



# The Himbo Trope

Exploring Definition, Character Design, Narrative Significance and Fan Reception in Media

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## ABSTRACT

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Tropes and archetypes are an important part of media studies. They help better create, analyse and understand any media that includes characters or a storyline. New tropes are emerging all the time, which leads to some of them being generally unfamiliar or underexplored, and that prevents media experts from utilizing those tropes in their work as effectively as they could. One of those tropes is "himbo".

Etymologically, the definition of a himbo is "a male version of 'bimbo'". The definition one most likely comes across when using Google Search is something along the lines of "an attractive, but unintelligent young man". However, there seems to be more to it than just that, since the definition is nuanced and evolving. This thesis focuses on defining the trope, analysing its significance and the way it is perceived in modern fandom spaces, and creating a coherent set of guidelines that could be potentially used for creating or identifying himbo characters in media. The thesis also attempts to explore the character design aspect of the trope and determine the possible visual cues that are commonly utilized when designing a himbo character. The main objectives of the thesis are to redefine the term "himbo" to better fit what it is actually used for right now and attempt to design a character that could be read as a himbo.

To meet the objectives of the thesis, research on the following topics has been conducted: history of the term, possible definition and how it could be altered, fan reception and behaviour around himbo characters, narrative significance of those characters and if (and how) it might have changed over the years. To further proceed from the theoretical research part, the practical part was delivered in three parts: a questionnaire to gather information and opinions from fandom spaces on social media and the results analysis; a set of guidelines; and a character design project (a reference spreadsheet as well as other visual/textual exploration).

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Key words: himbo, character, media, trope, narrative theory

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**GLOSSARY**

trope	a reoccurring cliché in media
archetype	a defined type of character with repeating characteristics and/or story narratives
fandom	a space (can be digital or/and physical) where fans interact and participate in discussions centered around a certain media
fanart	a piece of (usually visual) fine or contemporary art depicting an already existing media
headcanon / canon	something a fan imagines about the characters that does not appear or is not confirmed on screen/on the page (in “canon”)
meme	an element of a culture or system of behavior passed from one individual to another by imitation
edit	(in context of this thesis) a video; creatively edited clips, typically featuring fictional characters, that use effects, transitions, and music to enhance the original content’s visual appeal and emotional impact
alter	alternative identity of a person with Dissociative Identity Disorder, created subconsciously as a way for the brain to cope with trauma

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tropes are foundational elements in storytelling, as they help building and guiding plotlines, offering tools for the creation, analysis, and comprehension of narratives. Tropes emerge in media as recurring storytelling devices or patterns used to express ideas that the audience can recognize or relate to, often based on successful examples in the past (García-Sánchez et al. 2021). Tropes most resemble the analysis of motifs in folk literature, which dates as far back as the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was popularised and standardised by Stith Thompson in his *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1932). By Thompson, a motif is the smallest element in a story that persists in tradition, and to have that power, such narrative has to have something striking about it. That definition echoes the definition of the trope provided in the glossary.

New tropes emerge by this day, as the state of media often reflects what the society is lacking or striving for, and tropes used in certain stories help us as media consumers not only better understand the world around us, the complexity of the psychology of the characters, and discover something within ourselves, but also better understand the society and its state (or what it was like when the media was published) (García-Ortega et al. 2020).

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of specifically the himbo trope, as it is one of the tropes that emerged fairly recently and has gained some popularity in the last few years. Central to the objectives of this thesis is the redefinition of the term "himbo" in an attempt to accurately reflect its current usage. The research conducted strives to understand what makes a himbo characters earn their "title". The thesis also dwells into the history of the trope, as well as its relation to modern pop culture, fandom culture and queer culture. By establishing an informal set of guidelines, this study seeks to facilitate the creation and identification of himbo characters in various forms of media. Additionally, another main goal of this thesis is to visualize a character that embodies the essence of a himbo. The thesis delves into the character design aspect of the trope, identifying common visual cues utilized in creating himbo characters.

To achieve these goals, the thesis focuses on several key areas: the historical evolution of the term, potential alterations to its definition, multiple case studies, fan reception and behaviour surrounding himbo characters, inclusivity or lack of thereof in the term, as well as the narrative significance of these characters and how it may have evolved over time.

The thesis turns to online communities and excerpts from online fandom spaces as they are an important tool of understanding the unique patterns of human thoughts and particular feelings tied to emerging tropes in contemporary media. Referring to Twitter/TikTok/Reddit posts is not exactly science-based, but it helps gain insight into what the people in the communities say. That is especially important when the subject at hand (a himbo definition, in this case) is shaped and moulded *by* those communities.

Moving beyond theoretical exploration, the practical component of the thesis is divided into three parts. Firstly, a questionnaire was distributed to gather insights and opinions from fandom spaces on social media, followed by an analysis of the results. Many examples of himbo characters used in the thesis, including case studies, come up in the data collected. Secondly, a set of guidelines was developed based on the findings, aiming to assist creators in effective crafting of himbo characters. Finally, a character reference spreadsheet and other visual and textual explorations were conducted to further examine the nuances of the himbo archetype and provide a practical example of what one himbo character can look like based on the set of guidelines created.

Through this mixed approach, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the himbo trope, providing insights for both media students and experts, and creators in the realm of media studies and entertainment.

## 2 INTRODUCTION TO THE HIMBO TROPE

### 2.1 Evolution of the type and term

Traditionally a himbo is considered "an attractive man, often very buff or fit, that is not particularly smart or bright but often tries to be respectful, particularly to women" (Urban Dictionary, user vibesx, 2020). Essentially, the evolution of himbo – where it derived from and what it has come to be – is, beside all, a reflection of how masculinity was perceived through time. The word "himbo" itself is not very new, it's first usage is documented in 1988 according to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. However, judging by the Google Search results for "himbo" from 2004 to this day (24th of January 2024), it started becoming more popular around 2019, peaking in 2020, and is still quite popular in the late 2024 compared to the previous years (Picture 1). Peculiar thing can be noticed if we take a look at the other diagram (Figure 2). Here the key phrase for the search is "what is himbo". The peak popularity is shown around the years 2004-2007, then drops, and increases again after 2020.

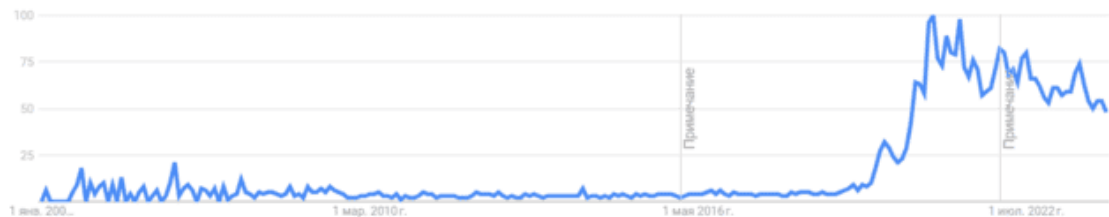


FIGURE 1. Google Search Popularity Dynamic, Keyword "himbo". Data used is from 2004 to 2024.



FIGURE 2. Google Search Popularity Dynamic, Keyphrase "what is himbo". Data used is from 2004 to 2024.

Two hypotheses can be drawn here: either Google Search users now tend to have a different approach to forming their search inquiries, or after the 2004-2007 period users did not feel the need to research what is a himbo that actively, but rather look at examples or details about that trope. Either way, both diagrams show that in the recent 2 to 4 years the interest to the topic increased.

### 2.1.1 True Hero Origin (Superman)

Jungian Archetypes (Table 1) is a concept that was created by Carl Jung in the 20th century (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, 1969). These archetypes, as Jung and other psychologists and psychiatrists after him state, are the common topics or narratives that arise during one's life. Archetypes are seen as universal, inherited potentials which shape human experiences and behaviours (McAdams & Reischer, 2019, 83 - 86.). Media and literature experts apply this concept to fiction, and it is commonly used to classify different characters in the story to fit into a certain archetypal mould. The idea of Jungian Archetypes is also what aided shaping the concept of a Hero's Journey popularized by Joseph Campbell (Campbell, 1949).

TABLE 1. Jungian archetypes, their role in the story and value for the viewer.

Archetype	Helps Rid the World Of	Helps Us
Creator	Mediocrity, consistency. poor craftsmanship	Craft something new
Caregiver	Selfishness and ingrati- tude	Care for others
Ruler	Chaos, vulnerability	Exert control
Jester	Boredom and fear of be- ing boring	Have a good time

Everyman	Standing out, seeming to put on airs, and being rejected as a result	Be okay just the way they are
Lover	Being alone, a wallflower, unwanted, unloved	Find and give love
Hero	Weakness, vulnerability, wimping-out	Act courageously
Outlaw	Powerless, trivialized, inconsequential	Break the rules
Magician	Unanticipated negative consequences	Affect transformation
Innocent	Wrongdoing, mistakes that provoke punishment	Retain and renew faith
Explorer	Being trapped, conforming inner emptiness, nonbeing	Maintain independence
Sage	Being duped, misled, ignorant or out-smarted	Understand their world

One of those character archetypes is the Hero, probably one of the earliest concepts of what later on will evolve into a plethora of subtypes, "himbo" being one of them. The Hero is courageous, noble and strong; however, their arrogance is their greatest flaw. As Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette state in their book "King Warrior Magician Lover", "The 'death' of the Hero in the life of a boy (or a man) really means that he has finally encountered his limitations. He has met the enemy, and the enemy is himself. He has met his own dark side, his very unheroic side". Such characters are often the main character of the story that the audience is supposed to empathize with. In popular media culture, one of the greatest by-products of exploring this archetype is the superhero media. According to Scott Jeffrey, "the original superhero archetypes were arguably the Greek gods of

Olympus. DC Comic superhero characters, in particular, are modeled after these Greek gods of ancient mythology” (2024). Superman, or Clark Kent, showed a new twist on the image of "The Hero". "Superman" later on partially replaces the Hero archetype and becomes its own subcategory of said archetype.

Superman, one of the first and most iconic superheroes, was created during the time of significant global crises and social upheaval, particularly The Great Depression (influencing Superman's focus on social justice and fighting for the common men) and World War II, when Superman became the symbol of American patriotism. In 1969, Superman intervened in the Vietnam War in Superman #216. This marked a significant shift as DC Comics had previously kept Superman away from direct involvement in America's wars. The decision to involve Superman this time was partially in response to letters from servicemen and reflected the changing public opinion against the war (Gordon 2015).

