

The background is a dark charcoal grey. In the top left, there is a stylized illustration of an open book with pinkish-red pages and a gold-colored cover. To the right of the book, there are several calligraphic flourishes in shades of pink, red, and gold. In the bottom right corner, there is a drawing of a pencil and a pen, both in shades of pink and red. The overall aesthetic is elegant and artistic, typical of a branding for a creative or literary business.

Defining Audience Expectations

What is dark romance?

The logo for Kallista Ann editing features a circular emblem on the left containing a delicate line drawing of a flowering branch with several buds and open flowers. To the right of the emblem, the name 'Kallista Ann' is written in a flowing, cursive script. Below this, the word 'editing' is written in a large, clean, serif font.

Kallista Ann
editing



Objectives

01

Define
dark
romance

02

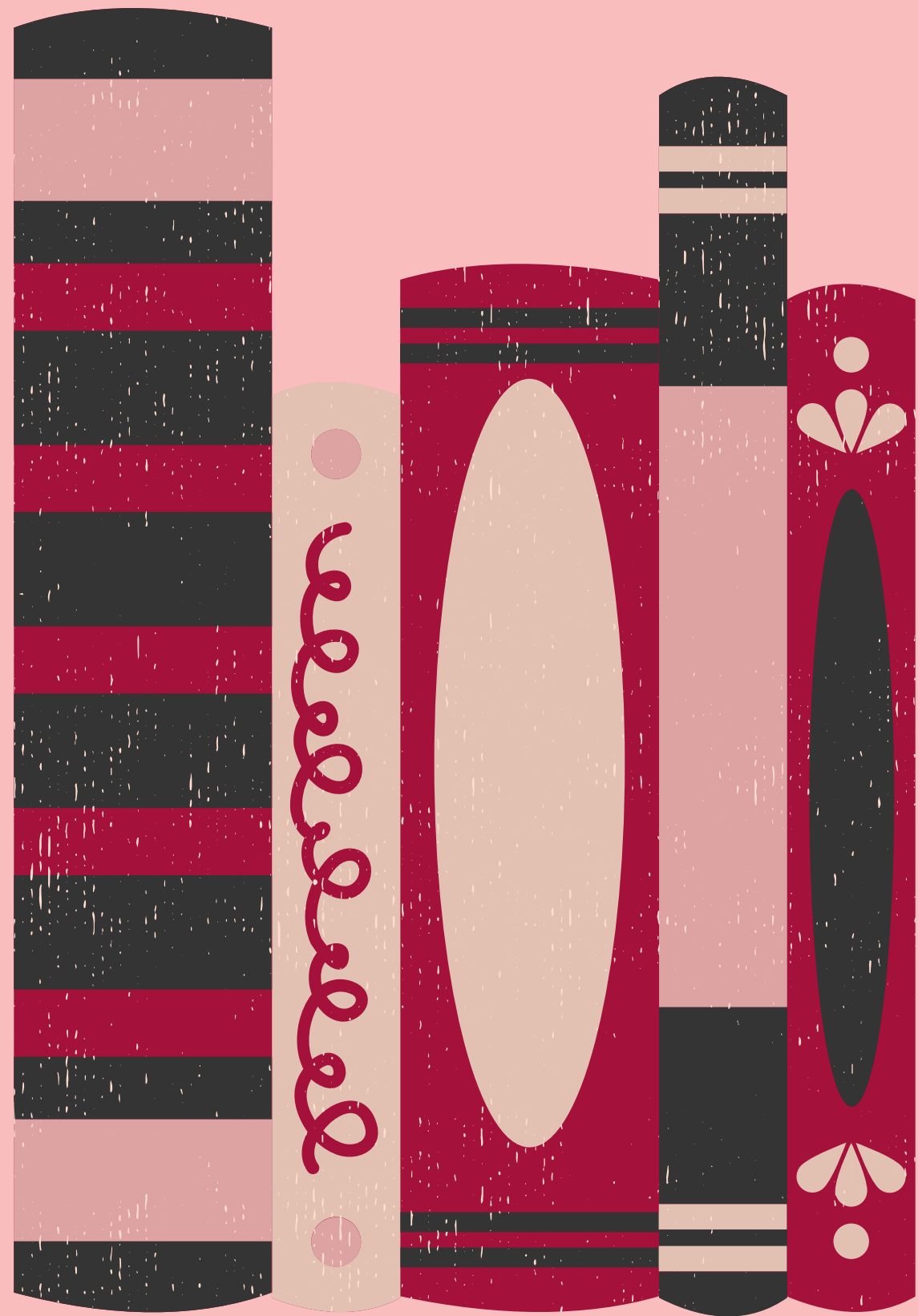
Define
audience
expectations

03

Discuss
why
readers
adore it.

04

Tips on
achieving
audience
expectations



Who is this for?

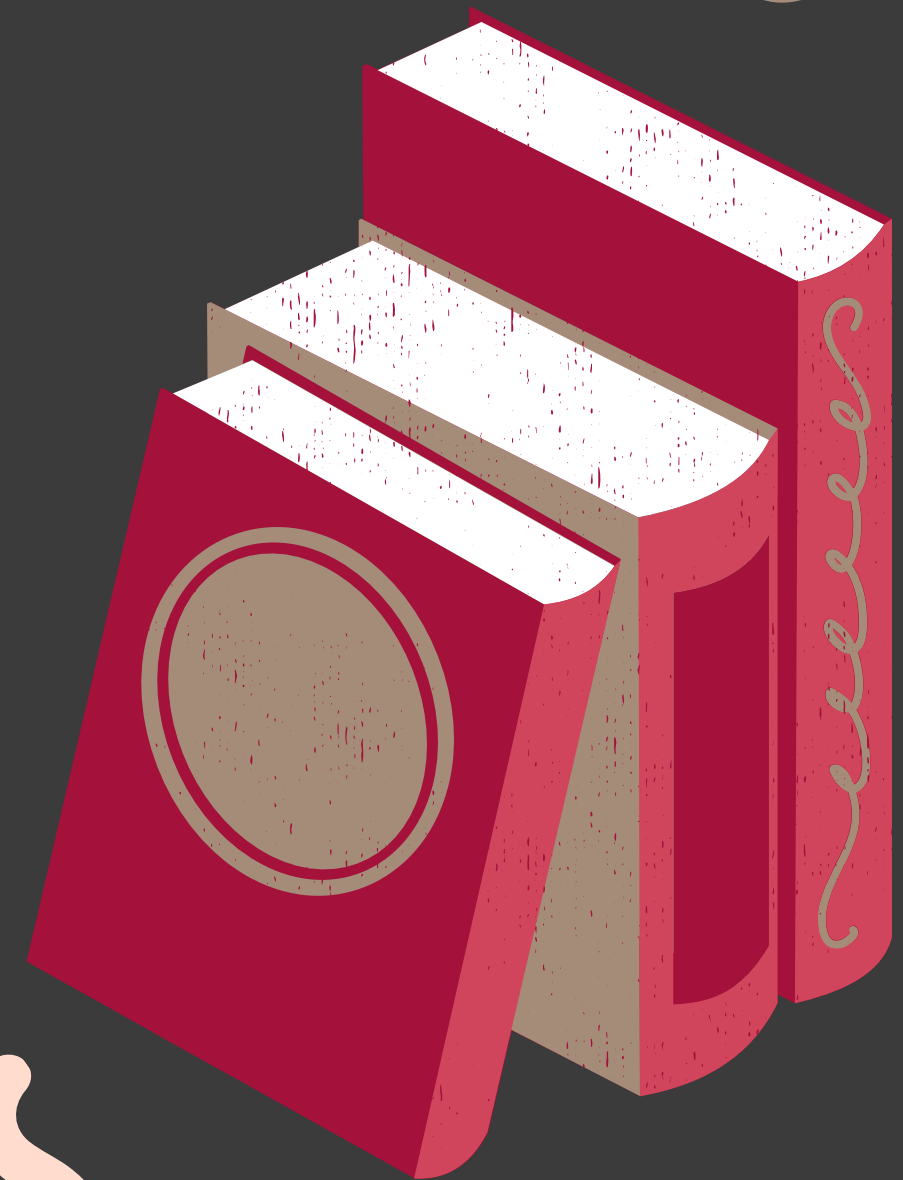
- Anyone who's interested in breaking into dark romance.
- Anyone who's curious to know what this is all about.

