How Spicy is Too Spicy?

READERS ADVISORY IN THE EVER CHANGING WORLD OF ROMANCE

HEAT SCALE CATEGORIES

Sweet • Mild • Medium • Steamy • Scorching

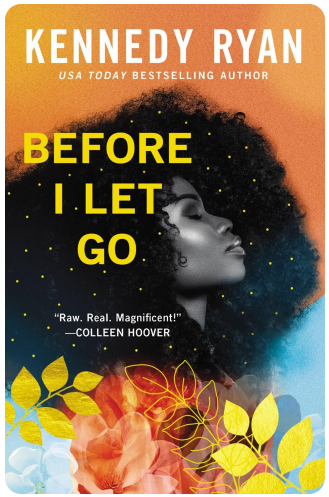



#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
ABBY JIMENEZ
"ONE OF OUR MUST-READ WRITERS." —COSMOPOLITAN
THE NIGHT WE MET
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
EMILY HENRY
Author of BEACH READ
PEOPLE WE MEET ON VACATION
"The perfect getaway." —JODI PICOULT
A NETFLIX FILM
a novel
HEATED RIVALRY
"The book that got me into hockey romance."
New York Times Bestselling Author
RACHEL REID
"Contemporary romance's unicorn: the elusive marriage of deeply brainy and delightfully escapist." —New York Times bestselling author CHRISTINA LAUREN
the Love Hypothesis
New York Times Bestseller
A Novel
Now with BONUS CHAPTER!
ALI HAZELWOOD
THE NEW HAVEN SERIES
Restore Me
J.L. SEEGARS
Netflix Book Club
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
JULIA QUINN
BRIDGERTON
shondaland NETFLIX
THE VISCOUNT WHO LOVED ME
ANTHONY'S STORY
Mile High
LIZ TOMFORDE
"This book contains a hero to die for."
—#1 New York Times bestselling author Tessa Bailey
MY CONTRACT IS FOR TWO MONTHS... BUT MY HEART SAYS THIS IS FOREVER.
HEART LESS
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
ELSIE SILVER

Essential Elements of Romance

GENRE CRITERIA & READERS' ADVISORY DISTINCTIONS

ROMANCE



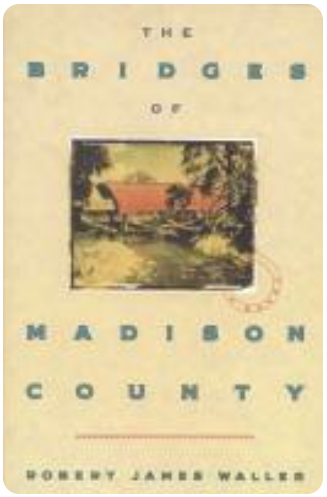
Example Title:
Before I Let Go
by Kennedy Ryan

CORE REQUIREMENT
Central focus is the love story and emotional relationship development.

Key Genre Indicators:

- **Mandatory HEA / HFN:** Must have a Happy Ever After or Happy For Now ending.
- **Protagonist Focus:** Romantic arc drives all main character growth.

ROMANTIC FICTION



Example Title:
The Bridges of Madison County
by Robert James Waller

GENRE MISCONCEPTION
Classified as Romantic Fiction / Women's Fiction rather than Romance genre.

Why It Differs:

- **Tragic / Bittersweet:** Lacks guaranteed happy outcome or long-term union.
- **Subplot Relationship:** Romance serves external drama, life choices, or grief.







JOYCE SARICKS ROMANCE GENRE BENCHMARKS

Key characteristics defining narrative structure and reader experience in romance fiction

Emotional Tone

Evocative emotional tone designed to deeply engage and connect with the reader.

Central Conflict

Misunderstanding or outside circumstances continuously keep the main couple apart.

Pacing & Readability

Fast-paced narrative flow that can be stopped and started easily across reading sessions.

Descriptive Language

Rich use of sensory details and descriptive adjectives that elevate mood and heighten romantic atmosphere.

Character Dynamics

Easily identifiable character types and clear tropes that build instant rapport and reader engagement.

ROMANCE READERS

Romance readers are unusually consistent buyers. The category is built around four key behaviors:

Repeatable Tropes

FReaders seek out familiar character dynamics and story frameworks that readers actively seek out and return to repeatedly.

High Completion Rates

Books in this genre are finished at exceptionally high rates compared to other fiction categories.

Binge Patterns

Rapid consumption habits lead readers to buy and read multiple titles or entire series in quick succession.

Strong Author Loyalty

Deep reader engagement translates to consistent auto-buys across backlists and new release catalogues.

A Stabilizing Force for Publishers

That combination produces predictable demand. It's one reason publishers often treat romance as a stabilizing force when other genres swing more sharply with trends.

ROMANCE INDUSTRY STATISTICS

Taken from the booketics.com website and includes 2025 statistical information

51M Units

Latest 12-Month Sales

US print romance sales hit 51 million units. YTD sales were up 24% versus the prior year period.

18M → 39M

Print Sales Doubled

Romance print unit sales roughly doubled from 18M in 2020 to 39M in 2023, highlighting the recent boom.

$1.44 Billion

Annual Revenue

Estimated revenue for May 2022 to May 2023, though revenue is cited less consistently than unit sales.

+52.4%

Multi-Year Surge

Posted a 52.4% jump in 2021-2022, +34.6% in H1 2023, and almost +9% overall in 2024.

£69 Million

UK Market Lift

UK romance sales reached £69 million by 2024, reflecting a major mainstream lift for the category.

#1 Growth

Leading Category

Leading growth category in US print books in 2022, reaching nearly 19M units through August 2022.

Of Note: Many articles still quote older claims like romance is 25% of all book sales, but these broad share figures are contested and often lack a clear, consistent measurement basis.

Acquisition Habits of Book Buyers

Across adult fiction more broadly (which romance heavily influences):

+31.2%
Digital Audio

Digital audio jumped 31.2% in 2024, reaching 16.5% of adult fiction sales.

20% Share
Ebooks

Ebooks grew 5.3% and represented 20% of adult fiction sales in 2024.

+10% & +17.8%
Trade & Hardcover

Trade paperbacks rose 10% and hardcovers increased 17.8% in adult fiction.

131M → 21M
Mass-Market Paperback

U.S. mass-market paperback unit sales fell from 131 million in 2004 to 21 million in 2024.

FORMATS

As mass market fades, romance increasingly migrates into:

Trade Paperback

Often priced higher, more "giftable," and bookstore-friendly — "floppy" books are highly desirable.

Ebook Subscriptions

Ebook subscription ecosystems providing seamless digital access across devices.

Audio-First

Audio-first consumption driving rapid growth in listening habits and story engagement.

Dual Consumption

Dual consumption seamlessly integrating content via eyes and ears.

Special Editions

Features artwork on both book jackets and interiors, often with embossed covers. These are currently highly collectible and sprayed edges are even showing up on paperbacks.

Trends Shaping Romance



Video Discovery

Short-form video platforms (BookTok and its successors) serve as the primary engine for content discovery and viral growth.



Format Shifts

Rapid migration away from mass market paperbacks toward trade paperbacks, ebook ecosystems, and digital audio.



Subgenre Cycles

Accelerated rotation of subgenres inside romance, including romantasy, dark romance, and niche contemporary micro-trends.

Takeaway

Romance looks less like a temporary fad and more like a high-velocity consumer category that's fully optimized for modern discovery.

TOP 10 PREFERRED DISCOVERY OPTIONS

How romance buyers discover new authors or titles (ranked from most to least likely)

01 Browsing in a bookstore

02 In person recommendation from people you know

03 Browsing online book sites

04 Best-seller lists

05 From books I've sampled

06 Following favorite authors on social media

07 Book review from Social Media influencers on all platforms

About 59 million print book sales in 2024 could be tied to BookTok-related influencers or content.

