

Real or Not Real?

—

The problem of writing another gender.



Hi there...



My Name Is: Beth

I am...

- One of the founders of Sim Central.
- A lover of writing since before I knew it was a thing I could do for fun.
- A GM/AGM for two games and a player on three others across a few different fandoms.

I got my start with Star Trek simming back in 2001.

When I'm not writing I'm chasing kids, working with universities, or reading.



The fine print

- Writing a character of a different gender doesn't always mean men writing women, or women writing men.
 - These suggestions apply for any gender or sexuality that is not your own.
 - Many of the examples used are of men writing female characters and women writing male characters.
 - Some of the examples are from authors writing of their own sex/gender.



Tell me about...

Something that makes you just utterly cringe when someone writes a character of another gender?

How cringe moments like that have impacted your relationship/interaction with those writers?



Writing any type of fiction is about inserting oneself into an experience that differs from real life.

People like to write for a lot of reasons:

- To experience something
- To create something
- To process something
- The list... goes... on...

Why do you write?



“**T**here are at least two principal ways to write speculative fiction – write about people, or write about gadgets.”

- Robert A. Heinlein, *On the Writing of Speculative Fiction*



Simming by any other name...

Heinlein defines the people story a few different ways, but focuses on the one that I think fits the type of writing we all do best:

“...the story embodying the notion **Just suppose**— or **What would happen if**—”

Within this story type there are two key elements:

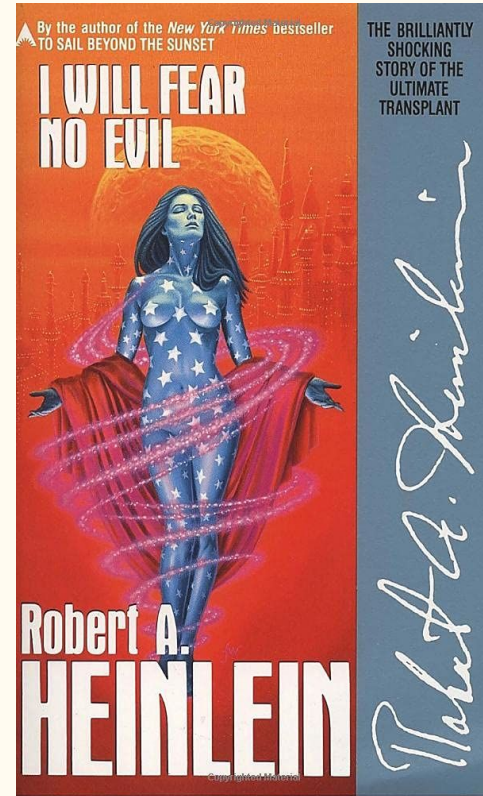
- The External (Plot)
- The Internal (Character Development)



Who cares?

Exploring characters of a sex or gender which you do not share is nothing new.

Heinlein's book *I Will Fear No Evil* notoriously explores what could happen if a man's brain is transplanted into a woman's body. He spends a sizeable portion of the book exploring that new combined person's sexuality. (That was first published in 1970...)



Who cares?

This kind of exploration addresses all of the already described scenarios:

- What if?
- The desire to experience or create something outside of your real life.
- A way to process thoughts.

AND...

Can be done well or can be done extremely poorly.



1. Pay attention to
the mundane.



Don't focus on the physicality of a person unless there's a good reason.

“Liz stripped leaving her shorts and tank top on the floor and started the water cranking it to full heat full blast. A real shower... another amazing thing about being home and not underway. Once in the shower she stood there... not moving... and enjoying the water until she slowly adjusted the temperature so it wouldn't burn her as it continued to get hotter. She would miss showers when Arizona got underway she knew they'd return to Kitsap after the trip around the continent but knew that they'd also be sent right out on their first true patrol after the crew had been ashore for the past year in pre-commissioning status.”



When there is a good reason, don't dwell.

"Wouldn't that be lovely?" Deb replied with a nod. But then her thoughts were back on Noah's predicament. "Listen, if *Irynya* is complimenting your body, she's probably right," Debbie began again, turning back from the soup. "She's pretty matter-of-fact about these kinds of things. If you'd ever gone bra shopping with her, you'd know," she clucked, reaching up to subconsciously boost her bustier. The garment had been obtained on Risa and did a fantastic job of keeping everything in its place. "Would it have been less awkward if she'd seen but *not* complimented you?"



2. When in doubt
be realistic.



Temptations and fallacies...

I need to be sure to include details that indicate my character's sex to prove they are what I say they are.

It's my character, I should be able to play out my fantasies.

It's believable because I said it is.

I'm just interested in writing a romantic entanglement with someone.



Good Example:

“Commander Ayda Muldowney greeted the Chief Medical Officer on her way down to Space Sciences. They encountered one another as Kiam was helping a very pregnant Crewwoman, arm in arm, into Sickbay. Pivoting on her heel, the First Officer twisted into the turbolift to face forward. "Deck six," she stated to the AI within. Humming to life, the lift began its short crawl down. Ayda's thoughts stayed blank, fingers drumming, curled, around the top of a large PADD.

