

Living with a “Problematic” Fictional Identity (And Where to Go from Here)

By Goratrix *bani* Tremere

Introduction

Greetings, people, creatures, and other beings. Welcome. This is a panel about how to live with “problematic” fiction-based identities, and I am someone with one such identity. My name is Goratrix. I am a fictive. Back in my source of Vampire: the Masquerade, I did quite a few bad things, the details of which I will not go into here or now. If you’re curious, I have written entire essays on the topic. Suffice to say that many of my actions were morally repugnant to most, making me quite the moral quandary to some people who encounter me online in this strange reality I have found myself in. Presumably, quite a few of you have had a similar experience—whether you be fictionkin, a fictive, or something similar, or just know someone who is, some of you undoubtedly have identities that are not as squeaky clean as some people would like. Perhaps they are voluntary, perhaps they are not. Perhaps you regret the things “you,” as in, your identity, did, or perhaps not.

Today, we are here to discuss that, how to live with it, and where to go from here.

I will say this: I am going to be making a case for universal acceptance of people with identities like these. Yes, even *those* people. Yes, even people that did *that*, whatever you are thinking about. If you disagree with me, that’s fine. I will be happy to discuss and debate this—*respectfully*—in the later sections of the panel or after it ends. If the concept of accepting people despite their crimes in another world upsets you, please feel free to leave the panel at any time. I will not notice and I will not mind. That being said, those who want to have respectful conversation or have respectful questions—whether they disagree with me or not—will have time at the end of the panel to speak up. I can’t take questions *during* the lecture effectively because I am easily distracted and long-winded; a bad combination for staying on-script. So, please, hold your questions for me until I open the floor for them. There will be multiple

opportunities to speak up, and I will take suggestions and feedback on certain topics throughout the panel. Thank you all for understanding and cooperating. To head off one question, though—if you are wondering if I always talk like this, yes. I do. You get used to it.

Special thank-you to Chaiya, Pale, Rani, and everyone else who gave feedback and/or encouragement during the writing of this panel. I think I would have been reduced to ash without them.

Initial Discussion

No matter what way you spin it, there are identities out there that people don't like. In a broad sense, this is more obvious: there are bigots worldwide. In our community, however, this can be a little harder to spot if you aren't one of the affected, and it can be all-consuming if you are. Syscourse and purity culture plague us, as do accusations of being abusers and varying ableist claims of us being "sick in the head." Ironic, coming from those battling to get recognition for their kintypes and headmates at all, don't you think?

Attacking someone for *who they are* is ridiculous. Most people do not choose their identities, problematic or not. A common argument in the otherkin community against outside harassment is that you do not choose to be 'kin—you just are. Must I spell it out? Must I explain that there is no difference, here, between someone whose kintype is a wolf and someone whose kintype is a murderer? The identity simply *is*. By attacking or allowing harassment of these "problematic" people, you are indicating that the entire community deserves harassment. Furthermore, *people are not responsible for the actions of their kintypes*. Yes, they *are* their kintypes, but did they make those decisions now, as they people they are, now? Typically no. They did not choose to be this, they did not choose the actions; leave them be.

Ah, but Goratrix, you may be saying. What about the people that did choose their identity? And what about fictives, who have no distance between their sense of self and their fictional identity—their "fictomere," as we call it on the fictionkind Dreamwidth?

I shall address voluntary identities first. There are a thousand and one reasons to voluntarily identify with, or on some level, become, a character or creature. (Some would argue that the line of voluntary and involuntary is rather blurry in places, which I agree with, but that is not in the purview of this panel.) Perhaps they are coping with something, maybe even the thing that the character is guilty of. Perhaps not. Perhaps they see a shred of who they *could* have been in this character, given different circumstances, and see them as a different version of themselves to be integrated into their personality and considered. To be quite honest, it's none of our business. Identity is a deeply personal thing—especially identity that you choose for yourself—and judging anyone, for any reason, based on it is going to get messy, unpleasant, immoral, and run into exceptions left and right. Who's to say which exceptions are allowed, and which are not? Who's to be the referee on the harassment of the “right” “problematic” identities? You see how this can go wrong, I imagine. And, furthermore, once again, *these people did not perform these actions in this world, in this life*. If you were to go to the authorities about these people, accusing them of a crime or some immoral act, with no evidence other than “they identify as a fictional character that did this,” you would be laughed off the block. These people have done nothing wrong, and I implore that those of you who disagree please consider *why* you disagree. Have you considered why they took on the identity at all, or are you just experiencing a kneejerk reaction? Put yourself in their shoes, just for a moment. Consider what might make *you* take on such an identity, and try to see it in other people. Assume the best, for assuming the worst tears you down as quickly as it tears down those around you, and, speaking as someone who *repeatedly* assumes the worst in people, it can destroy your life. Do better than I did; grow from this.

