Plan Your Own Multi-Genre Novel



*This is meant to be the cherry on the top of the ice cream sundae that will be your writing portfolio.*

*I am going to be paying close attention to your ability to professionally format and edit your work without any input from me. Plan a novel people are going to care about. Nothing too silly. Put stuff you care about in it. And stuff you like. Make your novel satisfy the requirements of three (EWC4U1) or two (EWC4C1) genres listed below. Yes, it really has to.*

1. **Adventure**: in the two basic types of adventure stories, characters either must travel from home through a series of dangerous settings and obstacles, to a distant location, and then possibly return, or else they find themselves stranded far from home and must get back. Could be:

* In outer space/on an alien planet
* Travelling through time
* A sea voyage
* Exploring the wilderness, a jungle or forest, including old ruins found there
* Under the sea, to the top of a mountain, to the center of the earth
* Travelling to North America and settling it in frontier days (western)
* A fantasy setting (dragons, castles, ogres, wizards, witches, fairies, swords, horses)

1. **Romance**: in the two basic types of romances, either the protagonist may spend the entire story choosing between two possible partners, or else s/he may go through a “star-crossed” romance, in which s/he has a specific person in mind, but everything (setting, characters, fate) conspires against the union being possible. You can have a romantic comedy or a romantic tragedy. You can also have a farce, *Super Bad* or *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* style, in which the main obstacle to the protagonist finding love is that s/he is such a colourful idiot. The audience enjoys seeing how many ways s/he can screw things up.
2. **Horror**: in the two basic types of horror stories, either the protagonist is a creature which will kill everyone by the end, possibly dying itself, or else the protagonist is a person who must put an end to the horror, possibly dying him/herself.
3. **Crime fiction**: your protagonist’s central motivation is against the law (stealing something, committing murder) or they can be trying to prevent such a crime from happening, *or* they could be trying to find out after the fact who did it. Crime books are normally about heists (successful or unsuccessful), murders, infidelities, insurance scams, smuggling, hit men and the like. Losers with no future, women with “pasts.” Crime fiction really only works in “our” world or one very like it in terms of the legal system. Katniss Everdeen isn’t going to get charged with murder, nor Bilbo Baggins with theft, because they don’t live in worlds much like ours.
4. **Sword and sorcery**: can be an adventure story, romance or whatever, but something magic must be a central plot point. There can be an evil sorcerer/witch/item/monster that is the central threat, or there can be a good wizard/witch/fairy who needs help or is trying to accomplish something good. The sword can be magical, or it can be more a matter of “magic is evil and sneaky, so we’re going to beat it with honest muscles and pure steel.”
5. **Science Fiction**: apart from the “space exploration adventure” stories, science fiction is most often exactly the same as the “sword and sorcery” genre is described above, but with scientists instead of wizards and often using technological items like robots, spaceships, ray guns or light sabres instead of swords or magical items or spells.
6. **Espionage**: in a spy thriller, a typical story involves webs of deceit and odd allegiances being formed and destroyed, usually over another country vying to steal our military, technological or governmental secrets. Can also be about rogue agents, or highly trained agents who have been betrayed, set up, tortured, brainwashed or the like, maybe even by people in their own governments. Think the Jason Bourne series.
