

VOL. 2 • JAN 2025

MAGFEST 
 POWER PRESENTS

THE **OFFICIAL**
BEHIND THE SCENES
EXPERIENCE



SUPER
MAGFEST 
2025



AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE MUSIC, GAMING, AND MORE FROM MAGFEST 2025!



YOUR FUTURE IN TRASH

From: Dr. Garbotnik, OVO (Overseer of Vital Operations)
To: Aspiring Henchpeople

Attention All Ambitious Individuals Seeking Mediocre Glory:

Garbotnik Industries is expanding, and I—Dr. Garbotnik, the Mastermind of Progress—am seeking eager Junior Henchpeople to support my groundbreaking (and occasionally ground-shattering) work.

Garbotnik Industries is the world's leading sanitation corporation, but we could be leading-er. We are searching for ambitious new employees, contractors, sub-contractors, sub-sub-contractors, and adjuncts. Do you have what it takes to join Garbotnik Industries?

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Explore MAGFest to collect six unique stamps to unlock your
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Completing it grants you an exclusive digital reward made by Garbotnik Industries employees. Only those who prove themselves worthy will be granted the opportunity to join my empire.



Yours in innovation,
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Overseer of Vital Operations (OVO)
Executive Governing Garbageperson (EGG)
Director, TRaSHCo
☎ 867-5309 | ✉ Dr.Garbotnik@magfest.org



FOREWORD

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FROSTED KING

You're here — welcome! Thank you so much for supporting Super MAGFest 2025. Our year-round events would be nothing without your support, engagement, and, most importantly, community. Whether this is your first year experiencing the magic, you're a lumberjack with lore circa 2002, or anything in between, we are thrilled to have you with us at arguably the best music and gaming festival in the world.

As years have come and gone, MAGFest has grown not just in attendance, but in content and geographical reach, too. New content is added and evolves year after year, largely spearheaded by volunteers who are driven to produce content they're passionate about. This year you will find an entirely new performance stage, the XP Stage, to spotlight up-and-coming artists. Every year we also host hundreds of independent developers through our Indie Arcade, Indie Videogame Showcase (MIVS), and Indie Tabletop Showcase (MITS), all of which you can preview in this MAG'zine!

There is so much content for us to share that we couldn't fit it all into a single 4-day event. Our summer camp staple, MAGStock, combines everything you used to love about summer camp with our MAGFest brand of music, gaming, and nerd culture. For a totally tubular California vibe, MAGWest is the chilliest and illest event on the Best Coast*. And, at long last, the triumphant return of MAGLabs - an environment where you can share in the art of creation beside other creators of all levels and still feel comfortable letting yourself be new at something. Let's not forget about MAGPowered events such as BitGen and The Smithsonian American Art Museum's Annual Arcade!

The MAGFest Test Kitchen isn't done experimenting yet. We have folks testing out streaming, Ham Radio, warehouse fire sales, and even online "help us get rid of this merch from 2019" sales. If there's something you'd love to see us try out, tell us about it! Better yet, if there's something you'd love to lead the charge on, tell us about it!

We sincerely thank you again for your continued support and hope you enjoy this year's Super MAGFest.

Hearts and Sprinkles,

-King Donut**

President, CEO, Chairman of the Board,
King of MAGFest



*West Coast is the Best Coast

**Ghostwritten by King Donut on behalf of our Employees, Board of Directors, Chair & Division Teams, and many other people who truly appreciate your love and support.

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'D LOVE TO SEE?

TELL US ABOUT IT!



MEET THE EDITORS

DEDICATED TO DOCUMENTING THE POWER OF MAGFEST



JFrye (aka Swadgeman)

Volunteer Since: Super 2022

Roles include: Photographer, Swadgeman, Producer for Swadgeman magTV commercial(s), #magham-ops President, MAGFest Power MAG'zine Editor, MAGFest Discord Admin, Communication Division Co-Head

Where do you spend most of your time at Super MAGFest? Main Stage in the photo pit.

