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# SAGA JOURNAL

An academic *Star Wars* fan journal

The *Saga Journal* is a monthly on-line academic review dedicated to the in-depth study of the *Star Wars* saga as presented in George Lucas's six-film series. Our goal is to deliver one of the best collections of scholarly essays on the subject that the internet has to offer.

Here at the *Saga Journal*, we believe *Star Wars* is more than just an enjoyable space opera set in a galaxy far, far away. We recognize it as a modern myth, a cultural phenomenon all its own. We want to encourage the literary exploration of all aspects of the story as presented in the Prequel and Original Trilogy films.

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# Following the Will of the Force: Qui-Gon Jinn as Maverick

by ami-padme

The Jedi Order's golden age is one of the many facets in the *Star Wars* saga that the prequel trilogy gave fans the chance to see for themselves for the first time. Decades after the original trilogy showed us a decimated Order that had been reduced to two great masters in hiding – Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda -- and a neophyte in Luke Skywalker, *The Phantom Menace* promised from its very first trailer to show what the Order was like prior to its fall. In addition to seeing Obi-Wan grow from Padawan to Knight to Master, watching a warrior Yoda oversee the Council, and witnessing Anakin Skywalker's path from slave to Jedi to Sith, the prequels introduced many new Jedi characters, with a particular focus given to the members of the Jedi Council. One of the main new characters, however, was not a member of the Council, and in fact provided a helpful contrast against those Masters and the rest of the Order in general – Qui-Gon Jinn. An independent, confident, and open-minded individual, Qui-Gon is perhaps the best example from the *Star Wars* universe of the maverick character type.

While the first definition of the word “maverick” in *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language* focuses on the word's roots in the Wild West – an American cattleman named Samuel Maverick became well-known in the 1800s for not branding the calves in his herd<sup>1</sup> – the subsequent meanings are related to the word's contemporary use in describing both fictional characters and real people. The second definition is: “one that refuses to abide by the dictates of or resists adherence to a group.”<sup>2</sup> While Qui-Gon is not the full-fledged rebel or loner this definition appears to imply, he is certainly shown to be in a certain level of conflict with the Council and Order during *The Phantom Menace*.

Qui-Gon is unconcerned about ever becoming a member of the Jedi Council, despite the fact that it is shown to be a great honor, which only the most powerful and well-regarded Masters in the Order eventually achieve. The Council apparently demands a high level of abidance from those who sit on it, and while that is an understandable demand for any organization to make of its leaders, Qui-Gon has chosen not to put the Code above doing what he believes is right or above his efforts to listen to and follow the Will of the Force. His Padawan, Obi-Wan, tells him directly, “If you followed the Code, you'd already be on the Council,” but Qui-Gon's relaxed response (“You still have much to learn”) shows that in his mind there are more important things in a Jedi's life than strictly following the rules. In fact, this specific conversation between the Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan focused on the former's determination that Anakin would be trained to become a Jedi, despite what the Code or the Council had to say about his being “too old.” He later insists on training the boy himself, though the rules forbid him from taking on more than one Padawan at a time, and the Council insists that only they could properly determine whether Obi-Wan was truly ready to become a Knight. In this case, the conventions of the Order were less important than his belief that Anakin was the Chosen One of prophecy, and Qui-Gon exhibits his apparently long-standing trait of not playing by the rules more than once in the saga's opening chapter.