08 Library or library staff recommendations

09 From Book Recommendation lists

10 From online retail sites that recommend based on what I've bought/read before.

TROPE TRENDS TO WATCH

2017 Trends

- Romantica
- LGBTQIA
- Bikers
- Military
- Billionaires
- Small Towns
- Stepbrothers
- Scotland
- Dark Romance
- Rock Stars
- Beards and Man Buns



2026 Trends

- Romantasy
- LGBTQIA
- Bikers
- Sports/Hockey
- Afterlife
- Witches
- Paranormals
- Cozy Fantasy
- Dark Romance
- Mafia
- Aliens

MICROTRENDS



She's Got Male

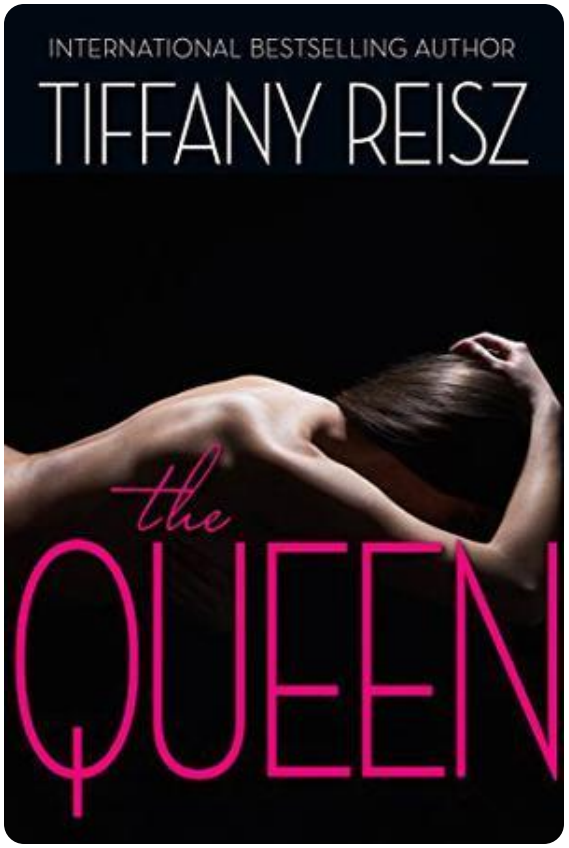
by Sinclair Kelly

Featured Omegaverse Release

Key Tropes & Themes

- **Omegaverse**
- Why Choose
- Acts of Service
- Morally Gray
- Power Imbalance

EROTICA AND ROMANTICA



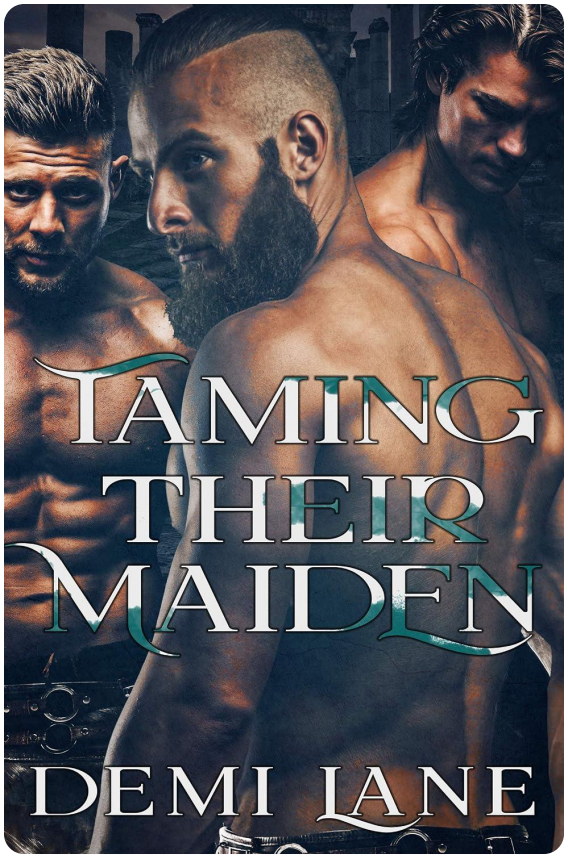
The Queen

by Tiffany Reisz

Featured Authors

- Zane
- Maya Banks
- Sylvia Day
- Lorelei James
- Lauren Dane
- Cherise Sinclair
- Katee Robert
- Roni Loren
- Elle Kennedy
- Tiffany Reisz
- Sierra Simone
- Rina Kent
- L.J. Shen
- Lily Gold
- Callie Hart

EROTICA



Taming Their Maiden
by Demi Lane

Authors to Know

- Nikki Sloan
- Eva Chase
- Sarah Bailey
- Tate James
- Giana Darling
- Penelope Douglas
- Natasha Knight
- J.L. Seegers
- Sophie Lark
- Mia Knight
- Adrian Blue
- Grace Goodwin
- Harley Laroux
- Raven Kennedy
- Jade West
- Jessamine Rue
- Eve Dangerfield

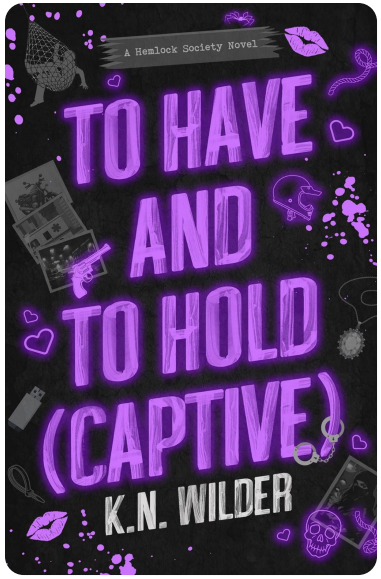
DARK ROMANCE

Dark romance has expanded from niche to mainstream visibility, with growth strong enough to appear in category-level tracking and industry reporting.



This Is Why We Don't Date Serial Killers

by L.M. Gilmore



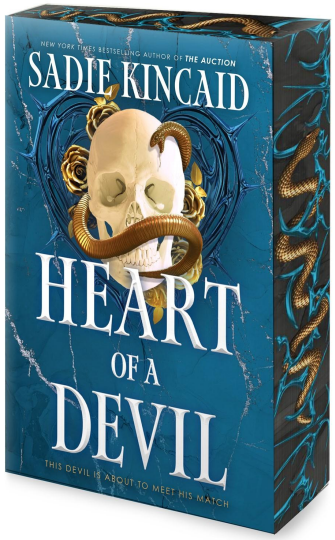
To Have and To Hold (Captive)

by K.N. Wilder



The Haunting of Lady Death

by Maddie Martinez

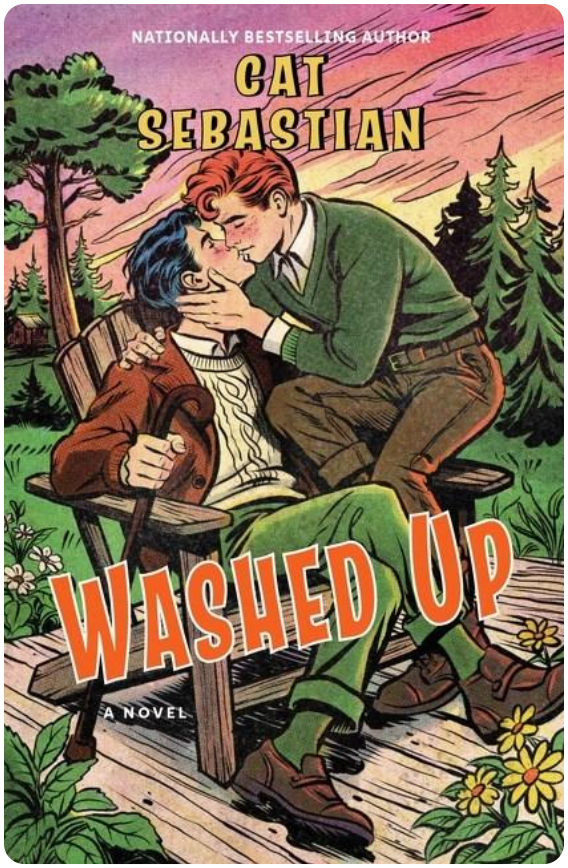


Heart of a Devil

by Sadie Kincaid

LGBTQIA+ ROMANCE

Featured Read & Essential Authors



Washed Up
by Cat Sebastian

Authors of Note

- Cat Sebastian
- Alexis Hall
- Mazey Eddings
- KJ Charles
- Emma R Alban
- Emily Rath
- Sara Raasch
- Sarina Bowen
- Alexandria Bellefleur
- Alison Cochrun
- TJ Alexander
- Ashley Herring Blake

