

# Fantasy

## Why in the World Do Kids Read This Stuff?

by Terry Brooks

I have more than a passing interest in the answer to the question in this article's title. As a writer of "this stuff," I have been dealing with the corollary for more than 30 years: Why in the world do you *write* this stuff? This is not exactly how the question is asked, but I can intuit the thinking behind the words. *Fantasy is for kids. Fantasy is lightweight reading. Who cares about elves and dwarves and dragons? Why don't you write about something important?*

Kids never ask this question; they get it right away. It is the adults who ask. Adults, I am sorry to report, don't always get it. Even adults who should (teachers and librarians and—horror of horrors—parents) don't always get it. Why are kids so enamored with these stories? Why don't they read something worthwhile, like Dickens or Melville or Thomas Hardy or . . . well, you fill in the blank. Fantasy, they think, is just a waste of time.

I heard this same argument 50 years ago when I was a kid, as various well-meaning adults were trying to wean me off comics and series books about space exploration with robots and aliens. My own parents weren't involved in this nonsense, I am happy to report, but some of my teachers were, as were the parents of some of my friends. Some things never change.

Okay, so I've made my point about my feelings concerning books of fantasy, but do I have anything to back up my opinions? It's easy enough to say that anyone who doesn't think fantasy is worthwhile reading for kids is misguided, but what sort of argument would I offer in support? Am I just blowing smoke?

I have talked about kids and books with librarians and teachers at national, state, and local conferences, and I have spoken privately at library and school appearances for most of my career. I do it in large part because I believe in the importance of what I write; however, I also do it because many of my readers are

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

kids. If you are a writer, you'd better have some understanding of your audience. One thing I've learned about kids is that they are not afraid to tell you, as the author, how they feel about what you are doing—good or bad. They don't do it so much in person, but they are wellsprings of opinion when they resort to e-mails and letters.

What they tell me has much to do with my understanding of their reading choices. It starts with their passion: They love fantasy. They love adventure stories. Many tell me the first book they ever read was a fantasy. Many tell me they read only fantasy because only fantasy speaks to them, satisfies their reading needs, and doesn't disappoint them.

Over the years, I've developed an understanding of what draws them in and what keeps them coming back for more. They are starting out in life, still learning, trying to understand, and wrestling with issues and ideas; as a result, they like reading about characters who are doing the same. They are growing up, turning into adults, and there are no road maps to show them the way. They are looking for books that offer insights into how this transformation from childhood into adulthood might happen, so that they can feel connected. They aren't, however, looking for small stories or even for stories that too closely mirror their own lives. They want to read about larger-than-life experiences with life-threatening confrontations and conflicts that transcend their own struggles while giving insight into how those struggles might be overcome.

Most of all, they don't want to be bored. They want to be amazed and energized. They want to be taken out of their own lives to places they have never seen—places that may not even exist. They want to visit worlds of good and evil. In addition, they want to experience struggles of endurance and victory, transformation and redemption, and love and heartbreak vicariously through the people they meet in books, so that they can begin to understand how they might respond to the challenges of their own lives. They want to know that there are people worse off than they are who can overcome worse problems. They want to

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

know there is hope. Kids want to believe that all things are possible, and fantasy provides archetypal illustrations of how that might be so.

Don't get me wrong: Kids aren't stupid. They know that elves and dwarves and dragons don't really exist. (Not in their more recognizable forms, at least.) They know the difference between fantasy and reality. Good fantasy mirrors reality. Think *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and many, many more. What do they all have in common? They address real life issues and conflicts. One small hobbit can change the world. A family of four brothers and sisters can save a kingdom. A little girl from Kansas can defeat a witch and discover the truth about what she really wants. A curious child can teach us all how strange the world really is by visiting an even stranger world.

Good fantasy does more than entertain: It teaches lessons about life, and it does so by changing the rules. Good fantasy places the story in an imaginary world and creates imaginary characters, allowing us to see the familiar in an unfamiliar context. It gives us a fresh look at things we might otherwise be unable to view objectively. We are given a chance to rethink what we believe. Nothing is immediately recognizable except the way the characters respond to what they encounter. Such re-imaginings allow readers to step back from what they think they believe and take a second look.

I write about dysfunctional families; about how secrets kept can destroy families from within; about taking responsibility for yourself and sometimes, even when you don't want to, for others; and about the ways in which power corrupts and destroys, even when intentions are good. Other writers of fantasy explore other, equally compelling issues. We all try to tell a good story first, but we know that good writing demands something more—we must make our readers think.

