

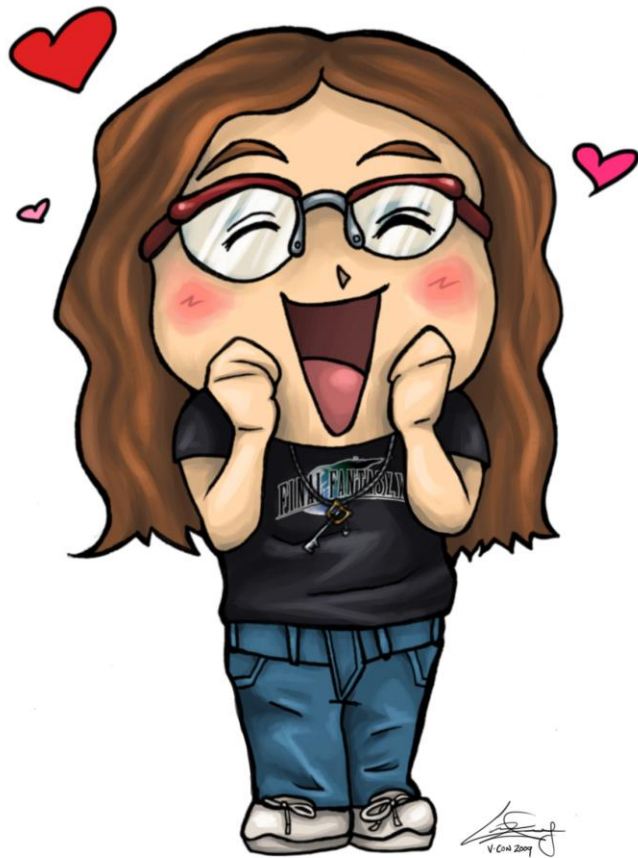
# Fewer Tifas, or More Sephiroths?

## Male sexualization in games

**Michelle Clough**  
Freelance

# Introduction













# We're bringing sexy... uh... back?





# Dating sims are doing it...



"Everlove" by Silicon Sisters



"Shall we Date? Ninja Love"  
by NTT Solmare



# But core games?



# A missed opportunity...

- For more diverse male characters
- For creating a sex-positive industry
- To reach out to a “new” audience





# The presentation

1. Why it's important
2. Why we're failing to do it
3. Who's doing it "right"?
4. How to write sexy male characters?



# Why is it important?



# Like I was saying...

- For more diverse male characters
- For creating a sex-positive industry
- To reach out to a “new” audience



# Sexualization = bad?



# Sexualization = bad?

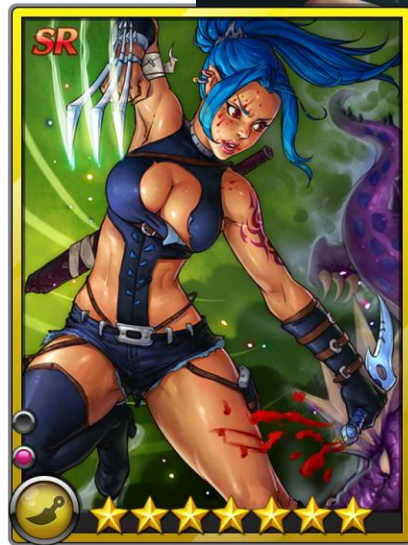
- Sexualization – character intentionally designed to evoke sexual or romantic interest





# Sexualization = bad?

- Sexualization – character intentionally designed to evoke sexual or romantic interest
  - Objectification – when that's all there is to them

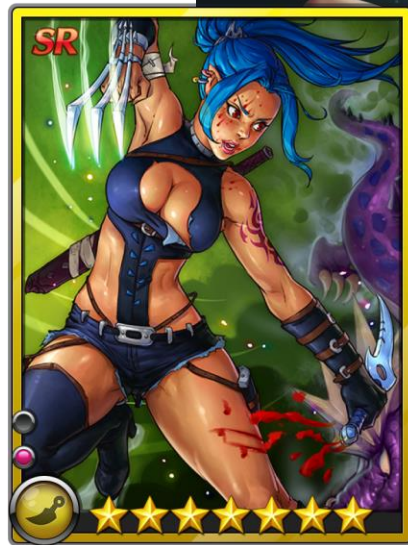


Artwork from Spirit Stones



# Objectification = bad!

- Sexualization – character intentionally designed to evoke sexual or romantic interest
  - Objectification – when that's all there is to them
    - Extremely problematic
    - Bad writing



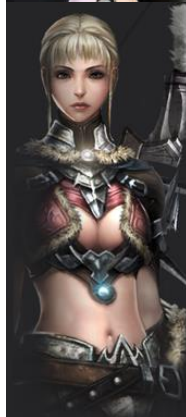
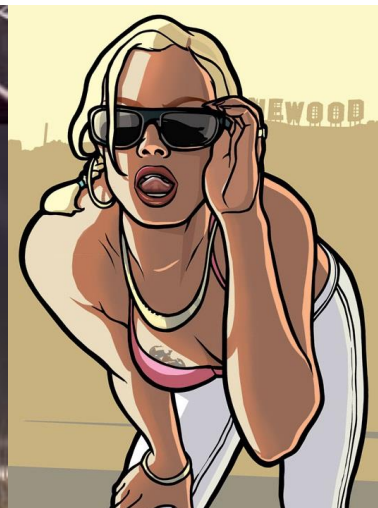
Artwork from Spirit Stones

# Sexualization is okay(ish)



- Sexual desire and interest is part of life!
- As writers, let's
  - Explore
  - Evoke
  - Satisfy







# Some statistics to consider...

- 45% of gamers are women (ESA)
- College age women think of sex 10 times a day (Journal of Sex Research)
- Erotic imagery causes women's neurons to fire 20% faster than any other imagery (Brain Research)

# “Sex? Yes please!”

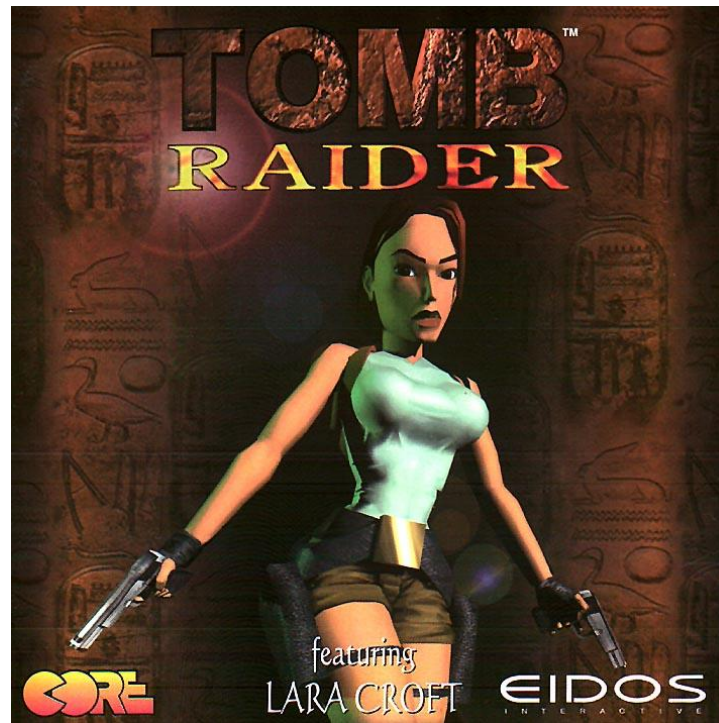


# Message of inclusivity

- “We know you’re playing.”
- “We like that you’re playing.”
- “We acknowledge your desires.”
- “Here’s something to fulfill those desires.”



