

SEX. SEX. SEX.

SENSATIONAL REVELATIONS!

EVERYONE'S DOING IT!

HORMONES!

ROMANCE OVER THE DICE!

HOT & HEAVY SCENES!

TEENAGE LARP ORGY!

TRANSEXUAL GAMERS!

CHEESECAKE!

XENOPHILIA!

GNOME FETISH!

'I WAS AN RP SEX SLAVE!'

RETURN OF THE EROTIC DEAD!

SUPERHEROINES IN TROUBLE!

BLUE MAGIC!

HAWT ONLINE LOVING!



NO!

ANTIOPSSY

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first issue of *Autopsy*, an irregularly produced thematic 'magazine' produced by *Postmortem Studios*, I hope you enjoy its contents and find it useful, intriguing and discussion worthy!

My name is James 'Grim' Desborough I am, primarily, a freelance RPG writer and have worked for *Steve Jackson Games*, *Mongoose Publishing*, *Cubicle Seven Entertainment* and various PDF publishers as well as for *RPGnow* directly. I have been role-playing since the age of eight, starting with *Fighting Fantasy* choose-your-own adventure books and have engaged in every part of the hobby at one point or another from boffer LARP through to freeform 'art house' style play and MMORPGs. I also independently publish my own material on my 'Indie label', *Postmortem Studios*.

How terribly 'street' of me.

I am under no illusions that this makes me a particularly special or unique commodity, who hasn't written their own game? It does, however, give a very broad basis of experience to draw upon and to fuel comment and enquiry.

Postmortem Studios was created, at least professionally, on January the first two-thousand and four after a long period of unemployment following the dot-com crash and the winding up of my department at the company I worked for. Just in case any of you are harbouring illusions about the profitability of setting up your own RPG company I can now tell you that I made, in two-thousand and four, approximately what I would have made on the dole and could only take a minority of that as personal wages, the rest having to be ploughed back into the business. I anticipate this year being a little better. In other words: 'It's a mug's game.'

Postmortem Studios allows me to explore my 'crazy ideas' and to put out games and ideas on more of a 'whim' than working for other companies does, PDF publishing is relatively 'immediate' and somewhat less demanding on the writer, working for yourself also means there are no deadlines other than those you impose upon yourself, which is very, very nice. It also means editing is often self-done and almost non-existent, so excuse the errors, it's hard to edit your own work.

The credit card requirement for *RPGnow* also allows one to explore more adult subjects than would be allowable under most companies' conditions, to tackle difficult or controversial subjects 'under the radar' and to publish in a means that acts as a barrier to minors getting hold of 'inappropriate' material.

That's how I rationalise talking about sex, drugs, violence and other controversial topics.

Autopsy then is my 'magazine' bringing news of what I'm up to as a freelancer and self-publisher and exploring various thematic subjects issue to issue. This issue the subject is sex, gender and romance in gaming, next time the subject might be violence, or

drugs. Another issue might be disaster-gaming or examining traditional games or subjects with a more critical and mature eye. *Autopsy* is the PDF magazine for the grown-up, if not necessarily mature, gamer.

This issue of *Autopsy* tackles the... 'sticky' subject of sex and role-playing from comparisons to incorporations to methodologies and examinations of precisely why you might want to include sexual aspects in your gaming in the first place. We will also be looking at peripheral subjects such as transgender role-playing and we have interviews from two adult-oriented role-playing web presences.

Before we continue then, a quick update on what I'm up to...

I have just finished writing a second supplement for *SLA Industries* for release at some point this year, making two fairly large releases I have written that are planned as part of the resurrection of this game, fingers crossed. I also hope to be working with *Mongoose Publishing* within a few months on one thing or another.

For my own publishing line the first half of this year will likely be spent playing catch-up on half finished products. By June you should expect to see *Bloodsucker: The Angst*, *Bloodsucker: The Cacophony*, *Feast of Crows* – A book for d20 abstracted mass combat and, hopefully, either '45 (Bettie Page – Road Warrior) or @ctiv8 both of which will be powered by a dice pool system I am developing for myself. I'm leaving things fairly loose and open in case of imminent freelancing.

Oh, and by the way... 'Gizza job'.

Grim

April 2005

INFORMATION BOX

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Postmortem Studios

Role-playing Games to *DIE* for.

SEXUAL ROLEPLAY IS ROLEPLAY

We constantly hear tell of how role-playing is dying or even dead already without knowing it. No matter how many copies of *Dungeons & Dragons* are sold or how many new peripheral products like card games or collectable figures take off. Well, it's simply not true; role-playing is very much alive and well, though it might not be precisely what you necessarily think of as role-playing.

Anyone who has an instant messenger account or who frequents IRC has, at some point or another received a private message from someone asking 'ASL' and telling you 'My name is Pranjit from India and I have a very large penis' or similar. Those that aren't advert-bots trolling for interest in porn-sites are people looking for cybersex and what is cybersex except a form of consensual role-playing?

Hear me out.

All across the world thousands upon thousands of people are role-playing without going anywhere near a dice or a game book. Admittedly the goals of the 'game' are rather narrow, being simply 'Cum' but the endless variety in the parade of perversions and 'scenes' is staggering. Some of this is particularly unsavoury in the unregulated net, schoolgirl fantasies, bestiality, rape and white-slavery fantasies seem to be disturbingly common, but a great deal panders to the more acceptable, BDSM, French maids, back alleys, drive ins and just about any other theme you could think of. Many of them follow science fiction, anime or fantasy stereotypes and give them a sexual twist and many of them seem to develop into something beyond the sex and become ongoing stories that we might recognise as a 'campaign'.

Look at any costume or adult clothing store and you'll see role-playing aids, nurses outfits, handcuffs, schoolgirl skirts and an endless parade of other costumes and items. Some of these people are even LARPing!

Before you dismiss what these people do as simple one-track perversion consider the lack of depth of the standard dungeon bash game, shallow characterisation, poor dialogue, the exploitation of – in this case – goblins for money and enjoyment and a sick obsession over violence. Your standard dungeon bash is pornography, just of a different sort, a shallow 'quick fix', levelling its orgasm. The longer, more involved, erotic scenes and stories that the cybersexers and scenesters get into are more akin to our campaigns, deeper characterisation, emotional relationships, back story and history that influences the future. This is erotica rather than pornography, more tasteful and developed, *HeroQuest* rather than *Dungeon's & Dragons*.

Since around 1990 or so, perhaps a little before, there has been an increasing interest in and market for a more 'mature' approach to role-playing games. We have always had the cheesecake covers and *Dungeons & Dragons* was, initially, a massive success due to the teenage and college crowd that took it on and made it theirs but it never really, and I'm sorry for the painful truth, appealed to a large number of women or sociable,

well dressed or fashionable people. *White Wolf's Vampire* tapped into the burgeoning resurgence of Goth/Punk/Metal culture that continues to today and brought a lot of relatively well dressed, attractive and sexually active people to the hobby. LARPs can be as much a meat-market as a role-playing event and even before *Vampire* certain boffer LARP events had a certain reputation once the swords were put down and the ale began to flow.

There seems to be a congruity between role-players and the alternative/fetish crowd. *Vampire* especially seems to tap into a rich vein of fetishists, though this may simply be a side-effect of the slow fusion of the Goth/Alternative scene and the fetish scene in terms of fashion in both clothing and sexual proclivities.

Going further on the link seems to be maintained even into fantasy. The web contains many fantasy sites and chat rooms based around fantasy taverns or Jon Norman's *Gor* books where bondage, domination and slavery are prevalent themes. Whether this is rampant misogyny and whether that derives from the sort of people who role-play or simply an ability to fantasise about different times, places and societies more easily I do not know but some of these places have support and research associated with them that would put a gaming sourcebook to shame. I don't understand the how or why but there seems to be a definite link between role-playing and, at least the fantasy of, alternative sexuality.

These 'sex role-players' aren't the only ones who are role-playing without knowing it, there are journals and message boards galore where people cooperate in creating ongoing stories based on Harry Potter, The Power Rangers or some other fiction of their choice, even non-fictional characters are given this treatment. Then there's Slash Fiction, encounters - typically homosexual - between two fictional characters, written by fans. The darker side of Fanfic. These imaginings, often cooperative between several writers and critics who pick up 'errors' in characterisations, are at the very least proto-role-playing and there seem to be even more of these than there are sexual sites.

Is this an exploitable audience though? Would we want them if we could have them? How do you make what is acceptable online, anonymously, acceptable across a tabletop? Can we use the internet better in traditional role-playing games? Can we reach out to the Slash and Fanfic writers and interest them in a more structured role-playing environment? Can we learn anything from them to broaden the appeal of our hobby or should we just leave each other alone? It seems strange to me that role-players should remain ostracised and thought of as hopeless geeks when all of this goes on and appears to be more widely accepted, ironically, than rolling a few dice.

Perhaps we should just be smug next time we get an 'ASL' message and remind ourselves that, like it or not, these people are geeks.

Just like us.

DEVELOPING INTERESTS

As we age our interests shift and change, we become enamoured of different things. Where once hugging a favourite teddy-bear or going to the park to play on the swings held our interest, now we might find ourselves fascinated with the varying quality of different kinds of prunes or in endless rambling about our younger lives. Some pastimes change and shift with us as we grow, we watch television for much of our lives but what we watch changes, we read books but the type and complexity of the book shifts, as well as the subject matter. Some of the things you wouldn't think would change do, or try to, or develop different markets and niches as their creators and audience grows.

Gaming is not truly any different, the gaming population is aging and the gaming market is maturing, looking for more, looking for things that engage them on more complex levels. The older gamers are in their fifties and sixties now, even older and there seems to be a swell of those in their mid to late twenties and thirties who continue gaming but explore other avenues.

Good comparisons can be made with several other fields of entertainment perhaps the most relevant being comics which share many of the boom and bust experiences of the role-playing field. When comics first emerged they were, overwhelmingly, aimed at children full of bright colours and simple black and white morality, whiz-bang adventures, secret identities, superpowers and even the war comics approached their subject with an innocence long since lost, one that looks more than a little ridiculous when looking back. There are aberrations like the horror comics that caused outrage, resulting in their ban and the establishment of the comics code but from their inception right up until the 80's they remained relatively pure and innocent even though to a cynical 21st century eye they seem to contain strong undertones of kink.

Some people remained interested in comics as they aged though and the people that grew up with comics and still liked them created a market for more mature titles. The 80's gave rise to more mature comic writing, more mature subjects and the graphic novel. Neil Gaiman's work, books like *Maus*, *Watchmen*, *Charlie's War in Battle*, the emergence of *2000AD* alongside Punk and Post-Punk culture and the success later of writers such as Warren Ellis and Grant Morrison who tackle subjects and ideas that are confusing, out there and make you think. This has continued to develop to where we now have *The Invisibles*, *Planetary*, *The Authority* and *The Ultimates*, some traditional superhero tropes, others less traditional but all treated with maturity, depicting horrifically graphic violence, sex, relationships and even giving old heroes 'the treatment' to update them to their more mature, more demanding audience.

Computer games have emerged and developed in a similar fashion from early, simple games like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* on through to today's *Playboy Mansion* and a plethora of adult software of all kinds. Unlike comics computer games weren't, necessarily, initially targeted at children and have always had some sort of appeal to all ages, perhaps the lure of gadgetry and technology and that gaming has driven much of the graphics, sound and processing development in personal

computers for their history.

Similarly, mature interests, meaning pornography, has driven a great deal of the internet development in streaming content, compression and interactive services. While there was some toying with adult concepts in computer games relatively early, *Leisure Suit Larry* and *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* for example, it is the advent of much more realistic graphics which has led to fully adult titles having a real boom and the existence of gory and adult themed, rather than pornographic, titles such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Manhunt*.

Cartoons are another, similar, area, for the longest time it was perceived wisdom that cartoons could only be for children and yet people grew up with them and remembered them fondly even into their grown up years. The spate of live-action Hollywood remakes being churned out certainly confirms that people still remember them and are willing to see their modernised, post-modern and ironic versions. There was something of a bloom of adult cartoons, most notably Ralph Bakshi's work, in the 1970s and 80's but, again, it wasn't until the end of the 80's and the start of the 90's that adult animation really began to show itself again in the west with the suddenly increased popularity of Japanese anime and the marked improvements in CGI. Now even the cartoons aimed at children have a nod towards the adult market, the odd knowing wink, joke or references that only adults will get, broadening their appeal.

When we're younger we relate to the world in simple terms and play simple games, any little boy will play at war, picking up a stick or using their fingers if there are no toy guns available. There's always roughhousing and physical games, fights between children that can be playful or genuinely meant. With games the earlier stages are similar; we want to fight, kill the monster, gather the treasure and rescue the princess, even if we don't quite understand what we're supposed to *do* with a rescued princess. The classic dungeon bash fulfils all those base requirements to start with, role-playing, thinking about our character in terms of a person rather than as a playing piece comes later and as the in-game venue might change from exploring underground worlds to the spaces between them. Our actions and reactions become more complex and the character takes on a life of their own.

At some point, and I'm sorry but I'm assuming here that the primary audience and membership of the role-playing fraternity is male, girls enter the scene and stop being stinky, kootie-riddled figures of fear. Those gamers who don't give up their 'dorky' hobby entirely in their pursuit of the opposite sex may find that their random surging of hormones begin to give them some insight into just what good princesses are when saved other than as potential sources of reward or ransom. Still though, you're playing with your friends and you can't exactly go into that really can you? At least no further than 'I shag her' and some giggling.

Sex, romance and relationships, however crudely portrayed in the early days begin to add another dimension to the characters. What is their home-life like, do they have children, what would they do for each other? As the players age further, form

relationships of their own, even get married and have children, they may begin to speculate about how these things occur and progress in the shared fantasy world, or they may run screaming and kicking back to a life of monster slaying and Kirk-behaviour. If the gaming group is still going at this point it may well include wives or partners in the playing group with their own expectations and requirements from the games that they want to explore. Generalising is rarely a good thing to do and there are always female gamers ready to out gross, out munchkin and out drink the male gamers. Generally speaking though, the girls want a little more of the interpersonal side of things and the romance.

Gaming depth and style can mature over time gaining in breadth and scope to the point where the roles become alternate lives that we care deeply about. It is still a game but we are as invested in them as we might be in a novel we had written, a television show we cared about or anything else that has been made personal and important in our experience. To live an alternate life one must consider all aspects of that life, romance, sex, day-to-day living all included. Even in the fantasy novels that so much of gaming is built upon there is much more to the heroes' lives than killing and saving the day. Now there are even games emerging catering especially to this, more feminine, sort of story, *Blue Rose* for d20 probably being the best known.

