io9 Discussion
- Bad news: books editor Charlie Anders is leaving the team to focus on writing novels.

Things We Liked:
- Goofy SF and geek articles from Gizmodo
- You get to see inside the minds of fans and what triggers their interest–science, books, media
- Posts about newest award list nominees and winners all in spot
- The comments to articles are wonderful, knowledgable, and even nice!
- The round-up posts are great

Negatives:
- Frustrating that the Facebook interface doesn't give you access to all the links you'd expect it to
- There is a lot of click bait…and you can lose hours.

Fantasy Book Camp
Annabelle made nice overview slide deck with information from the boot camp portion. The notes aren't going to replicate the slides, but only attempt to capture discussion.

- **Definitions**
  o Saricks' definition contains the "common knowledge" that *Fantasy deals more with emotions and relationships than ideas*. However many fans may disagree with this, seeing a lot of thought provoking ideas in works. Particular authors may also emphasize ideas or issues over emotions.
  o Martin's definition has probably the most beautiful language, using color to distinguish fantasy from other works.
  o Grossman's definition shares many of the thoughts Fantasy fans expressed on Reddit about why they read fantasy
    ▪ Taps into childhood understanding of narratives formed when fairytales were read to us
    ▪ Sense of wonder – even if something very negative is happening
    ▪ Sense of longing – looking for a different, better world than reality
      • For example, "Because the real world sucks, and I can't fix it."
      • May also explain the recent rise of Fantasy
      • Fantasy is often more popular when the world is less stable: times of war, technological change, sense of being lost or disconnected
        o Sense of connectedness to Earth or Humanity
        o Mysticism
    ▪ Generally has happy or hopeful endings
  o Annabelle's favorite: "Because I enjoy reading people whose vision is wider than what is and deeper than what's possible."
  o To see why fans say they enjoy reading Fantasy, check out Reddit's Fantasy subreddit.
    ▪ There are equivalent Reddit boards for other genres, but the Fantasy one can be very useful.
      • View Reddit as a giant discussion board, where people post ideas
        o Each topic has sub-discussion board (subreddit – /r/Fantasy)
        o The subreddits related to books are especially great
    ▪ Articles are constantly being voted up or down
    ▪ Famous authors or other celebrities will go on Reddit and say "Ask me anything?" which can lead to great conversations.
    ▪ Reddit has annual Stabby Book Award which nominates and awards the community's top picks.
- **Themes**
  o Good versus Evil often dominates. Though it may be the darkness within ourselves versus the good within ourselves. And in most fantasy, good *eventually* wins.
  o Fate versus Free Will ties into the ideas of:
    ▪ Chosen one – Do you have to be "chosen" or can you chose yourself?
    ▪ Quests driven by outside forces or own will
    ▪ Mastering forces of the universe versus mastering yourself (or may be the same)

- ▪ Coming of Age – time when learn what is within your control/free will
- • **Hallmarks**
  - o Get a lot of author collaborations (where both authors are still alive)
  - o Will find more maps, genealogies, and "Casts of Characters" than in any other genre, with Historical fiction coming in second.
    - ▪ With the complexity of the worlds, these touchstones are often necessary
    - ▪ Authors trying to help you not get lost in imagined worlds
    - ▪ Always point out to *Game of Thrones* newbies that these materials are at the end of the book.
    - ▪ These "bonus" elements create some overlap with Historical Fiction, and between fans of both.
  - o Because of all that world-building, series are almost a given.
    - ▪ However, series are really one long story told over multiple books. Whereas with crime, each volume is an episode – more independent.
  - o Traditional "Quest" may become (or be driven by) a mystery with a detective.
  - o Magical Beings
    - ▪ More horror creatures are showing up, even if their context isn't to terrify
    - ▪ A lot of "half supernatural" half something else (another supernatural being or a human) are appearing.
  - o Trends
    - ▪ More multicultural ideas and characters – just as in SF
      - • Moving away from European folktales, Arthurian legend, and Norse mythology to African and Middle Eastern roots
      - • Marlon James says his next book with be an "African Game of Thrones"
    - ▪ More genre-blending – just as in SF
    - ▪ Gunpowder fantasy
      - • Fantasy war but with muskets
      - • See Django Wexler or Brian McClellan
    - ▪ Grimdark fantasy
      - • Evil sometimes wins
      - • See more of struggle with what is morally acceptable
      - • Good versus evil not clear cut but shades of grey
      - • BLOOD
      - • *Game of Thrones* series is an example of trend.
      - • Even long-running series like *The Dresden Files* by Jim Butcher are getting darker and grimmer as they progress.
  - o *Points made later in discussion, that are also hallmarks*:
    - ▪ Some people love movies that are Fantasy or SF, but they don't read the books.
      - • It's harder to get into the worlds through text. Media makes it easier to get into world.
    - ▪ Some fans form such a relationship with the books (or movies) that it becomes part of their identity.
      - • Intensely emotional about what they like or don't like.
      - • It's hard to find a book that speaks to them in the same way as their favourite.
      - • Listen to what readers say when they tell you why they love it. They may not even want recommendations, but just want to share their love. Fans love minutia and minor points.
        - o Think of people who are huge sports fans versus non-sports fans.
      - • Fans get upset if minutia changes between books or movies.
  - o **Subgenres**
    - • While the ARRT workbook identified 5 subgenres, it's often difficult to pigeonhole an author (or even a novel) into just one subgenre.
    - • It's even becoming increasingly difficult to pin down to just fantasy.
    - ▪ *Epic Fantasy*
      - • This is what most people tend to think of when "Fantasy" is mentioned.
      - • In some ways, it's **Lord of the Rings** (Tolkien) done in different ways, over and over
      - • Also called High Fantasy
        - o We rolled Sword & Sorcery Fantasy into this subgenre in the new edition of the ARRT Workbook. The level of *adventure* is the major distinction.
      - • Often have morally complex characters

