



## IN THIS ISSUE

---

- [Meet the IGDA Women in Games Advisory Board at GDC](#)
  - [Debut of Microsoft Women in Gaming Awards Luncheon](#)
  - [IGDA Women in Games GDC Social Gathering Features Knit-A-Thon](#)
  - [Attend the IGDA Women in Games Panel at GDC](#)
  - [How to become an IGDA WIG SIG member](#)
  - [How to contribute to the IGDA Women in Games newsletter and web site](#)
  - [Meet Our Editor: Tina Tyndal](#)
- 

## FWD TO A FRIEND

Think you know someone that will enjoy this email? Why not send it to a friend?

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THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2009

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## Opening Letter from SIG Chair

by **Fiona Cherbak**

Welcome to the first IGDA WIG SIG Newsletter!

Our staff of volunteers have just closed out a terrific year and I'd like to share some of our many accomplishments with you and plot the course for 2009. [Read More](#)

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## The Top 5 Benefits of Becoming a Mentor

**Become a Game Mentor Today with GameMentorOnline**  
by **Anne Toole and Tina Tyndal**

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## How to Approach Networking

by **Jane Pinckard**

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## IGDA Professional Spotlight - Tracy Fullerton

**Game Developer, Educator, Mentor, Jedi Master**  
by **Tina Tyndal**

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## An Interview with Ludica

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by **Tina Tyndal**

Ludica is a game design/art collective devoted to

developing innovative concepts that explore the potential of games to express women's narratives, aesthetics, culture and play. [Read More](#)

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## Behind the Avatar

We asked the Members of the IGDA Women in Games mailing list to tell us a little bit about their avatars and how they came into creation. [Read More](#)

[back to top](#)

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## An Opening Letter from SIG Chair, Fiona Cherbak

### Dear Members and Friends of the IGDA WIG SIG,

Welcome to the first IGDA WIG SIG Newsletter!

Our staff of volunteers have just closed out a terrific year and I'd like to share some of our many accomplishments with you and plot the course for 2009.

When I joined the IGDA WIG SIG in 2008, my primary focus included establishing the group's goals and building strong supporting infrastructure to help us accomplish goals and promote organic growth. To that end, we have increased and cultivated key partnerships with like minded organizations to help promote our work and message in the market. We also created a team of strong internal leaders and volunteers, committed to the vision and promotion of the WIG SIG within the IGDA and the video game industry.

Not one to rest on our laurels, our staff is well underway tackling 2009 projects, reaping the benefits of last years work and building on our past successes.

With a terrific staff and supporting infrastructure in place, we continue to promote women in the video game industry, providing them with positive exposure among their peers and the industry, through effective vehicles like the IGDA WIG SIG

[back to top](#)

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website and newsletter. We also continue to work with other SIG's in the IGDA to increase awareness and opportunities in education, diversity training, and talent development.

Last but not least, I'm pleased to announce an exciting new pilot program we are launching in partnership with Women in Games International called [GameMentorOnline](#), the first-of-its-kind online mentorship program for the international games industry.

We've certainly got our hands full and I look forward to sharing developments as the year progresses. Support our work by becoming a Member of the WIG SIG or, if you are not already a member of IGDA, become a Member of the IGDA today.

Thank you for your support.

Fiona Cherbak  
Chair, IGDA Women in Games Special Interest Group

*P.S. By becoming a Member you play a personal role in our work and increasing the visibility of women in the game industry. Be a part of our work and help us accomplish our goals. [Become a Member today!](#)*

## The Top 5 Benefits of Becoming a Mentor

Become a Game Mentor Today with Game Mentor Online  
by Anne Toole and Tina Tyndal

**An AOL Time Warner Foundation poll found that a whopping 99% of mentors who participated in mentoring programs would recommend the experience to others. The**

4. Enable you to establish a legacy in your industry. When you train individuals entering the profession, it allows you to establish a lasting legacy and give back to the industry.

**reason is simple: mentors found that they benefitted from the experience as much as their mentees did.**

If you haven't considered participating in a mentor program in the past because you didn't view it as your calling, considered it a significant investment of your time, or thought that you wouldn't benefit from the arrangement, we're here to change your mind. We at Game Mentor Online have identified just a few of the many benefits associated with being a mentor.

Becoming a mentor will:

1. Build your professional career and expand your network. The relationship you establish with your mentee can be a mutually beneficial experience and last throughout your careers. Grooming industry talent enables them to start off on the right foot and become successful. Over time mentees can return the favor as a future employee, business partner or peer by connecting you to social networks outside of your current circles.

2. Maximize your time and keep abreast of industry trends. Let's face it, as busy professionals we often don't have enough time to keep abreast of all of the latest happenings in our field. Mentees can help you balance your workload by helping you keep up to date on the latest games and industry trends. In the process you maximize your time and your mentee benefits from learning new information about the industry.

3. Enhance your teaching and presentation skills. Mentoring is a learning process for both parties; as you train your mentee and ensure that their professional skills are up to par, you grow as a leader. The ability to be an effective teacher and communicator is a valuable skill that can improve your standing at work.

[back to top](#)

As a mentor you have a unique opportunity to pass on your knowledge and propagate your unique approach to game development.

5. Provide you with renewed energy and satisfaction. Being a mentor is a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Remember when you were just starting off in the industry, excited and ready to take on the world? Your mentee can renew your passion for the industry, while your experience can benefit your mentee, helping him or her navigate many of the same situations you faced early on in your career.

You will get a sense of satisfaction from passing on your knowledge and helping the next generation of professionals in your industry. Take the next step and become a mentor today!

The International Game Developers Association, in association with WIGI, will be launching Game Mentor Online. Set for a soft launch on March 2nd, 2009, Game Mentor Online makes it easy for you to take the next step and participate in a rewarding experience by becoming a mentor in the video game industry. You can make a huge impact in the lives of upcoming talent by helping them realize their dreams and establish a successful career in gaming. Won't you join us? Sign up today, or contact Anne Toole at [gamentorline@igda.org](mailto:gamentorline@igda.org).

