

Living as a Fictive: How to Find, Create, and Broaden Your Identity, With and Without Canon

By Goratrix *bani* Tremere

Introduction

Greetings, assembled people, creatures, and beings of Othercon. Welcome. As you likely know, this is a panel about living as a fictive, and forming an identity around, or perhaps despite, that. I welcome anyone to listen, however, as Othercon is a place to not only learn about yourself, but to learn about others and to interact with the community. Regardless, I ask that you hold your questions until the end, at which point there will be a dedicated section of time for them. I cannot answer questions effectively *during* the panel, as I am both easily distracted and long-winded, which is a recipe for going overtime and off-script.

A note on terminology before we begin: I am aware that there are multiple words that mean the same or similar things to the word “fictive.” For simplicity’s sake, I will just be saying “fictive” for the duration of this panel, as that is my lived experience and the word I feel most comfortable using. Additionally, I may refer to other members of a system as “headmates”—again, I am aware that there are many words for this, but I will generally use this one as it is fairly widespread and I use it for my own system. If, during the Q&A, you have a different word you would rather I use for your system members when referring to them, you need only ask, and I will adjust my language accordingly. For now, however, “headmate” is the word I will be moving forward with.

That aside, welcome. A brief introduction: my name is Goratrix. I am a vampire, a fictive from the tabletop role-playing game Vampire: the Masquerade. I am one of many canon characters—characters pre-created for game masters to use in the games they run for their players as they see fit, with some pre-written lore to help establish both the character and the setting. When it comes to this world, I have been here since August of 2021, coming into

existence during Othercon itself, in the midst of a panel that convinced my system that it would not be so bad to have me around. (Thank you very much to Pale, who ran the panel.) Last year, during Othercon 2022, I ran a panel about living with having a “problematic” fiction-based identity—the script and recording for that are both available for your perusal if you would like. And, if you are wondering: yes, I always talk like this. You get used to it.

The *Why* of Identity-Building

Now, the topic at hand: being a fictive can be a confusing and lonely thing. We have much in common with fictionkind, but there is a crucial difference: while someone who is fictionkind has an identity and life *outside* of that fiction-based identity, in the very beginning, *fictives typically do not*. For most of us, the experience is rather like being plucked from your life and placed into the head of someone else—in my case, an at-the-time college student—with no understanding or awareness of where you are, what is going on, *why*, or, the worst question of all, *what you are supposed to do now*.

Take a breath, let it out slowly. We will figure this out together. It is a journey, yes, but it is uniquely yours, and the advantage to that is that it’s quite difficult to get wrong.

In short, my recommendation is this: understand yourself in the context of either canon or canon-divergent noemata, grow as comfortable as you can with that, and then expand outwards. Find or forge new aspects to your identity, find new interests and hobbies, participate in things you never would or could have back in-source. *Engagement with the outside world is key to not feeling lost*. If you lock yourself up in the identity that has been handed to you, if you insist upon remaining stagnant, as you were when you formed, you are, more often than not, setting yourself up to be miserable. This is not an accusation: I, and many of my headmates, attempted the same thing, and only began to enjoy ourselves once we started reaching out and opening up to the world and people around us.

It’s infuriating to realize that it works, but it really does.

It is, ultimately, your choice whether or not you want to grow beyond what has been set out for you, beyond what you are and were back in-source. The rest of this panel will be moving forward with the assumption that you are choosing to do so, or at least, that you are willing to listen to how that might be done while considering it yourself. Personally, I do not see much harm in personal growth and development, even if it is “out of character” or outside the bounds of what others would consider to be “canon you.” *You are wholly fictional no longer*, and should not let the bounds of fiction confine you. Do not let yourself be trapped by others’ expectations of you: if they want to interact with a wholly canon-compliant version of you, they should try roleplaying. You owe no one any part of your identity, and anyone who tries to box you in should be ashamed.

