The sentences above may not sound like much, but they do actually make sense—of you speak gamer slang. To the increasing number of people around the world who are fluent in gamer slang, the sentences tell them that a newcomer to the video game industry just found a bonus feature and offers congratulations.

The newcomer, or nosh (from 'newbie'), is Jennifer Estaris, a second-year student in the Writing Division at the Graduate School of the Arts. Estaris is one of 25 students recently awarded an International Game Developer's Association Conference Student Scholarship. Awarded by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), the scholarship pairs each winner with a mentor toward the goal of developing future industry innovators.

The gaming industry is very difficult to break into,” says Estaris that she is already well on her way toward that goal.

Estaris works part-time at a game development company and uses her writing skills to develop the story lines that help turn many games into favorites. The seemingly odd pairing of creative writing and video games is an important void in the evolution of the industry. As journalist Matthew Taylor wrote in an essay recently for IGDA, “Technology and creative elements are equal and inseparable aspects of development. Remove the technology, and the game becomes non-existent. Remove the creativity, and the game becomes a spreadsheet. The sum of their collaboration requires pure synergy.”

That synergy is what Estaris works toward. She fell in love with video games as a kid, playing Atari system favorites. Her fascination with those arcade-style games quickly piqued an interest in writing. First-generation video games had one objective: Destroy or kill as many bad guys as possible. After a while, destroying—or fragmenting, as the industry slang goes—becomes monotonous. But add a clever narrative, and suddenly the player is enveloped in the mythology of the game; embarking on a quest to recover a sacred relic or becoming a diplomat trying to identify spies from a list.

Who better than a writer to help fashion the game story lines—especially when the writer brings a different perspective to the fore? The original versions of many of today’s popular video games, such as Age of Empires, Rise of Rome, had all-male characters. “Designers create characters that appeal to them. Estaris points out. “All-male developers of the past weren’t exactly working with women.”

Robert Williams was an exception to that rule and an inspiration to Estaris. “She was one of the first women gamers to create female characters who were the hero of the game without being overly sexual,” Estaris says. Another mentor for Estaris is Bernard Yee, adjunct associate professor of computer science at Columbia and the instructor for ‘Video Game Design and Technology.”

“Yee’s class is great,” says Estaris. “A lot of people walk away from it because they think it requires coding, but you don’t necessarily need coding knowledge to play the class. It’s more about studying the aesthetics of the game. What makes it fun? What makes a game compelling?”

As any gamer will tell you, programs without a great story line don’t have gameplay—“the rush a gamer gets while playing Estaris favorite games, such as Final Fantasy (versions 7 and 10), and her current game flavor of the month, Katamari Damacy, which means ‘clumping soul’ in Japanese, all have that element.”

Estaris made as much of an impression on Yee as he did on her. After the end of her class with him, he took her on as a teaching assistant and later as an employee at his video game development company.

Although she isn’t yet sure whether she’ll pursue video game development as a full-time career, Estaris is sure that she’ll continue to write narratives, even if just for the gameplay.

A Brief Guide to Gamer Slang

4X game where players must execute the four Xs: explore, expand, exploit and exterminate.

AI artificial intelligence

Baseball: shot or other weapon capable of inflicting significant damage.

Boss the main villain in a game; a mini-boss is a less powerful enemy.

Brick a powerful weapon that often protects a weak- er player; an online ‘big brother’.

Cheat feature built into the game that allows a player to gain power or abilities or unlock special game features. Cheats aren’t usually described in the game manual.

CIM cover me, partner.

Easter egg hidden game features included by developers that usually don’t help players in gameplay but are sometimes amusing.

Flag to kill another player or blast something to bits.

Gameplay the rush experienced when playing a game; also, the ability of a game to inspire such feelings.

Gender person for whom a game is a primary leisure-time activity.

GFP good job, partner.

Grats congratulations.

High-ginger player with a slow internet connection, which can negatively affect reaction time during gameplay.

Newbie NPC that exists for the sole purpose of being killed by PCs.

Newbie new player who is learning the game; often abbreviated as ‘noob’.

Patch software update, usually available for free download.

PC player character controlled by a live player; NPC (nonplayer character) is controlled by the computer.

Persue to obliterate your opponents. Persue to obliterate your opponents.

RTS real-time strategy game where all players, including computer-controlled AI, perform actions continually and simultaneously. Examples of RTS games are StarCraft and Age of Empires.

Sim simulation games players build a city or other major construction project.

Sneaker game where players solves a problem using guide, cunning and intelligence.

Smash to intimidate opponents with textual insults or via sound files.

Walkthrough document describing how to beat a game in detail. A hint deee is less explicit.

WGP way go to partner.

Kennedy Research

The two groups independently showed that Ngal is a sensitive marker of renal failure, and after extensive studies with mice, the two independently found that Ngal will be ready for initial human trials after one software update, usually available for free download. PC player character controlled by a live player; NPC (nonplayer character) is controlled by the computer. Persue to obliterate your opponents. Persue to obliterate your opponents.

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Banners Away: Celebrating Women’s History Month

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The combination of intriguing narratives with artwork that focuses on the role women have played in the sales of games like Age of Empires (at left) and Katamari Damacy (above).