



GAME NARRATIVE
SUMMIT

10 Ways to Make Your Game More Diverse

Meg Jayanth
@BetterTheMask



GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE March 14-18, 2016 · Expo: March 16-18, 2016 #GDC16









WHAT THIS TALK ISN'T





DISCLAIMER



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GOOD FAITH



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THE DIVERSITY AGENDA



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Gravity.
It's not just a good idea.
It's the Law.



YMMV



**YMMV = YOUR
MILEAGE MAY VARY**



1.

DEVELOP DIVERSELY



- RECRUIT DIVERSE TEAMS
- SEEK OUT EXPERTS – PAY THEM!
- YOUR AUDIENCE IS DIVERSE



imagine your audience would be representative of the actual society you are living in and 1/3 of the people beholding your art would be POC's. Then imagine the room would be full of POC (no white people). What would it mean to them? What would they see in it? How relevant would it be for their lives? Feel the panic?

7 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR ART LESS RACIST – Sandrine Micossé-Aikens



1876: The telephone emerges from Alexander Graham Bell's many attempts to create technologies to help the disabled.

1937: Joseph Friedman creates the flexible drinking straw so his young daughter can drink from her cup more easily at the table.

1948: The transistor is invented to power smaller hearing aids.

1973: Vint Cerf, who is hard of hearing, develops email, in part because it's an easy way to communicate with his wife, who is deaf.

1978: Ray Kurzweil creates machine-scannable fonts and the first image scanner, to help the blind.

1994: Originally begun by Bill Stumpf and Don Chadwick as a research product to create seating that wouldn't cause bedsores in the elderly, the Aeron chair is released.

— Cliff Kuang, FastCo Design (February 2016)



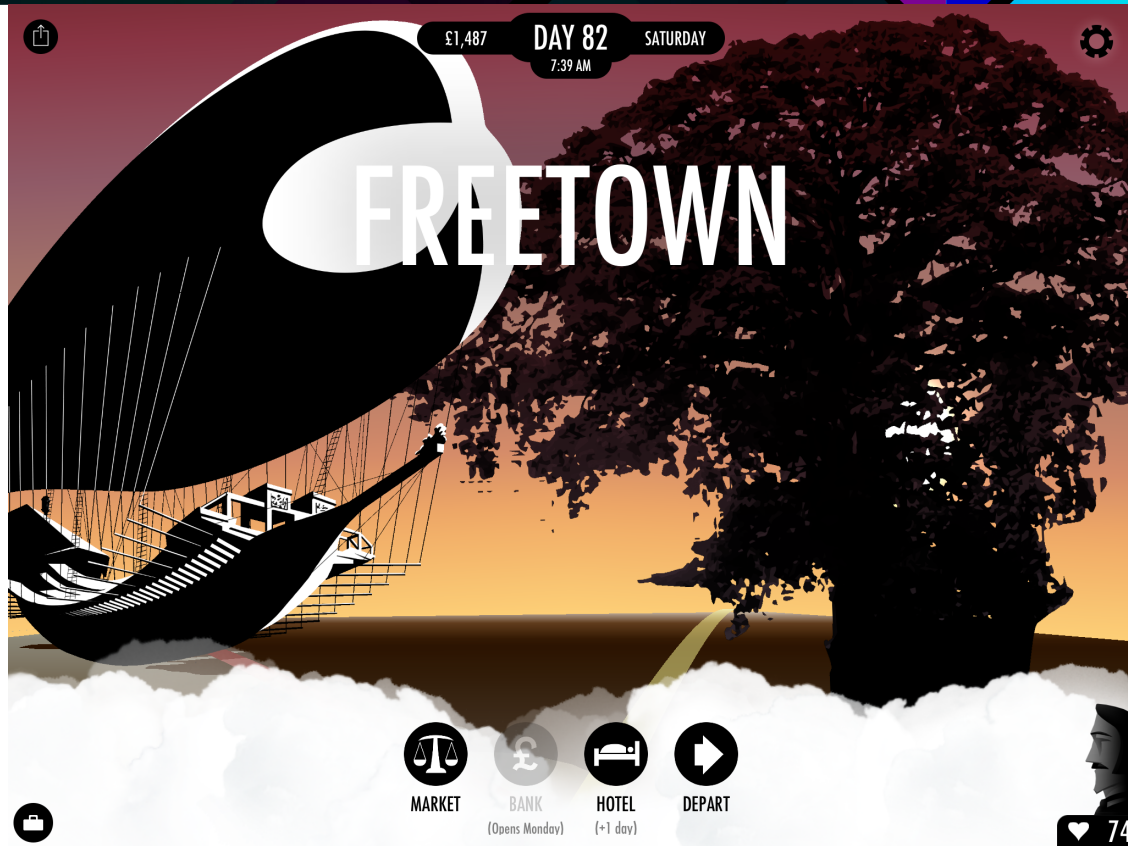
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DIVERSITY DRIVES INNOVATION