All-Time favorite game: Xenogears

Most recent game: Satisfactory

Pets: 2 cats (Jupiter and The Doctor), 1 dog (Elehayym Van Houten)



Greg Lord

Volunteer since: Super 2021-2022

Roles include: Theme Team Artist/Graphic Designer/3D Modeler, Swadge Team, MAGFest Power Designer/Editor, Former VRChat Dept Head, Panelist (Blender, VRChat)

Where do you spend most of your time at Super MAGFest? Concerts, wandering, late-night arcade, jumpods

All-Time favorite game: Final Fantasy VI

Most recent game: The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom

Pets: 2 cats: Smores and Poe (unrelated to this year's "Poe the Opossum," but she does run *Poe's Nightclub* in VRChat!)



Emily Anthony

Volunteer since: Super 2023

Roles include: Swadge Department Head, Arcade Helpdesk, Makerspace Teacher, MAGFest 21+ Moderator

Where do you spend most of your time at Super MAGFest? Makerspace or at the gazebo cosplaying

All-Time favorite game: Twilight Princess

Most recent game: Zelda Echoes of Wisdom



Kaitie Lawson

Volunteer since: Super 2022

Roles include: Theme Team Artist, Registration Manager, Swadge Team

Where do you spend most of your time at Super MAGFest? Indie Arcade, Makerspace, Concerts, or the Gazebo cosplaying as Aerith

All-Time Favorite Game(s): Journey & Final Fantasy VII (Don't make me choose!)

Most Recent Game: Raji: An Ancient Epic

MAGFest Recommendation: You should totally visit the Arcade at least once from 1:00 am - 5:00 am. It's like the Twilight Zone and you can play anything you want!



ThatGamerGrl

Volunteer since: Super 2019

Roles include: Guest Department Head, Theme Team Core Artist, Social Media Team, SAFE Committee, MAGStock Merch Department Head

Where do you spend most of your time? Main Concerts, Makerspace, TTRPG Freeplay & Panels

All-time favorite game(s): FF7 & Mass Effect

Most recent game: Stardew Valley & Baldur's Gate 3

Pet: Ripley (dog) Puck & Tali'Zorah (cats)



Heather "Heathstaa" Hamilton

Volunteer since: Super 2022

Roles include: Panels Helpdesk and room attendant, Makerspace assistant, Registration, Swadge team

Where do you spend most of your time at Super MAGFest? Makerspace, BEMANI/ rhythm-action games

All-Time favorite game: Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo (with Sakura)

Most recent game: The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (need 7 more Korok seeds!)

MAGFest Recommendation: Makerspace! Hangout, do something old, learn something new!



Silviana Russo

Volunteer since: Stock 2023

Roles include: Stock ARG Department Head, D&D Team

Where do you spend most of your time at Super MAGFest? Indie Arcade

All-Time favorite game: Final Fantasy X

Most recent game: Urban Shadows TTRPG

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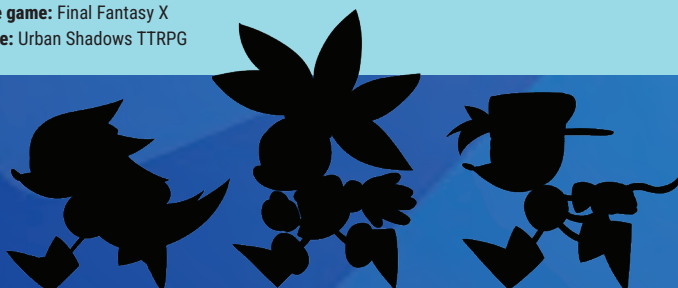
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ROTTEN FISH HEADS, OR
SLIMY BANANA PEELS

LIMITED TIME OFFER
WHILE SUPPLIES DECOMPOSE





OUR **MUSIC** SECTION puts the **M** in MAGFest, setting the stage for the stars, songs, software, and square waves that keep us all rocking out throughout the festival. Stay tuned for interviews, previews, essays, and more...!

MUSIC AND GAMING



The OneUps & MAGFest - Now & Forever. Photo: @filmerforhire

MAGFEST POWER EXCLUSIVE

I WAS THERE

MAGFEST I, X, XX, AND BEYOND

by Mustin




You do NOT meet up with anyone you've met online. It can be extremely dangerous. It **can** be. But sometimes, it'll be the most fun you'll ever have.

In the year 2000, the video game music arrangement "scene" grew some pretty strong legs. David "djpretzel" Lloyd created the OverClocked ReMix website at the end of 1999 and it quickly found its audience with millennials who were nostalgic for a time of less responsibility. Not only was OC ReMix the most popular place to find free arrangements of video game music for your CD Burning pleasure, but a community grew out of the worldwide network of arrangers/contributors and fans coming together on the

site's message boards and IRC channels. It was only a matter of time before this community, and others like it, grew out of the Internet and into the real world.

