

Daily

Life

IS BOOKTOK LYING TO YOU?
CHECK OUT THESE ROMANCES INSTEAD

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As much as I love BookTok and the fact that people are reading again, I can't help but notice that the same books are always being recommended. Obviously, for the big-name authors like Emily Henry or Ali Hazelwood, a lot of people are going to talk about their releases because of how large their fanbases are. But when you have a bunch of creators all talking about the same books, the reader space can feel very oversaturated. With that being said, I've compiled a list of some of my favorite romances that I never see talked about.

"Annie Knows Everything" by Rachel Wood

Now this book just came out so there hasn't really been an opportunity for people to start talking about it, but I think we should get that conversation started because this was some of the most fun I've had reading a romance in a minute. It follows Annie as she gets laid off from her job and instead of panicking, decides to go for a different job at the same company that she isn't qualified for at all. As she settles into her new position, she starts clashing with her new boss, which turns into chemistry. Annie is such a chaotic character, and this book is so funny. If you're a fan of workplace romances, this one is perfect.

"You Between the Lines" by Katie Naymon

If you're a "Tortured Poet,"

this is the book for you. We follow Leigh, who's at a cross-road in her life and decides to take a leap and apply for a poetry MFA program, which she gets accepted to. When she starts her program, she's reunited with someone she went to high school with, Will, who didn't have nice things to say about her work, which causes tension. This book has everything — Naymon blew me away with her phenomenal writing, and I saw myself so deeply in the main character Leigh. The tension is delicious and Leigh's journey to becoming more confident in herself was so well done. This is probably the top three of my favorite romances.

"Any Trope but You" by Victoria Levine

I love a book about books; whether the main character works in publishing or is centered around a bookstore, I love the sort of meta-ness to it as a reader. And in this one we follow Margot, a famous romance author, who finds herself in hot water when it's revealed that she doesn't really believe in happily ever after. Because of this she decides to pivot and try to write a murder mystery and to do so she goes on a writing retreat to the Alaskan wilderness.

This book is such a good time because it turns the typical romance tropes on their head — our main characters swear they're not looking for love but keep finding themselves in scenarios straight out of a novel. Both characters

are also very guarded as they're the caretakers in their families and struggle with feeling like they can't give themselves to anyone because of that. Levine is such a delightful addition to the romance genre and I'm pumped for her next release.

"Passion Project" by London Sperry

This book felt like it was written for me because I too lived in New York City and absolutely hated it because of how depressed I was. Only I didn't have a hot guy take me on adventures to help find my passion, I just transferred colleges. This is a more emotional story because our main character Bennet is dealing heavily with grief, and Sperry does such a good job showing her journey and how grief is different for everyone and isn't linear. If you're someone who misses who they used to be, pick this up immediately.

"The Heartbreak Hotel" by Ellen O'Clover

Speaking of tender romances that dive into the topic of grief, this one will rip your heart out. We follow Louisa who was just dumped by her famous boyfriend and instead of moving out of the house they lived in together, she decides to turn it into a bed and breakfast for the recently heartbroken. The landlord of the house, who Louisa had never met before, starts coming around more often and as they spend more time together feelings start



A phone playing an audiobook version of "You Between the Lines" by Katie Naymon. Taking a look at "non-BookTok" books might lead to some great reads. PHOTO COURTESY OF @READWITHFERN ON INSTAGRAM

to blossom. O'Clover wrote some brilliant longing and a tender, quite kind of romance that's so beautiful to read. If you like your romances with a lot of emotionality, this one is perfect.

As the weather begins to warm up and the semester comes to a close, if you find yourself in the mood for a romance, hopefully one of these books will have piqued your interest. And if you're curious as to what's on my romance radar, I'm hoping to pick up "Love and Other Brain Experiments" by Hannah Brohm and "A Little Buzzed" by Alys Murray.



Reader flips a page in the book "Annie Knows Everything" by Rachel Wood. BookTok, a trend discussing books on social media such as TikTok, has recently surged. PHOTO COURTESY OF @THEJOYFULREADS ON INSTAGRAM

'STAR WARS: MAUL - SHADOW LORD' show opens
with some promise

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Maul, first known as Darth Maul in "Star Wars: The Phantom Menace," entered the "Star Wars" franchise with a fierce frenzy. His red tattoos, horned head and double-bladed crimson lightsaber made him a menacing enemy, one who seemingly died after his first appearance.

