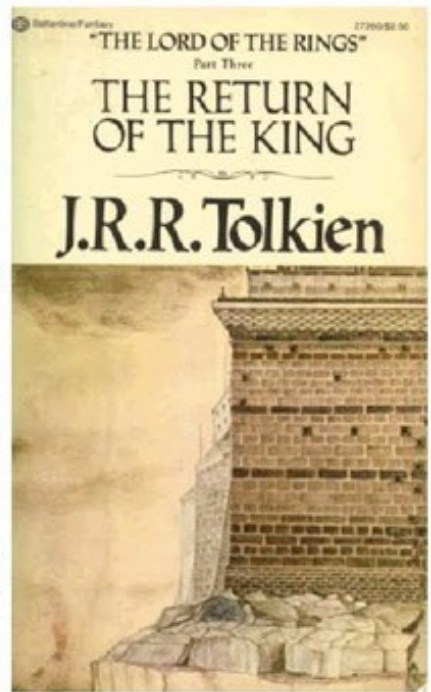
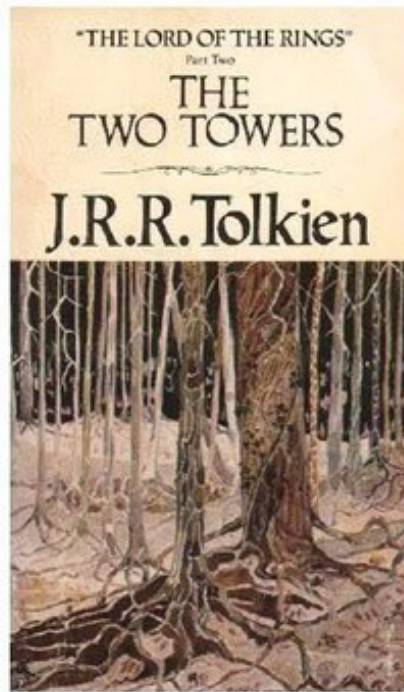
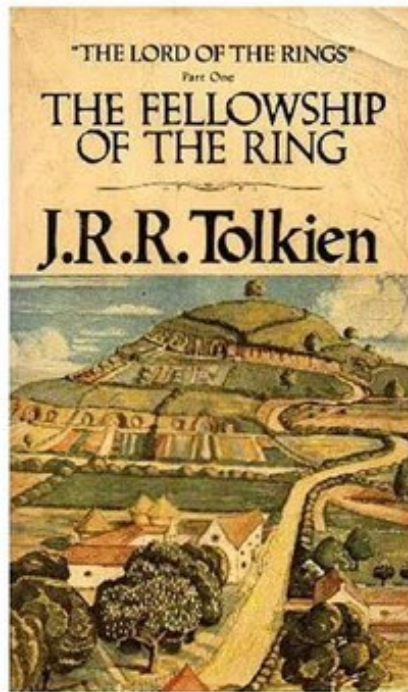




Bantam Books

A Song of Ice and Fire, the series that *A Game of Thrones* belongs to, is a modern classic. If you enjoy the HBO show you owe it to yourself to read the books. (Just be prepared for this thing to start real tight and end up *sprawling*.)

4. *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien



Ballentine Books

If you're reading a list of the best fantasy books, there's like a 0% chance you haven't read *The Lord of the Rings* books already, but just in case you somehow haven't, you should. Required reading. Prerequisite for all fantasy.

5. *The Lightbringer* series by Brent Weeks

Orbit Books

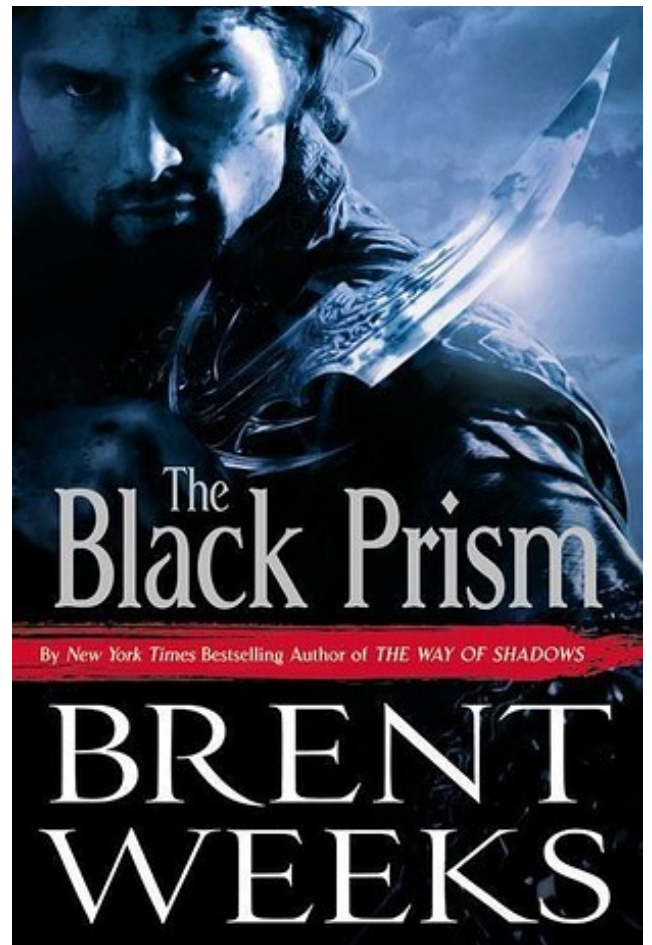
Orbit Books

Solid fantasy books with an intricate and fascinating system of magic. A little bit like how the power rings work in the Green Lantern comic books, except set in a fantasy world.

6. *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman

Classic storybook fantasy full of witches, magic animal companions, and badass polar bears covered in armor. These books skew a little younger, but are still fun to read for adults as well.

7. *Discworld* by Terry Pratchett







Harper Collins

Discworld isn't a traditional fantasy cycle, but more of a fantasy-themed and generally humorous collection of books, short stories, encyclopedias, and maps. There are 40 books in eight different storylines, so it's quite an undertaking. Sadly, Terry Pratchett died earlier this year, and the final *Discworld* book, *The Shepherd's Crown*, is expected to hit shelves this fall.

8. *The First Law* by Joe Abercrombie



Orbit Books

As violent, gritty, and unpredictable as *Game of Thrones*, but with more heart, humor, and sense of play. This series will draw you in immediately and make you fall in love with its troubled, complicated lead characters.

9. *The Sword of Shannara Trilogy* by Terry Brooks

Elves, Dark Lords, and quests to retrieve mythical swords in order to vanquish said Dark Lords. These are classic, epic fantasy books that feel an awful lot like the *Lord of the Rings* series at times, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. The *Lord of the Rings* books are, after all, very, very good indeed.

10. *Demon Cycle* by Peter V. Brett

A "hero's journey" told through several protagonists and settings. As its name implies, the *Demon Cycle* exists in a complex and fascinating world where humans and demons are forced to live at constant odds with one another, and explores what happens when humans finally take a stand.