Image courtesy of iAmbro@  
freedigitalphotos.com















# The takeaway?



- Goddamn, that man is hot
- And that was deliberate
  - Writing and art
  - Assumed there were straight women/gay men playing!

# Why are we failing?



# MALE GAZE



# Male Gaze

Image courtesy of imagemajestic @  
freedigitalphotos.com



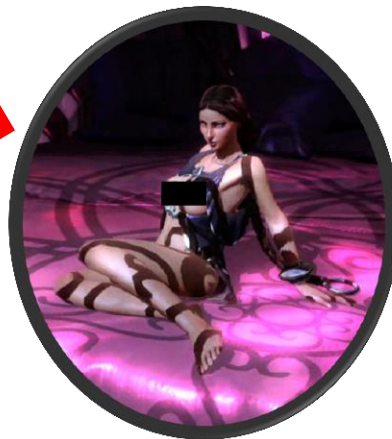


# Male Gaze

Image courtesy of imagemajestic @  
freedigitalphotos.com



Lusts after / Desires



# Male Gaze

Image courtesy of [imagemajestic](#) @ [freedigitalphotos.com](#)



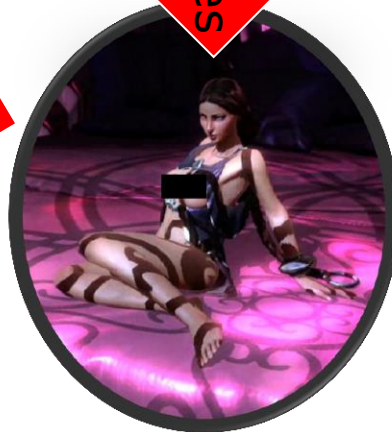
Identifies / Admires



Does stuff

Lusts after / Desires

Desires



# Male Gaze

Image courtesy of [imagemajestic](#) @ [freedigitalphotos.com](#)



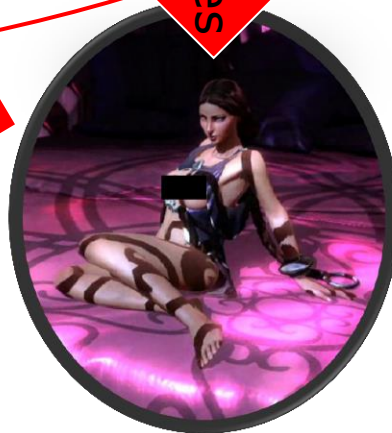
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Does stuff

Lusts after / Desires

Desires



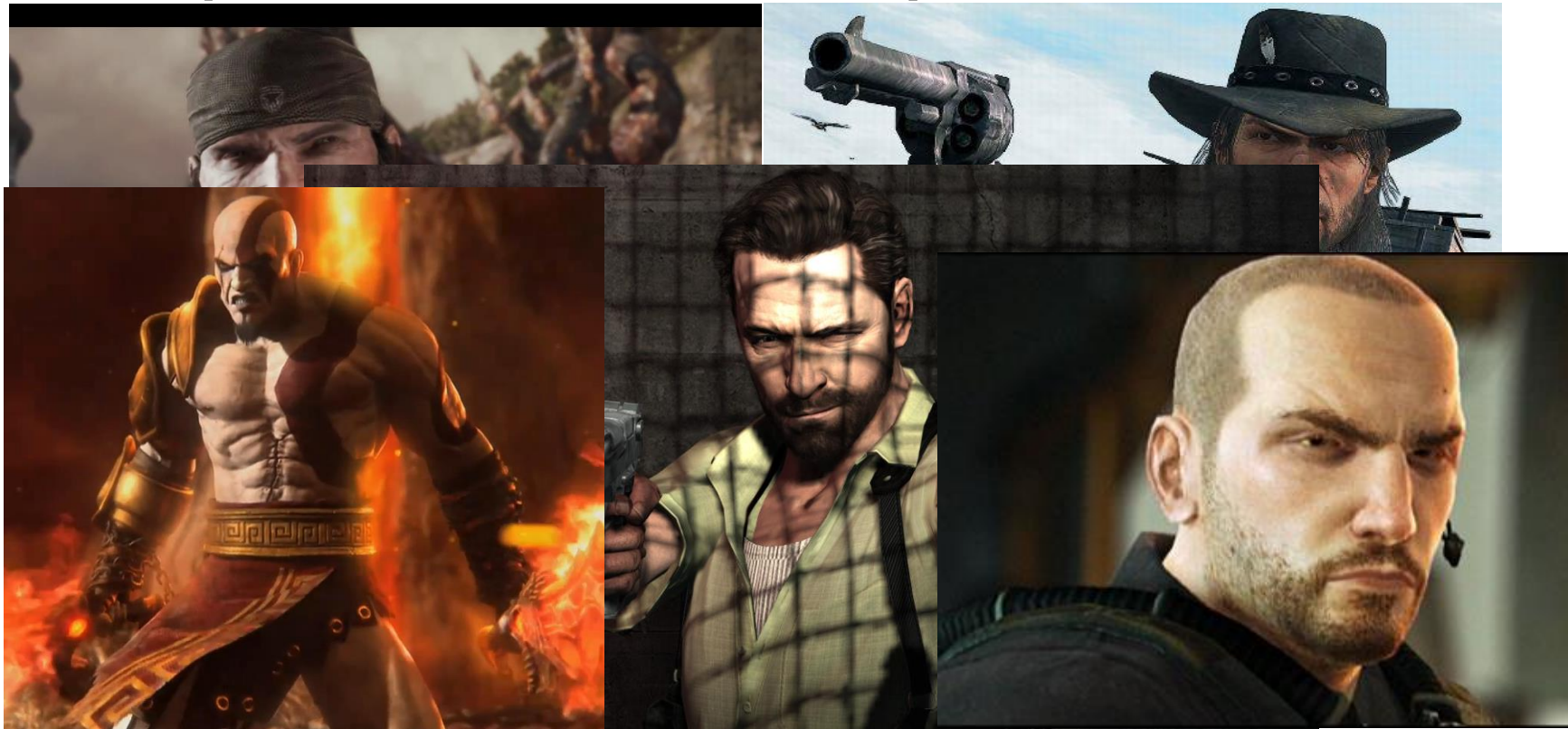
# Emphasis on “manly” traits



Alexander Nels Elofson  
Winner of the “Art of Manliness”  
Put Up Your Dukes Contest



# Emphasis on “manly” traits



# "No sex, please, we're men."

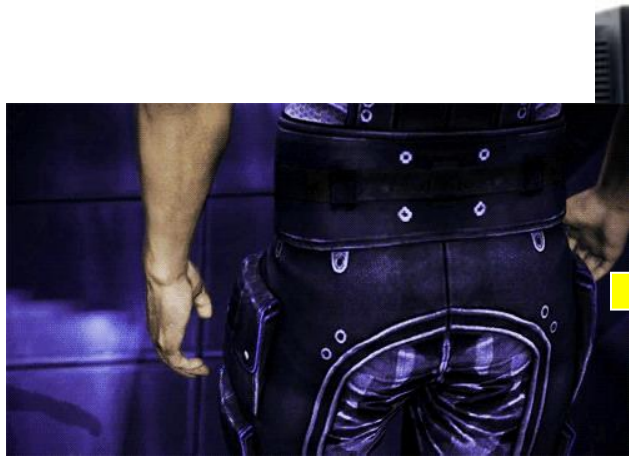


Image courtesy of [imagemaajestic.com](http://imagemaajestic.com)  
[freedigitalphotos.com](http://freedigitalphotos.com)

