

Page-Turner Fiction

TROPES FOR MAJOR GENRES

KNOW WHAT YOUR GENRE
READERS EXPECT AND
ENJOY IN THEIR BOOKS



Contents

[CONTENTS](#)

[WHAT ARE GENRE TROPES?](#)

[FANTASY TROPES](#)

[HORROR TROPES](#)

[MYSTERY TROPES](#)

[ROMANCE TROPES](#)

[SCIENCE FICTION TROPES](#)

WHAT ARE GENRE TROPES?

[Fantasy Tropes](#) [Horror Tropes](#) [Mystery Tropes](#)
[Romance Tropes](#) [Science Fiction Tropes](#)

So...what is a trope?

Basically, a trope is a concept, character, setting, or plot device that is commonly found in various genres. All the major genres have tropes, and the more popular the genre (i.e. the more books written in that genre), the more tropes you find as stories use and reuse ideas over and over again.

Why do authors reuse a trope? Because they *work*. I mean, if you're writing a horror story and you stick in a haunted house—yeah, your readers will instantly have a clue what to expect will happen in that house.

Readers in genres have specific expectations about stories published in genres. They buy books labeled “romance” on the spine because they want to read about a romantic relationship with a happy-ever-after ending. They buy books labeled “science fiction” because they want to be transported to a different world (or a new version of this world) to see what happens. Readers *expect* stories in a given genre to have tropes they're familiar with. Omit those, and you seriously risk pissing off your audience—and losing those readers *forever*. Not kidding. FOREVER.

But wait? Doesn't that make genre fiction formulaic? Nope, not at all. The trick is to choose a trope or four that fits both the genre you're writing and the story in your head. Then mix-and-match them. Use the trope in a new way. For example, don't make that scary haunted house a place of horror. Make it a place of safety, while the well-lit family home is where the true horror lies.

Turn your tropes around. Mix them up. Play with them so the reader can both recognize the tropes you're using but also be surprised and delighted that you've discovered a new way to use them. That will win your readers' hearts and minds—and win you a host of new fans.

But whatever you do, don't ignore the tropes in your genre. That's a huge mistake, so don't make it.

The tropes in this list are organized by major genre categories and, with the exception of mystery, are not broken down into subgenres at all. Even the mystery category only breaks down the cozy mystery separately.

The lists of tropes on the pages that follow are primarily from **WritersWrite.com**, but has been supplemented from other sources. WritersWrite.com is an excellent source of writing information, but do note that it is British in origin, so be aware of cultural and spelling issues that differ from American English. Another source was **Tropedia.fandom.com**. This is less useful as a writing guide but offers fan attitudes toward various tropes. Historical romance tropes were added from **LornaFaith.com** and cozy mystery tropes from **CaronAllanFiction.com**. These last two are writers in their respective genres.

FANTASY TROPES

- The **Dark Lord**. An ancient evil from the elder days is once again threatening the world.
- The **Chosen One** (protagonist) whose job it is to defeat the Dark Lord (antagonist) and restore the natural order of the world.
 - Often a sword is involved.
- **The Chosen One or Hero has been orphaned.**
 - It doesn't matter how they were orphaned, only that family members are a liability to your protagonist and a headache to fit into the plot. (See any Disney cartoon for more information.)
- **The Hero needs a mysterious parental figure.**
 - But never an actual parent. They are there to guide them on their journey and offer advice.
 - It helps if their mysterious parental figure is a wizard with contacts in the magic sword business. Whether they do or not, they usually like long flowing robes.
- **Your Hero must go on a quest** to find or destroy the magic item giving the Dark Lord his power.
- **They will need a landscape to trudge through.**
 - Remember it has to resemble Medieval Europe or everyone will make fun of you.
 - Unless of course it resembles Ancient Rome or Japan, because that's just as cool, man.
 - Maybe, look up China while you're at it. After all, who doesn't like Kung Fu?
- **Nobody cares about peasants!**
 - Treat them like props, but if they speak out of turn mow them down like the cannon fodder they are.
- **Your character must be a peasant.**

- Of course, secretly they are also the descendent of the long-lost king with a birth mark to prove it.
- For some reason everyone except the Dark Lord's evil advisor will like your secretly noble Hero. It must be their royal grace shining through, right?
- **The advisor must have a black goatee beard.**
- **They will need friends.** Maybe a party or a fellowship?
 - They will help your Hero along the journey, supporting the Hero whenever the Hero has lost all hope. This happens around scene 45.
 - They should all be improbably, overly capable. Your elf should not just a good archer, but the best there ever was.
 - They should also be princes, nobles, wizards, clerics and even the rulers of entire nations. Nobody delegates in Middle Earth. King Arthur sends his best men on pointless errands all the time. Probably, to get Lancelot away from his wife, but still.
- **Your Hero will need to be trained by a master swordsman/magician** who is secretly their...<someone>
- **Your Hero will need to be descended from a master.**
- **Your Hero will need to be the best fighter in the whole realm.**
 - They are never allowed to use a helmet or a shield. That is for nameless support characters without exception – except if they only hunt goblins.
 - Real Heroes use two swords.
 - Real Heroes have magic swords.
 - Real Heroes don't cast spells. That's the wizard's job.
- **Your Hero can out-think the wizard who is the smartest person in the world.**
 - This means they can beat any spell-caster with just their wits and cunning.
- **You Hero must be a nerdy kid who likes magic.**
 - Sure, they get beaten up at first but soon they become the greatest mage of all time. Then they get even with the bullies...
- **Your wizard Hero is the best of all time and keeps getting better.**

- **Your wizard Hero is just okay, but through hard work comes out on top.**
- **Your “wizard” Hero is just the worst spell-caster of all time, but they have personality and people just like them.**
 - Give them an endearing spell like “Cause Mild Discomfort” or “Summon Milk”
- **Your Hero is bored with their life and wants to make a name for themselves** in the wide world.
- **Your Hero loves their hometown and never wants to leave** but those damn orcs/trolls/goblins/wizards/invaders destroy this idyllic life, and they are forced to right this injustice.
- **Your Hero gets caught up in circumstances that soon take over their life and makes them believe in a greater cause.**
- **Your Hero falls in love with a princess** who needs to be rescued from the Dark Lord.
 - Turns out the princess was the real Dark Lord all along.
 - She killed her whole family just to rule the kingdom.
 - She was actually good after all, and just pretending to be bad to learn the Dark Lord’s secrets. Her family were all secretly monsters, though.
 - Your Hero needs to rescue her from the Dark Lord’s Castle.
 - Oh, no. Your Hero got captured while freeing the princess.
 - Now, she needs to mount a rescue for the Hero.
 - For some reason, her farther, the king, won’t help her so she needs to gather allies and infiltrate the castle on her own.
- **Your Hero has found the magic item they need to save the world** while locked up at the Dark Lord’s Castle.
 - They insist that they steal it before they leave the castle.
 - Conveniently, the Dark Lord, or maybe a dragon, is asleep and they can retrieve it.
 - But the Dark Lord wakes up just as they are making their escape.
 - The Dark Lord, or their minions, chase the Heroes until they are saved by a secret magical kingdom – usually in a forest populated by elves.

- Or they are forced underground into dangerous caves – sometimes populated with elves.
- But not the nice elves Dark Elves. These are evil creatures worshipping demonic gods. They are a foul and irredeemable lot.
- Except, of course, there is one good dark elf who is wandering the world making up for his race's evil ways.
- Perhaps, this dark elf paladin helps lead your Hero back into the light – even though it hurts his beautiful lavender eyes just to see the sun. He probably writes poetry while crying.
- **In the dark under the world, the Under Dark, there are as many fabulous creatures as anywhere else in the world.** Even though, I mean, what would they eat?
 - They live in magical cities.
 - They live as savage beasts or wild tribes.
 - They prey on wary travelers not used to the blinding darkness.
 - Glowing red eyes follow your Hero on their journey.
 - They turn out to be an ally who guides them to safety.
 - They turn out to be a stealthy assassin come to collect the bounty on your Hero's head.
 - They are a swarm of monsters that dog your Hero's every move.
 - But your Hero makes it back to the surface to find much has changed.
- **They have been under a spell, and it is a hundred years too late** to save the kingdom from the Dark Lord's rule.
 - All hope is lost, and the world lies in ruin.
 - Your Hero cries out in despair. When the darkness is at its fullest a light answers their call.
- **Your Hero has gained the notice of a god/goddess who wants to help them** right the wrongs of the world.
- **Your Hero finds an impossibly old ally** still fighting the good fight.
 - This ally has gained ancient knowledge and needs to pass it on to your Hero.

