# The Goal(s)

You should leave this talk
- Knowing more about human behavior
- Understanding how systems and platforms influence it

So you can **DAB**:
- **D**econstruct behavior
- **A**nticipate problems
- **B**uild fun spaces for you & your community

# Audience Participation!

Please verbally confirm the answers as they appear on screen. :)

Are we here to insult fans who are passionate about things they love?

# NO!

Is the point of this talk to pass judgement on individuals for existing within complicated systems?

# NO!

Are we here to understand normal human behavior and how we can build safe, fun spaces for fans and ourselves?

# YES!

Are we ready to get started?

**YES, YOU'RE SO COOL AND SMART.**

**WE LOVE YOU, BRIA!**

# Roadmap

- Intro ✅

- Audience Participation Disclaimer ✅

- Roadmap ✅

- Understanding the Shape of Fandom

- How Does Fandom Behave

- Navigating Fandom's Waters
  - Doing the Math
  - Solutions Corner

# Understanding the Shape of Fandom

# Fandom is an Ocean

- Amorphous, shifting, overlapping
- Different "oceans," one big body of water
- Large ecosystem around us that impacts how we behave and live

# You can't control the ocean.

You can only assess risk and preparedness to be near it.

# Fandom's Forms

- Focused around consuming a piece of media or brand
- Often involves derivative content as self expression
- Being a "member of a fandom" denotes a level of intensity beyond casual fan
- In "nerdy" spaces, strong feeling of Otherness and search for belonging
  - Sci fi, fantasy, horror, coming of age cartoons

# A Discerning Eye

- Easy to identify toxic behaviors:
  - Racial slurs
  - Insults
  - Harassment
- The water spouts of the ocean

- Harder to identify harmful behaviors:
  - That come from earnest places
  - That sound positive
  - That feel normal
- The rip currents of the ocean
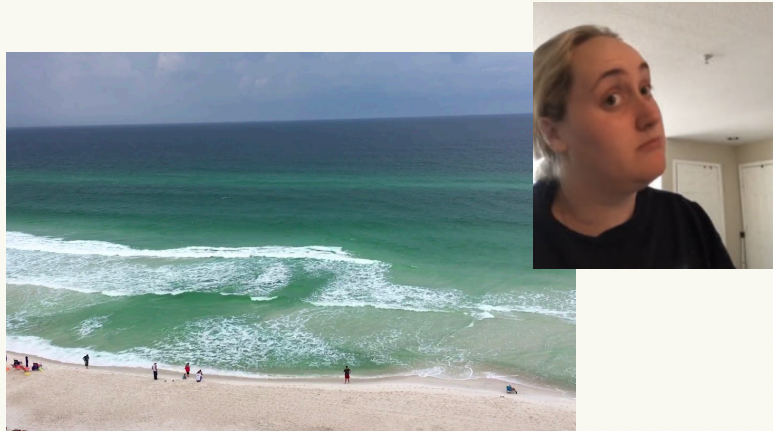
# How Does Fandom Behave?

# You are what you Consume…

- Current trend to treat media consumption as reflection of moral code
- To consume media that is "good" is to be morally good
- To consume "bad" media is to agree inherently with those ideas or represent undesirable values

# The Basic Fandom Cycle

1. If media breaks the promise of its perceived morality…
2. This is seen as a betrayal of "correct" values
3. Must be punished or corrected via "activism"
   a. (petitions, online harassment, open letters, call out posts)
4. Fans police "correct" storytelling and engagement
5. Fans earn power through policing
6. Fans set behavior expectations in Fandom spaces
7. Cycle perpetuates

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WHY??
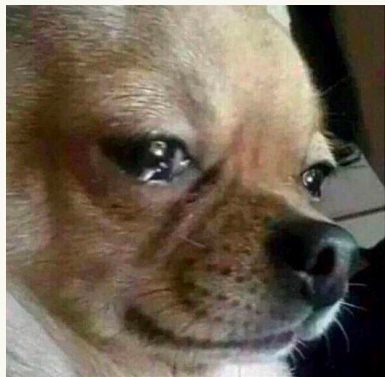
WHY IS IT sad

# Well….

Here's why.

