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Necessary Evil: Super-Villains of DC Comics

By Bill Finger

NARRATOR:

[JOKER CACKLING]

A man who laughs.

The master of Metropolis.

The Guardian of fear.

A conqueror of worlds.

Many faces, but just one name:

The superviilain.

Powerful, charismatic...

...intelligent, ruthless.

The superviilain reflects

our fears and frustrations...

...the dangers and

perils of everyday life.

They commit the heinous

crimes we will not.

And in a world where right

and wrong are not absolute...

...where shades of gray exist in

life as well as the comic page...

...evil isn't just

unavoidable, it's necessary.

In the world of comics, one could argue that

the villain is even more vital to the story...

...than the just and moral hero.

For without a proper adversary...

...we tack the very essence of story:

Conflict.

After all, isn't it the villain

who catapults the hero into action?

Without the villain, there's really no

story. The superhero exists and does nothing.

If the villain isn't acting

out, Superman stays Clark Kent.

The superheroes are always reacting.

The villains are making things happen.

Villains are the ones with a plan. The villains

are the ones who are taking the initiative.

If you define "protagonist" as

somebody who sets something in motion...

...and "antagonist" as

somebody who stops him...

...almost all the villains in

comic books are protagonists.
You need that ongoing impetus of the bad
guy, the one who's gonna be a challenge...
...the one who is going to
threaten society's rules...
...and be put in their place by
somebody who upholds those rules.

NARRATOR:

or conflict without the villain...
...but it's through the villain that
we see our hero at their very core.
We see their many flaws, we
see their many weaknesses.
We see what makes
them the hero they are.
Without the villain
to define the hero...
...you don't have a hero.
You have no anvil from which the superhero
is pounded into the shape that he is.
Villains in comic book stories...
...allow the hero or the superhero
to really flex their muscles.
The more power the supervillains have...
...the more you can showcase
how important that superhero is.
The stronger your villains are, the stronger
your hero is. They have to overcome...
...somebody who's smart, powerful...
...who knows what they want and who's
on a mission that they believe in.
So if the hero can stop them, you
know, it makes them that much better.
All the more true in the DC universe
because we have rich villains.
One is Flash and Reverse-Flash. The
very names give you what they are.

PORTER:

suffered something so horrible.
And he felt like the Flash could have fixed it.
He knew that the Flash could go through time.
He'd seen it happen before.

He said, "Why don't you go back, prevent this from happening? Why won't you?"

The guy won't do it.

"Well, he won't do it because he hasn't felt tragedy like I have.

So I'm going to have him feel tragedy to make him a better hero.

You need to be able to take the measures to protect everyone you love.

You wouldn't do it for me. Maybe you'll do it for yourself. So I put you to the test. "

SCOTT:

all about Batman's intellect.

He, to me, is the sword-sharpener.

He's the guy that says:

"if you are not clever enough, everybody dies in that way. "

He shows in some ways that

Batman, at his roots...

...needs to be the greatest detective.

At his heart, he's born in Detective Comics.

At the core of the character is Sherlock Holmes.

He's that guy that, because he's human, needs to be smarter than anybody else...

...to solve these crimes.

For me, the Riddler steps on to the stage and challenges that fundamental element...

...of Batman's capabilities that needs to be there almost more than any other.

I mean, that's Batman's superpower.

He's the greatest detective of all time.

NARRATOR:

and their rival is more complicated...

...than a question of right

versus wrong, good versus evil.

Together, they form a dynamic that is, at times, interdependent.

A villain cannot exist without a hero and a hero, his or her villain.

They're in a symbiotic relationship in that if the villains were to do off the hero...

...I think they would probably

find themselves a little listless.
When we did "Death of
the Family" story...
...he comes at Batman saying, Deep
down, we really love each other. "
And, of course, Batman says, "I hate
nothing more on the earth than you, Joker. "
The Joker feels that the family that Batman
has built around him all these years...
...is dragging him down.
He says, These people
are draining your soul.
These other members, they're
sucking the life out of you.
I'm your friend. I wanna make
you be the best that you can be...
...so that we can both have a relationship
that we could enjoy for so many years...
...without these knuckleheads on
the side constantly draining you.
And so I'm gonna take care of them for you,
and I will wipe out all these family members...
...so you can be free
of their encumbrance. "
What the Joker, at his
core, is saying is that:
"You might not love us
the way that we love you...
...or you might not want to admit
you love us the way we love you.
This rogues' gallery that you have,"
he's like, "All of us love you.
All of us are here only to
make you a better superhero. "
The question always becomes: What
came first, the hero or the villain?
Did the hero introduce himself
to society to do better good...
...and because they
put on that costume...
...the costumed villain arose to
confront him or to challenge him?
Or did the costumed
villain arrive first...

...and the hero was created in order to stop that type of villain from succeeding...
...or getting more powerful?

HARRAS:

that Superman has to face...
...where I would tend to think we're grateful Superman is there.
People might say, "if Superman weren't here, would these menaces be coming to Earth?"
Bane comes to Gotham specifically to fight Batman.
This is the Riddler as he originally appeared.
First moved to Gotham because he was attracted by the challenge of Batman.
They both came there to challenge Batman...
...to see if he could be a foe worthy of them, give them something interesting to do.
So the question is which came first?
And I'm not sure if I really wanna answer that question.
The one thing I can say, one can't exist without the other.
As long as we have villains, there will be heroes.
And as long as we have heroes, there will be villains.

NARRATOR:

villain that keeps us so entranced...
...that captivates and enthralls us?
What makes us applaud the very person we want to see vanquished?
The reasons are often as multifaceted as the villains we enjoy.
What makes a great supervillain is something that we can relate to.
It's the same thing that makes for a great superhero.
In the superhero we have this exaggeration of what our hopes and desires are.
At the same time the

villain has aspects of us...
...that challenge the strengths
that we're admiring in the superhero.
I would like to think that most
people identify with the hero, heh.
But in this day and age there might
be some who identify with the villain.
I understand getting a gun that shoots ice
and going into a bank and trying to rob it.
We understand temptation.
The oldest stories ever told
have to do with temptation...
...whether it's Pandora or Adam and Eve.
This very basic quality in human beings
that runs with us throughout our lives.

JOHNS:

like the Joker or Black Hand...
...that are so twisted and dark...
...you love seeing them do their
stuff, but you don't relate to them.
At least, you don't admit you do.
Everyone wishes that they could turn
invisible or fly or have x-ray vision.
And I think what's cool about villains is
everyone wishes that they could break bad.
What's the point of having a villain who can't
act out aspects of ourselves that we repress?
I can be evil. I'm gonna give
you my husband's number...
...and you can have a long
chat with him. Heh, heh, heh.
I think there are some people who really
associate themselves with, like, a Superman.
On the other hand, people covet
Lex Luthor's keen intellect.
When I was growing up I loved
the character of Vandal Savage.
DC had relaunched The Flash
with Wally West as the Flash...
...after Crisis on Infinite Earths and his
first villain that he fought was Vandal Savage.
He was immortal. And who
wouldn't want to be immortal?

And who wouldn't want to have
this far reach into history?
He's one of those villains that has nothing
to lose. That's a very dangerous man.
You know, he just knows
he will be resurrected.
How do you defeat that person?
You look good. Been working out?
You could probably use a little sun.
Then again, who am I to talk?
[LAUGHING]
They seem to be happy. Heh.
They seem to enjoy being bad.
Most of the heroes,
especially of late...
...they're all broody and sad. They
never seem to be enjoying anything.
You look at villains and they're
having the time of their lives.
Harley became popular
because, in part, she's funny.
She can stand up to the Joker. She
can tell a joke. She can get a laugh.
When I go to conventions and I see
young ladies cosplaying as her...
...I think they just tap into that feeling of
fun and that she can just be kind of whimsical.
Harley Quinn is one of
those characters you love.
Even if she's smashing somebody
with a hammer, you love her.
There's a handful of those
villains, like Larfleeze...
...the Orange Lantern.
He's deadly but he's fun.
He's overwhelmed with greed and he'll kill
for it. He's still funny because of that.
He comes to Earth and finds out
there's a being called Santa Claus...
...who gives people
things that you list.
When Larfleeze finds out there's
a being called Santa Claus...
...that answers your Christmas

list, he makes a giant list.
When Santa doesn't show up,
he gets pissed off and says:
"I'm gonna kill him. " And he
goes on a hunt for Santa Claus.
There's very few characters that
you can pull that story off with.
Larfleeze is one of those characters.

NARRATOR:

be fun, as well as fascinating...
...they're also a direct
reflection of our own fears.
They force us to examine the
deep and personal terrors...
...that we are unable to
face in our everyday lives.
When writers create supervillains...
...when children imagine monsters...
...they're trying to make
sense of a scary world.
They're trying to feel strong.
They're trying to do so many things.
Villains in some ways, you know, should
reflect our fears and our concerns...
...you know, both as
individuals and as a society.
They change over time.
But the more important thing the villains
present is our more global fear...
...our more human fear,
our fear of loss...
...our fear of death,
our fear of the unknown.
The villain represents basically
everything that we fear...
...or everything that
we need to fight against.
Parallax is interesting because the idea that
it's a world-eater, that scares the hell out of us.
At any moment some
universal malevolence...
...can come and take us over.
That's a pretty scary thing.

