

FANTASY

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EPIC/HIGH FANTASY

Epic or high fantasy is probably what many people envision when they hear the word fantasy. These novels feature extensive worldbuilding of rich fictional fantasy settings, as well as quests and magic. Many of the best-known works in this genre are part of a series, and this subgenre of fantasy often relies heavily on the European medieval period for setting inspiration.

J. R. R. Tolkien:

Tolkien is the father of modern fantasy fiction, and pretty much every other author in this list of epic/high fantasy is inspired by him in some way. His Lord of the Rings series features an epic quest and battles between good and evil, with likeable, relatable characters. His worldbuilding is so extensive that Tolkien crafted his own detailed mythology and languages for his Middle Earth setting.

If you like J. R. R. Tolkien:

- George R. R. Martin
- Terry Brooks
- Tad Williams
- T. H. White
- Robert Jordan
- Ursula K. Le Guin

R. A. Salvatore

Salvatore's Forgotten Realms books star dark elf Drizzt and are packed full of fast-paced adventure and battles and memorable characters. He writes other related series in the same setting, which you may or may not recognize from Dungeons and Dragons.

If you like R. A. Salvatore:

- Ed Greenwood
- Richard Lee Byers

Brandon Sanderson

A prolific author, Sanderson rose to fame with his Mistborn series, though he has written numerous ones. His work is defined by its fast-paced action, intriguing characters, and unique, detailed worldbuilding, which differs from more traditional magic systems.

If you like Brandon Sanderson:

- Robert Jordan
- Adrian Tchaikovsky
- Patrick Rothfuss
- Jim Butcher
- N. K. Jemisin
- Scott Lynch

Terry Pratchett

Pratchett's fast-paced, hilarious, slyly perceptive Discworld novels are satires that skewer every topic imaginable. This lengthy series has multiple subseries and numerous potential entry points for starting. Characters range from wizards to vampires to con men, and the setting is as well-developed and smart as it can be silly.

If you like Terry Pratchett:

- Douglas Adams
- Ben Aaronovitch
- Piers Anthony
- Eoin Colfer
- Tom Holt
- Jasper Fforde

Robert Jordan

Jordan's complex, lengthy Wheel of Time novels blend political intrigue, adventure, magic, and elegant prose in his tale of a group trying to save the world. These books feature extensive, detailed worldbuilding and a large cast of characters and an ultimately hopeful tone.

If you like Robert Jordan:

- J. R. R. Tolkien
- George R. R. Martin
- Brandon Sanderson
- Terry Brooks
- Ursula K. Le Guin
- Stephen R. Donaldson
- Tad Williams
- Terry Goodkind
- Steven Erikson

George R. R. Martin

Martin is best known for his gritty A Song of Ice and Fire series that inspired the hit HBO show *Game of Thrones* and its varied spinoffs. Martin's brutal, medieval-inspired novels are still ongoing and often turn fantasy tropes on their head. The books feature intricate worldbuilding, complex characters, ample political intrigue, and gripping adventure as characters jostle for control of the throne, largely ignoring greater destructive magical forces at work.

If you like George R. R. Martin:

- J. R. R. Tolkien
- Tad Williams
- Barbara Hambly
- Joe Abercrombie
- Justin Cronin
- Greg Keyes
- Robin Hobb
- Anne McCaffrey
- Robert Jordan
- Marlon James
- Steven Erikson

Patrick Rothfuss

Rothfuss's Kingkiller Chronicles made an immediate splash when it was first released due to his eloquent prose and immersive worldbuilding. The ongoing series features compelling characters and a mixture of violent action and more quiet atmosphere building.

If you like Patrick Rothfuss:

- Susanna Clarke
- Robin Hobb
- Tad Williams
- Guy Gavriel Kay
- Robert Jordan
- Brandon Sanderson
- George R. R. Martin
- Joe Abercrombie
- Robert Jordan
- Scott Lynch
- N. K. Jemisin
- Jim Butcher

Terry Goodkind

Goodkind is best-known for his Sword of Truth novels. These action-packed, often violent, books also have a heavy focus on philosophy, and Goodkind envisioned them as literature about the human experience as much as they were fantasy.

If you like Terry Goodkind:

- Lois McMaster Bujold
- Katherine Kurtz
- Robert Jordan
- Terry Brooks
- George R. R. Martin

Terry Brooks

Brooks's fast-paced Shannara novels depict all the hallmarks of epic/high fantasy—swashbuckling action, battles between good and evil, magic, quests—and though things can look bleak for the heroes at times, they feature a more hopeful and optimistic tone than many of the other fantasy series listed here have.