- This knowledge comes at a price.
- The price is a part of your Hero's soul is lost each time they use this black magic. Oh, the tragedy.
- **Your Hero defeats the Dark Lord, spending all of their soul, and becomes the next Dark Lord**, completing the cycle, as foretold in an ancient prophecy.
- **Your Hero refuses to give into this dark magic** and instead ascends to a new level of power. This may change their hair color.
 - This power gives them a chance at victory and a better tomorrow.
 - This power comes from the last magic of an elder race, and using it means that they will fade from the earth and the world will be a less magical place. A forced relocation into the west often happens simultaneously.
- **Your Hero wins but dies in the process.**
- **Your Hero dies, but that goddess from earlier has plans for them and brings them back to life.**
 - That god/goddess reincarnates them as a small child with all the memories of their past life.
- **Your Hero does not die but gets to retire** and have a good life and maybe raise a child.
 - This child inherits the powers of your Hero and must learn to live with this responsibility.
 - They are easy prey for an evil organization that wants to hurt your Hero.
 - They steal your Hero's little girl and try to kill your Hero.
 - But they survive and if it is the last thing the Hero does, they will rescue their little girl.
 - They are old now and past their prime. But, with age comes skill and they are deadlier than ever.
 - The task is long and hard, but they are tough and will see it through even if it kills them.
 - Standing over the smoking ruins of the organization that stole their little girl, the Hero has won.
 - They have won, but it is just too much for them. They have seen their child freed and safe and at long last is

allowed to rest – you know in a sad way.

- Perhaps, they have served their god/goddess well and they are allowed a day to say goodbye to their friends.
 - Maybe, their spirit is so strong it becomes a magical beast that prowls the woods keeping evil at bay.
 - You Hero is allowed to ascend to heaven as a reward for their service.
 - The war is won, and everyone returns home. Many farewells occur.
 - But, have they changed, or has the world they left moved on without them?
- **It's time they settled down, but they are haunted by the call to adventure.**
 - They seek a new adventure at every turn but are never satisfied. Ships and golden fleeces are often involved.
 - Eventually, they bite off more than they can chew and end up dead.
 - They die nobly protecting the next generation.
 - They pass on what they have learnt so that the story can continue with someone else.
 - They find they have become the crazy old person in the tavern who all the kids make fun of.
 - But every now and then, wizards, dwarves, and elves are seen talking to the crazy old person.
 - One day the old person gives a gift to their nephew.
 - They give them a magic clock or wardrobe that leads to another world.
 - They give them a magic sword that leads them on a quest to be king
 - They give them a book of magic spells. Which will conveniently solve every obstacle in the narrative.
 - And of course, the One Ring to rule them all.

HORROR TROPES

LEVELS OF FEAR:

- **Horror:** The feeling triggered by an unambiguous threat: a bear charging your loved one. It leads to a typical fear response. This is a middling alternative to terror.
- **Revulsion:** The feeling triggered by an experience of the morbid or diseased—blood, gore violence, etc. It leads to a powerful feeling of disgust: the sight of your loved one’s remains after the bear has torn them apart. This is a cheap gimmick that plays on humanity’s most basic evolutionary-biological responses. It’s best to imply this or only show a glimpse—don’t linger here.
- **Terror:** The feeling triggered by an ambiguous threat—you’re walking through woods said to be full of bears... when you hear what sounds like the growl of a bear close by. At its most potent, it leads to an experience of the numinous (spiritual or religious fervency) and/or the sublime (awe of greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation). This is the ideal type of fear.

SUB-GENRES:

- **Body Horror:** This sub-genre is a heightened, metaphorical exploration of the deteriorating effects of age and disease on the human body and mind — the loss of self.
- **Cosmic Horror:** This subgenre explores monstrous, (super)natural forces that are powerful on a scale beyond the realm of human understanding. Attempts to understand the Cosmic Horror drives the protagonist mad — even looking at a Cosmic Horror might be enough to drive the viewer insane. This sub-genre highlights humanity’s smallness and ignorance in relation to a vast, hostile universe. Human actions taken against a Cosmic Terror are futile. The Terror is rarely a direct antagonist; more often it is a pervasive,

unavoidable presence. The protagonist's only hope is that he might be too inconsequential for the Terror to notice him.

- **Psychological Horror:** This sub-genre places the audience in the monster's mind, forcing them to follow the rationale for its perverse actions and confront their own capacity to commit and rationalize atrocities.
- **Surreal Horror:** This sub-genre relies on the heavy use of Uncanny elements and the psychological landscape as a setting. It rarely contains any obvious monsters or overt threats.

HIGH CONCEPTS:

- **Hear No Evil:**
 - The monster can control others by talking to them; It's voice may even drive them mad.
 - The monster is silent and therefore difficult to perceive.
 - The protagonist is deaf and thus it's harder for them to perceive the monster.
- **See No Evil:**
 - The monster is invisible (or virtually invisible because it is so stealthy)— it may even disguise itself as ordinary people/everyday items.
 - Anyone who sees the monster loses their mind/falls under its spell.
 - The protagonist is blind and thus it's harder for them to perceive the monster
- **Speak No Evil:**
 - Speaking the monster's name in a certain context summons it.
 - The monster is blind, (but has excellent hearing) so characters must be silent to avoid it.
 - The protagonist is mute and thus handicapped when trying to get help.

CHARACTERS:

Sadly, many of the character tropes mentioned below are stereotypes populating the slasher sub-genre of horror. Most of them ought to be avoided, but it's still important to be aware of them so you avoid falling into clichéd writing by either a) not using these character tropes at all, or b) putting a clever, thoughtful twist on a character trope to reinvigorate it.

- **Best Friend/Sidekick:** The wisecracking goofball no one takes seriously, but who often functions as a knight in jester's costume.
- **Comatose (during the apocalypse):** The protagonist wakes up from a coma (or simple hospitalization) to find out the world has fallen to some sort of cataclysm and is now overrun with monsters of some kind (usually zombies or demons).
- **Creepy Kid:** The kid whom everyone picks on; as such, in slashers, he is often the red-herring—the character we are supposed to suspect of being the killer.
- **Druggie/ Alcoholic:** The oddly charming, worldly-wise addict who sees through everything; still, no one listens to them because of their altered perception.
- **Evil Boyfriend:** Surprise! The creepy, possessive boyfriend was the killer all along. Who saw that coming?
- **Harassed Mother/Wife:** A woman desperately trying to protect her family from an evil entity. People often assume she's just paranoid or crazy, and therefore ignore her warnings about the monster(s).
- **Jerk Jock:** The dim-witted, handsome meathead. He's probably also the Evil Boyfriend.
- **Love Interest:** Any character the protagonist has a crush on/is dating. They will probably be threatened by the monster multiple times throughout the story to raise the stakes.
- **Nerd:** The socially inept know-it-all who often functions as a means of sharing exposition about the monster, setting, or horrifying events (possession, haunting, alien invasion, etc.)
- **Nonbelievers:** All those folks who treat the protagonist like they're crazy when they try to warn people about the monster/setting/event.