Perhaps as the bulk of gamers continue to age and mature, as their tastes change, we will see the emergence of new genres, new styles of play and new systems that reflect those shifting interests. What might it be like to play the head of a noble house with headstrong and stupid children, trying to teach them the wisdom of age? What might it be like to play rebuilt geriatrics given a second lease on life in youthful bodies but with the accumulated experience of a lifetime?

I don't intend on giving up gaming until I physically cannot roll a dice, at least I, maybe, have something to look forward to.



WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Article by Andrew Peregrine

There is one thing that just about everybody spends their lives searching for, regardless of their race, sex or religion. Wars and duels are fought over it and it is thought more priceless than any jewel. It is love. So when it is obviously so important, why is it so often ignored in most role-playing campaigns? In role-playing, characters spend all their energy righting wrongs or gathering vast fortunes, but rarely do they ever search for romance. In fact, many gamers avoid the whole idea of their character's romantic lives entirely.

The reasons are quite simple, adding romance to a game can be very difficult and often rather awkward and embarrassing for many gamers. This is not to say we are unable to do it. Not every gamer is the socially awkward dateless wonder the stereotype would suggest. Most gaming groups have a mixture of both sexes these days; my own group is made almost entirely of couples. Yet it is still rather rare to find romantic story lines in many games, especially when they are about serious relationships. This is a shame as it can add a great degree of depth to your character and make party dynamics intriguing. It can also be a good opportunity to flirt in game with another member of the group you fancy!

So why are gamers often reluctant to pursue the romantic life of their characters? Most often it is just something they don't consider. RPG adventures are often about killing the monsters, capturing the stronghold and getting the gold. The closest many come to romance is saving the hapless maiden, but even then it is usually on someone else's behalf. This is not really the fault of the adventures. Romance is a highly personal thing, and needs to be tailored to the individual character. An adventure that focuses on the romance of one character is often not a lot of fun for the rest of the group. That is unless the romance is between all the members of the group and not just a collection of NPCs (but more on that later!). Romance is best used as a sub plot, or as a starting point for an adventure. A character might ask his friends to help search for the gem of power. Not for any riches involved, but purely so he can impress the girl he fancies. This may seem a little extreme, but most Arthurian quests are begun simply so a knight can prove his worth to a maiden, and just look at the fuss over Helen of Troy.

No matter how successful the characters are their riches and reputation will mean little without someone to share it with. Unfortunately characters can't talk back to their players and tell them how lonely they feel. When they have completed their adventure and gained their reward, any player can be forgiven for thinking their character has everything they wanted. If your characters need to be reminded about this, let them visit their families now and again. Let them see their other siblings in relationships and having children and they may begin to wonder if they are in the right career. (Captain Picard in *Star Trek—Generations* is a fabulous example of this.) If they still don't get the hint, make sure their mothers ask them why they aren't married and if the nice Barbarian Queen they brought round for dinner is their girlfriend or not. Depending on your game world, this may go double for any female characters.

Gamers also tend to avoid romance because of the effect it has on their character. Being in love often makes you act like a fool, breaking the cultivated aura of cool most players try to build up for their characters. Love also grants great power over a character. If the person you love wants you to do something for them, most people tend to do as they are told. Sure, your dwarven ranger may complain that his wife wants him home early and not staying out all night in the tavern, but he'll still go home early if he knows what's good for him. However, both these 'problems' can actually make a game worth playing and add fantastic role playing opportunities. Characters can have incredible adventures trying to send flowers to their paramour without anyone seeing them act soppy. Just look at the spy/ninja guy in the chocolate adverts, and what he goes through just to deliver chocolate to a woman he never meets! A wife or lover putting pressures on a character that opposes the designs of the player group means the character has to work hard to please both, possibly lying or manipulating one party to satisfy the other. Romance can turn a simple adventure into a very complicated mix of possibilities. Done right it makes the job of a GM a lot easier, as characters will write their own plots in pursuit of their desires. Paramours can also be useful for the GM, allowing you to push characters in the right direction. The characters may often try to ask one character's wife what to do as she (via the GM) always seems to know the right thing to do. She may also be the one telling her husband to go out on quests because the children need new shoes.

Being rescued by the object of their affection will, of course, only increase their ardour as well.

If this is something you think your characters will have trouble dealing with, as a GM you can start the ball rolling. Adventuring characters are usually local celebrities sooner or later. They are going to attract a lot of romantic interest if they are 'the guys who killed all those Goblins', especially if they have been flashing their treasure around town. So it is quite reasonable to have a few groupies start chasing after them. This will be pretty innocent and avoidable at first. If the characters aren't interested it is pretty likely all but the most hardened groupie will give up. However, make sure that one or two stay. An attractive young girl who idolises the paladin, a gentleman who just wants to protect the Barbarian Queen, or even a manipulative bitch (of either sex) who spreads lies to try and capture their romantic target, are all good possibilities. At first the paramour will be a bit of a joke, and the party will try and do their best to avoid them. However, after a while they may come to realise the feelings are genuine. At this point the object of their affections may realise the value of someone who sees something so wonderful about them, and defend them against the jeers of the group. When someone sees the good in you despite being constantly turned away and rejected, it is hard not to feel something for them, even if it is just pity. If the situation becomes stalker-like, you have a ready made scenario there as well, especially if the paramour is someone important like the major's daughter. Such an adventure allows you to visit the darker side of love, and serve the characters right for not reciprocating love when it is offered. At the very least the paramour becomes as useful as any other romantic NPC, as the characters should at least feel some measure of responsibility for

their actions. If she chases them into the Goblin caves to be with her love, or he strays too close to a dragon's lair looking for a rare flower, it should be the players who come to the rescue.

What you must be very careful with is endangering the lovers of characters. It is all too easy to use them as hostages for the bad guys or 'race against time' plot devices. The 'she'll die if I can't get the antidote from the evil castle stronghold' deserves to be the utter cliché it has become. If every adventure involves the characters lover being the victim then the spouse may get rid of her for her own safety. By all means use this device on occasion, but be very sparing with it or the group will just say 'what's up with her this time?' rather than 'my god, the fiend, we must save her'.

Which one do you fancy?

So how do you get started with romance? In gaming, it is just the same as in life; you decide what sort of person your character will be interested in. Here I do not mean you simply compare Charisma ratings. Think about the sort of character you are playing. Are they looking for someone like them, or their opposite? Does your warrior character want to find another swordsman, or an academic magic user? Is your princess looking for a foppish snappy dresser, or a muscle bound barbarian? Certainly, the appearance or charisma rating in your game will count for something. However, that rating depends very much on who you are talking to. For example, an attractive football player is not going to get on so well with a Goth girl. No matter how attractive he is, she just isn't after the clean cut, sporty look. Sure, she'll think he is cuter than most others of his type, and may even be happy to talk to him, but he'll have to work a lot harder to impress her than her cheerleader friend. So look beyond the statistics of your characters and ask yourself what they are really looking for in a mate. You don't need to be realistic either. A character with a low charisma still wants to meet the woman of his dreams. The fact that his desire may be unrealistic could be the whole crux of a story, especially if a stunning woman turns up wanting to be with him. Is she after him for some other reason, and if so, how is her paramour going to take the news. Of course, it could be that she really does like him; love is a funny thing that way. It also works the other way round. The beautiful princess sometimes falls for the Ogre rather than the handsome prince; and they made a movie about that story.

Lust and love

One of the easiest ways to figure out your character's 'type' is to start with what they find physically attractive. Does she like big muscles; is he a leg or a breast man? Knowing this also allows you to decide if what your character feels is love or lust. While you can potentially love almost anyone, you usually only lust after those you find physically attractive. Just like in real life, it is quite acceptable that characters may jump on each other in the throes of passion, only to wake up in the morning to find they have nothing in common. Life and death situations tend to create relationships, but ones that rarely last. Imagine the stunning female Paladin and her Elven magician friend running from the death throes of the dragon they have defeated together. In that moment, having faced death together and won, they are

closer than they have ever been. They fall to the ground on top of each other, exhausted and exhilarated, and find themselves kissing. However, when the passion is spent and the word has calmed down, what happens then? That is up to you to decide, because the results of love depend so much on the characters involved.

If your character gets into a romantic tryst, pause and think for a moment about how they may feel. What do they really think about their paramour? Do they see the relationship as lasting or just a bit of fun? Do they really feel something for their partner or was it sympathy or lust that made them go with the flow? Try to step outside the character as well and consider if the couple has much of a chance from a neutral perspective. Here it is worth looking at the charisma rating of your character. It will tell you how much general attention they are used to from the opposite sex. The more attention they get, the less precious such attention becomes. It isn't an iron rule, but it is a good place to start. Perhaps more importantly, you must also decide on the 'relationship cowardice' level of your character. Just because you have killed a few dragons, it doesn't mean you have the guts to tell a lover its all over, or that you won't break down when you hear those words yourself. Take a moment to answer these questions, and then just role-play out the result with the other character. Let feelings run high if need be, because that is what happens in real life.

Don't think for a moment that love is always a good thing. Just because in the fairy tales people live happily ever after, don't assume that love in your game will always turn out well. Characters can still lie about their feelings to charm someone into bed, or dump those they no longer need. People can be love rats as well as paramours, but remember that it works both ways. NPCs can screw you over in love, just as easily as they may con you out of anything else.

Knights of the Pink Triangle

It is also important to remember that not every character or NPC need find the opposite sex attractive. Gay relationships were just as common in the past, and in certain cultures were even celebrated. The sexual preference of your character can have a great bearing on the game, but don't fall into stereotypes. If you decide your Elven character is gay, he need not wear pink and dance through the forest (although if he does do that and isn't gay he may get an awful lot of attention he doesn't want). It is up to you to decide how camp your character is, but that often has nothing to do with sexuality. You can have a lot of fun playing against type. How about a gruff dwarven fighter who finds himself hopelessly in love with the local paladin knight? Remember that gay people have a certain type they fancy just like anyone else. Don't assume that a gay character wants to bed every man he meets. Gay people have same sex friends they don't fancy in the same way that straight people have friends of the opposite sex they don't fancy either.

If you are going to have gay characters (player or NPC) in your game, you should take a moment to figure out what your game's society thinks about the issue. It may be looked down upon, or exalted as an ultimate form of friendship. After all, men and

women can't seem to understand each other, so how much more intimate a same sex relationship must be. It is possible in a fantasy that most people won't acknowledge the existence of homosexuality. Queen Victoria famously announced that it was ridiculous to suggest two women could fall in love, and so lesbianism didn't suffer the same restrictive legislation that came against gay men. However, it goes further than that. In a more swashbuckling adventure, homosexuality could be rife. It was seen as a decadence of the nobility, something the sexually experimental did. Heterosexual sex was only there for procreation, but gay sex was just there for pleasure. It was also seen as expedient, no well to do lady could have sex out of marriage, or she would be damned by her society. However that same society recognised that men needed sex. So the obvious answer was to allow men to sleep with each other and simply say it didn't count. This attitude was good news to many priests who were told their vow of chastity was only broken if they slept with women. So in general, think carefully about how these attitudes apply in your game, but as far as the relationships that develop themselves, they are not really any different to any other.

The Green Eyed Monster

What you must always be careful of with romantic plotlines is taking it out of the game. While I said this is a good opportunity to flirt, you still need to show a little bit of common sense. If you are attracted to the player of the character (or NPC) that your character is having a romance with, then things can get sticky. After all, you will spend the evening looking them in the eyes professing undying love in life or death situations. Roleplaying romances are (and should be) the stuff of romantic legend, full of high drama, passion and excitement. You must never assume that anything is going on out of game, just because your characters get together. If you think there is something more than the usual role play going on, talk to each other, maybe ask for a date. Don't assume you've done the preamble and already begun some form of relationship. You may well get a big shock, and you will not have any right to say you were led on. Also be aware not only about the other player, but any boyfriend/girlfriend who may already be involved as well. They may get jealous if things get heated during the game, as they spend their time watching you chat up their other half. This is especially true when the other partner doesn't game. After all, how are they going to feel when their partner comes home with tales of romance with one of their friends? If they don't quite understand gaming (and lets face it, most non-gamers don't) they may not see it as innocent fun.

Now We Must Part

Despite the potential pitfalls your game can only benefit from a touch of romance. Remember to keep it as a side plot though, as making it the crux of the adventure will only involve a few of the characters. Also, don't assume it will follow any rules or end with the right episode. Love plotlines have a tendency to run where they will, and often erupt after periods of dormancy. It is also interesting to watch players play the opposite gender in relationships. Men often enjoy their female characters making their paramour really work hard to earn their affections. It is also fun to see women taking the active role in the relationship when their warrior tries to chat up the princess. Both genders can learn an awful lot by trying to role-play through such

relationships, and perhaps gain a little more respect for how the other sex feels. A little more understanding and respect for the opposite gender can only help your relationships outside the game. So in this way, not only will your game improve by adding a little romance, but you may also find yourself better equipped to find love in the real world.



SEX AND GAMING

So, there are enough gamers out there who are interested in more mature gaming, including more adult situations, and products are beginning to appear to cater to those demands. More books about romantic and sexual situations in particular, even though they might be tongue in cheek, are addressing these concerns and providing people with options on how to incorporate adult themes into their games. In typical gamer fashion however they are typically limited to over-complex rules about the physical act of love or a list of monty-haul sexual artefacts scattered liberally with 'dick jokes'.

I'm as guilty of that as anyone, even though I have tried to slip in a few genuine ideas 'under the wire'. There's still a 'nudge-nudge, wink, wink' attitude towards a lot of these themes, reducing them to humorous ciphers and being a bit 'naughty' that does the whole area something of a disservice. Even the more complete and mature approaches have been hampered by the sources that they have come from, overtly 'right-on', feminist slanted or 'pretentious' – used in context of the common understanding of the term – companies. Even the most mature and complete book on the subject, *The Book of Erotic Fantasy* falls into some of the traps and the wheat must be separated from the chaff.

I can't begin to address such a broad subject even in this whole issue, but hopefully there will be a few sparks of ideas here that people can use.

There are more ways and means to game now than there ever

were back in the age old days when you were limited to simply flapping your mouth organs at each other over a table. You can play in chat rooms, across microphones or even video conferencing if you were so inclined. There are levels of comfort zones and a much wider range to the age of gamers than ever before and that also increases your options on how to portray romantic moods and adult themes to your players.

Fade to Black

The easiest, least challenging and most acceptable way to deal with adult situations in a game is to leave it up to the imagination, to simply 'cut away' at the point of the adult situations. Who really needs to know that the bar-wench 'wails like a banshee' at the point of orgasm or that the half-orc cleric has a tendency to try to impose his liking for bum-sex on anyone he sleeps with? Once the situation has gotten to the point of physical love the group 'moves swiftly on', fading to black and fading back in, after the act or to the morning after.