1. In-group dynamics
2. Media consumption = social change
3. Capitalism reinforcing and profiting off of media consumption as activism

# 1. In-Groups and Out-Groups

- Humans form groups and identity based on what they belong to
  - Ideologies, religions, sexualities, hobbies, race, nationality, illness, astrology, cilantro gene
- We love a group….as long as its our group.

# 1. In-Groups and Out-Groups Continued

- Main way we maintain community as humans is to:
  - establish group norms and behaviors
  - reward behaviors that support our norms
  - Punish behaviors that diverge
  - Assign immorality to diverging behaviors and demonize them in other groups
  - Feel more validated in our choice to be good, and do the right thing



Nobody trusts anybody now.

And we're all very tired.
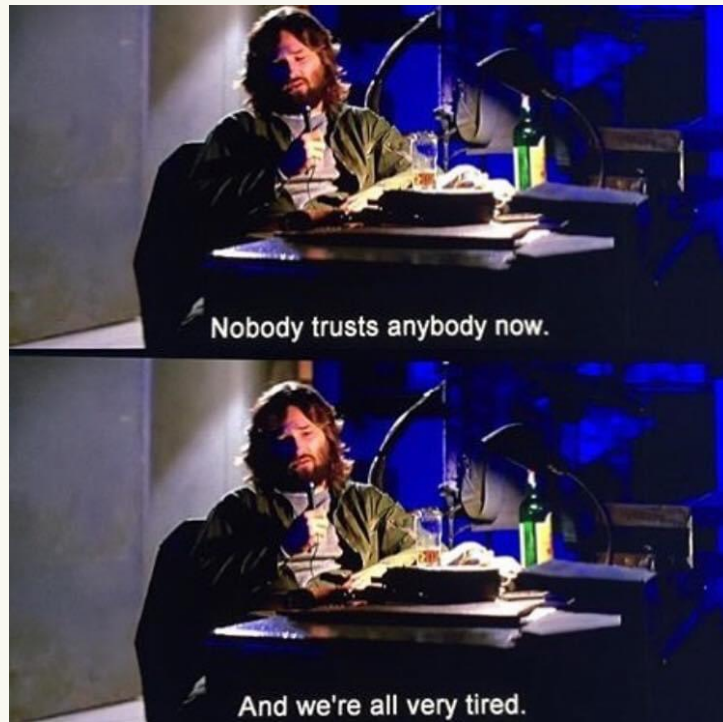
# Who's Who?

**In Group:**

- your friends
- the good guys
- the people who share your values
- the correct ones
- the ones to be protected
- the ones who are fighting for a greater good

**Out Group:**

- Those assholes
- The people who just don't get it
- The ones who are wrong
- The people trying to ruin what you love
- The people getting in your way

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# Example: "Irony" vs "Softness"

**The "Bad" Internet**
- Mean, detached irony
- Often racist, homophobic, ableist, etc.
- Usually white nerd guys

**The "Good" Internet**
- Kind, soft, genuine, wholesome
- Advocates for social good
- Usually marginalized people

# Example: "Softness" vs "Irony"

**The "Bad" Internet**
- Weird babies
- Out of touch
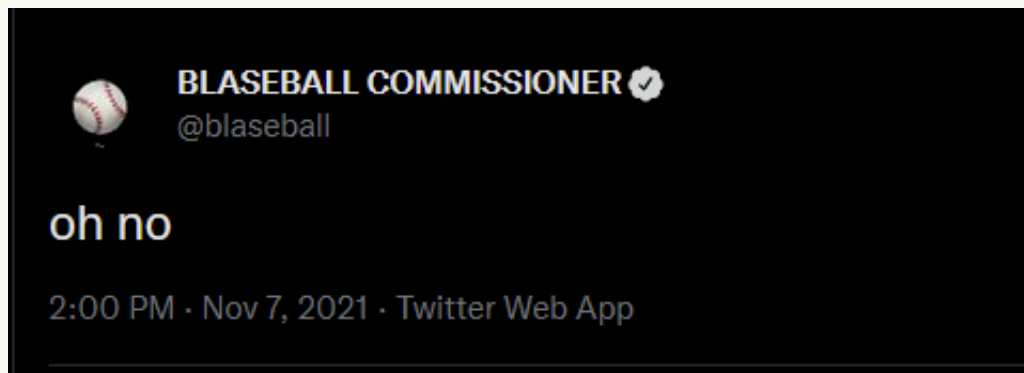- Overly sensitive
- Obsessed with identity

**The "Good" Internet**
- Honest, realistic
- Talking about what matters
- Can have real conversations

# The Moral of the Story

If we are good and feel this way, they must be bad if they feel that way.