But Maul eventually made a return with prosthetic legs and hellbent revenge in the animated series, "Star Wars: The Clone Wars." Six years after "The Clone Wars" ended, Maul returned to the spotlight with a show of his own: "Star Wars: Maul - Shadow Lord."

The first two episodes were released exclusively on Disney+ on Monday, April 6. Sam Witwer returns to reprise his role as Maul in cartoon form,

while the show was created by "The Clone Wars" creator Dave Filoni. The series follows Maul about a year after the end of the Clone Wars and the fateful Order 66 as he attempts to rebuild his criminal empire and exact revenge on those who wronged him.

The first episode, "The Dark Revenge," opens with a group of Mandalorian and Zabrak warriors conducting a heist. Fans of "The Clone Wars" might recognize both groups as the more loyal members of Maul's Shadow Collective, a crime syndicate he formed during the Clone Wars.

After a high-speed chase through the shadowy city planet Janix, the group finds themselves cornered by law enforcement. As the group pretends to surrender, a cloaked Maul steps out of a landed ship, cutting through every

blaster bolt sent his way with his signature double-bladed lightsaber. Choral music reminiscent of "The Phantom Menace's" "Duel of the Fates" accompanies the fighting as Maul's blade slices into the camera perspective of a guard — the perfect cut for a title drop.

One of the immediate strengths of the show is the visuals. Like season seven of "The Clone Wars" and the animated "Star Wars" shows that followed, each scene and character is brought to life by intense detail and color. Janix feels perpetually dark and dangerous, but prevalent neon lighting gives it a sense of undiminished life. Maul's tattoos and lightsaber bring dramatic reds to the table, filling his scenes with a sense of fiery anger.

However, the rest of the first episode doesn't bring much more to the table. The pacing

feels jumpy, cutting between uninspired action scenes between different crime groups and law enforcement, with bits of forced exposition along the way. Maul explains his plan to turn local criminal organizations against one another to further his revenge and make his way to larger intergalactic targets, like the Pyke Syndicate.

Maul even voices a desire to get back at Darth Sidious, who killed his brother and discarded him during "The Clone Wars." To do so, he captures a young Jedi named Devon Izara in the next episode, who managed to survive Order 66 along with her master, Eeko-Dio Daki. The first two episodes also make it seem like Brander Lawson, a captain of law enforcement on Janix, will have a prominent focus as he tries to stop Maul, though what's currently seen of his character lacks substance

beyond his virtue.

One of the problems with the many "Star Wars" projects set between blockbuster films are the countless exceptions that must be made to the universe's canon to justify new stories. While watching "Revenge of the Sith," Order 66 comes across as a monumental event that killed nearly every Jedi across the galaxy. But it feels like more and more exceptions to the purge get added each year.

There's also the matter of stakes in these stories. Based on Maul's cameo appearance in "Solo: A Star Wars Story," watchers know that Maul will survive the show and become a criminal leader once again. On the other hand, Izara will likely die or find herself placed in a minor role unrelated to main "Star Wars" events by the shows end.

The power of shows like "Maul - Shadow Lord" depends on the watcher's immersion in the "Star Wars" universe and whether the presentation of these temporary stories can sustain these predetermined outcomes. With only two episodes of this new series out, it's hard to say whether the show will fulfill these needs.

Its visual presentation, while impressive, may not be enough, especially because seeing Maul acrobatically cut through hordes of enemies can only excite for so long. This wouldn't even be the first time an animated series has focused on Maul, fueled by revenge, as he tries to return to his former strength. Still, the question of exactly how Maul will win out in the end might be interesting enough to justify the show's existence.

The following eight episodes of "Maul - Shadow Lord" will be released in pairs every week on Monday on Disney+. The first season is planned to conclude on May 4.



Photo from the new star wars show, "Star Wars: Maul - Shadow Lord". The first episode premiered on April 6th, 2026. PHOTO COURTESY OF ONLY COMIC UNIVERSE ON FACEBOOK

RATING: 2.75/5