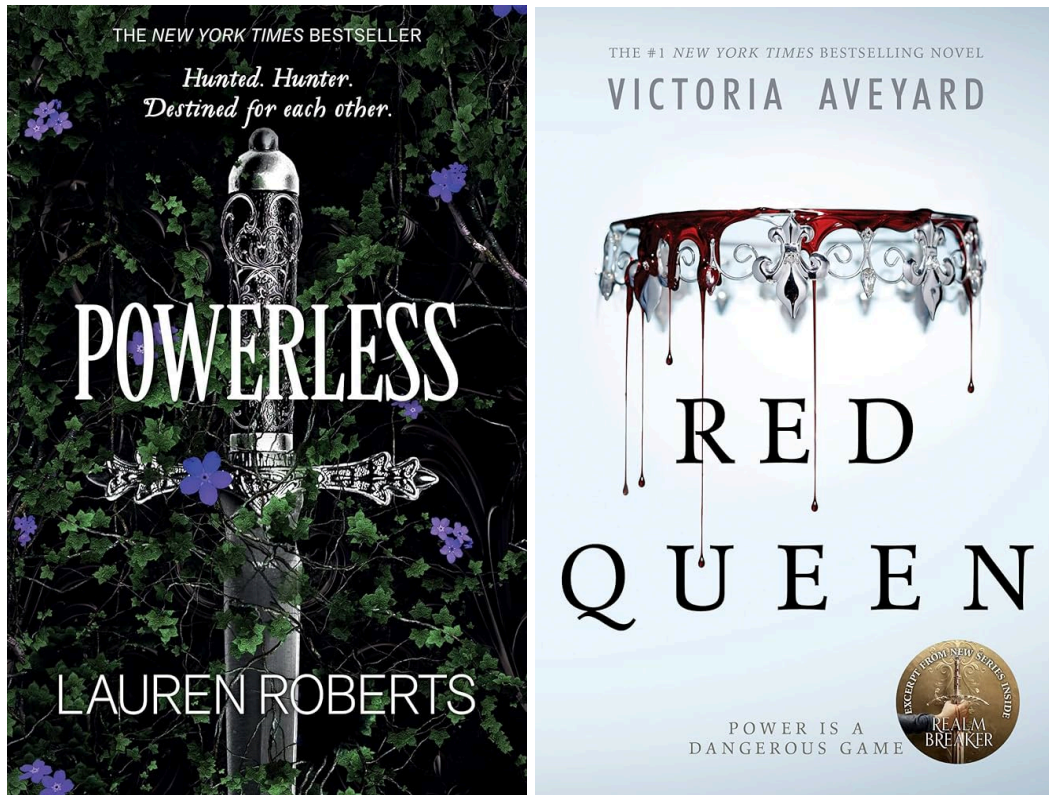


Plagiarism or Inspiration: Where is the line?

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Roberts self-published her debut YA fantasy book *Powerless* before it was picked up by Simon & Schuster in 2023. The sequel *Reckless* was published on July 2, 2024, and has sparked renewed conversation about plagiarism within BookTok (the community of TikTok that solely discusses books). Roberts notes that her series and *Powerless* specifically is “a mix between Victoria Aveyard’s *Red Queen* and *The Hunger Games*.” In the same Q & A, she notes that Mary Pearson’s *Dance of Thieves* was “very influential” for her as she wrote *Reckless*.

But BookTok claims her books weren’t just inspired by the different YA fantasy hits, rather she plagiarized them. The discussion opens up a can of worms of what is inspiration and what is plagiarism, and how can future writers know where to draw the line.

What is reused: Tropes

Whether we are talking about romantic tropes (i.e. enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, second chance romance, love triangles,) other relationship tropes (i.e. found family,) or more generic tropes (i.e. hidden treasure, indestructible hero, coming of age, the chosen one,) all books have tropes and that is what makes our favorite stories so special. Tropes help to craft a story and allow the reader to find a wide variety of stories with common elements that they love.

When does it become plagiarism?

When authors reuse tropes found in older books they are not copying or plagiarizing. Often these tropes will look entirely different from book to book because each author will utilize the tropes differently and have a unique setting. Even when looking at different fantasy "chosen one" series from Harry Potter to Percy Jackson to The Mortal Instruments to Legendborn and many more, each one has enough unique elements to make them entirely different stories despite the common Chosen One trope.

However, when authors begin to copy the same scenes (even if the characters have different names) from older books keeping the dialogue or setting the same that is when tropes can become plagiarism.

Returning to Roberts' *Powerless*, several TikTok and YouTube reviewers have noted the similar scenes between Roberts' books and older YA fantasy series. For example, Roberts' main characters Paedyn and Kai meet the same way Aveyard's characters meet in *Red Queen*, the poor female main character steals from the Prince. But the similarities don't stop there, in both books there is a love triangle with two prince brothers (which on its own is a common trope) however Roberts also writes how while one brother asks the main character to the ball, the other gives her a private dance lesson. Furthermore, in Roberts' series, the story is set up eerily similar to *Red Queen* where there are magical and non-magical human beings. In Aveyard's series, there are "reds" who have no powers and "silvers" who do - the names coming from the peoples' blood color. Roberts' series contains "elites" with magical abilities and "ordinaries" without powers.

To some, the similarities are too similar and they say Roberts has plagiarized Red Queen but others note that it is suspicious and do not directly state she has plagiarized.

As a reader, it is hard to tell if there was direct plagiarism or if this was a coincidence of inspiration. But what is clear is that this gray area of plagiarism and inspiration is concerning for authors and that new writers must ensure that their books are not pulling from a mix of old stories.

Therefore the best tip for new writers is that reusing tropes is okay but “borrowing” settings or scenes is not. It is the details of the characters and the worlds that make stories unique.

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