

Rise of the Fantastic Super Heroines

Sure, we love a good hero – but we love a strong heroine even more. **Deidre Donnelly** celebrates a few pioneering fantasy figures.



The Princess

Merida

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a princess must be in want of a prince – right? Wrong. Merida, the latest (11th) Disney princess, with a temperament as fiery as her locks, rails against her parents' traditional ideas of how a princess should live. She gallops on her horse, shoots arrows and climbs up to waterfalls. In arguing against the arranged marriage planned for her, she stands up for her free will. "I want my freedom! It's my life!" she shouts, unlike princesses past. As it offers an animated action heroine equally appealing to boys and girls, *Brave* has been called "an important mainstream feminist document" by *Forbes* magazine. (Frankly, we weren't surprised when *Brave* won the 2013 Oscar for Best Animated Film.)



The Hunter

Katniss Everdeen

For centuries, stories of daring quests have followed men (Odysseus, Frodo, Luke Skywalker, and so on). What makes *The Hunger Games* series powerful is that the hero is a teenage girl. And as Katniss Everdeen goes from hunting for food for her family to defending the people of Panem, she not only breaks new ground, but earns respect with every step. First, when she volunteers for the games in place of her little sister, we admire her protectiveness. Then, as her survival skills and emotional resilience see her through the games, she becomes a riveting role model. On a camping trip after reading the series, I drew on her courage when I got spooked on my first solo hike, and on her steely focus when tending my campfire.



The Leader

Daenerys Targaryen

When we first meet the diminutive Daenerys in the *Game of Thrones* TV series, she shrinks in the shadow of her vengeful brother, Viserys. But as the epic unfolds, we see her self-esteem and strength emerge. Initially, when Viserys marries her off to the Dothraki king, Drogo, she's little more than a slave. Yet she finds her power: first through her sexuality, which she uses to form a bond with Drogo, then as the widowed Khaleesi, who leads with benevolence. US literature professor Ann Marie Rasmussen says this transformation is much like that of the self-made man archetype. In being the kind of leader who puts herself on the line and learns by doing, Daenerys shows that you may not be born a hero, but you can grow to become one.

The Mentor

Glinda, the Good Witch

Oprah often shares the lessons she has taken from the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, especially the advice Glinda gives Dorothy at the very end of her adventure: "You've always had the power." When she first appeared in the L. Frank Baum classic, Glinda subverted the Bad Witch stereotype by being a powerful older woman who uses her special abilities to help others. In the latest prequel, *Oz the Great and Powerful*, she offers similar mentorship and protection to Oscar. In doing so, she guides him to his destiny – defeating the Wicked Witch, Evanora, and presiding over Oz. Today, Glinda tells a new generation that goodness and power can coexist, and the best kind of mentorship nudges people to discover their potential. **Q**