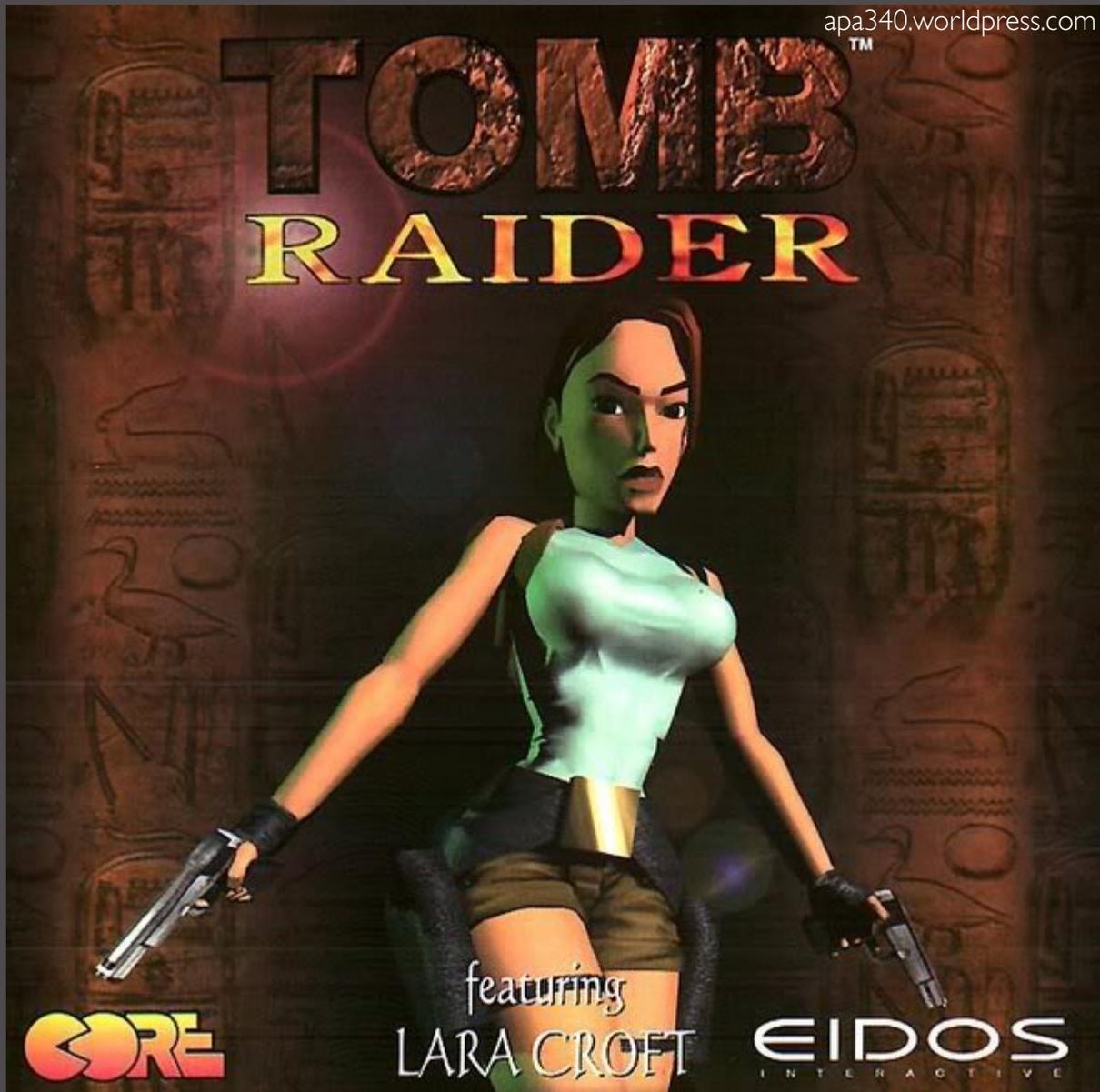


Women not allowed in techno-geek & gaming culture



Tech is still a largely male dominated field. This is nowhere more apparent than in the world of gaming. Game developers often are creating female characters that are highly sexualized, both in their character design (expect impossibly thin, impossibly large-breasted girls or women wearing nothing but a chainmail bikini) and role within the game.

