Good - You root for the character and they aren’t cast in a light to make them seem bad. They probably will mess up, but it’s clear they have a heart of gold. If they seem like a hero who hunts animals, put that as good.

Neutral - When a person murders someone but is cast in a likeable light. Think Loki, antiheroes, James Bond. You want to root for the character, but you know they mess up and sometimes make really bad decisions.

Evil - murders people and seems to be in a bad light. If the character is a trickster and likeable, then put them as neutral. If the character has some positive qualities but seems unlikeable, then castthem as evil.

Day - This character is in daylight, wears white, or has words associated with glowing/brightness. Can be the literal sun or a star.

Night - This character is in nighttime, darkness, shade, wears dark clothes, has association with grey or black. Can be a moon or a shadow. Sometimes this is implied: at the bottom of the sea it’s dark. In the shade of a forest it’s dark.

Associate the items in the story with the closest character or the character they seem to relate to. If they don’t relate to anything then just leave them be.\

Protagonist/Antagonist/Neutral

These tags serve to tell us the role of characters in the story to determine their importance to the narrative.

Protagonist -

A protagonist is a central character or limited set of central characters. The story revolves around or follows this character and we are often rooting for them. There will be people or obstacles pitted against them, and those obstacles may be internal or external. They have some kind of goal to overcome, internal or external.

An internal goal is often a trait they grapple with. For example, a character may start a story afraid of cats. Maybe they don’t explicitly say ‘I want to overcome my fear of cats’, but every day they have nightmares about cats and they don’t want nightmares anymore. This is an internal goal.

An external goal is something happening in the world they want to change. Maybe the character also needs to create a dress for a masquerade. This is an external goal, they’re making something physical happen in the world.

In fact, the protagonist may do evil things or be morally questionable, or just morally neutral. A protagonist may even be an unwilling protagonist and want nothing to do with their own story. Maybe this dress-maker despises sewing, and the cat king of the forest has coerced them into making the dress for the annual forest masquerade. The protagonist burns down the forest to get retribution and overcome their cat phobia, and gosh darn it you’re cheering because the cat was so mean, and the protagonist has developed courage!

Is the protagonist a good person for burning down a forest? This doesn’t matter. If the story centers around this person as the main character and you’re (probably) rooting for them then it’s the protagonist. It is important not to confuse ‘good’ with protagonist and ‘evil’ with antagonist. Think: is this a main character we’re following around?

If there are sidekicks who significantly help a main character, that is not a protagonist. That is a neutral character who helps the protagonist. For example, Momotaro has a dog, a quail and a monkey help in his journey. The story does not center around those characters, so they are not protagonists, even if they are still important to his journey.

Antagonist-

An adversary of the protagonist who plays a large role in the story. Their goals are somehow different from the goals of the protagonist and come in conflict with them. We are often not rooting for these goals. The most classic idea of an antagonist is the old school villain, but it’s important not to equate villainy with antagonism for this task.

Take the dress-making protagonist, but let’s setup a new scenario for them. This time they want to make a dress for their younger sister who has never owned a pretty article of clothing in her life. However, their neighbor wants to buy all the fabric in the village to sew quilts for all the elderly in town. Is this neighbor a big evil villain? Probably not, but since they’re buying all the fabric, and the story isn’t centered around them, they’re against the protagonist’s goal - how will the protagonist sew a dress with no fabric?

Maybe this fabric-buying neighbor is an absentminded person who doesn’t realize there are already way too many quilts in the town. The village economy is breaking due to excessive quilt charity and if the neighbor creates more they’ll draw the ire of the prime minister who wants to develop a dress-making business sector to temper the enthusiastic quilters. So you’re not rooting for the quilt-maker, but are they a ‘bad person’? It doesn’t matter, their goal is not one you’re rooting for and it’s against the antagonist’s goal of making a dress.

The questions to ask are: does this character’s goal go against the protagonist’s? Are they the an important character? Do they foil the main character?

Neutral -

There are few ways to be a neutral character. Sometimes our characters serve other purposes in the plot besides being a central character to follow or a character pitted against the protagonist. They could assist the protagonist towards their goal, or they could assist the antagonist. When tagging for a neutral character, first ensure they’re not a character the story revolves around and therefore not a protagonist. Next, ensure they’re not foiling the protagonist in some way.

Here are a few high-level ways this can play out using the sewing and quilting story:

-A side character who helps the protagonist, but who is only mentioned once or twice. Maybe the sewer has a best friend who knits who also wants to overthrow the quilters.

-A sidekick who does something to foil the protagonist’s plans, but they didn’t mean to or want to, and it wasn’t their main goal. They would be neutral, as their goals weren’t opposed to the protagonist in an obvious way, they’re still aligned with the protagonist. Maybe the knitter needs to buy a quilt one day because moths ate theirs.

-Characters who are more set-dressing than characters. They may not even speak. They’re just there. Maybe the prime minister never appears in the story as a physical person and is only there to drive the stakes of stopping the quilt-makers.

Good/Neutral/Evil

The purpose of these tags are to give sentiment to how characters seem to be morally presented in the story.

It’s very important here to be sensitive to bias and read with the most empathetic lens you can. Maybe you (the reader) are a vegetarian and find the act of killing animals reprehensible. You’re tagging a Blackfeet story on a bison-hunter who is presented as a protagonist and provider for their family, who won’t survive the harsh northern Montana winters without bison meat. Unless the story goes onto the negative aspects of killing bison and shows this as a net bad for the main character’s welfare or overall community, then this tag would likely be good, even if you personally consider hunting evil.

It’s not always possible to recognize this kind of bias, and of course there will be differences of opinion on good/evil, but do your best to maintain mindfulness of the cultures and contexts of the stories.

Good-

Are the actions of the character lauded? Are the character’s goals overall helpful to the community or the character’s overall happiness? Do you finish the story and go, ‘wow, that is a hero!’? These are all indicators of good.

Neutral-

Is the character set dressing who does nothing of substance to deem good or bad? That’s the clearest neutral tag.

However, there are characters whose actions don’t seem to help or hurt anyone. Maybe a character does something so mundane it doesn’t ring as good/evil.

There are also characters who both help and hurt in abundance and blur the lines between good and evil. Many tricksters fall in this category. These would all be neutral.

Evil-

Does the character’s goals and actions have negative effects on a community or on other characters? Does the story present the character’s actions as bad and vilify them? Do you finish the story and have clear distaste for the character? These are all indications of evil.

Maybe the evil character does one or two good or neutral things, but your gut instinct is to say ‘this is a bad person, and it seems the story wants us to see them as bad’. Then tag them as evil.