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## The anti-hero: describing Rick in Casablanca

Rick, a kindhearted man with a strong moral compass, is far from the most detestable of the characters in Casablanca. While he demonstrates some qualities and actions that could lead to the assumption that he is loathsome, he is not to be confused with his cowardly counterparts. His tireless charade at the beginning of Casablanca may give the wrong impression as he appears cynical and aloof, detached not just from other people but from the traumatising events happening around him. This quickly changes as the film progresses and his strong moral compass shines through, proving he is undoubtedly “at heart a sentimentalist”. This is not the case for some of the other characters, as their weak, unscrupulous ways become apparent and they make Rick seem almost angelic in comparison.

When Rick sees a poor Bulgarian couple desperate to escape the uncertainty permeating Casablanca, he is reluctant at first to assist them. His idealistic side soon wins out and he allows the husband to win roulette, saving him from the fearful grasp of the city. A horrible person would surely not have rolled over as quickly and easily as Rick did; this act disproved his earlier statement that he “(stuck his) neck out for nobody”. It is inarguable that his jaded, sardonic outer shell could lead to feelings of dislike toward Rick but his compassionate core emerges so frequently throughout the film it would be impossible to call him contemptible. In the flashback to Paris we see his gentle, loving side as he and Ilsa fall for each other. The man in Paris had kind, sparkling eyes and was relaxed and happy. His broken heart and the horrific events of the war have stripped this from the surface of his being, but Paris implies he has the capacity to love and be loved. At the conclusion of the film he commits a selfless and noble act, putting his feelings for Ilsa aside and helping Laszlo escape to continue his heroic fight for freedom.

Louis is perhaps the most complex character in Casablanca and constantly blurs the lines between good and evil. His expedient ways make it clear he is not a man of high moral standing; however, clues in the film and his part in the final scene show there is more to Louis than meets the eye. His actions make it clear from the start that he is observant and inquisitive, as his eyes miss nothing and he leans in to hear Rick’s opinions. The way he sits back in his chair almost casually and gives a limp salute to fellow Vichy France soldiers displays his flippancy and deceiving insouciance in the goings on. He happily follows the prevailing wind and arrests Ugarte on order, but clearly sees this as an opportunity to impress and raise his status amongst the officers. He shuts down Rick’s Café under the pretence that gambling was no longer allowed but happily collected his winnings on the way out. So it can certainly be said Louis is self centred and indulgent in his every urge. By contrast, Rick clearly sees the good in this character from the beginning, and when he didn’t join in to the German national anthem, a pivotal point in the film, it became clear that Louis was not fully committed to the Nazis. His

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closing act of assisting Rick in his plight to help Laszlo escape despite the ramifications on Louis himself is evidence that can be just as admirable as he can be corrupt. Overall his noble actions overcome his selfish misdemeanours.

Ilsa may not be an obviously detestable character but perhaps her fence sitting and frustrating complacency make her even more unlikeable than Louis and Rick combined. She may do the right thing in Paris when she leaves to reunite with Laszlo, who was clearly more in need of assistance than Rick, but in Casablanca she is nothing more than an inconvenience to all involved. "You must think for the both of us" she cries to Rick as they ponder their fate, displaying a lack of decisiveness and inability to form a coherent thought herself. She is prepared to leave her heroic husband alone and without support so she can satisfy her own selfish desires, but even this she refuses to decide for sure, allowing the men in her life to mould her in any way they want. To an extent she is also cold and detached throughout Casablanca, with her aloof expressions and haughty posture. Ilsa's arrogance, helplessness and emotional instability make her a most unpleasant character.

While Louis and Ilsa are inferior to Rick, a clear antagonist in the film comes in the form of a pathetic, sweaty Italian shyster. Our instant impression of Ugarte is that he is shady and corrupt, his outfit a bit too groomed and his hair a bit too oily. He has distinct "parasitic" qualities as he rips off civilians for letters of transit, and he is responsible for the murder of "two German couriers". These vile actions are not helped in any way by the way he simpers around, sniffing out the weak and disgusting Rick in every way possible. His smile dances smugly around the corners of his mouth, a metaphor for the way in which he questions Rick – navigating around his real question in a most deceitful manner. Ugarte is very easy to "despise" and is perhaps the only character in Casablanca without a single redeeming quality.

Ultimately, the fitful tension in Casablanca brought out the worst in all involved, and the fact that Rick maintained his good heart set him a far above the supporting cast. Whether they showed a weakness in character or were corrupted by the war, the "crazy world" around them broke them down into a despicable mess making Ilsa, Louis and Ugarte far more contemptible than Rick.

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