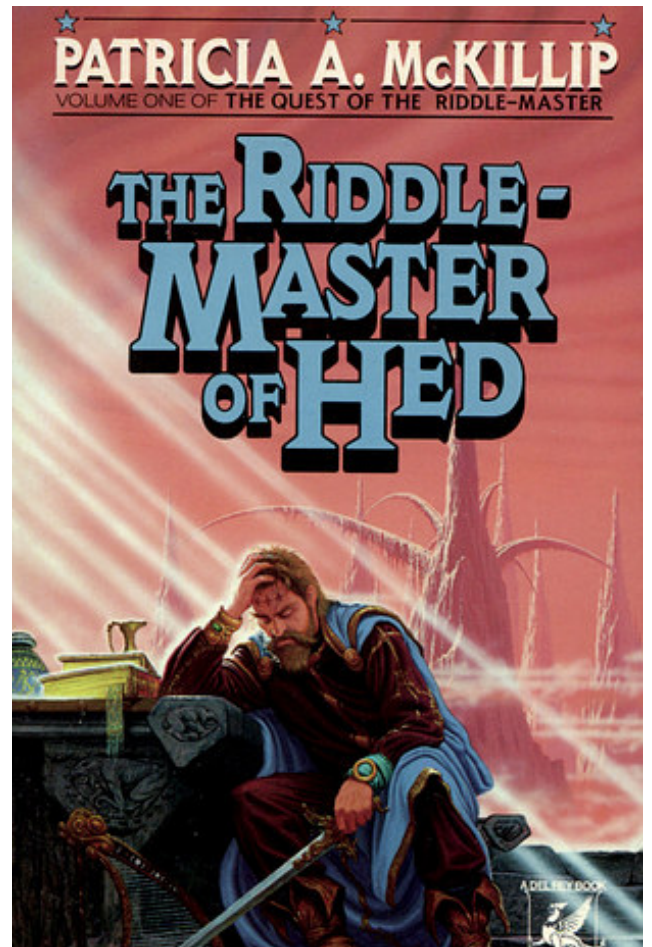
11. *The Riddle-Master Trilogy* by Patricia A. McKillip

Del Rey

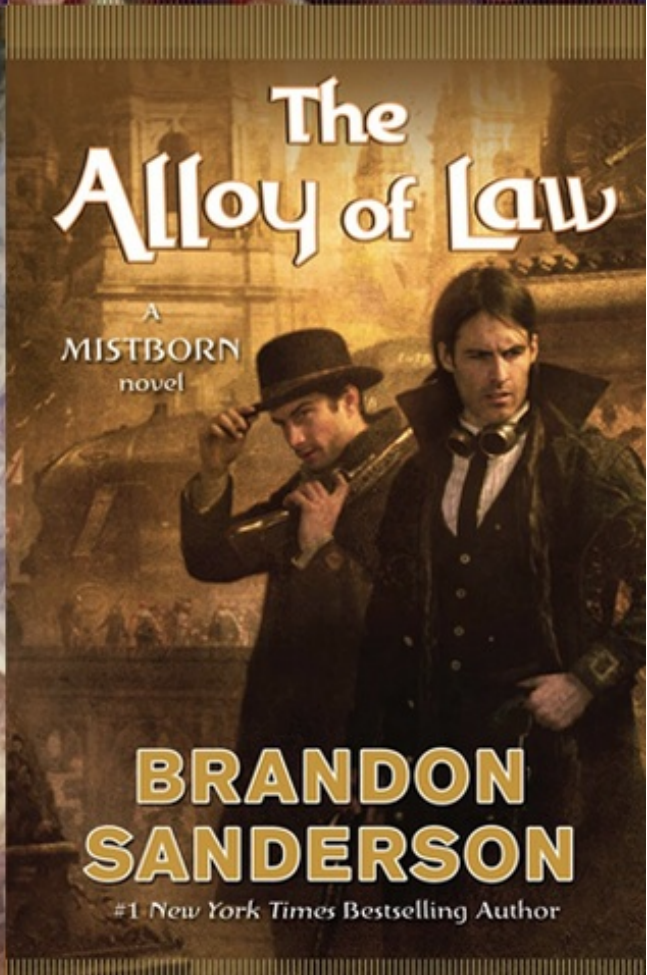
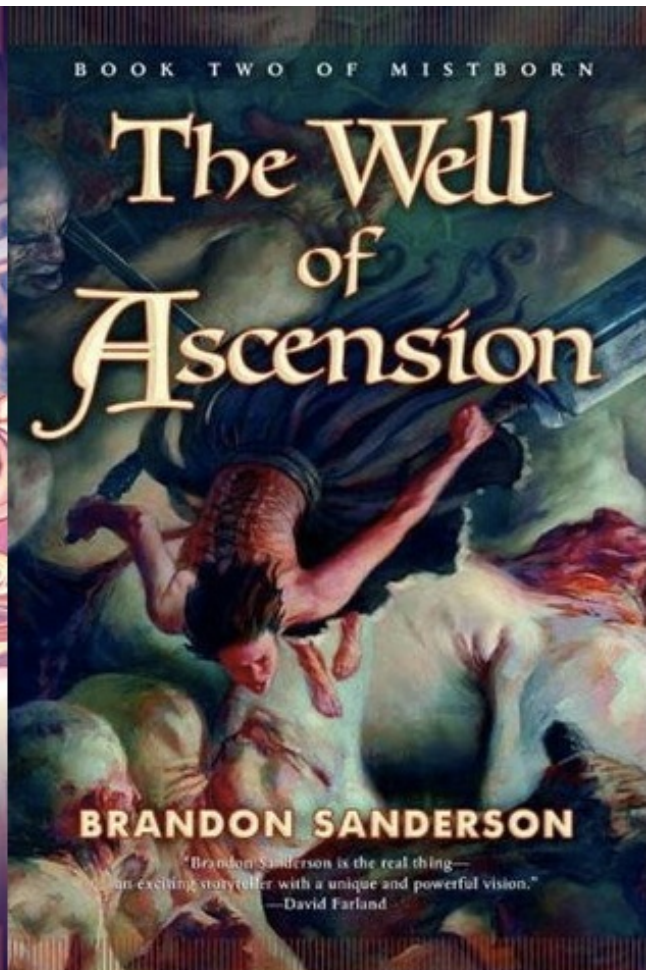
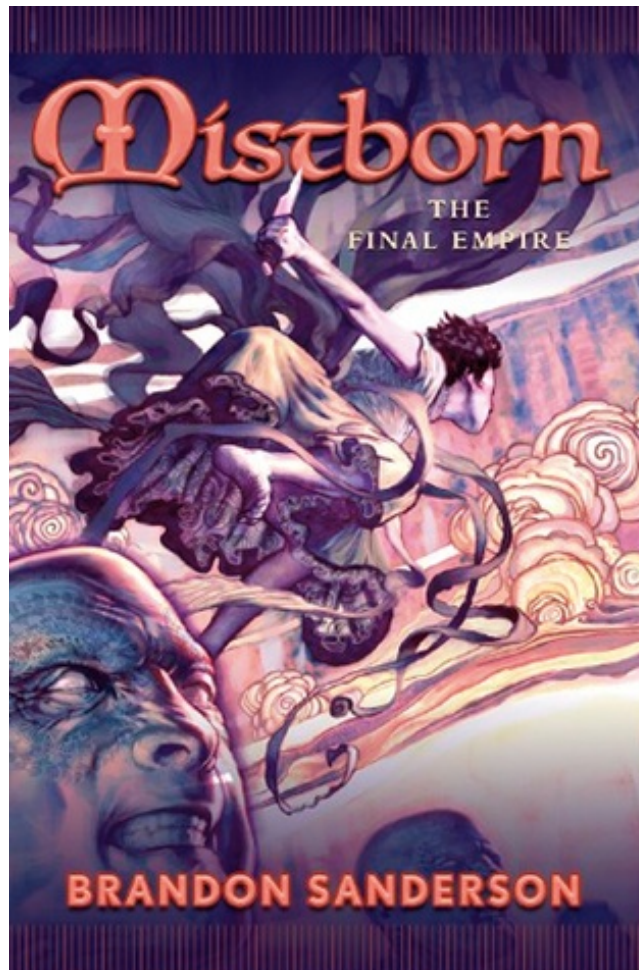
Stepheng3

Set in a world akin to northwestern Europe, and with royalty disguised as commoners, talkative ghosts, and star-crossed lovers, *The Riddle Master Trilogy* feels a bit like a contemporary fantasy equivalent to some of Shakespeare's stories. (But with shape-shifting monsters, magic, and, yes, lots of riddles.)