GameMentorOnline is generously supported by title sponsor Microsoft Game Studios, with additional support from premier sponsors Design, Direct, Deliver and Sony Online Entertainment.

*"Those that know, do. Those that understand, teach." Aristotle*

[www.gamentoronline.org](http://www.gamentoronline.org)

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## How to Approach Networking

by Jane Pinckard

Some people are natural networkers, able to walk into the center of a room full of strangers with preternatural ease. For others the act of approaching strangers and initiating conversation or pushing yourself out of your traditional comfort zone can be an intimidating experience. If you happen to fall into the latter category of individuals, I'm here to offer you valuable advice designed to help you build your networking skills with practice.

titles and the companies, and try to get a sense of who the person actually is. This means I know a lot of random people but I wouldn't have it any other way - I find diversity stimulating.

6. Meet the connectors. These people are your true gateway -- the people who seem to know everyone. They walk along the hallways of the Game Developers Conference greeting

One of my first recommendations is to approach networking not as a chore but as an opportunity to explore the diversity of personalities and talent in your industry. You should view every encounter as a chance to meet new friends and professional contacts and learn something new. By establishing a network of friends and peers in your field, you can positively impact your professional career; after all you never know who will introduce you to new opportunities in the future.

While there isn't a magic formula that will make you a "master networker" overnight, I have identified 10 rules that I've developed over the years. Apply them to yourself however it seems right to you.

1. Be sincere when you approach individuals, if you're not sincere, it won't work. Think about the reason why you want to meet certain individuals: if it's just because they are "big" or "famous" then think of another reason. Find common interests that you can talk about to develop and foster conversations.
2. Be yourself. Our industry tends to be full of oddballs and eccentrics (thanks goodness); feel free to be yourself, on good behavior, and express all of your wonderful quirks.
3. Do your research on the individuals you want to meet. I've cold-called people before using this approach holding conversations along the lines of: "Oh hi, I saw you worked on Game X. I'm a big fan because Game X really meant a lot to me! I see you're speaking at Game Conference Y. I'd love to come by after your talk to introduce myself and grab a coffee if you have time? I'd like to talk to you about a project I'm working on." But do remember rule 1 and make sure that everything you say is sincere!
4. Do favors for others. If someone asks you for a favor - an introduction, information or help, consider it an opportunity to establish or build a relationship with that individual. These acts can pay off a hundred times over in the future.
5. Think long-term; you never know where people will end up in the future. As a guiding principle, be nice to everyone. The most talented QA lead will be a Senior Producer one day. My philosophy is that interesting people will always be up to interesting things wherever they go. So I tend to look past the

[back to top](#)

people left and right. Find a few whom you get along with, with whom you share some interests, and get to know them. They are professional door-openers.

7. Don't push your luck. If you're really getting the sense that someone you're trying to develop a networking relationship with is resisting you, you will only annoy them by persisting. Let it go; there are other people to meet, but don't be resentful. They might be overloaded, or just having a bad day and no doubt your paths will cross again. Respect their boundaries and be open to meeting again in the future.

8. Use social networking sites like Facebook or LinkedIn. I can't stress how useful these tools are for maintaining connections. Facebook alerts you to people's birthdays and are a perfect opportunity to wish them well and gently remind them of who you are - it's remarkable how activities like these can make a big impact. LinkedIn is also useful to build up your professional network and alert your connections to your latest work.

9. Follow up and stay in touch. Facebook and LinkedIn can make this task ridiculously easy. If you are traveling for work or attending a conference, look up the individuals in your network who live there and send an email suggesting a casual meeting after work. Formal meetings in conference rooms are all well and good but the real bonding happens outside the office, in contexts that promote feelings of trust and friendship. Additionally, when you see an article that might be relevant or interesting to someone, forward it to them with a little note. Sometimes even a casual "Hey, good blog post; how are you?" helps to keep those connections alive.

10. Finally, seize the moment! If you're standing next to Will Wright at some conference or other, don't be shy! Smile and introduce yourself and tell him how funny your Spore creature was.

Like anything else, the ability to network is a skill as much as a talent and it can be developed and refined, so give yourself some time to build on the fundamentals. Good luck!

For more on networking, I highly recommend Darius Kazemi's series, *Effective Networking in the Game Industry*, available online [here](#).

## IGDA Professional Spotlight - Tracy Fullerton

Game Developer, Educator, Mentor, Jedi Master  
by Tina Tyndal

Tracy Fullerton, M.F.A., is the Director of the Electronics Arts Game Innovation Lab at USC and this past December was named the holder of the Electronic Arts Endowed Chair in Interactive Entertainment.



Tracy Fullerton

As an educator and a mentor, Tracy is instrumental in teaching the next generation of game developers to “make the games of their imagination,” games like the award-winning *fIOW* and *Cloud*. These games transcend the status quo in the video game industry by developing rich, innovative game play; promoting deeper player emotional investments in the game and shifting the paradigm of what constitutes a “gamer.”

Tracy graciously spent some time with me to discuss experiences from her childhood and some of her professional career that shaped her game design philosophies.

### Childhood and Early Professional Career

From an early age Tracy demonstrated an interest in understanding how systems worked. Encouraged by her father, an engineer, when she asked him how something like a light bulb worked, the two would work together to create a light bulb from scratch. Her parents also fostered her interest in media and technology by purchasing items that would later influence her career interests including a Super 8 Camera and a Commodore 64, which was her introduction to video games.

After high school, Tracy attended film programs at UC Santa Cruz and later at USC because “it didn’t really occur to me that I could have a profession making games, but the media was full of stories about academic programs that film makers like George Lucas had attended, and I thought that I should go to film school and learn to make films.”

