**Cracking The Genre Code: Tips And Tricks For Writing An Engaging Thriller, Romance, Sci-Fi, Or Fantasy Novel**

**By Andrew Salomon**

Not every writer (or reader) likes the word ‘genre’ - but there is no denying that definite genres exist in fiction writing. We are all drawn to particular kinds of stories that resonate with us, and when we develop a useful understanding of the elements of different writing genres and how these elements slot together, we can use genre to our own benefit as storytellers.

Every genre has its own conventions and expectations, and a well-developed understanding of these can help a writer captivate and keep readers. If we think back on novels that have made a deep impression on us, the chances are good that they were of a strongly distinctive genre. Let’s have a look at some of the tips and tricks you can use when writing thrillers, romance, science fiction, or fantasy.

**Thrillers**

Thrillers are very much about keeping readers on the edge of their seats, and the best way to do so is by skillfully employing suspense and tension. Here are some tips for writing a thriller:

* Begin by crafting a gripping premise: You want to kick off with an intriguing premise that immediately hooks the reader into the story. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is at its core, a perilous quest to uncover deeply-hidden secrets. Brown’s combination of this simple yet intriguing premise, along with historical facts and a fast-paced narrative, ensures readers are hooked from the first page.
* A balance between twists and pacing: You want to maintain a steady pace of plot development and keep the tension high and varied, by having strategically placed twists and surprises. A great example of this is Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* with its unreliable and unpredictable narrator and surprising revelations.

**Romance**

One of the key elements of romance novels is that they transport their readers into a different world where love and passion are highly amplified. Let’s look at the genre conventions that hold strong in popular romance novels:

* Your characters have to be deeply compelling. Every successful romance novel takes the reader along for the ride to experience how the characters grow and evolve.

Protagonists can have a lot of flaws and foibles, as long as they are relatable - this way the reader can empathise with them and keep rooting for them as they pursue love and emotional fulfilment.

* There must be chemistry (lots of it). The success of a romance novel depends strongly on how believable the connection between your main characters is. The writer’s aim is to have the reader become emotionally invested in the evolving romance. Obstacles, misunderstandings and tumultuous emotions all add the sense that two people have a love that is worth fighting for. It can also be very useful if your characters have contrasting personalities that eventually lead to romance, such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy, and Tessa Bailey’s *It Happened One Summer* with the unexpected pairing of a big-city socialite and a gruff fisherman.

**Science Fiction**

Science fiction enables the writer to explore futuristic worlds and to be highly creative with the potential and dangers of technology. To create a believable and immersive sci-fi experience, keep the following elements in mind:

* Your science fiction world has to work and be consistent. You can set your science fiction novel on truly astonishing worlds - as long as they are coherent. That means the physics has to work (or if it doesn’t, you need a compelling and convincing reason why this is so). Science fiction benefits richly from dedicated world-building and establishing the rules and limitations of your futuristic setting. Orson Scott Card’s *Ender's Game*, Frank Herbert's *Dune* and Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* are all great examples of extensive and intricate universes that are outlandish, yet still highly believable.
* Exploring the impact of technological and social innovations. Science fiction can be highly informative and entertaining when it explores the impact of scientific innovations on society and individuals. An iconic example is Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series, where we see the ramifications of predicting the future using psychohistory. Science fiction is a wonderful genre to investigate the intricate relationship between individuals and society, against the background of distinctive political systems, technologies and cultures.

**Fantasy**

Fantasy novels are known for taking readers on extraordinary journeys through enchanting worlds characterised by magic, myths and the supernatural. When writing a fantasy novel, keep a strong focus on these elements:

* Construct a rich mythology. By developing a detailed mythology and magical system that shapes your fantasy world, the reader can be guided in their perception of your vivid setting and can also be convinced that your characters are behaving authentically. One of the most complete examples of this would be J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* that combines its own distinctive languages, histories, and mythologies that allow readers to feel immersed in Middle-earth.
* Chosen heroes who are involved in epic quests. Astonishing settings and battles are great elements of fantasy novels, but what really keeps readers engaged is extraordinary quests undertaken by heroes who embark on transformative journeys. George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* keeps audiences captivated with its constantly expanding narrative that allows for developing multi-layered characters engaged in high-stakes struggles for survival, revenge and power.

Genre fiction often gets criticized for stifling creativity or limiting the potential of a story. But through understanding the different elements of genre fiction, we can give careful consideration to its unique characteristics and also be in a better position to deliver on readers’ expectations. Genre can become another tool in your writers’ toolbox to use for broadening your storytelling skills and creating captivating stories. And it’s a great excuse to reread many of the classics.