

1. The Core Axis: Reality vs. Secondary Worlds

The most effective way to plot fantasy is by the **"Saturation of Magic."** We measure how much the story relies on a world completely separate from our own.

The "High" Pole (Secondary World)

In this sector, the world is entirely invented. Physics, geography, and history are unique to the setting.

- **Epic Fantasy:** Grand stakes, world-altering quests, and massive casts (e.g., *The Wheel of Time*).
- **Heroic Fantasy:** Focused on a single protagonist's deeds and growth (e.g., *Conan the Barbarian*).
- **Mythic Fantasy:** Stories that draw directly from or rewrite established mythology (e.g., *Circe*).

The "Low" Pole (Primary World)

Magic exists, but it is tucked into the corners of our recognizable reality.

- **Urban Fantasy:** Magic in a modern city setting; often involves hidden societies (e.g., *The Dresden Files*).
- **Magical Realism:** A literary approach where the supernatural is treated as mundane and goes unexplained (e.g., *One Hundred Years of Solitude*).
- **Contemporary Fantasy:** Magic occurring in the present day without the "grit" of Urban Fantasy.

2. The Multi-Genre Crossing Zones (The "Hybrids")

The spectrum becomes vibrant where Fantasy collides with other primary genres. These are the most rapidly growing sectors in modern literature.

Genre Hybrid	Key Characteristics	Famous Example
Science Fantasy	Futuristic tech explained by magic or "force" powers.	<i>Star Wars / Dune</i>
Romantasy	High-stakes fantasy where the romance is the primary engine.	<i>A Court of Thorns and Roses</i>

Historical Fantasy	Magic integrated into a specific real-world era (e.g., Victorian).	<i>Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell</i>
Steampunk	Industrial-era aesthetic driven by steam power and gears.	<i>Perdido Street Station</i>
Grimdark	Anti-heroes, moral gray areas, and violent realism.	<i>The First Law</i> series

3. The Tone & Sub-Genre Micro-Clusters

Beyond the setting, we plot by **vibe** and **aesthetic**. This allows readers to find their "frequency" within the spectrum.

The "Cozy" & Whimsical Sector

- **Cozy Fantasy:** Low stakes, domestic settings, and emotional warmth (e.g., *Legends & Lattes*).
- **Fairy Tale Retellings:** Subverting or expanding on classic folklore.

The "Liminal" & Portal Sector

- **Portal Fantasy:** Characters travel from our world to a magical one (e.g., *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Isekai* in manga).
- **Gaslamp Fantasy:** Similar to Steampunk but focuses more on the magic and manners of the Regency/Victorian periods.

The "Dark" & Eldritch Sector

- **Dark Fantasy:** Fantasy that incorporates elements of horror and the supernatural to induce dread.
- **Sword & Sorcery:** Grittier, smaller-scale conflicts often involving mercenary protagonists.

4. Visualizing the "Fantasy Color Wheel"

To truly see the spectrum, imagine a wheel where:

1. **Blue/Cold Tones:** High, Epic, and Mythic (distant, grand, cold).
2. **Red/Warm Tones:** Urban, Contemporary, and Magical Realism (familiar, hot, immediate).

- 3. **Purple/Blended Tones:** Science Fantasy and Romantasy (fusion points).
- 4. **Shadow/Greyscale:** Grimdark and Dark Fantasy (the absence of "heroic" light).

Designer's Note: Every story is a coordinate. A book can be "70% Epic, 20% Grimdark, and 10% Romance." Identifying these coordinates is how we build the ultimate library.

1. The Romantasy Spectrum: The "Internal vs. External" Stakes

Romantasy is defined by a delicate equilibrium. If the romance is removed, the plot should collapse; if the fantasy is removed, the romance loses its context. We plot this on a **Quadrant Map**.

The Romantasy Quadrants

- **The "Epic" Romantasy (High Plot / Moderate Romance):** World-ending stakes where the romance provides the emotional anchor. (e.g., *The Priory of the Orange Tree*).
- **The "Spicy" Romantasy (High Romance / Moderate Plot):** The world-building serves as a backdrop for the central relationship's tension and chemistry. (e.g., *A Court of Mist and Fury*).
- **The "Portal" Romantasy:** Often features a fish-out-of-water protagonist finding love in a magical realm (e.g., *Fourth Wing*).

The Heat Scale (The "Spice" Gradient)

Level	Aesthetic	Focus
Sweet / Clean	Wholesome, pining-focused.	Emotional intimacy, "The Slow Burn."
Simmering	High tension, fade-to-black.	Subtext, longing, and chemistry.
Explicit (Spice)	Graphic and central to the plot.	Physical intimacy as character development.

2. The Grimdark Spectrum: The "Morality vs. Nihilism" Axis

Grimdark isn't just about "blood and mud." It is a philosophical rejection of the "Chosen One" trope. We plot this on a **Saturation Scale of Hopelessness**.

The Descent into Darkness

1. **Gritty Fantasy (The Entry Point):** Realistic consequences for violence, but heroes still exist, even if they're scarred. (e.g., *The Witcher*).
2. **Grimdark (The Core):** Moral ambiguity is the rule. Characters do "bad" things for "right" (or selfish) reasons. (e.g., *The First Law*).
3. **Nihilistic Fantasy (The Extreme):** The world is fundamentally broken, and no amount of effort can save it. The "Light" is a lie. (e.g., *The Second Apocalypse*).

Key Grimdark Design Elements

- **The Anti-Hero Archetype:** Protagonists driven by survival rather than destiny.
- **Subverted Tropes:** The "Mentor" is a drunk; the "Prophecy" is a scam; the "King" is a coward.
- **Visceral Realism:** A focus on the logistical and physical toll of war and magic.

3. The Collision Point: "Dark Romantasy"

Where these two sub-genres intersect, we find the **"Dark Romantasy"** or **"Gothic Fantasy"** niche. This is a high-contrast zone characterized by:

- **Villain Romances:** Where the Grimdark antagonist is the romantic lead.
- **Survival Stakes:** The relationship is forged in a brutal, unforgiving world.
- **High Emotional Cost:** The romance often requires significant sacrifice or moral compromise.

Designer's Note: When reading Romantasy, look for the "Anchor"—what keeps you there? The world or the person? When reading Grimdark, look for the "Flicker"—is there any hope left, or are we just watching the world burn?