GAME NARRATIVE SUMMIT

Eros in Play: Writing and Designing Sex Scenes in Games (Part 2)

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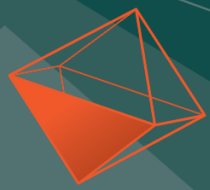
Freelance Writer / Editor / Designer
IGDA Romance and Sexuality SIG Chair



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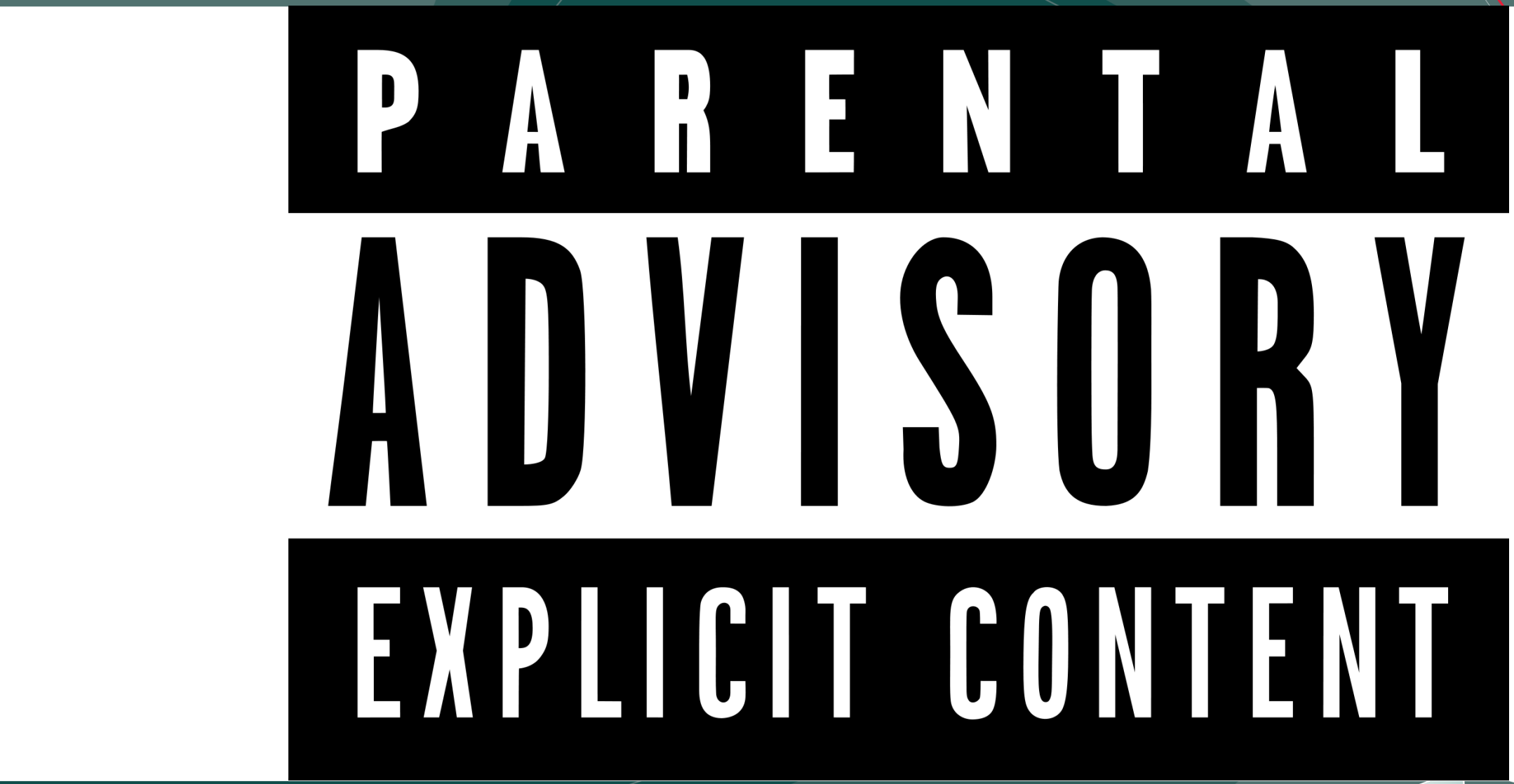
UBM


PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT

I felt her ropes suddenly dig into my skin with every breath I took, as I waited on her words... pathetically, desperate for her approval.

EverReach: Project Eden
Lead Writer

Purrfect Date
Lead Editor

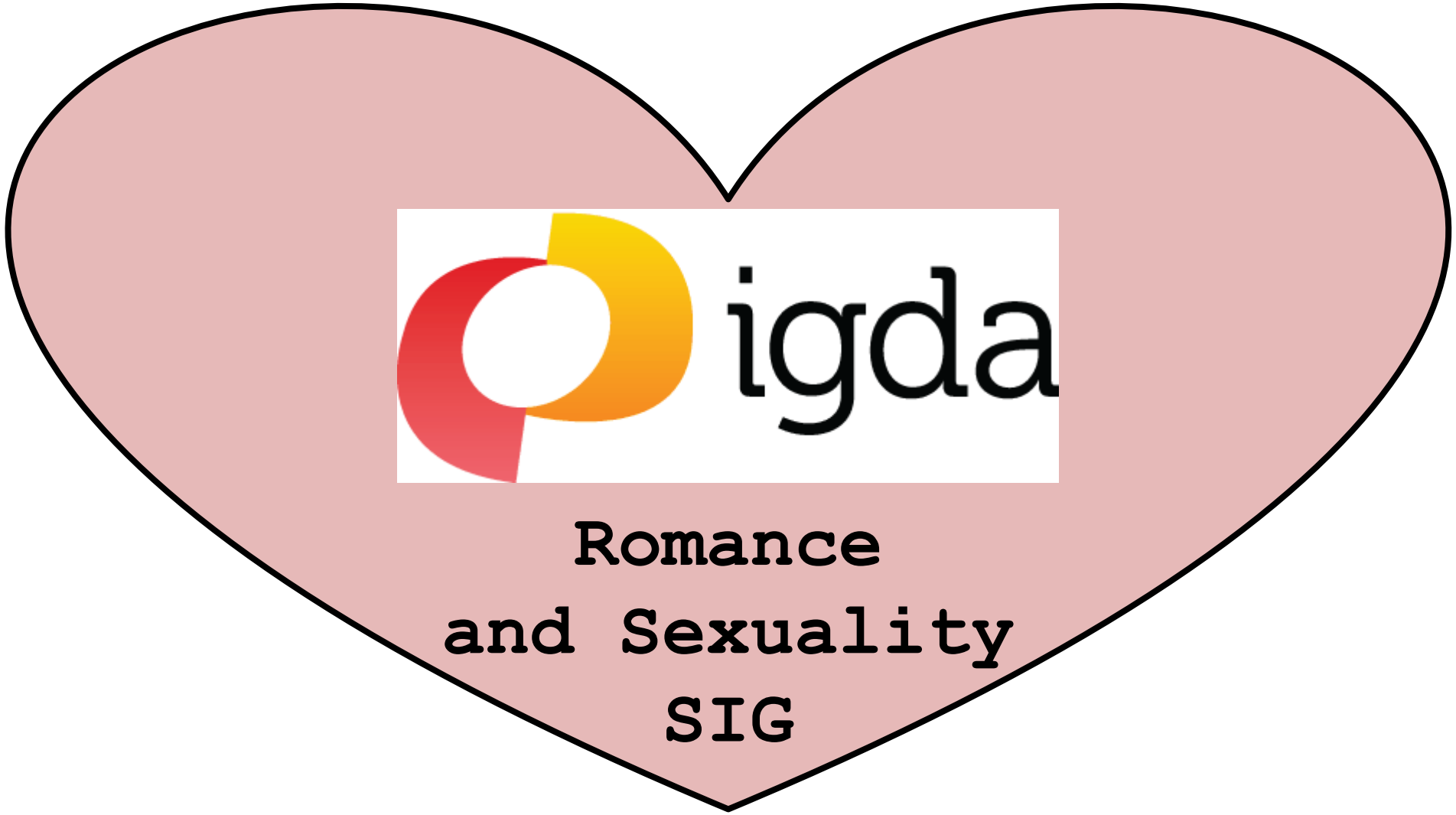
1931: Scheherazade at the Library of Pergamum
Senior Writer / Editor

Mob'n'sters
Lead Writer

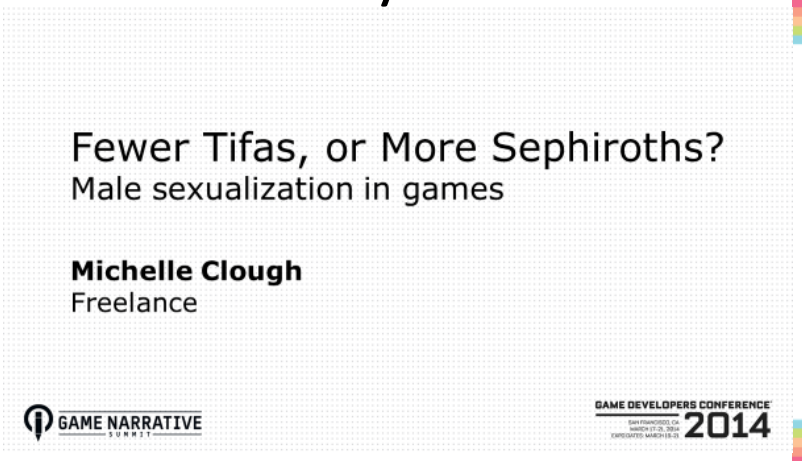
Mass Effect 3
Playthrough QA

Unannounced co-op VR adventure
Writer / Narrative Designer

Unannounced mobile interactive romances
Writer


igda
Romance
and Sexuality
SIG

Previously on…



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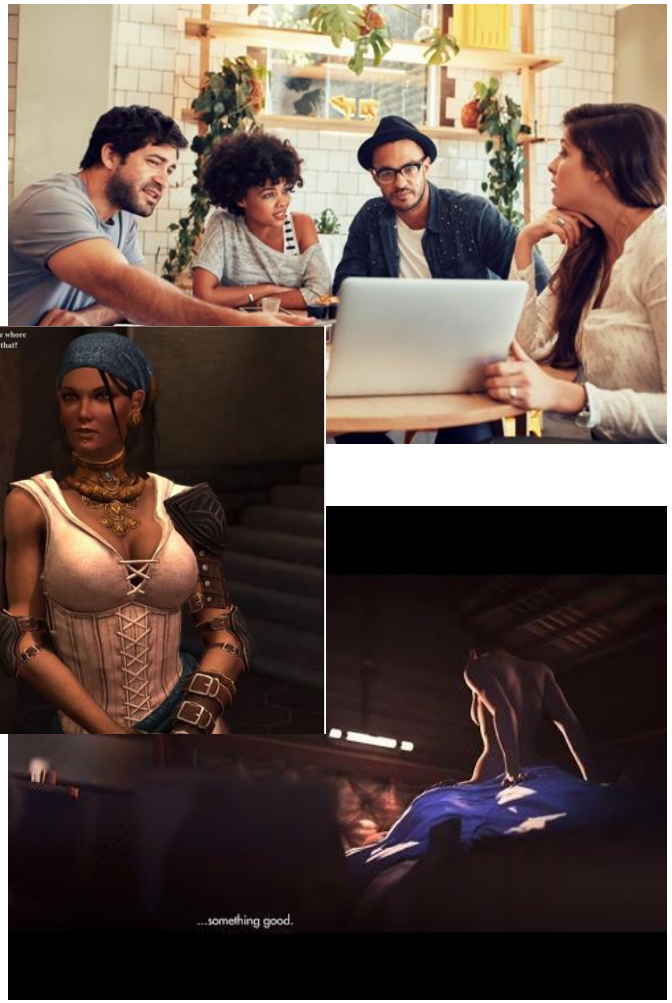

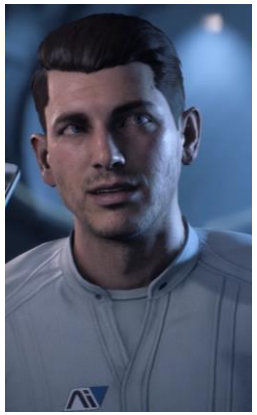

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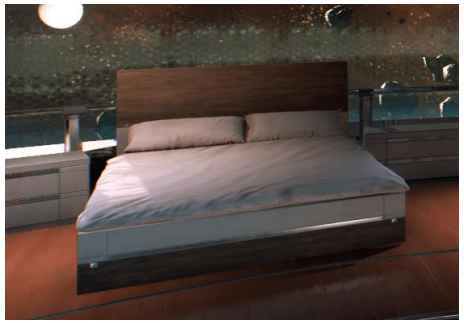


=

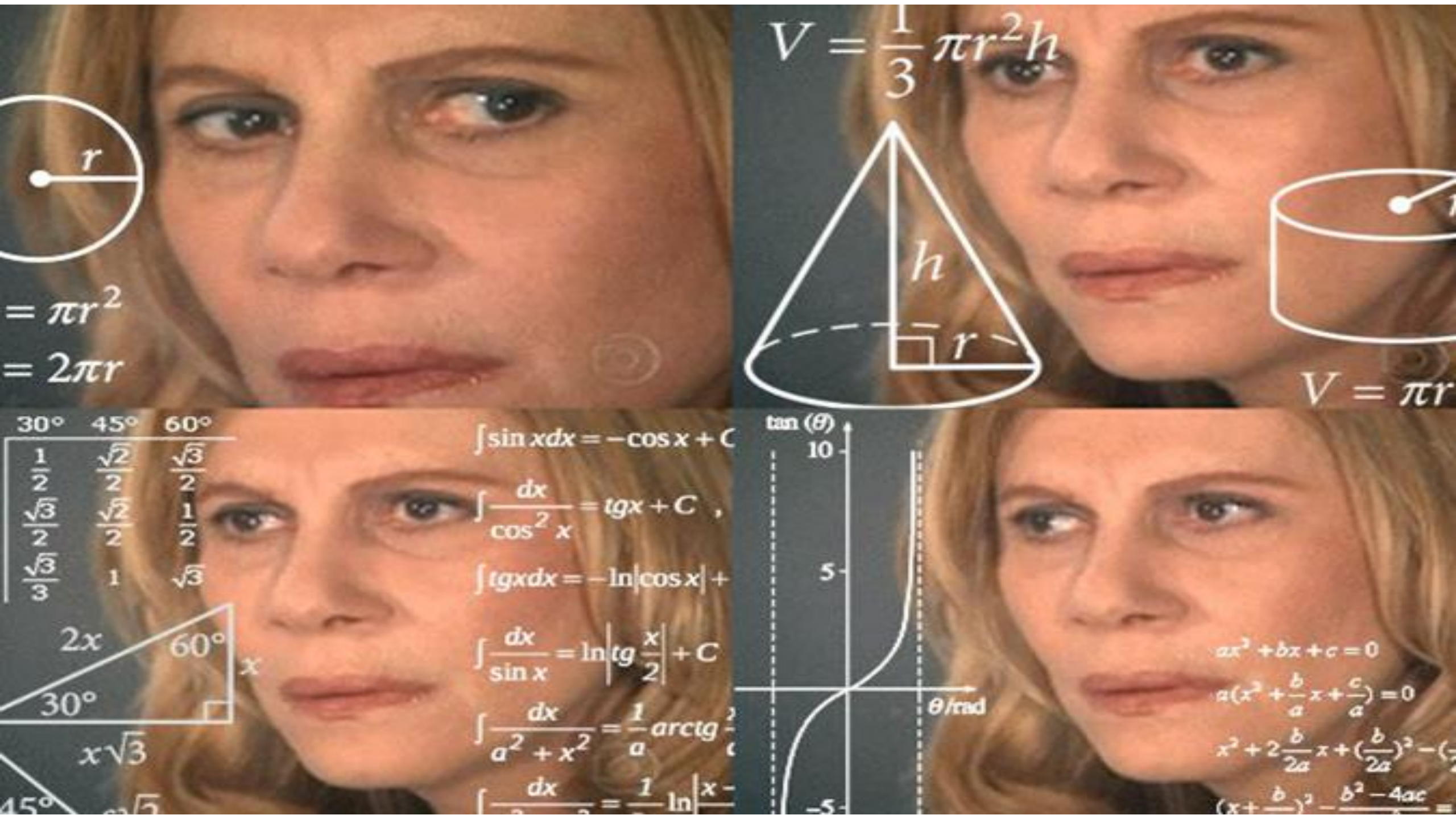
...sex scene???