By the time they were doing the Superman show, I was an adult. But whenever you'd watch those Darkseid episodes, I'd be like: "Oh, God, this is gonna be bad. " You know... ..anybody who can make Superman bleed... ..is somebody that you don't wanna be trifled with. Because what are any of us really gonna do against him?

JOHNS:

the Sinestro Corps embody fear. They're cosmic terrorists. Their mission when they come is to destroy Coast City. "We're gonna make Green Lantern's town a crater... ..and a symbol of fear, so that nobody will ever come back here. " Hal Jordan and the Green Lantern Corps says, "We're not afraid. We're gonna fight your fear. " Hal flies to his brother's house and his brother is there with his wife and his kids. Hal Jordan says to his brother, "You have to leave right now. " His brother says, We're not going anywhere. We believe in you. We're not afraid. We're standing our ground. " And suddenly another Green Lantern says, "Hal, look outside. " And someone's put a green light in their window... ..and another person puts a green light in their window. And suddenly there's green lights all throughout the city... ..as a symbolic gesture to Hal. And for me, that was a recharge moment for Hal Jordan overcoming fear... ..but it was also a moment,

emotionally, for me saying, like:
"This is how we deal with
fear. We take a stand. "
They're our personal demons.
Like, they're the fears
we have about ourselves...
...come to life in these
incredibly colorful and bright...
...and sometimes funny,
sometimes terrifying ways.
All of us face those things in our lives,
where you face adversity in some way...
...where you're positive you're
not gonna make it through this one.
And I think we've all been there at some
point where you're just thinking to yourself:
"I am not capable of overcoming this. "
Whether it's a small day-to-day
thing or it's a big thing.
And what villains do is they represent
those fears on this macro way...
...I think, for the hero, who's the
representative of all the things we think...
We hope that humanity is capable
of or we're capable of at our best.
Then when the hero overcomes those
things at the end because they have to...
...it says to us that we can too.

NARRATOR:

Just like our heroes, every
villain must have an origin.
And what qualities do we see
in the most popular villains?
Instilling a sense of
fear simply isn't enough.
Villains must be layered, nuanced.
We must ask ourselves: What
makes a bad guy, a bad guy?
You wanna give your villain idiosyncrasies,
and you want to make him strangely weird...
...and interesting psychologically.
Those kind of characters lend themselves
to having stories told about them...

...because their bones are so strong.
You can put, you know...
You can hang a lot of meat on them.
They have their own path and
they all have their own story.
And, you know, while their
powers may be similar...
...hopefully their
personalities are not.
If a villain is great-looking
or is great just visually...
...but doesn't have a back-story...
...it really takes away
from enjoying its run.
The wonderful thing about

Batman:

...is that they not only featured...
...and celebrated a number of
DC villains in Gotham City...
...but introduced a
number of origin stories.
Of course, we have this
back-story of Harvey Dent...
...and his struggles with his anger.
We even get to see this session
he has with a psychiatrist.
And the psychiatrist puts him
into this state of hypnotism...
...and asks him to
draw up his alter ego.
He calls it Big Bad Harvey.
Later in the episode, of course, we
see his full development into Two-Face.
And I'll never forget that moment...
...where he breaks open the
door out of his hospital room.
He then turns at the same
time that there's lightning...
...and we see the image of
the second half of his face.
Black Hand really came into his own...
...in Green Lantern 43 when
his origin was revealed.

Taking a character like Black
Hand who was a minor villain...
...and looking at him and saying, "if we have an emotional spectrum..
-...
...and all the colors represent life...
...the absence of color has to represent
death. There's got to be black. "
Black Hand, by becoming the avatar
of death, having a black ring...
...committing suicide to become
a zombified Black Lantern...
...which is one of the best moments
Doug Mahnke's ever drawn in his life.
It's creepy, twisted, dark.
Once people actually got to get inside
his head a little bit and see who he was...
...then it became much
more of a connection.

NARRATOR:

is usually straightforward:
Save the day, serve
justice, defeat evil.
Villains, however, are
driven by a variety of forces.
It could be as grandiose
as taking over the world...
...or as direct as forcing
others to share their agony.
They can be much more complex,
personal and often even relatable.
What makes a villain the most memorable is the
reason they're doing whatever it is they do.
It's not the crime. We've
seen a hundred thousand crimes.
We've seen Luthor break into banks.
We've seen all these
characters do weird things.
But why they do it.
Every one of us is driven by, you know,
our own singular, you know, needs and wants.
So are villains.
A character like the Anti-Monitor
from Crisis on Infinite Earths...

...needs to absorb all the universes.
And that's the only
way he could survive.

ANTI-MONITOR:

definition of true power.

WOLFMAN:

because he cares at all about life.
And that makes him frightening
because you can't reason with him.
He's not an intellect that
you can talk to and say:
"Don't you realize you're
doing something bad?
Can't we figure out something else to
do?" He's not interested. He has one need.
When I created Clayface II at the
behest of the late Julius Schwartz...
...I came up with a
character who was a monster...
...because he had screwed up.
He was someone born with acromegaly,
essentially the elephant man disease.
And in trying to fix himself...
...became somebody who basically can
draw the calcium out of your body...
...and reduce people to
little clay-like masses.
But he didn't want to.
It's just how he survived.
There may also be,
certainly, revenge involved.
A lot of villains feel that
they've been wronged in some way...
...whether it's by society
or a loved one or the police.
With Mr. Freeze, when we developed the
character for Batman: The Animated Series...
...I thought, "Somebody that cold
has to be that cold for a reason. "
Essentially he had some funding to carry
out his research to cure his wife, Nora.
And the man who pulled that funding...

...he then became the focus of Mr. Freeze's evil-doing. His mission is to go after the one man who took away the love of his life. He actually says to Batman: "This is my sole purpose, and if you get in the way, you'll pay for it. " Which kind of implies, Look, if you just step aside, I won't harm you. "

LANGLEY:

argue whether he's a villain or not. Atrocitus, he was motivated by anger at the Guardians of the Universe. His family got killed because the Guardians of the Universe... ...they created these manhunters, androids... ...which were their predecessors to the Green Lantern Corps. Atrocitus skips over the denial stage of grief... ...goes into anger and stays there. Forget going into the later ones. The only bargain he makes is to stay angry... ...and avenge his family by going after the Guardians however he can. That's why the Joker is so interesting, because he sort of doesn't have a motive.

WOLFMAN:

Most of the crazy villains, most of the villains who in comics, who are insane... ...have no idea they are. But the Joker is aware of it and he loves it. He loves the concept that he is chaos to Batman's logic and order. And, obviously, we have the most recent incarnation on the big screen. Heath Ledger's Joker is a perfect example of that. And he even says it.

He's a dog chasing a car.
And when he catches it, he doesn't...
He doesn't know what he's doing.
He just sort of does things.
With Lex Luthor, he just wants power.
But how does he attain it?
How many ways does he have to go?
Why is he jealous of Superman?
Because he wants to be
more powerful than Superman.
Those self-made men tend to
feel that they have license.
Tend to feel that they're
superior to everybody else.
He has these personality characteristics
that one would consider narcissistic...
...in the sense that he has
this element of superiority...
...that he is more powerful than others.
Thinks that he's more intelligent than others.
And, therefore, believes that he deserves
more than what other people deserve.
He is like the pinnacle of humanity.
He has made himself the best man.
And then there's this alien
that's better than him.
I did the revision of
Luthor back in the 1980s.
I turned him into a character
who brought jobs to Metropolis.
He provided museums and
philharmonic orchestras...
...and did all this stuff as long
as everyone knew he was the best.
He wanted the power. He wanted
the control. And he was happy.
He was delighted because
everyone honored him.
And then Superman came
along, who could fly.
It was ego.
"I am the person who looks
down on everybody else. "
And the first time Superman

and he meet, Superman says:
"I'll be around. If you
wanna find me, just look up. "
And suddenly there was somebody who was
over Luthor and he couldn't deal with that.

ROMANO:

is that villains love to hear themselves talk.
They love to hear their theories
as expounded upon by themselves.
The Penguin made a
comment in one comic book:
"What's the point in committing the perfect
crime if no one knows it was you who did it?"
Lex Luther's brain, as
evil as it is, is brilliant.
Once he had him and
he was incapacitated...
...to the degree that Lex could
do anything he wanted with him...
...he could aggrandize himself in front of
him. "Let me tell you how brilliant I am. "
You were great in your day, Superman,
but it just stands to reason.
When it came time to
cash in your chips...
...this old, diseased,
maniac, would be your banker.
Mind over muscle.
The grandiose nature of the villains
figures into every one of those key aspects.
Whatever their mission is in life,
the main thing they want to do.
The one who wants to get the money, he
wants to do it in the outlandish way...
...the creative, different way.
When you think of some of the more
flamboyant villains in the DC Universe...
...you sort of think about:
Would they really be happy
with all the money in the world?
Would they really be happy
with running the city?
You know, it seems to be they're much happier

trying to take the city than actually having it.
That's why you don't see a lot of books
about supervillains now running city hall...
...or "Now I'm the
mayor" or, you know...
What are they gonna do with,
you know, a billion dollars?
So I do think it's sort
of more the pursuit.
It's not enough for the Riddler
to rob a bank or steal a diamond.
He's got to drop clues on his way to
robbing a bank or stealing a diamond.
The Riddler's probably the most self-defeating
villain in the history of comic books...
...because he's always providing
Batman with a clue to his comeuppance.
He's obviously got some deep, dark...
...damaged psychological reason that,
you know, deep down he wants to be caught.
He wants to be punished.
Otherwise he wouldn't leave ridiculous
riddles to be left for Batman to solve.

