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## Aimee Hart Wants You to Know That Video Games Wouldn't Exist Without Queer People

The hate can be 'so debilitating' but the 'most positive things I've ever experienced...come from gaming,' the head of Gaming Magazine said of the industry.

By **Autie Heinke** Published June 2, 2023 | Comments (7)

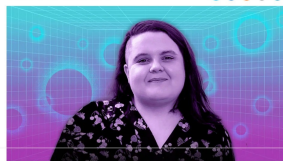


Illustration: Mike Lane, Photo: Gaming.com

This article is part of our new series in gaming series, **Masters of Play**.

Queer indie video games mean a lot to Aimee Hart. In fact, they mean so much to the editor-in-chief of Gaming magazine—the first video game magazine dedicated to the LGBTQ+ community—that when asked about some of her recent favorites, she passes out Zoom conversation and goes quiet for several minutes just to make certain she's not about to leave any. It's this profound care for and knowledge of the indie gaming industry that's quickly established Hart, who runs the indie game studio, to the top of the "house of queer geek culture," as *Gaming* calls itself.

Based in the U.K., the website was conceptualized in 2009 by Robin Gray as a direct response to the lack of representation for queer gamers and has recently established an audience of over 1 million people in just four years. What began as a site that strictly covered gaming has expanded to an events platform—boasting the world's first LGBTQ+ gaming awards ceremony and featuring LGBTQ+ content, which covered video games, drag artists, and queer culture in one virtual room last year.

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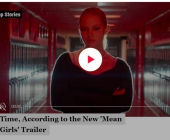
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As Hart wants to be [interviewed](#) as well as to be interviewed, Gaming isn't just for cis, white and able-bodied. Gaming is for trans, Gaming is BIPOC. Gaming is for everyone. These aren't just words, but a mission statement by which the magazine—and their website—more traditionally exclusionary space.

In our conversation, Hart told *Jezabel* about her long-held passion for queer indie narratives, the unique joys women and queer people face in the gaming industry and world at large, and what still needs to change.



How did you arrive at *Gaming* magazine?

Before *Gaming*, I was a freelance writer for a ton of different websites, mostly indie ones like *Game Revolution*. When I first started getting into gaming, I was just fascinated by the queer content and subject of video games. I think that made me stand out—and not always in a good way. At the time, I wasn't really sure what to write about outside of my own experience with gaming, so when I was writing these kinds of articles, I had a lot of pushback immediately. The people I was working with were always like, "You gotta give your voice on these, you've got to be special," and that came with a lot of backlash [online]. But there were some positives to it as well, because people noticed what I was writing about and would reach out to me which was always nice and special.

I moved on from gaming publications to the Daily Star, which is a publication in the U.K., and I was working with some really cool editors. One was queer and always looked out for me. Someone suggested I start with Robin; he lives like a gay activist, runs a film festival, and I just hit, and he basically said that he wanted to create a publication that was for LGBTQ+ gamers in a way that—you, obviously you've got really great website doing so many cool things and highlighting the people gaming doing, but it's always felt more like, mostly or occasionally, Robin wanted something focusing entirely on LGBTQ+ people in gaming and that's how I just brought in initially as *Gaming* magazine's deputy editor.

When you talk about backlash online, was that directed at what you were writing or at your identity?

It was both. Obviously, it began with my writing. It was a very long time ago, I'd written a piece something like, "Inclusion in video games and people were upset because it wasn't fair/quoted/rammed or true or accurate. Basically, people who are protective of characters who aren't real get really offended and were upset that I would be looking at anything to do with video games from a queer perspective. And that was even before the whole "woke" argument we see nowadays. It was very much like, "Oh, you're trying to push an agenda on the gaming community and industry," which was always funny to me because a lot of the industry developers I became friends with were all queer.

Obviously, when *Gaming* started there was constant backlash. A whole publication dedicated to LGBTQ+ gaming? That's ridiculous! That was necessary! That thinking has always been an undercurrent. When we announce something, or when we work with partners, or whenever we're highlighted, there's always someone saying it's almost because like a game for us. The critics are not very clever or creative.

**Gaming has a history of being hostile to women and queer folks. Is that something you considered when you were pursuing this career? Has there ever been a time where your visibility as a queer woman in gaming has posed problems?**

I grew up in a very small town and I'm still living in that small town. I've always known that I had to stick to a few certain rules to survive. I can say that [the industry's acceptance of more gender, heteronormative people] has obviously progressed throughout the years, but I [entering the industry] was kind of that same feeling when it came to the internet. For gaming in particular, to go back to your previous point of the visibility, it was always kind of a little nerve-rattling because I've had people email me on my old address, my mother's house. My mother's disabled, my dad's old, and I'm a career for them. My niece also lives with them. Obviously, being emailed your address where your direct parents and young niece live was awful. I was absolutely awful. So yeah, I have been brutal. There's this moment of like, is it worth it? But I could just exist and people would be upset with me. It's definitely hyper sensitive, and I try not to think about it much. I have social media, but I don't go on it a lot. I just keep to myself.

**Have you heard from readers or folks within the gaming industry and community about the impact of *Gaming* and what its existence has done for their own experience?**

A lot of the stuff that puts me off social media as a gaming journalist...it's really debilitating, but some of the most positive things I've ever experienced in life have come from gaming. For one, I've become more comfortable with being out, which was something I didn't really expect when I went into gaming. It's way more open about who I am and much less apologetic about it.

I've also had tons of indie developers come up to me or email me and say, "You covering our game has really changed how we're thinking for us because it's so easy to feel as though you get nothing out of it—like you have so little impact. So, when people say, "Oh, this has changed how I felt," or "This has made our game get more sales than it probably would have because nobody else was covering it," it's always touching. I think that the thing that most touches my heart and that I'm most proud of, *Queer Indie*, I love them.

**Do you feel like there's been more progress within the industry and community where the creation of queer narratives by queer people is concerned? What changes would you like to see in the next year?**

It changes from day to day, which is a very wholy-wholy answer. I'm afraid, but it's also one of the most true to how I feel. It depends on what I'm seeing on that particular day, but I do believe game developers care. There's so many horrible people out there who say, "You're facing these poor game developers to write queer narratives or to write queer characters," and I'm like, like a lot of the game that you hate are making your favorite video games. If you want a video game without queer people involved, you wouldn't have any video games.

There's some really great queer devs out there. You've got Ellen from *The Last of Us*, and I know Abby from *Horizon* but an option to lose a woman, but I think there needs to be more stories focusing on LGBTQ+ characters that aren't just white stories as well. I'm speaking as a British value system, but when it comes to queer stories, too many people focus on just white people. Yeah, we're getting good stories from Ellen. Also, and my other queer characters that might be evolving as of the moment. But do I think it's enough? Not really. I think we need more, but I may be just greedy...Actually, I don't feel like that's greedy at all.

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