

**‘That Boy Is Our Last Hope’:
Andrew, *Star Wars* and the Figure of the Jedi in
Buffy the Vampire Slayer.**

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When the first installment of George Lucas’s *Star Wars* trilogy was released in 1977 it became a cinematic cultural phenomenon with a large cult following. Joss Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*) came to our television screens twenty years later and, like the *Star Wars* trilogy, Whedon’s show instantly drew a cult audience. Cult films and television series draw on themes and ideas used in myth and legend. Although ‘everyday life’ changes from generation to generation, the timeless nature of myth enables the human experience to have continuity throughout the ages that ‘real life’ cannot provide (Sakal 2003, p.239). In all mythology, there are common images, motifs and symbols that together become story patterns. Both *Star Wars* and *BtVS* use mythical story patterns. By comparing the *Star Wars* characters Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader to *BtVS* character Andrew Wells, this paper will explore the story pattern Joseph Campbell refers to as the conflict of good and evil. The mythic pattern of the journey of the hero will be examined by contrasting the two differing yet important journeys undertaken by Luke Skywalker and Andrew.

Cult fandom is of vital importance to *BtVS* as every episode since the pilot actively acknowledges the show’s dedicated audience (Larbalestier 2002, p.228). The word ‘cult’ is defined in *The Macquarie Concise Dictionary* (2003) as ‘an instance of an almost religious veneration for a person or thing, especially as manifested by a body of admirers.’ This definition suggests that certain films and television series are, like religious icons, ‘worshipped’ by a dedicated, yet often small, audience. In this sense,

BtVS fandom has a great deal in common with the first media fandom, *Star Trek* (Larbalestier 2002, p.229). When the *Star Wars* trilogy hit cinema screens, *Star Wars* fandom mirrored *Star Trek*'s cult fandom. *BtVS*, and other cult phenomena such as *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* are full of mythical implications and overtones and the ageless theme of good versus evil is predominant in each of them.

In season six of *BtVS*, Whedon plays on the idea that *BtVS* is a television series with a cult following. Whedon creates a 'Big Bad' of human 'geeks' – called the Trio - who are fanatics of cult films and series such as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *James Bond* and *The X-Files*. The Trio is made up of Warren Meers, Jonathan Levinson and Andrew Wells, who team up to 'take over Sunnydale' (*BtVS*, season six) and become Buffy's 'arch-nemesises ... ses' (*BtVS*, season six).

In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell states that good versus evil, especially within the individual, has always been of great importance. Campbell argues that 'it has always been the prime function of mythology... to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back' (Campbell 1993, p.11). Mary Henderson supports this idea suggesting 'a myth shows us what we're up against; it identifies the "bad guys" – who often turn out to be within us ... and it helps us find a way to defeat them' (Henderson 1997, p.6). Both Whedon and Lucas explore this idea that the hero and the villain are not opposites but rather they are of the same flesh (Campbell 1993, p.108).

Through the characters of Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, Lucas demonstrates that both good and evil exist within the individual, and how easy it is to give in to the

Dark Side. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke Skywalker takes his first journey to the Dagobah System. It is here that Luke is shown that both good and evil reside within him. Luke enters a cave where he has a vision of Darth Vader. Vader and Luke embark in a light saber duel, resulting in Luke decapitating Vader. Vader's mask blows up and reveals Luke's face. The vision suggests that Luke's shadow side is Darth Vader, and that the Dark Side of the Force exists within Luke as much as it does in Vader (Henderson 1997, p.6). Henderson argues that although Vader personifies evil, he has the potential to be redeemed, yet while Luke personifies good, he has the potential to become evil (Henderson 1997, p.120). Just as opposing characters Luke and Vader demonstrate the individual internal struggle between good and evil in *Star Wars*, so does Andrew in *BtVS*.

Andrew Wells is just one character in the Buffyverse who illustrates the conflict between good and evil within the individual. Andrew is reflective of the *Star Wars* character Anakin Skywalker (Darth Vader). Like Anakin, Andrew is lured to the Dark Side. While Anakin turns evil because he underestimates the power of the Dark Side, Andrew turns to black magicks and summoning demons in order to 'belong' in the world and acquire friends.

