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Special Focus on Women and the Gaming World
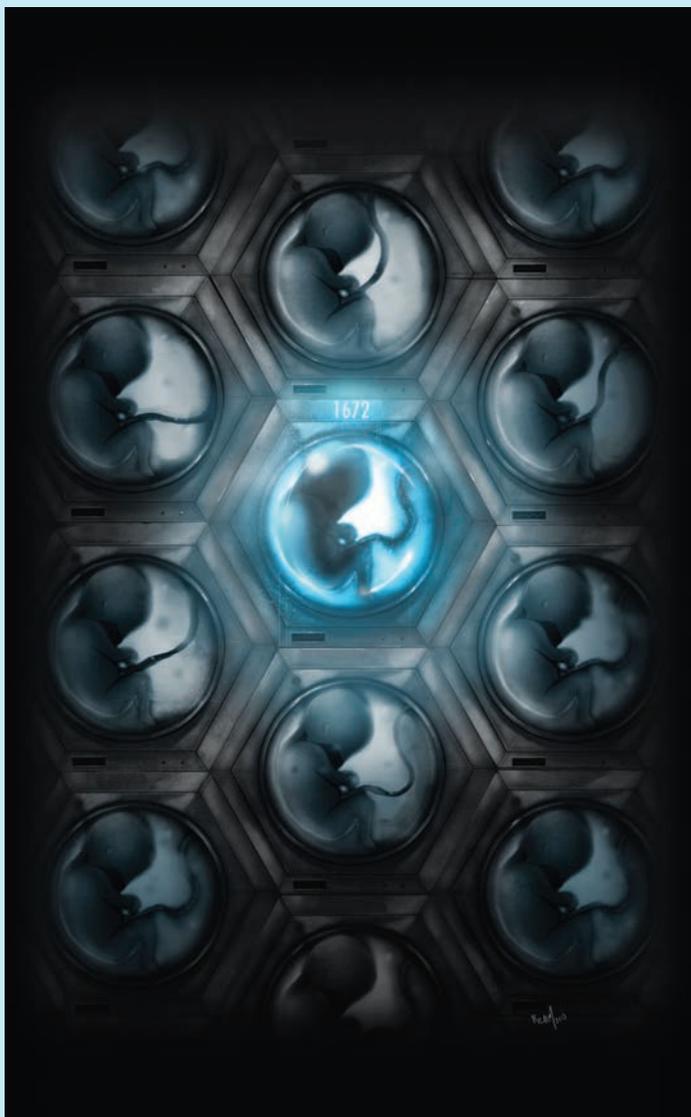
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Change is Coming (CLAN) ☙ Realm Lovejoy

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☙ Jonathan McCalmont, February 18, 2013, Hugo Ballot Nomination

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In This Issue

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Introduction
Women in Video Gaming

INTRODUCTION: Women in Video Gaming

by Diana Sherman, Guest Editor

When I first started writing this introduction, it was going to be a different creature entirely. It was going to contextualize the changes in gaming over the last five years in terms of women's roles both in games and in the industry. It was going to be critical but optimistic. I was going to talk about all the strides we've made—and we've made many—and how hopeful that makes me. But it wasn't going to include anger.

That was before prominent feminist video game critic Anita Sarkeesian was driven out of her home with death and rape threats for daring to point out how women are treated in video games. That was before Zoe Quinn, indie game designer of the award winning *Depression Quest*, was slut-shamed online because a community of bigoted gamers refused to allow her respect or dignity.

Looking at such events, we *should* feel anger.

Games are hardly the only medium in which women are objectified, but they are a new and dynamic medium. Just as television and film were the art form(s) of the last century, video games have the potential of being the art form of this one. We haven't even begun to explore their full potential. Games not only tell stories, they also teach persistence (when many academic institutions do not) by presenting players challenges just beyond their abilities and requiring them to continue trying in order to progress. Games put agency into their players' hands. They empower, they enlighten, they enliven. They give us models outside of our daily lives in the same way books and movies do, but they use different pathways.

Video games came into existence in a world that had already experienced the feminist movement. They are the first new artform in that time and as such, far too good an opportunity to waste. Women must get involved in gaming if we want to influence future generations. Women, people of color, and those who are transgender must get involved in the creation and critique of video games if we want those games to reflect us. Note I don't say we need to get more involved in the consumption of games, since women are already half of the gaming audience.

We are underrepresented in the industry, which has been, like many industries before it, primarily a boys' club. There are female designers, but we are definitely the minority. Often women are shunted into management or production, and out of design. Often we're questioned and forced to prove our geek cred when instead we should be heard.

It has been slowly getting better, but we're coming up to a watershed moment. It may have happened last August, with the outrage provoked by the dual harassment of Sarkeesian and Quinn. It may have begun in 2012 with the advent of the #1reasonwhy meme on twitter, when a gamer asked why there weren't more women in the video game industry. The women in the industry answered—in a flood of tweets and blog posts. Many of us had never spoken openly about the sexism or harassment we had experienced: to do so could well have meant the end of our careers.

There is resistance to women in gaming. We do get harassed, threatened, insulted, and ignored. But there is also reason for hope. Increasingly, male game developers have been acknowledging and speaking up in defense of their female counterparts. Marketing departments are beginning to realize women are playing games, too. The Game Developers Choice Awards gave Anita Sarkeesian recognition for the amazing work she's done critiquing the representation of women in games. More and more young women are going into the game industry, having grown up playing video games. Game companies like Bioware have created complex female player characters and non-player characters, as well as providing representations of varied sexual orientations.

We shouldn't let go of the anger. We also shouldn't let it blind or discourage us. Very little ever changes without anger, passion, and determination driving the effort.

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Diana Sherman has been working in the video game industry as a writer and narrative designer since 2008. She has worked on *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified, KingsRoad, Star Trek Online*, and *Champions Online*—thereby proving you can do something with a Master's in Playwriting.

Asking the Right Questions in Games

by Fred Zeleny

"Can't we give her some pants? Or a dress? Or anything more than strategically-placed belts?"

With a multi-million-dollar game, if we wanted to sell enough copies to keep the studio alive, we had to appeal to our audience. Never mind that 45 percent of game players are women and that there are many more women over eighteen playing games than boys under eighteen.

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"A girl in the lead? I don't buy it. How am I supposed to relate?"

That was one coworker's response when I asked him what I thought was a simple question: "What if the lead character is female?" My first response was bewilderment. Then I very nearly threw my chair at him.

Perhaps I should back up: a few years ago, I had the pleasure of working on a major video game. I was working with many friends I respected, exploring themes I cared about, and writing characters who were dear to me. The most exciting challenge was writing for the female lead; as a major character in the game's setting and advertising, she would be under tremendous scrutiny. After many revisions and with feedback from many sources, she developed into a compelling character with her own agenda, an uncertain ally who challenged the players even as they slowly earned her respect. On paper, she was one of my favorite characters. But whenever I saw her in the game, I kept coming back to the same question:

"Can't we give her some pants? Or a dress? Or anything more than strategically-placed belts?"

I asked this repeatedly over the course of two years. While my coworker who "couldn't relate" never even saw what the fuss was about, my questions were echoed by many artists and nearly every woman in the studio. But she wasn't changing: her visual design had been set long before I wrote her and had been dictated from someone much higher than I am on the corporate ladder. He didn't see why I would complain in the first place: I could write her however I liked, but she would be a major character in the marketing, so this was how she had to look.

With a multi-million-dollar game, if we wanted to sell enough copies to keep the studio alive, we had to appeal to our audience. Never mind that 45 percent of game players are women and that there are many more women over eighteen playing games than boys under eighteen. The decision had been made by men who had been in the industry far longer than we, and this was just how games were marketed. We couldn't risk diverging from the traditional formula of bare skin and fantasy clothing.

My friends and I lost that fight, but we won others. Sometimes it was as easy as asking, "What if the player isn't a straight, white guy?" In the games industry, where most developers are straight, white guys who grew up playing games that catered primarily to straight, white guys, it's all too rare for anyone to recognize and raise these issues in the first place.

If games are going to improve, we need more people who will ask these questions. We need more perspectives, better representation, and more people who are willing to fight for them.

Why Is This Important?

Some are quick to dismiss video games as mindless children's entertainment, and there's no denying that some games have no higher aspirations than pure entertainment and profitability—like some books, movies, songs, or the rest. But games are an increasing part of our media landscape, with over half of American adults and more than 90 percent of children playing them. From big-budget AAA games to the simplest mobile app, games are an unavoidable facet of modern American media.

As their influence has swelled, so have their ambitions. Major games create exotic new worlds for us to explore. Casual games offer puzzles and tasks to fill players' every spare minute. And designers influence how we eat, exercise, save, and spend with "gamification"—the use of reward systems and game mechanics in everything from forum comments to credit cards.

That's the power of games: where literature gives the reader an experience from a different perspective or an alternate vision of the world, games teach the player to recognize and navigate a system. In the best cases, they convey to players a new way to measure the systems that influence our world and methods to approach and solve problems. This can range from seeing the influences behind the sweep of history in Sid Meier's Civilization series, to the risks and rewards in the personal arc of a lifetime in Jason Rohrer's *Passage*, to how to face real-life challenges in Jane McGonigal's *SuperBetter*.

But it also means players can learn dangerous lessons as well. Whether it's the simple nihilism underlying some shooters to the ill-conceived moral lessons behind some role-playing games, even otherwise excellent games can impart problematic ways of viewing the world. Worst of all, these lessons need not be the deliberate message of a designer; they can result from unconsidered design choices.

For example, while BioWare's Dragon Age series presents players with a complex world rife with social and racial tensions and familiar dilemmas, it uses a relationship system familiar from many other role-playing games and Japanese dating simulations. This has the unfortunate effect of reducing sexual relationships to a simple transactional system: pick the object of your affection, give them the right presents, say the things they want to hear, and it's only a matter of time before they succumb to your charms. The gaming community already has a reputation for socially awkward people with difficulty in relationships, and this is only made worse when gamers take this sort of lesson to heart.

