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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

“MEET DEERE: QUEEN OF INTERNET STREAMING” BY AMANDA BLOOM

CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.



“When the wig is on, it’s officially Deere time.”

This is what the ravishing drag queen tells her 15,400-plus Twitch followers as she nears the end of her transformation from 32-year-old man to the long-lashed, high-cheekboned, full-lipped, devil-may-care video-gaming maven Deere.

After the expert live makeup application and wig donning, Deere spends hours playing scary video games from her San Francisco Bay Area home while people from across the globe tune in to soak up her witty banter and impeccable style. A green screen, professional remote-controlled lighting, and a streaming webcam allow Deere's stunning avatar to float through the decrepit factories and foggy graveyards she navigates in horror games such as Resident Evil and Dead by Daylight.

Deere, whose hairstyle of choice is often voluminous and platinum blonde, supports herself as a makeup artist and through Twitch, a live streaming video game platform that allows viewers to chat with the streamer and each other in real time. Deere earns money via subscriptions to her channel and with "Bits." Bits are akin to digital tips.

Since her drag debut on Twitch, Deere has amassed a cult following online, and many of her fans are fellow members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Deere admits she's quite introverted, and showcasing her artistry online feels more natural than taking to a club stage. Twitch is also a performance space that allows her to reach an international audience.

"I believe that entertainment is escapism," Deere says. "Video games, movies, books, drag—all are a way to put worries and pains aside."

When she first started dressing in drag, Deere didn't have an avenue to channel her creativity into something meaningful. She sat in her bedroom in full makeup and a wig, thinking about the next step to take. What began as a solitary journey now inspires countless others via the Internet.

"Where I'm from, this sort of expression is illegal, but I love it, and thank you so much for making it accessible to me," someone wrote in Deere's chat stream.



Photo by T. Nguyen.

2019 was a big year for Deere. Her Twitch followers more than doubled, and she became a full-fledged Twitch Partner, which is similar to getting verified on Instagram and Twitter. She collaborated with MAC Cosmetics (a company Deere worked for as a teenager and college student) on a social media campaign for a new line of scented setting spray—this time instead of being behind the counter, she was in front of the camera sporting her own makeup looks inspired by watermelon, pineapple, peony, and white tea.

Deere also appeared at her second TwitchCon as one of 15 convention Ambassadors last year, and she founded her first team of Twitch content creators: the Stream Queens. The name is a riff on “scream queens,” an affectionate term for the famous actresses who bled, crawled, and wailed their way through 1970s slasher films (think Jamie Lee Curtis in *Halloween*).

Deere is quick to point out that queens are not the only kind of drag entertainer, though. There are drag kings, who dress up in a hyper-masculine fashion. There are female-identifying people who dress up as drag queens, and there are drag kings who identify as male in their day-to-day. Nonbinary people do drag, too. Drag artists might create a gendered character for themselves, or perhaps they'll dress up as a genderless monster.

"Stream Queens is a snappy name," she says, "but it consists of queens, kings, characters, and creatures, because I want everyone to feel supported by me."

As a child, Deere was drawn to powerful women and video games. There was Jessica Rabbit, the seductive damsel-meets-powerhouse lounge singer in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and *Street Fighter*'s Chun-Li, who Deere cites as the first prominent video game character who wasn't a damsel in distress. In fact, Chun-Li was the first female fighter in any fighting game franchise, and her specialty was martial arts.