What is dark romance?

“A subgenre of romance with darker themes and mature content.”

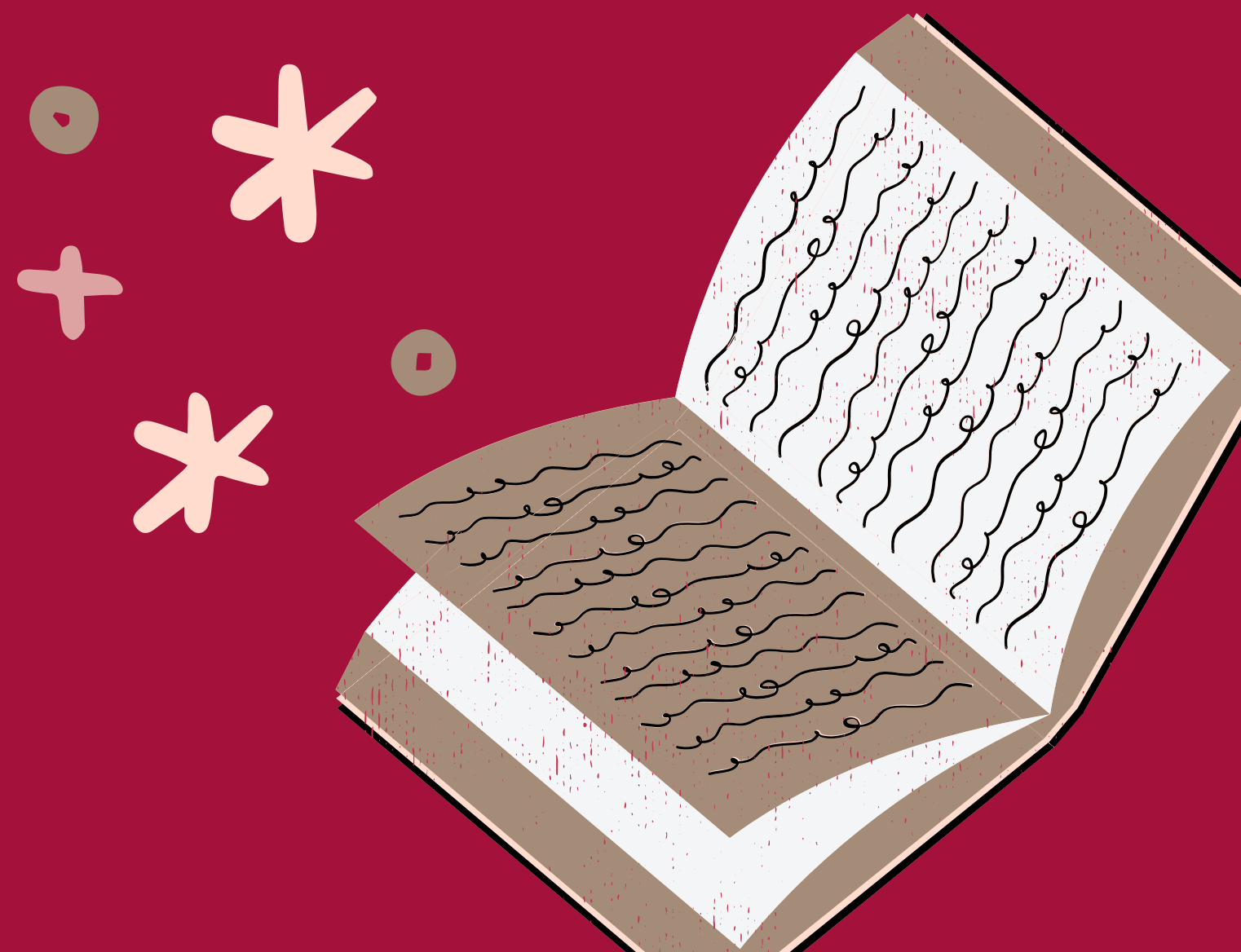
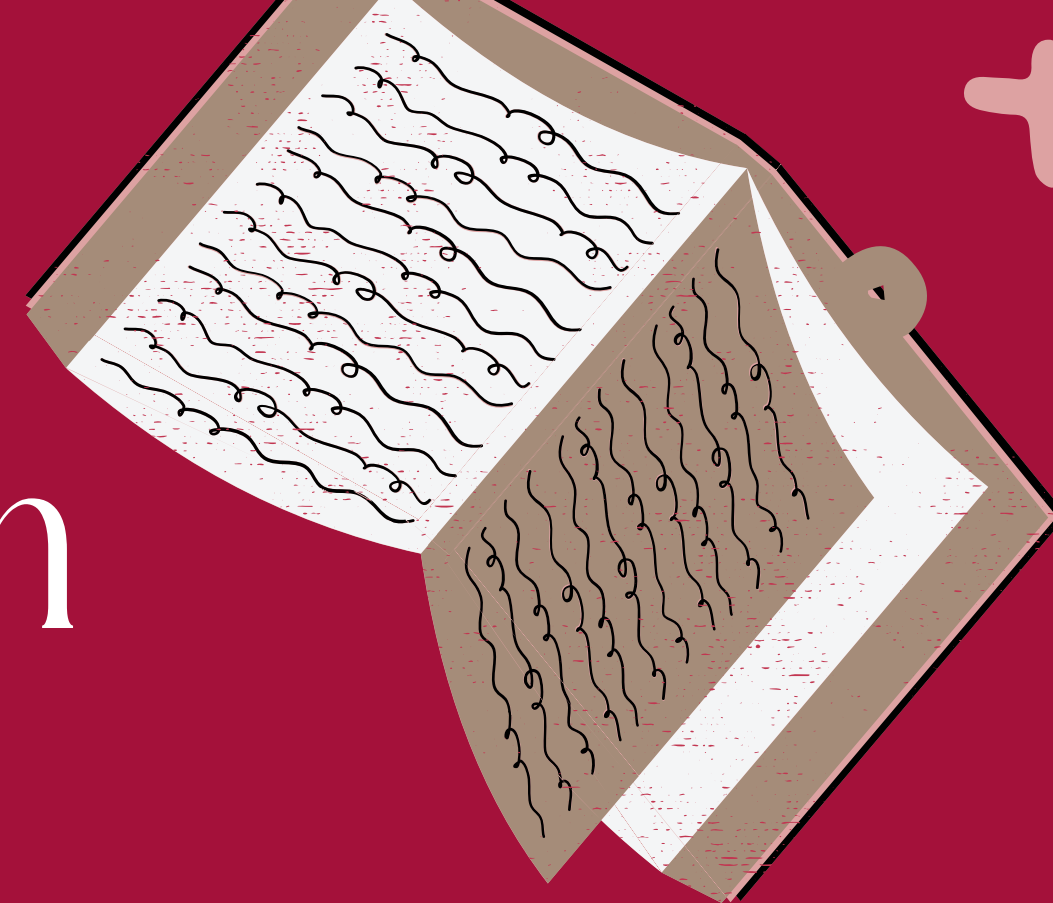


Is this romantic
suspense
repackaged?



Dark romance is the intersection between romance and horror

- How can there be an intersection between mutually exclusive genres? Horror inspires terror. Romance inspires butterflies.
- “It’s sour but sweet!”



Dark Romance Spectrum

Romance

Emotional experience is just like a romance novel. The audience feels love, connection, and all things fuzzy.

02

Love interest pursues the protagonist in ways that are considered socially unacceptable. The audience begins to feel uncomfortable, but the story emphasizes the warm feeling of romance.