Although Qui-Gon does not choose to place a large personal emphasis on the Code, his lack of rule-following does not imply a lack of ethics or morality on his part. Indeed it is quite clear that Qui-Gon possesses a very strong moral center in conjunction with a high level of self-confidence and assuredness. One of the contemporary, popular uses of the term “maverick” tends to focus on politicians and suggests that not only do mavericks refuse to adhere to certain groups – be they the political parties, government entities, or even the nations the politicians are affiliated with – but that they do so for higher, noble reasons. The label “maverick” can imply, rightly or wrongly, that the person in question has chosen to

take a surprising, unpopular, or risky stand because their personal or professional ethics will not allow them to continue to follow the rules or to do what is expected of them; breaking from the rules and expectations becomes the right and moral thing to do.<sup>3</sup> As mentioned, Qui-Gon was willing to bend or break the rules of the Order in *The Phantom Menace* because his conviction that Anakin was the Chosen One had to be stood up for, even in the face of a skeptical and disapproving Council. Certain parts of the Code could be considered more a consolidating of “best practices” or a formalizing of the usual occurrences than a statement of “right versus wrong,” but whatever the advantages of doing things a certain way (and after at least a millennium’s worth of success, the Code must have many), these rules do not necessarily speak on morality, or do not seem to do so in a way that Qui-Gon could find compelling in the face of the other issues he and the Order are forced to deal with in Episode I. In a manner similar to the way current maverick politicians are perceived to act, Qui-Gon is able to look beyond the Code to bring himself closer to the Force (and therefore, closer to the true nature of what the Order perhaps ought to be about at its core). The fact that Qui-Gon is able to attain immortality in *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith* – a feat that no other Jedi had previously achieved in the history of the Order – speaks to the idea that Qui-Gon’s approach was correct in many ways.

The third and final definition of “maverick” from *The American Heritage Dictionary* uses the word as an adjective: “being independent in thought and action or exhibiting such independence.”<sup>4</sup> Again, Qui-Gon’s actions throughout Episode I fit well with these ideas. Aside from his solitary support of Anakin, he is equally steadfast and alone in his immediate belief that the Sith have returned after his encounter with Darth Maul on Tatooine. We also see indicators of independent behavior in Qui-Gon’s teaching methods with both Obi-Wan and Anakin. The official *Star Wars* website says in its biography of Qui-Gon that he is “[a] venerable if maverick Jedi Master...a student of the living Force. Unlike other Jedi Masters who often lose themselves in...the unifying Force, Qui-Gon Jinn lived for the moment...”<sup>5</sup> His first lines in Episode I show him disagreeing with Yoda’s instructions to Obi-Wan regarding his Padawan’s focus on the future versus the present. Later, he begins teaching Anakin even before the boy is brought before the Council, encouraging him to trust his instincts and use them to his advantage. After the Council fails to reach a decision on Anakin’s training, Qui-Gon still manages to impart a lesson to his ward about the importance of quieting his mind to listen to the Will of the Force.

Qui-Gon also displays his independent streak throughout his handling of the series of crises he encounters as a result of his mission to negotiate with the Trade Federation following its invasion of the planet Naboo. He saves and takes on the Gungan Jar Jar Binks as a member of the group, agrees to seek refuge on Tatooine and venture out into the lawless planet to secure needed supplies, entrusts the entire group’s ability to leave Tatooine with a young child he has only just met, and engages in high-stakes gambling to win the child’s freedom. After his previously mentioned dealings with the Council on Coruscant, he finds himself back on Naboo, supporting Queen Amidala’s risky plan to re-take control of the planet. In the end, Qui-Gon enters a potentially deadly battle with Darth Maul, and at a critical

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juncture during the fight, chooses to meditate and quietly listen to and channel the Force in what wound up being some of the last moments of his life. After being fatally wounded, he uses his last breaths to reiterate his belief that Anakin is the Chosen One, and to ensure that Obi-Wan will take it upon himself to train him as a Jedi. The ability to improvise and quickly adapt to rapidly changing situations is a trait assigned to people, both fictional and real, who are called mavericks for the way they deal with military or battle situations.<sup>6</sup> Qui-Gon’s circumstances in Episode I may not be nearly as grave as some

of those individuals, but he does show a penchant for finding ways to deal with what comes to him.

Qui-Gon Jinn's maverick personality helps define the prequel-era Jedi Order by standing apart from it, offering the audience an alternate vision of what makes a great Jedi, and highlighting some of the issues that played a factor in the Order's fall. Though his time on screen is limited, his impact is felt throughout the *Star Wars* saga.

