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Ign's top 100 comic book villains of all time

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The number one cause of coulrophobia (the abnormal or exaggerated fear of clowns) is not, as you might initially think, a bad childhood experience at a birthday party or the circus. Mental health experts believe it may have more to do with children seeing sinister portrayals of clowns in the media. If true, Spawn creator Todd McFarlane may have psychologically damaged an entire generation with the Violator. A Hell-born demon whose purpose is to groom Hellspawn's in the service of evil, the gruesome Violator's most iconic physical form is the Clown, a disgustingly overweight, short, balding man who wears blue face-paint. His demonic powers include super-strength, shape-shifting, healing, teleportation, and the ability to breathe fire... just to name a few. And if being a real bastard was a superpower, we'd have listed that, too. Sent to Earth by Malebolgia, the powerful ruler of the Eighth Circle of Hell, Violator is tasked with monitoring Al Simmons. But the foul-mouthed Clown harasses and taunts Simmons, feeling that he is far superior to this newest Spawn. And while he cannot kill any Spawn without an order from his superiors, that hasn't stopped him from making Simmons life a (literal) living Hell.He has been killed numerous times, only to be sent back to Hell and restored to life by his master. Violator first appeared Spawn #1 (May 1992), he was prominently featured in the popular HBO miniseries, and was main antagonist in the oft-maligned 1997 live-action movie (played by John Leguizamo). The Violator has also made an appearance in every Spawn videogame ever released. For the past two weeks, IGN Comics has been presenting its list of the Top 100 Comic Book Villains of All Time. It was hard to narrow it down so far, and some of you have made it perfectly clear you're not fond of our choices. But love it or hate it, the countdown has reached its final day, and the top 10 villains stand revealed. One question we've seen many readers bring up is which stories and comics factored into our decisions. Many merely want to know which books they should hunt down to learn more about these terrific villains.
Fair enough. This Recommended Reading List brings together some of the defining stories that helped make these villains who they are today. These stories alone didn't earn them their spots, but they certainly helped. And just to avoid spoilers for those who haven't read the final countdown yet, these villains are arranged alphabetically rather than by ranking. So read through our list, and hopefully you'll be able to add a few new books to your shelf. Incidentally, we want to know your picks for the top comic book villains. Click here to send us your feedback. Dark Phoenix More than almost any villain in the entire countdown, Dark Phoenix is epitomized by a single, definitive story. In Chris Claremont and John Byrne's landmark The Dark Phoenix Saga, Jean Grey was finally overwhelmed by the vast power within and threatened the entire galaxy. The X-Men were forced to do battle with one of their own, and the end result was truly tragic for all involved. This is still considered by many to be the greatest X-Men story ever told. That's a tough legacy to live up to, but there are other quality X-stories involving the Phoenix Force. After Jean Grey was killed (again) by Xorn in New X-Men #150, the series dove far into the future to examine a world that had gone horribly wrong. In Here Comes Tomorrow, a ragtag band of X-Men are forced to do battle with the fabled Beast of the Apocalypse, who has found a way to harness the power of Phoenix for his own twisted experiments. This story is best read as part of Grant Morrison's larger creative run, but it has something to offer all Phoenix fans regardless. Shortly after reality returned to normal, the X-Men were once again faced with the threat of a rising Phoenix. In Phoenix: Endsong, the Phoenix Force returned in the form of Jean Grey to haunt her loved ones. In the end, this story was more of a sweet farewell to an old friend than a cosmic mega-epic, but it caps off the saga of the Phoenix very well. Darkseid If you consider Darkseid a Superman villain, he came as a relatively late addition compared to the likes of Lex Luthor, Brainiac, and Parasite.
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Similarly, Cosmic Odyssey sees the heroes of the 20th Century banding together to fight this near-unstoppable force. Cosmic Odyssey is written by DC sci-fi legend Jim Starlin, and illustrated by Hellboy creator Mike Mignola who proves himself very capable of carrying the Kirby torch. Finally, last year's epic crossover Final Crisis deserves a mention. Though just as many fans derided Final Crisis for its confusing story structure as praised it for its originality, there's no denying this particular Crisis showcased Darkseid at his worst. The foul tyrant found himself trapped in human form, but that didn't prevent him from finally harnessing the Anti-Life Equation and bending the universe to his will.
This is the closest Darkseid ever came to victory, and it may well be the last we ever see of him. If so, he went out with a bang.
Doctor Doom Doctor Doom is a villain with a murky origin at best.
