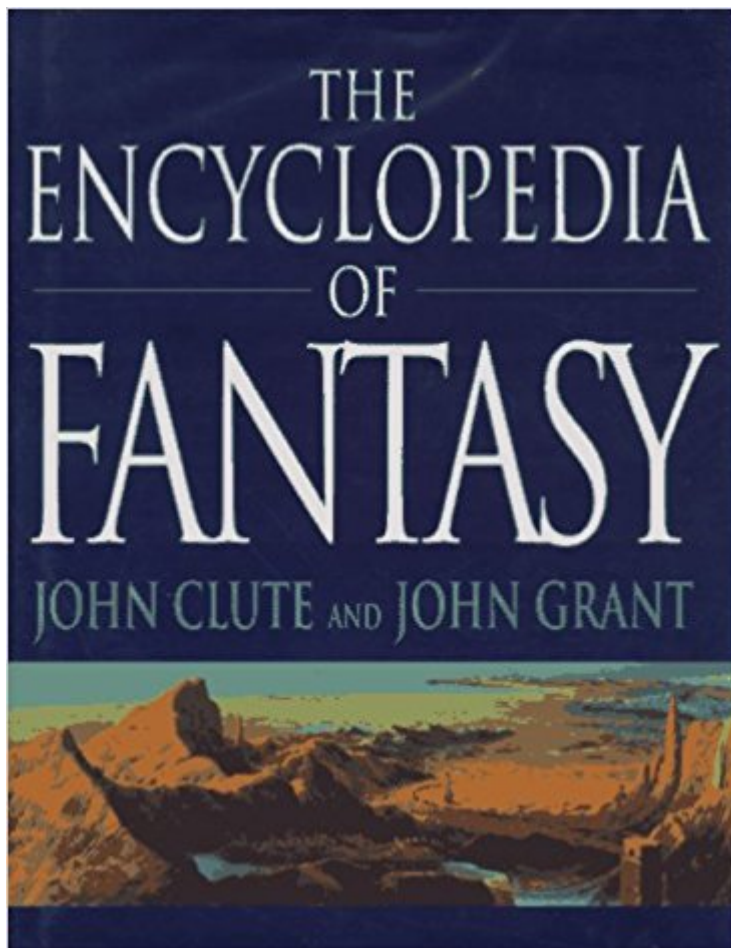


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The Encyclopedia Of Fantasy



Synopsis

This huge volume is the first comprehensive encyclopedia of the fantasy field, offering an exciting new analysis of this highly diverse and hugely popular sphere of literature, from precursors such as Shakespeare and Dante, through Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald and L. Frank Baum to J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and their modern successors, like Ursula K. Le Guin, Peter S. Beagle, Stephen R. Donaldson and Jostein Gaarder. With over 4,000 entries and over 1 million words, it covers every aspect of fantasy - in literature, films, television, opera, art and comics.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

WARNING: THIS REVIEW IS ANECDOTAL I had coveted this book for quite some time before I ordered my copy. Aside from being a longtime and irredeemable fantasy geek, I am also an English teacher at a small independent school, and our reference library has a copy. This fact has enabled me to waste many happy free periods rifling through the _Encyclopedia_ instead of, say, grading papers or thinking deep, serious thoughts about the state of pedagogy in America. But before you write me off as a disgrace to my profession, hear me out:_The Encyclopedia of Fantasy_ is a remarkable book, and any time I have spent with it in lieu of more mundane tasks is time very well spent indeed. I can even justify this frivolous perusal academically, because what really makes the _Encyclopedia_ a great resource isn't so much its exhaustive listing of authors or titles (much of which information is available elsewhere anyway), but the fact that Clute et al. have managed to accomplish nothing less than a rigorous, consistent, and phenomenally well cross-referenced

taxonomy and analytical vocabulary for fantasy. I know, I know, that sounds awfully dry, but it isn't. I'm a word junkie, so I love learning apt new terms for things, especially if those nameless concepts have gone begging for far too long. When Clute coins the term "thinning" to describe any fantasy world that, over time, loses its magic [Middle-earth, anyone?], you cannot help (assuming you're an aficionado of the genre) but say to yourself, "Aha! Now I know what to call it!"

To begin, John Clute and company's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* is an essential book for anyone who is serious about fantasy. Having said that, much of this review is going to focus on negatives rather than positives. As can be expected with any book this size, mistakes have crept in. Within the first few days, I found several errors, mostly minor. A book attributed to Lynn Abbey which was written by Robert Asprin, a mistaken title for a book by Charles de Lint, that sort of thing. These mistakes, however, are minor. Perhaps a bigger problem with the *Encyclopedia* is the strange inclusion and omission of authors. Neither Sterling Lanier or Steven Frankos are included in the book, however Steve Szylagi, who has written a single fantasy novel has received an entry. According to Clute, the book does not claim to be as complete as its predecessor, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* and the editors were forced to make some cuts. It would have been nice if he could have given some hint as to the selection criteria in the front matter. One friend suggested that if an author was included in the first book they would be left out of the second book, but too many authors appear in both books for this rule of thumb to be applied (Charles de Lint, Mervyn Peake, Larry Niven, etc.) A larger percentage of *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* is given over to thematic entries than *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Fantasy, however, has more common themes and prototypes than science fiction does, therefore making these types of entries a larger portion of any survey of the field. Still, the reader has to wonder about entries such as "Pornographic Fantasy Movies" which is so vague ("few researchers are willing to sit through the stuff...").

Winner of both the Hugo and Nebula awards---and deserving---as every other reviewer has stated, this work is indispensable for anyone interested in fantasy fiction, whether scholar or casual reader. Comprehensive would be an understatement, as the authors have collected almost every reference, author or subject pertaining to the genre in one weighty volume, ranging from the Dolorous Stroke of Arthurian Romance to the influence of opera or film upon the fantastic imagination. Writers both influential and otherwise are included, and cogent examinations made into the conventions, tropes and history of this aspect of speculative fiction. True, as often happens with all efforts to compile an

encyclopedia reference, this work reflects a certain cultural and Euro American bias, with certain, perhaps crossover, authors from the third world absent, as well as the burden imposed by the rapid passage of time, that demands constant revision, newer (at least for European and American audiences) and significant authors, such as the Australian writer, Sara Douglass, missing mention. Hopefully a new and updated edition will soon be forthcoming. But these quibbles are petty and unavoidable compared to the monumental accomplishment this volume represents, and I find myself continually referring to its pages for additional background upon authors and thematic elements that catch my interest, often individual entries leading to further study and references, as well as authors whose work I was not previously acquainted with. As varied and vast as the world of fantasy has become in recent years, this work will surely open up new vistas for any reader, as well as firmly root the history, influence and contributions of the genre in the larger perspective and traditions of our literature.

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