



## **ADVENTURE GENRE STUDY**

**The ARRT Genre Study Group studied the Adventure genre from 1998-1999.**

### **Adventure Characteristics**

Hero--likable; usually male; follows own moral code, sometimes outside the law; uses ingenuity to extricate himself and others from dangerous situations

No strong, lasting, mutual relationships with women.

Physical action. Characters placed in extreme situations.

Gives the impression of fast pacing. May start slow but pacing often builds at the end. Actions

pull reader along and into story. Story generally builds to culminating event; pace quickens as read.

Violence, often graphically described.

Setting, usually "elsewhere," underlines sense of danger and obstacles to be overcome.

### **Military Adventure**

Instead of single hero, there may be a community of men. (However, there is usually an identifiable lead character.)

More realistic characters and plots, often featuring real people and historical events. Characters seem more real even if involved in extraordinary activities.

Often strong secondary characters.

Strong survival theme as characters in military situations spend more time in immediate peril of their lives.

Plots may be episodic or show characters working toward a specific goal.

Often long build up and details of military operation with action-packed ending.

Often series featuring recurring characters.

## **20th Century Military Adventure**

20th century military adventure differs in some respects from other adventures we've read.

Instead of a single hero, there may be a community of men. However, there is usually an identifiable lead character.]

There may be individual heroism, but basically this is a group ( like police procedural vs. private investigator.

Less sense of justice done; can't be certain happy ending because war we know what happened.

"War is hell" theme makes bleaker

More realistic characters and plots

More real people and historical events

Lots of secondary characters

Women idealized and still fill negligible roles

Still sense of nobility, moral code, idealism

Survival theme still strong

Violence in battle

In some, physical action described; in other, we don't see it happen

Some books have goal (Higgins, MacLean), others show slice of life, what like to be in military

Based on what we read--British titles tend to be more realistic and American more Cussler-like, more outlandish (see summary of difference below)

Career military vs. volunteers

Some may be more historical fiction rather than adventure; just because they are military stories does not make them all adventure.

## **Differences in 20<sup>th</sup> century military adventure novels by American and British authors:**

### **American:**

Acts independently

Lone star hero

Pragmatism

Ingenuity

Adventure is a way of life

Plot often outlandish

Don't have respect for authority

Never doubt selves and actions

### **British:**

Duty given more weight

Group of men and 1 leader

Doing the " right thing"

Ingenuity

Ordinary person in extraordinary circumstances

Plot more realistic

Worry about doing right thing

## **19th Century Military Adventure**

### **Appeal**

Not contemporary problems (not like Elmore Leonard)

Usually series character, who start at lower levels and move up

Dependent on money from prizes; need money for commissions, then uniforms and food; uniquely British arrangement.

Community of men, tho some women on ships and/or camp followers.

Characters may have life partners, but women are secondary. Career over wives; women accept this arrangement. (May accompany husbands or wait at home)

Stories feel authentic; reader involved in characters and stories

Characters in true physical danger, life and death situations. Put in dangerous environment; constantly need to be alert. (In mystery, grave personal danger for 1 person. In adventure, danger is a way of life and characters live by a code of honor and preparedness that allows them to meet danger any time. In mystery, seek out danger, here always in dangerous situation on boat or battlefield).

Protagonist/hero doesn't always get credit for actions.

### **Profile of average 19th century military adventure reader:**

Likes military, historical, strategy detail

Reads for formula

Crossover with other historical readers? If enough detail, etc. perhaps with westerns as similar

### **Exotic Adventure**

Set in exotic locates. Setting and sense of place emphasize danger and adventure elements

Feeling of justice done at end; good triumphs over evil.

Seldom secondary characters of any substance.

Characters and plots often rather cartoonish, including fantastic elements.

Plot lines often out-of-the ordinary. They usually don't deal with real-life issues but focus on life and death issues involving danger and escape.

Characters often black and white, stereotypical rather than realistic.

### **Authors**

#### **Clive Cussler:**

There has been a change in his books from early to later, although exotic settings seem consistent throughout. The later titles are bigger books, full

of more extra stuff, interesting details related to place and plot. They have more characters as well. Subplots have become stranger in more recent titles.