This is not to say that the act is completely ignored, the rest of the group might receive a sly wink and a mention of the creaking of bedsprings, the GM might even go so far as to make a 'performance' check to see just how impressed and grateful the opposite party is for the affection they have received and how it affects their reactions from now on. There can even be consequences like pregnancy, jealousy and negative social reactions to loose or immoral behaviour.

Fading to black can give you all the reactions and consequences and allow you to explore certain adult themes, it is also the way of approaching the subject that causes the least discomfort and embarrassment in players who might be a little sensitive on the subject or not feel comfortable describing the romances of their characters in front of the rest of the group. What it doesn't give you is any kind of equal involvement or character connection or emotional investment in the act or its consequences. Many games fetishise violence with long, detailed and complicated combat rules. Everything else, social interaction, technical skills and so on gets short thrift when it comes to attention. This is because combat is involving, exciting, risky and emotional. So is sex and romance but they never get the same attention, nor would we really want to 'roll for penetration' or make 'premature orgasm saves' which is why we often fade to black.

Would combat be as involving or engaging if it faded out at the beginning of the fight and came back up with the characters being slightly wounded and the enemy dead, without knowing what happened in between? Fade to black creates a disconnection, one that can be fixed with extensive social role-playing between the character and their romantic partner but a lot of that 'fixing' would not be necessary if the scenes were just played through.

The other major pitfall of romantic scenes that Fade to Black avoids is that of spending an inordinate amount of time with one player, the rest of the group having nothing to do but sit there, perhaps voyeuristically, until the scene is done. This is why splitting the party has often been seen as a bad thing and why a lot of cyberpunk games had problems with their hacking rules, diverting the GM's attention from the majority of the

group. With a Fade to Black everything is sorted out quickly and relatively easily with no hanging around and no chance for boredom to set in with the rest of the group.

Hollywood Sex

We all know what Hollywood Sex is; we see it in the movies all the time. Hollywood Sex is soft lighting, Vaseline on lenses rather than bodies, Mel Gibson's 'stunt bottom' and strategically placed sheets. It shows a few writhing limbs, has a bit of music, perhaps a little gasping and moaning and that's about it. It shows sex without getting into any crude details and is a sort of 'middle way' for depicting the act without getting an 18 rating for the film and losing audience figures.

In role-playing terms Hollywood Sex would mean going into the minimum amount of interplay and description to establish exactly how the people involved have sex without getting into any gory, or sticky, details. Typically this might be limited to a single interchange between the GM and the player along with, if they're being particularly fussy and rules oriented, a 'performance' roll of some kind even though that's likely to ruin the flow. A likely interchange might go something like this...

'Leading her up to my room I undress her with my eyes all the way up until I kick the door shut and my hands replace my eyes. I try to be a considerate lover but my passion for her is such that I might get careless, still, I genuinely care for her so I try to be as ardent and thoughtful as possible.'

'She is a little timid and bashful until you're alone and then she seems to respond to your tenderness, meeting your passion with her own which mitigates your carelessness. You both draw closer from your intimacy, making love several times through the night and talking about perfect little nothings until the small hours of the morning, sleeping in each other's arms.'

Hollywood Sex allows you to find your own comfort levels and prevents love scenes from dominating or distracting from a game while still allowing romantic and adult situations to play a role in the game and some form of intimacy and care to be reflected between the characters and those they encounter. For most groups who want to play a more mature and involving sort of game but whom are still uncomfortable around each other this will be the best sort of solution.

Prepared Notes

Perhaps the least embarrassing option for dealing with the whole 'adult situation' theme is to have prepared 'love notes' that can go into a little more detail, titillating and satisfying the desire to involve sexual situations in the game without having any of the embarrassment of having to describe what your intimate actions are in front of your friends and playing group.

Note passing is common enough in games to describe hidden or secretive actions or preparations that any note passing related to any other matters shouldn't be any more disruptive to play than the usual notes, though there may well be even more curiosity as to what is written. The problem with having notes is that there is no instant feedback on comfort levels, whether something is too described or too little and there is little to no role-playing

involved in the accomplishment of the act itself, not a single word from the player. The Games Master has to come up with a short amount of prose describing the act with no feedback from the player or, indeed, without knowing which character may even end up in bed with the person from the encounter.

Without creative writing skills and an ability to leave enough space in the text for the player to fill in the blanks with their own interpretations the note-passing method can fall a bit flat but. If you, as a Games Master, don't feel you have the writing skills or the interest in the subject matter to write engaging, interesting and involving scenes then you are better off simply fading to black. 'No art is better than bad art' as they say.

Another downside to this method of representing adult situations in this fashion is that the onus is entirely upon the Games Master. It exposes any ignorance or perceived-to-be-unusual sexual proclivities or interests that they might have to their players since they have to produce the scenes whole cloth, with no input from anyone else. This places all the embarrassment upon the Games Master and so can detract from their ability to run the game, making them increasingly nervous and distracted. The support of the players for this method and their understanding of the additional pressures upon the Games Master are, therefore, essential.

Hardcore

If you're all into it and your gaming situation, embarrassment level and personal morality allow for it you can, of course, 'go the whole hog'. What that means is that the sex scene is played out completely and graphically with interaction on every level of the 'performance'. While this can create an engaging and involving scene that cements the sexual and/or romantic ties between two characters it does leave the rest of a group with nothing to do while one person gets their jollies. The other great worry with having graphic sexual scenes within a game is that sex can become the focus of the game rather than a supplementary addition to it. Sex is a powerful human drive and, even abstracted, draws the attention like little else. In a group comfortable, and kinky, enough to play out powerful and complete sexual scenes the temptation will be to make sexual relationships, kink and pleasure-seeking the basis of the entire game.

Internet Gaming & Anonymity

Hardcore sexual game scenes are probably best suited to online play where there is at least a measure of anonymity, a familiarity with the concept of cybersex and the ability to carry on conversations in several different windows at once so that the rest of the group does not get left behind or forgotten.

There are a surprising, at least to me, number of sexually oriented or inclusive games being played online at any time over every chat system imaginable from IRC to Instant Messengers and web pages. You can find fantasy, science-fiction and anime oriented games as well as a great many worlds based upon such books as Jon Norman's *Gor* series. Many of these may be too entrenched in kink or too focussed on sex for the average gamer but the net is vast and caters to every taste and whim.

Emotional engagement

The plus side to involving sexual scenes and romantic overtures to your games is that players will grow more attached to the NPCs around them and thusly the impact of, say, having one's wife kidnapped or children killed by marauding 'bad guys' can have a lot more impact as a spur to get things moving. On the other hand wiping away and destroying the emotional involvement that a player has spent so long putting together can be resented. The more invested in the game and the characters the player is the more genuine their reactions to the situations in the game are, the more interested they are and the 'better' the game overall is.

When those reactions are grief, anger and hurt, this can be too much for some. People play games in order to have fun and their interpretation of fun may not be to experience emotional highs and lows or to be drawn into caring so very much about a pure fiction. Gauge your players motivations and needs from the game, even by asking them, then adjust your own expectations and game content to meet those needs, without making them too uncomfortable.

Consequences

You, and your players as well, should consider the consequences both short and long term of involving sexual material and romantic entanglements in your games. Taking them more seriously moves games away from the more cinematic or swashbuckling style of a girl in every port and seduction merely as a means to an end and creates a structure in which such encounters can have real and lasting consequences.

The most obvious consequence is the emotional entanglement. Even if the player feels nothing for the NPC partner they have wooed does the NPC feel the same way? How do they feel about their 'beau' constantly putting themselves into danger or flirting with others? Do they get angry, bitter and possessive? Does their erstwhile bed partner try to come with them, to protect them? Do they stalk them and get progressively scarier and scarier? Does a broken heart lead them to revenge? If you use people they get hurt and react in a bewildering number of ways, emotion is tangled up in sex, even without romance and emotions make people unpredictable and dangerous.

Another obvious consequence might be pregnancy and, at least in a medieval fantasy world, there aren't really a lot of options other than to have the baby unless there is some convenient hand waving and some new magic or special herbs. Partners and children tend to mean, to someone playing a responsible or good character at least, settling down, which can really be a game killer. With no motivation to go out into the world abandoning their family and putting themselves in danger a campaign can quickly stall though one way to overcome this is to move on to the next generation picking up where the fathers and mothers left off.

A Brief Word About LARP

LARP games and their social interactions, especially those that do not concentrate on the rubber-swording aspect, do allow for the examination of romance and give much greater provision for a social context in which romantic encounters can take place.

The problem inLARPs, and some tabletop groups, is that the players initiating these plots and ideas are often blurring the lines between real life and the game. What better way to subtly show your interest in someone than to approach their character? If some interest and flirtation is received back then you can try pressing further, get rejected and well, it's just a game and just your character, at least to start with.

Even if the situations and encounters are purely innocent there is a great deal of scope for jealousy in a LARP situation from someone's real-life partner or other admirers and little breaks up a LARP group more then jealousies, rivalries hurt feelings and cheating partners. A LARP Games Master would do well to keep a close eye on such plots and player interactions and to keep a lid on anything inappropriate.



TRANSEXUAL GAMING

James ‘Grim’ Desborough & Tiffany Craig

Sooner or later it happens; someone in the group wants to play someone of the opposite sex. In the predominantly male groups this can be the cause of some consternation and uncertainty, immature in-game horseplay, hoots of derision or accusations of ‘gheyeness’. What often occurs with the introduction of a man playing a female character is that everyone ends up looking like a bit of a dick, from the guy portraying the character to the other men in the group reacting as they do.

A great many gamers seem unable to perceive of a female character, even one played by another man, as anything other than a sex object, a mother figure, a princess who needs rescuing or the evil-manipulative slut. Either this says a lot about the gamers themselves or the women they’ve run into. Regardless it causes problems for the game and the Games Master can fall into exactly the same trap in portraying female NPCs. Like it or not the genders are different and getting into a different mindset or headspace, especially that of a woman, seems to defeat even those who routinely play monsters, aliens or other bizarre viewpoints. The same applies in reverse and, when faced with difficulty it is all too easy to slip into standard stereotypes.

The Male Perspective – James ‘Grim’ Desborough

Playing a Woman

I could give a great deal of touchy-feely advice and scientific, psychological and cultural studies indicating how much better women are at coping with and understanding social situations, languages, lateral thinking, pain, endurance and so on and so forth but that wouldn’t really help you get into the mindset. I don’t really understand women any more than anyone else does but the big secret, really, is that you don’t have to.

Most games exist in a world that is accepting of action/fantasy, the same world inhabited by comic book heroes, fantasy novel protagonists and action film stars. If you want to portray a woman in those terms, in those worlds then really you don’t need to portray a woman at all. Most women in those films, books, comics and TV shows only show their feminine side in distracting a guard or wearing a knock-out dress in one particular scene. The rest of the time, regardless of any historical setting or other concerns, they do everything the men do in almost the same way, swashing the same buckles, fighting just as hard, if not better, and often showing up the heroes terribly, even when they’re trying to rescue them.

So, the best advice I can give to someone trying to play a female character is ‘Don’t even try’. Just play the same way you usually do and don’t obsess about it or let anyone else in the group worry about it. Just play one of the headstrong, independent, as-good-as-a-man-at-anything women typified by current media stories and go wild. Just remember you have a few extra tools of persuasion up your sleeve but that you never have to follow through on them.

Playing a Man

I am a man, albeit one of approximately four billion or so individual male souls in the world so I can at least give a little

advice to women on how to portray a typical male mindset. These are, of course, horrible generalities that don’t apply to many men or many situations and probably endanger you of stereotypes as much as male players are likely to stereotype female characters but this is just one short article.

We tend to think linearly. Men tend to work on one problem at a time, focussing upon it and pushing forward relentlessly, even if we lose patience with it. If we give up on something we’re less likely to come back to it in the future and if we do we’ll be a lot less enthusiastic about it.

We are constantly raging with hormones. Sex is, if not the primary thing on a man’s mind at any point in time at least a secondary concern. Almost anything can cause sexual thoughts and feelings and the greater majority of our interactions are about determining the pecking order with other men or trying to impress potential mates. Even ones we don’t particularly feel attracted to. Almost all behaviour from the acquisition of wealth to building can all be linked, if somewhat tenuously to this need to impress. This makes us bigger risk takers and far more likely to show off.

Men are also far more likely to take a physical and direct approach to a problem, to live in the moment and not to, necessarily, pause to consider consequences of their actions. In games this will be reflected in prison breaks, attacking when attacking isn’t necessarily the best option and taking the risk of drinking unmarked potions before having them identified.

You might think some of that sounds negative or untrue, it won’t be true for everyone, but as general hints it goes pretty far.

The Female Perspective – Tiffany Craig

The only time I’ve felt at an advantage, as a woman in the gaming community is when I play Munchkin. The Amazon monster and the Amazon sword have only once fallen into my polished hand and I was grateful. I sparkled with the knowledge that somewhere; somehow the makers of the game and inspiration for the cards knew that sometimes, we should have an advantage. It is only for the few card bonuses that I even play a female in Munchkin. I prefer men; it just makes gaming life so much easier. So I become puzzled when men want to play female characters, especially in situations where no one can tell your real gender. Do you want to be patronized, side lined and ignored? Do you want to have someone class you as being in ‘that time of the month’ the minute their antics start to annoy you? Or are these things even part of your thought when you write up a pornographic cat-woman mage? And to the women, do you want to further put us in the ‘novelty’ category by not accepting your gender as being appropriate? Or is it just for an easy life? Either way, I’m here to help.

The first question to ask yourself when you’re deciding to play the opposite sex is ‘why?’ If you’re hardcore and use gaming as an opportunity to explore certain alien sides of yourself, then you’re going to have a different starting place than the woman who just doesn’t want to be bothered. Be honest about the why question as well. If you’re just writing up masturbation worthy buffed out priest, then go for it. Just make sure to get some

release before a session that includes others. If you're going for hardcore, remember not all men like scratching their balls and jacking off to uber Barbie. For a well rounded character, be it in LARP, MET or just your paper based dice rolling types, you're not going to get very far if you constantly wander around thinking about putting your dick into every soft surface the GM throws at you. How many men do you know of, outside of the Maxim reading population, actually do that? I'd actually venture to say that many men think Jordan is hideous and would rather have a young lady with real breasts that won't suffocate him in a 'female dominant' position. Even though the opposite gender can be more foreign than a man in a towel on a flight to Philadelphia, their basic chemistry is still pretty close to yours. Don't forget a personality.

