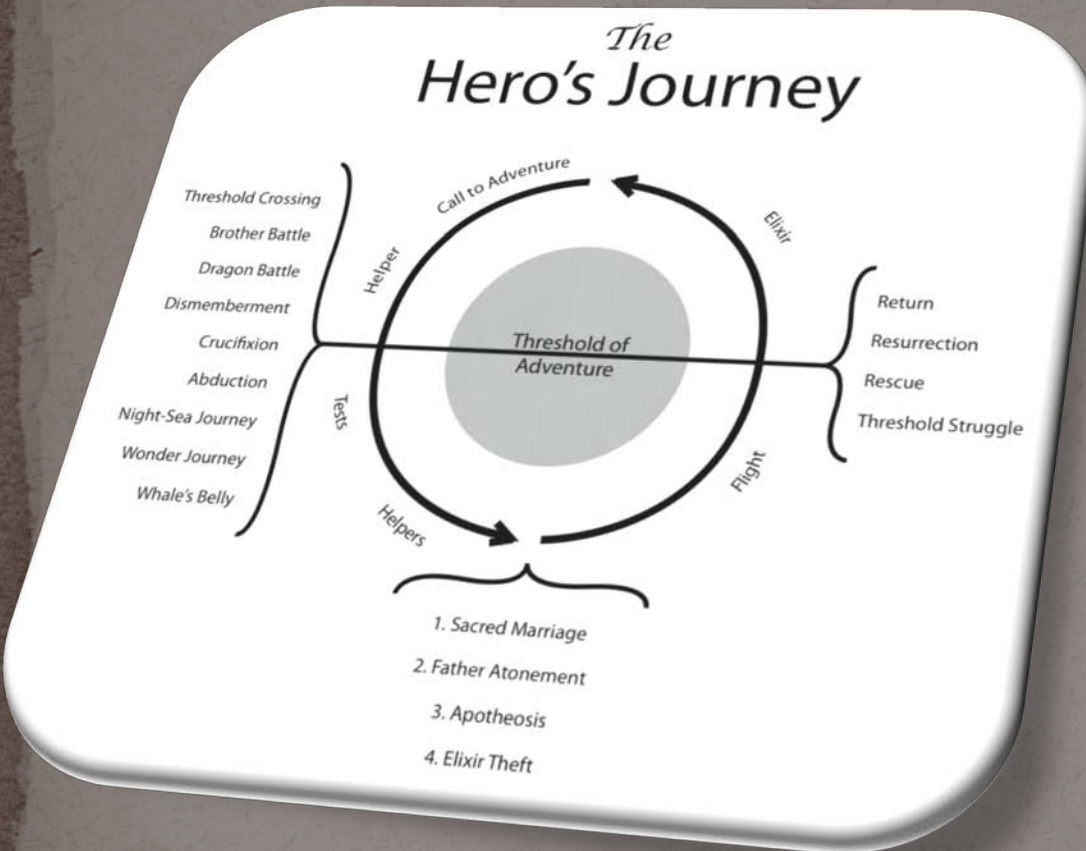
David Boreanaz as Angel in [Buffy the Vampire Slayer](#)

Classical Hero Archetype



HERO - From the Greek ἥρωϛ, hērōs: a demi-god with a cult following. Capable, extraordinary, has the *favor of the gods*. On a journey of becoming. It either ends well (comedy) or bad (tragedy) but there is always a growth arc and a catharsis/inspiration.

The Heroic Journey



Call to Adventure – choice
Departure or decline
First threshold – evocation
Supernatural aid
Belly of the whale - separation
Initiation – road of trials
Meeting with the goddess
The liminal region – suspension
More supernatural aid
Next initiation and trial
Ultimate boon
Refusal to return
Rescue from without
Master/Mistress of both worlds

Writing and the Hero's Journey

Heroes Make Readers Cheer



Julia Roberts plays [Erin Brockovich](#)

In this workshop we will be creating a male protagonist and story outline. Because of social and cultural biases and gender issues, building female heroes or villains requires a slightly different examination of narrative and will be covered in a separate workshop. See

[Writing Strong Women](#)

Sacrifice (Altruistic)

A series of trials (growth arc)

High Risk (failure must be likely)

Faces fears (internal or external)

Pays a price (can't come cheap)

Works hard

Overcomes inner or outer trials

Huge pay off

Inspiration

Action Heroes



Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft



Arnold Schwarzenegger as
the Terminator



Sigourney Weaver as
Ellen Ripley in Alien

The contemporary hero is *always* going to succeed. The question is, what will it cost them? The hero taps into our notion that 'being good' will pay off, that altruism is 'right' and 'one person can make a difference.' Action heroes are not victims. They are thinking, moving and deciding characters that make things happen!