Challenges for “HOW TO SEX SCENE”

- Few game-specific resources
- Extremely variable and inexact science
- Depends on a huge number of factors
- Also…

LET'S DO THIS
ALL NEW
EPISODE

A recipe for sex scenes…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$x^2 + 2\frac{b}{2a}x + (\frac{b}{2a})^2 - (\frac{}{}$
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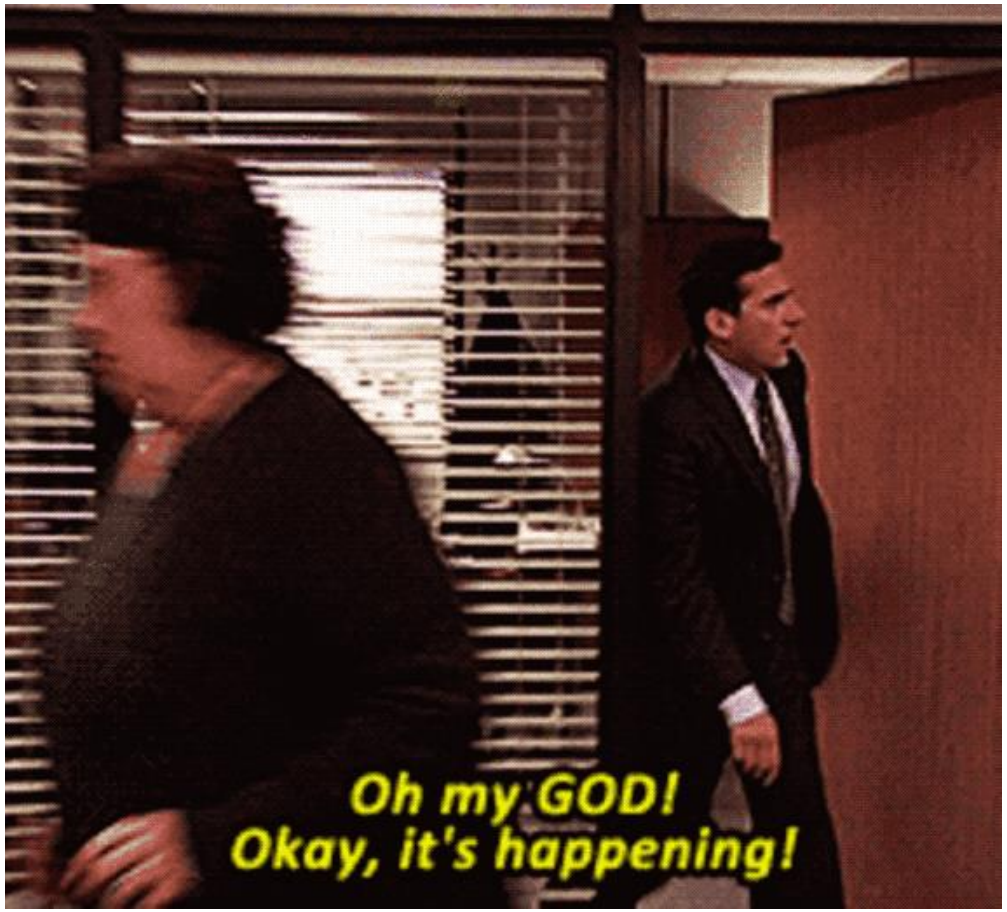
A recipe for sex scenes…

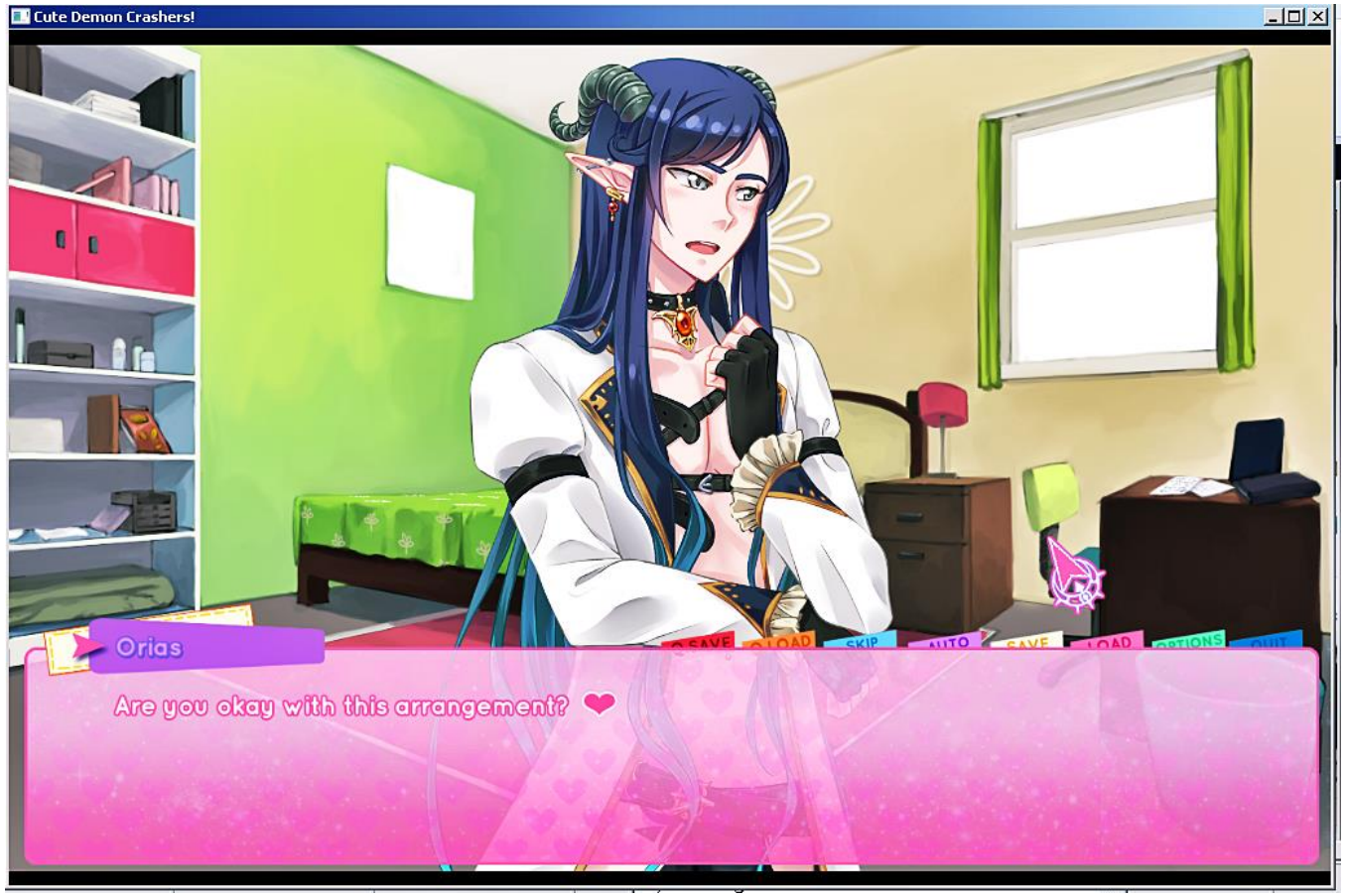
Sex scenes: The Sequel

Sex scenes: The Sequel



Definition of a sex scene

Consensual sex scenes only



Step 1: Grab basic ingredients

(start with characters, relationships, etc.)

The key building blocks

- Who are the characters?
- What is their relationship?
- Why are they having sex?

Aya

(confident, calm, independent, etc)

Married for years
Shared grief
Passionately in love
Apart for long periods
Etc.

Emotional catharsis

Celebration of victory

Reunion and reconnection

etc

Bayek

(passionate, emotional, devoted, etc)

Yeah, we already know that.

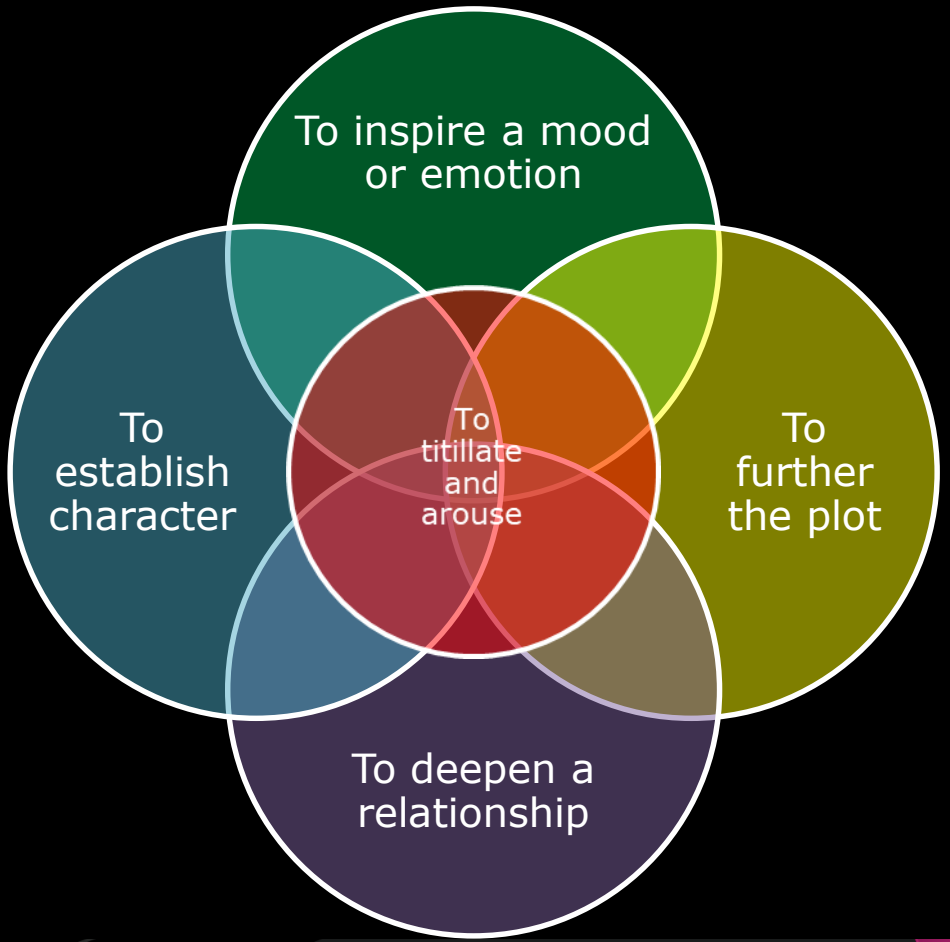
Characters, relationships, and reason for sex

- Sex reveals/reflects info on characters and relationships
- Need to consider how THESE people would have sex, how they treat others, etc.
- Will influence and guide every narrative choice you make

Step 2: Choose your flavour profile

(identify mood and purpose of scene)

Back at GDC 2017...



Explicit depiction vs. implicit “fade to black”

VS

FIGHT

Badly done explicit sex

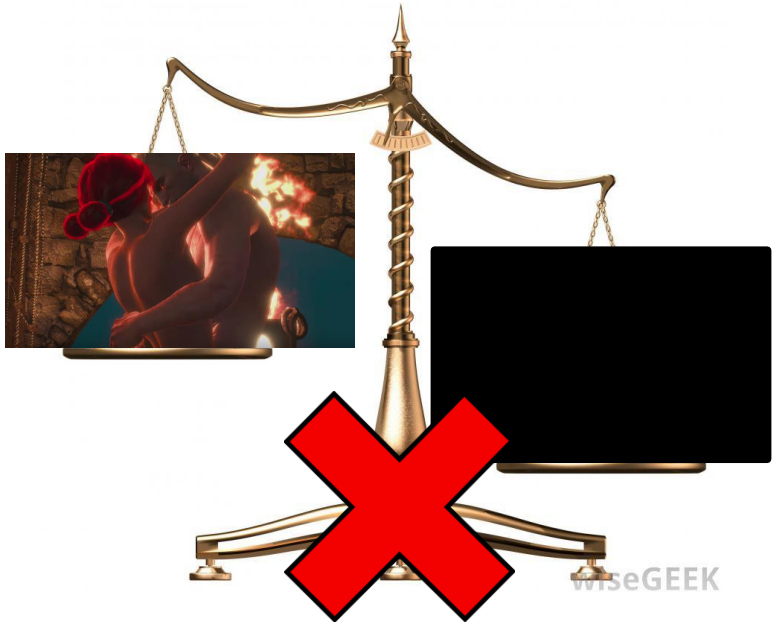
Badly done fade to black

Fading to black

- Strengths
  - Keeps pacing quick
  - Avoids issues of censorship
  - Avoids technical issues such as uncanny valley
  - Lets players imagine the sex (vs. writer/artist/actor's imagination)

Showing explicit sex

- Strengths
  - Direct input from writing/art/etc
  - Sustains and builds emotions established by lead-in
  - Highlights physical intimacy as well as emotional
  - Intensely character revealing



- Fade to black for:
  - Fast-paced plot advancement
  - Storytelling through implication
  - Meta-narrative concerns (e.g. technical)
- Show the sex for:
  - Sustaining emotion of scene
  - Storytelling through visuals/physicality
  - Revealing character and relationship

Mood

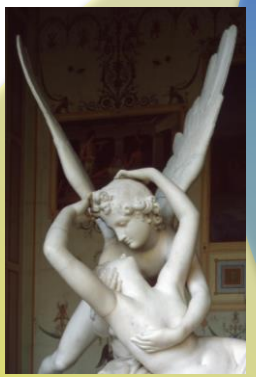
Joking?
Lustful?
Playful?
Slow?
Angry?
Cathartic?
Frenzied?
Aching?
Sleepy?
Kinky?
Bored?
Awkward?
Hollow?
Romantic?
Sad?
Sorrow-drowning?
Thoughtful?
Life-affirming?
Passionate?
Casual?

