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# Equal Opportunity Fanservice

## Creating Attractive Characters Of & For All Genders

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#GDC22



# MEET THE CREW



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They/He



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# WHAT \*IS\* FANSERVICE

- **Fan service** (ファンサービス, *fan sābisu*),<sup>[1][2]</sup> is material in a work of fiction that is intentionally added to please the audience,<sup>[3]</sup> often sexual in nature, such as nudity.
- We also talk about "fanservice" when we give the players what they wish they could see in the game, but that's the definition we will be referring to here.



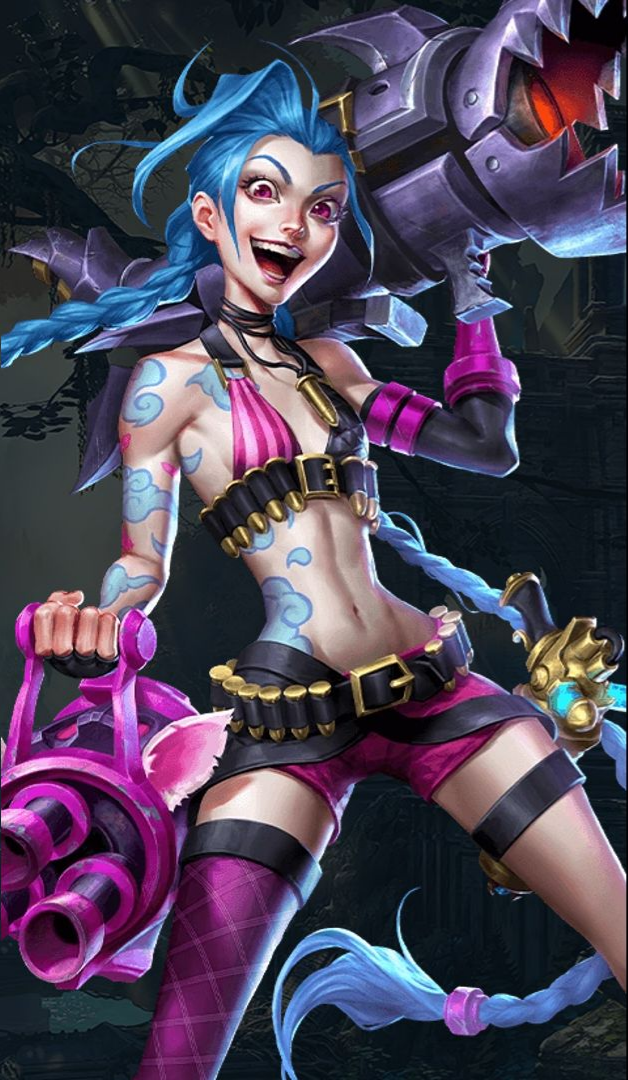


# HOW WE GOT HERE

## (the history of fanservice)

- All throughout the '90s and well until the late 2000s the playing field for fanservice in games was mostly composed of women in scanty clothes.
- It was fanservice made and marketed for a **cis heterosexual male gaze**.





# HOW WE GOT HERE

## (the history of fanservice)

- But even within such a limited range of design to choose from, most of us grew up with characters that appealed to us.
- Whether we found them attractive or stimulating, these characters helped us get invested into the game! We imagined ourselves as them... or perhaps ***with*** them! And the designers took notice of this.







# POWER FANTASY VS OBJECTIFICATION

- One thing you may have noticed over the years is that there HAVE been many a scantily clothed barbarian cishet male protagonist flexing their muscles for all to see! Warriors with muscles rippling under tight shirts! How is that NOT fanservice?
- The intent, and the way to manifest it, makes all the difference.

