

ANALYSIS COMPANION

FOR ASPIRING ROMANTASY WRITERS

READ LIKE A WRITER

The Romantasy Analysis Companion

Extract craft lessons, track story structure, and understand
the techniques that make romantasy novels work





A note for you—

Every great writer started as a great reader. The fact that you're here, ready to dig beneath the surface of the stories you love, says something real about your commitment to the craft.

This guide was built to help you see the invisible choices that make romantasy novels work—so you can make those choices in your own writing.

Thank you so much for supporting Plot Brew. This is a one-person operation fueled by a genuine love for storytelling, and your support means the world.

Happy reading (and writing!)

— Plot Brew

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Read Like a Writer: The Romantasy Analysis Companion

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How to Use This Guide

When you read for pleasure, you let the story wash over you. That's wonderful, but it won't teach you how to write.

To learn from the books you love, you need to read differently. You need to notice the choices the author made and ask yourself why those choices work.

This guide will help you do that. It gives you a framework for tracking the elements that make romantasy novels successful, from romance beats to fantasy plot structure to the small craft moves that make readers swoon.

What Is "Craft" Anyway?

You'll see the word "craft" throughout this guide. Let's be clear about what it means.

Craft is the HOW of storytelling. It's not WHAT happens in your story—it's how you make it happen on the page. It's the difference between "they fell in love" (plot) and "she noticed his hands were shaking when he handed her the cup" (craft).

CRAFT INCLUDES

Structure: How the story is organized. Where beats fall. How chapters begin and end.

The pacing of reveals. Why Chapter 12 is the kiss and not Chapter 5.

Scene-Level Choices: What's shown vs. told. Whose POV we're in. Where the scene starts and ends. What's left out. What's emphasized.

Line-Level Choices: Word selection. Sentence rhythm. Dialogue patterns. How description is woven in. The specific details chosen to make a moment land.

Emotional Engineering: How the author makes you feel things. The buildup before a kiss. The dread before a betrayal. The release after tension. This is craft at its most invisible—and most powerful.

When we talk about "craft moves," we mean specific, replicable techniques. Not "make the reader feel sad" but "end the chapter mid-sentence when the character realizes the truth." Not "create tension" but "have character A notice something character B is hiding, then cut away before confrontation."

The goal of this guide is to help you see these moves—to make the invisible visible—so you can use them in your own writing.

THE GOAL

When you can look at a page and see not just a dragon, but a "Catalyst"—not just a kiss, but a "Midpoint"—you have learned to read like a writer.

Choose Your Analysis Level

You don't have to fill in every section. Choose the level that fits your reading session — or mix and match chapter to chapter.

QUICK-FILL

About 2-3 minutes per chapter, plus 20 minutes when you finish the book.

You'll complete chapter logs with tension ratings, do a quick post-read synthesis, and capture 3-5 craft moves. In the chapter logs, look for the **QF** marker — those are the fields to focus on.

Ideal if you're reading for pleasure but want to stay aware of craft.

DEEP-DIVE

About 5-10 minutes per chapter, plus an hour or more after finishing.

Fill in every question in the chapter logs — you can ignore the **QF** labels and work through all the fields. Then track romance and fantasy beats, analyse tropes, log spice scenes, and dissect standout moments.

Ideal if you're doing serious craft study and want to understand how the book works.

Top Tip: The Color-Coding System

If you're reading a physical book, colored sticky page markers or highlighters can help you track different elements as you go. Here's a suggested system.

COLOR	CATEGORY	WHAT TO MARK
Pink/Red	Romance Beats	Tension, kisses, declarations, yearning moments
Blue	Fantasy/Plot	Quest progress, magic use, battles, external conflict
Green	World-Building	Lore, setting details, magic system rules
Yellow	Character	Wounds, ghosts, backstory, motivations
Purple	Craft Moves	Exceptional techniques worth stealing

Key Terms

You'll see these terms throughout your analysis. Knowing what they mean will help you identify them in the books you read.

ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY

Adhesion: This is the external force that keeps characters together when they'd rather walk away. In romantasy, it's often fantasy-based. A curse, a bargain, a war, a shared quest. It creates forced proximity.

Ghost/Wound: The past trauma that shapes how your character sees love and the world. It explains why they behave the way they do and creates internal conflict.

The Lie: A false belief the character holds that must be overcome for them to grow. In romance, this often sounds like "Love is weakness" or "I'm unworthy of being loved."

Deep POV: A narrative perspective that puts the reader inside the character's head with no emotional distance. It feels immediate and intimate.

Slow Burn: A pacing strategy that builds romantic tension through delayed gratification and "almost" moments. It's about how you structure the longing, not how long the book is.

HEA/HFN: Happily Ever After or Happy For Now. Romance readers expect one of these endings. It's a promise of the genre.

DUAL-ARC VOCABULARY

Through-Thread: The causal chain that makes romance and fantasy arcs inseparable. When you pull one thread, both arcs unravel. This is the defining feature of great romantasy.

Double Helix: A structural model where romance and fantasy arcs twist around each other like DNA strands, crossing at key beats. Each strand takes turns being dominant, but they share the same backbone.

The Bridge: The specific mechanism that binds two plots together—a magical bond, a shared quest, a political marriage. Without the bridge, the arcs could exist independently.

Symbiotic Causality: When a romance beat directly causes a fantasy beat (or vice versa). Not "these happen at the same time" but "this CAUSED that."

Midpoint Rupture: The moment (usually near 50%) where both arcs collide and transform each other. A romantic truth changes the fantasy stakes, or a fantasy crisis forces a romantic reckoning.

Emotional Mirror: When the state of the world reflects the state of the relationship. The kingdom thrives when they're united; it crumbles when they're apart.

Bolted-On Romance: A structural pitfall where the romance could be removed without affecting the fantasy plot. The love story feels decorative rather than essential.

SECTION ONE

PRE-READ SETUP

Before you start reading, take a few minutes to record what you expect from this book. This helps you notice later when the author surprises you or delivers exactly what you anticipated. Both are worth studying.

Book Metadata

Title: _____

Author: _____

Series & Book #: _____

Publication Year: _____

Page Count: _____

Subgenre: _____

Expected Heat Level (check one)

0 1 2 3 4 5 (0 = Clean, 5 = Explicit)

Anticipated Tropes (check what you expect based on cover/blurb)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enemies to Lovers | <input type="checkbox"/> Touch Her and Die |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forced Proximity | <input type="checkbox"/> He Falls First / She Falls First |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fated Mates / Soul Bond | <input type="checkbox"/> Possessive / Protective Hero |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slow Burn | <input type="checkbox"/> Villain Gets the Girl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forbidden Love | <input type="checkbox"/> Who Did This to You |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grumpy/Sunshine | <input type="checkbox"/> Redemption Arc |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Morally Grey Hero | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Found Family | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Only One Bed | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fake Relationship | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arranged Marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hidden Identity / Secret Royalty | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Expectations & Goals

What do I expect from this book based on cover/blurb?

What specific craft element am I hoping to learn from this book?

What weakness in my own writing do I hope this book can help me improve?

CRAFT REFERENCE

THE CRAFT TOOLKIT

Before you start logging chapters, familiarize yourself with these core craft concepts. This is your cheat sheet—refer back to it whenever you're not sure what you're looking at.

Story Structure: The Big Picture

Every story is a series of promises and payoffs. Structure is how you organize those promises so readers stay hooked until the final payoff.

THE THREE-ACT FRAMEWORK

Act 1 (0-25%): Setup. Establish the normal world, introduce the protagonist's wound/flaw, present the inciting incident that disrupts everything, and end with the protagonist choosing to engage with the story problem.

Act 2 (25-75%): Confrontation. The protagonist pursues their goal, faces escalating obstacles, experiences a midpoint shift (usually a false victory or false defeat), then watches everything fall apart in the "All Is Lost" moment.

Act 3 (75-100%): Resolution. The protagonist faces their deepest fear, makes a crucial choice that demonstrates growth, confronts the antagonist/problem, and earns (or fails to earn) their reward.