Superman's hypermasculinity is rooted in personal, intertextual understandings of desirable characteristics in a man; he, being the embodiment of the ideal masculinity of his time (Lund 2016, 157-173.), is a truly unrealistic goal for a human being to strive for (Picture 1). He is attractive, he is inhumanly strong, he is smart, almost invincible, and he always saves the day. So much so that he is barely allowed to be weak and vulnerable on-page, especially in his earlier comics. He is a superhuman, a hero, with barely any soft spots to hit (Picture 2).

Later on, the "Marty Stu" trope gained relevance (deriving from the "Mary Sue" trope, just as "himbo" derives from "bimbo"), mocking the hypermasculine traits of all-perfect male characters like Superman. As the article "Marty Stu" on Tropedia suggests, Marty Stu is usually extremely handsome or has a unique charm that draws in all the women, but romance isn't his main focus. He is a tough fighter, rogue agent, often skilled in disguises. Marty Stu is all about action because men who don't take charge are seen as unmanly and imperfect. If he is more of a thinker, he solves problems with his intellect, sometimes even creating new science or technology in the process. He is too powerful and imbalanced.



PICTURE 1. Page from "Superman", issue 1, DC Comics, 1939.



PICTURE 2. Frame from "Superman", issue 1, DC Comics, 1939.

Another great example of the himbo evolution stage is Hercules (Disney, 1997) – he is both a hero and a himbo, he falls right between the Superhero motif and the “traditional” definition of himbo. He is the main character of the story, is shown as heroic and bold, strong and courageous. However, he also has a side that is later on typically attributed with himbos (Picture 3): he is kind-hearted, slightly naïve and oblivious, friendly and easily excited, which is a derail from the original myths (Homer, 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE; Euripides, 416 BCE) of Heracles that did not dive into that aspect of the character and has shown him as plainly heroic, and, frankly, quite a bad person by today’s standards.



PICTURE 3. Frame from “Hercules” showing Hercules and Phil, Disney, 1997.

### 2.1.2 Early Usage (Kronk Pepikrankenitz)

If one searches up examples of himbo characters, there is almost a certainty that they would come across this example: Kronk from “The Emperor's New Groove” (2000). Kronk is, in a sense, a very typical himbo. He is often used for comedic relief in the story (Picture 4). He’s not very intelligent as is reflected in the famous scene with Yzma that became a well-known meme (Knowyourmeme, updated 2024), – the way Kronk misunderstands, forgets or mixes up certain things leads to a lot of key plot points or just funny situations. However, he is very muscular

and conventionally attractive, and, despite not being smart, he is still compassionate and friendly, a gentleman and even can be considered a “pushover” as he can be convinced to follow orders fairly easily. However, Kronk got his own movie (Kronk’s New Groove, 2005), which means there was something more outstanding about his character than the other ones of the original movie.



PICTURE 4. Screenshots from “The Emperor’s New Groove”, Disney, 2000.

In this context, it also feels important to mention two other tropes, one of which overlaps with himbo in a lot of cases – the jerk jock (Ram Sweeney and Kurt Kelly from “Heathers the Musical”, Thoddeus Sureblade from “Nimona”, Jackson from “Teen Wolf”) and the lovable jock (Andrew Clark from “The Breakfast Club”, Jeff Atkins from “13 Reasons Why”, Harvey from “Sabrina the Teenage Witch”) that are typical in high school settings. While the Jerk Jock is usually the main bully, the Lovable Jock is “a Nice Guy by default”, as stated in the article by TvTropes.

The article “Jerk Jock” on TvTropes claims: “Originally Lovable Jock was the normal portrayal while Jerk Jock was a reversal, but nowadays the Jerk Jock tends to be more populous in fiction than Lovable Jock characters”. It is pretty clear that the Lovable Jock shares a lot of qualities with a traditional image of himbo: he is handsome, buff, benevolent and a certain degree of slow-witted; more muscle than brains. The Jock tropes, as well as the Himbo trope, are heavily tied with the masculinity aspect of it.

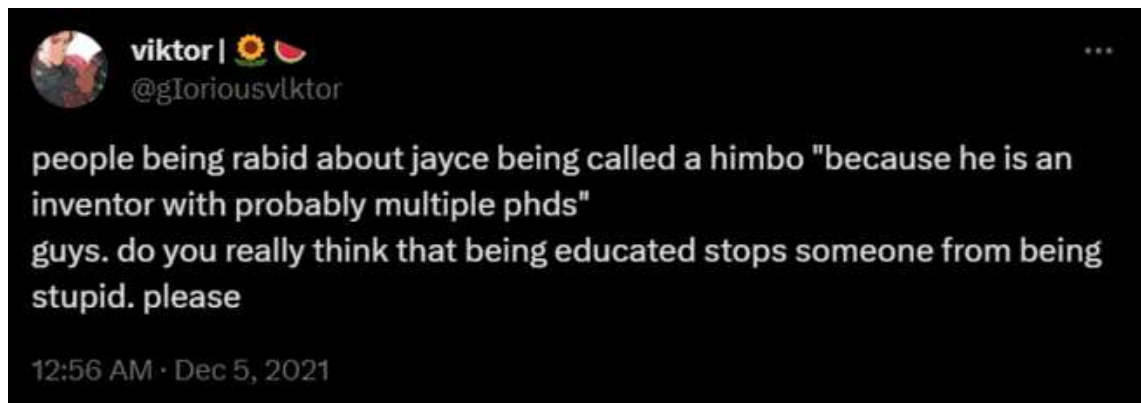


PICTURE 5. Screenshot from “The Breakfast Club” featuring Emilio Estevez as Andrew Clark, 1985.

### 2.1.3 Subversion of the stereotype (Jayce Talis)

Even despite the abovementioned traditional definition of a himbo, one could argue that the perception of the trope is changing with the recent years. Major evidence of that would be people in fandom spaces reframing the term and using it towards characters who are intelligent, but naïve, gullible, unsophisticated and/or kind-hearted, while still being fit and conventionally attractive. In the screenshot provided (Picture 6), one of the users on Twitter mentions that Jayce Talis, a character from the show "Arcane" (Riot Games, Fortiche, 2021), who is a genius inventor capable of building technologies never-seen-before, is a himbo despite his obviously extraordinary academic performance. The user states that academic success and being educated does not stop one from being "stupid". Another Twitter user agrees (Picture 7), stating that "high intelligence low wisdom" characters can still be considered himbos. That gives us an illustration of how people, particularly in fandom spaces, treat the term “himbo”, therefore stepping away from the “unintelligent jock” stereotype.

Jayce is one of the clearest examples of the “new himbo”, his character subverts the stereotype that a man can’t be handsome, smart and kind all at the same time. However, with all those positive traits the flaws remain: just as any “traditional” himbo, Jayce is extremely gullible and emotional, he can be led against his own beliefs by someone he trusts and cares for. That precisely happens with Mel Medarda, who first makes Jayce fall in love with her, and then manipulates him into becoming a councillor and using his technology to build weapons, despite Jayce stating multiple times that politics or war are not something he wants to partake in.



PICTURE 6. Twitter user gLoriousvltor's post.



PICTURE 7. Twitter user vikjayce's reply.

Jayce Talis and other characters (for example, Dr. Reed Richards from Fantastic Four, Marvel Comics, 1961) that are well-meaning, intelligent, physically fit and gullible or “dorky” forge the “new himbo” trope that offers to expand the expectations of traditional masculinity and create himbo characters that are multi-dimensional and read more like real people instead of mere functions.

## 2.2 Narrative Significance

The hero archetype, as an origin of the himbo trope we see in modern media, is a symbol of hope, a personification of courage and resilience. A hero is proactive and ready to take action, they are responsible and trustworthy (Jung 1919, Jeffrey 2024). Characters that fall into the hero archetype definition can be protagonists, such as Katniss Everdeen (Collins 2008), Harry Potter (Rowling 2001) and even archaic Greek heroes like Odysseus and Heracles (Homer 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE), but they can also be sidekicks and companions like Samwise Gamgee (Tolkien 1954), as well as mentors or even antagonists turned heroes.

However, since himbos are usually seen as less intelligent and serious, it is more common to see them as side characters rather than the main ones compared to their hero archetype “ancestor”. Heroes are brave and courageous; their role is often saving the day. Himbos, on the other hand, are kind, caring and are sometimes used for comedic relief, for example characters like Ken (Barbie, 2023), Shiv (Pu-239, 2006) or Tormund (Game of Thrones, 2011) are often the centre of the jokes in scenes they are a part of (Picture 8).



PICTURE 8. Oscar Isaac as Shiv in “The Jackson Five” scene, PU-239, 2006.

“Traditional” himbos often take on sidekick roles (Kronk, *The Emperor's New Groove*, 2000), romantic interests to the female lead (Kristoff Bjorgman, *Frozen*, 2013 & *Frozen 2*, 2019), foil characters (Thor from *Marvel Cinematic Universe* is

the main character, but also a foil to Loki). The “new himbos”, such as Jayce Talis (Arcane), Peter B Parker (Across the Spiderverse, 2023), Gale Dekarios (Baldur’s Gate 3, 2023), Beck (Tron: Uprising, 2012), Laios (Delicious in Dungeon, 2024) become more popular, a lot of them take the leading roles of protagonists or crucial side characters, they are seen for more than joke characters or strongholds of masculinity and play a role more significant to the story than the “traditional” himbos usually do. Although it is important to note that even then some of them take on the functions of companions and mentors (just like the original “heroes”), the weight of himbo characters in stories is growing, media creators build them in a way that helps audience better identify and sympathise with their arcs (Picture 9).