I didn't know Joe Yamine before he and Sean Rider co-founded MAGFest, but I think he was just trying to put on a fun gaming convention for friends and for the region. But once me and the crew got wind of the upcoming, centrally-located east coast con, we were ready to go. MAGFest was bringing in the most famous video game music band - the Minibosses. I knew this was the right time to debut the project that me and the boys had been cooking since 2000. After a little back and forth with Joe, MAGFest

would be the debut of The OneUp Mushrooms (who were later renamed to just "The OneUps" by none other than Tommy Tallarico, but that's a story for a different time...).

 *We met former-Internet-strangers-now-friends in real life, and we made so many bonds - some of those bonds I still carry to this day. Friends of 22+ years. Just incredible."*



Left to Right: Mustin, David Embree, Nathan McLeod, Sean "Ailsean" Stone playing Final Fantasy VI music to close out the set. Photo: Carlito Reyes

I just somehow knew this was going to be a big deal for us. I flew out the core band members and I opted to drive with now-video game composer Dale North and his truck full of gear for the band, along with CDs to sell. It took us two days to drive from Arkansas to Roanoke, Virginia. Over the weekend, the total attendance was around 250 people. On the night of September 28, 2002, when The OneUps performed for the first time, that 250 felt like 250,000. I had imagined performing a show of live video game music to an enthusiastic audience since I was 13, but to actually do it in my early 20's was unreal. We played all styles of music from bossa nova, to rock, to flute and guitar duet, to furious funk. These video game music fans jammed through all of it and were super enthusiastic and respectful. And then everyone lost their minds when the Minibosses took the

stage - me in particular because I was worried that they were destroying our amps and drums (they did not - they just rock way harder than us). For everyone in attendance, it was a night to remember. We made fun of the Minibosses for being in their late 20's (define: "situational irony"), we met former-Internet-strangers-now-friends in real life, and we made so many bonds - some of those bonds I still carry to this day. Friends of 22+ years. Just incredible.

And that's why it was so special for us to come back in 2012 for the 10th anniversary of MAGFest. Not only was it an honor to be asked to return as a featured performer, but it was amazing to share the stage with so much talent and see how far the convention had come. Being on the bill with the likes of *Metroid Metal*, *The Megs*, and *Bit Brigade* - along with Final Fantasy composer himself Nobuo Uematsu's band *Earthbound Papas* - was unbelievable. I mean, I had always dreamed of meeting the composer of some of my favorite soundtracks, but I never imagined I would be standing right behind him in an elevator party.

I felt very respected. And very "seen." Over 10 years of this community and all of the things I had done, and the help I had worked hard to provide for people - it was spectacular. Not only did we have a main stage performance where we dazzled the crowd with new material, but we also had a full second stage show in which we took a trip through time by playing old fan favorites, including music we performed at the first MAGFest, like *Final Fantasy VII's* "Costa Del Sol."

I know how lucky we are to have bonded as musicians and performed together for so long. September 28 of 2022 would be the 20th anniversary of that very first performance as a band at the very first MAGFest. And so when the opportunity arose for *The OneUps* to make their debut onto vinyl - why not make it a 20 year retrospective? That's exactly what we did. And wouldn't you know it - we were asked to perform at Super MAGFest 2023 - the 20th anniversary of the con.



SCAN: Elevator Party!



Performers Left to Right: Tim Yarbrough, Kunal Majmudar, Mustin, William Reyes pumping out intergalactic funk.
Photo: Chris Serani

19,000 people. Nineteen-thousand people is a long way from 250. The time of year changed, the venue changed, the management changed, and some of the focus changed - but the people still demand and adore live video game music. I love being able to go to MAGFest after 20 years and see that *The Lumberjacks* from MAG 1 are still alive and kicking after attending each year. The kids that used to be in the corner of the Jamspace with their Game Boy Micros and Advance SPs are now there with their Switches and Steam Decks. So many of the incredible performers from the weekend are using their time off-stage to stand in the back of the room to cheer on their friends. And musical artists from all worlds are coming together to perform their arrangements and/or compositions made via manipulations of software/hardware for the entertainment and education of the masses.

