



IN THE PINK VIDEO GAMES: A HIDDEN BATTLEGROUND

While everyone else is frolicking at the river, gamers like me are still in the house parked in front of a screen. But in Portland you never know when it'll rain, even in August. So let's have some indoor fun.

In early 2012, a globally anticipated game was released. Mass Effect 3 hit shelves, and millions of fans ran to get their copy. In this fight for the survival of the galaxy lies one of the most epic gender queer adventures of all time. The lead character, always with the last name, Shepard, could be any gender. Even more remarkable, she could be gay, straight, bi or even asexual. It's your choice. Your romantic life can be as murky or nonexistent as you like. I chose murky, because I like danger.

No matter who you choose to be, there are many romantic interests to pursue, or abandon. As a bleeding heart lesbian, it was hard to not reassure everyone, even if they didn't stand a chance. Yup, nice is a lonely road.

If you don't play modern videogames, you might envision them as being just sexist and violent. You aren't very wrong. Women in comic books and videogames are often in tacky costumes, and impossibly anorexic/buxom. One of the best examples of this is the cover art for the game "Bayonetta". She looks like Sarah Palin in a revealing leather outfit. I still can't scrape the image of Fetish-Palin out of my head. I want more control over aesthetics.

Playing ME 3 is so rewarding for that reason. Not only are there queer story lines, there are also amazing moments of morality and justice. For example, you can choose not to provide a cure for disease to a planet of dying allies. However, refusing makes them despise you, and limits certain rewards. Being a big jerk changes your ending, and even your physical appearance. Bad Shepards slowly develop an evil looking red scar.

In order to get the best possible ending of the game, you have to play a certain number of online matches. You log onto the network, and before you know it, you're on a base with other players. It's chaos, but it isn't the sound of bullets, death groans, or the cacophony of war that rings out clearest. It's the actual live voices of players speaking into their headsets during the fight.

I always expect the worst when it comes to anonymous free speech. Long ago, I played Halo with my brother and his friends. The online portion of the game scared me. I was shocked at the way players spoke to each other. Every other word seemed to be "fag", and if they found out you were a woman, game over. Unsupervised kids were threatening to rape, stalk, and kill girls on the game network. Half of them probably didn't understand the damage they were causing.

After that bad experience, returning to online gaming seemed like gluttony for punishment. I very timidly joined a few fights being very careful to not reveal specifics of my identity. Granted, I was wearing pink body armor. Don't we all? Eventually, I noticed that no one was being rude. It was shocking. Players were chatting about game strategy and weather. I high-fived myself and did a dance. Thank you Mass Effect.

Clearly, we need to address homophobia, sexism, and bigotry in games. It's a booming industry that is only gaining realism and popularity. If you go to FeministFrequency.com you can read about a feminist video project by Anita Sarkeesian called, Tropes vs. Women in Video Games. She's undergone outrageous harassment in pursuit of her goal, and is unflinching in her commitment to talk about these issues.

Imagination and diversity are the foundation of video games. They're emotional and strange. If it's not absurd to pilot a spaceship across the galaxy to defeat murderous aliens, then it should be humdrum to be a hot queer while getting the job done.

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