

What Romantasy Gets Wrong About Real Relationships

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Shadow daddies and bonded mates and brooding warriors (oh my!) If you've spent any time on BookTok lately, chances are you've encountered the wildly popular world of romantasy — a genre blending fantasy, romance, danger, and enough tension to make readers stay up until 2 a.m. saying, "Just one more chapter."

Books like *Fourth Wing*, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, and *Shield of Sparrows* have captivated millions of readers (including me), and for good reason! They're exciting, emotional, immersive, and often deeply cathartic. There's nothing inherently wrong with enjoying dramatic fictional romance any more than there's something wrong with enjoying superhero movies.

But just like watching *Spider-Man* or *Dr. Strange* while forgetting that physics still exists in the real world could seriously warp your expectations about time and gravity, reading romantasy without understanding how healthy love actually works can distort your expectations about relationships.

This doesn't mean readers should stop enjoying the genre. It just means it can be helpful to notice where fantasy relationships differ from the kinds of relationships research

suggests actually help people thrive in real life. Because while dragon riders and fae warriors are entertaining, healthy love usually looks a lot less dramatic, and (good news) a lot more sustainable.

Attraction Isn't Magic — It's Something We Help Create

One of the most common romantasy tropes is the idea of destined love: soul mates, mating bonds, irresistible attraction, or "the universe" deciding two people belong together. In fiction, attraction often happens instantly and feels completely outside the characters' control. One glance across the battlefield and suddenly two enemies are cosmically intertwined forever.

Real attraction, on the other hand, is usually more dynamic than destiny-driven. Research on relationships consistently shows that [attraction grows over time](#) through familiarity, emotional safety, shared experiences, responsiveness, and intentional investment. These qualities aren't just things a relationship either has or doesn't have — they are skills and patterns partners can actively strengthen together. Additionally, long-term couples often report that attraction ebbs and flows depending on [stress](#), emotional connection, novelty, conflict, and life circumstances.

The idea that attraction is flexible and can be developed over time is actually great news because it puts you in the driver's seat. You are the one with the power to deepen your connection if the spark isn't immediately present or if the butterflies fade temporarily! This may make finding and choosing the right partner take more time and intentional effort. But I think intentionally choosing each other is a whole lot more romantic and empowering than having no control over your own relationship fate.

Healthy Relationships Usually Start More Like Friendship Than Warfare

The enemies-to-lovers trope is one of romantasy's reigning champions:

1. The characters hate each other.
2. Then they are forced to reluctantly work together.
3. Then they kiss while arguing.
4. Then suddenly they're emotionally inseparable.

To be fair, tension is highly entertaining! Healthy communication about grocery lists and whose turn it is to drive the kids to school is usually not bestselling fiction. But research suggests that stable, satisfying

relationships are generally built on friendship, kindness, trust, and emotional safety — not prolonged hostility. In fact, relationship researcher Dr. John Gottman famously found that [contempt](#) is one of the strongest predictors of relationship failure. Couples who consistently mock, belittle, or attack one another tend to struggle over time, even if they also feel strong passion.

What actually predicts long-term relational happiness?

Things like:

- Friendship
- Fondness and admiration
- Emotional responsiveness
- Repair after conflict
- Trust

- [Positive interactions outweighing negative ones](#)

In other words, the healthiest relationships are often less “I wanted to stab you when we met” and more “I genuinely enjoy being around you.” That doesn’t mean every strong relationship begins as a perfect friendship. Plenty of couples grow into closeness gradually! But the idea that cruelty, manipulation, or constant antagonism are signs of hidden passion can become unhealthy when imported into real-life dating expectations. That’s not sexy, it’s toxic.