If you like Terry Brooks:

- Terry Goodkind
- Tad Williams
- Robert Jordan
- Stephen R. Donaldson
- R. A. Salvatore
- David Eddings
- Christopher Paolini
- S. M. Stirling
- Guy Gavriel Kay

Blast from the Past

Robin Hobb has authored several acclaimed epic/high fantasy series. Her dark, haunting, leisurely-paced work features extensive, intricate worldbuilding and plenty of scheming and intrigue. Her books are character-driven and feature nuanced, complex characters who deal with realistic psychological struggles.

Already like Hobb's work?

- Tad Williams
- George R. R. Martin
- L. E. Modesitt
- Patrick Rothfuss
- Robert Jordan
- Joe Abercrombie
- Brandon Sanderson

Branching out from Epic/High Fantasy

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Mythical fantasy (Seanan McGuire, Naomi Novik, Susanna Clarke, R. F. Kuang)
- Historical fiction (W. Michael Gear and Kathleen O'Neal Gear)
- Adventure (Clive Cussler, James Rollins)
- Science fiction (Anne McCaffrey)
- Cozy fantasy (Travis Baldree, Rebecca Thorne)

MYTHICAL FANTASY

Mythical fantasy has magic just like epic/high fantasy, but the settings are real-world historical time periods and their inspirations derived from global history, legends, lore, fairytales, and mythology. The historical elements in these books are often richly drawn and immersive and inspired by world cultures and time periods more diverse than the medieval European settings epic/high fantasy usually draws from.

Silvia Moreno-Garcia

Moreno-Garcia's work blends mythical fantasy and gothic horror, with a heavy inspiration from Mexican history and folklore. Her highly atmospheric, character-driven novels often re-imagine preexisting stories, like Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* or H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and feature unique, vividly realized settings, which can range from Jazz Age Yucatan to the 1990s Mexico City film industry.

If you like Silvia Moreno-Garcia:

- Isabel Cañas
- P. Djèlí Clark
- Gabino Iglesias
- Daphne Du Maurier
- Shirley Jackson
- H.P. Lovecraft
- Zoraida Córdova
- Peter Straub
- Alix E. Harrow
- Nghi Vo
- Stephen Graham Jones
- Victor LaVelle

Naomi Novik

Novik's well-researched, immersive, action-packed alternative history Temeraire series presents the Napoleonic Wars . . . with dragons. Follow the adventures of dragon Temeraire and his human pilot Will Laurence as they battle against Napoleon's fleet. These books are full of action but also feature complex, intriguing characters and extensive worldbuilding that overlaps with detailed historical fiction.

If you like Naomi Novik:

- Lois McMaster Bujold
- Anne McCaffrey
- Patrick O'Brian
- C. S. Forester
- Robin Hobb
- Seanan McGuire
- Kameron Hurley
- Martha Wells
- Mary Robinette Kowal
- Jim Butcher
- Alexander Kent
- Marie Brennan
- Ava Reid
- Kell Woods
- Jo Walton

Seanan McGuire

McGuire writes in numerous genres of both fantasy and horror, but she is best known for her fairy-tale-like Wayward Children series. Set in a boarding school for children with magical powers, these whimsical, haunting books are novellas written for adults and feature strong, atmospheric worldbuilding, alongside lyrical prose and complex, likeable characters.

If you like Seanan McGuire:

- Charles de Lint
- V.E. Schwab
- Alix E. Harrow
- Martha Wells
- F. T. Lukens

Susanna Clarke

Clarke's intricate, layered, leisurely-paced fantasy features rich and atmospheric worldbuilding, elegant and witty prose, and complex but compelling plots. She often uses Regency English settings with a hefty dose of magic and depicts the resulting historical fantasy world as an engaging comedy of manners.

If you like Susanna Clarke:

- Erin Morgenstern
- R. F. Kuang
- Naomi Novik
- China Miéville
- Patrick Rothfuss
- N. K. Jemisin
- Christopher Priest
- Mervyn Peake

R. F. Kuang

Kuang writes in a range of genres but is best known for her historical-inspired fantasy. Her settings range from 19th century Oxford to an alternative history version of 20th century China. Her books contain detailed worldbuilding, as well as thoughtful exploration of themes related to colonialism and dramatic, action-packed, and gritty plots.

If you like R. F. Kuang:

- Susanna Clarke
- Ken Liu
- S. A. Chakraborty
- Rebeca Roanhorse
- Leigh Bardugo
- Olivie Blake
- N. K. Jemisin
- Naomi Novik
- Shelley Parker-Chan

Deborah Harkness

Harkness blends fantasy, historical fiction, and romance together in her sweeping novels. Harkness is a history professor and often uses scholarly characters and academic settings in her work. Her books feature a leisurely pace and atmospheric, extensive worldbuilding.

