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MORTAL KOMBAT LEGENDS: SCORPION REVENGE: STUDY OF ANTI-HERO CHARACTERIZATION AND ANTI-HERO ROLES

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Abstract

The film Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion's Revenge, directed by Ethan Spaulding, presents numerous antihero elements. An antihero differs from a traditional hero, often doing the right thing in morally ambiguous or wrong ways. This movie focuses on Scorpion, the main character, who displays various antiheroic behaviors through his actions. The study aims to analyze the antihero traits and roles as defined by Jessica Morrel, whose work outlines numerous strategies for creating complex characters like antiheroes. By using a descriptive qualitative method, the research delves into character analysis, exploring the context, background, and interactions between characters.

The study reveals that Scorpion embodies seven out of eleven antihero traits, with his most dominant characteristic being his tendency to show little or no remorse for bad behavior. This reflects his dark past, which fuels his desire for revenge and leads him to view murder as both justified and necessary. Regarding antihero roles, the research identifies five out of twelve roles, with the "dark hero" being the most prominent. This role is consistently depicted throughout the film, evident in Scorpion's actions and dialogue. The analysis concludes that Scorpion's portrayal as a dark hero is central to his character.

This research aims to illustrate what an antihero looks like, highlighting the importance of antiheroes in popular media and exploring their characterization and roles in literary works. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of antiheroes, particularly in terms of their traits and roles as defined by Morrel.

Keywords: Antihero, Characterization, Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion Revenge, Antihero characterization, roles of antihero.

Introduction

Characters are crucial components of a narrative, serving as the individuals portrayed within the story, each possessing distinct ethical, intellectual, and emotional qualities. These traits are inferred by the reader from the characters' dialogue—their words and the unique manner in which they express themselves—and from their actions within the narrative (Abrams, 1999). To bring these characters to life, authors employ characterization, which is any technique used to depict a character comprehensively. Characterization is generally categorized into two types: direct and indirect (Reams, 2015). Direct characterization occurs when the author

explicitly describes a character's traits, while indirect characterization is when the author reveals a character's personality through their actions, speech, and thoughts.

Heroes with strong characterization are often used in narrative works to leave a lasting impression on the audience. Many people are drawn to well-characterized heroes because they find inspiration in these characters, motivating them to improve their own lives. This is why heroes with positive characterization typically triumph over antagonists. However, not all authors rely solely on positive characterization for their characters, as characters often possess multiple traits that can evolve throughout the story.

When people first encounter an antihero, they might assume the character is evil, but in reality, antiheroes are fundamentally good people who engage in morally questionable actions. An antihero is a protagonist who lacks most of the positive qualities typically associated with a stereotypical hero. They are known for rejecting conventional hero stereotypes and operating within a "moral gray area" (Axis, 2019). Unlike traditional heroes who embody greatness, honor, and courage, antiheroes are often depicted as petty, dishonorable, passive, and deceitful. Antiheroes are especially prominent in dramatic tragedies, where the traditional protagonist is usually a person of high status, possessing dignity and courage (Abrams, 1999).

Today, many comic book series, novels, and movies feature a wide array of antihero characters, which can be found in major publishers around the world. For instance, Image Comics, an American comic book publisher, released Spawn. The character Spawn is considered an antihero because he brutally kills his enemies, a trait that sets him apart from traditional heroes who do not engage in such acts. Similarly, Marvel Comics, another American comic book company, has Wolverine. Wolverine is often labeled as an antihero due to his lack of hesitation in eliminating his enemies.

The researcher selects *Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion Revenge* as the focus of the study. This film offers an intriguing perspective by centering on Scorpion, who is portrayed as an antihero within the Mortal Kombat storyline. Directed by Ethan Spaulding, an American animation director, producer, and storyboard artist, the movie explores Scorpion's unique characterization, which sets him apart from traditional heroes. As an antihero, Scorpion actions are controversial and not universally accepted. His journey is marked by strong emotions as he seeks revenge after a devastating tragedy befalls him.

