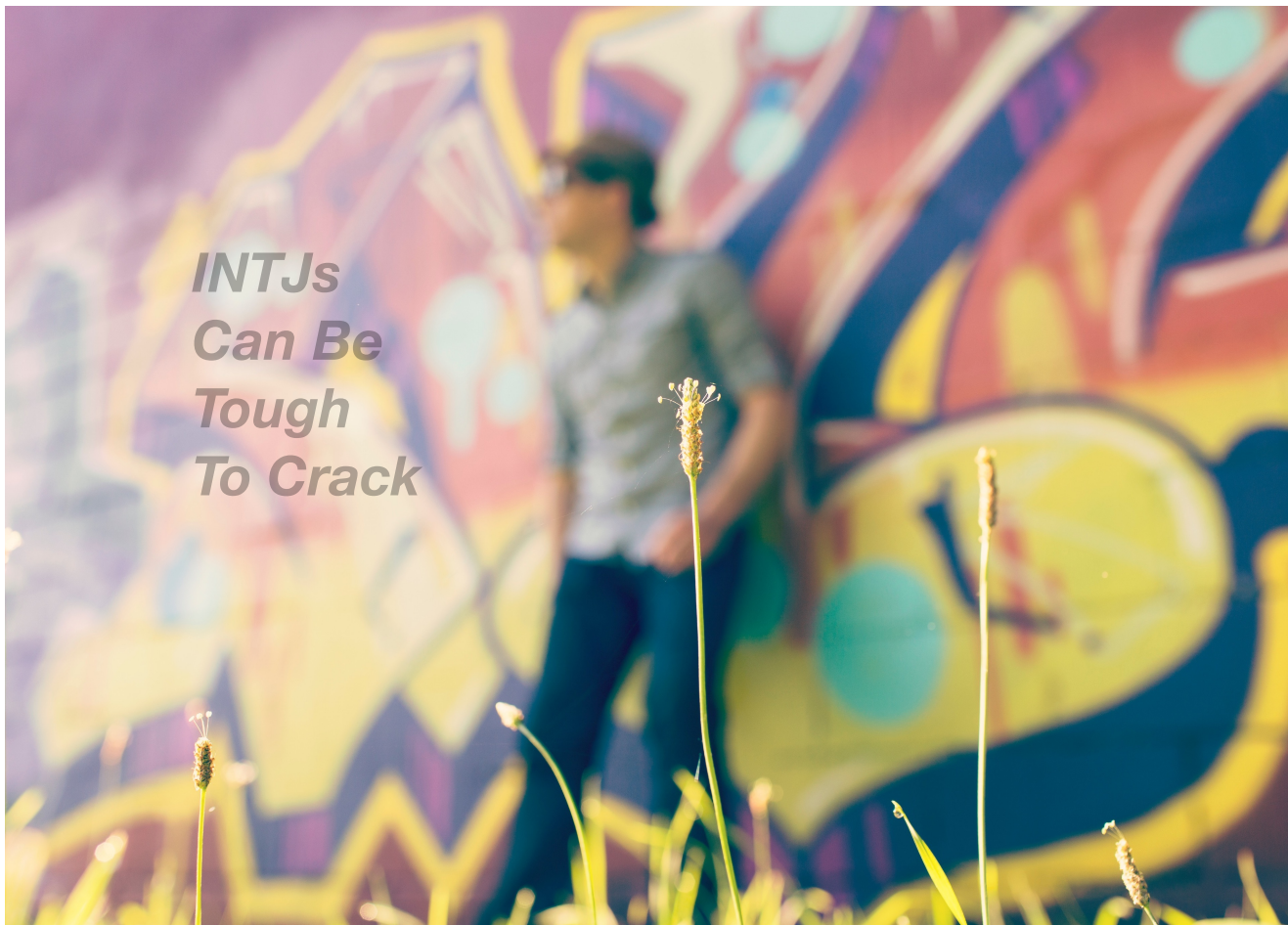

CHARACTER DESIGN HANDBOOK

The Character Most Writers Get Wrong (And How To Fix It)

by *Mandy Wallace*



Here's an incredible tool for writers. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a personality tool that savvy writers use to create deeply complex and startlingly realistic characters. Yes, it's as complicated as the name implies. But worry not. There's a simple explanation. And it's worth your time if you want to take your fiction to the next level. MBTI is a personality tool, yes. But this isn't astrology. It's a science-backed explanation of how humans process and use information. Fortune 500 companies use MBTI to find the perfect match for high-level career positions. People use it to make sense of their lives, to find spouses, and to understand their children. Writers use it too. But not every writer uses it wisely.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a powerful writer's tool for creating complex, realistic characters.

The Most Abused Personality Type in Fiction

Since INTJs are among the rarest personality types (among women, INTJ is the rarest type), you might be surprised it's the most often used yet least understood type in fiction.