Upon graduation Tracy began working at Synapse as a designer where she worked on the interactive documentary *Columbus: Encounter, Discovery and Beyond* and several other interactive projects. During this time the interactive media industry was a relatively young environment that she likened to the “wild, wild west.” Individuals could take initiative on projects and “if you saw what needed to be done and did it you could move

Her philosophy starts with creating a safe environment for her students to feel free to create unique and personal games, telling them to “go out and make the games of their imagination.” She encourages students to be uninhibited in their creation, to take risks and develop games that they are passionate about. While in school students have a rare opportunity to be personally creative, to make games they won’t have the opportunity to produce once they go to work in the game industry, because it’s a research environment, “at USC you can make games that take amazing risks because no one here is going to say that it won’t sell.”

“My job isn’t to make all the decisions; it is to create an environment and culture so that people can do the best work they can.”

Tracy stresses to her students the importance of making games, not only for themselves, but for other people to enjoy, “games that appeal to new types of players and markets and not just the hardcore gamers that have dominated the industry so far. Prior to the advent of digital media, games were considered an activity for everyone in the family ... it is not until the digital era that games start to belong to a certain population and I want to reclaim the idea of playfulness for a wider population.”

Her students have embraced these concepts, developing award-winning games that propagate Tracy’s unique approach to game design including *fIOW* and *Cloud*. (You can read more about Tracy’s game design approach by reading her textbook [Game Design Workshop: a Playcentric Approach to Designing Innovative Games](#), in use at game programs worldwide.)

### Chair Appointment

On December 9, 2008, Tracy was named the holder of the Electronic Arts Endowed Chair in Interactive Entertainment in recognition for her work as an educator and expansion of the interactive media curriculum at USC.

In Tracy’s own words “the endowed chair is an honor that recognizes the work I’ve done to help establish the Game Innovation Lab and the Interactive Entertainment program as a premier place to study game design. I feel self-conscious stating it like that, because it seems to lack humility [laughs] but that is the case. I was really overwhelmed by the whole event, which was packed with faculty, family, industry friends, and what seemed like every student we’ve had in the program. It was a

up quickly in the company." Tracy thrived in this can-do environment and took on additional projects, developing new tools to solve production problems, and taking on more responsibilities on each new title.

She would later move on to become a creative director and producer at R/GA Interactive and president and founder of the interactive television game developer Spiderdance, Inc. Spiderdance's games include NBC's *Weakest Link*, MTV's *webRIOT*, The WB's *No Boundaries*, History Channel's *History IQ*, Sony Game Show Network's *Inquisition* and TBS's *Cyber Bone*.

#### Game Design Philosophy

Currently Tracy is an Associate Professor in the Interactive Media Division of the USC School of Cinematic Arts where students fondly refer to her as their "Jedi Master." At USC, Tracy is instrumental in teaching the next generation of game developers.

[back to top](#)

really great night."

As chair holder, Tracy will continue working to grow the Interactive Entertainment program and the field of game studies, as well as continuing her work in the Game Innovation Lab. "I now have a front row seat to all of the fantastical ideas the coming years of students will dream up, that means I get to be play-tester number one for the future of interactive entertainment. Something tells me I'm not going to be disappointed."

"Tracy's sincere love for games, all kinds of games, combined with her skills as a meticulous designer make her a great source of inspiration and a force of nature in the industry and academic community. She is truly authentic and the world is a better place with her spirit guiding the way towards better games for everyone to make and play." – Janine Fron

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## An Interview with Ludica

### Bringing Fresh Perspectives to the Video Game Industry

by Tina Tyndal



*A dozen roses for Rainer*, ©2005 Janine Fron: a cooperative, handmade poetry game designed to celebrate childhood memories of playing games and reading fairy tales with my grandparents, made in their honor.

Ludica is a game design/art collective devoted to developing innovative concepts that explore the potential of games to express women's narratives, aesthetics, culture and play. Formed in 2005 by Celia Pearce, Jacki Morie, Tracy Fullerton, and Janine Fron, they shared their perspectives on their work, the state and evolution of the video game industry, and words of advice for individuals currently working or looking to work in the video game industry.

During the course of the interviews it became immediately apparent that each woman brings a unique perspective to Ludica and that each is passionate about what they do by instilling

respect with the Wii and DS, making deliberate decisions in their product development, marketing and advertising to create products for women and show women playing video games. Almost all of their ads have women in them. The fact that they changed the name of the GameBoy to the DS and introduced a pink version was a deliberate decision to open their markets. From a business perspective, they were very smart: rather than competing for an over-saturated "gamer" market, they opened it up to women, retirees and others the game industry had been ignoring.

#### Are there potential risks in segmenting male and female gamers?

Celia: It would be preferable to not have to make the distinction [between male and female gamers] but for right now we need to because of the marginalization of female gamers.

As an example, when I ask my students "how many hours they play games in a week" men and women raise their hand indicating an equal amount of gameplay, despite this, when asked if they consider themselves "gamers" more men than women raise their hands.

I think the game industry has contributed to some of these stereotypes by, for instance, insisting that women only play "casual games." One of our students experienced this firsthand when he interned at a very large casual game

delight in the exploration of new types of gameplay, teaching students and building safe institutions where they are free to explore their imagination, spreading knowledge and generating new ideas among their peers through publications, drawing in new audiences by making games more accessible and most of all, having fun playing games.

In an industry where commercial video games overwhelmingly target male demographics, voices like Ludica are important because they remind us that people play games because they are 'fun' not because they are developed with gameplay mechanics tailored to a specific gender. There are benefits to being more inclusive in the industry. One example is an empirical study based on Ludica's paper "Getting Girls Into the Game: Towards a 'Virtuous Cycle'" in the book *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming*. Published in *Games and Culture* (January 2009), the study, conducted by Carrie Heeter among middle school students validated Ludica's position that because games are tailored to men it establishes a barrier for women to participate, initially as players, and hence, as designers, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle.

Interestingly enough, Heeter's study showed that not only did girls prefer games designed by girls, girl-designed games were more appealing to boys than the inverse.

Bringing more women and unique perspectives into the game industry can positively impact the bottom line and generate new types of gameplay, however there is still much work to be done. Each one of their voices is an inspiration.

