How to Use This Book

You don’t need to read this chapter to enjoy the plots contained within Eureka: 501 Adventure Plots to Inspire Game Masters in your game—we designed this book to be easy to pick up and use without any fuss. But if you’d like to know more about the way Eureka’s plots are structured, how to turn them into full-fledged adventures, and how you can adapt plots to different genres, this chapter offers a wealth of advice and information.

Finding the Perfect Plot

If you’re reading Eureka for inspiration and don’t need a specific kind of plot to use in your ongoing game, just dive in: Start at the beginning or flip to a random page, and enjoy. Chances are you’ll find a plot that sparks your imagination in short order.

If you’re looking for an adventure that fits specific criteria, we’ve provided four tools to help you find the perfect plot:

- **Theme**: Every plot has a theme, and there are 36 themes altogether; you can read about themes later in this chapter, or jump to the theme index on page XXXX and search for plots by theme.

- **Primary Genre**: Each plot also falls into one of three primary genres: fantasy, sci-fi, or horror. These “umbrella” genres each get their own chapter in Eureka, with 167 plots per chapter. There’s an index for genres, too (p. XXXX), and descriptions are provided later in this chapter.

- **Sub-Genres**: Alongside the primary genres are 19 sub-genres like Traditional Fantasy and Space Opera. The index by genre, which starts on p. XXXX, is a good way to find plots that can be easily adapted to the specific genre you need.

- **Tags**: Tags are short descriptors that call out specific elements within a plot, like intrigue for adventures that feature conspiracies and scheming. All 42 tags are described in this chapter, and the tag index (p. XXXX) will help you locate plots by tag.

**COMMON ABBREVIATIONS**

The following abbreviations are used throughout this book:

- **GM**: Game master
- **GMing**: Game mastering
- **NPC**: Non-player character
- **PC**: Player character
- **RPG**: Roleplaying game
- **Sci-fi**: Science fiction

The abbreviation AI for “artificial intelligence” is also used in some sci-fi plots.

**TERMINOLOGY AND GENDER**

You’ll notice that Eureka uses the term “GM” throughout. This is because GM is the best-known and most universal term available, and isn’t intended to exclude the use of this book with games that favor a different term. Even if your RPG of choice calls the GM something different, the meaning is generally the same: This is the person who runs the game, plays the NPCs, and creates the adventures. The same is true of “adventure,” which is the most common term for what happens during a gaming session, and “party,” which is used to describe the PCs as a group.

In writing Eureka, we also aimed for roughly 50% usage of “he” and 50% usage of “she” (and related terms, like hers and his). Because layout considerations often dictated plot order, you won’t find strict alternation from plot to plot, but the overall distribution should be close to 50/50. The only exception is the themes, which are identical to the original titles listed in Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations; we left those alone because we like the quirky qualities of that book, theme titles included.

**CHAPTER 1: GMING ADVICE**

The first section in this chapter, Anatomy of a Eureka Plot, explains the common structure underlying the plots in this book and gives you an overview of the tools we’ve included to make those plots easy to use.

Turning Plots into Adventures offers up a comprehensive look at how to go from adventure plot to full-fledged adventure. From tweaking the setting to expanding scenes and adding game mechanics, this section will have you making the most of Eureka in no time at all.

The third section, Adapting Plots to Your Game, is all about turning a fantasy plot into a sci-fi adventure, altering horror plots to fit into your fantasy game, twisting sci-fi elements to make them work in your horror campaign, and changing up plot details to suit your story, the PCs, or the game world. You might be surprised at how easy this is, and we’ll show you how to do it in this section.
Anatomy of a Eureka Plot

Because we want this book to be as useful to you, the GM, as possible, we wrote Eureka's 501 adventure plots in a specific way. We created a template to use as our starting point, and diverged from it only when doing so produced a better plot. Our design goals were to make this book useful to every game master and to make it as easy to use and versatile as possible.

Eureka is a GM's toolkit for adventure-building, and knowing what goes into each plot will help you decide which tool to use, how to use it, and which plots you want to use it on. Here are the common elements of every plot in this book.