Now, BioWare is an excellent and diverse team of designers, and normally quite careful about the messages they convey in their games, which makes it even more surprising that they would make this sort of error. It's quite possible that some members of the team objected to it but were overruled. After all, that game mechanic has been used for decades, and if they had tried a new system, traditionalist fans may have objected. As we've seen, multi-million dollar games cannot afford to risk alienating their fans.

Thankfully, there's another way to make games. And it's open to everyone.

Why Not Try Something Smaller?

Recent years have seen a boom of smaller, independent game developers. As big-budget games have become more and more expensive and risk-adverse, scores of smaller studios have sprung up, creating games that are cheaper, less constrained, and far more diverse—both in their representation and in their gameplay.

While major studios may consist of a hundred or more designers, artists, and programmers, these indie studios rarely consist of more than a dozen people. In some cases, they may even consist of one or two dedicated auteurs. Where big-budget games have generally followed one of a few familiar genre patterns, smaller studios have taken advantage of their freedom to experiment, to create games that convey messages that are important to them, whether or not they'll resonate with a widespread audience. Some developers even gather for "game jams": whirlwind creative events where each group develops a tiny game around a common theme or cause, from concept to playable game, sometimes in the span of a single weekend.

This freedom has resulted in games that deal with subjects too risky, controversial, or personal for major studios to create. From Tomorrow Corporation's *Little Inferno*, exploring the perils of consumption and consumerism, to Anna Anthropy's *Dys4ia*, taking the player through the trials of gender identity disorder and transitioning, the freedom and diversity of indie games have undeniably improved the medium. In fact, Anna Anthropy has excellently chronicled these changes, their importance, and more in her book *The Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*.

Until recently, these creators tended to be developers who left the major studios, frustrated with the limitations that come from big budgets and traditional games. But more and more, we're seeing games from people who have never worked in the major studios: artists who want new ways of involving the audience in their creations, dreamers who create alternate worlds for others to explore, and writers who want to expand their stories into interactive fiction.

This has become possible thanks to the expansion of publicly-available game creation tools. Making games no longer requires specialized programmers or expensive modeling software. Programs like GameMaker and Unity provide easy and free ways to create games that can be shared with the world, and there are libraries of free art and sound assets at Open-GameArt.Org.

One of the simplest game creation tools is Twine, a free program that's barely more complicated than an editing program. If you can write a story in Word, you can make a game in Twine. But its simplicity hasn't kept writers and designers like Porpentine from creating highly evocative,

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But a change is coming over the gaming industry. More people are calling out the problems in representation, and more developers are showing the big studios that there's a different way to do things.

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There's an entire generation of players growing up and hungering for games that go beyond the familiar systems, and for messages that resonate with experiences beyond the standard "straight, white guy" adventures of the past. The big studios are afraid to take the risk and too rooted in tradition, but indie developers are the new forces of creativity in the medium.

Eventually, the big studios may even follow these pioneers.

How am I supposed to relate?

To this day, I don't know how much the fantasy outfit on my main character helped or hurt our sales; it drew roughly equal amounts of cheer and derision from the different parts of the gaming community. Those of us who raised the issue have gone on to work on other projects, and we continue to fight for other improvements in our games, and to ask other important questions.

Even my ex-coworker who "couldn't relate" has come to admit that his attitude was "kind of misogynist-y." Some progress is slower than others.

But a change is coming over the gaming industry. More people are calling out the problems in representation, and more developers are showing the big studios that there's a different way to do things. The medium is coming of age, complete with the awkwardness and pubescent stumbles that comes with it. And it won't reach its potential without hearing from more people than just the straight, white guys who have always been in charge.

Games reach a bigger audience than ever before. And that audience needs to hear your voice.

Fred Zeleny is a narrative designer and game writer whose work can be found in *Fallout 3, Skyrim*, and *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*. He lives in San Francisco and spends far too much time worrying if he's really in any position to complain about lack of diversity in games.

Anna Anthropy's *Dys4ia*: http://auntiepixelante.com/?p=1515.

Anna Anthropy's *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*: http://www.indiebound.org/book/9781609803728.

BioWare's *Dragon Age*: http://dragonage.bioware.com/.

Game audience statistics: http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2013.pdf, http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/16/e-reading-rises-as-device-ownership-jumps/, and http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/09/16/teens-video-games-and-civics/.

GameMaker: https://www.yoyogames.com/studio.

Jane McGonigal's *SuperBetter*: http://superbetterlabs.com/.

Sid Meier's *Civilization*: http://www.civilization.com/.

Open Game Art: http://opengameart.org/.

Porpentine's Twine Games: http://aliendovecote.com/intfic.html

Jason Rohrer's *Passage*: http://hcsoftware.sourceforge.net/passage/.

Tomorrow Corporation's *Little Inferno*: http://tomorrowcorporation.com/littleinferno.

Twine: http://twinery.org/.

Unity: http://unity3d.com/.

⚙ The Women of Dragon Age

by Marie Brennan

According to Hollywood legend, the reason Ellen Ripley is such a great female character in the first *Alien* movie is because the part was originally written for a man.

Much the same can be said about the protagonists of the Dragon Age series of video games, produced by BioWare. These take place in the fantasy world of Thedas, but unlike the company's Mass Effect games, each one focuses on a different main character. In *Dragon Age: Origins*, you play a member of the Grey Wardens, whose task is to save the nation of Fereldan (and ultimately all of Thedas) from a Blight, an invasion of monsters called darkspawn. In the sequel, *Dragon Age II*, you are Hawke, a refugee from the Blight who rises to become the most important person in the Free Marches city of Kirkwall.

As in many of their games, BioWare gives players multiple ways to customize their character, one of which is the choice of male or female gender. Back in the days when most dialogue was conducted through text, this wouldn't have been a very large challenge, but the Dragon Age games feature extensive voice acting, which means that every single line of dialogue that references your protagonist's gender has to be done twice: once for the male character and once for the female.

It also imposes certain limitations that, paradoxically, can make the female play experience more satisfying. "Reactivity" is the term for how the game changes depending on player decisions, and it's both logistically and financially expensive to implement. Every reactive element requires coding extra decision trees, recording extra dialogue, even designing extra characters or locations—and all of this content is, by definition, material that not every player will encounter. BioWare *could* make their games reactive to protagonist gender, beyond the basic level of pronoun choices, and in a few places they do. But faced with a choice between focusing on gender and designing reactivity for other aspects (such as character personality or political decisions), they seem to prefer the latter.

For players wanting an exploration of gender ideology, this may seem like a missed opportunity. But in a medium still dominated by male characters and the occasional token female, including women without making a big deal out of it can feel like a breath of fresh air. On the rare occasions gender *does* become an issue in the more standard sense, it often feels jarring. In the first game, your companion Sten comes from a society with strictly defined roles for all its people, and if you're playing as a woman, he complains a few times about following a woman's lead in war. Because sexism and the character's struggles to overcome it are not woven into the story or most of the setting, those moments can come across as unnecessary distractions from the business at hand—which is being awesome and saving the world.

The novelty of being awesome and saving the world should not be underestimated. *Dragon Age II* has a framing narrative in which Cassandra Pentaghast, a servant of the setting's pope equivalent, is questioning one of your companions about your past deeds—because, as the companion retorts to her, "you need the one person who can help you put [the world] back together." For a male character, the narratives of these games are fairly standard epic fantasy material. Hearing a female character discussed in such terms, however, is still something of a novelty.

It shouldn't be, of course. But since it is, even the minimum of effort—allowing players to choose a female avatar—has a disproportionately large effect.

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The protagonist is only one small element of the gameplay experience. If that was where inclusiveness ended, BioWare would not be deserving of much praise on that front. Their games, however, are also known for their companions: NPCs who join up with your hero or heroine, not only assisting them in battle but expanding the narrative in new directions. You can talk to your companions and undertake quests on their behalf; they also banter with one another as you travel around and react to your decisions. The Dragon Age games include a mechanical element that reflects each companion's opinion of your protagonist:

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in the first game this is approval/disapproval, while the sequel replaces that with friendship/rivalry. The latter scale in particular can result in widely different relationships with your companions, depending on how you choose to characterize your own hero or heroine. Even apart from variability, the companions offer a variety of experiences, which are worth discussing in greater detail. (This will, of necessity, include minor spoilers for the games.)

Dragon Age: Origins contains a total of ten possible companions, though depending on the situation the player may not end up recruiting all ten. Of these, six are male (one of those being a war dog), three are female, and one is arguably genderqueer.

Three female companions is not an enormous number, but they span a decent range, from the antisocial witch Morrigan, to the sweet-tempered bard Leliana, to the grandmotherly mage Wynne. Each one is recognizably a type, but the variation among them is satisfying, and the types are merely starting points: each character has history and individualized quirks that makes them stand out as individuals.

Morrigan, for example, is not antisocial for no reason. She was raised by another witch in the inhospitable Korcari Wilds and has little experience of society, especially of the male variety. Moreover, she has a rather complicated relationship with her adoptive "mother," whom she suspects of intending to steal her body as a way of being effectively immortal. Leliana, so friendly and kind, is on the run from her former master, the woman who trained her as a bard—in a society where "bard" means "highly trained spy and assassin." She is pious and loves fancy shoes, and knows more about killing people than any nice person should. Wynne has a near-death experience during the events where you recruit her, which results in her being possessed by a spirit. Although her demeanor is generally grandmotherly, she is not above turning this back against the other companions when they presume too much upon her goodwill.

Shale is especially interesting from a gender standpoint. This companion is a centuries-old stone golem that refers to everyone as "it," regardless of gender. During Shale's personal quest, you discover that the golem was made by infusing the spirit of a dwarf woman into a stone body. Shale has no recollection of this, and shows no inclination to self-identify as female after learning its origins. The voice actor, Geraldine Blecker, speaks in a low, raspy voice that doesn't register as feminine. Although no one within the game uses any term like "genderqueer," it seems the most appropriate label to apply to Shale.

Awakening, the expansion to *Origins*, introduces two new female companions: an elven mage named Velanna, and a dwarven woman named Sigrun. Velanna comes across as being the expansion's replacement for Morrigan, as the two share many personality traits. Sigrun, however, provides more variety. She is a member of the Legion of the Dead, a dwarven group made up of people who have undergone symbolic "funerals" and dedicated themselves to fighting the darkspawn. Her origin is grim, but her demeanor is tirelessly cheerful and amusing.