Although he writes bigger books now with multiple plots lines, we agreed they are genuinely intriguing; we want to continue reading to find out what happens. Spoke last meeting about his lack of interesting women and generally flat characterizations, except for Dirk Pitt, who is now trademarked.

These may be good YA reads, not much sex, cinematic adventure elements. However, YA's seem not to read them.

### **H. Rider Haggard:**

Classic adventure writer carries the "community of men" element to an extreme in *King Solomon's Mine* (1896), in which he has only 1 woman character and she's killed. *She* (1897) has a very powerful woman, "She Who Must Be Obeyed," but she's also evil, and the men are the good guys.

Contains adventure elements: likable hero, good versus evil, lots of violent death. Action in these books is less dominant; more is left to the reader's imagination.

These may still appeal to readers of adventure, particularly to fans of George MacDonald Fraser's Flashman series.

### **Wilbur Smith:**

Smith proved more problematical. Some of us read novels that clearly qualify as adventure. (For example, *The Sunbird*, another adventure involving ancient civilization and treasure, like *King Solomon's Mine*). Others found his books too political and too problem-oriented to qualify as adventure. Not to mention generally unsatisfying and unsatisfactory.

Setting is important in all Smith's books, and it's usually southern Africa, an area not many writers focus on. But he also deals with political aspects of whites in Africa. Women are seldom important. Not all protagonists were likable, and the heroes were always as ingenuous, nor all plots adventurous. His books seem more realistic, or at least to deal with more real problems.

There might be individual titles we would suggest for adventure fans, but certainly not all his work.

### **Hammond Innes:**

Another problematical author. His books, too, are often more realistic and feature an ordinary guy who falls into an evil plot and has to set all right. There isn't as much physical action as one finds in Cussler. These are more like Nevil Shute's novels or perhaps even some Alistair MacLean.

They do feature exotic setting, interesting details—archaeology, finance—and usually boats or action on water. Hero is ingenious, follows a moral code, and is involved in physical action/violence. Women are lesser characters.

What sets Innes (and Shute) apart is a more intellectual/cerebral approach to the adventure genre. They're the thinking man's adventure, paralleling the contrast between thriller writers Ludlum and LeCarre, for example. More elegantly written, more demanding reading. That there is not a series character also sets these apart.

Additional comments on Shute and Innes. Shute and Innes have a different world-view. They see the world as a place that can be made better. There is an underlying morality in their books, a feeling that problems can be fixed. Books are more thoughtful. Ingenuity and activity in Cussler save the day; in these there is more thoughtfulness to characters and situations.

### **Eric Lustbader (aka von Lustbader):**

Readers were more satisfied with those novels featuring Nicholas Linear (aka Bruce Willis); these seem to fit the profile better than Lustbader's other novels. Bigger-than-life- characters (hero and villains), lots of women in sexually explicit scenes, much violence. However, Linear also spouts haikus (and reminds some of us of Trevanian's Shibumi). For action readers who like the eastern locales and philosophy, and the stereotypical bad guys (in at least one of the titles read, these were Japanese, who are very bright and advanced but basically evil).

### **Gerald A. Browne:**

Softer adventure, more like Sidney Sheldon and Nora Roberts and Stuart Woods, with a blend of adventure, mystery, romance, and suspense. These feature exotic locations and usually involve jewels (diamonds, pearls, emeralds, etc.) These are as likely to be read by women as men,

and women characters fare better in Browne's novels; they are stronger and more important. Characters are real people not superhuman but likable, in unusual situations. There is less violence and it is not as graphically describes. Fast paced because of physical action. Lots of dialog, sense of movement of plot.

### **James Clavell:**

Writes stories with a lot of political and cultural detail. Also much adventure, but they certainly aren't fast paced. The television versions may fit our destination of adventure better than the novels. These have the characteristics of adventure novels, except for the pacing, although fans may claim they move at a fairly rapid pace because they are pulled in by the story.

### **Gary Jennings:**

Also writes more leisurely paced adventure. Lots of details—but are they accurate, since settings are little known places and times? Complex characters, better written, stronger women. Is this a different kind of adventure novel?

Readers of both Clavell and Jennings may like Dorothy Dunnett's multi-volume series ( that combine adventure, romance, history) as well as Michener and Jakes.