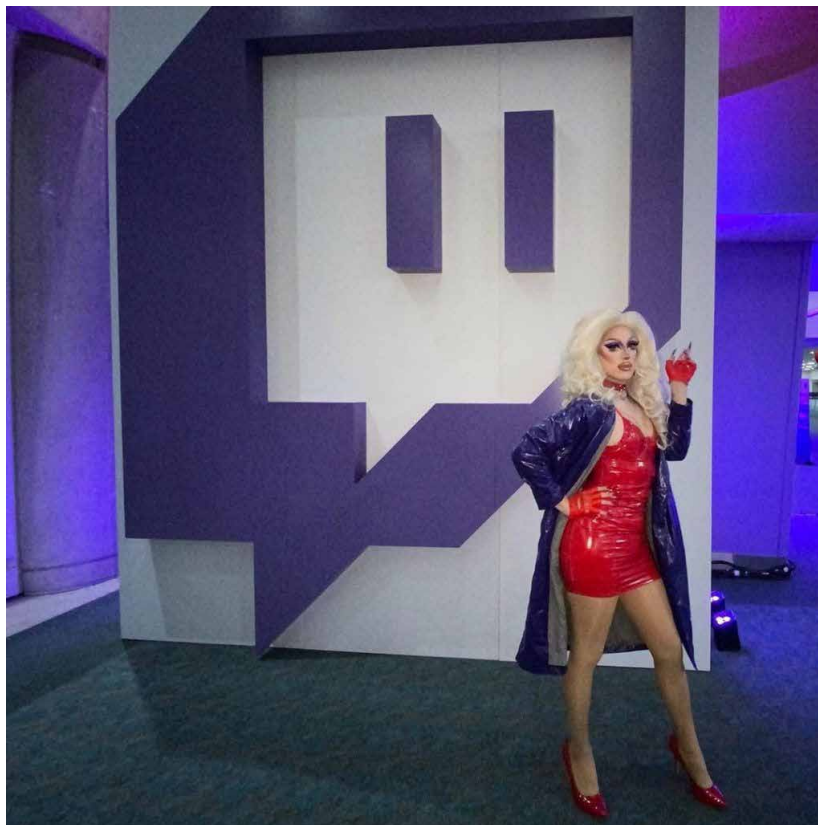


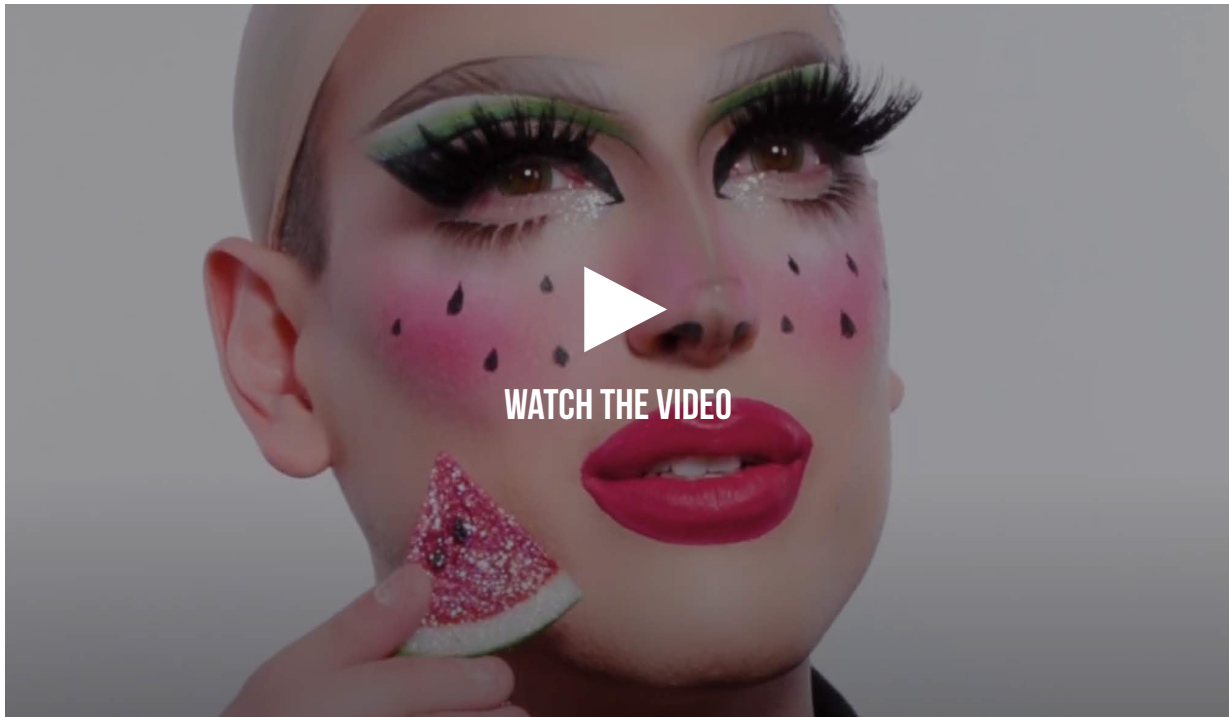
Photo by T. Nguyen.

"She can have any job she wants," she says of the iconic blonde doll. "I had an Olympic Barbie, and I thought that was cool. Olympic athletes train all their lives, but only a handful of people succeed. I liked that Barbie stood on the podium, even though it was just a fantasy."

Drag itself also wove through Deere's early teenage years. The Rocky Horror Picture Show, the 1975 musical extravaganza of all things transsexual and drag-adjacent, was her parents' favorite film—her father made a cassette recording of the entire movie, dialogue and all, and played it in the car on road trips. A follow-your-own-rainbow mentality was a staple at her home, but not everyone understood young Deere's fascination with feminine characters, colors, and clothing.

"People made me feel self-conscious," she says. "At home, I could become that woman I wanted to be so badly. I could play with dolls all I wanted. Video games especially gave me a space to express myself."

"I think that idea extends to drag so well, too," Deere continues. "You can become whoever you want whenever you want and live in this fantasy world. I get questioned by my viewers all the time on how I keep my cool during hectic moments, and I think it's because I feel so strong and untouchable when in drag. It's like what Jaymes Mansfield once said: It's a gay suit of armor."



Deere leads author Amanda Bloom through a makeup tutorial for National Watermelon Day.

With her blonde wig, drawn-on button nose, extravagant outfits, and oversized accessories, Deere exists in an altered state where her authentic, vulnerable self is protected by a carefully crafted spectacle.

"You're being this fierce, exaggerated version of yourself, so what people think doesn't even matter at that point," she explains. "Your sense of reality is a little bit broken down."

This armor helps Deere confront the trolls that sometimes haunt her Twitch channel. Just as she's able to take on freaky virtual villains with a level head, Deere doesn't let disparaging comments throw her off. By pretending to be mystified by certain words—or by mispronouncing the words outright—she puts trolls in positions where they have to backtrack and explain themselves, robbing harmful messages of their power and delighting Deere's loyal fan base. She calls this tactic "feigning ignorance," and says it's life-changing.

In a broadcast of Dead by Daylight, a multiplayer game where four "survivors" fight one "killer," Deere plays as Nea Karlsson, a skateboarding, graffiti-writing outcast from Sweden with short, jet black hair and a lacing of tattoos. Nea runs through an abandoned asylum, destroying totems and healing fellow players.

"Oh my gosh yes queen," Deere coos. "Yesssssss queen."

The bliss Deere experiences in gaming is passed onto her fans, who get the added benefit of a friendly, campy host who fuses glamour and horror into high art.

Amanda Boom's work appears in The Rumpus, The Offing, The Yale Review, CRAFT, Narratively, The Atlantic, and elsewhere. Find her on Instagram at [@bloomamanda](https://www.instagram.com/bloomamanda), and at amandabloom.com.