The array of companion types opens up even more with *Dragon Age II*. Class-wise, the previous games restricted your female companions to mages (Morrigan, Wynne, and Velanna) and rogues (Leliana and Sigrun). *DAII*, however, introduces the warrior Aveline, who is an absolutely splendid character. At first glance, she seems like the standard no-nonsense fighter type, being fairly stern, law-abiding, and unromantic. But when you encounter her fighting darkspawn, she has a husband at her side. Years later, after Aveline's husband has died—*DAII* spans a full decade of in-game time—there is a minor quest that involves Hawke trying to play matchmaker between Aveline and another member of the Kirkwall city guard. It's a charming bit of romantic comedy, for a character who would normally not receive that kind of story.

Aveline is one of four female companions in *DAII*, out of a total of nine. One of the remainder is Hawke's sister Bethany, a mage whose role in the story can vary wildly depending on player choices. Merrill is another elven mage, but unlike the prickly Velanna, she is anxious to make friends after being exiled from her clan. Her sweetness and innocence contrast with the reason for her exile: she is a practitioner of blood magic, which in this setting is both highly illegal and highly dangerous.

The fourth member of the set, Isabela, is remarkable for the balance with which her concept is deployed. More than any other female companion in the entire series, she is overtly sensual and exotic: a dark-skinned pirate who shows no particular shame where sex is concerned. She could easily have been a terrible character, and no doubt some players will react to her that way. In my opinion, though, Isabela is a successful example of the defense often trotted out for highly sexualized female characters: she's in charge of her own sexuality, even empowered by it. She talks on more than one occasion about how she manages her male crew and their sexual needs, making sure they have opportunities to indulge themselves, but never forming relationships with them herself. During a cutscene in a local tavern, she shuts down one man's clumsy attempts at flirtation, but this doesn't translate to a general haughtiness and untouchability; Isabela is more than happy to enjoy herself. But it happens when *she* wants it to.

Any such statement, of course, must be taken in its full context. Isabela is a character, not a real person; her choices are the choices made by her writer (Sheryl Chee). The test here is one of believability: does it seem like Isabela is behaving coherently, following an internal model that guides her toward or away from sexual behavior according to in-story factors? Or is she "fan service," acting purely for the entertainment of an audience presumed to be largely male and heterosexual? Player reactions may differ, of course, but I find her to be a plausible character, one for whom sexuality is merely a portion of her nature, rather than her defining purpose.

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Sexuality becomes a central topic for many of the female companions (as well as several of the male ones) when we stop to consider romance.

This is another gameplay element BioWare is known for, which few other games include, at least to this degree. Rather than presenting the player with a single scripted romance, Dragon Age games include multiple potential love interests, who must be cultivated through in-game decisions before a relationship can happen.

Dragon Age: Origins offers four romance possibilities. Two are male and two female; two are straight and two are bisexual. *Dragon Age II* follows a similar pattern, except that both women and both men are bisexual; in addition, there is one male companion under a vow of chastity who can form a non-sexual romance with a female Hawke.

The straight options in *Origins* are Morrigan (for male Wardens) and Alistair (for female Wardens), while the bisexual ones are Leliana and another rogue, Zevran. Furthermore, if the player has made the correct dialogue choices at earlier points in the story, it is possible to have a brief multi-way tryst with Isabela, who appears as a minor character in *Origins* before returning as a companion in *DAII*.

Although the story's female characters are the focus of this review, their effect on the player depends partly on the larger context, which includes the male love interests. Zevran in particular offers an interesting contrast, because he is, if anything, even more sexual than Isabela. Although it is difficult to get him to confess feelings of attachment, he begins flirting with the Warden as soon as he appears in the story, and can be brought to bed almost immediately. He also makes sexual innuendos at other companions—the elderly Wynne not excluded. Because our real-world culture attaches different values to promiscuous men and promiscuous women, Zevran cannot be treated as a precise analogue to Isabela. His existence, however, goes some way toward counter-balancing negative judgments of Isabela's own behavior.

Like Zevran, Isabela is much more comfortable with merely enjoying sex than with admitting any real attachment to the protagonist. Morrigan has difficulty with intimacy of any kind, even friendship; Leliana, by contrast, moves easily from friendship to affection, but will not sleep with the Warden until fairly late in the game. Merrill is by far the most innocent of the female love interests, often missing the point of Isabela's innuendos during party banter—but her embarrassment usually seems rooted in surprise rather than shame.

In fact, shame plays very little role in any of the game's sexual content. When the protagonist enters a romance, other

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companions may not approve, but their disapproval has little to do with prudery: they may not trust the love interest or may worry that personal matters will distract the protagonist from his or her duty. They are just as likely to be protective, though, threatening retribution if either partner hurts the other. There is no societal disapproval of same-sex relationships, though some characters may express surprise to find themselves falling for someone of their own gender. Outside of the games themselves, BioWare has received some amount of pushback from people who object to seeing the series "pander to" gay and bisexual players by including these options, but the company has been noteworthy for its refusal to budge or even apologize: lead writer David Gaider in particular has been outspoken in defending such content.

Sadly, they have not often done as well when it comes to transsexual characters. Both *Origins* and *Dragon Age II* feature a brothel as a location the character can visit (and optionally patronize) at various points during the game, and both places contain transsexual characters as sex workers, whose presence is played for comedic effect. Additionally, one of those characters can be encountered outside the brothel, in the downloadable content *Mark of the Assassin*, but a badly-designed dialogue tree means the meeting can come off as offensively transphobic. If Hawke has enjoyed the company of the prostitute Serendipity at the brothel, then Serendipity greets the protagonist in an embarrassingly explicit fashion, prompting a brief exchange that ends with the temporary companion Tallis commenting "Awkward…." If Hawke has not made use of Serendipity's services, however, then the prostitute merely offers a greeting in an unexpectedly deep voice, which leads to the exact same comment from Tallis and an embarrassed reaction from Hawke. The game designers have acknowledged this as a bug, rather than an intended result, and apologized for the error. This misstep did inspire Gaider to include the transwoman Maevaris Tilani in the tie-in comic books, however, and that character seems to have been well-received.

Finally, it is worth noting that the upcoming game *Dragon Age: Inquisition* will be the first to include gay-only romance op-

tions. Although not all of the specifics have been announced yet, in addition to straight and bisexual love interests, there will be at least one man who can only be romanced by a male Inquisitor, and at least one woman only available to female Inquisitors.

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Because the Dragon Age games are an audiovisual medium, any analysis of the female characters should include a mention of their appearances. The results here have varied over time. In the first game and its expansion, almost every character can equip with any of the armor, provided they have the stats necessary to wear it. This works acceptably well with the medium and heavy armor, as well as with mage robes, but the light armor falls victim to the regrettable tendency in video games to differentiate male and female models: an item that gives full-torso coverage on Zevran bares cleavage and midriff on Leliana. Fortunately, this ceases to be an issue in *Dragon Age II*. A female Hawke receives good coverage regardless of what armor she equips with, and companions are taken another route entirely.

Like Morrigan in *Origins*, the companions in the sequel each have their own distinctive look, instead of being equipped with whatever gear the player chooses. This was somewhat problematic with Morrigan, because her outfit included a low-cut red top that must have been held on with magic; nothing else could possibly explain it. (Amusingly, the mobile game *Heroes of Dragon Age* depicts her wearing a bra-like garment beneath the usual top.) Not only is she the only companion in the first game to be supplied with a piece of character-specific clothing, but later in the game the player can acquire a replacement that has the exact same appearance, but improved stats. The message is clear: the game designers intend her to always be seen wearing an impractical, navel-draping garment that has less to do with in-story logic than with catering to the (presumed male and heterosexual) audience.

With the companions in *Dragon Age II*, however, the situation improves immensely. Aveline first appears wearing a practical outfit that bares little more than her impressive arm muscles; later she wears plate armor noteworthy for its complete lack of

breast contours. Bethany's robes change depending on the direction her story takes, but always suit her role in the world. Merrill is covered from neck to ankle, though she swaps out her standard outfit for a brilliant white costume if engaged in a romance. Only Isabela's costume flaunts her sexuality—but she is the one companion for whom that makes sense. Putting any of the others in thigh-high boots, a waist cincher, and a tiny excuse for a skirt would be a clear case of prioritizing sex appeal over characterization. For her, however, the two go hand in hand. Isabela's outfit is undeniably ridiculous, but it cannot be called inappropriate for her personality.

<center>❦</center>

The companions are not the only female characters to appear in the games; they are simply the most prominent ones. Perhaps one of the best praises I can lay upon BioWare is that they don't forget that women exist when filling in the rest of the world.

Female characters appear in all walks of life in the Dragon Age franchise, from street thieves to merchants to noblewomen to scholars to guards. The player regularly encounters female humans, elves, and dwarves; the fourth race in the setting, the qunari, appear much more rarely, and thus far a female qunari has only shown up in the comic books. (Theirs is also the one society that maintains strict gender roles.) The dominant religion in the setting is, according to David Gaider, based on the concept of "what if Jesus had been Joan of Arc?" The savior was a warlike woman named Andraste, and her clergy is almost exclusively female; men can become lay brothers, but only in one schismatic nation are they allowed to become priests.

This has had an interesting effect on the upcoming third game, *Dragon Age: Inquisition.* Responding to fan criticism over only three of the nine companions being female, Gaider first said that three vs. four was not a very large change. While true in direct numerical terms, that undervalues the relative change; it's one-third of the companions instead of nearly half, women being outnumbered two to one instead of nearly having parity. But Gaider also pointed out that the setup of *Inquisition*, which will take place in the country of Orlais, creates a situation where many

non-companion women are in prominent roles. Orlais is ruled by an Empress; it is also the home of the Divine, the woman who leads the Chantry in a manner much like that of the real-world pope. Both of them will figure heavily in the plot. The game will also deal to some extent with your protagonists from the previous games, who may have been female. Therefore, this story is one in which women occupy many prominent roles outside of your immediate party, which Gaider cited as a counterbalance for the party itself.