- Examples are Brandon Sanderson *Stormlight Archive* and George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*
  - *Historical Fantasy*
    - Require a *familiar* historical time and place – not an accurate time and place
      - Can even be an imaginary place if it feels like real history (e.g. *Game of Thrones* series)
    - May or may not remain true to events of actual history
  - *Humorous Fantasy*
    - Remember, humor is subjective. At least the author thinks it's funny and is trying to make you laugh
  - *Myths & Legends*
    - Doesn't have to feel like the story is set in the past. Can have historical or modern settings.
    - Retelling classic stories in modern setting is popular
  - *Urban Fantasy*
    - We rolled Dark Fantasy into this subgenre in the new edition of the ARRT Workbook.
      - Reflects the influence of the Grimdark trend that the dividing line became too blurred.
      - Overall, becoming darker in tone
    - Adding a mystery element is a common trend.
      - Often the detective is a supernatural creature – from magician to zombie
    - Seeing more "sexy-time" – or blurring between Paranormal Romance and Urban Fantasy
    - Humor, even if dark or cynical, very common.
    - Adding mystical or mythological beings (instead of just supernatural creatures) also a trend.
    - A lot are issued straight to mass market paperback.
- **Doorways**
  - Character
    - **Among Others** by Jo Walton has a Welsh Fairy as the lead
  - Language
    - **The King of Elfland's Daughter** by Lord Dunsay is written in the style of the time, which can make it hard to get into. (Think about picking up a Shakespeare play. It takes a while to get into the rhythm.)
  - Story
    - **The Golden Compass** by Phillip Pullman has a lot of great ideas, great plot, and ties all the pieces together like intricate clockwork.
  - Setting
    - World building is an element of all speculative fiction. But some works it is the major draw, while in others it takes a second seat.
  - Tone
    - **The Eyre Affair** by Jasper Fforde is written to be very fun and super clever. The reader enjoys the *fun* of journey through the plot and with the characters more than other elements.

There is a very humourous [YouTube "Epic Rap Battles of History" episode between J.R.R. Tolkien versus George R.R. Martin](#)
- It has foul language, so not work safe.
- If you read Martin as well as Tolkien, watch this!
- Tolkien and Martin works are contrasted as "they" tell what they hate about the other's works.

Lord of the Rings, by J.R.R. Tolkien
- This is the touchstone for fantasy, even though it is massive.
  - SF has no equivalent single benchmark
  - Most of 1960-1980s Fantasy was either copying Tolkien or reacting against Tolkien
  - Because of the popularity of the TV show, today people may be thinking **Game of Thrones** when they hear fantasy. But for a long time, it was Middle Earth.
- Tolkien's Doorway is very much SETTING
  - The place feels real, like it existed, even though it is imaginary
- Also captures the strong Sense of Longing mentioned as a genre hallmark
- You can gauge the level of fandom for Tolkien by asking:
  - Have you read the entire trilogy?

- - ▪ Also, how passionate they are about the parts of the books that were left out of the movie. (No Tom Bombadil!)
  - o Have you read **The Silmarillion**?
  - o Can you speak Elvish?

