

Crossover Novels and YA vs. Adult Fantasy

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A Brief Introduction to Crossover Literature

Crossover literature is defined by Beckett (2011) in the context of children or young adult literature as, “literature that crosses from child to adult or adult to child audiences,” (para. 1). Essentially, it is a work that may have been originally written for young adults or adults but is then read widely by another age group. In some cases, a book may have two different covers targeted to two different age demographics, although the content is the same.

In general, although crossover fiction is not a new concept, there has been an unprecedented shift in adult’s reading habits of young adult fiction within the past millennial decade (Falconer, 2010). J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter books have been seen by many as a catalyst for the rise in popularity of young adult fiction, as described by Beckett (2011); however, Falconer (2010), suggests that, although Harry Potter certainly did play a role in shifting publishing and marketing strategies, and therefore influencing readership among adults, this iconic series also happened within a wider context that Falconer describes as “ripe for a [...] shift in perspective on children’s literature,” and should thus not be the single motivating factor behind this shift in reading habits (p. 87).

Fantasy has not been left untouched by the crossover novel phenomenon and even as early as 2001, Estes describes the rise of young adults’ fantasy novels and their readership of both young adults and adults alike. Estes (2001) also points out that novels deemed as “high fantasy”, defined as novels “usually written on a grand scale, in an elevated, often figurative style, and [including] otherworldly settings, impressive characters, memorable themes, and a sense of wonder,” (para 7) often have crossover readership. Interestingly, Estes (2001) notes that there are a number of female fantasy authors that write for both YA and adult readers, including Diana Wynne Jones, Patricia McKillip, Robin McKinley, Shirley Rousseau Murphy, Nancy Springer, Patricia C. Wrede, and Jane Yolen.

Crossover Fantasy Novels You Should Read

The following list includes fantasy novels that have been identified as having crossover readership:

Red Rising (series) by Pierce Brown

Red Rising, the first in Brown's series, follows Darrow who is situated on Mars and is identified as a member of the lower ranking Red – a class of the community whose purpose is to work hard all day in order to create a livable environment on Mars for their children and future generations. Darrow soon finds out, however, that his people have been deceived; Mars is already livable and home to a thriving society of upper-class people. Darrow sets out to on a dangerous path to infiltrate the system and overthrow those in positions of power.

A Court of Thorns and Roses (series) by Sarah J. Maas

Feyre lives in the forest and must hunt in order to survive in her cold and harsh environment. Killing is a normal part of life and survival, so when she sees a wolf hunting a deer, Feyre cannot resist fighting it for the prize. There are, however, consequences that come from killing the wolf. Feyre finds herself prisoner in a magical kingdom under the accusation of killing a faerie. Feyre must navigate this new environment, fight to break a curse, all while also coming to terms with her shifting feelings for her captor.

The Queen of the Tearling by Erika Johansen

In this series by Erika Johansen we follow young princess Kelsea Raleigh Glynn, who has grown up in exile from her parent's kingdom. As soon as she turns nineteen, she sets out on a dangerous journey to reclaim her place at the throne.

The Golden Compass (#1 in His Dark Materials series) by Philip Pullman

Lyra Belacqua lives in a world much different than our own, where there are witch clans, armored bears, and children are taken by strange beings. When Lyra's friend Roger disappears, she sets out on a quest with her daemon, seafaerers, a witch, and a bear to rescue him.

The Dark Angel (#1 in the Dark Angel series) by Meredith Ann Pierce

A vampire of unsurpassable beauty seeks to gain the full potential of his power through a 14th bride. When Aerial is kidnapped for this purpose, she sees beyond his evil façade and feels she must try to save him from his own darkness.

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