

An autobiography,  
american sniper: the  
autobiography of the



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An American Hero - Film Adaptation of American Sniper  
Chris Kyle was a Navy SEAL and is the deadliest sniper in United States Military history.

He had at least 160 confirmed kills over four tours in Iraq, according to the Pentagon's count, but according to his own count and his fellow Navy SEALs, the number of kills was closer to two times as many. Over the span of his four tours of duty in Iraq, Kyle earned two Silver Stars and five Bronze Stars with Valor. He survived six separate IED, or improvised explosive device, attacks, two helicopter crashes, was wounded three times, and underwent multiple surgeries. The honors he received and the injuries he lived through, earned him the title of "The Legend" among his Navy SEAL teammates, and from his enemies, he was given the title of al-shaitan, "the devil" (Mooney 3).

Kyle was honorably discharged from the United States Navy in 2009 and years later, with the help of Scott McEwen and Jim DeFelice, he wrote and published an autobiography. In his autobiography, *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U. S. Military History*, he writes about his experiences overseas and the struggles he faced when he came home. The book's film adaptation, *American Sniper*, directed by Clint Eastwood, is based loosely off of Kyle's book and also tells about the experiences of Chris Kyle, played by Bradley Cooper, but with some changes. The film adaptation of *American Sniper* exaggerates the role of a character, Mustafa, in order to emphasize Chris Kyle's image as an American hero. Many films exaggerate certain aspects of the literature they were adapted from in order to better portray a specific aspect of a character or idea.

In some cases, it is necessary to exaggerate in order to adapt appropriately. According to Rodney Welch, a freelance journalist and book reviewer, the drama in a novel may only take place inside a character's head, or is described by an all-knowing narrator. The screenwriter, therefore, may have to adjust certain scenes and form a dialogue with other characters.

Also, turning literature into film may create other demands, such as if a book is long and includes a large amount of characters. In this case, certain scenes will need to be condensed, or cut out completely, and some characters may have to be removed to shorten a story into a manageable film length.

Additionally, many filmmakers may be focused on using the book for profit, such as selling it to a larger audience, rather than to providing a film adaptation that will satisfy readers of the book (Welch). In the case of *American Sniper*, Clint Eastwood exaggerates the role of Mustafa to portray to a large audience of Americans, the image of Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle as an American hero and to emphasize his heroic qualities.

There are many qualities that heroes possess, among the most important qualities are courage, bravery, loyalty, selflessness, dedication, determination, perseverance, humility, sacrifice, and most of all, a purpose. In the case of Chris Kyle, his sole purpose is to protect his family, his men, and his country. Along with certain heroic qualities, heroes, or protagonists, also need a nemesis, or an antagonist. According to J. Gideon Sarantinos, this idea can be traced back to classical storytelling where protagonists are the first to enter the stage, or in the case of *American Sniper*, the scene, and represent the point of view the audience should follow throughout the film.

On the other hand, antagonists are portrayed as negative, bad, or evil. Even though antagonists have a negative connotation attached to them, they do have a positive impact on every story by giving the protagonist a “glimpse into a better world by making their current world increasingly undesirable.” This teaches the protagonist right from wrong and that all the struggles will pay off eventually and that obstacles will always arise. Overcoming these obstacles allow for the protagonist to become a better, or stronger, person. These obstacles are the innate expansion of the antagonist’s role. Antagonists are a crucial element of motivating a protagonist to overcome their obstacles. Along with all of this, antagonists must be an equally skilled opponent in order to push the protagonist (Sartanos). Throughout the film, Chris Kyle’s character displays all of these traits but in his book, these traits are not as clear-cut as they are in the film.

By exaggerating the role of Mustafa in the film, Clint Eastwood not only highlights Chris Kyle’s heroic traits but also provides Kyle with a nemesis. Mustafa, played by Sammy Sheik, is a skilled Iraqi sniper, who may or may not exist in the real world. According to Adam Taylor, it is not clear whether Mustafa exists or not, but there are similar legends of skilled Iraqi snipers, such as that of “Juba,” a sniper with the Islamic Army in Iraq.

Some legends accredit this Iraqi sniper with hundreds of kills and accounts from American soldiers indicate that he was a nuisance to many of the U. S. troops. “Juba” also sent a video message to then U. S. president, George Bush, that contains him saying, “I have nine bullets in this gun and I have a present for George Bush. I am going to kill nine people.”

" Snipers like " Juba" have been a terrifying aspect of warfare formany years (Taylor). Even though legends exist of snipers like Juba andMustafa, in his autobiography, Chris Kyle only mentions Mustafa in oneparagraph where he writes about his connection with the near-mythical sniper: While we were on the bermwatching the city, we were also watching warily for an Iraqi sniper known asMustafa. From the reports we heard, Mustafa was an Olympics marksman who wasusing his skills against Americans and Iraqi police and soldiers. Severalvideos had been made and posted, boasting of his ability. I never saw him, butother snipers later killed an Iraqi sniper we think was him. (Kyle 168-169)This quote reinforces the fact that Kyle has heardof Mustafa, but has never actually seen him. On the contrary, in the film, Clint Eastwood uses Mustafa as a villain and Chris Kyle's nemesis throughoutthe film. Mustafa, is portrayed as a sniper with skills almost as good as ChrisKyle's and, similar to Kyle's statement in his book, competed as a marksman inthe Olympics.