DIVERSE TITLES

Featured Authors & Essential Reads

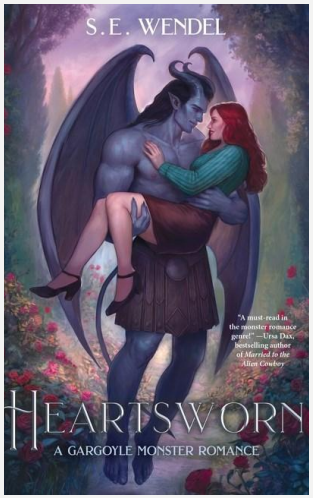


Sunflower Season
by Danica Nava

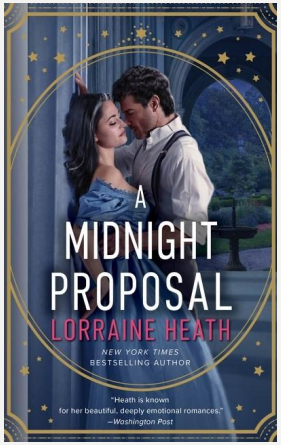
Prominent Authors

- Kennedy Ryan
- Jo Segura
- Lavanya Lakshmi
- Tia Williams
- Britt Middleton
- Alexa Martin
- Naima Simone
- Emily Ohanjanians
- Raquel Vázquez Gilliland
- Talia Hibbert
- Danielle Allen

