



# WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN A PLAYER IS SUDDENLY SMITTEN WITH AN NPC

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Use the Third Person and  
Keep Your Distance

Keep Scenes G-Rated and  
Public

# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

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Thank you for reading and supporting my work, and happy gaming to you!

# HOW TO NOTICE WHEN PLAYERS ARE HOOKED



## FIRST SIGNS



### A SUSPICIOUS AMOUNT OF ATTENTION

It probably won't take long to notice that the player has zeroed in on an NPC. They'll try to keep a conversation going and ask more questions than seem warranted. The NPC might not seem special to you or be integral to the scene - they could very well be a background character intended to add a dash of flavor and never been seen again - but that doesn't matter if something about them has sparked interest in the *player*.

Chances are, their inquiries will go beyond the needs of the moment. They may start asking about things like the NPC's history and feelings, whether or not they're

related to the plot. They may also want more descriptive details about the character than you initially provided. Either way, the player will be quite focused on the exchange and concerned with the NPC's plight.

Instead of seeing this as an annoying interruption to the real plot, take it as an opportunity to deliver choice tidbits of information and draw the player into your web. What might the NPC know or have seen that can benefit the PCs? Can their attitude and beliefs help fill in your setting? If you don't know much about the NPC yet, call for a brief break, use a character generator, or draw a tarot card - whatever helps you improvise a believable person.

You may worry that the player's intense focus on one NPC will bore other players at the table

and hurt the flow of the game. It's perfectly okay to pause the exchange and switch to other parts of the scene so everyone has a chance to interact. Spend a certain amount of time (say, 5 minutes) per person and develop smaller moments until everyone is brought together again. You could offer to run a short scene for the conversation outside of the main game, such as in play by post or a video chat.

To be clear, it's also understandable if you cut the tête-à-tête off when most of the party wants to move to the next scene. Giving the player a taste is better than nothing at all, and the desires of the group deserve to be honored, as well. It's also acceptable to end the scene or call for a break if the player makes you or anyone else uncomfortable with what they say or how they approach the NPC.

Reinforce whatever boundaries are needed and move on.

And if the player seems to lose interest or you aren't sure where they're coming from at any point, it's okay to ask them if they had special interest in that NPC and/or if they're done with the character. If they want to focus elsewhere, let them. If something's gotten in the way of them enjoying time with the NPC, you may be able to work on it together.

But it can be worthwhile to see what the player's interest is and where it goes, so long as everyone's okay with the content and tone. This can offer chances to develop your improv skills, put NPCs to even better use, and keep the player coming back for more.

Because if they really *are* becoming smitten by the NPC, they *will* be back for more!

## CONTINUED PURSUIT



Does your player keep checking up on an NPC whenever they get the chance? Do they invite the NPC on adventures or into scenes

they wouldn't otherwise be in? Do they seek the NPC's counsel and company about as often as their party members' – or more? These

could be signs that the player can't get enough of that character, whether their interest is romantic or not.

This doesn't have to be a bad thing. Of course, if the other players like the NPC, it'll be easier to have them around for frequent visits or as a member of the party. If the group finds the NPC a bit annoying, you can likely give the player a brief scene with them every now and then without souring the mood. If the rest of the party absolutely hates the NPC, however, it may be best to keep them at a distance (i.e., in quick private scenes or via written correspondence) so resentments don't rise.

The group's opinion of the NPC may shift over time, so check in to make sure everyone's still having fun, but you can honor the player's interest even if others don't share it. To avoid major problems down the line, it may be best to keep the NPC out of serious danger most of the time. Targeting a beloved NPC frequently can make the player feel personally attacked or punished just for developing an interest in one of your characters. Having other players attack a favored NPC, whether or not there's "good cause," is likely to end in ugly arguments and resentment.

If you really don't want to run the NPC or other players can't abide

them for some reason, work with the player on a way to retire the NPC gracefully. Sending them to a far-off land probably won't cause the bitterness that their death would - just don't be surprised if the player sends their PC off into the sunset with them and creates a new character.

If you're concerned that the player will rely on the NPC too much, an easy way to avoid that is to give the character their own life. Give them interests, social ties, and professions that keep them occupied. The NPC won't always be available if they're busy with their own obligations; they won't be able to give the player everything they ask for because they have limited resources and knowledge. This isn't to say that you should make the NPC useless or utterly unavailable. They'll still be who they are, know what they know, and have access to materials and connections. They'll offer what they wish and what they can when they can.