Now, onto the topic of fictives, of which I am one. There is frequently a distinct divide in fictotype and fictive; while someone *is* their fictotype, in many cases they are also separate from it, in that they have lived a life separate from their fictotype in this world. (Note that I am speaking generally, not completely—generalization is necessary for conversations like this, and

I apologize for those who do not fit in with such generalizations or the words I am using. I am speaking largely from personal experience within my system.) Fictives are not that way, or at least, are not that way initially. (Fictives can change into very different people upon exposure to this world and time spent living in it, something I know well from watching my headmates and fictives in systems I have befriended.) Fictives typically appear in the system as if they'd been plucked straight from their source, from their life. They are *precisely* the people who made their life choices, and in some cases, those choices are abhorrent to your average Internet-goer. In my case, my morally questionable decisions include murder, betrayal, and human experimentation, among others. Does that not make me a criminal, worthy of damnation?

I argue: no. It does not.

Why?

Because the circumstances that led me to make the choices I did *do not exist in this world*. I have been here for almost a year, and have done nothing that others would consider “wrong,” as far as I am aware. (This is a record for me.) Why is that?

My source is Vampire: the Masquerade. My nightly life was filled with political, scheming, ancient vampires that would backstab me given a moment of weakness, a second of hesitation. I *had* to be ruthless, conniving, murderous, or I would be cut down, and I refused to let myself be killed by the world I had been thrust into, nay, that I had *clawed my way* into living in, desperate to survive. I considered those things that I did necessary, even “right”—in the situation I was in, the standards for “right” are quite low, and if you are keeping yourself and those you care about alive without harming others merely for the fun of it, you are doing quite well.

This world, and my system's placement within it, does not force me into those kinds of situations. I have no need to kill, backstab, and lie here, and I argue that if I did, it would not be wrong of me to do so, because trying to merely survive *is not wrong*. People do what they must,

and fictives, even the ones who seem the most horrible, were forged by circumstance just as I was. Hell, this applies to fictotypes, too—*people do what they must to survive*.

All right, say circumstances were not life-or-death and someone still did something you consider “wrong.” Can *they* be harassed?

No.

Let me bring up my theory of morality: **people do the best they can in the circumstances they are in with the information they have. What is “best” depends on nothing more than prioritization—in my mind, that is all morality is: prioritization.** What is more important: the life of an animal, or the life of a human? Someone’s bodily autonomy, or someone else’s life? Your life, or someone else’s? Your pocketbook, or someone’s livelihood? All morality can be broken down this way. Moral debates happen when two or more people have *different moral priorities*, and consider each other’s prioritization to be “wrong” in some way. I am not free of this; I find people who are willing to harm others for mere entertainment to be doing something “wrong,” but I do try not to throw bricks when living in a glass house; I know my list of actions better than anybody, and I also know that a morality system where my own survival is paramount (second only to the survival of the one I love) is bound to be seen as “wrong” by many. This does not bother me.

My point, in bringing this up, is that few people believe that what they are doing is both wrong *and* unnecessary. People may do things they consider wrong to survive, and hate every minute, or may do things they consider right unnecessarily, but people *rarely* do what they think is wrong for reasons they believe are unnecessary. ***People’s moral prioritizations are formed by the circumstances in which they are in and were raised.*** Had I been born into a world with limited or no magic, no vampires—*this* world—I would be completely unrecognizable. I would be a different man entirely, one that you likely would not consider to be “problematic!” If I had chosen to perform the same actions, unnecessarily, that I did back in my source, when I felt it *necessary*, morally, for me to do, then perhaps I would be worthy of judgment or retaliation.