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2.

DO THE RESEARCH



TOWARDS A STEAMPUNK WITHOUT STEAM – AMAL EL-MOHTAR



“Syria, you may be aware, is a fairly arid country.

*There are better things to do with water than
make steam.”*

- Amal El-Mohtar



- **USE MULTIPLE SOURCES**
- **CHECK BIAS & PROVENANCE**
- **USE A WIDE RANGE**







3.

THE “AUTHENTICITY” TRAP



RESPECTFULNESS IS THE OPPOSITE OF NOSTALGIA



WE HAVE ALWAYS FOUGHT – KAMERON HURLEY



4.

EXAMINE YOUR BIASES



Most Western contemporary art has grown out of a context shaped by coloniality and white heterosexist supremacy – among other forms of oppression. Many of your renowned poets, philosophers and playwrights etc. were racists/sexists/etc. This is not your fault. But then it becomes your problem, too, if you elect to continue their legacy as if they had not been dehumanising the majority of the people on the planet. Their theories, their ideas of morality, beauty and knowledge have since been challenged by Black/POC (People of Color) poets, philosophers, playwrights etc. Acknowledge this and arrive in the present

- 7 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR ART LESS RACIST



Okay: In the role playing game known as The Real World, “Straight White Male” is the lowest difficulty setting there is.

This means that the default behaviors for almost all the non-player characters in the game are easier on you than they would be otherwise. The default barriers for completions of quests are lower. Your leveling-up thresholds come more quickly. You automatically gain entry to some parts of the map that others have to work for. The game is easier to play, automatically, and when you need help, by default it’s easier to get.

- JOHN SCALZI



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RAMI ISMAIL

gamedev.world



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VIDEO GAME PROTAGONISTS

Kids love brown-haired 30-something white males.



DESTROY NORMATIVE THINKING





FAIRNESS IS UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED



5.

