



## Game of Emotions

*Writing Slash as Gamification*

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## **Game of Emotions: Writing Slash as Gamification**

### **Problem 125/100**

Research into fanfiction is understood and conducted in a narrow academical context consisting of media and social studies. Methodologies are drawing on psychoanalysis, ethnography, and text analysis. While these examine the relationship between fan, text, and producer in various ways, research into the writing process itself is scarce.

Elements of gamification and emotions can be found rather articulated within fans' writing communities, especially concerning the genre of slash fiction. Little research has been done in identifying and addressing these elements.

Understanding the gamification process found in slash fanfiction can give a deeper insight into motivation, support, and creativity in other, related situations outside of fandom. This concerns both the understanding of the writing process as well as a broader understanding of the possibilities within gamification.

### **Current Understanding: What is known about this problem? 394/400**

Marc LeBlanc (2005) writes about the game that "A game's aesthetics are its 'emotional content', the desirable emotional responses we have when we play—all the kinds of 'fun' that result from playing the game", yet nobody has connected the idea of games with the many smaller and bigger games and challenges that are played out in fandom. Fanfiction as games, or as a gamified activity, is largely overlooked, even though fanfiction has become known to the general public, little interest has been paid to the context in which some fanfics are produced. The understanding and interpretation of slash fiction and why it is read and/or performed (Busse & Helleksson, 2006) is still under discussion, not only because the reasons for writing and reading it are as many as there are writers and readers, but also because the research is carried out by scholars who are not themselves fans, or participants in fandom. The findings are thus fluctuating between results that are interpreted without a full understanding of the fandom context, and results that might be coloured by autoethnographic bias. The homoerotic content seems to be a stumbling block as well: because focus tends to be directed quite narrowly on the juicy parts and on the, to some clearly surprising, fact that women enjoy reading and writing erotica, there is little research on other aspects on female use of fanfiction, for example on how the constant gift cycle in fandom (Larsen and Zubernis, 2012; Westberg, 2012) often turn into challenges and games, strengthening the impression of fandom as a playground. In its purest form we find the game of emotions in slash fiction in 1-on-1 RPGs, role playing games where two writers join together, either in private fora or public, not as some have suggested, to perform a "grotesque play with the (hu)man body" (Booth, 2015), but to play the game of emotions, letting two beloved characters go through a number of trials to finally come together, thus getting the prize in the form of emotional resolution between the characters. Current research tend, at times, to take a tinge of misogyny by patronising the female fan (Black, Booth, Smith etc.), and this bias might skew the angle with which we look into the entire area, making us overlook aspects that might widen our scope of why female fans enjoy the game of emotions in fandom.

**Research Question: What is the goal of the paper? 111/100**

By studying the writing process, focussing on the elements of gamification, it will be possible to add to the present perception of the area, particularly when it comes to understanding how powerful emotion and gamification are as encouraging motivators for writing. We argue that emotion as reward and motivation can be transferred to other settings, i.e. learning environments, writing, and social literacy, as well as company-client relationships.

Our research question is twofold:

1. How is the writing process of slash fanfiction supported and encouraged through emotional aspects and elements of gamification?
2. How can our findings be transferred to other areas, e.g. educational settings and the relationship between company and customer?

**Research Design: How will the work be executed? 100/100**

Fandom has a number of challenges and writing competitions. We will use analyses of these, adding the findings from a number of qualitative interviews with authors, readers and RPG (role playing game) players from various platforms (ArchiveofOurOwn.org, tumblr.com, fanfiction.net and LiveJournal.com), and collection of genre data from archives such as ArchiveofOurOwn.org and Fanfiction.net. Furthermore, we will use the framework of among others Zimmerman and Salen (2004) and Salen (2008) to analyse challenges and RPGs as games. Additionally, we will examine the communication context of each slash fic as being a part of the gamification.

