

Mythmaking in Star Wars II

Archetypes, Part I

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The Use of Archetypes

In our last article, we explored Heroes in the monomyth – those larger than life characters that drive our most memorable stories. In this article and the next, we're going to take a look at another key element of mythmaking – the use of archetypes.

Famous psychologist Carl Jung posited that basic themes of life emerge through consistent patterns in the collective unconscious. He referred to them as archetypes. For what we are discussing here, that simply means that archetypes are types of characters that have significant impact in any story because they speak to common types of people and human experience, regardless of geography or culture. In that context, they fit perfectly within the idea of the monomyth.

Archetypal characters become tools that fulfill useful functions in your story, that help it also fit into the eternal resonance that is the monomyth. Once you master these concepts, you will be able to populate your *Star Wars* game with such archetypes and they will help you in your task as Gamemaster. You will come to understand their importance as you read on.

Here, we are going to look at three key archetypes as they apply to *Star Wars*: the Mentor, the Threshold Guardian, and the Herald.

The Mentor



Originally referred to as the Wise Old Man/Woman by Joseph Campbell, this archetype is perhaps more easily known as the Mentor. The characters that teach, guide, or protect the Heroes or provide them with important gifts are Mentors. They are designed to help prepare the Hero for the trials ahead, or to guide the Hero through them. Though they may arrive later, Mentors usually appear early in the story when the Hero needs the most guidance. They also motivate the Hero to action and help him overcome his fears. One example of this is the relationship between Ben Kenobi and Luke Skywalker. Young Luke meets Ben just as his destiny begins to unfold. If it were not for Ben, Luke may have given into his fears and stayed on Tatooine – even after the death of his Aunt and Uncle. Ben takes on the role of Mentor in many ways. He tells Luke about his father Anakin, gives the boy his first lightsaber, and begins to tutor him in the ways of the Jedi. Without Ben's influence, Luke would never have become a Jedi, may never have left Tatooine, and would have most likely been killed by Stormtroopers looking for C-3PO and R2-D2. Luke owed a great deal of who he was and who he became to his Mentor.

Sometimes, as an aspect of their instruction, Mentors must act as the Hero's conscience as he wavers in his own judgment or wrestles with his own emotions. The relationship between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker is an excellent example of this. Anakin's impulsive nature and deep personal anger consistently move him to make poor decisions, or at least not decisions befitting a Jedi, during his years as an apprentice. Obi-Wan was always there to correct his action or thinking, to guide him in the ways of the Jedi Code and teach him to be mindful of the living Force. Even after Anakin became a Jedi Knight, he still looked to his master for guidance, on some level knowing that his own internal moral compass did not point true north.

There are those Heroes who are already on their journey, whose Mentor comes from the inside – oftentimes in the manifestation of a code. In *Star Wars*, both the Jedi Code and the Code of the Sith immediately spring to mind. Once Darth Malak betrays Revan, he becomes the Dark Lord, beholden to none. What guides him in his

conquest is the Code of the Sith, which preaches passion, strength, and power. Obi-Wan Kenobi, a Mentor to others, draws his strength from the Jedi Code, which practices control, inner peace, and harmony. Whenever these types of characters need guidance, they can look to their own internal mentor to help them find their way.

Mentors don't have to be put together Heroes in their own right. It is perfectly okay for them to be damaged or broken in some kind of way. Jolee Bindo acts, in his own way, as a Mentor to the amnesiac Revan, though he is a rebellious Jedi, occasionally blathering, and somewhere between light and dark in his adherence to the Force. Both of Luke Skywalker's Mentors, Ben Kenobi and Yoda, have been utterly defeated and outcast. Yet, in these cases and others, the Mentor's contribution to the Hero was still profound.

Following that line of thinking, Mentors can also be dark in nature. In *Star Wars*, many of these kinds of mentors are villains in their own right. Chancellor Palpatine, before his disfigurement, was such a Mentor to Anakin Skywalker. Not outright evil, at least not on the surface, the Chancellor had been a Mentor to the young Jedi since Anakin was a boy and his guidance was most certainly dark at times. Ultimately, it was designed to mentor the young Jedi down the path of the dark side. Then you have relationships such as that of Darth Vader and Starkiller, wherein Vader's tutelage was that of a Sith Lord and dark and cruel as it comes.

Many times the Mentor also functions as a parental figure. Ben Kenobi became a father-figure to Luke Skywalker, Qui-gon Jinn the same to a young Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Chancellor Palpatine the same to Anakin Skywalker. These are but a few examples, though this type of Mentor-Hero relationship runs through *Star Wars*.

The Threshold Guardian

Another archetype pertinent to the monomyth is the Threshold Guardian. Essentially, while the Heroes travel on their paths, there are characters that will arise to prevent them from easily stepping across the threshold into whatever new world is next. They are not the primary villains, but rather are designed to test the Hero, whether it be his abilities or his resolve, to make sure that he is ready for the challenges that lay before him. They prevent the Hero from charging ahead without being fully prepared.

These characters manifest in many ways in *Star Wars*. On the benign end, Owen Lars was a Threshold Guardian to young Luke Skywalker. Owen was firmly against Luke leaving the farm, for reasons of his nephew's safety. He was a living test to see if Luke was willing to embrace his destiny, even though it was not in his upbringing or convenient for him to do so. The Jedi Council acts as a Threshold Guardian to Anakin Skywalker. First, the Council tries to keep the young boy from training, then they keep him as an apprentice for a good long time, then they refuse to confer on him the title of Jedi Master, and then they try to keep him from a seat on the Council itself. They test him at many points along the way. Imagine how swiftly and dangerously Anakin would have fallen to the dark side if it weren't for the Council's vigilance.



On the other hand, there are more violent manifestations of this archetype. Darth Maul is a Threshold Guardian to Obi-Wan Kenobi. Only if Obi-Wan can defeat the Sith hammer can he go on to deal with what waits for him in the Clone Wars. Darth Tyrannus tests Anakin Skywalker to see if he is indeed ready to walk down the path of being the Chancellor's apprentice. Calo Nord opposes Revan to see if she is ready to take her place as a Hero of the Jedi. The droid Proxy continuously tests Starkiller to make certain that he is worthy of the title Sith. Eventually, the secret apprentice must destroy the droid to cross the threshold into his rejection of the dark side.

The Herald

Where Threshold Guardians test the Hero, characters that are manifestations of the Herald archetype come to shake up the Hero's world and get him on his path. The appearance of a Herald is the catalyst that makes it so that the Hero can longer live in the ordinary world he has called home. In essence, they are the energy that motivates the Hero to be a Hero.



Every Hero in *Star Wars* has his or her own personal Herald. Young Anakin Skywalker would have been content to remain Watto's slave if not for Qui-gon Jinn entering his life. The older Jedi discovers the boy's natural power in the Force and brings him out into the greater universe. Luke Skywalker begins on his path not because of the droids, but because of a message by Princess Leia Organa. Compelled by her plight, he goes off to meet his Mentor and ultimately realize his destiny. Bastila Shan is a Herald for the amnesiac Revan, the bond they share drawing the former Sith Lord on a path that will crush the Sith Empire. Starkiller's Herald might not be so obvious – Juno Eclipse. It is her appearance in his life that sparks the first feelings that blossom into love, one of the primary reasons the secret apprentice starts to question his path with the Sith.



For now, let these concepts sink in and see if you can identify other characters that fit these archetypes. We will discuss more about how to utilize them once we have finished our archetype discussion in the next article.

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