7. **Rise of a New Hero**: this is what Joseph Campbell analysed in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. There is a structure which any genre can be built upon or slotted into. That’s why it’s been done so much. The heart of a hero story like this is that a “nobody,” Joe Average character realizes the hope of being somebody special (an appealing dream for the reader to imagine), and despite everything seeming completely doomed, prevailing, through great sacrifice. Very Jesusy.
8. **Redemption/Comeback story**: a character who had it all, and loses it (riches to rags, like *Arrested Development*) and needs to try to rebuild his/her life, regain his/her original place, but having learned life lessons and being a better person now. Often, they kind of deserved to “fall,” having been an arrogant jerk clearly being punished for his/her hubris by the gods. Sometimes they did something horrible and must now atone for that. Sometimes, though, it is the story of an innocent, with a nice life and bright future, who has had it shattered by a horrible accident, addiction or tragedy. In a “walkabout” story, something bad has happened, and the protagonist must go on an odd, meandering journey to try to find some kind of peace and closure, as in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Crabbe* or *The Catcher in the Rye.*
9. **Satire of a modern issue**: you can take something like Facebook, cell phones, intellectual property theft, identity theft or whatever, and fictionalize, exaggerate and build upon it, to make a cautionary tale or a farce. You could, for instance, create a world in which people not only copy and share other people’s recorded songs, but have a technology for predicting and then pre-writing a hundred songs by an artist, in five minutes, and are putting the songs up for sale to anyone (including the artist) who can afford to pay for the rights to record them. Or, like Kurt Vonnegut in “Harrison Bergeron,” you could lampoon the modern school system by writing about a society in which all gifted people are handicapped with technology to ensure they are “average,” to be fair to everyone else.
10. **A simple tragedy**: like Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, or like *Macbeth*, your protagonist would like to build an “empire” or “kingdom” of his or her own, and moves heaven and earth to try to achieve it, only to have the whole thing get smashed shortly before (or after) reaching out to grasp it. Build a dream until the audience wants it to happen. Then smash it. Everyone cries.
11. **Revenge story**: the protagonist has devoted everything to getting revenge for something bad done to him/her. Can become an armed vigilante, as in the very worst of stories, or it may be a social, professional, romantic or economic revenge. Or it could be *Hamlet*. It’s hard to care much about the well-being of someone who wants revenge, because revenge is ugly, childish and weak. This is normally glossed over by making the protagonist charming, amusing or pitiful.
12. **Town with secrets**: you can create a community in which you have equipped each character with several shocking secrets, which no one would guess, as they each have a veneer of respectability. Then you have them interact, have all the secrets gradually get exposed, and you tell the story of what happened then. This can be a horrific or a comedic thing.
13. **Fairy Tale**: you can build a novel on the story of a (usually much shorter) fairy tale. Often a young person sets out to build a life. This is spiced up by dwarves, ogres, giants, fateful prophecies which must come true, evil step-mothers/Queens/witches and the like. Nice people try to feed the protagonist, nasty ones try to poison, trap and eat him/her. Exaggerate real world problems.