Reluctant Heroes



Keanu Reeves as Neo in [The Matrix](#)



Linda Hamilton as Sarah
Conner in [The Terminator](#)



Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker
in [Star Wars](#)

The hero may refuse or ignore the adventure or deny the ability to move beyond the status quo. All of these constitute the 'Refusal of the Call.' The use of magical intervention is then needed to plunge the hero into the unknown. The reluctant hero requires supernatural forces to urge him on.

Romantic Hero Archetypes



Johnny Depp as [Don Juan Demarco](#)



Liv Tyler as Arwen Undómiel in [Lord of the Rings](#)

These heroes are motivated by love, and not in a sensible way. They don't think, *is this a good, sane, healthy relationship? Will she/he be supportive of my aims and goals? How will we share the housework?* Instead they love intensely, completely, passionately.

Spiritual Heroes



Sir Ian McKellen as
Gandalf in [LOTR](#)



Mother Teresa



Alec Guinness as Obi-Wan
Kenobi in [Star Wars](#)

The spiritual hero instills in us hope, love and belief in ourselves. They often have divine guidance, are enlightened and model a higher behavior or set of beliefs than the masses. They are on a journey just as difficult, challenging and dangerous as the action hero with sacrifice at its core. We do not see the *flaw* or it is a part of their past that has been overcome.

What makes a good villain?



Motivation! Villain as *shadow* to the hero is personal. Because we know him, there is the possibility for a growth arc and redemption.

Gollum – ‘Shadow Hero’ [LOTR](#)



Cypher – ‘Betrayal Villain’ [The Matrix](#)

Villain as *betrayal* creates the opportunity to do bad things to your heroes and tell the ‘other side’ of the story. The chance for redemption is usually lost. Where heroes overcome inner conflict, the villain cannot. We cheer their demise.



Agent Smith – ‘Super Villain’ [The Matrix](#)

Super villains are all powerful like a force of nature (Sauron/dark side of the force). We do not ‘know’ them unless they have a representative with a growth arc or history (Darth Vader, Agent Smith) Individuals make super villains accessible (personal). Creates excellent obstacles and is usually woven into the world building.

Anti Hero Archetypes



Hugh Jackman as Wolverine

This is the Punisher Archetype, or the Dexter. He does 'bad' things (terrible things) but only to 'bad' people for 'good' reasons. We love that justice is served even though it undermines society. Judgments are key.



Matt Damon is T.M.R.