KEY STORY BEATS TO RECOGNIZE

The Hook: First pages. Creates a question the reader needs answered.

Inciting Incident: The event that starts the story engine. Usually around 10-12%.

First Plot Point: Protagonist commits to the journey. No turning back. Around 25%.

Midpoint: Major shift—false victory, false defeat, or revelation. Stakes raise. 50%.

All Is Lost: Rock bottom. The protagonist's worst fear realized. Around 75%.

Climax: Final confrontation. Everything the story promised comes due. 90-95%.

Resolution: New normal established. Final image mirrors or contrasts opening.

Scene Craft: The Building Blocks

Stories are made of scenes. A scene is a unit of story that happens in one time and place, with a clear purpose. Understanding scenes is understanding craft.

WHAT EVERY SCENE NEEDS

A Character With a Goal: Someone wants something in this scene. If no one wants anything, the scene has no engine.

Obstacles: Something prevents the character from getting what they want easily. No obstacle = no tension.

Stakes: Why does achieving (or failing to achieve) this goal matter? What's at risk?

Change: Something must be different at the end of the scene than at the beginning. Information, relationships, circumstances, or emotions—something shifts.

SCENE-LEVEL TECHNIQUES

Scene Entry: Start as late as possible. Skip the arrival, skip the small talk, start where the tension is.

Scene Exit: End as early as possible—often before the scene "finishes." Cut on tension, not resolution.

Scene Sequels: After an action scene, characters need time to react, process, and decide what to do next. This is called a "sequel" and provides emotional pacing.

Scene Types: Action scenes (something happens), reaction scenes (characters process), revelation scenes (information delivered), transition scenes (moving through time/space).

Tension & Pacing: The Rhythm

Pacing isn't just "fast" or "slow"—it's the rhythm of tension and release that keeps readers turning pages.

CREATING TENSION

Questions: Every unanswered question creates tension. Who is the masked figure? Will she find out his secret? What's in the locked room?

Dramatic Irony: When readers know something characters don't—massive tension engine. We see the betrayal coming; we watch them trust the wrong person.

Ticking Clocks: Deadlines create urgency. The ball ends at midnight. The poison takes effect in three days. The army arrives at dawn.

Competing Desires: When a character wants two things that are mutually exclusive, every choice creates tension.

CONTROLLING PACE

Speed Up: Short sentences. Short paragraphs. Action verbs. Dialogue without tags. White space on the page.

Slow Down: Longer sentences. Sensory details. Internal thought. Description. Reflection.

Chapter Length: Short chapters = fast pace, hard to put down. Long chapters = immersive, luxurious. Mix creates rhythm.

Scene Breaks: White space signals time passing, perspective shifts, or tonal changes. Controls reader breathing room.

Character Craft: Making People Real

Characters aren't just descriptions—they're patterns of behavior, contradiction, and desire that create the illusion of a real person on the page.

CHARACTER ESSENTIALS

The Want (External Goal): What the character is actively pursuing. Defeat the villain, win the tournament, escape the kingdom. This drives plot.

The Need (Internal Goal): What the character actually needs to grow, usually something they're avoiding. Learn to trust, accept themselves, let go of revenge. This drives arc.

The Wound: Past pain that created a false belief about the world. "Love leads to loss." "Power is the only safety." "I'm not worthy." This creates internal conflict.

The Flaw: Behavioral manifestation of the wound. Pushes people away, trusts no one, seeks control. The character must overcome this to get what they need.

SHOWING CHARACTER

Action Under Pressure: Who someone is gets revealed when stakes are high. Easy choices reveal nothing.

Contradiction: Real people are inconsistent. A killer who's gentle with animals. A coward who's brave for love. Contradiction = depth.

Specificity: Not "she was nervous" but "she kept touching the scar on her wrist." Specific details make characters real.

Voice: How a character speaks—word choice, rhythm, what they notice—should be distinct from other characters.

Line-Level Craft: The Micro Skills

Big-picture structure matters, but stories live or die at the sentence level. These are the small moves that separate good from great.

SENTENCE TECHNIQUES

Vary Length: Long sentences for flow and immersion. Short sentences for impact. Like this. The rhythm creates feeling.

End on Strength: The most important word should come last. Not "She was dead, he realized" but "He realized she was dead."

Active Voice: "She drew her sword" not "The sword was drawn by her." Passive voice weakens action.

Concrete Over Abstract: "Grief" is abstract. "She kept setting two places at the table" is concrete. Concrete lands harder.

DESCRIPTION & DETAIL

The Telling Detail: One perfect detail beats five generic ones. Not "the room was messy" but "dirty dishes grew mold on the nightstand."

Character-Filtered: Description should reveal who's observing. A soldier notices exits and weapons. A chef notices food. A lover notices their beloved.

In Motion: Static description stops story. Weave details into action. She noticed the paintings as she ran—ancestors watching her flee.

Sensory Balance: Most writers default to visual. Use sound, smell, touch, taste. Smell is especially powerful for memory and emotion.

Dialogue Craft: Making Characters Talk

Great dialogue does multiple jobs at once—reveals character, advances plot, creates tension, and entertains—all while sounding natural.

DIALOGUE PRINCIPLES

Subtext: Characters rarely say what they mean. "Fine" means "I'm furious." "Whatever you want" means "I'll hold this against you forever." The gap between said and meant creates tension.

Agenda: Every character in a conversation wants something, even if it's just to end the conversation. Competing agendas = conflict.

Distinct Voices: Cover the dialogue tags. Can you tell who's speaking? Vocabulary, rhythm, topics, formality—each character should sound different.

Compression: Real speech is boring. Fictional dialogue cuts the boring parts. No small talk unless it's doing work.

DIALOGUE TECHNIQUES

Misdirection: Answer a different question than was asked. Creates tension, reveals character avoidance.

Interruption: Characters cutting each other off shows conflict, urgency, power dynamics.

Silence: What's NOT said matters. "She didn't answer" can be more powerful than any words.

Beats: Small actions between dialogue lines. She turned away. He set down the cup. Controls pacing and reveals emotion.

THE GOAL OF THIS GUIDE

You now have the vocabulary. As you read, you'll start to see these techniques everywhere. The chapter logs will help you track them. Over time, recognizing craft becomes automatic—and that's when you can start using it in your own writing.

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER LOGS

These logs help you capture observations while they're fresh. Fill one out after each chapter.

It should only take a few minutes. The goal is to stay aware of craft without interrupting your enjoyment of the story.

How to Use These Chapter Logs

Reading like a writer means noticing things. But noticing without a framework just creates noise. These logs give you specific things to look for—and more importantly, teach you WHY they matter.

WHAT TO TRACK IN EVERY CHAPTER

The Chapter's Job: Every chapter needs a reason to exist. Ask yourself: What does this chapter DO for the story? Does it advance the plot? Deepen the romance? Reveal character? Build the world? The best chapters do multiple jobs at once.

Opening & Closing: Pay special attention to the first and last paragraphs. How does the author hook you in? How do they make you turn to the next chapter? These are high-leverage craft moments.

The Emotional Shift: Characters should feel different at the end of a chapter than they did at the beginning. What changed? Even in "quiet" chapters, something should shift—information, feelings, relationships, stakes.

Tension Types: Romantic tension and plot tension often move in opposite directions. When plot tension peaks, romance might pause. When romance heats up, external threats might recede. Notice the balance.

SPECIFIC THINGS TO NOTICE

For Romance: Any moment of awareness between the characters? Physical proximity? Vulnerability shared? Walls going up or coming down? Even in non-romantic chapters, track how the relationship status changes.

For Fantasy Plot: What new information do we get? What questions are raised? What threats loom closer? How does the magical world expand or constrain?

For Craft: Did any sentence stop you? Any technique you want to steal? Great dialogue? Killer description? Perfect pacing? Write it down NOW—you won't remember later.

For Pacing: Did the chapter feel too long, too short, or just right? Was there a point where your attention wandered? That's data about pacing.