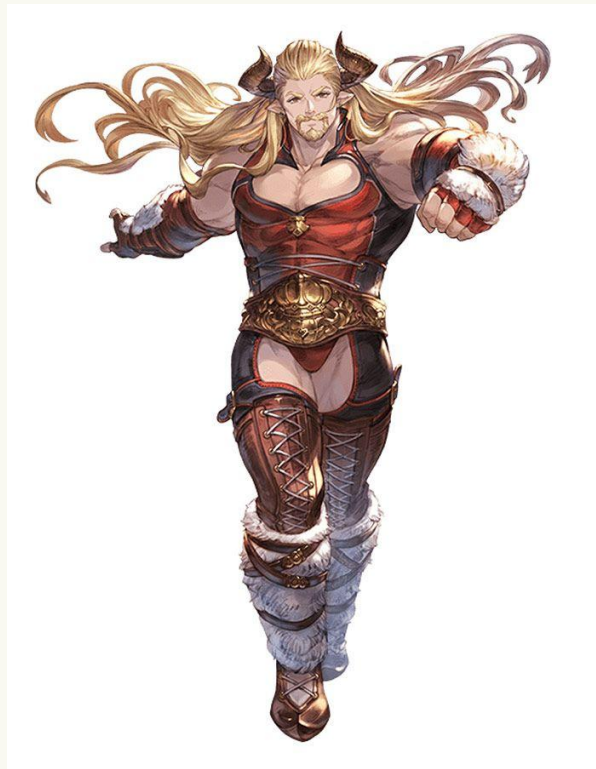


# POWER FANTASY VS OBJECTIFICATION

- We're not, in general, meant to lust over these characters' extremely chiseled bodies - they're there to project an image of extreme physical prowess that the player can insert themselves into.
- They're powerful. In control. Their body is part of the Power Fantasy for the players.



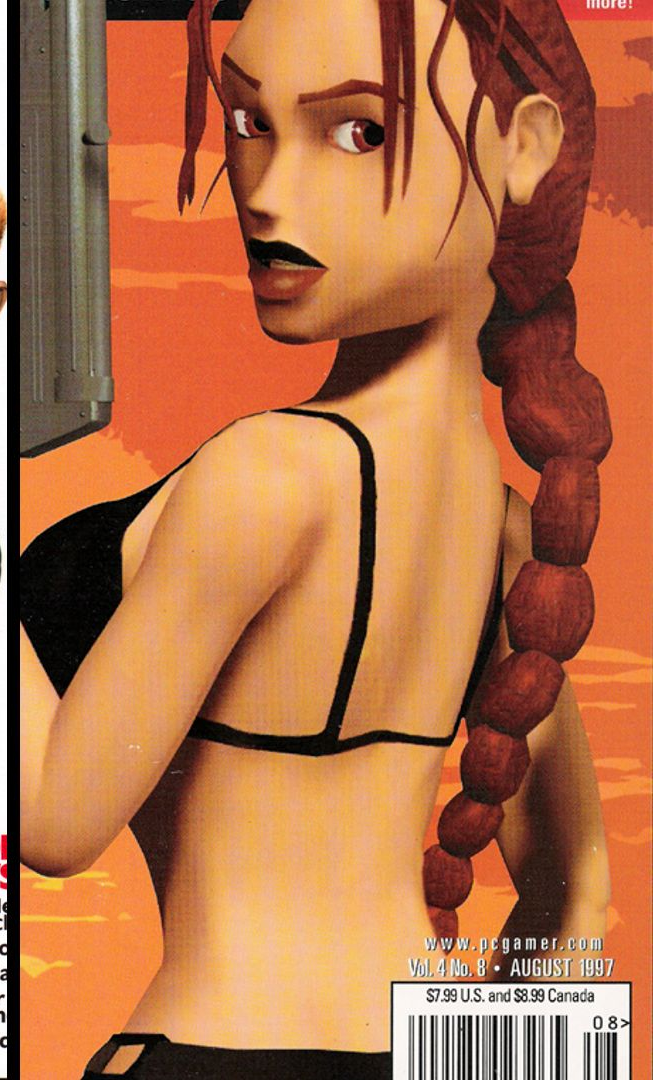
# GUESS WHICH PECS WERE DRAWN FOR A CISHET GAZE



# POWER FANTASY VS OBJECTIFICATION

- Objectification, on the other hand, makes it so the narrative and visuals call attention to the sexual features of the character in question, in a way that draws the player away from their narrative importance.
- The character becomes a helpless image of admiration, the object of the player's affection and desire.