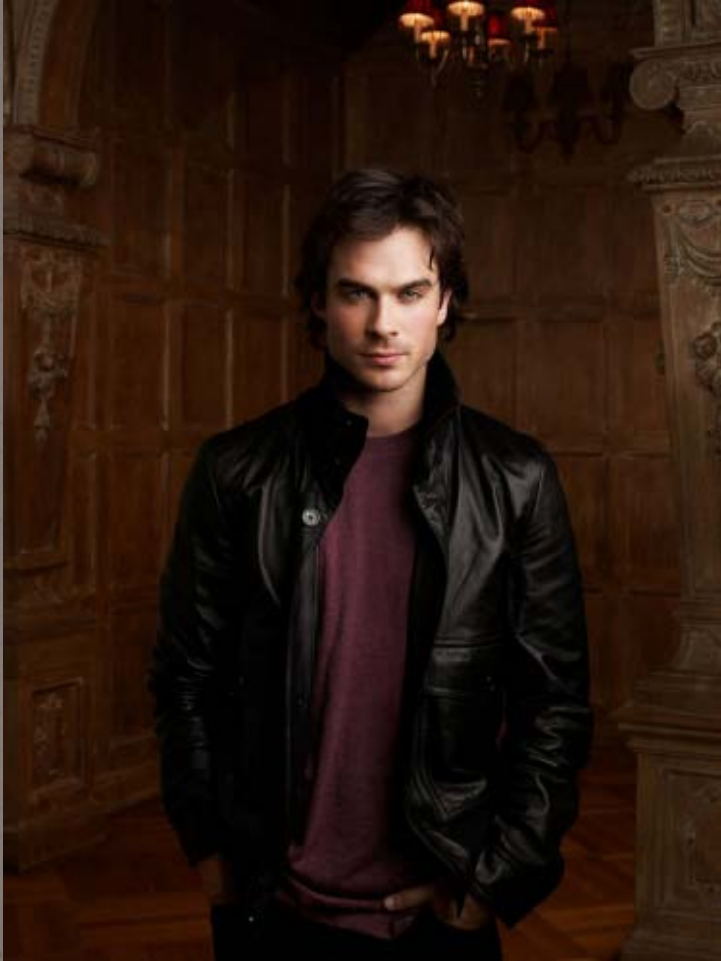
The true antihero archetype allows us to tell stories about 'bad' people doing 'bad' things for 'bad' reasons. Will they be caught? How will they fail?



Elijah Wood in LOTR

The archetypal hero who fails. He goes through all the stages and challenges of the classical hero but the story ends tragically because he fails. Turns tension past the breaking point and may allow a villain to prevail or inadvertently succeed.

Dark Hero Archetypes



Ian Somerhalder playing Damon Salvatore in [The Vampire Diaries](#)



Aidan Turner is Mitchell in [Being Human](#)

Sympathetic villains
Characters with steep growth arcs
Bad dudes doing bad things to good or
bad people but we love them anyway
Why? Why do we fall for them?

What makes a Dark Hero?



Brad Pitt in Ocean's Eleven

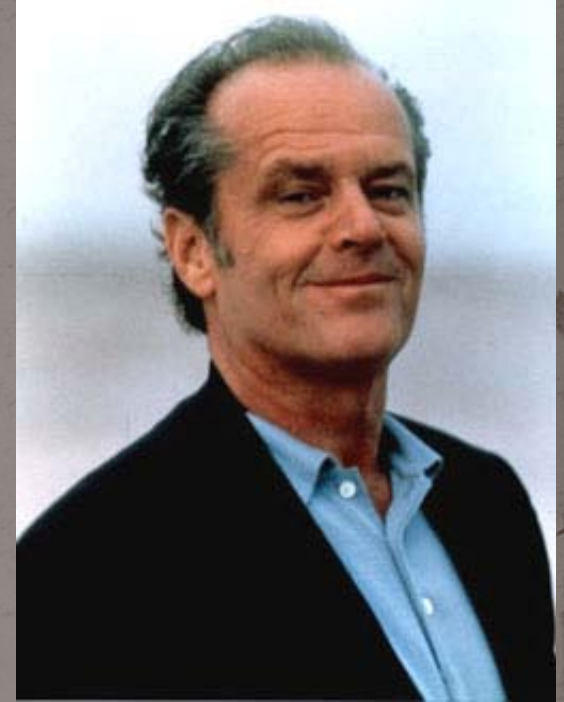
- Sexy
- Capable
- Mind of his own
- Extraordinary qualities AND a tragic *flaw*
- A place where 'good' and 'bad' blur (perspective)
- Charismatic
- Erotic
- Unrestrained

Dark Heros are Hot



Joe Manganiello plays Acide in [True Blood](#)

. . . In any language. This is *not* only a visual quality but an energetic one and it can transcend the traditional notions of beauty and attractiveness. The dark hero has *something* we want to get close to!



[Jack Nicholson](#)

You feel it right away and whether it is eye blazing good looks like [Damon Salvatore](#) or the [Joker's sexy ugly](#), the dark hero captivates and compels.