We must protect our group and values from those who challenge them.



BLASEBALL COMMISSIONER ✔
@blaseball

oh no

2:00 PM · Nov 7, 2021 · Twitter Web App

# 2. Example: Media Consumption & Action

- Platforms like Tumblr, Tiktok, and Twitter often young people's introduction to activism
- academic language and activist language to describe media experiences
  - Gaslighting, erasure, lovebombing, intersectionality, parasocial relationships, tone policing, etc.
- This language:
  - Sets higher barrier to entry to a group
  - Is very effective at policing others
  - Associates activism with media consumption
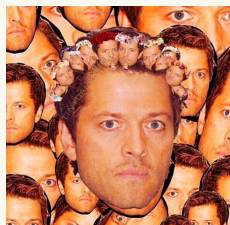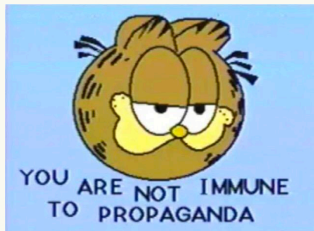
# Happens in Every Group

# What we're trained to think!

THE FEMALE COMPLAINT- LAUREN BERLANT, 2008

- The "intimate public" conflates a sense of shared experience with a sense of shared values

# What's that mean?

If we build community around our values

And are taught our values are shared responses to what we consume…

Then people who respond differently to what you've consumed don't share your values.

People who respond differently to media are in the out-group.

*"What are the political consequences of a commoditized relation among subjects who are defined not as actors in history but as persons who shop and feel?"* - Berlant, 2008

**What does it mean for the world if we only form connections to each other and the world around us through how we <u>shop and feel?</u>**

## 3. Capitalism Profits

Systems around us reinforce this association because it makes money

- High engagement, emotional responses, a duty to police behavior, and "discourse" all drive numbers
- Numbers mean ad sales, + DAUs, dopamine association with opening apps



