

Bespoke Traveller:

Meet Les Seules - Rock Star Video Gamers

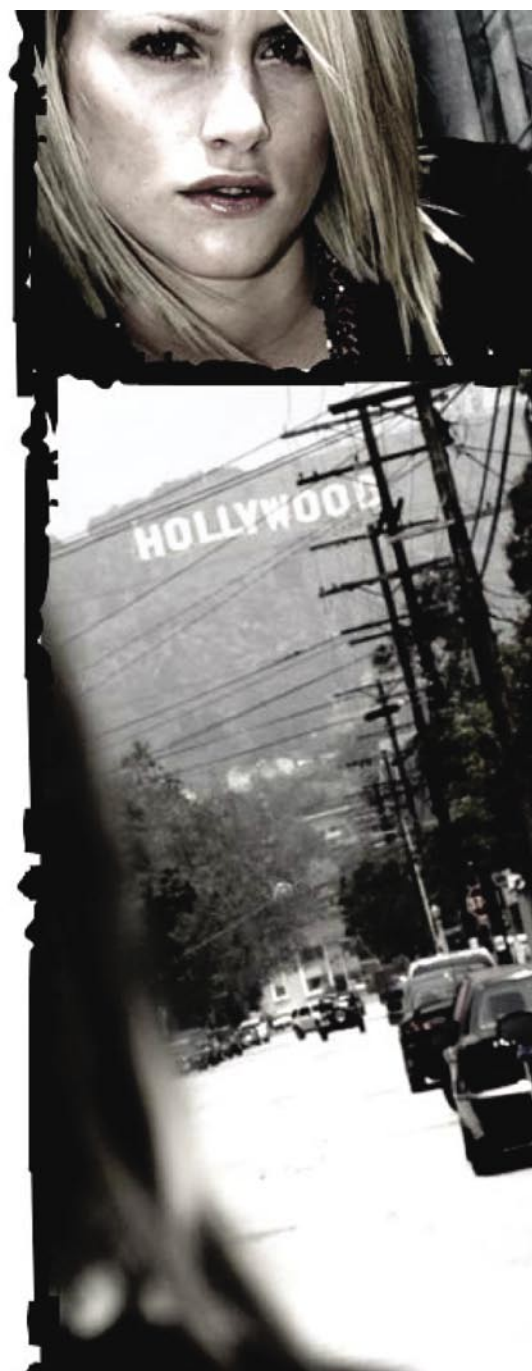
Adored by legions of crazed fans. Insouciant and rebellious, their rock star vibe is envied by guys and girls. Rock stars? No, professional video game players touring the world and taking the stage in major cities with their new reality show 'Play Us'

Rock star meets video gamer. Only in your wildest dreams? Think again. Les Seules means 'outsider' in French and these handsome, Scandinavian ladies are the most popular and successful gaming group in the world. And they are as serious as a heart attack. Video games are a \$35 billion a year industry-bigger than movies and growing. Halo 2 opened bigger than most top movies. So it was bound to happen: the emergence of celebrities and stars that would embody the hopes and dreams of its generation. Enter the 'e-athlete'.

Les Seules got together in Sweden's teeming video game tournaments and cybercafes. Sophie is a demure blonde who wryly remarks, "Shopping's fun, but so is mowing down five opponents at once with a machine gun"; Miss Hyper played with the boys before she jumped into the female gaming scene; AurorA is the hot headed one who was recently awarded the title of best female gamer; Nat0 is rated "Best Newcomer of the Year 2005"- she thinks, "Heavy guitars are the perfect soundtrack to exploding flash grenades" and Cassidy is the group's extroverted

game leader who believes "a single blow to the head always does the trick." Coming from different backgrounds, but sharing a love for teamwork, camaraderie and gaming they've used animated hand grenades, machine guys, pistols and sniper rifles to become big time celebrities.

This crew kills at Counter-Strike, the world's most popular online action, first person shooter game. Good guys versus the terrorists is played out over various scenarios. Although Counter Strike has been around over five years and more sophisticated games have emerged in this genre Counter Strike maintains a strong core following due to its simplicity of purpose and lack of story distractions. With over 100 million fans worldwide and an especially large following in Asia, the girls were treated like heroes coming home. Rather than finding the stereotypical, introverted, reticent, gamer type personality, the girls of Les Seules were engaging and thoughtful about their vocation. We chatted about life on the road, their new reality show 'Play Us', and naturally, the ins and outs of Counterstrike. Luckily, they left their weapons in the hotel room.