The researcher references three previous studies to provide new insights for their work, using a different movie and main data source. The first study is titled "Anti-hero of Main Character in *Venom* Movie Directed by Ruben Fleischer" by Rifky Fadililah Hidayat (2019). Hidayat's research aims to analyze the antihero character in the *Venom* movie, focusing on the character's behaviors and their effects. He utilizes Merrell's theory to explore antihero behaviors and Wilson's theory to examine the effects of these characters. The second study is "The Anti-hero in *Chbosky's The Perks of Being a Wallflower* Movie" by Dinda Siti Rodiyanti Pane and Sri Minda Murni (2015). Their research seeks to identify and describe the antihero characterizations of the main character. The final study is The Portrayal of Antihero in Leigh Bardugo's Six of Crows by Arifka Setya Adiasa (2023). Adiasa's study focuses on describing how the antihero, Kaz Brekker, is depicted in the novel, utilizing Richard Wilson's theory to address the antihero's complexities.

This research differs from previous studies in its choice of subject, focusing on a film with more antihero scenes in a live-action format. The distinctions are as follows: compared to Rifki Fadililah Hidayat's 2019 study, this research differs in the object of study; compared to Dinda Siti Rodiyanti Pane and Sri Minda Murni's 2017 study, it differs both in the object of study and in the theoretical framework used; and compared to Arifka Setya Adiasa's 2023 study,

it differs in its analysis of Scorpion as an antihero [6] in the movie Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion's Revenge (2020), directed by Ethan Spaulding.

To ensure the accuracy of this thesis, the researcher focuses on analyzing the antihero aspects of the main character and the role of the antihero in the movie *Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion Revenge* (2020). The study provides a detailed examination of the antihero's characterization and role as depicted in the film, using Morrell's (2008) theory to explore these elements.

Review of Literature

Character development in literature can occur through dialogue or events that advance the plot, as crafted by the writer. There are two primary methods for understanding characterization: direct and indirect characterization. These approaches are commonly employed by writers to convey character traits, making them especially useful for creating antiheroes, who possess a blend of both positive and negative qualities.

Antiheroes are protagonists who lack the traditional qualities of a typical hero. They are not simply rebellious characters who disregard rules; their motivations and self-perception play a crucial role in the story. A key element in crafting a complex antihero is shaping their morally ambiguous traits and actions into a deeper commentary on humanity (Morrell, 2008). Positioned between heroes and villains, the antihero is a multifaceted character who embodies both admirable qualities and objectionable behavior (Vaage, 2016). Below is a list of antihero characteristics:

1. Antiheroes aren't role models, even though we want to kick ass like they do.

We are drawn to their toughness and rebellious nature, as they break the rules and do things we secretly wish we could. However, because they challenge traditional hero norms and operate within a moral gray area, they don't serve as ideal role models. For instance, Robin Hood, who stole to help the poor, or Aiden Pearce, who exposed Mayor Rushmore's dark secrets, exemplify this complexity.

2. Anti-hero [1] can be selfish and essentially bad people who occasionally are good.

Antiheroes differ from traditional heroes in that they do not adhere to a conventional moral code and often exhibit selfish behavior. While antiheroes may act out of selfishness and display negative traits, they can still make morally right choices. This is often due to their internal conflicts or personal sense of justice. For example, Deadshot from *Suicide Squad* (2016) is a mercenary who has killed many people, but he remains devoted to his daughter and desires a normal life with her, despite ultimately being captured by Batman. Similarly, Kratos from God of War III (2010) is driven by personal vengeance when he chooses to confront Zeus rather than saving Pandora from the box, illustrating how his internal struggles influence his actions.

3. Anti-hero [1] are sometimes unglamorous and unattractive in character as well as in appearance.

Many antiheroes are indifferent to their appearance, often appearing menacing rather than attractive or glamorous like traditional heroes. They typically have physical features that reflect their rough lives, such as scars and disheveled looks. For example, Aiden Pearce in Watch Dogs (2014) wears a hoodie, jeans, and a leather coat, which underscores his gritty and unkempt appearance.

4. Anti-hero can be motivated by self-interest and self-preservation, but there is usually a line antiheroes will not cross, which sets them apart from villains.