Writers have disagreed even on basic concepts such as whether his face is truly disfigured or Doom is just extremely vain. The Books of Doom doesn't answer every burning question regarding the Latverian dictator, but it does provide a close look at his early years. The story follows Victor from his life as a gypsy to his time as a student in America to his eventual rise to power. Emperor Doom is a classic example of what the world would be like if Doom ever actually succeeded in his goal to rule the world. In this alternate future tale, Doom has quelled the various super-teams of the Marvel universe and established himself as emperor of the world. Surprisingly, Doom's reign has made the world a much happier and safer place. Doom realizes that life without men like Reed Richards to challenge him is a life not worth living. Luckily, a few good men remain to help set thing aright. Doom is never lacking in villainous bravado, but he does have a more complex, almost sentimental side that the world at large rarely sees. In Doctor Strange and Doctor Doom: Triumph and Torment, Doom enlists the aid of his frequent magical sparring partner in order to rescue Mrs. Von Doom's soul from the fiery depths of Hell. Few stories have shown Doom at his absolute worst like "Unstoppable", a story arc from Mark Waid's extended run on Fantastic Four. In this tale, Doom accumulates an even greater store of power thanks to a particularly twisted betrayal, and he unleashes his full wrath on the Richards clan. The formerly happy family was left reeling after the events of issue #500, and Doom was once again crowned their greatest nemesis. Galactus No lineup of Galactus stories would be complete without the one that started it all. Galactus and his herald Silver Surfer both first appeared in a storyline called "Galactus Begins", which ran in the pages of Fantastic Four #48-50. This is the classic story of a giant monster who wanted to devour Earth, and the shiny silver minion who dared stand up to him. It's a motif that has reappeared frequently over the years. Few stories can really hammer home the sheer, terrifying scope of Galactus' power like Galactus: The Devourer. In this 6-issue mini-series, mighty heroes of all sorts band together to wage all-out war on Galactus. This is a foe who numbers among the most powerful beings in the universe, and it's easy to see why when Galactus can swat aside even the greatest of heroes like pesky ants. This story also established that Galactus is a very necessary evil in the Marvel Universe. No story in recent years has done more to revitalize and draw attention to Marvel's cosmic characters like Annihilation. Annihilation sees great heroes like Silver Surfer, Nova, and Super-Skrull fighting a desperate battle to repel Annihilus and his vast armies. Galactus first appears in a rare state – captured by the enemy and used to power a doomsday device. But you'd better believe that isn't the extent of his involvement. What happens when Galactus gets angry? You'll have to read Annihilation to find out. The Joker Joker is another villain whose origin has seen varied and conflicting accounts. The man Who Laughs isn't an origin story per se – it doesn't explain who Joker is or what created him. Instead, this graphic novel retells the original appearance of the Clown Prince of Crime in a new and modern context. Some of the character's cunning and menace was present in the original comic, but this version presents Joker as a true force to be reckoned with. As for Joker's actual origin, many look to The Killing Joke for the definitive account. This graphic novel is split between two time periods.
In the past, we follow a young, failing comedian whose happy domestic life is cruelly taken away. In the present, Joker tears apart the Gordon family when he shoots Barbara Gordon in the spine and proceeds to psychologically torture her father in an attempt to prove that one bad day can drive any man insane. But one good day can also drive a man back to sanity. In Batman: Going Sane, Joker seemingly realizes his life's dream of destroying the Batman. But with his most prized audience out of the game, Joker has no reason to commit crimes and no other recourse but to settle down and live a normal life. This story explores the idea that most readers have come to accept – Joker needs Batman too badly to ever dream of killing him. Fans of The Dark Knight who find the comic book version of Joker a little too loopy may find Brain Azzarello and Lee Bermejo's graphic novel Joker a good compromise. In terms of its visuals and its tone, Joker is not unlike the recent movie. In some ways it could almost function as a sequel.
This story examines Mister J and the other criminal lords of Gotham from a uniquely grounded standpoint. Here, Joker isn't even insane so much as just a really, really bad man. Kingpin The Kingpin has plagued many of the street level heroes in the Marvel Universe, but few would argue his primary nemesis is anyone other than Daredevil. Frank Miller and Dave Mazzucchelli's The Man Without Fear is the ultimate exploration of their feud and the forces that drive both men. When Kingpin learns Daredevil's true identity, he proceeds tearing apart Murdock's life piece by piece. But as Kingpin soon learns, a man without hope is a man without fear. This dynamic is explored again in "Hardcore", a watershed story arc in Brian Michael Bendis' Daredevil run. After losing his criminal empire and fleeing New York, Kingpin returns in hopes of claiming his throne. Daredevil has had quite enough, and so the two clash in the streets of Hell's Kitchen. A new Kingpin will rise in the end, but it may not be the one you think.
Kingpin has also repeatedly plagued Spider-Man's life, and perhaps the best illustration of this feud comes in the form of Bendis' Ultimate Spider-Man. In the book's sophomore story arc, "Learning Curve", an overly confident Spidey learns that not all bad guys in New York can be felled with a punch to the face. And in "Ultimate Knights", Spidey is forced to team with heroes like daredevil and Moon Knight to put down Fisk once and for all. One of the greatest Kingpin stories actually only features the villain in a small, supporting role. In Spider-man: Tangled Web #4, a mob enforcer is ordered to kill Spider-Man.