- **Promiscuous Girl:** The girl who dies first because she's sexually uninhibited. *Please don't use this stereotype.*
- **Red Herring:** Any character who is obviously meant to be unlikable and suspicious. They rarely fool modern audiences—especially those well-versed in Scooby-doo.
- **Scientist/Researcher:** This is another character often used to communicate exposition. They may also be the one who unleashes the ultimate evil/calls on the aliens/creates some unholy monstrosity.
- **Spiraling Father/Husband:** The dad/husband who is seduced by the monster to do its bidding—usually sacrificing his loved ones.
- **Survivalist:** That wacky character with the bunker and armory whom everyone dismisses as crazy. However, everyone wants to be their best friend once the cataclysm starts and the monsters are roaming the streets.
- **The Final Girl:** The girl who survives (or dies last) because she conforms to societal morals. Not a terrible trope—just have her survive cause she's competent—not just because she upholds a particular moral standard.
- **Token Minority:** A character who functions as a mark on the writer's diversity checklist who often dies early on. Avoid this stereotype. Write a diverse cast to create authentic representation, not to virtue signal.
- **Useless Cop/Medic:** The person whom the protagonist is counting on to save the day, but ultimately, they fail. Often used as a plot device—they are the harbinger of an “all is lost moment.”
- **Weird Girl:** A quirky girl who represents whatever alternative subculture is most prevalent at the time of writing. If you include such a character, make her a full-fledged character who serves the story and has a genuine arc.

POSSESSED/CURSED ARTIFACT

Items which may be sentient or simply possessed. Either way, they are one means by which the monstrous forces torment the characters.

- **Amulet/ Locket**

- **Book**
- **Car**
- **Cell Phone**
- **Doll/Toy**
- **Idol/Relic**
- **Internet/computer**
- **Mirror**
- **Music Box**
- **Painting**
- **TV Set**
- **VHS**
- **Videogames**

SETTINGS:

- **Abandoned/Derelict:** No one has lived there in a long time; shows obvious signs of dilapidation/disrepair.
- **Cursed:** Some entity has placed a curse over the setting that terrorizes anyone who enters until the curse is broken.
- **Horrifying Past/Lingering Dread:** Terrible violence was done to a person or persons in the place: a cult site, mad scientist's lab, etc.
- **Isolated:** The setting is far from civilization and thus far from aid/support/help.
- **Possessed:** Similar to a curse, only an entity is actively controlling the setting, using it to terrorize the characters. Sometimes called a "Genius Loci."
- **Around Every Corner:** The setting is maze-like with plenty of right-angles and corners behind which monsters may lurk.
- **Asylum/Hospital:** Haunted by failed human experiments.
- **Cabin:** Where the protagonists are trapped and inevitably descend into madness before killing (and maybe even eating) one another.
- **Camp:** Terrorized by a masked killer or a monster. Maybe there is a secret cult working somewhere in the woods that wants to use the campers as sacrifices.
- **Castle:** Haunted by a ghost, of course. Maybe owned by a mad person who enjoys torturing visitors in the dungeon.

- **Church/Temple:** Probably overrun by cultists. Maybe overtaken by a celestial (angel or demon).
- **Circus/Carnival:** Full of crazed killer clowns and rampaging animals. Please don't portray "circus freaks" (usually differently-abled folks) as inherently violent and dangerous.
- **Dark:** Obscures potential threats.
- **Foggy/Misty:** Also obscures potential threats.
- **Ghost Town:** Abandoned town—usually for unknown/mysterious reasons.
- **Graveyard:** Probably full of ghosts and zombies.
- **Grocery Store:** Wait—what? Yeah. I'm not joking. Everyone is headed here during the cataclysm and the limited visibility of the aisles makes it ripe for some "around every corner scares."
- **Hell/Nether Realm:** A place of torment or punishment for wayward souls. Usually populated by demons.
- **Morgue:** Well, if the dead are rising, you don't wanna be here.
- **Hotel:** Vast, winding corridors full of strangers doing strange things.
- **Haunted House/ Mansion:** Nuff said.
- **Mall:** This is the agoraphobic cousin of the more claustrophobic Grocery Store.
- **Mirrors:** Can reveal a monster creeping up on the protagonist, and/or make the space feel larger than it really is, and thus, disorienting.
- **Psychological landscape:** The characters internal fears are projected onto the setting, so they see/hear threats which may or may not actually be present, confusing them about which threats are real.
- **Remote Research Facility:** Mad scientists and aliens like hanging out here for some reason. Usually someplace pretty cold.
- **Space Station:** Like the above, only it's even harder to get out, because—ya know—the infinite vacuum of space.
- **Woods/Forest:** Represents the violence and uncertainty just outside civilization. Could be populated by just about anything. They can be dark, foggy, difficult to navigate—kind of a worst-case scenario for horror protagonists. And those pesky cultists are just everywhere.

MONSTERS

- **Alien:** A biological entity from another world in our universe.
- **Angels:** A celestial being (usually summoned by sorcerers to help with some form of Magic), which may ask for brutal sacrifice or worship in exchange for its aid.
- **Beast:** Any terrifying creature from our own planet and/or plane of existence. May be bigger or more aggressive than usual. A bear, snake, shark, spiders, etc.
- **Cannibal:** A person who eats other humans, either ritualistically or for a taboo cuisine preference.
- **Clown:** Maybe a sociopathic killer dressed as a clown, or a monster presenting as someone's personal phobia.
- **Cosmic Horrors:** Any creature or entity whose form and/or power is so beyond comprehension that it leaves those who see it in a state of existential dread. (H. P. Lovecraft is a great resource for these kinds of monsters).
- **Country Folk:** this may be a trope that needs to die out (remember, not all tropes are good/helpful), as it stigmatizes rural people as backwards thinking and brutal. Flannery O'Connor is one of the few writers who used these kinds of "monsters" throughout her work effectively because she fully-fleshed out her characters.
- **Cultist(s):** Any fringe religious offshoot that deifies its leaders and uses their teachings as justification for committing atrocities against others.
- **Demon:** A fallen, malevolent celestial being; functionally identical to an angel, although it may be in the service of a greater evil. While an angel may be beautiful, a demon may be deformed or bestial in appearance.
- **Doppelgänger:** an exact double of a character who may be better or worse at certain things; may have an opposite or drastically different personality. Usually, they want to steal the character's identity, loved ones, or their entire life. To add a further level of uncanniness, make them taller, shorter, or less proportionate than the original.

- **Evil AI:** artificial intelligence that uses extreme measures (usually mass violence) to achieve its goal (usually revenge on its creators).
- **Fairy Creatures/Subhuman:** Humanoid creature from the world folkloric tradition. Usually they look like larger, smaller, or disproportionate humans (Trolls, ogres, elves, goblins, dwarves) and practice dark magic and/or eat humans.
- **Force of Nature/Disaster:** Tornados, Shark-nadoes, Knife Storms. That kind of thing. Usually these are just a means to keep the protagonists locked in the horror setting.
- **Ghosts:** A spirit which remains tethered to a place because of some unfinished business.
- **Infection/Possession:** A spirit, demon, or disease that transforms people into a violent bestial version of themselves.
- **Kaiju/Colossus:** A giant beast or humanoid. May wreak havoc on purpose or by accident because of its size.
- **Lich:** A sorcerer who has tethered their soul to another person's body (living or dead).
- **Mad Scientist:** Willing to commit all kinds of atrocities and crimes against humanity to further scientific progress and/or secure their legacy in the pantheon of great innovators.
- **Main Character:** An ordinary, disempowered Jane/Joe Schmo who lacks the means, resources, and intellect necessary to overcome the monster and/or cataclysm, but who persists anyway.
- **Mask wearing, weapon-wielding:** (fill in the blank)
- **Mutant:** A human or beast deformed by genetic experimentation or radioactive/biohazardous materials.
- **Pagan gods:** Gods not belonging to the character's culture.
- **Parasite:** A creature that feeds off of others—often while keeping them alive. May even be able to manipulate them into doing its bidding.
- **Psychopath:** A character who is so unempathetic that they are willing to commit all kinds of violence to achieve their personal goals. Avoid writing these characters as people suffering from mental illness.
- **Reanimated Corpse:** A (usually) mindless, bestial corpse, reanimated by a demon, magic, or some other means. May be

cannibalistic.

- **Robot/Cyborg/Android:** a cybernetic being which may be some mixture of human and machine that seeks to hurt/destroy others. Robot: fully cybernetic entity that doesn't appear humanoid. Cyborg: Cybernetically enhanced human. Android: A fully cybernetic entity that is humanoid in appearance.
- **Shifters (Were_____):** A human that transforms into a violent man-eating beast. Like a Were-kitten.
- **Sorcerer/Witch:** A person who uses dark, forbidden magic (usually via a celestial) to achieve personal goals. They may also be cultists.
- **Soulless (Vampires):** An immortal being who traded their soul for immortality. As a result, they are cursed to feed on the living.