12. *Mistborn* by Brandon Sanderson







Tor Books

The heart of this series is in the intricate and cleverly deployed system of magic that powers it. Allomancers have different abilities tied to different metals, and there is a real thrill in watching the characters learn and master their craft and combine forces as they attempt to overthrow a corrupt and oppressive regime.

13. *Gentlemen Bastard Sequence* by Scott Lynch



Bantam Spectra

Thieves, pirates, and a beautifully planned series of heists that are a delight to watch unfold. This series is not without its share of heartbreak and loss, but the tribulations of its protagonists are tempered with a joyful sense of mischief, cunning, and a fair amount of swashbuckling. *Oceans 11* meets *Pirates of the Caribbean* meets *Robin Hood*.

14. *The Inheritance Trilogy* by N.K. Jemisin

A vividly imagined world where gods are slaves and nothing is as it seems. Author N.K. Jemisin deftly subverts all the old fantasy tropes in the course of creating a beautiful, rich world full of intriguing characters and dazzling moments that will leave you wanting more.

15. *Liveship Traders Trilogy* by Robin Hobb

Epic tales of the sea and pirate stories...except all the ships are magical and sentient and sort of have minds of their own at times. The thinking "liveships" carry with them generations of collected wisdom and often have as much rich characterization as the human characters aboard them.

16. The *Harry Potter* books by J.K. Rowling

You've probably never heard of these little-known books from British author J.K. Rowling. But this well-kept secret is actually a wonderful series of books that deserves much more recognition than it gets. OK, let's be real: If you are the one person who hasn't read these yet, just do yourself a favor. Read them now. Right now. No more excuses.

17. *The Sword of Truth* by Terry Goodkind



Tor Fantasy

Less a fantasy series and more a complex dedication to world-building. The *Sword of Truth* series is 14 books, all of which are designed to be stand-alone stories, totally independent from the others. (Except for the final three books, which are a traditional trilogy.) They follow several key protagonists all grappling with the same antagonists bent on world domination.

18. *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis

Like reading the Bible, if the Bible was set in a fantasy universe. OK, that's an exaggeration, but the books are pretty heavy on the Christian allegory. The seven novels (the reading order of which is a little controversial) are shorter than standard fantasy books, and written for younger readers, so they're incredibly fun, easy to get through, and definitely worth picking up if you had the extreme misfortune of not reading these as a child.

19. *The Earthsea Cycle* by Ursula K. LeGuin

A classic of the genre from one of its all-time masters, Ursula K. LeGuin. The *Earthsea* saga confronts the great themes of life and death with its wonderful cast of magicians, priestesses, and dragons. Elegiac in tone and epic in scope, the books in this series will make you think and grow as you delight in the adventures of its characters.

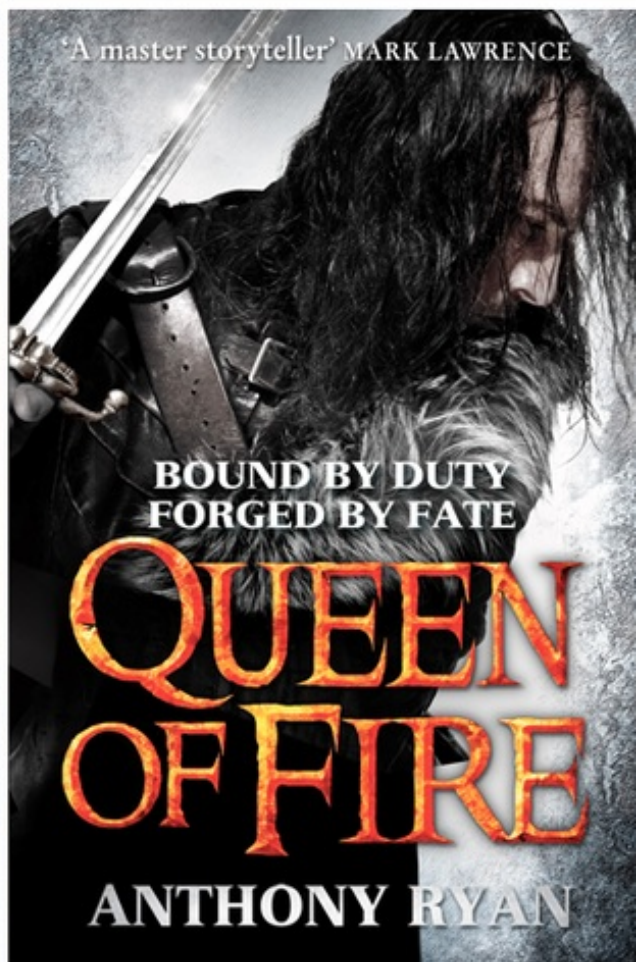
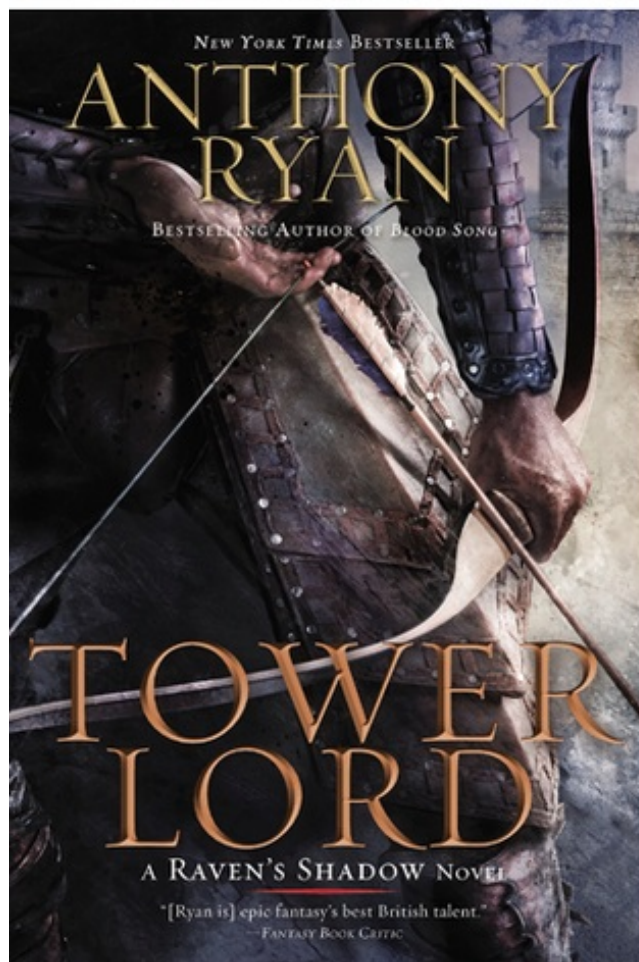
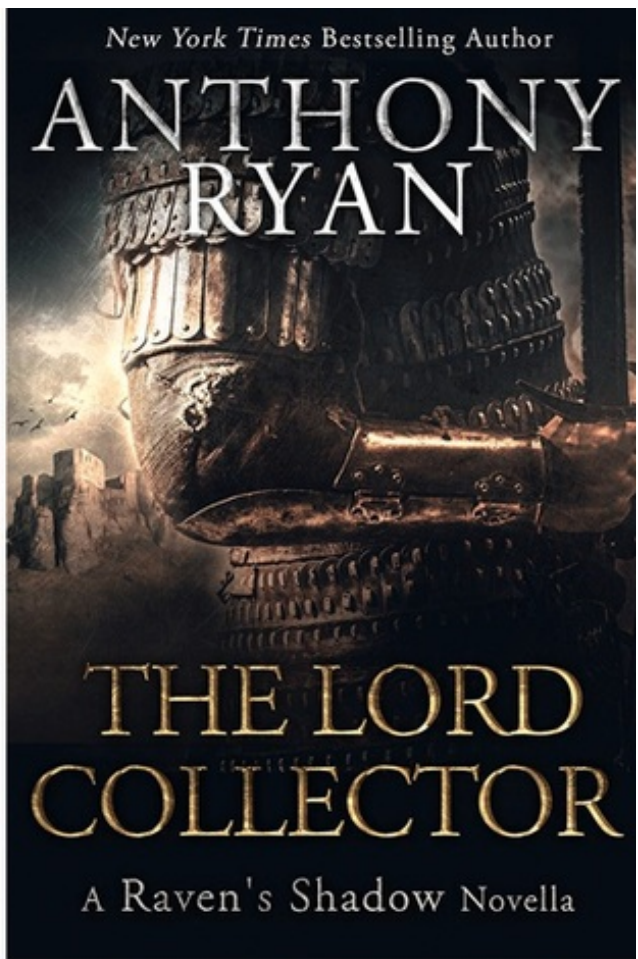
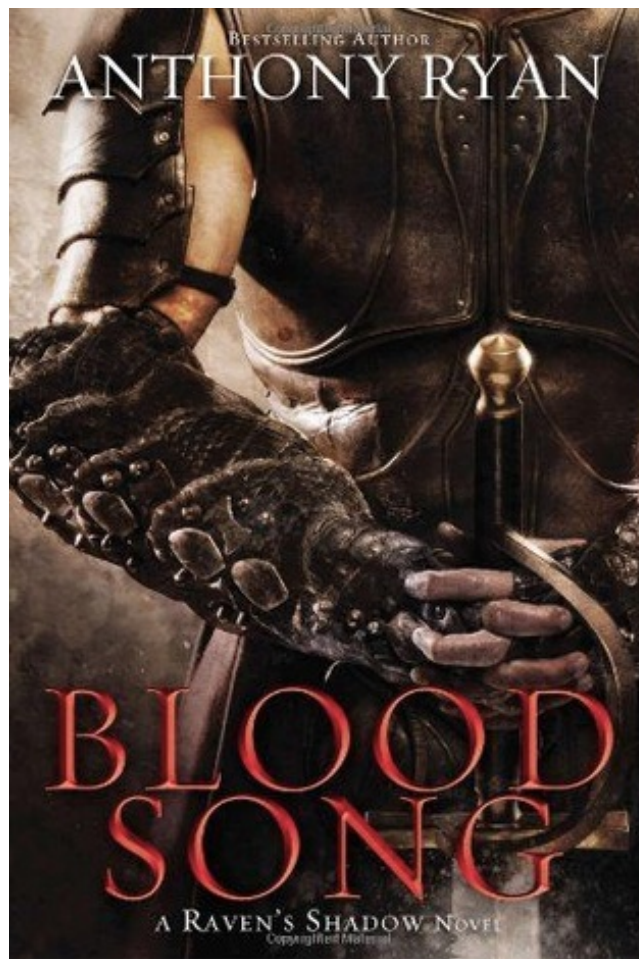
20. *The Fionavar Tapestry* by Guy Gavriel Kay