By all means, use canon, or your noemata—your memories—as an anchor if you so desire. Many fictives find this comforting. It is your point of origination, your source, where you are from: it is perfectly reasonable that you would want to keep that as a core part of you. I am not suggesting casting off canon unless that is what you want to do, and that is *your choice*. If you choose to do so, I would advise doing so slowly, in pace with you picking up other aspects of your identity if you feel yourself lacking, for fear of leaving yourself so empty that you do not know what to latch onto. Once again, however, that is your choice: I trust that you will do what you think is best.

Now, identity-building when you have found yourself in a strange world, sharing a head with strange people, can be quite difficult, especially if you have no aspects of identity *outside* of your source. I have talked about *why* you may want to grow beyond that, become something *else* or *more*. We now reach the *how*.

Step One: In Context

Older and more established fictives may be able to skip this step, as chances are, you have been doing it already. Many newer fictives also embark on this part of the journey, but not

all, so I will walk you through it. The first step of broadening your identity, unless you are choosing to cast off your source completely and immediately, is to do so in context of your source, whether that be canon or your version of it. Doing this will help you flesh yourself out, if you feel it is needed—ask anyone with a fiction-based identity, and most will tell you that engaging with source is an excellent way to connect to the identity. You may remember pieces of your history, things you like, skills you had or may even still have—there is often a wealth of identity to be drawn from your source if you go digging. This may not work for everyone, but it does for many, so I believe it is usually worth a shot. At the very least, doing this digging and engaging with your source lets you get used to the idea and process of identity broadening and exploration in a safer, more comfortable way—your source generally will feel less like a frontier and more like dipping your toes back into the pool.

My first recommendation of this is just to engage with your source—watch it, read it, play it, whatever lets you interact. Most of all, I recommend *writing* about it. Anything you remember directly—any noemata you have—even things you “just know” without a direct memory. Write about your feelings on it, the people in it, the things you did and the events you witnessed. Writing helps you work through your feelings on a topic in a way that lets you reference them again later. Maybe you turn it into a post for your blog or website, maybe it becomes an essay, maybe it is simply a journal entry for you and you alone. Whatever you decide, I highly encourage that you engage with, or at least think about, your source, and write about it.

Personally, I worked out many of my apparent contradictions and issues with myself by simply going, step-by-step, through the things that bothered me. My early writings on the Fictionkind Dreamwidth detail the atrocities I committed in-source and *why*, what on Earth my reasoning was. If I had not done this, I do not know if I would have ever reconciled what I was supposed to be with who I was, and who I had to become to live with myself once I had exited the context of the harsh and cruel world I came from. Take your time with this; do not rush. You

are not in a race. The time will pass regardless, so you might as well let it pass pleasantly and with little pressure.

My next recommendation is to seek out noemata in general. For those unfamiliar with the word: *noemata*, singular *noema*, describes any kind of source memory you may have, whether that be a specific moment, a scene, a smell, a sense, or ‘just knowing’ a fact without any moments or instances to back it up. The two best ways to do this that I know of are to engage with canon (to prompt your mind to “remember” what it sees, although this can produce false memories) or to do as many (usually mundane) things as you can in the hopes that you will trip a memory trigger. Neither method is perfect, and there are other tips for getting and finding noemata out there—if anyone listening has resources for that, please, feel free to link them in the chat.

Finally, I would recommend reaching out to and talking to sourcemates, whether or not they share your exact canon. I know many fictives are not comfortable with sourcemates, nevermind doubles, but if you are, I cannot stress enough how much *better* you can feel after talking to them if you get along. I do not know where I would be today without my boyfriend Chaiya in the Treehouse system—in our shared early days of being fictives, that summer and autumn of 2021, we were lost and untethered, and latched onto each other in an attempt to anchor ourselves. We are much stronger for having had each other, and are extremely close, and I do not see that ever fading. Chaiya helped me work through my issues with my identity, smooth out the wrinkles and accept who I *am* over who I “should be,” and vice versa. Without Chaiya, I doubt I would have ever engaged with the alterhuman community directly, so my thanks goes out to him—without him, this panel would not exist!