You'll find INTJs cast in villain roles everywhere. From Professor Moriarty and Lex Luther to Emperor Palpatine and Khan, INTJs are the personality type that people love to hate.

Of course, these examples are just from fiction. In real life, do-gooders like Nikola Tesla and Isaac Newton were INTJs. Jane Austin and CS Lewis were also INTJs.

So why is the divide so vast between these real life INTJ heroes and the villains they become in fiction?

INTJs: The Writer's Greatest Challenge?

If you want to write a great story, you need to know the pitfalls when it comes to INTJ character design. Don't feel bad. If writing an INTJ were easy, every writer would do it. Here are just a few reasons why INTJ characters are a challenge for writers.

Getting to Know an INTJ is Tough

Getting to know an INTJ is tough, and that can make them tough to write.

Most INTJs hate small talk. To the INTJ, talking about inanities like the weather and how many siblings you have is like slamming your head against a stone wall—painful, with no discernible payoff.

An INTJ who is genuinely interested in you is more likely to ask how you deal with despair when confronted with mortality or how your concept of god has evolved through the years. This startles people. And the INTJ has become aware that others find this line of discussion uncomfortable.

Since small talk is still too painful, though, most INTJs withdraw instead.



The magic INTJ elixir: perceived arrogance + perceived lack of emotion + perceived unpredictability + intelligence = prime fictional villain.

INTJs are also terrible at explaining their thoughts sometimes. This makes it even tougher to understand them. The INTJ doesn't think linearly. Instead, the INTJ's thoughts are a complex cloud of relationships and patterns. And many of the ideas and relationships aren't thought out in words. That makes translating their thoughts into language extremely difficult.

In fact, explaining things to others is often so exhausting that if your INTJ struggles to explain something to you, you can bank that he has both a high opinion of you and your intelligence.



INTJs Appear Unemotional

Most INTJs have been called unfeeling machines. This is because INTJs hide their emotions. To the INTJ, it's just polite and appropriate. And communication is often detached from emotional content. To many other types, it makes the INTJ seem robotic and unfeeling. This makes them easy scapegoats for villain designers.

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INTJs Seem Unpredictable

- INTJs are extremely unconventional by most other type's standards.
- The INTJ doesn't care about social rules or the standard way of doing things. He cares only if something works
- INTJs abhor going along with inefficient or ineffective tasks just because they've always been done that way. And the social conventions that keep the outdated in

place have zero effect on the INTJ.

- The INTJ will work tirelessly to change flawed methods, moving quickly and without “permission.”
- Since INTJs aren’t always great at explaining their methods, nor do they understand that other people can’t see the patterns and problems that seem obvious to them, their actions can sometimes appear unpredictable and lacking good cause to outsiders.

INTJs Seem Arrogant

INTJs are very confident about their conclusions, ideas, and projects. This often comes across to others—even other INTJs—as arrogance. Really, the INTJ just knows he’s analyzed far more data than those around him. He also has the experience of being proved right more often than not. This is because the INTJ is a far more long-range and analytical thinker than any other type. So the INTJ’s predictions aren’t tied to personal experience or limited to what has “always happened before.” Instead, the INTJ takes into account new data, changes, and shifts in trends to predict future outcomes.



INTJs aren’t as closed-off, harsh, or arrogant as their expressions sometimes indicate.

All of this analysis, coupled with an inability to explain these processes to others, plus their ultimate need to create systems that work means that the INTJ takes confident action while ignoring complainers, naysayers, and doubters. So what you have is a man who knows what he is doing and doesn’t care what other people think about it. The disdainful smirk he’s wearing may come from his resentment at doing the right thing for others while they criticize him for it. But it also adds to the “arrogant” perception. The other problem?

INTJs often have as much trouble understanding others as others have understanding them.

INTJs are so used to systems thinking that what seems glaringly obvious to them isn’t always obvious to others. This is genuinely confusing to the INTJ. Some INTJs are openly disdainful in these situations, assuming that the other person is not just different but stupid. This is because INTJs have just as much trouble understanding others as others have understanding the INTJ. This is a character flaw worth exploring in your story. But be sure to include the INTJ’s motivation and lack of social skills here. This is especially important if

you write from the INTJ’s point of view.

As the writer, *your character’s* blindspot should never become *your* blindspot.

INTJs Are Wicked Smart



Expect
blunt,
honest
answers.

If you
don't want
the truth,
don't ask.