**HANDS-ON  
REVIEWS**

Tomb Raider  
Chrono  
Banjo-Toad  
Grandia  
MechWarrior  
Vengeance  
Skies of Arcadia

www.pcgamer.com  
Vol. 4 No. 8 • AUGUST 1997

\$7.99 U.S. and \$8.99 Canada

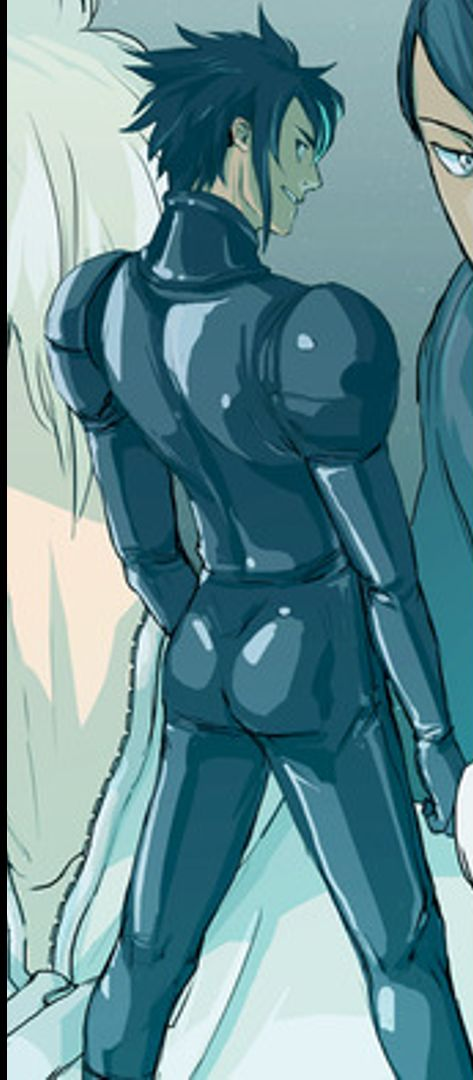


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# LEVELLING THE PLAYFIELD

- Objectification isn't inherently bad. However, it's necessary to keep in mind **who** has been historically objectified.
- Fanservice can be empowering and/or exciting for the player in ways the designers may not have foreseen! It can help them learn more about themselves (trust us — it has!)



# LEVELLING THE PLAYFIELD

- When you give your players options to customize their characters as they want, avoiding bigoted mechanics such as the **gay tax**\* you're empowering your marginalized players through making their characters more attractive!  
**More like themselves!**

\***Gay Tax** refers to having to pay extra for gender nonconformity or gay options, etc. in-game