NARRATOR:

evil follows a long road...
...with many possible avenues.
But for the fallen,
the question remains:
Were they born bad or did they
willingly turn down the dark path?
Is it the end result of
a lifetime of suffering...
...or did one horrible incident
forever push them over the edge?
Is there real evil? Does
evil in itself really exist?
Or it is always a reaction to something?
Is it a reaction to some childhood trauma?
There are a number of different, I guess,
causes or trajectories toward evil-doing...
...or toward a life of villainy.
The best villains probably are born bad.
You want them to be, at least.

There's always, like, maybe they were born bad,
and then you had horrible incidents occur...

...that sort of kept
them down that path.

We have yet really to have true examples
of these particular experiences...

...that the Joker, Harvey Dent and
other villains have gone through.

So I think there is a lot of
room for the fictional writing...

...and the fictional exploration
of one event creating...

Completely redefining a person
where it turns them to villains.

I created a character called Man-Bat.

It's this guy who is a Batman fan.

He is a genius. He is a scientist.

Works in museums. But

he's just a little off.

And he thinks that if he
creates a serum out of bats...

...that he can give it
as a gift to Batman...

...and Batman will have
the attributes of a bat.

Wouldn't that be great?

But somebody has to test it.

So he tests it on himself.

It's Jekyll and Hyde.

He's turned into this
creature. He becomes a man-bat.

You can say, "Man-Bat is a
villain. " No, he's not a villain.

He can be manipulated by
villains, but he's a good guy.

In fact, he loves Batman.

He thinks Batman is the
greatest hero on earth.

And he wants to be like Batman.

But if he's like Batman, he becomes a
drug addict then becomes this monster.

You will bow down before me!

First you, and then one day, your heirs!

ROBINSON:

fantastic villain for Superman.
While some of his actions aren't justifiable,
you completely understand why he is the man he is.

PORTER:

like the Scarecrow...
...the fact that he was
bullied into submission...
...and picked on by way more
powerful people than him...
...and he was so scared to live his life because
he had this constant air of fear around him.
It drove him to figure out why
that fear existed within him.
And then at the end of the day, how
he could inflict it upon other people.
You're writing it and you see:
"Why can't you just go left instead
of right at this seminal moment?"
That kind of story, I think, is equally
inspiring and exciting to read...
...for different reasons, but because mostly
you see that making the wrong choice...
...or falling victim to sort of difficult
circumstances and letting them turn you...
...and twist you that way is something that
gets you nowhere but Blackgate or Arkham...
...or, you know, the Phantom Zone
or that sort of thing. Heh, heh.

NARRATOR:

The function and role of the hero and the
villain is all simply a matter of perspective.
If we reversed focus and considered the
story from the point of view of the villain...
...wouldn't they be the hero
and the hero the villain?
You have to think that pretty much
everyone's a hero in their own story.
The villains who are really
interesting characters...
...have an affirmative
reason for what they're doing.

Their strength comes from...
...absolute certainty, 100 percent
certainty, that they are correct.
If they're uncertain about what they're
doing, then they're not interesting characters.
Perspective of ants. You know,
do ants see us as giant villains?
We're walking around. It's ruining my picnic,
so I'm just stomping on ants. I'm not thinking.
To someone's point of view down there...
...we are these giant gods who are villainous
and are destroying their civilization.
So it's really just
about your point of view.

JOHNS:

so much on Korugar, his home world...
...he wanted it to be safe for everybody that he
started to instill fear like, "I'm in control."
Sinestro is a villain who really did see
himself as a hero and couldn't believe...
...that he was being chopped off at the
knees by the Guardians all the time...
...and being perceived to be
someone who wasn't looking out...
...for the better interest of
the universe and his own people.
And, eventually, it pushed
Sinestro into a dark place...
...where he finally just
had to use his powers...
...to bring to light what he
thought was the best thing.
And Hal Jordan ultimately had to
stop this guy who had gone renegade.
So it just set them
on a collision course.

BROWN:

himself as a bad person.
He doesn't perceive
himself as anything...
...but the agent of
order and civilization.

You hold the future of the
entire planet in your hands.

- I'm here to take it back.

- Lex?

You'll never threaten the world again.

I think Luthor is correct in
the way he views the world.

He's right. Superman is an
alien and we shouldn't trust him.

He has a lot of people
on his side today...

...in that I think in the '50s,
during the Eisenhower years...

...the idea of a superman with
all these incredible powers...

...that we can't stop even if we wanted to, but
he's a benign force for good, that's reassuring.

In today's day and age, I don't
know if that's as reassuring.

So the idea that there's a
guy who is a businessman...

...you know, a tycoon who's
looking out for his fellow humans...

...against a threat that actually
can't be contained or controlled...

...I think it really speaks to
I think a lot of people's fears...

...about authority and power today.

NARRATOR:

...just as it is in life...

...the choice between right and
wrong often isn't so cut and dry.

Heroes are flawed,
sometimes villains justified.

But it's the villain and
sometimes society itself...

...that further blurs the line.

The same way there's a thin line
between love and hate, to me...

...the best heroes are the ones that
probably act a little villainous.

And the best villains are the ones
that might have martyr complexes.

Where we are in comics right now, we probably
examine the line between good and evil more...
...than ever had been done before.
Batman is always trying to maintain
that control within himself.
You know, This is how
my parents were killed.
I'm gonna make sure that
doesn't happen to anybody else. "
He is a guy who's fighting
to not become a bad guy.
Had it not been for the humanizing
anchors of his humanity, Alfred...
...and a few other key
people keeping him in line...
...young Bruce Wayne, traumatized...
...by witnessing the murder of
his parents before his eyes...
...could easily have gone
the dark side of that line.
All I've ever wanted to do is kill him.
A day doesn't go by when I don't
think about subjecting him...
...to every horrendous torture
he's dealt out to others.
And then end him.
But if I do that, if I allow
myself to go down into that place...
...I'll never come back.
There's sort of a power struggle
going on with the villains too.
There's the character that's
sort of more of a gray nature...
...who was originally maybe
intended to be a villain...
...who cleaned up his act a little bit or who
is just so engaging that you like him a lot.
You look at a character like Lobo.
Here's this guy who should not be called
a hero by any stretch of the imagination...
...but he's got just enough
honor, I guess you'd say...
...like, you know, he's a bounty hunter.
If he goes after somebody, for better

or for worse, he'll honor the deal.
And he'll track down
the guy and bring him in.
The appeal of Lobo is just the
over-the-top black comedy and violence...
...I think the character brings.
You know, he's a badass
biker from outer space.
Who doesn't love somebody like that?

GUGGENHEIM:

nice and simple and clear.
He's like a bullet. He goes from point
A to point B and he doesn't waver.

KIRSHEN:

not just doing this for the sake of fun.
He's doing it because this is the thing
he's good at. He's good at killing people.
And he only does it for money.

WOLFMAN:

I actually did not create him to be a villain.
I created him thinking he was a
character who was morally ambiguous...
...who was doing certain
things for his own reasons.
He was a hunter, he was a
mercenary, he was an assassin...
...but always on a
political, for-hire basis.
And then because his son was trapped by the
H.I.V.E., he was forced into becoming a villain.
He didn't want to be, and no matter how
many times he wants to get out of it...
...he can't because he has
a certain code of ethics...
...that says he promised to
complete his son's mission...
...and he can't stop until he does, even
though he knows it's not his mission...
...and even though he knows it's wrong.

JOHNS:

greatest characters in DC comics.
She is the black ops government
leader of the Suicide Squad...
...the program that recruits supervillains
and forces them to do missions for them.
And she is manipulative, super smart.

DIDIO:

bad guy because she makes the tough choices.
That's the reason why.
And what she's doing is she is willing to
sacrifice the individual for the greater good.
Amanda Waller continues to be
a presence in the DC universe.
She's created a Justice League called
the Justice League of America...
...that is designed to take out
the real Justice League if need be.
She's prepared for the worst
because she's experienced the worst.
She has a very clear moral line and whether
you agree with it or not, it doesn't shift.
That's why you'll have that
discussion going back and forth...
...of whether Amanda
Waller is a hero or villain.

NARRATOR:

have a strong moral code.
"I Will not kill. "
"I will uphold the law. "
But just because
villains commit crimes...
...does not mean they are
completely without principles.
There does exist honor among thieves,
even if that honor is warped and twisted.
I don't think you can
generalize about villains...
...the same way as you can generalize
about heroes across the board.
You know, I do think that there are
some villains who have a moral code...
...or have a line that they

personally will not cross.
Two-Face, where he basically lets his
morality be decided by a flip of a coin.
Sinestro certainly has a code of
ethics he thinks he's following.
And in a strange way he is following it.
He believes in the Green Lantern Corps so
much he's willing to be a villain to them.
Allow me to introduce myself.
I am he who is called Ra's al Ghul.