Average debate on What Sex Means

Sex is the ultimate mix of:

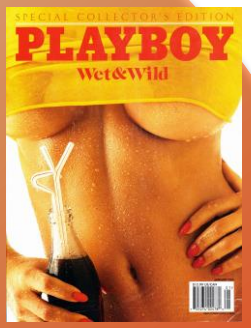
MUNDANE

Sex as:
- Normal
- Regular activity
- "What people do"
- Can be casual or romantic, healthy or destructive, etc etc



SACRED

Sex as:
- Spiritual
- Emotional
- Transformative
- Transcendent
- Ecstatic
- Exalted



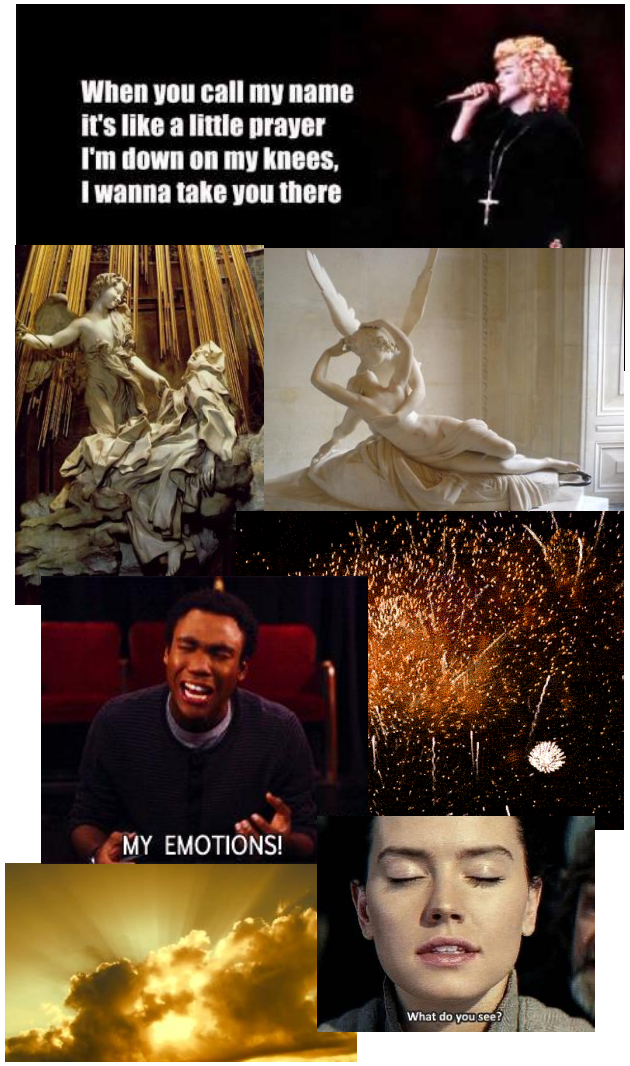
PROFANE

Sex as:
- Physical
- Lurid
- Animalistic
- Base
- Sweaty
- "Dirty"

SACRED	PROFANE	MUNDANE
Spiritual	Physical	Mental
Exalted	Debauched	Ordinary
Idealized	Filthy (in the good way)	Realistic
Desire	Lust	Interest
Making love	Fucking	Having sex
Erotica / romance novel	Porn	“Literary fiction”

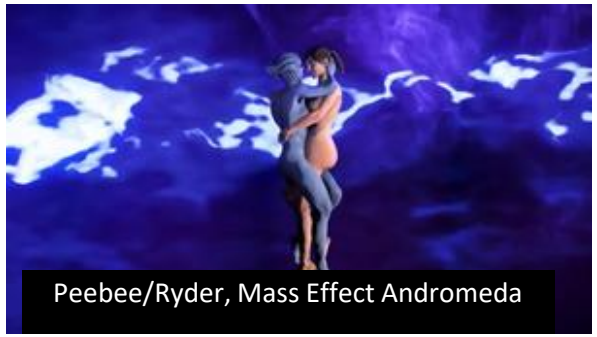
Sex as sacred

Inspiration:



Game examples:

Liara/Shepard, Mass Effect 3


Peebee/Ryder, Mass Effect Andromeda

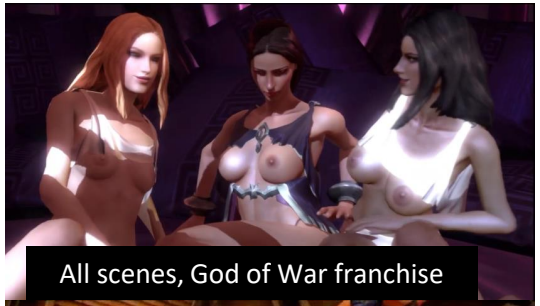
Geralt/Yennefer, The Witcher III

- Sex as spiritual, transformative
- Emphasizes:
  - Emotion and connection
  - Dramatic moment
- Stereotypical depictions:
  - Sweeping music
  - ARTSY!!!1! staging
  - Touching and foreplay
  - Slow, powerful action
  - Emotional declarations
  - Spiritual ecstasy

Sex as profane

Inspiration:

Game examples:


All scenes, God of War franchise

All scenes, Ride to Hell Retribution

Jason/Citra, Far Cry 3

- Sex as lustful, animalistic
- Emphasizes:
  - Physical (bodies, sweat, etc)
  - Personal pleasure
- Stereotypical depictions:
  - Uncontrollable lust
  - Sweatiness
  - Lots of animated action
  - Kinky positions/activity
  - Fast pace
  - Dirty talk
  - Loud/performative ecstasy

Excuse me, I ordered The God of War Profane Sex Special.
I didn’t know it came with sexist bullshit topping.

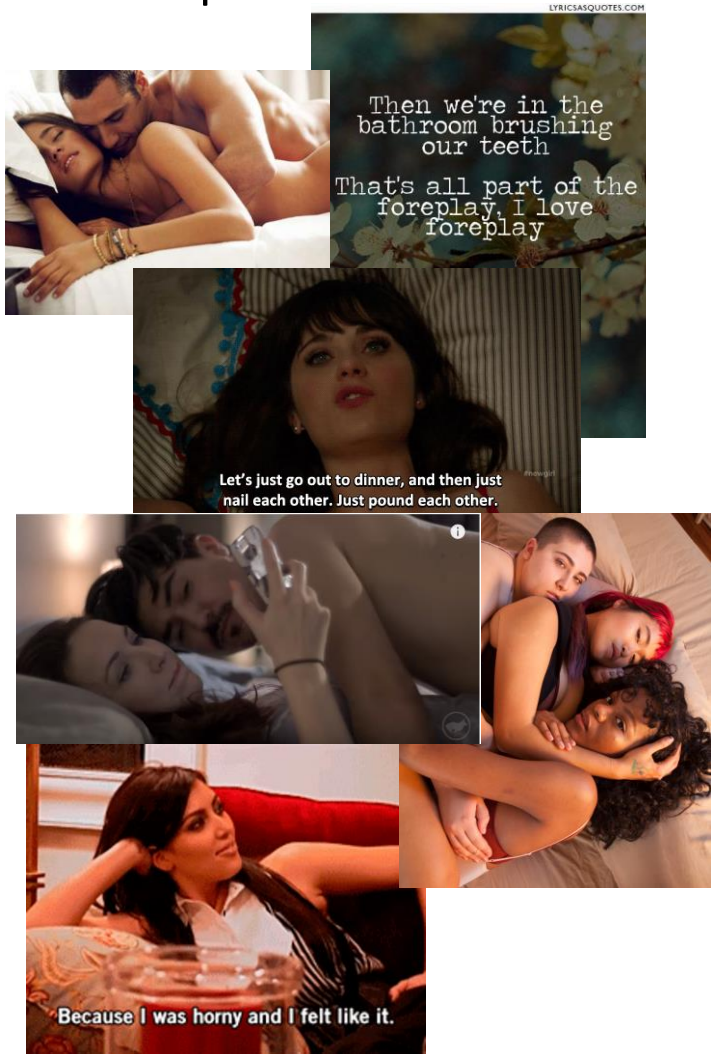
How to fix:

Profane sex is for horny people.

Let the sin begin!

Sex as mundane

Inspiration:



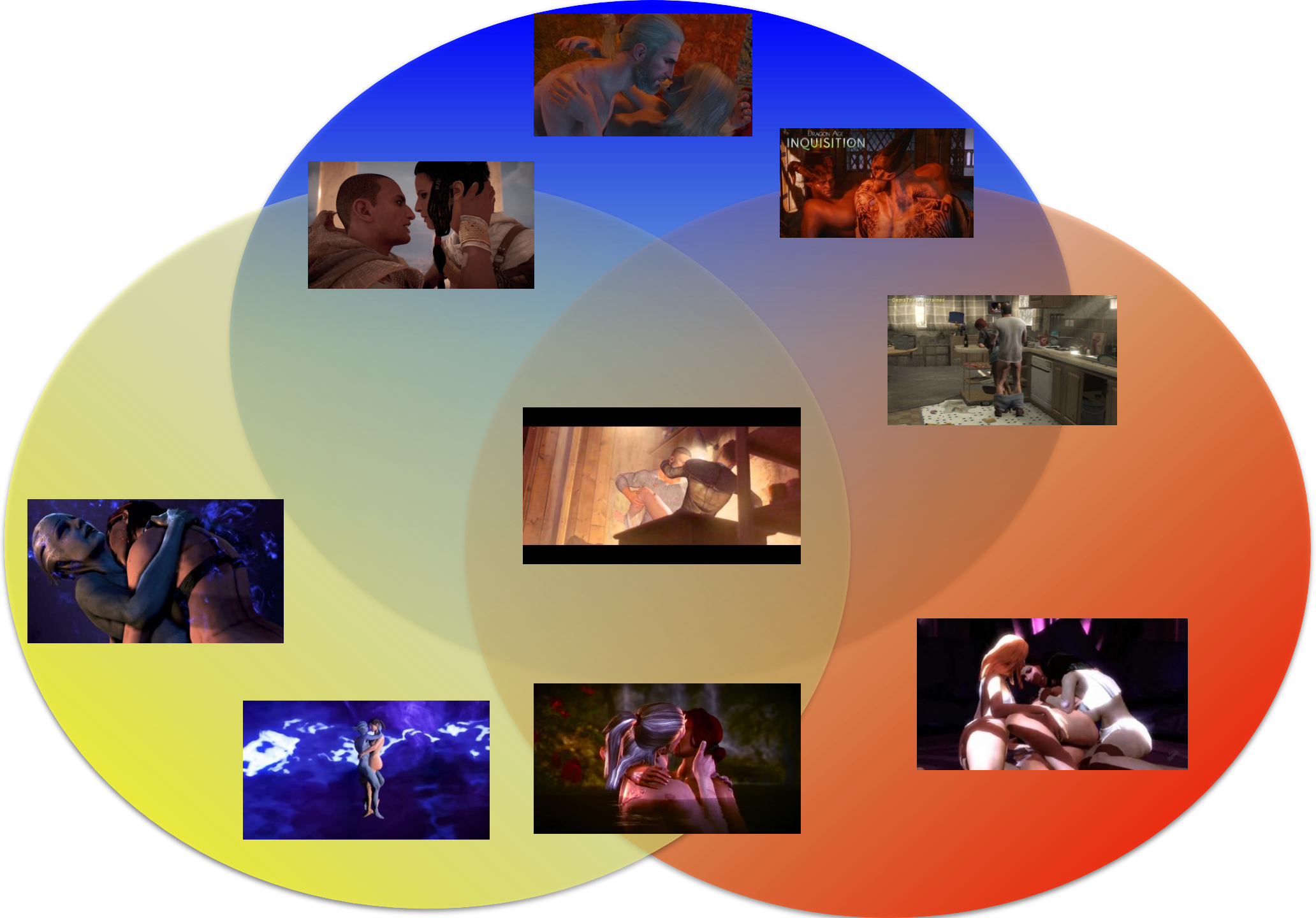
Game examples:

Bayek/Aya, AC: Origins

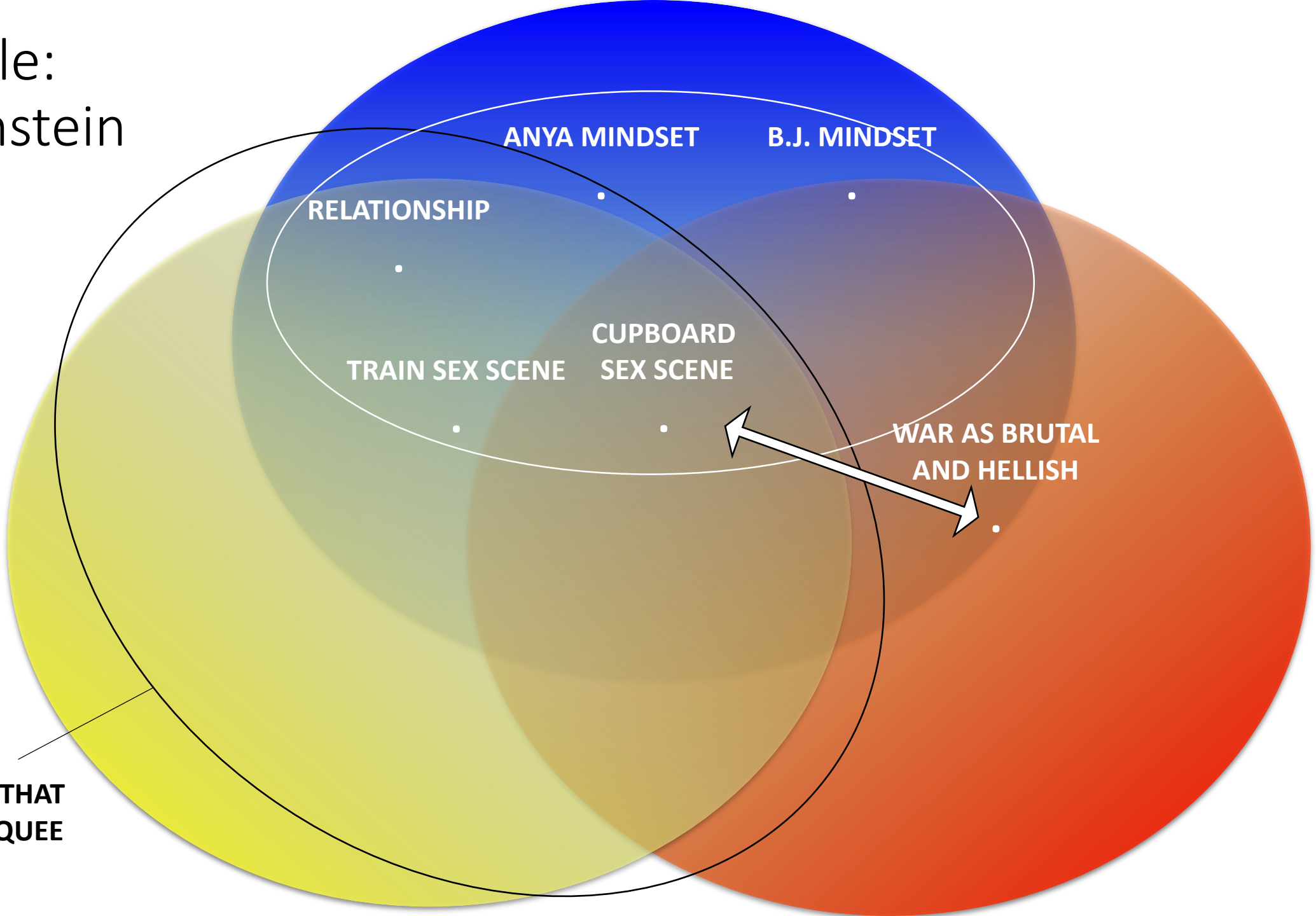
Trevor/Ashley, GTAV

Geralt/Keira, The Witcher III

- Sex as normal part of life
- Emphasizes:
  - Normality
  - "Mundus" – Latin for "world"
- Stereotypical depictions:
  - Vary wildly, but include
    - Loving committed relationships
    - Casual sex / FWB
    - One night stands
    - Awkward first times
    - Unhealthy/self-destructive sex
    - Unenthusiastic/distasteful sex
    - Etc.


