

Say Good-Bye to Mary-Sue

These are my final words on the subject of Mary-Sues, so before you read this, please, please, read *everything* I've written that's Mary-Sue related because I don't think reading this before reading everything else would make any sense. That being said, for my final words, where do I begin?

The first guide I wrote, What They Are and What to do if you See Them, was a blatant argument towards the person that called my first fan fiction a Mary-Sue fic, published way back in 2005, but the guide was published in 2009. Now, if any of you remember that fic, yes, that story was poorly developed, but the "critic" could have handled their part better by actually taking the time to tell me what the heck a "Mary-Sue" was instead of just saying "look it up." In the subject of Mary-Sues, looking it up, and taking the test, is useless. Absolutely useless. Everyone has a different opinion, and if there are two people who have the same opinion, the line is drawn at different lengths, and a resulting number on the famed Mary-Sue Litmus Test doesn't tell me how to fix my story or what I should look out for. It's just a number on a scale, and, during the testing, it felt suffocating, like I wasn't allowed to have any remarkable traits in my characters.

Not to mention that I did try and defend my work and even said something along the lines of, "Well, other people write Mary-Sues successfully," only to be smacked back down with the person saying that I wasn't good enough to write with Mary-Sues (so Mary-Sues are a good thing?). It seemed like no matter how many answers I tried to get out of the critics, and how much I wanted to continue my story, no one was going to let me without ranting about "another bad fic." In the end, I just wanted to be left alone and deleted the story, but every story I posted after that, I cringed when I received a review, especially if said review is more than a paragraph long. Only recently have seeing that I've gotten a review excites me again. It's traumatic when people keep telling you to just dump the story that you worked so hard on, and, yes, I did work hard on that story.

I've read some people claim that Mary-Sues are characters whose creators just cobble together with random bits, but that's not always true. I worked hard on my characters and stories, and it was still flamed to hell. That story was written when I was fifteen and just barely getting into writing stories. At that time, I just focused on my spelling and grammar and thought that was good enough. Creating characters, a role, choosing which point of view was hard for me; writing is a skill that takes practice! It's not as if you can just read ten or fifteen guides on how to develop a character and the plot in the story and suddenly become a master at it. So that story, what I had, was hard work. I laugh at that story now, but the reviews I had gotten still haunt me, and it still makes me angry. And because I defended the story I worked so hard on, my username was on a "Wall of Shame" on someone's profile page, and that story was copied and pasted with bolded commentaries in the story on Live Journal making fun of it even more—as if the reviews weren't bad enough. If I knew I could have reported it, I would have, but it's too late now.

So, according to the Mary-Sue Killers:

- Specifically for fan-fiction, watch out for any story with CanonxOC pairings, because, apparently, 99.9% of the time, the OC is female, and 99.9% of those female OCs are Mary-Sues.
- Every story they deem as "Mary-Sue" should be flamed and insulted at all cost until it's deleted, even at the cost of hurting the person's feelings to the point of never writing again (because I had seriously thought about it for a long time).
- If the person isn't smart enough to "look it up" or "take the test," they shouldn't even be on writing sites.
- Because they are the be-all end-all of whether a story is Mary-Sue or not, their stories are what should be strived for, even when they make separate accounts for "writing" and "flaming," and won't share their stories to provide examples of what sort of excellence should be strived for. They claim that they don't want their story revenge-flamed (if they didn't want their stories flamed back, they shouldn't have flamed in the first place).
- If the author defends his or her story, they are automatically immature and should be flamed and humiliated without mercy.
- If the author refuses to listen to us, they get their names on a wall.

I wasn't lazy; I just hadn't gathered enough experience. How could I know everything at fifteen? Just

because a twelve year old managed to publish an epic novel, doesn't mean I could have. Everyone is different, and learn at different rates, so why should I be ashamed of my first story, or any of my stories for that matter?

Four years later, by writing my own Mary-Sue guides, I learned exponentially. They say that you learn ninety percent of what you teach, and that seems to be true for me. I got to finally rave and rant all I wanted, so I was relieving four years worth of pent up rebellion because I had essentially written "I don't care what your terms are. I made my own, explained them with all the details I could manage, and if you don't agree, you can go to hell," and I learned on my own what it means to develop characters, plots, writing styles, and a bunch of stuff I had no clue about before (because no one was telling me before without mentioning "Mary-Sue"). The Mary-Sue: Who is She? guide was for me, so the next time that someone claimed that my character is a Mary-Sue, I can just direct the person to my research and say, "I do know what Mary-Sues are, and I do have my own original and in-depth opinion of them, and, damn it, I'm doing my best not to write Mary-Sues. Wait until my story is finished before spouting out the red-alert because I may actually answer for all of the 'abnormalities' that happen within the story." And if there happens to be stuff that go unanswered, then this is the time that I can hear about it and edit my work.