But even if the player thinks the world of the NPC, they're just one character in a larger world that the player can't afford to forget. Giving them boundaries will remind the player that no single character can provide everything they need.



## ONGOING AFFAIRS



### YOU'LL HAVE TO DO SOME DIGGING

As a GM, you're probably used to coming up with the minimum info needed to portray an NPC: name, profession, power level, and a few distinguishing features. For many encounters, not much more will be needed, and many GMs can throw these elements together on the fly. It isn't unusual for GMs to take more notes about NPCs they expect to be more important to the story, or put more thought into them ahead of time.

But as mentioned previously, a smitten player may fixate on a character you didn't expect to be noticed at all, and their character will want to know a *lot* more about that NPC. This can start with minutiae - likes and dislikes, personal interests and hobbies - but probably won't end there. Eventually, the player will want to know more intimate details such

as childhood memories, philosophical leanings, hopes and fears, and other topics we tend to share as we get to know our friends.

These may not be things that you've imagined for the NPC, or they could be sought at just the wrong moment, when you have trouble concentrating. It isn't unusual to be drawn up short by what seems like an innocuous question about a beloved character. When in doubt, roll 1d6:

1. Call for a short break, clear your head, and see what comes up when you get back to the table.
2. Recall someone you know that reminds you of the character and use them as a guide to what to say next.
3. Pick something specific that you already know about the NPC and extrapolate something in line with it.

4. Choose something you already know about the character and come up with an answer that goes *against* that.
5. Use a randomizer, like tarot cards or a generator.
6. Have the NPC decline to answer at that time; it may come easier later.

You may want to ask the player to take notes on the object of their affection and share them with you, such as in a cloud document. This way, even if you're developing the NPC on the fly, you'll be able to see what's already been established. You can also skim the results or search for names or details quickly.

None of this has to be difficult or awkward for long, but these situations may ask you to stretch your creative muscles and/or jot down a few more notes than you might otherwise. And while you don't have to honor every request, even a short answer can go a long way with a smitten player.

## **FAMILIARITY BREEDS**

### **CONTEMPT**

Even if you really like the NPC that your player has become enamored with, you may grow tired of them suddenly or over time. The

same is true for the player: they may stop seeking the character or start avoiding them without explaining why. This can happen in real life when the "honeymoon phase" of a relationship is over or when people develop diverging interests. And no matter where or when it happens, the situation will probably feel awkward to everyone involved.

But before you implement drastic changes, be warned: rash decisions can make things a lot worse. Remember, the NPC has become a fixture in the game because a player has relished their company and become attached to them. Even if they're currently bored with the relationship, the player probably isn't going to take it well if the NPC is threatened, harmed, or disposed of. As noted before, attacks on a cherished NPC can quickly lead to resentment and strife.

If you can discuss the matter with the player away from the table, great! It's okay to say that they've seemed to be enjoying the NPC a lot less lately or that you've been struggling with where to go with the character. Ask how the player feels and how they'd like to proceed, but don't be surprised if they're unsure. They might not have figured it out yet. This means that smaller, careful alterations are your best bet and



you'll need to monitor reactions as you go.

If it's a simple matter of overexposure, then taking more breaks from the NPC can help. Making the character unavailable more often gives everyone time to miss what they have to offer. By the time they show up again, they should be more welcome and fun to portray. This doesn't mean you should make the NPC completely unreachable forever. Instead, bring them up less often, don't initiate visits, and see how things feel.

What if the player keeps asking for their beloved NPC but as the GM, you're bored to tears with them? Try introducing a development in the character's life that inspires new concerns and goals. That way, they'll have new things to talk about and can lead to different plot hooks. This doesn't have to

involve threats or losses to be interesting. The return of an old flame or discovery of a potentially lucrative business opportunity can swiftly change a person's life. Tie the NPC to recent developments in the setting or put them at odds with the player through their new opinions. Whatever you do, remember that your goal is to help everyone have fun, including yourself.

If the player decides they are truly tired of the character, they'll probably let them go. They'll stop asking about the NPC and seek new company, and it's best to allow the old relationship to fade away. You may feel some disappointment after putting so much extra effort into the character, but you were able to stretch your muscles as a GM and they had extra fun for a while. Take the positive aspects as a win and leave the rest behind.

## TROUBLESHOOTING



### THE NPC YOU CAN'T GET RID OF

“My GM keeps pushing this NPC at me and I’m just not interested!”