When you wake up

and it's still **capitalism** outside
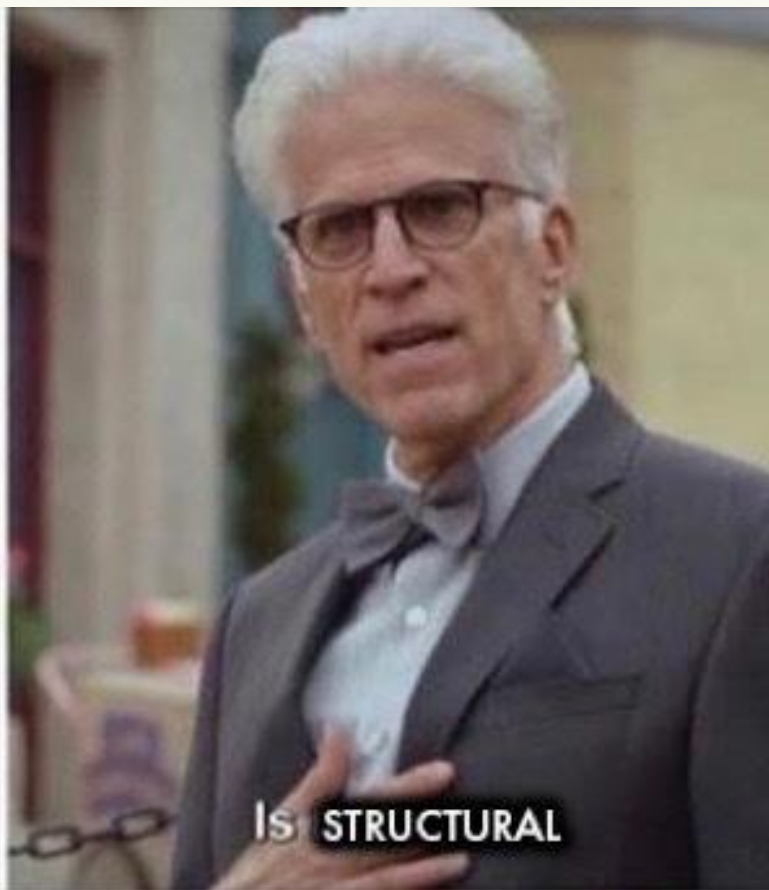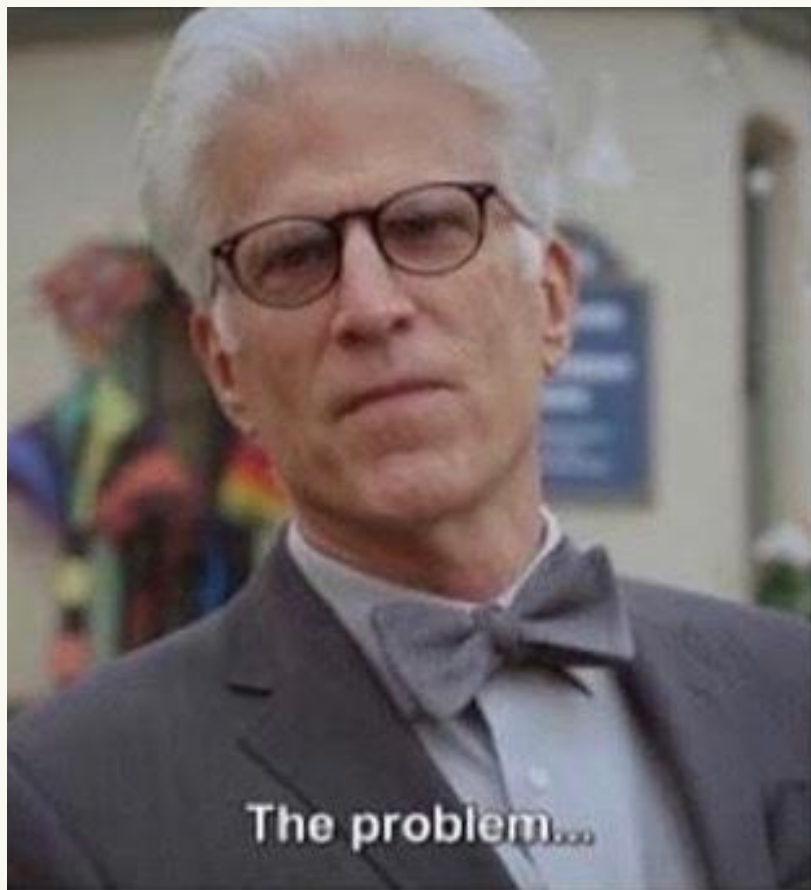
# A Feature, Not a Bug

- People looking to support good ones and keep out bad ones
- Belief that how we spend our money and our attention is equal to meaningful action or activism
- Reinforcement of consumption as connection by systems like Capitalism
    - "Put your money where your mouth is"
    - "Vote with your dollar"
- Encouragement of behaviors that make companies money
- Discourse ensues, $$$
- Everyone's too busy fighting to challenge the system

# Power and Fandom

# Keys to the Castle

- Fans seek control in spaces they can hold it
  - Often can't control outside circumstances but can impact a fandom
- Fandom power dynamics built on how fans gain and wield control over others
- Power means setting values for the group

# HOW FANS GAIN POWER

- Seek Attention
- Stick Around
- Protect Yourself
- Protect the In-Group
- Make a cycle that Supports Status Quo

# Beginner Strats- Name Recognition

- Post a lot
- Be very funny
- Post responses quickly
- Have strong, confident opinions
- Be recognized by Important People on social media



- I will die on any hill.

# Constant Engagement

Easiest way to accomplish Beginner Strats is just being present. A lot.

- Platforms like Discord + social media encourage this because → $$
- Means deep investment in your game
- Means a dopamine hit every time someone engages with you
- Encourages continued power gathering

# Intermediate Strats

- Be talented, prolific, or both at making fanwork
- Organize fan events like zines, art prompts, and fun projects
- Become a resource for the Fandom



**birdsrightsactivist**
@ProBirdRights

I am feel uncomfortable when we are not about me?