Theme

Thirty-six themes are used throughout Eureka, with one theme per plot. Sometimes the theme is front and center, while in other plots it stays in the background. You can use themes to find the perfect plot (for example: One of the PCs has just discovered that her brother is now her bitter rival—an excellent time to check out plots based on the theme “Rivalry of Kinsmen”), as inspiration, or as one more tool for evaluating a plot's suitability for your game. For a complete list of themes, see the Themes section of this chapter.

Title

Each plot has a unique title, and you can find all 501 plots listed by title in the index that starts on page XXXX.

Chapter 2, 3, and 4: Adventure Plots

The meat of Eureka is the massive collection of plots contained with the Fantasy, Sci-fi, and Horror chapters—167 per chapter, for a total of 501 plots. If you ran one plot every week, never missing a week, you’d be running Eureka adventures for almost 10 years straight—nine years and 33 weeks, to be exact. (Take Christmas and your birthday weekends off, and you’ve got the full 10 years covered.) We hope that this book will be useful to you for the rest of your GMing career.

Chapter 5: Indexes

Last but not least are Eureka’s four indexes, which will let you locate plots by genre, tag, author, or title. You can use them to look up plots you’ve read before or to discover new ones; the latter is a special strength of the tag index, as you can pick a tag and quickly check out all of the plots that feature that tag. The same is true for genres: If you want to find plots that are easy to use in a superhero campaign, for example, the Supers entry in the genre index will get you where you need to go.

The Adventure Plot

This section contains a brief dissertation on the wave theory of subluminal travel in highly etheric environments. Just kidding—this is the meat of each plot: the actual plot. It’s a big topic, so it’s covered in depth in its own section below.

Easily Adapted To

Every plot in Eureka falls into one of three intentionally broad genres—fantasy, sci-fi, or horror—and with minimal work, you can adapt any Eureka plot to multiple different genres. Those sub-genres appear in this section of every plot entry, and are indexed at the back of the book (p. XXXX). With additional elbow grease, you can adapt nearly any Eureka plot to just about any genre you like; the ones listed here are just the genres that require the least tweaking. For more about genres, see the Genres section of this chapter.

Tags

Every significant element of an adventure appears here as a tag—essentially, a flag to tell you what to expect from the plot. Tags cover locations (like planet-based for sci-fi), goals (like bearers, which denotes that the PCs need to get something from point A to point B), play styles (intrigue, for plots that feature schemes and conspiracies), and more. You can use tags as a discovery mechanism: Every tag is indexed beginning on page XXXX, making it easy to find more plots featuring that tag. Tags can also tell you that a particular plot won’t be useful...
**What Might Go Differently?**

Most *Eureka* plots describe a likely progression for the adventure to follow, but that’s only one way that things could go. Your players will surprise you by handling things differently, blazing their own trail, or otherwise throwing you curve balls. If you know your group well, you can probably anticipate some of the points in the adventure where these surprises are liable to pop up.

Take some time to consider what your players will do at different points during the adventure, and jot down a few notes about how you can respond and what elements of the plot will need to change depending on how things shake out. There’s no perfect system for this, but there is one key principle to keep in mind: It doesn’t matter whether the adventure turns out the way you expect it to, it only matters that everyone around the table has a good time.

**The Ending**

The closing of an adventure can be tough to predict in advance. You can usually make a pretty good guess how things will wrap up, though, and there’s one key goal to keep in mind: The ending of the adventure is just as important as the opening. When the adventure is over, you want your players to feel a sense of completion and satisfaction. How you bring it to a close plays a large part in that.

*Eureka* plots almost always include a possible ending (and sometimes more than one, like success and failure), but no amount of prep can account for the actions of your players. If improvisation under pressure isn’t your strongest GMing skill, you may want to write some notes about the more likely outcomes for the adventure, accounting for how the campaign will continue in each case.

For example, an adventure centered on finding a powerful artifact has two likely outcomes: the PCs find the object, or they fail to acquire it. If they succeed, then the campaign progresses, but what if they fail? Can you give them another crack at it, or set them back but provide another means to accomplish the same goal? A few notes about both outcomes will help you decide what to do in the heat of the moment, and will also help you deal with other surprises as they come up.

**Consequences**

After the adventure is over, it’s important to consider the longer-term ramifications of the outcome on your game world and the campaign as a whole. Just as foreshadowing helps to breathe life into the game’s setting, showing the impact of an adventure’s outcome in future sessions will make your players feel like the world is a living, changing place, giving them a deeper connection to the campaign.