This can happen when a GM assumes that a player’s smitten with an NPC but hasn’t asked to be sure. In this case, the GM is trying to give the player what they think they want: a much closer relationship with the NPC. The player might not be showing major signs that they’re annoyed, especially when their *character* doesn’t want to be rude. Or the player could be giving plenty of signs that they’re sick of the NPC but the GM isn’t seeing or heeding them.

This can happen when the GM is smitten with an NPC. Since they’re impressed with and delighted by the character, it’s easy to assume the players are, too. Having the NPC tag along offers the GM more chances to enjoy the character and win the players over. The trouble is, the GM may not consciously realize how attached they are to the NPC or how unamused players are. Consider it

like having a crush: their perception is skewed so they only see the best in the character and it’s easy for misunderstandings to occur.

When a player feels stuck in this scenario, it may be tempting to have their character verbally or physically attack the NPC in-game. Hurting or slaying the character will have to make it clear they’re not wanted and put the matter to rest, right? And a blow-up will be cathartic and clear the air – what could go wrong? It’s understandable that a player wants to express their frustration, but this route can easily lead to arguments and grudges. Instead, there are two key ways to circumvent this problem.

#### GMS, CHECK IN

First, as a GM, you should be checking in with players regularly

about what they enjoy and what might be bothering them. You don't have to do this every single session, but once every few sessions is a good rate and can keep problems from festering. If doing this face-to-face is too awkward, try sending asynchronous messages between sessions (texts, DMs, etc.); this will give them time to think before they respond and some distance so they feel less pressure as they reply. If you don't get responses that way, end a session a little early and ask then.

If or when a player expresses negative feelings about an NPC, honor that. They get to feel how they feel, even if you don't agree with their estimation. Trying to argue with their view or change their mind will probably go poorly; it will seem like you're refusing to hear or heed them after they worked up the courage to speak with you. Doubling down on the NPC's importance and keeping them around is likely to make the player feel like their input doesn't matter, and that will become a grievance they hold onto.

## PLAYERS, REACH OUT

Second, if you feel this way as a player, don't let it continue for long. It's okay to give the NPC an honest try and reserve judgment for a time. It's also nice to be polite to the GM, but if you aren't having fun, try to let them know sooner rather than later. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to get it out peacefully.

If you're feeling very upset, write out your response and let it all out – don't censor yourself or stop until you feel done, but *don't send it anywhere*. Keep it to yourself, sleep on it, and then edit it so it's brief, focused, and respectful. You can ask fellow players to read it and suggest things or find a friendly online forum where you can post anonymously and ask for feedback. If other players agree with your concerns, you can add that to your message or ask them to send their own.

Either way, try to send it to the GM within a week and give them at least a week to respond.

Try something like this:

[Dear, Hey, or whatever friendly greeting works best with that person] [GM's name],

I appreciate you running for [me or us] and I want you to know that. I've been enjoying [insert something specific about the campaign here] a lot, and I'm looking forward to more.

But I've also been having trouble with something in-game and I'd like to work with you to resolve it. I really haven't been enjoying interacting with [NPC's name], and it feels like they're around all the time. I'd really like to [have them removed from the game, see a lot less of them, see less of them for a while] and focus on [a story arc, a location, other characters]. Can we please work on making this happen soon?

Thanks for reading this!

If the GM doesn't respond and/or the situation doesn't improve, then you should bring it up at the table calmly during a break or after the session: "I've asked not to deal with this character [as much, at all] but [nothing's changed, things have gone back to now they were, I still have to interact with them more than I'd like]. I'd like to talk about this with everyone so I can have more fun moving forward." If the GM persists beyond this point, you may have to leave the game to be rid of the NPC, but that is probably better than being

disregarded. Generally speaking, no gaming is better than bad gaming.

Whatever side of the situation you're on, remember: everyone deserves to have fun, be included, and feel respected. A GM can get attached to an NPC just as easily and strongly as a player, and that doesn't have to be a bad thing. When disagreements arise, it's best to work together on a solution everyone's okay with. Taking a little time and effort to communicate can go a long way.

## THE UNWANTED LOVE TRIANGLE

**“My character is in a romantic relationship that I don’t want!”**

There are a number of reasons why these situations occur. If a player relishes an NPC’s presence, their GM might assume they want a romance with that character. A GM can take flirting as a sign that the player wants more in that vein. Sometimes a GM will amp up the romance to inject drama into the story. Other times, they decide that it makes sense for one or more NPCs to develop feelings for the player’s character. Much of the time their intentions aren’t bad, but if the player isn’t on board, they can quickly feel trapped.