So, really, the guides were for me more than anything, but I am so happy to see that other people got a kick out of them as well, and to see people getting back into writing, and gaining courage to try something new or "taboo." I always encourage people to write their own guides if mine don't fit your own opinions, but no one has really sent me a link to their own guides if I hadn't found it already. My opinion shouldn't be the be-all end-all of Mary-Sueism, and even though I've been dubbed the Mary-Sue guru (thanks Rouge!), I'm no expert. I just have a lot to say, and there's a lot I disagree on when it comes to the typical interpretation of Mary-Sue.

Thank you all for letting me know that you've enjoyed what I've had to say, even if some of it was unconventional (who the heck actually encourages overpowered super characters?), but there's still one thing I would like to say, and this is probably the weirdest thing, after five years of writing Mary-Sue guides, you would expect for me to tell you.

Do not believe in Mary-Sues.

Seriously. There's no such thing as Mary-Sues. Everything I've written in the last five years was about lack of research, development, and skill. That's it. The next time someone tells you that they think you've written a Mary-Sue, press them for more information. Ask them not to use the term "Mary-Sue" so they can give you a more in-depth critique. If they tell you to "look it up," you can tell them that you have, and that it's too broad of a term to use. Otherwise, don't pay them any mind. If they can't take the time to tell you what they think needs another look at, you shouldn't be bothered to take them any more seriously than the other Mary-Sue haters that think they have an original opinion.

Honestly, I wish I hadn't have had to write these guides. Even though I met a lot of awesome people and got to read personal experiences from them, not to mention my guides being mentioned at Fanime every year (thanks OneAmahira), I truly wish my guides weren't needed. I wish Paula Smith never gave underdevelopment a name because now no one knows what she thought "Mary-Sues" were because they don't search for her opinion on "great vs. bad" fan fiction stories, and now no one knows how to be specific enough to actually be helpful to the fellow writer. I'll say it again:

Do not believe in Mary-Sues.

It's more drama than what it's worth.

If you see this, I implore you not to use this term to critique a story ever again. Please. And if someone tells you that you have a "Mary-Sue" on your hands, it's one hundred percent your choice of whether or not to follow whatever they say. If you've read all of my guides, then you probably have an idea on what can be improved on, but it's still your choice. Many people may hate these so-called Mary-Sues, but you are allowed to write bad stories. You're allowed to keep the bad stories up. You can edit your stories at any

time you want, or even not at all. Where on this site does it say that you're not allowed to have "Mary-Sues" or bad stories? Trust me, you won't find it. I've looked.

I would have been so much happier if I had never heard of Mary-Sues. Yes, I probably wouldn't have written my guides and probably not have done as much writing research, and my stories wouldn't be as good, but I would have been enjoying my stories more if I didn't have to keep looking over my shoulder. I would also look forward to reviews instead of feeling dread in the back of my mind, even after five years of writing Mary-Sue guides.

Sucky stories are part of practicing and developing your skill. It takes time. There's nothing to be ashamed of if your story isn't great, or even good. You tried, and that's always worth some recognition because writing stories aren't as easy for some people as others claim it to be. Be proud of yourself today, and look forward to your future improvements.

Does this mean that I won't answer any of your Mary-Sue questions? No, I'll do my best to answer your questions, and I'll also give you as much encouragement as I can muster, but in all honesty, the answer would more than likely be, "I can't say for sure until the story is written and finished," because that's the only way anyone would know whether or not your story is fleshed out or not. You can bounce ideas off of me—that's different from telling you whether or not your story is developed enough—but I would like to never utter "Mary-Sue" again, if I can help it.

So, everyone, I don't think I've asked you for anything, but help me spread the word. Tell people that you don't need to use the term "Mary-Sue" in a critique or a review. End all abuse against writers because they wrote a "Mary-Sue." Calling their story a Mary-Sue and telling them to delete their story isn't tough love, it's just tearing down a person's confidence in order for them to feel superior. Treat it like the Review Initiative, except pledge that you won't use the term "Mary-Sue" in whatever review you give, unless it's to defend a writer's work and to tell them not to pay attention to the label. Help create a community that allows a person to be as creative as they endeavor to be, and learn how to improve at their own pace with the help of gentle nudges every once in a while. What do you say? Will you help me spread the word?