Dark Heroes are Erotic

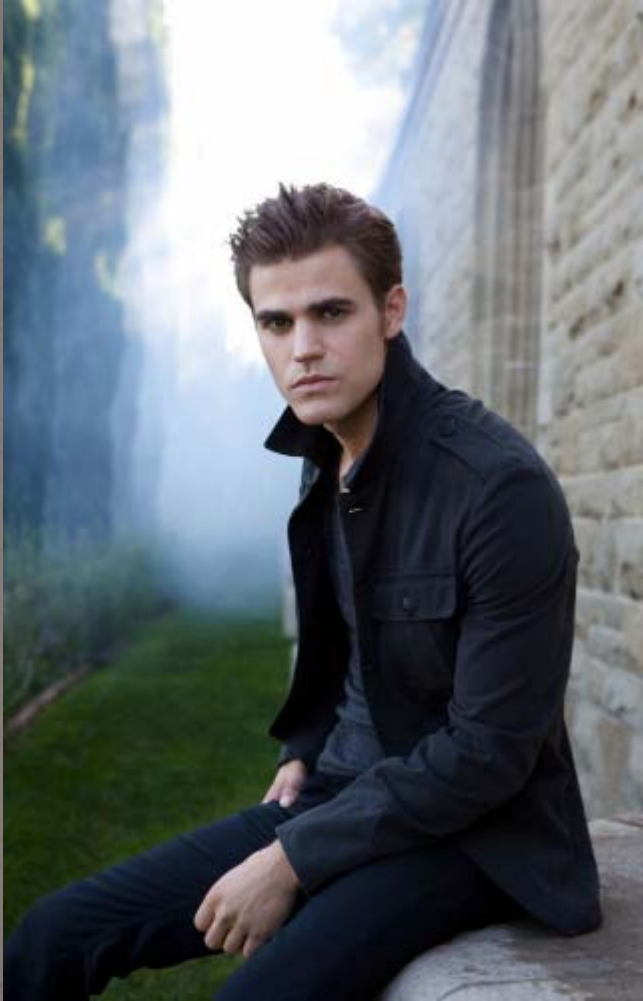


Eric and Sookie in [True Blood](#)

Dark Heroes are '[of Eros](#)'. They represent erotic experience, one that merges two or more people in such a way there is a lasting transformation.

"[Eros](#) brings beauty, meaning and divinity into our lives. It comes to us through a very particular epiphany, a passionate inspiration present in a particular lover, teacher, melody, or landscape. We long to follow it always. But this is not the whole story. For Eros also brings us obsessions, cruelty, abandonment, and betrayal. It may come through anguish..." [The Other Loveliness](#) by Harriet Eisman

Dark Heroes are Mysterious



Paul Wesley playing Stefan Salvatore in [The Vampire Diaries](#)

The dark hero's past is sketchy, or maybe tragic. They carry a burden that has become their secret mission. This makes them unpredictable. Not formulaic. They can do the unexpected. They can get away with murder.

Dark Heroes Speak their Minds



Johnny Depp in [The Secret Window](#)

They have the best dialog because they don't give a rip what others think. It means their voice can be sharp, edgy and liberated. Their conversations flow in ways the moralistically constrained hero's cannot.

Dark Heroes are Amoral



Dark heroes can break rules and feel good about it. If they perform a selfless act, it's not because it was the 'right thing' to do but because they were moved by their hearts. This is incredibly beguiling.

Bruce Willis as Korben Dallas in the [5th Element](#)



Dark Heroes are Powerful

- That's alluring in itself but they are also *comfortable* with their power. They make no apology for who they are.
- Writers and directors can put them in more danger and under more duress because they are not afraid to do what it takes to succeed.
- The risk factor skyrockets because they are so hard to kill!

Alexander Skarsgård as Eric Northman in [True Blood](#)

Mad or Bad?



Heath Ledger in [Dark Knight](#)

If the Joker is *mad*, it is in the way the ancient Greeks used the word *mania* (passionate outpouring.) He is everything that is repressed. His redemption is through chaos and disorder.

Cobb lives in a [world based on dream logic](#). His own subconscious, Mal, doesn't even believe it is 'real'. Within the dream, are his actions [heroic, mad, bad](#) or simply cathartic?



Leonardo DiCaprio in [Inception](#)



Timothy Dalton in [Wuthering Heights](#)

[Heathcliff](#) underscores our association of devotion with violence and abuse. Is he a product of his gender, his environment?