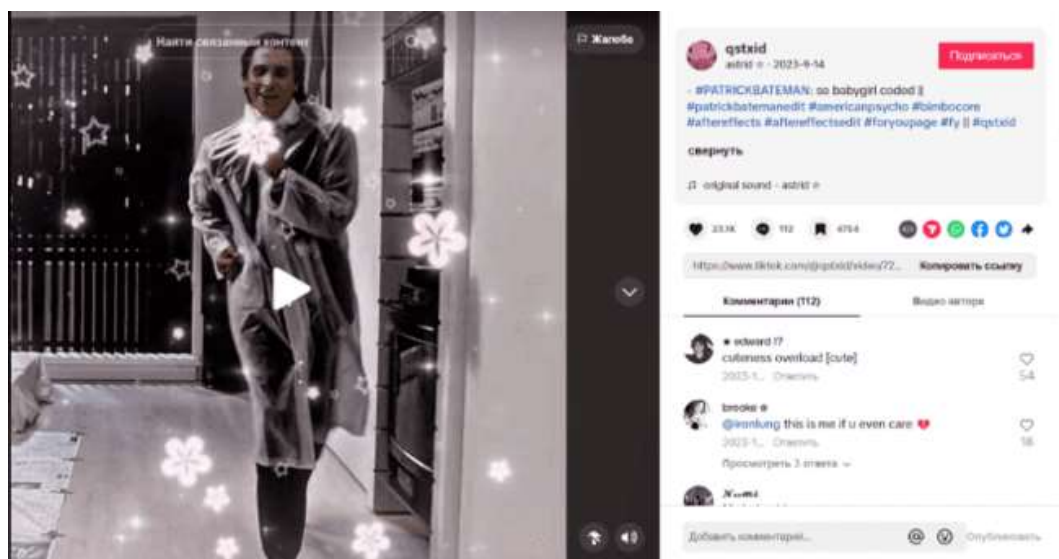
PICTURE 9. Laios and Shuro Argument, Delicious in Dungeon, 2024.

### 2.2.1 Expanding Gender & LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

With Hero and Superhero archetypes, one can notice that even characters that aren't male fall into the definitions, for example Wonder Woman (DC Comics, 1941) or Moana (Disney, 2016) are strong female leads. Himbo, however, derives from the term “bimbo” (according to Online Etymology Dictionary), supposedly making the two terms binary gendered mirrored versions of each other. But looking deeper into the origins of the words and the way they are used today one can argue with that. Although Wikipedia still provides the definitions for both terms as

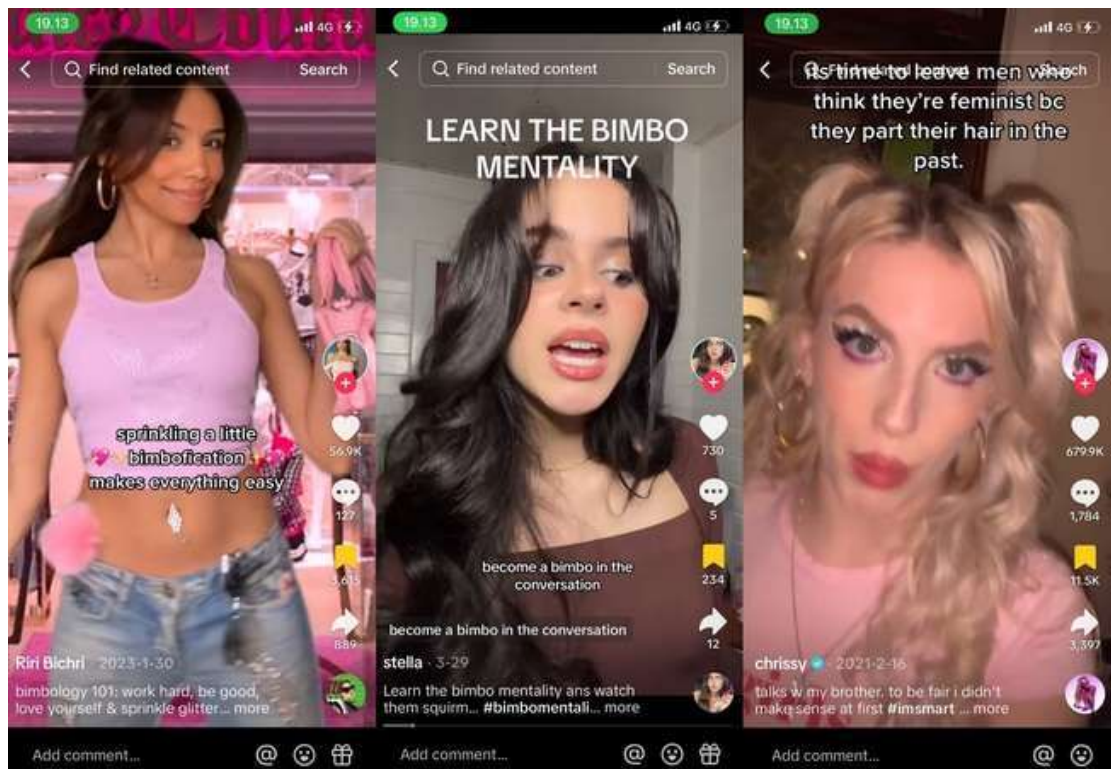
“attractive, but unintelligent” man or woman respectively, the words seem to have wandered far off from the binary gendered definitive frames.

Interestingly, the term “bimbo” used to mean exactly what “himbo” does today: in the 1920-s in the US unintelligent men were called bimbos (“Oxford dictionary of word origin”, Cresswell, 1950). Today bimbo is often used to describe a certain aesthetic that can sometimes be called “bimbocore”, “glittercore” or “girlypop”. That “aesthetic” can be applied to all characters regardless of their gender as long as there’s pink, glitter and, most importantly, a certain gleeful vibe. Fandom spaces go as far as calling Patrick Bateman from “American Psycho” (2000) “babygirl” and using hashtags like “bimbocore” in an edit with him (Picture 10).



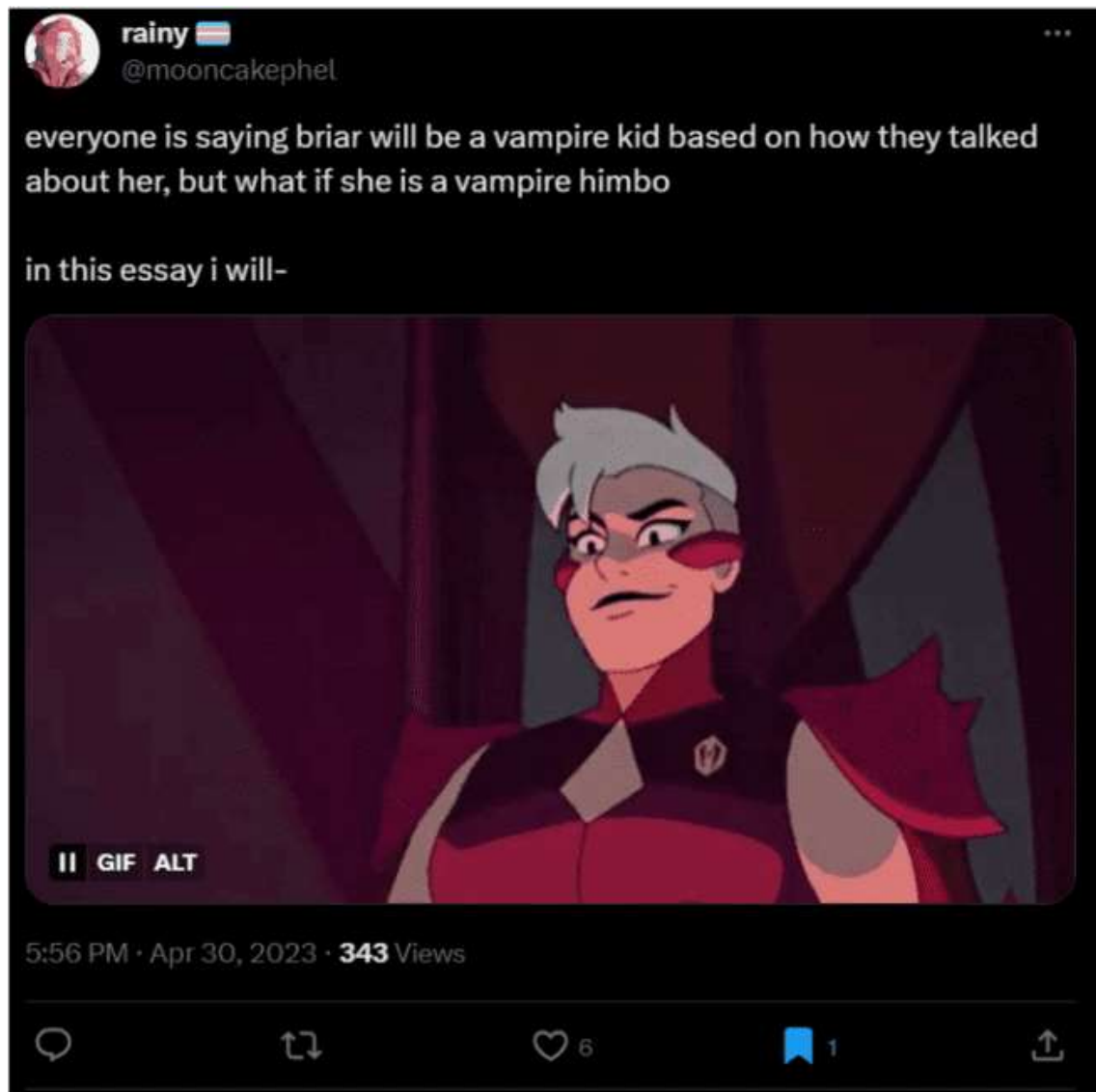
PICTURE 10. Screenshot of user qstxid’s Patrick Bateman edit on TikTok, 2023.

The Bimbo personas and Bimbocore aesthetic have gained significant traction in feminist spaces, where women are reclaiming the term “bimbo” as a way to empower themselves (Picture 11). They see it as a statement that they can dress and present themselves however they choose, without worrying about society labelling them as “fake”, “inauthentic” or “unintelligent”. They choose to embrace the overly-feminine image. This movement highlights the importance of autonomy and challenges the restrictive norms that dictate how women should look or act as opposed to the belief that only a woman who fully rejects adaptive preferences (Khader 2022) can be considered a “real feminist”.



PICTURE 11. Screenshot of users Riri Bichri, stella and chrissy on TikTok, 2023, 2024 & 2021.