DRAGON AGE
INQUISITION

Example: Wolfenstein

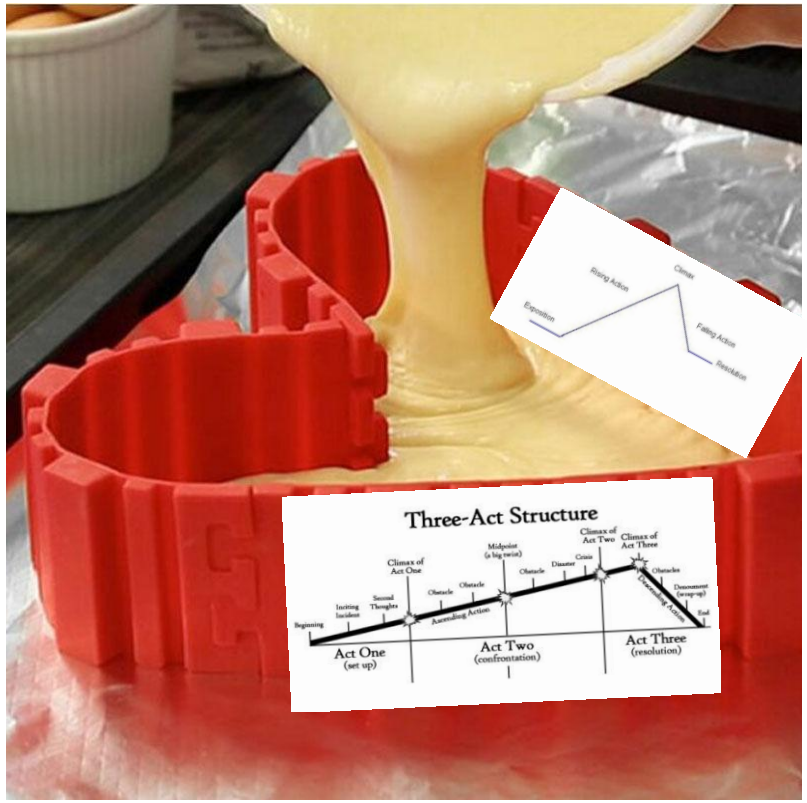


"They have [ADJECTIVE] sex."

- Tender
- Passionate
- Angry
- Frenzied
- Bored
- Friendly
- Playful
- Tearful

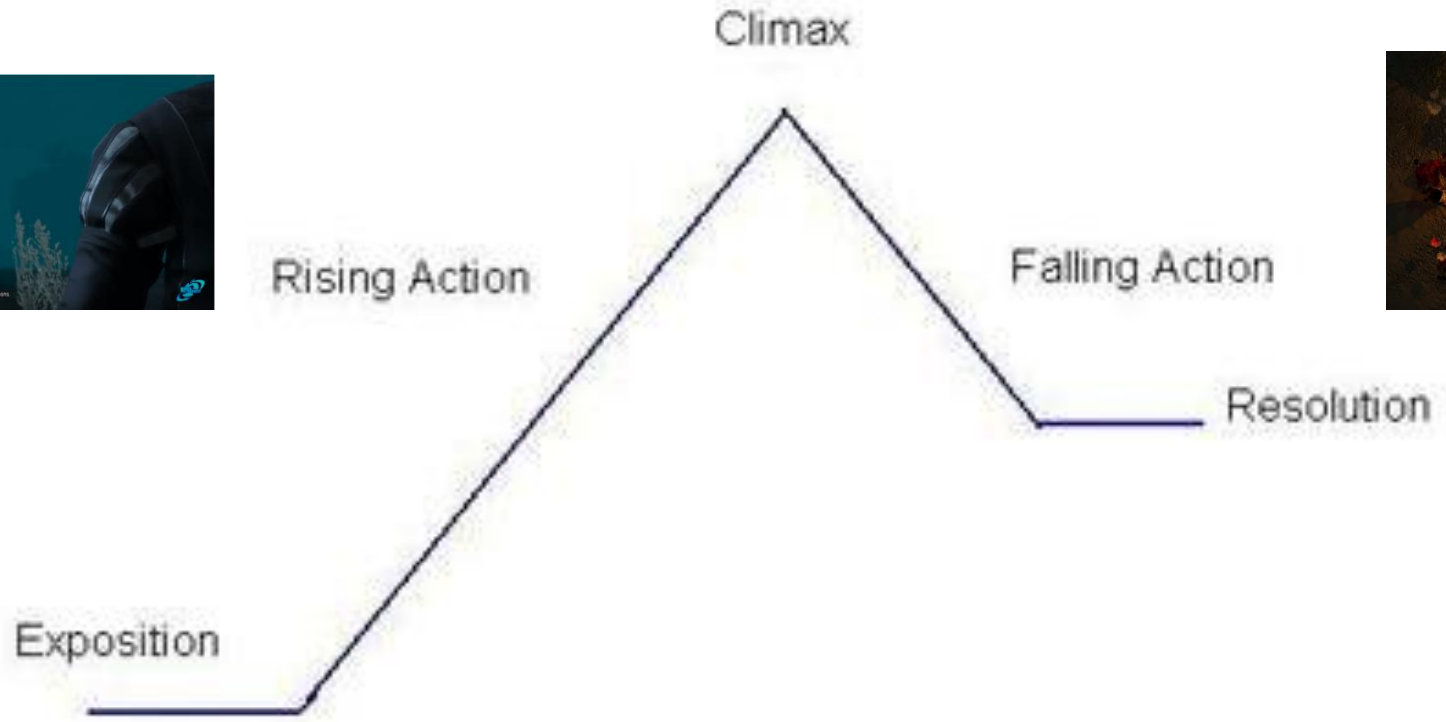
THIS JUST IN
12:53 PM / 96°
IT'S FRIDAY
Homes.com

Step 3: Pour ingredients into mould



(use classic narrative/dramatic structure)

Freytag's Pyramid



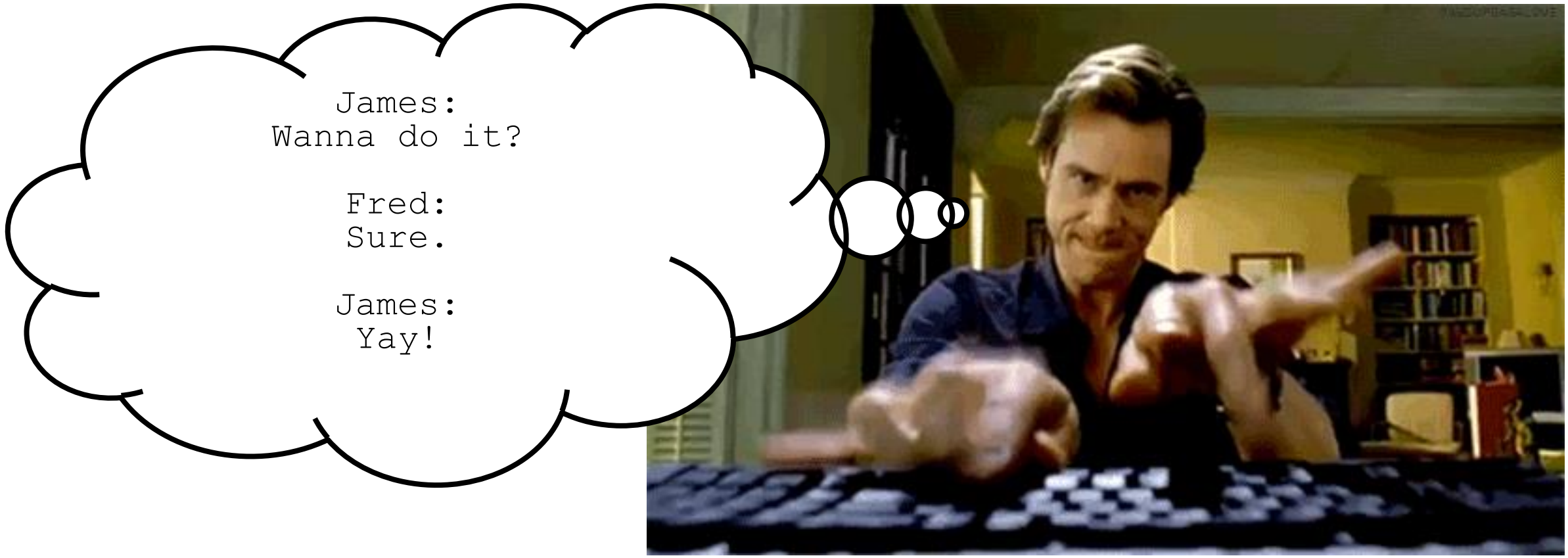
PART 1: RISING ACTION

Rising action - tension

Rising action – physical intimacy

- Involve the physical throughout scene
  - touches and caresses
  - gestures
  - physical proximity
  - embraces
  - kissing
- Use to reveal how characters handle erotic/physical side of sex
- Use to build action to climax

Rising action - dialogue



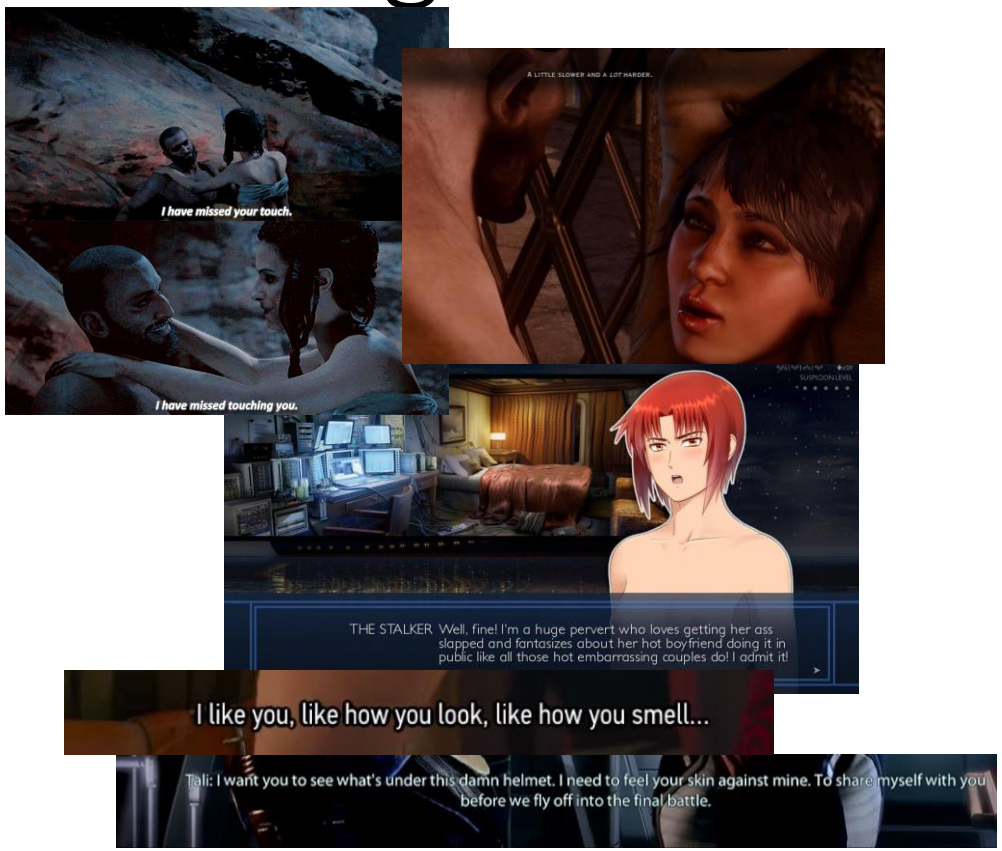
Rising action - dialogue

Common Dialogue Models:

- Talking about something totally unrelated
  - e.g. a mission
- Talking about feelings
  - either romantic or mission-related fear

- Flirting (subtle or blatant)
- A basic invitation to sex
- No dialogue at all, sex just happens

Rising Action - dialogue



Less Common Dialogue Models:

- Communicating sexual desire
  - How they want each other and why
- Establishing explicit mutual consent
- Talking about sex-related feelings
  - (nervousness, excitement, arousal)
- Being overwhelmed and not “coherent”

Rising action – player agency

- Quicktime events
  - Most current examples are linear
  - Only narrative effects are from fail state

Press R1:
Unhook bra

Don't hit R1 in time:
Fail to unhook bra
Fail at sex?

Rising action – player agency

- Quicktime events
  - Most current examples are linear
  - Only narrative effects are from fail state
  - Improvement: meaningful choices and outcomes

Press R1:
Undress her hungrily

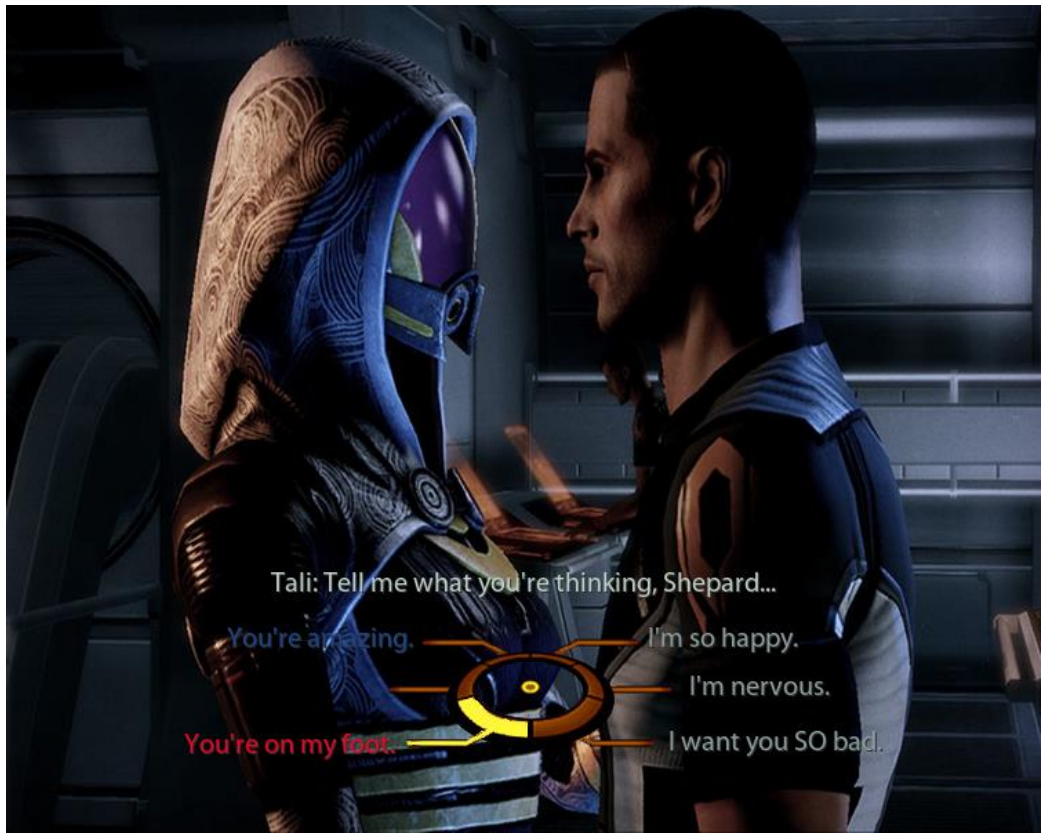
Press X:
Catch breath, slow down

Press nothing:
She takes initiative

Rising action – player agency

- Branching dialogue
  - Sex vs. no sex choice

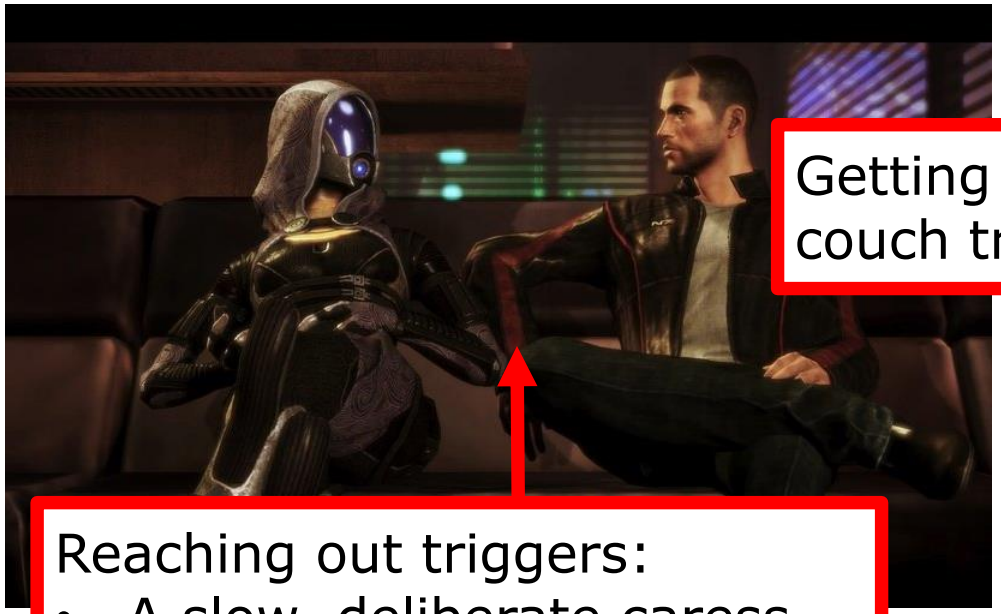
Rising action – player agency



(generated by the Mass Effect Dialogue Generator)

- Branching dialogue
  - Sex vs. no sex choice
  - Improvement: choosing flow of dialogue
    - Flirt
    - Be vulnerable
    - Take things slow
    - Joke
    - Be openly sexual
    - Etc.

