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Research Paper

Industry Armageddon: Can Heroines Save the Game Industry?

Picture this: you are standing, facing your opponent breathing heavily as a mixture of blood and sweat drips from the pores of your body. A simple kick or punch could send you to the ground never to get up again. Then you remember why you are fighting, to seek revenge for your mother's death. You let your anger build until finally, you release it on your opponent giving him the fate you thought would be yours...Now, picture this: You are in an ancient Mayan temple full of mystery and treasure. You must be careful because a slip up as small as tripping over the scattered bones of a skeleton could set off a trap killing you within minutes. To add to that danger there are murderers after you, trying to stop you from succeeding, but with your hands always near your guns, you are not scared. You grab the treasure, and the temple starts to crumble, racing to swallow you whole...Do these descriptions of Tekken 3 and Tomb Raider 3: Lara Croft, Angel of Darkness sound like games you would want to play? For some, the violent nature alone is enough to steer them away from games like these. For others, these games are ideal. Now factor in the characters. Does a character's gender make a difference in who buys what game? What role do females play in the game industry? A lack of effort

by game designers to make games more appealing to female gamers is prohibiting the potential for a major growth in the game industry.

Here are some statistics to keep in mind: Currently, a healthy percentage of video gamers are female: 43% of PC gamers and 35% of console gamers are women. In 1998, 48.6% of PC entertainment software buyers were women, while 51.4% of console software purchasers were women. Women have a buying power of well over 2 billion dollars (Dr. Kathryn Wright, "Video Gaming: Myths and Facts"). Some may say that if almost half of all gamers are female, then they must be okay with the lack of games they can identify with. Well, just like males, females love games, and if they have to play games geared towards males, it is better than nothing. But, that hardly seems fair, and with an increase in female buying power, the industry might sky-rocket. Why aren't there more strong female main characters in games? Game designers claim that they do not know what female gamers want in a game or a character, so they just design games that they would want to play. Because the industry is male dominated, this becomes a problem when try to reach female gamers. So, why not do more research or poll female gamers? Designers say that even if they know how to curtail a game towards females, the game would not be as good because their hearts would not be in designing the game. However, they do admit that females are an integral part in keeping the game market alive from little girls to adult women:

The 'girl games' companies have their place, they really do. But I think as long as they refuse to acknowledge that they're only making 'games' to satisfy SOME little girls, they're enforcing a stereotype. Little girls like the one I saw are becoming more and more commonplace. Why did she pick Tomb Raider to play

instead of, say, Final Fantasy? Maybe because of Lara. Or maybe because, as she put it, it just "is killer."(Bobbi, "But Girls Don't Do That)

The game industry would profit well to market more games towards females or even make more games that would be enjoyable by both genders. What makes a good female character? Well first of all, her gender should not be her defining characteristic. She should have an interesting personality, have skills outside of stereotypical female skills, and there must be a decent story behind her character. She must be the main character and not a damsel in distress or someone to boost the ego of the male main character. She must be intelligent: "Lara Croft's creator, Toby Gard...said [that] all the successful characters have the same thing in common: a good game. You cannot have a good character in a crap game because then everyone would perceive the character as crap too...it's not the costume they are wearing or what their face looks like, it's what they do and how they do it"(Poole 150).

Some designers do just that but with one problem: the female character's appearance. They create a character that is physically attractive to men, but revolting to most women: "Respecting the female characters is hard when they look like strippers with guns and seem to be nothing more than an erection waiting to happen" (Michele Goulet, "Where do Girls Fit in on the Gaming Scene?"). Some female gamers are just happy to even have a heroine be the main character. One can assume that the quote was referring to Lara Croft, the main character of the Tomb Raider series. Before I begin, a bit of background information is necessary. In 1988, Jeremy Smith along with some members of Gremlin Graphics and later game creators Andy

Green, Robert Toone, Terry Lloyd, and Chris Shrigley teamed up to found the British development company Core Design. In 1989, they released a predecessor to Tomb Raider called Rick Dangerous. In 1993, Core had a major boost when it gained its first international partner, Sega. Also in this year, Eidos had employed the development company to commence work on Tomb Raider: “The first Tomb Raider game was launched in October on Saturn and on PlayStation & PC in November 1996. The Tomb Raider franchise (5 games in total) has now sold more than 25 million units worldwide. Tomb Raider III released on PlayStation and PC November 1998” (“Eidos Interactive”). When commenting on the creation of Lara Croft, Jeremy Smith founder of Core, said this:

“There weren’t any girls in video games at all then...other than in Japanese games. Sure there were a few single women figures, for example in *Virtua Fighter*, but still no games that completely revolved around a heroine.” However, Toby Gard [lead designer for Core] was convinced that a female heroine was the way of the future and fought to get Lara to be the main character. In an interview, Gard was quoted saying that men of their target audience preferred to play with women in action and “beating” games (Rachelle Fernandez).

Despite her huge chest and curvy hips, the people at Eidos claim that it is Lara’s personality that makes her so popular.