Throughout the film, Mustafa is shown continually stalking Kyleand the other Navy SEALs through various cities and deployments in Iraq overmany years. He systematically picks off the members of Kyle's squad and othertroops and, in one scene, targets Kyle and his good friend, Ryan " Biggles" Job, played by Jake McDorman, on an Iraqi rooftop. Mustafa shoots, his bullet thenhitting Biggles' rifle, causing it to shatter into multiple fragments.

Thefragments of Biggles' rifle explode into his face, disfigure it, and blind him, but he survives. Ina later scene, shortly after the run in with

Mustafa, Kyle visits Biggles inthe hospital just before leaving for his fourth tour to Iraq. During the visit, Biggles tells Kyle that he proposed to his fiancé,  
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they joke with each other, and before Kyle leaves, the two exchange words and in the following dialogue from American Sniper, Kyle's heroic nature can be seen: Biggles. You're not going back. Kyle.

We are. We'll walk them in and hunt them down. Biggles.

Come on. You don't have to do that. Kyle. You're my brother... And they're gonna fucking pay for what they did to you. Biggles. Hooyah, Legend.

Kyle. Fucking hooyah. (3. 117. 17-22) These quotes from Ryan "Biggles" Job and Chris Kyle reinforce the idea of Kyle being a hero. They show Kyle's sacrifice and dedication to his cause and his Navy SEAL brethren because, even though Biggles insists he stays, he courageously is risking his life along with leaving his wife and child behind to avenge his injured comrade. Soon after Kyle returns to Iraq, he learns that Biggles has passed away during surgery. In his autobiography, Kyle does write in depth about the day Biggles was shot, but in contrast to the film, Biggles was not shot by Mustafa but, rather, by an unknown enemy insurgent.

Also, Biggles did not die soon after he was shot, as witnessed in the film, rather, he died three years later, in 2009, due to complications for facial reconstructive surgery. Before his death, he got married, attended college, got a job, and also climbed Mount Rainer. Similar to the film, Kyle did want to go back to avenge Biggles' death and writes, "A few guys weren't sure whether we should go or not.

We talked about it, and planned out the mission. I didn't hardly have time for it, though. I just wanted blood for my guy (368)." Though Kyle writes about

wanting revenge for Biggles, there is never mention of him fulfilling this in his book.

In the film, however, Kyle does get revenge, with a skillful kill shot. Both the film and Kyle's book include one of the longest shots in United States military history, 2,100 yards. In his autobiography, Kyle writes about this 2,100-yard shot he made on an enemy insurgent who was carrying a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, or RPG.

He admits in his book that it was an exceptional, yet lucky, shot where he writes, "Twenty-one hundred yards. The shot amazes me even now. It was a straight-up luck shot; no way one shot should have gotten him (Kyle 447)." This shot being exceptional, along with being particularly lucky, however, was not taken to kill "Mustafa" but rather to protect American troops from an RPG-wielding enemy insurgent. On the other hand, the film exaggerates this tremendous shot to use as a major moment in the film where Chris Kyle takes down the notorious enemy sniper and nemesis, Mustafa. This exaggeration of Mustafa and Kyle's 2,100-yard shot, according to Jason Hall, the screenwriter for American Sniper, was used to tie everything together into a major climatic moment in the film (Lamothe). The role exaggeration of Mustafa is used to increase Chris Kyle's image as a hero and his purpose in combat and highlighting the heroic qualities of courage, bravery, loyalty, selflessness, dedication, determination, perseverance, humility, and sacrifice which he uses toward his purpose, protecting his country.

Additionally, by exaggerating Mustafa's role, the film can focus the constant fight between him and Kyle, and focus less harsh language used in Kyle's autobiography. In his book, Kyle talks about "slaughtering the enemy" and refers to them as "savages" on more than one occasion. Phil Zabriskie, who covered the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars for Time and other magazines, stated in an interview with GQ on the language used in Kyle's book: The language used by soldiers in war zones is rarely pretty; usually it's quite the opposite, things you just wouldn't say at home.

It's bloodthirsty. So the argument that he was bloodthirsty is spot on. He was bloodthirsty. But when you're talking about someone whose job is killing, being bloodthirsty was a way to help him carry out the job he was sent to do. (Editors of GQ) By using this language he seems less humble and selfless.

In the film, however, there is never any instance where Kyle refers to his enemies as "savages" or talks about "slaughtering the enemy." Rather, there are only instances where Kyle talks about protecting his men, family, and country such as when he says, "Cause it's the greatest country on earth and I believe it's worth protecting," "You want to invite these motherfuckers to come fight in San Diego? Or New York? We're protecting more than just this dirt," or when he is talking to the doctor about his psychological issues and says, "I was just protecting my guys. They were trying to kill our soldiers and I'm willing to stand before my creator and answer for every shot I took. The thing that haunts me are all the guys I couldn't save." These quotes show how the film portrayed his motivation as being solely to protect others.



By exaggerating the roles of Mustafa, American Sniper focuses the audience's attention on his heroic behavior rather than the brutality that goes along with war. With the movie being directed towards Americans, an important reason for the film focusing more on Mustafa and less on the harsh language, according to Antoinette Weil, a marketer and writer for Literary Traveler, is that Americans are sheltered from the brutality of wars because they take place far away from the United States. The only exposure most Americans get is from the rare news footage that only occurs when the U. S. is taking troops out or sending more troops in (Weil). In conclusion, by exaggerating the role of the character, Mustafa, the film adaptation, American Sniper, allows the film to focus on Chris Kyle's heroic qualities as well as giving him a nemesis, the main antagonist, Mustafa. Most importantly, the exaggeration of Mustafa's role