

You're listening to Imaginary Worlds, a show about how we create them and why we suspend our disbelief. I'm Eric Molinsky.

When I walk home, at the end of the day, I pass by a bookstore in my neighborhood called The Ripped Bodice. It's a romance bookstore, and sometimes there are lines around the block as people are waiting for author signings or other events. I stopped by recently to talk with the manager, Katherine Zofrea.

Hi, I'm Eric.

Hi, I'm Katherine. So nice to meet you! How's it going?

Good, good.

I asked Katherine to bring me to the section on Fantasy Romance. It's a big section. They labeled it fantasy and paranormal, but the term that is most widely used, but romantasy.

KATHERINE: I mean definitely the big seller is A Court Of Thorns And Roses. I'm sure you will hear that one come up time and time again. Uh, looking at a couple different ones, you have Fourth Wing, that's another one that is very popular by Rebecca Yarros.

Oh, could you also describe them like what is, what is Fourth Wing?

KATHERINE: So, Fourth Wing is, is about a girl named Violet who goes to a basically dragon riding college. But basically, she's like learning some different things about the society that she lives in that maybe she didn't really know about before, all while learning to ride dragons, yeah.

Cool. So what are some other ones then?

KATHERINE: Um, some other ones would definitely be, I would say a really popular one is actually a really fun title. It's called That Time I Got Drunk and Saved A Demon by Kimberly Lemming. It's a really fun, I describe it as like a rom-com type fantasy romance. So it's very fun, very funny. So that one is definitely a popular one for sure.

Romantasy is extremely popular. Half of the bestselling books in any genre this year are romantasy novels. And the author that you'll hear people mention a lot is Sarah J. Maas. She wrote A Court of Thorns and Roses among many other books. And so far, she's the bestselling author of 2024 -- not just the best selling fantasy author. She's the bestselling author overall.

Here is the actress Tanya Rich, reading from A Court of Thorns and Roses. The main character has been transported to the Faye realm, a place that she spent her whole life being afraid of without really knowing what was there.

Everything about the stranger radiated sensual grace and ease. High Fae, no doubt. His short black hair gleamed like a raven's feathers, offsetting his pale skin and blue eyes so deep they were violet, even in the firelight. They twinkled with amusement as he beheld me.

For a moment, we said nothing. A half smile played on his lips. "What's a mortal woman doing here on Fire Night?" His voice was a lover's purr that sent shivers through me, caressing every muscle and bone and nerve.

I took a step back. "My friends brought me."

The drumming was increasing in tempo, building to a climax I didn't understand. It had been so long since I'd seen a bare face that looked even vaguely human. His clothes — all black, all finely made — were cut close enough to his body that I could see how magnificent he was. As if he'd been molded from the night itself.

"And who are your friends?" He was still smiling at me — a predator sizing up prey.

"Two ladies," I lied again.

"Their names?" He prowled closer, slipping his hands into his pockets. I retreated a little more and kept my mouth shut. Had I just traded three monsters for something far worse?

When it became apparent I wouldn't answer, he chuckled. "You're welcome," he said. "For saving you."

I bristled at his arrogance but retreated another step. I was terrified of him, but I wasn't about to let him know.

Kayleigh Donaldson is a cultural critic who has been covering this phenomenon.

KAYLEIGH: I think what makes romantasy is to see how incredibly quickly it became commodified and how very quickly the chasing of the trend became. We went from suddenly, oh, there's this writer called Sarah J Mass who was rising when I was a blogger, to suddenly every book wants to be Sarah J Mass.

Bloomsbury Publishing used the term romantasy to market Sarah J Maas's books. They didn't invent the word, but they popularized it. What really made her work take off were the book Influencers on social media,, otherwise known as BookTok, BookTube and Bookstagram.

Not every writer likes the term romantasy, partially because it's so trendy. Some of them prefer to describe their work as fantasy romance. That way you know it's not just a romance novel. With the fantasy backdrop, you're going to get a lot of the world building that you'd expect in a fantasy novel, but structurally, it is still a romance novel.

KAYLEIGH: The basic definition of a romance novel is it has to have a love story in it, and it has to have a happy ending. And I think with what is determined as romantasy, there is a, a thorough effort to keep a balance kind of, if not 50/50 then relatively even between a romance and a fantasy. Often when people think of classic fantasy, the love story is usually a, a subplot or it's like a, a reward for the, for the hero. It's not really the driving emotional or thematic stake of the story. Whereas to compare it to something like Sarah J. Maas's books, which are all about the relationship, I would argue far more than the world building or any of the kind of narrative heft. Same with something like Rebecca Yarros' Imperium series, which is all about a school for people training to be dragon riders. So much of that is about not even just necessarily the romance, but the sex, the sexual tension. I think that's another thing that is really driving the current romantasy trend is there is a really big focus on spice to, to use the kind of euphemistic term.