03

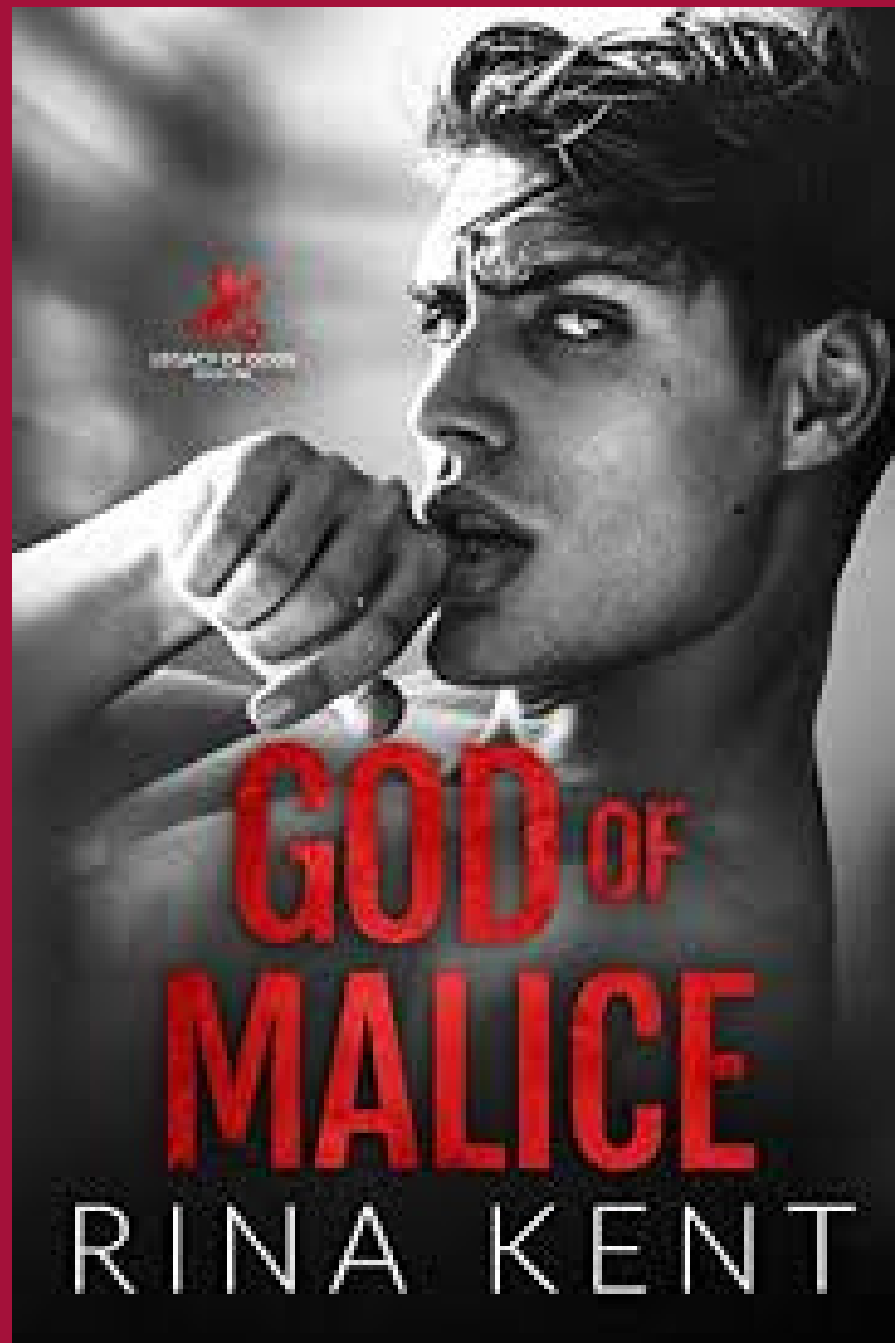
Love interest pursues the protagonist in extreme ways like kidnapping, trafficking, non-consensual touching, etc. The audience experiences distress mixed with heady romance.

Horror

Emotional experience is just like a horror novel. The audience experiences fear, disgust, and horror.

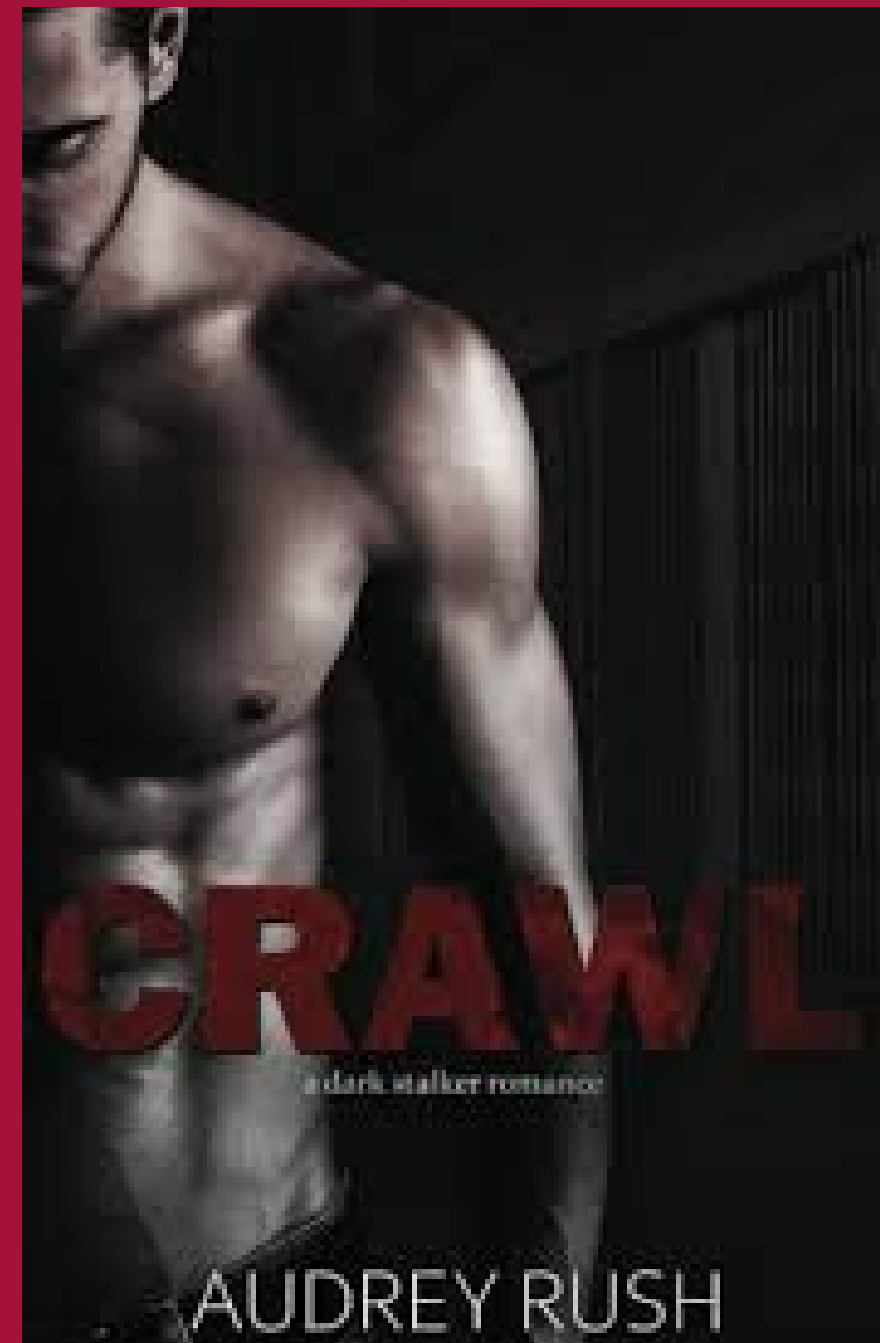
Dark Romance Spectrum

Romance end of
dark romance



VS

Horror end of dark
romance



Spice factor

01

It's known for being spicy.

02

It has the exact opposite relationship to sex than traditional romance.