Penguin Putnam

From the great Guy Gavriel Kay (see also, the stunning *Tigana*), *The Fionavar Tapestry* is a high fantasy tale of princes and princesses, dragons and warriors, with an intriguing foothold in the contemporary world. Follow the adventures of five students from our world who find themselves in the middle of an epic battle in the magical Fionavar, in this riveting and deftly realized series that draws from Arthurian legend, Norse and Welsh mythology, and the very best of the fantasy traditions established by Tolkien and C.S. Lewis.

21. *Raven's Shadow* by Anthony Ryan



Anthony Ryan

In the vein of *Name of the Wind*, the first book of the *Raven's Shadow* series more than does justice to a hero's journey with a compelling bit of world-building and enough action and adventure to keep you completely hooked. Follow the adventures of Vaelin al Sorna as he weaves his way from his apprentice training in the harsh military "Sixth Order" to worldwide renown as the fearsome "Hope Killer."

22. *The Broken Empire* series by Mark Lawrence

A little more adult than many of the selections on this list, the *Broken Empire* series is aimed at the cynical fantasy fan. The world in which these books take place is violent and brutal, and their protagonist is not particularly sympathetic. This series feels a bit like a fantasy story told from the perspective of the vile and power-hungry evil king who would usually play the part of the villain.

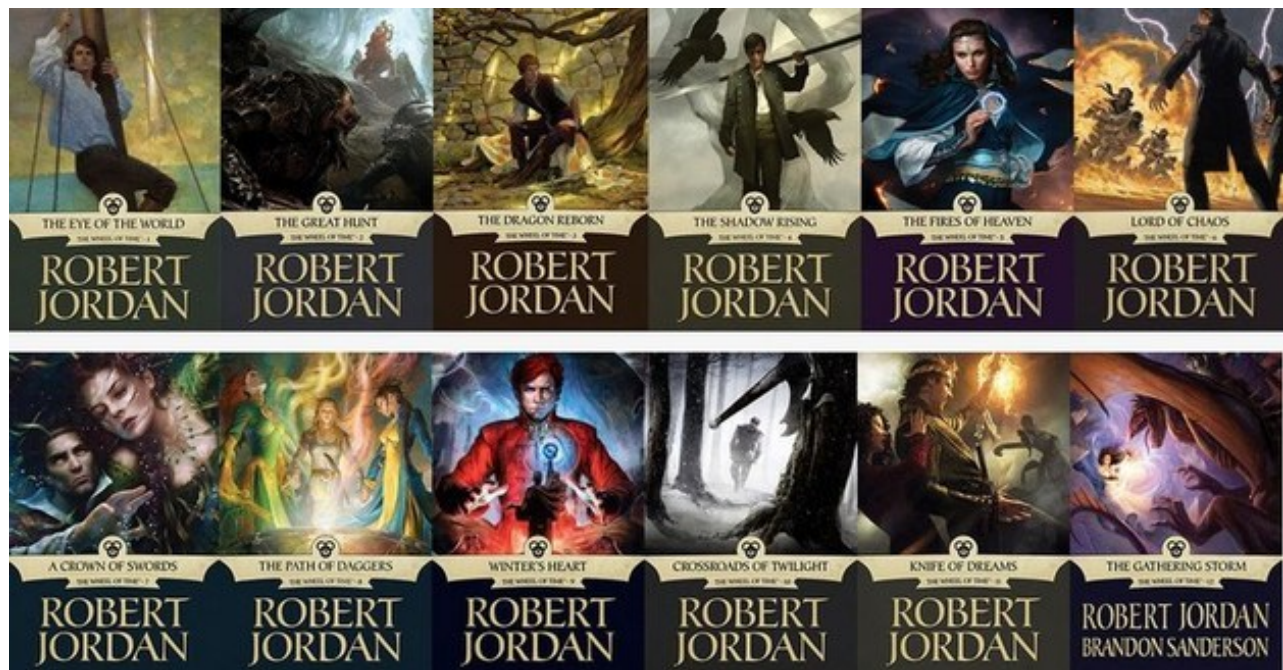
23. *A Land Fit For Heroes* by Richard K. Morgan

An exuberant twist on some standard dark fantasy tropes, *A Land Fit For Heroes* is almost gleeful in its violence, sexual themes, and cynical outlook. Author Richard K. Morgan brings some of his science fiction chops (see in particular the brilliant Takeshi Kovacs novels) to add color to a fantasy world full of magic, destiny, and so, so, so much violence. Also, the hero is gay, which is a refreshing change.