The term himbo, on the other hand, is often used on social media to describe a certain set of characteristics. It seems to strive further away from the binary gendered definition, as some people claim that characters who are not male are or can be himbos (Picture 12). On Picture 13 TikTok edit-maker kqklllo refers to Supergirl (2015) as a himbo, as Kara Kent exhibits many of the qualities typically associated with this trope, similar to later portrayals of Superman. Kara is portrayed as excitable, attractive, friendly, sporty, slightly anxious, and naïve, all while embodying a strong sense of justice. In 2020, the term “thembo” was coined to describe non-binary individuals who share similar characteristics with a himbo (Urban Dictionary). However, “himbo” continues to be used as a broad term for people and characters of all genders, encompassing traits like kindness, impressionability, and physical fitness, an interest in athletics or general attractiveness.



PICTURE 12. Twitter user mooncakephel discussing the possibility of Briar (League of Legends) being a himbo before she was introduced into the game, 2023.



PICTURE 13. An edit of Supergirl (Kara Kent) by kqklllo on TikTok, 2024.

Furthermore, as the term “himbo” originated from the word “bimbo” but both of them derail from the gendered definitions, it is worth looking at how there are characters that combine the characteristic traits of the typical himbo with that of a bimbo. One of the key examples would be, of course, Ken. If we take Ken’s portrayal from the latest Barbie film (2023) for reference, as a quintessence of what this character has become after years of existing, we can see that he clearly represents all the qualities of a “traditional” himbo mentioned above: he is not

smart, he is highly naïve and gullible, obsessed with his appearance. However, he possesses a certain charm exactly due to his unsophisticated approach to life. Especially in contrast to Barbie, whose character is meant to raise topics such as the role of a woman in a society, the meaning of existing even, as well as making a commentary on modern feminism as a whole (Kermode, *The Guardian* 2023), Ken seems quite shallow and simple.

That is the crucial part of the dialogue about himbos and bimbos as they are today: Barbie, the “original” bimbo who has been the image of simple femininity (Bramescio, C., *Barbie: the patriarchy, the existentialism, the capitalism*, *The Guardian*, 2023), becomes extremely self-conscious, leading and independent. Ken, on the other hand, who has been the “traditionally masculine counterpart” of Barbie for decades, is reduced to an actual doll-like figure who does not even understand what “patriarchy” actually means. It’s a subversion of gender stereotype expectations on a societal level, the structural level.

But it is also worth mentioning how despite being a simple and rather carefree character, Ken’s aesthetic and appearance perfectly mirrors those of Barbie. Despite being the obvious male “reflection” of Barbie, his clothing style is just slightly more masculine, but all the colors, patterns and overall feeling stays consistent with the world of Barbies. That is especially apparent in the rollerblades scene (Picture 14), as the outfits of Barbie and Ken are almost the same. He is wearing pink and glitter, with his outfits becoming more “traditionally masculine” and even somber as he dwells deeper into his harmful patriarchy ideas. That aesthetic, combined with the absolutely simple-minded narrative of “I’m just Ken”, makes Ken stand out as the true combination of himbo and bimbo characteristics.



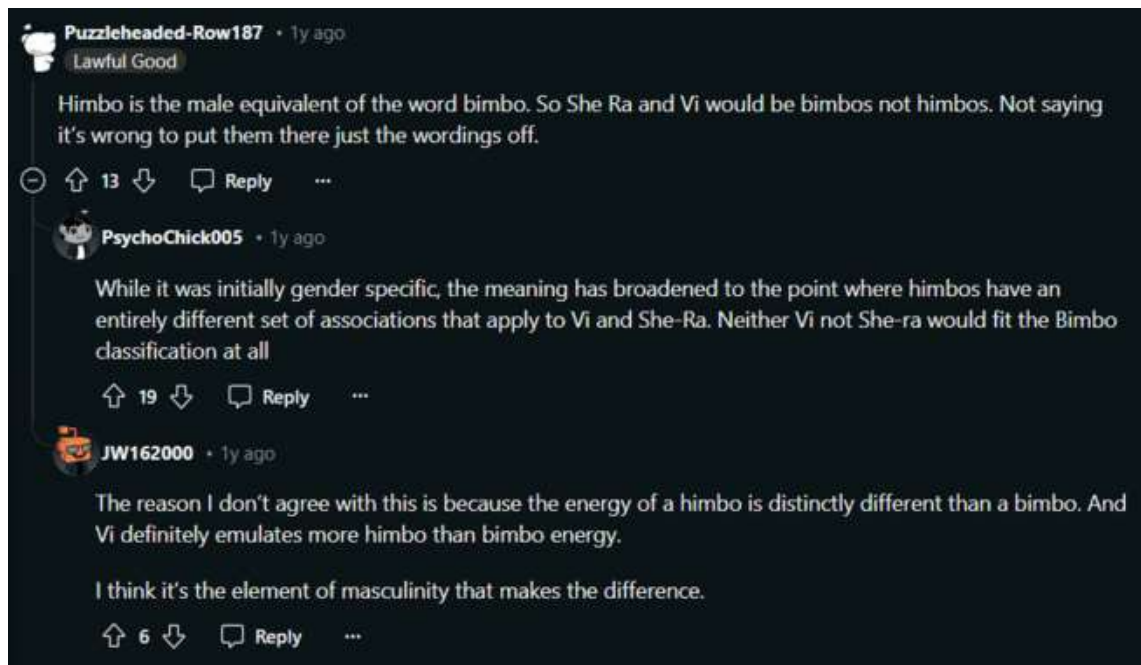
PICTURE 14. Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling shooting for “Barbie”, 2022.

In conclusion, bimbo and himbo are definitely not just opposite-gender versions of each other. Bimbo is essentially about femininity, and himbo is a masculine

archetype, but it is more than just that. Bimbo can also be a commentary on feminism for women, as well as an aesthetic as described in the song “Bimbo Doll” by Tila Tsoli (2021), it’s pink and glitter and absurdly carefree. Himbo, on the other hand, is associated with soft masculinity, gullibility, and fitness. Any person and character can be a bimbo and/or a himbo regardless of their gender. A picture posted on Reddit expands on the idea (Picture 15), providing a grid chart to differentiate between different types of himbos, implying that it is not always necessary for a himbo to be a man, and even that appearance and fitness are not always important either as long as a character possesses at least some of the himbo qualities. Reddit users elaborate in the comments (Picture 16), claiming that “the energy of a himbo is distinctly different than a bimbo” and that the element of masculinity is essentially what makes a himbo.



PICTURE 15. “Himbo Alignment Chart” posted on Reddit in r/Alignment Chart, 2023.



PICTURE 16. Reddit users elaborating on their perception of how "himbo" is more than a male version of "bimbo".

## 2.2.2 Neurodivergence in Himbos

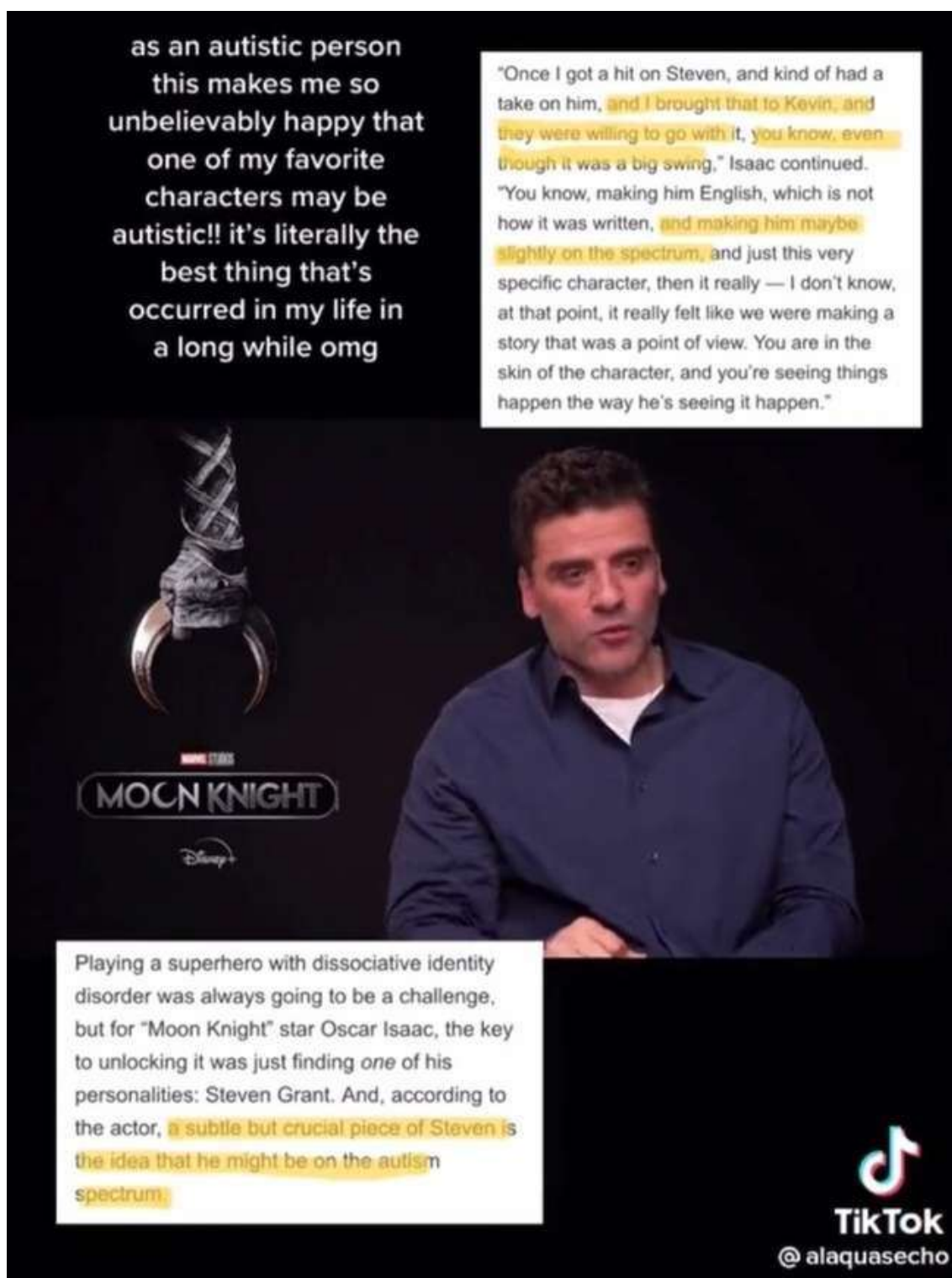
As one of the main traits of a himbo as we perceive them now is lack of wisdom despite possible high intelligence, a lot of himbo characters are bad at picking up social cues, are gullible and even more often lack focus or are inattentive to certain things that would be obvious to others. As mentioned in the case studies, one of examples could be Jayce Talis (Arcane, 2022): despite being an academic genius, he does not understand that he is being manipulated by a powerful politician Mel Medarda into doing what she needed him to do, but what essentially went against his own beliefs (making weapons for the war based on the technology Jayce and Viktor discovered and developed). There are more subtle and mundane examples of that, e.g. Shiv (PU-239, 2006) being pushed around by his mates and the antagonists of the movie due to his lack of perceptiveness and poor ability to adapt to the rules of the crime world. Shiv is kind-hearted, slightly clueless, and that gets him in trouble.

