

# THE REAL WOMEN OF GAMING

Introducing the mythical species  
of female gamers

By Nachiket “therapist” Mhatre

**A**n issue examining the importance of women gamers can't really be complete without including a feature on the ladies actively involved with everyone's favourite hobby. Videogame development lies pretty high up on the totem pole of nerd-dom, which makes it a rarefied space at the outset. Finding out about women involved in this niche, therefore, tends to be a novelty that generally goes down well with gamers. After all, nothing warms the cockles of our hearts than finding out that our favourite pastime isn't the irrevocable sausage fest that we had always feared it might be.

Sometimes the vocal (and also rather horny) minority of gamers tend to overstep limits thanks to their abject inability to contain excitement. Case in point: the Jade Raymond saga that played out following her uncannily high visibility in the Assassin's Creed promotional blitz. The infamous saga spawned a smutty comic strip on the Something Awful forums, a rather creepy article from current reigning white knights at Kotaku waxing eloquent on how good she smells (I swear I haven't made this up), and generally the sort of silliness you expect from the vocal minority's reaction when it discovered the female videogame developer.

Trust the internet to make anything weird. However, the childish reaction was essentially the internet exaggerating the fundamental shock of discovering an attractive woman in an industry where the odds of finding women are only slightly better than coming across a snowflake within an active volcano. And that's why every single feature covering women involved in the gaming industry tends to be the same tired old regurgitation featuring all too familiar names such as Jade Raymond, Amy Hennig, Lucy Bradshaw, Chelsea Howe, and Kiki Wolfkill.

That's why I decided to buck the trend and feature women from the Indian videogame industry and gaming scene in general. When I say that “I” decided to cover Indian women, I mean my colleague Barbarian Monkey. To be honest, I had no clue that there were enough Indian women involved behind the scenes in the videogame spectrum. Neither did Barbarian Monkey, but his research and active effort in reaching out to them eventually paid off. Soon enough, he successfully dug out a treasure trove of Indian women actively involved in this field. What follows is a healthy mix of not just gamer girls, but women developers working behind the scenes, making new games.

**POORNIMA SEETHARAMAN****TEJASWINI JOGLEKAR**

**Hailing from** Palakkad in Kerala, 31 year old Poornima is one of the rare Indian women actively involved in developing videogames. When she isn't making games, she plays them on a sizeable collection of platforms including Xbox 360, Nintendo DS, Game Cube, and the good ol' PC. Her tryst with game design involved outsourcing content for a Korean Mobile Games company, where she worked on a mobile game along the lines of Neverwinter Nights. Her second stint in the industry was at Indiagames (now Disney), where she assumed the role of Lead Designer for the mobile version of Bioshock.

Apart from running her own game design studio, her work on various videogame projects has won her local awards as well as nomination for international awards as well. Working closely with Square Enix founder Yasuhiro Fukushima, while helping the company arrange the Square Enix India Game Development Contest was one of the high points of her career. After a stint with Knowledge Adventure (aka JumpStart), which makes educational MMOs for kids, she's currently employed at Bash Gaming (aka GSN Games). Here, Poornima works towards learning the finer nuances of social casino gaming, while working with known industry veterans such as Steve Meretzky and Raymond Holmes.

**First gaming memory/system**

I started with the NES clones, playing Mario, Tank and Duck Hunt. However my gaming addiction started with Age of Empires II (1999). Since then, there's been no turning back.

**Jade Raymond or Anita Sarkeesian**

Jade Raymond

**Describe Gamergate in one line**

Intrusion of privacy and cyber bullying.

**Do you think gaming is friendly/inclusive to women?**

It is to an extent. That is, if you can choose to ignore the wrong people and stay with the right crowd.

**If there's one thing you could fix about videogames and/or the gaming culture what would it be?**

Not everyone who plays it needs to be a pro at it. Videogames are forms of entertainment. E-sports exist for displaying your skill. For regular gamers, play and let play. You may be good, average or bad. It shouldn't matter. Enjoy the game and the experience.

**Why are female videogame protagonists in short supply?**

In real life itself, the number of women taking the lead roles is much lower compared to men, and videogames follow suit. Men still form the majority of the audience and hence equality is still an issue.

**Mumbai-based** Tejaswini Joglekar is a 24 year old Game Design and Production Management graduate from DSK Supinfogame (Pune). After completing her education from the videogame school, she has since been working as a Project Manager at DSK Green Ice Games. Watching her brother play videogames is what introduced her to the medium.

That's how she got involved with MMOs such as Ragnarok Online, Cabal, and Aion among others. The hobby was also why she pursued a career in the field of video games. Her gaming arsenal includes Asus G74SX gaming laptop and portables such as Nintendo DS Lite, PSP, Playstation Vita, and also her Google Nexus 5.