BURNETT:

knows who Batman is.
He can give it away.
He doesn't because there's sort of
a respect that he has for Batman.
And he has this hope that one day
Batman will come to his side...
...so he doesn't
destroy Batman that way.
Specifically, the Rogues, they won't kill
somebody. That's where they draw the line.
They do have their own... It may be a
warped code, but they have their code.
If you go to the Rogues and say,
You have a chance to kill the Flash.
Here's the plan. This is how we're gonna
kill the Flash. We're gonna kill the Flash. "
Captain Cold would be like,
"You're out of your mind.
If we kill the Flash the whole
Justice League's on top us.
We don't need that right now.
We have this thing going. We don't wanna
kill the Flash. He's just in our way. "
There's versions of the Rogues
who have been more bloodthirsty.
Their versions, I don't respond to because
I don't think that's who the Rogues are.
The last thing they would
ever do is kill the Flash.
That doesn't mean they're
uninteresting to watch...
...or uninteresting characters

for the Flash to go against.
That makes them more interesting.
What are their motivations?

NARRATOR:

the counterpoint to the hero.
A polar opposite in many respects...
...but also bearing subtle or
sometimes striking similarities.
The villains often mirror
the hero's dark reflection...
...the result of a divergent
path, a different road taken.
I think a good nemesis for a hero
needs to have some of the hero in him...
...have some of the
qualities of a hero in him.
You are defined as much by the
dark side of the mythology...
...as you are defined by
this light side of mythology.
So for every mythology about demons,
there need to be angels and vice versa.
You need to have a
degree of polar opposite.
At the same time, there
needs to be those things...
...that make them mirror
images of themselves.
You have Ocean Master who is
kind of a mirror of Aquaman.
He is an Atlantean king, like
Aquaman, but he's Aquaman gone wrong.
He's "What if Aquaman went
down a different path?"
In the case of Flash,
it's Reverse-Flash.
Literally, it's a reverse version
of the Flash, a mirror of him.
And then the opposite
would be Captain Cold.
On first blush you're like,
Oh, it's ice. He slips. "
You look at Captain Cold and

you analyze him a bit more.
When introduced, he was called The
Man Who Mastered Absolute Zero. "
And absolute zero means
zero atomic motion.
That means the atoms do not move.
You know, when things are colder,
they're slower on the atomic level.
So that's why Captain Cold,
to me, always captured...
...the essence of an
opposite of the Flash.
When you look at somebody like Batman...
...Catwoman is certainly
the sexual challenge to him.
Riddler is the intellectual challenge.
Penguin is almost a mockery of what
Bruce Wayne is on the social scene.
And the Joker is the horrific version
of what Batman is to ordinary people.
Whereas Batman scares criminals, the Joker
scares and horrifies the ordinary people.
Black Adam is another good
opposite number character.
Kind of got a costume that's similar
to Shazam's costume, but it's black.
He's also another member of a police
force that has kind of fallen from grace...
...the Wizards Protector Society, which
is what Shazam is and what Black Adam was.
The Crime Syndicate characters
that have been around for decades...
...they come from a version... A
parallel Earth, a version of our Earth...
...where everyone who's good is
bad and everyone who is bad is good.
And so you've got an
evil Superman in Ultraman.
Then you have Owlman, who
is a dark version of Batman.
And Superwoman, who is a
dark version of Wonder Woman.
You have Johnny Quick and Power Ring.
Power Ring is this Green Lantern...

...who's a coward.
The Crime Syndicate represent the Justice League completely flipped on its head...
...and if they were horrible, horrible, evil people.
In terms of what they can accomplish and who they can defeat...
...they're on par with the Justice League, but their goals are so perverted...
...compared to the honor and the morality that the Justice League have.
Which leaves the governments of the world with two choices, bow down to us or die.
The best supervillains that resonate the most, they do it on two levels.
They do it... How they psychologically reflect or challenge your superhero...
...and then also, in the story, what they've done to affect the superhero's life.
If there is not that personal connection, it just weakens it.
It just becomes another person trying to do something dastardly.
When well-paired, the villain's been able to get inside the superhero's head.
It's almost as if he knows precisely what makes them vulnerable, what their greatest fear is.
When they make it personal and can make it personal...
...when the villains have the knowledge to make it personal and know your inner secrets...
...that's when things get real.

ROMANO:

fell in love with Batman.
So when it comes to the point of killing Batman...
...many times in many stories, she draws the line there.
She will not kill him.
She wants him for her own.
Star Sapphire was not only Hal Jordan's boss, but also girlfriend.
And when she was manipulated...

...she did not know consciously
that she had become Star Sapphire.
Then you've got this
interesting dynamic...
...of when he ultimately finds out that this
is his girlfriend and he's got to battle her.
And how does he battle her when
she's so smart without hurting her?
That kind of conflict of people who
were once friends and become enemies...
...you know, it's almost like the Greek
tragedies, these enormous stories of betrayal.
I just ended my run
with Green Lantern 20.
And as I was wrapping it up the story kind
of organically revolved around not only Hal...
...but Hal and Sinestro and that
relationship is really key to Green Lantern.
There is this moment where Sinestro, who
blames the Guardians of the Universe...
...who have done all
these horrible things...
...against the Corps they
created... They tried to destroy it.
They're ultimately the
big bad guys of the piece.
And Sinestro vows to destroy them.
"I'm going to kill them one by one. "
And Hal says, "I can't let you
do that. " And he grabs him.
And Sinestro says, "You
think they can still be saved?
You think that they can be redeemed?"
And Hal says, This isn't
about them, this is about you. "
He says, "I wanna save you.
You don't have to lower yourself to
this level. You don't have to kill them.
You can be a great Green Lantern. "
And he goes, "Because
I believe in you. "
And Sinestro looks at him and he says, Jordan,
it's too late. I've already killed them. "
And you reveal that Sinestro has already

wiped out the Guardians, one by one by one.
And Sinestro's like,
"I'm leaving forever.
But before I go, you had a
question you wanted to ask me. "
And Hal says, you know, "Were
we ever friends, Sinestro?"
And Sinestro, who has never
called him by his first name...
He's always called him Jordan.
...Says, "You know, that's the
tragedy of all this, Jordan. "
He goes, "Hal, we'll
always be friends. "

NARRATOR:

reserved solely for the just.
While heroes can exhibit
incredible strength or skills...
...villains may possess abilities equal
to or even greater than their foes.
It's not enough for villains merely
to offer a challenge to the heroes...
...but, rather, they must present
the all-too-real possibility...
...that good might
not triumph over evil.
You're defined by the height
of the mountain you climb.
And so the higher the mountain, the more
the epic struggle it is to climb that...
...the greater the adventure,
the greater the hero.
If I have the powers of the
gods, then am I not a god myself?
A good villain, you have
to believe that he can win.
If you have Superman fighting a
common mugger, that's not interesting.
You know that Superman's gonna win.
The idea that Lex Luthor can out-think
Superman, that he is smarter than Superman...
...and no matter what Superman's powers are,
Lex Luthor can think of a way to defeat him...

...makes that dynamic between
the pair of them brilliant.

ADAMS:

You need a Moriarty for Sherlock Holmes.
If Sherlock Holmes is superior
to every criminal out there...
...what's his value?
So we want Sherlock
Holmes to have a Moriarty.
We want Batman to have a Ra's al Ghul.
And we want it to be neck and neck.

SHANNON:

powers because he's on Earth...
...and watching Zod discover
that he has those same powers...
...I think Superman and Zod
could fight for centuries.
And basically, it just comes down to...
The person who's gonna win that fight is
the person who puts the most heart into it.
When I was writing Superman, I
created the character called Mongul...
...who has become very
big in the mythos since.
Basically, because I felt,
"All right, this is silly.
You've got a guy here
who moves planets...
...and he has to fight a guy
he has to outsmart to beat.
What about somebody
who can kick his butt?"
So I came up with Mongul, who
was bigger and strong and taller.
And he gives somebody
a physical challenge.
Somebody Superman has to work to
beat, just on a hands-on basis.
Darkseid is a great villain just because
of the amount of power that he holds.
He's godlike and it's not easy
to fight him and come back alive.

Going up against a character like
Darkseid really proves your hero's worth.
The Anti-Monitor is a character like
Darkseid, one of our cosmic-level villains.
He's a force of nature,
a force of danger.
Darkseid and the Anti-Monitor can
literally cross time and space...
...and they represent a threat that,
again, only a hero such as Superman...
...or a hero of that level can face and
that's why they are almost more frightening.
Again, to an earlier point,
that's why we need a Superman...
...because they have to deal with
threats that we as common people can't.

NARRATOR:

outcome always remains uncertain...
...and, on occasion,
fortune favors the fiendish.
The villain escapes soot-free.
They get their lucky break or
manage to land the killing blow.
What does it mean when the hero falls in
battle and the villain emerges victorious?
If it's all too clean and too neat,
why are we continuing to buy books?
Why are we continuing
to read these stories...
...if we don't have the sense
that there's a certain danger...
...or a mortal danger to our hero?
You know, we have a very clear
statement. We said, you know:
"The hero has to win every time.
The villain only has to win once. "
Even though we want ultimate
good to triumph over evil...
...there will be battles along
the way where there are setbacks.
The question of "Can the villain
succeed?" is always a tricky one.
I believe they can...

