



Getting up to Speed in...Fantasy

Here's what Fantasy is:

With its intuitive, rather than rational, approach, Fantasy describes a world that never could exist, one where magic rules. Fantasy deals more with emotions and relationships than ideas, and Fantasy cherishes and preserves familiar stories, legends, and myths, retelling them, sometimes with a twist. These are often elegantly written stories with a haunting quality, with something just behind the story, something bigger than the story itself that hints at a larger meaning.

Here's what happens in Fantasy:

Story lines feature good versus evil, and protagonists battle and ultimately conquer the dark forces. The characters, clearly defined as good or bad, often attain special magical gifts, and the story lines explore ways to discover one's own potential, magical or otherwise. Characters may include mythical creatures — dragons, unicorns, elves, wizards — as well as more common animals. Characters more traditionally associated with Horror (vampires, werewolves, and more) may also find a home in Fantasy. Quests commonly drive the plot, and adventure elements play an important role.

Elaborately detailed settings describe another world, often Earth, which does not follow Earth's time line. Thus the setting may be a pseudo-Medieval world with knights and dragons or a fictional future world with elves on motorcycles. Gritty urban settings are almost as popular as more traditional historical ones.

In general Fantasy novels start slowly as the author sets the scene, often involving a large group of characters in a strange world. Pacing increases later as the adventures become more dangerous.

Here's why people like Fantasy:

Fantasy novels create worlds in which magic exists and battles between good and evil resolve questions of right and wrong. Novels cover a wide range of tone, from the humorous to the dark and gritty. Readers who appreciate well-developed landscapes in another time and place can find a range of characters, storylines, and, tone to match their mood. Fans of familiar stories, told with a twist, find much to appreciate here, as that is the foundation of much Fantasy. Popular themes — good versus evil, coming of age, struggling to reach one's potential and find one's place — permeate all forms of the genre. Protagonists may be male or female, and writers of both genders spin their tales here. Readers expect big books and long series; they read them in order and eagerly await each installment.

Here are key titles to read:

- Marion Zimmer Bradley re-imagined traditional Arthurian legends in titles such as *The Mists of Avalon*. Here, the familiar story is told through the eyes of Arthur's aunt Viviane, his sister Morgaine, and his wife Guinevere.
- Emma Bull sets her battle between warring fairy courts in modern-day Minneapolis. In the cult classic, *War for the Oaks*, Bull mixes rock and roll with the world of fairy.



- Stephen King's *The Gunslinger*, first in his *Dark Tower series*, typifies Dark Fantasy, with its bleak landscape and an anti-hero on an anti-quest.
- J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, first published in the 1950s, revitalized the Fantasy genre with a breathtaking, multi-layered quest and the ultimate battle against evil.
- T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, a whimsical retelling of the story of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, appears in both children's and adult collections and testifies to the enduring appeal of Fantasy for readers of all ages.

Here are Key Authors to Know:

- **Neil Gaiman**, master of Urban Fantasy, creates edgy, dramatic tales filled with humor and tragedy. Memorable characters and imaginative, complex plots appeal to a wide audience beyond the Fantasy genre.
- **Guy Gavriel Kay** is best known for his elegant quest Fantasy series, *The Fionavar Tapestry*. He weaves music, myth, and magic into a satisfying montage of language and imagery, interesting characters, and a complex, layered plot.
- **George R. R. Martin** represents one of the most innovative of current writers of Epic Fantasy. Politics vie with magic for center stage in his compelling series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*.
- **Terry Pratchett's** quintessential British humor pervades his Fantasy series set on the *Discworld* — which travels through space on the backs of four elephants. Puns and parody provide humor as well as social criticism.
- **J. K. Rowling's** *Harry Potter series* was marketed originally to children. And while it captured that audience, it has reminded many adult readers of the pleasure of the genre. Rowling's ageless and timeless series includes all the traditional themes — good versus evil and coming-of-age — with a healthy dose of magic to create an irresistible combination.

Here's how to talk with Fantasy fans:

- Fans of all ages read widely in this genre, with adults reading children's fantasy and children moving to the adult collection. Become familiar with the titles that span conventional age designations.
- Fantasy readers love big books, and they will demand all titles in a series.
- Listen to how readers describe books they enjoy. If they talk about darker mood and tone, they may prefer Urban Fantasy (Bull, DeLint) or Dark Fantasy (Gaiman), rather than the more prevalent High Fantasy (Martin). Suggest a range of types.

A few more tips:

- Music and the arts often provide the backdrop for Fantasy novels.
- Series predominate in this genre, with long books that tell a continuing story. Several authors may write novels that take place within a single, shared world. For ease in locating, catalog them together under the name of the world, rather than under the author. The *Forgotten Realms* series is a good example.



- Fantasy themes appear in several genres and may attract fans to Fantasy or expand Fantasy readers' horizons. Readers who enjoy Historical Fiction or Historical Romances may also appreciate Fantasy with medieval settings, especially if they share that romantic tone. Fans of darker Fantasy may easily make the transition to the Horror of Stephen King and others. Readers of Adventure novelists who sometimes include fantastic touches — Clive Cussler and James Rollins for example — may also enjoy Fantasy.
- Fantasy tends to inspire life-long fans. Readers re-read their favorites, and parents ask for suggestions to introduce their offspring to the genre that saw them through their adolescence and beyond. These are the stories of legends come to life, and the popularity of the genre attests to the continuing importance of this kind of story in our lives.
- A few of the many sources for highly recommended Fantasy fiction are: the *Nebula Award*, the *World Fantasy Award* and the *Mythopoeic Award*.

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