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, Mike. *What They Didn't Teach You About the Wild West*. Presidio Press: Novato, CA. 2000, pg. 91.

<sup>2</sup> "maverick," *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition. Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. <[dictionary.reference.com/search?q=maverick](http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=maverick)>

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary examples of this perception of "mavericks" in American politics include Senator John McCain and Senator Joseph Lieberman. Internet searches of either name and the term "maverick" produce a wide variety of results.

<sup>4</sup> *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*.

<sup>5</sup> "Qui-Gon Jinn," *The Official Star Wars Website Databank*.  
<[www.starwars.com/databank/character/quigonjinn](http://www.starwars.com/databank/character/quigonjinn)>

<sup>6</sup> One fictional example is Captain James T. Kirk of *Star Trek*. StarTrek.com says of Kirk: "[T]he tall tales of his exploits...are numerous...[He was] the first captain to bring his starship back relatively in tact after a five-year mission...[He] gained a reputation as an independent whose success couldn't be argued even though he often bucked the system."

<[www.startrek.com/startrek/view/series/TOS/character/1112496.html](http://www.startrek.com/startrek/view/series/TOS/character/1112496.html)>

# “Help me take this mask off” – Power and Redemption through Unmasking

by Matril

For centuries, masks have played a role in the cultures of varied peoples. From Native American tribes in North America to the ancient Greeks, masks have entertained, inspired respect and fear, and facilitated religious rituals (see Laurent). At its most basic level, a mask is a form of disguise, of taking on the identity of someone or something else. It is more evocative perhaps than any other disguise because it conceals the face, where emotions and personality are most prominently displayed. It is a profoundly potent symbol of transferred identities; indeed, in some ancient societies it was believed that a mask literally “transforms whoever wears it, giving them the strength and power of what it represents and making them no longer human” (Laurent). The word “mask” itself obtains its derivation from “French *masque*, from Italian *maschera*, from Medieval Latin *masca*, *specter*, *witch*, *mask*” (dictionary.com), indicating its supernatural and sometime sinister origins. Symbolically, a mask could be seen as a sign that its wearer’s true self has been buried and replaced by what the mask represents.

Masks, both literal and figurative, appear frequently in *Star Wars*. The most famous is Darth Vader’s, but other prominent masks are worn by both Jango and Boba Fett, Leia as the bounty hunter Boussh, and clone- and stormtroopers. If we extend the list to include other forms of masking the face to obscure identity, we can mention Zam Wesell’s veil, the Naboo queens with their face paint, and Padmé’s flight helmet as part of her disguise at the start of Episode II. The films are rife with characters who wish to conceal their faces for myriad reasons, and it can be surmised that this wearing of masks often carries the symbolic meaning of shifting identities. For example, Anakin Skywalker’s transformation into Vader is physically manifested as he is masked, concealing the face we have come to associate with Anakin and leaving us with a dark, expressionless visage that shows he has become someone else entirely. Other maskings, more temporary or less sinister, nonetheless carry the meaning of an altered identity.

**[I]f masking represents the replacement of one identity with another, then unmasking marks the return to the genuine self.**

But along with the motif of masks, there is also a recurring enactment of unmasking. Padmé takes off her helmet to speak with the mortally wounded Cordé; Luke removes his stormtrooper helmet to introduce himself to Leia; Leia pulls off her bounty hunter mask to profess her love for Han; a dying Anakin pleads with Luke to remove his mask. Sometimes it is as simple a matter as no longer needing a disguise. However, on a deeper level, if masking represents the replacement of one identity with another, then unmasking marks the return to the genuine self. Yet this return is not entirely without change. If the mask has truly caused its wearer to absorb the traits of another identity, then with the reclamation of the old self, there will still be knowledge and wisdom gained from that journey into another persona. Much like “the two kingdoms” described by Joseph Campbell, between which the hero must journey, there is a “wisdom brought forth from the deep” (Campbell 217), an understanding which he carries back on his victorious return home from the strange world he has traveled through. Thus, a synthesis must be attained to achieve the genuine self; to assimilate what has been learned as the Other, without losing one’s real identity. The power of unmasking, in fact, is largely dependent on the reasons for assuming the other identity in the first place. I will discuss how episodes of unmasking play prominent roles in the development of Leia, Padmé and Anakin as complex characters. For Leia, it is the moment when she reveals herself to Han after she has freed him from the carbonite. Padmé’s revelation