And gentlemen, that goes for you as well. I realize that getting to know your feminine side means dressing it in cotton candy pink duct tape and prancing around with a whip but how successful do you think that will actually be? Not only will your fellow players get a certain, er, thought about what you do at night but you're also potentially alienating any female gamers who do want to interact with you. It all goes back to the masturbation vs. complete image. Cotton candy up there probably isn't going to last for very long before you get bored or someone kills her for showing the group's hiding place to Orc raiders. And even if you do go the shallow and sexy route what do you find attractive in a woman? Did it ever occur to you that those triple J tits might just mean that she falls over instead of being able to pull back her bow? I challenge any GM that sees a character so grotesquely disproportionate just to give them one roll to see if she snaps in half. Women, despite what you might think, aren't inscrutable, usually don't wear liquid latex and aren't all obsessed with shopping. A lasting female character is probably going to be this side of boring, with a Goblin's concerns for what to have for dinner and will think an awful lot like you. Still want to play one?

For ladies playing men, I leave you with this. Your male friends are a good source of what it is to be male. Watch the subtext in their actions. Are they suffering a Hornby like crisis of identity? Are they a stereotype? Do you want to explore that stereotype? Check some blogs and get an idea of motivation. What would that person do if faced with a thousand women in long capes? Have you written up a misogynist? For men, the gamer's ideal female is old and frankly, horrible. Think outside of the cage; talk to your female friends, read their blogs and listen without the period filter. For both, the more information you have and the more open minded you are, the more successful you're bound to be in the great role-playing gender swap.

CHEESECAKE

One thing that always gets done to death on forums and in any RPG magazines that last more than a few issues is the subject of cheesecake art being used to sell gaming books and paraphernalia and, therefore, the subject of sexism in gaming as a whole. These discussions and innovations generally follow a familiar line, people argue the point back and forth, perhaps a company will change to using alternating or the feminine pronoun and annoy English language purists and then everyone else will carry on putting cheesecake on the covers to sell books once again because it works.

That's why it's on the cover of this.

Like it or not sex sells. Sex sells because it is the primary motivator of the human species. The sex drive commands us on a deep and instinctual level and a depiction, or reality, of someone we find sexually attractive cannot help but grab our attention. This is true not just for gaming but for just about every product from vacuum cleaners to toilet paper, beautiful women are used to sell products to men and women alike as something to ogle or someone you might wish to be. The presentation may differ but there is little practical difference in the selling tactic between someone clutching their breasts on the cover of *FHM* or pouting prettily from the cover of *Cosmo*.

The argument against games having cheesecake art stems, mainly, from two contentions with an assortment of other, smaller, arguments coming along at the same time for the fun of it like lampreys on the side of a shark.

Argument number one says that RPGs now have a much larger proportion of female players than they used to and that this is a laudable and wonderful thing and we should do everything we can to make them feel welcome and included – that includes toning down the amount of cheesecake art we use within and on the covers of our books.

Argument number two builds on, or replaces argument number one. Argument number two says that we want more 'chicks in gaming' and that in order to attract and keep more female RPG players we must present a more mature and understanding image. It is posited that girls are put off gaming by the sexy imagery, character assumptions and very 'male' nature of much of gaming material. If we mend our ways and 'act nice' girls will be attracted to our hobby and more likely to stay and take part if they discover it.

The assorted additional arguments that sally forth in defence of both main arguments include elements of feminism, political correctness and outright geekiness such as the argument 'We should show them wearing more practical armour and they didn't have depilation or expert hairdressers back then you know'. Many of these arguments are spurious or irrelevant to the main point, or are social discussions on a wider level than simply gaming. On the practicality and historical accuracy point I think we can agree that wild-haired women with hairy upper lips and forests of body hair sprouting through saggy and ill-fitting chain mail wouldn't make a very good advertisement for

anything and might even make you turn away from the page.

Argument number one fails to recognise that, perhaps, RPGs have attracted this 'new' female audience in spite of or because of their unreconstructed nature or because of slower, more natural changes in the state of the hobby. *Vampire: The Masquerade* is often credited with being behind the glut of new players, especially women, during the 1990's and undue credit is given to *Vampire's* 'right on' writing style. At its core the vampire myth is about sexuality, sensuality and rape masquerading as the hunger for blood and *Vampire* gaming books contain more than their fair share of cheesecake, even if the women are more elegant than pneumatic. The *Vampire: The Masquerade* LARP scene is also credited with bringing in a lot of women and given that LARP is basically an excuse to dress up pretty and go on the pull one-step-removed from reality at a geek meat-market how accurate are these assumptions?

Argument two trots out under the false notion that these sorts of hobbies can somehow, magically, be turned into something with broader appeal to the masses in general and both genders equally. You don't see model train sets, antique car restoration or other borderline-Aspergers hobbies having these sorts of crises of conscience. Nor does Hornby use large-breasted models to sell their products and yet, despite their circumspect nature, they appeal to women no more, in fact a lot less, than role-playing does. The intricacies of rules-sets, miniature painting, maps, polyhedral dice that are 'kinda neat' and the other assorted frippery of gaming are always going to make it a niche and, primarily, male interest area and we should be more than proud that any women are interested in the same silly little hobby as we are.

Changing our ways and eliminating the cheesecake art and fantastical assumptions is something akin to being the 'nice friend' who secretly lusts after a girl of his acquaintance. You act nice, sympathetic and mature while she dates a succession of jerks just waiting for her to realise your faithfulness and companionship could be more. Which she never does and it's actually kind of creepy and a betrayal of yourself.

The bad-boy hobbies may always have more appeal.

Role-playing's big 'sell' is its unlimited escapism and fantasy along with its literary and dramatic roots. You can be and do almost anything in the various settings of gaming, step into the pages of your favourite novel or build you own engaging world, fantasy and characters. Just as some might wish to play out their barbarian fantasies or sail from star to star others might fulfil their fantasies by playing someone dashing, beautiful or sexually alluring. These are established fantasy ideas and ideals and the ideal of being sexually irresistible is common between sexes, ages and cultures. Removing those fantastical images of women may well be removing part of the lure of gaming for women, 'I could be like her'.

Fantasy art has always been popular with both genders and the likes of Luis Royo and Chris Achilleos built their reputations and skills on sexually oriented imagery that has always had massive appeal to both sexes. The foundations of fandom and fantastical

fiction upon which role-playing is built depend on the same imagery and strengths from the scream queens of horror films through the eye-candy of black and white B-movies through to the femme fatales of the pulps right the way up to the present day and the arse-kicking eye candy of Buffy Summers, Max Gueverra, Sydney Bristow and the Charmed girls, all of whom are embraced as much by their female audience as they are lusted after by their male aficionados. The modern difference is that they are, to quote a fictional character in Jesse Custer of Preacher...

'It's modern women is all. They ain't just chicks anymore. They're chicks in their own right.'

This same trend has come into computer games which echo many of the concerns role-playing has suffered down the years, right up to their present problems with the religious lobby and the politics of blame. Canny computer game producers have realised that they can double their audience with strong, independent and nonetheless sexy characters, especially since the runaway success of Lara Croft who, yet again, has been somewhat co-opted from her pin-up niche into that of, almost, a feminist role model, whatever the size of her breasts. Computer games have, however, largely dealt with the growing wing of female gamers by producing games in different niches, - puzzles and less violence oriented 'cute' games or material like *The Sims* all of which shows a whole different raft of prejudices and assumptions but seems to be borne out by demographics and sales figures as well as research, all of which computer games have much greater access to than traditional role-playing games.

In some ways it is laudable that role-playing concerns itself so much with these issues despite its relatively small size and relatively small amount of room for manoeuvre. With such small profit margins role-playing game production can be extremely unforgiving of mistakes that are made. Perhaps the truth behind it is that role-playing can tend, overall, to appeal to the liberal minded, sensitive and intellectual souls who do worry about these sorts of things constantly and want to make what they perceive as a positive change to the world around them. Role-playing thereby becomes a sort of 'ghetto' of writers and other individuals who make these changes in their writing and production values that set role-playing apart from other hobbies and publications.

In particular role-playing seems to pander more than any other media to a sort of 'anti-masculine' backlash with gamers often practically self-flagellating over the weaknesses and peculiarities of their gender and, in RPG writing in particular this has manifested in a peculiarity of writing style that makes many graduates of English or lovers of the language froth at the mouth and spit blood.

The use of the female pronoun as the default.

Most noticeable in White Wolf's books the use of the female pronoun as the default seems to have crept increasingly into other books produced by other companies. The cynic in me wonders if perhaps this isn't to pad out the page count for greater perceived value since 'she' is one character longer than 'he'

and the pedant in me likes to point out that this is not only still sexist, but more sexist since in 'correct' classical English 'he' is the correct and inclusive pronoun while 'she' is exclusive. Less objectionable is the use of alternating pronouns or swapping between example text and the main body of the work. Still this is a concern and an argument that I have not seen taking place in any other area of written endeavour as much as I have seen it agonised over in role-playing writing. Why they can't just use 'they' and 'them', which are generally agreed to be the best solutions or revert to 'correct' English usage I don't know, after all, the phrase 'personkind' never really caught on and *Star Trek: TNG's* 'No-one has gone before' still sounds grating and clumsy.

As gamers we have to recognise that our core and, most important, audience is predominantly male and has certain interests, obsessions and preconceptions that need to be pandered to in order to make a successful product. If you disenfranchise your core audience to the extent that they no longer feel compelled to buy your products then you will not have the money or latitude to try and appeal to new audiences later on. Without reaching you run the risk of creating a self-devouring and incestuous fan base that cannot grow but outreach, especially from a niche hobby, is extremely risky. Over analysis and concern, making spurious changes to chase an audience that may never be interested in what you are selling is to forget the original things that made role-playing a much-talked-about success, the selling of an accessible fantasy.

My conclusion then, and you can feel free to differ, is that the sexy, rather than sexist, depictions of women are as much a part of gaming as killing things and taking their stuff, pizza and peculiarly shaped dice. We sell fantasy, we sell repackaged imagination and a great many fantasies and imaginations are about sex or being attractive. Strong fantasy heroines are as important to women, if for subtly different reasons, as they are to men and removing those images and ideas would be harmful to the hobby as a whole, removing part of its appeal to both genders. Rather, I think, we should try to follow the same route as computer games and popular SF/Fantasy TV series, cute chicks, but 'chicks in their own right'.



GENRE SEX

Sex and sexuality remains the great unexplored in the majority of role-playing settings, systems and games which is sometimes odd to understand. You can find quite academic works amongst role-playing supplements going into ludicrous detail about many aspects of real medieval life and extrapolating them into a detailed fantasy world. You can find accessible and entertaining material on complicated issues like transhumanism or the technological singularity point and yet, generally, the only sexual content you can find is a vague mention of the brothel in a fantasy town or some slightly dubious cybernetic impants.

This is absurd and strange since so much of human endeavour is fuelled by the sex drive and subverted and perverted aspects thereof. Wars are fought over tribal affiliations which are only extended families, advertising uses the sex drive in its marketing of every product that exists, lap dance clubs proliferate, prostitution is regulated and licensed in an increasing number of places. Sex has driven technological change and progress second only to war, even there sex and death are linked, with personal video technology, digital video and, lord help us, the internet all being massive propelled forward by the requirements of the adult entertainment industry. Indeed, analysed enough just about everything can be reduced down to the sex drive and its repercussions on human society.

When it comes to gaming however, even in settings that are detailed down to the moles on a King's backside and mapped out to the degree of an ordinance survey map the impact of sex, so important in normal human life, is completely disregarded. We don't get to hear how magic, which in fantasy worlds is a replacement technology, is used in this regard, how interspecies relationships work or are regarded, where baby Orcs come from or how the different gods regard such activities as homosexuality or sex before marriage. In science-fiction worlds we don't hear how technology or genetic engineering has modified these base human drives, are babies decanted, grown in exo-wombs or assembled to spec by nanites? Do A.I.'s have sex and what are their babies like? If internet pornography looked, smelt, tasted and felt like the real thing, only great every time, with a simulated partner who would do whatever you wanted, would we ever leave?

A short article cannot hope to address every aspect of human sexuality in every genre but an overview of some of the main influences and themes that can be introduced by including sexuality can be gone over. Hopefully this will be enough to spark your imaginations and get some ideas flowing.

SF-Sex

Science-Fiction has the single greatest breadth of possibility of any genre. From playing in the 'good old fashioned future' as imagined by the visionaries of the past, through alternate histories to fantastical space operas or Clarkeian hard science fiction, the universe, or universes, are you playthings and, in an infinite universe just about anything is not only possible, but likely.

Transhumanism

Transhumanism is the idea that, at some point in our future, the changes we bring upon ourselves and the alterations that we make to the human experience and animal will be so profound that we go beyond what we are now, become so different that we will transcend the current context of human existence and go beyond human to become something different. This might come about through genetic alteration, technological innovation or ideas and concepts that haven't even been dreamed up by man yet. A classic example would be the uploading of consciousness into a digital realm and the adaptation to life without body, or the change in perspective and society that might come about with the achievement of effective immortality.

What does this have in store for sexuality? Well, Transhumanism is, largely, based upon rational and logical argument and it can be argued, quite effectively, that while sexuality provides a great deal of the human drive to succeed and move forward it also has caused a great deal of tensions and has held humanity back as much as it has propelled it forward. Indeed the sexual drive is so strong that we cannot help but overpopulate our world despite the great strain we put upon her every single day. A completely rational analysis might relegate reproduction to a lesser level of importance, eliminating the competitive sex drive entirely and allowing the post-human race to examine their world through clear eyes rather than through a fug of hormones, attraction and jealousy.

A great deal depends on whether mankind transfers to a new state or gives 'birth' to a new post-human species. If we alter ourselves into something new then that new species will only have the context of its own existence from which to judge and behave. If we become something new then we may bring some of our hang-ups and obsessions with us. A digital human consciousness may still feel, may still desire sensation and may still achieve it through virtuality, when you transfer your consciousness rather than becoming a being of pure and rational thought you might immerse yourself in an unending eternity of sensual debauchery freed from the constraints of time and 'proper' behaviour.

In SF games one must always consider the potential broader impact of introduced and advanced technologies. If the technology is sufficiently advanced then the society will be as different and difficult to comprehend as cybersex relationships and democratic politics would appear to be to a Neanderthal.

Transhuman technologies may also be able to have other far reaching effects into our social order. Imagine an engineered race of hermaphrodites who can all become pregnant or inseminate according to their particular wish at any one time. Imagine humans adapted to different environments with characteristics far different to the current racial differences, yet still human. Would cultural taboos arise about intermarriage or breeding between such? What if cloning technology were abused to create an underclass of exploitable, moronic clones? Would they be traded as sex dolls, what if they were engineered for sex but left at a child-like state of emotional development, would that be paedophilia or something else? What if other animals could be raised to a higher level of intelligence or a

human mind could be placed in an adapted animal body? What if someone had sex with a human mind inhabiting an animal body, would it still be bestiality? Would it be acceptable?