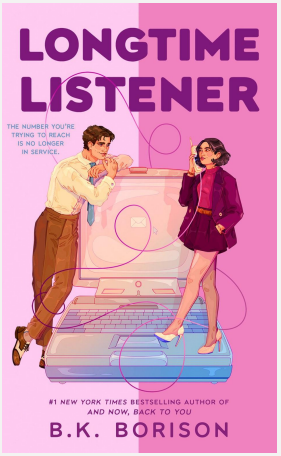
TRENDS THAT HAVE STOOD THE TEST OF TIME



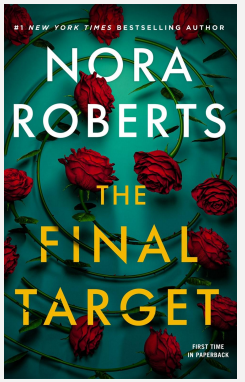
Paranormal



Historical

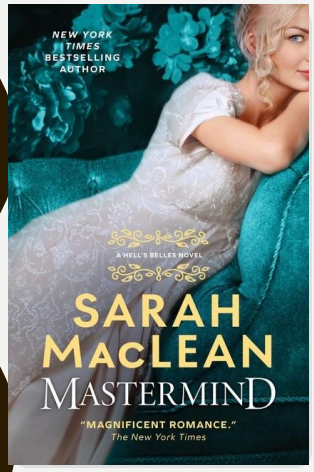


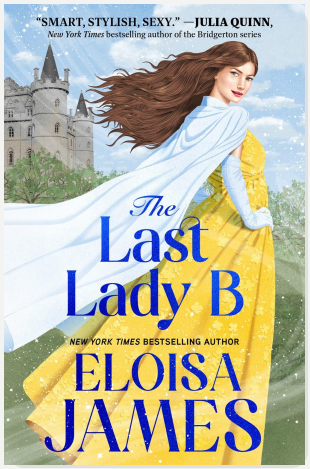
Contemporary

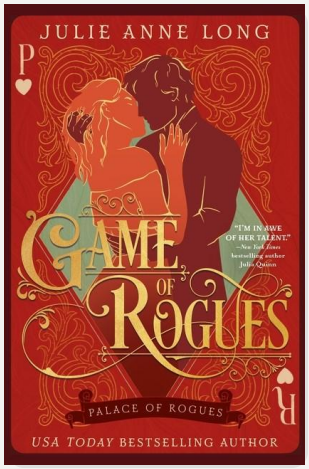


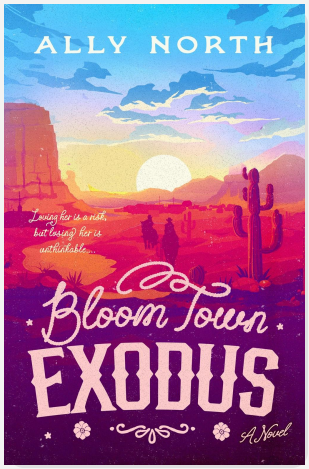
Romantic Suspense

HISTORICALS TODAY



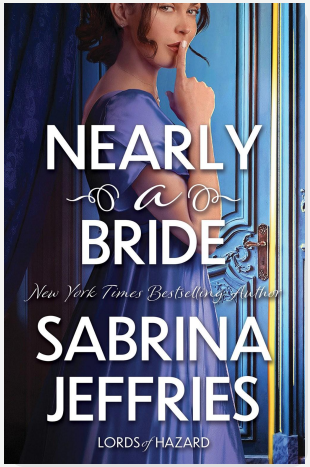


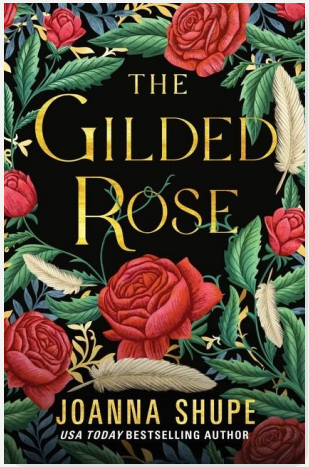




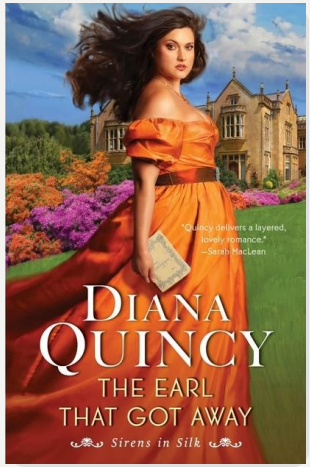








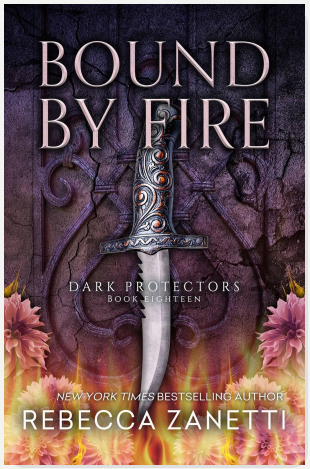


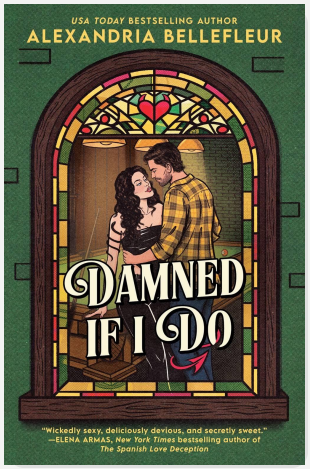


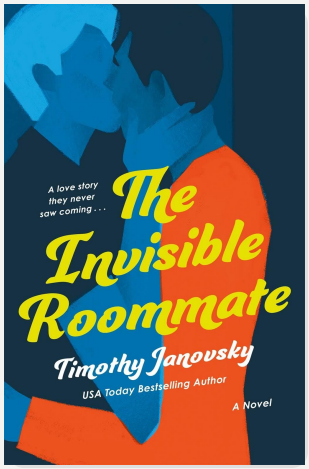
PARANORMAL

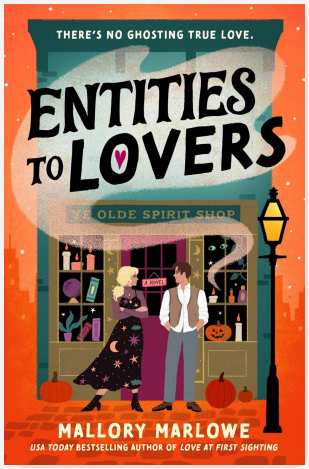
Dragons and Wolves and Witches Oh My!





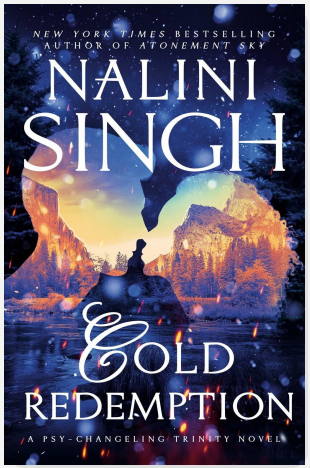


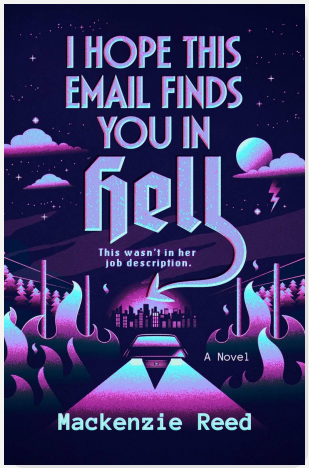






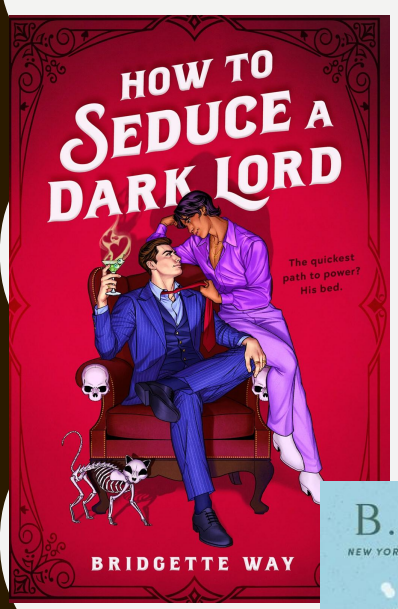






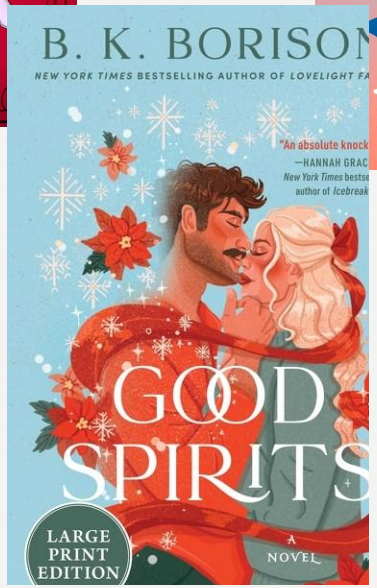


Paranormal: The Afterlife





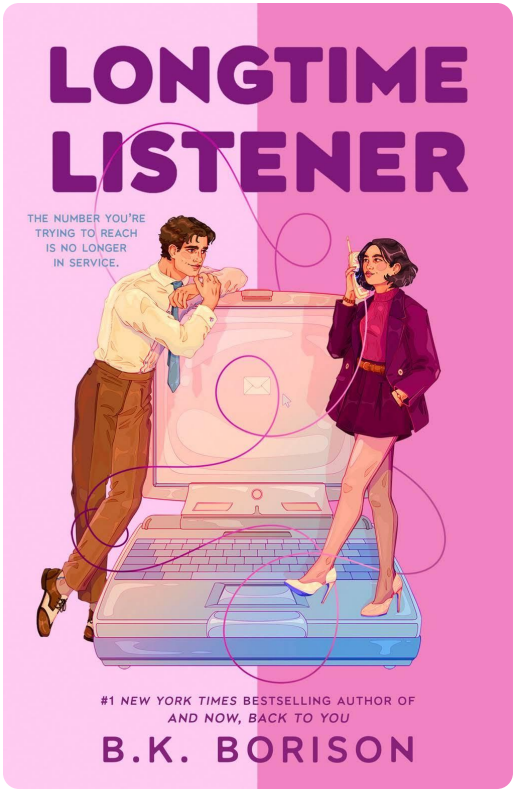






CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS TO WATCH

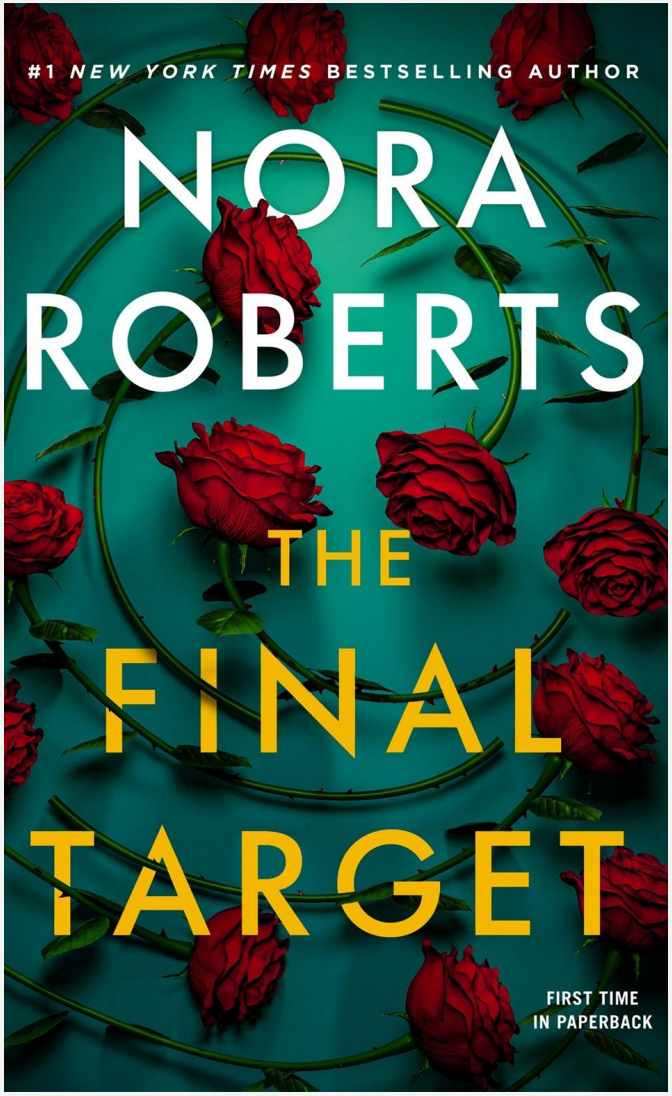
B.K. Borison	Pippa Grant
Emily Henry	Elle Kennedy
Abby Jimenez	Carley Fortune
Ali Hazelwood	Annabel Monaghan
Liz Tomforde	Mia Sosa
Christina Lauren	Lucy Score