# Being a Fandom Resource

- Can earn power by doing work others don't want to do
  - they can consume and share easily
- Others can regurgitate your content to look like a good person
  - Think about people sharing info onto instagram stories/retweets during Discourse
- You gain power by making it easy for others to look good
- More power = more control in fandom

# Sunken Deez Nuts

- Old fans can't reconcile leaving as anything other than giving up on their obligation to keep your game/fandom/experience "Good."
  - Sometimes this leads to hating the game and community but sticking around anyway
- Your new fans have much less to lose

# This is the Blueprint of Modern Fandom

- Unavoidable
- Every time a fandom reaches a level of notoriety it happens
- Most fandom spaces just don't try to moderate it

# Growth with a Fandom?

- Fandom's core cycle can inhibit growth
- Fandom seeks to remain insular & fortify the in-group
- In-group members often long-time fans

# Navigating Fandom's Waters

# Know Your Cost

- Sometimes the cost is worth it
- Need to understand and scope for the price of encouraging fandom
- Always consider cost when making decisions

So the question you
ask yourself is…

# Who is paying? What is paid?
# Can we afford it?

Cost comes from many places

- Emotional work + burnout from community or marketing teams
- "Discourse," bad coverage, bad reputation
- Personal comfort and safety of your team
- Negative fan experience if you assess poorly
- Time dealing with conflicts
- Misunderstanding of your game or brand

# How to do the Math

- **Know what you want**
- **Know your tools**
- **Know what you can manage**
- **Know your goals and values**
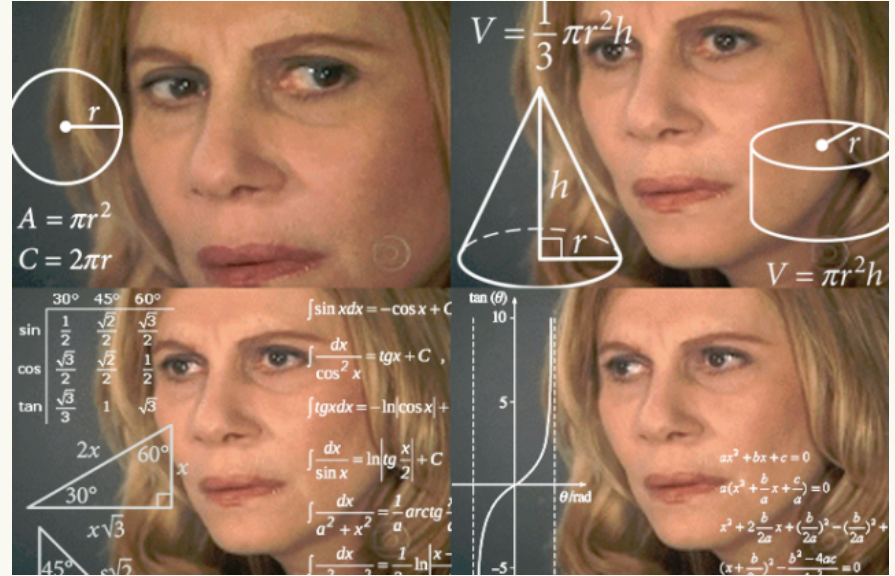
How make it less scary Bria ?????

Let's give it a shot.

# Know Your Space

Set clear purpose and expectations of official spaces.

If your discord exists to talk about your game, make it focused on talking about your game.

The more topics your space holds, the more topics you'll have to moderate.

# RULE 2: KEEP IT FOCUSED

✅ Understand the purpose of this server and how you're using it! This is a public discord server for talking about the video game Blaseball, so moderators will redirect behavior elsewhere if it doesn't use the space for that purpose.

If your posting is taking away space that could be used for other people discussing Blaseball, stop posting, and move to a different space better suited for that purpose.

# Stratification of Spaces

- Users should make/find/join their own spaces that match their engagement styles
- As we grow we can't control user responses or hold everyone's feelings

BUT

- We can build foundation now for acceptable engagement, so new users onboard easily and leave comfortably if they want something else

# Invest in Anti-Racism

(Hire Sweet Baby; they're awesome.)

Prioritizing something other than white comfort will alienate people who only care about their own comfort.

# Softness in Fandom



- Softness and kindness are not bad.