...but obviously you have to make certain that you're careful, the extent of it. There are different kinds of villains... ..and thus different kinds of impact to what a villain does. Most of the criminal villains... ..the guys who are just out there to rob a bank or do whatever... ..don't leave lasting impact. The ones like the Joker potentially can affect an entire series. Don't you just love a happy ending? One of the risks of being a superhero is that the people that you love... ..whether they're superheroes themselves or citizens... ..you put them at risk. And so with Jason Todd, essentially that is what happened... ..where the Joker murders him... ..and we have one of these rare instances where a primary character was murdered. For Batman, that meant incredible guilt. That meant feeling that he was responsible for the death... ..and that was what the Joker essentially wanted.

JOHNS:

You never knew his real name. He had that helmet that covered his face. He killed Aquaman's baby. You have to be a real sick, cold bastard to kill a baby. It felt so horrific to me that I couldn't do anything... ..but look at this character and go, This is the coldest guy in the DC universe. " In a lot of ways, I think Black Manta to Aquaman... ..is very much akin to what Bane is to the Batman. Both characters were very capable... ..and did cause great harm

and pain to the main characters.

SHANNON:

Bruce Wayne's back...
...it was proof positive to all
the readers around the world...
...that, yes, you got
this right all these years.
This is a superhero who
has no superpowers...
...who, arguably, his greatest
superpower is his humanity...
...who is vulnerable...
...whom you can identify with
because he has no superpowers.
And now, maybe for the first time,
we're taking that one extra step.
We are crossing the Rubicon...
...and we are showing you,
and his back is broken...
...and Batman is either
dead or incapacitated.
And I think readers still remember that.
Readers have a visceral reaction to that.
This is someone who could hurt
Batman. This is someone Batman...
...even in his calmest of
nights wakes up and thinks:
"This is a guy who once really severely
hurt me, who's still out there. "
So I think that's why Bane still has
that kind of attraction to readers.

SHANNON:

Doomsday was to Superman...
...the embodiment of
brutal physical force.
This is the great fear Superman has.
Having a foe that he cannot find
a way to stop one way or another.
He was designed to kill Superman.
Every time he dies, he
comes back stronger...
...with whatever killed him now no

longer something that can kill him.
Doomsday stirs up massive chaos...
...and delivers the hero
his biggest defeat ever.
Doomsday kills Superman.
I can't think of another villain where his
appearance on the stage is enough that...
...you know, the world is shaking.
I would even argue that the death of
Superman story itself isn't even a story.
It's just a fight scene.
The story comes from how
the world reacts afterwards.
When you get to see the
"Funeral For a Friend"...
...you see what Superman
meant to the world...
...which reflected what
the real world did a lot...
...when they thought we were
really gonna leave Superman dead.
They went crazy sad.
Any time you have that level of
tragedy impacting a DC character...
...we go through and show the
repercussions of that act...
...and how it affects the
relationships between all the heroes...
...and the impact it has on
all their friends and family.
And so, to me, it's not done lightly.
We don't have last episodes.
We have the next episode.
And we do have to deal
with the repercussions.
And, again, if the bad guys
are winning too often...
...then that hero doesn't deserve his own
title and he should probably stop being a hero.
Superman died, but that wasn't
what the story was about.
His death was a piece of that story.
It was almost the
beginning of the story.

And then Dan Jurgens and Mike Carlin, all those guys created Reign of the Supermen... ..which is all about Superman's return. With Batman breaking his back, it was the same thing. How strong is Bruce Wayne? His back's broken, but the city still needs him. So he heals himself and comes back as Batman. He overcomes that. But sometimes the villains do win... ..but it's only momentarily. Any general can tell you it's not the battles, it's the ultimate war. And I think if you look at the grand scope of the DC universe... ..it is ultimately good triumphing over evil. The best stories, the stories that kind of last with you... ..are the ones that even though good wins, there's a price to be had for that victory. I don't consider the hero having a victory if it doesn't come at a cost. They have to have something sacrificed, either personal or physical... ..that occurs every time they win. They have to be giving up something of what they are in order to help mankind. They're making a sacrifice every time they put that costume on... ..every time they're confronting something and putting themselves at risk. So, therefore, there should be something given up in their social life... ..their personal life, about who they are. They should be a little broken because of what they've done. Only thing that keeps them going is that they're doing something for the better good... ..and for helping other people. In the history of comics,

DC in particular...

...there are not hundreds, there are thousands of supervillains.

Thousands of supervillains.

And there's no way we can talk about all of them.

We can only talk about a fraction of them.

I think that the very fact that we have such a wide variety of villains...

...that can be anything from, you know...

...essentially, a high-tech bank robber to someone like Darkseid who is a new god...

...is something I think strengthens our universe.

It gives us, you know, a great spectrum of villainy.

NARRATOR". This spectrum of evil is diverse and dynamic...

...falling into a vast array of villainous categories and characteristics.

Indeed, the tropes and commonalities of villainy are far-reaching.

First off is the uncontrollable beast...

...that rages and rains down destruction on those unfortunate souls caught in its path...

...the monster.

My favorite monster is my...

The classic monsters, the reason that they're enduring and scary...

...is because they almost... They look like people that you love...

...or that you care about or that you trust.

Your neighbors, your wife, your mother.

Then something infects them or turns them into something that's an unstoppable force.

Probably the most illustrious monster of the Golden Age of comics was Solomon Grundy.

He's an animated corpse.

The heroes, even Batman, is okay with trying to destroy Grundy...

...because he's dead already.

BUCCELLATO:

because he's just so off-the-wall.
I mean, he's like just sort
of a crazy super powerful...
...almost Frankenstein
monster version of Superman.

NARRATOR:

as old as literature...
...but only heightened by the
advent of the atomic bomb...
...the mad scientist reflects our
mistrust and fear of technology...
...of advances that
could undo us as a people.
New inventions come
along that could be...
...the most wonderful
boon for humanity...
...or it could mean the
seeds of their destruction.
So it figures that mad scientists
would be one of the true fears...
...incorporated into the
personified forms of supervillains.
Doctor Sivana was a cackling,
bald, bespectacled scientist...
...who usually could
be seen in a white coat.
And he was responsible continually
for the near demise of Shazam.
Before there was a Doctor
Sivana, for Lex Luthor...
...there was the Ultra-Humanite...
...who was sort of like the
very first mad scientist.
He put his brain into other people's bodies,
or his consciousness in other people's bodies.
So I believe, at one time,
he was a beautiful woman.
He was different people
throughout his history.
And now he's like a

white ape-like creature.

Charmed, I'm sure.

But that just goes to show the
power of the mind over the matter.

It doesn't matter what you
look like on the outside.

As long as that brain survives, that
brain is going to be trouble for you.

NARRATOR". A militant general...

...a despot, a conqueror.

This is a villain not far removed
from our world's own tyrants.

We know them as the dictator,
or more simply the overlord.

ZOD:

And I will not allow anyone to
prevent me from carrying it out.

SHANNON:

it's a pure power thing.

There's something very
moving about the fact...

...that this story begins with him...

...basically seeing his
entire planet explode...

...like his home evaporate into nothing.

I can't imagine a bigger
launching-off point for a character...

...and then knowing that he'll do
whatever he can to make a new Krypton...

...because he can't help himself.

It's the only option he has.

It's what he was born to do.

That's what he's been
training to do his whole life.

He's fighting for
Krypton, for his people.

And he's a warrior.

And so he's capable
of committing, like...

...horrific crimes against
humanity and/or anything living.

USLAN:

is an alien starfish.
Giant starfish that comes down on
Earth and seizes control city by city.
Then in terms of seizing their minds, it was
right out of Invasion of the Body Snatchers.

NARRATOR:

own Mob-laden underworld...
...the criminal mastermind is
both power-hungry and immoral.
Feeding their insatiable
desire for control...
...they keep the public in fear as they
tighten their grasp on their domain.
Certainly one of the great types of
villains is the criminal mastermind...
...the guy who holds an entire city or town
or village or whatever in a grip of fear.

LANGLEY:

known as a Napoleon complex...
...the small man who wants to be big.
If he could lose that weight, he wouldn't,
because it helps him take up more space.
His hat makes him taller.
His umbrella, when extended,
helps him take up more area.
From the very first
story he appears in...
...he wants to rise up in high
society and wants to be a crime boss.
A number of stories feature
him running for mayor...
...not because he wants to do
something great. He wants that status.
He wants the power...
...and he wants the status to be the
big man over everybody else in Gotham.
The criminal mastermind is sort
of an extension of the real...
...Mob crime organizations or crime families
that have been a part of American history...
...almost since the country was founded.

That's a great character for comics...

[GUNSHOT]

...because you can take that
into the area of caricature.
Currently, guys like Black Mask.
What's more hideous than
a guy in this, you know...
...awful-looking skull mask...
...wearing a business suit,
commanding a legion of street troopers?
I mean, that's a great foe for Batman.
To guys like Penguin, Black Mask,
they're out to really dominate the city.
They wanna be the distorted, hideous,
grotesque face of Gotham City.

