The Good, the Bad, and the Sultry: Indigenous Women in Video Games

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Abstract

As an Irish, Anishinaabe, and Métis girl whose early years were influenced by video games and computer games like *Super Mario Bros*. and *King's Quest*, I looked for representations of myself in the games I played. I never did find that half-breed girl, but I certainly found the pan-Indian Warrior. T. Hawk, Nighthawk, Nightwolf, Wolf Hawkfield—all stoic, arms folded, wearing body paint and leather, the "keeper" or "protector" of his "people."

Later video games such as *Turok* and *GUN* made me look more critically at what was happening in game industry—Native representations were naturally based on already uninformed films or comic books. Around that time, Native women finally appeared, although still in the form of Non-Player Characters.

In *Darkwatch*, we run into Tala (Stalking Wolf), who was intended to be the Player Character, but the Marketing department at the studio didn't think that would fly, although they did think to give her a nude appearance in the October 2004 issue of *Playboy*. She ended up as a wicked busty character in skin-tight black leather that tempts the Player Character Jericho to side with vampires, meanwhile juxtaposed with an innocent blonde cowgirl who is killed and returns as a ghost to guide the Player Character to the side of good.

In *Prey*, we see Jen, a hot but tough Cherokee chick that owns a bar, but ends up just being the catalyst to making the Player Character Tommy, a Cherokee garage mechanic, reluctantly take the hero role when aliens invade and kidnap her. He has to save his girlfriend, after all, even though she ends up dying anyway.

Despite these typical narratives, that these women have a voice at all gives them more depth than the myriad of generic tribal female

forms in games like *No Man's Land*, *Age of Empires III: The WarChiefs*, and *Sid Meier's Civilization III*.

And even these non-descript bodies are a far cry from the first appearance of an indigenous female body (and quite literally, just a body) in 1982 on the Atari 2600 game console. At a time when anyone could make a game and by-pass platform approval, Mystique set out as an adult game company. Among their titles was *Custer's Revenge*, which put players in the role of General George Armstrong Custer walking across the screen with his pixilated pink penis visible and erect. Either you lost by getting killed by the "evil Indian arrows" you were supposed to avoid or you won by making it to the end of the screen and raping a nude and busty "Indian" woman pre-tied to a pole.

Her name is "Revenge."

Today, I set out as a game writer and designer to change these representations, to give indigenous women a voice that is both dynamic and varying from individual to individual. Not only can we change the representations in games; we can change the mechanics of game play to align with indigenous ways of knowing.

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