Because some of those traits (like misunderstanding, forgetting or mixing up certain things, not being completely socially adapted (that is often read as being naïve), acting lost or even "silly", having hyperfixations or special interests) as

well as some behavioural patterns are tied to neurodivergence, these characters are often “headcannoned” by people in fandoms to be autistic or have ADHD, called “autistic-coded”, etc. Dung Nguyen explains that “since most of these case studies are not confirmed or implied to be autistic, phrases like “perceived” or “coded” are more relevant when describing them. These phrases imply having autistic characteristics and tendencies instead of assigning the person to have autism” in their thesis “Autistic Perceived Character Representation in Sitcoms” (2023).

A good example of this is the Moon Knight system, particularly in the latest adaptation of the story in the series Moon Knight (2022 miniseries, Marvel, Disney). Although none of the three alters of Marc Spector necessarily fit the 'himbo' criteria (arguably), this series illustrates how characters can be strongly suggested to be neurodivergent, even without explicit confirmation. The portrayal of these characters carries significant weight, particularly because they are played by Oscar Isaac, a highly respected and influential actor known for his nuanced performances in pictures like “The Card Counter” (2021), “Inside Llewyn Davis” (2013) or “Scenes from a Marriage” (2021). Oscar Isaac's involvement adds a layer of credibility and depth to the depiction of neurodivergence.

In fact, Isaac himself mentioned that he pitched at least one of the alters, Steven Grant, as being on the autism spectrum (Interview for Disney+ 2022). This creative decision resonates with many fans, who felt that Isaac portrayed all three alters of the system as neurodivergent to some extent. Isaac's interpretation not only reflects his own understanding and sensitivity toward the representation of neurodivergent individuals but also highlights the growing importance of such representations in mainstream media, particularly when portrayed by actors of his calibre.



PICTURE 17. TikTok user alquasecho posts a clip from the Disney+ Interview with Oscar Isaac (2022), with parts of it transcribed and highlighted. The user expresses their own joy towards autistic representation in Steven Grant.

**Steven Grant's autistic traits** ☐:

- Info-dumping
- Special Interests
- Has a strict routine
- Sensitive to bright lights/loud noises/etc.
- Anxious in social settings
- Hard time understanding people's feelings but is still very compassionate

P.S. He has social anxiety, DID (obviously), and insomnia.

*I love him and so should you*

**Marc Spector's autistic traits** ☐:

- Accidentally blunt and rude
- Blank/neutral facial expression
- Trouble connecting to others
- Tone problems
- Has trouble understanding others
- Paces to stim
- Antisocial

*(I headcannon that his mother used to make fun of just autism traits so now he masks 99% of the time and Steven has always been an "outlet" of sorts)*

PICTURE 18. Pinterest user TooGayForThisTwat analysis of the system's autistic traits.

While the group of confirmed neurodivergent characters is small and seldom overlaps with the group of himbo characters, they share a lot of common traits, and, as far as I've noticed, many himbos are perceived in fandom spaces as autistic. It's important to consider the perspectives of neurodivergent fans, as many of them believe certain characters may also be on the spectrum often because they relate to them on a personal level. Even when these claims are made in a light-hearted manner, they are worth exploring and acknowledging.



PICTURE 19. Twitter user samhaiin states that both Jayce (Arcane, 2022) and Fred (Scooby-Doo, 1976) are autistic. Both of the characters, as well as Ken (Barbie, 2023) are considered himbos.

## 2.3 Fan Reception

### 2.3.1 Empathy and Identification with Himbo Characters

As fandom culture expands and geek interests become more available to the public, it is unavoidable that more people start to identify with certain labels that inhabit fandoms. “Himbo” is no exception. If earlier interpretations of the trope were seen as “stale” or even boring at some point, right now the himbohood is going through a certain renaissance.

The article “SUPERMAN TO BE KILLED” by L., J. suggests Superman's death (and, later on, rebirth) is a natural progression for a character who has become more human and vulnerable, a change that has been a long time coming (1994). People seem to be drawn to the kind, soft, dorky, naïve masculinity these characters radiate. What was seen as annoyingly overpowered (Marty Stu trope), or purely funny (Comedic Relief character role) now is awakening more and more fondness in online fandom spaces.

People don't seem to enjoy stoic masculinity as much as they did when earlier renditions of Superman became popular. He was created in response to global crises as a way to cope with them and raise the public's spirits, as well as to portray an ideal man, a strong soldier of social justice that America needed. He urged men (mostly young boys) to grow up to be just like him and defend the innocent. Now that there are no global wars, and the opinions on military service has also shifted from strong support during World War II to a more nuanced and less uniformly supportive stance today (Schreiber 1979; Simon & Lovrich 2009), that Superman is needed no more. Bigger issues are at play in the modern Western society.

Earlier superheroes era in general follows the same patterns of creating flawless characters with what seems to be a lack of personality. However, in modern day, fandoms learn to appreciate male characters that are vulnerable and imperfect in their own ways. Nowadays more and more people find themselves relating to those characters rather than treating them as mere functions for the plot.

Of course, in this context it is impossible to overlook the “golden retriever boyfriend” (WikiHow, 2024) label that became rather popular recently. It follows the same characteristic blueprints modern interpretations of himbo does: golden retriever boyfriends are excited, supportive, affectionate, naïve, very energetic and/or sporty, kind-hearted. In fact, “golden retriever boyfriend” made it well outside the fandom circles and is used primarily by young people, even those who are not very invested in pop culture. Labels like “husky boyfriend”, “black cat girlfriend”, “doberman boyfriend” are also a less popular, but still present variations, all used to describe different behavioural (and sometimes physical) characteristics of one’s partner. The “golden retriever boyfriend” is a great example of not only fandom and non-fandom circles interests intersecting, but also the mirrored need in the society for softer and kinder masculinity.

### 3 CHARACTER DESIGN

#### 3.1 Analysing Common Traits

To gather some opinions on the matter and hear what other people think constitutes a himbo, I made a questionnaire I shared with my friends on social media and multiple subreddits, including r/DnD, r/animation, r/geek, r/himbos, r/DigitalPainting, r/popculturechat and multiple others. Despite the fact that the demographics weren't very diverse as the average participator was a person between 19 and 30 years old who claims to have some understanding of the term himbo and actively participates in fandom culture (Figure 3), some conclusions might be drawn from the results still.

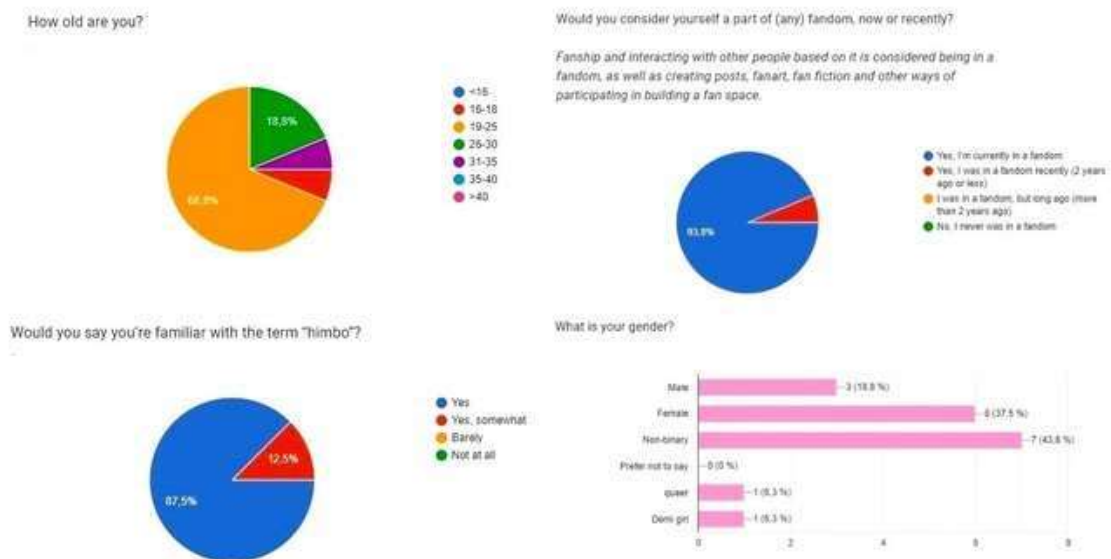


Figure 3. Approximate estimation of the age, gender and niches of interests of the participants.

After analyzing all the definitions given (the participants were asked to provide one each in their own words), I managed to string them together and a form one that includes most mentioned qualities. As per the survey results, a himbo *is a big, attractive, kind-hearted man who is often seen as naive or a bit clueless, typically friendly, respectful, and well-meaning, but not the sharpest. Known for his easygoing nature, emotional warmth, and sometimes seen as a bit like a golden retriever in human form.*

I analysed the survey responses regarding himbo qualities (physical and not), as shown in the stats in Figures 4, 5 and 6. In Table 2, I calculated the importance index for each quality covered in the questionnaire, and then included the most voted options (anything that scored above 50%) if the importance index was higher than 1.5 and if the question assumed that (meaning, there were no options to vote for in the last three qualities rating questions).



Figure 4. Statistics of the answers to the survey's question on himbo qualities.