**Findings: What are/will be the main outcomes and results? 409/400 Words**

We seek to document, analyse, and interpret elements of fandom activities as games. These are: RPGs, role playing games, in which the participants co-create a story or scene, each playing the part of a preferred character; fic-challenges, in which authors are challenged to write fanfic or produce fanart under certain conditions, and lastly: author/reader relations as gaming. We will explore how these activities are similar to commonly distributed digital role playing games, and how fanfiction and roleplaying games within the fandom context elicit the same emotionally satisfying response. We will look into reader response, tracking how the game of emotions plays out in novel-length fanfictions where writing, posting, and commenting on a fic also create a game-similar context. The reader and commenter play a vital part in the development and finishing of a given story.

A second part of our study concerns the framing and active support of the gamification elements and the development and maintaining of relationships within other settings.

Thus, we will use our findings to create a framework, which can be used to understand and design spaces in which creative and passionate work is enabled and supported. This in turn will be useful for

1. schools, when teaching language literacy and social media literacies,
2. organisations, when trying to create a supportive environment for passion and creativity, especially concerning volunteers and activists,

3. companies for a better understanding of the customer-consumer-prosumer relationship with the company and its products.

Especially concerning the relationship between company and customer, we claim that an understanding of the gamificational aspects of writing within fandom spaces can be used in a disruptive technological setting (Christensen, Raynor and McDonald, 2016). Fanwriters are prosumers, i.e. they produce new material, create communities and maintain archives. Encouraging prosumers to create and share their work means loosening control with the original material and product. A paradigm shift for companies as well as educational organisations is necessary, going from a 'cathedral' paradigm, in which the company controls and mediates its products, to a 'bazaar' paradigm, in which consumers can and are encouraged to discuss, share, and work with the product on its own merits (Raymond, 2001).

At the same time, fanfiction is creating an emerging market by itself, albeit slowly, due to the homoerotic and sexually explicit content. Turning to Japan, *doujinshi* service a huge clientele of mostly female customers and co-creators. Understanding the motivations of this segment gives rise to possible new markets, underdeveloped as they currently are.

**Contribution: What will the outcome and result add to the current understanding of gamification?** 361/400

By introducing the writing of slash fanfiction as gamification, with special focus on the emotional side of the writing and reading process, we widen the scope for both the understanding of fanworks as well as the understanding and applicational possibilities of gaming aspects in a broader context. Even more so, since fanfiction is written and read by a female majority (90%), the outcome of this study will show the potential of marketing and supporting spaces which merges gamification and writing elements for a segment, which has been neglected for a long time. One of the newest examples being the absence of Rey, the female protagonist of the new Star Wars movie, as merchandise (Telegraph, 2016; Forbes, 2016). Likewise, Marvel decided to leave out Black Widow in their merchandise for the Avengers movie 'Age of Ultron' (themarysue, 2015). By choosing not to marketing female action figures, the companies missed the obvious: namely that a giant, predominantly female fandom exists, counting fans in the hundreds of thousands, ready to buy into the universes (and their related merchandise); female fans who are using considerable energy to create fanart, fanfiction and other fanworks, thereby promoting the characters, the universe and the creators hereof.

Furthermore, we will show that attempted exploits of fandom spaces by outside companies tend to go wrong, resulting in losses for the companies in question. For instance, FanLib, a 2003 industry-supported startup, seeking to make a revenue on fanfiction, was bought up by Disney in 2008 and immediately closed down with no regards for the users, resulting in the loss of 25,000 fanworks, and the discussions and comments related to them (Fanlore, 2007, 2016). Thus avoiding similar losses, both for fans and businesses, we argue that fan spaces should not be exploited by companies (Kindle Words being another example), but that the gamification elements as well as the supportive and motivational design of these spaces should be transferred to other spaces. Thus, a company has to create its own space for a

gamificational approach towards their customer. And this space has to consist of more than just competitions and sending cute pictures of pets and babies to the company's Facebook site.

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