#### What inspired you to create Ludica?

Celia: Janine's games inspired the formation of Ludica.

We shared a vision that we didn't want to just critique the game industry, we also wanted to do something about gender disparities in the game industry.

Jacki: It was at a special meeting at Janine's house, where she invited us to come over and play some games that she had created. The games were so beautiful and so different from anything that was out there [in the market]. They had a different sensibility and we were blown away that we could enjoy games so much that had no counterpart in modern computer games.

By the time we played Janine's third game we decided that we wanted to promote the concept that games can be many things that they don't have to follow a formula and that there is so much to be explored. We all felt

studio where the developers making games for women were dismissive of their audience. [Furthermore] people in the industry talk about the games that women like, like the Sims, as not being games.

#### What would you like to see others do to help promote Ludica's mission?

Celia: I see this being a bottom-up approach. [Individuals should] mentor and help women to pursue an education in games, encourage them to be visionaries and become what they want to be. In 2008 many of Tracy's students won awards. She is making a huge amount of headway in the game industry and her students are well known for a particular style of game design.

I'd also like to see more promotion of alternative genres through [channels] like Indie and Activist Games.

#### How do you see the landscape of the video game industry shifting in the next 5 years?

Celia: There are some interesting trends in indie game design, games like Portal [whose development team comprised] two women and a man. Among the student games that won awards in 2008, each of them had a woman in their team. [Many of these games] would not have been developed in a traditional game studio, but the student and indie game scene allows them to show their talent and vision before they are nudged out of the industry.

Jacki: The indie movement we have seen evolving and succeeding in movies is being mirrored in the gaming industry. Indie festivals and events are showcasing new kinds of games, often created by students or tiny innovative companies. These games tend to be much broader in their range of ideas; they explore new directions. Most won't be World of Warcraft, then again most won't cost as much. Another thing that will help with the bottom line, if the mainstream industry will open up to it, is user generated content. Giving the players a say in what they experience in games can be very exhilarating, and make a game seem new or personalized for each person.

Janine: It's hard to know what our world will look like in five years. I hope the work we have been doing now opens up possibilities for people to work more dynamically together, to share resources in times of possible scarcity – but also creating opportunities for people to make beautiful lasting moments together in the spirit of play.

Tracy: [Broader gameplay] is becoming more and more accepted. When you look at games like Portal and Flow, these are created by young people coming out of school given the opportunity to create innovative new kinds of

this really needed to be encouraged, especially to the young people looking to get into the industry – the creators of future games.

Janine: I like to think of us as a group of four women with our own unique ideas and distinctive personalities that when pulled together, create a range of possibilities and excitement that is invigorating to be around. We have been geographically separated for quite some time now. I hope we will be able to continue our work into the future, as we make our own progress with all of the different things we are working on individually. We do not always agree on everything, which makes it interesting – somewhere in the mix emerges a collective perspective that is both insightful and authentic. When we were getting together that night, I think we were working on a game design workshop submission for DiGRA in Vancouver. Spontaneously I showed the personal games I was working on. It seemed really nice in the moment to share in a creative camaraderie to do so, like a magic circle without the rules.

Tracy: We started the group over at Janine's house. She invited us over to play some games that she had made on her own, [they were] gorgeous board games. In one game, the components were rose petals. We mentioned that we had never played games like these before and that we should do something around this ... for me, that was the moment that the group started.

#### Why the name Ludica? What does it symbolize?

Celia: Ludica is the feminization of the word ludic, which means, "to play." This was in response to some classic books that are considered canon in the academic community, such as "Homo Ludens," "Man the Player," and "Man, Play and Games." We wanted to flip that around a little.

#### Why aren't the types of game design promoted by Ludica commonplace in the video game industry? What are the barriers to accepting broader gameplay?

Celia: [Female perspectives are largely missing in the video game industry.] There is a tendency that as media evolves and becomes an established business, women are pushed out. In the 1920s the movie industry had more women than it does now. As it migrated from being experimental to a big business, women were pushed out. Once power structures are entrenched, they are threatened by anybody that questions the establishment.

In our research about board games, we found that there were many women game designers in the Victorian era, and because the factory workers were women by and large, they

play. I see a lot of interest for new material.

I want to point out that getting a game produced commercially isn't the definitive mark of success; just getting your game made, perhaps putting it up on the internet and reaching a small, but dedicated audience is important. Don't tie yourself in knots about the marketability of your experimental game; it's about the passion.

#### Where do you see Ludica in the next 5 years?

Celia: Our growth is organic; at some point I expect we will do a book of some kind. We often work on a case-by-case basis; because we have full time jobs it is challenging to maintain Ludica. There are two areas though in which we've experienced emergent growth. First of all, we have had multiple requests for reprints and our publications tend to propagate themselves in that way.

Second, we get approached for consulting opportunities in game design and I anticipate that we will get involved in a project when timing, circumstance, and financial backing are right. We have also considered starting a studio ourselves.

Jacki: One of the things I would like to see is Ludica putting together our papers into a compendium book, maybe with a few other key people who have similar sensibilities. I'd also like to see us develop a couple of games, or at least promote a few unique designs, since actually producing a game takes a lot of energy that would take away from other activities and interventions. I hope in the future that we're still viable, mentoring new game designers, and that our job actually becomes easier because what we have been promoting and discussing will have come to pass.

#### For your peers currently working in the video game industry, what are some guiding principles or rules to live by?

1. Think about other players beside yourself. I tell my students that when they design games, make something that others would like, identify a demographic different from you. The games/industry can be narcissistic and there are very few industries that get away with that. Open up your ideas.
2. Try to avoid clichés. Why do we do the same thing over and over again when there is so much uncharted territory? The Sims almost didn't get made because of this tendency and there are so many opportunities to forge new ground.
3. Improve the game industry work environment. For women in particular the game industry work environment can be hostile, particularly towards procreation (pregnancy and children) and there is a problem with work/life balance when the 80-

became the primary playtesters. The board game industry has never had this type of gender divide that prevails in digital games.