The doors opened and broke her from her void of reverie. She stepped away, past the doors to the Seven-Eleven mezzanine and beyond a bank of windows. Stars streaked by at high warp- blackness abounded with no other features save a glimpse of the bussard ramscoop. She turned and pressed the key for Space Sciences. The doors opened and Ayda strolled to the center.”



Bad Example:

“Janice had a full day ahead of her but first? First it was shower time. Stepping into the sonic booth, she let the waves of sound wash over her body, her hands following in their wake. She caressed her curves, feeling the momentary hitch of her nipples slowing her hands in their descent but not stopping them. The sonic waves were abuzz in her ears as Janice's hands met her stomach and then trailed lower and around, moving across the mounds of her buttocks. The shower felt so good, she thought to herself, then allowed her hands to rove back up in reverse course before turning off the shower and stepping out. Seeing her pert reflection in the mirror, Janice decided it was going to be a good day indeed.”



3. The Internal - External Test.



The Test

Question 1: Does it serve the plot? (external)

Question 2: Does it serve the character's development?
(internal)



The Test - External

Does this action, description, etc. make sense in light of the external happenings around my character?

Will this action, description, etc. detract from or distract from the focus of the plot?

If this action does fail the above qualifications, what are the corresponding consequences of that failure?



The Test - External

"Now I can't guarantee he's going to be up for visitors," Marlena said, grabbing her purse. Though a Starfleet officer -- and thus wearing a uniform -- the woman operated like many others when it came to personal accouterments. It wasn't uncommon to see various folks wearing backpacks or carrying around briefcases or fashionable bags on their way to and from the office. Which is why Marlena never felt out of place in slinging her overly large handbag over her shoulder, as she was doing now. "The Admiral is an exceptionally private man, as you know. He hasn't even wanted *me* to visit...had to rather fight him on that front, I'll tell you," she nodded toward the door across the way.



The Test - Internal

Does this action, description, etc. have to do with things going on within my character?

Is my character reacting to something happening around them that affects them personally?

Is this part of my character's normal day to day or is it extraneous?

Does this speak to my character's state of mind or set the scene?



The Test - Internal

“He stared down the skinny plank of his chest, his finger and thumb met with soap in between. No amount of blowing bubbles through your fingers, he told himself, was going to change the contents of that letter. He flexed his fingers and the soap between popped. Normally Noah just did a sonic shower in the morning. But the feeling of the water against his sodden hair and scalp had something to it. It was distant but he knew its sympathetic strand: his mother used to tap on his face and head when he was feeling overstimulated. And after his accident, his therapist had shown him some techniques to help re-center his spinning mind on the physical.

Tap tap tap. Tap your head. Tap your face. Tap the backs of your arms, even.”



The Test - Internal

“While the family talked, he stayed where he was, using the height advantage from horseback to have a look around. Like most farms, the land was flat, trees pushed back beyond the perimeter of the property. At night, things were dark enough for a body to sneak up unaware. Not good. His grandfather always kept dogs, useful to help with the herding, and they didn't miss much. Was he worrying for nothing? There had been no new sightings but that didn't mean he was in the clear neither. Sooner or later, they'd show up again. The traitor was out there and he needed to be found. Stopped.

He heard a girly kind of laugh and wasn't sure if it was Addy or her younger sister but he liked how the sound floated above the deeper, more masculine tones of her father and brother and his own, of course. The war had stolen laughter and pleasure from him it seemed so it was nice to have it all floating around him, even if he weren't a part of it. And he ignored the part of himself that whispered how it was all a lie and the reality was waiting out there for him.”



**A parting word of
advice...**

When in doubt – do some research...

We research details for all sorts of things in our writing.

What was technology like at this point in the universe's timeline?

What were the political factors?

Did these people/races exist in known memory yet?

We should do the same for our characters sexual/gender expression.

What is the accepted understanding of macro events in this universe?



When in doubt – do some research...

Figure out your character's personality type and get familiar with what that personality is like.

Look at examples from places like:

- 16 personality types: <https://www.16personalities.com/personality-types>
- 9 enneagram types: <https://personalitypath.com/enneagram/9-personality-types/>
- Post-Apocalyptic Survival by type:
http://oddlydevelopedtypes.com/post-apocalyptic_survival_by_type

Consider your character's sexual and romantic expression:

- <https://www.healthline.com/health/different-types-of-sexuality>



When in doubt – do some research...

Ask a friend.



Kahona 12/14/2021

And I'm sort of torn over whether a character (female-type) would really get upset at having someone she borderline loves is being transferred without her, or if that's just some self-serving drivel



Beth 12/14/2021

Yeah. Upset

Absolutely

That's a complicated emotional situation



Kahona 12/14/2021

Enough to start the conversation with a thrown PaDD?



Beth 12/14/2021

So yeah. Back to the PADD. I think it's fun explosive fireworks, but it stretches the edge of believability



Kahona 12/14/2021

I think you are also right

And have changed it, even if it doesn't change the entire tone of the piece, believability is important.



Thank You!

Want to chat further?

Find me on Sim Central: <https://discord.gg/simcentral>

Email me: beth@simcentral.org

