

CYCLOPAEDIA 13 — SWORD AND SORCERY

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OVERVIEW

The term "Sword and Sorcery" was coined by author Michael Moorcock in a letter to the fanzine *Amra*. He wanted a name for the unique fantasy stories written by Robert E. Howard, specifically his Conan and Kull series. Moorcock and author Fritz Leiber got into a bit of a debate on the topic leading to this comment by Fritz Leiber which sets the term solidly for years to come and is still looked at as a founding statement.

"I feel more certain than ever that this field should be called the sword-and-sorcery story. This accurately describes the points of culture-level and supernatural element and also immediately distinguishes it from the cloak-and-sword (historical adventure) story—and (quite incidentally) from the cloak-and-dagger (international espionage) story too!" (Source: *Amra*, July 1961)

Sword and Sorcery emerged and gained its popularity in the pulp fantasy magazines of the 1930s. Specifically, *Weird Tales* published Robert E. Howard's Conan the Cimmerian and Kull of Atlantis stories which strongly defined and embodies the genre to this day. Soon to follow were the famous Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser from Fritz Leiber and the first notable sword and sorcery heroine, Jirel from C.L. Moore.

So what makes the sword and sorcery genre unique? Up until the 1930s when Howard started writing his stories, most heroic fantasy literature was mythology, swashbuckling, or fairy tales. Sword and sorcery was influenced by those as well as Middle Eastern tales such as Arabian Nights

with its mix of the supernatural into the stories.

You can think of J.R.R. Tolkien defining one side of heroic fantasy (high fantasy) and Robert E. Howard defining the other (sword and sorcery). Where high fantasy is uplifting with reluctant heroes seeking truth, fighting for right, and working alongside others in their quests, sword and sorcery focuses on a single hero of action, self-motivated, defining their own morality, fighting against all odds in a world of gods, horrors, and the supernatural.

ELEMENTS THAT DEFINE SWORD AND SORCERY?

With sword and sorcery a sub-genre of heroic fantasy, how does it stand out? What elements are core to a sword & sorcery story?

- Destiny
- Gods Are Real
- Horror
- Riddles
- Romance
- Solo Hero
- Sorcery
- Swords
- Stalwart Warrior
- Supernatural Evil

Following are sources of information pertaining to Sword and Sorcery to assist prospective game masters, game designers, writers, and storytellers in knowing where to start their research.

ARTICLES

The Demarcation of Sword and Sorcery

By McCullough V, Joseph

Source: <https://www.blackgate.com/the-demarcation-of-sword-and-sorcery/>

The Irish-American Identities of Robert E. Howard and Conan the Barbarian

By Dowd, Christopher

Source: New Hibernia Review, v20 n2 (2016): 15-34

A sheep in wolf's clothing? The problematic representation of women and the female body in 1980s sword and sorcery cinema

By Wright, Andrea

Source: Journal of Gender Studies, v21 n4 (2012 12 01): 401-411

BOOKS

Black God's Kiss

by Moore, C.L.

The Blade Itself

By Abercrombie, Joe

Blood and Thunder: The Life and Art of Robert E. Howard

By Finn, Mark

Camber of Culdi

By Kurtz, Katherine

The Chronicles of Amber

By Zelazny, Roger

Chronicles of the Black Company

By Cook, Glen

The Coming of Conan

By Howard, Robert E. and de Camp, L. Sprague

Complete Book of Swords

By Saberhagen, Fred

Conan

By Howard, Robert E., de Camp, L. Sprague, and Carter, Lin

Conan - comic series

By Thomas, Roy and Smith, Barry

Darkness Weaves

By Wagner, Karl Edward

Dark Valley destiny: The life of Robert E. Howard

By de Camp, L. Sprague

The Dragon Lord

By Drake, David

The Dreaming City

By Moorcock, Michael

The Dying Earth

By Vance, Jack

The Empire of the Necromancers

By Smith, Clark Ashton

Foundation

By Lackey, Mercedes

Gods in the Darkness

By Wagner, Karl Edward

Imaro

By Saunders, Charles

Jared of Joiry

By Moore, C.L.