Jacki: One reason is a lack of risk-taking prevalent in the industry. The big companies and bean counters are afraid to fund broader games; they would rather copy what's known to be successful. The CFOs don't want to take chances.

Tracy: In my game design classes, I see a phenomenon related to this. On the first day, there are mostly young men and one or two women in my class, I provide them with questionnaires to get to know them better. All of the young men typically write long lists of the games that they had played and knew what they liked and what they wanted to make.

After class the young women typically come up to me and tell me that they are not sure if they belong in my class because they are not "gamers." When asked what games they played they have often listed games like charades trivial pursuit, scrabble. They don't consider themselves as "gamers" because the [industry] has co-opted that definition to describe only hardcore gamers, not players who enjoy traditional or social games.

These young women have bought into that notion that they aren't gamers; but the truth is that we are all playful, we all enjoy games of some kind or another. Playing is a part of our learning process; it's only in the last 30 years with the rise of the digital game industry that games have been hijacked by a certain segment of the industry. It is interesting that board games have never been viewed, or marketed, as being for a particular gender.

#### How do we overcome these barriers and how are you affecting change in the video game industry?

Celia: Women in the academic environment tend to be much more gender inclusive and independent, we can be activists and help promote documentary and art games to help improve the video game industry.

As an educator I support and nurture our female students and because I have a background as a professional in games I am able to demonstrate that yes it is possible to be successful as a woman in the video game industry. I have also become strident and unapologetic in my efforts to make men more gender conscious. As an example, I give all my students an assignment where they play a game and then analyze it for gender representation.

Jacki: From an educational perspective we can encourage people to consider different perspectives – for example, when you design

hour workweek has become commonplace. We need to rethink this with more humane working conditions - overtime should be a contingency, not the standard.

4. Take on a proactive role and become a mentor. We owe it to each other to foster talent and promote growth and new thinking in our fields. Provide mentees with the ability to present their ideas, just having someone at another company who listens allows them to come up with new ideas and promotes fresh perspectives. You can find pearls of wisdom from a fresh approach.

5. Be innovative. The games we are working on independently may not have a mass market at the moment, but are innovative in the thinking behind them and the kinds of experiences we are trying to create between people.

#### What recommendations would you tell individuals looking to enter the video game industry?

1. Know what you want to do and be very clear about your vision so you don't have to settle. Everyone has to do their homework and should understand what the production process is. The more educated you are about the various positions in the industry, production, programming, art; the better off you will be coming into the industry.

2. Better working conditions that provide you with a good quality of life. Don't let your quality of life suffer, the companies holding onto the old business models and running people into the ground will have hard times. There is room for companies that provide a better quality of life.

3. Establish community among your peers. Gathering with your peers can help establish empowerment.

4. Be an informed dreamer. Dreaming is great, but be knowledgeable about what's involved and learn the skills to implement.

5. Do what you love, love what you do and do it with heart. Never give up and be fearless to try new things, both in what you typically might play and want to create.

6. Don't get into the game industry just because you love playing games. Game design requires a particular passion, skill and worldview; it's demanding and intellectually challenging.

7. Have a proactive "just do it" attitude. Look out for what needs to happen and how you can best contribute. If something needs to be done, just do it.

8. Have an open mind to change and be flexible.

To learn more about Ludica please visit their [website](#).

Suggested Reading List:

- [Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat](#)
- [Game Design Workshop, Second](#)

a game think about an emotion it can evoke. Think about not only computer games, but also, board games and a broader range of play styles and topics. A good exercise it to pick something from another discipline (literature, music, poetry, art) and use it as an inspiration or jumping off point for a new game concept.

Janine: I'm not sure if we can change the industry or if that is even a viable goal of mine. Offering additional perspectives with publication, alternative channels of distribution, teaching, and being committed to uncovering hidden histories of women designers are all helpful contributions to make. To me everyone is a gamer. It is in our nature to be playful. We live in a playable, playful world. It's an exciting, dynamic time to reconsider perceived tried and true methods of design.

Tracy: My own way of approaching this is as an educator. I encourage people of all backgrounds to come to my class and learn to create [games] in a safe environment. I tell them to go and make games from their own imaginations and experiences. I try to help both the men and women in my classes to envision themselves as game designers and be confident in the quality of their game ideas to feel safe enough to experiment with these ideas.

All beginning designers need to find that confidence in their own creative voice, and I can support that process. I had several mentors myself in high school and college that taught me to be an independent thinker; they influenced my creative outlook. I try to play that role for my own students now.

Where have we seen examples of progress made in the video game industry?

Celia: Many of the impressions about "gamers" come from advertising where most game ads feature primarily male players. However, Nintendo has made progress in this

[back to top](#)

[Edition: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games](#)

- [Birth of the Chess Queen: a History](#)
- [Utopian Entrepreneur](#)

Ludica Publications (PDF's):

- [The Hegemony of Play](#)
- [A Game of One's Own: Towards a New Gendered Poetics of Digital Space](#)
- [Sustainable Play: Toward a New Games Movement for the Digital Age](#)
- [Playing Dress-Up: Costumes, roleplay and imagination](#)

Ludica Game List:

- Animal Crossing (Nintendo DS, Game Cube, Wii)
- Bioshock (PS3, Xbox 360)
- fIow (PS3)
- Flower (PSN)
- Katamari Damacy (iPhone, PS3, Xbox 360)
- Okami (PS2, Nintendo Wii)
- Passage (iPhone)
- Portal (PC, PS3, Xbox 360)
- Myst (PC)
- Second Life (PC)
- The Sims (PC)
- Uru: Ages Beyond Myst (PC)
- World of Goo (PC)

2008 IndieCade Games:

- [Gravitation](#)
- [ibb and obb](#)
- [The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom](#)
- [The Unfinished Swan](#)

Websites:

- [Ludica](#)
- [The Ludica Weblog](#)
- [Game+Girl=Advance](#)
- [IndieCade](#)

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## Behind the Avatar: Exploring Player Avatars

When playing online, I'm always curious about who the real folks are behind their avatars. To that end, we asked the Members of the IGDA Women in Games mailing list to tell us a little bit about their avatars and how they came into creation.