Identification & the Participation Mystique



Matt Damon as Jason Bourne

- When we are immersed, we fear for a character in danger, but to fear for someone we must believe the danger is real. We do not believe in the danger described in fiction yet we still fear for the character.
- To have compassion for the 'other' we have to believe it is happening to us. Arthur Schopenhauer
- See also my workshop on immersion and writing to connect.

The Erotic and Cathartic



Neo and Trinity in The Matrix

We need tragedy and conflict so our dark heroes can throw us out of our ordinary lives.

They move us into accordance with our inner world, into a *participation mystique* with our inner reality be it through erotic transformation or cathartic release.

Page #1 Describe your Character

Building the Dark Hero

Think **1)** a character who is **2)** in a situation with **3)** with a problem

- Looks
- Goals
- Flaws
- Attributes
- Inner conflicts
- Outer conflicts



Chris Hemsworth as **Thor**

Page #2 Setting the Details

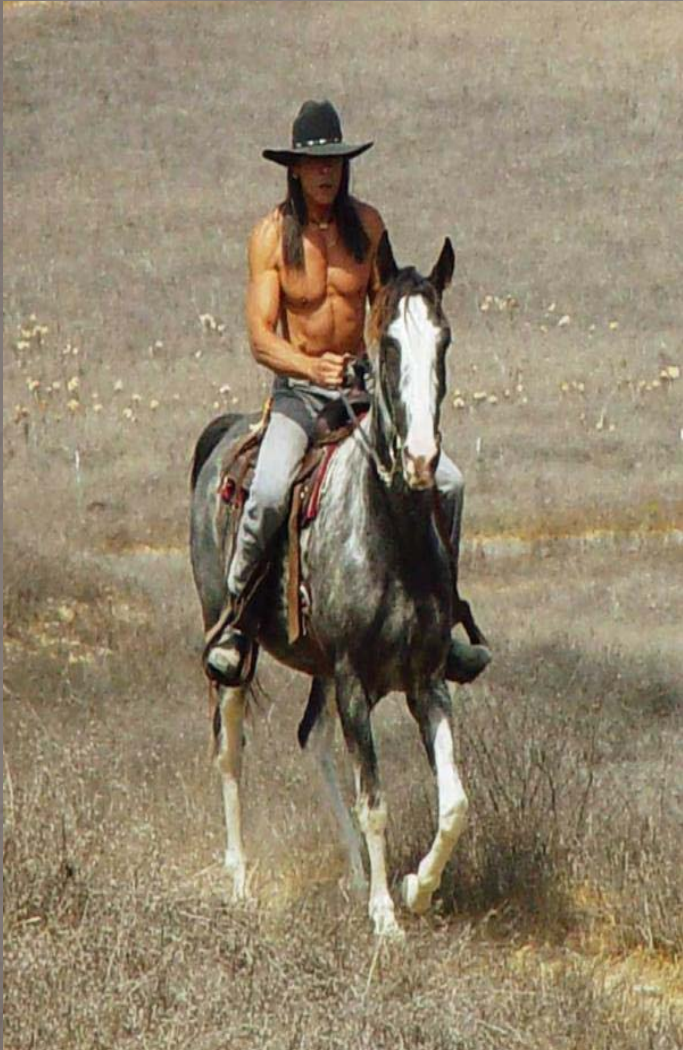


Ron Pearlman as Hell Boy

- Sight
- Smell
- Hearing
- Taste
- Touch
- Lighting
- The little things



Page #3 History & Time



Kaytenna Native American Actor

Consider the historical background of your character and the social and cultural implications. What will the reader assume? Remember the story must move through *time* and involve *change*.



Brad Pitt in Inglorious Bastards

Page #4 The Situation



Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith in [MIB](#)

Stakes say what could be lost. To test the stakes, ask, 'so what?'

The situation can be personal or global. Think risks and high stakes but it's not always 'conflict'. It can include things like loss, discovery, exile, change, reproduction, death, birth.