Even in games where female characters are not explicitly sexualized the subtext is there. The Mario Series, for example, have you rescuing Princess Peach from her many, varied captors. This is problematic on two fronts. Firstly it propagates that women are helpless and in constant need of saving and while Nintendo - Mario's creators- has worked to give Princess Peach a more active role in the series and its spin-offs, she still remains

the perpetual damsel in distress. Secondly Princess Peach serves quite literally as a trophy for the completion of Mario's quest. She is ultimately just another object or reward for Mario to use. This is especially problematic as Mario is marketed, in particular, to children and kids in their early teens. So the message about women and their roles that Mario and games like Mario send is learned and internalised by the very young already.

Now Mario isn't the only games series that treats its female characters in this manner. It is however one of the most popular and well known examples. Another major problem is the lack of female protagonists or player characters in the vast majority of games.

Feature

Girls and women on the side of good – at best - are often portrayed as the male character's side-kick, or in the worst case scenario as objects that need to be protected. On the other hand, female villains (to the extent that they appear in games) are almost always portrayed as evil seductresses, once again underscoring the belief that women are only sexual objects. In all these cases the female character is generally physically much weaker and less capable of defending herself than the male lead. There are some attempts to present or show strong, non-sexualized female characters. Samus Aran (from the Metroid series) and Chell (Portal fame) are good examples of this. Games like Silent Hill 3 (a popular horror game series) shows us that women can also be pushed to the forefront of series previously dominated by men. I personally feel that the most problematic aspect of the gaming world has less to do with the developers and more to do with male fans. Female gamers - often referred to as gamer girls- are on the one hand highly fetishized. A post on the gaming site heavy.com describes gamer girls as "every gaming geek's dream. If you date a gamer girl, lucky you. Don't do anything stupid to screw it up. Also, does she have a friend or sister that games?" Also; "can I come over and go on a double date with you guys that consists of playing COD(Call of Duty)/ drinking beer/enjoying myself for all eternity? That would be pretty cool of you.Thanks, brah." followed by pictures of scantily clad girls holding game controllers.

The "value" of gamer girls, according to sites like Heavy, is that they are hot and readily available for sex. Also being more bearable to spend time with than other

non-beer-drinking, sports loving women. Because this perception is held by so many male gamers, places like gaming forums and online games are not safe for female gaming fans as they are likely to be verbally harassed and often propositioned for sex. A recent example of this is the brutal manner in which, women's rights activist and media critic, Anita Sarkeesian was attacked after the launch of her new project Tropes Vs. Women in Video Games (records of which can be found on her website feministfrequency.com).

On the other hand, female gamers are also constantly being accused of not knowing anything about video games or told to "go back to the kitchen" and "make me (the male gamer) a sandwich." This totally marginalizes and can potentially put down and put off any girl or woman who is interested in the world of video and computer games.

While at the moment the gaming world is still largely dominated and run by men and still very sexist, opportunities are being made for girls and women in the gaming industry which, hopefully will influence the content of games that are being released. One can also see pressure for the better treatment of girls in games and girls who play games from fans and consumers. Individuals who are playing a role here include Anita Sarkeesian and on a group level like we see from organizations like Girl Gamer. We can only hope that through these initiatives, the sexist nature of gaming and techno-geek culture in which women are portrayed only as the objects of heterosexual male fantasies.

By Inger Junge

Inger Junge is a Namibian techno-geek girl. A techno-geek is a person who is described as obsessed with computers and electronic technology and techno-geek is an emerging sub or pop culture based on the computer and cyberspace or internet-based platforms. Unfortunately techno-geek culture remains a hetero-sexual male domain from which women are discouraged to participate in. Inger looks at the objectification of women in one area of techno-geek culture, namely gaming.



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