

Romance and Gender in Role Playing Games

Too hot to handle?

Ropecon 2007

Emily Care Boss

Black and Green Games



Romance and Gender in RPGs

Romance: Why or Why not?

Advantages:

- Character development – strong motivation
- Rich source of conflict – key in most great literature

Narrative or Fiction Level – in the story



Romance and Gender in RPGs

Pitfalls:

- Digressions from story
- Misunderstandings between players
- Abuse of players
- Social taboos

Social Level – between the players



Romance and Gender in RPGs

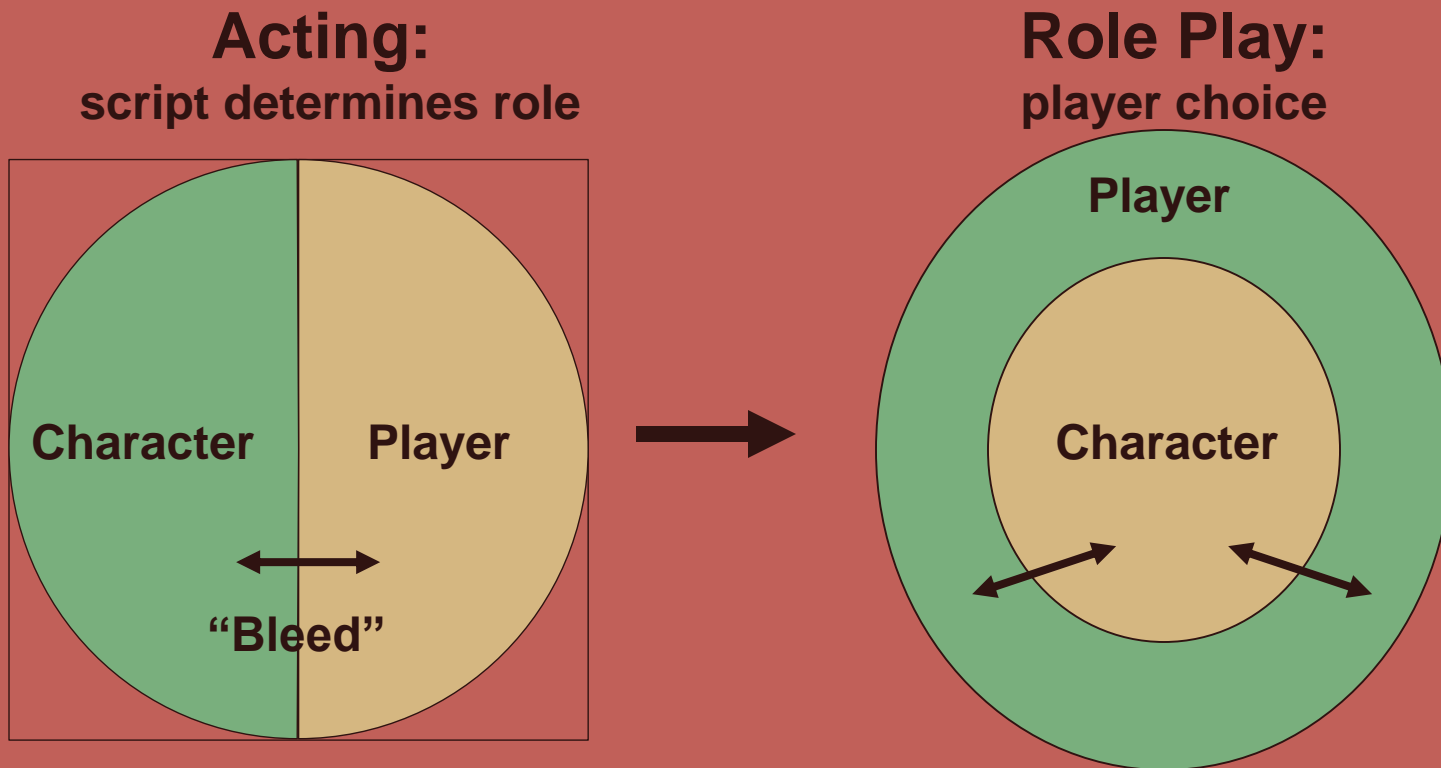
Why is romance problematic?

- Player/Character Boundaries
- Social and Personal Lines
- Players as People
- Romance as Conflict



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Player/Character Boundaries



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Player/Character Boundaries:

Bleed:

- Choice of character actions based on personal relationships/interactions
 - Safety to create vs. real world alliances/grudges
 - Inspired by real life vs. Out-of-Character decisions
- Flirtation in game vs. in real life
 - Opportunity to relate or invasion of privacy?
 - Social boundary issues

--*Social confusion*

--*Warping of fiction*



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Social and Personal Lines



Elizabethan Drama



Kabuki

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Social and Personal Lines

Playing Characters Cross-gender

- ❏ Perceived threat to gender identity
- ❏ Pragmatic: confusion about character
- ❏ Brings up taboos about homosexual interactions (i.e. homophobia)

Escalated by Romantic plotlines.



Romance and Gender in RPGs

Players as People

Creating Safety

- Real world interaction as basis for shared fiction
 - Gaming with friends/real social networks
 - Introduce yourselves in game: *Breaking the Ice Switch*
- Put all players on even field
 - All change gender, etc.
 - Primary aspect of game/rules



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Players as People

Social context

■ Online narrative RP

- Women (teens, at home)
- Not face to face
- Anonymity
- Romance part of fiction models
- Powerful source of creative exploration in “fanfic” – unresolved issues



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Players as People

Social context

■ Live Action RP, Free-form

- Decentralized action—an easy hook/strong motivation
- Can connect characters in a web of interactions
- Alternative to acting out combat
- Real world bleed is an advantage: underlying motive for getting together



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■ Romance as Conflict: why overlooked

- Can isolate players, create “bubble”
 - Opportunity for 2 player play (Btl)
- “Party play” diminishes desire for inter-character conflict, lose texture of character development
- Fear of hot button issues for players
- Other types of conflict not bring up as much player/character bleed



Romance and Gender in RPGs

- Romance as Conflict: what we gain
 - If connected to larger plot, becomes motivating factor
 - Makes conflict meaningful. Examples: Romeo and Juliet, Die Hard (1), Firefly
 - Web of interconnections
 - Variety of experience of characters' lives
 - Depth of world



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Real Examples:

Functional:

- Ganakagok with Bret Gillan
- Stellan and Rig, with Jenn Manley Lee
- Breaking the Ice, Shooting the Moon

Non-functional

- rape of character
- Others from Audience?



Romance and Gender in RPGs

Summary:

 Romance as rich source of creative play

Problems:

-  Issues of player/character confusion

-  Taboos about gender and sexuality

Solutions:

-  Social context/expectations

-  Create feeling of safety among players

-  Other lessons??