- **"The male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like."**

- Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema

# “No sex, please, we’re men.”



# Player agency

- Male characters
  - "the man's role as ***the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen.***"
  - "***the bearer of the look of the spectator***"
- Applies doubly to male player characters
  - The PC must act and do





# Player agency





# Male Gaze

Image courtesy of [imagemajestic](#) @ [freedigitalphotos.com](#)



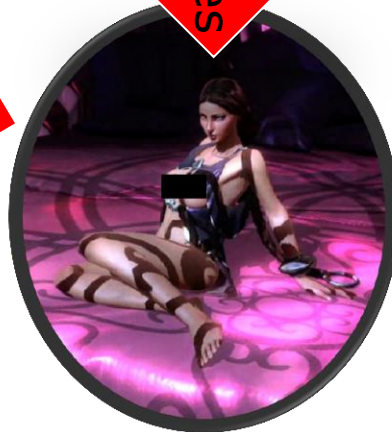
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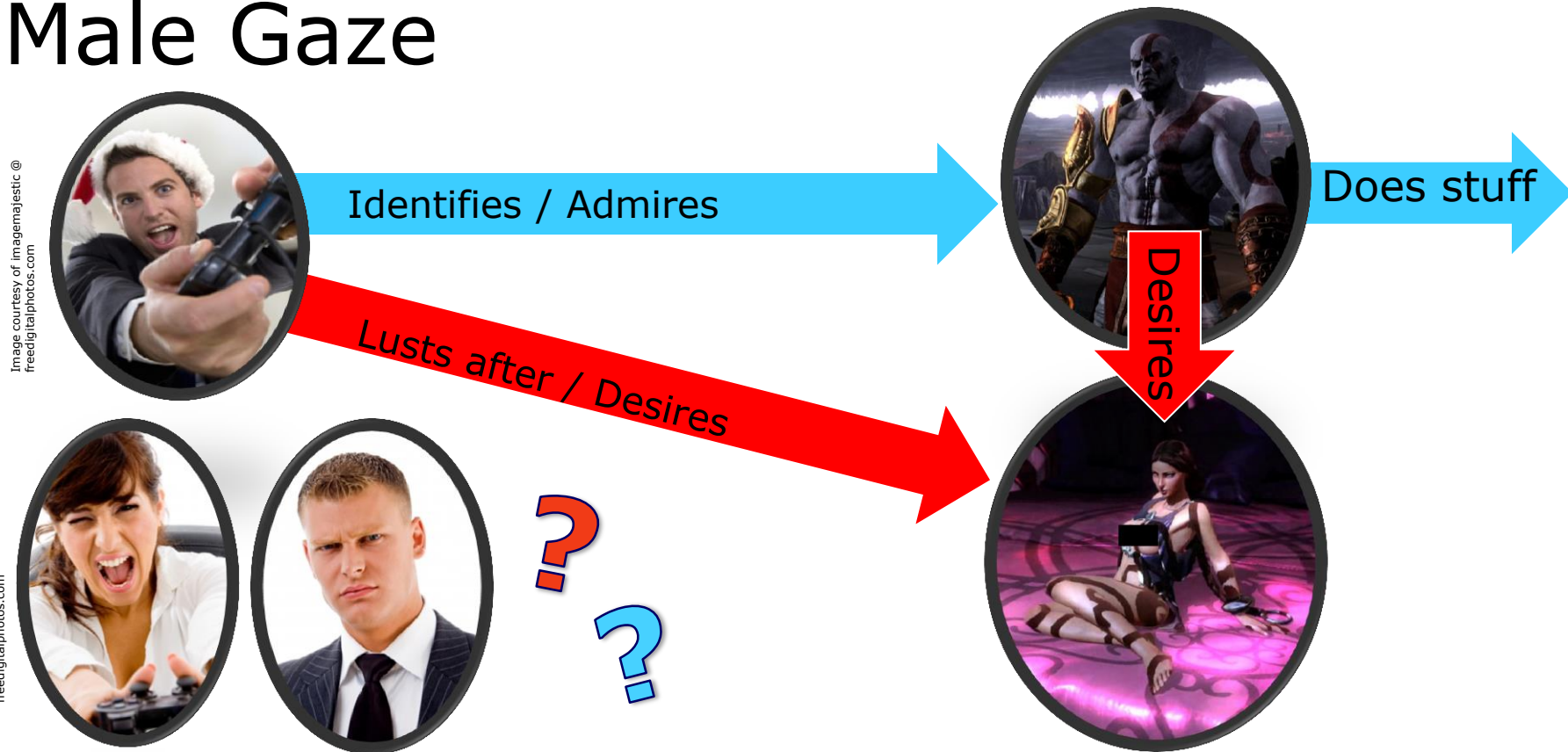
Does stuff

Lusts after / Desires

Desires



# Male Gaze



# Hooray for agency!

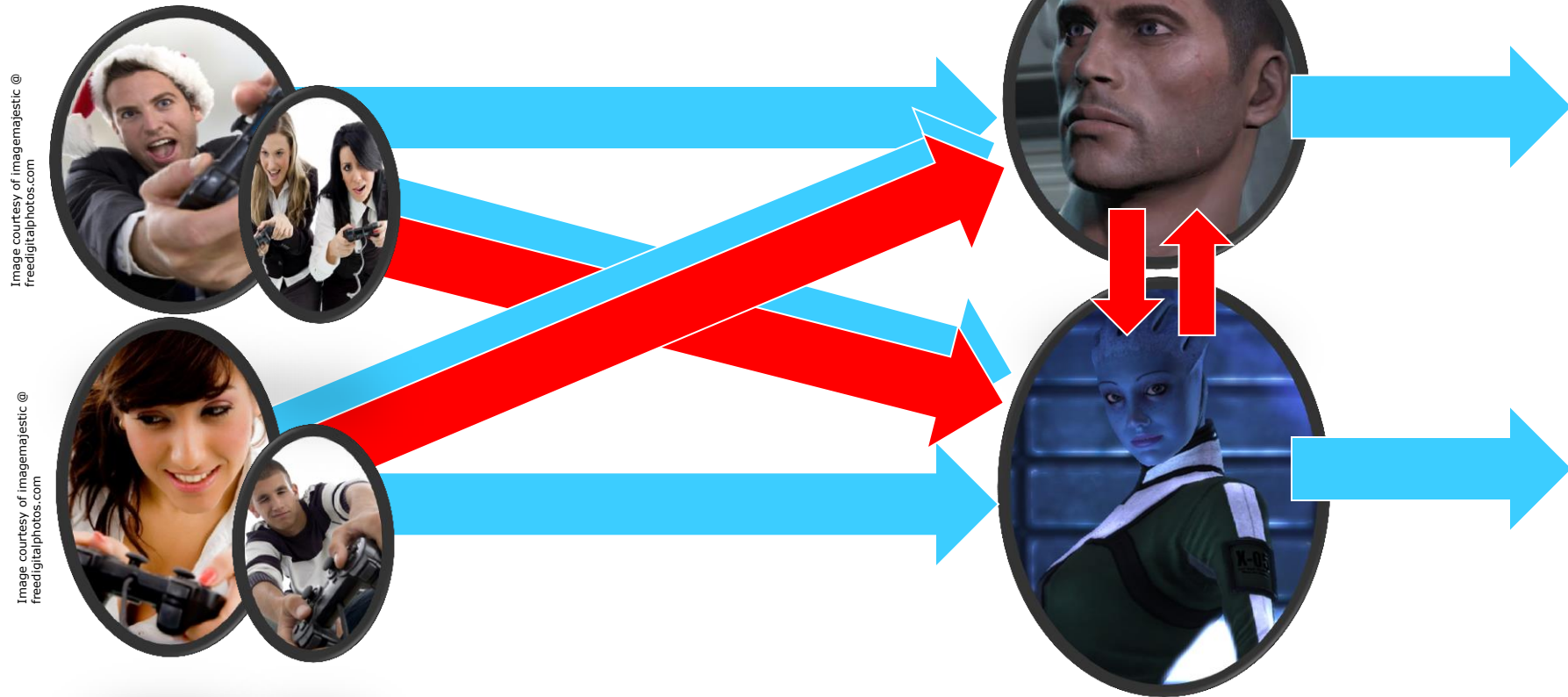
Image courtesy of imagemajestic @ freedigitalphotos.com