MAGFest will always be special to me. I can't always go, but it's the place where my band was born, where I met so many of my friends, and where I know I can be myself - be it on stage or just walking around. I very much believe it takes vulnerability to sit and work on making music - a safe space



I very much believe it takes vulnerability to sit and work on making music - a safe space to not worry about being judged on your ideas or how many tries it takes for you to get it right."

to not worry about being judged on your ideas or how many tries it takes for you to get it right. I have the privilege of being able to be present and vulnerable at MAGFest. I'll always answer the call when asked to perform. But if it doesn't happen soon, then I hope to see you at the 30th.

[colossusroar.wav]



Obligatory shot with the crowd post-performance. Photo: @filmerforhire



Diwa de Leon performs at Super MAGFest 2023

THE MUSIC OF MAGFEST FROM STRING PLAYER GAMER TO LIONMIGHT

Have you ever wondered how your favorite performers got into performing video game music? Our long time friend, Diwa de Leon, who you may know as String Player Gamer, is sharing his personal journey in a video essay! (Watch the full video by scanning the QR code on Page 7.) Diwa was kind enough to share a preview, and answer a few questions around the essay and his rebranding to Lionmight.

Earlier this year you announced your rebrand from String Player Gamer to Lionmight. What are your aspirations under the new moniker that previously seemed unrealistic under SPG?

It all boils down to three dilemmas — conquering stubbornness, licensing issues, and feeling boxed in. I created a self-imposed box of only playing video game music - a stubborn decision, remnants of my teenage years. Over time, however, I opened up to other kinds of media. I fell in love with Studio Ghibli music, and lots of other anime soundtracks.

I wanted to make my own arrangements, but being known as “String Player Gamer” is a bit awkward if I plan to release an anime album. I had deliberated making additional brands to cover different genres. I went back and forth over five years, but ultimately decided to make one all-encompassing name with no genre-lock. Inspired by single-name artists like Madonna and Sting, The name “Lionmight” is a poetic translation of my real name, Diwa de Leon. I realized I had been using the name as a moniker in online gaming since 2014 so I went with that. It’s the story of wanting to break free from the limitation I stubbornly set for myself.

Of course I had to deal with licensing issues with 500+ albums and singles released under “String Player Gamer”, those had to be rereleased eventually under the new name. It was crippling, and made me hold off on the rebrand for nearly

five years. Until I finally found a team of experts who know how to fix this issue professionally.

After 20 years of being almost exclusively a VGM-artist, I started to feel really boxed-in, a “prison” of





my own doing. But now, with this rebrand, I feel free. Liberated. With this new found freedom, I am excited to be venturing into new musical territories, especially a grand return to writing original music meant for albums, instead of my usual background music film scores.

In the "retirement" video, you mentioned expanding into additional genres - not being limited to just gaming. Are you also considering expansion beyond strings? Is there a hidden keys, woodwind, or brass player within Lionmight?

I'm very passionate about strings, especially the violin, so I chose to focus on this. But I'm not opposed to including guest artists who specialize in keys, brass, and woodwinds. The sky's the limit!

What can viewers expect from the video essay?

I talk about my own experience abandoning a career in the Philippines as a film composer, moving to a new country, and re-establishing a name for myself as an artist and composer. There is no VGM industry in the Philippines, but also no real-life reference that this risk would pay off. After attending my first MAGFest in 2016, I knew I found my home - found my people. The moment I got back home after MAGFest 2016, I spent the next two years planning the migration. This essay reflects on why and how I did that - how the economic situation in the Philippines would not allow that, but that opportunity was available in

the US. There are lots of global facts and situations, and MAGFest is one of those pivotal moments.

You're here and well established now; how do you feel the journey played out along the way?

There were ups and downs, but I'd rather be dealing with the downs in my current life than anywhere else. I'm living the life that I want for myself. I am constantly writing and playing music without having to worry about putting food on the table, and that's all I really wanted. Anything more than that, such as getting cool composition projects, or epic live gigs, are a bonus.

It's obvious that you cherish both Music and Gaming; is there an "And" that draws your attention at MAGFest?

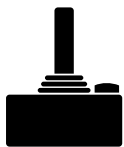
It's the parties, the hangouts, the in-betweens. Friends, stories, memes. Unorganized and unscripted happenings, getting kicked out of rooms you aren't supposed to be in. Rebellious moments you wouldn't find elsewhere.