03

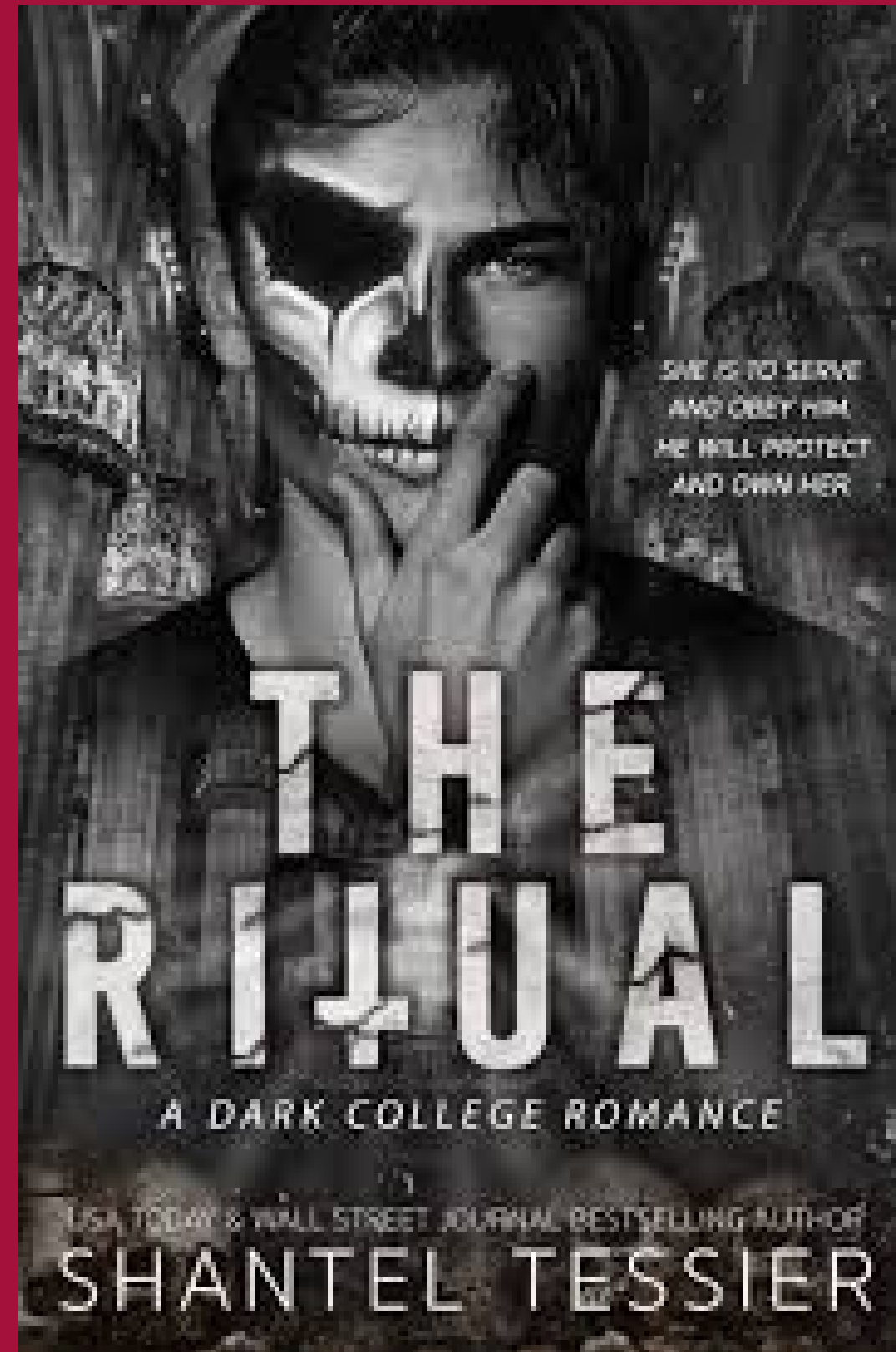
Sex is often used as an emotional intimacy tool.

04

Characters often jump into bed early.

Spice factor Example

01 Sex is an emotional intimacy tool.



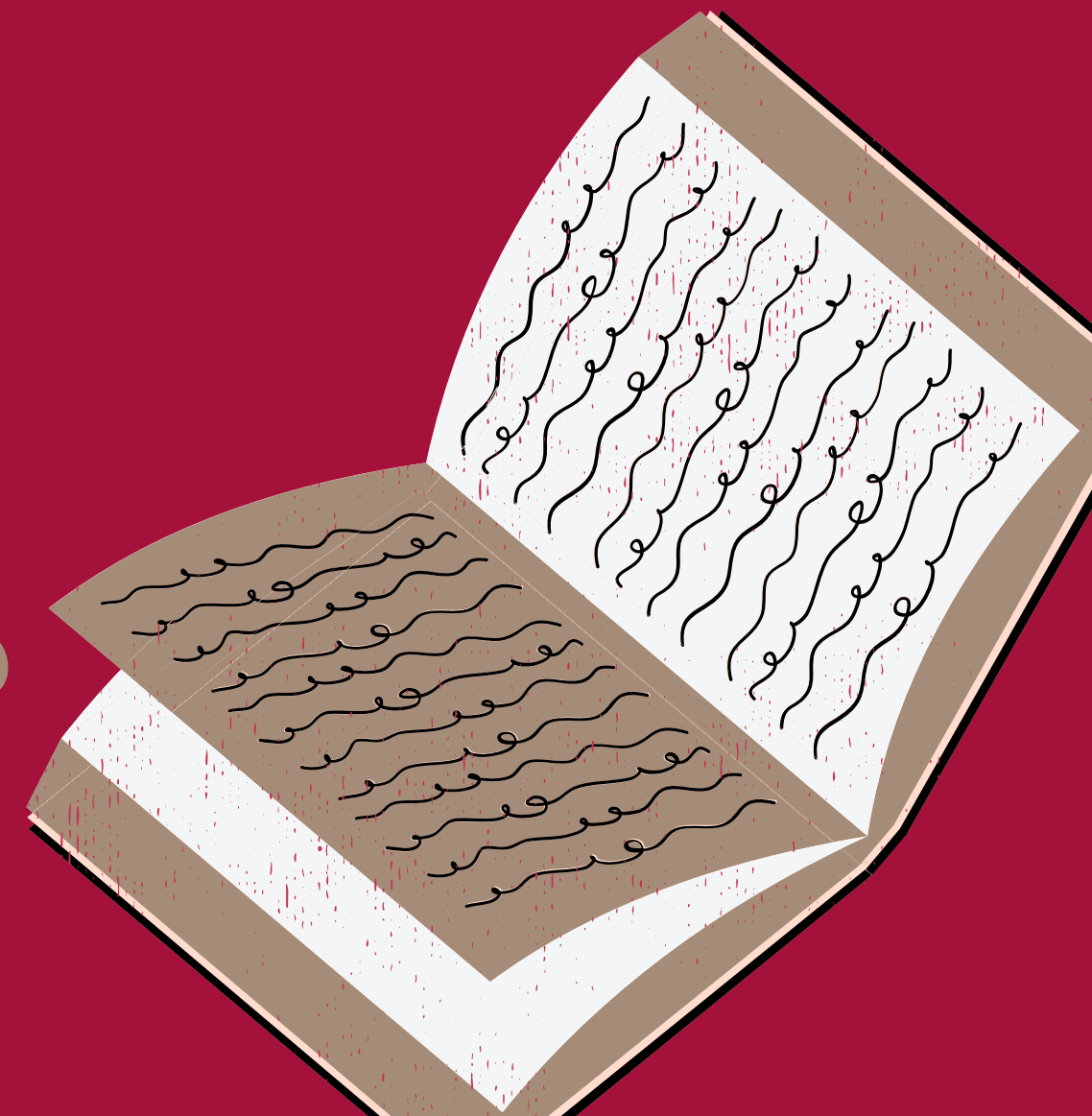
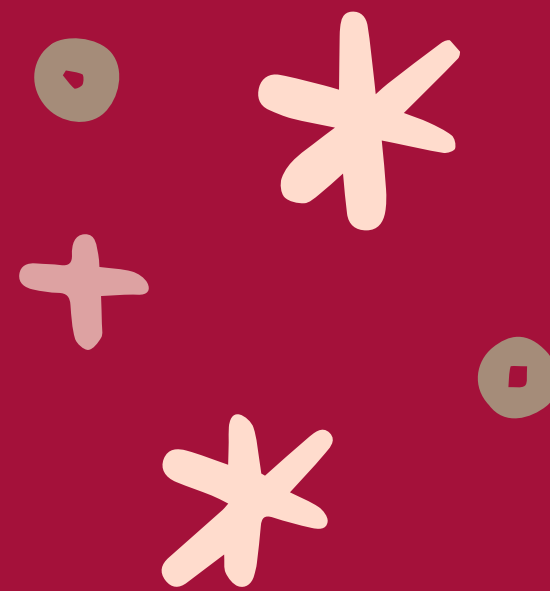
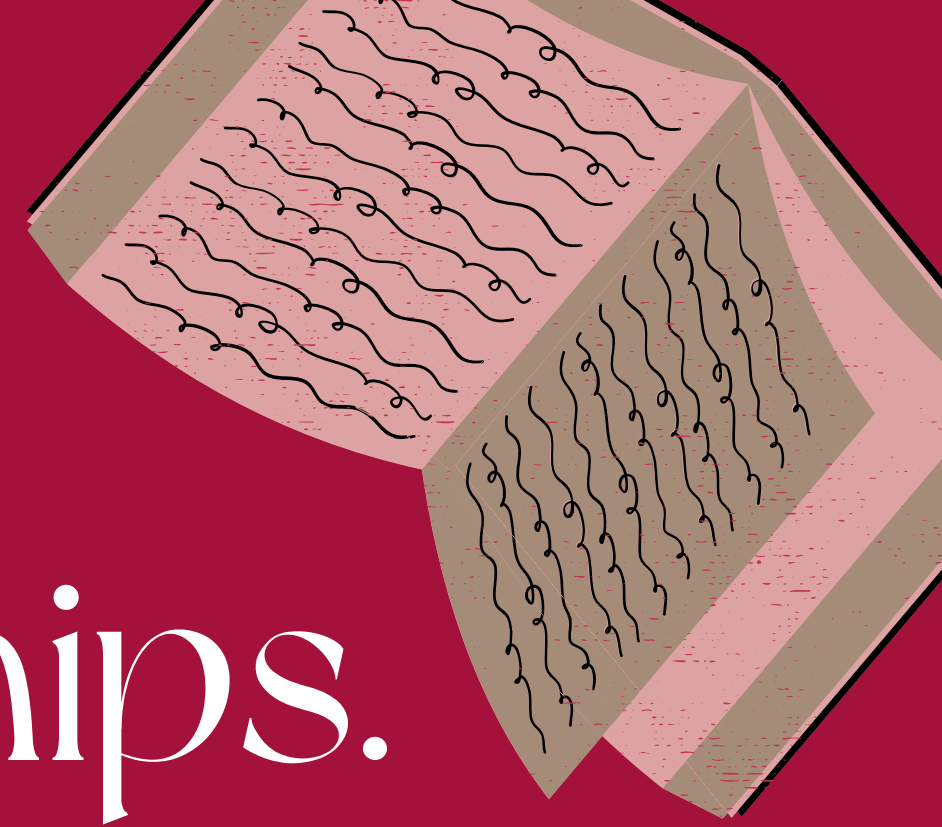
Dark Romance vs Dark Erotica

