



The Complete Book of Swords

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The Swords were forged on a lifeless, wind-scoured mountaintop, with fire drawn from the earth's belly, and metal that fell from the sky. They were tempered with human sweat and human blood by the hand of the god Vulcan, Master Smith.

The Complete Book of Swords Details

Date : Published 1985 by Doubleday

ISBN : 9781568650098

Author : Fred Saberhagen

Format : Hardcover 626 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy, Epic Fantasy

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swords. Over the course of time, Mark crosses paths with many of the different swords and witnesses their spectacular effects (either in his own hands or in contention to him). During his travels, he meets and makes human friends, witnesses ancient powers both godlike and of other unique nature and ultimately comes into his own across battlefields and adventures.

It's a nice, fast-paced tale that doesn't linger too long on any one point of action or plot. There are times the reader might wish for more exploration of some relationship or interaction, but in whole, the work flows well and reaches a satisfying, if abrupt ending. This is somewhat mollified by the fact that there are several more stories regarding the characters and the swords continuing past this volume.

The depiction of the many powers in the world is probably Saberhagen's best concept in this series. From the ordinary human queens and kings to the extraordinary Gods, so similar to our own mythology, to the mysterious Emperor and Beast Lord, Saberhagen crafts a wide range of characters that allow him grand scope for building his own (as yet undetailed) mythology and (as yet undetailed) post-apocalyptic return to magic and middle-ages technology.

You should have fun reading these books for simple enjoyment. Don't look for anything deep or brooding, for it's a lively adventure and stands well on its own merits.

LiteraryMania says

This book could be classified as both a sci-fi and a fantasy book. The premise as you quickly learn is that a pantheon of gods exist with some very familiar names from our own mythology. They demand that the god Vulcan create a set of swords that they can scatter around the world and take sides as the humans duke it out for the ultimate power one would have by collecting all of the swords, all for their amusement.

Vulcan does so, using several mortals to help him forage the swords and spilling their blood to seal the magic - all except one man whom he lets live and take one of the swords with him. Fast forward a few years later and in an unexpected turn of events the youngest son of this man finds himself inheriting the sword and becoming an outlaw at the same time.

From there on he has interactions with many of the swords and the people who wield them, all the time trying to keep ahead of those trying to find him. We learn about the unique mythology of the gods and find that something is not quite right...

As the game continues, soon the gods start to worry, as some of these swords could have the power to bring even their rule to ruin. Filled with adventure, these books do get at times a tad overly descriptive, and yes there are lulls that the casual fantasy/sci-fi reader may not appreciate, but it's a fantastic series and certainly worth reading through. I never felt it was a struggle to read through these parts, but then I appreciate detail about the world I'm immersing myself into and it feels much more realistic to me as a whole to give your characters the occasional rest from constant action. The way some fantasy books are written, all the characters would surely die from exhaustion before you read a third of the book, Saberhagen's character's are pressed to their limit and beyond, but I don't have the same feeling that they never get a break.

Lolowe says

I read the series as an awkward teen and I loved them. I need to re-read them now and see how I feel!

Hugo says

This is a collection of the first three Swords books by Fred Saberhagen. It features the origins of a set of twelve swords forged by the god Vulcan. They are to be used in a game played by the gods using humans as pawns. However, the game does not turn out like they expect.

I found it to be ok, but it fell somewhere in between the classical pulp style of his older Berserkers short stories, and modern fantasy by more contemporary authors. This means it felt a bit flat to me - the characters were neither the swaggering heroes of old nor the more nuanced and complex ones from modern (quality) fantasy. The story itself with its mix of fantasy and legend, dusted with a subtle sprinkling of sci-fi is an interesting premise, although unfortunately I don't think it really managed to live up to its full potential. The ending of the third book was very abrupt and it felt rushed to me. I know that the lack of closure probably is due to the fact that there are more "Swords"-book sequels, but it still left me with the impression that the author saw a page limit approaching and quickly needed to wrap things up.

However, it was entertaining enough (let's face it, this isn't great Literature), and despite a couple of brief lulls the pacing kept me turning the pages. In summary, although a bit stylistically dated, I'd say it's good, entertaining, light fantasy fare.

Dawson says

This is a good Sword and Sorcery adventure book. And I say that as someone who is not a fan of the genre. However, I read many of his "Berserker" series books so I thought I would give this a chance. The story is set in a far future earth where technology is gone, replaced by magic. Into this world the god Vulcan forges a set of swords imbued with great powers for a game the gods are going to play. The stories themselves really focus on one individual, Mark, whose father was used to help make the swords. Over the course of 10 years the characters and you interact with the swords and the people of the world.

Overall, I thought the development of the main characters was good. The desires and wishes of the characters interact with plots of the Gods and the sword's powers to lead the characters through the books. Rather than contrived however the plot worked, feeling very natural.