It makes me a little wistful. He isn't wrong, insofar as it goes; this will already be a story in which women play a major part. But what if party composition were closer to gender balance, as it was in the previous game? Play a female Inquisitor; import a world state in which the Warden and Hawke were also female…you'd end up with a game in which women aren't just present, aren't just represented, but actually have the edge. In other words, the same kind of situation we've seen a thousand times with men, and almost never with women.

Inquisition will not be that game. But even without it, the Dragon Age series stands head and shoulders above many of its competitors, many of which are still caught in the "Smurfette" mode of female representation. The companions and other NPCs cover a gamut of character types and receive the same kind of in-depth storytelling as the men do—sometimes including elements where gender differences are relevant, but more often simply treating both groups as people, about whom many kinds of stories can be told. This is especially true where the protagonist is concerned: whether you play as a man or a woman, you can enjoy the pleasures of being an admired peacemaker or a feared autocrat, a warrior or a mage or a rogue, the hero who saved a nation or the troublemaker who tore a city apart.

The message is clear: the game designers intend her to always be seen wearing an impractical, navel-draping garment that has less to do with in-story logic than with catering to the (presumed male and heterosexual) audience. With the companions in Dragon Age II, *however, the situation improves immensely.*

Perhaps one of the best praises I can lay upon BioWare is that they don't forget that women exist when filling in the rest of the world.
Female characters appear in all walks of life in the Dragon Age franchise.

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Marie Brennan is an anthropologist and folklorist who is currently misapplying her professors' hard work to the Victorian adventure series The Memoirs of Lady Trent. The first book of that series, *A Natural History of Dragons*, has been nominated for a World Fantasy Award.

The Othering of Women in Gaming

by L. Wagner

> Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. [...] She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.
> —Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

… whenever a woman tries to make a name for herself in a given field or industry, she must prove herself to be worthy of joining the men already there.

The initial notoriety of the Kickstarter campaign started a wave of abuse that grew as word about the campaign spread.
… A New Statesman *article about the Kickstarter launch refers to the resulting threats and abuse as "a maelstrom of hate…"*

The harassment of Anita Sarkeesian is clearly gendered, making reference to her with gendered slurs and threatening her with rape.

In Western society, men are considered to be the standard. Therefore, women are predetermined to be deviations from the standard. This informs general assumptions about culture and women's place in it, such that whenever a woman tries to make a name for herself in a given field or industry, she must prove herself to be worthy of joining the men already there.

Despite the existence of female game developers, programmers, writers, and enthusiasts—women's involvement on every level of video games—they face a significant struggle for recognition and equality in the gaming industry. And as this struggle progresses, the establishment backlash intensifies, trying to drive the women in the industry out of the limelight and back to the sidelines. Two recent controversies have arisen around the presence of specific women in the field of gaming: Anita Sarkeesian and Zoe Quinn. Though each woman faces a different situation, the overall community reaction to these women exemplifies the general resistance to the overt presence of women in gaming and the forms that resistance takes.

First, there is Anita Sarkeesian, blogger and media critic. She is the creator of the Tumblr and video blog *Feminist Frequency*. "In 2012, Sarkeesian was targeted by an online harassment campaign following her launch of a Kickstarter project to fund the *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* series. At the same time, supporters donated over $150,000 to the project, far beyond the $6,000 she had sought. The situation was covered extensively in the media, placing Sarkeesian at the center of discussions about misogyny in video game culture and online harassment" (*Wikipedia*). The initial notoriety of the Kickstarter campaign started a wave of abuse that grew as word about the campaign spread.

In the beginning, Sarkeesian's Kickstarter project attracted a notable degree of negative attention and threats that went beyond the usual Internet trolling. A *New Statesman* article about the Kickstarter launch refers to the resulting threats and abuse as "a maelstrom of hate" and "concerted attempts to wreck her online presence" (Lewis, June 12, 2012). The *Globe and Mail* published an online article about a particular instance of online abuse, the creation of a game that allowed players to virtually punch a picture of Anita Sarkeesian, applying bruises and other injuries to her image. The article refers to the "extent of Internet viciousness" and the "campaign of harassment" focused on Sarkeesian (Moore, July 11, 2012).

Once Sarkeesian began actually producing videos, the harassment got worse, with many online forums calling her a fraud and a cheat. The attacks on her professionalism are frequently accompanied by more direct insults to her, her appearance, and her motivations. A more recent article in the *New Statesman* covers the increased intensity of the online abuse Sarkeesian has received as she has gained popularity and credibility in the world of gaming and pop culture criticism. "Sarkeesian became a lightning rod for attacks from anyone pissed off at the concept of serious literary criticism of gaming, especially from a feminist perspective" (Steadman, August 27, 2014). The harassment culminated recently in a Twitter account posting graphic threats to Sarkeesian and her family, including personal information such as her home address and the names of her family members. This caused her to leave that address to protect her safety: "A few days ago, Sarkeesian tweeted that she had left her home to stay with friends because she had received specific threats—ones so serious that she had reported them to police" (Steadman).

The harassment of Anita Sarkeesian is clearly gendered, making reference to her with gendered slurs and threatening her with rape. Sites such as *A Voice for Men* accuse her of "damseling for dollars" to bring in "gash-cash" from playing up the threats against her (Elam, August 28, 2014). Other sites and blogs keep track of the online conversations about Sarkeesian and other women who are harassed for trying to

make space for themselves in areas that some consider to be set aside for men. A blog post on *We Hunted the Mammoth* refers to "the top post on the Men's Rights subreddit, in which a fellow calling himself mradiscus lamented what he called "a pattern of female feminists migrating to formerly male spaces, demanding to be accommodated and eventually causing conflict" (Futrelle, August 26, 2014). This delineates the space of video gaming as male, with no room for women. In the minds of some, women's demands cause the conflict.

Women's attempts to fully participate in spaces such as video gaming are seen as encroachment, and the men who claim these spaces as their own fight back against the perceived invasion. The community is the video gaming community, and all gamers should be welcome. However, the dichotomy is not set between male gamers and female gamers, but between gamers and women. Framing the conflict this way marks out separate groups, making clear through language that women are not considered gamers. They are interlopers, outsiders who are trying to force their way into a space not meant for them.

It is true that Anita Sarkeesian, as a pop culture critic and blogger on feminist issues, might not be a full insider in the video game world. The other woman who has recently drawn the wrath of the Internet video gaming community, however, is an independent game developer. An *Ars Technica* article summarizes Zoe Quinn's situation: "The tide of abuse first surged over Zoe Quinn, creator of the game *Depression Quest*, who got a deluge of negative attention, abuse, threats, and harassment over a blog post written about her by an ex-boyfriend that was published August 16" (Orland, August 21, 2014). The blog post "exposed many personal details about Quinn irrelevant to her profession or professional conduct" (Orland) and led to a widespread discussion of Quinn's supposed professional and personal failings. "Details from the post were quickly spun into a conspiracy. Based on the lone fact of Quinn's relationship with one *Kotaku* writer, Nathan Grayson, who quoted her once in an article and never covered or reviewed her game, rumors circulated that Quinn had 'alleged affairs with video

game journalists,' which influenced coverage of her game. There is no evidence to support this assertion, and the only fact that it's based on—that Quinn began a relationship with Grayson sometime after he quoted her in an article and never published anything about her again—disproves it. The other two people named in the post are a sound designer and Quinn's boss, who do not work in gaming journalism" (Johnston, August 29, 2014).

An editor of *Kotaku* made a post about these accusations, declaring them to be unfounded with respect to the journalist involved. "The allegations have been extreme. Nathan has been accused of in some way trading positive coverage of a developer for the opportunity to sleep with her, of failing to disclose that he was in a romantic relationship with a developer he had written about, and that he'd given said developer's game a favorable review. All of those are troubling claims that we take seriously. All would be violations of the standards we maintain. Having spoken to Nathan several times, having looked closely at the numerous messages sent our way by concerned readers and, having compared published timelines, our leadership team finds no compelling evidence that any of that is true" (Totilo, August 20, 2014). Despite this clear evidence, Internet gaming communities and message boards continued to call Quinn a liar and a fraud. Although based on personal revelations made by someone else, these accusations are similar to those leveled at Sarkeesian. A woman working in the video gaming industry must be a fraud, less worthy of consideration than the many anonymous posters who only consume games rather than creating them. Her qualifications do not matter, as they can be dismissed as false by attributing them to her gender instead of her experience.

Because of the personal information in her ex-boyfriend's online post, Quinn has received more overtly sexualized abuse than Sarkeesian has. However, both women have received rape and death threats that make explicit reference to their anatomies and perceived sexualities. Both have been called frauds, accused of cheating, and derided as not real gamers. The harassment aimed at Quinn and Sarkeesian is a way of pushing them away, declaring them

The community is the video gaming community, and all gamers should be welcome. However, the dichotomy is not set between male gamers and female gamers, but between gamers and women. …women are not considered gamers. They are interlopers, outsiders who are trying to force their way into a space not meant for them.

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A woman working in the video gaming industry must be a fraud, less worthy of consideration than the many anonymous posters who only consume games rather than creating them. Her qualifications do not matter, as they can be dismissed as false by attributing them to her gender instead of her experience.

"…women enjoy gaming as much as men, with 48 percent of gamers identifying as female and 52 percent identifying as male."

The discourse of gamers versus women needs to change, to make it clear that the issue at hand is women openly claiming their fair share of a space that they have been inhabiting all along.

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L. Wagner has a BA in English literature, a job in information technology, and a 25-year history of playing video games.

to be outside the space to which they are staking their claims.

However, the framing of this as gamers versus women overlooks, or perhaps denies, the truth about the video gaming community. The *Huffington Post* describes the actual demographics on video gamers: "According to the Entertainment Software Association's annual *Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry* report, women enjoy gaming as much as men, with 48 percent of gamers identifying as female and 52 percent identifying as male" (Casti, April 24, 2014). An earlier article on CNN.com discusses a different report showing that nearly half of all gamers are women, but notes that many women are still mocked and harassed when they play games. "Story after story recounts female gamers who, once they ventured into gaming circles beyond family and friends, faced mockery, dismissive attitudes and even abuse from their peers" (Frum, August 11, 2013).