- The point of an erotica is to set up different reasons for the character to have sex. Any romance in it is only to titillate the reader further.
- The point of a romance is to get the characters into a relationship. The sex scenes help push the characters towards that.

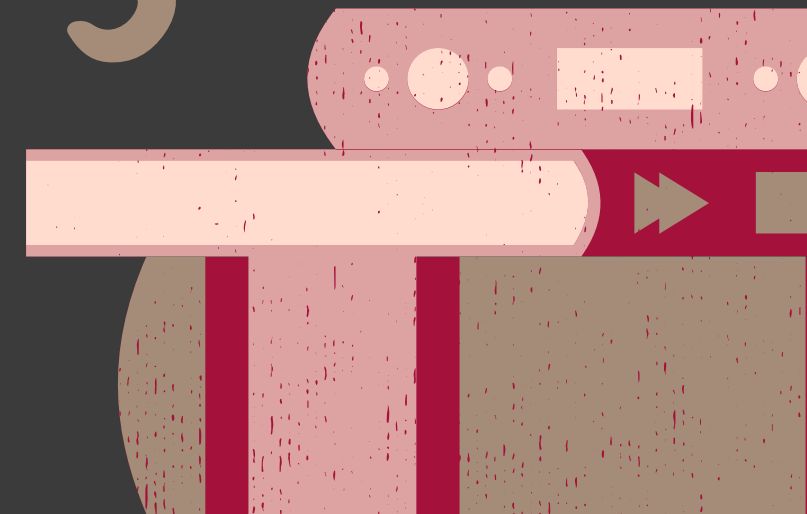


Dark romance explores nontraditional relationships.

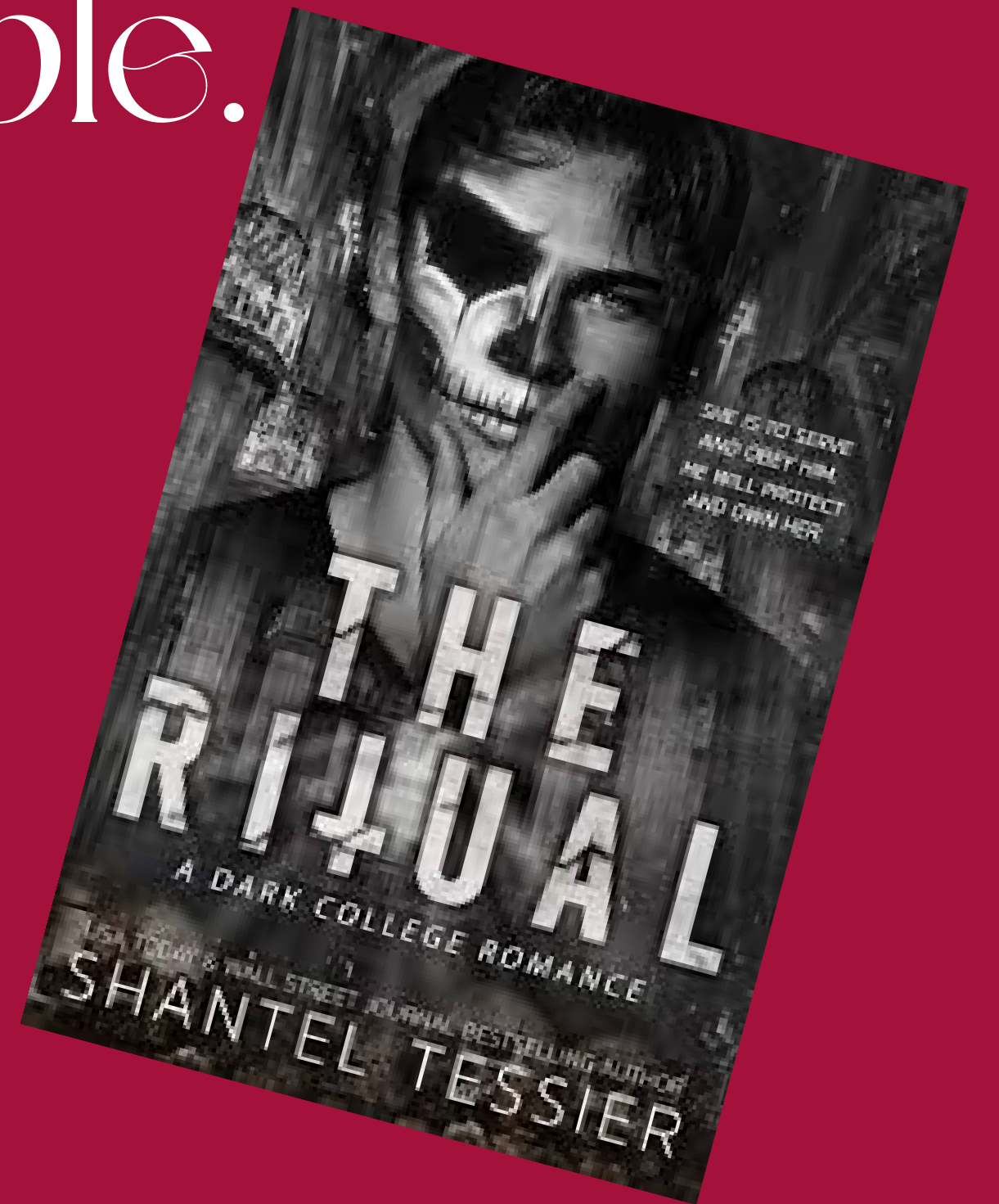
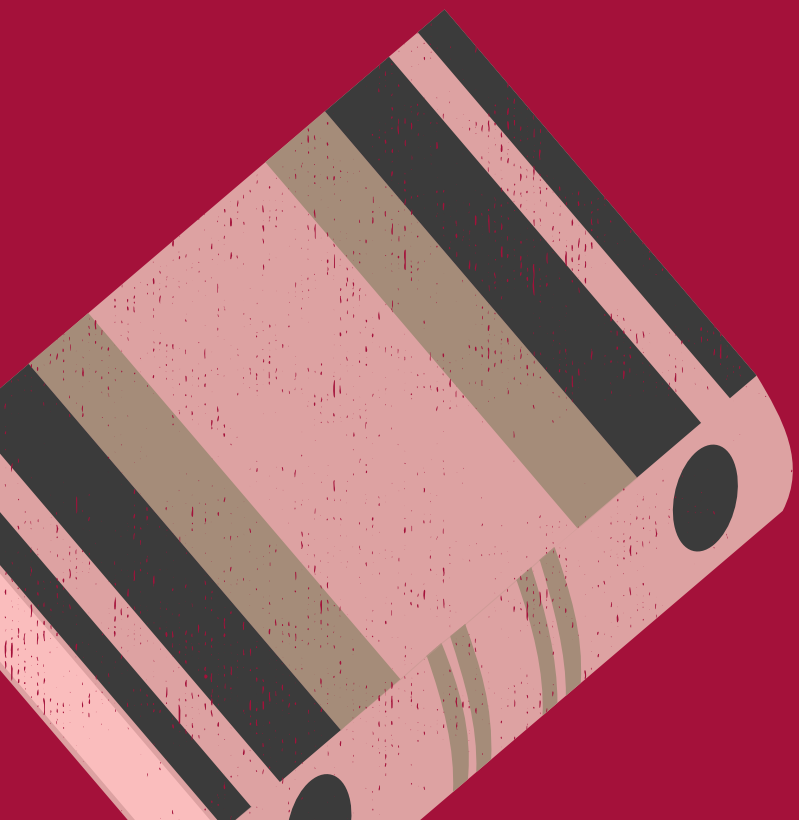
- Dominate/submissive – most common
- Polyamory
- Sadism/masochism



