

Creating Your Hero's Fatal Flaw

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THE NINE TYPES

Type One is the Perfectionist, the Improver. These are the people who have very high standards for themselves and for the world. They know how things ought to be, and they do their best to make sure they (and the rest of the world) live up to it. There's never any question about what's right and what's wrong—no gray areas—and there's never any question that they'll constantly try to do and live for what's right. Their motto is "I work toward perfection in an imperfect world," and their greatest desires are to avoid criticism and to be right.

Now, this can be a very heroic character...always willing to stand up for what he or she believes in, very aware of what's right and wrong. It's interesting that Ones are hardly ever overweight, which again is that sense of perfection. Their most outstanding character trait is moral courage...but of course they've also got a fatal flaw, like everyone else. (We'll come back to the flaws after the rest of the types and subtypes.)

Type Two is the Nurturer, the Helper, the Giver, who loves taking care of other people and feeling needed. They'll go out of their way to nurture everyone around them, always focusing on what others need more than on what they need. In fact, they'll frequently neglect their own needs and wind up feeling kind of hurt because, "With all I do for everyone else, what thanks do I get?"

Two's motto is "People depend on me," and they live to be needed. An example might be Beth in *Little Women*, or Rachel in Susan Elizabeth Phillips' *DREAM A LITTLE DREAM*, where she was starving herself to feed her little boy. Twos are constantly giving, giving, giving.

Type Three is the Achiever, the Succeeder, the Performer—these people are very aware of the right image. They're always onstage, projecting whatever the situation requires. Success, career and achievement are important to them...no matter what's going on around them, the Threes will look really, really good. They go around believing (and this is their motto), "The world values a champion...I must avoid failure." So you can imagine the internal conflict when you get a Type Three who's faced with the prospect of failure.

At their worst a Three will embody charm without substance, at their best they embody excellence with a heart. Oprah Winfrey might be a real-life Three; Jay Gatsby might be a fictional one. Threes are often the oldest or only child in their family, because the firstborn is almost always oriented toward being the best and performing the best—and that's what Threes do.

Type Four is the Romantic, the Artist, the Individualist. These are people who love drama and tragedy and falling in love. They have BIG feelings, and they don't like feeling ordinary because that's too flat. Nothing is ever quite grand enough, long enough...they dream about the perfect love, and they're the best at offering wholehearted sympathy when you're feeling low. They make good teachers, actors, counselors, what Tom Condon called "translators of humanity."

When I did an enneagram website survey, looking for literary characters who fit each type, I was amazed at the responses for who's a Type Four. Somebody said Scarlett O'Hara, who devoted her whole life to pursuing the love of Ashley—in terms of romantic drive, Scarlett was definitely a Four. Somebody said ALL the Anne Rice characters, because of their huge, vast,

sweeping emotions...big ups, big downs.

Type Five is the Observer, the Thinker, who'd rather be behind a book than out there involved in the world. They like to keep back, keep to themselves, study like crazy but always from a distance. They tend to "compartmentalize" their lives: work here, family there, one friend here, another group over there.... They're proud of getting by with very little, and they're very careful about guarding their time and their privacy and their personal space.

Sherlock Holmes sounds like a Five, because he's not involved in the world except on an intellectual level. Real-life Fives might be Albert Einstein (your classic ivory-tower professor), Greta Garbo ("I want to be alone"), and George Lucas (who dreamed up the whole Star Wars universe). Fives are out there in this whole other dimension, and it's mainly a world of the mind.

Type Six is the Defender, the Trooper—these are the people who get the job done. They're very aware of any possible threat to their well-being or the people they love; they're very aware of the rules and determined to always keep them...or to always break them. (That's the counter-phobic Six, the James Dean rebel type.) Either way, Sixes are very loyal, steady, always on the lookout for danger, good to have on your side.

It's interesting that in America there are more Sixes and Threes than any other type. Threes are flashier, Sixes are more steady and the Six hero is probably more a beta than an alpha male. I remember a Nora Roberts book where the heroine thought the hero didn't love her because as a special present he gave her a set of tires for her car, and a wise observer pointed out that there was PROOF he loved her—he wanted to keep her safe.