Thank you Tracy, Laurie, and Carolyn for your participation!

**Tracy Seamster**

Game Designer, The Agency

Do you identify



Sony Online Entertainment



**What is your name/avatar's name?**

I'm Tracy Seamster. My avatar is Lael.

**What game is your avatar from?**

The avatar image is from Rockband 2.

**What is the history behind your avatar?**

Ever since I started playing text-based games, I've used the name "Lael" for my character. Even when playing Final Fantasy games where I can change the hero's name, it's always Lael. I first saw the name in a book called "The Cave Dreamers" and fell in love with it. I have no idea what it means or what its origins are; it's not a particularly common name. In many ways, my avatar is really the name Lael and not the image that goes with it!

**Is this avatar typical of the types of characters you play?**

When possible, I create a character that looks somewhat like me, with dark hair. While I'm not much of a rocker, the look I was able to get with Rockband 2 is closest to what I have always envisioned my various Laels to be. In general, I prefer to play druids or bards in games, so I suppose this Lael is simply a bard version.

**with your avatar?**

I'm currently using this photo of Lael as an avatar in a couple of different online communities (Ravelry and Yelp), so I suppose I identify with it. To me, Lael is strong while still feminine. She's pretty, resourceful and confident. Lael has all of my best attributes and none of my worst.

**What degree of customization do you prefer in developing your avatar?**

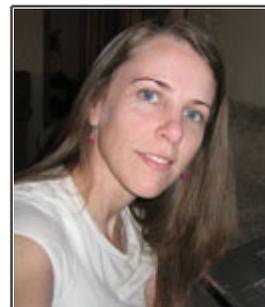
I like fiddling with character customizations in games. That's probably one reason why I still enjoy making new characters in Sims 2; the expansion packs only serve to provide me with more clothing and hairstyles for my Sims. If there are preset characters in a game, at the very least I want to change their hair and clothing color.

**How important is avatar customization to you when playing a game?**

It's very important nowadays. Players are used to being able to customize their characters to some extent. Ideally, customization allows us to find a way to express our individuality, even if one later finds out that quite a few folks out there have made a character that looks exactly like ours. It's the illusion of control that makes it more fun.

Laurie Annis Morgan  
Full-time college student studying Game Art and Design  
[www.laurieannismorgan.com](http://www.laurieannismorgan.com)

My second choice in avatar is often the most overtly sexy type available, and I did try out other more conventionally pretty avatars in World of Warcraft such as a blood elf Elvira clone, but my second favorite character was still a rough looking female orc, and I wound up enjoying and playing Drizela the most.



**Do you identify with your avatar?**

I do identify with Drizela. Looking the way she does, you cannot take yourself very seriously. You can't expect special treatment based on your appearance either. People will only laugh at your jokes if they're funny when you're ugly and they'll only invite you



What is your name/avatar's name?

Laurie Morgan/Drizela

What game is your avatar from?

World of Warcraft

What is the history behind your avatar?

I first made a character by the name of Drizela during the open beta testing phase of World of Warcraft. I enjoyed playing her so much that I made essentially the same character (same class, same race, same name, different hairstyle) when the game went live in November 2004. I played Drizela to the maximum level you could attain at the time before I took my final break from playing World of Warcraft.

Is this avatar typical of the types of characters you play?

As an undead character, Drizela is typical of the types of characters I play in the sense that I enjoy playing kick-butt avatars that display exaggerated or atypical feminine traits. With purple bed head hair, droopy breasts and abundant maggot holes, Drizela appealed to me precisely for her lack of sex appeal. I've definitely enjoyed other characters for similar reasons. My all time favorite video game character is Samus Aran -- who hardly resembles a female in her massive metal suit -- and my favorite illusion to wear as my enchanter in Everquest is a ridiculously over muscled orc with a purple ponytail and dirty loincloth.

With Drizela, I liked very much playing a character that people wanted to have in their group for her skills and not for her potential as eye candy. I took a lot of pride in playing Drizela well even though my primary intent with her was to have fun. My

to group if you play your class well. You get less unwanted attention (catcalls, cyber requests, stereotype insults and the like) when your character isn't glamorous, even though you also get fewer handouts. I definitely pride myself in being dependable, approachable and funny in real life, and I often choose my avatar as an extension of that side of myself if the option is available.

What degree of customization do you prefer in developing your avatar?

I would ideally prefer far more customization flexibility than is offered in any game I have seen to date. Body types are something that are rarely truly flexible, for instance. Sometimes you can make a character slightly thicker or thinner or older or younger than the majority, but the differences are nowhere near as extreme as in reality. I've never seen a game where I could be obese, for example.

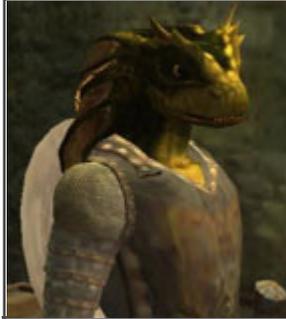
I would love for the chance to try out more radical extremes. Games that offer customizations to humanoid characters that are further from human are nice too. Undead, cat people, lizard men, Twilek and Taurens are a nice start but even more variety would be nice. For me there is a certain amount of joy to be had purely from experimenting with the way I present myself and experiencing peoples' reactions to my avatar.

How important is avatar customization to you when playing a game?

For me the importance of customization is directly tied to its relevance within the game. In multiplayer games, customization is supremely important, because that avatar represents me to other people. I want as much freedom as possible to express myself in that case. On the other hand, expanding character customization while limiting the number of racial variety can be important to retaining immersion. That is, unless the game is about something like a galactic trade post. In single player games, customization is fun to play with and a nice feature to have, but the lack of it doesn't detract too much from my enjoyment of any game. I can identify just as much with Banjo and Kazooie as I can with Samus Aran.

second choice in avatar is often the most overtly sexy type available, and I did try out other more conventionally pretty avatars in World of Warcraft such as a blood elf Elvira clone, but my second favorite character was still a rough looking female orc, and I wound up enjoying and playing Drizela the most.