Is this
romanticizing
abuse?



Abuse vs. nontraditional relationships example.



Non-consent

Dubious
consent

Obsession

Self-harm

Trigger warnings

Possessive

murder

Kidnapping

Stalking

Audience expectations = genre conventions

1. They are essential features that create the experience readers search for when they open a book in a specific genre.

2. Ex. Murder mystery conventions.

3. Audience expectation think reader experience.

4. It's why the reader loves the genre.

This is not a mindless checklist

Mindlessly plopping in audience expectations leads to clichés and stereotypes.

Why do these conventions work?

How do they connect to other parts of storytelling?

How can you put your own spin on them?



Why readers love it #1

Complex Relationships

The Phantom of the Opera



How do you create Complex Relationships?

Have a villainous love interest.

Have a compelling arc of change.

love interest is a villain

Real Villain

Real villainy would be the love interest doing something genuinely bad and not caring because it got them what they wanted, whether it's murder, kidnapping, drug dealing, etc.

- Villainous love interest creates moral ambiguity.
- What type of relationship dynamic would that look like?
- How do you get those two into an authentic, loving relationship?

Love interest is not a fake villain

Fake Villian

Fake villainy would be the love interest doing one bad thing ten years ago and is haunted by it. It's the love interest blaming themselves for something that clearly wasn't their fault.

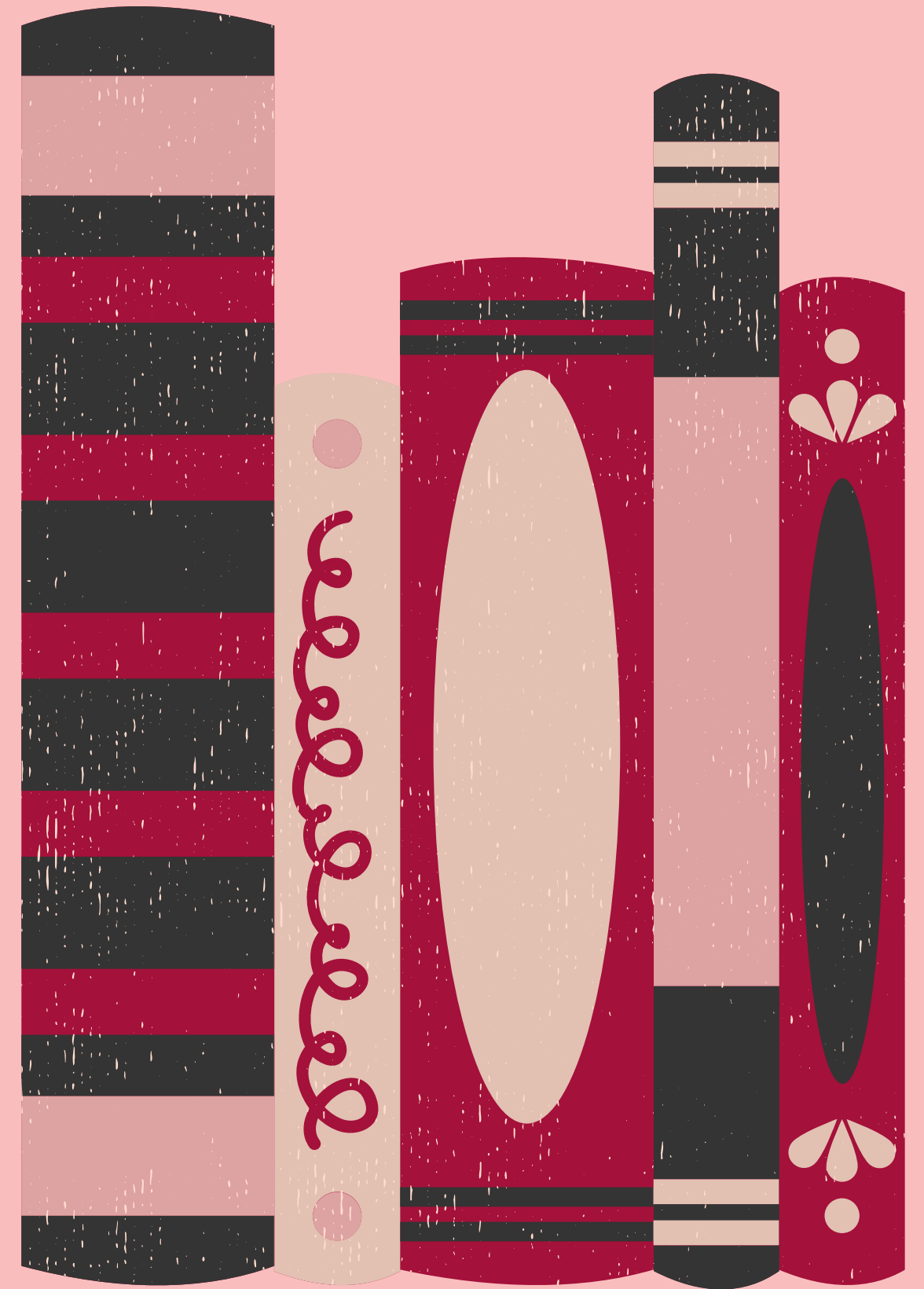
Arcs of change



- Whatever is holding the lovers back from being in an authentic, loving, healthy relationship.
- Ex. God of Malice

What NOT to change

- The lovers going from a nontraditional relationship to a traditional relationship.



Putting it all together

To create complex relationships.