Somehow, that statement does not seem correct, granted the humanistic story behind her character would seem to be appealing to males and females. Lara liked fast cars and firearms from a young age. She is the daughter of wealthy Lord Henshingly Croft. She worked for Professor Werner Von Croy making her interested in travel, adventure, and archeology. Her parents died in a plane crash in the Himalayas. Leaving her to fend off jealous archeologists. Men are attracted to Lara's looks and almost feel a need to protect her from these jealous archeologists, and women like the idea of Lara being able to take care of herself and beat her male opponents. Despite the apparent appeal to both sexes, women still only made up about 25% of the people who bought Tomb Raider. When looking at the real model for Lara, one can see there is quite a difference between her chest and the chest of the video game character, although some say that if she looks too realistic, she'll lose some of her mystique and seductiveness:



Appearance aside, Tomb Raider is an awesome game to play with third person 3D graphics to die for and Lara being made up of more polygons which also adds to the success of the game:

New hardware and software allowed Core to place more focus on the protagonist, making Lara Croft the game's star. Core introduced a viewpoint of the player as that of a camera, which follows Lara in a short distance, looking at her from behind at all times. In most other 3D games at the time like Doom, the player looks out of the eyes of the protagonist, only seeing his/her weapon on the bottom of the screen or the hand holding it at the most. In these games the player is more apt to identify with the protagonist whereas in Tomb Raider it is more of a joint adventure between the player and Lara, the player being "encouraged to identify

with her situation as you would with an action hero on the big screen”

(Fernandez).

Another aspect of Tomb Raider that attracts female gamers is the multitude of puzzle solving that is involved. However, Tomb Raider 3 involves more combat with more various weapons and less puzzle solving than the first two games of the Tomb Raider series:



This game appeals to both men and women, however there is a trade off; if there is a heroine, she must be almost overly aesthetically pleasing to men.

This is the case in Tekken 3 as well. The Tekken series was created by a company by the name of Namco which started out in 1955 creating amusement parks. In 1974, they acquired Atari (Japan) Corporation from the Atari Corporation of the US. In 1995, the creators of Pac Man announced the release of Tekken for the PlayStation console. In 1997, Tekken 3 was released and became Namco’s best selling game with 6 million units sold world wide. While the violent nature of this game appeals to males of all ages by, for example “giving boys a potentially safer outlet for their aggressive feelings,” it also

involves many main characters who each have a story or a history behind them and why they have chosen to enter the King Fist of Iron Tournament (Henry Jenkins). The story of the game, however, revolves around a male character, Jin Kazama, whose mother was killed by a something possessed by the devil. Jin has been training for four years in order to seek revenge on the man who killed his mother, so his grandfather creates the King Fist of Iron Tournament in order to lure the evil man to Jin. This again makes the characters more humanistic and provides more appeal to females to combat the violent nature of the game. Upon reading the mission statement of Namco, they strive to achieve this idea of humanistic characters:

"To play is human." Basic human needs are in a state of transition, moving from values based in materialism--that is acquiring more, better and different goods--to a more spiritually fulfilling existence that satisfies the human desires for play and pleasure. At Namco, we are motivated by society's positive recognition of our company as a creator of pleasurable diversions. However, we maintain that our mission is more than creating high-tech amusement--rather, we must endeavor to provide high-tech, high-touch entertainment with an emphasis on enkindling human warmth. (Namco).

Most of the characters are men, but there are a few women characters. One of them, Xiaoyu, is arguably one of the best characters, skill-wise using her quick moves and small size to her advantage, in the game. Here we see her defeat one of the bigger of the male characters, King:



What might be unappealing to males playing this game is beating up a woman, especially since blood splatters when contact such as punching, kicking, or body-slamming is made:



But, most guys are able to look past that because beating Xiaoyu is such a challenge.

What females like is that her clothes are appropriate for fighting. This is true for half of the female characters. The other half are clad in high heels, skirts, and tight pants.

However, their skill makes one over look that characteristic:



Unfortunately, there are only two female characters in the beginning. You have to beat the game several times in order to unlock the rest of the female characters. No matter what character one chooses or is randomly assigned, the action, killer moves, and graphics make the game worth while. Although Tekken 3 has strong female characters, the appeal to female gamers just does not seem to be there. This is due to the lack of much strategy, puzzles, or problem solving. It somewhat lacks intelligence. A good player must be able to press buttons faster than the opponent and memorize long strings of combos.

Both of the games discussed in this paper have been the top sellers for their respective companies. Think about how much more money could have been made had more female gamers wanted to buy them. The game industry is neglecting to take a serious look at what will attract more female gamers. There will always be female gamers who will play a good game despite a lack of a good heroine, but this does not allow for growth and could eventually lead to decrease in female gamers. This could potentially be a big upset to the industry. More girls starting at very young ages are starting to get into video and computer games as the gender stereotypes begin to change. However, due to a

lack of heroines in games, these girls are losing interest: “Even though Americans have spent far more time and energy in discussions of gender images in the media, we have been dismal at creating heroic figures for little girls” (Jones, 89). Adult female gamers keep interest longer because the games they grew up with were predominantly male. This increase in games appealing to females will not happen overnight. But, if the male dominated industry does not make an effort to create gender blind games and games with strong female characters, the industry will suffer. Most people play video games to escape from reality or live in some alternate reality, but I am sure that a woman’s fantasy or alternate reality does not involve becoming a man: “Fantasy provides an antidote. It can help people take control of their fears and approach life’s scarier aspects more realistically...entertainment can be a great help in easing the tensions of real life”(Jones 100). In the spirit of true video games, it only seems right and natural to create more female oriented games, for the sake of the industry, for the sake of true gamers everywhere.

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