

Feature



Some Thoughts on Costuming for Heroes and Villains

Kaja Foglio

A sooo distinguished Professoressa lectures on the how costumes influence the roles of hero and villain.

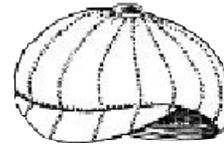
Good morning, class! I am Professoressa Foglio, and today's lecture is entitled: *Some thoughts on Costuming for Heroes and Villans.*

Before we begin, allow me to introduce my friend Sven, a helpful shape shifter who owes me a favor. Sven has agreed to be my model for today's lecture. Step right up, please, Sven, so everyone can see you.

Now. Here is Sven. He's currently a male of medium build. We're going to make him look like a hero. Actually, Sven already looks like a hero, because a hero, being the protagonist of the story, can pretty much look like anyone, but today we're here to try out some variations on the type. Sven? Look like a scruffy little orphan child for me, will you, please?

Ah. There. Here is Sven, our plucky orphan. He and his little dog are off to foil a plot to kidnap Queen Victoria, and find a

family to love them in the process. He's wearing a ragged pair of burlap trousers, no shoes, an oatmeal-colored work shirt and a saucy little cap. He carries a perky terrier tucked



under one arm. Actually, because we're talking about costumes, let's make that dog into a stuffed toy, shall we? Adorable.

All right, Sven, can you do a boy wizard? Same basic shape, school uniform, cute glasses, magic wand?

Ah. Very good. Very heroic.

Now change the color of your tie and lose the glasses. Ta-dah! You're now a villain!

Nice, work, Sven.

You see, class, sometimes there isn't much difference between the costume of a hero and that of a villain. Let's look at another example...

All right, Sven. Can you do a starship captain?

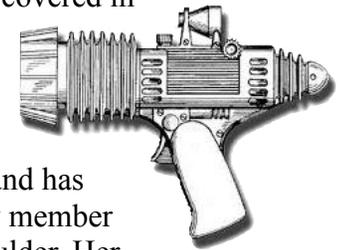
Ah—very nice. Now, class, here we have a dashing young starship captain. Her military uniform is clean and fits well. You can see that she's one of the good guys, because her uniform is a lovely soft blue with black trim, gold epaulettes and little golden stars on the collar. She has two medals pinned to the front of



her jacket. Her hair is neatly pulled back with a black band, and she has a little headset over one ear. Hmm...

Let's make her even more heroic. Go ahead, Sven.

Ah! Perfect! Now our captain has lost her jacket, and she's covered in dirt, blood and machine oil. She's got a bandaged arm, is carrying a



rather large blaster, and has an unconscious crew member slung across her shoulder. Her hair is still pulled back, but it's attractively disheveled and tied with a bit of surgical tape. Well, for the costumes, we should probably lose the crew member. It's hard to get a friend to play dead that long, especially at ComicCon. We could probably use a dummy, but that's kind of awkward to carry around... Let's give her another blaster, instead.

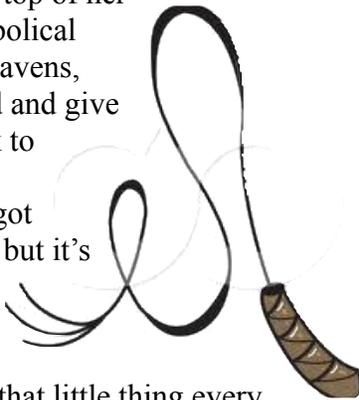
Okay, Sven, same captain, but let's make her one of the bad guys.

Oh. Well done, Sven. All right, class, the first thing you'll notice is that she's all cleaned up, blood, sweat and dirt gone. She's a villain now, so she'll be hanging back, having her mooks do all the dirty work. She's got her jacket back, and my goodness, isn't it low-cut? Is that her navel?

Ahem. Anyway, the color of the jacket's changed, it's now a mean blood-red. The trim is still black, but there's lots more of it, and instead of the epaulettes she has huge spiky spaulders. She's got a chest full of medals, and a pair of tall, shiny black boots. You can never go wrong with boots. In fact, Sven, can you make those heels higher? Ah, good. And give them buckles, lots of buckles!



