How to Use Romance In Your Game

Avalon Games

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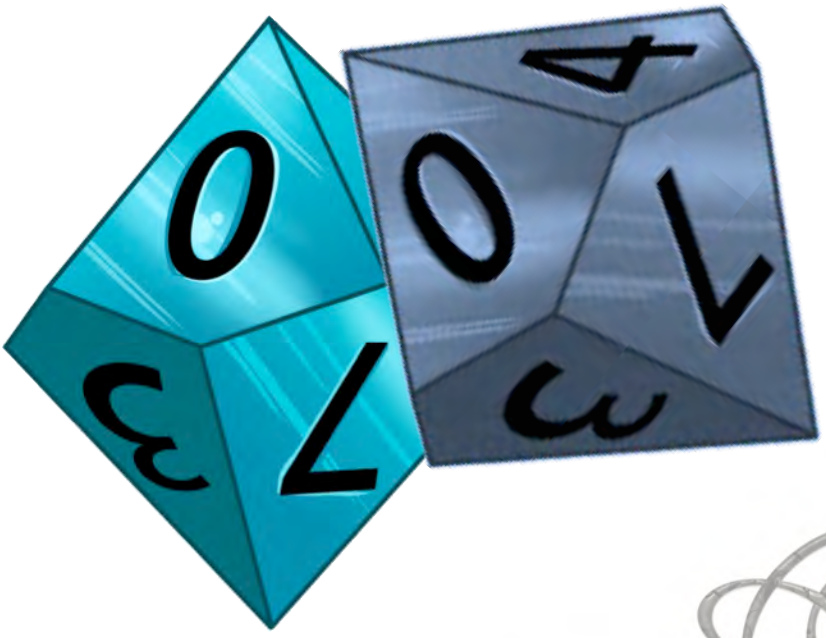

Love. It happens. We're flesh and blood with one simple program...to seek a mate. The emotion is straightforward but courtship is a human institution full of opinions and restrictions. For most of history, one couldn't fall in love without society's approval. If you fall in love with an unacceptable somebody, you can be locked away, banished, or even killed. In early history, marriage was for material gain. Two people got involved in a relationship for personal power or for their families, their cities, or their nations.

Only humans could complicate sex and love by adding institutions, rituals, and propaganda. Society and religion focused on the "rights and wrongs" of sexuality. This is what this supplement is about; the societal rules that characters may have to negotiate should they become romantically involved. This book covers the interesting courting rules of various societies based on real historical facts, as well as rules for developing romances among the player characters with non-player characters. Also included is the concept of using magic to create compulsory love and the ramifications should one get caught doing such a thing.

So if love and romance are such rules-laden annoyances in most societies, why deal with them at all? Why not forgo them in the fantasy world?

One reason is because romance is significant and love is something to fight for or even die for. If the player character (PC) can get this deep into love and romance, then the campaign leads itself. Even if a PC gets involved only for wealth or power, the character now has to protect this relationship against all outsiders.

Another reason to introduce romance or courtship is for the abundance of plot hooks. Every town, every region, and every era has its own idea on what should be permitted, what is taboo, and how to navigate a romance from introduction to marriage. There are so many stories of vengeance, jealousy, family battles and regional wars with romance at the core: Love is an essential ingredient in nearly every adventure or tale.

This information was developed as a generic supplement for any game system, mostly regarding campaign settings in high fantasy medieval-style settings, but with information dating as late as the 19th and 20th Centuries for steampunk adventures and modern-day gothics. This information can also be used in anything from strange post-apocalyptic locales that developed their own laws based on salvaged texts to alien worlds where a gesture might be construed as a marriage proposal.

Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Before introducing romance into your play group's campaigns, there are some essentials.

1. Make sure your players are comfortable with romance being in the game. If you are thinking about putting the player characters in any sort of romantic scene, you'll want to know how comfortable they are with the situation. See below for more information on PC romances.

2. Make sure your players are okay hearing about anything related to sex. In most cases, no one wants to hear details about the sex act and not many GMs want to describe it seriously. Sex as an act should be one of those things that get skipped over. However, some of your players may not want to even think about implied sex. Just because their characters are in an era where prostitution or casual sex may be acceptable, it doesn't mean the players have to be comfortable with it.

3. Romance is a lighthearted event until it gets ruined. As long as the romance is ongoing, it will be often treated with humor. Sex is another area often reverted to comedy. If the players or you as the GM do not want people to make light of a situation due to romance or sex, then you probably shouldn't introduce it at that time.

4. Stay away from BAD sexual or marriage situations. Obviously, the history of the world is filled with incidences of pedophilia and rape. While forced marriage can make a good plot for an adventure or two, we're certain you can figure out how to create it by yourself without us telling you how. No child brides, and no kidnappings or forced sex to ensure a relationship. Not here.

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5. Consensual relationships without boundaries. Obviously if we were to follow real-world settings as our sole example, there would be religious rules against relationships involving homosexuality or transgender situations starting in the medieval period. This is not the real world and we can rework history as we see fit. Although human society will consider heterosexual sex and marriage to be the best way to proliferate, alternative measures and systems of child-raising in a fantasy world can be introduced without questioning its acceptance. Of course, the GM will decide what to allow or not allow in the privacy of their own game sessions.

6. Above all, have fun. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it. Get the players' feedback as to what they want to do and abide by it. If someone's not having fun, then try something else.

Player-Character Involvement In Romance

Make sure everyone accepts his or her character being involved in a romance or courtship before play begins. Some players will totally work their characters' sexuality like they have the libido of the gods, but if get them " involved" with someone, they will freak like it is real. Never force romance; it's like forcing sex and that's just icky. If none of the players wants to be directly involved, just use the information in this supplement to develop plots among the non-player characters or, at most, with a relative of one of the player characters. You can always try again later.