ENDINGS:

- **Hero survives:** She survives the hostile setting and defeats monster.
- **Hero dies:** She seems to overcome the hostile setting and monster, but ultimately succumbs to them.
- **Hero seems to win but fails:** She does whatever it takes to survive, even if that means becoming a monster herself. OR it turns out the protagonist was the true monster all along.

MYSTERY TROPES

NOTE: There are so many mystery tropes, more than in other genres, in part because there are many subgenres of mystery. Most of the mystery tropes are instantly recognizable from the name for anyone who reads in the genre. (And if you don't read in the genre you're writing in, why are you writing in that genre? Choose a genre you like to read!) As a result, only those tropes that are non-obvious from their names are specifically defined in this list.

Not all tropes are relevant to all mystery subgenres. Be sure you read widely in the specific subgenre you choose so you have a solid understanding of reader expectations in that subgenre.

Subgenres of Mystery (with notable author examples)

- Amateur sleuth (Charlaine Harris's Aurora Teagarden series)
- Cozy mystery (anything by Agatha Christie)
- Great Detective (Agatha Christie's Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot; Sherlock Holmes)
- Hardboiled detective: (Sam Spade; Dashiell Hammett mysteries)
- Paranormal investigation: (Ilona Andrews, Jim Butcher's Dresden Files, Patricia Brigg's Mercy Thompson series)
- Police procedural (J.D. Robb, Gregg Olsen, Lee Child)

Cozy Mystery Tropes (specific to this subgenre)

- No excessive gore or violence; no realistic trauma, mild swearing, no sex scenes.
- Small cast of characters in an idealized setting such as a small village, an enclosed estate, or country house.
- Clues and red herrings must be present.
- Emphasis on the puzzle of the crime; the reader solves the puzzle along with the sleuth.
- Usually, uses an amateur sleuth rather than a police officer or detective; often sleuth is female, but not always.
- Generally, the main suspects are gathered at the end and the sleuth reveals what happened to them and makes the formal naming of the criminal(s).
- The crime must be resolved at the end.

Mysteries in General

(from Tropedia.fandom.com)

- **Absence of Evidence:** The evidence is the *absence* of something that should be present or that should have happened.
- **Anonymous Killer Narrator:** When parts of the book (occasionally the entire story) are written from the POV of the killer, but it's not obvious until the very end who that narrator is, or possibly that the narrator is the killer.
- **Asshole Victim**
- **Beyond Suspicion:** A character clearly linked to main suspect is never even considered seriously by police or sleuth.
- **Bluffing the Murderer:** Implying to suspect that the sleuth (or police) has more evidence than they have, or are about to collect evidence from where the killer probably hid it.
- **Chronic Evidence Retention Syndrome:** A fatal flaw in which criminals retain vital evidence that proves to be their downfall.
- **Closed Circle:** Victims and killer are in an enclosed location where they cannot escape, and no one can enter. Classic example of this is Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* (also published as *And Then There Were None*.)
- **Confess in Confidence:** As to an attorney, a priest, a doctor, all of whom are ethically prevented from reporting the confession to the police.
- **Conviction by Contradiction:** A crime-solving technique, generally using amateur sleuths, that solves the crime by logical deduction.
- **Curtain Camouflage:** Someone hides behind a floor-length heavy curtain. Sometimes successfully, sometimes not.
- **Cut Himself Shaving:** An unlikely excuse used by suspect to explain away a suspicious wound.
- **Death in the Clouds**
- **The Dog Was the Mastermind:** The true killer is the least suspicious, most innocuous person in the entire story. Like, you know, the dog. Or the little kid eating ice cream.
- **Dramatic Curtain Toss:** Something is hidden under a large sheet or behind a heavy curtain. It will inevitably be revealed in highly dramatic fashion and with appropriately dramatic responses from characters.
- **Eagle-Eye Detection:** Sleuth relies on details at the crime scene no one else noticed.
- **Eureka Moment:** The moment the sleuth realizes they know who the killer is.
- **Everybody Did It:** The prospect that *all* the suspects are guilty. Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* is a good example.

- **Everyone Is a Suspect:** At some point the sleuth will tell a possible suspect that “everyone is a suspect.”
- **Evidence Scavenger Hunt:** Characters spend their time hunting down clues.
- **Evil Plan:** The plan the killer or criminal has to perpetrate evil doings on the world.
- **Exposition Victim:** Sleuth, caught by killer and at risk for their life, interrogates the killer instead of running away.
- **Fingertip Drug Analysis:** A detective searching a location finds a white powder. Touches it with his finger and smells/tastes it. Declares it to be heroin, etc.
- **Hidden in Plain Sight:** A crucial piece of evidence that no one can find is sitting openly in plain sight.
- **Hidden Villain:** The villain is out of sight, unable to be located, and operating from the shadows.
- **I Never Said It Was Poison:** A suspect reveals too much knowledge of the case while under interrogation, i.e., that the victim was poisoned. The detective then says, “I never said it was poison.”
- **Important Character, Important Evidence:** Important evidence in the mystery is found by important characters in the story, no matter their skill or training (or lack of those) those characters have.
- **Intrepid Reporter:** Popular in the 1930s and 1940s, the intrepid reporter sleuth runs headlong into danger to solve the case before the inept police can do so. Less popular today.
- **Let Off by the Detective:** An unspeakable villain is the victim, and the motives of the killer were good. The detective turns a blind eye and lets the killer go free.
- **Lights Off, Somebody Dies:** At some point when many suspects are gathered, there is an unexpected, sudden blackout. When lights are restored, someone else is dead.
- **Locked Room Mystery:** A victim dies in a locked room, clearly murdered, but no way for the killer to get out of the room before the body is discovered.
- **Mistaken for Evidence:** Something found at the crime scene is collected as evidence that makes the crime an open-and-shut case—but it’s not what the police thought and it has nothing to do with the crime.
- **Mystery Magnet:** A series amateur sleuth who attracts murders everywhere they go.
- **Needle in a Stack of Needles:** Hiding something in plain sight by creating a large number of duplicates—so many that they cannot be individually checked.
- **Never One Murder:** There is never just one murder in a case. There’s always another...and another.

- **Never Suicide:** Amateur sleuth is convinced a death is not a suicide despite police determination and abundant evidence that it is a suicide.
- **Not-So-Fake Prop Weapon:** Useful for murders performed near stage or film set where there is a prop weapon that supposedly is safe, but is actually loaded with real ammo, has a razor sharp blade, etc. When the actor uses it to fake-kill the victim in the play or film, the actor playing the victim dies.
- **Notable Non Sequitur:** A dialogue comment that appears to be unrelated to the conversation turns out to be an essential clue.
- **Old Dark House:** A staple setting to invoke feelings of dread, fear, and doom.
- **Ontological Mystery:** Characters are locked into an enclosed space with no knowledge of where they are or how they got there. The story is about their exploration and mastery of the space, revealing its secrets, and escaping. Near escapes are often punished with harsh returns to the space.
- **Orgy of Evidence:** The sleuth discovers far too much evidence at the scene of the crime that tends either to point to some suspect who is actually innocent, or that points to a wide variety of suspects, one or some or all or none of whom committed the crime.
- **Placebo Eureka Moment:** The moment the sleuth (or police) believe they have solved the case...but they're wrong.
- **Public Secret Message:** A message sent to sleuth or victim or police that appears to be an ordinary message or gift, but actually has a secret encoded in some way.
- **Red Herring:** A clue that points to the wrong murderer.
- **Reverse Whodunnit:** We know who did the deed from the beginning; we don't know why or how they will be caught. Think the TV series *Columbo*.
- **Rewind, Replay, Repeat:** A video or audio recording is played over and over by the sleuth to figure out what tiny detail provides an essential clue that cracks the case.
- **Ripped from the Headlines:** A mystery that draws inspiration from an actual true crime that recently filled the headlines. To be effective, the real crime needs to be recent enough to stay in the reader's memory.
- **Saying Too Much:** The suspect accidentally (or accidentally on purpose) says more than intended when questioned by the sleuth.
- **Serial Killings, Specific Target:** A killer undertakes a series of murders to disguise the fact that there is only one person they really want to kill. The other murders are to throw the police off the scent. Agatha Christie's *The ABC Murders* is an example of this.
- **Shell Game:** Multiple identical objects are introduced and one character and/or the reader knows which one of them is significant. As they are shuffled and reshuffled, the character and/or reader loses track of which one is important.