FEATURED AUTHOR

B.K. Borison

ROMANTIC SUSPENSE



ROMANTACY

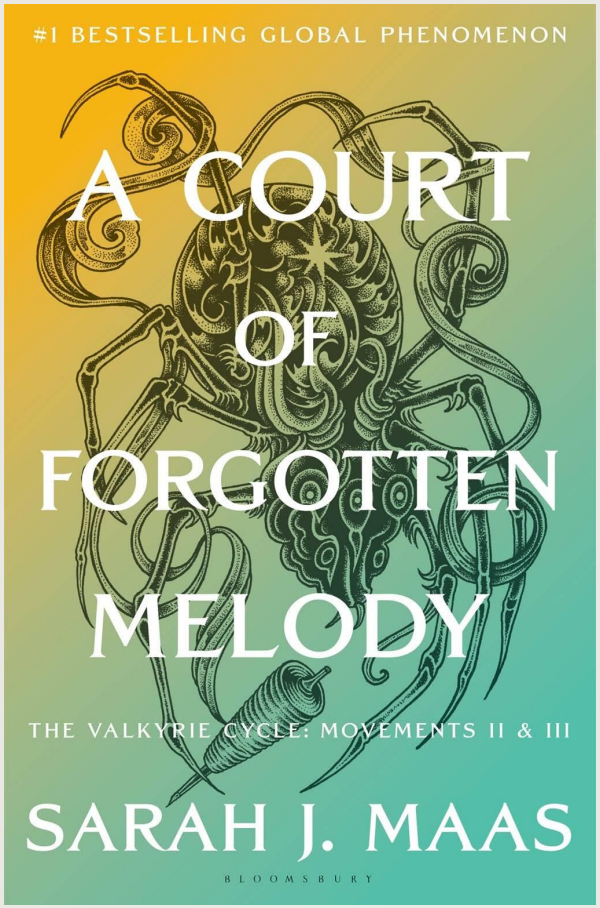
GENRE SPOTLIGHT

DEFINITION

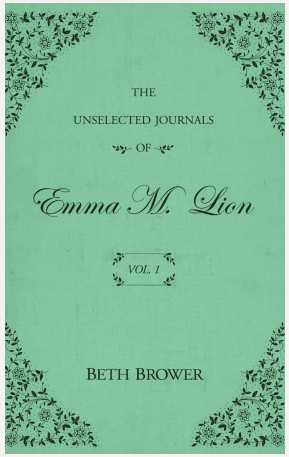
A popular literary subgenre that blends **high-stakes fantasy** and **romance**, where a central love story carries just as much weight and drives the plot as much as the magical world or external conflict. (Wikipedia)

PUBLISHING & SALES IMPACT

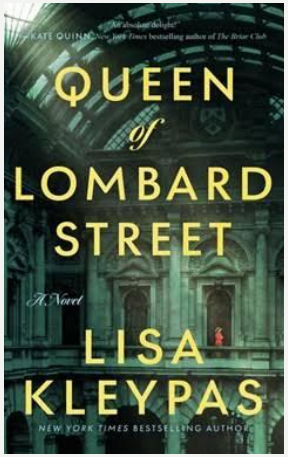
Romantasy (romance + fantasy) has been a major sales engine for adult fiction, pulling new readers into romance-adjacent titles and series reading. (romancingthedata)



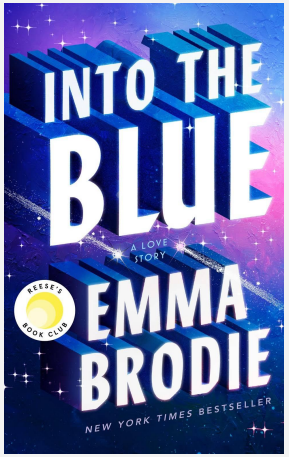
Fiction with Romantic Elements



Beth Brower



Lisa Kleypas



Emma Brodie



Sarah MacLean

READER'S ADVISORY INTERVIEW

For the Romance Reader

CORE MINDSET

- **Feelings, not facts** for this genre
- This genre is **highly subjective**
- This is all about how it makes the reader **feel**

PATRON PREFERENCES

- Discover the **appeal factors** of interest to that reader
- Look for the underlying similarities in favorite author/titles
- Level of **"sexy times"** the patron is comfortable with

RA ADVISORY APPROACH

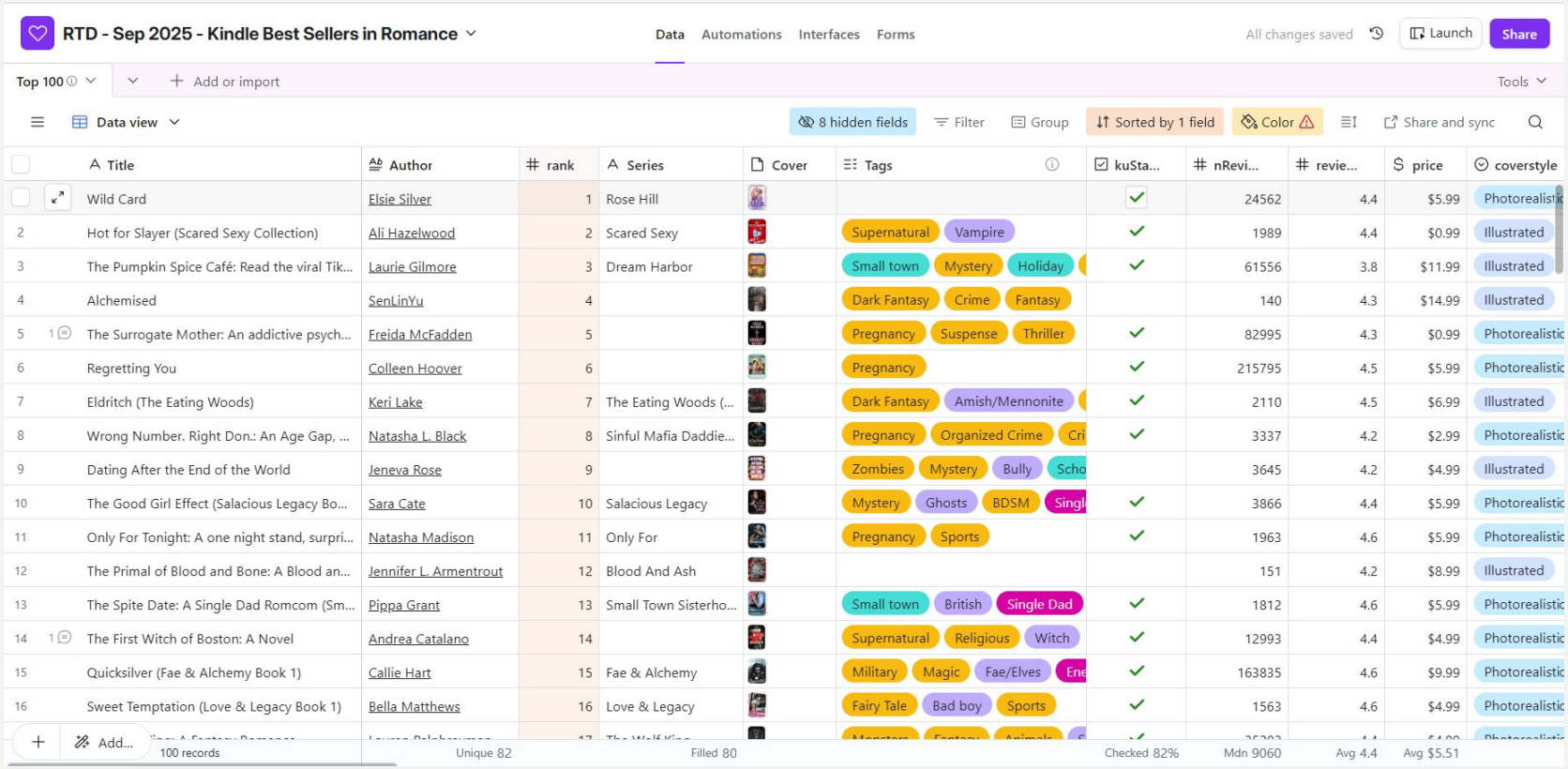
- Accuracy **may or may not** be of importance
- Standard RA tools **may not apply** here

GOLDEN RULE

Remember the golden rule of romance!