Chapter Logs

Fill these out immediately after finishing each chapter. Your first impressions are valuable data.

Jump to Chapter:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

CHAPTER 1

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Romance: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| Plot: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 2

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Romance: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| Plot: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 3

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 4

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 5

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 6

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Romance: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| Plot: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 7

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Romance: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| Plot: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 8

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 9

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 10

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 11

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet |

QF One-Sentence Summary

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QF Tension (check one per row)

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|----------|--|
| Romance: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| Plot: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 12

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Action |
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QF One-Sentence Summary

[Who] wants [what] but [obstacle] so [outcome]

QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 13

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
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Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 14

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
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Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 15

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

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Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 16

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

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CHAPTER 17

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

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Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

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CHAPTER 18

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QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

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QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 19

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

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Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 20

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

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Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 21

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

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Beat Types (check all)

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Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 22

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

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Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 23

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
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Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 24

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
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Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 25

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
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QF One-Sentence Summary

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Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 26

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
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QF One-Sentence Summary

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- | | |
|----------|--|
| Romance: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 27

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
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QF Tension (check one per row)

Romance: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Plot: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 28

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plot | <input type="checkbox"/> Character |
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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 29

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

Beat Types (check all)

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

Closing Hook: Why turn the page?

QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

CHAPTER 30

Pages: _____ - POV: _____ Location: _____

QF Arc Driver: (check one) Fantasy
 Romance Both Intertwined

QF Tension Source: (check all that apply) Danger
 Will-They/Won't-They Mystery Emotional Intimacy

This chapter's JOB: Why does it exist?

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Romance: How did the relationship shift?

Plot/World: New info? Stakes changed?

Opening Hook: How did it grab you?

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QF Craft Move to Steal: Quote it if you can!

Need more chapter logs? Use the Chapter Logs Supplement for books with 30+ chapters.

SECTION THREE

ROMANCE ARC TRACKING

Romance readers have expectations for how a love story should unfold, even if they can't articulate them. This section helps you identify the beats that make a romance feel satisfying.

Romancing the Beat Framework

This framework comes from Gwen Hayes's book *Romancing the Beat* and breaks the romance arc into four distinct phases. Each phase has specific emotional beats that readers expect—whether they consciously know it or not. These beats create the rhythm of falling in love: the push and pull, the moments of connection and retreat, the building tension that makes the eventual union feel earned.

As you read, look for these beats. Not every book will hit them all, and some will subvert them deliberately. That's worth noticing too—understanding why an author chose to skip or subvert a beat teaches you as much as seeing it executed perfectly. The framework isn't a formula; it's a map of emotional territory that romance readers want to travel.

In romantasy specifically, these romance beats must weave seamlessly with fantasy plot beats. The best books make them inseparable—the magic system creates romantic obstacles, and romantic growth enables characters to master their power. Watch for how authors balance these dual storylines.

THE ROMANCE PROMISE

Romance is the only genre with a mandatory ending. Readers come expecting an HEA (Happily Ever After) or HFN (Happy For Now). This isn't a limitation—it's a feature. Your job as a writer is to make them doubt it's possible until the very last moment, then deliver it in a way that feels inevitable. The skill isn't in the destination; it's in making the journey feel impossible while secretly laying the groundwork for success.

PHASE 1: THE SETUP (0–25%)

This is where you meet the characters. You learn their wounds, why they can't be together, and what forces them to stay in proximity anyway.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN PHASE 1

Phase 1 is about creating the conditions for love while making love seem impossible. Pay close attention to these elements:

The Meet Cute/Ugly: In romantasy, the first meeting is rarely cute. Look for tension, hostility, or danger. Someone might try to kill, capture, or manipulate the other. Ask yourself: What emotion does this first meeting create? Anger? Fear? Grudging respect? The stronger the initial conflict, the more satisfying the eventual love will feel.

The "No Way" (Why They Can't Be Together): This is the engine of your entire romance. In romantasy, it's almost always tied to worldbuilding: "He's Fae, I'm mortal." "Our kingdoms are at war." "He's my captor/enemy/the person who destroyed my family." Look for whether the obstacle is external (worldbuilding-based) or internal (wound-based). The best books have both.

The Adhesion (What Forces Proximity): Despite the "No Way," something forces these characters together. Look for: magical bonds, bargains with consequences, shared quests, captivity situations, or forced alliances. Ask: How does the author make it impossible for them to simply walk away from each other?

Character Wounds: What past pain is each character carrying? In romantasy, these often involve betrayal, loss, or trauma tied to the magical system. The wound should make love feel dangerous to the character—not just inconvenient.

BEAT	CHAPTER/PAGE	HOW IT'S EXECUTED	FANTASY ARC CONNECTION
Meet Cute/Ugly	Ch 2, p.34	<i>She tries to steal his horse; he catches her at knifepoint.</i>	<i>Meet happens during a quest ambush—romance is born from plot.</i>
Meet Cute/Ugly			
The "No Way"			
The Adhesion			
Character A's Wound			
Character B's Wound			

PHASE 2: FALLING IN LOVE (25–50%)

The characters are forced to cooperate. Proximity creates intimacy. Attraction grows despite their resistance to it.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN PHASE 2

This phase is about the slow erosion of resistance. The characters don't want to fall in love, but they can't help it. Look for:

The Inklings of Desire: This is the first crack in the armor. It's often physical—a moment where one character notices something attractive about the other despite themselves. Look for: stolen glances, unwanted awareness of the other's body, finding excuses to be near them. How does the author show attraction while the character is still in denial?

Vulnerability Moments: Watch for scenes where one character sees the other's true self—often their pain, their kindness, or their competence. In romantasy, this might happen during a battle, a magical trial, or a moment of physical danger. What makes one character start to see the other as a person rather than an enemy/stranger?

The Deepening: Attraction becomes something more. Look for: conversations that go deeper than necessary, shared secrets, moments of unexpected tenderness. How does the author escalate emotional intimacy? What small moments build the connection?

The Midpoint Intimacy: Around the 50% mark, something significant happens in the relationship. This might be a first kiss, a confession, or a physical intimacy scene. But note: this moment should feel earned AND premature. The characters aren't ready—that's what creates the tension for Phase 3.

BEAT	CH/PAGE	HOW IT'S EXECUTED	FANTASY ARC CONNECTION
Inkling of Desire			
First Vulnerability			
Deepening Desire			
Shared Secret/Bond			
Midpoint Intimacy			

PHASE 3: RETREATING FROM LOVE (50–75%)

Just when things are going well, internal fears resurface. External threats exploit the characters' vulnerabilities. The relationship fractures. This is often the most painful part of the book.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN PHASE 3

This phase is about everything falling apart. The characters were getting close, but now their wounds, fears, and external circumstances conspire to drive them apart. This should hurt.

Shields Up: After the vulnerability of Phase 2, characters often retreat into old patterns. Look for: emotional walls going back up, characters pushing each other away, reverting to antagonistic behavior. What triggers the retreat? Usually it's fear—fear of being hurt, fear of losing everything, fear of what love means.

The Retreat/Breakup: Something happens that makes one or both characters pull away decisively. In romantasy, this is often tied to the external plot: a betrayal (real or perceived), a revelation about identity or past, a sacrifice demanded by the magical conflict. How does the author make the separation feel both devastating and inevitable?

The Dark Night of the Soul: This is rock bottom. One or both characters must confront their deepest fears about love, about themselves, about what they're willing to risk. Look for: moments of despair, realization of what they've lost, confronting the lie they've been telling themselves.

The "Black Moment": The relationship seems completely, irreparably broken. As a reader, you should genuinely doubt whether they'll find their way back. If you don't doubt it, the author hasn't done their job. How does the author make reunion seem impossible?

BEAT	CH/PAGE	HOW IT'S EXECUTED	FANTASY ARC CONNECTION
Shields Up			
The Retreat/Breakup			
External Pressure Peak			
Dark Night of Soul			
The Black Moment			

PHASE 4: FIGHTING FOR LOVE (75–100%)

The protagonist realizes love is worth the risk. They make a choice to fight for the relationship, often at great personal cost. The HEA is earned through sacrifice and growth.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN PHASE 4

This phase is about earning the happy ending. After all the pain of Phase 3, the characters must actively choose love. This choice must cost them something.