The alteration of the human condition raises so many possibilities but human filth and obsession, thus far, remains the same despite the social and technological context we place ourselves in. The future is far more likely to be *Transmetropolitan* than a clean, sexless utopia.

Virtuality

While VR goggles and rigs never really caught on like everyone assumed they would, perhaps due to peaking too early before graphics software was really powerful enough for the 'wow' factor, immersive games such as MMORPGs and First Person Shooters still do extremely well with ever-more realistic 3D worlds being rendered at faster and faster speeds. Research continues into interfacing the human mind with computers and it can only be a matter of time before we will have the technology to plunge people's perceptions fully into a digital world with everything we can feel, taste and touch with our physical bodies replicated there, even with greater fidelity than our actual bodies can transfer to our minds.

We can, therefore, extrapolate a future field of entertainment containing these interactive digital fantasies that can be as, if not more, compelling than real life. This is, as naturally as breathing, going to result in a massive amount of interactive pornography and a great many addicts.

What can this bring to a game? What about pirate body-models being used in pornographic fantasies? How would you feel, how would a celebrity feel, knowing that they've been 'pirated' and traded into the sweaty masturbatory fantasies of a million otaku? What if a contact or a target for their job is a 'virtch' addict and is locked up in some coffin hotel somewhere on a drip-feed and catheter, locked into 'Harem Lord III' for days at a time under an anonymous sign in? What if the characters themselves are addicted to 'virtch' or their adventures are all virtual in nature and they don't even know, or deny themselves the knowledge?

Virtuality attained to such a degree also creates the possibility of very advanced telepresence with someone able to see, hear and feel everything that the robotic body that they inhabit feels. How will society view someone having sex with a robot, even if that robot is 'possessed' by the consciousness and experience of their distant lover? What about two people conducting an affair through telepresence with both of them occupying robotic bodies? Is that adultery and wouldn't it make an interesting futuristic case to look into for a private eye?

The social impact of advanced virtuality and telepresence would be as marked, and as tied up with sex, as the invention of the telephone, the personal video camera or the internet and, if particularly effective, could see more and more people turning on and tuning in rather than living real lives. With control over the senses one could also stimulate the pleasure centres far more directly and addictively than with any other pleasure and without the expense of the virtualities, something better than sex.

Decadence

It is not, necessarily, true that advancements in science and technology bring people less stress, more wealth and more leisure time but let us assume that technology and science can and will progress to a point where death is impermanent and the majority of tasks are automated leaving man with great, relative, wealth and the time to do whatever he wants. What would result?

We can see some indications by looking at historical precedent. The closest example we have to an automated culture is that of the Romans and their slave economy. With most of the hard work being done by non-citizens the wealthy elite of Rome had more time to devote to arts, sciences and other, less worthy, pursuits. Leisure frees the mind but for every great philosopher freed from the constraints of daily survival there will be a hundred debauched pleasure seekers. The Romans had their orgies and their gladiators, the people of the future leisure society will have even more options.

The great pursuit of the 'increased leisure citizen' will be sensual experience; great food, great sex, excitement through hobbies or simple descent into slothful luxuriance. A decadent society will immerse itself into any and all sensual pleasures available and as homosexuality was somewhat accepted in Greece and the Roman Empire, and as sexuality was accepted as Pompeii's wall painting and mosaics show, what might become acceptable in the future? Things we regard as disgusting and unacceptable now may well be considered with blasé acceptance in the years to come and knowing humanity it will trawl for new depths of unacceptability every time something new is considered passé.

An increased leisure society offers a good reason for dilettante 'adventurers' to get together and the decadence of sensual empire can make a dramatic backdrop for their pursuits and shenanigans as well as creating the set-up for a classic *Falling Empire Vs The Barbarians* backdrop. The decadent depths of the human capacity for perverted sexuality may be a little strong for some groups but can be inferred rather than treated directly and still remain effective.

Xenophilia

One thing virtually all science-fiction settings contain are aliens. In many settings a lot of these aliens are humanoid, especially in settings derived from TV or film, since truly 'alien' aliens are much more expensive to produce effects for.

In space opera the alien's forms and appearance are often allegories for aspects of the human psyche and behaviour. Even Jabba the Hutt is quite human, two eyes of a recognisable type, a nose, a mouth and we can all appreciate his desire to have a bikini-clad Leia on a chain even if it would make more sense if he found that smooth, dry skin detestable. He is a fat slug because it fits his role as horrible, unsympathetic space-gangster to be a fat slug. Many other humanoid aliens are designed in appearance to complement their role in the story, from intimidating bad-guy to sexy dancer. Interspecies attraction, even half-breed children, are considered relatively normal in these settings though aliens and halfbreeds may garner disgust from forces such as *The Empire* or *The Peacekeepers* they are

the bad guys and we, as viewers, readers or players are not meant to share their disgust even though shagging a Vulcan is the cultural equivalent of making love to a sheep.

If one believes in convergent evolution then aliens would be very much like us since the same pressures that have produced intelligence in us are likely to have produced similar creatures according to similar evolutionary pressures upon other species. Few people believe that convergent evolution is the most likely scenario these days though and most believe it to be very likely that aliens will be very, very different to us, perhaps to the point where we may not realise each other's intelligence. Such species may be of interest in some games but long term relations and stories between species rely on some intrigue or point of commonality.

Consider the factors credited with the development of human intelligence; tool use, adaptive intelligence and social structure. What is the biggest factor in social structure? You guessed it, sex. Attracting a mate, keeping a mate, raising a child and understanding complex familial relationships is credited with a great deal of our societal and intellectual development and it is also an interesting fact to consider that we are one of the few species where both genders derive pleasure from the act of mating, that experience orgasm so powerfully. The other species that also have sex for the pleasure of it are, perhaps not coincidentally, the ones we also regard as the most intelligent: Dolphins and Bonobo chimps.

If we give convergent evolution some credit then, it is likely that other intelligent species will have some interest in sex as more than just a procreative activity to continue the species and this may be one of the more powerful things that we would have in common with such species, even in hard science-fiction settings. This, naturally, leads on to the possibilities of interspecies sex. This is, needless to say and despite the sheer number of spam e-mails talking about girls who *really* love horses, something we do not accept in reality. Someone who entices their dog to commit carnal acts with them is regarded as a freak of the worst order and even those who lust after cartoon, humanised animals are treated, most commonly, with distaste and censure. Will this be any different if the sex partner is of a different species and possesses consciousness? This theme has been touched on before, most completely in *Ringworld* with the tradition of rishathra, ritualised interspecies sex, between native intelligent species. They are all variations on the humanoid however and sex between intelligent species is unlikely to be as easy as that, especially if the mechanisms are substantially different.

Will the fact that both partners are intelligent make the act any more acceptable? Do not think it unlikely that such sexual attraction will occur in a world with bestiality, furrries, plushies and people who get turned on by inanimate objects and do not think the attraction will be entirely one way. Dogs will 'hump' your leg or get prodigious erections when you rub their tummies, it's a sex-signal to a dog, chimps will groom their human carers at zoos and make sexual displays towards them and dolphins have been known to make, 'untoward advances' on swimmers all of which makes it more credible that there will be human sexual encounters with aliens.

In a game setting this can mean controversy and hatred and can make good allegories for racial tensions in the real world. It can even be a pretext for war, assassination, religious problems and many other plots that form the standard fare of adventuring.

Who knows, maybe the greys giving people anal probes are just intergalactic perverts?

Robotics & Artificial Intelligence

What interest would robots or artificial intelligences have in sex and procreation? Well, that's not really the point, the point is to what uses would humans put robots and A.I. in their pursuit of sex, still, let us not discount robotic interest in 'sex'. Robots will have to come from somewhere, be built and how better to develop a new robot than by taking on successful adaptations from previous generations and taking them into the new generations? This 'genetic' inheritance is, in effect, a mating between the roaming robots put to their various uses and the 'mother' that is the production line. Self-replicating nanotechnology is more akin to a viral or bacterial reproduction but more complex and larger devices require something closer to sexual reproduction. Digital minds, artificial intelligence, may also like to or want to replicate themselves or create copies, developing their intelligence and creating combinations of successful traits, which is also reproduction of a sort.

It is the use to which these robotics and intelligences are put that will be the telling factor. At present the highest quality intelligences and reactions in entertainment are the 'A.I.' rules used to govern the behaviour of opponents in First Person Shooter computer games, some even having the ability to learn from your behaviour and adapt to it to a limited degree. Imagine though, the appeal of a sexually oriented game where the sex partner from the fantasy can learn your preferences, react in a more lifelike fashion to your actions and come up with ideas of their own. Of course to create such an intelligence you need to program and adapt it to pursue these sorts of behaviours and to find 'enjoyment' or 'fulfilment' in meeting those rules of their programming.

With A.I. this is likely to, mostly, tie in with virtuality, as mentioned previously, but the possibilities for love dolls or companions is also massive. Don't think people won't pay for it, they already spend inordinate amounts of money on *RealDolls*TM, made to order fantasy men and women and those can't speak or move. Why waste time and effort on a real relationship when you can get everything you need, in and out of the bedroom, from subservient robotic mate dedicated to your every pleasure? The pursuit of the *Cherry 2000* begins to make sense, despite the moralising ending to the film.

Cultural diversity

Communications technology creates many diverse and individual communities. If you're into something, even something quite unusual, odds are you can find a community of people who share tastes, interests and experiences with you on the Internet. Now imagine that communication experience taken to the next level, fully interactive, video, telepresence and lord knows what else will come along in the future. Also envision a future with many

worlds, a great deal of lebensraum and the technologies to exploit any environment easily and relatively cheaply. In a large area without a great deal of effective and centralised control these communities will be able to come together physically and create their own 'pocket societies' in a mirror of *Night's Dawn's* 'ethnic streaming' or *Snow Crash's* national franchises.

When this comes to down to sexuality it means you might find all manner of experimental communities from homosexual or lesbian societies who reproduce through machinery, cloning and exowombs and to whom heterosexuality has become a cultural taboo to societies based around multiple marriages, polyamory or even non-reproductive incest as in Theodore Sturgeon's tale '*If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?*'.

Different planets, different micro-cultures, allow you to examine the social impact and implications of all of these societies and people's reactions to them. In the aforementioned Theodore Sturgeon tale the question that is raised is 'Why shouldn't relatives have sex if contraception is effective? Who does it hurt?' In the story the people are vilified and hated and even the hero, an open minded sort of bloke normally, is filled with revulsion when he finds out, even though it is consensual and nobody is being exploited. With the root of the taboo being in reproduction and inbreeding rather than the act of sex itself, provided all are consenting adults, the argument is a compelling and logical one but it is all but impossible to see past the cultural and social reaction of disgust. The best stories, the best games can look into these thoughts in a compelling and imaginative fashion and really make people think.

Fantasy Sex

The world of fantasy is typically a medieval setting in which have been placed all the magic and monsters of Arthurian legend and beyond to create a world of treasure, adventure and heroics. Fantasy hangs heavy with expectation and tradition, dwarves, elves, wizards, dungeons, dragons, Kings and Princesses all of which can somewhat restrict the breadth and scope of a game, or any other fantasy treatment, to certain areas.

As with technology in science-fiction games the impact of such diverse factors as magic, humanoid races and clerical medicine, not to mention herbal remedies as effective as modern treatments, is often under considered in fantasy settings when, often, if these were as prevalent factors as they are presented to be then the societies would be as 'modern' as our own, albeit based on magical, rather than scientific, advancement.

This applies to sexuality as much as anything else. Effective herbal or holy medicine would reduce infant mortality and childbearing deaths, would ensure more children reached a healthy adulthood and so would reduce the required birth rate, herbal or magical contraception might lead to a more tolerant and libertarian society than we associate with a medieval setting and many other factors could alter the world in other, significant ways that are often given only the briefest of thoughts.

Magic & Sex

Magic is, clearly, the major societal difference in most fantasy worlds and magic has far reaching implications. Particularly clerical magic, imagine a world where you knew exactly what your god wanted because they genuinely did communicate to you and all their followers could agree. Wouldn't that be scary?

Magic is the technology of the fantasy setting, whether it be widespread so that everyone may learn a trick or two or whether it be restricted to an educated elite it still has the potential to have a massive effect on the lives of every individual in that land. Our concern here is with sex but healing and martial magic would have drastic effects beyond that on population, birth control, war, technology, crafting, jobs and all manner of other parts of society. Perhaps strangely, perhaps not, the best reflection of a working fantasy society is Terry Pratchett's Ankh Morpork, a larger than life fantasy metropolis with magic pulling as much weight as common labour.

So, what does magic mean for the sex lives of our fantasy folk? For starters there would be a lot less infant mortality, a lot less pressure on women to breed fresh warriors and workers, even with the imposition of monsters and wars with evil humanoids. Women should then, in theory, be more emancipated in most areas with more control over their own destiny. Herbal and clerical magic should allow birth control, abortions and less birth complications which changes things more. Magical talent is often also something that one is born into, regardless of sex or station, a talent that must be nurtured. Female magicians especially should be used to being treated as equal, or superior, to most men and to getting their own way.

What does all of this mean? Well, with sex having less serious, or at least avoidable consequences the institution of marriage means less, sex becomes even more about pleasure than children and women take control of their own reproduction. Sexual intrigue, sexual experimentation become far more likely and a morality more like that in our modern world would likely emerge, unless the strong religions of the society forbade such behaviour.

Magic is also a force to manipulate reality; it is a tool and a powerful one. Not only does it give effective mind control, magical slavery and the ability to see great distances but also to manipulate objects and energies in ways that can only be achieved by the most powerful mechanisms and sciences in the real world. What does man do with the technology of the internet? He downloads porn. What would be done with summonings, genuine working love potions and all the other magical methods and skills? Many of them would be used for personal gratification.

If a succubus is inherently evil is it wrong to summon and bind one into sexual servitude? What of the many fantasy species who use their sexuality to entrap and even kill men? Is turning the tables on them fair and equitable? In these situations, with this magic and the other planes of reality it implies, with demons and spirits that prey upon the human weakness of lust is this reverse exploitation even seen as a bad thing?

Technology is used in many ways to enhance or expand the sexual experience in the real world, from electrically charged stimulation devices to more and more complex vibrators and even highly realistic sex-dolls as produced by the *RealDoll* Company. There are devices to expand ones manhood, there are surgical techniques to give you the body you always wanted but couldn't have. Fetishes are served and created by artificial fabrics and hundreds of people make a living flashing their bits over webcams, carried across the whole globe through the net, interactive DVDs, *Viagra*, pornographic video games and tele-fucking-dildonics. Would a world driven by magic be any different? Animated statues and devices, rings and necklaces that give you stamina and lasting power, potions to make you cum like a stallion or to prolong or provoke orgasm, sex golems and summoned partners, spying devices to spy nymphs, 'frolicking' in their glades. Interest in sex may often be seen as puerile but it's a universal drive and need and one that humanity has always turned every trick at its disposal towards.