In fact, some of Sarah J. Maas's fans have jokingly referred to her work as fairy smut. Katherine Zofrea at The Ripped Bodice says some authors will market their books based on the level of spice.

KATHERINE: Yeah, yeah, people definitely use that.

Does that play out differently with fantasy romance when you have a spicy scene in one of them is a vampire or a werewolf or a zombie <laugh>? Like, does this, does it play out differently in particularly interesting ways?

KATHERINE: It can, um, <laugh> especially in terms of like werewolves or vampires, they may have um, some different ways to express that. There's a really great book called Bride by Ali Hazelwood. She both does fantasy as well as contemporary romances and that one is about a werewolf and a vampire. So a lot of those things, a lot of the anatomy tends to come into play, which can be really fun.

That book is about an arranged marriage to broker the peace between warring vampires and werewolves.

READING: This war of ours, the one between the Vampyres and the Weres, began several centuries ago with brutal escalations of violence, culminated amid flowing torrents of varicolored blood, and ended in a whimper of buttercream cake, on the day I met my husband for the first time.

Which, as it happens, was also the day of our wedding.

I did try to arrange a meeting. Suggested to my people to suggest to his people that we could grab lunch the week before the ceremony. Coffee the previous day. A glass of tap water the morning of -- anything to avoid a "How do you do?" in front of the officiant.

"He is an Alpha, Miss Lark. Too busy to meet."

"Busy with...?"

"His pack, Miss Lark."

I pictured him in a home gym, tirelessly working on his abs, and shrugged.

Ten days have passed, and I have yet to meet my groom. Instead, I've become a project — one that requires a concerted effort from an interdisciplinary crew to look weddable. A facialist smacks my cheeks with relish. A makeup expert paints a different face on top of mine, something interesting and sophisticated and zygomatic.

"This is art," I tell him, studying the contouring in the mirror. "You should be a Guggenheim fellow."

"I know. And I'm not done," he reprimands, before dipping his thumb in a pot of dark green stain and swiping it over the inside of my wrists. The base of my throat on both sides. My nape.

"What's this?"

"Just a bit of color."

"What for?"

A snort. "I pulled strings and researched Were customs. Your husband will like it."

Another way romantasy novels are marketed is based on the tropes. Enemies to lovers is a popular one. Another one is grumpy/sunshine, where maybe a plucky heroine will far for a dark and brooding man. There's actually a wide variety of tropes and subgenres, but there's one thing every romantasy book has to have -- a happily ever after ending. But the books don't feel formulaic.

KAYLEIGH: Formula gets a lot of hassle from a lot of critics, a lot of, even a lot of readers. They don't like the predictability of that, but I think they confuse, uh, a trope for laziness. The idea, well, there's no tension in a romance because you know what's going to happen. No, you can do plenty of things in between those other 300 pages before you get to the ending.

You can say the same thing about superhero movies. It's not about whether the hero can defeat the villain. What's interesting is how you play with the formula and defy expectations.

Now I've tried reading romantasy novels. They're well written. I'll get hooked, but after a while, I realized this genre isn't for me. But that's fine. I'm actually very happy that people are really into them. In fact, when something is popular in a sci-fi fantasy realm, and I don't quite get it, that only makes me more curious. Who is excited about this and why? And in this case, those questions overlap with larger issues like gender, sexuality, and given the fact that romantasy is just dominating the charts of sci-fi fantasy novels, I wanted to figure out, is this a trend? Is this a publishing bubble that's gonna burst or is it a game changer for fantasy as a whole?

BREAK

The first thing I wanted to figure out is where did this come from? And why did it take off in the last few years?

A lot of people have pointed to the pandemic. I did an episode last year about how Gothic novels were making a comeback. That was because of the pandemic. The sense of isolation was so spooky. People felt like they were haunting their own homes. Romance is the other half of the equation, the yearning to connect.

Marcela di Blasi is a professor at Dartmouth, and her interest in romantasy began during the pandemic.

MARCELA: I was pregnant with my second child. I had a toddler who was at home because we were in lockdown and daycare was closed. And I am a tenure track professor trying to put together a book project. And the idea of doing academic work in those conditions, <laugh> was just like laughable, like completely laughable. And so I found myself reading really widely in a way that I hadn't really since maybe grad school.