24. *Outlander* series by Diana Gabaldon

Part romance novel, part historical fiction, part fantasy, the *Outlander* series takes the best parts of each genre and makes its own unique narrative, which begins with a 20th-century nurse who's mysteriously time-warped to 18th-century Scotland. These books are full of intrigue and romance and are extremely readable, and also feature a female protagonist, which is rarer than it should be for fantasy novels.

25. *The Wheel Of Time* by Robert Jordan



Tor Fantasy

The first three books in this iconic series are a classic exploration of the themes of good versus evil and a template for almost all of the high fantasy that follows it. After Jordan's death in 2007, the extremely talented Brandon Sanderson (see also *The Stormlight Archive* in this list) has finished off the series to great acclaim from fans. But there are 14 books (of, frankly, varying quality) to read before the grand finale, so you better get cracking now.

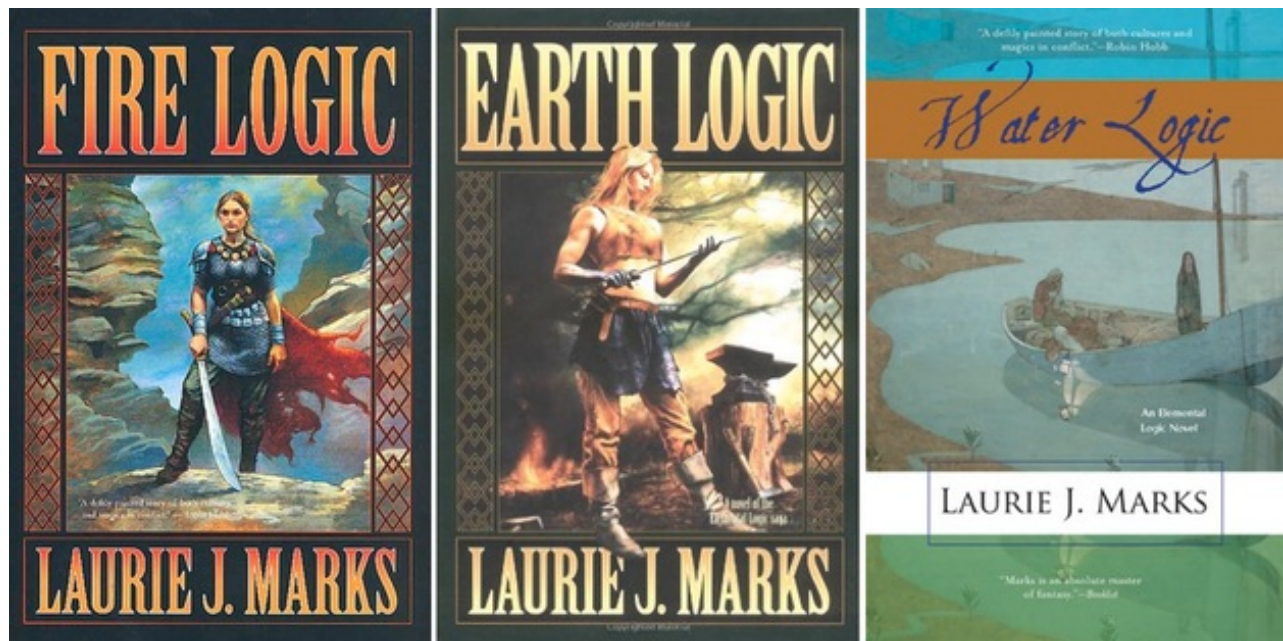
26. *Malazan Book Of The Fallen* by Steven Erikson

“Epic” doesn't even really begin to describe this 10-volume series, with its sweeping plot, its multiple storylines, and its intricate, ambitious world-building. This is the *War and Peace* of high fantasy literature, but obviously way better, because it has assassins, magic, and dragons – three things Tolstoy never thought to include in his magnum opus, to his great detriment and (presumably) lasting regret.

27. *The Black Company* by Glen Cook

You won't read a review of *The Black Company* without seeing the word “gritty,” and that's because Glen Cook basically singlehandedly brought the idea into the world of fantasy. Follow the adventures of this morally questionable group of mercenaries as they hack their way through a dark, war-torn world full of death, misery, and, occasionally, a chance at redemption.

28. *Elemental Logic* by Laurie J. Marks



Tor Fantasy

The *Elemental Logic* books are a fascinating look into what it's like being on the wrong side of a hostile occupation, and all the politics and betrayal that comes along with it. Complicated characters play their stories out in a richly imagined world, and the lines between good and evil often become blurred throughout the three books.

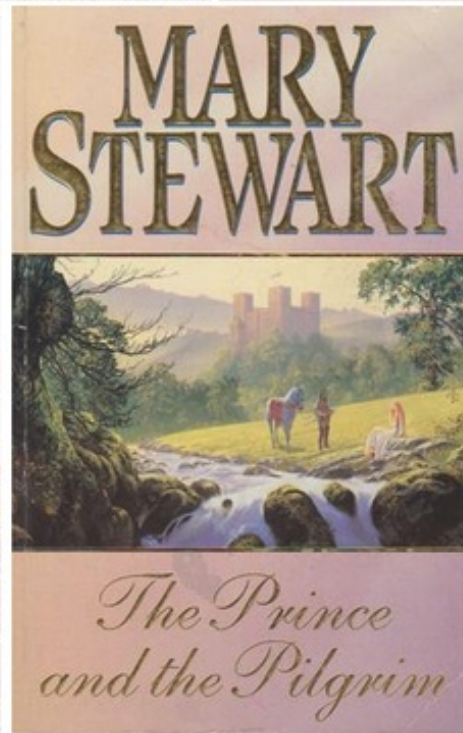
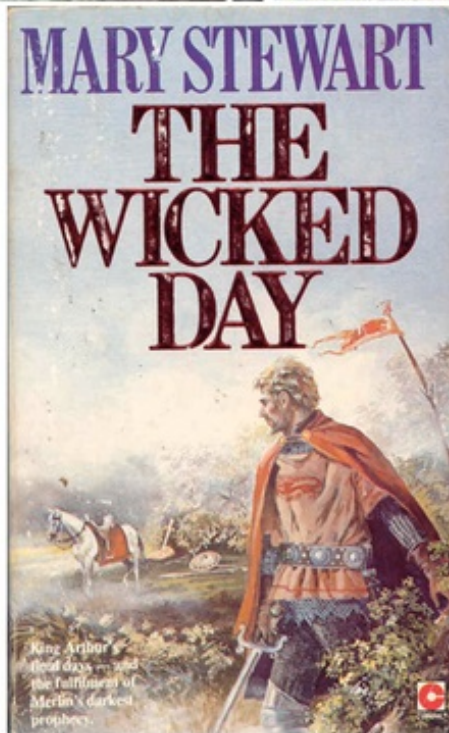
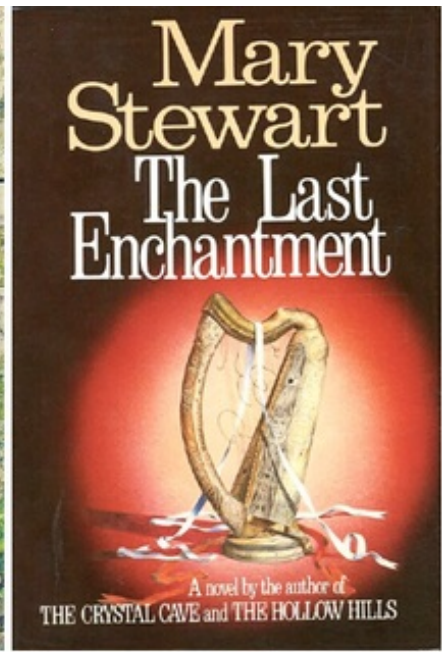
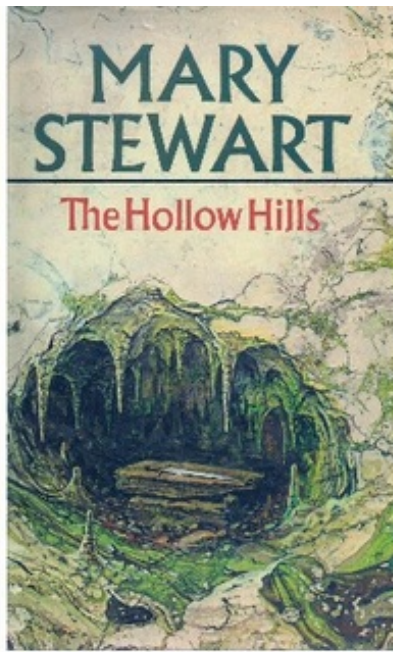
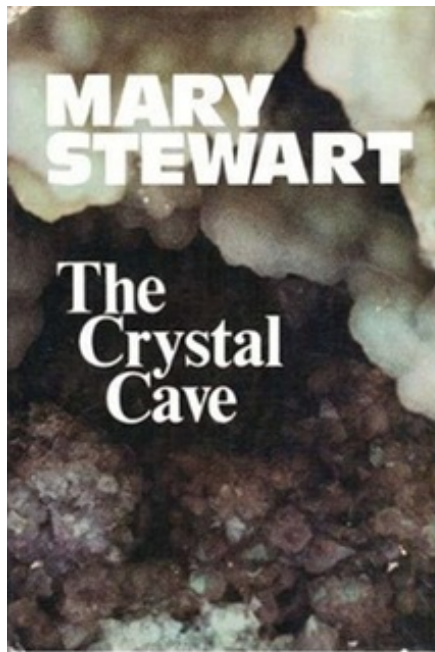
29. *The Chronicles Of Amber* by Roger Zelazny