If you’re in this situation, the fastest and best way to resolve it is to speak with your GM privately, ideally outside of game day. If a face-to-face discussion seems daunting, send a message or email. It can be helpful to assume your GM isn’t trying to annoy you but may have misread or misunderstood the situation. If they’ve given you reasons to believe they don’t care how you feel about the matter, you can still try to discuss it with them, but don’t be surprised if it doesn’t go well. Either way, the advice below can be helpful.

Start the discussion with what you enjoy about their campaign; saying “thanks for running” also helps set a good tone. From there, express how you feel and what you want as simply and directly as possible. First, specify whether or not you wish to interact with that NPC at all. If you don’t mind having the character around, explain what kind of relationship you want to have with them moving forward (friendship, mentor/student, etc.). If you do mind their presence, let your GM know if you want them to be completely removed or just for their “screen time” to be reduced. If you only wish to deal with one NPC romantically and avoid a love triangle, make that clear.

Before you send your message or talk with your GM, sleep on it. When the time arrives, try to stay focused on the issue at hand, even if other problems exist; you can address other things later. Assure your GM that you’re willing to work with them to make the change happen smoothly and easily, and give them a few days to respond. If they don’t reply before the next session,

you may have to broach the matter before the game starts.

Your GM might ask to adjust the relationship over a few sessions for the sake of plausibility. If you don't mind waiting, great, but if you do, it's okay to insist on an immediate change. Something can happen between sessions – such as a

major disagreement – to explain the shift. If they refuse to alter the situation at all, or if they continue to take things in the same direction despite telling you they wouldn't, you should probably walk away from the campaign. You deserve a GM who respects you and your desires, and you can find one who will value your comfort and fun.

## THE THIRSTY PLAYER

**“A player keeps trying to romance an NPC, and I feel awkward about roleplaying it.”**

Sometimes a player is already comfortable with the idea of roleplaying romantic encounters; other times, they're so taken with an NPC that they're willing to put their own awkward feelings aside. Either way, it's easy for players to assume their GM is willing to go along with what they want. But that doesn't mean a GM will know how to roleplay romantic scenes, care to have such scenes in the current campaign, or have any interest in portraying much beyond the basics.

It can help to establish how comfortable you are with romantic scenes during Session 0, especially if the campaign is heavily social and romance is an option. If you don't

mind others having relationships but don't wish them for yourself, say so. If you'd rather not sit through extended banter or sexual content, or you'd prefer for romantic scenes to be handled privately, specify that. This can help avoid some blunders later. However, a player might meet an NPC who makes them change their mind later. That's what this guide is about, right – that NPC you just have to pursue?

If you're at least willing to try having romance in your game, you have a variety of options about how – and how much – to play it out:

## **ROLL THE DICE**

If you want romance to be part of the story but don't want to dwell on it, stick to dice rolls. If the system you're using has social resolution mechanics that work, use them; if not, the GM can decide what's appropriate.

## **ASK FOR A PRIVATE TEST RUN**

Experimenting can be easier when there are fewer people around. A separate scene outside of game day can sate your curiosity and/or build your skills, and if you end up feeling comfortable, you might try a scene during a full session later.

## **KEEP IT PRIVATE**

If you won't ever be comfortable roleplaying romance in front of a group - or if others have said they don't want to see it - keep scenes between lovers private. If the GM doesn't want to deal with it, the players involved can summarize any key story developments.

## **HIDE YOUR FACE**

It could be easier for some gamers if romances are handled at a distance physically. Writing online may help alleviate some fears of

being watched and judged. If you enjoy hearing and portraying characters' voices, a phone call can work just as well.

## **KEEP IT BRIEF**

Nothing says an engaging romance has to take a lot of time. Quick exchanges and messages can hold a lot of tension and even be fun for others to watch! And nobody wants to wait forever for their turn to interact, whether during social scenes or combat.