Antiheroes are often motivated by self-interest and personal goals, but they maintain a moral boundary that they are unwilling to cross. This boundary might involve avoiding excessive persecution or rejecting the use of overwhelming power. For instance, Deadpool, who is known for killing his enemies, still chooses to protect the innocent. Similarly, Batman operates outside the law but refrains from killing his enemies, differentiating himself from the murderer of his parents.

5. Anti-hero often have motives that are complicated and range from revenge to honor.

Antiheroes are often driven by complex motives, which makes them intriguing. Common motivations include revenge and redemption. For example, antiheroes may seek revenge if they or their loved ones have been wronged, as seen with Scorpion in *Mortal Kombat X* (2015), who seeks vengeance after discovering that Quan Chi murdered his family. Redemption is another motive, where antiheroes strive to atone for past mistakes. This quest for forgiveness can be a significant part of their journey, such as in *G.I. Joe: Snake Eyes* (2021), where Snake Eyes, initially working with the criminal group Cobra to find his father's killer, ultimately forgives the murderer after his quest for vengeance is fulfilled.

6. Anti-hero forced to choose between right and wrong, will sometimes choose wrong because it is easier.

Unlike traditional heroes who adhere to rules, antiheroes often prioritize their own desires over notions of right or wrong. Their decisions are frequently driven by personal gain, as they seek to protect their own interests. For example, DJ in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) does not view either side in the conflict as entirely right or wrong. Instead, he chooses to betray Finn and Rose to Captain Phasma in order to save himself.

7. Anti-hero can play both sides with good guys and bad guys, profiting from both.

Antiheroes often maneuver between good and bad sides to achieve their objectives. They may assist the heroes when it serves their interests but will readily ally with villains if it benefits them. This ability to navigate both sides allows them to gain advantages and remain unpredictable and resourceful. For example, John Constantine in Constantine (2005) calls on Lucifer to cure his cancer, while Hawkeye in Hawkeye: Freefall (2020) pays the supervillain Count Nefaria to help capture the main antagonist, Red Hood, from Marvel.

8. Anti-hero can sometimes be forced to help underdogs, children, or weaker characters, and they sometimes do so voluntarily.

Although antiheroes often have a dark appearance or troubled past, they frequently show compassion toward weaker characters. This tendency arises because helping others provides antiheroes with an opportunity to redeem themselves or improve their own character. For instance, in Red Dead Redemption 2 (2018), Arthur Morgan, who once killed Archie's father, comes to Archie's aid when he sees the boy being bullied by his peers.

9. Anti-hero can embody unattractive traits and behaviors, such as sexist and racist attitudes, and violent reactions when wronged.

Antiheroes often display negative behaviors, such as racism, sexism, or violent reactions when wronged, reflecting the darker aspects of human nature. This complexity allows antiheroes to navigate between right and wrong. For example, Walter White from *Breaking Bad*

(2008-2009) is both a drug dealer and a loving father, but he reacts violently toward his wife after she learns that he killed Hank.

10. Anti-hero can show little or no remorse for bad behaviors.

Unlike traditional heroes who often regret their mistakes such as Superman's remorse after killing General Zod in *Man of Steel* (2013) many antiheroes commit wrong doings without feeling remorse. This lack of guilt highlights the darker aspects of human nature and adds a layer of realism to the story. For instance, in *The Punisher* series (2017), Frank Castle, shaped by his military experience and personal losses, becomes violent and shows no regret for killing the criminals who took his family's life.

11. Anti-hero are usually a mess of contradictions.

By making the line between hero and villain, antiheroes reject the idea of being purely good like traditional heroes. This complexity offers insights into human nature and adds realism to their portrayal. For instance, Red Hood from DC Comics turns to murder to protect Gotham City, while Ghost Rider from Marvel Comics judges evil with deadly and sometimes brutal consequences.