Andrew is introduced to us in 'Flooded' (*BtVS*, season six), when we first meet the Trio. Warren, Jonathan and Andrew are considered to be 'geeks'; they have no other friends and do not fit in with the rest of the Sunnydale community. Andrew and Jonathan are illustrated as the 'weak' members of the Trio who follow Warren's orders. While Andrew and Jonathan join the Trio in order to do things such as control the weather, miniaturize Fort Knox, conjure fake IDs, use shrink rays and get girls, Warren's intentions for the Trio are purely evil. Like Anakin Skywalker, Andrew underestimates the power of the Dark Side. In 'Dead Things' (*BtVS*, season six), Warren hypnotizes his

ex-girlfriend Katrina with one of the Trio's gadgets and she becomes his sex slave. When Katrina comes out of her hypnotic state she tells the Trio that what they are doing is rape. After Warren kills her, Andrew sits crying next to Katrina's body. It is at this point that Andrew realizes that Warren's villainous plans are becoming criminal and truly evil. Towards the end of the episode, however, the power of evil begins to change Andrew's ideas and the innocence that both he and Jonathan brought to the Trio. When the Trio discovers that Katrina's death has been labeled a suicide in the police report, Andrew starts to taste the power of evil, and says to Warren and Jonathan, 'We really got away with murder. That's... kinda cool.'

Previously, in the episode 'Flooded' (*BtVS*, season six), Andrew tells Warren that he has no intention of killing anybody: 'But aside from the moral issues and the mess, we can get in trouble for murder.' But after Katrina's death, Andrew, like Warren, tastes the dark power that comes from murder (Tracy 2003, p.47). Andrew begins to help Warren in his attempts to destroy Buffy and eliminate Jonathan from the Trio. Unlike Andrew, Jonathan is not lured to the Dark Side; he simply wanted to be a part of the Trio in order to 'belong'. Andrew is quickly seduced by the power of evil, as was Warren, and follows in Warren's footsteps by becoming a murderer.

The journey of the individual is of extreme importance for both Whedon and Lucas throughout their respective stories. Throughout the *Star Wars* trilogy we watch Luke Skywalker, a naïve farm boy, go on a journey that sees him learn about the Force, save the princess, begin his training as a Jedi Knight and learn of his family lineage. Whedon, like Lucas, understands the importance of the journey to his characters. Although Andrew is not a hero like Luke Skywalker, the two characters both embark on

life altering journeys. Andrew's and Luke's physical and spiritual journeys, although very different, are equally important.

Andrew is introduced to us as a morally ambiguous 'evil genius', who treats the Trio alliance as a game (Tracy 2003, p.47). But the influence of the evil Warren transforms Andrew into a sinister young man who becomes a murderer. In 'Conversations with Dead People' (*BtVS*, season seven) Andrew kills his only remaining friend, Jonathan. Although under the influence of The First, in the guise of Warren, Andrew still consciously chooses to murder Jonathan. It is not until Andrew becomes the Scoobies' 'guestage' that he begins to realize that he was evil, and now wants to help the Scoobies fight against The First: 'I admit, I went over to the Dark Side, but just to pick up a few things, and now I'm back' (*BtVS*, season seven). It is his redemptive journey, however, that is vital in understanding the character of Andrew and his development, more so than his journey to the Dark Side.

Redemption is an important and recurring theme in *BtVS*. Gregory J. Sakal proposes that 'without evil, there would be no struggle, no sacrifice, and hence no possibility of or need for redemption' (Sakal 2003, p.251). In *Return of the Jedi*, the Emperor tries to turn Luke to the Dark Side. In his attempts to turn Luke evil, the Emperor ultimately gives Darth Vader the strength to redeem himself by saving Luke's life. Luke's father dies as Anakin Skywalker, rather than the evil Darth Vader. At the end of *Return of the Jedi*, when Luke and the Rebellion are celebrating in Endor, Luke sees his father, Anakin Skywalker, reunited with the other two deceased Jedi Masters, Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi. Like Lucas, Whedon understands that evil is necessary in order for salvation and redemption to occur.

Andrew's redemptive journey begins after he accepts the fact that he was evil. In 'First Date' (*BtVS*, season seven) Andrew tells The First: 'I follow Buffy's orders now. I'm redeeming myself for... killing Jonathan.' After wearing a wire when speaking to The First, Andrew discovers that 'redemption is hard' (*BtVS*, season seven). Despite the challenge, Andrew is prepared to work hard, and even to suffer, to amend his murderous past: 'I'm good now. When the fight is over, I'm gonna pay for killing Jonathan' (*BtVS*, season seven).