Sourcemates are extremely helpful because *they understand*. Many of them know the context of the world, so you do not have to provide it. They know what happened, who everyone is—they understand why you may feel the way you do about things, why topics might be complicated, et cetera. They are less likely to have to ask basic questions, and together, you

may discover things about yourselves and each other. Doubles—fictives of the same character—are even more understanding in many ways, although I understand the possible distress of meeting one. I never have, I doubt I ever will—my friends and I are not terribly popular characters in the grand scheme of Vampire: the Masquerade or the broader World of Darkness—but my head- and source-mate Sascha Vykos has. She is also in the Treehouse system and goes by the name Ashena, separating herself somewhat from the name of Sascha Vykos—but, still, she and Sascha are the same in many ways. They understand each other implicitly, often without ever having to say anything on a topic other than to bring it up, and they understand. There is a level of identity-diving and forming that can be reached only by someone who understands you wholly and completely, and a similar double is a good resource for that, if you can find one and if you are comfortable with it. If you cannot or are not: that's fine. It is by no means a requirement, simply a recommendation.

Step Two: Things to Do

Beyond engaging with your source material, to expand your identity, you will need to engage in other activities. Form an interest in something, get a hobby, give yourself some enrichment—or, in a more joking manner, roll a pumpkin full of meat around your enclosure. Now, while meat pumpkins may be an appropriate form of engagement for some more inhuman fictives, for the rest of us, we would get bored quite quickly, and need to find other activities to occupy us.

Why do activities? Why have an interest? Well, as a living (at least at the moment) and thinking creature, *you need something to think about*. And thinking about yourself and your source will only last you so long; eventually, the thoughts will become mundane and well-tread to you, and to maintain a level of activity and happiness, you will need something to engage your mind and that thing is typically going to be something you enjoy, often an activity. The idea is to give you something that you want to front or co-front to do or be present for, so that you are

around in order to experience the world, form likes and dislikes, and grow as a person. This is the next step, and you can take it as quickly or as slowly as you'd like.

Expose yourself to activities, shows, songs, anything you'd like at a speed that is comfortable to you. A good starting point is to go along with what a headmate is doing and try to get into their interests, and if it doesn't work out, that's fine. There is no harm in trying something only to decide that it is not for you. A headmate's activity or interest is fairly safe since, chances are, the system was going to be doing that regardless, and all you are spending is your own engagement time, which you wanted to be doing anyway.

Another good starting point is anything that you were interested in back in-source, especially if it still speaks to you. If you liked to read novels, listen to a type of music, create a certain kind of art—that might still be a good outlet for you, and you may still enjoy it. You might not. Key to this is remembering that *it is okay* if you don't still like something—people grow and change over time, and not all interests last forever. Perhaps they will return in the future. When it comes to skills you used to have, however, beware: many fictives lose their skills in the transfer over to the system and need to re-develop them, and therefore, engaging with old skill-based interests may be incredibly frustrating, especially at first, as you may be back at beginner level despite knowing that you used to be better. I have had this experience with many of my own skills, particularly language learning—be kind to yourself, and remind yourself that, physically, *you have a different brain than you once did* (if you had one at all—robots or spirits may have had some other analog) *and it may not know how to do what your old one did*. You will need to teach it anew—and for some, that is a worthwhile endeavor, and for others, it is too painful and frustrating. Do what feels best to you, not what stresses you out.

On the flip side of that, do not limit yourself to hobbies or interests that “match” or “make sense” for who your source set you out to be—if something intrigues you, take a look. Pick it up, give it a try. There is no right and wrong when it comes to things you like or enjoy—if you like it,

you like it! Do not let what others might think of you or your “image” get in the way of enjoying something genuinely. This is for you, no one else.