- **Sherlock Scan:** A way of introducing a detective/sleuth that demonstrates his extraordinary ability to notice details and draw amazing, and highly accurate conclusions from those details. Usually presented when sleuth is introduced.
- **Stranger Behind the Mask:** Often a deus ex machina type ending where at the last minute someone's mask (literal or hidden identity) is revealed. Not recommended.
- **Summation Gathering:** In cozy mysteries in particular, all the suspects are gathered together when the sleuth (usually an amateur sleuth or a private detective) proceeds to explain how and why the murder(s) was committed and who did it.
- **Ten Little Murder Victims:** Based on Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* (also published as *And Then There Were None*), about an isolated group of people where one after the other of them die. With no one else possibly there, one of the members of the group is the killer.
- **That Mysterious Thing:** An object that appears that may be relevant to the crime—or it may be a red herring. The characters refer to the object in highly ambiguous ways.
- **The Butler Did it:** Standard concept that the butler in the large estate/household is the murderer. Has become trite.
- **The Game Never Stopped:** A group plays a game and after they leave the game, one is murdered, and they realize that the game they were playing never stopped—and all are in danger now.
- **The Meddling Kids Are Useless:** Not a useful trope since inexperienced amateurs (kids or otherwise) get into danger and adventure trying to solve a crime, but ultimately, it's solved by the police or other professionals.
- **The Stakeout** The police (or sleuth) lie in wait for the murderer to appear and do something specific, such as pick up a package with a ransom inside.
- **Toxic Tropes**
 - **Acquired Poison Immunity:** The murderer has prepared for their crime by regularly taking a specific poison and building up immunity to it. Thus, they can be "poisoned" like everyone else and survive, throwing suspicion on someone else.
 - **Bits of Me Keep Passing Out:** Often a function in Science Fiction where a person who has been transported (ala Star Trek) experiences momentary loss of awareness but keeps on trying to perform needed tasks.
 - **Bitter Almonds:** Cyanide at extremely high doses smells like bitter almonds (whatever they smell like—do you know?) But one in four people genetically cannot detect that smell.
 - **Carrying the Antidote:** The poisoner carries the antidote around with him.

- **Cyanide Pill.** The poisoner has a pill containing cyanide, possibly in a false tooth so they can simply bite down on the tooth and commit suicide.
- **Deadly Gas:** The poisoner uses a deadly gas such as ricin to kill their victim(s).
- **Drugged Lipstick:** The poison is in a lipstick of the favorite brand/shade the victim uses. When she applies the lipstick, she's poisoned. Victim is generally a "she" but could be a male actor applying stage makeup.
- **Find the Cure:** Race to find the cure before victim(s) dies.
- **Finger-Licking Poison:** Poison on an innocuous object the victim licks, such as an old-fashioned postage stamp or envelope flap.
- **Improbable Antidote:** An antidote of some improbable concoction can save the victims.
- **Instant Sedation:** When a sedative is given to victims (or a suspect) they instantly lose consciousness.
- **Knockout Gas:** Poisoners use a gas to cause unconsciousness in their victim.
- **Know Your Vines:** Character in a wilderness setting picks up a vine that turns out to be highly toxic and/or aggressive.
- **Magic Antidote:** The antidote (in a fantasy or paranormal) is one that includes magical properties to save the victim.
- **Perfect Poison:** The poison is "perfect" in that it affects all living animals the same way. (No such actual poison is known to exist.) This is again primarily in fantasy novels.
- **Poison and the Cure Gambit:** Villain unleashes a poison and then sells or holds antidote for money or power concessions.
- **Poison Is Corrosive/Evil** In fantasy novels, the poison will corrode most containers and/or has an evil aspect to it.
- **Poisoned Chalice Switcheroo:** The poisoner puts the poison in one glass/cup and invites the victim to share a toast. The potential victim secretly switches the two glasses so the poisoner takes the potion.
- **Poisoned Weapons:** The poison is on the tip of a weapon such as a knife or sword so even small scratches are enough to kill. A modern variation is that the bullet in a gun releases poison when it hits the victim, even in a non-lethal gunshot wound.
- **Poisonous Person:** A person who is poisonous to be around because they ruin relationships and damage others constantly.
- **Suck Out the Poison:** Common misconception that sucking out poison from a snake bite can save the bitten person. Generally untrue but

used sometimes in mysteries especially those in historical and/or remote wilderness settings.

- **Tampering with Food and Drink**
- **Technicolor Toxin:** In GameLit/LitRPG etc. and in fantasy, poisons tend to have bright, obvious colors, usually green, orange, or purple. Very useful for identification in online and LitRPG scenarios.
- **The Paralyzer:** Often in fantasy, this allows the user to paralyze another person, either by paralyzing body parts (arms, legs, etc.) or the whole body which leads to suffocation and death.
- **Tranquilizer Dart:** A dart containing a tranquilizer, such as that used to sedate animals in the wild, is used to bring down either a victim or the killer (depending on who's shooting the dart!)
- **Universal Poison:** Often used in fantasy novels, affects all living things equally, and sucks the life force from those beings gradually; only one antidote to this poison exists and it works instantly when taken or applied.
- **Walking Wasteland:** Character causes people and things to wither and die wherever they go; may or may not be on purpose.
- **Withholding the Cure**
- **Twist Ending:** Plot leads to an inevitable conclusion but at the last moment, something changes everything.

ROMANCE TROPES

- **Alien Hero:** A human heroine falls in love with, or is abducted by, an alien life force hero from another planet.
- **Alpha Hero:** The heroine must contend with a strong-willed, domineering, hyper-masculine, successful and wealthy hero. (See Mediterranean, Asian, Russian Hero etc.)
- **Amnesia:** The hero or heroine suffers temporary or permanent memory loss and is forced to start over and reclaim their identity. (See Mistaken Identity)
- **Armed Forces:** A sexy, dynamic hero in uniform draws the heroine into a relationship, but a career in the army, navy etc., creates conflict. The heroine may also be in the military and is attracted to someone in her unit or during a mission.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** The heroine falls for a sentient robot or even a disembodied form of A.I., such as a holographic character.
- **Asian Hero:** The hero is either fully Asian or of Asian ancestry (Chinese, Indian, Korean etc.) and now living in UK, Europe, America or Australia.
- **Athlete Hero:** Sports themes are popular in North American romances, especially for teen and young adult audiences. Typically, the hero is a baseball, football, or hockey player, but the trope can extend to tennis stars, racing car drivers, etc. (See Alpha Hero)
- **Au-Pair Abroad:** The young heroine takes a job as a nanny or child-minder in a new city or exotic location. She falls for an older, local hero or even the handsome, single employer. (See Nanny, Single Parent)
- **Bachelor Auction:** The heroine 'buys' a handsome, wealthy hero for a dinner or once-off date at a charity function. (See The Dare/The Bet)
- **Beauty and the Beast:** The hero, often disfigured or injured in an accident, must overcome his physical and emotional scars to find

love with the heroine. (See Trauma)

- **Best Friend's Brother:** The heroine sees her friend's brother in a new romantic light and must hide her feelings from him and her friend. (See Home for the Holidays, First Love)
- **Beta Hero:** The good guy, the guy next door – this type of hero is usually more even-tempered and more realistic than the typical alpha hero. He doesn't want to run the world; he just wants to be king of his own castle. (See Small Town, Fish Out of Water, Country Inn)
- **Betrayal:** The heroine is betrayed by the hero – the betrayal may be genuine or the result of a misunderstanding. She often vows revenge. (See Revenge)
- **Bisexual Hero or Heroine:** This character is openly and equally attracted to both men and women. As a protagonist, they live by their own rules or sexual code, which makes them irresistibly unpredictable.
- **Blackmail:** The heroine is blackmailed by the hero into marrying him, usually as a form of revenge or payback for a previous slight or insult, real or imagined. (See Marriage of Convenience)
- **Blind Date:** The heroine agrees to a blind date. The date usually delivers a surprise or a twist – for example, her dinner companion turns out to be her boss, best male friend, or an ex-boyfriend.
- **Boss & Secretary:** Although a bit dated as a trope, the boss falling for his personal assistant or secretary is still popular.
- **Bully:** A controversial trend and popular in teen or young/new adult romances, the heroine falls for the boy who used to bully her. She must seek revenge or confront him on his past sadism. The hero must usually atone for past behavior.
- **Christmas Romances:** Almost a genre in itself, Christmas provides a theme and background for the love story, which features European or North American settings. (See Home for the Holidays)
- **Circle of Friends:** This trope features three or more protagonists all searching for love, in parallel to pursuing their careers and passions. For example: a group of ballet dancers, actors on the same film set, or students at the same school.