The Realization: One or both characters understand what they truly want—and what they're willing to sacrifice to get it. In romantasy, this often means choosing love over power, safety, duty, or revenge. What lie does the character finally reject? What truth do they finally accept?

The Grand Gesture: This is the visible proof of inner change. It's not just words—it's action. In romantasy, grand gestures often involve: giving up magical power, defying fate or prophecy, risking death, or standing against their own people/kingdom. Look for: What does the character sacrifice? The bigger the sacrifice, the more earned the HEA feels.

The Proof of Change: The grand gesture should demonstrate that the character has overcome their wound, their fear, their fatal flaw. They are not the same person they were in Chapter 1. How does the author show (not tell) this transformation?

The HEA/HFN: The Happy Ever After or Happy For Now. In romantasy, this often intertwines with the resolution of the fantasy plot. Look for: How does the author make the ending feel both surprising and inevitable? What loose ends are tied up? What promises to the reader are fulfilled?

BEAT	CH/PAGE	HOW IT'S EXECUTED	FANTASY ARC CONNECTION
The Realization			
The Choice			
Grand Gesture			
Proof of Change			
HEA /HFN			

Common Pitfalls to Notice

Unearned HEA: If the grand gesture costs nothing, or if the characters haven't truly changed, the ending feels hollow. Did this book earn its happy ending?

Weak "No Way": If the obstacle to love could be solved with a simple conversation, the romance lacks tension. Was the obstacle genuinely difficult to overcome?

Rushed Phase 2: If falling in love happens too fast, we don't believe in the connection. Did the author give us enough moments to believe these characters belong together?

Insufficient Pain in Phase 3: If the breakup doesn't hurt, the reunion won't satisfy. Did you genuinely worry they wouldn't end up together?

SECTION FOUR

FANTASY PLOT TRACKING

In romance, the fantasy plot isn't just backdrop. It creates the pressure that forces romantic development. This section helps you track how the external plot and the romance work together.

Save the Cat! / Three-Act Structure

The three-act structure is storytelling's oldest framework—setup, confrontation, resolution. Blake Snyder's "Save the Cat!" method breaks this into specific beats that appear in nearly every successful story. These beats aren't arbitrary rules; they're patterns that emerge because they satisfy deep psychological needs in readers.

As you track these beats, pay attention to how they connect to the romance. In the best romantasy, you can't separate the two arcs—the fantasy plot creates obstacles for the romance, and romantic growth gives the protagonist strength to overcome fantasy obstacles. The climax should resolve both storylines simultaneously.

Understanding structure helps you see why certain moments land and others fall flat. When a book feels "slow in the middle," it's often a structural problem—Act 2A went on too long, or the Midpoint didn't raise the stakes enough. When an ending feels unearned, the setup was missing something. Learning to identify beats helps you diagnose exactly what's not working and why.

Readers have internalized these beats from a lifetime of stories. When you hit them at roughly the right moments, the story feels "right." When you miss them, something feels off—even if the reader can't articulate why. Major structural shifts tend to happen around 25%, 50%, and 75% of the book. These aren't rigid rules, but if a catalyst happens at 40% or the climax starts at 60%, something is likely off with the pacing. Structure is invisible when done well—but once you learn to see it, you can't unsee it.

THE DUAL-ENGINE GENRE

Romantasy must satisfy the external stakes of fantasy (save the world, defeat the villain) and the internal stakes of romance (win the heart, overcome wounds). The best books make these inseparable—the magic system should create romantic obstacles, and love should be essential to defeating the villain. If you can remove either plot without affecting the other, the weave isn't tight enough.

ACT 1: THE SETUP (0–25%)

We meet the protagonist in their ordinary world. Something disrupts that world. They cross a threshold into adventure.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACT 1

Act 1 is about establishing normal so you can destroy it. Pay attention to:

The Opening Image: What is the very first scene? This often mirrors the final image in some way—either as a contrast (showing how far the character has come) or as a completion (showing a cycle finishing). What world does the author establish? What tone? What questions are planted in your mind?

The "Stasis = Death" Moment: Before the catalyst, the author should show us why the protagonist can't stay where they are. Their current situation is untenable. In romantasy, this might be: an abusive home situation, a loveless engagement, a power they can't control, a secret that's about to be exposed. What makes staying impossible?

The Catalyst: This is the inciting incident—the event that disrupts everything. In romantasy, it often involves: discovering magic, being captured/sold/bartered, a death that changes everything, or meeting the love interest under dramatic circumstances.

Note: The catalyst happens TO the protagonist. They don't choose it.

The Debate/Refusal: After the catalyst, there's usually hesitation. The protagonist isn't ready to leave their old life. What internal and external forces pull them back? What eventually pushes them forward?

Break Into Two: The protagonist makes a choice to enter the new world. This is the first time they actively decide rather than react. In romantasy, this might mean: accepting a bargain, entering the Fae realm, joining a rebellion, or agreeing to a fake marriage/arrangement.

BEAT	CH/PAGE	WHAT HAPPENS	ROMANCE CONNECTION
Opening Image			
Stasis = Death			
Catalyst			
Debate/Refusal			
Break Into Two			

ACT 2A: FUN & GAMES (25–50%)

This is the "promise of the premise." The protagonist explores the magical world, trains their powers, and navigates the early stages of romance. This is often the most enjoyable part of the book.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACT 2A

This is the section readers came for. It's where the author delivers on the promise of their premise. Watch for:

The "Fun and Games": This is what the book jacket promised. If it's a Fae court book, we're IN the Fae court. If it's a magical academy, we're taking classes. If it's enemies-to-lovers, we're getting delicious tension. How does the author deliver on reader expectations while keeping things fresh?

The B-Story (Romance): In romantasy, the romance IS the B-story of the fantasy plot—and the fantasy IS the B-story of the romance. Notice how the external plot forces romantic proximity. How does surviving danger together create intimacy?

Building the World: Act 2A is where we really learn the rules of this world—the magic system, the politics, the dangers. Notice: Does the worldbuilding feel organic (learned through experience) or forced (info-dumps)?

The Midpoint: Around 50%, something big happens that changes everything. The protagonist gets new information, wins a false victory, or suffers a false defeat. In romantasy, this often coincides with a significant romantic moment (first kiss, first intimacy, or a major confession). The midpoint should raise the stakes for both arcs.

BEAT	CH/PAGE	WHAT HAPPENS	ROMANCE CONNECTION
Fun and Games			
B-Story Development			
Worldbuilding Reveal			
Midpoint (False Victory/Defeat)			

ACT 2B: BAD GUYS CLOSE IN (50–75%)

The fun is over. External pressure mounts. The villain gains ground. Internal doubts fracture the team and the relationship. Everything that can go wrong does.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACT 2B

This is where the author earns their climax. If things don't get bad enough here, the ending won't feel satisfying. Watch for:

Bad Guys Close In: The antagonist gets stronger, smarter, or closer. Maybe secrets are revealed. Maybe allies are lost. Maybe the protagonist's plans crumble. How does the author systematically destroy everything the protagonist built in Act 2A?

Internal Bad Guys: It's not just external threats—it's internal ones too. Team members turn on each other. Trust breaks down. Old wounds resurface. In romantasy, this is where the romance often fractures. Look for: What internal flaw or fear causes the protagonist to make things worse?

All Is Lost: Rock bottom. Someone important might die. Hope might die. The protagonist might die (metaphorically). This should genuinely feel like the end. How does the author make recovery seem impossible?

The Whiff of Death: There's often a literal or metaphorical death here—a character, a relationship, a dream, or an identity. What does the protagonist lose that they can never get back?