Furthermore, anything I did in this world would be fair game, because it was done *in this world*. If I murder someone *here*, then *yes*, I should face some kind of retaliation for that. I would have done it here, just as things I did back in the world I am from earned retaliation *there*. It just seems ridiculous, to me, to judge someone by moral standards that they have no concept of nor connection with, *across entire worlds and across the boundary of fiction*, when chances are that they were doing the best they could with the way they saw the world. People who are “problematic,” in terms of fiction or fandom, are *not* inherently dangerous in this world, *because* of the change in circumstances. And, furthermore—don’t they deserve another chance? A chance to be who they feel is best in these new circumstances?

That being said, no one is obligated to interact with anyone else. If you cannot get over what someone did back in their source, and are uncomfortable with them—fine. That’s your business, not theirs: avoid or block them and move on. Anyone is well within their right to refuse to interact with anyone for any reason. Harassment, however, is over the line, and I think you all know that. Identity is identity; leave well enough alone.

If you are one of these people—as I’m sure many of you are—with a “problematic” fictional identity, *you are not wrong for merely existing*. You are not alone. You are not doomed to be hated and reviled forever. And, if you struggle with your identity, you are not doomed to struggle alone forever. Let us move now to the topic of coping.

Coping

For fictives, it can be *extremely traumatic* to come to this world and find out how different things are here. To find out that what you did is so repugnant as to be seemingly worthy of constant harassment and no support—and for fictionkin, learning that your fictotype is someone that did things that *you* consider horrific can be traumatizing as well. Good God, I cannot even imagine learning that I am, or was, someone who did something that I would consider repugnant. Facing that and coping with it can be hard enough without hordes of strangers

getting on you about it. People do not need help in feeling bad for who they are; they *do* need help in accepting it and handling it in a healthy way.

There are infinite types of trauma, here. My suggestion, overall, is this: approach it with a policy of self-forgiveness. I know it can be difficult, but listen to me: remember my definition of morality earlier. **You did what you felt was best with the circumstances you were in and the information you had.** Forgive yourself for doing differently than you would do now. Changing your priorities, and thus, your morality, is not hypocritical—it is growth. Let no one take that from you. Let no one take what you find precious in your identity from you, because it may be your past, or a parallel present, or something that your mind latched onto because it was important to you. *Let no one take this from you.* Forgive yourself, if need be, and never let anyone make you feel like you cannot do that, or like you don't *deserve* to do that. Defend yourself from those who would wrong you for the things that were done in your source.

My suggestion on coping and dealing with cruelty from the community is quite simple, but I have found it effective. It comes in two parts: one, block liberally, and two, find a small group that accepts you and stick primarily to them. There are community spaces that facilitate this, but you can also form small groups of friends. Discord DMs, email chains, Snapchat threads, whatever works for you. Block those who will not accept you and allow yourself to befriend those who will. If people would hurt, harass, or exploit you for things done in your source, *block them*. The block button is there to protect you. You have been given a potent tool—use it. Consider it a form of taking care of yourself, and, if need be, self-forgiveness.

Finding friends you can trust is harder, and admittedly, I am not the best person to ask about this. I have only recently begun to open up, and have gotten lucky with the system's pre-existing friends. Furthermore, I have had little need to cope with my identity, although I have watched multiple fictives in our system have to deal with it, so my advice here is somewhat limited, but here is another suggestion: work on accepting and understanding your identity. Journal, make posts, do long-form writings, answer prompts—whatever helps you unpack

everything, whatever helps you understand and record, *do it*. I thought it silly, at first, but after I started doing longform writings, I never looked back—I enjoy them immensely, and wish I had more time for them.

I believe it best to open the floor for a few minutes for suggestions on both coping and finding an accepting group, including community spaces. I know of the fictionkind Dreamwidth, of which I am an administrator—where else is there that accepts people such as us? How do you find accepting friends? How do you cope? Leave your suggestions in chat. Let us have a brief conversation before we move on.

Growth

Let us continue, now, on the topic of healing and changing. I spoke earlier of morality being shaped by circumstance, and of our ability to alter our morality via reprioritization, something fairly common in fictives especially. (After all, fictionkind tend to have their own sense of morality *before* awakening as fictionkind, as do those with heartypes and most other identities.) We are capable of doing this—changing from what we are and were—but I ask: are we *obligated* to do so? Must we become “good” people, model citizens of the world we now find ourselves in? I say no—as long as you are not bringing direct harm to others, it’s no one else’s business who you are, what you feel, what you believe. You should not be forced to change *your very identity and sense of self* just because someone else does not like it. The self is the most intensely personal thing about anyone, and it is no one’s business but yours.

