

## What Makes the Perfect Romance Novel?

I've seen this question asked and answered many times. Some say there's a formula. Others say its emotion on the page. A unique writing voice comes into play.

The RITA contest rules say only: The work contains a central love story, and the resolution of the romance must be emotionally satisfying and optimistic.

If you were to ask a thousand readers, you'd probably get just as many answers. But I do believe there is a list of 'must haves' for all of us, closely coupled with a list of 'will not tolerate' items that cause us to bemoan the waste of a hard-earned dollar. Or, in the case of my very best friend, to blurt out in the middle of an airport, "Are you kidding me?" After which I watched her tear a book in half, and march two terminals down just so she could throw half the book in one can, and the other half in another. She told me she could not bear for anyone else to pick up such a book.

So lest my latest romance fall into the wrong hands, I thought I'd take this blog opportunity to share with readers my personal list of 'must have's' and 'will not tolerate' items. I'll only ever write what I love to read.

A sense of humor: At least one character had better have one.

Passion: And I don't mean just sex. Our hero and heroine should be passionate about the world they live in, their families, their job, their country, or their beliefs. If they exhibit intensity and dedication in one area of their life, then I can happily anticipate them doing the same in their romance with each other.

Sex: And I do mean sex. It's a fabulous invention, after all. We should revel in it. That being said, I'm a firm believer (for a romance to be a romance) that our couple should be focused on one another (no third parties, past, present, or future, thank you very much). And in love (if not 100% before they succumb to temptation, at least shortly thereafter). And yes, I like to see my couples tie the knot, but on occasion, I'm a bit flexible on when in the story this happens. Our hero is supposed to be *that good*, after all.

Action and Adventure: I love it when a book takes me away from the stress and routine that can sometimes overwhelm day-to-day life. I gobble up once-in-a-lifetime adventures, where our hero and heroine overcome obstacles, stand up to injustice, and leave the world a better place. I want to read about the gunfight at the OK corral, not how many hours it took to muck out the OK corral.

Absolutely no: "I'm dating my sister/best friend/any friend's old/current boyfriend/husband/one-night stand". No sharing. No stabbing our friend in the back. No leftovers. See 'admiration and respect' point.

Admiration and Respect: The hero should have both for the heroine. The heroine should have them for the hero. And the reader should have both for our couple. After an appropriate level of life-threatening action, brave deeds and chivalrous acts have proven their character, of

course. They shouldn't be perfect, by any means. But I'd better want the guy for my favorite cousin.

No Sick and Twisted: I leave that for the bad guy. I have no interest in writing the hero or heroine with serious psychological disorders, mental illness, or some fundamental (really scary) flaw. How on earth can this lead to the 'happy ending'? Don't get me wrong, there are some fabulous books out there with just such main characters, and I read them with fascination, better understanding (or horror) of the world around me, but this is not why I pick up a romance novel.

Time travel: I'm a huge sci-fi fan. I'll be first in line if ever one gets invented. But I've never been able to get past the part where either our hero or heroine abandons (forever) their entire family and friends, just for 'love'. Just doesn't work for me in a romance novel context.

Too much, "Do I look fat in this dress?" I'll put any book down where a character that I am supposed to like spends three pages straight angsting over 'Does he like me?'. Too much real life, and not enough 'better than real life'. You, my reader, should put my book down and say, 'I feel fabulous. I'm gorgeous. And I deserve a man who'll treat me this well.'

A happy ending: Enough emphasis cannot be placed on this.

My hope as a new writer (this is book number 2) is that my stories take a reader into another world, and leave her (or him) feeling happier and more energized on the last page than on the first. Stop by my website (<http://www.edencarson.com>) for a sneak peak at my latest, *Widow, Spy, & Lover*, (available on all major online retailers, including in paperback format on Amazon). I've included a few excerpts from the book. Happy reading!