If you like Deborah Harkness:

- Diana Gabaldon
- Kim Harrison
- Charlaine Harris
- Patricia Briggs
- Alice Hoffman
- Alix E. Harrow
- Laini Taylor

S. A. Chakraborty

Chakraborty's work is heavily influenced by Middle Eastern lore and history. Her memorable characters range from 18th century Cairo con artists to 12th century Indian Ocean pirates. Her books feature fast-paced adventure and intrigue, detailed worldbuilding, vivid settings, elegant prose, and thoughtful explorations of power.

If you like S. A. Chakraborty:

- R. F. Kuang
- Ashok K. Banker
- Sabaa Tahir
- Zen Cho
- Katherine Kurtz
- Saad Z. Hossain

Erin Morgenstern

Morgenstern's leisurely-paced, detailed novels bring to life magical circuses and libraries and can also include a romantic element. They're known for their rich sense of atmosphere and vivid prose. These books emphasize tone, setting, and style rather than featuring plot-driven action.

If you like Erin Morgenstern:

- Susanna Clarke
- Kell Wood
- Alix E. Harrow
- Katherine Arden
- Seanan McGuire
- Madeline Miller
- Victoria Schwab
- T.J. Klune
- Deborah Harkness
- Helene Wecker
- Lev Grossman

Katherine Arden

Arden's dark historical fantasy books often draw on Russian history and mythology for inspiration, though they can also include settings like World War I-era Belgium. Regardless of location, her books depict vivid, atmospheric settings, supernatural elements, and strong female characters.

If you like Katherine Arden:

- Juliet Marillier
- Leigh Bardugo
- Alix E. Harrow
- Seanan McGuire
- Laini Taylor

Blast from the Past

Gregory Maguire may be most famous for his *The Wizard of Oz*-inspired stories, but he's also written numerous retellings of classic fairy tales. He transplants the stories to realistic historical settings, ranging from 1600s Holland to Renaissance Italy. His dark, gritty character-driven work features vivid prose as he relates his own twists on Cinderella, Snow White, the Nutcracker, and more.

Already like Maguire's work?

- Christopher Moore
- Sarah Pinborough
- Mercedes Lackey

Branching out from Mythical Fantasy

Like mythical fantasy but interested in trying other genres?

- Epic/high fantasy (J. R. R. Tolkien, George R. R. Martin, Robert Jordan)
- Romantasy (Danielle L. Jensen)
- Paranormal/alternate reality romance (Diana Gabaldon)
- Historical fiction (C.S. Forester, Patrick O'Brian)
- Horror (Stephen King, Dean Koontz)
- Cozy fantasy (T. J. Klune, Heather Fawcett)
- Cozy science fiction (Becky Chambers)

URBAN FANTASY

Urban fantasy features magic and magical beings in contemporary real-world settings. Often dark and gritty, these books usually feature mystery and romance elements and draw heavily from noir tropes.

Patricia Briggs

Briggs writes in multiple fantasy subgenres but is best known for her Mercy Thompson urban fantasy series. Mercy is a shapeshifter mechanic who interacts with a wide range of supernatural beings, including werewolves and vampires, in the Pacific Northwest. Briggs's fast-paced, action-packed books star strong female characters and blend fantasy, mystery, humor, and romance.

If you like Patricia Briggs:

- Kim Harrison
- Laurell K. Hamilton
- Kelley Armstrong
- Jeaniene Frost
- Charlaine Harris
- Yasmine Galenorn
- Ilona Andrews
- Lilith Saintcrow
- Tanya Huff

Ben Aaronovitch

Aaronovitch's witty Rivers of London series follows the adventures of a London constable who finds himself investigating and solving crimes involving magic and the supernatural world. These amusing books feature dangerous adventure, lots of humor, and enjoyable characters.

If you like Ben Aaronovitch:

- Jim Butcher
- Terry Pratchett
- Martha Wells
- Paul Cornell
- Garth Nix

Lev Grossman

Grossman writes dark, haunting, contemporary-set literary-ish fantasy that often revolves around academic settings and can overlap with horror. His books feature complex but likeable characters dealing with difficult, realistic problems against a backdrop of magic.