Good Vs Evil

Fantasy worlds, even Star Wars which is basically a fantasy story with spaceships, have a very clear-cut morality system where light and dark, good and evil, right and wrong are very, very clearly delineated. You are generally one or the other and even the more selfish choices; presented as neutral, tend to favour the 'good' over the 'evil'. Morality has genuine and far-reaching consequences within the world and the gods exist, walk amongst men, empower their priests and leave little or no room for interpretation of their words.

Different cultures in the real world have often made certain actions taboo and, while some of these, such as refraining from eating certain foodstuffs, may have had a basis in avoiding disease and prolonging life, many of them seem to have risen for no reason at all other than to have something that a people joined by religion can adhere to and identify with. In a fantasy world with real gods, often ascended men, these taboos may reflect their own personal prejudices or a minor act of worship that fuels their powers and ascendancy in the heavens.

Sexuality is almost always caught up in the taboos and religions of modern humanity in the real world and there is no real reason to suspect that the humanity, or the other humanoid races, of a fantasy world would be any different. With clear-cut indications of good and evil though the darker aspects of hatred and prejudice may by far more openly displayed. If your god views homosexuality as evil or if that is the commonly accepted belief then its practitioners are evil in that world. Cast out, warded by spells and struck down by the might of your god. This does not make for a world that fits our modern tolerances and ideals though and may not be a fun world to play games in and so this sort of topic is often skimmed over, with only questions of murder and torture being considered evil and sexuality not being questioned or examined in this context as it makes people uncomfortable.

Prejudice can make for a richer, more absorbing game world, but not necessarily one that is engaging on a strictly pleasurable level. By and large gamers tend to be a fairly liberal minded lot and exploring the idea of divinely sanctioned prejudice can be

extremely distasteful, even on the balance that some gods will encourage such behaviour and that religions and tribal traditions around our globe and through our history have been tolerant, even encouraging, of such wide ranging things as lesbianism, homosexuality, masochism and even paedophilia. Walking in another man's shoes can give you understanding of their beliefs though and such a game world can give profound insights into the beliefs of those who do use religion to fuel and support their prejudice.

Humanoid Interbreeding

One part of a fantasy world that has no real correlation in the real world with which we can properly compare is the existence of multiple humanoid species or the fact that they can interbreed and produce half-caste offspring. Indeed that wholesale rape and the production of half-breed offspring seems to be a major part of the motivation and existence for the 'inherently evil' nonhuman races such as Orcs.

The closest experience we have in our experience in the real world is romance between members of different 'races' whose genetic differences are vanishingly small compared to the differences between humanoid races in fantasy worlds whose characteristics such as longevity, different eyesight and different size, shape and other factors all combine to make them far more alien and different than another race of humanity. The only other remotely close experience is the occasional mating between similar species of animal, horse and donkey for example, to produce a mule, a sterile half-breed.

Humanity is capable of perverted attraction to all sorts of strange things from vacuum cleaner attachments to animals, even paving slabs or car exhausts and the slender pointed elf, the soft and rounded Halfling or even the bear-like dwarf are a far more appealing prospect with attributes far more attractive to the average person than any number of inanimate objects or animals. Many of the fantasy races are idealised or demonised forms of human appearance and endeavour. The joie de vivre of the Halflings, the introspection, learning and beauty of the elves, the hard working endeavour and craftsmanship of the dwarves even the martial chaos and lack of conscience of Orcs and goblins. The demihuman races are the same as us, with one personality trait turned up to eleven.

Interestingly, the existence and inclusion of half-breed races, usually half-orcs or half-elves is one of the few areas in which traditional game setting acknowledge sex. They acknowledge that humans can be attracted to or forced by the most idealised and the most demonised of human traits and provide rules for playing the progeny of such a mating though, oddly, there rarely seems to be any acknowledgement of half-dwarves or half-gnomes, perhaps showing a little prejudice there.

An interesting spin on the existing attraction and interaction between different races is to treat it precisely how it is treated in the real world. Interracial pornography is a big sector, people are attracted to the exotic and against the taboos and prejudices of many cultures we are often attracted to the exotic and different, the classics being the supposed fascination of white women for black men and of white men for Asian women. Might then the

attraction between elf and man, or other interactions become fetishised? Might it be taboo? Are there good stories in a Romeo & Juliet type impossible love between orcish warriors and noble elf princesses? Do the cultures approve or disapprove of these liaisons; do they see it as a 'thinning' of the blood for the race? Something that has far more basis for the fantasy races than it has in our world, not that that has prevented bigots and murderers down the centuries.

Modern Mores, Archaic World

Despite the Jack Chick's of this world and the best efforts of the assorted Inquisitions, Dictators and fundamentalists throughout history we today, at least in the cultural grouping we call 'The West', enjoy an extremely tolerant society where, by and large, someone's business is their own. There remain prejudices and a public figure that commits adultery or has a bizarre fetish is likely to get a roasting from the tabloids or lose their position of influence and fame but they are not going to be stoned, killed or arrested for it unless it is particularly awful or has resulted in death or the corruption of a minor. Even then the cult of celebrity protects many of those with the money and jaded tastes to be interested in the more perverse of activities.

We, by and large, accept or tolerate homosexuality, bisexuality, polyamory, fetish, bondage, domination, sadomasochism and a dozen other perversities that, while they may have existed, would have entailed arrest, death and at the very least total social isolation had they been discovered. In the case of BDSM it is fusing with more public fashion in the clubs and pubs of the goth, alternative and industrial scenes and in the case of bisexuality it seems that a teenage girl's street credibility practically depends on it.

The fantasy worlds in which we play often taken on measures of these modern moralities, we cannot help but be steeped in the modern culture of tolerance in which we all live and the characteristics of intolerance, of hatred are things we associate with evil, not with good. As noted previously though these fantasy worlds are often worlds of absolutes, not shades of grey. Evil is insidious and seductive and reaches out to corrupt. One of the greatest defences against such evil would be intolerance of even a hint of such ideas and behaviours that are associated with evil. Fantasy worlds of this sort would be very unlikely to hold to the same ideals, beliefs and values as a teenager or young adult in the western world of the twenty-first century.

A counterbalancing factor is the existence of better medicine, a relatively emancipated female gender and many other knock on effects of a more supportable metropolitan existence, one where long distance travel can be facilitated by flying beasts, magic or portals and where intelligent monsters and creatures from other planes of existence are a fact of life. This may be enough to create cultural melting pots within the larger cities where a more tolerant and modern outlook may not only be likely, but essential in order for people to live in such masses in such close proximity to one another and this is the way to excuse lapses into more modern thinking.

Slavery, Seraglios etc.

Fantasy worlds, despite their magic, are, generally, pre-mechanical save for a few wondrous devices produced at great expense, both personal and financial, by powerful magicians. What takes the strain without mechanical or computational assistance is human endeavour, be it brain or muscle power. This obviously leads to the large peasant classes in many medieval fantasy settings but it also leads to the institution of slavery.

Slavery has not always been utterly terrible in the past; indeed in many cultures slaves had their own sets of rights and laws governing their ownership that made being a slave somewhat preferable in many regards to being a free peasant. Serfdom is a specialised form of indentured servitude to a lord or Master with less control than personal slavery, one that formed much of European society for a great many years.

This article is, however, concerned with a much more personal form of slavery, that of the pleasure slave strangely idealised in many pulpy fantasy novels.

This form of slavery, while often hidden under other social conventions and ways, has persisted for much of history from the boys kept by the Greeks for pleasure, through Roman times, concubines and wives who were little more than chattel in many cultures, the Geisha of Japan who, while not necessarily primarily sexual were there to care for and please the men who came to the tea houses. Even today the concept of a mistress, of a 'kept woman' persists and can be viewed the same way as these roles of the past.

In fantasy such ideas can become entrenched, slavery is associated with 'evil' cultures and many of them may take captives for breeding, pleasure or even worse fates. Some imagined fantasy worlds, particularly the subset of barbarian fantasies make slavery, especially that of women, a cornerstone of their imagined lands the most extreme case being Jon Norman's notorious *Gor* novels. It seems domination and a simplifying of relations between the sexes to one of subservience and dominance is a common fantasy, either way around and our imagined worlds simply respond to these tastes.

Slavery and indentured servitude, even of whole peoples, has been commonplace throughout history and there is no reason not to believe it would exist in a fantasy world, especially one of 'evil' races who would simply enjoy brutalist domination and control of an oppressed people. Other reasons for slavery exist as well, simple manpower being one of them. While wizards toys and magic take much of the physical strain of existence that technology does in the real world wizards require a lot of training and the creation of artefacts can be taxing for them in the extreme, magic cannot do everything that needs to be done and common people will envy the luxury and wealth of the skilled classes. A slave class can perform all the more difficult work, freeing their betters to pursue pleasure, leisure and academic pursuits, the pleasure sometimes at the expense of the slaves be it in a seraglio or in a gladiatorial arena.

Institutionalised pleasure slaves brings some interesting

questions, what of slaves specifically bred for their beauty or some physical feature? What of the trade in the more exotic peoples and races? Where do these slaves come from, are they captured from enemies or born into it? Is it a status symbol to own a great deal of attractive flesh and the sign of a good host to offer it? Are there some who object to slavery and protest it and how do they free people, some of whom have known nothing else and may want to be slaves?

Horror Sex

The horror genre need not necessarily, immediately present itself to the gamer as one in which sex plays a very great role. The aim of horror is, after all, to horrify and disturb, even to sicken. Not things you want associated with sex and not things that are easy emotions to stir during a horror game in any case. Yet, if you look at horror novels they are often full of the most graphic sex, horrific or not, of any books. The visceral, no-holds-barred nature of many horror books, especially those of splatter or 'gross-out' horror means that any coyness about such a subject would be out of place. In films who dies first? The couple making out or having sex. What twists many of these serial killers or drives many of these monsters in their slaughter? Perverted or primitive sex.

Horror and sex are intertwined, perhaps more than any other genre outside of the romance novel. Horror is made worse by contrasts, pleasure and pain, love and hate and the killing of someone you care about and have an attachment to is worse than the deaths of a million unknown strangers. Sexuality clearly has a massive part to play in horror from self loathing to disgust, hate and fear sex stirs up feelings like little else.

Sex & Death

Sex and death are intertwined in so many ways, sex being the act of creation, death the final destruction. Life seeks to persist even in the most horrific of situations and war, death, murder are all known to act as aphrodisiacs to men as well as women, spurring celebratory passions when a city is liberated or mass rape when one is taken by hostile forces, a forceful display of human primitivism as old as our ape ancestors and mirrored still in the behaviour of our primate relatives.

Orgasm was even called 'The little death' and is referenced as such in Macbeth, used as a pun with a knowing wink to the audience of the time. In popular culture heroes still prove themselves in battle, in fighting, even in comedies the romantic lead may have to fight, even kill, to win over the leading lady. The two are intertwined in legends, from which many horror stories gather themselves, from the ghosts of wives to the medusa, siren, succubus and harpy, all themes and ideas developed or stolen for the themes of horror. Even the dead wife or lover, created or risen from the grave by a desperate man, turning upon her saviour and creator, some sort of parable for relations between the sexes.

Intimacy to Horror

Romantic or sexual intimacy is the closest you can be with someone in the right circumstances, all the walls and barriers between two people tumble down leaving them both very open.

It is, generally, a moment of pleasure and delight for those involved and that creates a moment of vulnerability that can be used as, and often is used, as a key moment to introduce horror.

The teenage couple making out in *Lover's Lane* get attacked by the slasher, the lover you embrace rots in your arms, takes on a demonic aspect or you wake from an erotic dream to find a 'thing' squatting over your bed, dripping ichor and using you for some vile reproductive purpose. The moment of pure intimacy, of no walls, no barriers is used to turn pleasure into horror and revulsion, an effective contrast to lurch from one emotion and experience to another as well as, often, being an allegory of disapproval for underage sex or some sort of kink, from the terrifying strap-on of *Se7en* to the wholesale slaughter of naughty teenagers in any number of slasher films.

Organ Threat

To many, perhaps most especially men, though I expect not, pain to and mutilation of the genitalia produces a very powerful and immediate horrified reaction. This is something that is often exploited in films and novels of all kinds from the enemy's ability to withstand a solid blow to the nuts with little more than a grunt to the slicing, sandpapering, infection of, boiling and removal of the genitals in any number of horrific ways, even cannibalism which lends a special kind of horror to the process.

Sexual Metaphors in Horror

Horror fiction and themes are replete with sexual metaphors. The traditional, gothic-horror vampire is an allegory for rape and seduction developed over many years from their plague-bearing and even more unsavoury roots. Romero's zombies are a rather brutalised metaphor for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and some other causes of horror in films and books are more directly related to sexual activity as with the David Cronenberg film, *Shivers* with insanity and mutation being spread by sexual contact.

Not all of the sexual content is so clearly and blatantly laid out. Looking back, since Clive Barker came out as gay, you can see many subtle connotations in his earlier work, such as *Books of Blood* and *Imajicca*, of a regard as the feminine as somehow horrifying or alien, different. Many of the 'villains' of his work, the horrors or the sources of the twisted magic, are female and there is a great deal of reference to indeterminate or transformative gender in many examples of his work. The Cenobites of *Hellraiser* are, of course, a blatant BDSM reference taken to the extreme and much of his work also explores this dark line between sensuality, terror and pain. It is somewhat telling that, apart from his children's works, Barker's books haven't been half as good since he came out, lacking the nervous, frenetic, visceral and invested quality of his earlier work.

Superhero Sex

Back in the old days it was simple, your costumed avenger got toggled up and went out on the streets with his plucky young chum to punch Nazis and other evildoers back onto the path of righteousness. These days your average comic buyer wants something a bit more involved and a bit more mature, something

a little less open to accusations of paedophilia and homosexuality. Though if buff men running around in tight or skimpy outfits doesn't qualify as a homoerotic fantasy I'm not entirely sure what does.

Superhero comics these days seem to be more about the relationships between members of superteams or between a hero and their allies, confidantes, families and hangers on than they are necessarily about the villains or disasters the hero must face. Instead these events, alien invasions, earthquakes and Dr Death aiming his doom-laser at the planet, just form a backdrop to these personal interactions with personal differences or crises from the hero's 'real life' impacting on the ongoing events in some fashion.