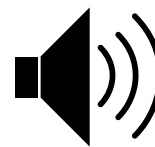
(2023) Diwa de Leon rebrands to artist name "Lionmight", formerly String Player Gamer

MAGFEST POWER EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW



THE DREAMER'S JOURNEY

VIDEO GAME MUSIC ACROSS BORDERS



by Diwa "Lionmight" de Leon

Coming back to Manila for the first time in five years felt like flipping through an old photo album. Each scene reminded me of the comforts of home—the sounds, the sights, the pace of life. But, like an old photo album, it no longer told the whole story. I left for the U.S. in 2017, chasing a career in video game music. That journey, shaped by both my roots and my new opportunities, has raised a question I often reflect on: What kind of person has the audacity to uproot their entire life just for video game music?

Is it simply about playing the right games or hearing the right melodies? Or does it run deeper? Growing up in the Philippines, where consoles were often considered a luxury, my experience with video game music was shaped by unique circumstances that stand in stark contrast to those I encounter in the U.S. today.

When I was seven, the Family Computer—our version of the NES—introduced many Filipino kids to the iconic sounds of Super Mario Bros., Mega Man, and Contra. Later, the PlayStation era made

games like Final Fantasy VII and Resident Evil accessible through piracy, which fueled gaming's popularity in the Philippines. By 2003, Ragnarok Online swept the nation, sparking an MMO craze that defined a generation. Its shared virtual worlds and unforgettable soundtrack created a cultural moment. For many, myself included, songs like Prontera's theme remain etched in memory as a symbol of those golden days.

I threw myself into that world wholeheartedly—organizing guild meet-ups, leading a 400-member guild, and making lifelong friends. Even when the MMO craze faded, Ragnarok Online's music lived on as a timeless echo of that era.

However, as gaming technology advanced, consoles like the PlayStation 3, 4, and 5 became increasingly out of reach for the average Filipino. While console gaming flourished in other parts of the world, it became less accessible in the Philippines, where mobile gaming grew to dominate the scene. With 43 million active gamers in the Philippines as of 2024, nearly half of the population plays games,



The Nintendo Family Computer, released 1986

but most of them engage with free-to-play mobile platforms. In contrast, the U.S. boasts 190.6 million active gamers, roughly 61% of its population, with a significantly higher proportion able to access premium consoles and their accompanying musical legacies.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., video game music flourished not just in games but as a cultural phenomenon in its own right. MAGFest, one of the conventions dedicated to video game music, was a pivotal moment in my journey. Attending for the

first time in 2016, I realized this was where I should be—where the Western video game industry's heart beats.

I remember one particular moment that solidified this realization. It was my first time attending MAGFest, and someone came up to me, recognizing me from my YouTube videos. That person thanked me for the music I'd created, and for a moment, I felt like a celebrity. I appreciated it, celebrated it, and thought, This is it. This is where I'm meant to be—I felt that I belonged. I found my people.

Reflecting on these differences brings me back to my own journey. Leaving the Philippines for the U.S. was one of the hardest decisions I've ever made. My love for video game music was nurtured in Manila, but pursuing a career in it required infrastructure, community, and industry connections that didn't exist back home—and still don't.

Being back in Manila reminded me of everything I love about the Philippines: the people, the culture, the sense of home. But it also highlighted the barriers I'd face if I'd stayed. In the U.S., I'm part of a thriving network of creators who celebrate video game music as serious art. It fills concert halls, inspires deep

artistic expression, and sustains a global community.

Since moving, I've landed record deals, contributed to franchises like Apex Legends, and achieved financial independence doing what I love. The media scoring world even came knocking again in a big way in the form of an upcoming TV project with Warner Brothers. My trip home confirmed what I've always felt: for now, the U.S. is where I can live this dream.

So, what kind of person has the audacity to dream so big that they abandon 37 years of life, a career, and everything they've built—just for video game music?

A dreamer. But not just any dreamer. One with skills, a global network of like-minded friends, and a relentless thirst to prove one's self. It's the belief that these melodies—crafted to bring pixels to life—can spark universal connection. It's about recognizing the power of this art form, the joy it brings to fans worldwide, and the communities that form around it. Whether that connection begins in a smoky Manila internet café or at a convention like MAGFest, it's a shared love that transcends borders.