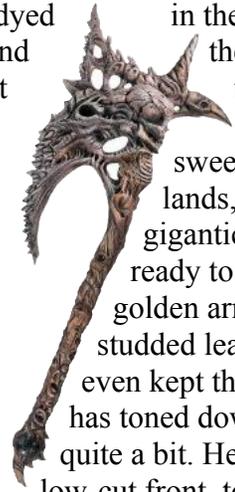
Her hair is the same color, but long, down past her knees, with two horn-like buns twisted up on top of her head for a nice diabolical effect. Oh, good heavens, Sven, just go ahead and give her a widow's peak to go with all that. Lovely. She's still got one of the blasters, but it's smaller, sleeker. At her side she wears a whip. We're only missing one thing, that little thing every villain needs. Sven, give us one perfect sneer. Ah! Beautiful!



Let's turn her into a barbarian warlord. Sven?

Here we go! Now Sven is an evil barbarian warlord, and the first thing you'll notice is that he's kept his color scheme from last time. The leather breeches and

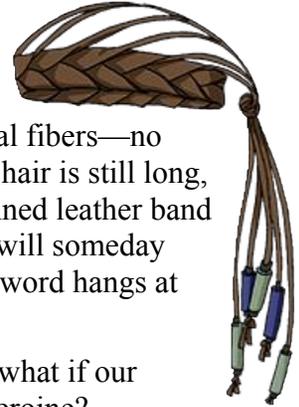
waistcoat are dyed in the blood of his enemies, and the sable fur trim brings out the evil in his eyes just beautifully. He's all set to sweep across the lands, and he's got his gigantic bloody axe at the ready to prove it. He's got huge golden armbands, with black studded leather gloves—and he's even kept the tall boots, although he has toned down the heels quite a bit. He's still got the extremely low-cut front, too. He's got a great big magical-looking medallion right in the middle of it all, and the general feeling is one of raw, cruel power. This is clearly a man who would burn any number of helpless villages for a laugh. Sven! Don't forget your sneer!



Okay, so the sneer is starting to hurt your face. Sorry about that, Sven. For our next example, let's take things back to the good side.

Oh, very nice. I like the strong, earnest face almost as much as the sneer. All right, class, now our Sven is a sturdy young farmhand, who, of course, is actually the rightful king (although he doesn't know about that part just yet.) All he knows is that his helpless village has just been burnt by some vicious monster of a warlord, and he's out for revenge! He's wearing a simple pair of homespun pants, sturdy leather boots, and a white linen shirt under a leather jerkin. I see Sven just isn't going to let go of the

“extremely low-cut shirt” motif, but it works, here, because it lets us see the magical amulet he's wearing around his neck. It's a lovely blue stone set in a golden ring of graceful running horses, and it shines with an inner light. He's all in earth tones, because heroes always wear natural fibers—no shiny polyester here. The hair is still long, and swept back with a tanned leather band that echoes the crown he will someday reclaim, and his father's sword hangs at his side. Nice.



All right, Sven, and what if our young hero here were a heroine?

Right. Here we have Sven, the lovely young princess-in-exile. She's traveling, so a frilly pink dress isn't going to be practical. She's got her long hair swept back, her amulet around her neck—ah, and I see Sven has finally buttoned up a bit, that makes sense. Princess Sven has buckled on her Mother's sword, and off to restore her kingdom, which is being overrun by a barbarian horde and...hm. Actually, costume-wise, this girl is pretty much exactly like sturdy young farmhand Sven, only with less chest showing. Let's move on. Sven, I've got a request here from a member of the class: can you make her an *evil* princess?



Hm. Interesting. Now we're back to the villainous starship captain, only with a

nasty-looking sword and a more fantasy look to the whole business...I do like the little crown...but, oh, dear. We're back to the low-cut shirt? Tsk. Do try to be a little less risqué, please...hm? What are you doing now?

Oh, you liked the idea of the frilly pink dress, did you? ...but you're doing the sneer again. Ah! You're *still* an evil princess, just a different type! I see.