High personal and public stakes yield highest risk and payoff. It has to matter to the characters, and to the reader

Page #5 Establish Relationships



Trinity and Neo in [The Matrix](#)

The way the dark hero relates to other characters tells readers who they are. Growth arcs occur in all relationships. This is where you can amp up personal risk in the midst of public crisis.

[Will Smith & Jada Pinkett](#)



Page # 6 The Problem



Antonio Banderas Alejandro Murrieta in [The Mask of Zorro](#)

- Makes an *intelligent* effort to solve the problem (don't make them dumb unless they've got *something else!*)
- Protagonist keeps getting closer and closer to victory or character fails.
- Repeat as necessary to build tension, suspense, etc.



Ryan Kwanten as [Jason Stackhouse](#)

Page #7 Raise the Stakes



Jason Scott Lee in [Dragon](#)

- To raise personal stakes, ask *how could this matter more?*
- To raise public stakes, ask *how could this get worse?*
- Keep testing the stakes by asking ‘*so what?*’

Page #8 Up the Danger



Keanu Reeves in [The Matrix](#)

- Keep danger immediate.
- Make your characters suffer.
- High stakes come from taking risks as you write the story.
- What is the cost of success?
- What is given up?

Page #9 Force a Choice



Tobey Maguire in [Spiderman III](#)

- Which side will the dark hero choose?
- Show the inner struggle
- What will be sacrificed?
- What are the consequences?
- What is the payoff?
- What is the catharsis?

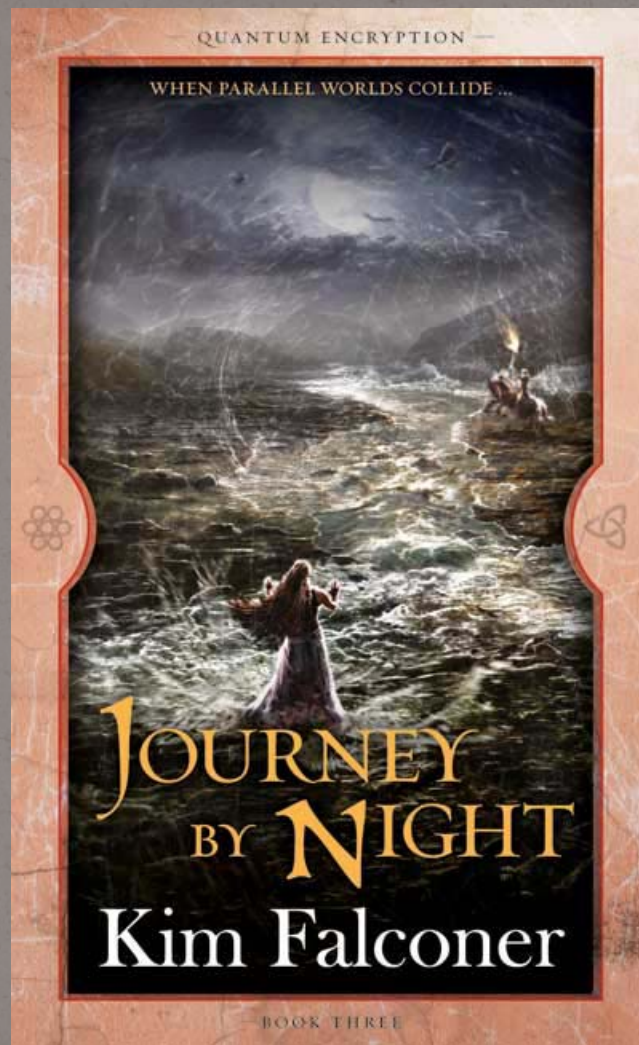
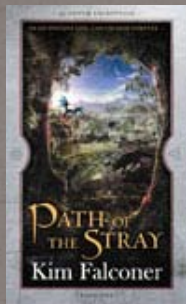
Page #10 How will it End?



Ian Somerhalder, Nina Dobrev and Paul Wesley in [The Vampire Diaries](#)

- The character finally succeeds (or fails ultimately) in solving the problem.
- Cliffhanger for a series?
- Validation. ('He's dead, Jim.' 'The Force will be with you, always.' 'Tomorrow is another day.')

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Kim's recommended reading order ☺