Donna's Family
- Donna, her husband, and her son formed a "book group" and all read **Lord of the Rings** together
  - o Donna's son was the Tolkien fan, so he formed the syllabus. He also had three different editions of the story, so each person read a different edition. (He has read **The Silmarillion**.)
  - o Each week, they picked a day for all three to discuss the assignment.
    - ▪ Often Donna and her husband would quiz her son on what was happening, or the symbolic meaning.
      - Why does Gandalf keep a grey cloak over his white robes?
      - Who is the Christ figure of the novel? Is it doled out between different characters?
      - Does Sauron have a physical existence?
  - o As a group, they decided Tolkien is not an allegory for anything. Remember, the outlines of the novels go back to before the atomic bomb existed.
  - o While they were reading **Two Towers**, they all felt like "are we there yet?"
    - ▪ The action is slow going, but the progress is important.
    - ▪ It may seem to take forever, but it makes you feel the weight of the quest.
    - ▪ You don't realize as reading how short the time line is:
      - Fellowship sets out – Oct 25th
      - Boromir dies – Feb 26th (the Fellowship breaks, and **The Fellowship of the Ring** ends)
      - **Two Towers** ends on Mar 13th
      - Sauron destroyed March 25th
      - (See *The Encyclopedia of Arda* or Karen's coworker who can speak Elvish, Stacey Costabile) ☺
  - o It's a great book to read as a group so you can discuss it.
    - ▪ If you have friends or a community with whom you read and discuss it, you may like it better.
    - ▪ May be why some people become huge fans in junior high or high school – when they read it with a group of friends.
  - o Donna found a surprising number of parallels with **The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**, by Edward Gibbon

General Comments
- **The Atlas of Middle-Earth** by Karen Wynn Fonstad makes a great companion book when reading trilogy
- Tolkien spent his early years in a rural environment, and then moved to an urban era
  - o Can see his love of the rural life in his writing: environmentalism, destruction of the Shire, the sense of longing for being a child reading in a beautiful field.
- A number of readers found the Prologue in **The Fellowship of the Ring** slow and boring.
  - o Felt like should be getting hazard pay for reading it.
  - o Couldn't get into the story until halfway through Chapter 1
  - o Might recommend to new readers to skip the Prologue
- Language was lovely
  - o Easier to appreciate the language and poetry of the writing when listening to audio
    - ▪ However, can zone out while listening if not careful.
    - ▪ May seem slower when listening, because can't scan or skip over the slow parts.
- Characters
  - o Likeable
  - o Great sense of camaraderie
  - o Very male-centric
- Setting
  - o If you aren't into world building, it really feels like too much detail.
    - ▪ Feels like needs editing to shorten it.
  - o Do you want to read a book where the author creates (and uses) multiple entire languages?

- o Slows down the story.
- o The movies create the world more quickly
  - ▪ Creates the culture visually instead of verbally
- New readers
  - o Many came to **Lord of the Rings** through the movies
    - ▪ Maybe extended editions and/or with commentaries
  - o May love the movies, but not the books
    - ▪ Don't care about the songs or poems
  - o Give it to people to read on vacation or over the summer, when they have time to read the whole series together.
    - ▪ Have copies of the complete trilogy in one book.
      - • Some people are more willing to keep going if they see it all in one book.
      - • It is only a "trilogy" because at the time they thought publishing it as one book was too long.
    - ▪ You need to have time to relax and fall into the story. Time to get past the set up and involved in the story itself. (Similar experience with **The Poisonwood Bible** by Barbara Kingsolver.)
- If you read in small segments, it may be harder to enjoy. You really need to read at least 100 pages in one sitting to fall into the story.
  - o Often true of SF as well, but doubly so for Fantasy.
  - o You have to get past the barrier of "this is weird". You need to get oriented and have your bearings in the world, language, and who/what the characters are before enjoying.
  - o You also need to have the "benefit of the doubt" that any questions or confusions will get sorted out as you read.
    - ▪ Some of the world may be explained in the middle or last third of the novel instead of at the beginning.

The Movies
- Peter Jackson made the movies as a fan for the fans.
  - o Whereas Tolkien was writing for himself.
    - ▪ Some felt like reading was coming into the middle of the discussion they hadn't been invited to
    - ▪ Language, songs, maps, botany, EVERYTHING!
  - o Movies are more accessible than the books
    - ▪ All the environmental details are visual
  - o Similar to fans of television show **Man in the High Castle**. When they read the book, they are expecting something much different than what they get.
    - ▪ Media and Print are really entirely separate works.
    - ▪ May be harder to enjoy the print if you see the media first
      - • Print is slower
      - • Has to use words to describe what visual media captures more quickly – world building
  - o Some people have come to resent the movies because it is harder to do readers advisory for "Tolkien Fans".
    - ▪ Fans of which?
    - ▪ Fans of what elements?