### **Readers might enjoy:**

Clavell and Jennings (history, culture details)

Cussler and Lustbader (political implications, violence)

Browne, Roberts, and Sheldon (mystery, romance, suspense elements)

Innes, Shute and MacLean (period pieces, more cerebral)

### **Technothrillers**

Prey on paranoia whether its Cold War or now, terrorism--do liberals read these?--very conservative bent

Hero has a moral code (but not necessarily the same as the establishment)

Likable hero--maybe not to women, but definitely to men

Women are stereotyped--stand by their man, goody two shoes

Physical action--yes! fast pacing

Violence not described or dwelled on, violence against technology, not people

No community of men--more of a "team" ( as in sports) working together,

but there's on super hero  
Technology is the star--not what happens but what could happen  
Episodic, strong survival  
Coonts, Clancy, Thomas--series writers

## **Authors**

### **Tom Clancy:**

Author produced mixed reactions among readers  
Heavy on techno-details  
"Big" stories-in length and scope  
Man's fantasy-best, fastest, biggest  
Men grow up with model airplanes, putting on decals (details)-books feed this physical danger (usually) against things, not people  
Women--no "relationships"; portrayed as bad or stereotypically good ( the "little woman," the sweetheart back home", "the nurse")  
Clancy has moved from Cold War to environmental terrorists  
Based on some rationale-farfetched...but could be true

### **Stephen Coonts:**

Books written in series  
Singular plot (Clancy had multiple plots)  
Main character ( Jake) has a conscious, sense of nobility  
Throws in every kind of transport (helicopters, aircraft carriers, submarines, etc.)  
Indestructible characters  
Anti-establishment  
Uses "in" words, such as DEFCON One, and abbreviations  
Adds information for the reader- refueling in the air written in detail

### **Dean Ing:**

Lots of sexual innuendo--old men looking at strippers  
Main character poorly written--"unattractive and creepy" to ARRT reader  
Technology neat and very interesting  
Confusing plot  
Main character has superiority complex: "I know more than you and I'm right-so I'll save you"  
One of the main characters is a woman, MIT grad, but she knows nothing (a dimwit) and lets herself be overpowered and ruled by men

**Dale Brown:**

Takes old technology (B52s) and upgrades it to current uses--this would appeal to older readers

Vocabulary very old-fashioned--" Old Dog" and Dreamland" --also appeal to WW11 vets

Action more important than characters

Plane itself is a character

**Joe Weber:**

Glossary in back--technological vocabulary is very confusing

Outrageous plot--reminds one ARRT reader of Clive Cussler

Plot jumps around--one page chapters--designed for the TV channel surfers

Lots of politics

**Craig Thomas:**

Less technology

British author

**Westerns****Characterizations**

Hero: usually loner who moves on (doesn't stay to start a family)

Strong, silent type

Similarity to medieval knight who rides in to save day and leaves

Also like hard-boiled private eye, with few close companions

Sometimes "honorable thief" character

Surprisingly uses strategy more often than guns; good guys turn to guns and violence only as last resort

Occasionally sidekick

Women: secondary in Westerns (may be more important in novels of West)

Fallen woman or woman with heart of gold

Rarely evil: civilizing force

Indians: range of treatment from stereotypical of Brand to more depth, balance and non-judgmental approach in L'Amour and others

Black and white characters, but lawmen could be bad guys

Mix of real and fictional characters

**Storyline**

Themes: redemptive power of west

Lack of law; people of moral standing may be on either side of "law" and they are the "good guys"

Survival in harsh landscape

Usually told 3<sup>rd</sup> person

### **Frame**

Extensive descriptions of landscape/terrain

Setting primarily post-civil war, pre 20<sup>th</sup> century

Romance of west

### **Tone**

Nostalgic, looking back at a time when this story was possible

### **Pacing**

Short books (generally under 300 pp.) but not necessarily page turners

## **Medical Thrillers**

### **Storyline**

Plot focuses on newsworthy medical issues and plays upon fears of readers: this could happen to them

Typical themes:

Conspiracy (big medicine, bad doctors after doctors and patients)

David and Goliath (big medicine--HMO's, drug companies, hospitals--against good doctor)

Corruption on individual or system and cover up of problem (unearthed by good doctor to his peril) Readers trust own doctors but not the system

Secrets, usually involving one of the above, uncovered by the good doctor who is then in trouble

Ethical issues considered; always black and white

Plots are far-fetched

Not much sex, although there may be a love interest

Plots may involve crusade against enemy author sees as bad: HMO's ,etc.

