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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.

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***

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 their 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.

*Penny Arcade* follows the generic “web comic” style of comic strips. The “web comic” style includes a three panel strip with releases on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. *Penny Arcade*, like most web comics, has chosen to release their comic strips in full color and with proper grammar. 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.

The supporting characters in *Penny Arcade* are used along with the main characters or by themselves in standalone strips. 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 ranting in *Penny Arcade* is used to explain the comic strip by setting the stage and providing background information about the scenario. The *Penny Arcade* rants focus on the gaming industry and the current projects being sponsored by Tycho and Gabe.

*Penny Arcade* rarely involves the political realm in their strips and rants. During the past few months, with the election underway, *Penny Arcade* has used their rants to get the news of Child's Play out to the public instead of falling behind a candidate. Child's Play is a fund set up to help out Children's Hospitals and is one of the charity events sponsored by *Penny Arcade*. 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 Tycho and Gabe are not focusing on their community service work, their rants are used to explain the current comic. Since not everyone 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.

### ***Little Gamers***

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.

*Little Gamers* is set up to mimic the standard "newspaper comic" style. The "newspaper comic" style has strip releases five days a week, Monday through Friday, and also includes three panels per strip. *Little Gamers* takes the more typical newspaper

approach and create (mostly) black and white strips. According to the *Little Gamers* website, the comic is created by Mr. Madsen, who likes to use the Copy and Paste method to create strips faster by re-using past images to develop new scenes. *Little Gamers* also takes the more Net-centric approach by using abbreviations and “133t-speak” (pronounced “leet,” short for elite) on a continuous basis to define the storyline.

The supporting characters in *Little Gamers* are placed into the strips along side the major players. The supporting characters are made up with friends and roommates of Christian and Mr. Madsen (founders of *Little Gamers*), their horde of cute ninjas, and the occasional appearance of guest artists. None of these supporting characters in *Little Gamers* can exist entirely on their own. Any *Little Gamers* strip with supporting characters must, by design of the artists, reference or include one of the main characters: Christian or Mr. Madsen.

The *Little Gamers* rants are used to push a political agenda and update the reader on what is going on behind the scenes. This 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.

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.

**Examples of the two web comics:**

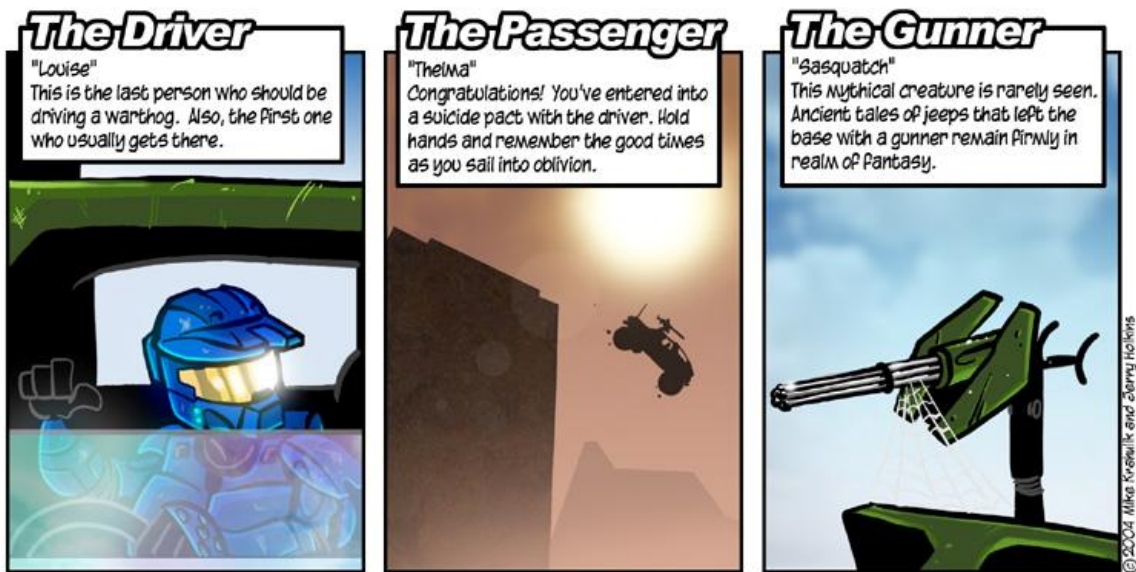


Figure 1: Penny Arcade: The Laws (11-10-2004)



Figure 2: Little Gamers: Halo 2 and Killzone (11-08-2004)