It isn't a coincidence that so many fantasy protagonists are kids themselves. It isn't a coincidence that these protagonists are dealing with familiar difficulties. They are loners. They are different from everyone else. They have secrets to keep.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

They have immense parental or adult pressures to overcome. They are threatened by bullies. They are desperately in love, and their love is often unrequited. They are secretly better informed than everyone thinks. They know how they want to live their lives, but they aren't allowed to do so. They are smarter than adults know but are given few opportunities to show it.

Think *Harry Potter*. Think *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Think *Eragon*. Then advance in age a bit and think of the works of Susan Cooper and Garth Nix and Philip Pullman. If I am lucky, you might even think of *Shannara* and of me.

Fantasy is all about the wider world, about life lived large, and about escaping the smallness of our own existence to explore what lies beyond. The size of the canvas on which the stories are painted is limitless. No other type of fiction can make this claim. There are literally no boundaries to what is possible. Fantasy in its various forms embodies everything we might expect to find in other forms of fiction. Mystery, romance, science fiction, horror, combat, and even contemporary fiction—you can find bits and pieces of them all.

Most young readers begin their reading lives with fairy tales, myths, talking animals, dinosaurs, pirates, and dozens upon dozens of imaginary beings. Fantasy is immediately familiar to them and is therefore much easier to access. Even the most reluctant readers seem to be able to find a home. Of course, it requires lining up the right book or author with the right reader, but you have a better chance of doing this with fantasy than you do with anything else.

I can talk myself blue in the face about this, but it won't do any good if you don't read the books yourselves. I say this to teachers, librarians, and parents all the time. Whatever the kids are reading, you have to read, too. You can't recommend for or against something if you don't know what it is about. Sure, everyone has read *Harry Potter*, but sooner or later you have to move on. You need to have a clear awareness of what else is out there in fantasy, of the kinds of stories and their appeal, if you are to be in a position to make recommendations that might change a child's life.

When you have gained that awareness, then you will better understand what it is that young readers find so captivating.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

You can do this. You might even be surprised at how much you will enjoy it.

### **About the Author**

*A writer since high school, Terry Brooks published his first novel, The Sword of Shannara, in 1977. It was a New York Times bestseller for more than five months. He has published 17 consecutive bestsellers since, including The Voyage of the Jerle Shannara: Ilse Witch and the novel based upon the screenplay and story by George Lucas: Star Wars®: Episode I The Phantom Menace™. His novels Running with the Demon and A Knight of the Word were each selected by the Rocky Mountain News as one of the best science fiction/fantasy novels of the twentieth century.*

### **New and Forthcoming Titles**

### **Enter the Wondrous Worlds of Terry Brooks**

#### ***New!***

#### **Armageddon's Children**

In *Armageddon's Children*, Brooks brings his gifts as a mythmaker to the timeless theme of the unending, essential conflict between darkness and light—and carries his unique imaginative vision to a stunning new level. Prepare for a breathtaking tour de force. To those who are new to Terry Brooks, welcome. And to those who have read him for many years: prepare for a dramatic surprise.

Del Rey | HC | 978-0-345-48408-6 | 384 pp. | **\$26.95**/\$35.95 Can.

#### **The Sword of Shannara**

(Series Description): *Twenty-five years ago, New York Times bestselling author Terry Brooks wrote a story that brought to life a dazzling world that would*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

*become one of the most popular fantasy epics of all time, beloved by millions of fans around the world. A phenomenal epic trilogy of good and evil, and a thrilling introduction to his most famous world of Shannara.*

**The Sword of Shannara: In the Shadow of the Warlock Lord**

Tucked away in peaceful Shady Vale, the young half-elf Shea Ohmsford gives little thought to the outside world. Yet far to the north, the evil Warlock Lord has dispatched shadowy Skull Bearers, creatures twisted by dark sorcery, to hunt him down. At the same time, a black-cloaked giant of a man appears in Shady Vale. He claims to be the mysterious Druid known as Allanon, a wizardly wanderer of vast knowledge and power—and he has come to see Shea. For Shea, he says, is the last descendant of an ancient Elven king. Only he, in all the world, can wield the fabled Sword of Shannara. And only the Sword can stop the Warlock Lord from destroying all that lives.

Del Rey | TR | 978-0-345-46146-9 | 240 pp. | \$6.99/10.99 Can.