Image courtesy of imagemajestic @ freedigitalphotos.com



# Hooray for **desire**!



# Who's getting it right?





# Games from East Asia



Image courtesy of Gamersroute

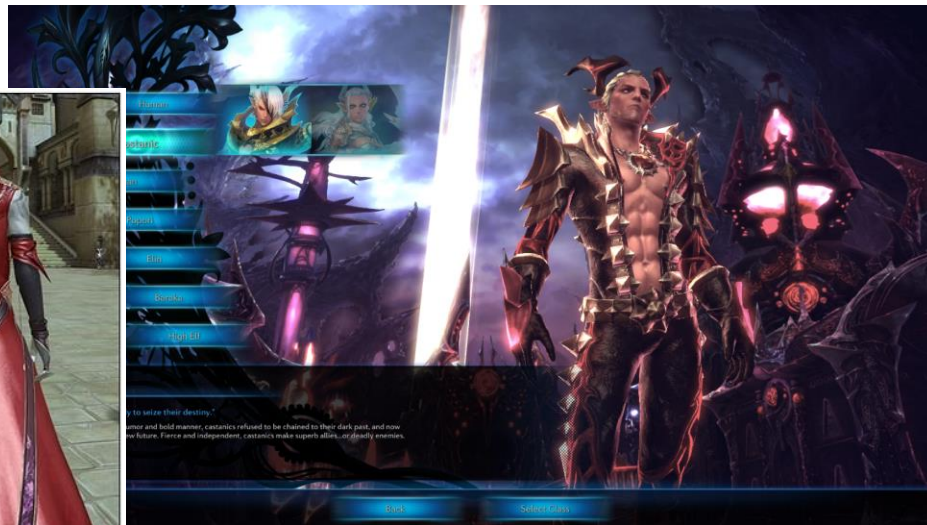


Image courtesy of Terra Wikia

# Games from East Asia



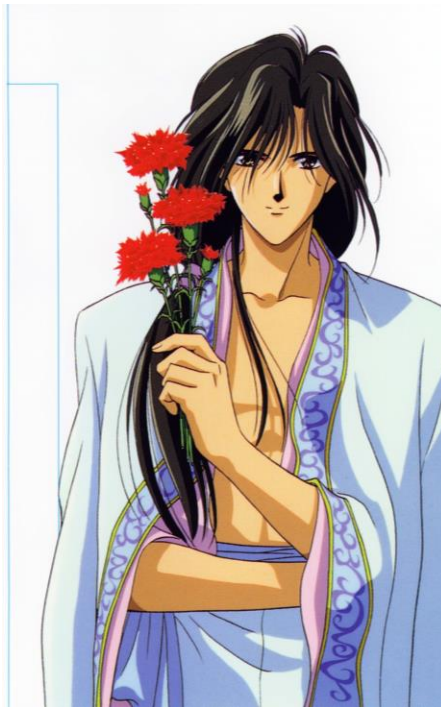
# The *bishonen* archetype

- Translation: “beautiful boy”
- A man or boy whose beauty and sexual appeal transcends gender and sexuality
- Identify as male but with “feminine” or “androgynous” elements
  - Long hair
  - Affinity with flowers
  - Elegant costuming / body language





# Anime and manga



# Anime and manga



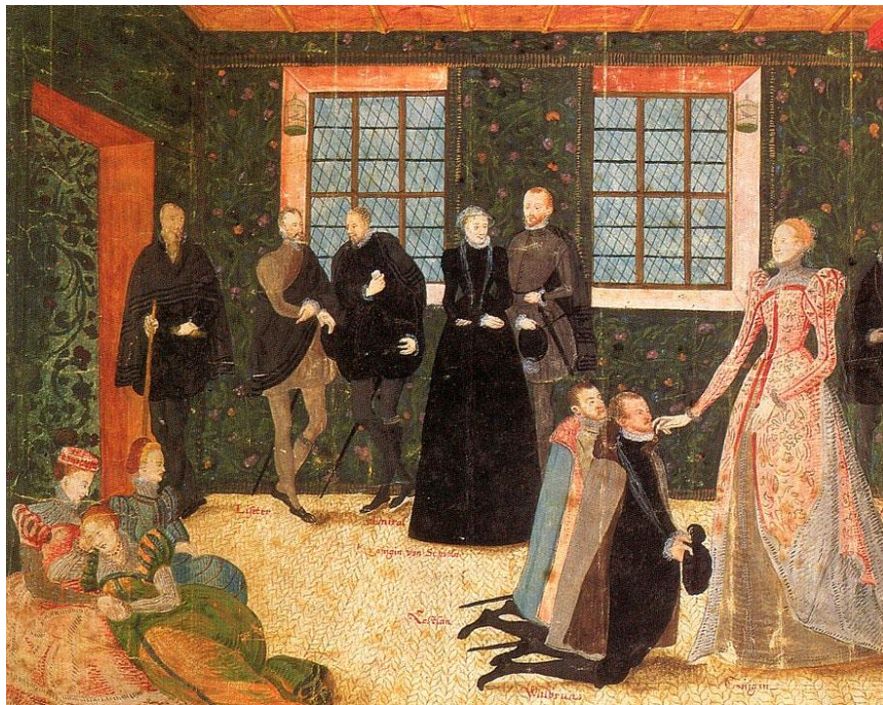


# Asian courtly narratives



- Example: Tale of Genji
- Environment where beauty, elegance, etc prized for all genders
- Male heroes = noblemen with “peerless” beauty and deep emotions
  - Informs the larger culture

# European courtly narratives



# European courtly narratives





# European courtly narratives



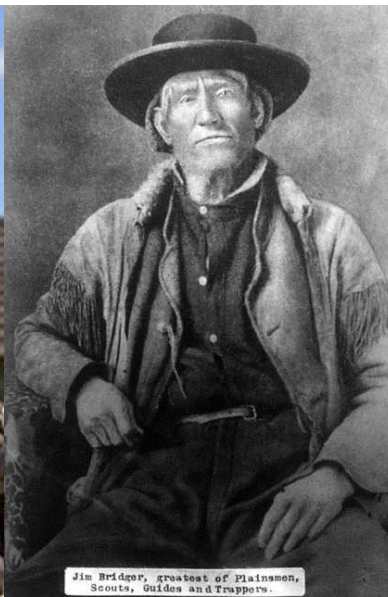
# North American frontier narratives

Images courtesy [werner22brigitte](#) via [pixabay](#)





# North American frontier narratives



# East vs West?



**SQUARE ENIX®**





# Example: Crisis Core



- Approx 2.5 million sales
  - 830,000 in Japan
  - 710,000 in North America
  - 270,000 in Europe

# Example: Crisis Core



Skilled fighter  
Team Mom  
Seeks revenge  
Hesitant  
Optimistic  
Etc.