BEAT	CH/PAGE	WHAT HAPPENS	ROMANCE CONNECTION
Bad Guys Close In			
Internal Fracture			
All Is Lost			
Whiff of Death			

ACT 3: THE FINALE (75–100%)

From the ashes of defeat, a new plan emerges. The climax resolves both the external threat and the internal romantic conflict. Ideally, these resolutions are intertwined.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACT 3

This is where everything comes together—or should. Watch for how the author weaves both arcs into a single climax:

Dark Night of the Soul: After "All Is Lost," there's a moment of reflection. The protagonist must confront their deepest fear, their fatal flaw, the lie they've believed. In romantasy, this often involves realizing what they're willing to sacrifice for love—and what they're not willing to sacrifice anymore.

Break Into Three: A new plan emerges. It might come from combining everything the protagonist learned in Act 2, or from finally accepting help, or from letting go of the thing that held them back. What shifts that makes victory possible?

The Finale/Climax: This should resolve BOTH the external fantasy plot AND the internal romance arc. In the best romantasy, these are inseparable—you can't solve one without solving the other. Look for: How does the romance enable the fantasy victory? How does the fantasy victory prove the romance?

The Final Image: Mirror to the opening image. How has the world changed? How has the protagonist changed? In romantasy, this often shows us the couple together in their new normal. What promise is made about their future?

BEAT	CH/PAGE	WHAT HAPPENS	ROMANCE CONNECTION
Dark Night of Soul			
Break Into Three			
Finale/Climax			
Final Image			

SECTION FIVE

DUAL-ARC INTEGRATION ANALYSIS

This is the defining craft challenge of romantasy. Not just "romance plus fantasy" but two

arcs woven so tightly that pulling one thread unravels both. This section helps you see how authors achieve that—and teaches you to do it yourself.

The Through-Thread

Here's the difference between a fantasy novel with a love interest and a true romantasy: symbiotic causality.

In a fantasy-with-romance, the love story runs alongside the quest. The characters fight the villain AND fall in love. Two tracks, same book, mild intersection. You could remove the romance and the quest still works. You could remove the quest and the romance still works. They're neighbours, not family.

In a true romantasy, the arcs are a double helix—two strands twisting around each other, crossing at every major beat. A romance revelation changes the fantasy stakes. A fantasy crisis forces a romantic reckoning. The climax requires both arcs to resolve simultaneously because they've become the same story told from two angles.

The through-thread is the causal chain that makes this happen. When every romance beat causes a fantasy consequence, and every fantasy beat forces a romantic shift, you have a through-thread. That's what you're looking for in this section.

THE CORE TEST

Could you remove the romance and still have a complete fantasy story? Could you remove the fantasy and still have a complete romance? If the answer to either question is yes, the through-thread is broken. In the best romantasy, the answer to both is NO.

Where Does This Book Fall on the Spectrum?

Romantasy isn't one thing. It's a spectrum. Knowing where this book sits changes how you analyse its structure and what you can learn from it.

FANTASY ROMANCE

The love story is the primary arc. The fantasy world creates obstacles, raises stakes, and provides the adhesion that keeps the couple together—but the emotional engine is "will they end up together?" The HEA is the climax. The quest serves the romance.

Think: From Blood and Ash, Zodiac Academy

ROMANTIC FANTASY

The quest/world is the primary arc. The romance provides emotional depth, character motivation, and internal stakes—but the engine is "will they save the world?" The climax resolves the external threat. The romance serves the quest.

Think: The Priory of the Orange Tree, The Poppy War

This book is: (mark on spectrum)

Fantasy Romance

Romantic Fantasy

Why? What evidence supports your placement?

The Bridge: What Binds the Arcs?

Every successful romantasy has a bridge—a specific mechanism that makes the two plots structurally inseparable. The bridge isn't just "the characters fall in love while questing." It's the thing that makes the quest impossible without the romance and the romance impossible without the quest.

Identifying the bridge tells you HOW this author achieved integration. It's the most concrete, stealable craft lesson in this entire guide.

The test: Ask yourself, "Could the romance plot happen without the fantasy elements? Could the fantasy plot resolve without the romance?" If the answer to either is yes, the bridge may be weak—or the book may lean more toward one genre with the other bolted on.

IDENTIFY THE BINDING TECHNIQUE(S)

In your own words, what is the bridge in this book? What single mechanism makes the two arcs inseparable?

Review the common binding techniques below, then use the next page to note which ones appear in this book:

BINDING TECHNIQUE	DEFINITION
Symbiotic Magic	Bond, curse, or shared power—emotion fuels the magic, so the relationship <i>is</i> the power source
Crucible Quest	A dangerous mission that cannot be completed alone, forcing interdependence
Antagonist's Leverage	The villain threatens, manipulates, or weaponizes the characters' feelings for each other
Political Marriage/Bargain	A strategic arrangement forces proximity and partnership until the pretense becomes real
Mirrored Wounds	Complementary trauma that only the other can understand—recovery requires mutual vulnerability
Secret Identity	A hidden truth that, when revealed, detonates both romantic trust and fantasy stakes at once
Power Synergy	Magical abilities that complement or amplify each other—together they can do what neither can alone
Prophecy of Union	Fate or destiny declares them bound; the tension is whether they choose it freely or resist
Forbidden Alliance	Enemy factions, rival courts, or opposing sides—the relationship itself is an act of treason
Sacrifice Gate	The magic demands a price only love or trust can pay—one must sacrifice for the other
Guardian Bond	One is sworn to protect the other—duty becomes devotion, and the power imbalance must be reconciled

Fill in the binding techniques you identified in this book and describe how each one appears.

BINDING TECHNIQUE	HOW IT APPEARS IN THIS BOOK

The Dual-Arc Causality Grid

This is the most powerful analysis tool in this guide. Instead of tracking the two arcs separately and hoping they connect, this grid forces you to trace the actual cause-and-effect chain between them.

For each major beat, ask: What did this romance moment CAUSE in the fantasy arc? And: What did this fantasy moment FORCE in the romance? If you can't answer, that's a spot where integration breaks down.

How to Use the Grid

Start by identifying the major beats in each arc at the story percentages listed. Then—and this is the crucial step—fill in the *Causal Link* column. Force yourself to complete the sentence: "A caused B because..." If you can only write "these happened around the same time," that's proximity, not causality. True integration means one arc's event *directly changes* the other arc's trajectory.

Look for three patterns:

- Strong causal chains — Fantasy event forces a romantic response (or vice versa), which then triggers the next fantasy beat. The arcs spiral around each other.
- Parallel tracks — Both arcs hit their beats at roughly the same percentage, but neither causes the other. This is the most common weakness in romantasy.
- One-way causality — The fantasy arc drives everything and the romance just reacts (or the reverse). This reveals which arc the author treats as primary and which is decorative.

A well-integrated romantasy should show strong causal chains for at least four of the eight beats below. If you find fewer than that, the dual-arc structure may be more cosmetic than structural.

%	FANTASY BEAT	ROMANCE BEAT	CAUSAL LINK (A CAUSED B BECAUSE...)
~10%	Catalyst / Inciting Incident	Meet Cute/Ugly	
~25%	Break Into Two	Adhesion Locks In	
~37%	Fun & Games / Promise of Premise	Deepening Desire / Vulnerability	
~50%	Midpoint Shift	Midpoint Intimacy	
~62%	Bad Guys Close In	Shields Up / Retreat	
~75%	All Is Lost	Black Moment	
~85%	Break Into Three	The Realization	
~95%	Climax / Finale	Grand Gesture / HEA	

The Midpoint Rupture

The midpoint is where a good romantasy reveals its hand. In stories with weak integration, the midpoint serves one arc—a big fantasy reveal OR a romantic milestone. In stories with strong integration, the midpoint is a rupture that detonates both arcs simultaneously.

This is the moment where a romantic truth changes the fantasy stakes, or a fantasy revelation transforms what the romance means. The arcs don't just intersect here—they collide and reshape each other.

MIDPOINT ANALYSIS

What is the fantasy midpoint event? (False victory, false defeat, major revelation, stakes shift)

What is the romance midpoint event? (First kiss, first intimacy, major confession, vulnerability shared)

Do they happen at the same time? If yes, you're looking at strong integration. If they're separated by multiple chapters, the arcs may be running in parallel rather than intertwined.