Overall, my only major down check was the ending. It was believable but too short. Too many loose ends left dangling. However, you could make reasonable guesses on what happened with the major characters.

Still, if you like this genre I recommend the book.

Chisa Puckett says

The overall concept of the Book of Swords is pretty amazing - twelve swords forged by the god Vulcan have legendary powers and their impact on humanity.

However, for the most part I found myself struggling through all three parts of this omnibus.

Saberhagen has a tendency to describe what is going on rather than have the character act out the scenes. This makes me less immersed in the story.

Mark, who I felt should be the primary protagonist, frequently felt like a secondary character. Nestor, who I liked very much from the first book, disappears and is never mentioned again. Ben's relationship with Barbara always felt a bit creepy and forced, something that gets one line of recognition in the final book but is never truly resolved.

In fact, several relationship issues never feel resolved. Maybe it's because the series is supposed to be about the swords and not people. But ultimately I found myself dissatisfied with the general flow of the novels.

In short, good idea, mediocore execution.

Michael says

****Some spoilers****

I had forgotten how well I liked these books. Even, the more minor characters are likable. The story never really lags, and the ideas are fresh. Not many of the conventional tropes of fantasy are present. He never really makes any of the characters, "the chosen one". The princess doesn't lead her people to glorious battle, and conquers the entire continent. The evil is not really a supreme evil, and even knows his own limitations. The swords themselves are very interesting as plot devices, and the game that the gods play keeps everything on a pretty brisk pace. People actually die in these stories, and the relics they use might end them as easily as it ends their foes.

This isn't exactly dark fantasy, and it isn't exactly high fantasy. It fits neatly in between the sub-genre. This is also how I feel about Fred Saberhagen in general. Some of his work, I really end up liking, like his Berserker books, and others not so much. Luckily, this series follows suit with the former. I can say I am encouraged to go back and purchase the few Swords, and Berserker books I do not already own.

Jean-Paul says

A good friend had recommended this collection to me a year or so ago, but had also added at the time that he had mislaid his copy of it and wished he could read it again. Recently while searching for an ugly shirt to wear to a Hawaiian themed party I was fortunate enough to find a copy of this volume on sale for a dollar at a local thrift store. When I informed my friend of my good fortune I had to promise to lend it to him to re-read as soon as I was done with it. And now having completed the task of reading these stories I am glad to say that I can now understand his eagerness to return to this world.

To truly begin this review I should point out that while the volume I read is titled "The Complete book of Swords" it only actually comprises 3 books out of the dozen or so volumes which Saverhagen's website Berzerker.com lists as belonging to the Swords cycle: <http://www.berserker.com/FredsSwords...>

So I take this to mean that I do have more to look forward to in this series down the road and that I should keep my eye out whenever I happen to be in a book browsing mood.

This collection is split into three separate tales revolving, primarily, around a boy named Mark and his

friend's Ben and Barbara and how their lives intertwine with the destinies of 12 Magic Swords. The eponymous swords of the title are shown in the first chapter being forged by a god named Vulcan at the behest of a pantheon of other gods and goddesses who are drawn from the mythologies of varied cultures and nations. It shouldn't be too much of a spoiler to point out that although this story is in a fantasy setting it can be also categorized as science fiction as it is set approximately fifty thousand years in the future of our own world and there are hints that the magical property of the Swords is actually at least partially technological in origin and that the gods themselves may be a manifestation of the collective unconscious of humanity and therefore not truly immortals at all.

Part of the fun of the stories comes from the Song of Swords given in the forward to the book. A series of 12 poems that describes the properties of the swords and acts as an introduction and a warning for those who would wish to wield the power granted by the blades. Each time a new Sword was mentioned, I found myself flipping back to the front of the book to re-read the poem and try to figure out exactly how each weapon would be used and what effects it would have on the progression of the story.

The first book is a bit of a chase, wherein Mark is on the run with the sword named Townsaver after accidentally killing the cousin of a local ruler.

The second book opens up the scope of the book further and a now twenty year old mark and his friend Ben become embroiled in a heist attempt against the Blue Temple, a religious order that worships wealth. This story will be a lot of fun for any Dungeons and Dragons aficionados who enjoy a good dungeon crawl.

The third book picks up 4 or 5 years down the line as the great game of the gods who set these swords loose into the world begins to really heat up, and the armies of at least 4 different forces are marching to war to control the swords and the fate of the world.

If you can find a copy of this or any of the other books in the series I recommend giving them a read.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This one is from so far back, I read it years ago. Saberhagen is pretty versatile. I'd just read the Berserker stories and moved into these fantasies. Pretty good.

These take place in the fictional universe set up in Empire of the East taking place thousands of years after that book. If you enjoy the universe this one carries on it's tale. While I like Empire better, these are still pretty good.

Sean says

it's fine.