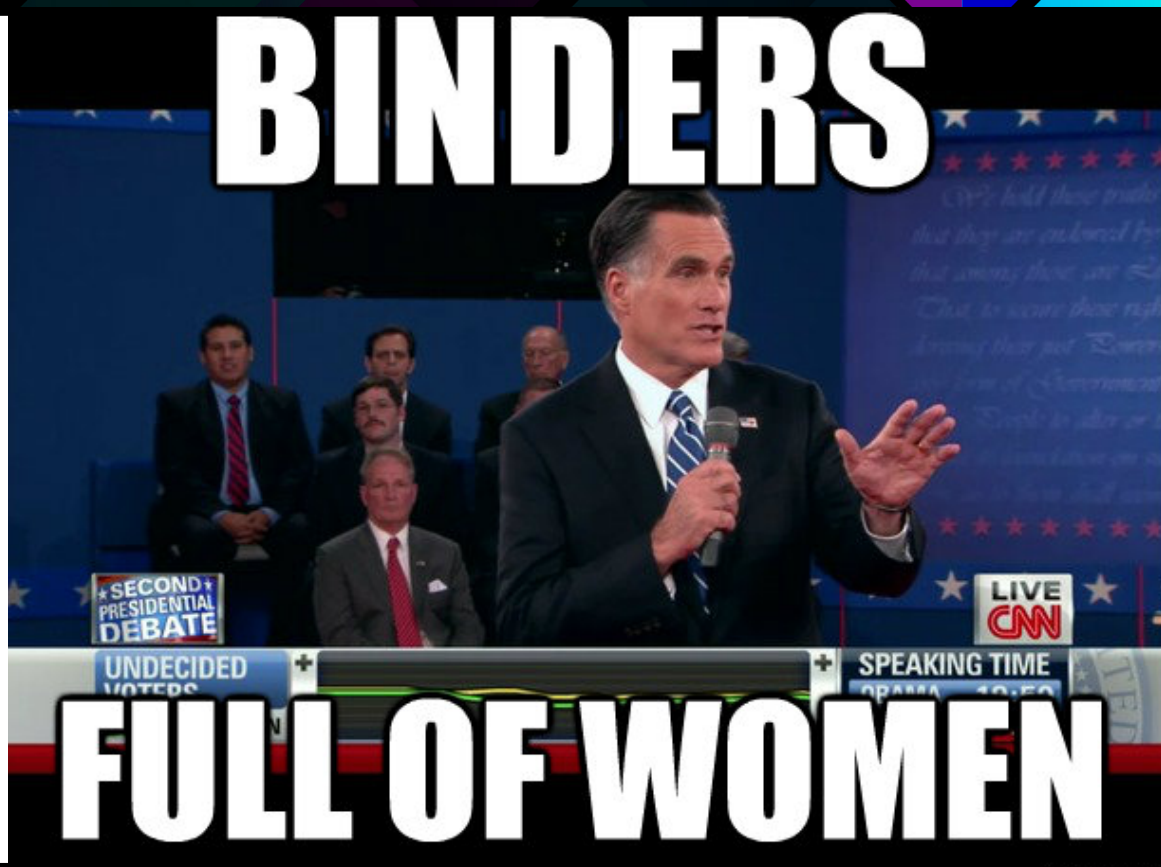
COUNTING





6.

“NORMALISATION” VS. VISIBILITY





Quite frankly, we wanted the women in DD's universe to be adventurers first and runway models second. This adjustment turned out to be startlingly non-trivial – you'd think that a bunch of supposedly conscious, mindful individuals would instantly be able to nail a “good female look” (bonus points for having a woman on our crew, right?), but huge swathes of our artistic language tended to be informed by sexist and one-dimensional portrayals. We regularly surprised ourselves with how much we took for granted.

- Quarter Circle Forward

<http://www.qcfdesign.com/?p=845#more-845>



In some of the more egregious cases, time and pressure still had us throwing up our hands and going with what was easiest for us with slightly disappointing results ... like bringing in an entire cast of female goblins relying on secondary markers like eyelashes and lipstick. We also messed up pretty badly by whitewashing our cast (with the occasional blue-skinned Bloodmage, but that doesn't really count). And for the most part, enemy rosters and main story characters still reflect a heavy male bias.

- Quarter Circle Forward

<http://www.qcfdesign.com/?p=845#more-845>



7.

AVOID THE “SINGLE NARRATIVE”



“Many stories matter.
Stories have been used to
dispossess and to malign.
But stories can also be used
to empower, and to
humanize. Stories can break
the dignity of a people. But
stories can also repair that
broken dignity.”

— Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

www.thegirlgod.com



**“STRONG FEMALE
CHARACTER” is as bad
“DAMSEL IN DISTRESS”**



‘THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A GOOD STEREOTYPE’

-NK JEMISIN



EVERYTHING, AND MORE OF IT



8.

SUBVERT THE FAIRNESS FANTASY



If a game is ever cheap or unfair, this is a cardinal sin, a provocation to rage-quit, for the entire system is predicated on the understanding that gaming is a hermetically sealed bubble of justice. Within this bubble, players are closet deists. And their gods are always fair.