Kill: Exile of Atlantis

By Howard, Robert E.

Knights of Dark Renown

By Gemmell, David

Legend

By Gemmell, David

Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy

By de Camp, L. Sprague

Red Sonja - comic series

By Thomas, Roy

Return of Nevèrÿon

By Delany, Samuel R.

The Savage Tales of Solomon Kane

By Howard, Robert E.

Stormbringer

By Moorcock, Michael

The Storm Lord

By Lee, Tanith

Sword and Sorceress

By Bradley, Marion Zimmer

Sword and Sorcery

By de Camp, L. Sprague

The Sword Edged Blonde

By Bledsoe, Alex

The Swords of Lankmar

By Leiber, Fritz

The Tale of Satampra Zeiros

By Smith, Clark Ashton

Tarnsman of Gor

By Norman, John

Thieves' World

By Asprin, Robert Lynn

The Traveler in Black

By Brunner, John

Two Sought Adventure

By Leiber, Fritz

The Worm Ouroboros

By Eddison, E.R.

GAMES

Age of Conan: Unchained - Computer Game

Astounding Swordsmen & Sorcerers of

Hyperborea - RPG

Barbarians of Lemuria – RPG

Conan Exiles - Computer Game

Conan: Hyborian Quests - Tabletop Game

Conan: The Roleplaying Game - RPG

Dark Souls - Computer Game

Diablo - Computer Game

Elder Scrolls - Computer Game

Fable - Computer Game

Heavenly Sword - Computer Game

Kingdom Monster: Death - Tabletop Game

Lankmar: City of Thieves - RPG

Mistborn: Birthright - Computer Game

Robert E. Howard's Conan - RPG

Stormbringer - RPG

Sword & Sorcery - Tabletop Game

The Savage World of Solomon Kane - RPG

Warriors & Warlocks - RPG

The Witcher - Computer Game

CINEMA

Ator, the Fighting Eagle
The Barbarians
The Beastmaster
BeastMaster - TV
Berserk - Anime
The Black Cauldron
Clash of the Titans
Claymore - Anime
Conan the Adventurer - Cartoon
Conan the Barbarian
Conan the Destroyer
Conquest
Deathstalker
Dragonheart
Dragonslayer
The Dungeonmaster
Excalibur
Fire and Ice
The Golden Voyage of Sinbad
Gor
Hawk the Slayer
He-Man and the Masters of the Universe -
Cartoon
Hercules - The Legendary Journeys – TV
Historic World of Arslan - Anime
Kriemhild's Revenge
Krull
Kull the Conqueror
Ladyhawke
Legend
Red Sonja
Solomon Kane
The Sword and the Sorcerer
Sword of the Valiant
Thunder the Barbarian - Cartoon
Wizards and Warriors - TV
Xena - Warrior Princess - TV
Yor, the Hunter from the Future

LOCATIONS

Barbarian Festival
<http://barbarianfestival.net/>

Frazetta Art Museum
<http://www.frazettaartmuseum.com/>

Robert E. Howard Home
[http://crossplainstx.com/howard/museum.
htm](http://crossplainstx.com/howard/museum.htm)

Robert E. Howard Days
[https://www.facebook.com/RobertEHoward
Days/](https://www.facebook.com/RobertEHowardDays/)

World Fantasy Convention
[http://www.worldfantasy.org/index.php/pa
st-conventions/list-of-conventions/](http://www.worldfantasy.org/index.php/past-conventions/list-of-conventions/)

PEOPLE

Robert Lynn Asprin
Leigh Brackett
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Lin Carter
Conan
L. Sprague de Camp
Elric of Melniboné
Frank Frazetta
Robert E. Howard
Fritz Leiber
Michael Moorcock
C.L. Moore
Andre Norton
Basil Poledouris
Clark Ashton Smith
Arnold Schwarzenegger