### **Characterizations**

Patient as victim; plays on readers fear that this could happen to any of us

Story told from point of view of good doctor ,caught up in dangerous situation; always a maverick, outside the system. Identify with character

Characters black and white

Often strong female characters

### **Pacing**

Typically fast; suspense/chase/danger elements make move quickly; main character often in peril

### **Frame**

Abundance of medical detail but in the best, presented so it's not too daunting if reader doesn't have medical background

Behind the scenes look at the profession: here's what they really do

## **Authors**

### **Robin Cook:**

Fast paced

Strong message/crusade—against HMO's

Strong women

Focus on newsworthy issues: medical development. Build on current fears, such as biological terrorism

More readable than others in medical thrillers-fast-paced. Not too much medical detail

Average reader could appreciate fears

Plot 90%

Philosophical/ethical issues; doctors often target of bad guys ( HMO and hospitals and drug companies)

Doctors at mercy of health profession

Feed on lack of trust, fear of doctors, in plots

### **Michael Palmer:**

Fast-paced

Mixed reviews: some liked plot of *Miracle Cure* others thought very slow

In both Palmer and Cook, Many bad doctors; conspiracy with big medicine against little guy

### **Neil Ravin:**

More complicated books than those by Palmer and Cook

Plot deals with bad doctors

More complex, more elegantly written

Quick pacing but better developed characters; motivation more complex

### **Kathy Reichs:**

Is this mystery or fiction? More like a police procedural than a straight mystery: investigation, lots of details; many police aspects.

Medical research secondary

Forensic evidence that supports police investigation

Parallel to Patricia Cornwell: troubled character, depressed, divorced; problems with police

Reader hit over head with red herrings

### **Patricia Cornwell:**

Martha Stewart in autopsy room

Liked books and character early in series

Bright women; dumb, sinister men  
Plot-always target of serial murderer  
Romantic suspense/Clark elements: don't know if lover is bad guy or good  
Difference between series and stand-alones. Focus on characters in series, rather than on plot.  
Does it always have to be a serial killer in Cornwell and Reichs?  
Enough interesting things that can come out of one murder  
Doesn't need to be serial killer in every book  
With serial killer, don't need to be as careful with plotting details, just through as number of bodies covers up discrepancies

### **Tess Gerritsen:**

Sympathetic protagonist-female  
Medical detail  
Far-fetched plots with organ transplants and Russian mafia or contaminated water supply  
More horror elements?  
What makes medical horror, as opposed to these books? More supernatural elements; need to have special powers (perhaps as result of genetic experiment)  
But there's crossover with horror

Other medical books of interest that are not medical thrillers:

### **Anne Benson:**

Plague tales and sequel  
How does this fit?  
14<sup>th</sup> century 21<sup>st</sup> century stories  
For readers of Connie Willis' Doomsday Book  
Bigger books and slower paced  
Serious medical component but different from Cook , etc. Pacing slower and historical detail  
Not for readers of medical thrillers but maybe for historical fiction readers or time travel readers

### **Caroline Roe:**

Breach of Treason and Cure for a Charlaton  
13<sup>th</sup> century Spain  
Jewish physician  
Uses medical practices of the day

Again for historical fiction readers, not thriller  
Kellerman doesn't write medical thriller; medical details in case are interesting but not the point of the story.

### **Readers Advisory Tips**

- Forensic details in Cornwell and Reichs may be way to move those readers to medical thrillers.
- Clancy readers might read these too if like all details (and don't care if they're medical)
- Environmental/biological warfare stuff works for medical suspense readers if there's enough medical detail.
- Some readers love all the medical details; others are bogged down by them
- Compared to legal thrillers these are scarier while deal with more personal situations, with which we readers identify
- Legal can have too many terms and details as well Like finding similar authors for Turow; may need to cross genres and finds books that aren't just medical thrillers

### **Since plots are based on topics in the news, do these date more quickly?**

- Good books will still be readable
- There will always be a new plague, so can't be too dated
- But if tied very much to specific news item, dates; if more general, still a good read
- Maybe they'll be okay until that disease is cured
- E.g. *Spy Who Came in From the Cold* and *Coffin for Dimitrius*--still very readable, classic espionage. If the situation created well, the plot transcends time and place