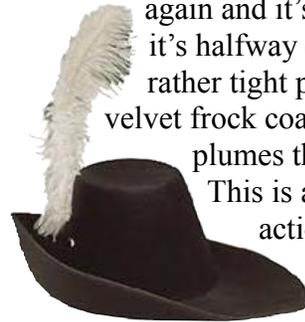


Well, class, Sven is looking innocent as a newborn lamb in her frills, but what's this? She's got a dagger in her garter and a ring full of poison on her finger. Interesting. She's hoping to fool everyone into thinking she's harmless,

so she can take them out one by one. Now, class, this type of costume for a villain can be fun, but requires a certain amount of explanation. How often do you really want to have to raise your skirt to show the hidden dagger, just to let people know you're actually portraying a villain, and not a sweet little ingénue? Hm. Sven, may I suggest the bloody battle-axe from the Barbarian Warlord example? Ah, there you are. You can strap it to your back with a leather harness. Perfect. That's a nice look. Thanks.

All right, we're almost done...Sven, do you have any other heroic types to show us?

Ooh, I see. Class, here we have Sven the suave pirate captain. You can tell he's a hero, because he's got that white shirt back again and it's not only halfway open, it's halfway clean. He's got...um... rather tight pants and a lovely red velvet frock coat and a hat with white plumes that looks terribly dashing.



This is a pirate who is ready for action, possibly rescuing (or kidnapping, losing, and then rescuing) a fair damsel or three.

Now, if we wanted someone similar who was a *villain*, we could take it over the line into foppishness simply by overdoing things. Sven? Could you make that hat ridiculously huge and ornate...and add, oh, I think about five times as much trim to the coat? Ah. There we are. Hm. How about piling



on the huge, tacky gemstones, and adding some bad teeth or a hook? What about the skulls of some formerly adorable animals thrown in for good measure? Ah. There we go.

Now you look more villainous. Actually, with pirates, it tends to be hard to tell the heroes from the villains, but that's part of their charm, and besides, it just makes it easier for them to change sides at the drop of a ridiculously ornate hat.

Ah, what's this? Still a bit pirate-ish, but with some kind of strange Victorian-

looking device strapped to your back. Sven, you've gone steampunk on me. All right, I'll admit, class, Sven makes a very nice steampunk heroine. She's still got the pants and shirt from the pirate costume, but now she's got a leather waistcoat and brown leather boots with buckles and little pockets all up the sides. She's got



her time travel device, which looks like a backpack made of wood and brass grandfather clock movements, connected via looping wires to a brace on her forearm which sports mysterious glowing dials and switches. Her tool belt is a wonder to behold, and she's got a fantastic pair of green-lensed goggles with little lenses that swing up and down, and little golden wings off the sides. Beautiful, Sven, just beautiful. Now. We have time for one last example. Sven, you've been so helpful this morning. Could I perhaps persuade you to give us a *your* idea of the quintessential villain?

Oh. Now that's just the thing. Class, here we have a classic melodramatic villain. Very stereotypical. Note the perfectly-tailored black suit, with the sweeping greatcoat



over the top. The heavy cane topped with a silver monkey skull is perfect for menacing any revoltingly sweet little

children who may cross his path, and I see that he's got fangs of his own that match the monkey skull. He's got a fine, curling handlebar mustache for twirling while he shows off his evil chuckle, and a huge, dark hat to top it all off. Frightening! Thank you, Sven, you may now slink off to work on your nefarious plans for lunch. You've been such help today, I do believe *I* now owe *you* a favor.

And, class, I see that I am now out of time, and must make way for the next lecturer. Remember, it's those little details that mark the line between heroics and villainy, so your homework for today is to accessorize carefully! Good morning to you all, good luck, and for goodness sake, don't bother me in my office after class. I need a drink.



Kaja Foglio is a Hugo-award winning artist, writer and publisher. She illustrates and co-writes the "Girl Genius" series with her husband, Phil. Previously, she illustrated the 1998 omnibus edition of Barry Hughart's "The Chronicles of Master Li and Number Ten Ox" (ISBN 0966543610).

For more information about Kaja Foglio's work, visit the Studio Foglio [web site](#).



Two Sides of the Same Coin

Oh, look! For extra credit, Phil Foglio and Cheyenne Wright have given us two lovely pictures of Sven as Gilgamesh Wulfenbach, heir to an empire that spans most of Europa and a powerful Spark.

On the left, he's going all out for the "Hero" team, and on the right, he's working the "Evil" look to the point of silliness.

Interestingly, we can see from his costumes' detailing that, no matter which alignment he's currently supporting, he is still a big fan of the story's heroine, Agatha Heterodyne, *Girl Genius!*

