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Little Arcade

An In-depth Analysis of Two Popular Web Comics

Penny Arcade and *Little Gamers* are two of the most popular gaming web comics around today. With the help of an artistic license and long days in front of a computer screen, these two comics take turns ranting and raving about everything under the sun. From the newest games and crazes to current events and the daily mishaps the average gamer, there is not a topic these comics will not address. While both comics have similar target audiences, the methods in which they use to display their messages differ greatly.

Michael Krahulik and Jerry Parkinson, who go by the names Gabriel and Tycho Brahe respectively, are the masterminds behind *Penny Arcade*. Starting as a weekly strip back in 1998 with a relatively small reader population, the Seattle based *Penny Arcade* has grown into “the” example for web based comics. Offering strips three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) with a loyal and ever-growing fan base Tycho and Gabe have turned there little side project into their dream job complete with opportunities to bring people together from across the Nation to help out with noble causes, such as Child’s Play, and just to party, at PAX (the Penny Arcade Expo). *Penny Arcade* has built its fan base not only from the artistic display of humorous gaming sketches, but by

backing the strips up with levels upon levels of depth and knowledge only a true gamer could grasp and respect.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, in Denmark, lies *Penny Arcade's* European counterpart, *Little Gamers*. Starting back in December of 2000, Christian Fundin began the *Little Gamers* web comic. Christian, along with Pontus Madsen, the artist behind the comic, have been releasing comics on a five day a week basis. Even though Christian and Mr. Madsen live half way around the world from the United States, they have a devoted readership here in the States and commonly bring up US politics and policies in their rants as well as their strips.

Both *Penny Arcade* and *Little Gamers* are three panel strips with a central focus on gaming and the occasional use of foul language, but that is where the similarities end. The artistic style, use of supporting characters, and the accompanying rants are three aspects of the comics that have very little in common even though the target audiences are the same.

Penny Arcade follows the generic “web comic” style of comic strips, while *Little Gamers* is set up to mimic the standard “newspaper comic” style. The “web comic” style includes a three panel strip with releases on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. By contrast, the “newspaper comic” style has releases five days a week, Monday through Friday, and also includes three panels per strip. *Penny Arcade*, like most web comics, has chosen to release their comic strips in full color. *Little Gamers*, on the other hand, takes the more typical newspaper approach and create (mostly) black and white strips. Tycho and Gabe hand draw their strips, scan them into their computer, and use software such as Adobe Photoshop to trace and color the comics before they are posted online.

According to the *Little Gamers* website, Mr. Madsen likes to use the Copy and Paste method to create strips faster by re-using past images to develop new scenes. Even the scripts in the two comics take different paths. *Penny Arcade* attempts to use proper grammar in their story lines, while *Little Gamers* take the more Net-centric approach, using abbreviations and “l33t-speak” (pronounced “leet,” short for elite) on a continuous basis.

Penny Arcade uses their supporting characters in standalone strips, while *Little Gamers* incorporates their supporting characters into strips along side the major players. The supporting characters in *Penny Arcade* range greatly, from friends of Tycho and Gabe to characters in video games to the occasional appearance of guest artists. When the supporting characters are actual characters in video games, the *Penny Arcade* comic is used to illustrate some aspect of the game, and generally do not involve any outside commentary from Tycho and Gabe. The supporting characters in *Little Gamers* vary a little from those of *Penny Arcade*. *Little Gamers* supporting cast is made up with friends and roommates of Christian and Mr. Madsen, their horde of cute ninjas, and again, the occasional appearance of guest artists. None of these supporting characters in *Little Gamers* exist entirely on their own. Any *Little Gamers* strip with supporting characters references or includes the main characters, Christian or Mr. Madsen.

The *Penny Arcade* rants are used as an explanation to their comic strips by setting the stage and explaining the scenario, while *Little Gamers* rants are used to push a political agenda and update the reader on what is going on behind the scenes. This difference can be seen in the recent months with the Presidential election just behind us. *Little Gamers* rants have had a political overture to them regarding the philosophies of

George W. Bush and John Kerry. These political opinions have also found way into their strips, with at least on comic a week for the past couple months related to the election at hand. The *Little Gamers* staff is also filled with a few designated ranters. These ranters focus on the latest technology and entertainment related news and avoid the political satire that can arise from Mr. Madsen. *Penny Arcade*, on the other hand, rarely involves the political realm in their strips and rants. The *Penny Arcade* rants focus on the gaming industry and the current projects being sponsored by Tycho and Gabe. During the past few months, while *Little Gamers* have been bringing up the election, *Penny Arcade* has spent about the same amount of time getting the news of Child's Play out. Child's Play is a fund set up to help out Children's Hospitals. Last year, *Penny Arcade* and the gaming community rose over \$250,000 in cash and toys to sponsor the Seattle Children's Hospital, and this year, it has expanded to cover an additional four hospitals. When not focusing on their community service work, the *Penny Arcade* rants are used to explain the current comic. Since not everyone is works in the gaming industry or knows everything about it, Tycho and Gabe explain what is happening in the gaming world that led to the inspiration and creation of the comic.

