

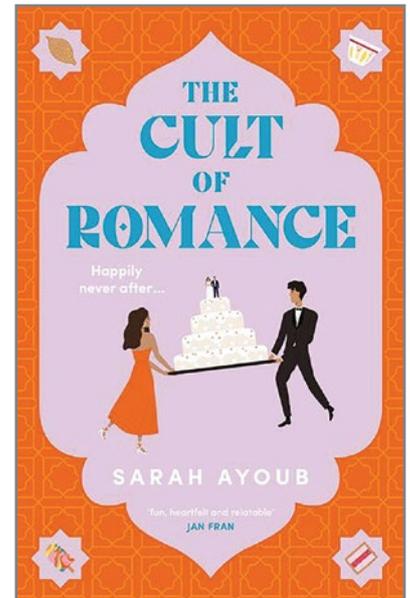
The Cult of Romance

AUTHOR
SARAH AYOUB

SCIS: 5398352

ISBN: 9781460758946

RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Secondary



SYNOPSIS

When your bestie is marrying a guy she barely knows, can you save her from the cult before it's too late?

Natalie is living proof that love is a scam.

She's traumatised by her parents' failed marriage and overwhelmed by her grandmother's expectations of good Lebanese girls—marriage, motherhood and exceptional tabouli-making skills.

When her best friend decides to get hitched to a guy in the motherland, Nat's not exactly thrilled by the mammoth task before her: juggling cultural traditions, extra bridesmaid dresses and super-judgemental relatives.

And to top it off there's the annoyingly good-looking best man and his constant need to mansplain all of the things.

Natalie is in for the trip of her life. But can she save her friend from the cult of romance, without falling in love herself?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Ayoub is a journalist, bestselling author and academic with a PhD in migrant Australian YA literature. Her work has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Sydney Review of Books*, *Meanjin* and more. Sarah is a Stella Schools Program ambassador, has mentored the youth curators of The Sydney Writers' Festival YA program, contributed to the anthology *Arab, Australian, Other: Stories on Race and Identity* and most recently been a judge for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Sarah was elected to the board of the Australian Society of Authors in 2021 and is currently working on her first novel for adults as the writer-in-residence of Sweatshop Literacy Movement.

Sarah is an advocate for education and Australian stories, appearing at schools and festivals where she promotes her YA novels.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CULT OF ROMANCE

- 'In the fairy tales I saw as a kid, romance always led to marriage, which was also the point in the narrative where the woman's story ended' (p19). Choose one of your favourite childhood fairy tales and re-read it.
 - Is Natalie right? Is this the way the story goes?
 - In what ways does the woman's story end?
 - Reimagine and rewrite the story in a way that her life doesn't end with marriage:
 - Does she still fall in love?
 - How does she define herself?
 - What does happiness look like for her?

- One of the reasons that Nat doesn't like marriage is that she believes it sets up unrealistic expectations for women. Make a list of some of the unrealistic or unfair expectations that marriage places on women.
 - Do you agree with George that marriage places unrealistic expectations on men too? Are these the same? Why/why not?
- Towards the end of the book, when Natalie confronts Tayta about her role in Ruba's departure, Tayta confesses that she feels ashamed at the way she behaved. Write a conversation that takes place between Tayta and Ruba in which Tayta apologises for her lack of understanding at Ruba's depression.
 - What do you think Ruba would say?
 - Would they be able to make peace with each other?
- How does being in Lebanon force Natalie to reckon with her own privilege?
 - What are some of the privileges that she has?
 - What does she mean when she says 'Lebanon's table always left room for one more' (p138)?
- Natalie and Janet are best friends, but in the story they both behave badly towards each other. Ultimately, Natalie realises that part of being a good friend (and feminist) is allowing Janet the choice to make her own decisions, and find happiness in her own way. Reflect on a friendship that is important to you. Write about a time where you've supported each other through something challenging.