(2016) Pictured: a group of proud VGM artists that just got kicked out of a jam room during MAGFest 2016

I am that dreamer.

For me, the journey from the Philippines to the U.S. isn't just about becoming a fan—it's about carrying the music with me, sharing its magic, and keeping the dream alive. It's all part of the power of video game music.



CITATIONS

<https://www.fwd.com.ph/blog/passion/the-rise-of-online-gaming-in-the-philippines/>

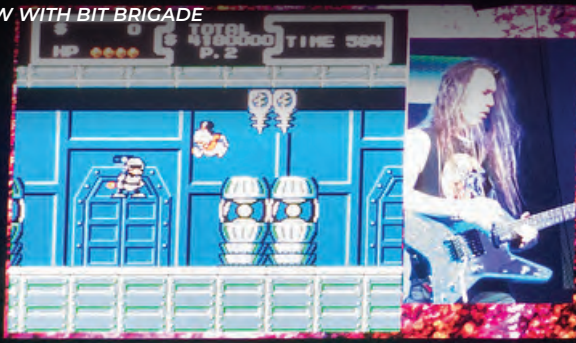
<https://www.theesa.com/resources/essential-facts-about-the-us-video-game-industry/2024-data/>



(2019) Pictured: a dreamer. Photo by Jason Kutchma



Scan this code to watch the full video essay!



WHAT MAKES A BIT BRIGADE SHOW EXTRA SPECIAL IS *the blending of live gameplay and live soundtrack performance in each of their shows. The band plays the game's soundtrack live as their "lead singer" Noah speedruns the game.*

Bit Brigade rocks the crowd to the Ducktales moon and back at Super MAGFest 2024

THE MUSIC OF MAGFEST BEHIND THE SCENES WITH BIT BRIGADE

We recently caught up with Bit Brigade during their 2024 tour featuring their new sets playing F-Zero and Super Mario World. If this is already too much of a spoiler for you, please stop reading this article until after Bit Brigade's show Saturday night. There will be more spoilers to come...

What are the biggest factors in choosing a title to play, and what specifically led you to F-Zero and Super Mario World?

In order for us to consider a game, it has to meet four requirements. It has to be completable with safe and repeatable strategies in a certain amount of time, the tunes have to be good and numerous, it has to be well known, and it has to be fun to watch. As for what led to SMW, we have been trying to build an interesting Mario run for years, but it never really worked out until recently. All three NES Mario games had gameplay obstacles that worked against the performance, such as being too short or having too many auto scrollers; but SMW is so big and varied that it allowed us to create a unique run that could incorporate songs from many different Mario games. F-Zero just fell into place with it being a SNES launch title alongside SMW and having such great music.

Are you more apt to choose a game Noah is already proficient at, or is it all about the best musical performance regardless of his baseline?

It's about what makes a good show. Most of these games Noah has played before in the past, but Noah doesn't have a speedrun built before we start considering what to play next. We talk about games that would be fun, then Noah tries it out and sees if he would be comfortable doing it every night for weeks on end for a tour.

You make a point every show that Noah's instrument is the controller. What does "band practice" look like?

When it comes to learning the games in the beginning, we do our individual homework first. Then we all show up as a band, Noah boots up the console, and we play along to his playthrough every single time. Everyone is always there and it's just Noah playing games while we play music to the game.

Super Mario World is a little different from other titles; there's more freedom to pick and choose which levels to play or skip. What was your process for choosing the specific path to make the SMW set just right?

With certain games you go from A to B. This definitely has a lot of options. The goal was to show a majority of the map within an hour. Noah ended up changing the run quite a few times for multiple different reasons. We have to consider if stages



Bit Brigade's Fall 2024 Tour - Richmond, VA. (Photo Credit: Moments of Zen Photography)



Left to right: Noah (Player One), Taylor (Guitar), Mike (Drums), Luke (Bass), Bryant (Guitar)

are long enough to fit certain songs; or maybe the stage is too long and we need to make a medley. We're looking at it from both sides at the same time - what gameplay is going to be fun to watch, and how will the music fit. Both will change to benefit the other to make the show as good as it can possibly be.

Do you really play 66 tracks during the SMW set?!

For now... It's going to be 67 by the time we play MAGFest. There's a little fudging the numbers because when we wrote that list for our Discord, we included every single song that's referenced. There's medleys and a movement where we do three versions of the same song that we count as three songs being played.

