(Definitions and Examples - All)

Whether set on our familar Earth (past or present), or in a vast parallel world, or some dreamlike realm where *everything* is different, fantasy tales allow our imaginations free reign. Even so its relationships, and use of magic, must be internally consistent.

Alternate World fantasy involves different worlds hidden within or parallel to our own. In past times these could be found in a mysterious country, as in Johnathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels*. With the Earth explored, some were envisioned inside a mirror, as with Lewis Carroll's novel *Through the Looking Glass*. Others 'distill' whole fictional libraries, as with John Myers Myers' novel *Silverlock*. In our scientific era, often these worlds are in a parallel cosmos, as depicted in Roger Zelazny's "Amber" series. ⌞⌝⌞⌝

Arthurian subgenre tales are set in the world of King Arthur's legendary Camelot. Merlin, Lancelot, Ygraine and friends are involved in fresh adventures. These novels have been popular for centuries, and one famous modern example is Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. ⌞⌝⌞⌝

Bangsian fantasy takes its name from a 19th century author named John Bangs. This subgenre deals all or mostly with the afterlife. Early legends speak of Hades, and it's been going strong ever since. A modern example is Philip Jose Farmer's "Riverworld" series, which overlaps with 'science fiction.' Though marketed as literary fiction, with its Heaven-dwelling narrator, Alice Sebold's novel and movie *The Lovely Bones* fits this category. ⌞⌝⌞⌝**Celtic** fantasy draws upon the rich lore of the Celtic peoples, mostly but not always from Ireland. C.J. Cherryh's novel *The Dreaming Tree* and Charles De Lint's novel *The Little Country* are fine examples. ⌞⌝⌞⌝

Christian fantasy is a rare subgenre, in part because (for complex reasons) many believers shun the whole 'fantasy' mileau, while many 'fantasy' mavens return the favor. A fine example of this subgenre is C. Dale Brittain's lighthearted "Yurt" series, which incorportates Christian elements without naming Jesus directly. Several of C.S. Lewis's novels are classified as 'fantasy,' such as his *The Screwtape Letters*. ⌞⌝⌞⌝

Comedic fantasy is a humorous and/or satirical subgenre. The many "Xanth" novels by Piers Anthony are a great example. ⌞⌝⌞⌝

Contemporary is a subgenre which posits that magical creatures are hidden amongst us. These tales are set in modern times, and deceptively familiar situations. Neil Gaiman's novel *Neverwhere* depicts a vast (yet hidden) magical underground London. Mercedes Lackey's "Diana Tregarde" novels bring realistic magic to Dallas and small town Oklahoma. ⌞⌝⌞⌝

Court Intrigue is a subgenre set in royal castles, whether historical (but with magic), or in some recognizable alternate world. George R.R. Martin's very popular "Game of

Thrones" franchise overlaps with 'high fantasy' and has enough palace intrigue to give Machiavelli some lessons.

Dark subgenre tales overlap with with 'horror,' and/or feature a gothic atmosphere. Michael Moorcock's "Elric" stories are often cited as examples.

Dying Earth stories take place in just such a dismal setting. Often humanity is beset with ennui, as the world itself fades away. The Martin and Dozois anthology *Songs of the Dying Earth* pays homage to Jack Vance's namesake tome.

Erotic subgenre tales contain a strong sexual element. Examples abound, since medieval times and before. A popular modern example is Jacqueline Carey's novel *Kushiel's Dart*, along with its sequels.

Fantasy of Manners is a subgenre related to the literary 'comedy of manners,' and it depicts the elaborate rituals and relationships of some narrow social class. These stories downplay or omit nonhuman creatures. Author Ellen Kushner is regarded as the dean of this subgenre.

Feghoot describes a tiny yet distinct subgenre, rooted in the 'fan fiction' of serious fantasy enthusiasts. These 'flash fiction' (under 1000 word) tales are laden with inside jokes, and must feature a bad pun for an ending. The protagonist is always a loutish adventurer named Ferdinand Feghoot.