Rising action – player agency



Getting up from couch triggers…

Reaching out triggers:
- A slow, deliberate caress
- Meaningful eye contact
- Sexual banter and teasing
- Hot couch make-out/sex

Moving here triggers:
- Looking out over the city
- Partner moves to join you
- Introspective conversation
- Kissing against the sunset

Moving here triggers:
- Beckoning partner over
- Sinking down together beside fire
- Romantic, achingly tender sex

PART 2:

CLIMAX

(get your snickering over with)

Climax – sexual climax

- Main thematic core of scene:
  - Intensity
  - Pleasure
  - Eroticism
  - Sexuality

Climax – the kiss

- Main thematic core of scene:
  - Affection
  - Connection
  - First physical intimacy
  - Gentler intensity

Climax – the fade to black

- Main thematic core of scene:
  - Emotional catalyst
  - Sex without physical
  - Player imagination
  - Gentler intensity

Climax – other scene climaxes

- Examples

Tackling on bed

Disrobing

Panning to something

Line of dialogue

Intimate touch

Interruption

Climax – thematic consistency

- Example: “off-topic” narration

BJ Narration:
“Sometimes Christmas…

sometimes birthdays...

sometimes mayhem, suffering and death…

sometimes you just ***need to feel****…*

something ***good****.”*

Elven legends:
“We Aen Seidhe remember how it was…

Limitless devotion, passion, commitment… and sacrifice*.*

Legend has it ***the lover’s sighs are enchanted*** *within these very stones…*

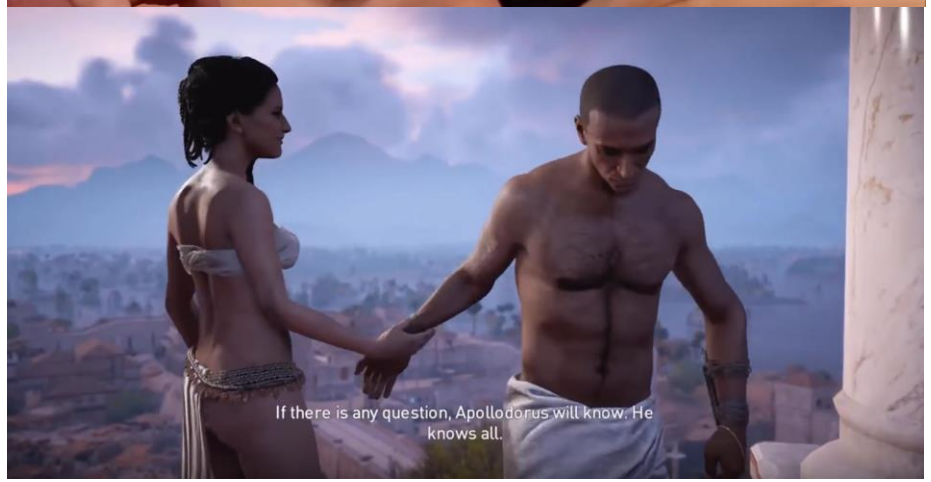
Though ***only those in love can hear them.”***

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT
A MAN WITH A RAIL GUN SHOOTING NAZIS
imgflip.com

Falling action – transitional scenes

Falling action – next quest assignment

- Common trick
  - Have characters discussing next plot point or mission
  - Offers both physical intimacy and practical information
  - Can feel flat/insufficient



Falling action – relationship development

- If relationship not “finished”
  - Weave evolution into falling action
    - Explicit conversations

    - Intimate gestures/behaviour

Falling action - agency

(generated by the Mass Effect Dialogue Generator)

Special cases – intercut/out of order scenes

- Good example: Witcher 3

Yay, sex scene!
How sexy and romantic.

Wild, racing hearts!
Freedom and pursuit!
Geralt's wolf motif!
Speed and gracefulness!

Themes continue in editing, music, lovemaking, etc.
Even MORE sexy and romantic!

Special cases – intercut/out of order scenes

- Not-so-good example: Assassin's Creed Origins

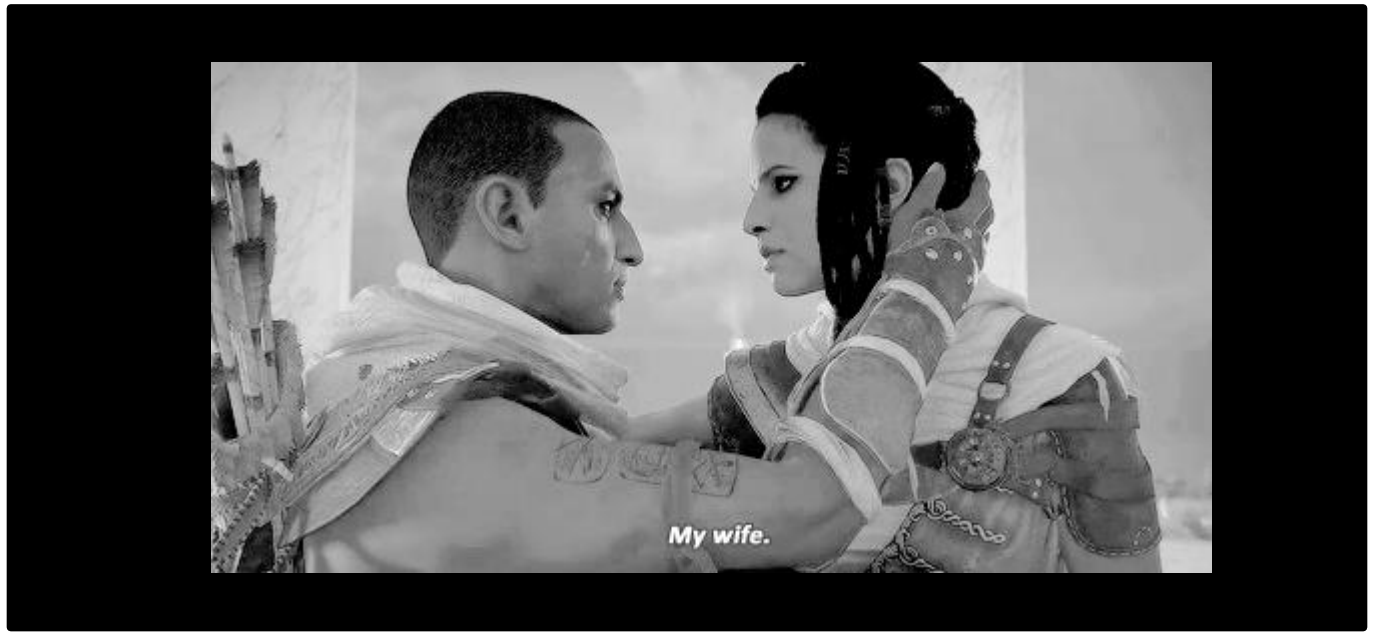
Yay, sex scene!
How sexy and romantic!

Wait, this has absolutely nothing to do with the sex scene?

Nope, sorry, you lost me.
Not in the mood.

Special cases – pop-ups

- DO NOT interrupt with quest alerts!



Special cases – pop-ups

- DO NOT interrupt with quest alerts!

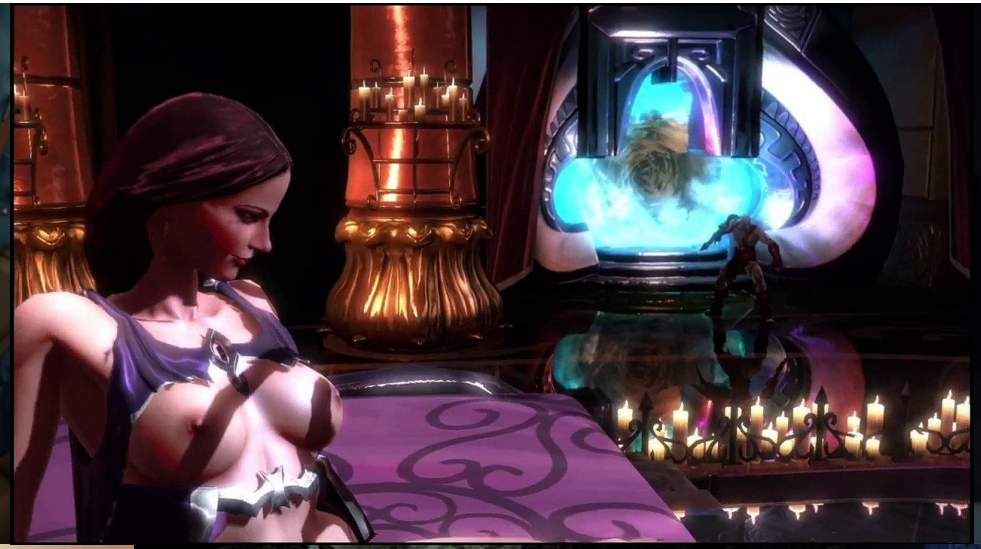
Special cases – open world encounters

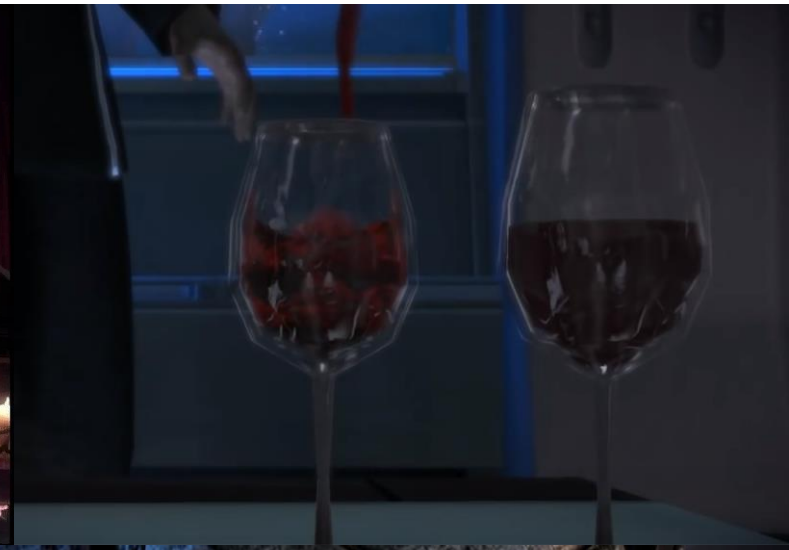
- E.g. sandbox games
  - No regular narrative structure
  - In theory, can be mundane sex
  - In practice, often voyeuristic or posturing
  - Unnecessary unless an integral part of the narrative

Step 4: Season (carefully) to taste

(use deliberately-chosen details)

No, I think I'll just leave that there.





Cultural associations

MASS EFFECT 2

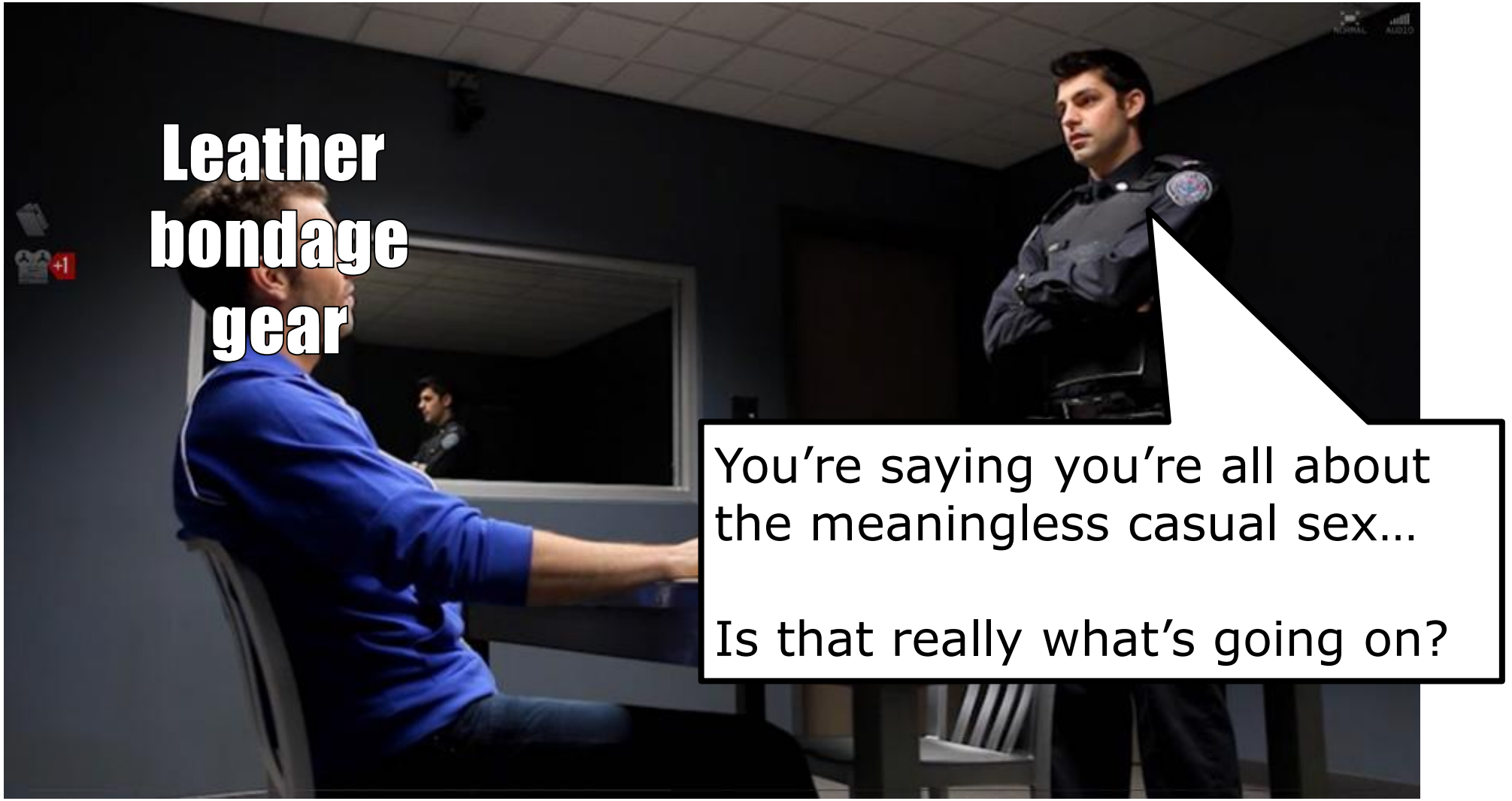
Objection!