Love or Hate
- There seems to be little rhyme or reason to who loves or hates Tolkien.
  - o With the exception of – if you don't like complicated world building, you probably won't enjoy the books.
- Some Fantasy lovers don't like Tolkien.
- Some people are huge fans of the movies, but don't like the books.
- We read it because Tolkien is so influential on everything else. Also,
  - o Dragons are cool
  - o Wizards are cool
  - o Magic can be a hook
  - o It has a dream-like quality.
  - o The otherworldliness can draw you in.
    - ▪ Complete other worlds – language and entire history.

- The Fellowship has to make a choice, and that choice has significant consequences. (As do all the choices they make throughout.) ← Free Will

Why not read **The Hobbit** as the "benchmark"?
- Frequently found the youth sections
  - Written as a children's book
- Doesn't work if you want to get into the mind of people who really love Tolkien
  - **The Lord of the Rings** is much more intense
- Advantages:
  - Starts at the beginning, no prologue
  - Not as dark (However, that darkness is part of what creates intense fandom for Tolkien)
  - Does give you more of the backstory to understanding the weight of the ring on the bearer – Gollum, Bilbo, then Frodo.
- Least complex, with **Lord of the Ring** and then **The Silmarillion** climbing the ladder of complexity

Song of Ice and Fire series – George R.R. Martin
- Martin has written SF and Horror as well as Fantasy
- If you are looking for a wiki that won't reveal spoilers, see *Tower of the Hand*
- 1st book, **A Game of Thrones**, was released in 1996 to rave reviews
  - Martin took the tropes of Tolkien and others and turned them on their heads
  - Each chapter has a different point of view
  - A lot of historical elements
  - Names were kind of normal…archaic, but not unreal
  - Touches of the familiar
  - Not a lot of magic, until the very end
    - Politics
    - Drama
    - Sex
  - Hooks people first, then hits them with dragons.
    - If you are looking for action, **A Storm of Swords** may be the one you like best.
- Definitely an Epic Fantasy
  - Everyone is trying to get the throne, and that desire corrupts them all
  - Intensity of following the characters, and multiple plot threads
    - Totally get absorbed in each character
    - Love seeing a character from multiple points of view
    - Every character is the protagonist of their own story
      - However, they may be the villain of someone else's story
      - When you see Jamie Lannister actions through other people's eyes, you think he is a horrible person. When, in **A Clash of Kings** you see him from his own perspective, you start to understand him. Starts to be somewhat heroic.
  - A LOT of restraint in storytelling
    - But a lot of words – not as much editing as some expect
    - Much more episodic than Tolkien, so it is easier to read in spurts
- For some people, this may be the only Fantasy they read.
  - Many historical fiction fans enjoy this series
- Martin didn't plan on the story taking so many volumes to tell
  - Some readers are left wondering "Where is the ending?"
    - Some Fantasy readers like to wait until a series is completed to even start it. Otherwise, end up re-reading entire series when new volume comes out.
  - Series that are this long, it's hard to maintain the quality of the storytelling
- Some get frustrated with all the new characters
  - They want to hear the stories of their favorites, even if they like the new people.
- The TV show so permeates the culture:
  - It's almost impossible not to hear spoilers!
    - When you miss an episode, you have to cut off all social media and internet contact (and maybe personal contact) not to have it ruined for you. Even the newspaper can have spoilers.

- o Even if you have never watched it, or read it, you know something about it. Willingly or not.
- o It's impossible to come to the books as a blank slate now.
  - ▪ Books always had a cinematic feel, which makes it easy for fans to cross between the show and the books.
- o Some lovers of the book do hate the TV show.
  - ▪ The spirit of the characters isn't maintained.
  - ▪ Worse yet, they are changing plot points!
  - ▪ Also Martin is giving the show plot points that haven't happened yet in the books.
- There are Reddits and subreddits for
  - o Television series only, Books only, and both
- Tone of Martin is much different than Tolkien
  - o Martin is part of the Grimdark trend
  - o Tolkien is much more hopeful
- Martin and Tolkien's traditions were together and against each other simultaneously