Does one CAUSE the other? This is the key question. A fantasy revelation that forces a romantic confession is stronger than a kiss that happens to occur near a plot twist.

Fantasy midpoint event (what happens and what chapter/%):

Romance midpoint event (what happens and what chapter/%):

How do they connect? Does one cause the other?

The Emotional Mirror

In deeply integrated romantasy, the state of the world reflects the state of the relationship. This is the Emotional Mirror—and when an author uses it well, the world itself becomes an expression of the love story.

Look for: weather that shifts with mood, magic that responds to emotional truth, kingdoms that thrive when the couple is united and crumble when they're apart, physical landscapes that mirror internal states. This isn't just atmosphere—it's structural integration at the level of world-building.

Examples of the Emotional Mirror in this book:

How strong is the mirror effect? (check one)

1 2 3 4 5 (1 = No mirror, 5 = World fully reflects relationship)

Integration Deep Questions

After filling in the grid, the bridge identifier, and the midpoint analysis, sit with these questions. They'll help you synthesise everything you've observed about how this book weaves its arcs.

At what point in the book does the romance begin to drive the fantasy plot (not just accompany it)?

Where are the "saggy" spots—chapters where one arc pauses while the other progresses?

Does the climax resolve both arcs simultaneously, or does one resolve before the other?

What is the single causal link that holds everything together? (The one thing that, if removed, collapses both arcs.)

WHAT YOU'RE REALLY LEARNING

The dual arc isn't a formula—it's a philosophy. The best romantasy authors don't write a quest with a love interest stapled on, or a love story with a fantasy backdrop painted behind it. They build one story with two heartbeats. Every craft choice—the magic system, the wound, the adhesion, the midpoint—exists to make those heartbeats synchronise. That's the skill worth studying.

SECTION SIX

TROPE EXECUTION

Tropes are promises to readers. When you advertise "enemies to lovers," readers expect certain beats. This section helps you study how successful authors deliver on those promises.

Understanding Tropes

Tropes aren't clichés—they're reader expectations. When someone picks up a book tagged "enemies to lovers," they're not hoping to be surprised. They WANT the enemies-to-lovers experience. They're paying for it. Your job is to deliver it in a way that feels fresh.

The difference between a well-executed trope and a cliché is specificity. Generic tropes bore readers. Specific tropes thrill them.

WHAT MAKES A TROPE WORK

When analysing trope execution, ask yourself these questions:

Is the Setup Earned? For enemies-to-lovers, is the hatred justified and specific? For forced proximity, is the proximity genuinely inescapable? Weak setups create weak payoffs.

Is the Progression Believable? Readers want to feel each step of the journey. If enemies become lovers too quickly, we don't believe it. If it takes too long, we get frustrated. How does the author pace the shift?

Is the Payoff Specific? The best trope payoffs are unique to these characters. A "who did this to you?" scene hits different when we know exactly what this character would do for revenge. How does the author make familiar moments feel specific?

Does It Serve the Larger Story? Tropes shouldn't feel like checkboxes. They should be integral to the character arcs and plot. How does the trope connect to the themes of the book?

Macro Tropes

These are the large-scale dynamics that define the romance. Mark which ones appear in your book, then analyse how they're executed.

ENEMIES TO LOVERS: THE FOUR PHASES

Phase 1 — Justified Hatred: The hatred must feel REAL. Ask: Is it personal (he killed my family) or systemic (our peoples are at war)? Is it based on a misunderstanding that will be corrected, or a genuine wrong that requires redemption?

Phase 2 — Crack in Armor: One character sees the other contradict their assumptions. This is often a witnessed act of kindness, competence, or vulnerability. What moment makes one think "maybe I was wrong about them"?

Phase 3 — Reluctant Allies: External circumstances force cooperation. "I don't like you, but I need you to survive." How does the author force proximity while maintaining animosity?

Phase 4 — Respect to Attraction: Grudging admiration becomes desire. This is where tension becomes romantic. What specific moment marks the shift?

FORCED PROXIMITY: HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

The Trap Must Be Airtight: Readers will poke holes. If characters could reasonably leave, they would. The author must close all escape routes.

Common Setups: Magical bonds, captivity, dangerous journeys, one-bed-in-an-inn, shared hiding place, academy/court assignments, fake relationships that require constant presence.

What to Watch: How does the author use physical closeness to create emotional intimacy? What conversations happen because they can't escape each other?

FATED MATES/SOUL BONDS: THE CHALLENGE

The Problem: If they're fated, where's the tension? Good authors create conflict BECAUSE of the bond, not despite it.

What to Watch: Does one character resist the bond? Is the bond incomplete or conditional? Does the bond create obligations that conflict with desires?

The Best Version: The bond forces them together, but they must CHOOSE each other to make it real. Fate brings them together; love makes them stay.

TROPE	PRESENT?	SETUP (CH)	PAYOUT (CH)	WHAT MAKES IT WORK
Enemies to Lovers	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Forced Proximity	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Fated Mates	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Slow Burn	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Forbidden Love	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Morally Grey Hero	<input type="checkbox"/>			

Micro Tropes (Viral Moments)

These are the specific scenes readers screenshot and share on social media. They're the moments that sell books on BookTok and Bookstagram. They're the lines people tattoo on their arms.

Understanding WHY these moments work is essential for any romantasy writer.

WHAT MAKES MICRO TROPS GO VIRAL

"Who Did This To You?" This works because it shows protective rage from someone who was previously cold or restrained. The power dynamic shifts. The reader thinks: "They would burn down the world for this person." Look for: What triggers the rage? How is it expressed? What does it reveal about their feelings?

Wound Tending / Injury Care: Forced intimacy + vulnerability + tenderness = reader catnip. One character must touch the other. There's often pain, which creates permission for comfort. Look for: How does the author slow down time? What small gestures carry emotional weight?

The Training Scene: Physical contact + competence display + sweating/breathing hard = tension. The best training scenes are foreplay disguised as combat. Look for: How does the author make fighting feel like flirting?

Jealousy / Possessive Moment: "Mine." The appeal is seeing how much one character cares, often before they've admitted it to themselves. Look for: What triggers the jealousy? How does it manifest? Is it addressed or suppressed?

Almost Kiss (Interrupted): Delayed gratification builds tension. Look for: How close do they get? What interrupts? How do they react to the interruption?

MICRO TROPE	FOUND?	CHAPTER	HOW IT'S EXECUTED
"Who Did This To You?"	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Wound Tending / Injury Care	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Only One Bed	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Training Scene Tension	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Jealousy Scene	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Protective Snarl/Threat	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Dance Scene	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Almost Kiss (Interrupted)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

SECTION SEVEN

SPICE & INTIMACY

Intimacy scenes work best when they serve the story. This section helps you analyse where physical moments happen, what purpose they serve, and how the relationship changes afterward.

Intimacy as Storytelling

The best intimacy scenes aren't gratuitous—they're story. They reveal character, advance the relationship, and mark emotional turning points. When analysing spice, don't just note **WHAT** happens. Focus on **WHY** and **WHAT IT MEANS**.

WHAT TO ANALYSE IN INTIMACY SCENES

Placement Matters: Where in the story does physical intimacy occur? Too early feels unearned. Too late frustrates readers. Most successful romantasy places the first major intimate scene around 50-65% of the book—after the relationship has built, but before the black moment can destroy it.

What Triggers It: Is this a celebration? A comfort after danger? A moment of weakness? An impulsive mistake? The emotional context shapes how readers interpret the scene.

Power Dynamics: Who initiates? Who's more vulnerable? Does the power dynamic shift during the scene? In the best scenes, both characters give and take.

What's Revealed: Good intimacy scenes reveal something new about the characters—their fears, their tenderness, their hidden desires. What do we learn that we couldn't learn any other way?

What Changes After: If nothing changes after an intimate scene, it didn't do its job. Does the relationship deepen? Do new fears emerge? Does vulnerability create new problems?