BUT

- Prioritizing it in spaces over all else is bad
- Softness often only a privilege afforded to people who have been able to exist more safely online
  - (hint: it's white people)

If you prioritize kind tone, low conflict, and tenderness over all else, you prioritize the comfort of people who were already comfortable.

If we only build community through shared feelings, minority experiences or valid criticisms are seen as attacks on the (majority) ((white)) shared experience.

To be "good" is to protect your personal intimate public, which makes people of color the bad guys.

# Anti-Racism

- Toxic fan culture overlaps heavily with whiteness and privilege
- Building a safe space for people of color inherently makes it inhospitable to fandom toxicity
- Prioritizing anti-racism and active intervention alienates toxicity by:
  - not prioritizing what toxic fans see as "correct" values
  - Leaving space for valuable conflict
  - Doing baseline advocacy for marginalized people



NO HALF-MEASURES

# Tips!

- Don't be racist
- Use tone as a clue, not a problem to be solved
- If you're white and feel defensive, unpack that
- Don't ask your non-white coworkers or fans to educate you
  - There are bountiful resources online compiled for this exact purpose
- Explicitly call out racism in your rules
- Don't have a memes channel
- Hire consultants

# Break up Fan Ownership and Power

Like anyone online, fans naturally accrue power via posting, art, prominence, humor, etc.

What are you doing to encourage this, and how does it impact your ability to run your space?

# Too Much Fan Power

Can look like:

- Your team making decisions to avoid "discourse"
- Mods being afraid to set boundaries with fans
- Clear misunderstanding of what your game "is"
- Vocal, prominent, recognizable leaders in fandom spaces
- Fans feeling obligated to be present and taking on too much (fan)work

# Fandom with too much power

- Forms an idea of what the experience is, or should be
  - Becomes the narrative of your product
  - Becomes what draws like-minded people in
  - Becomes the rallying cry for those who agree
- Means you are no longer in control of what your story is about

If fans decide your game is one thing, and it's something else…

**YOU** could be held accountable by the fandom for being Bad.

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# Tips!

- Be intentional in how you engage with fans, fanwork, and social media attention

- Be mindful of what events and structures put too much responsibility on fans

- Be clear what level of influence fan feedback and complaints have on your process. <u>You still make the game at the end of the day.</u>

- Be cautious of fan volunteer roles within your space. What's your vetting process?

- Make it clear developers are people but not friends

- Consider value of special privileges and access for fans

# More Tips! Distinguish Between Canon and Fanon

- Keep focused, limited spaces for fanwork
  - Label them as places for non-canonical or fan work
- Consider if fan projects like a wiki or zine planning should have official space
- Teach new users what they need and what is optional
  - If game has lots of gaps like Blaseball, fanwork and theories can overwhelm new fans & confuse what is required to play

# Take Space

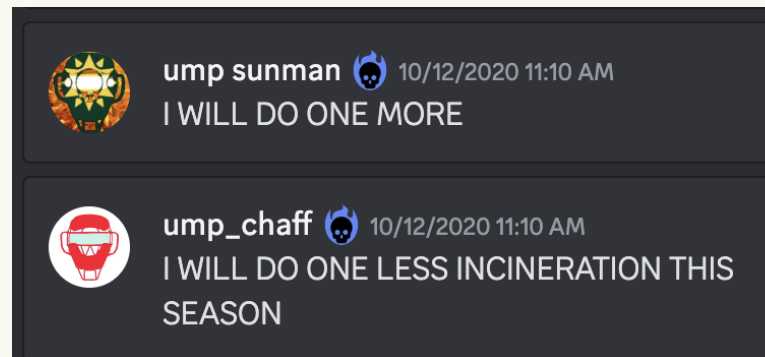Use levels of abstraction to engage with fandom