**First gaming memory/system**

I have been playing games since 2001 and my first gaming memory/system would be playing Contra, Mario and Duck hunt on the NES.

**Jade Raymond or Anita Sarkeesian**

Jade Raymond.

**Describe Gamergate in one line**

When it comes to ethics in Video Game journalism, I believe that reviewers have to be completely honest with their audience. However, I think that Gamergate has been used as an excuse to harass several women in the industry, which is wrong.

**Do you think gaming is friendly/inclusive to women?**

I think games can be more inclusive to women if they have more meaningful female protagonists where it actually makes sense to have a female lead over a male one.

**Have you had any bad gaming experiences due to your gender?**

I've had one isolated case where I got harassed due to my gender in an online game. However, the admins were quick to take action and I felt vindicated when they were banned immediately.

**If there's one thing you could fix about videogames and/or the gaming culture what would it be?**

Right now, a lot of video games have immature content in the AAA space. Having said that, a lot of Indie developers are making meaningful experiences that fully utilise the potential of video games as a medium. I think this trend needs to continue for the gaming culture to move in the right direction.

**Why are female videogame protagonists in short supply?**

That's due to a lack of diversity in the types of games being made. When game development opens up to a wider range of people once it becomes cheap, which in turn leads to a diverse range of games available to gamers. As this diverse catalogue expands, we can expect more female lead characters.





**TANYA SHRINGARPURE**

**Veterinarian** by profession and cosplayer by hobby, 27 year old Tanya Shringarpure loves to bring videogame characters to life when she isn't healing animals or putting them down. Going by the pseudonym Syrinx, costuming is serious business for her whenever she gets hired to cosplay at promotional events. Gaming mainly for fun, the Mumbai-based costumer prefers games such as Mario Kart, Street Fighter, and Kingdom Rush.

She doesn't consider herself hardcore gamer, but she admits to having a penchant for watching her more dedicated friends play through brutal games such as Bloodborne and Dark Souls. And it's these vicarious gaming experiences that help her discover videogame character designs for future cosplay projects. She also firmly believes that the gaming fraternity is much more accepting of women like her when compared to the normal society.

**Favourite videogame**

Mario Kart

**First gaming memory/system**

Mario and Duck Hunt on the NES and Road Rash on the PC

**Describe Gamergate in one line**

Ah, that can of worms. It really shouldn't have happened.

**Do you think gaming is friendly/inclusive to women?**

Not really. I don't think videogames were meant to be gender specific, only age specific. There's nothing that I'd want as "women inclusive". However, stereotyping characters needs to be addressed since games are pretty influential.

**Have you had any bad gaming experiences/harassment due to your gender?**

Not really, besides the occasional curiosity and surprised reactions. Perhaps, because I'm not involved with the community to that extent.

**If there's one thing you could fix about videogames and/or the gaming culture what would it be?**

I wish gamers would stop yelling, during and after games. All in all, I think the gaming world is evolving faster than societal norms, so I have high hopes for it.

**Why are female videogame protagonists in short supply?**

I suppose games could have a gender bias, as the lead characters always require physical strength, which is a male attribute according to the society. Moreover, female characters have been more ornamental than useful. But I see that changing as well. Perhaps, games and comics can force society to accept women as equal to men by the means of stronger female characters (which don't also have to be pretty or sexy).



**NIKITA JADWANI**

This 24 year old is a hardcore gamer based out of Bangalore, and also loves to cosplay at comic conventions. Like most, Nikita started out with el-cheapo unbranded NES clones. However, her next step was the highly underrated but otherwise sublime Sega Dreamcast console. Thereafter, she shifted loyalty to the Sony camp with the original PlayStation followed by the PlayStation 2 and finally the Nintendo Wii.

**Jade Raymond or Anita Sarkeesian**

Jade. She is cooler. Anita gets a little too serious in her conversations about women in gaming.

**Describe Gamergate in one line**

Honestly? It's so diluted with scandals, baseless generalizations and subjectivity that it's pointless to even talk about it considering no one knows the real reason behind the fight anymore.

**Do you think gaming is friendly/inclusive to women?**

Yes, it is. Some games are ridiculously offensive to women, but it's subjective. Men made the game, so there has bound to be some objectification. But all in all, a good game is a good game.

**Have you had any bad gaming experiences/harassment due to your gender?**

Well, I regularly experience preconceived notions. I am a girl gamer – a living breathing girl, who thoroughly enjoys video games. I am neither a myth, nor am I trying to impress the boys by "pretending" to know video games. I know my stuff.