Neil Gaiman
- Each of his books is very different from the others, despite common elements
  - o Writes dark fantasy and urban fantasy – both that almost segue into Horror
  - o Typically creates a familiar setting, and then adds magic
    - ▪ Don't have to learn and entirely new world
    - ▪ Grimdark feel similar to Martin, but set much closer to this reality
  - o Gaiman was as influenced by Tolkien as George R.R. Martin, just in different ways
- **Good Omens: the nice and accurate prophecies of Agnes Nutter, witch**
  - o Madcap satire. If this is your first exposure to Neil Gaiman, the first thing you realize on reading another novel is that he isn't as funny as Terry Pratchett (his co-author on this novel).
    - ▪ If you don't like Pratchett's sense of humour, you probably won't like this book.
  - o Some people loved the concept, but not the execution
    - ▪ Others thought the second half was much better than the first half
- **American Gods**
  - o Written in 2001, it won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards
    - ▪ One of the first urban fantasy novels, especially to so incorporate mythology
  - o Found it harder to get into because you need to know the mythology of all the different countries.
    - ▪ Others liked it precisely because it made them explore and learn about mythology they hadn't seen before.
- **Graveyard Book**
  - o Gaiman did his own audiobook narration, and agreed he is a great narrator!
  - o It's much shorter than many of this other books
  - o Again, the magical characters felt very familiar
  - o It's a middle school book, BUT
    - ▪ It starts with a bloody knife
    - ▪ Entire family killed – including the children
    - ▪ So lots of limiters and individual taste as to "how old should you be to read it"
- **The Ocean at the End of the Lane**
  - o Gives you a perfect introduction to his writing style and voice
    - ▪ Very different from **Good Omens** or **American Gods**
    - ▪ Beautiful language
    - ▪ Short snapshot of his style
  - o Story feels like it was always there, somewhere, just waiting to be written
    - ▪ Can hear Gaiman talking in your head – even if reading print
  - o Dark
    - ▪ Strong Horror elements
  - o Strong vein of friendship
- **Stardust**
  The town of Wall is distinguished by the rock barrier which divides it from the world, except for when the fair comes to Wall every nine years. When Trystran vows to obtain a fallen star for his true love from

the other side of the wall, he discovers the realm of Faerie. Trystan's quest to find the star changes as he learns about himself and the nature of the star.
- o Quick read
- o Gaiman's take on fairytales
  - ▪ Quest to find what's beyond the Wall
- o Movie is a must-see if you want to see Robert DeNiro in a dress!

Gaiman is often shelved in Fiction, not SF or Fantasy
- Same is true of other novels, such as
  - o **The Discovery of Witches**, by Deborah Harkness
  - o **Practical Magic**, by Alice Hoffman
  - o **The Magicians**, by Lev Grossman
- Where you shelve it changes the conversations we have with patrons
  - o Publishers' marketing or spin often determine when shelved
  - o May be harder (or easier) to get someone interested in a novel depending on where it is shelved.
  - o Similarly, the covers can also limit who you can hand sell the novels to
- Also, never going to win mainstream awards (or reviews) when shelved in Fantasy or SF.
  - o Fantasy doesn't win Pulitzers or Bookers.

We'll be discussing more about who to give books to, or how to get non-fans interested in SpecFic, in the Doorway meetings.

The next genre study will be
August 4th at **Glenview Public Library**
Horror Boot Camp

Resource: Horror Writers Association website
- Goal to promote Horror as a Genre
- Home of the Bram Stoker Awards
- Section specifically for librarians
- Great resource for core ideas and materials.

The Shining, by Stephen King
- If only going to read one King novel, this one will make you understand his style and appeal the best.
- If you've already read **The Shining**, then you can read **Dr. Sleep** (the sequel) instead.

Ready any book by Joe Hill or Jonathan Maberry
- Joe Hill
  - o Feel free to read the *Locke & Key* graphic novel series, starts with **Welcome to Lovecraft**
  - o **Heart Shaped Box** is a great ghost story
  - o **NOS4A2** received a lot of praise
  - o **Horns** would work
  - o His just released **The Fireman** is not really horror, so *do not* select it.
- Jonathan Maberry
  - o *Do NOT* read a novel in the *Joe Ledger* series. These are Supernatural Thriller novels more than Horror novels.
  - o **Rot & Ruin** starts the *Benny Imura* series of teen post-apocalyptic zombie novels
  - o **Ghost Road Blues** is the excellent start to the *Pine Deep* Trilogy, written for adults
  - o Maberry's novels written for adults are "grosser" than his teen novels.