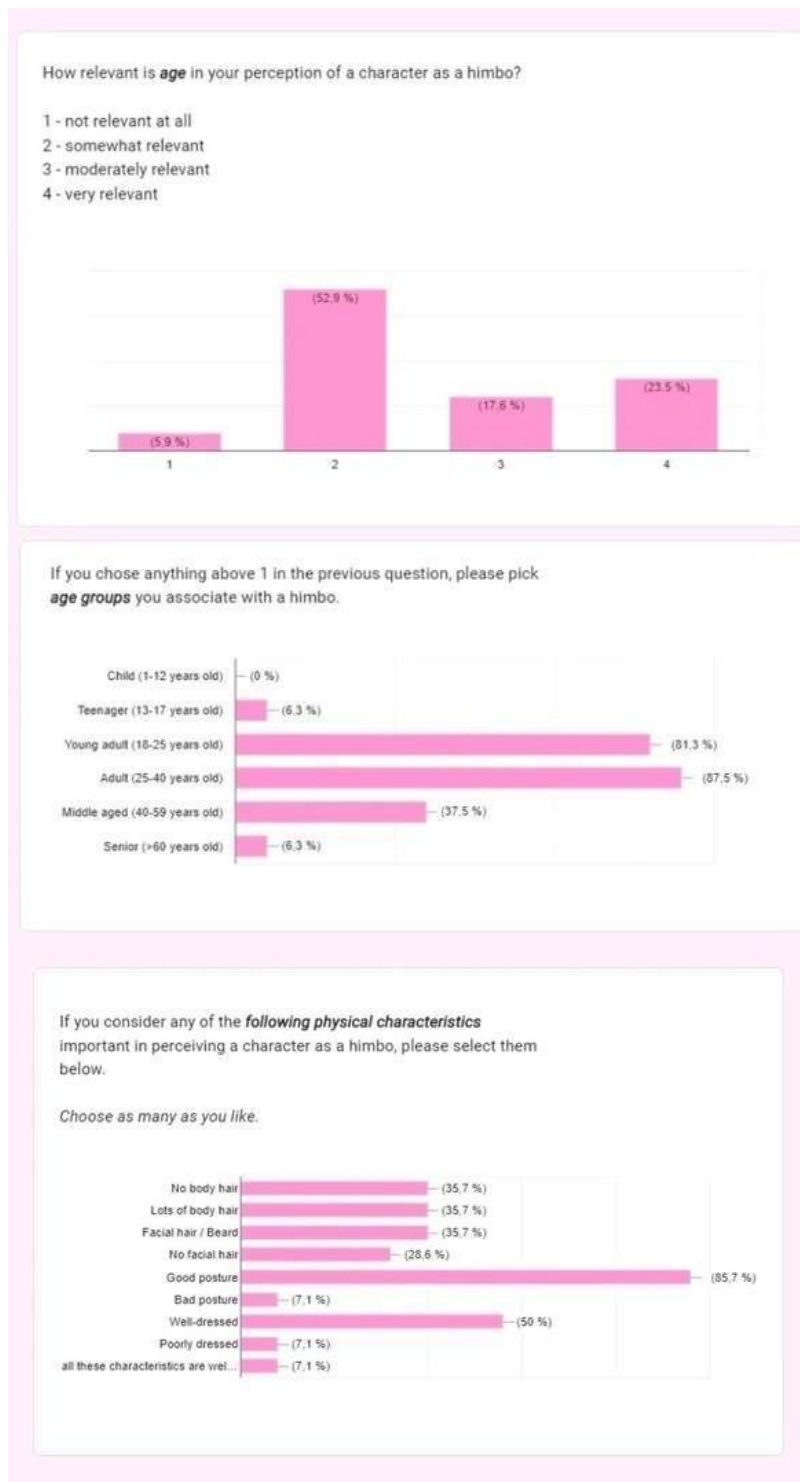


Figure 5. Statistics of the answers to the survey's question on himbo qualities.

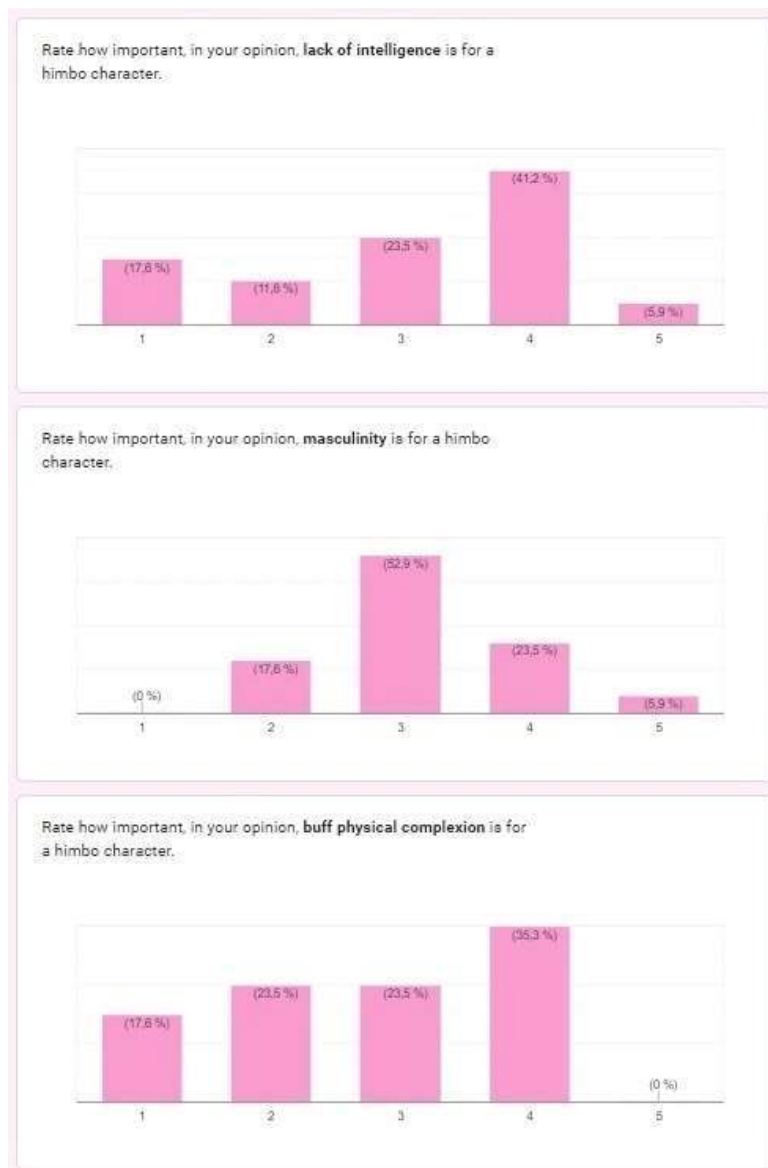


Figure 6. Statistics displaying the importance of certain stereotypical characteristics of a himbo, according to the survey.

	Importance index	Most associated option(s)
Gender presentation	2.7	masculine (88,2%)
Gender identity	2.5	male (92,9%); gender-nonconforming (57,1%)
Hair	1.1	-
Body composition	2.5	muscular (100%); strong (81,3%), tall (62,5%)
Age	2.5	25-40 y.o. (87,5%), 18-25 y.o. (81,3%)
Lack of intelligence	3.0	-
Masculinity	3.1	-
Buff physical complexion	2.7	-

Table 3. Importance index and most voted options.

Other important marked physical characteristics was having good posture (85,7% votes) and being well-dressed (50% votes). Afterward, I began analyzing the responses to the questions about non-physical himbo qualities. I counted the words that appeared more than twice and arranged them in a string, sorted by the frequency of occurrence (starting with the most mentioned and ending with the least).

Non-physical qualities associated with himbos: Sweet, loyal, kind, friendly, silly, confident, caring, naive, extroverted, enthusiastic, brave, stupid, chaotic, emotional, ambitious. *Four interviewees also mentioned "golden retriever"-like characteristics.*

Non-physical qualities antonymous to himbos: Intimidating, rude, malicious, manipulative, smart, crude, arrogant, stoic, aggressive, closed-off, wise, selfish, melancholic, self-conscious, bleak, introverted.

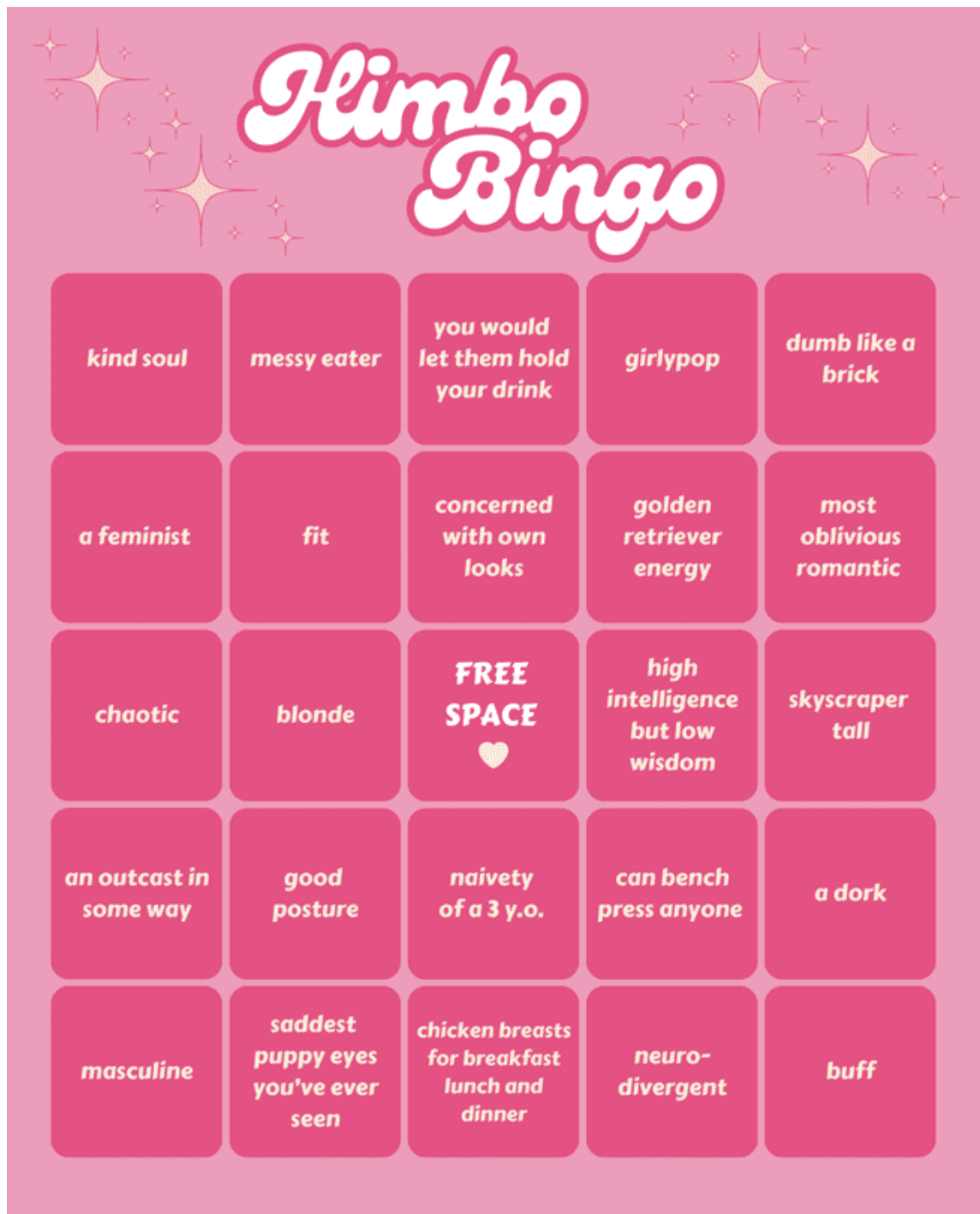
Those results paint a similar picture as the definition composed previously. According to them, a himbo is *a young or adult masculine male or gender-nonconforming individual, typically 18 to 40 years old, muscular, buff, strong and tall, not*