**If there's one thing you could fix about videogames and/or the gaming culture what would it be?**

I'd ensure realistic portrayal of women. How can the female characters move around with such bizarre proportions, or fight with an outfit that's makes a pair of handkerchief seem modest, or why are they getting caught and acting helpless all the time, and why can't they be as strong as the male leads? Videogames shouldn't be portrayed as a boys-only realm. It's a space for girls too. People should stop saying things like "Oh that's a boy thing, you are better off with Barbies", or "Ha, you can never be as good, you are a girl after all". My childhood consisted of video games AND Barbies. I didn't grow a moustache, nor was I branded a tomboy because I play videogames.

**Why are female videogame protagonists in short supply?**

Since it is a male dominated field, game creators would want to make games that appeal to a larger demographic. If they make one with a female lead, she has to be scantily clad to get the men's attention. But that's a risk as it may still be branded a girly game, so to avoid that they prefer male leads instead.



**MAHIMA SRIVASTAV****RASHI CHANDRA**

**Born and** brought up in Hyderabad, 25 year old Mahima Srivastav is an avid cosplayer. When she isn't busy playing characters such as Ada Wong, Corpse Bride and Minnie Mouse, she is a gamer who has dabbled with both the PC and consoles. However, after spending time with the PlayStation 2 and then the Xbox 360, Mahima has switched loyalties to consoles.

#### **Favourite videogame character**

Lee Everett from The Walking Dead. He's not your typical hero, just a regular character who has to choose between the options given to him, usually ending up making at least one person unhappy.

#### **First gaming memory/system**

I've been playing videogames ever since I was 5 years old, and it all started with Super Contra.

#### **Jade Raymond or Anita Sarkeesian**

Sarkeesian. It's tragic that we are still fighting for equality in 2015.

#### **Describe Gamergate in one line**

Gaming is a man's world and Gamergate ensures that.

#### **Do you think gaming is friendly/inclusive to women?**

Although it has taken some time, gaming is now becoming more inclusive to women. My friends neither put me down, nor do they put me on a pedestal for being a girl gamer. I'm just a person who loves to play video games.

#### **Have you had any bad gaming experiences due to your gender?**

Usually, when you express that you are a gamer and you like certain games, some people test your knowledge by asking a thousand questions about the videogame industry. Then they also try to shame you just because you don't like to play a certain popular game.

#### **If there's one thing you could fix about videogames and/or the gaming culture what would it be?**

There is a gender gap because most games depict attractive female characters solely as sexual objects or eye candy. This gender gap can be fixed by normalising the gender traits within games. When that gap reduces, so will the shame that female gamers experience within the space.

#### **Why are female videogame protagonists in short supply?**

Social conditioning has led us to believe that a female lead character should resort to emotions or manipulation instead of muscle power. Most games are about muscle power. That, combined with the fact that sex sells, leads the video game developers to prefer male lead characters with women acting as sexual objects or femme fatales.

**Delhi based** Rashi Chandra is a gifted illustrator by profession and avid gamer by hobby. The 26 year old has worked as a game artist. Her love for videogames can be seen in her art and influences within her creative projects. Predominantly a PC gamer, Rashi pledges her console allegiance to Sony with a PlayStation 3 and PS Vita reserved only for the exclusives. She prefers the PC due to the platform's vastly superior performance and graphics, as well as the superiority of the keyboard/mouse combination.

#### **Favourite gaming memory/system**

I have been playing video games since I was three years old. My grandfather was quite tech savvy and we've always had a PC since I was born. I remember my dad playing Prince of Persia (the DOS version) and I was just mesmerised by the concept of a man racing against time to save a princess and fighting monsters along the way. My first game was Doom. My sister and I would play it together – me on the gun, while she would lead us around.

#### **Favourite role model from the videogame industry**

If you are asking about game characters, then, I guess, you could say that Lara Croft has been a role model to me. She's tough and keeps her cool in dangerous situations. If you mean people in general, then I can only think of my friend and ex-colleague Vijay Sinha, who has always encouraged me to try different genres of games. Both of us are game developers – him being a Game Designer and me being a Game Artist.

#### **Describe gamergate in one line**

It was some weird shit.

#### **Do you think gaming is friendly/inclusive to women?**

My male friends have been very encouraging when it came to my love for games. However, I don't reveal my gender to players if I am playing online with unknown people.

#### **Have you had any bad gaming experiences due to your gender?**

A guy once asked me if I played anything besides FarmVille or Candy Crush and refused to believe that I play AAA games too. It wasn't bad as such, just amusing. I've always been encouraged to play videogames by friends and family.

#### **If there's one thing you could fix about videogames and/or the gaming culture what would it be?**

I wish more people encouraged others to play videogames and not bully each other online. Have fun, that's all!

#### **Why are female videogame protagonists in short supply?**

I guess majority of the gamers are men and the game developers feel that they should create male lead characters so that the guys can relate more with them. It's easier to imagine you being in that world if the character is the same gender as you are. \*

