

Paladiary Day 17: Magnificent Bastards

I am a huge fan of the Magnificent bastard trope. My personal first introduction to such a character was General Tarquin from Order of the Stick. Other characters that scratch that itch for me include Nicodemus from the Dresden Files, Havelock Vetinari from Discworld, and David Xanatos from Gargoyles. In a recent discussion with my partner, I realized that part of why this trope might appeal to me is that, in some ways, it can be considered an opposite, foil, or inverse to the Paladin Archetype.

Now, admittedly, this could be a stretch. It's possible I just like the trope for its own merits and am over-eager to associate everything that is important to me, personally as a thing for Paladins as an archetype generally. And there are certainly other more direct Anti-paladins, such as dark or fallen knights, etc.

But I really do think there's something to this. The magnificent Bastard is a somewhat subjective trope, and any villain might get the label if they sufficiently get and hold the audience's attention. But that's part of the point- MB's are *charismatic*. What comes across as charismatic to a person is, in itself, subjective of course. But the point is the villain is usually charming and has a presence. To bring back D&D terms, charisma is also the relevant stat for a Paladin- a paladin may have strength or wits, but what's fundamental to the archetype is conviction. Which brings me to my second point- most magnificent bastards are principles. They have internal rules or goals. They have lines they won't cross, whether moral or practical. As my very first MB, Tarquin, once said "there must be some order". So, while MB's are not necessarily Lawful in a D&D sense, they have the same rigidity and association with structure that I associate with Paladins.

So that's what it comes down to for me. As a self-identified Paladin, a Magnificent Bastard villain strikes me as a worthy opponent, a shadow-archetype, someone with the same force of character and commitment to order, but with opposing goals. And that leads to some degree of recognition and satisfaction, even in opposition.