Type Seven is the Adventurer, the Enthusiast...they want to keep having new experiences, try whatever there is. They're interested in everything and everybody, at least at first glance, and they love to plan things, plan trips, plan new activities—whether or not they actually carry out those plans. They like to keep all their options open rather than settle for just one of anything.

Sevens are charming as all-get-out...maybe not so good over the long haul, but boy, they're wonderful to have dinner with. When they aren't all mentally healthy and together, it's usually because they've deliberately avoided being alone with themselves. Sevens who let themselves examine their feelings become more realistic, more generous; and they're almost always cheerful, curious and open to new experiences. Either way, they're fascinating to be with—fun, intriguing, delightful people.

Type Eight is the Controller, the Aggressor, the Chief—this person is a self-confident, natural leader. They're used to taking charge, getting things done, making sure everyone gets a fair shake. They go after what they want, always keeping an eye out for the people they care about; they're strong individuals who take it upon themselves to defend the weak...kind of a Wild West sheriff mentality.

An Eight's motto is "I defend the innocent in an unjust world." And this is incredibly heroic—except that not everybody agrees on what is innocence and what is justice, so you might have some people who think this Eight is a real jerk! Scarlett O'Hara might be an Eight, considering how she went back to Tara and bossed everybody around and saved them from starvation. Some of the family resented her for it, but she was determined to get her way and make sure everybody at Tara survived...this take-charge attitude is what makes an Eight heroic.

Type Nine is the Peacemaker, the Mediator. They want everyone to get along and everything to be nice. They don't like conflict; they don't like having to pick sides...even picking chocolate or vanilla. They tend to go along with the flow, whatever that might be, and instead of exploring their own preferences, they kick back with TV or food or whatever's comfortable. There's usually some anger back there, but it's completely denied. Nines are excellent at

ignoring their own feelings.

They're the ones who'll be just kind of sitting back, letting everybody else flap around them. A few years ago there was a survey as to what types are most attractive to other types, and more women want to marry a Nine than any other type of man. (More men want to marry a Two.)

So from a thumbnail sketch of all the types, you can see how **each of them has good and bad traits. It's not like God said, "I'm gonna make a handful of wonderful people and they're all gonna be Ones. Then we'll have those scuddy Twos and loser Threes and so on." Each type has innately wonderful traits...which, taken to excess, can be bad. And that's a good thing, because we need there to be some conflict between our perfectly wonderful heroes and heroines!**

FATAL FLAWS

It's easy to find ideas for the fatal flaws our characters will have to overcome, because the enneagram theorists say that each of the nine types has a deadly sin within them. Although the math is off, because there are seven deadly sins and nine enneagram types, so they made up two more sins which fit the types.

ONE's fatal flaw is Anger. These are the perfectionists who get angry when they or anyone else doesn't strive for perfection. Picture a hero whose life has been about upholding what's right and good, maintaining the highest possible standards for himself and everyone around him, being kind of righteous about it and fuming when people don't live up to his standards of perfection—being especially upset when he doesn't live up to his OWN standards of perfection. He's going to be angry at himself when that happens, and of course it's going to happen. So you'll get this wonderful growth as the hero realizes (maybe with some help from the heroine, maybe on his own) that he has to let go of this anger and be more tolerant, more forgiving of the imperfection that's in himself and in everyone else.

TWO's deadly sin is Pride...these are the nurturers who take pride in being indispensable to those people they care for. So far every heroine I've done has been a Two, and every one of them has had to face that truth. She's had to quit knocking herself out trying to create the perfect world for her loved ones. And while this woman who spends her every waking hour nurturing others might sound like a doormat on the surface, in fact she can be a tremendously powerful character to watch. Seeing her overcome that pride in being indispensable, watching her realize that she can let go and the world won't come to an end, is a huge triumph. When she can finally stop doing for others as a way of fitting in, she's discovering her true power...and from then on, her nurturing comes from the strength of love rather than the weakness of pride.

THREE's fatal flaw is Deception. These are the performers who put on a front for the world and for themselves in order to look just right. This person will have to overcome the habit of deception...to quit putting on a perfect face and discover his or her true self. Imagine the impact of someone coming to realize that his or her whole life has been a series of performances, of trying to be the best at whatever comes up, of doing whatever will present the best facade to the public—and for the first time actually looking at what's really inside him or herself. This is a great chance for the lover to help out, to help this person discover that they can be loved for themselves...that they don't need a perfect facade in front of everyone in the world. That's a wonderful road to a happy ending for the Three.

