

Six Basic Fantasy Motifs

from Children's Literature Briefly by Tunnell and Jacobs

“If a story contains all six, it is either a classic fairy tale or an example of modern high fantasy. However, if a story contains fantasy's one necessary ingredient, the motif of magic or the violation of our world's physical laws, it is still classified as fantasy literature.”

1. **Magic**—Magic is often a part of the setting, explaining otherwise inexplicable events.
2. **Other worlds**—In much of fantasy, a special geography or universe is established, a place wherein magic may freely operate.
3. **Good versus evil**—This basic theme gives rise to the conflict in a story. . .without conflict there is no story.
4. **Heroism**—The hero's quest will always follow an age-old pattern that is the backbone of today's fantasy stories.
5. **Special Character Types**—Fantasies may include characters who come from either our legendary past or an author's vivid imagination. These characters are rarely typical humans.
6. **Fantastical objects**—Characters in fantasy stories often employ magical props in accomplishing their heroic or evil deeds. These objects—such as magic cloaks, swords, staffs, cauldrons, mirrors—are imbued with power.

The Hero's Round

- The hero is called to adventure by some sort of herald.
- The hero crosses the threshold into the other world or into a place that is no longer safe and secure.
- The hero must survive various trials in the new environment.
- The hero is assisted by a protective figure.
- The hero matures, becoming a “whole person.”
- The hero returns home.