The Language Choices: Pay attention to word choices. Clinical language creates distance. Poetic language creates romance. Raw language creates intensity. How do the author's word choices affect the tone?

Heat Level Progression

Tracking intimate scenes in sequence reveals pacing patterns. Most books escalate gradually, then deliver the most intense scene after maximum emotional build-up.

Use the scale below for consistent ratings.

HEAT LEVEL SCALE

0 – Clean: No physical intimacy beyond hand-holding

1 – Sweet: Closed-door, sweet kisses

2 – Mild: Heated kissing, some touching

3 – Moderate: Fade to black with buildup

4 – Steamy: On-page intimacy, some detail

5 – Explicit: Detailed, explicit scenes

#	CHAPTER	HEAT LEVEL	SCENE TYPE	WHAT CHANGED AFTER?
1				
2				
3				
4				

Banter & Verbal Chemistry

Chemistry isn't just physical. Often the most memorable romantic tension lives in dialogue. The way characters talk to each other—the teasing, the double meanings, the things left unsaid—can be more charged than any physical scene.

WHAT CREATES VERBAL CHEMISTRY

Subtext: Characters saying one thing while meaning another. "I hate you" that sounds like "I want you." Insults that are really compliments. Pay attention to the gap between what's said and what's meant.

Rhythm & Pacing: Great banter has a rhythm—quick back-and-forth, interruptions, finishing each other's sentences. How does the author create this breathless quality?

Power Shifts: One character has the upper hand, then the other. The best verbal sparring feels like a duel where the lead keeps changing. Who wins each exchange? How?

Callbacks: References to earlier conversations create intimacy. They have a shared history, inside jokes, a private language. What callbacks does the author use?

Vulnerability Through Wit: Sometimes a character reveals something true while pretending to joke. The other character catches it. How does the author weave real emotion into banter?

Collect exchanges that sparked chemistry. Try to identify the technique.

CHAPTER	THE EXCHANGE	TECHNIQUE

Techniques: Double meaning / Callback humor / Power play / Vulnerability as wit / Pet names / One-upmanship / Innuendo

SECTION EIGHT

CRAFT MOVES TO STEAL

This is your personal library. When you read something that makes you think, "I want to do that," capture it here. Over time, you'll build a collection of techniques to draw from in your own writing.

Building Your Craft Library

Great writers are thieves. Not of words—of techniques. When you read something that makes you stop and think "how did they DO that?", you've found gold. Your job is to mine it.

HOW TO EXTRACT USABLE LESSONS

Don't Just Copy—Analyse: Anyone can write down a beautiful sentence. The craft lesson is in understanding WHY it's beautiful. Break it apart. What specific choices make it work?

Opening Hooks: How does the author create immediate interest? Look for: questions raised, tension introduced, voice established, world hinted. The best first lines do multiple jobs at once.

Sensory Details: Which senses does the author use? How specific are the details?
Notice: Great writers don't describe everything—they pick the ONE detail that brings a scene alive.

Tension Building: How does the author make you turn pages? Look for: unanswered questions, delayed revelations, ticking clocks, competing desires. How do they make you NEED to know what happens next?

Emotional Moments: What made you feel something? Pay attention to pacing—did time slow down? Did the author use space, silence, or a single detail? Emotion often lives in what's NOT said.

Chapter Endings: How does the author end chapters? Hook (question raised), cliff (danger), revelation (new information), or beat (emotional landing)? Strong chapter endings are why readers stay up past midnight.

Technique Collection

Copy passages that stopped you. Then be specific about the technique.

CATEGORY	THE QUOTE/EXAMPLE	WHY IT WORKS
Opening Hook	<i>"The night my sister tried to kill me, the moon was full." (p.1)</i>	<i>Immediate stakes + family conflict + atmospheric setting in one line</i>
Opening Hook		
Sensor y Description		
Tension Building		

Emotional Moment		
Dialogue/Banter		
Action Sequence		
Chapter Ending		

Swoon-Worthy Lines

Some lines just hit. Copy them here with page numbers so you can study them later. Over time, you'll start to notice patterns in what makes you swoon.

SECTION NINE

POST-READ SYNTHESIS

This is where your scattered observations become usable knowledge. Try to complete this section within a day of finishing the book, while everything is still fresh.

Structural Metrics

These numbers help you compare pacing across different books. Over time, you'll develop a feel for what's typical in the genre and what's an outlier.

Chapters to inciting incident:	"All Is Lost" page/%:
First kiss page/%:	Total chapters:
Midpoint page/%:	Actual heat level:

Overall Assessment

Rate each element and jot down what worked or didn't. Be specific. "The pacing was slow" is less useful than "The middle 30% dragged because there were too many training scenes."

ELEMENT	RATING (1-5)	NOTES
Pacing		
Romance Arc		
Fantasy Plot		
Arc Integration		
Character Development		

Lessons for My Writing

This is the most important part. All your tracking, all your analysis—it only matters if it changes how you write. It's easy to finish a book, think "that was great," and move on. Don't do that. Sit with what you observed. The patterns you noticed in pacing, the way tension was built or

released, the moments where you forgot you were reading—those are the lessons worth carrying forward.

Your notes from the previous sections are raw material. This is where you refine them into something actionable. Be honest with yourself about what worked, what didn't, and most importantly—what you can actually use. The goal isn't to write a book review. It's to walk away with concrete techniques you can apply the next time you sit down to draft or revise.

QUESTIONS TO DRIVE YOUR SYNTHESIS

What Made This Book Work (Or Not)? Not "I liked it" or "I didn't like it"—WHY? Be specific. The answers will teach you something about reader expectations, genre conventions, and your own taste.

What Can I Steal? Not plagiarize—LEARN FROM. A technique, a structure, a way of handling a trope. How can you apply it to YOUR story?

What Would I Do Differently? This isn't criticism—it's craft analysis. If something didn't work for you, articulate why. Then figure out how YOU would solve that problem.

What Does This Book Do That My Book Needs? The most useful comp analysis is personal. What does this author do well that you struggle with? That's what you should study most closely.

Three things this book did exceptionally well (be specific):

One thing I would have done differently (and why):

Specific techniques I will try in my current project:

The single most important craft lesson from this book:

Dual-Arc Validation Toolkit

These diagnostic exercises test whether the book you just read achieved true integration—or whether its romance and fantasy arcs were running in parallel without truly depending on each other. They're also powerful tools for evaluating your own manuscripts during revision.

THE UNRAVELING TEST

This is the single most important diagnostic. Try to mentally remove one arc from the book and see what survives.

Remove the romance: Does the fantasy plot still make sense? Does the protagonist still have sufficient motivation to act? Do the key turning points still function?

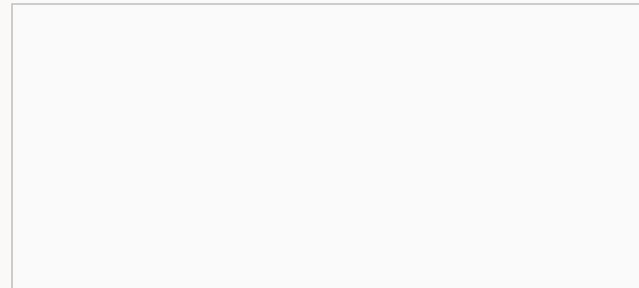
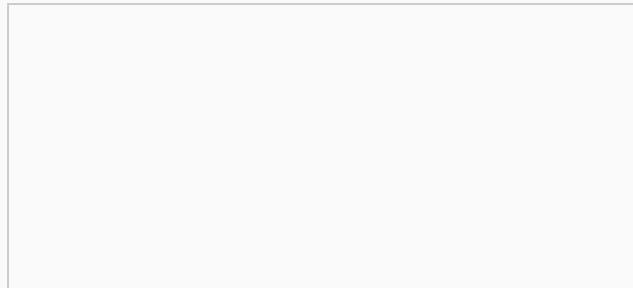
Remove the fantasy: Does the romance still have enough external pressure and obstacles? Is there still a reason these characters can't simply be together? Does the love story still feel urgent?