YOU ARE INSATIABLE
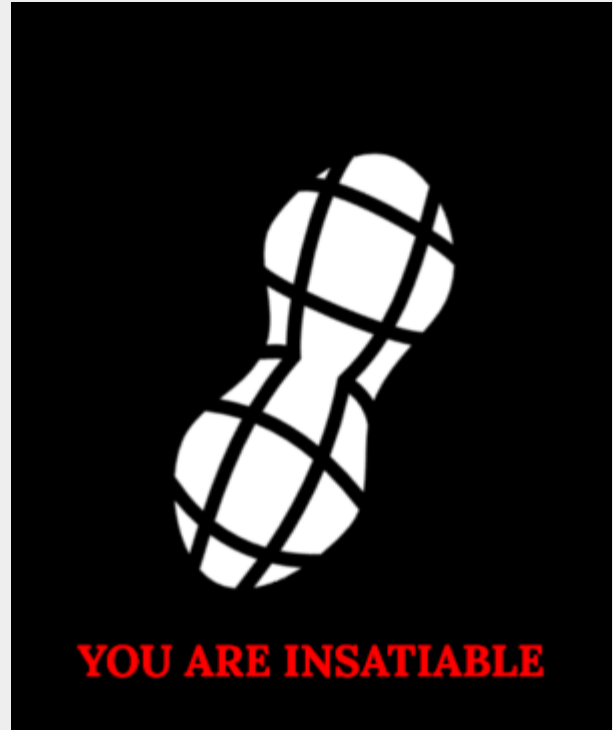
# Personas and Parasocial Relationships

Avoid entangling you as a person, or your team, with the consumption of the game.

- You become a feature, not a human, and people will respond to you as a tool for their experience instead of a real, living stranger.

# Being an Ump

- Fake personas on discord, fans know we're devs
- Treat us like umpires in the game (scary)
- We can incinerate them (change their nickname) and yell in all caps
- **It's a joke everyone's in on, but the fun is the persona, not the person.**

**ump sunman** 10/12/2020 11:10 AM
I WILL DO ONE MORE

**ump_chaff** 10/12/2020 11:10 AM
I WILL DO ONE LESS INCINERATION THIS SEASON

# Tips!

- Educate anyone interfacing with the audience on parasocial relationships
- Give purposeful spaces for behaviors like giving feedback
  - Conversation from morality of individual feedback → conversation about purpose of space
  - If you have a feedback place, make it private lol
- Limit and enforce specific vehicles of communication with you
  - Don't DM with fans
  - Don't respond to fans on personal Twitters
  - Send fans through an email, discord channel, google form, in-game form, etc.
- Use levels of abstraction when interfacing with fans.
  - Personas, characters, official spaces, etc.
- Ban users from pinging developer role in Discord

# Control your Narrative

Make it easy for your fans to advocate for you.

Figure out what parts of your story you need to control. Leave the rest to your fans.

# Controlling the Narrative

- Active fans set story for what your game is about
- Intentional obfuscation of the game means people pull whats most interesting to them
- This limits your audience!
- Blaseball:
  - "It's a horror game where fans create their own versions of characters. It's So GAY"
  - "It's about killing gods and fighting capitalism"
  - "Read this fic about my blorbos kissing under an eclipse"
  - All of these are true, none of them describe Blaseball fully

# Example: Reframing the Blaseball Pitch

- Adjusting how we talk about Blaseball in marketing
  - Co-creation → TGB builds a curated sandbox, puzzlemakers
- Consistent marketing presents cohesive, easy to find image
- Communicate what fans usually miss about Blaseball
  - Sports Simulation
  - PVP and PVE engagement
  - Horror
  - Change is natural
  - Text game

# Tips!

- Design an onboarding system where Official Language introduces people to your game
- Create official resources
- Have a clear pitch

# Remove Space for Morality in Communication

**This is a hard worldview to unpack. You can't fix this, only build a space that doesn't engage with it.**

# Untangling Morality from Media

- If media consumption=moral code
  - Your project is for "good people" and participating means you're good.
  - To be course corrected is to be "bad"

- Course correctors often painted as worse than bad behavior
  - absolves fan of whatever perceived sins they've been corrected for
  - If mods are bad, good media hasn't rejected you, the bad people have!



no, it is the mods who are wrong.

# It's hard to argue with **"no."**

## It's easy to argue with why you're saying no.

# Communication Tips

- Have clear language that moderation and redirection is **not** a moral judgement
- Simple scripts and plans for responding anger, hurt, etc.
  - Do your thinking when you're calm

# More Communication Tips

Moderation messages are SIMPLE.

- ○ Hello! This is a message from the Blaseball Discord. You are receiving a [warning/mute for X duration/ban] for breaking Rule __. This is the message/behavior that resulted in this moderation action: [link or text].