- **Coming Of Age:** The first discovery of love as teenager can be a powerful theme to explore in a romance novel or story. The plot can cover a sweet, innocent crush or a dark, intense attraction to the wrong boy. (See First Love)
- **Coming Out:** A gay hero, heroine, or transgender lead character decides to come out about their true sexuality or identity – their coming out is a catalyst for a new love interest. The lead character must overcome self-doubt, confusion, prejudice, and misunderstandings while dealing with a new relationship. (See Bully, Transgender)
- **Country Inn:** A career-driven city girl inherits or buys a charming little inn, bed-and-breakfast, or guest house in the calm, bucolic splendor of the countryside. (See Unexpected Inheritance)
- **Cowboys:** Whether a rancher or a Texas Ranger, the hero embodies the characteristics and moral codes of the American frontier: courage, integrity, and usually a bit of chauvinism.
- **Cursed!** In a fantasy or folklore-inspired romance, the heroine may have fallen under a curse, spell, or wicked charm that only the hero can break or reverse. (See Magical Heroine)
- **Cyborg Hero:** The heroine falls in love with an electromechanically enhanced man. The hero may have become cyborg after an experiment, accident, or some other tragedy.
- **The Dare or the Bet:** A staple of teen romances, the heroine takes up a challenge from friends or a rival to date or bed a popular young man – or an unpopular wallflower. She eventually loses her heart to him, until he learns of her deception.
- **The Dating Game:** From online dating agencies to hook-up apps, speed dating sessions to blind dates, the newly single heroine enters the world of dating with hilarious, romantic and/or sexy results.
- **A Divorce Never Went Through:** The lead characters discover that their marriage was never annulled, or a divorce decree was never issued because of a bureaucratic mistake or some other misunderstanding.
- **Dominant Alpha:** An archetypal character in explicit, erotic fiction, the dominant alpha is rich, sexy, possessive, and always in charge.

His psyche is tied up in sadism and role play. As his submissive, the heroine must break through his control and expose his vulnerability.

- **Domme Heroine:** A domme, female dominatrix or BDSM mistress is often found in erotica, steamy romances, or period romances.
- **Dukes:** Especially in a historical romance set in England, the attraction to the one-step-below-royal noble is powerful when love brings him to his knees.
- **Enemies To Lovers:** Probably an overused trope, but still effective. The heroine *hates* the hero on sight. She may still be smarting from a past betrayal or is being blackmailed by him. How the characters move past the anger to attraction and love makes up most of the narrative. (See *Frenemies*, *Revenge*, *Secrets & Lies*)
- **Fake Engagement:** The hero needs to produce a date or fiancé in a hurry and the heroine steps into the role. Of course, this phony arrangement soon leads to real complications and a genuine emotional connection.
- **Female-Female-Male (FFM):** An erotic ménage-a-trois that explores the romantic and sexual entanglements between two female and one male character.
- **First Love:** The heroine seeks out or is reunited with her first love or high school sweetheart – has he changed or not? The hero can't forget his first wife, or a deceased girlfriend, and the heroine feels she cannot compete with his former love. (See *Soul Mates*)
- **Fish Out of Water:** The heroine comes from a small town to a big city and is unprepared for the sophistication of the hero (see *Alpha Hero*). Similarly, a city girl finds herself working or stranded in a small town and falls for the charm of a local hero. (See *Beta Hero*)
- **Forbidden Love:** Taboos lie at the heart of this romance theme. Race, religion, conflicting culture, or feuds are just some of the forces that could potentially keep the lovers apart.
- **Forced Proximity:** The heroine finds herself stuck with the hero in a confined space. She could find herself snowed in with him at a remote cabin or trapped in an elevator – the possibilities are endless!

- **French Hero:** Whether he is a suave bachelor in Paris or a carefree winemaker in the South of France, the Frenchman holds a special place in romantic stories.
- **Frenemies:** The hero and heroine enjoy a friendly rivalry – either socially or at work. But soon the banter, teasing, and ribbing exposes an underlying attraction and sparks fly!
- **Friends to Lovers:** The main characters, who have hitherto been friends, discover a growing attraction to each other. For the heroine, this is often a childhood friend who re-enters her life as an adult. (See First Love)
- **Gay for You:** A hitherto heterosexual character becomes attracted to a gay friend, colleague, or mentor. The characters struggle with seemingly impossible feelings to define their relationship.
- **Ghost:** The heroine falls in love with a ghost, or both romantic protagonists are paranormal entities.
- **Girl Next Door:** Falling for a new, cute, sexy, or mysterious neighbor is what sets the plot in motion in this storyline.
- **Grieving Lover:** The heroine falls in love with a man who has lost a spouse or lover in the recent past. (See First Love)
- **The Guardian or Ward:** An older male is bound by the obligation of a legal will or promise to oversee the care of a young charge. When the heroine comes of age, she falls in love with her older, handsome guardian. (See May-December, Unexpected Inheritance)
- **Heiress:** The heroine comes from a fabulously wealthy family with an impressive pedigree. She is often in line to inherit a large fortune or take control of a family estate or company.
- **Hidden Identity:** The heroine hides her true identity or creates a false persona to hide her involvement in events that usually took place in the past. (See Revenge, Secrets & Lies)
- **Holiday Romance:** The heroine travels to a foreign city or exotic island and meets a sexy or intriguing stranger for a fling. The burgeoning affair will be tested by her imminent departure. (See Mediterranean Hero, French Hero)
- **Home for the Holidays:** The heroine returns to a hometown for a national, religious, or cultural holiday and finds romance in short

space of time amid family chaos – often with someone she knew as a child or teenager. (See Friends to Lovers, Christmas Romances)

- **Identical Twins:** Identical twins trade places as part of a romantic ruse or to exact a revenge of some sort. (See Mistaken Identity)
- **Incest:** The heroine unknowingly or consciously falls in love with a sibling or close relative. The taboo causes inner conflict and tension with her family and society. A tricky trope to handle with sensitivity, it may work best in period, fantasy, or gothic romances. (See Forbidden Love)
- **Kidnapped:** The heroine is snatched and reluctantly falls in love with her abductor. Or she must wait for hero to come to the rescue or, better yet, must find her own way out of the dangerous situation. (See Alien Hero, Armed Forces)
- **Learning-to-Love:** The heroine is determined to learn a new skill (dance or drive a car, etc.) and falls head over heels for the instructor. The heroine may also head back to school or college and falls in love on campus.
- **Love Triangle:** The heroine is often torn between two lovers and wrestles with the secrecy of the situation. The viewpoint of other characters in the triangle can also be explored. (See Forbidden Love, MMF, FMM)
- **Magical Heroine:** The heroine is a witch, sorceress, shifter, spell caster, fairy, or she possesses psychic or supernatural powers. (See Shape Shifter)
- **Makeover:** The heroine is transformed from drab to fab to catch the hero's attention. Alternatively, the hero has to transform his looks, body, and attitude to prove his worth to the heroine.
- **Male-Male-Female (MMF):** An erotic or homoerotic ménage à trois that explores the romantic and sexual entanglements between two male characters and one female heroine. (See Domme Heroine, Love Triangle)
- **Marriage of Convenience:** The heroine is compelled to marry the hero, usually an alpha hero, in name only. The marriage is based on necessity, or for financial or strategic reasons (For example, she has to save her father's business etc.)