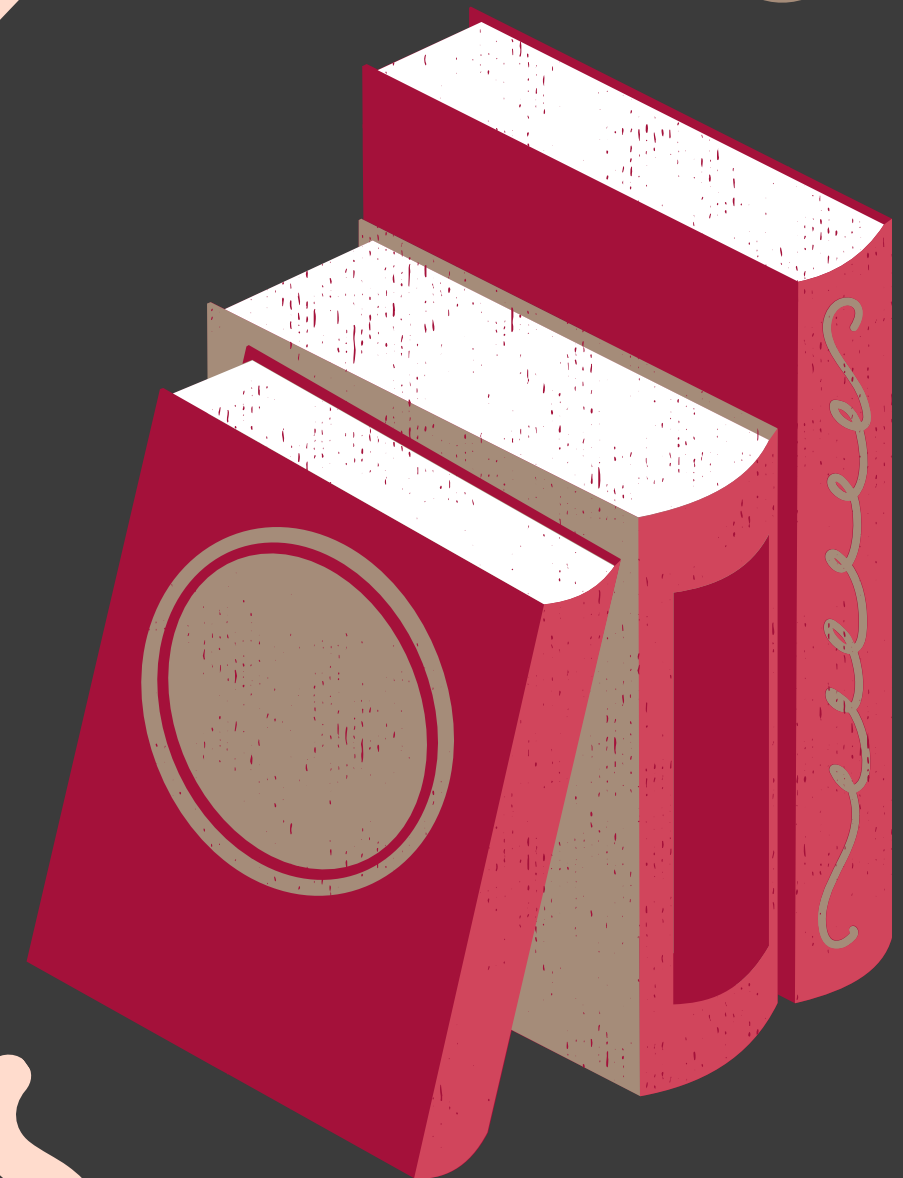
- Have a villainous love interest.
- Make the lovers change so they can be in an authentic, loving relationship.





Why readers love it #2

Intense Plotlines



How do you create intense plotlines?

Power imbalances

Breaking social norms

Emotional intensity

Adding in subplots

Power Imbalance

- Either the protagonist or the love interest must have more power over the other.
- The power imbalance is the crux of all relational conflict in a dark romance.



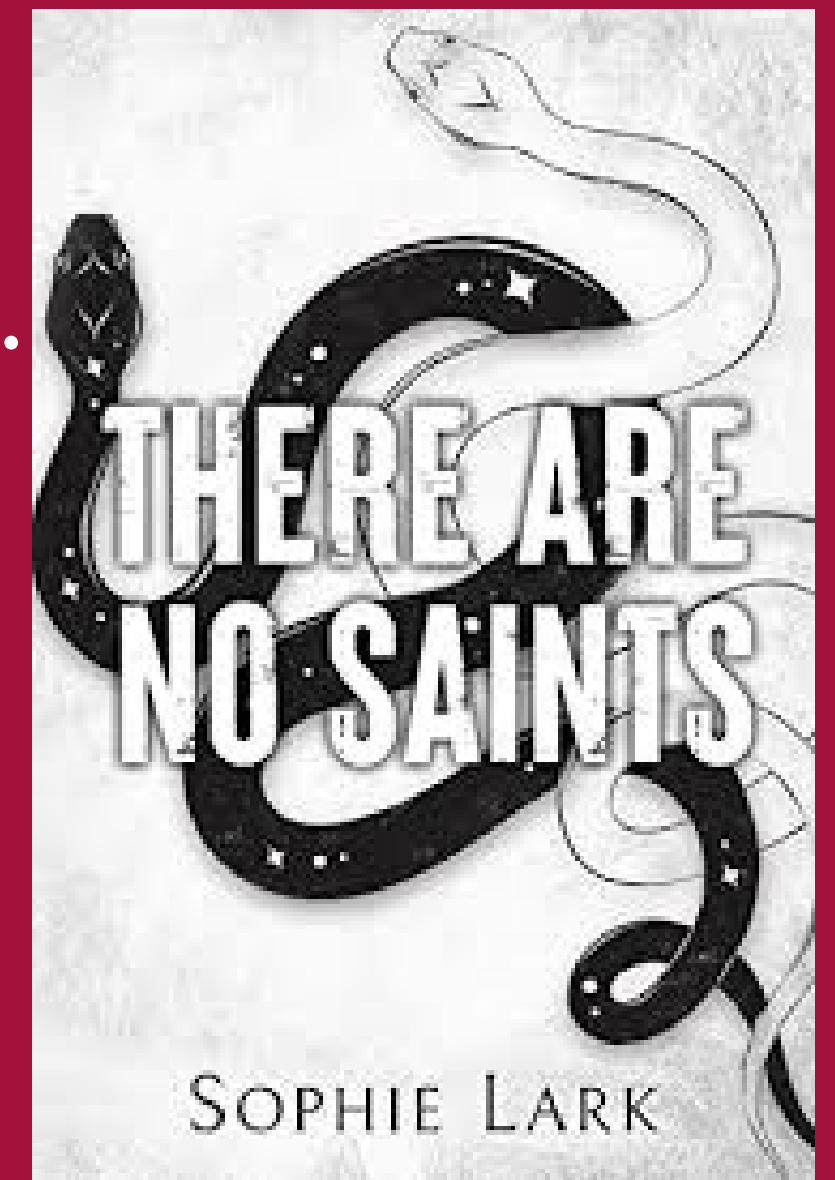
Power Imbalance DON'Ts

- The power imbalance is not necessarily a source of evil.
- Characters are learning how to have a healthy power exchange.



Power Imbalance Examples

Financial and social control.