- Tevis Thompson at Grantland

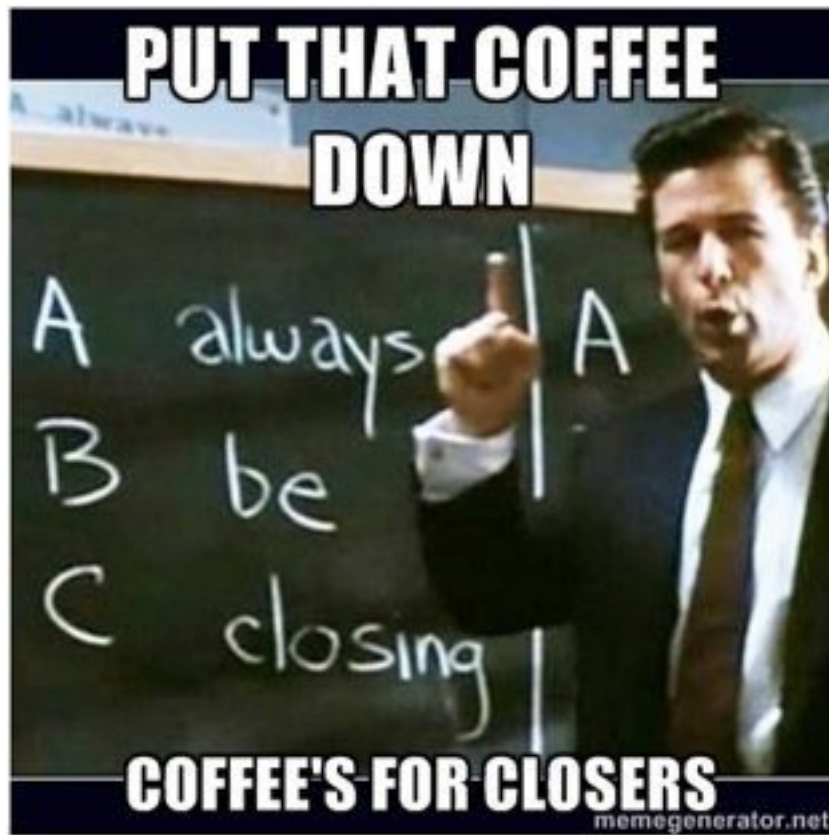
<http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/the-year-of-the-crush-how-the-radically-unfair-candy-crush-saga-took-over-our-lives/>



IVG



WINNING **ISN'T** EVERYTHING





Love in the Ice

Reignite love in the frozen north

1.7%



vimeo

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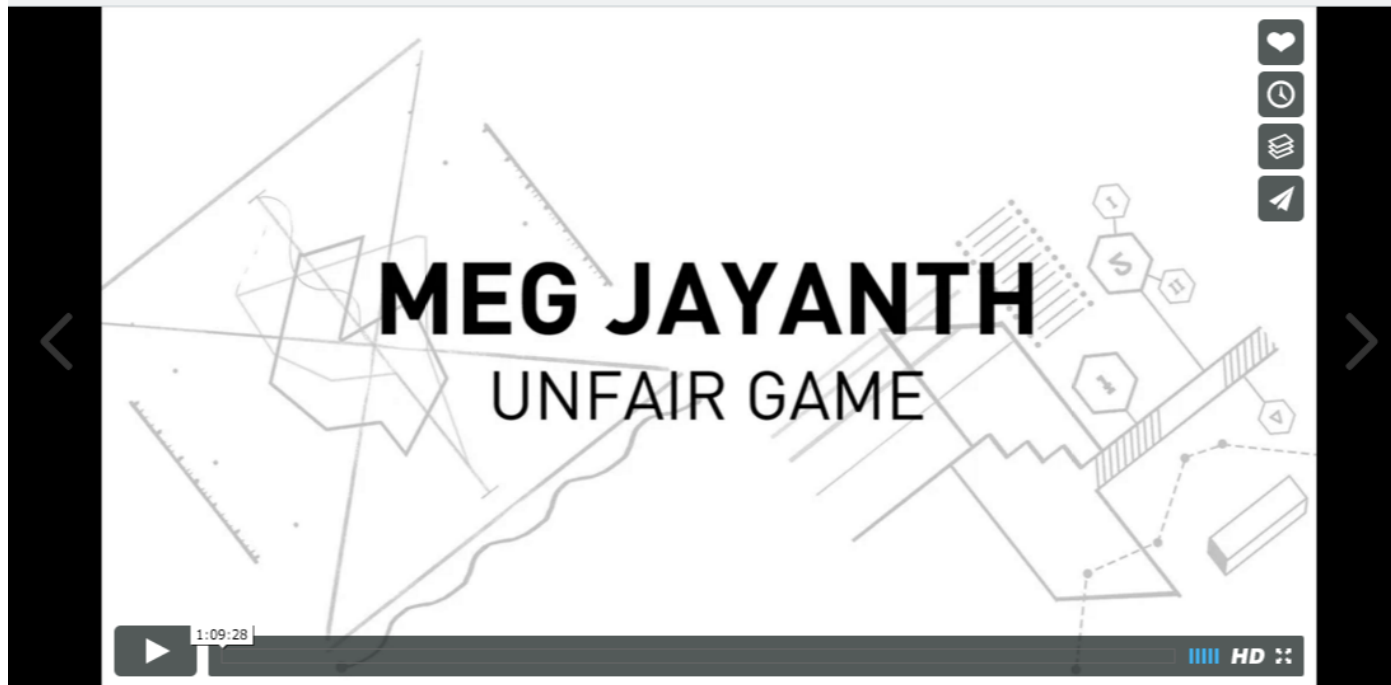
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PRACTICE 2015: Meg Jayanth