However, I am also not saying that you should act with impunity here just as you would back in your source. Chances are excellent that you can’t get away with what you would, there, and if you’re a fictive, you could hurt your headmates or get them in trouble. I will not presume to tell you how to handle dealing with your headmates (or whatever word you use to describe them), but I would advise not harming them intentionally. Chances are, you are stuck with them,

possibly for the long run—does it not make sense to try to get along with them? I will leave that in your discerning hands, however.

I won't tell you how to live your life, but I will recommend that you think carefully about what parts of your behavior you want to perpetuate moving forward. This should *always* be considered every time you enter a new, drastically different, situation: this is just one of the most drastic. When it comes to myself as an example, I did not have to think on it much: I don't *enjoy* hurting people, I just did so out of necessity. Here, I am not pushed to behave the way I did. My cutthroat sense of morality is key to who I am, and I refuse to abandon it, but the objectionable parts of it never come up since I am never pushed into dire straits here. I believe the worst thing I have done so far is threaten to block people who harass me because I don't care enough to try to convince them on a one-on-one basis to respect me. What a nightmarish creature I am, truly.

If you do not wish to change who you are, just as I did not, but also do not wish to do “immoral” things that would incite reasonable consequences, there is a balance to be struck between “same identity and morals” and “new behavior”—and that balance is different for everyone. I have worked out mine: you will have to take the time to work out yours. If you need a sounding board for that, my inbox is open, both on Tumblr and Discord.

Perhaps you do want to grow beyond your identity, whether you be a fictive or someone with a different kind of identity that influences you in ways you do not like. I think that, if this is something on your mind, it is a good idea: with this kind of thing, wanting it tends to mean you need it. Remember what I said about morality and prioritization: that is a matter of reprioritizing. For other parts of yourself: don't think about changing what already exists. Think about adding onto it, and the change will come in time. Pick up a new hobby. Make some friends. Play a game, make a playlist of songs you like but don't necessarily have anything to do with your fictional identity. Get involved in something creative, whether it be making or consuming, and relate to other characters. Modify your behavior in ways that make you happy, but remember two very important things: one, *never change yourself because someone else wants you to*, and

two, *changing who you are is not hypocrisy, it is growth*. No one stays stagnant forever, even those of us who cling to our identities because we do not wish to move beyond them: even as myself, as Goratrix, I grow and change, but well within the bounds of what people would think is still *Goratrix*.

What Now?

So you have this identity steeped in fiction. So you have heard all of what I have to say thus far. Perhaps you are accepting this identity, perhaps you are struggling with it. Perhaps you want to connect with and understand it more, perhaps you have feelings you need to get off of your chest, perhaps you want to move on from it. What now?

Find community.

I cannot express enough how much community has helped me in accepting my current place in this world, who I am, and why I did the things I did—and why I do the things I do *now*. I am changing, just as everyone does, and accepting that has been difficult. I am more social in a positive sense than I have been since my pre-vampirism days (which was about a thousand years ago) and I had a hard time accepting that until I began to make friends in the community who I legitimately enjoy speaking with.

Communities of this type, I'm sorry to say, cannot be found in broad social media spaces like Tumblr or Twitter. It's too chaotic, too public, too out there—smaller communities are our best bet. Earlier, I asked you all to give me examples of community spaces where people like us can go to find refuge and no judgment while we work through, or even just live as, our identities—I recommend going through those and finding places that you feel might work for you. Again: I run the fictionkind Dreamwidth—which, despite its name, welcomes anyone with any kind of fiction-based identity—and we put up with no harassment or judgment of any type. That kind of behavior gets corrected, and if it continues, the offending party is removed. There are plenty of spaces for people who want to be judgmental and downright bitchy: let us have our

havens, of which there are precious few. It is *vital* that your only external acknowledgement of your identity *not* be toxic—the self-hatred and emotional damage that can result from that is something that I am sure many of you are all too familiar with.