After wrapping up a session, make a few notes about the outcome of the adventure while things are still fresh in your mind: NPCs who died, survived, or now have a different attitude towards the PCs, what changed in the world as a result of the PCs’ actions, etc. Then as you develop other adventures (whether from *Eureka* or elsewhere), work those elements in as you go: NPCs who turn up again, news stories that mention the PCs, vengeful former allies who now feel maligned, changes to the local economy, and the like. Your players will greatly appreciate the connection to their past, and it will deepen their commitment to the current adventure.

**Reusing Plots**

Even though *Eureka* provides 501 adventure plots, there’s no reason you can’t reuse a favorite plot with a new group, in a new game, or even in the same game. If you’re reusing the plot with a new group (at a convention, for example), you don’t need to worry about anyone recognizing it. Think about things that went right or wrong the first time around, make a change here and there to emphasize the former and avoid the latter, and you’re good to go.

Using the same plot more than once with the same gaming group, however, can be trickier. To pull it off, you need to file off the serial numbers in such a way that even if your players notice that the underlying structure is the same, everything else is so much fun that they don’t feel cheated. Use the techniques described in the next section of this chapter to re-skin, remake, and replace plot elements as needed, and, just as you would with a new group, adjust the plot to focus on what went well the first time around.

*Artist: Laine Garrett*
Adapting Plots to Your Game

The adventure plots in *Eureka* are specifically designed to be usable with nearly any RPG, no matter what genre your game of choice might be or what system you prefer. Although we’ve broken plots down into one of three broad genres (fantasy, sci-fi, and horror), every one of these plots can be adapted to multiple other genres, as well as mined for great ideas to include in your game. *Eureka* is all about inspiration and ease-of-use.

You’ll be pleasantly surprised at how easy these plots are to adapt to your game. If they don’t fit perfectly, all you need to do is “drift” the plot a little bit (or sometimes, drift it a lot). So what is drifting? It’s a gaming term that refers to adapting a game element from one game to another, and while it’s most often applied to game mechanics, it also applies to genres and plot elements.

There are many reasons why you might want to apply this technique to *Eureka’s* adventure plots:

- Adapt a plot to a different genre or sub-genre
- Alter a plot to better fit the story you want to run
- Tweak a plot to utilize elements like NPCs and locations that are already found in your campaign
- Fit a plot to the particulars of your favorite game system
- Change a plot to suit the unique elements of your game world
- Use a plot cross-genre to provide a unique play experience

No matter the reason, the important thing to remember is that every plot has something to offer for your game. The monster rising from the lake in a horror plot might become the alien in your interstellar sci-fi campaign. The planetary governor from a sci-fi intrigue plot could become the chancellor in your next sword and sorcery session. The dark woods surrounding the castle in a fantasy adventure might be the inspiration for the setting of your modern horror game. Every plot in *Eureka* contains something you can use—all you have to do is find it.

**The Golden Rule for Adapting Plots**

If you find a plot you want to use as-is, go for it—no drifting or adaptation is required. But if you read a plot you love that doesn’t quite fit into your game, it’s time to make a few changes. While we can’t tell you how to adapt a plot to your specific game and campaign, we can give you plenty of advice to point you in the right direction, starting with the golden rule of plot adaptation:

*These plots are meant to fit into your game, not the other way around. Change anything you need to change to make them work for you.*

Never hesitate to change any element of any plot in *Eureka*. You know best what will work well in your game, so trust your instincts, have fun, and make the most of the wealth of plots in this book.

**Re-Skinning, Remaking, and Replacing Plot Elements**

When you adapt a plot, you’re generally doing one of three things: re-skinning it, remaking it, or replacing plot elements. All three are simple techniques—here’s how to handle them.

**Re-Skinning**

Every plot in *Eureka* is written with a core story in mind. Think of that story as the skeleton and the flesh of the plot. The rest of the plot is the skin—the outer shell. Using this analogy, many of the changes that you’ll make when tweaking these plots will fall into the category of re-skinning. Re-skinning is changing the outer shell of a plot to fit a different genre or play style, but leaving the core elements unchanged.