Women are not encroaching into a male space when they play, critique, or produce video games. The space was already half theirs, logically and demographically. The professional video gaming world has already begun to take notice of this. "In 2014, Sarkeesian received the Ambassador Award at the 14th Annual Game Developers Choice Awards for her work on the representation of women in video games, becoming the first woman to receive the award" (*Wikipedia*). The wider world of fans and consumers also needs to recognize the truth. The discourse of gamers versus women needs to change, to make it clear that the issue at hand is women openly claiming their fair share of a space that they have been inhabiting all along. Women are not The Other; they are half of the world's population and half of the category labeled gamers.

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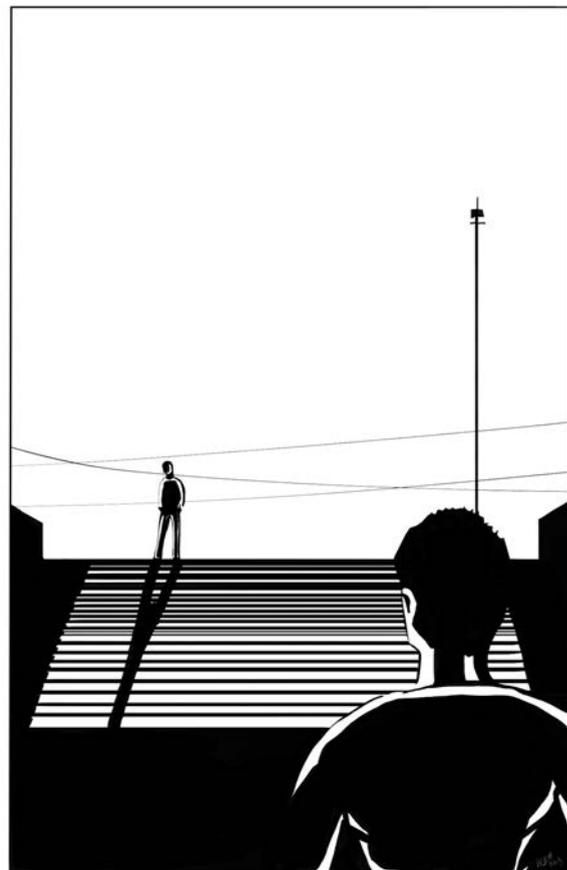
Twain, the protagonist of *Clan*, meets eyes with Chad, his bully, from across the courtyard. For the first time, Chad senses a deeper connection beyond their victim-tyrant relationship (Lovejoy).

The Legend of Kit Reed

The Story Until Now: A Great Big Book of Stories by Kit Reed,
Wesleyan University Press, March 2013, 468 pp., $35, Ebook, $27.99.

by Marc Laidlaw

Grandmother Magma

Kit Reed's *The Story Until Now* is a landmark collection spanning fifty-five years of tales from a career that continues to surprise and entertain, as well as intimidate. The earliest story has a publication date of 1958; the latest, 2013. For maximum impact, at the end of the volume Reed has put her latest story directly before her first, so that from the last word of "The Legend of Troop 13" to the first word of "The Wait," the reader steps across a half-century-wide gap without missing a step, gaining a glimpse of her entire career in one instant. If you have been reading Reed all your life, one story at a time, this sudden vista is vertiginous. It comes with the realization that Kit Reed has been so continually productive, and so consistently brilliant, that readers, editors, and other writers might just possibly be guilty of taking her for granted.

I first encountered Reed's work in 1972, when her grim 1969 story "Winter" appeared in a collection of the best recent horror. It tells what happens to two elderly sisters living in privation in a harsh wilderness when a lost man arrives in their midst, starved and conniving. From that story forward, the name "Kit Reed" has always promised black comedy and artistic integrity. She has been a model of concision and focused effect—a writer to emulate, in some ways more accessible to me than my other feminist heroes, James Tiptree Jr. and Joanna Russ, because she grounded her work in the present and near future, never (in this collection anyway) straying to distant planets or alien viewpoints.

The collection culminates in the pairing of her last and first stories, and it proceeds there in a similar whiplash manner. Reed arranges the stories by following common threads that tie them together across the course of her career. The themes seem obvious once you notice them: war, women, men, parents, children, siblings; family as the underlying template for society; society itself. One thinks, "Of course these are her subjects!" They're appropriately huge.

A writer like Reed wastes little time skewering trivia, unless trivia itself is key to the full picture. So in a satire like "Family Bed," while centering the story on an exaggerated example of a modern social trend, and filling it with recognizable contemporary details such as iPods and Game Boys, she crafts a modern yet classically proportioned revenge drama involving humanity's oldest dramatic unit: The Family. From the smothered child to the evening's entertainment news, she deftly shifts scale from the individual to the societal, so that the experience of reading many of these stories is akin to that of watching an artful cinematographer's dolly zoom: pushing in on a single character while simultaneously pulling back the frame to throw them into greater relief against their background.

One thing that has always been clear, even to the occasional reader, is how consistently strong Reed's sense of voice is. In such stories as "On Behalf of the Product" (1973), one often catches a paradoxical, anticipatory echo of George Saunders. There are early tales set in the South, inflected with the inescapable drawl of Flannery O'Connor or Eudora Welty ("Piggy"), containing macabre twists that suggest an affinity with Shirley Jackson ("The Wait"). But what she really shares with these other stylists is not their voices, but simply an understanding that in fiction, voice is everything, and each story, to succeed, must find its own. The fact that in all of these varied performances we can clearly hear the singular voice of Kit Reed is more evidence of her achievement: all the voices of Kit Reed heard, strikingly, as one.

Another thing this omnibus grants us is the chance to watch her develop, moving from strength to strength. The first stories are already strong. They tend to be slick, fantastic parables, often written from a male point of view, with traces of such literary models as Vonnegut and Cheever. In "The Automatic Tiger," a businessman discovers his inner power only after purchasing an electric simulacrum of a tiger…a polished story, cleanly construct-

ed but impersonal, betraying little of the writer herself.

Thrillingly, we see Reed hitting her stride just as science fiction moves into the New Wave of the 1960s and early '70s. Her stories grow more personal, her voice more consistently the one we recognize now as Reed's: sharper, starker, simultaneously overarching and introspective. Reed, ever more in control of her material, begins to combine multiple viewpoints, crosscutting scenes and fragments of disembodied voices and multiple characters. It is not hard to see these stories as engaged in dialog, deliberately or otherwise—for there may be many conversations going on in the same rooms--with the work of Russ, Tiptree, and Kate Wilhelm. The editors of the day prized and encouraged confrontational stories such as "The Food Farm" and "Songs of War."

In 1984, Reed penned one of her best-known stories, "The Bride of Bigfoot." Much like her classic "Attack of the Giant Baby," it begins as a comic conceit: a clichéd suburban housewife escapes domesticity to shack up with Bigfoot. But unlike that earlier piece about an uncontrollable infant and its humorously resigned parents, this one allows a distinctly non-satirical possibility of change, with the clichéd suburban husband himself giving voice to a transformative passage of real wildness and beauty.

After this energetic era, the work becomes more confident, the black humor more sublimated. While still capable of switching into antic mode to detail the teenage anarchy of "High Rise High" (2005), her most interesting recent stories have become less easily framed by moral argument, more completely open to remaining ambiguous. "The Singing Marine," a haunting retelling of Hans Christian Anderson's "The Magic Tinderbox," steadfastly refuses to settle into a neat resolution, as a soldier seems to be marching in a dream of death from which there is neither waking nor rest. "The Black Dog" takes off in a flight of typically Reedian satire—an hubristic scientist thinks she has created a canine breed that can identify the next person to die—and turns into a curse for a man who capitalizes on the program's failure. And there is also a defter combination of the elements that appeared individually in earlier stories, so that in "The Legend of Troop 13" we get a suspenseful adventure, multiple viewpoints, a marriage in freefall, lost children, comedy, and, ultimately, horror.

Reed's aptitude for horror, never far removed from the humor in her work, is still a large part of its appeal; it keeps her work feeling relevant and real. For while there is hope in some of her work, there is anger in almost all of it; and where a happy ending would feel forced, the structure of horror comes naturally to these stories. So I return at last to "Winter." I was twelve when I first read it, and I have thought of it frequently since as a perfect example of the short form. It has shaped my own ambitions as a writer, and thus my career. Specifically, it has a last line I have never forgotten for a minute, even though for many years the tale was hard to find.

Well, it's hard to find no longer. It's surrounded by others just as good and even better in *The Story Until Now*. And you should read it.

One thing that has always been clear, even to the occasional reader, is how consistently strong Reed's sense of voice is.

…while there is hope in some of her work, there is anger in almost all of it; and where a happy ending would feel forced, the structure of horror comes naturally to these stories.

Marc Laidlaw is an American writer of science fiction and horror and also a computer game designer. He is perhaps most famous for writing *Dad's Nuke* and *The 37th Mandala*, and for working on the popular Half-Life series.

The Chicks Should Dig This

Chicks Dig Gaming, edited by Jennifer Brozek, Robert Smith?, and Lars Pearson, Mad Norwegian Press, November 2014, 224 pp., $14.95.

reviewed by Victoria Elisabeth Garcia

Though all of the entries are by women, and all concern games, the pieces vary wildly in terms of topic, tone, and approach.

Reviews

Billed as "A celebration of gaming by women who love it," *Chicks Dig Gaming* is a collection of writings by journalists, SF authors, fan fictioneers, game designers, academics, and others. Though all of the entries are by women, and all concern games, the pieces vary wildly in terms of topic, tone, and approach. They also vary in quality. But though the book contains definite low points, its highs provide more than enough loft to compensate.

A substantial portion of *Chicks Dig Gaming* consists of autobiographical pieces about coming to understand life and self through gameplay. Some of these are rather unremarkable, but most are interesting, and a few are truly excellent. Mary Anne Mohanraj's "Refuge" is a luminous chain of vignettes about the power of games to foster human warmth. Here, aunts and uncles laugh and curse their way through hands of bridge; a *Dungeons & Dragons* session leads to a first kiss, and *SimCity*, played while a new baby sleeps in a shoulder sling, helps balm the exhaustion of first-time parenting. G. Willow Wilson's "Looking for Group" also stands out. While most authors in the collection tend to treat gaming as a means to self-actualization and mastery, Wilson boldly explores what it means to suck at *World of Warcraft*. Witty and revealing, the piece shows us the unexpected blessings that can flow from being the weakest link. Racheline Maltese's "Castling," an elegant reminiscence about chess and childhood, is also superb.