If either arc survives intact, integration has failed. The arcs were parallel, not intertwined. In great romantasy, removing either arc collapses the entire story.

Unraveling Test Results:

Without the romance, the fantasy plot would...

Without the fantasy, the romance would...



THE LOGLINE LITMUS TEST

Try to write a single-sentence summary of this book that requires BOTH arcs to make sense. If you can write a complete logline using only the romance or only the fantasy, the integration needs work.

Weak example: "A woman must defeat an evil king" (fantasy only) + "She falls for a mysterious warrior" (romance only). These are two loglines, not one.

Strong example: "A woman who can only defeat the evil king by unlocking a power that awakens through the bond with her sworn enemy." Both arcs are structurally necessary in a single sentence.

My one-sentence logline (must require both arcs):

STRUCTURAL PITFALL DIAGNOSIS

Based on your reading, does this book suffer from any of these common integration failures? Be honest—even books you love can have structural weaknesses. Identifying them teaches you what to avoid.

PITFALL	PRESENT?	EVIDENCE / WHERE YOU NOTICED IT
Bolted-On Romance Romance could be removed without affecting fantasy plot	Y / N	
"Plot? What Plot?" Fantasy exists only to create romantic scenarios	Y / N	
Logic-Leap Characters act against their intelligence to serve plot	Y / N	
Stakes Asymmetry One arc carries life-or-death stakes, the other doesn't	Y / N	

Applying the Through-Thread to Your Own Writing

Having analysed how this book handles dual-arc integration, now turn the lens on your own work-in-progress. These questions bridge analysis and application.

What binding technique(s) does your WIP use to connect its arcs?

Could your WIP pass the Unraveling Test? If not, what causal links are missing?

What did this book's through-thread teach you that you can apply to your own?



ONE LAST THING

Frameworks and analysis can teach you a lot. But only you can write your story. Take what serves you, leave what doesn't, and trust your instincts about what your particular book needs.

APPENDIX

INTEGRATION PATTERNS & GLOSSARY

A quick-reference toolkit. Use the pattern library to identify how this book binds its arcs,

and the glossary to keep the vocabulary of dual-arc craft at your fingertips.

The Eight Integration Patterns

Every successful romantasy uses at least one of these binding techniques to make its romance and fantasy arcs inseparable. Most use two or three. As you analyse the book, identify which patterns are in play. This tells you HOW the author achieved integration—and which techniques you might borrow for your own work.

Think of these patterns as structural adhesives. Each one answers the same question differently: *Why can't this love story exist without this fantasy world, and why can't this fantasy plot resolve without this relationship?* A book that relies on Symbiotic Magic binds its arcs through the magic system itself—remove the relationship and the magic breaks. A book built on a Crucible Quest uses the journey to make the romance inevitable—without the danger, these two people would never have let their walls down. The pattern tells you where the glue is.

Most authors layer patterns rather than relying on a single one. A political marriage might force the characters together (the initial hook), but it's their mirrored wounds that create genuine emotional depth, and a prophecy that raises the cosmic stakes. When you identify multiple patterns, pay attention to which one carries the *most* structural weight. That's the primary pattern—the one that, if removed, would collapse both arcs. The others are secondary: they enrich and complicate, but the story could survive without them.

Use the reference table below to identify which patterns are at work, then capture your findings in the blank worksheet that follows.

PATTERN	HOW IT WORKS
Symbiotic Magic	The magic system is tied to the relationship. A bond, a curse, shared power, emotions that fuel spells. The romance literally powers or constrains the fantasy.
Crucible Quest	The characters must complete a dangerous journey or mission together. Shared survival creates forced proximity, trust, and intimacy that couldn't form any other way.
Antagonist's Leverage	The villain directly exploits the romantic relationship—using one lover as a hostage, weapon, or bargaining chip. Love becomes a tactical vulnerability.
Political Marriage / Bargain	A strategic alliance (marriage, contract, deal) forces the characters together. The external arrangement creates a container where real feelings develop against both characters' intentions.
Mirrored Wounds	Both characters carry complementary trauma. Each person's healing depends on the other—their wounds are puzzle pieces that only fit together. Growth in one arc requires growth in the other.
Secret Identity	One or both characters hide who they truly are. The romance develops under false pretences, and the revelation creates a crisis that drives both plots simultaneously.
Power Synergy	The characters' magical abilities complement each other. They are stronger together than apart. The fantasy stakes demand their cooperation, and cooperation builds romantic connection.

Prophecy of Union	Fate, prophecy, or cosmic design declares the characters belong together. The tension comes from resisting or accepting destiny while the fantasy plot unfolds around that resistance.
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Record the integration patterns you identified in this book.

PATTERN USED	HOW IT APPEARS IN THIS BOOK (NOTES)

Dual-Arc Glossary

These terms give you a shared vocabulary for talking about how romantasy works at the structural level. They're drawn from romance craft, fantasy plotting, and the specific challenges of weaving those traditions together.

STRUCTURE & INTEGRATION

Through-Thread: The causal chain that makes romance and fantasy arcs inseparable. When you pull one thread, both arcs unravel. This is the defining feature of great romantasy.

Double Helix: A structural model where romance and fantasy arcs twist around each other like DNA strands, crossing at key beats. Each strand takes turns being dominant, but they share the same backbone.

Symbiotic Causality: When a romance beat directly causes a fantasy beat (or vice versa). Not just "these happen at the same time" but "this CAUSED that." The strongest integration is built from chains of symbiotic causality.

The Bridge: The specific mechanism that makes two plots inseparable. A magical bond, a shared quest, a political marriage. Without the bridge, the arcs could exist independently. The bridge makes them one story.

Midpoint Rupture: The moment (usually near 50%) where both arcs collide and transform each other. A romantic revelation changes the fantasy stakes, or a fantasy crisis forces a romantic reckoning. The strongest midpoints do both simultaneously.

Emotional Mirror: When the state of the world reflects the state of the relationship. The kingdom thrives when the couple is united, crumbles when they're apart. Weather shifts with mood. Magic responds to emotional truth.

DIAGNOSTIC TERMS

Bolted-On Romance: A structural pitfall where the romance could be removed without affecting the fantasy plot. The love story feels decorative rather than essential. Common in fantasy novels that add romance as an afterthought.

"Plot? What Plot?" Syndrome: The opposite pitfall—the fantasy plot is so thin it exists only to create romantic scenarios. The world-building and external stakes feel like wallpaper rather than a story in their own right.

Logic-Leap: When a romance beat forces an unreasonable fantasy decision (or vice versa) just to keep both arcs moving. Characters make choices that serve the plot but contradict their established intelligence or values.

Stakes Asymmetry: When one arc carries life-or-death stakes while the other carries mild inconvenience. If the fantasy climax is "save the world" but the romantic crisis is "mild misunderstanding," the arcs feel unbalanced.

Fantasy Romance vs. Romantic Fantasy: A spectrum, not a binary. Fantasy Romance foregrounds the love story with fantasy as setting and obstacle. Romantic Fantasy foregrounds the quest/world with romance as emotional engine. Knowing where a book falls on this spectrum changes how you analyse its structure.

ROMANTIC STRUCTURE

Adhesion: The external force that keeps characters together when they'd rather walk away. In romantasy, it's often fantasy-based: a curse, a bargain, a war, a shared quest.

Ghost/Wound: The past trauma that shapes how a character sees love and the world. It creates the internal obstacle to the relationship.

The Lie: A false belief the character holds that must be overcome for growth. In romance: "Love is weakness." "I'm unworthy." In fantasy: "Power is the only safety."

Slow Burn: A pacing strategy that builds romantic tension through delayed gratification and "almost" moments. It's about how you structure the longing, not how long the book is.

HEA/HFN: Happily Ever After or Happy For Now. Romance readers expect one of these. It's a promise of the genre.

Deep POV: Narrative perspective that puts the reader inside the character's head with no emotional distance. Immediate and intimate.