

A STOP WRITING! FIELD GUIDE

The 12 Archetypes

How to cast the characters your story needs.



David Cornue

AUTHOR OF STOP WRITING!

Characters are relationships.

Writers tend to dive into the protagonist. I suggest an extra step before turning to any individual character: **archetypes**.

Archetypes are recurring character motifs in storytelling. They represent foundational roles—hero, mentor, trickster—that resonate across cultures and time. We writers use these archetypes whether we know it or not. Most do not.

We aren't interested in any one character. As social creatures, what interests us is the relationships *among* the characters. And whether we're talking the knights of the Round Table, the gods of Olympus, or the disciples at The Last Supper, storytelling traditions gravitate to twelve perspectives to fully explore a subject.

A character only comes alive in relation to the others—the one they chase, the one who guides them, the one who deceives them. That shift, from identity to relationship, is the whole game.

Think of archetypes as essential energies that must be present for a story to feel complete.

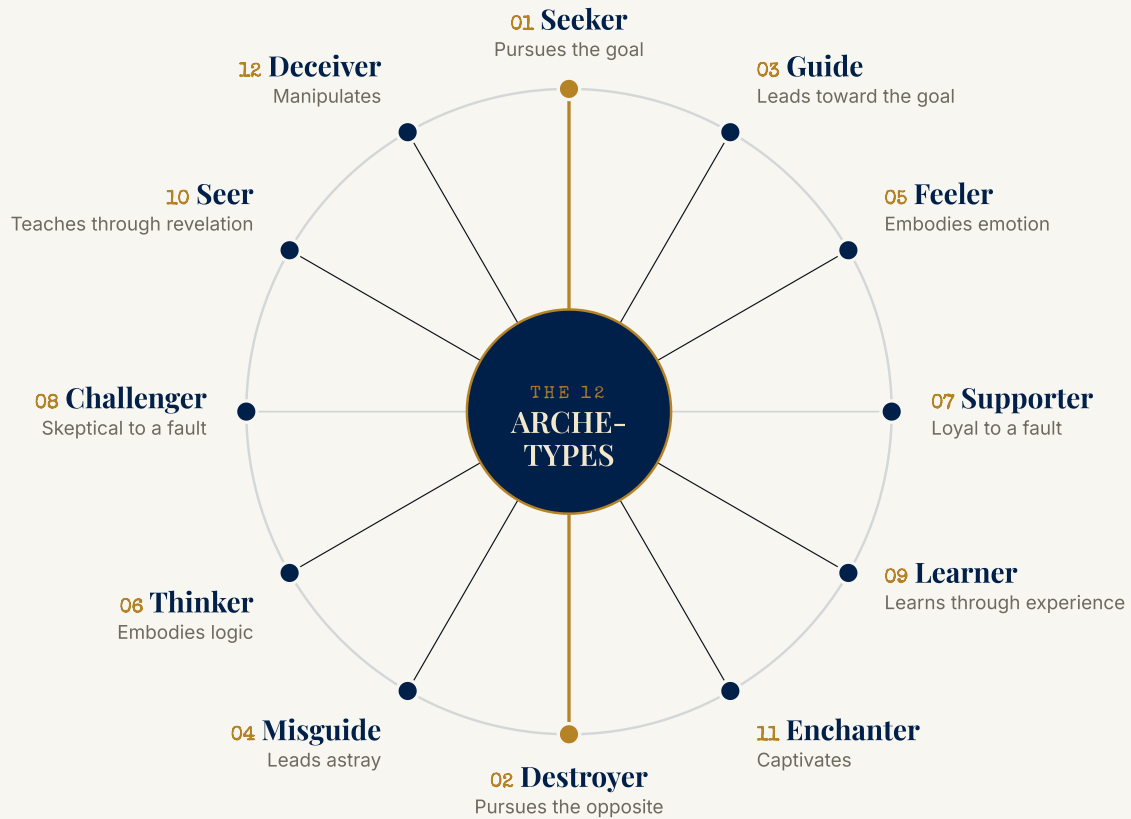
Sometimes that energy comes from a person, a rotating guest role, a group of characters, or even an object or force. In *Cast Away*, Wilson the Volleyball is as much a **Guide** figure to Chuck as Obi-Wan is to Luke Skywalker.

Picture the 12 archetypes as numbers on a clock. Just as numbers have direct opposites (12↔6, 1↔7), each archetype has a counterpart. Or picture a compass, where the main character always points true north, keeping us oriented.

The question isn't "does this story have twelve characters?" but rather "where do these twelve essential energies manifest?" When you can't identify where an archetypal energy lives in your story, your audience will sense that absence—that missing perspective—even if they can't name what's missing.