Other articles spotlight specific games, genres, and subcultures. Rosemary Jones writes of a turn-of-the-century board game that let children play out journalist Nellie Bly's record-breaking 1888 trip around the world. Interleaving musings about Bly's life, the game's evolution, and the author's own youth, the piece is a delight. Also exceptional is Jen Dixon's "Blood on the Hull: Gender, Dominion, and the Business of Betrayal in *Eve*." In *Eve Online*, a massively multiplayer on-line roleplaying game (MMPORG) set

in space, players routinely engage in real-world deception to further their in-game interests and to sabotage those of others. Dixon unflinchingly describes her transition from benign newbie to sophisticated predator. Through her eyes, we experience both the thrill of hoisting online misogynists by their own patronizing petards and the shame of collaborating with bullies to betray innocent trust. Other excellent entries include Amy Hanson's wise and funny article about playing *Second Life* and "We Play to Lose," Emily Care Boss's insightful post-play report on an emotionally demanding live-action roleplaying game. E. Lily Yu's crisply evocative "Black Windows," about playing the text-based precursors of today's MMPORGs, is another highlight. Alas, not all essays of this type are similarly strong: this cluster also includes much of the most frustrating writing in the book. Some of the problematic pieces fail to deliver much beyond simple description; others confine themselves to extremely well-worn intellectual paths; while still others sacrifice clarity for cleverness, with unpalatable results.

The pieces that focus on children and youth, on the other hand, are consistently solid. In "Raising Gamers" we follow Filamena Young as she designs a custom game for her daughters, aged six and three. Young's creative process is fascinating, and the degree of respect she shows for her children as independent storytellers is inspiring. In addition to Young's piece, there are several testimonials about specific benefits of gameplay for young people, showing how games help with critical thinking, mathematical competence, and understanding gender identity. Persuasive and well-illustrated with examples from the authors' own lives, these articles will be particularly valuable to parents and educators.

The book's more scholarly entries are also consistently wonderful. Cathrynne M. Valente's charming and vividly overthought contribution draws not-unconvincing parallels between the repeated respawnings of Nintendo's Mario and the

Buddha's journey through Samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth. In "Leopards at the WeddingL Finding Love in a Glitchy Landscape," Miriam Oudin discovers joy and promise in software bugs and rendering errors. Opening an interesting inquiry into issues of chance, player agency, and artistic intent, the piece is one of most intellectually stimulating in the book.

The set of essays addressed primarily to issues of gender and feminism is surprisingly small, but it does include one of the book's very best pieces. Lynnea Glasser's "How to Design Games for Boys" is a knife-sharp satire of the sexist and fallacious assertions that are often made about why girls aren't interested in games. Glasser delivers her first *coup de grâce* before the end of the first paragraph. Later lines about "trashy boys' romance" and tribble-petting will likely make many *CSZ* readers laugh out loud. This piece has the makings of an instant classic and seems destined to

be read, quoted, and forwarded for years to come.

Chicks Dig Gaming, in sum, is a book with much to offer. Readers who can tolerate a bit of chaff will find a great deal of nourishing, golden wheat.

Chicks Dig Gaming

Victoria Garcia lives in Seattle with her husband, comics creator John Aegard, and a chunky but agile little dog. Her fiction has been published in *Polyphony*, the *Indiana Review,* and elsewhere.

Mass Effect: Choice and Limitation in Storytelling
Mass Effect Trilogy, by BioWare, 2007-2012, $40 (Collected Edition).
reviewed by Rachel Blackman

The combined Mass Effect series comprises arguably one of the most memorable and beloved computer RPGs (Role-Playing Games) of recent years. Why is that?

The storyline is full of elements we've seen hundreds of times before: humanity, having discovered alien ruins, finds an interstellar travel system right in our own backyard and blunders out into the greater galaxy, where we promptly embroil ourselves in a war and get a reputation as the hot-tempered new kid. Decades later, a human military officer, Commander Shepard, stumbles across an ancient threat to the entire galaxy. Of course, no one believes the Commander at first.

Fear of synthetic life and artificial intelligences, the consequences of playing God, rivals and enemies pulling together in the face of a shared conflict…all are familiar elements. They're handled well, and an excellent voice-acting cast gives life to a diverse cast of characters—human and alien—that many have come to care deeply about.

But the reason Mass Effect stands out in so many players' minds is that they have the feeling the story is theirs in a way most games are not. Play a story-driven game like *Tomb Raider* or *Uncharted*, and then go talk to a friend who has also played it; the stories you two experienced will be much the same. But players discussing what they've experienced across the three Mass Effect games will often have very different tales to tell.

The series has been a topic of discussion in the gaming press for years, so the idea of an RPG driven by choice and consequence is a familiar concept to most gamers, and many other companies have tried to follow the Mass Effect formula (with varying degrees of success). When it was first announced, though, the idea of a game trilogy where seemingly inconsequential choices made in the first game would have an impact years later in the third game seemed a huge undertaking, not only from the technical standpoint, but from the storytelling one.

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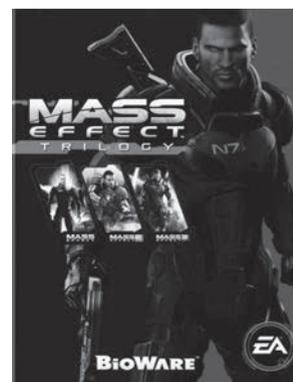
The player has a feeling of choice that is absent in many other story-driven games.
If you look behind the scenes, though, the choice the players perceive is largely an illusion.

The main character of the series is largely a blank slate: you can choose a sex, origin, and background, as well as Shepard's appearance and first name.

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Mass Effect remains, even two years after the release of the final installment of Shepard's story, near and dear to the hearts of many gamers, and one of the most oft-replayed computer RPGs out there.

After all, how could a writer possibly script the third installment of a trilogy if the ending of the previous game wasn't certain? Yet the Mass Effect series seemed, in many ways, to achieve this impossible feat.

Choosing to resolve a situation through diplomacy in the first game may lead to an unsatisfactory resolution but also give you a new ally who could assist with something in the third game, while resolving the situation through force may make for a positive outcome to that particular conflict but start a grudge that could come back to haunt you in the third game. Characters can die; political leaders can change, alliances can form or fall, all based on your actions. And along the way, you can make friends, even start a romance with one of your allies, friends, or crew. The player has a feeling of *choice* that is absent in many other story-driven games.

If you look behind the scenes, though, the choice the players perceive is largely an illusion. A character may die, but if the action that character would have taken is crucial, another character will be there to carry out an equivalent action. The storylines reuse as much content between different branches as possible, to keep the game from becoming unmanageably large, while trying—successfully, for many players—to preserve the feeling that your particular playthrough, your Shepard, is uniquely "yours" in some way.

It's a trick that ends up leading in part to one of the elements of Mass Effect that is most lauded: the portrayal of the female version of Commander Shepard.

The main character of the series is largely a blank slate: you can choose a sex, origin, and background, as well as Shepard's appearance and first name. So you can have Commander Danielle Shepard, the child of another military officer who is the sole survivor of an early military mission. Or you can have Commander Mark Shepard, a colony kid whose early military career gives him a reputation for ruthlessness. The background can influence bits of dialogue throughout the game, but your Shepard's sex only really determines who might be interested in Shepard romantically; some characters are straight, some are gay, some are bi.

This differs from a lot of science fiction, where a well-known female military officer might be given a nickname like "the Ice Queen" or "the Iron Bitch." In Mass Effect—likely in part to avoid too much duplicate dialogue—Commander Shepard is simply always called "Commander," "Shepard," or "sir," regardless of sex. And—again, almost certainly to avoid duplicating content—the way Shepard's actions play out tend to be first and foremost military rather than gendered in any sense.

In short, Shepard is written much like Ellen Ripley was in the original *Alien*: a role that could be played by either a man or a woman. And like Ripley, the end result is compelling. You have a world where a woman can be a prominent military officer, and her sex is treated as if it were not even worth mentioning. Shepard is a woman? So what; the bigger question is whether she can keep the galaxy from burning down.

Though it may have been driven in part by the technical limitations inherent in trying to fit in as many illusory choices as possible, the end result has been a revelation to many gamers. And so Mass Effect remains, even two years after the release of the final installment of Shepard's story, near and dear to the hearts of many gamers, and one of the most oft-replayed computer RPGs out there.

Now, excuse me; I have another new Shepard calling my name.

Rachel Blackman, an engineer at a technology development firm in Seattle, has been gaming in one form or another fairly nearly since she could roll dice or hold a controller.

⚙ Forty-two Skills to Power

Long Live the Queen, by Hanako Games, 2012,
http://www.hanakogames.com/llq.shtml. $9.95.

reviewed by Linsey Duncan

Long Live the Queen is a visual novel/life simulation hybrid about a nice fourteen-year-old princess who will be crowned queen on her fifteenth birthday. If she can survive that long.

The gameplay is simple enough. Our heroine, Elodie, has forty weeks until the coronation. Elodie can choose two classes to take each week. Classes raise skills (of which there are forty-two, no joke) and are dependent on her mood for impact: a depressed Elodie learns how to sing better than an angry Elodie does, while an angry Elodie can practice her swordplay with greater fervor. Weekends and story events give Elodie the chance to tweak her mood. Feeling too angry and need to settle down? Head to the church.

Story events also provide *Long Live the Queen* with its primary draw: risk. Most involve skill checks; many of them also involve choices. Any player will fail at least *some* skill checks, and that's all right. You're raising a queen, not a goddess. But you can't fail everything. For example, being terrible at "presence" (whether you project, say, queenliness) and manners can make you a lot of enemies. If you don't *look* like a queen or *act* like a queen, you run the risk of looking weak or clueless or capriciously violent. And you're not the only person in line for this throne.