**The Sword of Shannara: The Druid's Keep**

Without the Sword of Shannara, the evil Warlock Lord cannot be defeated. Yet the quest for the mysterious talisman lies in ruins. The intrepid company of warriors assembled by the Druid Allanon to recover the magic Sword has been shattered, dispersed by the Dark Lord's power. And young half-elf Shea Ohmsford, the last, best hope of all the races, is missing, perhaps captured . . . or worse.

Del Rey | TR | 978-0-345-46145-2 | 240 pp. | \$6.99/10.99 Can.

**The Sword of Shannara: The Secret of the Sword**

The Druid Allanon has dispatched Menion, the Prince of Leah, to aid in the defense of Tyrsis while he himself continues to search for Shea Ohmsford, the young half-elf who bears the awesome burden of wielding the only weapon capable of destroying Brona: the mysterious Sword of Shannara. Yet magic of the fabled weapon makes it as dangerous to Shea as it is to the Warlock Lord. Now, in

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

the very heart of the Dark Lord's domain, Shea is about to unlock the deadly secret of the Sword—and come face to face with his destiny.

Del Rey | TR | 978-0-345-46144-5 | 240 pp. | \$6.99/10.99 Can.

***New!***

***The Voyage of the Jerle Shannara Trilogy***

This stunning collector's omnibus volume contains the text of all three novels in the bestselling trilogy: *Ilse Witch*, *Antrax*, and *Morgawr*.

Del Rey | HC | 978-0-345-49286-9 | 1,248 pp. | \$35.00/\$47.00 Can.

***Forthcoming in Fall 2007***

**Terry Brooks Shannara Graphic Novel**

*New York Times* bestselling author Terry Brooks will create Del Rey's first original graphic novel, *Dark Wraith of Shannara*, set in his famous fantasy universe. The book will be created by Brooks, adapted to the comics format by Robert Napton and illustrated by artist Edwin David, and is tentatively scheduled for late 2007. Please visit the link below to view some sketches:

[http://www.randomhouse.com/features/shannara/darkwraith\\_sketches.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/features/shannara/darkwraith_sketches.html)

**Recommended Series by Terry Brooks:**

**The Word & Void Trilogy:**

*A Knight of the Word, John Ross is plagued by nightmares that tell him someone evil is coming to unleash an ancient horror upon the world. He has struggled against the forces of the Void and his minions for twenty-five years. Nest Freemark is a gifted young girl who senses that something is terribly wrong but has not yet learned to wield her budding power. Their lives collide in the midst of the firestorm of evil, as they struggle to prevent Ross's visions from coming true.*

**Running with the Demon**

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

Sinnissippi Park, in Hopewell, Illinois, has long hidden a mysterious evil, locked away from humankind by powers greater than most could even imagine. But now the malevolent creatures that normally skulk in the shadows of the park grow bolder, and old secrets hint at a violent explosion. Now the future of humanity depends upon a man haunted by his dreams and a gifted young girl—two souls who will discover what survives when hope and innocence are shattered forever. Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-42258-3 | 448 pp. | \$7.99/\$10.99 Can.

### **A Knight of the Word**

After decades of service to the Word, an unspeakable act of violence shatters John Ross's weary faith. Haunted by guilt, he turns his back on his dread gift, settling down to build a normal life, untroubled by demons and nightmares. But a fallen Knight makes a tempting prize for the Void, which could bend the Knight's magic to its own evil ends. His only hope is Nest Freemark, a college student who wields an extraordinary magic all her own.

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-42464-8 | 408 pp. | \$6.99/\$9.99 Can.

### **Angel Fire East**

The birth of a gypsy morph, a rare and dangerous creature that could be an invaluable weapon in the fight against the Void, brings John Ross and Nest Freemark together again. Twice before, with the fate of the world hanging in the balance, the lives of Ross and Nest have intersected. Together, they have prevailed. But now they will face an ancient evil beyond anything they have ever encountered, a demon of ruthless intelligence and feral cunning.

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-43525-5 | 384 pp. | \$7.99/\$11.99 Can.