ESCAPE: It's been a long time coming- the video game player becoming a rock star. From pong in the 1970s to Counterstrike. When did all this change?

Aurora: Greater gaming acceptance all over the world and new technology that's widely available. Since we were young, computers have become cheaper and faster so almost any kid around the world has enough basic power to play.

Sophie: ... and now that most parents today have played video games it means the whole activity is pretty mainstream. So where you find homes with kids you'll find a gaming console.

Traveling around the world, meeting other gamers – what have you learned from this experience? Are all gamers alike? Or do they share little in common?

Miss Hyper: Gamers come from all walks of life, short, fat, skinny. All share the love of competition and getting focused on the (Counterstrike) scenario.

Cassidy: Plus the age group is pretty wide- from teenagers to adults because Counterstrike has been so popular for years.

What do you take with you on your gaming travels? Your own keyboards, mouse, controllers?

Nat0: We carry our own keyboard and mouse. No one uses joysticks. Mostly high end Microsoft boards. You walk around a tournament with your keyboard and headphones. Sometimes, you meet cool people between rounds.

Sophie: Aside from that, mostly just iPods.

What has been your most interesting gaming experience? Most interesting place you've visited?

Aurora: Asia is the most intense gaming environment with so many gamers into CS. But, every place is rewarding as most of us have never lived outside Europe. Gaming has

no boundaries nowadays because it crosses cultures and crosses generations.

Miss Hyper: Going into the gaming halls in Seoul and Shenzhen were unreal. So many people looking down from the stands. Playing in cyber cafes is nothing like this.

Cassidy: America was also very cool. So many serious CS players in every city.

Counterstrike is over five years old. Today, there are other games like Rainbow Six that are technically better. But, what has accounted for Counterstrike's wild success around the world? Is it the game or simply the community?

Nat0: CS hasn't really changed much since the start. So there's nothing new to learn every year. And there's no need for a game console, most PCs can run CS because it is not complex.

Sophie: Yeah, it's a real hassle when consoles or games change and can't be brought over. Players want to play the same basic thing.

Cassidy: It's not about the graphics, more about the game and your experience. It's low not high hardware requirement that drives popularity for games. CS doesn't bother you with so much fancy, moving backgrounds. Nice and simple set ups with no need for a big story.

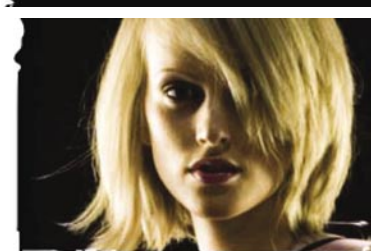
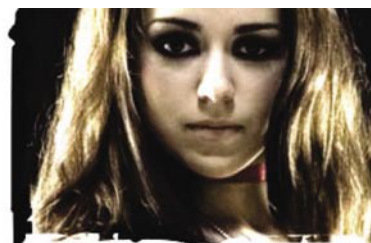
What's your favourite version or scenario or map of Counterstrike? Least favourite?

Cassidy: The train scenario is the favourite one (everyone nods in agreement). CS maps haven't changed much. In tournaments they stick to five standard maps that have been around since the early days.

Any favourite weapons? Any weapons you hate using? Any new weapons worth mentioning?

Miss Hyper: The sniper rifle, but it is hard to aim when moving.

Aurora: No favourites. I like them all.



When you're on the road, what do you do to relax? Any favourite music, movies you've seen lately?

Nat0: Everyone does their own thing; listening to the iPod is popular. Just chilling out.

Cassidy: Some of us are getting into yoga, doing more exercise.

Is this really a healthy thing to do?

Sophie: Oh yes, we think of it as 'e-sports'. It's all harmless and the violence in games is nothing different than what you see on TV or movies.