MAN:

CATWOMAN:

[MAN GRUNTING]

Unh!

Cat got your tongue?

NARRATOR:

The seductive siren
song of the temptress.
The femme fatale.
The femme fatale crystallizes the qualities
of both a villain and a love interest...
...at the same time.
You can find roots in movies.
You can find the actresses...
...who maybe inspired some of
the villainesses who were created.
And these were women who used
their beauty to lure the hero in...
...to get the hero to do their bidding.
And that of course was
reflected in the comics.
It was part of the
inherent popular culture.
Poison Ivy is a great
example of a female villain...
...who will actually take advantage,

knowing that the male characters...
...the male heroes, and
even the male villains...
...that she's working with, are
the ones susceptible to love...
...to connecting with her.
And she uses those
assumptions for her own gain.
She finds that her power
is in, essentially...
...taking advantage of other
people's vulnerability to emotions.
She took everything that could be seen
as objectification towards women...
...and then used it as her own power
and turns it around on the guys.

LANGLEY:

in controlling people.
Harley Quinn is a case of love gone bad.
The individual who's fascinated
with the supervillains...
"fascinated with their egos and their
qualities, and Joker plays to that.
So Harleen Quinzel is a woman...
...who is a psychiatry intern,
essentially, at Arkham Asylum.
When Bruce Timm and I
wrote the origin for her...
...in Mad Love, then we really
got into her personality.
That she wanted to write a tell-all book
about Gotham's psychotic criminals...
...then wound up falling under the
sway of one and becoming one herself.

LETAMENDI:

toughest case possible.
And who is the toughest
case? It's the Joker.
There's this connection
that they have together.
I think there is an element
of manipulation on his end.

That he, um...
I think he fancies her, but
also that he's realizing that...
...here's an opportunity for
him to get out of Arkham Asylum.
Harley's a bit of a social chameleon.
She molds herself to the people around her.
When she hangs out with heroes, she's heroic.
She hangs out with villains, she's villainous.
When with the Joker, she's more murderous...
...than she is at other times.
Some of the villainesses that
we have in the DC universe...
- ... are almost more powerful than the villains.
- The sky is the limit...
...as far as female
villains are concerned.

PORTER:

who is crazy ferocious.
With the Cheetah, I wanted
to create somebody...
...who resonated with
Wonder Woman, with Diana.
We added kind of a back-story
that they were friends...
...and then ultimately
she became the Cheetah.
And Wonder Woman later learned
she was never really her friend.
It was all just a play, and it was
a bond of trust that was broken.
And the Cheetah has turned into this savage
creature that wants to destroy humanity...
...as much as Wonder
Woman wants to protect it.
At this point in time...
...I think we're lucky enough to be in
an era where there is a lot more equality.
And you're getting some great stories.
They can be defined by
what their plot is...
...what their motive is, what their
goals are, what their methods are.

And that's great that you don't simply have to define them by gender. The female villain, you know, historically... ..goes back all the way to Greek mythology. Look at a character like Hera, for instance... ..who is both a heroine and a villain, depending on the story. Other female villains throughout time have a lot of that same complexity to them. You look at a character like Catwoman, for instance. In her original incarnation, I believe, she was just an adventurer. She was out there being a burglar and jewel robber... ..simply because of the thrill of it. We began learning more about her in the 80s, what her past might have been... ..and that certainly made her more of a complex and more of a sympathetic character. And then to the present day where she is... ..I believe one of the members of the Justice League. So she's gone all the way from being a villain to anti-hero to straight-on heroine. She's very curious to us. She has that duality of both good and evil. And I think that that allows her to be relatable. I think that she's the most realistic.

BLACK:

see this strong, female character. And she was a precursor, I think... ..to a lot of the sort of heroines that we now see on screen. Women really started to become more popular on the big screen and on TV. As a result, I think of characters like Catwoman being portrayed...

...in the early days
of television and film.
Today, happily, from what
I have seen and read...
...you have superheroes, superheroines,
supervillains, supervillainesses...
...all on a level playing field.
I think any time you can
make the character strong...
...whether they're male or female,
you'll end up with a good villain.

NARRATOR:

surprise, no coincidence, really...
...that the more popular heroes are the ones
who typically battle the most sinister...
...and charismatic rogues' galleries.
For it's this dynamic
roster of villains...
...that bolster and buoy
the popularity of our hero.
When you look at the very best
characters, the very best heroes...
...in comic book mythology, they typically
have the strongest rogues' gallery.
I think you develop a better rogues'
gallery around the superhero...
...if the scale of the superhero...
...is one where it's easy to imagine
the villain coming into being.
You look at Batman, Batman
ultimately is a human being.
So therefore you can have villains that
face him that are human plus a little.
Batman's rogues' gallery, which I
think is the best rogues' gallery...
...of all the DC heroes,
that resonates the most.
Those characters are considered, you
know, sort of the greater villains.
There's an interesting thing
about a lot of Batman's rogues...
...and here I'm specifically thinking
of, like, the Penguin and Two-Face...

...and Clayface and the Joker.
They're all physically
deformed in some way.
And that physical deformity
actually drives their evil.
Massively more difficult to have
villains of scale for Superman.
Character is incredibly powerful.
Who's tough enough to fight him?
Brainiac felt like a character who could actually
fight Superman and win without superpowers...
...because he's a computer.
He's a computer character.
So you must be Brainiac. Okay.
Brainiac was an alien who
was collecting cities...
...of different world cultures as
he moved throughout the galaxy...
...throughout the universe.
And he comes to Earth to shrink
Metropolis, among other cities...
...and put it in a glass bottle...
...and take it in his interplanetary collection
back to wherever he may have come from.
We didn't want it to always be Lex Luthor
that was fighting Superman, or Brainiac.
But then you start running
out of the famous names.
So we kept coming up
with new guys, you know.

LANGLEY:

individual who draws power from others.
He draws super power from Superman
or other superheroes he was around.
He draws life force from other people.
Sometimes even identity
from other people.

ROMANO:

really interesting villain.
And a large part of why I like
him is because he was human...
...but now he's got

this Kryptonite heart.
So he still has a heart,
but it's a deformed heart.
It's an obscene heart.
It's a heart of evil.
And that heart affects what he does, and
it has such a massive effect on Superman.

DIDIO:

Woman, the rogues' galleries get a lot smaller.
Wonder Woman in particular
has a very small gallery...
...because of who she is
and what she represents...
...and how she becomes more iconic makes
it harder to play off of her weaknesses...
...because a lot of people don't
see weaknesses in the character.
There's no major villainy that could
exploit those weaknesses in her.
We added another layer to Wonder Woman's
origin by making her the daughter of Zeus.
So she has divine blood.
And then we wanted to
take it even further.
It's like, "Well, let's create
somebody new, a new god. "
And it is... We created this
character called the First Born.
He has no name. He was the
first child of Zeus and Hera.
And he was cast out of Olympus
because there was a prophecy...
...that he would take over Olympus.
So here is her original brother who's
been cast out of heaven and hated by all.
So now he's got a major hate-on
for his family and the world.

NARRATOR:

together to fight a common enemy...
...so too will the villains.
The fusion of good is matched
only by the unification of evil.

The Crime Syndicate,
the Secret Society...
...the Rogues, the Legion of Doom.
Though their members differ...
...all villain team-ups employ
the same battle-tested strategy:
There is strength in numbers.
My favorite aspect of
working in this business...
...is when I have created various
incarnations of various teams.
We need one character who can fly. We
need one character who's really strong.
We need one character who's
maybe got some magical powers.
And just putting that
together is half the challenge.
The story writes itself more
often than not after that.

KIRSHEN:

of the Super Friends...
...where you've got the Justice
League members marching...
...towards the screen and then the other
side, the Legion of Doom are marching.
They're coming at each other, and there's this
explosion when the two sides hit each other.
I mean, you know, as a 6-, 7-year-old
kid, you know, it blew your mind.
Normally, villains are seen as individuals
and they have their own personal plot...
...to take over the world
or something like that.
But the idea of them combining together, you
know, makes their threat that much bigger.
Superviilain team-ups, ha, ha,
are their own unique animal...
...because on the one hand...
...there's a huge potential
and disappointment ratio...
...when supervillains team up.
The potential is, well...
...it's two great tastes

that taste great together.
It's two threats are better than one.
You know, when Lex Luthor
and Brainiac team up...
...you know, when the Joker
and the Riddler team up...
...that's incredibly, you
know, resonant and powerful.
The problem is that 99.9
percent of the time...
...the ability of the superhero
to overcome their plan...
...is usually hidden in the
conflict between the supervillains.
The supervillains, they can't get their
act together. A comic book is 22 pages.
They can get their act together for 19
pages, but those last three are just, ugh...
...they're just falling apart.
I'd like to complete this transaction
with as little bloodshed as possible, Lex.
Now put your hands up and
have Toy Man turn us around.

WOMAN:

Grodd is leader.

