

INVENTING THE ENEMY

📅 JANUARY 23, 2014 📌 TIPS 💬 0

When I picked up Umberto Eco's *Inventing the Enemy*, I did not realize that it was an essay of sorts, that Umberto Eco had compiled from his lectures and thoughts throughout the years. While I happily read the introduction, he expressed that:

Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values...

Although I did not continue reading the book because it was no longer about inventing a good enemy, I did learn a valuable lesson from that essay. In every book, every good story has a good enemy. For Stephen King's *Carrie*, you can say it was her peers, her mother and herself, and you could also say that she lost that battle.

Everyone knows who the enemy was in Suzanne Collin's *Hunger Games* trilogy, and who Harry Potter's main enemy was. The best stories often have the scariest enemies, or rather enemies that seemed to be stronger, more powerful than the hero. The bigger the challenge, the more audience it draws. Now I understand why people loved Roman Colosseum, aside from blood thirstiness of the audience, hope of the smaller man winning is good entertainment.

What happens if you do not have a physical enemy? An emotional one works just as well. A sense of uselessness, low confidence or helplessness is the enemy when people write about young girls. Their enemy comes from within, and it tears readers apart when they read about people paralysed with sense of a powerlessness and guilt. The inspiration felt when the negative emotions are conquered, attracts everyone looking for a good ending somewhere.

Every so often, I come across books without a good enemy, and usually they are not very interesting to read. If the hero was already perfect, there will not be an uphill struggle, and then there will be no sense of satisfaction when the story ends. As a reader I often feel very disappointed, because the enemy was too weak or there was nothing gained from the adventure.

However, I did come across one book that I think people should read; it is Kimberly Castillo's *The Convenience of Lies*. It seemed boring at first, but as I read on, there seemed to be an enemy, but who was the antagonist? It was not until the end of the book that I realized that the bad guy was someone I had not expected. The author had put me into the mind of the heroine,

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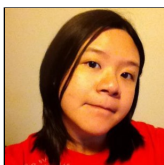
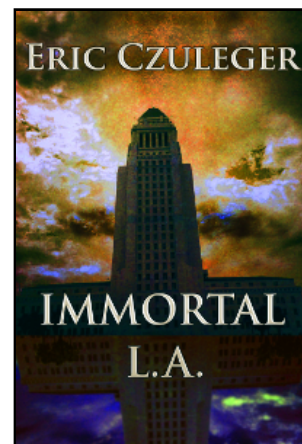
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and made me oblivious to some details that would have made it clearer.

The Convenience of Lies is about an abusive relationship, based on a true story. While I was tempted to put the book down, I was glad I did not, because I was going to discount it as a lame young girl's book about getting a boy's attention. I would recommend this book, just to see how well you are in picking enemies.

So if you have a story you would like to tell, you can make the enemy obscure like Kimberly Castillo, or make it glaringly clear like in the *Hunger Games*. Either way, the best books have the scariest, mightiest enemies. Without one, your hero will struggle to have an identity that attracts readers.



Inventing the Enemy is written by: Ailyn Koay. You can find more from Ailyn at her blog, [Penny For My Thoughts](#).

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