That's when she discovered fantasy romance novels. In fact, she ditched the academic book she was working on to write a different academic book about romantasy. Her book is called Love and Other Words.

MARCELA: And I think that I had underestimated the value of accessibility, and I'd also underestimated the importance of pleasure and escape and love, right? Because in the pandemic also people were sick and elders were dying, and we didn't know what the future held. There was incredible uncertainty. And I think in the midst of all that uncertainty, romance, fantasy and romantasy were all really comforting, right? Because in fantasy, you know what good is, you know what evil is and you know that good is going to win. With romance, you know, there's going to be a happily ever after with romantasy, you get both <laugh>.

Marcella says, you can draw a line from romantasy back to Gothic novels of the 19th century and even further back to classic tales from thousands of years ago. But she says it's not a coincidence that a lot of romantasy writers are Millennials. The pop culture they grew up on was full of paranormal romance.

MARCELA: The fact that we're also the Harry Potter generation is significant, right? So we were by and large readers of romantasy now were part of the Disney Renaissance, right, with The Little Mermaid and Beauty and The Beast. But like magic has been an important touchstone in a lot of our cultural products, <laugh>. And so I don't think it's surprising that that leads up through like Buffy and Twilight and arrives at romantasy really.

CL Polk writes fantasy romances among other books. They think romantasy also came out of the YA boom of the mid-aughts and twenty teens. That's why a lot of Gen Zers are buying these books.

CL: YA books very often have a character who is contending with a romantasy attraction while they are going on with whatever it is that they're happening in the, in the book like The Hunger Games is pretty, is pretty famously like this trilogy, this, this epic trilogy about this terrible dystopia and these awful things happening. But Katniss has

boy trouble while it's all happening and that's just normal. And all of these YA readers in the teens are older now. They're adults now. And when they went to say adult fantasy and they weren't getting what they expected, what they had been taught to expect, what they actually genuinely enjoyed, it kind of turned them off of it. But fantasy romance gives them what they were reading in YA.

But CL says it was ultimately romance fans who pushed it over the edge.

CL: It is the romance reader's enthusiasm and their eagerness to keep reading because they are voracious, and they are fast. What they came to when they went into fantasy and science fiction places were a lot of people who were very eager to tell them how romance plots were trash and unnecessary and terrible and eww, girl cooties, let's just get down to it. And so they just kind of went, okay, fine then and they left. And the science fiction and fantasy crowd didn't even really notice that they were gone. And, and it's kind of sad to me. I have often felt like I had to kind of hold my tongue around people who were like, but then it got into the kissy bits and, and it's just kind of like, come on, like can't people have a romance? Like is that not allowed?

Thinking back five or ten years ago, the pop culture zeitgeist of fantasy and sci-fi was dominated by Game of Thrones and Marvel. If there was romance in these superhero films, it was secondary. In the grimdark sword and sorcery worlds, it was sometimes abusive or tragic.

Fantasy fans who wanted to see more romance and healthier relationships were making that happen with fanfiction. In 2017, I did an episode about the popularity of fanfiction. And CL says fanfiction was the final factor in explaining why romantasy eventually took off. CL was writing fan fiction before they began writing fantasy romance novels.

CL: And what I discovered was that when I finally got up the gumption to write something that was longer than 10,000 words, I kind of chafed against some of the restrictions of fanfiction because a lot of people say fanfiction is great because you can do whatever you want. And that's true, but it's not true. You can explore all kinds of things in fanfiction, but fan fiction is not necessarily overly concerned with say a story that reads like a novel and conforms to a novel's expectations. And they are also, uh, very concerned with making sure that the, the characters that you are writing about in your fanfiction ring true to the canon. So I stopped writing fanfiction and started writing originals because I knew that what I wanted my characters to do were not necessarily what readers would accept from a fanfiction of the characters that started me thinking about that.

Kayleigh Donaldson says there's also a perception among fans of traditional fantasy genres that if you have too much romance, the stakes will go down as if the need to save the world will take a backseat to if these characters are going to kiss. But Kayleigh says that is a misunderstanding of how romantasy works. They're called page turners for a reason.

KAYLEIGH: Many years ago there was this survey done about the best onscreen kisses in film and the number, the top three were like Scarlet and Rhett in *Gone with the Wind*. It was the kiss on the beach in *From Here to Eternity*, and it was Rick and Elsa kissing as France falls.

In *Casablanca*.