I will say, however, that “community” does not mean “fandom.” I **do not** recommend engaging with your source’s fandom in the context of your identity: in most cases, this will lead to misunderstanding and harassment. Many people with fiction-based identities avoid fandom, period—I am one of these people. I cannot stand it. This goes *doubly* so for interacting with creators of a source in your capacity as your fiction-based identity—I recommend that you do not engage with them outwardly as this. This cannot go well: it will only make you and them uncomfortable. The possible exception to this is when it comes to, say, having an identity based on a friend’s OC or similar—since they know you, or a member of your system, they might be more accepting, *or* they might be more upset. Know that you did nothing wrong in having this identity, and that it may be best to not tell them to avoid the potential hangup of them getting upset at the implication that you know their character better than they do. I would typically err on the side of not saying anything, but I will leave that in your capable hands. You may want to get advice from community members on a case-by-case basis if you are unsure of how to proceed.

In addition to finding community, I recommend that you do writings on your identity. They don’t have to be pages and pages long: just a few paragraphs journaling your experiences would do. Write essays if you’d like, or just bullet-pointed thoughts. Answer prompts. Do creative writing exercises. You can keep these to yourself, or you can post them, which I would encourage. It can be immensely helpful to a newly-awakened or formed individual to find writings, no matter how small, from someone *like them*. The feeling of “*thank God I’m not alone*” cannot be underestimated.

Post them on your blog, or in your smaller community. Post them on your personal website—yes, your personal website, which you should have if you do any significant amount of writing, just ask Page—or anywhere else you can slot them in. Write for yourself, and write for

your past self who may have wished that there was more out there to guide them and make them feel like they were not alone. I know I wish that there had been more out there when I formed—other VTM fictives, more writings from other “problematic” beings. Write to understand and accept yourself, write to heal from any damages inflicted on you because of or by this identity, write to leave something for future wanderers of our breed—whatever your reason, I implore you to *write*. Write and find community: spend time with people. Find elders of your community and speak to them—they have more insight than you can imagine, more ideas than you realize, and less time and energy to implement them than anyone would prefer.

If you want to put yourself out there and build community, help run events, *do things*, excellent. I would love to see it, and I’m sure that others here would, as well. If you want to just exist with your identity, maybe answer a few prompts, talk to some people—that’s all you need. You need not *do* anything to deserve to exist as you are—you are more than enough, dear listener, and never, *ever* let anyone tell you otherwise.

At this point, my long paragraphs of thoughts are over. I want to hear what you have to say. I made sure to get as much time as I could for you to ask questions, speak your comments, voice your concerns. This is your time: I am sure many of you have questions, at least. Ask away.

Closing Notes (Post-questions)

Our time is running short, and we must end the panel at this point. I will be available via Discord PM for anyone who still has questions or wishes to speak to me about anything; my inbox on Tumblr is open as well, for those who would rather communicate there or send me something anonymously. Please remember that the anonymous toggle is a privilege, not a right, and if you use it to send cruel or rude messages to me, I will block you without reply and eventually disable the ability to use it.

Before we go, however, I wanted to read you my favorite poem. I formed during last year's Othercon, and my first memory of this world is Pale reading this poem at the beginning of his panel, which had a similar theme to this one.

This is *A Monstrous Manifesto* by Cat Valente.

If you are a monster, stand up.

If you are a monster, a trickster, a fiend,

If you've built a steam-powered wishing machine

If you have a secret, a dark past, a scheme,

If you kidnap maidens or dabble in dreams

Come stand by me.

If you have been broken, stand up.

If you have been broken, abandoned, alone

If you have been starving, a creature of bone

If you live in a tower, a dungeon, a throne

If you weep for wanting, to be held, to be known,

Come stand by me.

If you are a savage, stand up.

If you are a witch, a dark queen, a black knight,

If you are a mummer, a pixie, a sprite,

If you are a pirate, a tomcat, a wright,

If you swear by the moon and you fight the hard fight,

Come stand by me.

If you are a devil, stand up.

*If you are a villain, a madman, a beast,
If you are a strowler, a prowler, a priest,
If you are a dragon come sit at our feast,
For we all have stripes, and we all have horns,
We all have scales, tails, manes, claws and thorns
And here in the dark is where new worlds are born.
Come stand by me.*