Antiheroes play crucial roles in stories by offering a distinct perspective. Their roles in modern fiction are varied, reflecting society's evolving understanding that morality is not always clear-cut. Here are some examples of antihero roles:

1. Everyman

The term "Everyman" describes characters who symbolize ordinary individuals or daily life, often confronting challenges and issues that many people can relate to. An everyman character will typically have a mix of unsympathetic or even unpleasant traits. Whether depicted as an optimist or a cynic, this character realistically represents humanity (Morrel, 2008). For example, Butcher from *The Boys* (2019) can be considered an Everyman because he is an ordinary person fighting against corrupt superheroes.

2. Vigilante or Tarnished

A vigilante or tarnished individual is someone who seeks justice outside the boundaries of the law. While they might still have connections to the system, they are often ex-cops or former military personnel who have left their roles due to a mistake or an inability to follow the rules (Morrel, 2008). For example, the Punisher from Marvel Comics was once a military man with a family, but after a tragic event that took his family away, he became an antihero, taking justice into his own hands.

3. Charming Criminal

A Charming Criminal is a type of lawbreaker who wins people over with their charm, persuasion, or appealing personality, making them seem more likable or less dangerous despite their illegal activities. While audiences know that crime is wrong, they often can't help but like or sympathize with these charismatic rogues. They're not suited for a typical nine-to-five life, so they break the law, usually through theft or scams (Morrel, 2008). For instance, Joker from the Persona 5 video game exemplifies this as the leader of the Phantom Thieves, using his charisma to lead a rebellious group intent on reforming society.

4. Dark Hero

The term "Dark Hero" refers to hero characters in fiction who possess darker traits or have troubled backgrounds. These heroes are often angst-ridden, misunderstood, and tend to be loners (Morrel, 2008). Unlike traditional heroes, who are usually idealistic and have clear moral codes, dark heroes often appear brooding, with a somber demeanor, and frequently resort to violence. For example, Batman from DC Comics is portrayed as an antihero with a tragic past, having lost his parents, and he often uses violent methods when confronting his enemies.

5. Bad Boys

"Bad Boys" are individuals who reject societal norms and are often seen as rebellious, engaging in unconventional behavior. They are anti-authority and struggle with traditional morality, instead following their own personal code, which can be unsettling to others. Despite their bad habits, they are often portrayed sympathetically. Bad Boys are frequently depicted as hired guns or assassins (Morrel, 2008). For example, Deadshot from DC Comics, a member of the Suicide Squad, is a ruthless killer but follows a personal code of honor, such as refusing to kill women or children.

6. Reluctant Hero

A Reluctant Hero is someone who doesn't initially want to take on the role of a hero but is compelled to do so. This type of character is often a flawed or ordinary individual with a troubled past, who is drawn unwillingly into the narrative or forced into heroic actions (Morrel, 2008). An example is Shinji Ikari from Evangelion (1995), a teenager who is hesitant to pilot his mech and join the battle against the Angels.

7. Loser

A loser is characterized by extreme ineptitude, bad luck, and significant flaws that make them appear particularly unsuited for the challenges they face. Their incompetence often keeps the story on the brink of disaster (Morrel, 2008). An example is Rogue from Marvel Comics, who fits the "loser" antihero role due to her dangerous powers, which prevent her from physically touching others.

8. Outcast

This type of anti-hero often embraces or even takes pride in their status as an outcast. They frequently defy societal norms, behavior, or morality, but the reasons for their alienation from society can vary greatly. They reject a life of luxury, believing that their chosen path is more meaningful or righteous (Morrel, 2008). For instance, D from the manga Go! Go! Loser Rangers! (2021) is an anti-hero who opposes the Dragon Keeper. Despite knowing that the Dragon Keeper is seen as a hero by the public, D recognizes they are not true heroes and demonstrates anti-hero traits by rejecting conventional norms and using violent methods to achieve his goals.

9. Screwball

Anti-heroes often find themselves entangled in romantic or sexually charged situations. Screwball characters are typically showcased in intricate storylines, including mysteries, romantic entanglements, intense sexual tension, and numerous complications. A prime example is Denji from the Chainsaw Man manga (2018). As an innocent teenager, Denji's naivety often leads to humorous situations, and his sexual tension is evident in his fantasies about physical intimacy.