Although Andrew recognizes that he and Darth Vader share similarities - 'I'm like Vader in the last five minutes of Jedi' (*BtVS*, season seven) - their redemptive journeys differ greatly. By saving Luke's life and destroying the Emperor, Anakin Skywalker receives redemption just before he dies. Whedon's characters, on the otherhand, are redeemed through living. Although Anakin died as one of the 'good guys', had he lived, would he have been seduced by the Dark Side again? It is one thing to return from the Dark Side just before death, but for Whedon, redemption is about living and making amends for the past, as well as resisting the temptation of the Dark Side day after day. Yet Whedon also questions whether people are ever really redeemed for their actions.

Andrew's episode 'Storyteller' (*BtVS*, season seven) poses an important question to *BtVS* viewers - is redemption ever possible? In this episode Andrew records Buffy's fight against evil, in order to leave 'a legacy for future generations'. Buffy tells Andrew, 'You make everything into a story so no one's responsible for anything because they're just following a script.' This episode sees Buffy take Andrew to the Seal of Danzalthar. It is here, when Buffy threatens to kill Andrew, that Andrew becomes frightened of suffering the same fate as Jonathan and begins to cry, illustrating his sorrow and regret of

his 'dark past'. Andrew's tears close the Seal of Danzalthar, but his grief and remorse continue. Andrew finally takes responsibility for murdering Jonathan, and accepts that he is a murderer who perhaps may never be redeemed: 'I killed him. Because I listened to Warren, and I pretended I thought it was him, but I knew – I knew it wasn't. And I killed Jonathan.' Andrew tells the audience at the end of the episode, 'Here's the thing. I killed my best friend. There's a big fight coming and I don't know what's going to happen. I don't even think I'm going to live through it. That's, uh, probably the way it should be.' Andrew abruptly turns off the video camera, letting the audience know he is done telling stories and is ready to take responsibility for his actions. Andrew also accepts that even if he is redeemed, nothing will bring Jonathan back or take away the fact that he murdered another human being.

'Chosen' (*BtVS*), the final episode of the series, implies that Andrew is on the path to redemption. In the battle against The First, although not heroic like Luke Skywalker, Andrew discovers that he has finally found a genuine friend (besides Jonathan). Just as Darth Vader sacrificed his life for his son Luke, Anya sacrifices her life for Andrew. Anya sacrifices herself for a simple human being, not a hero. The significance of this is that Anya thought Andrew was a person worth dying for. Sakal defines sacrifice in *BtVS* as an act that consecrates a higher purpose and is an important part of the journey (Sakal 2003, pp.240-1). Although Anya may have sacrificed her life in order to redeem herself for running away from the Apocalypse of Graduation Day, her sacrifice ultimately enables Andrew to continue his redemptive journey and make amends for his past by living a meaningful existence. This suggests that Anya's death not only protected Andrew's life, but also had a higher purpose – Andrew's life and redemptive journey was not complete, yet Anya's was. Not only does Andrew appreciate Anya's sacrifice - 'She was incredible. She died saving my life' – but he questions his survival,

‘Why didn’t I die?’ From here, Andrew continues on his redemptive journey and starts to become a person who really ‘belongs’.

After the destruction of Sunnydale, Andrew appears in the *Angel* episode ‘Damage’ (*Angel*, season five). In this episode we discover that Andrew has begun to live a purposeful life as he is being trained by Giles to be a Watcher. Although Andrew still appears as his comical self, he takes his role as a Watcher seriously and we see that he is finally living a meaningful life fighting evil and is surrounded by a circle of friends – just like Luke Skywalker.

By drawing on themes from George Lucas’s *Star Wars* trilogy, which was heavily influenced by the content of Joseph Campbell’s book, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joss Whedon’s *BtVS* not only has elements of contemporary pop culture but also ancient mythology and legend. Although Andrew provides comic relief in *BtVS*, he is a central character in demonstrating the mythical story patterns of good versus evil and the journey of the hero in the Buffyverse. Andrew demonstrates how easy it is to be seduced by the Dark Side. In his journey to the Dark Side and back, Andrew reflects Anakin Skywalker with similarities so obvious that even Andrew comments on them. Both Andrew and Anakin demonstrate the conflict between good and evil within the individual. Ultimately, however, Andrew wants to emulate the Jedi Knights and what they represent – courage, strength and responsibility. Andrew often quotes and talks about Jedis. He wants to be admired, respected and needed, just as Luke Skywalker was. Andrew’s redemptive journey illustrates that by living a meaningful and remorseful life, he is slowly beginning to reflect the Jedi Knights. Like Luke Skywalker, Andrew wants someone to say of him ‘that boy is our last hope’.

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