Stock Characters



*Here are some “stock” characters which have been used over and over because they work. Use four (EWC4U) or three (EWC4C1) stock characters (to be completely unfair, the Freudian trio only counts as one). Yes, you really do need to use stock characters.*

1. The **Freudian** “three parts of a personality” trio (every Mr. character can be Miss or Mrs. of course):

* Mr. “I Want Everything Now! Do ALL the things!”
* Mr. Cautious/Manners/Rules/I’m concerned
* Mr. “Must Decide Between Those Two”

1. **Comic sidekick/clown/bumbling incompetent**: along with (or impeding, Lestrade from *Sherlock Holmes* style) the protagonist to be funny, to be not as good, to make “real life, believable” comments and objections to overly fanciful, horrific or heroic stuff, to ground the story in reality, to be the heart of the story and remind the protagonist of who s/he is or make him/her question him/herself. A pair of clowns is a favourite of Shakespeare (and George Lucas, who took the “one taller and skinnier, one shorter and fatter” clowns tradition and made them robots). Sometimes the comic sidekick is comic (and handicapped) by being an addict of some kind. Sometimes, as in the case of Eeyore or Marvin the Paranoid Android, the humour comes from this character’s blind pessimism.
2. **Jealous rival/foil**: *Archie’s* Reggie Mantle, *Harry Potter’s* Draco Malfoy. Someone who has the ability to replace the hero (or used to be like the hero). Usually nasty, proud, shallow and jealous. Makes the protagonist have to try harder, adds some tasty conflict, argument and complication. Can be an “evil twin,” with the same abilities, items, knowledge or whatever, but evil intent.
3. **Mr. Perfect-At-Everything-But-Needs-To-Learn-About-Empathy-and-Cooperation**. A cold, haughty, superior character who needs to “fall” and learn the value of depending on, caring about and helping out others. Can be the protagonist, or may be someone the protagonist is “stuck with.” May be a princess or rich boy.
4. **Mr. Get-Away-From-Me**: slimy, gross, possibly perverted character who hangs around like a bad odour. Can turn out predictably to be aligned with evil (or simply be in the story to be a henchman) or can turn out to have useful information or items. Like Gollum or Grima Wormtongue in *Lord of the Rings*.
5. **Mentor**: wise teacher. Too old or too dead by the climax of the story to simply do everything for the protagonist.
6. **Oracle**: supernatural predictor of the future. Says things that will turn out to be impressively, magically true by the end, but which provide no help whatsoever to the protagonist when the help is needed. Or can be used to force the protagonist onto a specific path.
7. **Nemesis**: when not actually an evil twin, can be more of a character designed perfectly to neutralize, kill or otherwise take out the protagonist. Can be wealthier, smarter, stronger, more supernatural, or better trained. Where the protagonist has a goal the audience sympathizes with, the nemesis exists only to defeat the protagonist.
8. **Femme Fatale**: master seductress, full of lies and quick with new ones. A manipulative mess. Perhaps a bit kinky. Everyone around her is dying and the protagonist could be next.
9. **Dark/Byronic/Flawed Hero**: this tortured, angsty hero is a force to be reckoned with, but is mostly preoccupied with sitting in the dark and brooding attractively and romantically over a past sorrow or sin. Haunted by his past. Possibly addicted or has mental problems. Guys like *Sherlock Holmes*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s Angel, or Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* or Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Also Dr. Gregory House from *House*. The real Lord Byron was famous for wit, intelligence, eloquence, poetry, wearing black, and walking around broodingly barely containing a passion that could come out equally in wooing or in anger and then switch from one to the other. Often amusingly or plot-complicatingly rude to others who don’t deserve it.
10. **The Black Knight/Juggernaut/Unstoppable Foe**: this character seemingly cannot be hurt by anyone ever. Except for a single key vulnerability (often psychological) which the protagonist may learn of. Not usually the main antagonist. More often a henchman. Like Polyphemus the Cyclops in *The Odyssey* or like Achilles in *The Illiad*. Like Darth Vader. (Not like the Black Knight in *Monty Python and the Quest for the Holy Grail,* who was rightly called a looney.)
11. **The Wild Card/Rogue**: like the Joker in *Batman*, Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, or Han Solo in *Star Wars,* Wolverine in *X-Men (*or even James Bond, a bit) this character may do *anything*. Leaves a swath of debris behind him/her. Delights in mayhem and not following the rules because s/he sees no reason for them. Smiles joyfully a lot, even when in (or doing) danger. May switch loyalties, may take off when needed quite badly. No clear allegiance to anyone but him/herself. Fun, funny, dangerous, charming, unpredictable. Gasoline on a candle flame. Seldom used as the protagonist because protagonists are predictable and wild cards aren’t supposed to be.
12. **Omniscient/Omnipotent/Unreachable Overlord**: like Big Brother in *1984*, Sauron in *Lord of the Rings* or Voldemort in *Harry Potter*, this antagonist is so powerful and aware that s/he must be used very sparingly. The protagonist is going to die if s/he meets up with this character until s/he is at the height of his/her powers, willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, and the end of the book is in sight. In some books, the protagonist is never going to see this character in person.
13. **The Judas**: a comic sidekick, mentor, rogue, Freudian “Mr. I Want Everything Now” (or any other character, really) who betrays the hero when it *matters*. The Judas’ own story arch will then end very badly, or else s/he will repent and rejoin the protagonist, creating a lot of distrust and strife, and loyalty needing to be proved, perhaps by sacrificing his/her own life for the hero.