occurs when she informs Boss Nass that she is in fact Queen Amidala, and, finally, Anakin's time comes just before his death.

Leia's character has already undergone significant development before Episode VI. Though quick-tongued and brusque when she first appears in Episode IV, she is revealed to also possess a softer side, in her fondness for Luke and her growing feelings for Han. Yet she has a tendency to resist completely opening up to her emotions. Even though her attraction to Han is undeniable, she is no more willing to admit it than he is to acknowledge his feelings for her. It is only at the moment of crisis in Episode V, when Han is in danger of perishing, that she is able to declare her love. This marks the beginning of a new character progression, which is continued when she dons the guise of a bounty hunter. The superficial purpose of the mask she wears is obvious – she needs to infiltrate Jabba's palace without the chance of being recognized, either as a friend of Han's or as an attractive woman for Jabba's lewd desires. Symbolically, she is descending into a sort of underworld, a place where emotions are unrestrained, where a burst of temper can result in a grisly death. It is not a pleasant place, but some of its aspects can be very useful. In her guise, Leia is able to pass the guards in the entryway, literally blasting through their resistance, and brazenly addresses Jabba face-to-face (or rather, face-to-mask) to demand a bounty for her supposed prisoner, Chewbacca.

Leia has become something very dangerous. In her role as bounty hunter, she threatens to blow apart the entire palace, presumably including herself, with a thermal detonator if her demands are not met. Perhaps she is merely bluffing. Yet we know from previous examples that Leia is capable of rash and violent behavior. In Cloud City after Han has been imprisoned in carbonite, she looks on approvingly while Chewbacca strangles Lando, an expression of vengeful vindication on her face. Indeed, one could trace the path of her emotions as Yoda outlined in Episode I. Her fear of losing Han has led to anger at those who threatened him, then hatred of his betrayer, and finally the suffering of Lando. Leia is treading dangerous waters, and it results in a delay that ultimately prevents them from catching Boba Fett's ship before he takes Han away. If Leia had cast aside the desire to make Lando suffer, they might have saved Han much earlier. Boushh, then, could represent a side of Leia which accomplishes much that is useful by dubious means, but is destructive at the center. She must avoid embracing the persona too fully.

When she frees Han from his carbonite prison, she is still in the guise of the bounty hunter. For dramatic purposes, of course, this is a device that keeps the audience guessing until the last moment. As far as the symbol is concerned, though, it indicates that Leia is clinging to the other self represented by her mask, not yet able to return to her true identity. Why does she hold back? Boushh is not genuine, but he is powerful, without the vulnerability that is a part of Leia's true self. Removing the mask will uncover that vulnerability once more, and it is only natural if Leia subconsciously resists it. The moment of truth arrives when Han touches her mask and asks, "Who are you?" Here, at last, Leia chooses to unmask, and the meaning of that act is typified in the words that accompany it: "Someone who loves you." This is her true, genuine self, the self that is capable of love and willing to bear all the uncertainties that go with it. Yet her masking has not left her unchanged. She retains the skills of the bounty hunter that allowed her to rescue Han, though the darker aspects have been shed. These skills are what enable her to take care of her captor, Jabba, effectively but without the vindictiveness she manifested earlier toward Lando. She is Leia again, and yet she is something more than what she was at the start.