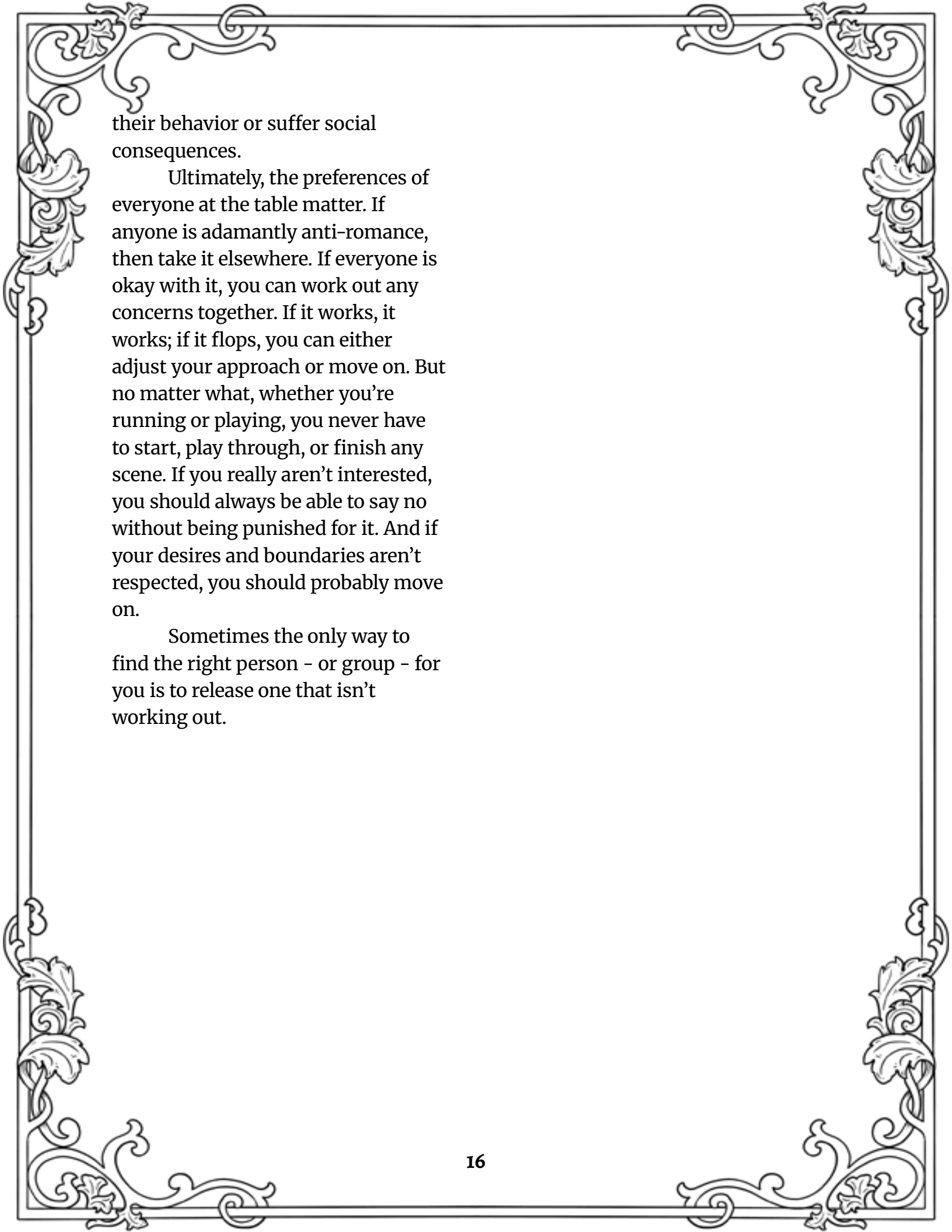
## **USE THE THIRD PERSON AND KEEP YOUR DISTANCE**

You might encourage using the third person point of view for romantic exchanges. "The lord compliments your dress and asks for a dance" can seem less personal than a direct delivery in the character's own words.

## **KEEP SCENES G-RATED AND PUBLIC**

Avoid cursing and sexual content; this can keep many gamers from taking things too far. It may also help to keep characters in public spaces where they'll have to watch





their behavior or suffer social consequences.

Ultimately, the preferences of everyone at the table matter. If anyone is adamantly anti-romance, then take it elsewhere. If everyone is okay with it, you can work out any concerns together. If it works, it works; if it flops, you can either adjust your approach or move on. But no matter what, whether you're running or playing, you never have to start, play through, or finish any scene. If you really aren't interested, you should always be able to say no without being punished for it. And if your desires and boundaries aren't respected, you should probably move on.

Sometimes the only way to find the right person - or group - for you is to release one that isn't working out.