

“But is it Art?” An Introduction to Fanfiction

Fanfiction is original work written using non-original characters, settings or worlds. It has also been described as folk tales for the digital era.

Historical Examples

- *Paradise Lost* – retelling of Genesis
- Unauthorised but published sequels to books like *Don Quixote*
- Parodies and revisions of *Alice in Wonderland*
- Fan stories continuing the work of Jane Austin and Arthur Conan Doyle
- *Wide Sargasso Sea* – features Bertha from *Jane Eyre*

Timeline of Modern Fanfiction

1960's – the popularity of *Star Trek* led to stories being written for home-made magazines by and for fans of the show (fanzines) which were distributed through conventions, fan clubs and mailing lists.

1973 – Paula Smith described 'Mary Sue' – a trope that has now become well-known outside of fanfiction.

1975 – Fanfiction is recognised in an academic paper

1980 – Listproc and Usenet are founded. These online message boards allowed faster and wider dissemination of fanfiction, and provided a hub for fan communities.

1998 – Fanfiction.net was founded. It is now the world's largest fanfiction archive with over a billion words posted, two million users and stories in 30 languages.

Best-selling authors who write or have written fanfiction:

RJ Anderson (the <i>Faery Rebels</i> series)	Lois McMaster Bujold (<i>The Vorkosigan Saga</i>)
Meg Cabot (<i>The Princess Diaries</i>)	Cassandra Clare (<i>Mortal Instruments</i>)
SE Hinton (<i>The Outsiders</i>)	EL James (<i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i>)
Neil Gaiman (<i>American Gods</i>)	Naomi Novik (the <i>Temeraire</i> series)
John Scalzi (<i>Old Man's War</i>)	Orson Scott Card (<i>Maps in A Mirror</i>)

Drawbacks	Benefits
No profit	Some fanfics have been rewritten to remove any non-original material and then sold e.g. <i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i>
Limits your experiences in world-building or character creation	Allows you to jump right in with your story idea.
Robust constructive criticism is rare.	Lots of positive feedback and encouragement.
Fan cliques and nastiness.	Supportive communities and a sense of belonging.
Wasted effort if there's no material gain.	No writing is wasted.
Narrow audience.	Experience in writing 'on demand' or to please an audience.
<p>Potential for legal action</p> <p>Laws vary world-wide but if you comply with a website's policies, don't sell your fanfiction, add a disclaimer that you don't own the rights and don't thrust your work in the original author's face, you should be fine.</p>	<p>An opportunity to write purely for pleasure and personal satisfaction.</p>
	Practice, practice and more practice.
	A way of using expressive writing to work through real life problems.
	Experience in plot and structure problem-solving.
	Finding your writer's voice.
	Speedy feedback.
	Dodge writer's block.
	Study structure and form.
	Representation
	Build confidence.
	Freedom and safety to experiment, take risks - and fail.
	Playtime!

Writing Exercise

Write a scene where two people are having refreshments and one decides that this is the best time to share some important news.

The two characters are from a TV show, a movie, a book, a cartoon or a video game that you know well. Consider an appropriate location and choice of refreshments. Think of the mannerisms, clothes, verbal patterns and personality traits of your characters. From your experience of these characters, how are they likely to share or react to the news?

Remember that readers of fanfiction are already familiar with the source material, so you don't have to fill in the background or relationship between the characters, or describe them in detail. However, fans do like mentions of signature characteristics, like Sherlock's deerstalker hat or Spock raising an eyebrow.

Enjoy your writing and congratulations on becoming a fanfic writer!

Fiona Clegg

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For the curious, you can find some of my fanfiction at <https://www.fanfiction.net/~purplecleric>