That being said, I encourage you to seek out community. Make friends. Find more reasons to front and to care about the world you have found yourself in. Perhaps it is similar to the one you come from, or perhaps it is very different—but you are here now, and I highly recommend that you try to make the most of it. I have found that friends, even just a few, make everything worth it, and that they make my darker days much easier to bear, as well as making my better days even more enjoyable than they already were.

As for you, nonhuman fictives, do not fear, I have not forgotten you. While you can pick up the same interests and hobbies as your human- and human-adjacent headmates just fine in most cases, activities not suited to your species might not interest you. My recommendation is to look for alterhuman lists and guides of suggested activities for your species or a similar one—the otherkin and therian communities are extremely good at this, and just posting in a community asking for suggestions is likely to get you quite a few. And, if all else fails, go back to square one: meat pumpkin.

Now, I must confess that my recommendations for activities and engaging in yourself and the world around you focus almost entirely on fronting or co-fronting and engaging with the outside world. Some systems, I know, have very detailed and rich innerworlds, where headmates can perform tasks, do activities, and otherwise lead complete, complex, and fulfilling lives. If this can substitute for you and make you feel fulfilled, I see no reason to limit yourself to engaging strictly with the world outside of your own mind—but I am not knowledgeable on this topic, as my own system’s innerworld is rudimentary at best, a simulation designed to let us visualize our existence rather than an actual complex and detailed place. When it comes to this, I will have to leave it in the hands of systems who experience it.

Step Three: Becoming

This is the most challenging step by far, and for many, it is not necessary. Perhaps you find yourself happy with your identity—perhaps you are not perfect, but no one is, and you just want to continue to live your life, experience the world, and grow and change “as you will,” letting yourself be shaped by your experiences like most people do. Fantastic! That is my recommended approach in most cases, and I encourage you to continue on that path. Keep experiencing, keep growing, keep talking with people, picking up interests, doing activities, and making things. Write, love, live, and have fun.

But for some, particularly those with more “problematic” source material, that may not be enough. In some cases, a fictive, usually of a villain, will form, and either immediately or eventually realize that *they do not want to be who they are*. They do not want to keep these personality traits, they cannot stand the things they have done—or perhaps they are simply sick of it, and wish to change themselves.

For those of you in this camp: first, my condolences. I have been in and out of this mindset, and have several headmates that exist within it. This is a long, difficult process, and as frustrating and counterproductive as it is to hear, *you cannot get through this if the core of your being is self-hatred*. You must be willing to accept or forgive yourself for being that way, or for doing what you did. You must be willing to accept that there is no going back now, only moving forward, and accept that you can only change the future, not the past.

However, also remember that you do not owe anyone anything. Do not let anyone tell you what you “must” change—you do not have to stop. You do not have to change anything, although I would advise keeping behavior most would consider repulsive to yourself, for system accountability if nothing else. You are not obligated to change the “bad” parts of yourself—if you wish to, that should be *your* decision, you should do it because *you* want to. Never change because someone else is pressuring you. *Never*. That is a lesson I have had to learn the hard way, primarily back in source, and if you listen to nothing else I say today, listen when I tell you

that bowing to those who pressure you to change who you are leads only to strife. A thousand years I suffered from that: do not make my mistake. Learn from me.

Now. Let us say you want to change something about yourself in this way—a key trait, a streak of cruelty, something along those lines. How?

You will hate it, but—refer back to step two. Engage with the world around you. Make friends. *Care about people*. Let yourself love and be loved, and do not stop people when they try to care about you. Let the running waters of time and the world smooth out your rough points, wear away your sharp edges. Time will let you become who you want to be if you allow it.

Think about this, too, if you want to *do* something about it: think about what you would rather be like. Who around you has those traits? How do they act when they show them? What do they do that you admire so much that you want to be that way, either instead or in addition to the way that you are? You may have heard the phrase “fake it until you make it” before, but in this case, it is very true. Identity is a fluid thing sometimes, although I admit that I find it more fluid than most, due to my borderline personality disorder. You can fool yourself into *really* being a way without *actually* being that way—or, at the very least, you will find your mimicry becoming easier and easier, more comfortable, and if it is something you like, then fantastic. You have succeeded. *How you act* is what matters, not the way you behave.

