



Hitchcock's Villains: Murderers, Maniacs, and Mother Issues

By Eric San Juan, Jim McDevitt

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The films of Alfred Hitchcock are appreciated for a variety of reasons, including the many memorable villains who menace the protagonists. Unlike so many of cinema's wrongdoers, the Hitchcock villain was often a complex individual with a nuanced personality and neuroses the common person might not be able to relate to, but could at least understand. If such figures did not always elicit sympathy from the audience, they still possessed characteristics that were oddly appealing. And frequently, viewers found them more likable than the heroes and heroines whom they victimized.

In *Hitchcock's Villains: Murderers, Maniacs, and Mother Issues*, authors Eric San Juan and Jim McDevitt explore a number of themes that form the foundation of villainy in Hitchcock's long and acclaimed career. The authors also provide a detailed look at some of the director's most noteworthy villains and examine how these characters were often central to the enjoyment of Hitchcock's best films. Whether discussing Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt* or Norman Bates in *Psycho*, the authors consider what attracted Hitchcock to such characters in the first place and why they endure as screen icons.

Intended for both casual and ardent fans of Hitchcock, this book offers insight into what makes villainous characters tick. While serious students will appreciate observations in *Hitchcock's Villains* that will enhance their study of cinema technique and writing, general fans of the director will simply enjoy delving further into the minds of their favorite villains.

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Editorial Review

Review

This probing appreciation by San Juan and McDevitt (*A Year of Hitchcock: 52 Weeks with the Master of Suspense*) looks at the complex, twisted minds of bad guys in the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Burdened with cruel urges and bad intentions, each of Hitchcock's misfits receives a thorough character study. Some of those included are Karl Anton Verloc, the small cinema owner in *Sabotage*; Alexander Sebastian, the spy in *Notorious*; Bruno Anthony, the spoiled playboy in *Strangers on a Train*; and Philip Vandamn, the spy in *North by Northwest*. Stressing Hitchcock's isolation from society and his love of the frightening, Juan and McDevitt hit their stride with their on-target analyses of the tortured souls of Uncle Charlie, the "Merry Widow Murderer" and poisoner of rich older women in *Shadow of a Doubt*; Norman Bates, the schizo slasher of the infamous Bates Hotel in *Psycho*; and Bob Rusk, the necktie strangler in *Frenzy*. Film buffs and diehard Hitchcock fans will delight in this serious discussion of these peculiar fellows who, after all, are "merely fun house mirror reflections" of the British director. (*Publishers Weekly*)

In 2011, San Juan and McDevitt wrote the well-received *A Year of Hitchcock* (Scarecrow Press), which analyzed the over 50 silent and sound films that Alfred Hitchcock directed. In this follow-up volume the same authors examine the various forms of villainy that have been portrayed in his films. Each of the nine forms of evil identified by the authors is dealt with in two chapters. The first surveys this topic as covered in all of Hitchcock's films and the second singles out one of these films for an in-depth analysis. For example, the chapter that deals with authority figures as villains, is followed by one that analyzes the actions and character of Alexander Sebastian (Claude Rains) in *Notorious* (1946), and the chapter featuring villainous mothers follows with a discussion of Bruno Anthony (Robert Walker) in *Strangers on a Train* (1951). Other chapters explore intellectual villains (*Rope*, 1948), innocent villains (*Vertigo*, 1958), and psychotic villains (*Psycho*, 1960). The films (and topics) are organized chronologically beginning with *Sabotage* (1936) and ending with Hitchcock's penultimate thriller, *Frenzy* (1972). Other important miscreants given a detailed, probing analyses are those in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *North by Northwest* (1959). The coverage is thorough and probing and the authors' insight into this material is impressive. The writing style is informal and often chatty. Scattered throughout the text are black-and-white stills from the highlighted films. The book closes with a three-page bibliography and a name index. . . .[I]t will be a fine addition to libraries specializing in film studies. (*American Reference Books Annual*)

As the title of *Hitchcock's Villains* indicates, San Juan and McDevitt examine the bad guys and wrong-doers who figure so prominently in Hitchcock's work. With any other filmmaker, that might be a limiting topic but Hitchcock's own conflicting feelings about right and wrong, good and bad, made for a rich crew of villains who are sometimes more sympathetic and often more charming than their victims. ... Written in a delightful and slightly cheeky "case file" format, San Juan and McDevitt gives each of Hitch's slime-balls a thorough character study. From Verloc, the cinema owner and kid blower-upper in *Sabotage* to Robert Rusk, the necktie strangler in *Frenzy*, the authors range across the whole rogues gallery of Hitchcock bad guys, offering insightful observations about how these characters are a critical component of enjoying these films. ... *Hitchcock's Villains* is written in a personable, imminently readable way, perhaps making it feel light at first blush. It is not intellectually light however, and brims with thought provoking suppositions and assertions. Hitchcock neophytes will find much value in the overview quality of both Hitchcock's work and the salient points of his biography. (*Pretty Clever Films*)

Hitchcock demonstrated an affection for his villains, the authors point out, and they offer an engaging

investigation into the nuances of the characters he created. They look closely at particular films and also discuss Hitchcock's oeuvre in terms of themes such as the villainy of authority figures and mothers, and of innocents and of non-villains. San Juan and McDevitt are independent writers who worked together on a previous book titled *A Year of Hitchcock: 52 Weeks with the Master of Suspense*. (Book News, Inc.)

San Juan and McDevitt give us a satisfying version of Hitchcock lite, with enough interesting tidbits to whet our appetite for juicy gossip. Its fifteen evocative black-and-white photographs are artfully chosen to jog our memory and dramatize a significant character trait or influence. . . . [I]f one wants a book to keep by the television, so that one may riffle its pages for quick facts and racy conjectures, *Hitchcock's Villains* will do nicely. (Journal of American Culture)

About the Author

Eric San Juan is the author of *Lakehurst: Barrens, Blimps & Barons* (2011) and *Stuff Every Husband Should Know* (2011).

Jim McDevitt is a freelance writer who has written numerous articles and stories for a variety of print and Internet publications.

San Juan and McDevitt are the coauthors of *A Year of Hitchcock: 52 Weeks with the Master of Suspense* (Scarecrow, 2011).

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