Confident  
Eloquent  
Isolated  
Seeks maternal  
approval/affection  
Etc.



# Any western developers?

The BioWare logo is centered within a large black rectangular area. The logo itself is rendered in a blue, stylized, blocky font with a slight 3D effect. The letters are bold and closely spaced, with a registered trademark symbol (®) at the end.



# Bioware

- Diverse array of attractive character types
  - Romancable!



# Bioware

- Diverse array of attractive character types
  - Romancable!
- Sex scenes which showcase male body / pleasure / nudity



# Bioware

- Diverse array of attractive character types
  - Romancable!
- Sex scenes which showcase male body / pleasure / nudity
- Using sexualization to inform other characters

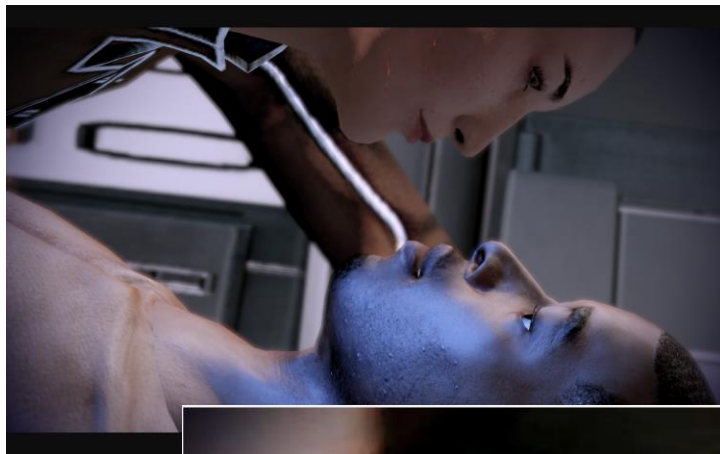






# Bioware

- Diverse array of attractive character types
  - Romancable!
- Sex scenes which showcase male body / pleasure / nudity
- Using sexualization to inform other characters



# How to write sexy male characters



# No single recipe

Let's see, that's one shirtless scene, two smouldering gazes, five paragraphs of angsty backstory, and three leather jackets...



Image courtesy of [imagenajestic](#) @ [freedigitalphotos.com](#)

The golden rule...

**Write good characters!**





# Two halves

- Get into the mindset – a general toolbox



# Two halves

- Get into the mindset – a general toolbox
- Traits and scenarios – a character toolbox



# General toolbox

- Is it appropriate for your game?

# General toolbox

- Is it appropriate for your game?

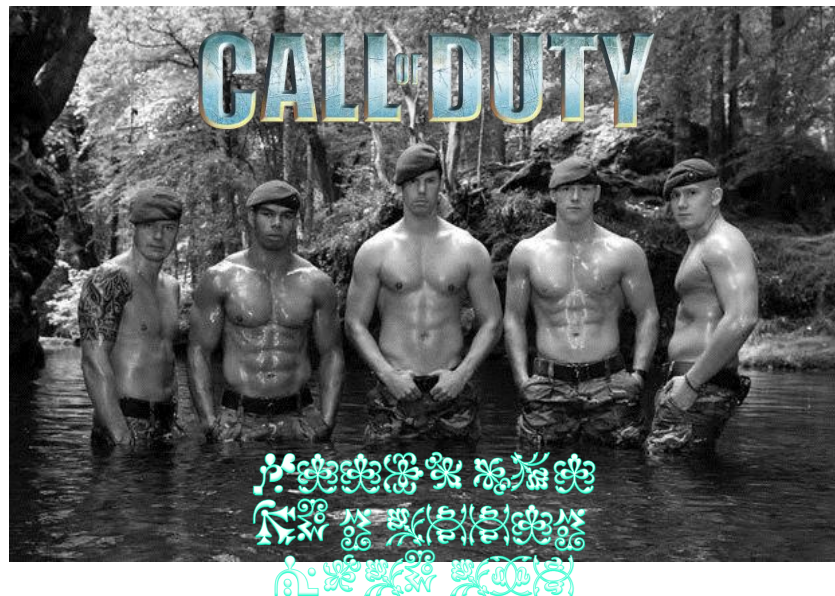
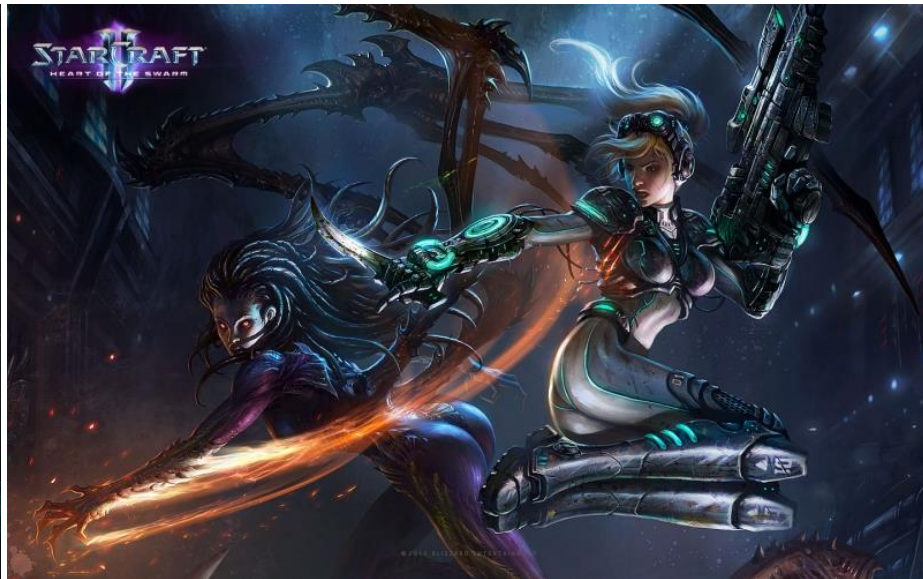


Image from Go Commando calendar  
2014 Edition



# General toolbox

- Is it appropriate for your game?



# General toolbox

- Consult your audience



Image courtesy of imagemajestic @  
freedigitalphotos.com

# General toolbox



- Consult your audience
  - If you already like guys...
    - Own it!

# General toolbox

Image courtesy of JGGVogue @  
Flickr.com - NYC Girl Gamers Meetup



- Consult your audience
  - If you already like guys...
    - Own it!
  - If you don't...
    - Talk to those that do

# General toolbox



- Consult your audience
  - If you already like guys...
    - Own it!
  - If you don't...
    - Talk to those that do
    - HIRE those that do!



# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Traditional games



# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Traditional games
  - Dating sims



# General toolbox

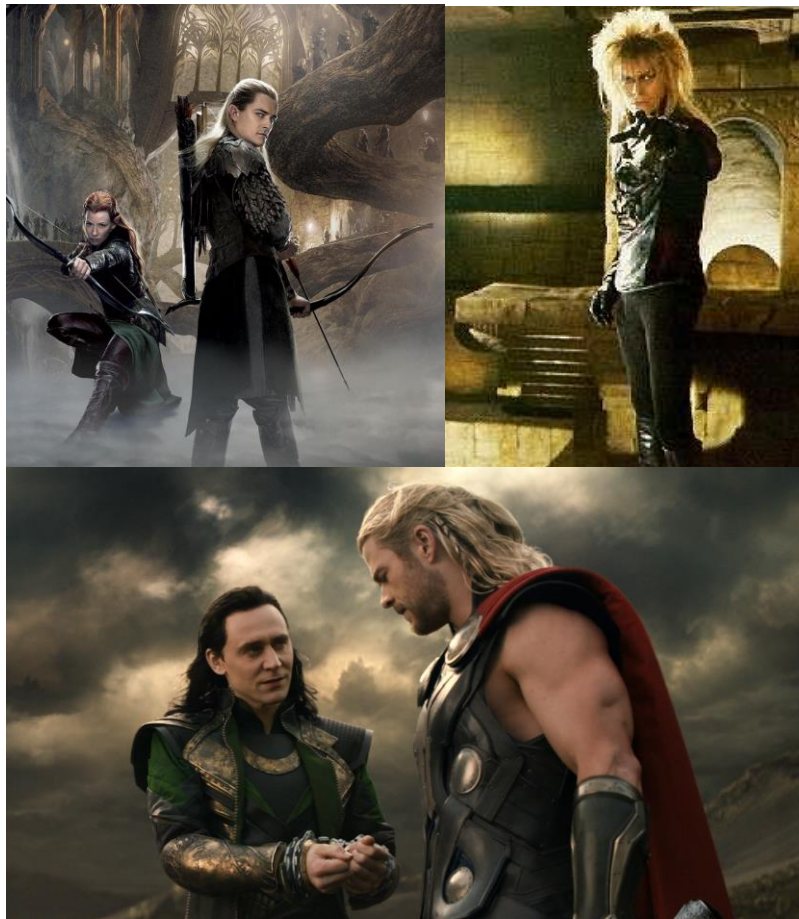
- See what works
  - Traditional games
  - Dating sims
  - Anime / manga





# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Traditional games
  - Dating sims
  - Anime / manga
  - Geek movies



# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Traditional games
  - Dating sims
  - Anime / manga
  - Geek movies
  - Geek TV shows





# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Traditional games
  - Dating sims
  - Anime / manga
  - Geek movies
  - Geek TV shows
  - Fandom



Image courtesy of ikellywoeshxD @  
deviantart

fanfiction.net   
unleash your imagination and free your soul

tumblr.



deviantART

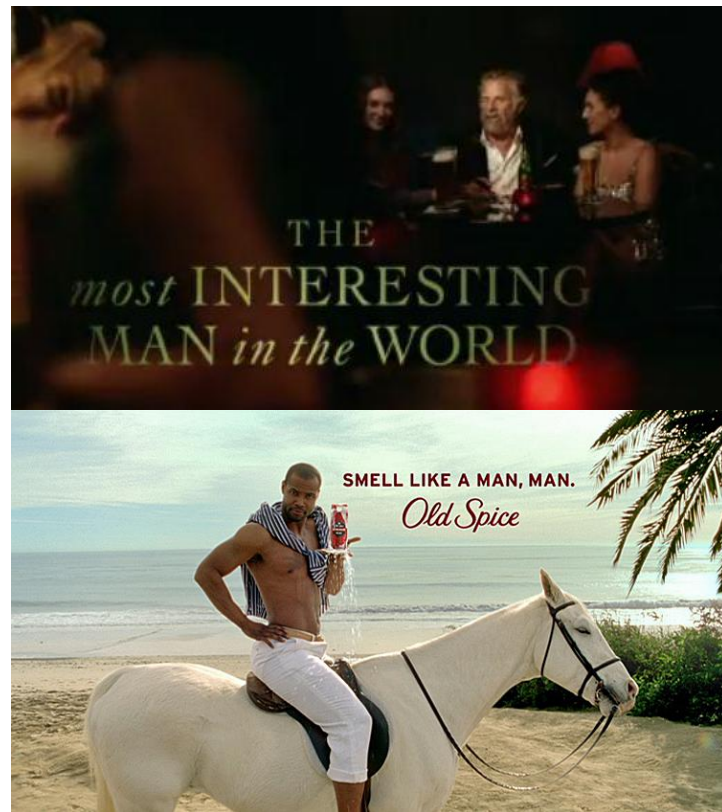


# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Non-geeky media

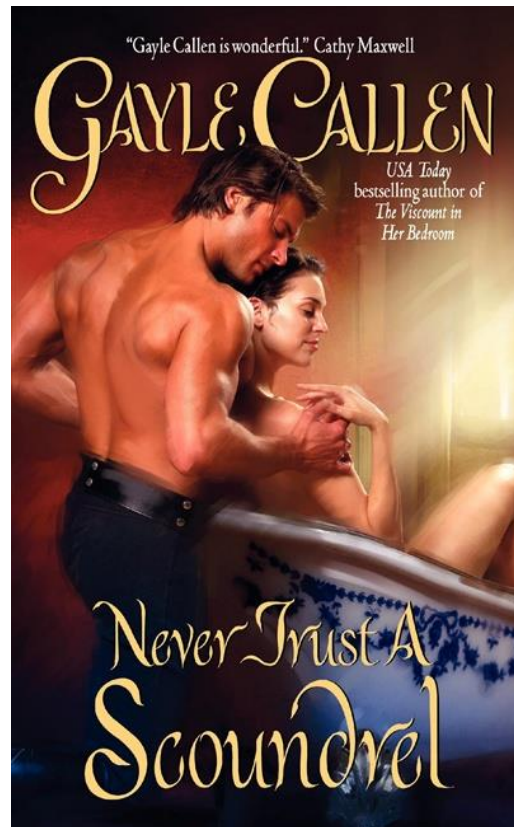
# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Non-geeky media
    - Advertisements



