

The Wounded Warrior Archetype

When I go through my list of obsessions, the men at the top are always of this archetype. There is something about the combination of skill, loyalty, dedication, duty, and discipline in these men that is a total intellectual and emotional turn on for me. The fact that these guys are essentially flawed in some way -- that the world, time, circumstance, and their own choices have pretty much rolled over them like a steam train -- does nothing to lessen the appeal. And, if the huge percentage of stories, television shows, and movies featuring these kinds of characters (not to mention response to stories I write about these kinds of men) is any indication, I am not the only one with a warrior fixation.

The elements of the Wounded Warrior are easy to identify from the name. The character's main focus in life -- their job literally and figuratively -- must be that of a soldier or military type. From samurai and barbarians to immortal swordsmen and Jedi, from gun toting mariachi's and hard-boiled cops to air-forcemen turned space explorers, this archetype is rampant. We love them. We love them as fans for their terse words, lack of communication skills, snarky dialogue, and ability to walk in where angels fear to tread and blow the shit out of the bad guy. We love them as writers because there is so much going on under the surface and because these guys are, well, wounded. Some of them are literally wounded and have external scars from battles. All of them are spiritually wounded. These are people who have lost battles, lost friends, lost family members, lost lovers, lost their religions and/or lost their political systems. These folks, often, are living for nothing other than revenge or payback. Many times they are suicidal. These guys will charge solo into an oncoming army. These guys will sign up for the impossible mission. These guys will stay behind and tell everyone else to run ahead fully expecting, even wanting, to die in the process.

So, you love the Wounded Warrior and want to write him? Here's your handy checklist!

- 1) Wounded Warrior's devotion to duty and the past is so strong that he no longer feels there is any future. This means he either gets himself killed during your story or he gets himself killed BEFORE your story even starts and you've really only got a ghost manifestation of the person that is powered by revenge. The only way the Wounded Warrior can survive your story is if he is also the hero -- and even then he's not got a huge chance of living.
- 2) For the Wounded Warrior there is nothing more important than justice. In fact, the Warrior's need for justice and retribution for the past is so all consuming that they will do all kinds of things that are unlawful, immoral, and duplicitous if they think it will mean divine retribution for past wrongs.
- 3) The Warrior has unrealistic expectations or is a perfectionist. This leads him to blame himself when things go wrong or to put the weight of failure on himself no matter how out of his control a situation may be.
- 4) Wounded Warrior doesn't say a whole lot. When he does, it's pretty cryptic or cynical. Nine times out of ten you can simply have him answer with a grunt or "Hn."
- 5) In anime, manga, and game fandoms Wounded Warrior usually has a weapon twice the size of anyone else. If it's a sword it is usually at least as tall as they are.

- 6) At the critical moment of the story, the past of the Wounded Warrior and the loss of his friends, lovers, family to the evil will be revealed to the astonishment of the rest of your characters.
- 7) Wounded Warrior is a badass with twice the skills of any of your other characters with the possible exception of your hero.
- 8) At least half the time, Wounded Warrior will be the one who finds and/or trains your hero.
- 9) Wounded Warrior will always know more about the real nature of the evil you face than anyone else but will not tell anyone about what he knows.
- 10) Wounded Warrior is usually a bit older than the rest of your "quest" group. However, he is not normally the oldest part of the team. That position is usually reserved for your "Wise Sage" Archetype.
- 11) Wounded Warrior doesn't get along with most of your party -- not because he doesn't like them or they don't like him but because he is a complete loner. He doesn't do warm and fuzzy and he doesn't like getting close to anyone. If he does have some kind of attachment to a member of the group it is either due to past history or because it will be used against him later by the bad guy.
- 12) Wounded Warrior has no friends when the story opens. The only friends he ever had died before the current story ever started. The loss of these friends, lovers, and/or family members to the evil you face is what has turned him into the taciturn badass he is.
- 13) Wounded Warrior likely would be the hottest member of your party if it weren't for the gray hair and/or scar on his face.

Give your military person even half these characteristics and you are well on your way to a fan favorite every woman on the planet will swoon over.

The question is, why do women swoon over this type? The same reason they swoon over The Badboy Archetype -- angst factor! Warrior has lost everything that made him who he is. He's cast adrift. Women naturally seem to want to grab hold of the Warrior and comfort him; to try to patch him up and fill the empty places he has left after the losses. It's the maternal instinct coming out to play. Never mind that Warrior would never talk about his loss -- that he would rather fall on his own sword or shoot himself in the head before opening up to someone -- your reader will fantasize that they are just the person who could crawl under this guy's skin and make him want to live again.

The Wounded Warrior at the top of my list is no surprise to those who read my stuff. Auron from Final Fantasy X is the entire reason I write. Game time Auron is the grizzled veteran, the jaded cynical badass, the knowledgeable sage who withholds information and manipulates others to achieve his goals. Is it so much of a stretch then that I also love Obi-Wan Kenobi? Both of these men lived on after their natural deaths to fulfill duty. Both of them manipulated the children of their friends to achieve their own goals. Both of them were religious men who worked for the establishment only to have it all go horribly wrong. Jack O'Neil from Stargate (or O'Neill for the SG-1 spelling crowd) is the modern Wounded Warrior. Jack lost his son to a tragic accident and it broke him. He became a lost man and wanted nothing more than to die. Strum Brightblade from DragonLance is yet another man so devoted to duty and honor that he gives up his life. El

Mariachi is betrayed, finds love, has it ripped away, and generally has issues with his brother. These guys put the D in dysfunctional and it's exactly why we adore them.

Just remember though, the Wounded Warrior never gets a happy ending. This character is made for angst, pain, and death. No matter how much you love the Wounded Warrior as a fan -- much less as a writer or creator of said -- you've got to accept the fact that he's never going to ride off into the sunset unless his name is Shane and some kid is screaming after him to come back. Home and hearth are not for these guys. Getting the girl is only for these guys if the badguy then runs her through, tortures her, or generally does nasty things to her as quickly as inhumanly possible. Kids? Nope. The only way the Warrior gets kids is if they get killed in massively angsty tragic circumstances causing Warrior to drown himself in alcohol and isolate himself from the world (or, perhaps, he has them but never knew it and, thereby you manage to get some fodder for a sequel to your original work as your angsty son-of or daughter-of goes off to claim their birthright).

Also, be sure when crafting the warrior that he has a hidden agenda and that the reveal of his past happens at a critical moment in the story. If you can have that reveal coincide with the climax or reveal of the TRUE NATURE of the evil threat it's even better. Remember, the Wounded Warrior is all about duty, loyalty, justice, and revenge. You can excuse the Warrior's lack of communication six ways from Sunday but he's the one that should leave your reader pondering the question, "does the end justify the means?" You get bonus points if you can get them to ask, "but hasn't the warrior done turned into what he hates by manipulating others for his own ends?"

You can pull all kinds of examples from numerous books, games, and shows for this type. I've mentioned just a few. The problem, of course, is exactly the fact that you can find the Wounded Warrior in just about every epic fantasy ever made. Not only are they an archetype, but they are also a cliché. The real test is not only to create this fan favorite but to do so with an interesting twist and make it fresh. Perhaps your Wounded Warrior is a woman? The "sidekick" character as well? Can you find a way to make the Wounded Warrior also hold the comic characteristics of your typical "thief" or "comic relief" character? Perhaps this is your hunter character -- working for the "bad guy" -- and the big reveal as to why they work for the "wrong side" is when they take out an important member of your group then turn sides having then fulfilled their vendetta?

There are a thousand and one ways to make a Wounded Warrior. These are just a few suggestions as a starting point to make this important type your own.