Surviving Trauma Together Isn’t the Same Thing as Building a Healthy Relationship

Another common romantasy dynamic is two characters becoming intensely bonded after surviving war, violence, danger, or extreme emotional upheaval together. Psychologically, this makes sense. High-adrenaline experiences can increase feelings of attachment and intensity. Researchers have long known that [emotional arousal](#) can heighten attraction in the short term. [But intensity does not always equal intimacy](#). Some fictional relationships are built almost entirely on crisis: fighting enemies, surviving near-death experiences, rescuing one another, or processing massive trauma together. While these experiences can absolutely create closeness, they do not automatically create relational health. In real life, healthy relationships are usually built slowly through consistency. This means:

- Showing up reliably
- Managing conflict respectfully
- Building trust over time
- Supporting one another emotionally
- Navigating ordinary life together

Research on attachment suggests that [secure relationships](#) are characterized less by emotional chaos

and more by predictability, responsiveness, and safety. This is one reason some people feel confused after leaving highly dramatic relationships. Intensity can feel like deep connection even when the relationship itself is unstable. Real love is often quieter than fiction. Less battlefield confession, more “I remembered how you take your coffee.”

Great Sex Is About More Than Physical Perfection

Romantasy books are famous for their spicy scenes often involving impossibly attractive characters with supernatural stamina, flawless bodies, and zero awkward communication. Real human sexuality is... considerably more human.

Research consistently shows that [sexual satisfaction](#) is strongly connected to emotional intimacy, trust, communication, and relationship quality, especially in long-term partnerships. Studies have found that couples in committed relationships often report more satisfying sex over time because they develop emotional safety, knowledge of each other’s preferences, and greater comfort with vulnerability.

In other words, the “best” sex is not necessarily attached to youth, perfection, or novelty — it’s attached to connection. That’s particularly important because media often teaches people to evaluate sexual relationships primarily through physical chemistry or appearance. [But healthy sexuality is deeply relational](#). Feeling emotionally known, respected, safe, desired, and cared for matters enormously.

Also worth mentioning: Real sex often includes awkwardness, communication, laughter, mismatched timing, vulnerability, and imperfection. That may not make it into the fantasy novel, but it turns out those things are part of what make intimacy meaningful in real life.

The Hottest Partners Usually Aren’t the “Monsters”

Romantasy loves the morally gray male lead. An incredibly handsome man and/or mythical being who is also totally emotionally unavailable, dangerous, hyper-possessive, violent toward everyone except the heroine, feared by society, and somehow still totally irresistible.

Fiction allows readers to safely explore danger, power, and emotional intensity. There’s nothing inherently

wrong with enjoying complicated fictional characters. But research on healthy relationships paints a very different picture of what actually makes a strong long-term partner. Studies consistently show that qualities linked to relationship satisfaction include:

- Emotional stability
- Kindness
- Reliability
- Integrity
- Self-control
- Generosity
- Good communication
- Commitment
- Emotional responsiveness

Not:

- Jealousy framed as devotion
- Possessiveness framed as passion
- Aggression framed as protectiveness
- Emotional unavailability framed as mystery

One fascinating [body of research](#) even suggests that people tend to be happiest long-term with partners who are emotionally stable and dependable rather than highly volatile or dramatic. Which honestly makes sense. The guy who burns down kingdoms for you may sound romantic in chapter 42. But the partner who consistently treats you with respect, helps with the dishes, communicates honestly, and creates emotional safety is far more likely to help build a healthy life.

So... Should We Stop Reading Romantasy?

Absolutely not.

Stories help us explore emotion, desire, courage, identity, fear, and hope. Fiction can be meaningful, healing, exciting, and honestly, a whole lot of fun! Reading romantasy does not doom you to unrealistic relationship expectations. The key is engaging thoughtfully.

It's okay to enjoy fantasy while still recognizing:

- Real love usually develops more gradually
- Healthy relationships prioritize [safety](#) and [friendship](#)
- Intensity is not always compatibility
- Attraction can grow intentionally
- Emotional maturity is often sexier than chaos

Fantasy relationships are designed to entertain you. Real relationships are designed to sustain you. And while healthy love may involve fewer dragons and dramatically flared wings, it offers something even better: trust, stability,

connection, and a relationship that can actually last long after the final chapter.