

# Mythmaking in Star Wars III

## Archetypes, Part II

Matthew Grau

---

### Archetypes Continued

In our last article, we began our exploration of a key element of mythmaking – the use of archetypes. To review, 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.

In the first of the archetype articles, we looked at the Mentor, the Threshold Guardian, and the Herald. Here, we are going to look at three more key archetypes as they apply to *Star Wars*: the Shadow, the Shapeshifter, and the Trickster. When we're done, we're going to explore how to utilize all of the archetypes in your *Star Wars* adventures.

### The Shadow

The Shadow archetype, as in psychology, represents the dark side of things. The Shadow is made up of all the things the Hero doesn't like about himself or the world. Shadows typify the demons that whisper to the Hero, the skeletons in his closet. Most times, the Shadow is represented by the villain or villains, who are often the mirror into which the Hero must look and also overcome in himself what lurks beneath. Shadows are not always vile and evil – they often have humanizing qualities (or qualities with which one can identify, in the case of aliens).

The Shadows in *Star Wars* are so often Sith. Luke Skywalker fought against his Shadow in Darth Vader, who represented the brutality and oppression against which the young Hero fought. However, Vader also wanted to be with the son who had been taken from him – a normal and very human emotion. He was also an example to Luke of what the young Jedi could become if he gave in to his anger and hate. Revan's Shadow was Darth Malak, ruler of the Sith Empire and scourge of the galaxy. There was little in Malak that one could call humanizing, but his traits of greed and envy are common to the human condition. Most importantly, he was the mirror to Revan, a reminder of what he once was and could easily become again.

Shadows may also be seductive. Anakin Skywalker fought against his Shadow in Chancellor Palpatine. Unknown to Anakin, Palpatine was a Sith Lord that embraced everything that the Jedi rejected and was bringing democracy to its knees. However, Palpatine also treated the boy like a son (or at least a nephew) for more than a decade, protecting and guiding him. In the end, Palpatine used Anakin's fears and desires against him, luring him to the dark side with promises of power over life and death.

Stories and Heroes are, in many ways, defined by their villains. The better the villain, the better the story. It is important to create a powerful Shadow antagonist if one wishes to resonate with the monomyth.

### The Shapeshifter

Always seeming to be changing are the Shapeshifters. They are never consistent for very long. Their chaotic natures are designed to bring about further suspense in the story, as well as to create doubt for the hero. Oftentimes, the role of the Shapeshifter is taken on by characters for stretches of the story, to fulfill the aforementioned dramatic purpose. Anakin Skywalker, even as an adult, had traits of a Shapeshifter. One never knew which Anakin he would get – the noble Jedi, the angry boy, the loving husband, the rebellious apprentice. Sometimes in conversation, he would cycle through several of these manifestations. Princess Leia Organa, with regards to her relationship with Han Solo, was a Shapeshifter. Was she going to thank him or pick a fight? Was she going to insult him or kiss him? Their relationship was rocky and uncertain, causing dramatic tension between the characters – until they finally fall in love and things stabilize.

Characters that typify the outsider are also often Shapeshifters. The outsider is a character that comes from an unusual, sometimes tragic, background, who remains aloof from the other characters. They dispense wisdom, but are also not necessarily to be relied upon. Han Solo is a perfect example. He is a former Imperial officer turned outlaw smuggler, who pretends to be mean and self-serving while hiding his heart of gold. At varying times, he is

mercenary, kind, arrogant, caring, and more. Until his capture and incarceration by Boba Fett, Han Solo is a moving target in terms of his personality.

## The Trickster

Ubiquitous in *Star Wars* is the Trickster – the comic relief. The Trickster's antics bring about change, as well as providing the much needed relief from the otherwise near-constant dramatic tension. Their comedy makes the serious parts of the story more meaningful. R2-D2 and C-3PO are perhaps the most famous examples of Tricksters, spanning two eras of *Star Wars*. Even in the most tense of situations, C-3PO's finicky nature comes through, most often in humorous complaints – or at least humorous to us. R2-D2's comedy is of a more physical nature. Whether it be being swallowed by a swamp beast on Dagobah and spit back out, spraying Battle Droids with oil and lighting them on fire as they slip and slide about, or simply revving up his partner in crime, R2-D2 is almost always amusing. Of course, both characters are heart-felt and invested in the drama that surrounds them.

Tricksters can be catalysts for needed change in others. Jar-Jar Binks, though a bumbling buffoon most of the time, had a profound influence in the fate of Naboo. It is he that warned his people of the Trade Federation's invasion, who guided the Jedi to the palace to rescue Princess Amidala, and who ultimately arranged the meeting that resulted in alliance between the Naboo and the Gungans. His antics put him in the right places at the right times to cause changes that were for the good of all. HK-47, though dark and bloodthirsty, sometimes played the role of the Trickster for Revan and his companions. The droid's condescending and humorous attitude towards organic life was not only funny, it was a reminder of who Revan once was. He helped Revan stay the course of redemption, reinforcing that change.

## Using Archetypes

Archetypes are tools. They are designed to be functions that you can assign to characters in your story that will help expand the drama – and resonate with the monomyth. Each of them is useful and each of them is appropriate for nearly any kind of story. However, they are not something to which to be enslaved.

When you are designing your *Star Wars* game, you will be dealing with a situation in which you have many Heroes. Every character portrayed by a player is one. It would be difficult and redundant to have separate characters for each of the archetypes for each of the Heroes. As you are creating the key NPC's for your game, choose only one or two of the characters who will have Mentors. It should be obvious which are the most appropriate – Jedi or Sith are the easy targets.

The Shadow archetype is the easiest – it will be your villain. The thing to keep in mind is that Shadows have certain traits that you will want to incorporate into the design of your primary antagonists. There is something humanizing about them, so resist the urge to make them nothing but monsters. They also contain something in them which your Heroes (one or several) will not want to face, because it is an aspect of themselves with which they cannot deal.

Threshold Guardians are also fairly easy. They are all those who somehow oppose your Heroes along the way. They are those that are minor hurdles all the way up to the minions of the primary antagonist. These types of characters are naturally designed into roleplaying adventures. Heralds are likewise a built-in roleplaying concept, being the person who inspires the characters to undertake their adventure.

The Shapeshifter is one you may not even need to assign. As your story goes on, players will undoubtedly portray their characters as inconsistent and you will do the same, so the dramatic tension will increase naturally.

Some of the Heroes may take on one or two of the archetypes. There is often someone who desires to play a character with comic tendencies, so you might wish to have a conversation with him about taking on the role of the Trickster. Remember that the Trickster is more than just a clown – it is a character that lightens things at the appropriate moment, and also forces or inspires needed change. Furthermore, one or two of the characters might take on the role of the Herald, moving the group to form or at least to take action.

So, as you can see, it's mostly likely not going to be very difficult for you to incorporate archetypes into your *Star Wars* game. However, the magic really happens when you put archetypes into the structure of the monomyth.

---

Discuss this article on the [Forums](#)

---

headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.