A man wakes up in a hospital with no idea of how he got there. His attempts to find out lead him through a series of other worlds and into a tumultuous confrontation with the members of his family who rule over the one true world.

30. *The Avalon Series* by Marion Zimmer Bradley

The Mists of Avalon and its decades-spanning series of sequels and prequels all tell the familiar tale of the Arthurian legend, but with characters such as King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table playing secondary roles. Instead, the series follows the lives of the women in Arthur's court, and explores the Matter of Britain from a more feminist perspective.

31. *The Merlin Quintet* by Mary Stewart



William Morrow

Another set of fantasy novels retelling the Arthurian legend, but this time mostly through the perspective of a Welsh boy named Myrddin Emrys, who grows up to be the powerful wizard Merlin. The series follows Merlin as he grows up, raises Arthur, and eventually becomes the young king's trusted ally during the part of the Arthurian legend that most readers will be familiar with. The series is a fascinating take on a familiar tale.

32. *The Dark Elf Trilogy* by R.A. Salvatore



TSR, Inc. / Penguin Books / Wizards of the Coast

Although *The Dark Elf Trilogy* was originally written as a prequel trilogy to another series, the popularity of the protagonist, a dark elf named Drizzt Do'Urden, has made this the stand-out series among all the D&D books out there. If you're a fan of the world of Dungeons & Dragons, or just need a fix between play sessions, look no further.

33. *The Elric Saga* by Michael Moorcock

Elric VIII, the 428th Sorcerer Emperor of Melniboné, is a weak and frail introvert. But his sword, Stormbringer, is anything but. It brings Elric the strength he needs to survive, at a cost: It feeds on the souls of its prey. Michael Moorcock's subversion of what he saw as the tired tropes of fantasy established by Tolkien and others make for a powerful read that is, to this day, a seminal influence on the genre.

34. *Redwall* by Brian Jacques

Redwall is a fantasy series for older children set in a world full of talking animals. The 22 books span centuries within the world, with some familiar characters from earlier books returning only as legends in later books. Despite being a children's series, the world of *Redwall* is rich and complex, and it manages to be engaging despite the expansive nature of the books.

35. *Temeraire* by Naomi Novik

For anyone who ever felt that the Napoleonic wars were all well and good but didn't have nearly enough dragons, this fun and compulsively readable series will permanently fix that problem. This is basically *Hornblower* meets *Dragonriders of Pern*, and it's a perfect combination. Naomi Novik is a true delight to read, and you should also check out her excellent new novel, *Uprooted*.

36. *Inheritance Cycle* by Christopher Paolini



ERAGON

Christopher Paolini



ELDEST

Christopher Paolini



BRISINGR

Christopher Paolini



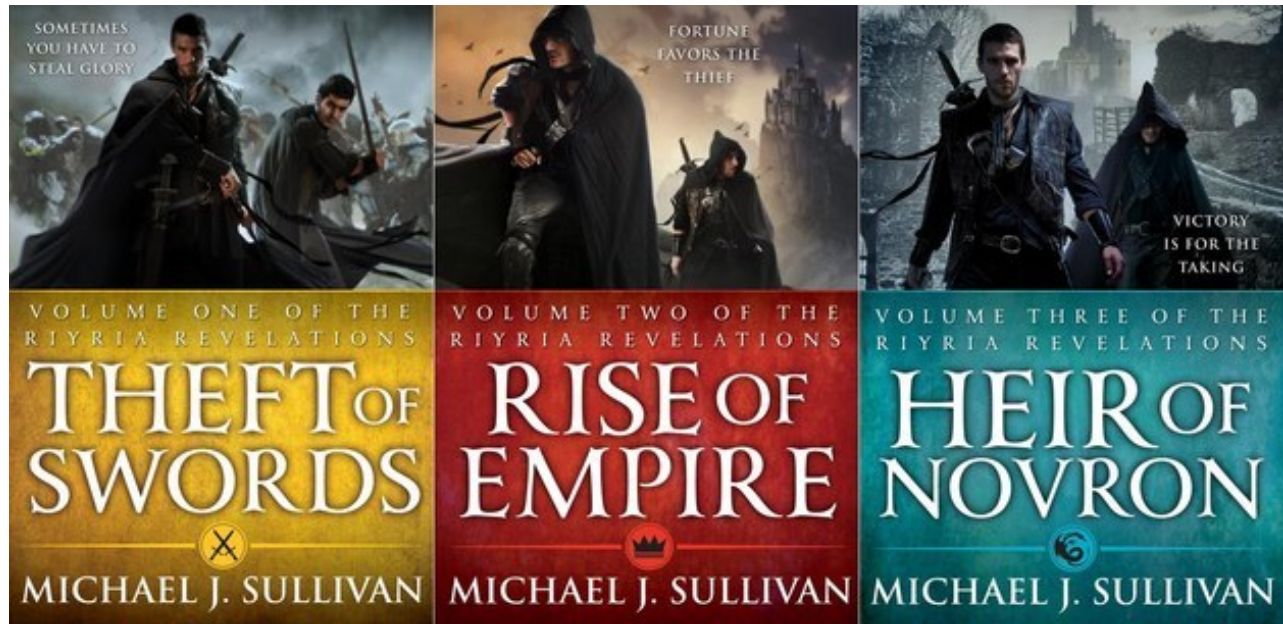
INHERITANCE

Christopher Paolini

Knopf Books

Eragon and its sequels are entry-level high fantasy. They're thematically similar to fantasy classics such as the *Earthsea* novels or the *Wheel of Time* books, but written to be accessible to modern kids and young adults. The book has everything you'd expect: dragons, ultimate evil, and a farm boy thrust into the role of the hero. All in all, they're a great introduction to the genre.