  OPTIONAL: This is a pattern of behavior we have moderated in the past. If it continues it will result in further moderation action/a ban.
- ○ Rule #1- Posting a racist meme

# Space Building Tips

Build your space to:

- Have clear purpose and use case
- Have freedom to remove anyone for any reason
- Normalize fans setting their own boundaries amongst themselves
  - blocking, leaving a conversation, self-requested mutes, safety tools

# The Boundary Zone

Setting boundaries to curate your ideal community space

Community Management is just Boundary Simulator.

# Set Boundaries for Yourself

What can you control? What can you engage with? What are you equipped to accomplish. Do that. **Make Community Guidelines that codify it.**

If you can't control it, consider why it's allowed in a space you caretake.

# Boundaries Can Be Silly AND Helpful

- Banned "Homestuck" on the Blaseball Discord
- Why are we moderating a fight about if Homestuck is racist on the Blaseball Discord?

We also did this for "Onceler" because we got tired of borderline horny Onceler posting.

GDC

# Tips!

- Enforce the boundaries you set
- Be willing to reconsider boundaries as your space/game/brand evolves.
- Accept not everyone will like or respect those boundaries.
- Remove people who do not respect boundaries
- Don't try to fix your fans; fix your space
- Do not hold space for others to grow at the detriment of your community
- Moderation for cultivation, not education.
- Fear the Pit of Empathy.



Somtimes It's Not Our Turn To Talk
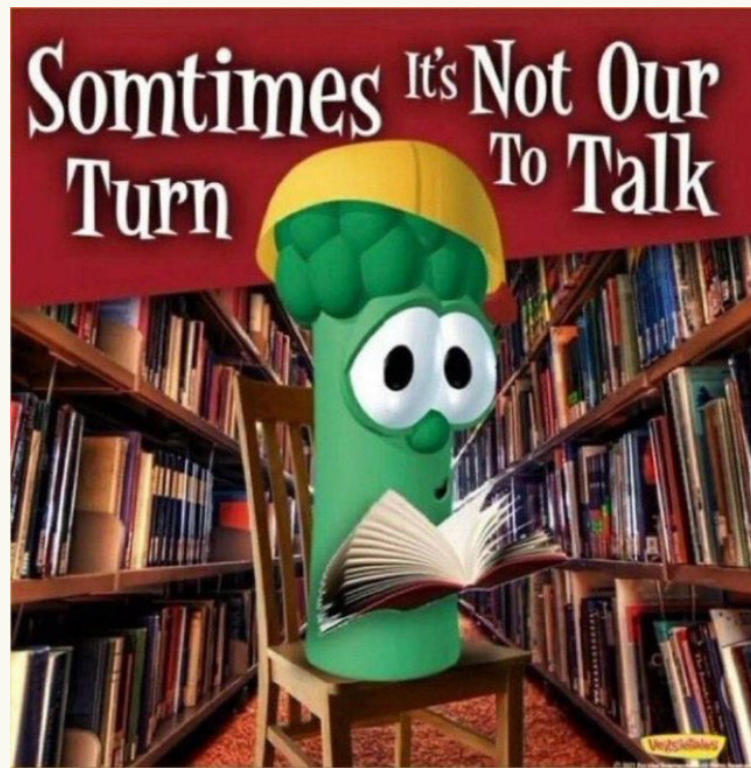
# THE PIT OF EMPATHY

IT WILL CONSUME YOU



CARING ABOUT PEOPLE AND UNDERSTANDING THEM DOES NOT MEAN ALLOWING PEOPLE TO BEHAVE POORLY IN YOUR SPACE.

BOUNDARIES, BANNING, & BIG CHANGES ALL SERVE TO CURATE A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE.

# **Miscellaneous Other Tips**

Just good advice

- Don't have a vent channel
- Have a pet pics channel
- Don't allow people to plan meetups if there are minors in your server
- Turn off @everyone pings
- Don't let people post rape, incest, pedophilia, and zoophilic, etc. fanfiction in your Official Company Spaces
  - please

# In Conclusion…

- Your space should be fun
- You can't control the ocean
- You can control your space
- You got this!

# QUESTIONS??
## Also fill out your evals!!

@thevoidencore (twitter)
@thevoidandmore (everywhere else)
Briadavis.com
Or just ask me for a card :)