### **The Magic Kingdom of Landover series:**

*The Magic Kingdom of Landover is the saga of former Chicago lawyer Ben Holiday, who purchased Landover from the wizard Meeks. But he discovers a few details the ad failed to mention. The kingdom is in ruins, and he must prove his right to be King to an unwilling populace. As he grows from naïve outsider*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

*to High Lord, he faces countless arduous challenges, including: dueling with the Iron Mask, lord of the demons; winning the love of the lady Willow; and war with Rydall, king of lands beyond the fairy mist. Terry Brooks's gripping tale of mystery, magic and adventure is sure to delight fantasy readers everywhere.*

*There are five books in this series:*

**Black Unicorn**

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-33528-9 | 320 pp. | \$7.99/\$11.99 Can.

**Magic Kingdom for Sale—Sold!**

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-31758-2 | 384 pp. | \$7.99/\$11.99 Can.

**Tangle Box**

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-38700-4 | 368 pp. | \$7.99/\$11.99 Can.

**Wizard at Large**

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-36227-8 | 320 pp. | \$7.99/\$10.99 Can.

**Witches' Brew**

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-38702-8 | 352 pp. | \$7.99/\$11.99 Can.

**SUGGESTED READING**

By L. Frank Baum

**Land of Oz**

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-33568-5 | 288 pp. | \$6.99/\$10.99 Can.

**Wizard of Oz**

Del Rey | MM | 978-0-345-33590-6 | 240 pp. | \$5.99/\$7.99 Can.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

**A Wonderful Welcome to Oz**

**The Marvelous Land of Oz, Ozma of Oz, & The Emerald City of Oz**

**Edited by Gregory Maguire**

**Illustrated by John R. Neill**

**Modern Library | TR | 978-0-8129-7494-2 | 624 pp. | \$15.95/\$22.95 Can.**

**The Wonderful Wizard of Oz**

**Introduction by Ray Bradbury**

**Preface by the author**

**Modern Library Classics | TR | 978-0-8129-7011-1 | 224 pp. | \$9.95/\$14.95 Can.**

**By Lewis Carroll:**

**Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass**

**Introduction by Morton N. Cohen**

**Bantam Classics | MM | 978-0-553-21345-4 | 256 pp. | \$3.95/\$4.95 Can.**

**Introduction by A. S. Byatt**

**Illustrations by John Tenniel**

**Modern Library Classics | TR | 978-0-375-76138-6 | 304 pp. | \$8.95/\$13.95 Can.**

**By Christopher Paolini**

**Eragon**

**Knopf Books for Young Readers | TR | 978-0-375-82669-6 | 528 pp. |**

**\$9.95/\$13.95 Can.**

**Also available in Audio:**

**Read by Gerard Doyle**

**Listening Library | Unabridged CD | 978-1-4000-9068-6 | \$39.95/\$54.95 Can.**

**By Lemony Snicket**

**A Series of Unfortunate Events**

**Read by Tim Curry**

**Available in Listening Library (Audio) | Unabridged CD**

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*

**#1: The Bad Beginning**

978-0-8072-1990-4 | **\$14.99**/\$21.00 Can.

**#2: The Reptile Room**

978-0-8072-1991-1 | **\$14.99**/\$21.00 Can.

**“HARRY POTTER” AUDIO**

by J.K. Rowling and read by Jim Dale

Available in Listening Library Unabridged CD:

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

978-0-8072-8194-9 | \$49.95/\$77.95 Can.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

978-0-8072-8232-8 | \$54.95/\$86.95 Can.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

978-0-8072-8195-6 | \$49.95/\$77.95 Can.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

978-0-8072-8259-5 | \$69.95/\$109.95 Can.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

978-0-307-28365-8 | \$75.00/\$105.00 Can.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

978-0-8072-2029-0 | \$75.00/\$115.00 Can.

For additional audio formats, visit [www.randomhouse.com](http://www.randomhouse.com)

**By J.R.R. Tolkien**

**THE LORD OF THE RING SERIES**

**The Hobbit**

978-0-345-33968-3 | 320 pp. | \$7.99/NCR

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: “RHI: Reluctant Readers”*

<http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/RHI/>

**The Fellowship of the Ring**

978-0-345-33970-6 | 480 pp. | \$7.99/NCR

**The Two Towers**

978-0-345-33971-3 | 416 pp. | \$7.99/NCR

**The Return of the King**

978-0-345-33973-7 | 512 pp. | \$7.99/NCR

---

\*\*\*\*\*

*Excerpted from **RHI: Reaching Reluctant Readers**, a publication of Random House, Inc. To request a complimentary copy of RHI, email [highschool@randomhouse.com](mailto:highschool@randomhouse.com), subject: "RHI: Reluctant Readers"*