Carolyn Koh  
VP & COO of Genesis Advanced Technologies



What is your name/avatar's name?

Carolyn Koh / Amaryllis Malitae

What game is your avatar from?

EverQuest 2

What is the history behind your avatar?

She is an Iksar Shaman, a lizardman type character. Her egg was found by a Barbarian monk and the egg hatched on him. As a result she thinks that he's her Daddy despite his best intentions to convince her otherwise.

Is this avatar typical of the types of characters you play?

Yes. I play a variety of types of characters and enjoy playing the really fat ugly troll just as much as the beautiful, sexy humanoid human or elf. I role-play in non-combat time and the ability to play characters with a bit of humor in their history and character is a lot of fun to me. [Characters like] a red-neck monk... a snooty high-elf... a big sweaty troll with a thing for wood-elves and a fondness for bikinis by Hassan the tent-maker, "He makes nice fashionable bikinis! With polka-dots!"

Do you identify with your avatar?

No. These are role-play characters and like the characters I played on table-top DnD games, some traits

chosen are completely opposite to who I am. Further, these role-play traits are abandoned the moment the group is in combat. The selfish "all for me" dark-elf rogue persona is dropped and I'm all about combat efficiency and obeying raid instructions.



What degree of customization do you prefer in developing your avatar?

I do not feel that there is a need to have slider bars for every facial feature but certainly a variety of facial and body feature types, colors, and body size and height is important. When it comes down to it, most of the more subtle differences just cannot be seen at the scale a computer game is rendered in and doesn't make a whole lot of sense to sacrifice performance for "eye-candy". I also feel that it is important to keep prestige armor non-customizable as they are a "badge of honor" so to speak.

How important is avatar customization to you when playing a game?

For appearance it is hardly important, but a nice option. For character development, it is highly attractive for me as although I enjoy playing the high fantasy games with typical class archetypes – wizard, warrior, etc. I also enjoy the different "flavors" that can be found by customizing the character's skills.

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**Meet the IGDA Women in Games Advisory Board at GDC**

Several months ago, we started to identify the need for advice and direction on key issues, topics and opportunities that impact or maximize the goals and efforts of IGDA Women in Games. We quickly realized that an ad hoc group of like-minded peers who contribute their advice and wisdom on an occasional basis throughout the year would serve this need. After a careful search, review and invitation process, IGDA Women in Games is ready to introduce our new Advisory Board members, as follows...

- Rayna Anderson, Game Designer, Gameloft – Montreal; Advisory Board, IGDA Montreal
- Phaedra Boinodiris, Product Manager, Serious Games, IBM Software Group; Founder, WomenGamers.Com
- Amber Dalton, PMS Clan Leader
- Torrie Dorrell, SVP, Global Sales & Marketing, Sony Online Entertainment
- Tracy Fullerton, Associate Professor, USC School of Cinematic Arts, Interactive Media Division; Director, Electronic Arts Game Innovation Lab
- Megan Gaiser, President & CEO, Her Interactive Inc.
- Susan Gold, Director, Program Review; Chairperson, IGDA Education SIG
- Gano Haine, President, ONAG Consulting
- Michelle Hinn, Instructor, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; Chair, IGDA Game Accessibility SIG; Co-Chair, IGDA Diversity Committee; Executive Director, AbleGamers.com

[back to top](#)

- Sonja Kangas, Game Director, GuppyLife MMO at GuppyWorks; IGDA Finland Coordinator; Advisory Board Member, Nordic Game Program
- Dina N. Lewallen, Diversity Specialist, Entertainment and Devices Division, Microsoft Corporation
- Jen MacLean, Senior Vice President of Business Development, 38 Studios
- Jane Pinckard, Business Development Analyst at Foundation 9 Entertainment; Founder at GameGirlAdvance
- Sheri (Pocilujko) Rubin, CEO/President of Design, Direct, Deliver, Chair, IGDA Quality Assurance SIG
- Mary Margaret Walker, CEO, Mary-Margaret Network

To kick off the new year, GDC attendees and IGDA Women in Games members are invited to meet our 15 new Advisory Board members at our roundtable meeting at GDC on Wednesday, March 25, 4 pm to 5 pm. This meeting presents a unique opportunity for you to learn more about our new advisory board, plus meet other SIG members, as we discuss IGDA Women in Games goals and plans for 2009 and 2010. All IGDA Women in Games members are welcome to attend and contribute at this meeting. For more info on the IGDA Women in Games roundtable meeting, visit [here](#).

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## Debut of Microsoft Women in Gaming Awards Luncheon at GDC

Women in the video game industry are working together in awe-inspiring ways and continue to make their mark in the industry. Microsoft's Interactive Entertainment Business in partnership with IGDA Women in Games and Women in Games International is pleased to announce our newest collaboration, the Women in Gaming (WIG) Awards Luncheon to be held on Wednesday March 25 at the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, CA. Participants at the event will celebrate the vast accomplishments of women in the gaming industry. "WIGI thanks Microsoft for its

Award recipients will be named at the luncheon.

Fiona Cherbak, Chair of IGDA Women in Games, offers "we are fortunate to have Microsoft celebrate outstanding women in gaming. Their support enables acknowledgement of key accomplishments of female leaders in game development that may otherwise go relatively unnoticed. As women, we need to continually recognize the value of promoting our achievements, and those of other women. Microsoft has created an ideal

consistent support of women in games efforts and intends to continue collaboration with other organizations for networking and more events" says Belinda Sickle, WIGI Chair of Community Mixers.

The award show will recognize women who have played an important role in the development of successful games. The award categories are: Top Female in Production, Top Female in Art, Top Female in Design and Top Female in Engineering.

platform for giving credit where credit is due."