*necessarily intelligent or smart, sweet, loyal, kind, friendly, non-intimidating and polite.*

### **3.2 Practical Study (Himbo Bingo)**

Based on the survey results, the previously conducted case studies analysis, and opinions on himbos found online, I composed a “Himbo Bingo” card. One may use it as an aid in creating a himbo characters, using it as a regular bingo card and checking off the qualities as they add them to the character or after creation; identifying already existing characters as himbos or even to check if they themselves might score a row. Of course, this is not a set of solid guidelines, but suggestions based on the research of collective understanding of the term.

I felt that it was crucial to make the bingo card informal, playful and even humorous as it is partially an entertainment activity, and because himbos are a product of popular culture which is a part of the entertainment sphere per se. The definitions of certain terms are quite loose, and the boundaries are rather blurred, so it is more of a recommendation or even an inspiration. One certainly does not have to “win” the bingo card (cross 4 or 5 squares in a row) for their character (or themselves) to qualify as a himbo, because the term is not rigid. However, it seems that characteristics such as *masculinity, fit complexion, kindness and cluelessness* are somewhat crucial to the core of a himbo. In the end, this card is a fun activity to help character creation and exploration and perhaps spark some ideas rather than a concrete directive.



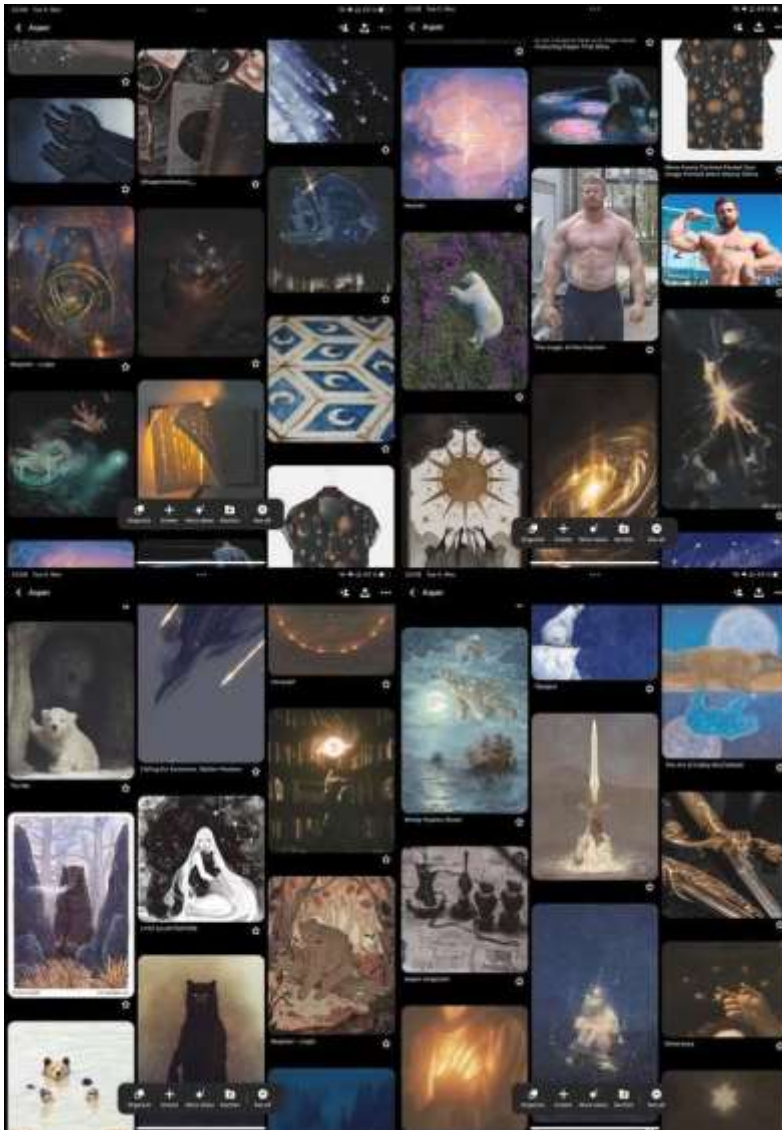
Picture 21. "Himbo Bingo" card.

### 3.3 Practical Study (Designing a Character)

The research conducted in terms of this thesis shows there aren't many physical qualities associated with a himbo. However, as per the survey results, when participants were asked to point out favourable physical characteristics in identifying a himbo, qualities like masculine gender presentation, buffness, fitness, strength,

tall height and good posture were one of the most highlighted. I am attempting to create a character design for a himbo in a Dungeons & Dragons world, and I shall make sure to include these in their design. However, himbo is more of a “vibe” than a costume, so while creating the character’s backstory and personality I am also going to reflect the non-physical qualities the research proved important in a himbo. With that, I will try to depict those personality traits and backstory elements in the design as well.

First, I collected inspiration for my character on a Pinterest board (Picture 22). I decided that I’m going to make a half-orc wizard, trying to combine certain crudeness with a softer, more mindful “occupation”. I named him Asper, and wrote a backstory of being a refugee from his home country, where magic is frowned upon and citizens are expected to have a war-oriented patriotic mindset (see Appendix 1 for a full backstory) In that sense, Asper’s desire to study magic and practice it can be also viewed as getting in touch with gentler, more feminine aspects of a man’s personality, which can be as scary and judged as it is exciting and rewarding.



Picture 22. Pieces of my Pinterest moodboard for Asper.

Then, after some sketching and design ideation, I drew a full front and back views for Asper (Picture 23). In his design, my main focus was to show the balance that in my opinion constitutes the visual essence of a himbo: that is, a balance between feminine and masculine, a dot on the spectrum of gender presentation where one reads as extremely masculine, but with touches of more feminine aspects to the point their appearance doesn't read as exactly "traditionally" masculine.



Picture 23. Asper, front and back view.

I gave Asper's design a lot of references to his story: the celestial motifs indicating him getting back in touch with his roots and practicing magic based on the stars and the sun; the legend of Ursa Major; laurel leaves on his cape since Emor is greatly inspired by the Roman Empire. He comes from a colder climate, so he wears a lot of warm clothing, with his cape being lined with fur to give his design some extra softness. His design has a lot of asymmetrical shapes and lines, indicating the internal conflict and his chaotic personality; however it still retains the semi-royalty Asper grew up in. Some of his design elements are not functional, but rather decorative, indicating that he puts some attention to his looks. My main point is surely highlighted with the colours I chose, with pinkish and lavender tones being predominant: that is to counter his highly masculine (buff, tall, bearded) appearance with softer colours that are rather associated with femininity.

Next, I drew a head turnaround to show some finer details of Asper's face (Picture 24). For example, his scars: the dots being deliberately scarred onto him as a part of a traditional emorian "coming of age" ceremony, and his eyebrow and cheek scar indicators not only of his physical combat experience, but also the certain degree of clumsiness and lack of agility due to his size. Another purpose of a head turnaround was to better define his features, the proportions of his face.



Picture 24. Asper, head turnaround.

After that, I turned to fleshing Asper out even further, and drew 9 different expressions for him, ranging from love-struck and gleeful to annoyed and confused (Picture 25). I strived to show his expressiveness, as he, as any himbo, is not exactly the type to bottle his feelings up; and most of what he is feeling one can usually guess by looking at his face. Asper isn't reserved in his emotions, and with these expressions I tried to show his kind-hearted, confident, oblivious and open nature. Of course, a lot of the himbo characteristics come from not just appearance, but also behaviour, and we can get a more well-rounded picture as we see them making choices in a story.