Throughout the events of Episode I, Queen Amidala's identity is associated with the traditional face paint mask of Naboo royalty. When she sheds the mask, she takes on the persona of the handmaiden Padmé. Curiously, what could be considered her "true" identity is associated with the wearing, not the removal, of her mask. This puts a twist on the meaning of her mask, particularly the unmasking. First of

all, the identities of Queen Amidala and Padmé Naberrie both contain aspects of genuineness. Padmé is more than a guise used to protect the queen from assassins; she is also a place of emotional refuge. In a sense they could be considered two halves of the complete person; the one concerned with the guiding, rational forces required of a leader, such as Amidala demonstrates during the Federation crisis; and the other one allowing the vulnerability and emotion that facilitates friendship and connectedness, such as Padmé forms with the young Anakin. This version of a mask fits in well with another word from Latin, “*persona*, meaning a mask, a role or a person which evolved from the Etruscan word *phersu* (a mask)” (Laurent), indicating not so much an evil or sinister side as merely a particular role.

If either of the two is more genuine, Padmé is more likely to be so. She wears the unassuming disguise of no disguise, while Amidala’s costumes obscure her form and features in a manner that is positively flamboyant. Yet Amidala is, for all that, not a false being. All that she does for her people as the queen is marked by a passionate desire for justice and compassion, evidenced in such statements as “I was not elected to watch my people suffer and die while you discuss this invasion in a committee!” When she arrives on Coruscant and again dons the face paint of the queen, she returns, largely, to her original persona, in order to become a part of the political workings of the Senate, but the question of her other identity remains, and is not fully resolved until the return to Naboo.

When Padmé reveals herself in a symbolic unmasking to Boss Nass, after a long moment of hesitation that indicates how difficult such an act truly is, she steps in front of Sabé, her decoy who is presently wearing the mask of face paint, and names herself as the true queen. “I am Queen Amidala.” However, it is important that she does not take on the physical trappings of the queen after her revelation. She donned the other identity to preserve her life and power as queen, and now she will bring back new reserves of power and life-strength as she returns to herself. She plays the role of leader in the forthcoming battle, but yet she remains Padmé as well. Her unmasking lifts her to a level of power and identity that she had not previously occupied, even as queen. As Padmé she could not have swayed Boss Nass to their cause; nor could she have done so as the masked queen. As both identities at once, she is successful.

Her dual identity continues to help her in the battle; literally, as a way of fooling the viceroy, and symbolically, as she draws on the resources gained from both parts of herself. At the end celebration, the two selves are acknowledged; Amidala by the face paint, and Padmé by the warm smile she gives to Anakin, whom she befriended as a handmaiden. It is clear, by Episode II, that she has retained this synthesis, for she is now known as Padmé Amidala, a union of both halves. It could be argued, in fact, that these two halves later become irreconcilably fractured, upon Anakin’s fall to the dark side, when the part concerned with a deep sense of right and wrong and the part concerned with emotional attachment stand at opposite ends of a widening chasm. This may be the source of the spiritual wound that kills her.

One of the crowning events in the *Star Wars* saga is the return of Anakin Skywalker from the Dark Side. Perhaps nothing symbolizes this return more evocatively than the removal of the mask he has worn as Darth Vader. The unmasking is meaningful only after considering what conditions resulted in his wearing of the mask in the first place. On a practical level, it was needed for survival, after Anakin’s duel with Obi-Wan resulted in severely damaging injuries. Metaphorically, the total deforming and masking of the face we have known as Anakin Skywalker marks the final step in his transformation into Darth Vader. However, the physical and the metaphorical are not as separate as they may seem at first. Vader wears the mask to escape an otherwise inevitable death; he becomes a Sith Lord in an attempt to prevent the dreaded death of his wife, an attempt that instead resulted in her death. The irony is complete: with his skull-like mask, Vader is almost an icon of living death. Within the faceless mask are contained all the fatalistic and fanatical motivations of the dark being that Anakin has become.