FOUR's deadly sin is Envy. These are the romantics who feel like everyone else in the world has a more rich and satisfying life. They'll have to let go of envy and appreciate that what they've got is pretty darned good—and this is hard for the Four. Someone whose life is about drama and tragedy and falling in love doesn't WANT to give up all those big up-and-down sweeps, all the glory and pathos and angst and feeling. But what's wonderful is that they don't have to! They can still have that larger-than-life, creative, artistic flair...as long as they let go of the self-pity. Again, this can be with the help of someone who loves them. This someone can show them how to laugh at themselves and the world around them, bring them down to earth while still letting them fly high with their own creative passion.... Watching a Four come to appreciate what they've got in their life can be a joyous, sparkling thing.

FIVEs need to overcome Avarice. These are the observers who are greedy about their precious time and their own personal space. In order to overcome their deadly sin, they'll have to quit being greedy about their own private selves and learn to share. Someone who spends their whole life wrapped up in solitude will have a really hard time letting a lover into their world. You're going to get some pretty intense conflict and crackling tension as this unfolds. Picture an ivory-tower professor leaving his library door open a crack when the heroine is nearby. Then slamming it shut. Opening it another crack... Picture someone who never talks about their feelings, opening up to a lover for the first time. It's exhilarating, watching a Five realize they can share their private world with someone else...that they can finally open the door and let love in.

SIX's fatal flaw is Fear. These are the defenders who are always aware of possible dangers and worrying about how to handle them. The Six will have to let go of fear and realize you can't always guarantee absolute security. You can imagine a character who lives in fear, right? Not so much a woman-in-jeopardy heroine, afraid of the dark baron up in the Gothic tower, but someone who's driven by the quest for security. It could be financial security, it could be emotional security, but whatever it is, this fear keeps them from living life to the fullest. And now here you have the lover offering a new kind of life...and the Six hesitating, afraid of taking any kind of risk. "What, jeopardize my comfortable life and the security of my heart to fall in love? I can't do that." But for the right love they CAN risk it, and when they do, it's wonderful to watch the payoff.

SEVEN's deadly sin is Gluttony...these are the adventurers who want every possible new experience, one right after another. Here's someone who'll have to learn that permanent freedom isn't so great; commitment has its own rewards. And you can imagine the struggle they'll go through to avoid learning this lesson. You've got a character who's the life of the party, ready to go anywhere anytime...and now all of a sudden they're in a situation where they have to slow down, move beyond the good-time surface and really come face to face, heart to heart, with another person. They're gonna resist that with everything they've got—stay out later, party harder, run away to some other distraction—and yet suddenly, this freedom isn't so attractive unless the loved one is part of their life. But only when they make the commitment to love will they realize that now, finally, this is what they've been missing...what they've been searching for all along.

EIGHT's fatal flaw is Lust. These are the leaders who lust for power, to be in control, to run the show and get things done their way. This person has to step back and share control, to let go of that lust for power. Here's someone who's spent their whole life running the show, making things happen, getting things done their way, and all of a sudden somebody's expecting them to give up control? Most types wouldn't have much problem sharing control with someone they love, but Eights didn't get to where they are by compromising on anything. So they resist. And maybe the lover walks away. And they try everything they CAN to win back this person—they want to give the lover everything, but they want to do it their way—and only after they give up this lust for being in control will they realize that here's the key to a kind of success they've never known before.

And finally, **NINE's is Sloth**...because these are the peacemakers who want to just sit back and have everything be nice and comfortable. This person is gonna have to give up the comfort of neutrality and make some kind of a stand. Here they've has spent a lifetime taking things easy, not getting worked up one way or another, refusing to take action, refusing to get involved on either side of anything. Now here they're faced with having to come down on one side or another...they're gonna have to declare themselves: this is what I want, this is what I believe, this is who I am, take it or leave it. (And maybe in a romance they're worried that the lover will leave it.) They've never let that happen before, they've never put themselves in a position where they have to take a stand...but now they HAVE to take some kind of action, make a stand for something, and it'll open their eyes to a whole new way of living.

So you can see how all nine types have their own deadly sin. And you can see how, even