Having a web based audience and gaming topic does not mean all comics found on the Internet are the same. *Penny Arcade* and *Little Gamers* are two of the more popular comics on the Internet that focus on the gaming community. While these two comics are often related, they are by no means the same. The readers of these two comics will come away from the strip with a different aspect on the gaming community.

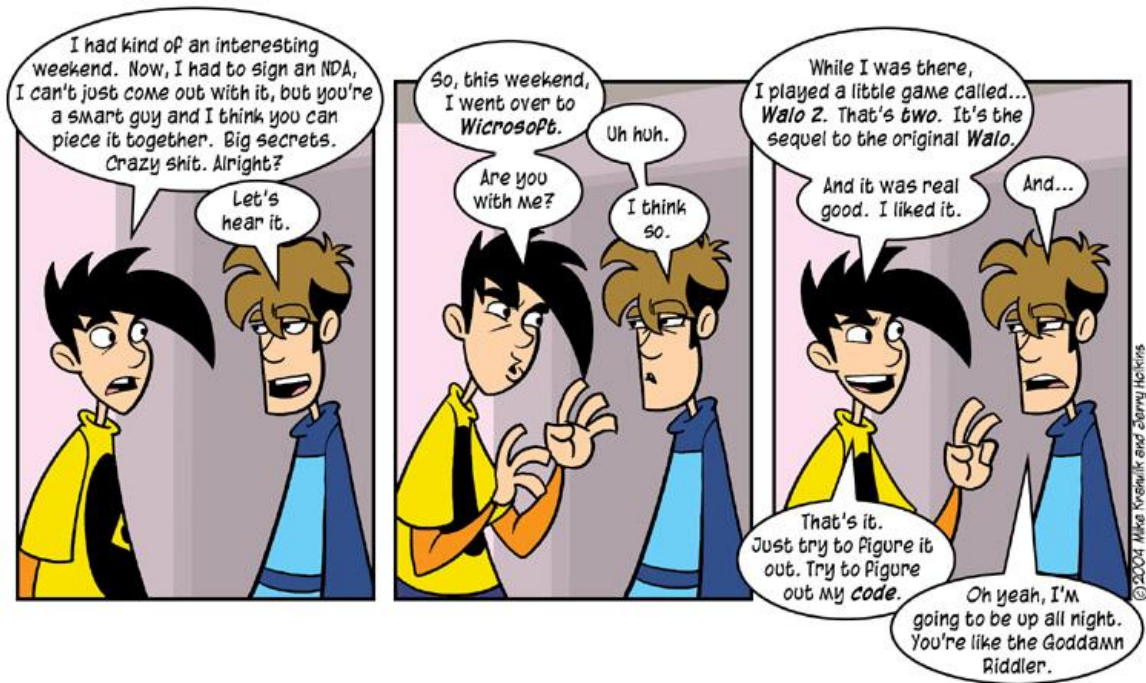


Figure 1: Penny Arcade: High Encryption (10-18-2004)

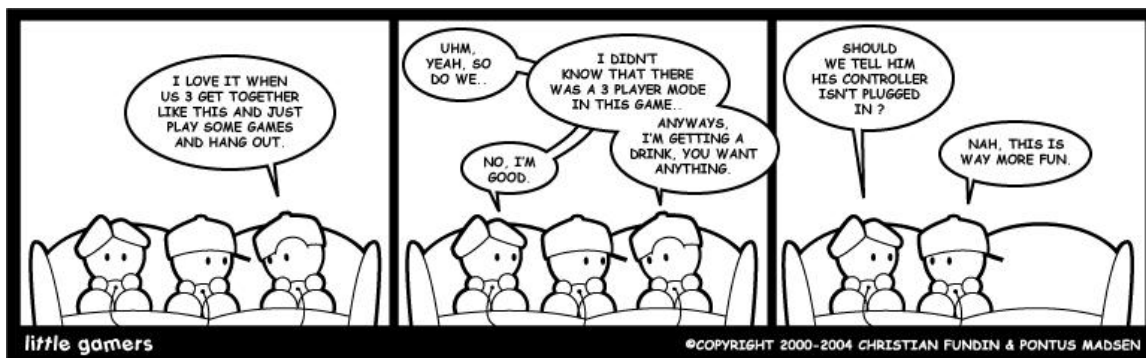


Figure 2: Little Gamers: 3 Player Love (10-18-2004)