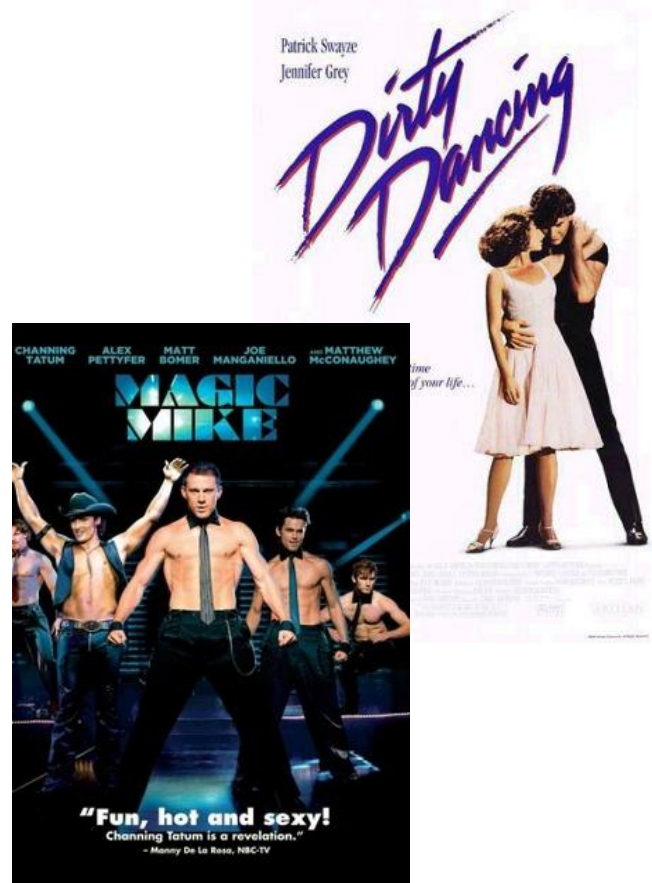
# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Non-geeky media
    - Advertisements
    - Romance novels / erotica



# General toolbox

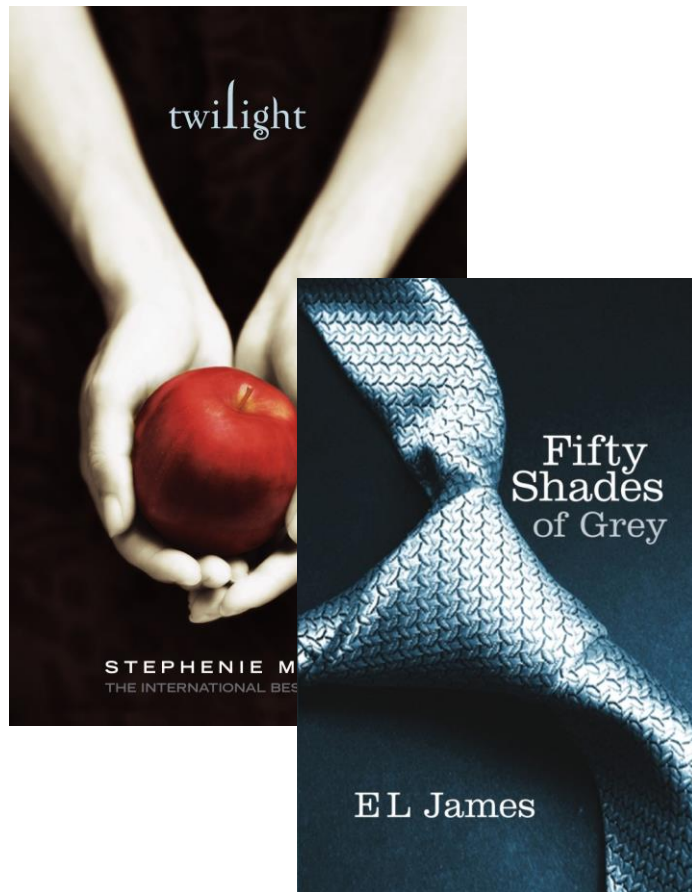
- See what works
  - Non-geeky media
    - Advertisements
    - Romance novels / erotica
    - Romantic movies





# General toolbox

- See what works
  - Non-geeky media
    - Advertisements
    - Romance novels / erotica
    - Romantic movies
    - Twilight / 50 Shades of Grey



# General toolbox

- Restrain your inner eye roll



# General toolbox

- Restrain your inner eye roll
  - “Ugh, teenage girls!”
  - “Ugh, anime!”
  - “Ugh, emo pretty boys!”
  - “Ugh, fanfic!”
  - “Ugh, Sephiroth!”



# General toolbox

- If the men are desired... who's desiring?



# General toolbox

- If the men are desired... who's desiring?
  - Character gaze





# General toolbox

- If the men are desired... who's desiring?
  - Player gaze



Image courtesy of imagemajestic @  
freedigitalphotos.com

# General toolbox

- If the men are desired... who's desiring?
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# General toolbox

- If the men are desired... who's desiring?
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# General toolbox

- If the men are desired... who's desiring?
  - Player gaze

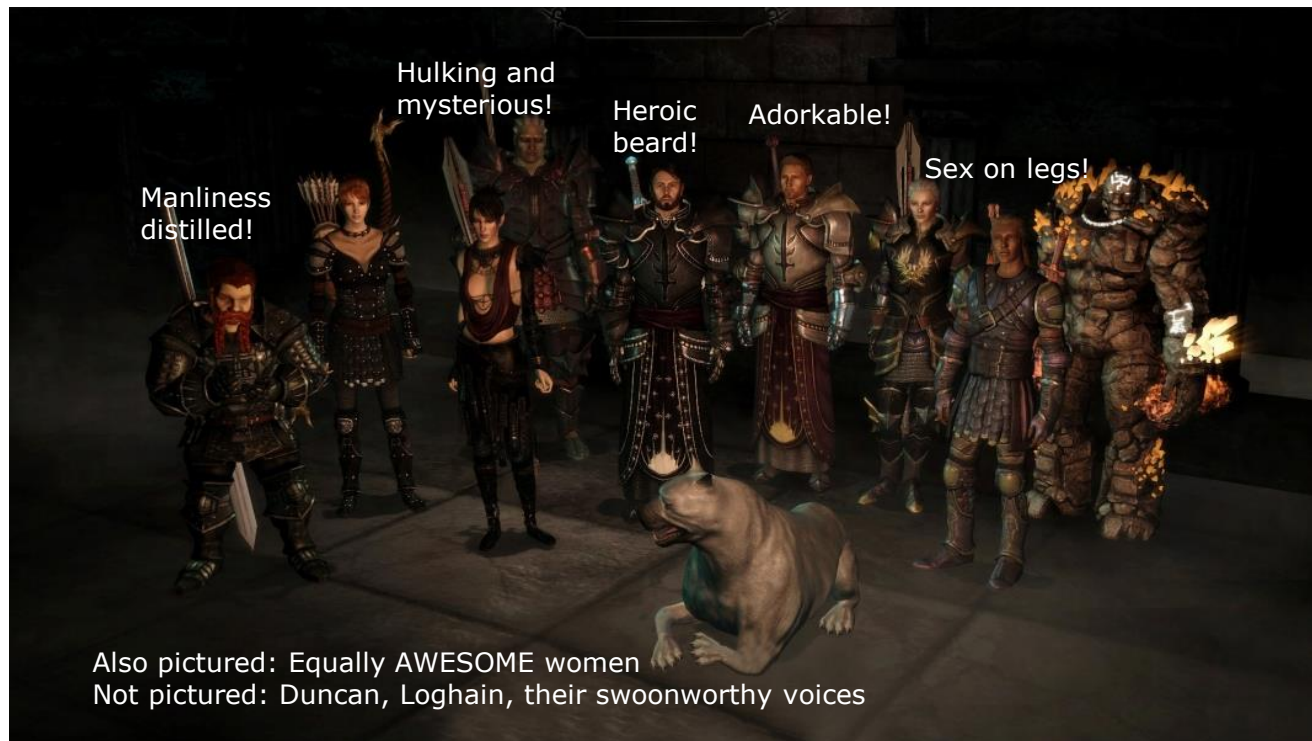


VS.