"Video game programming is a mentally rewarding career for many men and women. I am happy to engage with more creative intelligent women in game development than ever before. I look forward to geeking out on graphics and programming with fellow game developers old and new at this friendly gathering of minds" says Corrinne Yu, Halo team Principal Engine Programmer, Microsoft Game Studios.

For more information, please email [WIGgroup@microsoft.com](mailto:WIGgroup@microsoft.com)

[back to top](#)

## IGDA Women in Games GDC Social Gathering Features Knit-A-Thon

Come by the IGDA booth, located on Floor 1 of the West Hall, on Thursday, March 26, 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm, for mixing and mingling with IGDA Women in Games members, plus snacks and drinks, great giveaways and our first-ever Knit-A-Thon! Come early and sign up to win the Rock Band Portable Drum Kit for Xbox 360, provided by sponsor Mary-Margaret Network.

Hold on to your knitting needles folks! This year the IGDA Women in Games SIG will host our first ever Knit-A-Thon at the San Francisco GDC, generously hosted by SIG members Judy Tyrer (Network Engineer, Red Storm Entertainment), Tracy Seamster (Game Designer, Sony Online Entertainment) and Kimberly Unger (CEO, Bushi-go).

Judy states, "I build the online multi-player features of the game. My brain has a defective off switch. Knitting activates the shutdown procedure bypassing the faulty hardware," while Tracy offers, "I'm currently writing backstory, dialogue and secret spy stuff for The Agency, SOE's forthcoming MMO. On the knitting front, I've been relearning it for the past few years and have recently graduated to socks." Cautiously adds Kim, "What I do is easy, I'm hauling my startup off the ground by main force. About knitting.... Um.... \*stage whisper\* I don't know how to knit, I just like sharp pointy things..."

[back to top](#)

Come over to socialize and participate in the Knit-A-Thon. Through knitting games and friendly competition we will work together to create afghans to benefit the local homeless shelter. By working together, each of us can create a patch to contribute to the afghan, becoming apart of something bigger and helping others in need.

Knitters and crocheters of all experience levels are welcome to participate in the Knit-A-Thon. Don't worry if you've never knitted before! We will have experts available to teach you as well as extra knitting needles and yarn. In no time you'll be able to 'cast-on' and create a 'knit' and 'purl' stitch. Knit, crochet, build and play. Everyone is encouraged to participate!

Stop by and participate in the Knit-A-Thon and win great prizes from Blood & Cardstock, Star Trek Online (Cryptic Studios), 78friends.com, Star Mountain Studios and a signed copy of "Game Coding Complete" book by Mike McShaffry and a signed copy of "Settlers of the New Virtual Worlds" by Erin Hoffman. For more info on the IGDA Women in Games social gathering, visit [here](#).

## Attend the IGDA Women in Games Panel at GDC

After receiving a number of top-notch proposals, we've completed a careful review and made the selection of a panel topic for our IGDA Women in Games session slot at GDC 2009. IGDA Women in Games is presenting advisory board member Phaedra Boinidiris' panel, entitled "Play Games to Work Smarter: Why it is more critical than ever that women play and develop games."

Scheduled for Friday, March 27, 12 pm to 1 pm, this panel will discuss how the gaming paradigm is being adopted by businesses today, why it is more critical than ever that women are involved in this new emerging market, and how women can uniquely contribute to this new innovative way of affecting global change. We will also discuss how important is to create alluring

entertainment titles for girls as a way to get them interested in math and science and how games play a key role in engaging women in high tech careers. knit, I just like sharp pointy things..."

Speakers include Noah Falstein (President, The Inspiracy), Phaedra Boinidiris (Serious Games Product Manager, IBM Software Group), Tracy Fullerton (Associate Professor, Interactive Media, University of Southern California), Merrilea Mayo (Director, Future of Learning Initiatives, Kauffman Foundation), and Diane Pozefsky (Professor, University of North Carolina). The panel will be moderated by Fiona Cherbak (Chair, IGDA Women in Games, VP of Business Development, GameX). For more info on the IGDA Women in Games panel, visit [here](#).

[back to top](#)

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## How to become an IGDA WIG SIG member

[Support the IGDA WIG SIG and become a member today!](#) Your support helps us continue our mission.

Thank you for partnering with us in 2009.

[back to top](#)

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## How to contribute to the IGDA Women in Games newsletter and web site

If you would like to contribute content or articles to the IGDA Women in Games website or newsletter, please contact us at: [wigsignewsletter@igda.org](mailto:wigsignewsletter@igda.org)

[back to top](#)

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If you want to join our IGDA Women in Games Mailing List please sign up [here](#).

You can also join the IGDA Women in Games community on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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## Meet Our Editor: Tina Tyndal

Hello folks!

I'm pleased to serve as the Newsletter Editor,

when I unwrap a new game and watch the introductory video for the first time. My goals

working with Fiona and fellow volunteers to launch the first (of many) IGDA WIG SIG newsletters.

I come from a background in marketing and brand strategy, diagnosing brand challenges and delivering innovative marketing strategies to drive growth of Fortune 100 technology brands and leading national non-profits including the Arthritis Foundation, American Cancer Society, and Jane Goodall Institute.

Ever since I was a child I've been passionate about video games. 25 years later the magic continues; I still need a moment of silence

[back to top](#)

in 2009 include continuing to contribute to the video game community by establishing the IGDA WIG SIG newsletter as a premier platform to highlight the work of women professionals in the industry, while building community and support for one another.

I am member of the International Game Developers Association and currently serve as the WIG SIG Newsletter Editor and the Baltimore Chapter Content Manager.

If you would like to contribute in future IGDA WIG SIG newsletters, please contact me at: [wignewsletter@igda.org](mailto:wignewsletter@igda.org)

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IGDA Women in Games Newsletter  
For more information please contact Fiona Cherbak: [wignewsletter@igda.org](mailto:wignewsletter@igda.org)

