

# Deus Ex Machina

## Definition of Deus Ex Machina

The term deus ex machina refers to the circumstance where an implausible concept or a divine [character](#) is introduced into a storyline, for the purpose of resolving its [conflict](#) and procuring an interesting outcome.

The use of deus ex machina is discouraged, for the reason that the presence of it within a plot is viewed as a sign of an ill-structured plot. The explanation that the critics provide for this view is that the writer's sudden resort to random, insupportable, and unbelievable twists for the purpose of procuring an ending, highlights the inherent deficiencies of the plot. Hence, deus ex machina is a rather debatable, and often criticized, form of literary device.

The term is Latin for “god out of the machine,” and has its origins in ancient Greek theatre. It denotes scenes in which a crane (machine) was used to lower actors or statues playing a god or gods (deus) onto the stage to set things right, usually near the end of the play.

## Requirements of Deus Ex Machina

Deus ex machinas are solutions. They are not to be seen as unexpected twists and turns in the storyline that end up making things worse, and not as something that contributes towards changing the understanding of the story. Further, it must be shown that the problem solved by a deus ex machina is one that is unsolvable or otherwise hopeless.

It is also that they are sudden or unexpected. This means that the inherent capacity of deus ex machina to solve the mystery is not apparent until the time the device is actually employed to procure a viable ending for the plot. However, if some other type of intervention – like common sense – could have been employed to procure the same result, then no matter how sudden the solution is, it would not be termed as deus ex machina.

Euripides was one of the most prominent users of deus ex machina. Some scholars believe that he was the first writer to employ the device in his tragedies. His work is often met with criticism for the way he structured his plots, and for his underlying ideas.

## Deus Ex Machina Examples

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### Example #1: *Medea* (By Euripides)

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When Medea is shown in the chariot of the sun god Helios, the god himself isn't present. From her vantage point in the chariot, she watches the grieving Jason. The [argument](#) goes about that this specific scene is an illustration of the employment of the deus ex machina device within the plot of the [tragedy](#).

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### Example #2: *Hippolytus* (By Euripides)

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There are three deities present in this play: the jealous Aphrodite, Artemis the object of Hippolytus' affection, and vengeful Poseidon. However, it is only Artemis who appears. She explains to Theseus that Hippolytus was innocent all along, and that it was Aphrodite who had sinned and caused all the grief. Artemis also promises to destroy any man Aphrodite ever loves.

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### Example #3: *Andromache* (By Euripides)

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In the end of the play, Thetis the sea goddess appears to Peleus. She comes to take Peleus back with her to her ocean home. The play ends with Peleus going with Thetis his wife, into the ocean.

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### Example #4: *Helen* (By Euripides)

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Theoclymenos is furious when Helen and Menelaus trick him and run away together. In consequence, he tries to murder his sister for not telling him that Menelaus was not dead. The demi-gods Castor and Polydeuces – Helen's brothers, and sons of Zeus and Leda – appear astonishingly to interrupt

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### Example #5: *Orestes* (By Euripides)

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Apollo appears on stage to bring things in order. Apollo clears the situation by informing the characters (and the [audience](#)) that Helen had been put amongst the stars, and therefore Menelaus should return to Sparta. He also orders Orestes to travel to Athens to stand trial in their court, and ensures him of his subsequent acquittal. Further, Apollo states that Orestes will marry Hermione, and that Pylades and Electra will also marry.

### **Function of Deus Ex Machina**

The tool of deus ex machina remains a popular one even today, being employed in modern films, novels, and short stories. However the scope of the term has been effectively widened to present it as a multifaceted tool.

It can be employed for the purposes of moving a story forward, or when the writer has “painted himself into a corner” and finds no other escape. He uses this to surprise the audience, to bring a happy ending to the tale, or as a comedic device.