Here are a few examples of re-skinning:

- Change the orcs in a fantasy plot into brutish aliens living on a frontier world, making the plot usable in a sci-fi game
- Turn a horror plot’s zombies, which were created by a nuclear accident, into zombies that were produced using magic in a fantasy adventure
- Replace the feuding elves and dwarves in a fantasy plot with rival doomsday cults, and use that plot in your horror game

These kinds of changes are easy to make, and often you’ll only need to re-skin one or two elements of a plot in order to make it usable in another genre.
Remaking

Sometimes re-skinning isn’t enough, or won’t produce exactly the kind of plot you need for your game—that’s where remaking comes in. If re-skinning is changing only the outer layer, or trappings, of a plot, remaking is changing some aspects of the plot’s core: the skeleton and the flesh.

For example, using a horror plot centered on killer bees swarming around cell phone towers in a sci-fi game is simple, and requires only re-skinning. Change the cell towers into some sort of futuristic communications array, and you’re all set. But if you want to use this same plot in a fantasy game, a little remaking is in order.

If you turn the cell towers into magical beacons, that won’t address the fact that they need regular maintenance in order to advance the plot—so you might also add a magical power source to each tower, one that needs to be replaced or re-charged regularly (something only the PCs can do). But what if you’re running a low-magic game? Instead of magical beacons, you could use signal mirror towers staffed by villagers. This in turn might mean that instead of the local lord hiring the PCs to deal with the killer bees (analogous to being hired by the cell phone company in the original plot), it’s the villagers who recruit the party.

By the time you’re done remaking a plot, it might bear little resemblance to the plot you started with—and that’s just fine. You still saved time by starting with a solid, inspirational core concept, and the end result is a perfect fit for your game, your campaign world, and your gaming group.

Replacing

When it comes to adapting a plot for use in a different genre, sometimes re-skinning and remaking elements aren’t the way to go. You might be better off replacing a plot element with something that already exists in your game, or with a common element from the new genre. Replacing a plot element with something else is simply a matter of determining the purpose it serves in the original plot and replacing it with an element that suits the same purpose in the new genre.

For instance, if the governor NPC in a horror plot is mainly present to quarantine the town where the PCs wind up, and your fantasy campaign includes powerful merchant guilds, replace the governor with the head of one of the guilds. Or if the point of a starship in a sci-fi plot is to get the party from point A to point B, replace it with an airplane for use in a modern horror game or a sailing ship for a fantasy campaign.

Analogs for plot elements are just as easy to come up with in sub-genres, as well: a star cruiser in a steampunk game becomes an airship or a train, nanites become sprites, a keep in the wilderness turns into a remote space station, a genetic virus becomes magical plague, or a demigod turns into a powerful AI. All you have to do is make sure that the new element matches the purpose of the old one.

Sometimes the difference between re-skinning a plot element and replacing it is subtle, but it usually boils down to this: If the change also alters something significant about the way the plot unfolds (you can’t have space pirates attack an airplane, for example), that’s replacing. If the alteration just makes the plot element look different, that’s re-skinning.

Adapting Plots to Other Genres

Sometimes the elements that you need to re-skin, remake, replace, or otherwise change in order to make a plot fit another genre will be clear upon a first read-through. In other cases, it will require a little digging to root them out. We’ve included two handy tools with every plot to help you with this: the “Easily adapted to” section, which spells out which genres and sub-genres require the least tweaking, and the “Tags” section, which lists the major elements of the plot.

Using Tags

Tags can help you identify the key ingredients of a plot, and they’re especially helpful for drifting. They signal elements that may help you draw a connection between one genre and another. For example, the artificial life form tag indicates that a plot prominently features mechanical entities, and also signals that this plot might work well in a fantasy game involving magical constructs, a horror campaign featuring reanimated life, or a sci-fi game about blurring the line between AIs and human beings.

Modern Elements

When drifting plots from one genre to another, it’s good to remember that because they’re written by modern people, all of the genres utilized in roleplaying games include modern elements. Fantasy settings are based on modern thoughts about medieval worlds, and no matter how realistic to a time period we strive to make a setting, it will still incorporate modern ideas. Sci-fi settings are based on modern ideas extrapolated into their future forms, or a core concept recast in the light of different imagined elements. While we can imagine many ways the world will be different in a sci-fi setting, we include many things exactly as they are now. Horror settings are usually modern worlds with some element made more foreign and threatening to the human psyche, or they isolate us from the comfort and safety of our lives.