37. *The Riyria Revelations* by Michael J. Sullivan



Orbit

The Riyria Revelations follows two unlikely heroes across three novels written as one long ongoing tale, rather than as a series of sequels. The heroes are accused of regicide in the opening pages, and they spend the rest of the books in over their heads as they try to clear their names. Unfortunately, they have their hands full, because they're going to need to solve the mystery of the king's death and battle against evil wizards all at the same time.

38. *Prince Of Nothing* by R. Scott Bakker

On the surface, the *Prince Of Nothing* novels are everything you'd expect from well-written fantasy novels: a good magic system, a full and complex world, and well-rounded characters. But anyone who took a Philosophy 101 class will recognize some key principles of academic philosophy and human psychology at play, which makes for a challenging yet interesting read.

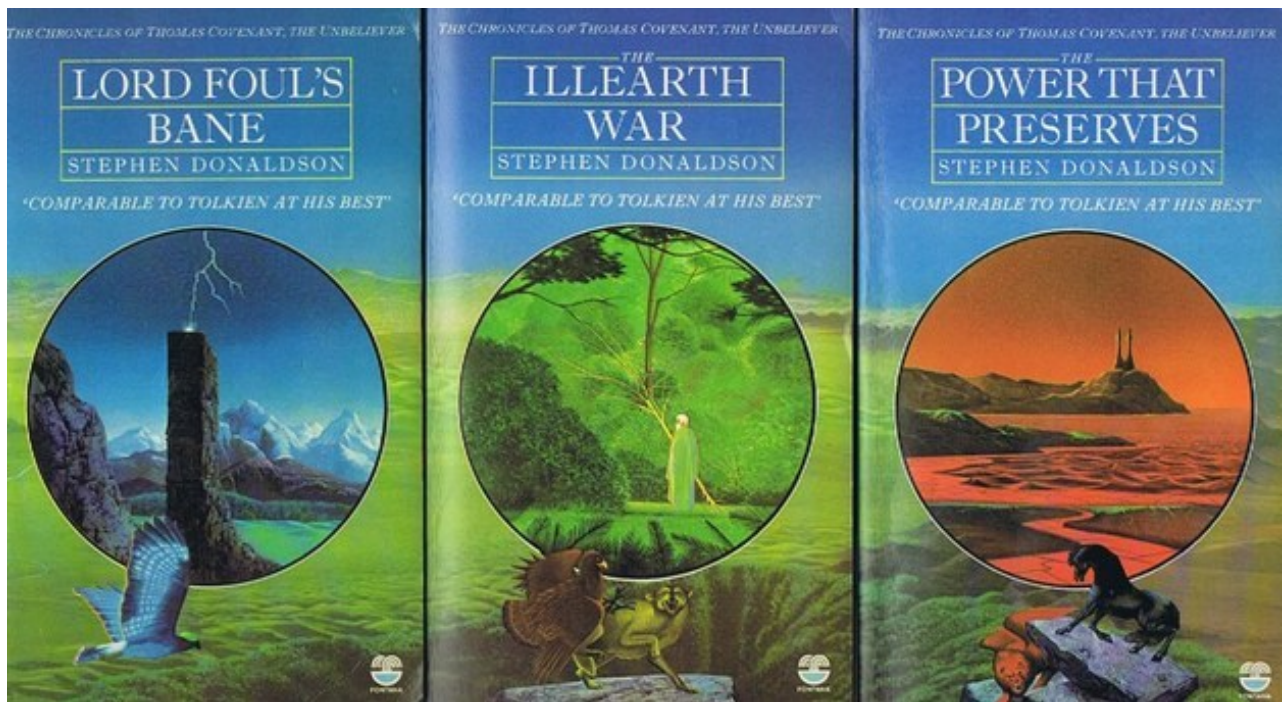
39. *Dragonlance* by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman



Wizards of the Coast

Dragonlance was one of the first independently produced modules for *Dungeons & Dragons*, and it was so well-written and engaging for fans that it became the setting for the game's first foray into the world of novels. At this point, there are over 200 published *Dragonlance* novels, but if you're looking for the core experience, the original *Chronicles Trilogy* and the *Legends* trilogy are your best bet.

40. *The Chronicles Of Thomas Covenant by Stephen R. Donaldson*



Fontana

When the protagonist of the series – a writer named Thomas Covenant who is afflicted with leprosy – is struck by a police cruiser, he wakes up in a land of high fantasy and magic. Was he somehow transported to this new world, or is he lying in a coma in a hospital bed? He's never quite sure, and he spends the entire series as "The Unbeliever," trying to figure things out alongside the reader.

41. *The Powder Mage* Trilogy by Brian McClellan



Orbit

The *Powder Mage* books are a little different from the other books on this list because they're set in a more modern "Bulletpunk" setting, where swords and sorcery are replaced with guns and epaulettes. Even the magic system in the books involves consuming gunpowder in order to access inert abilities. There's a lot happening in this trilogy, from gun battles with gods to good, old-fashioned policework, so there should be a little something for everyone.

42. *The Once And Future King* by T.H. White

Published in the '50s by T.H. White, *The Once And Future King* has gone on to be an enduring classic, and it still stands out as the very best reimagining of the Arthurian legend for a modern audience. Psychologically complex and at times devastating, this five-book series is rightly considered one of the very best fantasies ever written.

43. *The Bartimaeus Sequence* by Jonathan Stroud



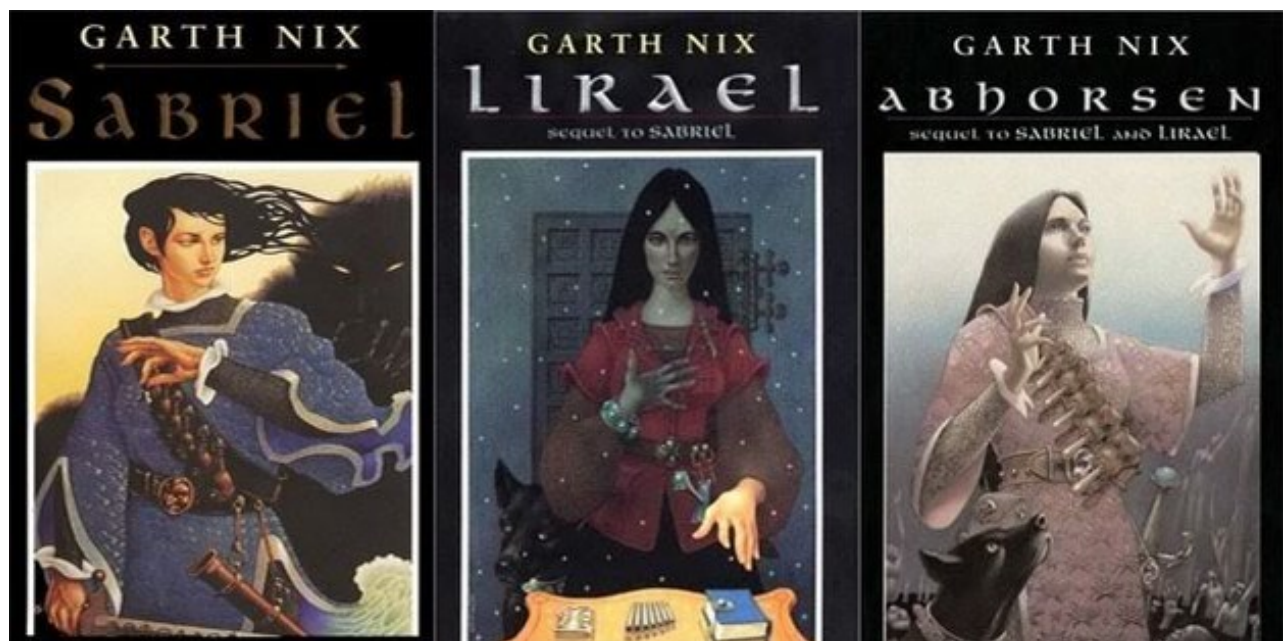
Disney-Hyperion

A young adult series that sets itself apart with excellent writing and humor. This trilogy by Jonathan Stroud tells the story of a 12-year-old magician and the lovable but cantankerous 5,000-year-old spirit who becomes his familiar. Basically...RIYL Harry Potter.