### **Changes in medical thrillers**

More issue-oriented

**New authors:** Kathy Reichs, Tess Gerritsen, Leah Ruth Robinson; sometimes medical themes; Eileen Dreyer has doctor but more mystery. To write these, need more medical background so there's a limited pool of authors necessity of keeping up with medical advances

**Dr. TV shows**--non-stop pacing in *ER*, *Chicago Hope*  
Wouldn't like to read about everyday life in hospital  
TV shows character-based  
Soaps set around hospital

## **Financial/Political Thrillers**

### **Characteristics of Political/Financial Thrillers**

#### **Storyline**

Usually more financial than political-some plots seem to include political overthrows or manipulation, but use technical means to accomplish-older "political" books (such as *The Last Hurrah* and *Advise and Consent*) are not thrillers, largely due to pacing and much stronger character development.

#### **1. Typical themes**

- Political or international conspiracies-manipulation of world markets
- Robin Hood--altruistic or ethical reasons for stealing
- Conspiracy--"taking over" something
- Greed and self-gain
- Government control/paranoia and conspiracy
- Old money vs. new money-good characters with traditional values vs. corrupt ones (nouveau riches) young person with ethics up against corruption of the system
- In older ones, the president needs to be protected
- In newer ones, everyone needs to be protected from the president

#### **2. Characters**

- Very little character development-these are plot driven, not character driven books
- Male fantasy characters--women are stereotypically drawn "Barbie with brains", or women act like men
- Some of the newer ones have a stronger female characters, who are just as evil as the men in the story
- Most protagonists are white, wealthy, manly" men  
Lots of detail about clothing-power clothing, descriptions of tailoring brand names dropped
- Crudity--locker room language and descriptions of sexual encounters

- By and large, the characters are not appealing
- Not much psychological motivation
- Much more emphasis on the technical aspects of financial world than the characters
- Reader doesn't really identify with any of the characters--"what happens" is most important
- Not much humor as a rule--most are pretty relentlessly grim

### 3. Pacing

- Very fast paced-plot driven--pacing at the expense of character development
- Slam-bang plot twists with much action and physical jeopardy e.g. "being eaten by sharks"
- Reader can skim over detailed descriptions of technical financial manipulations without losing sense of story

### 4. Frame

- Glitz and glamour settings
- World of high finance, banking investments
- Swiss bank accounts laundered money, books resolve around money and its manipulation
- Capitalism as good OR capitalism as evil
- Financial ones focus on greed, political ones focus of power
- The authors (many of whom work or worked in finance) are writing their fantasy of what that work would be like if it were dangerous and exciting-when in actuality it's probably pretty routine

#### **Stephen Frey:** *The Takeover, The Vulture Club*

Rich white manly men

Capitalism versus environmentalism (environmentalism is the positive value)

Political conspiracy, but politically "liberal" point of view of the author

Compared to John D. McDonald's Travis McGee but with flat, cardboard characters

Guns and loose women

Lots of violence of an unsavory sort  
Not really fast paced

**Linda Davies:** *Nest of Vipers*

**Paul Erdman:** *Zero Coupon*

**David Ignatius:** *Bank of Fear*

More sympathetic female character--she is heroic and likeable

**Michael Thomas--***Black Money*

**Christopher Reich--***Numbered Account*

Lots of detail

**Jack Higgins:** *White House Connection*

More political than some--Irish Republican Army and a feisty, elderly female " heroine"

**David Baldacci:** *Absolute Power*

President is a "bad" man

**Sabin Willett:** *The Deal*

**James Grady:** *Thunder*

**Thomas Gifford:** *Saints Rest*

More realistic than most of those discussed--his characters are not "Superman"

**Jeffrey Archer:** *Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less*

More character development, more humor

A much older book, and probably a typical

**Richard Condon:** *Prizzi's Honor*

More ironic, tongue in cheek

### **General observations about Financial/Political thrillers:**

- Most of these books are exceedingly plot driven--when doing readers' advisory interview, make sure to ask patron if s/he wants plot or

characters. By and large, you get one or the other in these books, but not both.

- Some of the books take a strong "political" stand, which is markedly "right" or "left" of center. Readers with strong political views in either direction could find a book politically offensive.