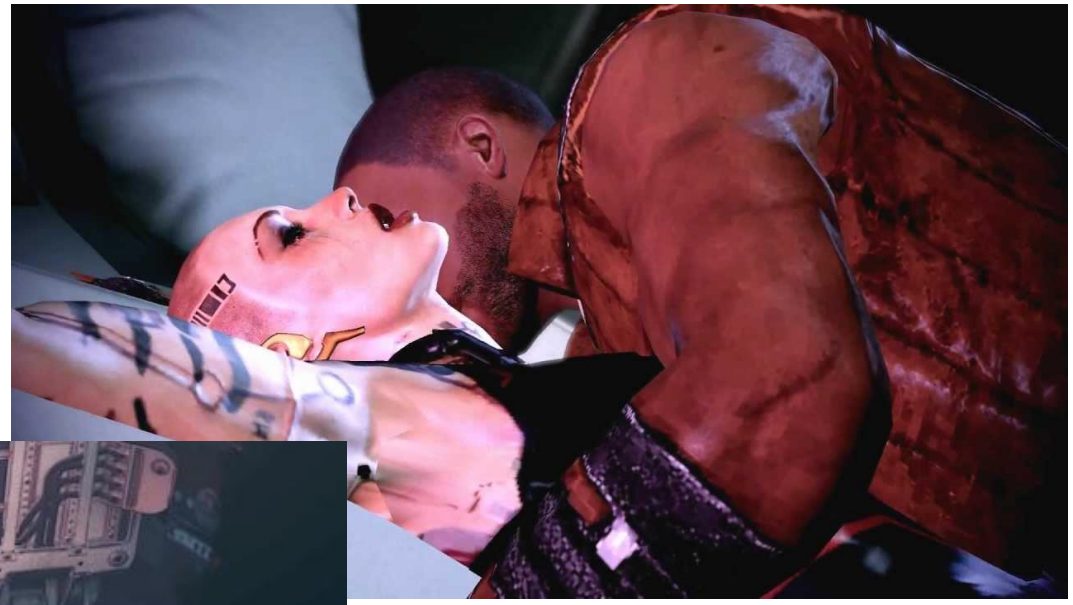
This villain is SUPER evil,
so they should have rough sex
to angry heavy metal music…

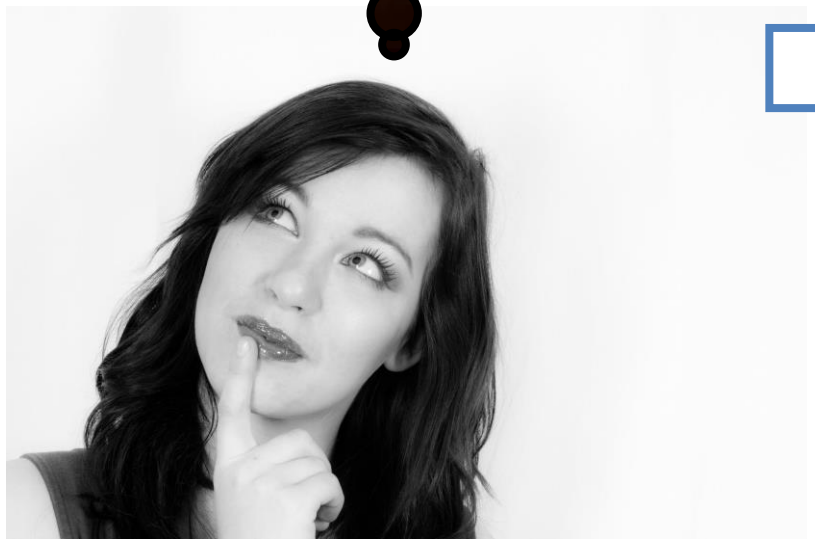
And wear black leather…

And have BDSM gear all over…

And be bisexual…

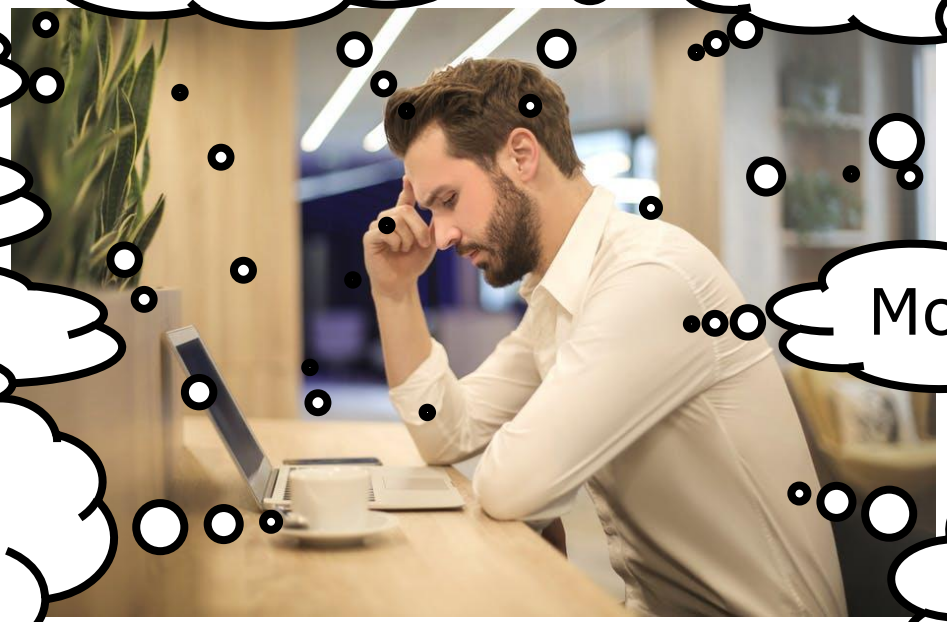

Leather bondage gear
You're saying you're all about the meaningless casual sex…
Is that really what's going on?





You must do what you feel is right, of course.

Considering details



"Artsy" angles?

Sexual positions?

Camera framing?

Animations?

Bedsheets?

Whose room?

O-face?

Is there a bed?

Sex toys?

Sweat?

Facial expressions?

Time of day?

Nudity?

Light source?

Moaning?

Underwear type?

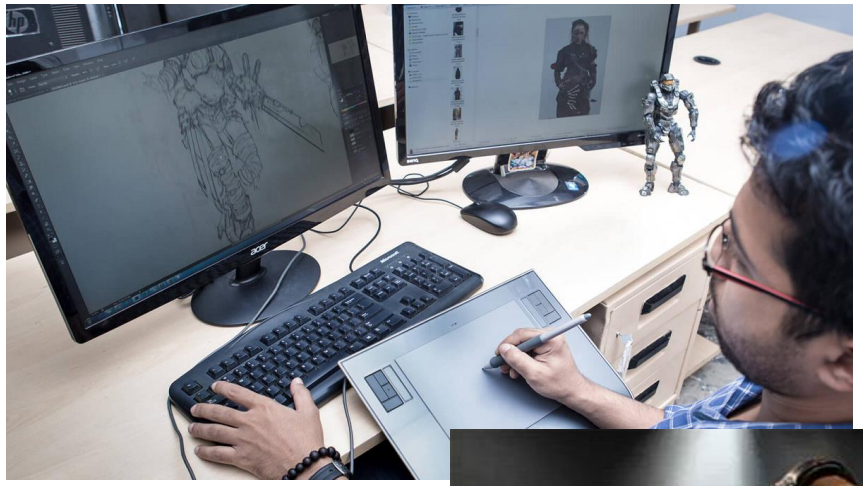
Colour of light?

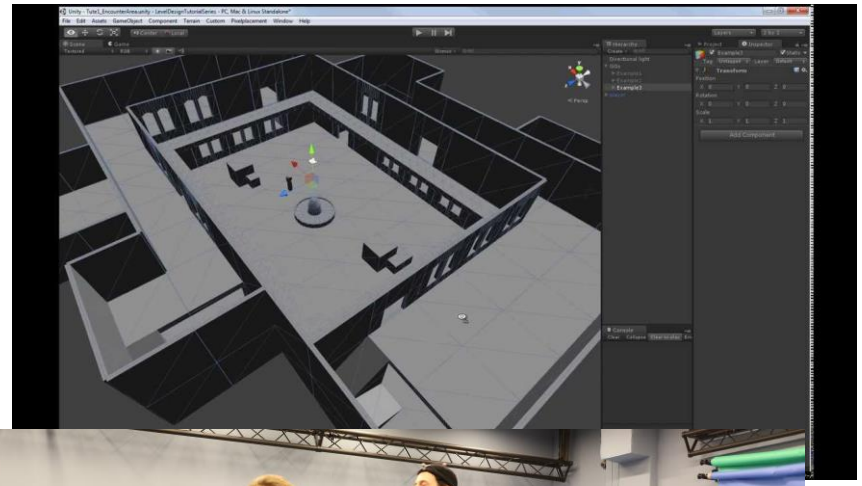
Reflections?

Use of shadow?

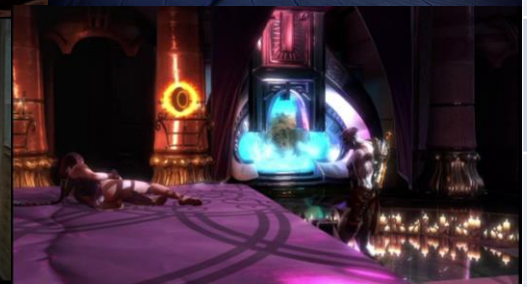
Fast or slow music?

Considering details





Environment



Some examples:	Examples of associations and stereotypes:
Luxurious fantasy boudoir silk sheets, fireplace, wine, etc	**Sacred / Mundane** romantic, heady, sensual
Lush natural environment waterfalls, forests, caves	**Sacred** closer to nature, Eden associations
Deluxe modern locations modern penthouses, sci fi quarters	**Mundane** stylish, cool, self-indulgent
Dilapidated locations abandoned buildings, alleys, old kitchens	**Mundane / Profane** dirty, lurid, gritty
Sex-related locations brothels, strip clubs, sex dungeons	**Profane / Mundane** lewd, taboo, debauched
Stock room environment Regular bedroom, kitchen, living room	**Mundane** normal, unremarkable
Personalized room environment Character's bedroom, kitchen, own space	**Mundane** personal, intimate, revealing

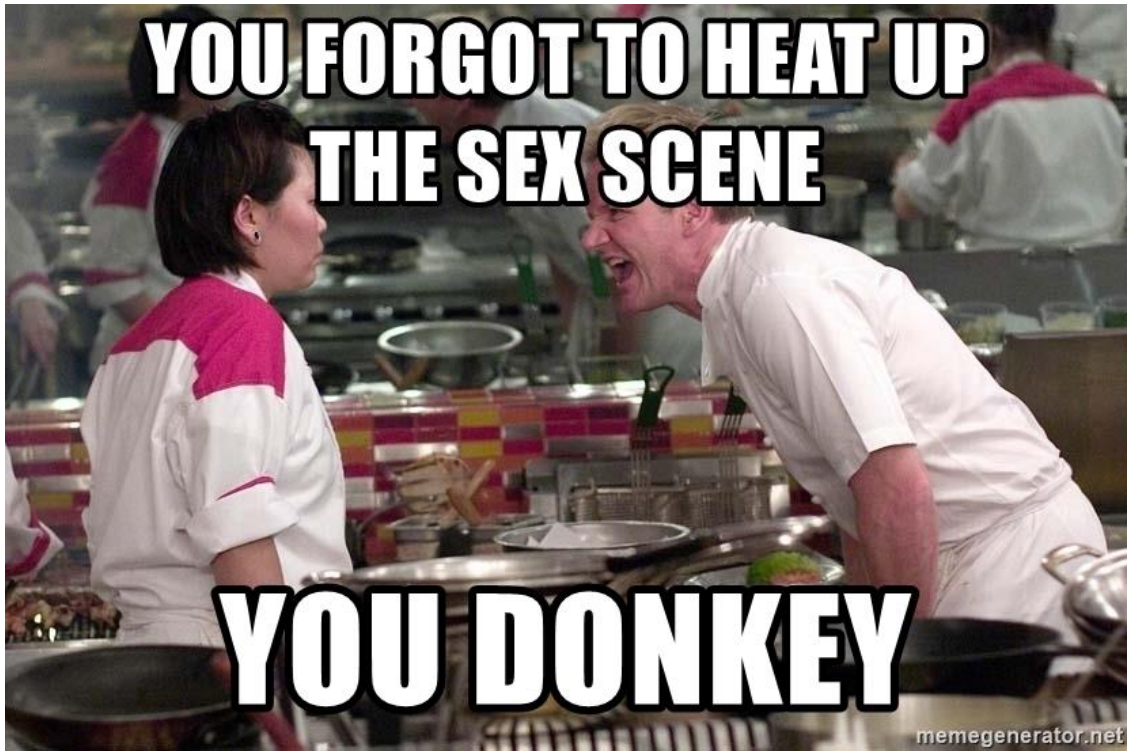
Body language

Some examples:	Examples of associations and stereotypes:
Hesitant movements trembling hands, pausing	**Mundane / Sacred** nervousness, awe, "big deal"
Rough sex and foreplay biting, slamming into things, fast pace	**Profane / Mundane** kinky, hungry, animalistic
Seeking physical proximity "invading" personal space, casual touch	**Mundane** pushing the issue, breathing other in
Body worship reverent caresses, touch of adoration	**Sacred** sex as act of worship
Eye contact and gaze Sustained gaze, looking at body	**Sacred / Mundane / Profane** connection, desire, lust
Face-to-face sex missionary, embraces	**Mundane / Sacred** Connection, intimate, conventional
Bent over sex "doggy style", bent over furniture	**Profane / Mundane** animalistic, degrading, exploitive

Audio

Some examples:	Examples of associations and stereotypes:
Approach-related SFX Rustling clothes, footsteps	**Mundane** Basic realities of "getting ready"
Kissing sounds Lip smacking, humming	**Profane / Mundane / Sacred** Depending on volume/nature
Subtle vocalizations Soft breathy sighs, hums	**Mundane / Sacred** Understated pleasure, breathing
Obvious vocalizations Laughing, loud moaning	**Profane / Mundane** Performative, demonstrative, loud
Rhythmic noises Bed squeaking, thumping	**Mundane / Profane** Movement, rhythm, physical
Soft, ethereal music Slower tempo, gentle, emotional	**Sacred** Transcendent, floating, breathy
Fast-tempo music Getting faster, heavy drums, rock	**Profane / Mundane** Frenzied, eager, harsh

Step 5: Simmer well



(build sexual tension)

GIRLFRIEND

...pation.