ILSA: Kiss me, like it's the last time.

KAYLEIGH: And they're all tied together by this, you know, terrible danger and life changing events happening in the background, you know, the, it's war, it's destruction. I think there is an element of that in romantasy as well. You know, um, oh, we have to save the world, we have to stop society from crumbling. We have to ride this dragon off into the sunset and make sure war ends. But also there is an undeniable tension between us and we have to explore that. You know, the raised stakes is very much the name of the game for a lot of this.

In fact, romantasy writers have said the way to make a sex scene really spicy isn't as much about what happens during the scene. It's about building as much tension as you can before that passion explodes, and with fantasy, you can raise the stakes to otherworldly levels.

BREAK

From what everybody has told me, the majority of people who write and read romantasy are women, and the main characters are mostly female, and that's often spoken about as a positive thing. But one criticism, which everybody I spoke with agrees with, is that the characters are all still predominantly white, hetero, and cisgender. CL Polk was one of the early writers who were breaking new ground with their 2018 novel *Witchmark*.

CL: My first book, *Witchmark*, was always on lists for queer fantasy. Always, always, always. Because there weren't that many to choose from. Now there are so many you

get to curate, you can be very specific, you can drill down into subgenre and situation and all of that. There is a very healthy variety of these books. Is it ever going to be like enough? No. That's why we got to keep writing them. That's part of the fun.

Witchmark takes place in a fantasy world that resembles early 20th century England. The main character is trying to keep his magical abilities a secret until he finds himself investigating a murder. Here's the actress Tanya Rich reading a scene where the character meets a handsome stranger.

"You want me to get to the point." Mr. Hunter leaned on my filing cabinet. "I need to know why magic is dying."

I stilled. Magic dying? It wasn't. He was wrong—

Blast! He'd shocked me with his pronouncement. I scrambled to make up for it.

"I see," I said. "How am I supposed to know the answer?"

"I want you to help me find it. You and Nick Elliot are the only witches I've met in Aeland. Mr. Elliot is dead. But here you are, alive and free."

Mr. Hunter wanted to help, but he knew too much about me already, too many of my secrets. I had no choice but to deny it. "You want my help in finding out who poisoned Nick Elliot, and knowing will lead you to — no, it's insane. I can't help you."

"You can, Sir Christopher. And I can help you."

My breath caught in my throat. This was worse than blackmail.

I had been found.

Run, I told my useless legs. Run!

"You're afraid," he said. "Don't be. I'm in as much danger as you." Mr. Hunter raised one hand clenched in a fist. The edges of his fingers glowed red, and he opened his hand to show me a tiny light. The core of it glowed brighter than a candle, brighter than gas lamps, nearly as bright as aether.

If he told the truth, it could only mean two things: He was a lowborn witch in fine clothing, or he was a runaway mage like me. He offered me this show of magic as a token of trust. He could report me, but I could report him back.

CL: I just basically went on the assumption that of course this man gets to have a romance with a man that he likes. Like why wouldn't he? And then if anybody asked me, I would say, well why wouldn't he? And then I would make direct eye contact with him until they went away. <laugh> like you have to kind of assume like if you're writing a story about people who are falling in love in same-sex relationships in our world up until relatively recently, there's a lot of baggage attached to that, and I didn't want it in my book. So I just basically said, you know, a lot of people have same sex romances, but they don't marry because of this other thing that's happening in the book.

You know, that's interesting though. I was just thinking as you were talking about like I think that's probably what's so liberating about writing in a fantasy romance with a queer relationship. Basically all the baggage, the cultural, political, historical baggage, you're like, well this is another world, and this is just a an accepted fact and this is just life in this other world. And that must be kind of liberating as a writer.

CL: Yeah, you, you have a scale because then you can say like, there's absolutely no problem with this whatsoever. Why would there be? Or you can slide it and make it a little bit heavier if this particular piece of baggage is something that you really want to talk about thematically in your story you have full freedom of choice.

One of the things I find so interesting about romantasy is that the writers came to it from so many different places. J.D. Evans writes fantasy romance novels that take place in a mythical past. Her previous career was in the military.

JENN: I kind of bounced around between Doha and Qatar and um, Jordan and Beirut, Lebanon. And I was at the embassy in Beirut for a while.

That inspired the fictional kingdom in her series of books, *Mages of the Wheel*.

JENN: Lebanon itself has this incredible, fascinating history because it's been in the middle of all of the empires, right? So it's just an incredible place and it just captured my imagination.