Every genre and sub-genre contains modern elements. Some modern elements and concepts will exist in the same ways in different genres, and when drifting plots you can use these elements as flags to pinpoint genre similarities.
Sub-Genres

While the three genres we used to categorize Eureka’s plots were selected to cover the widest range of RPGs and campaign settings possible, many sub-genres feature tropes that are closely tied to their settings. Even so, don’t rule out a plot just because it seems like your favorite RPG’s sub-genre is too restrictive to accommodate that plot. Every sub-genre is based on or derived from a more expansive genre, and they often include elements of other genres. In fact, some sub-genres actually make it easier to drift plots for use in your game.

Because of its technological elements, a steampunk setting might be a better fit for a sci-fi or horror plot than a traditional fantasy setting would be. A sci-fi setting featuring unexplained powers offers ready connecting points for a plot dealing heavily with magic. An adventure plot featuring zombies can work just as well in a post-apocalyptic sci-fi plot as it does in a horror game.

Similarly, many post-apocalyptic tropes work equally well in a fantasy campaign, like isolated enclaves staving off brutal invaders, tribal characters exploring ruined cities, and PCs safeguarding valuable cargo on a journey through dangerous badlands. If you’re running a dark fantasy campaign that involves the PCs protecting townsfolk from creatures of the night, many horror plots can be dropped right into your game with little in the way of modifications.

Cross-Genre Re-Skinning

An interesting option for cross-genre plot usage is to re-skin the plot but retain the core elements, which can create a unique experience for your players. For example, because horror plots are often specifically intended to take the main characters out of their comfort zones, using a horror plot in a fantasy or sci-fi game will give your players a different take on the campaign.

Incorporating this experience into other genres can shake up your players in good ways. While they might have more incredible powers, or be able to deal with greater threats, isolating fantasy and sci-fi characters from help, or utilizing a creature that has the upper hand (and may in fact be unstoppable), will provide a different play experience.

Similarly, employing modern elements and organizational structures from a sci-fi game in a basic fantasy setting can provide a sense of intrigue and complexity. Using a fantasy dungeon crawl in a sci-fi campaign based around space traders will shake things up: When the planetary ruler charges the PCs with defeating the legendary beast that’s destroying their mining facilities, the game will take on an epic feel.

Even if you only do this sort of cross-genre re-skinning for a session or two, a quick break from your usual play style can be a lot of fun—and has the potential to improve the play experience in all of the games that follow, too.

Genres

The 501 plots in this book are equally divided into three primary or “umbrella” genres: fantasy, sci-fi, and horror. These are intentionally broad categories, and if you stretch them a bit they can cover just about any roleplaying genre.

We further identified 19 sub-genres: 14 that fit inside the big three, and five that stand alone. Each plot in this book can be easily adapted to at least two other genres or sub-genres. With enough work, any plot can be made to work in any sub-genre, but the ones we’ve identified in the “Easily adapted to” section of each plot are the genres that are a natural fit.

Listed below are all of the genres used in Eureka, along with descriptions of each. Because gaming isn’t the same as fiction, we’ve defined genres according to the way they’re typically applied to roleplaying games.

Because it’s so easy to adapt plots from one genre to another, don’t be surprised to see a wide range of sub-genres listed under “Easily adapted to” for most plots. By the same token, each primary genre chapter includes numerous plots that can easily be used in one of the other two primary genres, so don’t limit your search for fantasy plots to the fantasy chapter, for example.

Lastly, if you want to track down plots that can be easily adapted to a particular primary or sub-genre (all plots flagged as Swashbuckling or Post-Apocalyptic, for example), you’ll find an index by genre on p. XXXX.

Fantasy

As a primary genre, fantasy covers a wide range of play styles, core concepts, and settings. Generally speaking, fantasy plots feature supernatural elements in a mythological or idealized medieval setting. They tend to include medieval or archaic weapons and armor, magic and magic items, monsters, and sentient non-human species (dwarves and elves, for example). The four fantasy sub-genres are distinguished mainly by tone.
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