10. Disgraced Hero

A Disgraced Hero was once a true hero but has since fallen from grace and can no longer fulfill that role. This type of anti-hero might have initially been heroic but was ultimately brought down by their own inner struggles or mistakes, though their actions can occasionally still be heroic (Morrel, 2008). For instance, Walter White from Breaking Bad (2013) was a respected chemistry teacher, but after he turned to manufacturing methamphetamine, he became consumed by his desire for wealth, putting his life at risk. Despite this, he still shows love for his family.

11. Oddball

This type of anti-hero is often considered odd, leading others to stay away from them. Their unusual traits and behaviors make them stand out and frequently result in ridicule or avoidance from those around them (Morrel, 2008). For example, Deadpool from Marvel Comics is known for his eccentricities, which cause people to keep their distance from him.

12. Rebel

A Rebel is an anti-hero who opposes authority or tradition, which can include challenging the government or other established systems. This character type resists the status quo, and their motives for rebellion often drive the plot and put them in direct conflict with other characters. Rebels may be tragic figures or achieve their goals; they can work alone or as part of a group (Morrel, 2008). For instance, Magneto from Marvel Comics is a classic example of a rebel, consistently fighting against the government to advocate for mutant rights.

Methodology

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to ensure accurate results, utilizing a methodological tool for analyzing the structure of policies (Seixas et al., 2017). The study focuses on the characterization and roles of the antihero, applying theories from Richard Wilson and Jessica Morrel. This qualitative approach highlights the antiheroic actions of Scorpion as portrayed in the movie. The data source for this research is the 2020 movie *Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion's Revenge* This source is crucial as it directly comes from the film. The analyzed data includes Scorpion's behavior, focusing on his actions, dialogue, and scenes that reflect his antihero traits throughout the movie.

Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the researcher presents several theories that contributed to the development of this study, including those on antihero characterization and the roles of the antihero. The researcher gathered data by examining Scorpion's actions and dialogue.

Figure 1 Scene 00:04:47-00:06:55

In this scene, Hanzo Hasashi (also known as Scorpion) searches for his wife, only to discover she has been murdered by Lin-Kuei ninjas. Upon learning this, he becomes enraged and kills her murderers. This tragic event reveals Scorpion's antihero traits. The scene highlights how antiheroes can display **Antihero can embody unattractive traits and behaviors, such as sexist and racist attitudes, and violent reactions when wronged**. The researcher identifies Scorpion's role as a **Vigilante**, as he takes justice into his own hands outside of legal boundaries, and as a **Dark Hero**, due to his brutal methods of killing his enemies.

Come further and he dies.

Figure 2 Scene 00:07:17-00:07:29

Sub-Zero: Come further and he dies.

Hanzo Hasashi (aka Scorpion): **What do you want?**

Sub-Zero: On your Knees.

The highlighted line reflects Hanzo Hasashi's (also known as Scorpion) deep concern as he attempts to save his son, who is being threatened by Sub-Zero. This example shows that antiheroes can be **Antihero can sometimes be forced to help underdogs, children, or weaker characters, and they sometimes do so voluntarily**. In this case, the researcher identifies the role of a **Reluctant Hero** in Scorpion, as he must obey Sub-Zero's commands to protect his son, despite not wanting to be in such a situation.

What do you want?

Figure 3 00:22:02 – 00:22:04

In this scene, Hanzo Hasashi (aka Scorpion) encounters Quan-Chi instead of Shinnok, and Quan-Chi offers him the chance to seek revenge on Sub-Zero by fighting for him. Hanzo accepts the offer. This moment illustrates the complexity of **Antihero often have motives that**

are complicated and range from revenge to honor. Scorpion's decision to strike a deal with Quan-Chi, a villainous figure, highlights how antiheroes may compromise their moral code to achieve their objectives. This scene also reflects the role of the **Reluctant Hero**, as Scorpion's deal allows him to return to Earth to exact vengeance for his family.

Figure 4 scene 00.27.10-00.27.26

Johnny Cage: That must be the bad guy.