Vader himself acknowledges his rejection of what Anakin was when he tells Luke, “That name no longer has any meaning.” His mask is more sinister by far than those previously discussed, fitting with the original etymology: “The word *mask* comes from the Old Italic *masca*, which defines an evil, hideous character. In Latin, it was referred to as *larva*, which was an infernal being, similar to the *scheme* of Germanic cultures” (Laurent). And yet, just as Anakin’s face is still there beneath the mask, albeit scarred and disfigured, his old self lingers beneath Vader’s crushing identity, waiting for the time to reemerge. And just as Luke is the one to physically remove Vader’s mask, it is Luke who helps to bring back Anakin.

The concealment of Anakin’s genuine self lasts considerably longer than Padmé or Leia’s; in fact, longer than any other’s. From the start of Episode IV until the end of Episode V, most of the main characters are entirely unaware that the identity of Vader is masking anything at all. He is assumed to be monstrous both inside and out, while his continuing brutal behavior seems to prove, for the audience members who are aware of the events of Episode III, that he is indeed “no longer human” (Laurent). Vader’s grim revelation to Luke, “I am your father” finally indicates that Vader has been masking more than just his face; however, the masking does not end with this revelation, for both his face and true self remained concealed. Obi-Wan Kenobi goes so far as to assert that “he’s more machine now than man, twisted and evil.” It is Luke alone who rejects this fatalistic judgment; even in the face of Vader himself insisting that “It is too late for me, my son.” Luke tells him staunchly, “I feel the good in you.” He has seen beneath the mask where others were deceived by the completeness of the concealment.

Just as Vader’s mask cannot be removed without serious consequences, Anakin’s true self cannot emerge unless a heavy price is paid. Anakin may return, but he must face the situation that has resulted from the choices he made as Vader. He saves his son and rids the galaxy of the great evil of the Emperor, but by betraying Vader’s position, he earns the vindictive wrath of Palpatine, and is mortally wounded. Yet there is victory for him on the verge of his death, poignantly symbolized as he unmask. And there could be no better symbol in this ritual than for Luke to be the one to remove the mask of Vader, for it was Luke who urged Anakin to reemerge above the false self of the Sith Lord.

Anakin has returned, yet more than any other unmasked character, he has brought new knowledge and wisdom from his long ordeal of concealment, earned through great pain and penitence. This Anakin no longer fears loss through death; when Luke protests the deadly act of removing his mask he argues that “nothing can stop that now;” more importantly, to Luke’s desperate plea to save him he says calmly, “you already have.” The young Anakin, before the ordeal of his masking, could not comprehend this great truth, and so fell to Palpatine’s temptations. Now he has learned enough to truly bring balance, and die in peace. Could there have been some other, less destructive way to give Anakin this wisdom than the concealment of his true self under cover of a brutal Sith Lord? Perhaps. Nevertheless, he must do what he can with the circumstances as they are, and he is able at last to find power and peace in the unmasking of his genuine, transformed identity.

From bounty hunters to unassuming handmaidens to Sith Lords, *Star Wars* is rife with disguises that mask the face and bury the identity, for the varied purposes of protection, power or even basic life support. But the true power and emergence of the transformed, genuine self can only occur when the masks’ wearer finds the strength to remove the disguise and reveal all the vulnerabilities and strengths evidenced in a vibrant, unconcealed face.

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## Discovering *Star Wars*

### **Jango4**

I used to see *Star Wars* on television all the time. I couldn't tell the difference between any of the three movies for quite a while, but I always knew that I liked them. The thing that really drew me in was the action sequences – I was impressed with the chase scenes, the lightsaber fights, and the space battles. I would watch them with my family, especially my Dad and my sisters. My Dad was a long-time fanatic for *Star Wars*, and his kids ended up following suit. I did not become a fanatic until later, with the Special Editions and Prequel Trilogy, but it was still always fun catching the classic trilogy when it came on.

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