Heroic fantasy centers on a conquering hero, or band of heroes; yet it often turns the genre's heroic trope on its head, with forgivable villains and deeply flawed protagonists. Stephen R. Donaldson's epic "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant" series fits the bill perfectly.

High or Epic fantasy is, for many readers, the heart and essence of the genre. Entire worlds are created, with long histories and vivid lifestyles, and a large cast of characters. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* utterly dominates this subgenre. Elizabeth Moon's five "Paksenarrion/Gird" novels (plus some brand-new sequels) are excellent examples. (Hand-drawn maps, which show the landscape and competing realms, are essential.)

Historical fantasy is the genre's answer to historical fiction. A specific period from Earth's history becomes the setting, but with fantastic elements blended in. Gene Wolfe's dreamlike novel *Soldier of the Mist* and Guy Gavriel Kay's novel *Tigana* are two fine examples.

Historical High Fantasy is a subset of the 'historical fantasy' genre, in which the stories are vast and detailed enough to resemble 'high fantasy.' Stephen Lawhead's trilogies are preeminent. His Pendragon Cycle novels combine an expanded Arthurian legend with the doomed Atlantis.

Juvenile fantasy is a vast descriptive category, overlapping with the 'children's' and 'young adult' genres, which has stories written for a younger audience. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is a stellar example, as are L. Frank Baum's "Oz" books. Joy Chant's novel *Red Moon and Black Mountain* is another. ␣␣

Low Fantasy is a descriptive category, and its definition has been shifting. Originally such tales are written, if not in conscious opposition to, then with a serious lack of, the sweeping vistas and serious heroism of the 'high fantasy' subgenre. Some observer link it to the 'sword & sorcery' subgenre, while video games such as *Shadowrun* have been placed in this category. By the ascendant definition, 'low fantasy' has less magic, and a more ordinary setting, mostly in our familiar world. An example of this would be P.L. Travers' novel *Mary Poppins*, the basis of the well-known Disney movie; plus another, *Saving Mister Banks*, about the making of that movie. Another example, which overlaps with the 'young adult' genre, is Candy Gourlay's novel *Tall Story*. ␣␣

Media tie-in (Buffy novels, etc.) ␣These stories involve characters and settings that originate in movies, TV shows, video games, etc. It's a huge subgenre, and its many series get plenty of shelf space. Such stories normally follow the canon of the specific creator/ownership, and cannot depict permanent changes to its principal characters. ␣␣

Medieval fantasy is defined by its name, as this subgenre's tales are set in that period, in between the ancient or Arthurian worlds and the modern industrial era. They will feature knights and knaves, often together with sorcerers and dragons. (Many fantasy subgenres, set on Earth or elsewhere, have a 'pseudomedieval' setting. That is: ox carts, tavern wenches, and swords; but no automobiles, stock brokers, or firearms.) ␣␣

Mythic (mythopoeia, mythpunk) ␣This subgenre is a broad category. In general, these stories are set on our familiar Earth, and incorporate existing myths. Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* and Neil Gaiman's *Anansi Boys* do a wonderful job of bringing ancient myths into our modern world.␣Tolkein used the term 'mythopoeia' to describe his own work, in that it's evocative of humanity's deepest myths. ␣Mythpunk is a small subgenre, its name a derivative of cyberpunk. Vera Nazarian's edgy novel *Dreams of the Compass Rose* is a clear example. ␣␣

Quest fantasies involve just that. It's a descriptive category, in which the protagonist is involved in some perilous all-consuming quest. In Peter Beagle's novelette *Two Hearts*, nine-year-old Sooz sets off alone to free her village from a murderous gryphon. Terry Goodkind's novel *Wizard's First Rule* is another example. ␣␣

Romantic subgenre tales incorporate 'fantasy' and 'romance' genre themes. There are plenty of examples, though often marketed as 'paranormal romance' (which pays better). *Catch The Lightning* by Catherine Asaro is a fine example. (As a physicist, Asaro blends elements of rigorous science into many of her stories.) ␣␣

Science Fantasy is an overlapping subgenre, with the trappings of high technology, but also pervasive elements of traditional fantasy. The term is well-established in two major

genres, and here refers to stories with lean toward 'fantasy' rather than 'science' fiction. Marian Zimmer Bradley's "Darkover" series is one example.