When he fails repeatedly, he realizes his own life has become forfeit. This single issue is a compelling example of both Kingpin's brutality and his twisted sense of honor. Lex Luthor Say what you will about Smallville as a whole, but this long-running television series has done a great job exploring Lex Luthor in his formative years. For those interested in seeing what the comics have to say about this period in Lex's life, check out Superman: Birthright. Though definitely influenced by Smallville, this comic also stands as the definitive modern take on the origin of Luthor and his sworn enemy. Luthor is such a tremendous villain because he truly sees himself as a potential savior of mankind, whereas Superman is a danger and a menace. What better way to explore Luthor's viewpoint than to craft a story with him as the lead? Lex Luthor: Man of Steel casts the industrialist as a tireless defender of the common good. Superman, meanwhile, is a silent monolith who may just be the true villain of the piece. As the Superman books moved into the '80s and continued to evolve, the writing staff chose to cast Luthor as less of a mad scientist and more of a respected businessman with a secret hatred of Superman. They Saved Luthor's Brain! is a collection of stories from the era that document this transformation. When Luthor's body succumbs to Kryptonite poisoning, he reemerges as the newer, sleeker Lex Luthor II. Everyone but Superman is pleased at the transformation. But everything in comics is cyclical, and eventually Luthor returned to his criminal roots.
Superman: Up, Up, and Away takes place at a time when Superman has been MIA for almost a year and Luthor is disgraced publicly. As both men make their public return, the whole of Metropolis will shake from the aftershock. Loki Every villain needs a proper origin story. For the trickster god Loki, his is simply titled Loki. This lavishly illustrated book follows Loki as he is adopted into Odin's family and brushes up against the mighty Thor. Loki, ever the outcast, has rarely been portrayed in a more sympathetic light. Loki would emerge to plague the Avengers time and time again over the years, even serving as their very first villain. One of his greatest plots came in the crossover known as Acts of Vengeance. This crossover united both the Avengers and the West Coast Avengers in a bid to halt Loki's latest attempt at worldwide devastation. Loki has emerged in an entirely new form in the pages of J. Michael Straczynski's Thor (currently collected as Thor Vol. 1 and Thor Vol.
2). In this ongoing saga, the Norse gods have returned after Ragnarök to repopulate Asgard, which happens to be floating over the fields of Oklahoma. The newly female Loki proclaims herself to be reformed, but readers soon learn she has all too sinister motives at work. Loki proves as ever that the worst kind of villain is the one nobody suspects.
Magneto Readers have long been privy to the basics of Magneto's origin – his internment in a Nazi concentration camp and the long, hard years that followed – but never had they seen the whole story until X-Men: Magneto Testament. This tale pulls back the curtain, revealing Mags' real name and former family life, the early trials that defined him, and the love that would sustain him through years of torment. This book is so well-crafted that most readers won't even notice that Magneto almost never uses his powers. The Chris Claremont X-Men comics remain true classics. Perhaps Claremont's greatest Magneto yarn came in the form of God Loves, Man Kills. This story, which heavily influenced the second X-Men movie, sees the rise of a radical religious cult who believe it is God's will that mutants be tortured and killed. Magneto, seeing the all too familiar signs of hatred and bigotry, allies himself with the X-Men to put a stop to this sect. Claremont's long run came to a close with X-Men #1-3. This story introduced Magneto's Acolytes. It was also intended to be the final Magneto story. That obviously didn't happen, but a new alternate universe series called X-Men Forever will find Claremont picking up where he left off. These three issues will first be reprinted in a collection called X-Men Forever Alpha. Ra's al Ghul For a man as long-lived as Ra's al Ghul, there must certainly be interesting tales to tell in the many centuries leading up to his encounters with Batman. Denny O'Neil proved this to be the case with Batman: Birth of the Demon. This graphic novel follows the long course of this criminal mastermind's life, and all the pain and loss that shaped him.
Perhaps no single collection is better able to explore the many battles between Bat man and Ra's than Batman: tales of the Demon. This book is a greatest hits assortment of Ra's al Ghul stories from the '70s and '80s. Included, of course, is the iconic shirtless sword fight in the desert.
Though Ra's is usually thought of as a Batman villain, he has shown a habit of plaguing other DC heroes as well. Ra's once incapacitated the entire JLA in the pages of JLA: Tower of Babel, and he did it using Batman's own hidden files and secret contingency plans. Batman alone is left standing to save the day, but Ra's has an ace up his sleeve that even Batman couldn't have planned for. Though the day would eventually be saved, Ra's left his mark on the team. It would be a long time before Batman could be trusted by his allies again. Documented List of IGN's list of the Top 100 Comic Book Villain