

Stuck in a fantasy rut? How to discover new subgenres like grimdark or LitRPG?

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Are You Stuck in a Familiar Fantasy Loop?

For many avid readers, the fantasy genre is a beloved escape, a boundless realm of magic, adventure, and wonder. Yet, even in the most expansive of worlds, it's easy to find yourself caught in a reading rut. You might gravitate towards the same epic high fantasy, the classic chosen one narratives, or perhaps a particular brand of urban fantasy. While there's comfort in the familiar, the true magic of fantasy lies in its incredible diversity – a vast tapestry woven with countless subgenres, each offering a unique flavor of escapism and storytelling.

If you're yearning for something fresh, something that challenges your expectations or introduces you to entirely new concepts, it's time to cast your net wider. This article will guide you through exploring two increasingly popular and distinct subgenres – grimdark and LitRPG – and provide practical advice for discovering the myriad other worlds waiting to be read.

6 ways to bust out of a reading rut



Diving into the Darkness: Grimdark Fantasy

What is Grimdark?

Grimdark fantasy is not for the faint of heart. It's a subgenre characterized by its gritty, realistic, and often nihilistic tone. Unlike traditional fantasy where good often triumphs over evil, grimdark embraces moral ambiguity, flawed anti-heroes, and a world where even the most heroic deeds come with immense

costs. Themes often include political intrigue, war, survival against overwhelming odds, and a stark examination of human nature's darker side. Happy endings are rare, and even victories can feel hollow.

Why Readers Love It

The appeal of grimdark lies in its unflinching honesty. It often mirrors the complexities and harsh realities of our own world, offering a fantasy setting that feels more grounded and less idealistic. Readers are drawn to its complex characters who grapple with difficult choices, its high stakes, and its ability to provoke thought about morality and power. It's a genre that doesn't shy away from depicting the brutal consequences of actions, making the triumphs (however small) all the more impactful.

How to Start Exploring Grimdark

- **Look for:** Moral ambiguity, unreliable narrators, political intrigue, epic battles with high casualties, realistic depictions of violence and suffering, a bleak worldview, characters with selfish motivations.
- **Examples to try:** *The First Law* series by Joe Abercrombie, *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin, *The Black Company* by Glen Cook.



Level Up Your Reading: LitRPG

What is LitRPG?

On the opposite end of the spectrum, LitRPG (short for Literary Role Playing Game) is a subgenre where the story takes place within a world that operates by video game rules and mechanics. This can

manifest in two main ways: either the characters are trapped inside a virtual reality game, or their real world suddenly gains game-like elements (stats, quests, skills, levels, inventories, etc.). The narrative often focuses on character progression, grinding for experience, completing quests, and strategically using game mechanics to overcome challenges.

The Appeal of the Game World

LitRPG offers a unique blend of familiar fantasy tropes with the addictive progression systems of video games. Readers enjoy the clear sense of advancement, the analytical satisfaction of understanding game mechanics, and the deep immersion into a world where every action can have a measurable impact on a character's stats. It's a perfect genre for those who love RPG video games and want to experience that progression in a narrative format, often with elements of adventure, crafting, and dungeon crawling.

Getting Started with LitRPG

- **Look for:** On-screen notifications (like 'Level Up!'), character sheets, detailed descriptions of skills and abilities, quest logs, crafting systems, dungeon exploration, clear progression goals.
- **Examples to try:** *The Way of the Shaman* series by Vasily Mahanenko, *Sufficiently Advanced Magic* (Arcane Ascension) by Andrew Rowe, *The Wandering Inn* by pirateaba.

Name: Richter	Age: 24	Level: 45, 3%
Race: Human (Chaos Lord)	Tier: 2	Languages: Sapient Mortals
Reputation: Lvl 5 "You are a man worth following."	Profession: Enchanter Specialty: Essence	Alignment: Chaotic (2) Neutral
STATS		
Health: 981	Mana: 828 <i>Regen/min: 36</i>	Stamina: 480 <i>Regen/min: 47.4</i>
ATTRIBUTES		
Strength: 67 <i>(base: 65 w. Dragonkin + Goblinhold: 2)</i>	Agility: 42	Dexterity: 33
Constitution: 79 <i>(base: 69 w. Dragonkin + mark: 14%)</i>	Endurance: 48	Intelligence: 78 <i>(base: 71 + Quickening: 10%)</i>
Wisdom: 50	Charisma: 41 <i>(base: 35 + Honorable: 4 + Impassioned: 5%)</i>	Luck: 65 <i>(base: 34 + Vassal: 20 + Tier 2: 20%)</i>
SPELL POWER BONUSES		
Air 50%	Light 5%	Fire 20%
Life 50%	Blood 5%	Earth 10%
Dark 50%	Water 50%	Chaos 30%

Practical Tips for Subgenre Exploration

Beyond grimdark and LitRPG, the fantasy genre encompasses a breathtaking array of subgenres: urban fantasy, portal fantasy, historical fantasy, military fantasy, romantic fantasy, epic fantasy, mythological fantasy, and many more. The key to breaking your rut is active exploration.

- **Read Reviews and ‘Best Of’ Lists:** Websites like Goodreads, Tor.com, and various fantasy blogs regularly publish lists of top books in specific subgenres. These are excellent starting points.
- **Join Online Communities:** Subreddits like r/fantasy, Discord servers, and Facebook groups dedicated to fantasy are treasure troves of recommendations and discussions. Don’t be afraid to ask for suggestions based on your current preferences and what you’re looking for.
- **Try Novellas and Short Stories:** Committing to a full-length novel in an unknown subgenre can be daunting. Many authors publish novellas or short stories that provide a taste of their world and style without a massive time investment.
- **Explore Author ‘Also Reads’:** If you find an author you enjoy in a new subgenre, check out who they recommend or which authors influenced their work.
- **Listen to Podcasts and Watch Booktubers:** Many content creators specialize in reviewing and discussing fantasy books, often highlighting less common subgenres and hidden gems.



Embrace the Unknown and Find Your Next Favorite World

Stepping out of your reading comfort zone can be incredibly rewarding. You might discover a new voice, a fresh perspective, or an entire world you never knew you needed. Grimdark and LitRPG are just two examples of how diverse and innovative the fantasy genre has become. Don’t let familiarity limit

your literary adventures.

The next time you're browsing for a new book, challenge yourself to pick up something that doesn't immediately fit your usual pattern. You might be surprised at the incredible stories waiting for you just beyond the edge of your current reading map.