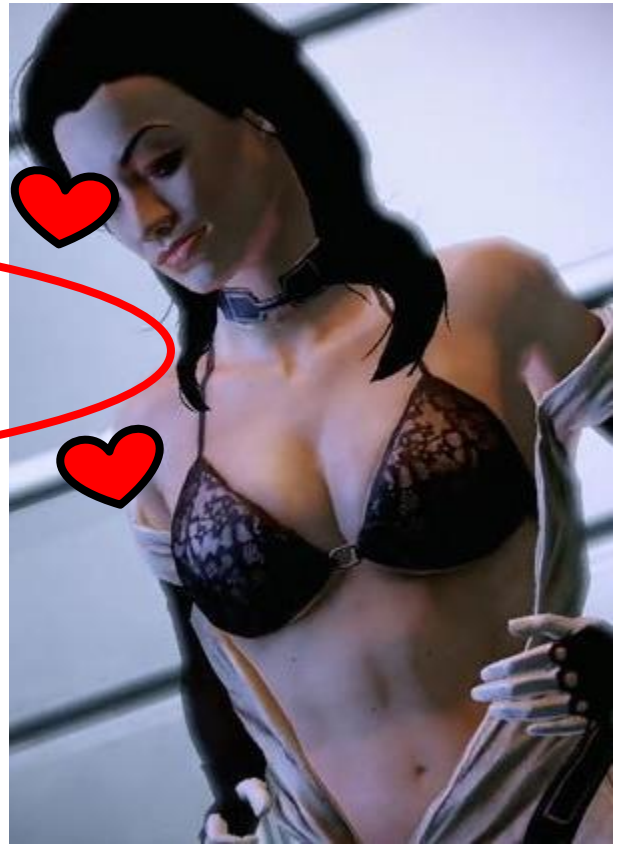
My wife.

Tension and agency

(generated by the Mass Effect Dialogue Generator)

The 4 Types of Tension in Sex Scenes

- I don't know what's going to happen
- I think I know what's going to happen, but I don't know how
- I know exactly what's going to happen
- Wait, what the hell just happened?

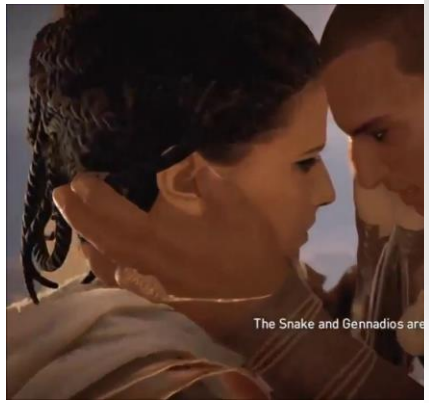


“I know what will happen, but not how.”

What will spark the flame?

How will the fire spread?

“I kno



aracters

gether

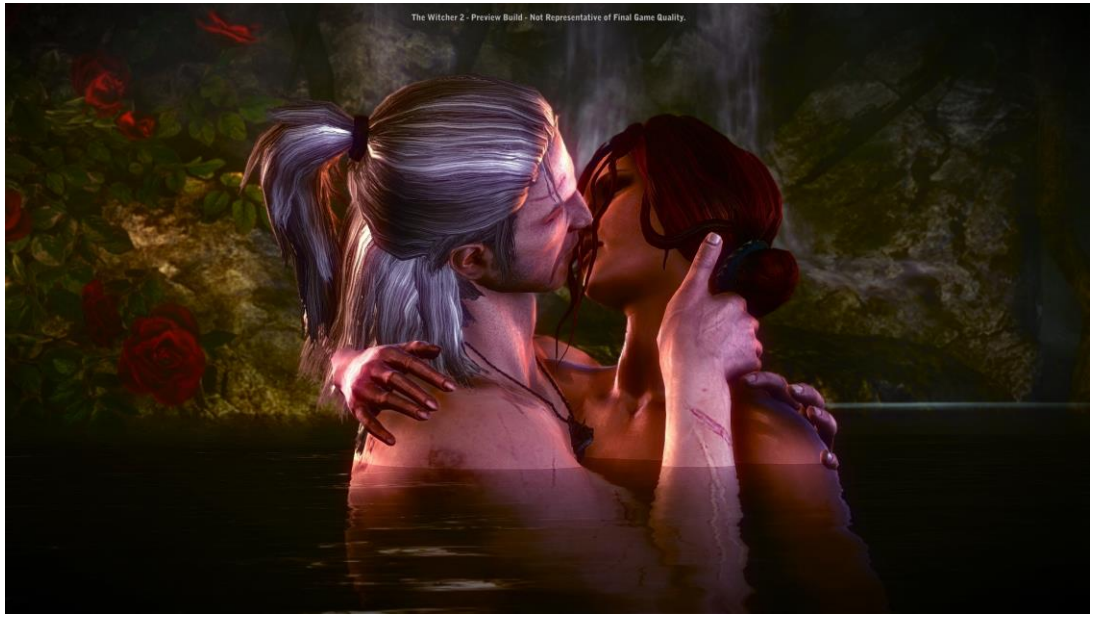
alogue

“I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

- Generalized tension as well as sexualized
- Must set up (ambiguous) dynamic
  - “Argue argue kiss”
  - Seeking comfort from friend
- To write
  - Develop “double duty” tension (e.g. rivalry masking attraction)
  - Reveal sexual element as surprise

“I know what’s going to happen.”

Good version



- When sex is so “right” it falls into place
  - Expect each moment, but satisfied
- Similar to “I know, but not how”
  - More telegraphing and signalling
- To write
  - Develop tension over entire game
  - In scene, tease actions in advance

“I know what’s going to happen.”

Not-so-good version

- Character says they’ll have sex, then have sex
  - *Not* same as clear communication
- Comes across as flat / unengaging
  - No stakes or surprises
  - Instant gratification
- To avoid
  - Give the scene stakes
  - Incorporate hints of uncertainty, hesitation

“Wait, what the hell just happened?”

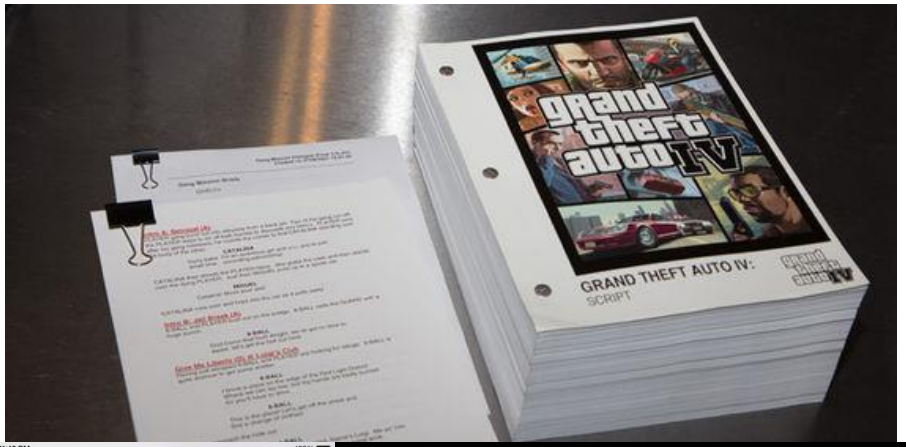
- Revealing sex via smash cuts, doors opening
  - Little to no buildup or warning
- Little time to build eroticism
- Two common intentions
  - Shock value / cheap laughs
  - Surprise character or relationship reveal
- To write
  - Identify best moment for “surprise”
  - Identify what expectations you subvert

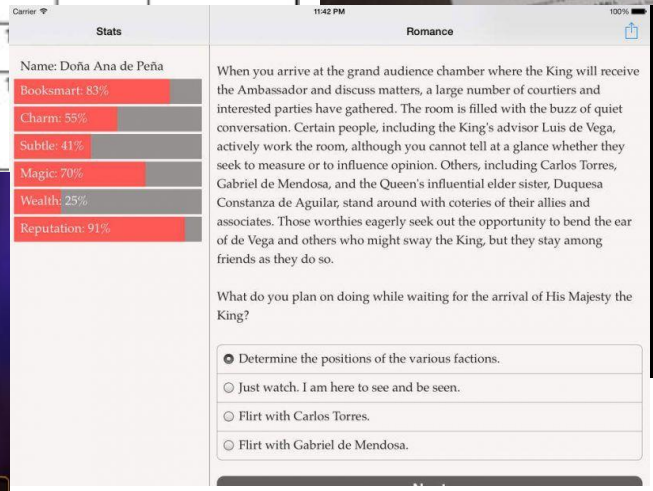
Step 6: Share your recipe

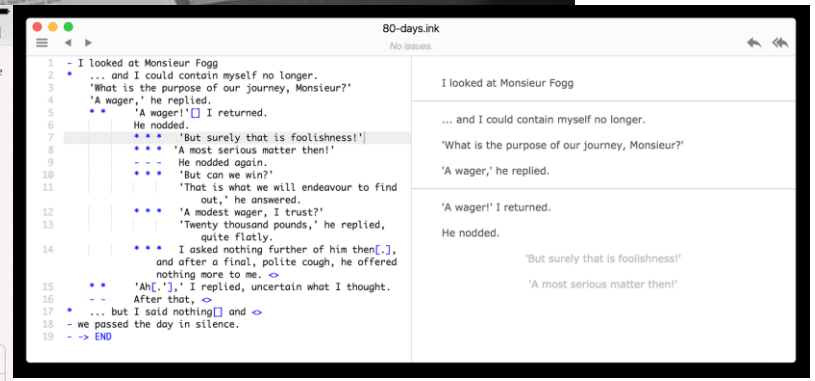
(communicate what the team needs to know)

Formatting

CHARACTER	CUE	CONTEXT	INFLECTION	LOCATION	AREA	EFFECT	FILENAME
King Arthur	Hey, Lancelot. I was looking for you.	He walks in on Lancelot and Guenevere in the Garden of Naughty Conduct.	normal	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-art01
Lancelot	What's up?	He's a little nervous because he was standing awful close to Guenevere.	normal	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-lan01
King Arthur	Well, I found these panties in your saddlebags, and I was thinking. You know, they look kind of familiar.	He's setting the trap.	normal	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-art02
Guenevere	Oh, hell no.	She knows that she and Lancelot are so busted.	mumbling	Throne room, Camelot			
King Arthur	Yeah. No, I'm sure there's a great explanation. Go ahead, I'm listening.	He's ready to beat somebody down, looks like it's going to be Lancelot.	sarcastic	Throne room, Camelot			
Mordred	Aw, snap						
King Arthur	Shut up. Let's hea						







Today's theme is
casual sex between
old friends

- **WHO**
  - Characters – character models, assets, actors, etc
- **WHAT**
  - What events take place – actors, motion capture, game design
- **WHEN**
  - Time of day – lighting, level design
- **WHERE**
  - Location and environment – level design, props, etc
- **WHY**
  - Motivation/situation for sex – actors, game design
- **HOW**
  - How the sex happens – animation, cinematics, motion capture

+ MEANINGFUL DETAILS

(asset design, character models, etc)

BONUS ROUND:

Dos and Do nots

- DO incorporate fantastical elements (where applicable)

Dos and Do nots

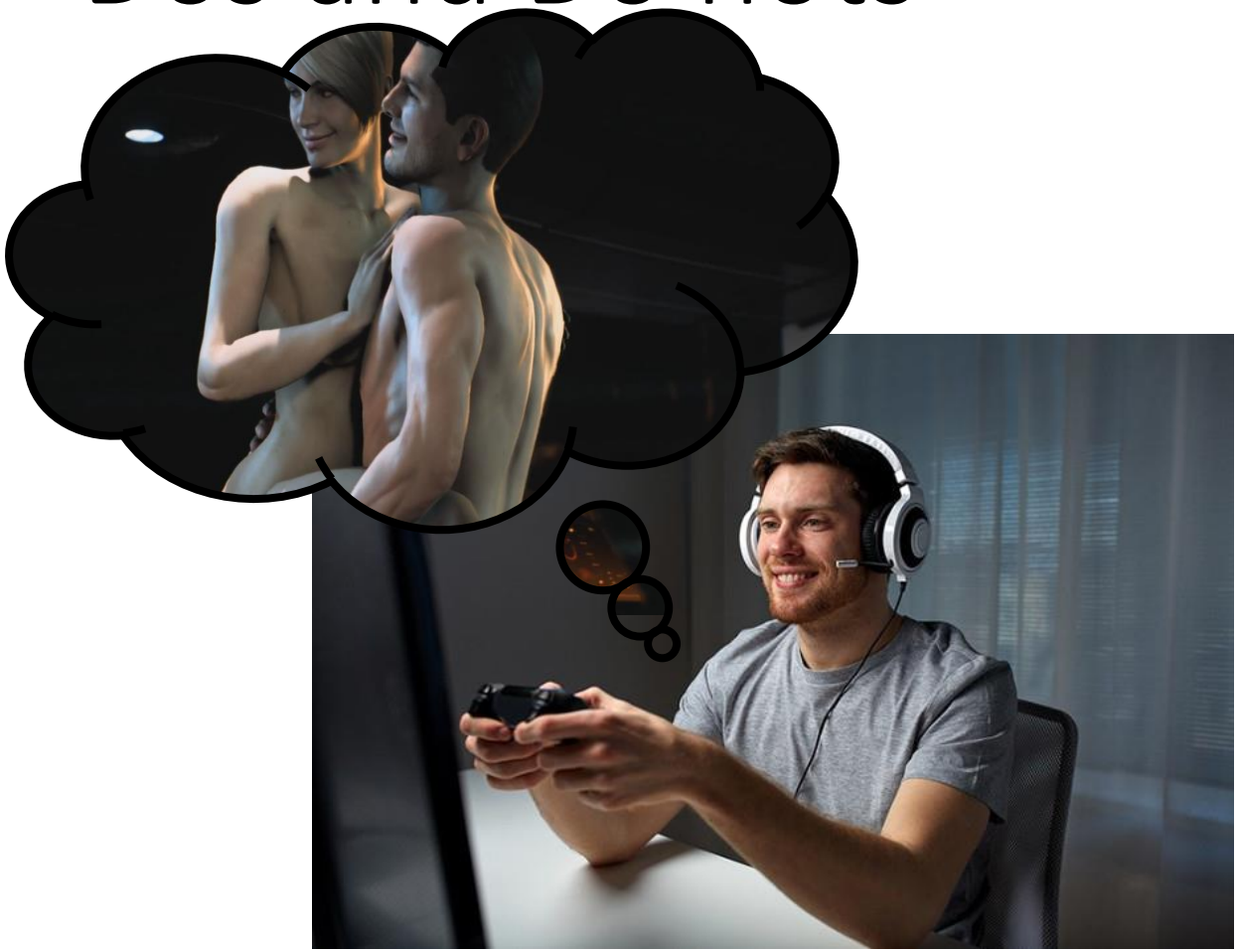
- DO embrace humour…

Dos and Do nots

- DO include relationships and choices without sex…

- But DO make all the ones with sex equally intimate and explicit

Dos and Do nots



Dos and Do nots

- DO NOT write queer sex scenes with less respect, intimacy, eroticism than straight sex

Dos and Do Nots

- DO use sex to reveal character…

Dos and Do Nots

- DO NOT make assumptions re: sex with certain groups
  - Examples:

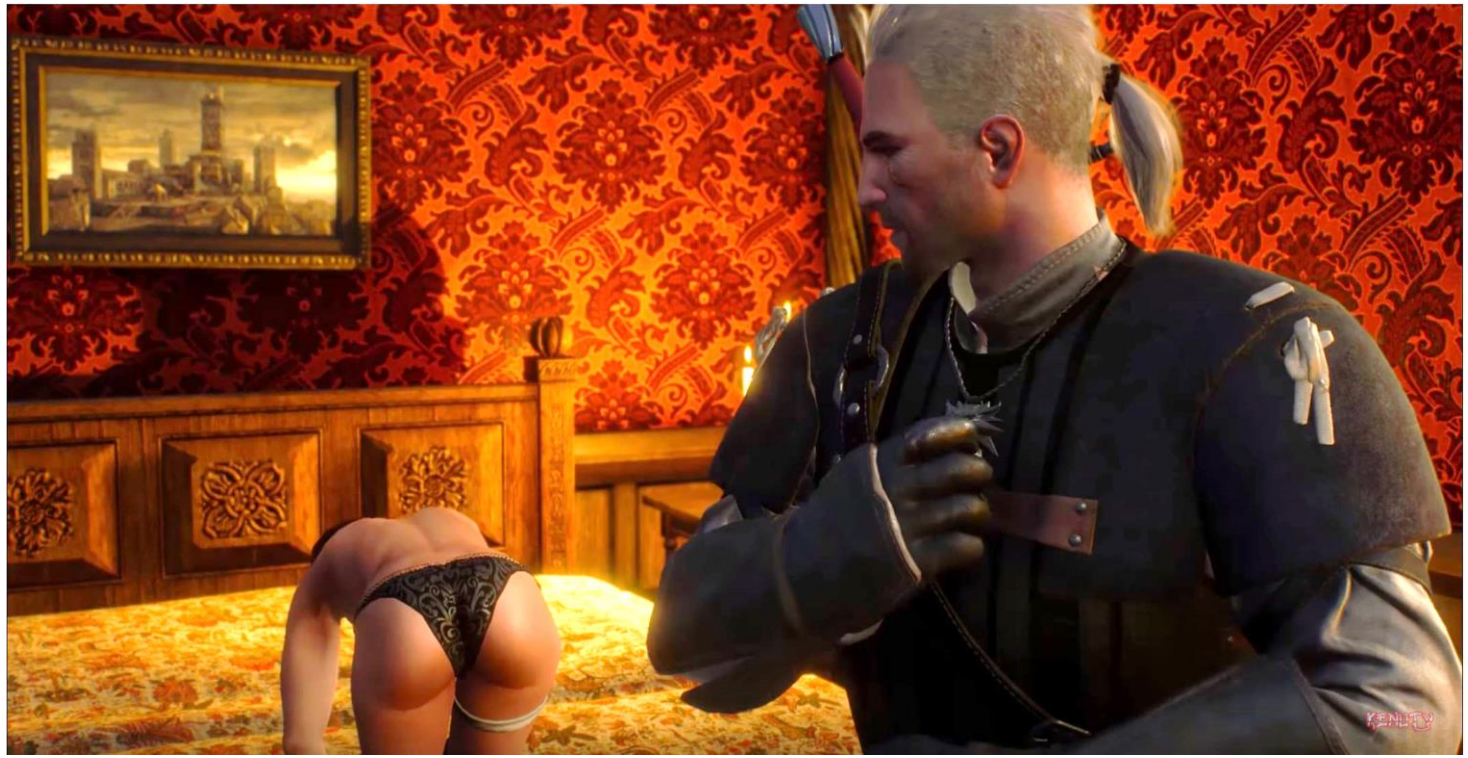
Sex [illegible] =
SPESHUL, heroic, “good”

Sex with peop[illegible] = EXOTIC
AND DANGEROUS!!1!

Sex wit[illegible]ers =
Meaningless, dirty, “bad”

Dos and Do nots

- DO NOT reduce one character to “invisible,” “secondary,” or “eye candy”



Dos and Do Nots

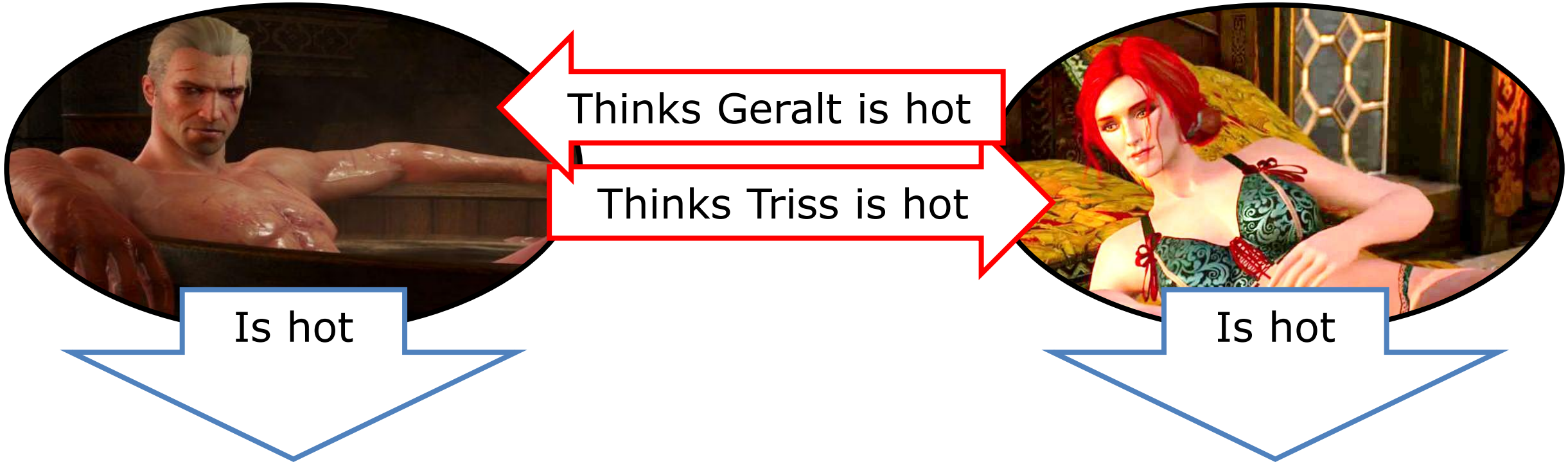
- DO NOT write desire/desirability all in one direction

Thinks Triss is hot

Is hot

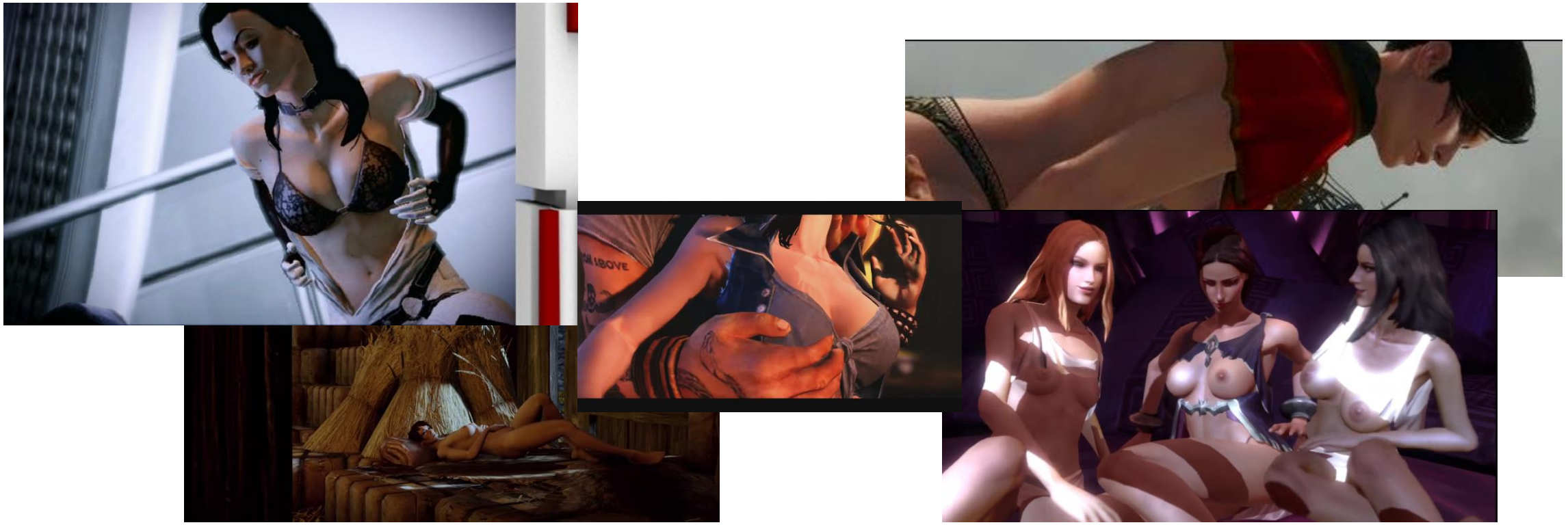
Dos and Do Nots

- DO NOT write desire/desirability all in one direction



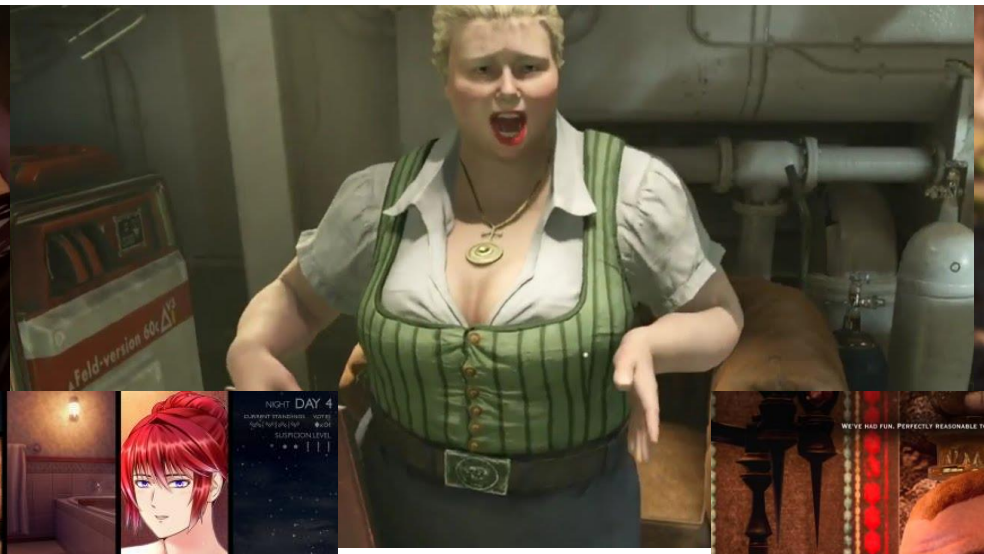
Dos and Do nots

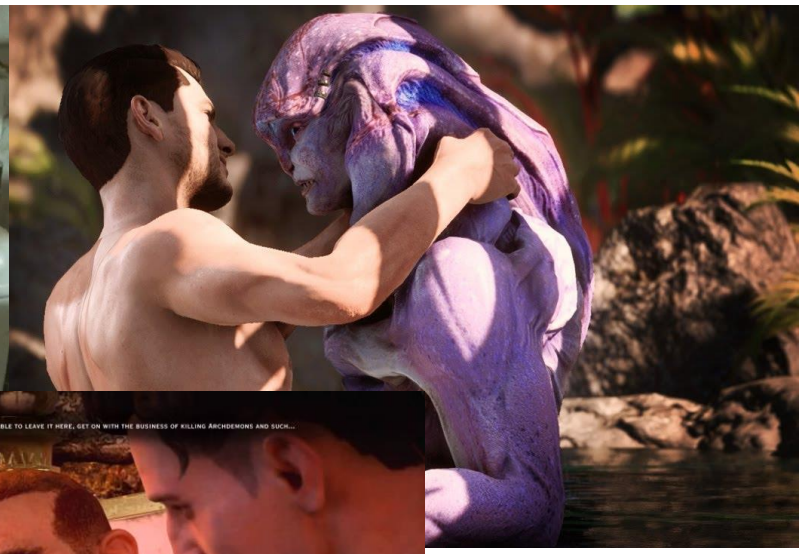
- DO NOT only write around conventionally hot women



Dos and Do nots

- DO write other genders, body types etc. as sexy





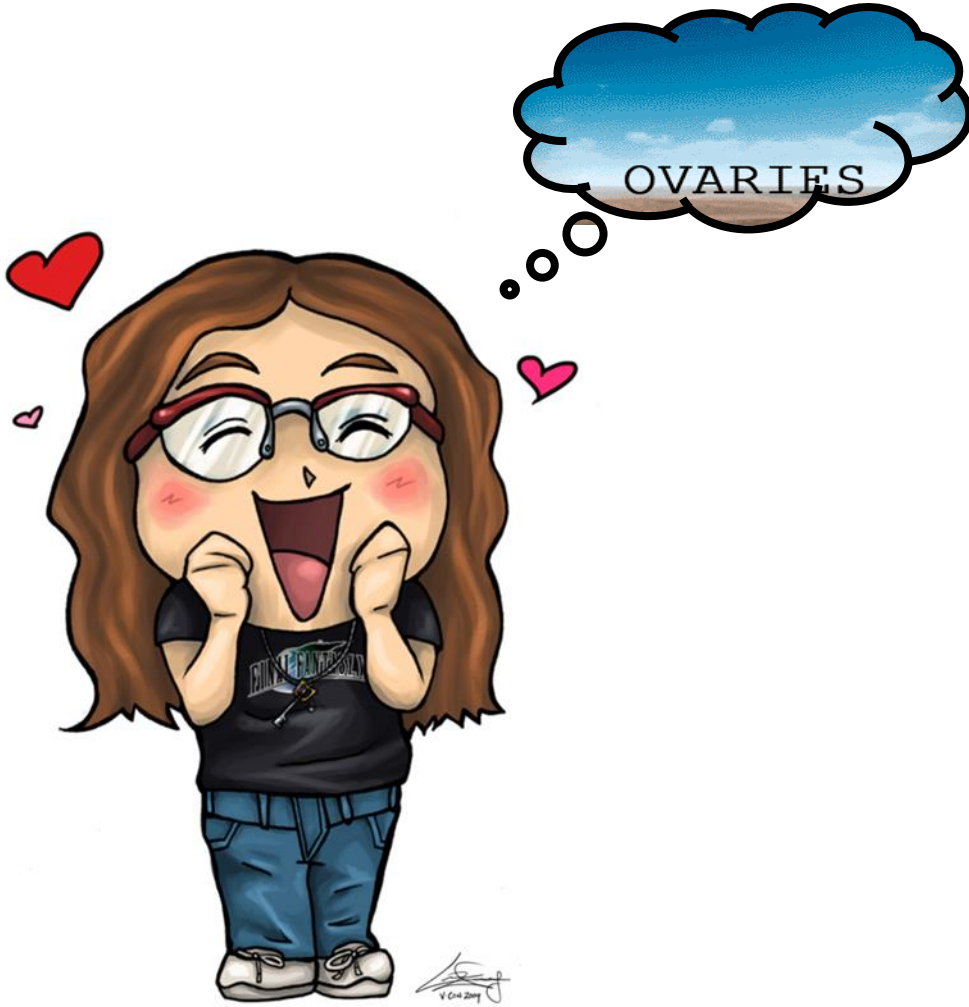
Dos and Do nots

- DO write men as desirable and sexy

Dos and Do nots

- DO write women as agents of their own desires

THEY WILL SAY ONE OF TWO THINGS ABOUT ME.

Thanks for coming!

- Please fill out feedback forms
- My other talks
  - GDC Microtalk – Thurs, 11:30
  - Romance and Sexuality roundtable – Fri, 3:00
- Get in touch:
  - michelle.clough@gmail.com
  - @michelle_clough
  - www.michelle-clough.com