In this scene, when Liu-Kang, Sonya, and Johnny arrive at the tournament, they encounter Scorpion, whose spectral ninja appearance cloaked in darkness with a fearsome mask symbolizes the Dark Hero. Johnny Cage's comment highlights Scorpion's antihero traits, specifically how antiheroes can be unglamorous and unappealing both in character and appearance. From this, it's evident that Scorpion embodies the **Dark Hero** role, as Dark Heroes often have a menacing and intimidating presence.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the researcher identified several antihero characteristics in Scorpion, as defined by Jessica Morrel (2008). These include: "Antiheroes can display unattractive traits and behaviors, such as sexist and racist attitudes, and violent reactions when wronged" with two instances; "Antiheroes are sometimes unglamorous and unattractive in both character and appearance" with two instances; "Antiheroes can show little or no remorse for bad behaviors" with eight instances (the most dominant trait); "Antiheroes often have motives that are complex, ranging from revenge to honor" with four instances; "Antiheroes may be compelled to help underdogs, children, or weaker characters, and they sometimes do so voluntarily" with two instances; and "Antiheroes are driven by self-interest and self-preservation, but they typically have boundaries that set them apart from villains" with three instances. From the eleven possible traits, the researcher only identified seven in Scorpion, with the most prominent being his lack of remorse for bad behavior. This is likely due to Hanzo Hasashi's transformation into Scorpion after a personal tragedy, which led him to lose his humanity and become consumed by revenge.

Regarding the antihero roles based on Morrel (2008), the researcher identified five out of twelve possible roles: Dark Hero in ten scenes, Vigilante in nine scenes, Rebel in one scene, Disgraced Hero in two scenes, and Reluctant Hero in four scenes. Dark Hero was the most dominant role due to Scorpion's tragic backstory, which shaped his dark personality and traits. The Rebel role appeared only once, as Scorpion primarily targeted those responsible for using and killing his family.

The researcher compared these findings with previous studies. The first comparison is with Rifky Fadililah Hidayat (2019), where both Venom and Scorpion exhibit antihero traits, but

their portrayals differ significantly. Venom is characterized by internal conflicts and a search for purpose, while Scorpion is driven by clear motives of revenge and honor, with a notable lack of remorse for his actions. This contrast highlights the distinct contexts and narratives of the two characters, with Venom's story focusing on personal struggles and Scorpion's on violent retribution.

The second comparison is with Siti Dinda Rodiyanti and Sri Minda Murni (2015), where the antihero traits of Charlie and Scorpion differ due to their narrative contexts. Charlie is introspective and emotionally driven, while Scorpion's characterization centers on action, revenge, and violence. This comparison emphasizes the adaptability of the antihero archetype to various storytelling frameworks.

The final comparison is with Arifki Setya Adiasa (2023), where Kaz Brekker and Scorpion offer contrasting portrayals of antiheroes. Kaz demonstrates a more balanced and complex character, showing empathy and humility, while Scorpion's characterization is driven by revenge and darker, lonelier traits. This highlights the diversity in antihero portrayals, with Kaz balancing his darker qualities with positive traits, while Scorpion is more singularly focused on vengeance

Conclusion and Suggestion

In Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion's Revenge (2020), Scorpion is portrayed as an antihero defined by his unattractive traits and behaviors, particularly his violent reactions when wronged. Numerous examples show him unleashing his rage without hesitation. Despite his fearsome reputation, Scorpion is depicted as unglamorous and unattractive, both in character and appearance. His rugged appearance reflects the pain and suffering he has endured. However, there is a moral boundary he refuses to cross, indicating that he isn't entirely on the side of evil, especially when he aids the Earthrealm heroes. The predominance of the Dark Hero role stems from Scorpion's tragic past and the brutal environment he inhabits. The Rebel role is less prominent, as his rebellion is mainly directed at those who have personally wronged him.

The researcher hopes that future researchers will improve upon this study of antiheroes and contribute further to the understanding of antihero characters. It is recommended that future researchers explore different subjects or theories related to antiheroes for their theses. The researcher also encourages paying closer attention to the concept of antiheroes, as it provides valuable insights for those looking to create antihero characters in their literary works.

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