If you like Lev Grossman:

- Erin Morgenstern
- N. K. Jemisin
- Patrick Rothfuss
- Victoria Schwab
- Charlie Jane Anders
- Jim Butcher
- Naomi Novik
- Seanan McGuire
- Jo Walton
- Ben Aaronovitch
- Christopher Buehlman

Jim Butcher

Though he's written more traditional epic/high fantasy, Butcher is best known for his Dresden Files urban fantasy series, which follows a wizard private eye in Chicago who deals with all manner of supernatural cases. The books are humorous and fast-paced and depict realistically complex characters. These have a strong mystery element without the romantic emphasis many comparable urban fantasies have.

If you like Jim Butcher:

- Patricia Briggs
- Kim Harrison
- Laurell K. Hamilton
- Lois McMaster Bujold
- F. Paul Wilson
- Glen Cook
- Charles de Lint
- Ben Aaronovitch

Jasper Fforde

Far more whimsical than most books on this list, Fforde's work draws on a rich well of inspiration, from fairy tales to classic literature. His witty Thursday Next series is urban fantasy meets science fiction meets mystery that features a book detective "jumping into" books in an alternate history version of 1980s England to solve cases. Fforde's quirky work is clever, silly, and lighthearted with a heavy emphasis on imaginative and playful wordplay.

If you like Jasper Fforde:

- Terry Pratchett
- Christopher Moore
- Douglas Adams
- Ben Aaronovitch
- Connie Willis
- Lewis Carroll
- Gail Carriger
- Genevieve Cogman

Blast from the Past

Charles de Lint pioneered the urban fantasy genre, and he wrote for a wide range of ages. His work blends folklore with contemporary settings and focuses on down-and-out but likeable characters.

Already like de Lint's work?

- Jim Butcher
- Seanan McGuire
- Alice Hoffman

Branching out from Urban Fantasy

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Paranormal romance (Christine Feehan, Kelley Armstrong, Sherrilyn Kenyon, Laurell K. Hamilton)
- Mystery (Robert B. Parker, Raymond Chandler)
- Adventure (Clive Cussler, James Rollins)

COZY FANTASY

The other subgenres of fantasy can often veer into rather dark territory. Cozy fantasy, meanwhile, has the rich settings and presence of magic and magical beings but with gentle cozy vibes. Crucially, unlike most other subgenres of fantasy, the fate of the world is not usually in the balance.

T. J. Klune

Klune writes heartwarming, soulful books about quirky likeable characters in fantasy settings. The books are generally uplifting and humorous, though they can thoughtfully touch on the characters' personal challenges, like grief.

If you like T. J. Klune:

- Travis Baldree
- Toshikazu Kawaguchi
- Stacy Sivinski
- Heather Fawcett
- Becky Chambers

Heather Fawcett

Fawcett's whimsical, cozy Edwardian-set romantasy blends historical fiction, romance, and fairy tales as it chronicles the adventures of a scholar studying faeries in rustic English settings.

If you like Heather Fawcett:

- Travis Baldree
- Olivia Atwater
- Marie Brennan
- India Holton
- Stacy Sivinski
- Emily Tesh
- Rebecca Ross
- Kristen Ciccarelli

Rebecca Thorne

Thorne's Tomes and Tea series is a heartwarming pirate cozy romantasy that features characters who operate a bookstore/tea shop and find themselves involved in adventures on the side. This entertaining, lighthearted, whimsical series features low-stakes mystery, suspense, and adventure.

If you like Rebecca Thorne:

- Travis Baldree
- Stacy Sivinski

Blast from the Past

Travis Baldree's Legends and Lattes series launched cozy fantasy into the literary mainstream. The books' subtitle bills them as "high fantasy and low stakes," and they fulfill that promise. They follow the adventures of Viv, an orc mercenary turned coffee shop entrepreneur who finds her past life keeps catching up with her. The lighthearted books feature likeable characters in traditional-seeming high fantasy settings with cozy, enjoyable worldbuilding.

Already like Baldree's work?

- Rebecca Thorne
- Stacy Sivinski
- Becky Chambers
- T. J. Klune

Branching out from Cozy Fantasy

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Cozy science fiction (Becky Chambers)
- Lighter epic/high fantasy (J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Terry Pratchett)
- Lighter mythical fantasy (Susanna Clarke, Seanan McGuire, Erin Morgenstern)
- Lighter urban fantasy (Jasper Fforde)
- Cozy mysteries with supernatural elements (Nancy Atherton)

Looking for more suggestions on what to read?

- Fill out our online Berryville Library's What Should I Read Next? form.
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf7VfQV7xaYIoTACTX7kX_TdTPHwQ1i9UnqBwVDS3gGrYcpcg/viewform?usp=sharing&oid=116325047873771509704
- Request a reader's advisory consultation at the library. You can call, email, or stop by the library to learn more.



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