The 12 Archetypes

Every energy a complete story needs — paired in opposition.



*Opposites sit across the wheel. Your main character is **true north**—the rest orient around them.*

Six pairs, in opposition

Ordered from most to least crucial to the story.

01 Seeker ↔ 02 Destroyer

Seeker: Aims to achieve the central goal.

Destroyer: Aims to achieve the opposite goal.

Luke Skywalker ↔ The Emperor · Harry Potter ↔ Voldemort

03 Guide ↔ 04 Misguide

Guide: Leads toward the goal.

Misguide: Misleads away from the goal.

Obi-Wan Kenobi ↔ Darth Vader · Dumbledore ↔ Snape

05 Feeler ↔ 06 Thinker

Feeler: Embodies emotion.

Thinker: Embodies logic.

Chewbacca ↔ Princess Leia · Hagrid ↔ Hermione

07 Supporter ↔ 08 Challenger

Supporter: Insider who's loyal to a fault.

Challenger: Outsider who's skeptical to a fault.

R2-D2 ↔ Han Solo · Ron Weasley ↔ Sirius Black

09 Learner ↔ 10 Seer

Learner: Insider who learns through experience.

Seer: Outsider who teaches through revelation.

C-3PO ↔ Yoda · Walter White Jr. ↔ Mike Ehrmantraut

11 Enchanter ↔ 12 Deceiver

Enchanter: Wild card who captivates.

Deceiver: Wild card who manipulates.

Lando Calrissian ↔ Jabba the Hutt · Saul Goodman ↔ Gus Fring

For musicians: the Circle of Fifths, where each note has a polar opposite. Just as tension and resolution shape music, these opposing archetypes create the dissonance and harmony that drive storytelling.

Where writers get tripped up

The Destroyer is not the Misguide.

They are **never** the same character. The **Misguide** is the “Big Bad” who strikes fear in the heart of the **Seeker**, whereas the **Destroyer** underestimates the **Seeker** and pays for it in the end.

In chess terms, the **Misguide** is like the opponent’s Queen—powerful, mobile, and threatening. The **Destroyer** is more like the King, whose defeat ends the game. The **Seeker** must battle the **Misguide**, who will repent, die, or both. The **Destroyer** falls by fate, not the **Seeker**.

The Guide is not the Seer.

The **Guide** is a hands-on mentor who steers the **Seeker** toward their goal, offering wisdom, counsel, or practical training (Obi-Wan Kenobi, Dumbledore).

The **Seer** is a hands-off oracle who offers insight or foresight but maintains a detached bird’s-eye view, speaking in riddles or cryptic truths (Yoda, Sybil Trelawney).

Most characters are one archetype.

A character may hold two archetypes if they have **two discrete identities**—Walter White is a **Seeker**, and his alter ego Heisenberg is the **Misguide**. Before assigning two archetypes to a character, ask: does the story treat these as two separate identities, with distinct plot threads and functions? If not, resist the urge.

Don’t fix a character by *adding on* another archetype instead of *drilling into* the character.

An archetype doesn’t need a face. In Cast Away, the Destroyer is the Pacific Ocean.

Breaking Bad, cast in twelve

ARCHETYPE	CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION
Seeker	Walter White	Chemistry teacher turned drug lord
Destroyer	DEA / Hank Schrader	Obsessed with catching Heisenberg
Guide	Jesse Pinkman	Wayward drug dealer, Walt's partner
Misguide	Heisenberg	Walt's power-hungry alter ego
Feeler	Skyler White	Intuitive wife trapped in Walt's lies
Thinker	Lydia Rodarte-Quayle	Calculating exec managing logistics
Supporter	Badger & Skinny Pete	Street-level allies for Jesse and Walt
Challenger	Marie Schrader	Says the quiet part out loud
Learner	Walter White Jr.	Discovers his father's true nature
Seer	Mike Ehrmantraut	World-weary fixer seeing through lies
Enchanter	Saul Goodman	Charismatic lawyer gaming the system
Deceiver	Gus Fring	Drug lord hiding behind philanthropy

YOUR TURN

Stop reading. Identify your cast of characters by archetype. Give each character a name and a description that highlights their relationship to the other characters.

If you feel overwhelmed, start with an existing story to see the pattern—then find worked examples (Game of Thrones, The Godfather, Hamlet, The Great Gatsby) at stopwriting.com/resources.

GO DEEPER

The wheel is one tool. The book is the whole method.

The 12 Archetypes come from the Character Creator chapter of **STOP WRITING!**—the story development method that takes you from first spark to a story that works, in three drafts: Dream, Design, Deliberate.

STOP WRITING!

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 1, 2026

davidcornue.com/book

Stop reading. Go cast your story.