from NYU Game Center PRO 3 months ago | more

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9.

YOU ARE **PART** OF A PROCESS



Jaymee Goh, Stephanie Lai, Mikki Kendal, Ken
Liu, Shweta Narayan, Rochita Leonen-Ruiz,
Benjanun Sriduangkaew, NK Jemisin
Beyond Victoriana, The Steamer's Trunk,
Crossed Genres



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#INEEDDIVERSEGAMES



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We're seeing more and more games make these baseline concessions, and we should applaud it whenever we see it – and remember to notice and mention it when it's absent.

- Brenna Hillier, 'Inaccessible: What I should have said in my review of The Witness'

<https://www.vg247.com/2016/02/04/inaccessible-what-i-should-have-said-in-my-review-of-the-witness/>



I forgot that the word accessibility has another meaning besides the concepts of difficulty and blandness we regularly reference with it. Awkward.

- Brenna Hillier, 'Inaccessible: What I should have said in my review of The Witness'

<https://www.vg247.com/2016/02/04/inaccessible-what-i-should-have-said-in-my-review-of-the-witness/>



10.

BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK & CRITIQUE



May we ask whether you're a lady or a gentleman?

- ☒ A lady
- ☐ A gentleman
- ☐ My dear sir, there are individuals roaming the streets of Fallen London at this very moment with the faces of squid! Squid! Do you ask them their gender? And yet you waste our time asking me trifling and impertinent questions about mine? It is my own business, sir, and I bid you good day.



1) Male character:

You invite the urchin in. "Nice place, Sir. Very nice. I like how it's got, like, a roof. Also walls."

2) Female character:

You invite the urchin in. "Nice place, Madam. Very nice. I like how it's got, like, a roof. Also walls."

3) Character of mysterious and indistinct gender:

You invite the urchin in. "Nice place, ah, Si-, er, Mad-, er, yes. Very nice. I like how it's got, like, a roof. Also walls."



“We’ve had dozens of support tickets both in support of and criticising the ‘yes/er’ pronoun replacement. Some people have loved it, and some have told us that it makes them uncomfortable. It’s clear from the mixed feedback that this language is still malleable: it’s highly a personal matter.

In Sunless Sea, we iterated on our gender options: the game isn’t interested in what gender you are, asking instead for your preferred form of address (“Your actual gender is up to you”).

This caused us a few headaches when trying to write the option to have children when the game doesn’t know about the reproductive equipment of either of the people involved – but we figured it out”

- ***Hannah Flynn, <http://www.failbettergames.com/the-mysterious-and-indistinct-art-of-pronouns/>***



YMMV









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