PORTER:

Rogues can come together for a common goal.
They're guys that seem silly at first, but
you look at somebody like Mirror Master.
Okay, the guy can teleport through any
reflective surface, not just a mirror.
He can bend light, illusions.
He can make himself appear
in multiple places at once.
I mean, there's so many very interesting
things that he can do on his own...
...that when you put him into a group
with other villains that are versatile...
...you have a really cool set
of personalities and powers.
Although, they do have, you
know, specific rivalries.

Heat Wave and Captain
Cold don't like each other.
Yeah, one's hot and one's
cold, but there are reasons.
In our "Flash Run," all the Rogues...
...they used to have guns and wands
and mechanical devices dating back...
...to when they were originally created.
But we made them have superpowers...
...and it's because of Captain Cold.
He made them undergo this transformation
that gave them superpowers.
Well, it had negative side effects.
For poor Heat Wave, it burnt off
basically all the top layer of his skin...
...so he looks really gross and messed up, so
he hates Captain Cold for making him that way.
Why do they hang out together?
There's strength in numbers,
and Flash is fast enough...
...he can fight more
than one person at a time.
There's something about the Rogues.
They wanna pull their jobs,
live their lives and be alone.
Like, it's their job to pull
off heists and steal stuff.
That's how they make their living. They
consider themselves blue-collar guys.
"Gonna pop a beer and we're gonna spend
the money we made by robbing the bank. "
What other villains can you think about?
They pull a heist, they escape the Flash...
- ... and then they go to a bar to have a beer?
- The Suicide Squad is the exception to the rule.
And what makes it interesting
is it's a bunch of villains...
...who are forced by the government to go on
missions that are for the good of the people.
And if they fail, if they decide to try and
escape, they have devices that will kill them.
So they are forced to do it.
I think the fact that they are forced to
be heroes despite their own instincts...

...and that they're constantly trying
to work out ways to undermine missions...
...and to sometimes betray their teammates
and be villains even while they're...
When they're forced to do the right thing
is the reason why that team, that book...
- ... is always around and is always popular.
- None of their motivation is theirs.
They're doing the bidding of
Amanda Waller and the government.

LEE:

are planting these bombs...
...on the backs of the
Suicide Squad members...
...are they the heroes?
You know, purportedly they are.
But the way they're doing it, it
really, you know comes down to...
...it's an extreme form
of water boarding, I think.
They have reason to hate their handlers,
who are supposed to be the good guys...
...but they're not seen
that way in the books.
So it's an interesting study in what
makes a villain and what makes a hero...
...because it's kind of
flip-flopped in that book.

CARLIN:

screw the other guy standing next to them.
They are there to just survive.
And they are... They don't want
it to be their suicide mission.
And I do think that that's
of a different and new angle.
Suicide Squad is successful,
because it has a rotating cast.
You could kill some members off.
There's always that question...
...of something happening to the
cast that could change the status quo.
There's always that anticipation

that if a mission goes wrong...
...somebody could actually die.
It's a gut-level survival instinct.
For the reader, you're just like:
"Who's gonna make it through
this mission and how?"
You know, and then, you know, Are
they gonna manage to actually get free...
...so they can take care of
Amanda Waller?" Heh, heh, heh.
Sometimes it's more exciting to
find a villain that's so powerful...
...the combined might of an
entire team can't defeat them.

LEE:

supervillains have to band together...
...put aside their differences.
You always have that classic shot
where they reach out and shake hands...
...and, like, "Let's team up. "
And, to me, that's like
the ultimate odd couple.
The problem is though that there aren't
that many of those kinds of villains.
So it's always a challenge to find one villain
powerful enough to take out all of them.
It's interesting that someone
like Lex Luthor could do it...
...just because he has the
skill to out-think them.
So it isn't always power.
Sometimes it's that X-factor.
But if you can manage to
do the right storyline...
...again, it can be a lot of
fun and a really great challenge.
I'm not here to challenge you,
Darkseid. Quite the contrary.
I've got something you want.
The only thing you want.
People can identify with that...
...because when we're faced
with something that endangers...

...our way of life...
...we can set aside our
differences and work together.

NARRATOR:

between a hero and villain.
And sometimes the line is crossed.
In essence, the hero
becomes the villain.
But when a hero loses their
way, is salvation possible?
One of the great classic
stories of literature...
...is the drama of
the good man goes bad.
What is it that can happen
to us that puts us through...
...a set of circumstances that drives us
to do something we don't morally believe in?
That's a powerful tale.
Trying to turn a hero, you have to actually
figure out how to affect their moral center.
It's in the face of a planet being
blown up, a city being blown up...
...or a wife or a lover dying.
And the idea that "I wasn't strong enough,
I wasn't powerful enough and perhaps...
...me doing the right thing or
being a hero was the problem.
If I'd been more vicious, if I'd been
more brutal, I could have changed things. "
I think every great turn of a hero
to a villain, it comes from that.

LEE:

is that the Joker has killed Lois...
...and it's not just Lois' death that drives
Superman to almost a level of insanity...
...but the fact that Lois
was carrying his child...
...and so it has double
significance and impact on him.

BATMAN:

At that point, he kind of
loses his frame of reference...
...and decides to create
almost a totalitarian state...
...where he's the ultimate
authority. So again in his mind...
...he is trying to prevent what
happened to Lois and his unborn child...
...from happening in
the world by becoming...
...you know, the enlightened dictator.
But, you know, you see sort
of the holes in logic of that.
You know, ultimately, you
are creating a greater evil...
...by trying to do some
small sense of good.
There have been a few stories where
heroes go villainous for some time...
...and I think probably the most famous
one is Hal Jordan when Coast City...
...the city he called
home, was attacked.
And many people were killed and destroyed
and he wanted to bring them back.
And he went to the Guardians and said,
"Give me this power so I can do it. "
And they said no, and he
ultimately killed them...
...and became...
Went crazy, became this big
villain in the DC universe.
You know, they say that power corrupts
and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
Usually when a hero falls from grace
it's because they've succumbed...
...to their own power, like
when Hal Jordan became Parallax.
It was Hal Jordan overreaching...
...and trying to use his power as the
Green Lantern to recreate an entire city...
...and he kept wanting
more and more power.
And he basically got

corrupted by his own...
You know, by his own super power.
And I think that is usually the
path down... You know, down darkness.

ROBINSON:

becoming the Spectre...
...and ultimately becoming Green
Lantern again he found redemption.
But it took years and it was a great
hero's journey that we got to witness.

JOHNS:

overcoming fear and I thought, "Well...
...if he's all about overcoming fear, there's
gotta be a moment that he gave in to fear.
When was that weakness?" That weak
point was when he was worried...
...something else was gonna happen
once Coast City was destroyed.
And in that moment, he let fear
kind of take hold of his heart.
That's when Sinestro unleashed
Parallax, who was this...
We created this entity of terror that
could possess his soul and corrupt his body.
And essentially turn him into Parallax.
And by having Hal still make
a mistake and give in to fear...
...it was still on point and
gave him a point of failure.
But at the same time...
...adding Parallax allowed
for an easier redemption.
And so if a hero does cross the line...
...does he just go back to work
the next day? The idea was no.
It was a 10-year problem for him.
Comic books, by, I think, their basic
nature is about wish fulfillment.
Therefore, the concept
of second chances...
...is actually built into the very
concept of the type of material we do.

So the idea that a hero or
a villain could be redeemed...
...is exactly what
comics have to be about.
We can take bad and turn it good.
And we can make good even better.
And that's what comics and
fantasy storytelling is all about.

ROBINSON:

of heroes trying to track down Prometheus.
Prometheus has actually taken
the identity of one of the heroes.
So he actually is amongst
them the entire time.
At the end of it...
...Prometheus has worked out a
way to destroy most of Star City...
...which is Green Arrow's home.
He also maims Arsenal...
...and then ultimately
Arsenal's daughter is killed.
What happens at the very end
is the one moderate person...
...Green Arrow, then tracks down
Prometheus on his own and executes him.
And that then led to a long arc for Green
Arrow where he had to redeem himself.

CARLIN:

line and took the life of a villain.
He did not just come back
from that adventure...
...and say, "Oh, well, I'm
never gonna kill people again. "
He had a mental breakdown,
and we did a year...
...a year and a half long
story where he lost it.
And it was to show that there's
consequences for this kind of stuff.
I do think that in modern comics,
it's okay for the heroes to fail.
You just got to have it mean something.

And not just teach them something...
...but have them suffer because
they did something wrong.
Taking someone's life, you take away
all they're gonna have and ever will be.
And it stays with you even if you
do it for the right and proper thing.
So, you know, killing in comics is...
When the hero pulls the trigger...
...I think it's not done a lot,
but I think when it's done...
...it has to be done
in a real big way...
...that has an emotional punch
to the hero's psyche and soul.

NARRATOR:

witnessed such heinous crimes...
...after we've experienced firsthand...
...pure evil in the face of villainy,
can the evildoer be redeemed?
In this comic book world where
heroes often get second chances...
...can the villain ever be forgiven?
It's a lot harder to figure out
how somebody who spent years...
...taking what they
wanted, killing people...
...whatever set of misdeeds
will suddenly turn around...
...and find God and become
moral the rest of their lives.
Does it happen?
Probably does in reality, but
it's a real tough story to tell.
Black Adam is an interesting character.
He was chosen by the wizard Shazam...
...given powers back in
the ancient Egyptian days.
He was a slave in Kahndaq.
He took these powers, became Black
Adam, the champion, and he was a hero.
And over time, he was
corrupted by that power.