Some of these relationships and entanglements are, of course, sexual though this has become far more prevalent with the Marc Millars, Grant Morrisons and Warren Ellis' of the world having more and more influence over modern comics. While few mainstream comics ever slip into graphic portrayal enough hints and lounging around half naked in bed goes on to leave no question as to the relationships between the characters. Even old stalwarts like *X-Men*, recreated in two separate ways recently, are now filled with romantic and sexual entanglements and the jealousies and frictions that those relationships inevitably create.

A portion of role-playing, larger or smaller depending on the game, is what is called 'genre emulation'; attempting to recreate the physical and dramatic laws and feel of a type of game world through mechanics and style of play. With so much of modern comics and, to a lesser extent older ones, involved in sexual and personal relationships it only makes sense to bring some of those themes into games for a complete experience.

Power Fantasies

Superheroics is about power fantasy, about having strengths and abilities that nobody else has, about the acclimation and responsibility a hero has to be worshipped, different, significant. This pretty clearly relates to a lot of adolescent fantasies about being bigger, stronger, more responsible, making your own way in the world.

Dominance, being in a position of strength, is very much tied into relationships, gender politics and sex all by itself, let alone with power fantasies. Power corrupts as the saying goes and, if tabloid scandals and public revelations are anything to go by our rich and powerful elite, those who experience the closest thing to 'superpowers' are drunk on it and enjoying every benefit it entails, including sometimes quite monstrous kinks.

The superhero's uniform is not really any different to the black latex cat suit of the dominatrix or any other fetish garb, body-flattering, attention drawing, it is a shorthand symbol of status and expectation. Indeed the superhero outfits of *Batman*, *Catwoman*, *The Midnighter* and others are very much fetish suits, even more so in the film portrayals of superheroes.

Superhero Fetishes

The combination of power, weakness, skintight clothing and secret lives has made superheroism into a fetish all of its own.

The elaborate costumes, the dominance subtext, the homoerotic undertones and the secret life all mirror aspects of alternative sexual culture and give points of identity. Now cosplay has given people more of an outlet for their fetish and numerous websites and chatrooms have appeared where people go into vivid, fanfic details about exactly what Dr Doom does with Sue Storm when he captures her or what happens when Lex Luthor gets tangled up in Wonder Woman's lariat of justice. Its not going to jail, I can tell you.

Alright, but what use is all this?

All very fascinating psychosexual examination, but what use is it in an actual game? Well, in understanding what might drive a hero, where they get their strength of resolve, their obsessive compulsive behaviour and their outfitting ideas. A hero's drive may well derive from redirected or sublimated desire. While relationships are now part of the superheroic soap-opera mythos, especially that of teams, singular heroes rarely have a successful love life, if any love life at all. Everything they do is dedicated to a single purpose, the eradication of crime, the defeat of a particular enemy, everything. *The Punisher* and *Batman* are two sides of the same coin in that regard, both having had loss, both dedicating their lives on the crudest level, to revenge.

Why would anyone dress up in a clown suit, even a Kevlar skull shirt, to go out and fight crime? Wouldn't some sort of fatigue battledress be more appropriate? Symbols are important, camouflage fatigues mean army, a suit means a businessman, a Mohawk means a punk, a badge and a uniform make a cop. These are stamps of authority, of meaning and colour and style carry meaning be it personal or public. If someone were to develop real, genuine superpowers it is likely that they would come to dress as a superhero, despite the efforts of modern comics and the spread of the superhero idea to the hyper-trendy characters of *The Matrix* our mental shorthand has assimilated the meaning of heroes such as *Superman*, *Batman*, *Spiderman* and a hero in a costume would say all they needed to just by wearing that costume. Instant moral authority, provided they had the superhero physique.

Modern Comics such as *The Authority* or *The Ultimates* make far more play on sexual and romantic entanglements than the comics of old and, if you want to explore those styles all this information can come into play. It would be more than appropriate to have arch criminals or even heroes who are fetishists for the uniforms or who get a sado-masochistic thrill from beating up on criminals. This reinvention is all part of the fun of comics in the 21st Century. Putting the superhero genre into a realistic context is also good for some of the more modern RPGs of the genre that follow along this take, *Aberrant* tries to present a realistic superhero premise, as does *Godlike* – albeit in a historical context. Incorporate people's real psychology, real hang ups and real kinks into your world and it becomes more believable.

Even if you want to play up to the four colour heroes of the past – the past here being as recent as the 80's and 90's – relationships still have a part to play. The dilemmas of who you trust enough to reveal your secret identity to, whether its true love, your lover's demands to know why you're always leaping

out of the window in red and blue pyjamas at three am, the choice between saving the woman you love and saving the city, all of these are classic superhero dilemmas. In a team context the romances, jealousies and banter between the team members are more the story than their problems are, without the intra-party romance and play that would be lost.

Use every tool at your disposal to make a better game.



BLUE MAGIC INTERVIEW

groups.yahoo.com/group/bluemagic2/

Q: When I wrote *Encyclopaedia Arcane: Nymphology* I didn't expect anyone to actually use it that much, especially not as the basis for a whole game. What do you think made people see through the humour to the possibilities underneath?

A: There's good material there underneath the humour. I'll admit, the first time I read *Nymphology* (I downloaded it from *RPGNow.com* long before I joined the Blue Magic game) I was turned off by the humour, but on second and subsequent reads I realized there is really neat stuff there. I think that's what the fellow that started the game felt, too. There is a desire by many gamers to include such material in their games, and despite the humorous presentation it was obvious to everyone there was something of substance beneath.

Q: Most people will think that your game is just a group of sexually-charged geeks writing porno for each other. What would you say to refute this? Would you refute it?

A: I would most certainly refute it! Yes, it is heavily sexual in nature, but there is far more to it than that. There is a lot of non-sexual interaction. There are actual plots and character development. Characters are rewarded for participation in plots and sub-plots, which may or may not be sexual in nature. I know some would consider it porn nonetheless, personally I prefer it be called fantasy erotica, though. To me, porn = no plot. Erotica has plot. In addition, not everyone playing the game has the same degree of sexuality to their characters. Some characters are involved in 'open' relationships, where as others are very, very committed to a specific partner. If it were simply gamers writing 'elf porn', you wouldn't have this wide variety of morals within the game, in my opinion.

Q: So you think it encourages social interaction? Isn't it just that the goal becomes 'nookie' instead of gold and experience points and greater power? This is good in a way since it does encourage social play but isn't that just an aspect of the 'reward'?

A: Actually, we as DMs hand out new spells, and standard ones from the PHB and Tome & Blood at that, as rewards for plot participation. The setting is, after all, a magic university. While a lot of sex happens, it's not the primary goal of the game. Sex is a by product, a 'self-awarded reward', so to speak. The sex takes place as part of story- and character-development, not as a reward. Now, on certain occasions a character might be rewarded with a spell from either *Nymphology* or *The Book of Erotic Fantasy*, but these are few and far between as the university actually discourages such spells as 'frivolous'.

Q: Women are not known for their participation in role-playing in general. What are the proportions of male to female in your game?

A: At the current time we have 13 active players (including two co-DMs). Five of our players are female. That's a pretty good percentage!

Q: Not bad, that compares favourably with the proportions in some LARPs, which also seem to be more popular with women. Egads, do you think we'll ever see erotic LARPing? I've been to conventions, that's a scary image...

A: ::Laughs:: It is. On the other hand, I've seen some gorgeous women at cons, too, so... Will people do erotic LARPing, though? I could argue they already do. I helped run two Star Wars LARPs at a two cons several years ago and we had people slipping off to have sex...and I think some of them stayed in character, too...

Q: Doesn't it bother you that some of the women in the game may in fact be male role-players pretending to be women? Or is this not even an issue?

A: I'm 99.9% sure that all five female players are really female. I know one of them is for sure, because she's my wife! Since there are no stigma's attached to cross-gender role-playing (playing a character opposite your own gender), and we have a couple of males playing female characters, it isn't an issue. There is no need to hide behind pretending to be a woman just to play a female character.

Q: What makes the game appeal to you?

A: The intense interaction, whether sexual or not. I've been gaming 25 years, been a DM or GM most of that 25 years. All of my games have always been very social, focusing more on character development, role-playing, and storytelling than dice rolling and combat, no matter what game system I was running. The Blue Magic game offers a fantastic opportunity for in-character social interaction, especially with our unique style of play that sets it apart from a standard table-top RPG.

Q: With the publication of *Nymphology* and *The Book of Erotic Fantasy* as well as *The Book of Vile Darkness* and a few other items here and there adult role-playing, in an erotic sense, seems to finally be showing itself. What has changed in gaming, do you think, to make this happen?

A: Gamers have gotten older. Despite the common misconception that gamers are all 14 year old boys gathering in their parent's basement, a large percentage are now older and have been gaming for years. As gamers have gotten older their tastes and desires have changed and they've decided to bring these things into the foreground, rather than leaving them as house rules only used in their own campaign. I know that I've been winging a lot of 'adult' situations for at least the last 15 years, if not longer, and I'm certainly glad to see such products finally be released. I've purchased *Nymphology*, *The Book of Erotic Fantasy*, *Naughty & Dice*, *The Book of Vile Darkness* and *The Book of Exalted Deeds* and use all of them, to varying degrees, in both the Blue Magic game and my regular table-top game.

Q: Well... there might be another couple of 'adult' Mongoose releases I had a hand in, if they get around to publishing them, so we can add to the pile. What other topics would interest you and your players that haven't already been adequately covered?

A: I wouldn't mind something on slavery. *The BoVD* covers it ever so slightly and Green Ronin's *Plot & Poison: A Guidebook to Drow* has a pretty good section on it, but a good book devoted to the topic would be nice. I also would like to see a campaign setting that specifically incorporates adult themes. That would be really nice.

Q: Are you aware of any other adult sites or groups of role-players?

A: I know there are tons online, some better than others. There are some that I would call 'bad porn', and I know some would say that's like the pot calling the kettle black, but we all have our own degrees of what is and isn't acceptable. I myself run a discussion group (located at groups.yahoo.com/group/EroticRPG/) for discussion of erotic and other mature themes in role-playing games. It's not a game itself, but a place to exchange ideas on a number of different themes and game systems. There is also the Valar Project forums (www.bookoferoticfantasy.com), of which I am one of the moderators, where discussion takes place not only on the Book of Erotic Fantasy but all sorts of erotic themes in fantasy role-playing.

Q: In my research I have noted there is an overwhelming number of sites based on Jon Norman's *Gor* novels, which combine some fun fantasy elements with some dodgy sexual politics. The crossover with the BDSM scene seems considerable, more so even than I've noted in Vampire fans. Do you think we'll ever see a Gorean RPG and what is the relationship between fantasy gaming and sexual fantasy do you think? Some of these people seem to take it very seriously...

A: I've never read any of the *Gor* books, but I'm aware of them. Honestly, I don't think I'd enjoy them from what I've gathered. There was an interesting debate at the Valar forums a month or two ago that pretty much slammed *Gor* and the concepts Jon Norman apparently believed in for real. I'm not sure that anyone would be willing to do a Gorean RPG, as it would most likely get even more backlash than *The Book of Erotic Fantasy* did.

As for fantasy gaming and sexual fantasy... I suppose that's true. There are some that take their real life sexual encounters to levels that I don't and wouldn't. Of course, I don't begrudge anyone their sexual fantasies, as long as all parties are willing and no one suffers injury. One of the reasons my wife and I do play the Blue Magic game is because it allows us the opportunity to vicariously experience sexual episodes we'd never do in real life.

Q: Do you involve sexual situations and concepts in your tabletop gaming?

A: My regular game does not include overt sexual situations. I am a big proponent on knowing the comfort level of all players and not going past the least tolerant. The 'lowest common

denominator factor' I call it. In my regular game, in which my wife also plays, there is one married couple (with children) and another married individual amongst the characters. We actually played through the pregnancy and birth of the twins as well, which made for some interesting situations. The mother is a wizard and she actually put the spell '*Floating Disk*' to good use to move around off her feet!

Q: Adult gaming seems to be a lot more common on the Internet; do you think the perceived anonymity of the internet makes people feel freer to explore these things?

A: I do. I know that I would NOT be comfortable with some of the situations I've gotten into in the Blue Magic game in my table top game. I also work with the guys that game with the wife and I in the regular game, and I just wouldn't want to role-play certain situations with them. The anonymity brings a greater degree of comfort and allows your inhibitions to drop quicker. Now, that said, since joining the Blue Magic game I've pretty good friends with several of the other players and I do feel I could explore these types of themes in a tabletop game with them because I have become comfortable with them and the situations our characters get into.

Q: Thank you for being interviewed, is there anything else you'd like to say?

A: Thank you for this opportunity! Adult fantasy role-playing is finally coming into it's own, and is proving more common and acceptable than many perhaps thought it would. I know that I've been all over the internet since last May when the Book of Erotic Fantasy was announced, and I've received more than my fair share of criticism for supporting it and other such products and themes in gaming. I've been called some horrible names and had some not so nice accusations hurled at both the wife and I. I'm just glad to find that adult/erotic gaming is a larger community than most thought it would be. I'm also surprised that Nymphology, Naughty & Dice and other similar items have received no where near the public detraction that the Book of Erotic Fantasy has. Despite the humorous bent of Nymphology, the content it contains is equal to the BoEF.

BELARIATH INTERVIEW

Q: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Could you first tell me a little about your site and how it came about and what its aims are?

A: I guess for the history of Belariath you'd have to look rather further back. I came online about 6 years ago and began learning web design. My first real experiment in fantasy was to design and build Shokushu.com which is a sort of homage to the old JAST style of hentai games. That was designed as a static web site to show off my writing and the photo manips of a friend called Niceman but in a game format.

When Shokushu opened we got an invite to go onto IRC and meet some people associated with Galaxy of Terror. So Niceman and I found ourselves in a fantasy sex channel called #Demonrape, owned by Lloyd. Well we both had a lot of fun and eventually, as Shokushu was proving so popular, we started our own channel #Shokushu-Campus (which still exists on Sorcery.net).

After a year or so of running that channel I and some really valuable people who were opping there wanted a change. The basis of the role-play was monsters and female students. Monsters raped, students got raped. There was very little by way of storylines or depth of character and there's only so many ways you can wield your tentacles :)

I'd been kicking around some ideas for taking a world based on Tolkein and adding sex to it. The basis would be heavy on rape and slavery since they were the central themes of our interests, but such a world would enable more depth, especially for the girls who could have more options than being helpless females sitting around waiting to be ravaged.

So Belariath came into being. Unlike Shokushu, it was designed from the start to be a combination of web site and role-play environment right from the start. We started on Dal with about 15 of us who moved from the Shokushu channels and I can't stress enough that without the others, it would never have happened. Though I've always driven Belariath by my vision of what it would be like, they gave it life.