# General toolbox

- Diversify





# General toolbox

- Diversify



# General toolbox

- Don't be hamstrung by MANLINESS



# General toolbox

- Get good voice actors



# General toolbox

NEED

# General toolbox

NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED  
NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED  
NEED NEED NEED **NEED** NEED NEED NEED  
NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED  
NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED NEED



# General toolbox

- NEED to get your art team onboard



# General toolbox

- NEED to get your art team onboard



What you wrote

# General toolbox

- NEED to get your art team onboard



What you wrote

+



What they drew

=

?

# Character toolbox



# Character toolbox

- "A \_\_\_\_\_ in the eyes"



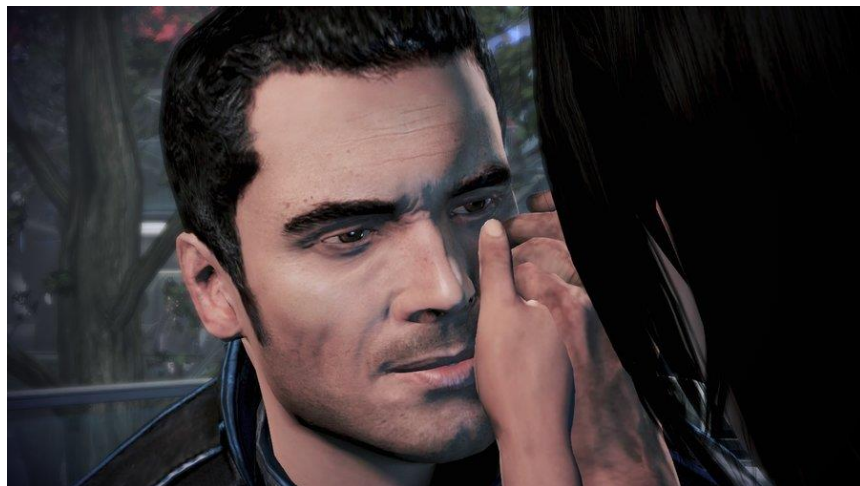
# Character toolbox

- “A twinkle in the eyes”



# Character toolbox

- “A tenderness in the eyes”



# Character toolbox

- "A sadness in the eyes"



# Character toolbox

- “A predatory gleam in the eyes”



# Character toolbox



- ## Charisma

- “Charisma is a by product of confidence, energy, creativity, and self-assurance.”

Mark Tyrell, Uncommon Help



# Character toolbox



- Charisma
  - “Charisma is a by product of confidence, energy, creativity, and self-assurance.”
  - Mark Tyrell, Uncommon Help

# Character toolbox

- Confidence
  - Swagger



# Character toolbox

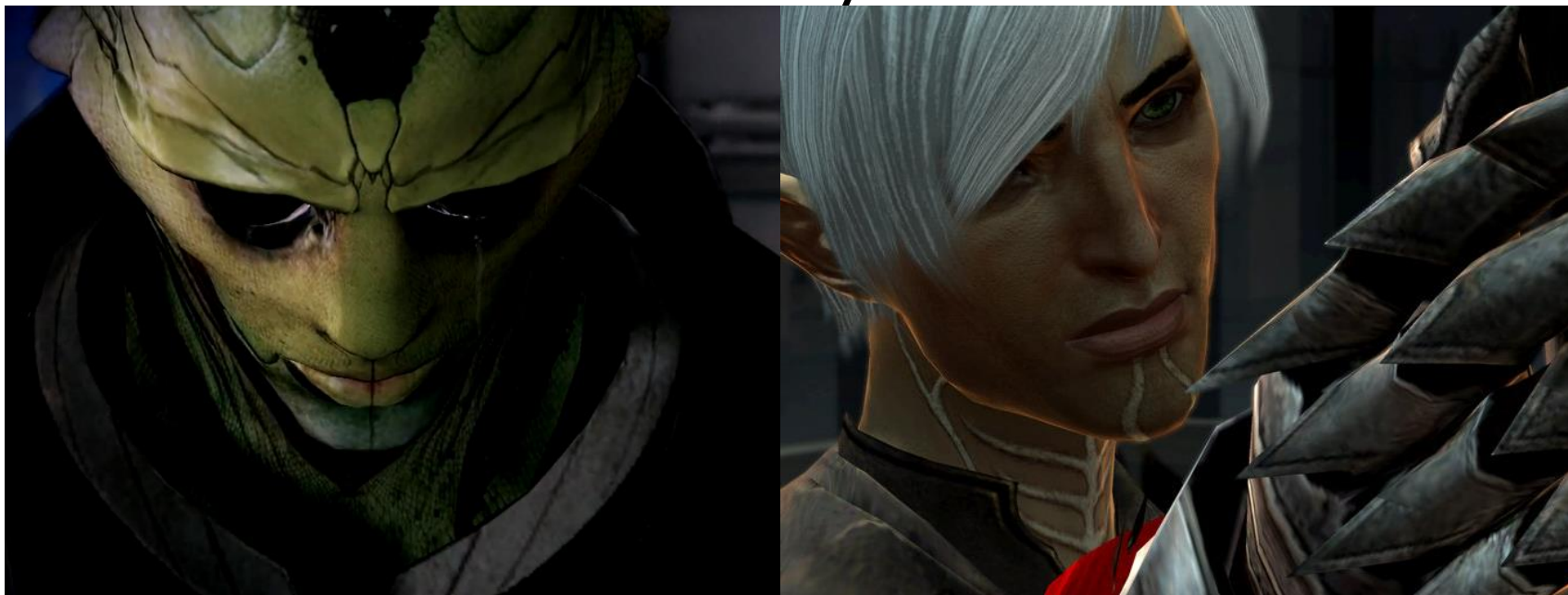
- Confidence
  - Swagger
  - Honesty



Gifs from [salikawood.tumblr.com](http://salikawood.tumblr.com)

# Character toolbox

- Emotional vulnerability



# Character toolbox

- Intrigue and mystery





# Character toolbox

- An “edge”



# Character toolbox

- Sense of Humor



Dialogue from *Dragon Age Awakening*

# Character toolbox

- Intelligence and eloquence



# Character toolbox



- Brooding

# Character toolbox



- Brooding





# Character toolbox

- Beauty



# Character toolbox

- Sensuality



# Character toolbox

- Nudity



Statue installation at the Square Enix Store in Tokyo

# Character toolbox

- Shirtless scenes



Mesphit from *Loren Amazon Princess*



# Character toolbox

- Heidi McDonald
  - Attractive traits in romanceable NPCs
  - Great ideas for attractive male characters





# Conclusion



# Conclusion



- Male sexualization rarely dealt with or portrayed...
- Yet appeals to large segments of population and offers different approach to character
- As writers, we can – and should – explore this

# Conclusion



# Contact info

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- Twitter: @michelle\_clough
- Website: [www.michelle-clough.com](http://www.michelle-clough.com)
  - [www.8bitbeefcake.com](http://www.8bitbeefcake.com) launching soon!

# Awesome sources

- Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*
- Mattie Brice, *On Men's Sexualization in Video Games*
- Malin Lövenberg, *Male Sexualization in Video Games*
- Kate Cox, *The Gamer's Gaze*
- Paul Tassi, *The One-Sided Problem of Oversexualization in Games*
- TV Tropes articles: *Eating the Eye Candy*, *Female Gaze*, *Bishonen*