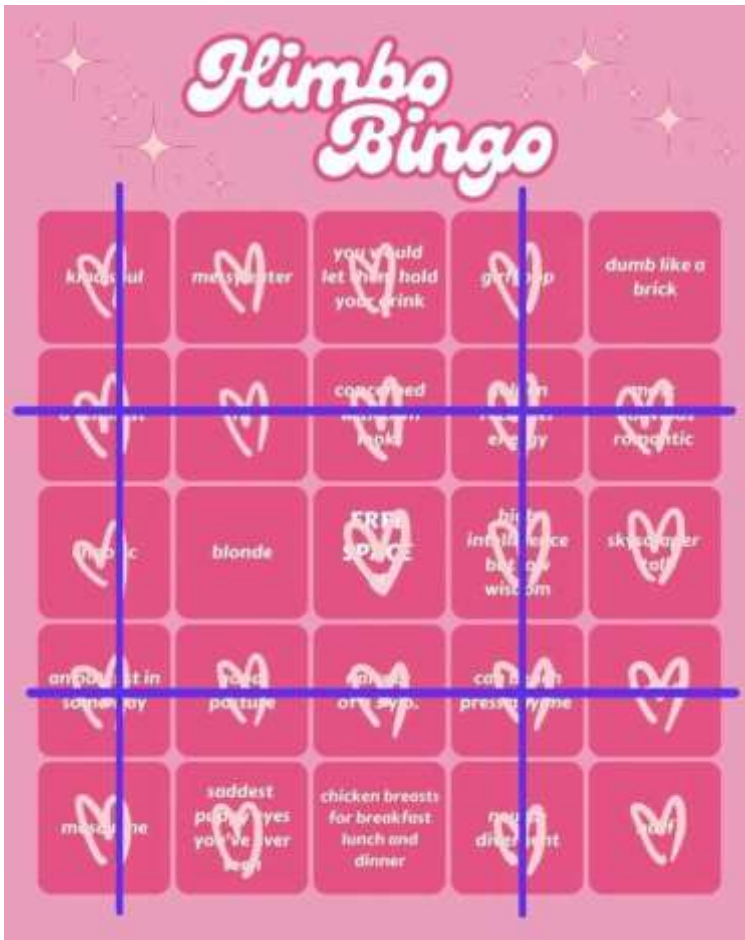


Picture 25. Asper, 9 expressions.

Lastly, I composed all of these materials into one reference sheet to give a full and cohesive impression of Asper, his looks, personality, and his backstory (Picture 26). After that, I filled my own Himbo Bingo to see if Asper would win it, and it is safe to say he did (Picture 27). I should mention that in creation of Asper I by no means strived to create *the* himbo character, but rather a himbo character. It was not my goal to fit into one character all common traits of himbos I was able to identify during my research (especially since some of them are quite contradictory), nor was it appealing to me to attempt to create a “stereotypical” himbo. Rather, I tried to focus on Asper’s individual traits, and how they correlate to and intertwine with the common traits most himbos share.



Picture 26. Asper, full reference sheet.



Picture 27. Himbo Bingo card filled for Asper.

## 4 DISCUSSION

During the process of writing this thesis, my perception of tropes as a whole and himbos specifically has shifted. I discovered that the term (as with any trope, really) is still rather fluid, and after conducting research I started trying to grasp the essence of it rather than making any set-in-stone decisions on what a himbo must be. Himbos have come a long way: from the brave, cunning and invincible heroes like Hercules and Odysseus, to even more obnoxiously hyperbolised masculine Supermen, to naïve, kind and stupid Kronks and Kens, and, finally, to endearingly clueless dorks like Jayce Talis or Laios. They were stripped off of their wit and aggressive behavior to be granted with empathy, a kind heart, and compassion – qualities traditionally associated with female characters in folktales and myths, as Maria Tatar cleverly remarks in her “The Heroine with 1001 Faces” (2021).

This points at a more general trend towards melding feminine and masculine characteristics in society at large. We can see it, for example, in the growing market for men’s beauty products (Chung & Kwak 2011). The use of cosmetics by men is redefining traditional masculinity, introducing new norms and expectations around grooming. This trend challenges conventional gender roles while reflecting a broader societal shift toward more fluid and hybrid identities. Modern masculinity increasingly embraces inclusivity and emotional intimacy, challenging traditional stereotypes. Men are adopting behaviors and attitudes historically considered unmasculine, such as expressing emotions and forming deeper emotional connections.

Himbos represent a certain type of personality the society is presumably lacking, especially in men and men-aligned individuals, hence the increasing popularity of the trope in recent decades. Media seems to be tired of the brutal, ruthless and closed-off heroes, and therefore shines light onto a new exciting narrative: *an Adam born from an Eve’s rib*. A himbo becomes a highly masculine person who shows no malice or threat, who can fight, but fights to protect the innocent, who is themselves innocent by nature, who may lack cunningness, but charms people with their big and open heart. Himbos are, in a sense, a fusion of masculine and feminine traits that has not really occurred in media just a century ago. They are genuine and lovable; they radiate strength and compassion.

It is, of course, very important to track the fluidity and elasticity of the term. Himbos may be inherently funny, because they contain incongruity, but they can also be incredibly tragic in a demanding world that may not be as open to them as they are to it. Shiv in PU-239 is exceptionally hilarious until he dies a shocking, miserable death since the world is not fit for a mobster with a good heart. Jayce Talis in Arcane gets all the chuckles for being soft and gullible, but then is forced to shed blood, despite his only dream being to build a better future. Hercules in Disney's film is adorable and endearing, and still gets bullied and almost exiled from his hometown for being *too strong*. This trope explores new, non-toxic and non-fragile masculinity and everything, good and bad, that comes with it.

Characters can be morphed like clay, and the world of himbos is incredibly diverse, but there are certain pillars it stands on, and I am coming to conclusion that those pillars are indeed masculinity, empathy, good intent, and, perhaps, certain degree of attention to one's own looks. However, pillars are not by any means *frames*, and when exploring tropes it is vital to not get stuck on stereotypes. As we strive to understand, develop or contribute to archetypes, we shall treat it like a space adventure on a booster rocket. The booster is the basis, the "rules" and textbook definitions, rigid and unmoving, that help us gain comprehension and propel us forward. But as we grasp the rules firmly, we need, we *have to* get rid of the booster to roam, explore and push the path forward. Stories and characters are fluid matter easily strangled and weighed down by inflexible definitions.

That is where we start drawing inspiration in the world around us and the communities that we find fascinating. Fandoms, for one, are a cradle of many modern tendencies in pop culture, as they are *the* communities of said culture. Fandoms are forgiving and welcoming, and, most importantly, ever-changing. Superman who might have been claimed boring and overpowered slowly gains fandom's sympathy again, in the form of, you guessed it, a new himbo, as we find ways to see his vulnerabilities and soft spots. "He's a nice guy! "Oh, he's boring, I can't shoot him and massacre him 'cuz he's bulletproof..." You wanna shoot a nice guy?!" exclaims mattyhaverty in his tiktok video (Picture 28).



Picture 28. Mattyhaverty on Superman, 2024.

With its gentle internal beauty and touching desire to make the world a better place (by destroying the gruesome exploitative society or by sharing lunch with a hungry friend), himbos paint a clear picture. “Golden retriever boyfriends” (and girlfriends) are a burning necessity in the modern world where noxious masculinity was the default masculinity and feminine was associated with dainty for millennia. The society is striving for kinder and softer souls and himbos came to prove that force does not have to be brute in order to be effective, and that masculine can – and sometimes should – be caring, compassionate and mellow.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Asper's Full Backstory

Asper is a half-orc, half-human, and a star mage (wizard).

Asper's homeland is a despotic orc-human coalition *Emor* — a cold and harsh place where war has long been an inseparable part of everyday life. In Emor, martial prowess is highly developed, while magic is frowned upon by society, although a few wizards and magicians serve the local elite. The people of Emor are obsessed with lineage and heritage; everyone is assigned a rigid role in society from birth, which they follow unquestioningly until the end of their life. Individualism and self-importance are scorned and punished.

Asper is a half-blood, the heir of a renowned military commander. He was destined to become a soldier, to devote his years to fighting for ideals that felt foreign to him. Asper longed for a different fate; he didn't share his family's views, and he despised war and everything it brought. However, Emor was a closed and conservative nation with minimal contact with the outside world. Its citizens were taught to kill, to fight, and to be ruthless — many of them knew nothing else. Asper, unaware of a possibility of living a different life, did what was expected of him. He thought that since he couldn't speak out against it, and as the heir to a line of renowned warriors, everyone expected him to perform heroic deeds and uphold an ideal image. If he failed to do so, he'd face serious consequences. So, he felt like he had no choice but to accept this fate as inevitable. But over time, the burden became too heavy to bear, and a rebellious fire began to grow stronger within him. Alongside this defiance, powers tied to his ancient roots and magical heritage started to awaken.

Since childhood, Asper had heard the song of the stars. Strange dreams would come to him, where a voice called out and shared incredible stories of unimaginable wonders of the world. But as he grew older, these mysterious episodes became less frequent, and in his teenage years, Asper convinced himself they were nothing more than a product of his childish imagination. Only later would

he discover that he was a direct descendant of a powerful mage, a legendary figure among his people.

Emor's streets still echo the Legend of the Bearess, although nowadays it is deemed an old wives' tale. The Great Bearess (The Big Dipper) was a mighty sorceress who could hear the stars and who served as the protector of the human colony where she was born. It was said that all her children had been killed when invaders came to conquer the ancestral lands, but the truth turned out to be only half as grim. Asper was her distant descendant, inheriting a part of her gift. He was the Little Bear (The Small Dipper), blessed with the power to wield magic.

One day, Asper overhears a healing spell used by a visiting mage on his wounded father and manages to memorise the whispers and successfully use it on an injured animal he finds in the forest. Later, as a teenager, he tries the spell again on the battlefield to save his brother. But something goes wrong in the process, and his brother dies as a result of Asper's mistake. Heartbroken and disappointed in himself and his abilities, Asper loses all interest in magic and abandons it for a long time. It isn't until he accompanies his father on a work trip journey beyond Emor's borders that his perspective starts to shift. There, Asper gets amazed by the wonders of the world that exists beyond his homeland. Progress, science, art, growth, and openness to ideas and imagination — the side of the world that had always drawn him in but had always been out of reach. Now, for the first time, he saw that he was free to choose his own destiny. Reignited by this new world, hidden from everyone, Asper begins to secretly study books on magic. He learns from the practices of court mages and visiting sorcerers, seizing every opportunity to observe their work. The next time his father is sent on a work trip, Asper decides to escape.

Without a penny to his name and no special skills, he finds himself at the very bottom of the social ladder. It takes him many years to improve his dire situation, adapt to this new world, and master magic at a level worthy of his ancestor's legacy. By the time Asper reaches a more mature age (and since half-elves and half-orcs live long lives, they have more time to master complex skills and spells than humans do), he has succeeded in honing his magical abilities.

As his powers grow, he makes contact with his ancient ancestor and learns to transform into a celestial bear.

Now physically stronger and guided by his own moral principles, Asper returns to his homeland with the goal of bringing order and dismantling the established despotic regime.

Appendix 2. A Brief History & Timeline of The Himbo Trope



Picture 29. A brief history & timeline of the himbo trope