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

AMAZON KINDLE BESTSELLERS

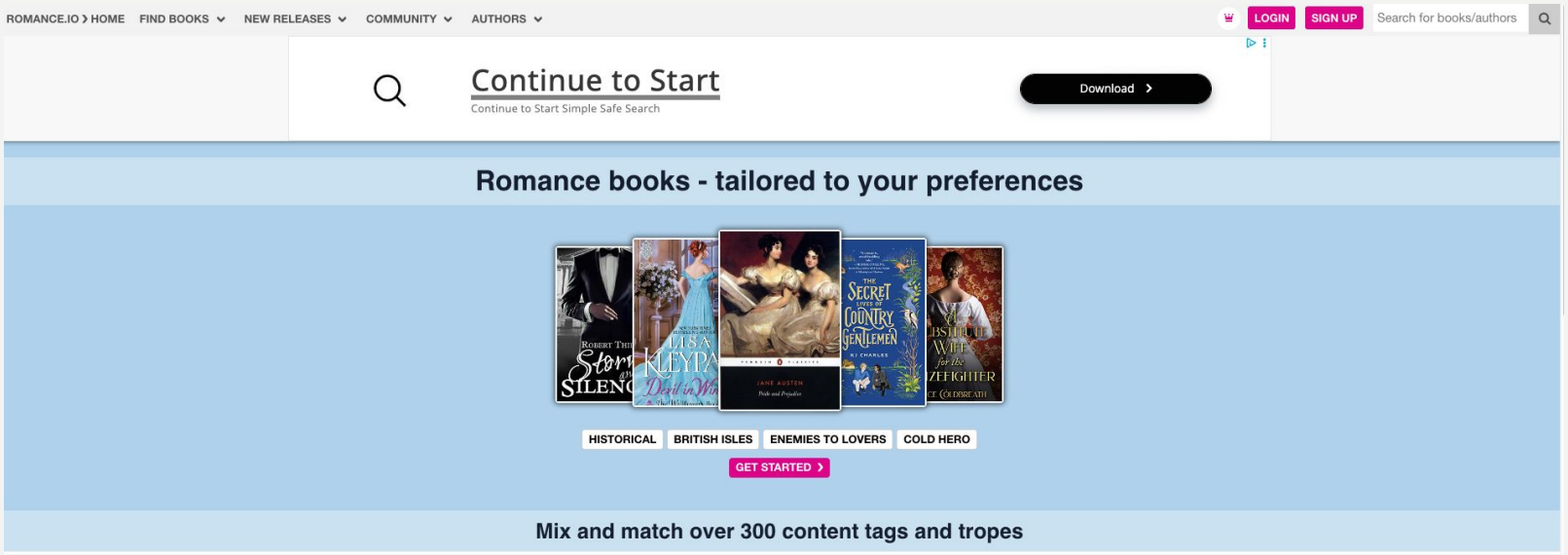


	Title	Author	rank	Series	Cover	Tags	kuSta...	nRevi...	revie...	price	coverstyle
	Wild Card	Elsie Silver	1	Rose Hill			✓	24562	4.4	$5.99	Photorealistic
2	Hot for Slayer (Scared Sexy Collection)	Ali Hazelwood	2	Scared Sexy		Supernatural, Vampire	✓	1989	4.4	$0.99	Illustrated
3	The Pumpkin Spice Café: Read the viral Tik...	Laurie Gilmore	3	Dream Harbor		Small town, Mystery, Holiday	✓	61556	3.8	$11.99	Illustrated
4	Alchemised	SenLinYu	4			Dark Fantasy, Crime, Fantasy		140	4.3	$14.99	Illustrated
5	The Surrogate Mother: An addictive psych...	Freida McFadden	5			Pregnancy, Suspense, Thriller	✓	82995	4.3	$0.99	Photorealistic
6	Regretting You	Colleen Hoover	6			Pregnancy	✓	215795	4.5	$5.99	Photorealistic
7	Eldritch (The Eating Woods)	Keri Lake	7	The Eating Woods (...		Dark Fantasy, Amish/Mennonite	✓	2110	4.5	$6.99	Illustrated
8	Wrong Number. Right Don.: An Age Gap, ...	Natasha L. Black	8	Sinful Mafia Daddie...		Pregnancy, Organized Crime, Cri	✓	3337	4.2	$2.99	Photorealistic
9	Dating After the End of the World	Jeneva Rose	9			Zombies, Mystery, Bully, Scho		3645	4.2	$4.99	Illustrated
10	The Good Girl Effect (Salacious Legacy Bo...	Sara Cate	10	Salacious Legacy		Mystery, Ghosts, BDSM, Singl	✓	3866	4.4	$5.99	Photorealistic
11	Only For Tonight: A one night stand, surpri...	Natasha Madison	11	Only For		Pregnancy, Sports	✓	1963	4.6	$5.99	Photorealistic
12	The Primal of Blood and Bone: A Blood an...	Jennifer L. Armentrout	12	Blood And Ash				151	4.2	$8.99	Illustrated
13	The Spite Date: A Single Dad Romcom (Sm...	Pippa Grant	13	Small Town Sisterho...		Small town, British, Single Dad	✓	1812	4.6	$5.99	Photorealistic
14	The First Witch of Boston: A Novel	Andrea Catalano	14			Supernatural, Religious, Witch	✓	12993	4.4	$4.99	Photorealistic
15	Quicksilver (Fae & Alchemy Book 1)	Callie Hart	15	Fae & Alchemy		Military, Magic, Fae/Elves, Ene	✓	163835	4.6	$9.99	Photorealistic
16	Sweet Temptation (Love & Legacy Book 1)	Bella Matthews	16	Love & Legacy		Fairy Tale, Bad boy, Sports	✓	1563	4.6	$4.99	Photorealistic
	Add...	100 records		Unique 82		Filled 80	Checked 82%	Mdn 9060	Avg 4.4	Avg $5.51	

