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Tuesday, May 8, 2012

## A List of Character Archetypes

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A character archetype is a pattern or model from which similar characters are based. Sometime last year, I noticed that all my main characters fit a heroic guardian archetype (Achan, Martyr, Spencer). I was pretty shocked to realize that. I didn't want to be the author who writes the same character over and over and over.

This is *my* list. I could likely combine a few of these to make a smaller list or expand the list as well. There are no rules here. But I find this list helpful in toying with the idea of completely changing my main character's archetype, analyzing my cast, deleting duplicate characters, setting apart the others, and determining personality conflicts.

All of these archetypes are capable of going on the hero's journey.

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Sometimes it's fun to combine several archetypes into one character. Take a look at this list. Do any of these archetypes appear in your story?

**Analyst:** Can explain anything rationally. Ex: Mr. Spock

**Anti-hero:** The hero who didn't ask to get involved but does. Ex: Sarah Connor, Wolverine

**Benefactor:** Has a whole lot of something he wants to share. Ex: Miss Havisham

**Bully:** Has no tolerance for weakness, especially in himself. Ex: Scut Farkus (*Christmas Story*)

**Bureaucrat:** Follows the rules no matter what. Hermione Granger

**Caretaker:** Cares for others. Ex: Digory Kirke

**Catalyst:** Makes things happen.

**Child:** Could be a literal child or just living like one. Ex: Wally McDoogle, Peter Pan

**Coward:** Afraid of everything, controlled by fear. Ex: Adrian Monk, Cowardly Lion, Alexandra Rover

**Curmudgeon:** Irritable and cynical and proud of it. Ex: Ebenezer Scrooge

**Dreamer:** Longs to be something he isn't. Ex: Annie, William Thatcher (*A Knight's Tale*)

**Elder/Mentor/Teacher/Parent:** Been around long enough to know some vital information. Ex: Ben Kenobi, Mufassa

**Explorer/Wanderer:** Wants to see the world—could be running from something.

**Extraordinary man:** The guy who can do anything. Ex: Indiana Jones, James Bond

**Gossip:** Must be the first to know everything and the one to pass it on. Ex: Rachel Lynde

**Guardian:** Protects the weak.

**Hedonist/Thrill-seeker:** Lives for today in case tomorrow never comes.

**Herald/Messenger:** The bringer of news, good, bad, or necessary.

**Hermit/Loner:** Just wants to be left alone. Ex: Phil Hercules, Martin Riggs (*Lethal Weapon*)

**Hunter/Predator:** Can catch or kill anything. Ex: Terminator

**Innocent:** An inexperienced individual exposed to the evils in the world. Ex: Dorothy Gale

**Introvert:** Lives inside his shell to prevent anyone from seeing the real him. Ex: Gabriella Montez (*High School Musical*)

**Investigator:** Thrives on puzzles and riddles. Ex: Nancy Drew, Sherlock Holmes

**Judge/Mediator:** The arbitrator or peacemaker in a conflict.

**Leader:** Always knows the best thing to do—and people follow. Ex: William Wallace

**Magician/Wizard/Superpowers:** Has special powers or abilities. Ex: Superman, Harry Potter

**Manipulator:** Plays with people and situations to get what he wants. Ex: Scarlett O'Hara

**Martyr:** Willing to suffer or die for others or a cause.

**Masochist:** Finds pleasure in torturing himself, denying himself—may take on too much.

**Masquerader:** Pretends to be something he is not.

**Monster:** A depraved beast. Ex: Gollum, Grendel (*Beowulf*)

**Ordinary Man:** Your average Joe, just like you or me or the guy across the street. Ex: Dr. Richard



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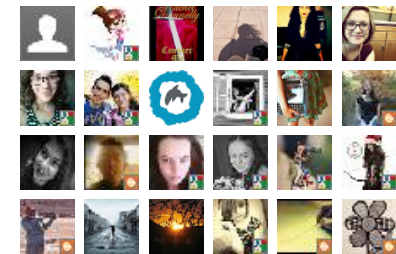
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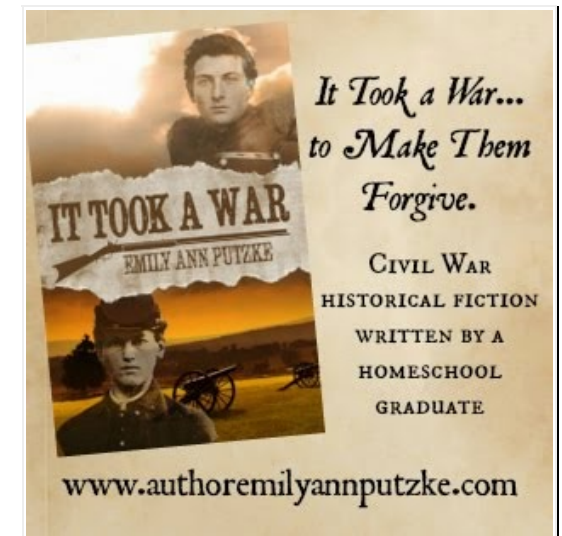


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**Penitent:** Lives to atone for his sin.

**Perfectionist:** Every action and word must be flawless.

**Pleaser/Show-off:** Craves approval from anyone and may do anything to get it.

**Poet:** Life is art, be that through story or song or art or sculpture.

**Rebel/Revolutionary:** Stands opposed to the status quo and fights for his cause.

**Rogue:** Looks out for himself and no one else. Ex: Han Solo

**Saboteur/Betrayer:** For whatever reason, he will make sure something fails. Ex: Edmund Pevensie

**Samaritan:** Does good deeds wherever he goes.

**Scholar:** Wants to learn.

**Sensualist:** Addicted to feeling good about himself.

**Slave:** Does not belong to himself. Ex: Dobby the house elf

**Survivor:** Pulls through no matter what happens, doesn't give up.

**Sycophant:** Self-seeking, flatterer, who works to please those in power. Ex: Smee (*Peter Pan*)

**Temptriss:** Uses power (intellect, magic, beauty) to make others weak. Ex: Megara (*Hercules*)

**Thief:** Takes what he wants or needs. Ex: Philippe Gaston (*LadyHawke*), Jean Valjean

**Trickster/Jester:** Always looking for the humor in a situation. Ex: Fred and George Weasley

**Tyrant:** Must be in control at all times. Ex: Captain Hook

**Victim:** Was hurt by someone or lives in fear that someone will hurt him. Ex: Claireece "Precious" Jones

**Villain:** Seeks to destroy/trap the hero. Ex: Evil Queen in *Snow White*, Lex Luthor

**Waif:** Appears innocent and weak and often relies on the pity of others. Ex: The Kid (*Dick Tracy*)

Posted by [Jill Williamson](#) at 9:15 AM 

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**Anonymous** May 8, 2012 at 9:25 AM

Thanks for this post. I didn't know how many character archetypes there are!

In theory, should there only be one of each archetype in a story? Like only one villain and one anti-hero? Or can there be more?

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**Becki Badger** May 8, 2012 at 11:20 AM

Just putting in my two cents, here. :) I actually have a situation where the hero thinks there are two villains, but in



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