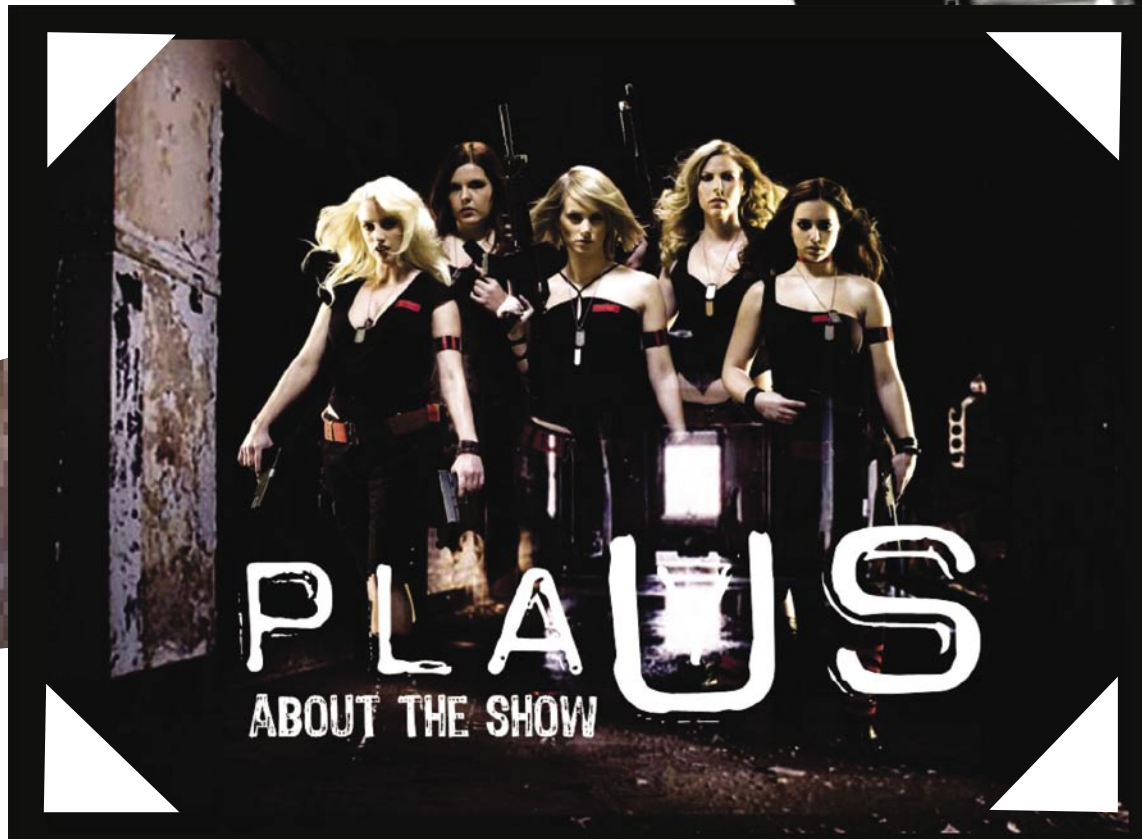
Miss Hyper: Our advice to gamers is to take breaks because the game will still be there if you take a break.

Does using a sniper rifle, jumping out and taking a snap shot still give you an overall edge against the lighter submachine guns?

Sophia: (Laughs) Not in the current versions of CS as it is hard to aim when jumping.

Who are some of the top Counterstrike teams in the world?

Cassidy: Mostly men in the US. Followed by Korea.





Miss Hyper



Cassidy



Aurora

Where have you found the most enthusiastic Counterstrike fans?

Aurora: Most definitely in Asia, by far. Our Shenzhen session was the biggest CS gathering I've ever seen.

Any other games you play for fun? Any other favourite first person shooter games?

Miss Hyper: For fun and relaxation, Final Fantasy, SIMS. Games that aren't first person shooter.

How do you guys practice?

Sophia: We go online as a team or individually to test skills and learn new techniques.

Any favourite cheats?

Nat0: Cheats are banned from competition so it's no use practicing with them.

And what's it like living on the road together?

Aurora: It's our first time traveling outside of Europe and

we're just happy seeing new places and meeting people. It's not easy being around each other all the time, but we have matured and can work out any differences pretty well.

And how do you feel about starring in your own reality show? What's it like having a camera crew follow you everywhere?

Sophia: At first I was intimidated, but we started getting used to it at tournaments when cameras were on you as you were playing.

Cassidy: It was in the beginning quite distracting to have such bright lights on you at tournaments. But now we are okay with that so doing a reality show became kind of natural for us.

What's in the future for you guys?

Aurora: I'd like to design video games.

Miss Hyper: See more of the world.

Check out Les Seullles and their reality show at
www.playus.tv