Over the past three years it has grown in depth and complexity, largely driven by the players who wanted to make it better and who put aside role-play time to work on development. The long term aim is to take it away from the limitations of IRC and into a dedicated environment based on a MUCK format and a lot of the current developments are being aimed towards the way we envisage it in that environment.

Q: Do you also participate in or run other forms of role-playing such as tabletop or LARP?

A: No. As I said I was involved in #Demonrape, first as a player then an Op, and then in #Shokushu-Campus but apart from that my background is in the early Forgotten Realms computer

games on the Atari ST.

Q: Your game deals with some very difficult topics like rape, slavery even sexual torture. Do you not worry that you might be encouraging some dangerous people to take some of these practices into real life?

A: This is a difficult question to answer because there are no absolutes. Yes it is possible someone could spend time in Belariath and then go on to commit some physical attack but I personally believe they would have to have the state of mind which would lead them to that event anyway. And strangely enough, the misogynists never stay long with us because they don't find what they are looking for. This isn't the sort of fuck-and-forget rape channel such as you may find on Dalnet, where the events are isolated and impersonal acts of casual brutality which carry no consequences. In Belariath you are dealing with deep characters and complex intra-personal relationships, both in character and out of character. You can't really dehumanise either the aggressor or the victim in such a way that they become the anonymous impersonal object which a rapist uses to rationalise his actions.

There is a big community spirit among the players at #The_Lonely_Inn where the roleplay takes place. Players know each other and care about each other. So, while I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to suggest we provide any sort of community service by encouraging people to release their inner demons and so make the world a safer place, we do have an environment where people can explore their curiosity in safety and experience the vicarious excitement of touching on taboo subjects without danger.

Q: Even so, with your themes of brutality, rape and so on you are, in effect, confirming peoples worst fear about the Internet, at least on the surface, in a similar fashion to the way the game Postal does about computer games in general. With the hysteria constantly ebbing and flowing about the evils of the net what do you do to protect youngsters and keep things under control? Is there anything that is beyond the pale?

A: We use a number of ways to check ages, within the limitations of the internet and we take that responsibility seriously because we are guests of the Sorcery network which hosts games for all ages. But should we take ultimate responsibility for a young person who has been given a computer and an internet connection by their parents and then left unsupervised to do whatever they want? Should you take final responsibility for who reads your e-zine and follows links to adult gaming environments? Or do we take a view that it's for parents to supervise what their children do rather than shuffle that responsibility off onto everyone else?

Generally speaking we deal with subjects that are comfortable to those who enjoy visiting our channels and that we are comfortable with ourselves within a fantasy context. This includes some degree of sexual violence but only that defined as necessary to effect forced sex or to reasonably discipline a slave. We don't allow torture scenes - violence as an end to itself,

incest, sex/death (snuff) scenes, bestiality, toilet scenes, and any hint of underage sex. We don't even allow players to NPC having children with them. So yes, we make our own censorship and we define limits just as everyone else does. Our limits may not be the same as someone else's but, as with all media, there's an 'exit' button if what we do is not what you like.

Q: What would you say the proportion of male to female players is within your site? Is cross-gender play something that is accepted?

A: It was one of the biggest surprises to me, coming to IRC and finding that girls actually fantasised about being raped or enslaved or assaulted by squid-like aliens. Until then I always assumed that books and pictures on such topics were exclusively by and for males. But my experience has been that if anything, females outnumber males and are often more adventurous in playing out their fantasies in a public role-play. I'd have to say that they also tend to be more appreciative of the forced aspects of such play. It's an ongoing complaint from our girls that too many of the males want to play chivalrous knights who woo and seduce instead of taking by force.

In general, in active roleplay rather than those who come to experience vicarious thrills from a dark corner, I would probably say that female characters outnumber males by a factor of about 5 to 3. But it's no secret that up to 25% of those females characters are played by males, so the actual player split is probably fairly even between the sexes. We don't have any problem with the cross gender players and sometimes a girl will play a male character for a change too. I suppose if there is any problem it's that the guys who play girls almost always want to play lesbian scenes with characters played by real girls, but so long as it doesn't create any OOC problems between players, it's all fantasy anyway.

Q: So you have guys, playing girls, who want to play lesbians, who play with girls? Doesn't that somewhat defeat the object of the experience of taking on a female role? Not to mention getting confusing! I'm a lesbian trapped in a man's body!

A: I guess guys play female characters for a number of reasons but it is rather strange. Such real-life transsexuals as I have spoken to tend to play female characters who prefer males or who are bisexual. The ones who go all lesbian seem to be those who have a rather limited r/l experience of sex. I think you'd need a psychiatrist to explain that but have you noticed that some people prefer lesbian porn to hetero? Maybe it's less threatening or they don't end up feeling jealous of their character in some way? In any event, it's their choice and we don't make moral judgements about the phenomena.

Q: Your site is one of the most organized adult role-playing areas I have seen during my research, indeed it is one of the most organized role-playing sites full-stop. What motivates you to put so much effort into a sexually oriented game? Is there more to it than the sex?

A: What motivates me personally? Or what motivates the other 20+ people who work on development? Or the approximate 150+ people who visit regularly and contribute their role-play to the environment? I guess we all do it because we enjoy ourselves and because we care about what we are creating and the people we share it with.

It would never have become this complex if it was just about sex though. We could have written a few pages describing the world and the game scenario and left everyone to freeform and fuck themselves into a stupor. But remember that we were coming from a rather two-dimensional environment and Belariath was always intended to address the ultimate tedium of playing isolated sexual encounters. It was always a melding of Tolkein, AD&D and Gor as represented in the early books. So character creation, stats and combat were influenced by traditional role-playing games which in turn were influenced by the Tolkeinesque fantasy novels. What we did was to graft rape and slavery onto that sort of background. As a result, the majority of our developers are people with a serious amount of experience in playing and designing fantasy role-playing games and they enjoy building a backdrop where their characters do many things besides ravage each other. And as it gains complexity, so too does it show a rather Darwinian process of attracting those who take their role-play seriously and repelling those who just want the no-consequences sexual encounters.

I'm immensely proud of the quality of people who make Belariath their online home and that, as much as anything, keeps me working on this when I should be doing stuff that pays the rent.

Q: Do you think that gamers interests have matured somewhat over the years? You are probably aware of the various adult games releases such as *The Book of Erotic Fantasy*. What are your opinions on these releases and the role of sexuality in gaming overall?

A: I don't consider myself any sort of expert on games and gamers. There are people at Bel who have been playing and designing role-playing games for 10... sometimes 20 years. They know far more than I do. So I can't really comment on the overall maturity of games, except for a view that the interactivity of the internet has produced an environment where people can play safely and anonymously. I think this has led to an ability to explore more risky subject matter than would normally be possible in a traditional offline gaming environment. After all, it's not that easy to sit around a table face to face with a dozen other people and describe how you are raping one of them :) So in that sense there's a natural ability to bring adult topics into traditional role-playing games.

In Belariath we have aimed for a two-track approach. We have the experienced gamers but at the same time we also have players coming to role-playing with no experience just because they are drawn to the sex. So we aim to create an environment that caters to both. A new player can make some fairly simple choices and get into the game with a character and have fun, but at the same time the mechanics are there to evolve into a deep

and complex character if that is what they want to do. The new skills system we are working on epitomises this. No one has to learn skills to play, but if they want a more unique and involving persona, they can evolve it over time by making choices about which way their character learns and grows.

Q: You have experienced games-designers who play your game? Hmm I'm going to be looking my fellow writers over a little more carefully from now on then! I won't ask you who they are, however tempting it is. Is the sex interwoven with the characters and jobs? Is there a slaver job for example? Or a slave breaker or some sort of seduction magician?

A: I think you need to have a fairly clear view that what we have here is a quite comprehensive fantasy role-play game in which sex, rape and slavery is encouraged as a central theme. But it is still a complex environment where three-dimensional characters work and live. So we have our knights, priests, healers, shopkeepers, warlords, farmers, smiths and so on. We have an empire that is being defined, along with it's support structure, Guilds, Combat and Magic Schools, alchemists, enchanters, a questing system, shops selling weapons and armour, a real estate office that sells houses to those who want them and an arena for combat tournaments. We are also developing war gaming as a side channel. It's this depth that creates a compelling and hopefully realistic backdrop against which people can play out their fantasies.

Of course we also have sexually oriented jobs such as slavers, temple courtesans, bathing attendants, erotic dancers and slave trainers. We also have a Seductress class alongside the conventional classes like Paladins and Assassins. And being the place it is, many of the locations have a sexual slant. The arena may also hold sex matches where owners can pit their slaves against each other to see which can make the other climax first, the temple services tend to involve orgies, the Inn slaves serve more than just food and drink and we have a shop selling sex toys and restraints alongside more mundane items.

I would guess that the average player probably spends no more than 10 - 15% of their roleplay time actually involved in sex, consensual or otherwise. It's the blend that keeps them involved because a diet of non-stop cyber sex soon gets rather boring.

Q: Besides the play erotic art is also a large part of your site and is linked from your site as well. Fantasy art has always had a pinup element to it; do you not think it is often exploitative and unrealistic? Simply used to sell under-quality product to horny geeks?

A: The art galleries and illustrations that appear on the web site have all been created by players, just as the stories have. The intention was to provide a growing resource for players to use in their role-play and at the same time, to create an interesting site for people to visit just for itself. Of course those pictures and stories have an erotic theme to them because that's the basis of the fantasy we are creating. After all you wouldn't create a web site about steam engines and illustrate it with pictures of deep sea divers.

Sex is such an ongoing fascination though, isn't it? Especially with HNG's of any age. But as you allude, I am also involved in running a site which sells memberships to viewing original erotic art by artists working in various media ranging from traditional painting to poser movies. If I've learned one thing from that, it's that in a medium like the internet, where anyone with a few dollars and a modem can become a published author, surfers learn very quickly the difference between quality and poor standards of work. And when they have to pay, they vote very clearly with their wallets. Offline they have had 20 years exposure to erotic fantasy artwork in books from people like Vallejo and online they expect the right blend of quality and subject matter before they will pay.

Q: Have you ever been tempted to turn Legends of Belgariath into a tabletop RPG?

A: Not personally. I think it's difficult for people to create explicit sexual scenes while sitting around a table. Especially for the guys who have to stand up afterwards.

Q: What is your opinion on Gorean online play?

A: Having an interest in BDSM, I've seen the best and the worst of Gor online. I have some close friends who play it and I've met some lovely people who follow it. I've also seen it used by weak, vacuous people as a way to dominate or be dominated in a way that they could never achieve without the strictly enforced codes of behaviour imposed on all visitors to their rooms. I don't personally believe that the message from the early Gorean books was that women are doormats and essentially inferior to men. In the Gor books, the women were spirited and proud, whether slave or free, so it's that influence I've tried to bring into Belariath. We don't attract Gorean players, but we do attract quite a few who have tried Gorean rooms and become disillusioned by their restrictiveness.

Q: What adult products would you like to see released for role-playing?

A: There are few products that beat an active imagination. That's why we aren't aiming to evolve into a graphics based system. If we need anything it would be a more stable internet so scenes don't get hit by lags or net splits and maybe a way to build gaming systems without so much programming. We were extremely lucky to have the services of a professional web programmer for much that underlies Belariath. Without that the game mechanics would be far more unwieldy. Certainly in IRC, even the creation of a bot to handle anything more complex than dice rolls is a fairly major task and I think this hinders anyone who has ideas but lacks the technical knowledge to implement them online.

Q: What are your favourite games?

A: Belariath tends to suck up the time I used to spend playing games, plus quite a bit more. So in odd spare moments I'm usually reduced to games like mah-jongg or Tetris (or even minesweeper, but don't tell anyone). If I do get time for a more involved computer game it tends to be from the Wizardry or

Might and Magic series. For adult games I still like the older Japanese games like Nocturnal Illusion.

Q: Thankyou for agreeing to be interviewed, is there anything else you'd like to say?

A: I think it's important that Belariath not be seen as a place where people come to abuse others. We have a community which, like any other, has its squabbles and its jealousies and dislikes. But beyond that we have a group of people who care for each other, and enjoy being together; sharing what to many may seem a strange set of fantasies. We are actually quite a friendly bunch and while our characters may abuse each other in fairly extreme ways, behind that we do not tolerate players who fail to recognise that it is just roleplay and who refuse to respect those who they play with.

More than anything else though, I don't want to give the impression this is all my work, or even a significant percentage of it. We have had an awful lot of work done by a great number of talented people to bring Belariath to where it is so far. I may coordinate and keep the overall vision of the world but without them, and without our players, it just would simply not exist.

NEXT ISSUE

Drugs, drugs and more drugs!

Drugs are credited with all sorts from the decline and fall of western civilisation to the existence of human consciousness. Drugs are often given short thrift in games, reduced to a pale stereotype of what they can do that is positive and overblown in the description of what they do that is negative.

Afraid of appearing to endorse drug use games tend to portray them as inevitably causing insanity, death and addiction. This isn't true now and it will be even less true in the future. Odds are a good number of the people you know toke, snort or pop something every few days, a lot more on the weekend.

Next issue will examine the effects of drugs and their consequences in different settings and times, the social impact of prohibition, some history on narcotics as an economic and military weapon and some suggested effects for common drugs.

Smoke 'em if you got 'em.



RESOURCES

Adult Roleplaying Sites

www.belariath.com
www.alterrealm.com
www.webmaze.com
www.darksidechat.com
www.shokushucampus.com

Adult Gaming Aids/Products

Naughty & Dice - <http://www.sabledrake.com/>
Nymphology - http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=718
The Quintessential Temptress - http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=2767&
The Book of Erotic Fantasy - <http://www.bookoferoticfantasy.com/>
Guide to Unlawful Carnal Knowledge - <http://www.netbook-of-uck.net/>
GURPS Sex - http://www.eskimo.com/~vecna/gurps_sex.html
Hentacle - http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=3047&
Hentacle - Sloppy Seconds - http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=3774&

Erotic Art & Fiction

www.luisroyo.com/
www.bromart.com/
www.milomanara.com/
www.4chan.org/
<http://www.literotica.com/>

COMING SOON

All These Worlds - Modular, updated Science Fiction d20 toolkit. Character and alien creation, world building, technology, battle and combat systems and psionic powers. Seperate books or a combined edition.

'45 - Bettie Page, Road Warrior.

@ctiv8 - Politics is dead, democracy doesn't work. What do concerned citizens with expertise and talent do in a world like that?

Bloodsucker: The Angst - Evil and petty-minded pistaking at the expense of a market leader.

And more...

NEXT ISSUE



ORRIS