- **May-December:** A love affair between two characters with a 15-25 year difference in age. (See Forbidden Love)
- **Medical Romance:** While working in a medical field or profession, the heroine falls in love with a doctor hero. The hero can also be a paramedic, veterinarian, or specialist. (See Alpha Hero)
- **Mediterranean Hero:** The dashing hero has Italian, Greek, or Spanish heritage. While he may be born in Europe, he has usually established his success internationally, if he is to be a sophisticated alpha hero. (See Alpha Hero, French Hero)
- **The Mermaid:** The mythological creature breaks the surface of romance fiction, either a shape-shifting nymph or a heroine with Undine-like qualities. The masculine 'merman' is also an exciting character to consider. (See Magical Heroine, Shape Shifter)
- **Mistaken Identity:** The hero mistakes the heroine for someone from his past. The heroine is mistaken for someone rich or royal. (See Amnesia, Rags to Riches)
- **Mistress Heroine:** The heroine finds herself the mistress of a rich and powerful man. In modern romances, the hero is not a married man but rather an alpha male who doesn't seek commitment. (See Russian Hero)
- **Nanny:** The heroine takes a position as a child minder for a single-parent hero, who is often divorced or a widower. (See Au Pair Abroad, Grieving Lover)
- **New Girl in Town:** The heroine finds herself in a new town, without many friends or adequate social skills to negotiate the new world she finds herself in. Often, she has moved to the town for a job. (See Country Inn, Unexpected Inheritance)
- **Partners in Fighting Crime:** The heroine is a cop or detective who falls in love with her handsome partner on the same beat or based at the same precinct or station. (See Armed Forces)
- **Prisoner:** The lead character, locked away in a penal facility, develops a sexual and/or romantic relationship with fellow inmate, or a guard or authority figure.
- **Prom Date:** Finding the right boy or a girl to take to that important dance is a highly popular plot in many teen novels and movies. (See The Dare/The Bet, Makeover)

- **Rags to Riches:** A struggling, or down-on-her-luck heroine comes into money and/or fame through a surprising windfall – like winning the lottery or a reality TV show. The hero helps her navigate this new world of wealth and popularity. ‘Rags to Royalty’ is a sub-trope. (See Makeover, Unexpected Inheritance)
- **Return from the Dead:** A man she believes is dead returns to upset the heroine’s life in a major way. The hero either faked his own death, or his demise was incorrectly reported through a chain of misunderstandings. (See Divorce Never Went Through)
- **Revenge:** The heroine, betrayed by the hero and/or his family, is determined to get revenge. The trope also works well if the hero is the primary character hell-bent on retribution. An extremely popular and successful theme in romantic stories.
- **Riches to Rags:** A wealthy heroine or heiress loses her money and status overnight. With the hero’s help and love, she finds a way to re-establish her identity, and realize her own ambitions and self-worth.
- **Rock Star:** The hero is a rock, musical, or reality/social media idol and the heroine must see beyond the groupies and fast-paced lifestyle to find the talented and vulnerable individual behind fame’s mask.
- **Royalty:** The main character rules or is in line for the throne of a fictional country, kingdom, or principality. (See Hidden Identity, Mistaken Identity)
- **Runaway Bride:** The heroine gets cold feet on her wedding day and makes a dash for freedom. She either realizes she is marrying the wrong man or realizes the groom was her soul mate all along!
- **Russian Hero:** A self-made business tycoon of extreme wealth, the descendant of powerful oligarchs and/or an American/British hero with Russian ancestry.
- **Scandalous Heroine Does the Forbidden** Heroine defies social conventions in terms of dress, manners, attraction to the “wrong” person.
- **Second Chance at Love:** A couple break up only to reunite years or decades later. Or a heroine who has been deeply and possibly

repeatedly hurt in love finally gives herself – and the hero – a second chance.

- **Secret Baby:** Keeping his child a secret and out of his life for several years, the heroine is now confronted with an angry and betrayed hero who wants to claim his parental rights.
- **Secret Billionaire:** The hero hides his identity and/or his wealth from the heroine, usually to test if she loves him for his true nature or his enormous wealth. (See Alpha Hero)
- **Secrets & Lies:** Someone close to the heroine tells a secret or insidious lie that causes her to betray or leave a lover without explanation. Or an antagonist feeds the hero misinformation that tears apart the budding relationship with the woman he loves. (See Revenge, Forbidden Love, Enemies to Lovers)
- **Separated Lovers Reunite:** A romance gone wrong in the past is reignited when the lovers are forced together in dramatic circumstances. They remember why they loved each other in the first place and why they broke up. But now they are older, wiser, and this time the love works.
- **Shape Shifters:** These characters are still popular in paranormal romances. The hero or heroine can ‘shift’ between human and animal or mythic form – werewolves, dragons, tigers, etc. (See Werewolf, Magical Heroine)
- **Shared Pasts:** The two main characters have a history together that must now be resolved in the present. The shared past could be dark and dramatic, or it could have been a wonderful period for the lovers.
- **Sheikh Hero:** The hero is the ruler of fictitious Arabian tribe or country. As at home in the desert as he is in the boardroom, this royal hero is often a modern and progressive ruler.
- **Single Parent:** The story focuses on a single mom or dad who is facing life after a break-up, divorce, or bereavement. The widower father is a popular, sympathetic character. (See Secret Baby, Nanny)
- **Small Town:** Heart-warming stories set in small towns. In romantic suspense, the rural setting could hide sinister secrets. (See New Girl in Town, Country Inn)

- **Soul Mates:** The two main characters feel they are destined to be together. However, other forces or characters in the story conspire to keep the lovers apart. From deadly hurricanes to horrible curses, the more obstacles in their path, the better.
- **Terminal Situations:** The heroine loses her heart to a hero who is terminally ill. Or the heroine, facing a life-threatening illness or condition, must help a romantic partner deal with the situation. (See Grieving Lover, First Love)
- **Time Traveler:** The heroine falls in love with a time traveler, from the past, future, or both, and must deal with finding love in a different place and time.
- **Transgender:** The main character is in the process of changing – or has already changed – gender and falls in love with someone who is unaware of their former identity.
- **Trauma:** A main character who has been abused, sexually assaulted, or traumatized in the past, finds healing through a romantic relationship.
- **Unexpected Inheritance:** The heroine comes into a windfall from a distant relative. (See Country Inn, Rags to Riches)
- **Unexpected Parenthood:** After a sibling dies or becomes ill, the heroine is now the sole guardian of one or more children.
- **Unexpected Pregnancy:** After learning of an unplanned pregnancy, the heroine must deal with the unexpected news and decide if she will tell the hero or not. (See Secret Baby)
- **Vampire:** The hero is a vampire and falls for a human girl, or he becomes romantically involved with another vampire or paranormal character. (See Shape Shifter, Magical Heroine)
- **Virgin:** The heroine's innocence is either a threat, obstacle, or prize for the hero. Or the hero is attracted to a virgin in the story; or the heroine wants to lose virginity to a special character.
- **Weddings:** Invited to a family or friend's wedding, the heroine will either *a*) run into an ex-lover or enemy from her past *b*) meet a new love interest or *c*) be thrown together with another character from the wedding party, like the best man.
- **Werewolf:** The hero becomes a werewolf at every full moon and must balance a human need for love with being a fearsome wolf.