This isn't to say that an Elodie who kills people right and left and focuses on aggressive magic and archery is doomed, or that Elodie needs to be a social genius. She *will* have a harder road with fewer friends and more assassination attempts. In theory, the road to alternate methods of seizing power in *Long Live the Queen* is simple: if you want to be the kind of queen no one expects, you'd better have excellent smarts or raw Murdertown skills.

In practice, *Long Live the Queen* relies on trial-and-error, and most players will die multiple times before finding a workable route through the game's perils. It's far from the only game with a handful of optimal builds and a bunch of alternate builds that will get you killed, and it is short enough that replaying the game after a death is easy. But I do consider the game's somewhat rigid win states to be a flaw. Although most of the forty-two skills will be checked at some point, many of them only offer background information or allow you to avoid minor mistakes. And many lesser skills require a significant point investment to be even that useful.

I would, however, also argue that the frustration of being unable to play exactly how you want to play is an interesting comment on the story in itself.

Elodie is a young woman born to power, but actually acquiring that power requires her to either conform to strict social expectations—some of which she can't be expected to know ahead of time—or to be dangerously formidable in exactly the right ways. This is not a game that encourages you to "be yourself." This is not a game that encourages the pursuit of anything but strength. For example, Elodie has a list of potential mates to choose from, and while some can be love matches, more often they're just another set of data points to raise this or that portion of Elodie's social standing.

I don't mean to disparage the writing, which is terse but atmospheric, or the characters, which are quickly sketched but detailed enough to be distinct. It's just that the world of *Long Live the Queen* is a harsh one, and Elodie has no clear allies. You must make your decisions without the hope that anyone will back you up. Elodie's task, ascension to the throne, is nearly impossible on a first playthrough, and I believe this is intentional. It's never enough to be skilled when the path to success is obscured or arbitrary.

Long Live the Queen's very trial-and-error difficulty makes it a unique take on the maneuvers of female ambition. It's also a charmingly designed and wickedly brutal life simulation, where death comes cheap. Definitely recommended.

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Linsey Duncan is an oft-times knowledge manager and a sometimes freelance writer. Her work has appeared in *Kill Screen Daily*, *Everyday Poets,* and in the upcoming *Torn Pages* anthology. She blogs at http://www.linseyduncan.com.

⚙ The High Price of Feminism in Video Games

Tropes Vs. Women in Video Games by Anita Sarkeesian, Feminist Frequency, http://www.feministfrequency.com, no charge.

reviewed by Arinn Dembo

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As I sat down to write an article about Anita Sarkeesian, the famous feminist pop culture critic was fleeing her home. Her latest videoblog had triggered a new flood of harassment, including some threats on Twitter that were starkly terrifying—not because they were abnormal in the level of rage and violence expressed, but because they included the street addresses of the blogger and her loved ones.

"I'm going to your apartment at [real street address] and rape you to death," one of her stalkers said. "After I'm done, I'll ram a tire iron up your cunt…. I'm going to kill your parents too. [He gives their full address.] I've seen their house."

Sarkeesian screen-captured and re-posted the threats with her personal information and that of her parents removed. She was already in motion herself; she had abandoned her apartment to spend the night with friends. Police were taking steps to assure her safety and that of her family.

If this seems a pretty high price to pay for the crime of posting a mere videoblog on YouTube, it is…and it isn't. In many respects, what Sarkeesian suffers for engaging with videogames as a medium is simply par for the course. The new generation of active feminists is made up of women now in their mid-twenties and early thirties, and they insist on being both seen and heard. The price for being seen and heard as a woman in the modern world is sometimes very high.

For old school academic feminists, a review of Sarkeesian's work in general reveals it to be intellectually innocuous. Her videoblogs are simple, articulate, and well-illustrated attempts to educate the public about the unexamined misogyny of pop culture media. She began her series of videoblogs in 2011, with lucid reviews of a few misogynistic tropes common in current film and television.

Her work is mainly notable for tackling pop media through the lens of "Geek Culture," which has been a sheltered cove of unexamined misogyny for decades. Her first few videoblogs were sponsored by *Bitch Magazine* and tackled tropes like "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl," "Women in Refrigerators," "The Demon Seductress," and "The Mystical Pregnancy." Although the viewer might not always agree with her, the blogs are thoughtful and well-reasoned and usually represent significant skill in the medium. The arguments are impressive, largely because the illustrative examples and clips are extremely well-chosen, and the scripting and editing are excellent. The *Tropes* series updates and carries forward the old points about representation into new media, and makes feminist critique more relatable to modern audiences by using examples from modern media: the TV shows, comics, and movies that we consume in the present.

Sarkeesian was already meeting with hostility and harassment for her work in other pop culture media, but the heat turned up by an order of magnitude when she turned her attention to the study of video games. In May 2012 she launched a small Kickstarter project for a new videoblog series, *Tropes Vs. Women in Video Games*. A savage backlash of misogynistic abuse and resistance followed, coming from a largely male self-designated "gamer community," only to be swamped by a more overwhelming tidal wave of support from both men and women. The original funding goal of the project was a modest $6000; in the end T*ropes Vs. Women in Video Games* raised over $150,000, which allowed Sarkeesian and her producer, Jonathan McIntosh, to make the production of the series a fulltime job and hire other team members to assist in production.

Since May 2012, the team at Feminist Frequency has released six videos in this series, though they cover only a few topics. The first three videos are a three-part study of the "Damsel in Distress" iconography and plot devices in video games, starting from the *Donkey Kong* era in the early 1980s and continuing to the present day. A fourth video covers the concept of "Ms. Male Character" (i.e., "Ms. Pac Man"), a common trope in comics and

animation that has carried over to video games. The most recent two videos are the first two parts of an in-depth examination of "Women as Background Decoration" in video games—a deeply disturbing examination of the use of female NPCs ("Non-Player Characters") in modern AAA titles (the open-world action/adventure and role-playing games).

What is noteworthy and truly laudable about Sarkeesian's analysis of these tropes in video games is the depth and breadth of the research. Her Damsel in Distress miniseries begins with the origins of the art form in games like *Donkey Kong*, *Mario,* and *Zelda*. Her examination of the Ms. Male Character begins with Ms. Pac Man and goes all the way to "Fem-Shepard," the female-playable variant of the male protagonist of BioWare's Mass Effect series covered elsewhere in this issue of *The CSZ*.

Cogent commentary focuses useful attention on how the sexist attitudes of a single powerful designer can do a disproportionate amount of harm. The story of how in 2002 Shigeru Miyamoto and Nintendo coopted a game originally designed and written for a female character with agency and power, and had it revised to serve as a vehicle for Miyamoto's male playable character in the Star Fox franchise is sobering, considering that this practice has become standard. In 2007, the same thing happened to a game called *Black Lotus*, which had been conceived as a Hong Kong action thriller about a deadly female assassin. The game was coopted by the True Crime franchise and its protagonist was Y-washed by high-ranking executives at Activision. Even when they dropped the True Crime franchise label and marketed the final game as *Sleeping Dogs*, the female protagonist didn't make a comeback.

Ultimately, my review of the *Tropes Vs. Women in Videogames* series comes down to two words: Watch it. Sarkeesian and other female game journalists, critics, and developers desperately need our support. I've been working as a game journalist and developer for twenty years; I assure you that things are getting much worse, not better, as the industry becomes increasingly more powerful and profitable.

About half the episodes of this video-blog series come with trigger warnings for the level of disturbing content aggregated into each twenty-minute segment. The violence and dehumanization of women you have to witness in some episodes can get a little overwhelming. But these slaps in the face are no reason to avoid the series.

A great many modern feminists have failed to engage with the new medium of games in the last thirty years. We do not all play the immensely popular games that are made for PC and console gaming platforms, even though they're shaping our culture on a daily basis.

The gut-wrenching montage of disrespect, degradation, and violence that Sarkeesian has pasted into her scrapbook is a sign of just how well the medium has gotten along without us. Watching these videos is a wakeup call, and will help a lot of non-gamers understand what has been peddled to the younger generation while our backs were turned. If you ever wondered why Little Billy seems so incredibly defective in terms of empathy for women and girls, these videos definitely provide part of the answer.

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Arinn Dembo is an American author currently living and writing in Vancouver, British Columbia. She is best known for her work with Vancouver-based Kerberos Productions, where she is lead writer and has worked on the background fiction for the Sword of the Stars series and *Fort Zombie*.

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A great many modern feminists have failed to engage with the new medium of games in the last thirty years. We do not all play the immensely popular games that are made for PC and console gaming platforms, even though they're shaping our culture on a daily basis.

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The Old Testacles

by Anna Tambour

"Ahem," said Moses.

"Do I need to repeat myself?"

Moses trembled. "Do you need to repeat yourself?"

"DO I?"

"Do… No, 0 Lord my G-d."

"Then get—"

"Ahem," said Moses, with an understandable 90 percent temerity but 10 percent chutzpah.

"WHAT?"

God's voice loosened a boulder that nudged Moses' shoulder. His grip on the tablets slipped.

"Now look what you've done," thundered God. "No, don't pick them up yet. Speak!"

"Well, G-d," said Moses. "You know these Commandments?"

"Why should I know them? I just gave them to you."

Moses ignored the sticky shower that had just fallen on him.

"We both know, O Lord, Creator of Heaven and Earth," he continued, "that the people are having the time of their lives down there."

"Why else did I call you here?"

"Why?"

"SPEAK ALREADY."

Moses rubbed one horny toe in the dirt. "So these Commandments, to be effective, you want for them to be the best that they can be?"

"Why should I want that? I wouldn't want that," said God. He'd dropped His voice to almost silent, the calm before—

"No, G-d. Yes, you wouldn't." Moses tucked his neck into his shoulders. "But?"

"BUT?"

"Oy, let the man talk."

A blinding light dropped between the old man whose face was twisted with malice, and the merely wizened old codger, Moses.

The light transmogrified into—into…

"And *you*," She said, looking at the bulge that suddenly appeared in Moses' filthy robe. "You who have refused to lay with your wife because you think to lay with *Me*."

"Is this true?" asked God, flabbergasted.

Moses cocked his head and opened his hands toward God, "You'd grown tired of Her, no? And haven't your hu—uh, servants destroyed all mention of—uh, and forbidden us to—"

"TTHAT DOESN'T GIVE YOUU—"

The once-married couple looked at one another, and the female laughed.