He went back to Kahndaq and he said,
I'm leading Kahndaq now, you are free.
I'm here. " And then he found someone
he fell in love with. Isis was born...
...and then Isis' brother Osiris. Like,
we kind of created a Black Adam family.
And then that family was torn
apart and they were killed.
And Isis, who had been such a great
presence for Adam, who had preached peace.
As she's dying in his arms, the
last words she says is, "Avenge us. "
And that sends Black Adam off.
And he kills an entire
country out of rage.
And, obviously, hard to
redeem somebody after that.
He believes in doing the right thing.
He just goes about it in
such a barbaric and awful way.
Pete Tomasi wrote a fantastic story wrapped
around a character everybody should hate.
And made him... You
know, made him a hero...
...in a very... You know,
from a very villainous past.
It's a weird spot to be in when
you're a writer, when you have to say:
"I committed genocide, but I have
to make this character relatable...
...and in a weird way have people understand
where he was coming from at that point. "
So it's a tough line to walk when
you're a writer writing a character...
...who's as three-dimensional
as Black Adam...
...because he really is one of those
great three-dimensional characters...
...that you could horribly
understand why he does something.
With villains, though, when you
try and turn them into heroes...
...they can lose their...
What makes them special.

So it's a very rare case where
a villain is better as a hero.
Most of the time most readers just can't
wait for them to be villainous again.

ROMANO:

on Dark Knight Returns...
...where we have Doctor Wolper...
...trying to bring the Joker back
and trying to work with him...
...and now Doctor Wolper
also has an enormous ego.
And so you've got
Joker's ego, Wolper's ego.
It doesn't work out well. It
doesn't work out well for Wolper.
But the Joker absolutely was all about:
"I am rehabilitated. I'm here.
I've seen the error of my ways. "
And he really just used that as a
matter to get himself out of Arkham...
...so he could commit tremendous crimes.
I think some of them can be redeemed,
but I think what you gotta do...
...is you gotta dangle the sense of
redemption in front of them then rip it away.
Ultimately, you show why they
were a villain in the first place.

NARRATOR:

to evolve, so too do our villains.
In September of 2011...
...DC relaunched its
entire line of comics...
...dubbed The New 52.
Two years ago, relaunched
the DC universe.
We called that The New 52 and it was
basically a soft reset of the universe...
...where we basically fixed the
things that we felt weren't working...
...and kept going with
the things that were.
We sat down and thought about: "What

do we need more of in the DC universe?"
And one of the things that we
wanted to address was the villains.
What is villainy to us in
2013? What is real evil in 2013?
It's horrendous, right? And sometimes if
you get too close to the reality of it...
...it takes you out of the comic book.
So using super villains as
metaphors for whatever that is...
...and for the brutal attacks that they do, it's
gotten darker. It's darker. And it's scarier.
And the attacks come without notice
sometimes and they're personal.
I think that's because we live
in a very, sort of, fearful time.
Ever since 9/11, the
world's been on edge...
...and no one knows when
the next shoe is gonna drop.
Is it gonna be a tsunami? Is
it gonna be economic collapse?
Villains that sort of embody
that sense of unpredictability...
...that sense of, you know, doom
can come in any form and at any time.
I think that speaks to
everyone's sort of hidden fears.
Instead of characters of good and evil, it
became about characters of order and chaos.
It became about anarchy.
We are artists and we're trying to
reflect what's going on in the world.
That's what all art does. It's a mirror.

NARRATOR:

of villains is already enormous...
...there's always room
for a little more evil.
With the advent of The New 52,
the heroes of the DC universe...
...must face new
threats and adversaries.
I have a strange belief about the

way one proceeds with comics...
...is to using old characters
and introducing new characters.
My belief is if you're gonna
use one or two old characters...
...you have to introduce a new one.
I don't think we should ever be so
content to keep riding on the same horse.
If the hero has to survive
for 16, 20, 30 years...
...you wanna know all the different
aspects of that character...
...and the villain will make them
face certain parts about themselves...
...that on their own...
...they may not even think about
or can come up in a storyline.
A villain will find that, because they're
always trying to find something new...
...to use against the hero...
...which makes you explore
your hero even more.
The goal of any villain is
to challenge our hero, right?
Not to challenge them but to
take them to the ragged edge...
...of his existence in every way.
The idea is to try and think about
what the character is most afraid of...
...at that particular moment
in his or her life, the hero...
...then create a villain that
comes right at that thing.
So for "Court of Owls," that
story was really about...
...you know, a moment when
Batman was on top of the world.
He felt very confident in
Gotham and it made me realize...
...Batman might think he knows the city
but he can't know the history of the city.
He can't know everything about it. So what if
the city itself begins to come at him saying:
"You don't know me that well."

" With the Court of Owls...
...they're this group buried and layered into the
past of the city in ways that are scary to him.
He doesn't believe they exist at all.
Then he sees that they actually
have nests for their Talons...
...inside Wayne buildings and
then in the penultimate scene...
...he realizes that the
person behind the story...
...is actually someone who
claims to be a Wayne himself.
The Guardians of the Universe were
characters that they're ancient beings...
...that divorced themselves
from emotion a long time ago.
They thought emotion was dangerous.
They say the law is supposed
to be devoid of emotion.
The First Lantern is the
being who got the first ring...
...who was there to witness the divorcing
of the Guardians and their emotional hearts.
And he took that emotional
power for himself.
And he had changed who he was...
...and the Guardians locked him
away like they did their emotions.
The First Lantern is a metaphor for all the
pent up emotion the Guardians have buried.
And that First Lantern is now free.
At one point, the First Lantern
says... As he's got them captured...
...he's turned the tables and he says,
I'm gonna change this universe now.
But before I do, I want you
to have your emotions back.
I want you to feel this. "
The Guardians, for the first
time in billions of years...
...have their emotions back
and they feel shame and fear...
...and horror about what they've
done and what they've become...

...which I really enjoyed.
And then that's right before
Sinestro wipes them out.
When I got into Aquaman and I was
launching Aquaman for The New 52...
...my attitude was he
wants to be on land.
So he made a conscious decision in
issue one, "My life is on land here. "
And I wanted to have something that
was gonna drag him back into the ocean.
So we created... Ivan Reis and I
created this race of sea creatures...
...humanoid sea creatures,
man-eating creatures...
...that were starving and from the trench
and they had eaten all their food...
...and they were coming up.
They come up out of the
ocean and attack a town...
...and Aquaman gets
involved with that attack...
...and has to go back into the water.
What Aquaman doesn't know is
they're actually another kingdom.
They're actually another underwater
kingdom that is one of many, with Atlantis.

NARRATOR:

was spawned from comics...
...the DC universe isn't
limited to panels and pages.
It has expanded to include all forms of media
and given its villains new worlds to explore.

JOHNS:

just comics, you know?
It starts in the comics, all the
characters come from the comics.
But then they explode
into everything else.

KIRSHEN:

rich and complex and multilayered villains...

...that we had to craft our stories around
and what is driving you through the story...
...what is pushing Batman,
you know, to push his limits...
...to get to the end of the
game is ultimately the plan...
...and the storytelling
around the villain...
...and the villains' interactions with each
other as they all try to take down Batman.
You had your shot, Deathstroke, but
you're not the only assassin in town.
There is such rich material here
and such deep, amazing characters...
...that have such long history
and love from the fans...
...for 50, 60, 70 years that we
wanna tell great stories in our games.
We don't want it to just be about
the gameplay and cool visuals.
There's gotta be the meat
there of a great story.
To me, it was a lot of fun to see that because
it explores the world of these characters...
...and it doesn't just give you
one flavor month in, month out.

NARRATOR:

upcoming Forever Evil comic event...
...will continue to emphasize the
villains and their many diabolical deeds.
As DC celebrates its villainy, we're
doing the first New 52 event series.
I'm writing it. David Finch is
drawing it. It's called Forever Evil.
And the context of this is
the Justice League is dead.
The villains have inherited the earth.
They've been killed by the Crime Syndicate.
So we create an event that now carries
on throughout the rest of 2013 and 2014...
...that's all about the villains.
And when we looked at the whole lineup
of characters, it really came down to:

Why does this character
exist in the DC universe?
What role does this character fill?
How do we show that function through
story, through character development?
Seeing all the villains manifest
themselves in animation...
...and television and film and
videogames from the comic books, that's...
I mean, that's the true power and
testament to the characters themselves.

NARRATOR:

of DC Comics...
...come in all manners of
shapes, sizes, personalities...
...dark recesses and eccentricities.
They conquer worlds, eradicate
cities and terrorize the innocent...
...all while fighting the hero.
And it's this bond between villain
and hero that is inseverable...
"unbreakable, a fusion of
soul, a sense of feeling...
...a deeply rooted connection
that cannot be extricated.
Theirs is a war of
intellect, of strength...
...of darkness and intertwined fate
and destiny to keep doing battle.
They can't give up on each other.
Without the hero, there is no villain.
Without a villain, there can be no hero.
[MAN LAUGHING]
[English
- US - SDH]