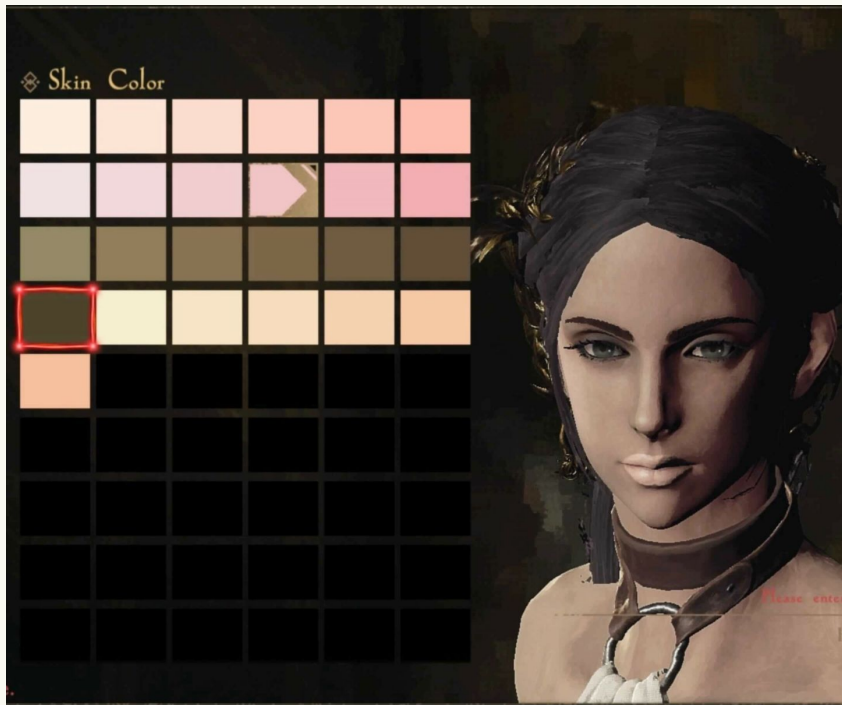


# THE PROBLEM WHEN EUROCENTRIC BEAUTY STANDARD IS THE ONLY CHOICE

- It is not uncommon for POC who play games to feel inadequate about their appearance because the media has taught them looking European is the only way to be beautiful.
- In many East Asian countries, there are billion dollar industries to help people look white, many procedures are quite risky.
- Character creators often lack the same amount of customization options for people with darker skin tones.
- By embracing the diversity of fanservice, you are also helping People of Color to love themselves for who they are.



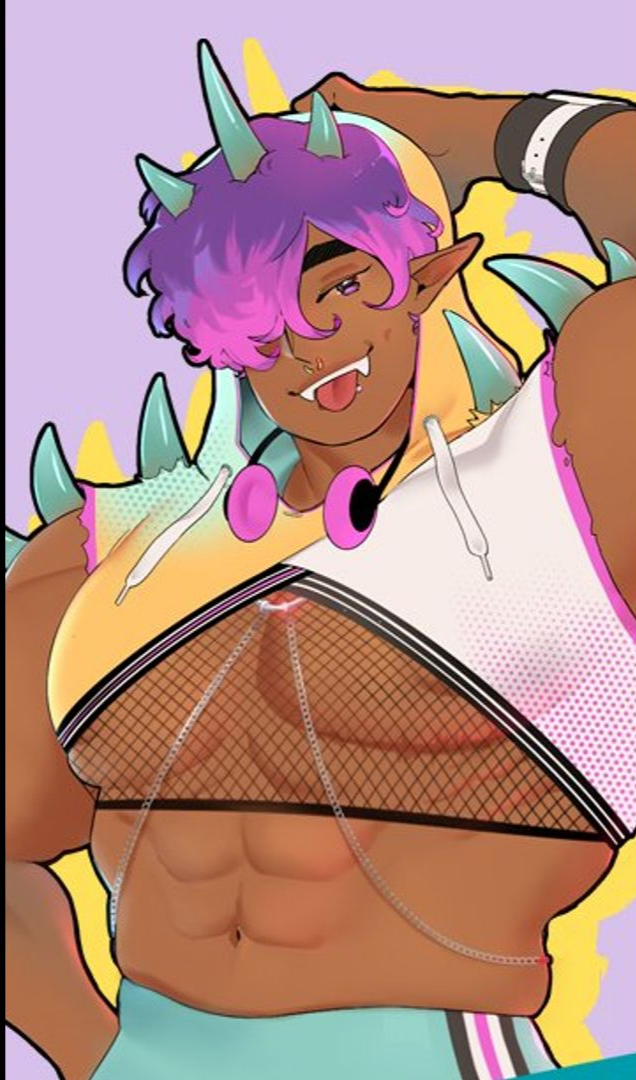
# THERE ARE SCALES OF "BEAUTY" ACCESSIBILITY