#intj

- “Smart” doesn’t really explain the INTJ’s thinking, though. Because they don’t just memorize data. They break it down to its principles to understand how it all works together and what it implies about every other fact. This makes them incredibly insightful by other people’s standards.
- Objectively, INTJs have the highest collective IQ of any other type.
- Their Se function constantly and unconsciously gathers data from their environment providing the INTJ with accurate “impressions.” These “impressions” sometimes appear uncanny or bordering on the prescient to others. It isn’t magic, of course. It’s just data gathering and analysis. But because the INTJ discards the data once he’s formed an impression and shares only the outcome of his thoughts, it seems to others that the INTJ picked up knowledge that he could not have because nobody shared it with him.
- You can probably guess that teachers love the INTJ, but people with secrets don’t.
- To some, this intuitive quality can be very intimidating. And it’s prime villain material because a foe who “knows everything” seems unbeatable. (This doesn’t mean the INTJ actually knows anything at all, but it’s how some perceive them.)

So what, as writers, can we do with all this know-how about the INTJ?

What Does All This Mean?

This magic elixir: perceived arrogance + perceived lack of emotion + perceived unpredictability + intelligence = prime fictional villain. This doesn't mean you shouldn't cast your INTJ in the villain role. Let's be honest, INTJs make great villains.

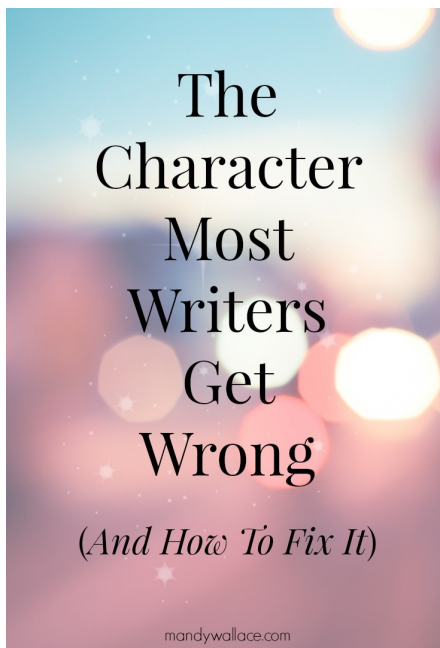
The problem comes when the writer uses the above as given qualities without exploring cause and motivation. This mistake results in the dreaded cardboard character, kills the story, and reveals an embarrassing lack of insight into character. Here's what to do instead.

Writers: Get To Know Your INTJ

Ask Your INTJ Direct Questions

If you're lucky enough to find an INTJ in the wild (only 2% of the population is INTJ), ask direct questions. But, fair warning, you're going to get an exceedingly honest answer. So ask at your peril. INTJs are exceedingly direct and often appreciate this quality in others. You may even find that the more "inappropriate" questions garner the most interest from your INTJ. So ask away.

Master Your INTJ The Objective Way



An overview of the INTJ.

- See what INTJs think of themselves through their INTJ Pinterest boards.
- Is your INTJ character middle-aged or a child? Find out how INTJs change through different life stages.
- Check out the Ultimate List of Famous INTJs (from real life and fiction).
- One of the best insights into the INTJ mind comes from YouTuber, Cztanu. He's an INTJ who creates video advice for INTJs and the people who want to date or understand them. He covers topics like: how to know if an INTJ is interested in you, warnings to the INTJ's lover, how to keep an INTJ interested, and what's up with INTJ communication delays. He's so good at explaining himself, it's almost hard to believe he's an INTJ. But watch his videos, and you'll doubt no more. Pay particular attention to the way his minimal expressions break out on his face as though from prison, how he breaks up his dialogue with long thoughtful pauses, and how he interrupts himself with seemingly random thoughts. These are classic INTJ qualities.

INTJ characters may be tough to nail, but they're worth the effort.

Of course, INTJs are only one of the sixteen character types we writers can master using MBTI. If you want to know the second the rest of the MBTI for writers series goes live, **[add your name to the free updates list](#)**. I hope you do.

About The Writer

hi! i'm mandy.



A Little About Me

INTJ + HSP female. It's a complicated merger. I love to write. I collect books. I love to dance. Girls on bikes are pretty amazing. And when I listen to Dubstep, I'm pretty sure I can take over the world.

My Writing Philosophy

The muse is a fickle bitch. Don't rely on her. Writing is its own reward, but I still want to publish. I believe in show up, shut up, and write—even if the words suck. I believe in skills over talent, tenacity over luck, and habit over willpower. If you sit down at the same time everyday and write, eventually you finish.

At The Mandy Wallace Site

I'm focused 100% on launching a writing career in fiction. And MandyWallace.com is where I write about writing.

I share articles about all the tricks and skills on writing I pick up along the way. That way you get to skip learning the hard way like I do. I reveal where I stumble and where I find backdoors into publishing.

Later I'll break down the greats, from *The Odyssey* to *The Goblet of Fire*, so we can steal their techniques. Want to chat with me? Get in touch.

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Thanks for reading. I hope this article made writing just a little bit easier.

- Mandy