44. *The Gormenghast Series* by Mervyn Peake

A gothic fantasy that looms imposingly in its influence on some of the later masters of the genre, Mervyn Peake's deeply weird but masterfully written *Gormenghast* series is often described more as a "fantasy of manners" than a heroic fantasy in the style of Tolkien. These are books of castle intrigue, romance, madness, and grotesque, brilliant imagination. You'd want Guillermo del Toro to direct the movies rather than Peter Jackson.

45. *The Abhorsen Trilogy* by Garth Nix



HarperTeen

A high fantasy series with a non-traditional subject: A family of necromancers. And a cat named Mogget. A deeply imaginative series that will keep you reading all the way to the gripping conclusion.

46. *The Dark Is Rising Sequence* by Susan Cooper

Susan Cooper's classic series is for a younger audience, but it stands up as one of the very best of its kind. Based on Arthurian legends and Norse mythology but set in the 20th century, these five books follow the story of 11-year-old Will Stanton, who discovers that he is the youngest of the Old Ones, and that the fate of the world rests on his shoulders.

47. *The Farseer Trilogy* by Robin Hobb



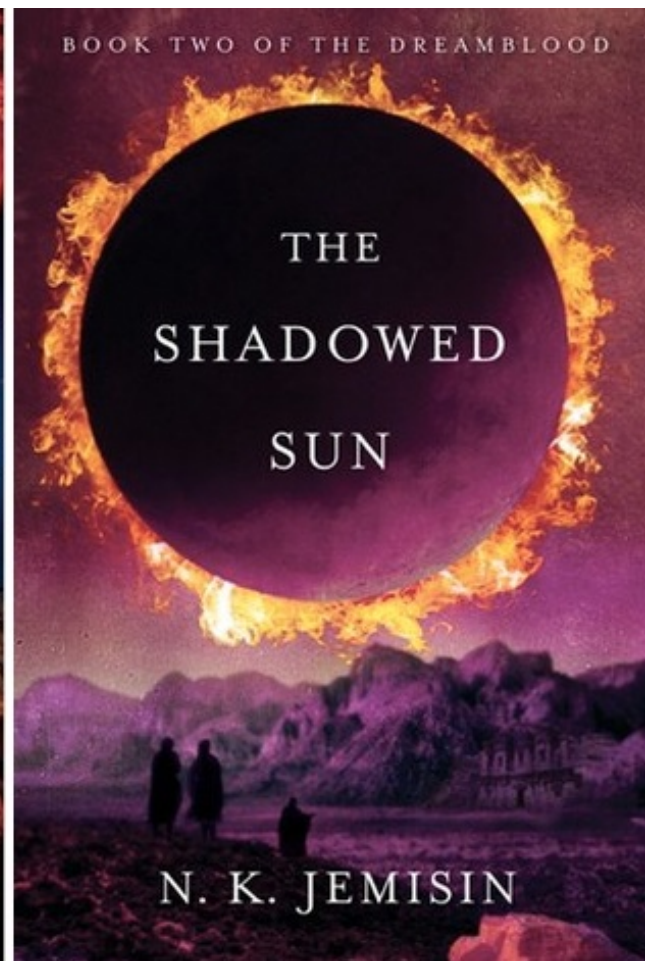
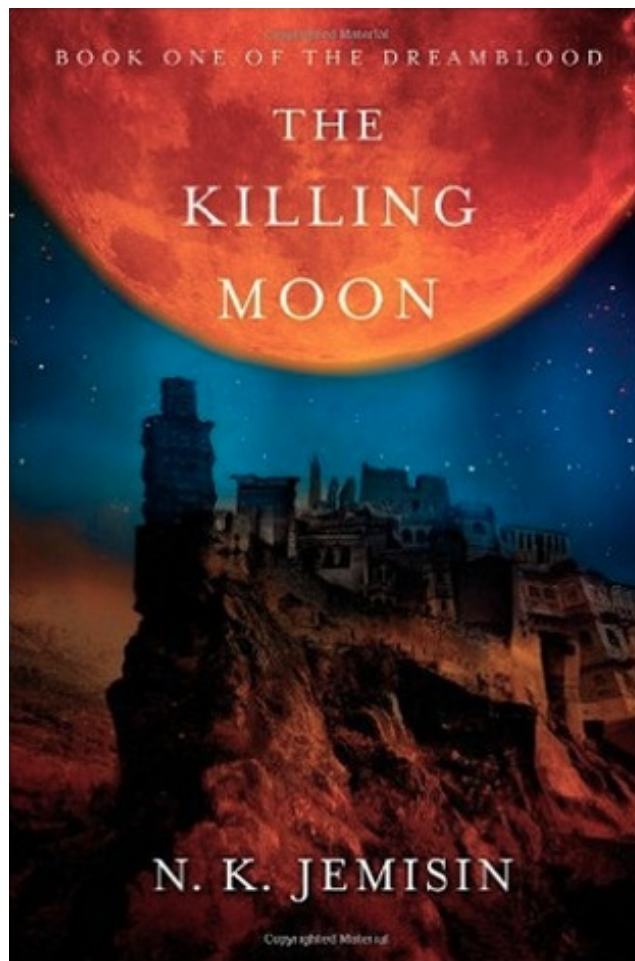
Spectra

Robin Hobb, aka Margaret Astrid Lindholm Ogden, published the first book of her *Farseer Trilogy* in 1997, netting her a British Fantasy Award nomination for Best Novel. The series follows FitzChivalry Farseer, a royal bastard whose nascent magical abilities and training as an assassin may just be enough to protect him from the powerful forces that threaten his kingdom, not to mention the malicious intentions of his dangerous and conniving relatives.

48. *The Traitor Son Cycle* by Miles Cameron

The Red Knight and its sequels read like historical fiction, if medieval Europe had been full of monsters and magic. The series follows a band of mercenaries and their captain, known only as The Red Knight, as he and his merry men hack and slash their way across the kingdom of Alba. The books are prohibitively thick, but don't let that turn you off, because they are immensely rewarding.

49. *Dreamblood* by N.K. Jemisin



Orbit

Another promising series by N.K. Jemisin, the *Dreamblood* series creates a vivid landscape of war, intrigue, and religion, set in the City of Dreams, where crime and violence are unknown, but nightmares lurk.

50. *The Riftwar Cycle* by Raymond E. Feist

Based on a role-playing world originally created to compete with *Dungeons & Dragons*, this is classic epic fantasy. An orphan boy discovers magical abilities within himself and becomes a hero in the world of Midkemia. Rifts open up between worlds and a huge battle between order and chaos erupts, spanning 10 novels.

51. *The Magicians Trilogy* by Lev Grossman

Lev Grossman's brilliant trilogy is always referred to as "Harry Potter for grownups," but a better description would be "Narnia for the permanently disillusioned." The evil forces arrayed against Grossman's hero, Quentin Coldwater, are not so much the wizards, monsters, and demons he has to face as he comes to terms with his considerable powers, but the even more terrifying horrors of finding a place in the world and learning how not to be an asshole while you're at it. This series may break you a little bit emotionally, but there's so much fun to be had along the way.