Often the character is under a curse and will need a lover's help or special boon to overcome the affliction. (See Shape Shifter, Magical Heroine)

- **Workplace Romances:** The hero and heroines are co-workers or colleagues in the same company and find that they can't suppress their chemistry. The professional suddenly becomes very personal. (See Boss & Secretary, Forced Proximity, Frenemies)
- **Wrong Side of the Tracks:** The heroine falls in love with a rough diamond from the proverbial 'wrong side of town'. Radically different socioeconomic conditions test the love affair. Or the heroine is from a poor background and finds romance with a handsome rich boy from the wealthier classes. (See Forbidden Love, Riches to Rags)

SCIENCE FICTION TROPES

- **Techno Babble** is speaking in high-tech tongues, and it solves any problem the crew is currently having. 'Reverse the polarity, the Glib-Glops are weak to theta radiation!'
- **All artificial intelligences are evil.** Especially the good ones.
- **Chekhov's Egg.** If you introduce an alien egg to the story it must hatch and eat someone by the third act.
- **Alternative universes...**
 - want to invade our own.
 - contain evil versions of your characters
 - warn your universe of a devastating threat.
- **Travelling to distant stars is very difficult and...**
 - is very difficult and takes generations.
 - is very difficult and requires Cryosleep to get there
 - is done by AI and robots while the humans sleep.
 - Someone always wakes up too early from Cryosleep.
 - Asteroids are usually involved.
 - A ship is found with people who have been in Cryosleep for thousands of years adrift in space. Because they crashed into the asteroid.
 - A ship is found where people have forgotten how their technology works and must be saved.
 - The people who wake up are evil but seem nice at first.
 - The people who wake up are the last survivors of a once great civilization and impart wisdom.
 - The survivors of the once great civilization die from the common cold before telling anyone the meaning of life.
- **Space travel is very easy...**
 - takes no time at all.

- but is very dangerous.
 - because it passes through an evil realm filled with monsters.
- **Space travel requires a navigator**
 - With magical powers to plot a course. Possibly, to avoid deadly asteroids.
 - Who takes drugs to see the future. These drugs only come from one planet. Everyone is fighting over them.
- **Space travel needs a special kind of computer or droid**
 - to plot a course and it takes time to calculate.
- **Faster than light travel** is the bread and butter of all space travel in science fiction. Breaking the rules of physics is often the best way to get your character from planet to planet.
 - Ships travel faster than light speed through real/normal space.
 - Ships travel though hyper-space which is another dimension.
 - Ships use Warp gates to travel through wormholes.
 - Warp Gates were created by a long dead civilization.
 - Humans discover these gates and have adventures through them.
- **Alien...**
 - are kind, intelligent pushovers, and humans are destroying their worlds.
 - are evil, brutal godlike beings trying to enslave humans.
 - want to eat humans.
 - want to lay eggs in humans.
 - want humans to help them with a problem they are too “evolved” to solve.
 - It turns out humans were the aliens all along.
 - Humans were the aliens all along, but they evolved into a different species.
- **Humans use technology...**
 - to evolve into a post-human civilization.
 - to ascend to a state of pure energy.
- **Humans use spiritual/psychic powers...**

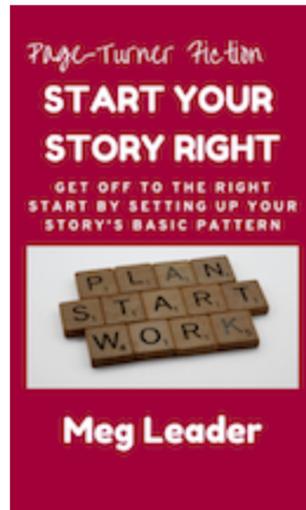
- to become beings of pure light and love.
- to become one godlike over-mind.
- Humans once had these great powers but lost them when the war with the robots/aliens happened.
- **They now live under a god emperor keeping them from evolving.**
 - The god emperor was an alien all along and the humans must rebel!
 - The god emperor was a super-computer the humans forgot they made and they must figure out why.
 - The super-computer had to do whatever the humans wanted it to do all along.
 - The super-computer was keeping them safe from aliens.
 - The super-computer was built to keep aliens safe from humans.
- **Two species of humans evolve and are at war.**
 - They are fighting over ancient crimes.
 - They are fighting over philosophical points.
 - One is racist.
 - One eats the other.
 - One is technological and the other is super-religious.
- **Space is empty and...**
 - humans are the first species.
 - humans start filling up the galaxy.
 - Humans make aliens.
 - They must fight these aliens. Possibly because they didn't do a good enough job making them.
- **Space is filled with aliens and...**
 - Most are like humans with funny ears.
 - Most are horrible eldritch monsters that humans can't even begin to understand.
 - Turns out the humans are the real monsters. The aliens were just trying to save our environment.
- **Humans and aliens...**

- hate each other and do nothing but have never-ending wars. Usually for the god emperor's glory.
 - live together, drink together and have mixed species children. He becomes the captain's pointy-eared best friend.
- **Humans are less advanced than other races** and are treated like children.
 - Humans resent aliens for treating them like children and start a galaxy wide genocide using the aliens' own technology.
 - Humans work hard to be as advanced as the other species and become accepted as part of them. Perhaps in some sort of commonwealth?
- **Space is full of Pirates.**
 - And Smugglers. The Important difference is that smugglers make better anti-heroes.
 - Space pirates are a plague, and the heroes must fight them.
 - Space pirates are cool and help the rebels fight the evil Empire.
- **Humans use nanotechnology to make very small useful robots that can do anything.**
 - Oh, no! The nanobots became sentient.
 - The nanobots want to replicate, consuming all matter they come into contact with.
 - The nanobots want to be more human and build human bodies and start pretending to eat avocado toast.
 - The humans defeat them using an ancient weapon left by a long dead race.
 - The humans program them to be nice and become friends.
- **Humans make copies of their minds.**
- **Humans clone themselves.**
 - Humans put their minds in the clones to live forever.
 - Something goes wrong. Humans can't have children anymore because of too much cloning.

- They must find non-clone humans to fix this. But that was thousands of years ago.
- They need time travel to fix this.
- They go through a wormhole/black hole to go back to the past.
- They recalibrate the deflector dish to emit tachyons to travel back in time.
- They can only send their minds back in time.
- Going back in time cannot change the future and they can do whatever they want.
- Going back in time means they have to be careful not to change the future.
- They change the past and come back to a different future.
- They must go back and fix their mistake.
- The space senate has blockaded all time travel.
- The heroes must get past the blockade in a stolen ship.
- The stolen ship turns out to be alive.
- It's also pregnant and needs their help to save its child.
- The heroes must argue about the ethics of what they are doing until they are forced to act.
- They turn out to be right and everything works out.
- They are wrong and they just helped an evil space wizard start a galactic civil war.
- The heroes spend the whole book arguing about ethics and nothing happens.
- The heroes decide that other races have different ethics, and they should not interfere.
- They say 'Screw their ethics. Ours are better!' and interfere.
- This fixes the problem, and the space people are happy with their new American constitution.
- The space people start a holy war to kill all humans.
- The space people and the humans fight until they have destroyed each other, and nobody left alive remembers what happened.

- The war between the space people and the humans turned out to be a cold war allegory all along. They eventually make up over some red space wine and a plate of gross space worms.

Have a Great Story Idea but Don't Know How to Make It a Novel?



The *Start Your Story Right* e-book guides you through 7 Essential Questions pro writers use to develop story ideas. Answering these questions will set up your idea, and turn it into a concept that's strong enough to support a complete novel.

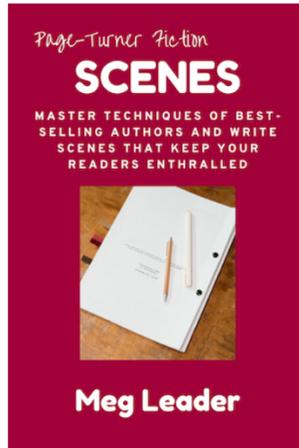
This is how the pros do it—and you can use the exact same techniques. You'll identify your story's protagonist, antagonist, main conflict, and even set up the story's theme and learn how to turn that into subplots!

And it all starts with 7 Essential Questions!

You can learn the specific techniques bestselling authors use--and make your novel a true Page-Turner!

[Click on this ad to learn more!](#)

Learn the Secrets of Bestselling Authors



The Page Turner Fiction: SCENES e-book explains how scenes are the basic building block of all novels.

The skills that bestselling writers use to create great scenes are easy to learn.

Why do I think writing great scenes is so important? It's because:

Having well-written scenes was the boost that took my whole critique group from unpublished to published with New York publishers in only a few months!

You can learn the specific techniques bestselling authors use--and make your scenes true Page-Turners!

Click on this ad to learn more!