"I admit to having made bad choices in my time," She said to Moses. "But I'm still not desperate."

"Please accept my apologies, wife of—"

"X!"

"X!" Moses hastened to correct himself.

"Now," She said, "Tell us about these so-called Commandments. And don't worry about Him."

"Well," said Moses, and suddenly all that learning he had received at the Pharaoh's court made his eyes shine with pedantry. "The first one isn't a Commandment."

She smiled. God's face was full of wrath. He was furious but powerless to change the fact that in She resides all Understanding.

"Go on," She said, like oil on bread.

Moses spoke at Her eyes, though it was hard not to get distracted by the shape of Her breasts, and the attraction of that slit of all slits, through which pours Creation. He closed his eyes, the better to spurt out, "And the next three Commandments are tautologies."

"WHAT?"

"They all say the same thing," She said, explaining as patiently as any good teacher.

"Go on," said X to Moses.

"And those plagues."

"WHAT ABOUT THEM?"

"Over these forty years, O Lord my G-d, King of the Universe, I've wanted to ask you, more and more. Why did you kill all those innocents? All those beasts who served so well. And the seed of the poor, who have no power. And above all, all those first-born of the slave girls. And why do you think we're so obsessed with gold and silver?"

God was mercifully quiet, encouraging Moses.

"And why," said Moses, "did you have to make everyone you killed in the plagues suffer such horrible deaths? All that skin peeling. And what is this Commandment about not coveting the slave of my neighbor? What makes us ex-slaves different to any other slaves?"

"So you don't want my liberation?"

"G-d forbid you should think that, Lord," said Moses, tugging at his beard. "But—"

God's beard thrashed like a storm at sea, froth tossing everywhere. He might have poured forth Words, but they were drowned by the sound of X's laughter.

God's hands clenched, He bared his great yellow teeth, and…exploded, catching a nearby bush on fire.

And suddenly, He was No More to Be Seen.

"About time," said X.

Moses took heart, looking to X with the eyes of an ancient ram.

"Don't even think of it," She said. "Now let's get you down to the valley below. I'll grant you a little lease on younger life so you can entertain your wife again. And now I can get back to work creating joy, and fruitfulness and understanding.

"It's been too long," said Moses, still hoping.

"NOT SO FAST."

Moses' heart skipped a beat. That was the Voice of G-d, and now that Moses couldn't look Him in the eye, He was even more terrifying than before.

"YOU," boomed He. "You were trouble from the beginning."

"And you," X shot back. "I picked you up from the gutter. My curse is that I've got bad taste in consorts."

She turned to Moses. "I picked him up on the rebound, someone so opposite from my great love that I thought he would make me forget, like dropping that tablet on your foot made you forget what you were thinking of the moment before you did it."

"Tell me more," said God.

X ignored the sneer in his voice.

"My great love—don't get your hopes up, either of you. He was another god. His favourite drink was the libation that once a month I pour from between my legs. That's why my creation-works inside are a cup. And why all my daughters have them, too."

Moses blinked. A cup inside? And that couldn't be—

"Disgusting," spat this god. Moses felt the spatter, and it stunk. God had obviously never felt the need for personal hygiene.

X gazed at Moses, then at God (He couldn't hide from *Her*). "Good thing I changed men as I did," She mused.

"What was that?" said God, who reddened with embarrassment. He hadn't a speck of curiosity in his making, but was full of forgetfulness.

"I let him help create you," She said to Moses. "Men. But he wanted you to have forty balls."

"She reduced them to two," said God.

"Only when I saw what you were planning."

"One to hold your seed," She explained. "And one to kick when necess—"

Moses looked in the direction of God's Voice with surprise and accusation.

"Enough already," He said. "I've still got SOME power."

And with that, His hands must have risen, for *whoosh*. When the smoke cleared, another old man stood in Moses' place.

"Abraham!" two voices rang out, not in harmony.

X left in a huff.

"G-d?" said Abraham uncertainly. His eyes were crusty as dried-up saltponds. His head shook like a rotten flowerhead in a breeze, and he smelt of moist death.

"You remember that Covenant we discussed?" God said to Abraham.

Abraham tried to stand straighter. "How could I forget?"

"You, too." God sounded exasperated. "Why is this night different from all other nights, that everyone's answering a question with a question?"

Abraham prostrated himself. "Blessed be He who has delivered me here."

"Now we're getting somewhere." The Voice was content. "Remember the Covenant?"

Abraham shuddered. How could he forget? He woke up one night with a voice telling him to kill his son, or he'd be killed himself. Of course he was going to kill his son, but then when he had the knife on the boy's throat, the voice laughed, telling him that he, Abraham, had passed the first test of loyalty. There were more to come. All the voice wanted was blind obedience or death, an order so simple that even Abraham the schlemiel was able to carry it out.

"Remember," the Voice boomed now, with the terrifying confidence that Abraham remembered all too well, "how I told you that you could know certainly that your descendants would be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them for four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve will I judge; and afterward they will come out with great possessions?"

"Yes, O Lord of the Universe who is the One and Only G-d," lied Abraham. Actually, the only thing he remembered was that someone in some unimaginably far future would have possessions greater than he did. G-d hadn't exactly showered him with wealth, an oversight that made Abraham's conjugal relations rather fraught, since he mostly either sat around daydreaming, or wanted to lay with his wife who was too busy trying to make ends meet to put up with his nonsense. Besides, he couldn't count to ten.

"That time has now come to pass, said the Lord. You will now take on the mantle that Moses shed."

"Who is—"

"Thick as two mudbricks," laughed X into God's ear.

"It doesn't matter," he snapped. "From now on, you shall be known as Moses. And don't look at nothing like a sheep. I'll tell you what to do."

And God, with one stroke, erased the witless countenance of Abraham and replaced it with one infinitely learned, pained, censorious, unquestionable, meshugganah as God—making him the first Priest of the Hebrews.

"Now pick up those tablets," said God, "and only throw them down when the people answer with the first question."

And Abraham who was raised from the dead to become "Moses" did as he was told.

As for his home life, X took care of that.

So he "lived" with Moses' wife for an interminability of years, till one sunset when he was finally released. And she who possessed X's Understanding lit a candle and ate some fruit and honey, for she was also blessed with infinite Outlastability.

Anna Tambour is an author of satire, fable, and other strange and hard-to-categorize fiction and poetry. Her novel *Crandolin* was shortlisted for the 2013 World Fantasy Award. She lives in the Australian bush.

Featured Artist

I grew up in Nagano, Japan, and Washington State. My Japanese father and my American mother separated when I was five years old, so I spent a lot of time going back and forth between two countries. My mother was extremely impoverished, so we lived in some difficult circumstances, such as a tent, homeless shelter, trailer, and a cabin with no water or electricity. For as long as I can remember, I have been drawing and writing stories. It's given me a way to live in a better world and keep my big dreams alive.

When I was twelve years old, things were a bit better financially for my mother, though we were still very poor. We were able to get an old computer, which was placed on top of an upside down cardboard box, and a Super Nintendo. The first game I ever played—*Chrono Trigger*—shocked me because I could be in a different world and experience storytelling and gameplay in a way that I didn't know was possible. It was magic to me. I got hooked on games and dreamed of working in the videogame industry. My dreams were all big: developing a game, directing a film, creating graphic novels, and writing novels… Basically, I wanted to create worlds and tell a story through my writing and art through various mediums.

Going to college and getting away from my trailer life in the middle of nowhere seemed like an impossible task, but through countless hours applying for scholarships, I was eventually able to pave my way into the DigiPen Institute of Technology, a school specializing in videogame production. It was overwhelming to learn everything about 3D modeling and games within the accelerated two-year program, but I pulled through. For my senior project, I worked on a game called Narbacular Drop with my team. Little did I know that this game would be what launched my career in the video game industry.

Prior to graduation, I began working as a paid intern at Nintendo Software Technology, which concentrated mostly on 3D modeling and animation. Immediately after graduation, my team and I showed Narbacular Drop to Valve Software to receive feedback from the Industry. To our shock, we were all offered jobs at Valve with the purpose of creating a game featuring our portal technology. I was only twenty years old at the time, and it was quite exciting and overwhelming to see my dreams coming to fruition. I was hard at work creating the visual identity from the ground up with my team, involved in a variety of content creation: concepting, designing, modeling, animating, and participating in every level of design session to come up with new maps for the game. We created what is known today as *Portal*, and we certainly did not anticipate how big the game would become in the industry.

I continued to work on games such as *Portal 2, Left 4 Dead, Left 4 Dead 2,* and *Dota 2*. After eight years at Valve, I transitioned to Microsoft 343i and am now working as an environment artist on *Halo 5*. While continuing to work on games, I also write and draw for myself. My debut novel, *CLAN*, was published in 2013, and my second book, *HENGE* (Le Fay Series), is coming out later this year. As I move forward with my career, I'm excited to see what's next. Above all else, I've learned that no dream is too big.

www.realmlovejoy.com

Front Cover Illustration: A promotional image that Realm created for *CLAN*. This is the Incubation Chamber, where Clans are created. In *CLAN*, everyone is the same; they are cloned from one human man. However, one is different: Twain, the main character.

*B*io-Regeneration Tank: An image of the main character, Twain, in Realm's debut YA sci-fi novel *CLAN*. The fluid in the Bio-Regeneration Tank works like an x-ray so his bones are visible beneath the waterline.

Cover Art for *HENGE* (Le Fay Series): Artwork for the upcoming YA fantasy novel, *HENGE*, the first book in the Le Fay Series. The series features Morgan le Fay, who is a powerful and complicated female figure in the Arthurian legends.

Tintagel (*HENGE*, Le Fay Series): An illustration featuring Morgan's hometown, Tintagel. Realm was able to travel to Tintagel and took note of the imagery to accurately portray her hometown.

Aperture's Requiem (Portal 2): Created for a set of limited edition lithographs that were released through the Valve Store. In this image, GLaDOS and Chell face each other amidst the ruin of Aperture.

Syringe: Another illustration from *CLAN*. Many of the illustrations feature dark, iconic imagery similar to this one.