Referenced from romancingthedata@substack.com

FAN ROMANCE WEBSITES

Romance IO https://www.romance.io/



FAN ROMANCE WEBSITES

SMART BITCHES, TRASHY BOOKS

HTTP://WWW.SMARTBITCHESTRASHYBOOKS.COM



FAN ROMANCE WEBSITES

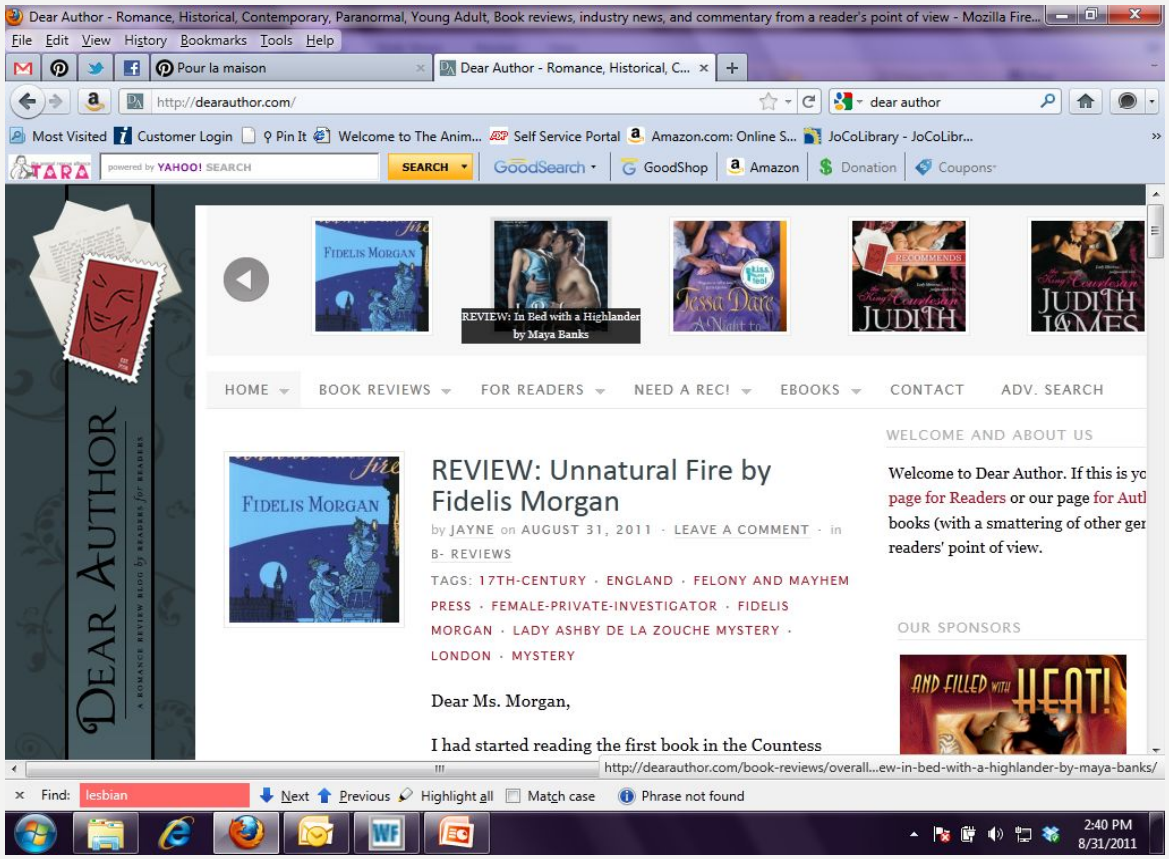
ROMANCE WRITERS OF AMERICA (RWA)

https://www.rwa.org/



FAN ROMANCE WEBSITES

DEAR AUTHOR - HTTP://DEARAUTHOR.COM/



Fan Romance Podcasts

BookRiot: When In Romance
https://bookriot.com/listen/shows/when-in-romance/

Fated Mates https://fatedmates.net/

Heaving Bosoms https://www.heavingbosoms.com/

Shelf Love https://shelflovepodcast.com/

Learning the Tropes https://learningthetropes.podbean.com/

Not Your Mom's Romance Book Club
https://www.buzzsprout.com/113419

WHAT ELSE ROMANCE READERS BUY

Top Cross-Read Genres

1. Romantacy
2. Mystery
3. General Fiction
4. Cooking / Food Books
5. Young Adult
6. Erotic Fiction
7. Fantasy



Demographic Split

When broken down by age:

Older Readers

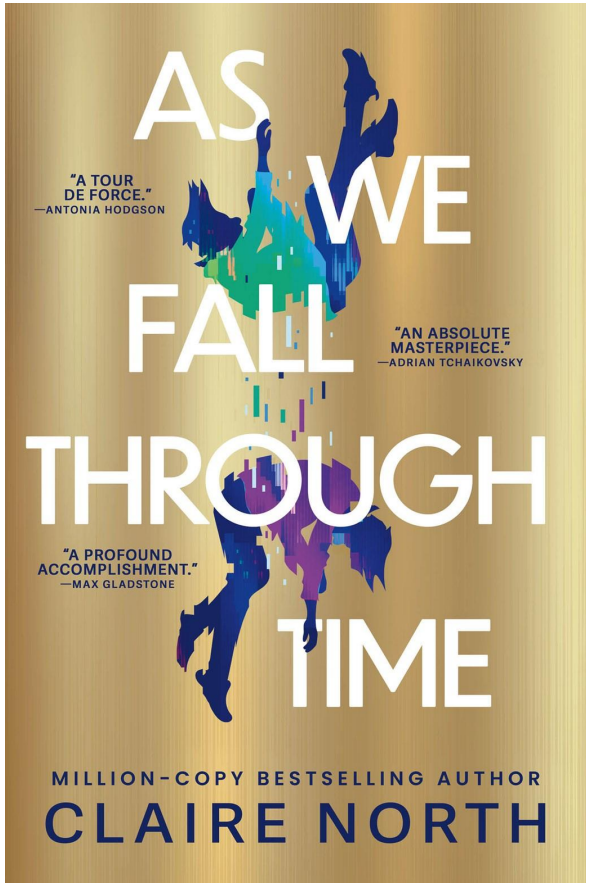
Predominantly buy **mysteries**.

Younger Readers

Favor **Young Adult (YA), Romantacy,** & **Erotic Fiction**.

RWA Website accessed 9/21/2016

GENERAL FICTION



GENRE SPOTLIGHT

Historical Authors

Philippa Gregory and Lauren Willig

POPULAR READS

Mysteries with Romantic Elements

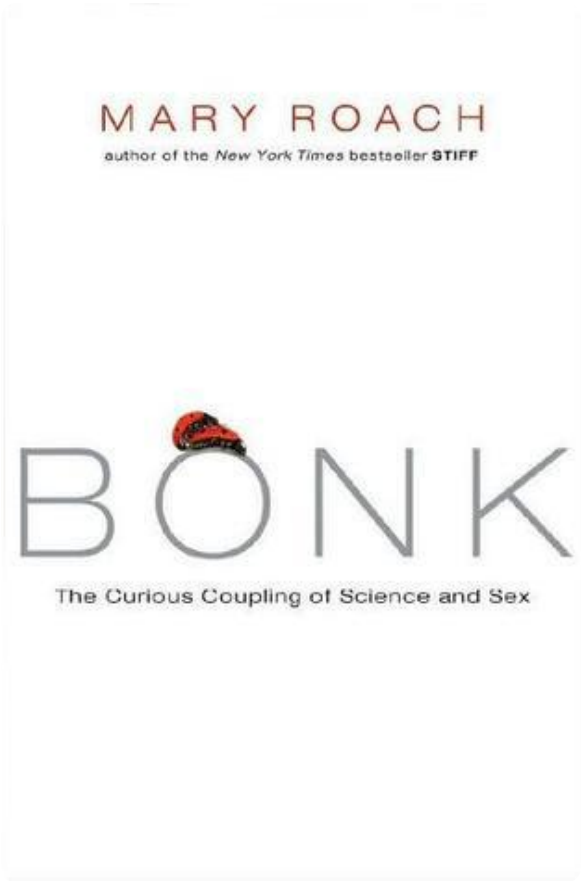
Stephanie Plum series by Janet Evanovich