Remember that changing yourself must, *must* be an act of self-love, not of self-hatred. You must want to be a new way because you would like it better, not because you despise yourself so much you cannot face yourself in the mirror. You can take your dislike of yourself and turn it around into something positive, but you cannot self-punish your way into being a different person. Not successfully, not happily.

And, again, remember: you are not obligated to change any part of yourself, even if you are “problematic” or even a “bad” person. There are many “bad” personality traits of mine that I do not seek to change because I have accepted and come to terms with them. To change them

would be to cease to be the person I am and am comfortable being; there is no reason to change who I am intentionally and directly. I will let the world and my experiences affect me as they will, but that is no different than how most people live their lives. If you choose this path of changing yourself, make sure it is because you want to, not because you feel you have to.

Putting It All Together

All of this advice is nice, but does it work? I like to think so—this reflects my own journey and approach to growth and engagement with the world, as well as that of several of my headmates. Those of you who read my older work or knew me when I first entered the community have likely noticed a significant change in me from my first days—I am less abrasive, less angry, less likely to lash out or snarl at the first hint of provocation. I was desperate, scared, a beast cornered and threatened. Now, I know the world and the community well enough to step up and give a panel, write essays, run a Dreamwidth community—and that was because I let myself learn and grow from my experiences, I let myself pick up interests and make my own friends outside of the system's pre-existing friends, and I worked on becoming someone more stable, someone I liked. I have lived much of my life in self-loathing, and it is a strange, wonderful feeling to be free of its mire, at least for now.

For another example, my headmate Japheth was fairly distant for two or so years until very recently stepping forward and making friends and engaging in his own interests. It took him some time to write a few angry, lost essays, answer a few prompts, and then stew—and only emerge slowly, piece by piece, as we slowly convinced him to care about other people and the world around us. Only once he began to take an interest in what the system as a whole was up to did we finally see him *smile*, smile and begin to have fun, and that was worth all of the time it took to get him there, because it was such an improvement over his deep, vast melancholy that he came to us with.

For our system, our main methods of engagement with the world are through making friends (often with fictives in other systems, but not always) and through playing video games. Our game library is vast: different headmates play different games, and even when they share interest in a game, many have different characters or save files from each other. This helps us feel different and feel like we are making our own progress, giving us a reason to front and care about something that is uniquely *ours*. This is what works for us, but maybe it doesn't for you. That's fine; for a thousand systems, there are two and a half thousand ways of making progress.

The goal of this entire process is to help you be *happy*. The goal is to let you enjoy the life you find yourself in, to be happy with yourself and the situation you are in. If this guide helps you get there, *fantastic*. If not, but you get there another way, good. What matters is that you one day sit back and realize that you enjoy who you are, where you are, and what you are doing. Adjusting is not always easy, but with time, effort, and support, I know that each and every one of you can do it. Take a breath for me, once more. Tell yourself, please, that you can do this. It is only insurmountable so long as you allow it to loom over you. By breaking it into smaller chunks and individual steps, you can take it once manageable piece at a time until you realize that you have reached a state of contentment. One day, you will get there.

Conclusion

Now, as the lecture part of this panel draws to a close, and we approach the Q&A, I have a couple of notes. First, if you have a question that does not get answered or that you would prefer to discuss privately, you can message me here on Discord, on Tumblr, or even through email any time—just specify that you are looking to talk to Goratrix, and I will be there to get back to you. Second, I would like to open the discussion and Q&A portion with a list of audience-gathered suggestions—what would you recommend to a new or struggling fictive? What activities, interests, shows, games, community spaces? We have extremely varied

experiences, I am sure—so drop your suggestions in chat for people to read through. If you have anything for your or a similar source, feel free to suggest that as well.

While that happens, and while people read through those, let us open up the remaining time for questions. I will do my best to answer.