The main character in the first book, *Reign & Ruin*, is a princess with political ambitions in a palace of intrigue and magic. And then she meets a handsome prince.

She had seen men without their caftans, in the fields, at the docks. But this was wholly different. He was different. A warrior, attested to by the scars on his golden skin. Naime wondered at them, a thin one across his chest, a thicker, short line over his ribs, and a long, curved one that disappeared into his salvar. The entire expanse of her skin felt as if it were on fire.

“Do you have clothes?” Naime said, appalled that she’d been so preoccupied ogling him that she hadn’t considered the fact she was lurking in an archway with a half-naked man.

“I am wearing clothes,” he said.

“More clothes.” Naime tried not to sound desperate, but the weak timbre of her voice gave her away.

“I do.”

“In the future, wear them. And refrain from such inappropriate displays.” Naime managed to find some composure once she wasn’t looking at him.

“What exactly do you consider an inappropriate display, Sultana?”

“Tamar is a place of restraint and decorum, Agassi. You are more than welcome to spar with the guardsmen as long as Commander Ayan oversees it, and I would expect that you would not humiliate yourself by doing so half-clothed again.”

“Only in a place full of weak-bodied, self-important pacifists would sword practice count as humiliating. You find me offensive,” he said, “Fine. There are few things I find more tiresome than someone who puts too much stock in pageantry and pretense. And you worship at the altar of pretense.”

Jenn – she told me I can just call her Jenn – grew up in a military family. They moved around a lot when she was a kid. It wasn’t easy making friends, so she became a big reader. I did an episode on military science fiction. It’s a thriving subgenre. But those weren’t the types of books she was interested in.

JENN: No. If there was a female character that was considered like a heroine, she was, we, we call them stabby. <laugh> in the romance, <laugh> in in romance parlance. Um, you know, like very kind of male coded, masculine coded, very strong, probably had a filthy mouth, not very emotional. And so that was kind of what I was aspiring to. And I

went into the military and I, I did my thing and um, I think instead of becoming like really into that, I went the opposite way and I'm like, you know, this is not exactly who I want to be. And so I went the other way, the softer way <laugh>.

But not entirely. There's a trope she fights against in her work. She says the trope is called, "I'm not like other girls."

JENN: It's used in movies and books a lot where you have your main character who is, she's not catty, she doesn't like makeup, she won't wear pink, she won't, you know, she's strong and fast and doesn't hang out with the popular girls and is often disparaging of people that like those things and that particular trope, I don't like it and I've talked about it before that I'm actually a recovering not like other girls because I grew up in an environment where it was very much things that are classically considered feminine are weaker or less than. And so that not like other girls trope if you will, plays into that a little too much for my taste. I feel like the only strength in the world is not being able to wield a sword or run faster or lift heavier things or curse like a sailor or be emotionally distant, right? Those don't have to be the only ways that we are strong in the world.

BREAK

Despite all the success romantasy has had in the publishing world, it doesn't get a lot of critical respect. Marcela di Blasi says that's especially true in academia.

MARCELA: If you think about where the scholarship is, there is a lot of attention to science fiction. And then when we talk about romance as a whole, there is very little scholarship going on about any kind of romance. There is more scholarship on pornography than there is about romance. You know, the accusation that that people lob against romance is that it's mommy porn <laugh>.

I actually hadn't heard that phrase before.

MARCELA: Oh yeah. This is, this is definitely a thing, especially in the context of the scholarly attention that pornography gets. I find this so revealing that when you have a genre that's written by women, that takes a look at the world we live in through the relationships we have. And then when we add to that, the fact that this is also a genre that can talk about women's sexual desire and that it's still dismissed as unimportant or not serious. Yeah, I think that that's really revealing.

Jenn says even readers of romance novels – conventional romance novels -- sometimes judge romantasy readers when they show up in their online spaces.

JENN: Because they're like, we don't want dudes with bat wings here. You have to go somewhere else, right? <laugh> There are no dragons in this space! So I think it's, you know, people, they want a group where they're in essence kind of the same. And so there are always going to be people within genres that are like, we don't do that here. Please get out. And I, I'd argue that in many cases that's less true in romance circles, uh, because women are kind of used to getting made fun of for wanting to read romance. So they're less likely to be harsh, but there are a few.

At The Ripped Bodice, they try to make the decor really playful to create an atmosphere of non-judgement. They suspended open books from the ceiling, as if the books magically flew off the shelves and stopped in mid-air.

KATHERINE: One thing we really wanted to focus on is making this space really bright, really airy, really, uh, not filled with the kind of shame that had been put on romance in the past. A lot of the times romance books would be put in a dark corner of the bookstore.