ATMOSPHERIC

Gothic Horror

The Haunting of Maddy Clare by Simone St James

NONFICTION



SCIENCE

Bonk

The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex by Mary Roach

MEMOIR

The Pioneer Woman

Black Heels to Tractor Wheels by Ree Drummond

LIFESTYLE & GUIDANCE

Dear Jane Austen

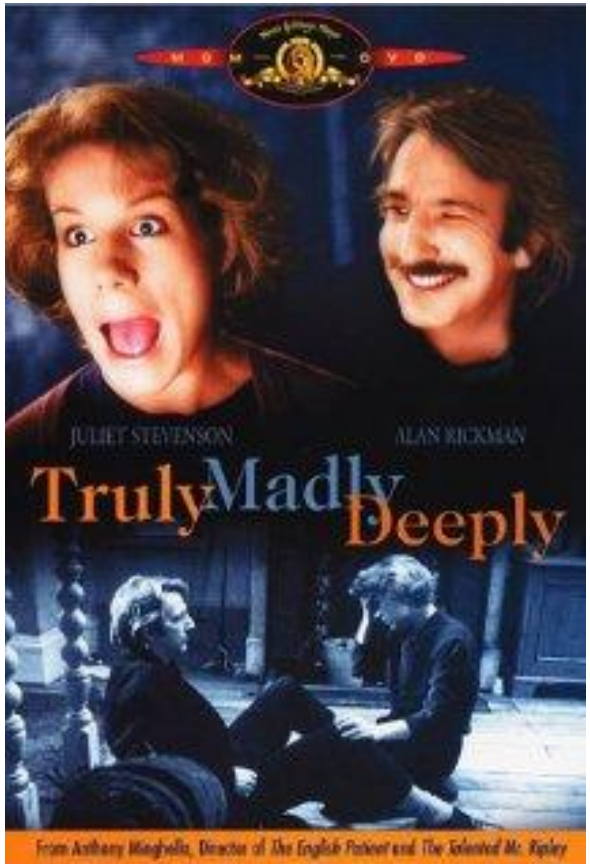
A Heroine's Guide to Life and Love by Patrice Hannon

BIOGRAPHY & STYLE

Beau Brummell

The Ultimate Man of Style by Ian Kelly

MOVIES



MODERN & UPCOMING

Contemporary Romances

People We Meet on Vacation • Reminders of Him • The Love Hypothesis

ALL-TIME FAVORITES

Classics & Magic

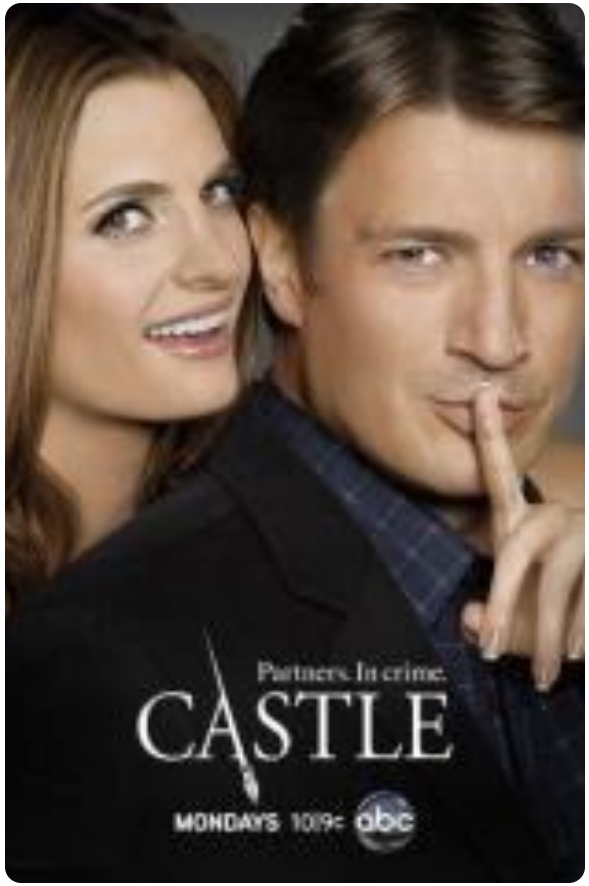
The Notebook • Pride & Prejudice • Practical Magic II

DRAMA & ADVENTURE

Heartfelt & Epic Stories

Up • Romancing the Stone • Hamnet

TELEVISION SHOWS



DRAMA

Acclaimed Series

Like Water for Chocolate • One Day • Outlander • The Bridgertons

ROMANCE & COMEDY

Binge-Worthy Favorites

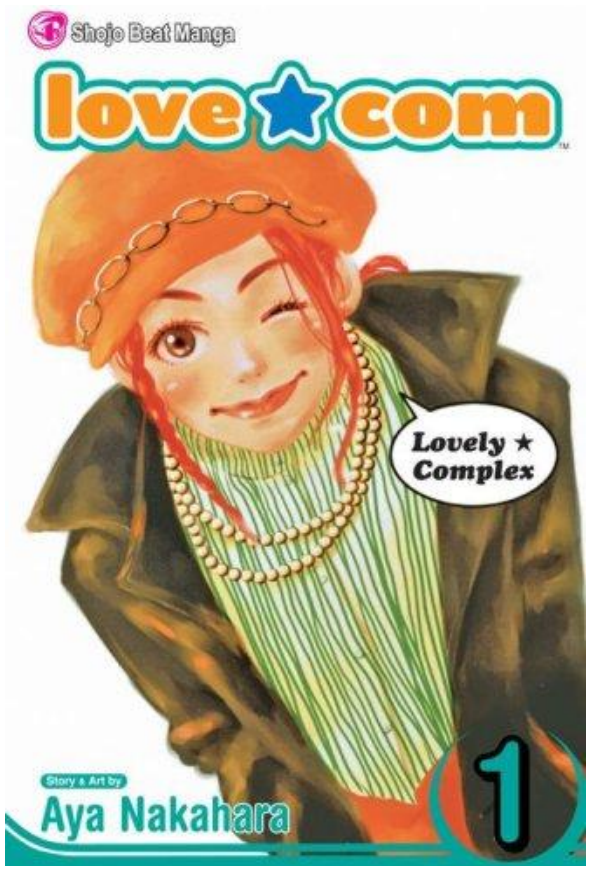
Nobody Wants This • Heartstopper • Off Campus • Emily in Paris

FAN FAVORITES & UPCOMING

Must-Watch Stories

Take Charge of My Heart • Heated Rivalry

GRAPHIC NOVELS



ROMANCE & COMEDY

Contemporary Manga

Incurable Case of Love by Maki Enjoji • Fragrant Flower Blooms with Dignity by Saka Mikami • Firefly Wedding by Oreco Tachibana

FANTASY & ADAPTATIONS

Epic & Literary Stories

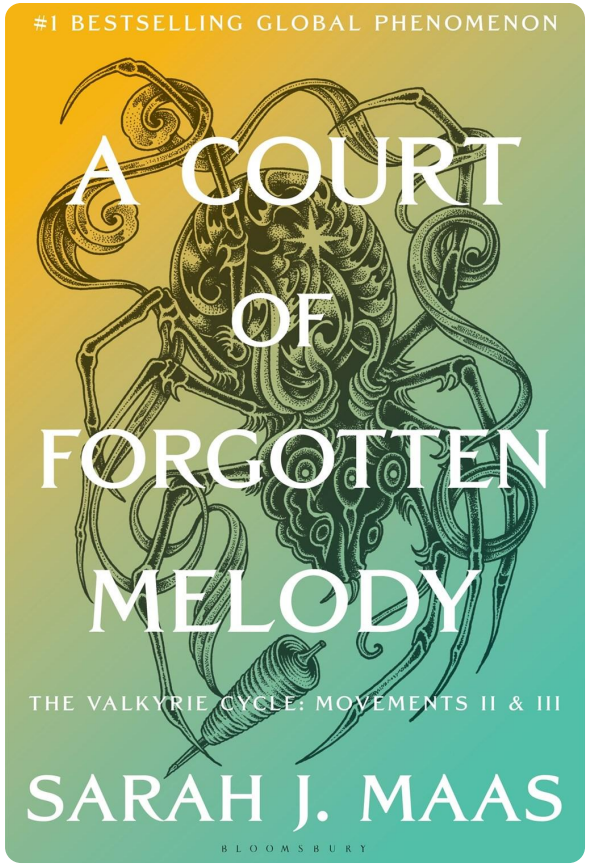
Heavens Official Blessing by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu • Dragonborn by Jade Lee • Manga Classics: Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austin

HISTORICAL & DRAMA

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A Bride's Story by Kaoru Mori

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