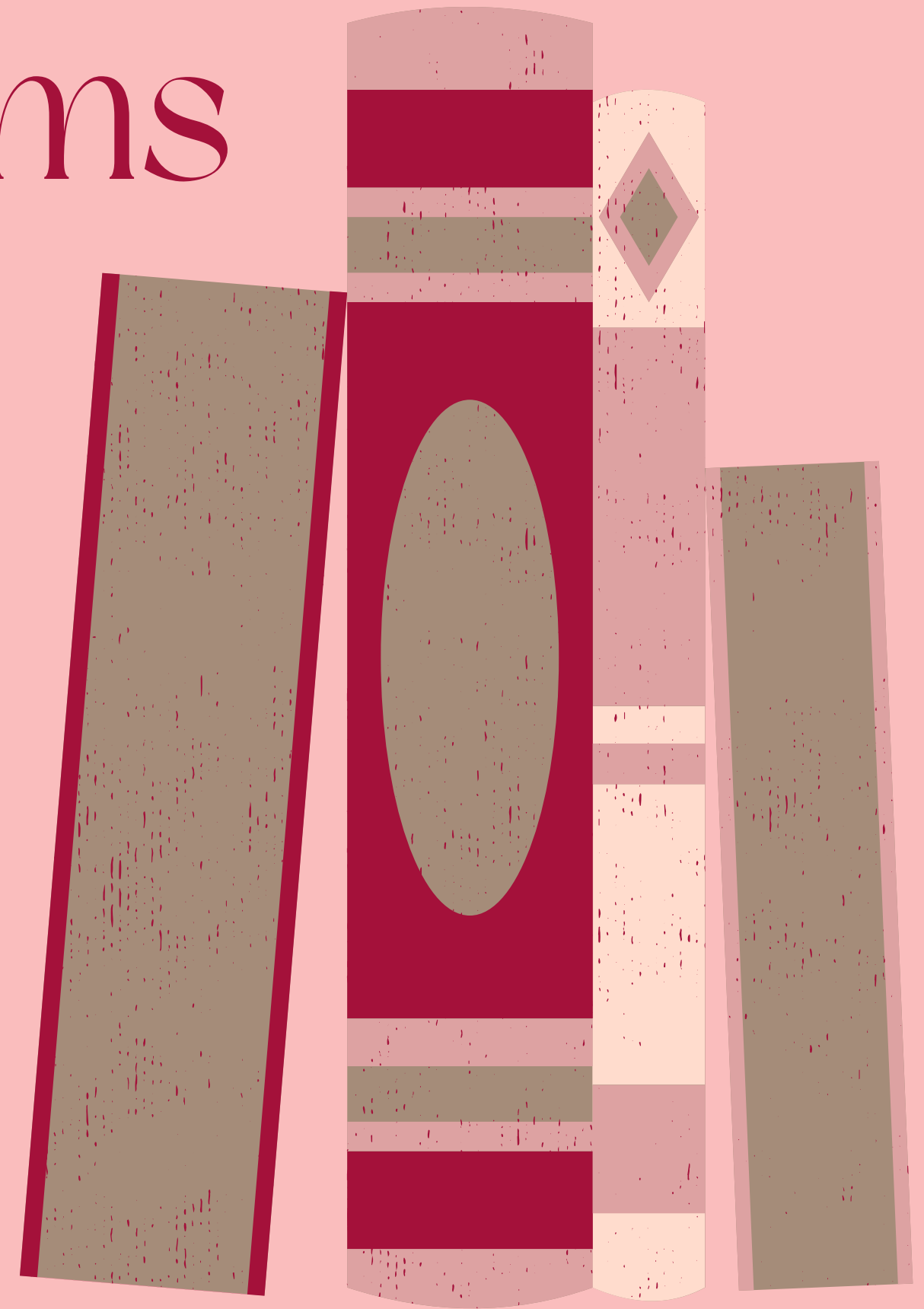
Breaking Social Norms

There are “rules” associated with how you’re allowed to pursue someone.

Dark romance breaks those social norms.

That is what gives this genre its scandalous nature.

Narrative drive.



Breaking Social Norms Examples



Haunting Adeline explores stalking:

- Breaking into her house.
- Watching her outside her window.
- Using technology to track her.
- Killing his rivals.

Emotional Intensity

- Readers expect to feel strong emotions when reading a dark romance.
- The specifics of that emotion depend on how dark the story will be.
- Emotional intensity is what makes the plot actually intense.
- One way to achieve emotional intensity is to focus on how the characters react to things.



Emotional Intensity

Examples

- The Ritual explores the arc of change from shame to freedom.
- There Are No Saints explores the ability to choose to enjoy life after experiencing horrifically traumatic things.



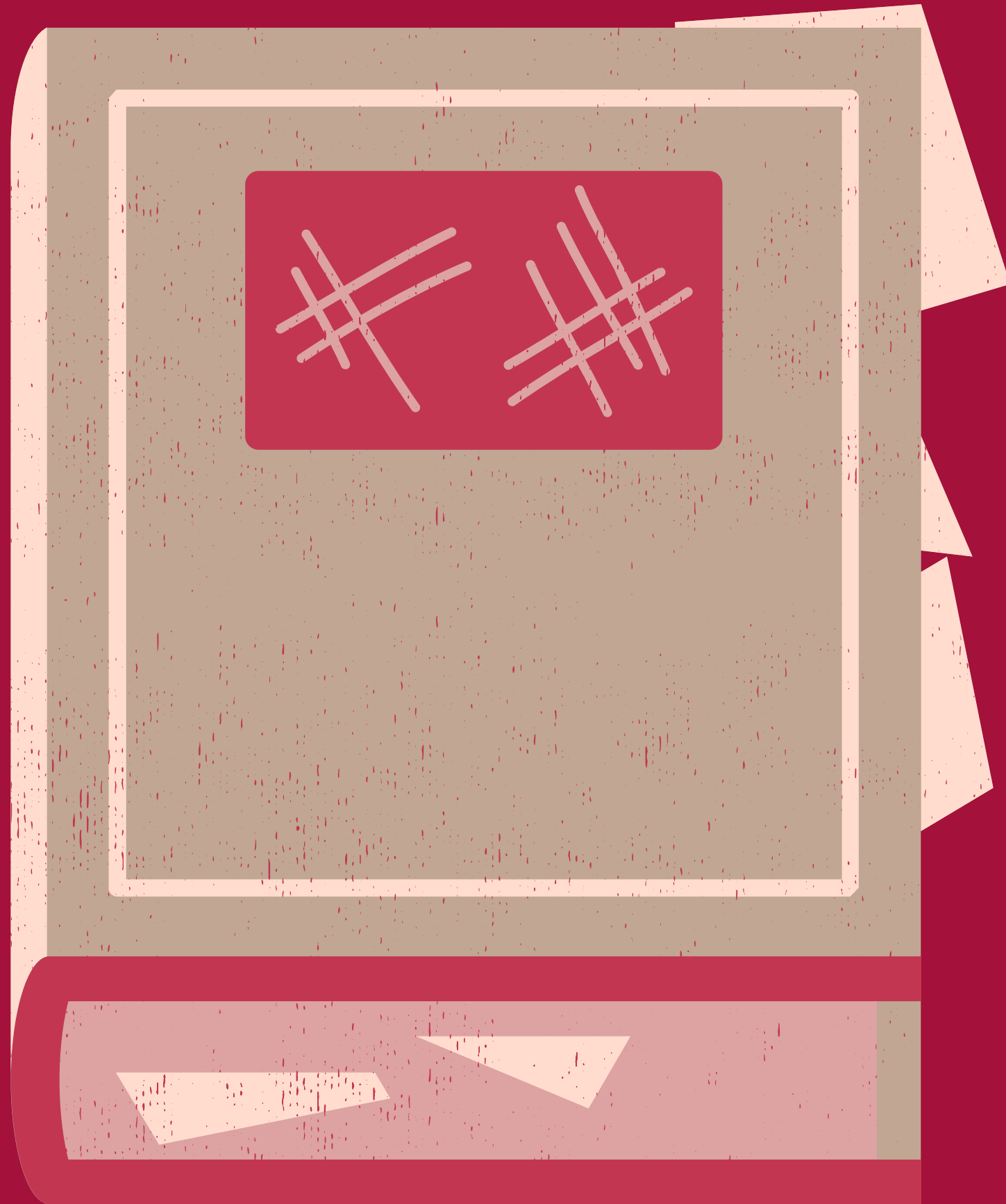
Putting it all together

- Power imbalances create the foundation for conflict
- Breaking social norms gives the conflict excitement.
- Establishing emotional intensity is what creates actual intensity within the plot.



Subplots

- Use subplots to contrast the darkness within the plot and lighten it or double down on the darkness.
- Think of subplots as a way of controlling just how intense the story is.





why readers love it#3

Passion

Uncompromising Love Interest

- Nothing will dissuade the love interest from pursuing the protagonist.
- What I don't mean by uncompromising is that their tactics won't change.
- That uncompromising nature gives urgency to the passion.

Uncompromising Love

Interest Examples

- Haunting Adeline: Adeline makes multiple police reports, threatens Zade, etc.
- God of Malice: Killian forces Glyn to hang out with him.

Now What?

Use this to help
you study the
genre.

Use this as an
editing tool.

Use this as a
writing tool.

Reach out for
editorial help.

Thank you for listening!

Any Questions?

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