Have you had people visiting from out of town or even like international tourists or like, we want, we saw this and we wanted to come here?

KATHERINE: Oh yeah. We have people who come from all over, which is just kind of crazy to think about. We have people who come from Texas, we have people who come from Wisconsin. We've had people who come from Australia and they're like, yeah, we're here because we saw you on BookTok and we really wanted to make this part of our like New York trip.

Another place that romantasy fans gather is at conventions. I'm not talking about San Diego or New York Comic Con, although they both had panels about romantasy last year. No, the real action is at ApollyCon every year in Washington DC.

ApollyCon covers all types of romance novels, but romantasy is a big part of it. That's because the event was created by a romantasy writer named Jennifer Armentrout. There are book signings, cosplay, panel discussions and parties. Marcela di Blasi was thrilled she got to go. It's a hot ticket.

MARCELA: Yes. It is really hard to get tickets to ApollyCon. I think they sell out in a matter of minutes. And fans will walk around with as close to a wheelbarrow as they can get, essentially <laugh>. And they are filled with books. And some of them I know are brought from home because they want authors to sign books that they already own. But a lot of them are purchased there. There will be special editions of really popular series that are released every, I want to say, every few years or by various different entities.

So, you know, there are different subscription boxes. Maybe one of them will come out with a special edition of Throne of Glass by Sarah J. Maas. And then, you know, readers who are fans of these series will collect all of them, as many of them as they can. And I was talking with some fans who collect multiple languages, they want first editions and as many languages as they can get.

Languages they don't even speak presumably.

MARCELA: Yeah.

Wow.

MARCELA: And so there's a lot going on, but fans, not all of them, but many of them really go all out with the cosplay. It's extraordinary.

Romantasy is still a hard sell for some people. But Jenn says they should have an open mind.

JENN: I think they think that women are reading this for titillation, but really, they're in it for the emotional impact. So the plot is about a woman being successful in whatever she wants to do and the man in there is putting her needs first. It is about women getting pleasure, whether that is um, in intimacy or in fulfilling whatever their dream is, but it not being taken away from them by this other character, right? This other characters participating in that.

CL: I mean, real talk.

Yeah.

Again, C.L. Polk.

CL: Sometimes I think that the dislike of romance is like basically collectively enforced. Guys don't like romance because if other guys catch them liking romance that will equal big social trouble. There could be a lot of shame involved. I think those barriers are breaking and I think they have been breaking for a little while and I think that we are going to see the whole get knocked down really, really soon. And so if you're reading romance novels, you could probably see, if you're reading enough of them, you could probably get an idea of like the many varied interesting things that the writers of these romance novels who are mostly women are thinking about, talking about, have on their mind, want for themselves, yearn for.

JD: If they are reading books about men with batwings, it's probably not the batwings. they like <laugh>, you know, it's like something else is in there that appeals to them and it might be worth it to read it and ask. And I've seen some really interesting social media

where men have sat down and read their partner's favorite books with them and learned a lot and almost exclusively have said, yeah, that was worth it.

You would think at this point there'd be big budget Hollywood adaptations of romantasy books in production. The screen rights were bought. They're in development, but it seems like they're stuck in development. The only headlines I've seen recently are Hulu denying rumors that it gave up on its plans to make a TV show out of Sarah J. Maas's books.

But in a way, I think it's better. Hollywood doesn't need the money. The publishing industry does. The generation on TikTok has made books sexy again. That's spicy.

And for romantasy readers, having these worlds in their minds gives them a safe space to explore sexuality and relationships without social pressure, judgment, or baggage. They can enjoy what they want, and not what they've been told they should want. So for romantasy fans, they already have their happily ever after.

That's it for this week, thank you for listening. Special thanks to Marcela DiBlasi, Kayleigh Donaldson, J.D. Evans, C.L. Polk and Katherine for giving me a tour of The Ripped Bodice.

Uh, do you remember there was a pet store here beforehand?

KATHERINE: Yes, so we have dogs coming to the door all the time. <laugh>, <laugh>. They remember that it used to be a pet store and are constantly like, no, this is where I got my treats from <laugh>. And we're still getting treats and so we definitely have treats behind the counter.

Also, thanks to Tanya Rich, who did the readings, and one of my listeners, Marie Rose, who suggested this topic. I mentioned that Marcela di Blasi is working on a book about romantasy. It's going to focus on authors of color. She provided a list of recommendations which I'm including in the show notes.

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