Series (shared world) This is a popular descriptive category. Such tales become part of a long series of novels (and often, short stories) whose publication can span decades, and be picked up by new authors after the originator's passing. For example, Terry Brooks' "Shannara" series joined up with his later "Knight of the Word" novels, for a vast future history. David Eddings' voluminous "Belgariad" series is another. The 'shared' subgenre does just that, by inviting many authors to add stories to an existing 'world,' with new subplots and characters joining the originator's familiar ones. Terry Pratchet's "Discworld" franchise is perhaps the most popular example. (This participation is done via a formal process, otherwise it's regarded as freelance -- amateur and only semi-legal -- 'fanfic' storytelling.)

Superhero fantasy needs no introduction. Whether in films or comic books or novels, characters such as Superman, Thor, and Iron Man are familiar indeed. Some authors will create their own new superheroes, incorporating familiar tropes. Michael Stackpole's novel *In Hero Years, I'm Dead* is a well-thought-out example. (Such protagonists may gain their special abilities from magic or technology or alien birth, or something else, and usually these will far exceed anything deemed plausible by science.)

Sword & Sorcery tales embody the action-packed aspect of fantasy, with powerful barbarians clearing a bloody swath across their pseudomedieval worlds. Robert Howard's "Conan" novels are perhaps the founding tomes. Fritz Leiber's clever "Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser" tales are popular (and much imitated) examples.

Urban Fantasy (nerd outfoxes supernatural) These novels are set in a modern, urban environment. Werewolves live in abandoned subway stations, or pixies hide in the small spaces of a campus dormitory. Jody Lynn Nye's novels often incorporate such characters. (A large percentage of such tales, especially if they involve vampires, are set in-and-around New Orleans.) In some tales, a computer nerd is up against ancient evil. Robert Weinberg's novel *A Logical Magician* is an example which features adaptable beings such as 'mall nymphs.' Charles Stross's novel *The Atrocity Archives* incorporates 'horror' and 'spy thriller' elements.

Vampire (Dracula, Nosferatu, sexy youth) This subgenre originally belonged to the 'horror' category, and much of it still fits there; however many newer tales overlap with the 'romance' and 'young adult' genres, so these tales now better fit the 'fantasy' section. Based in ancient myth, primarily from Romania, vampire stories have been popular for more than a century. Dracula type stories began with Bram Stoker's 1897 novel of that name. It's been filmed countless times, and launched the whole trope of vampires as (at least in their on-screen depictions) debonaire, attractive men with a very dark secret. Nosferatu type stories were popularized by FW Murnau's 1922 film of that name, featuring an ugly and repulsive (if wealthy) Count Orlock. There are numerous spinoffs and imitators. (The movie was itself a direct ripoff of Dracula, but distinct in this major regard.) Sexy Youth vampire tales often, but not always, overlap with the 'young adult'

and 'romance' genres, and also with the 'urban fantasy' subgenre. Young, or immortally youthful, vampiric (and other supernatural) characters get into serious relationships with mortals. Such tales have become very popular, beginning with Fran Rubel Kuzui's 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and Joss Whedon's namesake TV series. Countless books, movies, and TV series have followed, including Charlaine Harris's "True Blood" franchise. (In general, each author creates his-or-her own rules, as to a vampire's lifestyle, abilities, and weaknesses.)

Wuxia stories originated in China. They are often set during Imperial times, and feature a hero advanced in the martial arts, who battles human (and sometimes supernatural) foes. A famous example is Wang Dulu's novel *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, filmed by Ang Lee. (That movie was a huge hit in the west, but drew yawns in China, as just one of many such tales.)