# FANSERVICE AS A SELLING POINT

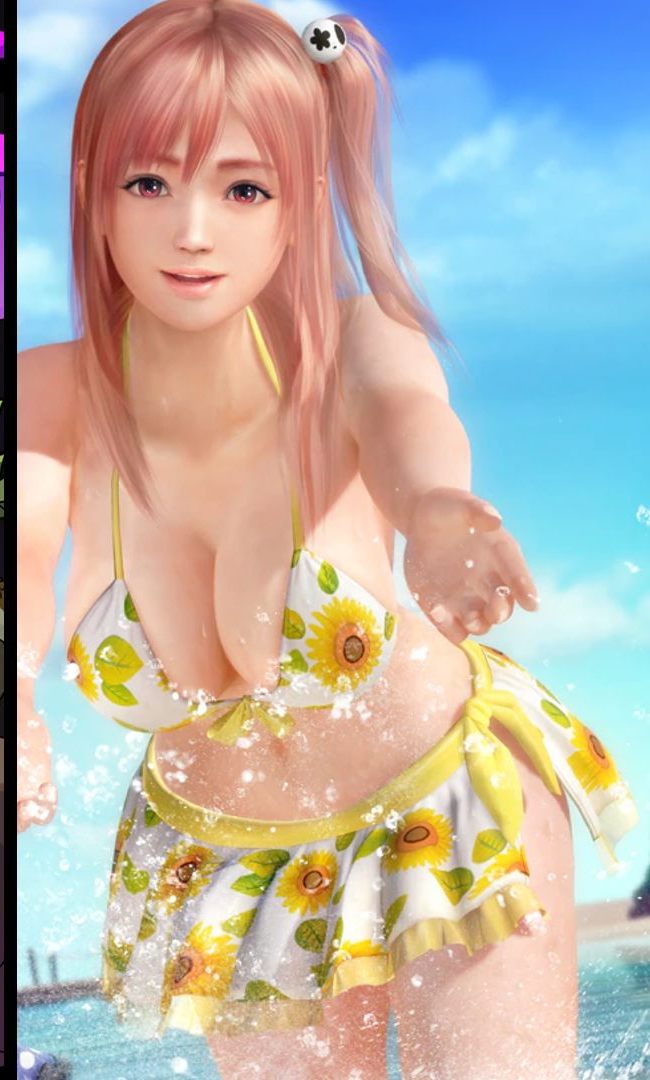
- Fanservice is an effective way to generate discussion among the player base (more gameplay layers and diverse player choices)
- Conversation around fanservice will last longer than the initial launch period, thus helping ensure success in the long run
- Fanservice, especially when targeted towards a niche audience, can encourage people to try out games that are not within their preferred genre.



# FANSERVICE AS A SELLING POINT

- This means that not only you can use fanservice in monetization design but it also makes the game more playable, thus creating other revenue streams (merch, DLC, sequel, etc)
- You can be fanservice-y AND queer AND successful (from Indie to Triple-A)
- Examples include: Hades, Apex, Final Fantasy 7 Remake, Kingdom Death, Arcade Spirits, Dream Daddy, Dragon Age, Monster Prom, etc.





# HOW TO DO FANSERVICE BETTER

- Awareness in the visual design of your character and the way you present it.
- Make a choice in what audience are you creating the fanservice for.
- Is it an incentive? Is it a reward? Is it both to scaling degrees? Make that decision and then lean into it.
- Fanservice does not exist in a vacuum.







# EMBRACE THE NICHE

- Embrace the **accidental sexiness** (The Dads, The Muscular Women, The Whatever It IS)
- Internet has taught us **everyone can be attractive to someone**. Just because your characters aren't considered attractive by mainstream media, it doesn't mean you won't find an audience and benefit from including fanservice.
- Queer audiences are more likely to eagerly embrace fanservice catered to them as games haven't offered enough to them. Let them enjoy their representation & headcanons!



# DESIGNING ATTRACTIVE CHARACTERS

- What aspects of your characters do you want to be appealing?
- Variety among these is important to reaching wider audiences, but it's important to stay true to what you like as well!
- Make sure the charm points in their personality and backstory manifest through their design! Don't shy away, commit to it!  
(Vampire -> Blood in fangs)



# Q&A



**Sandra "Maxi" Molina**  
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