Obviously those aren't all exclusively from SMW; I heard tracks from multiple titles, including a personal favorite, Mario Paint. Of all the adjacent titles, which were your favorites to include?

[Luke:] My favorite track compositionally is the Castle Theme from New Super Mario Bros. Wii that we use for Wendy's Castle. That one is such a cool song, and I really like the way it sounds with us playing it. My favorite track in general might be the Wario's Castle music from Super Mario Land 2. Going through the music for SML2, I didn't care for much of it; but when I got to the Wario's Castle music, I'm like "what is this?! This is incredible!" And it's kind of silly because that's probably the most boring bassline I have for the entire set. It's really just one note in the same rhythm over and over and over again. Everything going on around me is so sick, so I get to sit back playing my stupid little bassline and go, "yeah, I like this one!", every time we get to that song.

Circling back to F-Zero, the audience is sure to catch something very custom that they wouldn't otherwise see if playing on an original cartridge.

Are there any easter eggs in your ROM hacks you're willing to share?

Yeah, most of them are there to be seen. Not every game has them, but we want to work the word "shit" into the game somewhere, if we can. F-Zero has where instead of the "POWER DOWN" when your energy gets really low, it now says "OH SHIT". Super Mario World has, I think, two different dialogue boxes with "shit" jammed in there. So keep your eyes peeled for those.

Speaking of ROM hacking, is there a secret 6th member responsible for that work, do you have an army of volunteers, or is that also in the job description of every band member?

None of us are capable of doing that level of program hacking. We definitely have help. The secret 6th member was our friend Ryan 8-bit. He's done to date I believe every single one of our NES ROM hacks. Now that we've picked up Super Nintendo stuff, we have a couple other friends of ours who have jumped on. We have like three or four guys helping out. Andy has done a lot of custom stuff, like the splash screens that go up before we play. We've gotten some help from JMR and Dom that have helped suss things out for future titles. Dom did the majority of the work for Super Mario World and all of F-Zero. He made it so we have 6 races instead of 5 in our custom Bit Brigade league so we can play all the songs we want to play. So at this point it's like a small army. It's more of a brigade.

How often are in-game mistakes real versus staged?

We discussed staging mistakes a little bit in the past, and we felt like it would seem forced. So the philosophy is that Noah should do as good a job as he possibly can, and really look like a badass getting through the game consistently night after night in front of all these people. When he does make a mistake it always makes the show better, because it humanizes him, it increases the sense of tension in the room, and it makes everyone pay that much more attention. The goal is no mistakes, but if a mistake happens, that's great most of the time. It proves that it's real, that we're up there playing the music to a guy playing the game. There's no pre-recorded anything. The stakes are all very high every time we get on stage.

Last question - what does the future hold for Bit Brigade?

We do know the next game or two that we'll be performing, but we're not ready to share yet. Work has already been done on both of those. We're not necessarily finished with the NES yet, but Super Nintendo is probably going to be our home base for a while. We did NES for the better part of 20 years, so we're happy to be on a new system with new visuals and tunes. We know the next games we're gonna play, and everyone's gonna enjoy them all. They're very much requested and sought-after titles. ;)



A TEN VIDEO GAME MUSIC ARRANGEMENTS YOU SHOULD HEAR LIST

by Mustin



SCAN: Mustin's Playlist!

It's no secret that I love video game music. Well, I just love music in general. I love music from games I haven't even played (I don't know what "Uncharted Waters: New Horizons" is, but I know that Yoko Kanno's "Mast In the Mist" music is a masterpiece). With nearly 25 years clocked in the world of video game music arrangements, I've had an impossible number of tracks come across my desk. For me, some certainly stand out above others. I don't like using the word "favorite" because what I like most changes by the day and by my mood. But here are ten video game music arrangements that I absolutely want to share with you, along with a nice YouTube playlist of a bunch of arrangements that I enjoy and that you can jam along with from this QR code.

METROID METAL

METROID PRIME - PRIME THEME

Seeing Metroid Metal live for the first time at MAGFest 7 in 2009 was a religious experience. It was the first time I felt the two mediums of arrangement and performance come together to transcend the original intention of the original art. I believe this piece well-represents the intentions of Metroid Metal and pays a worthy tribute to our favorite bounty hunter.



JAMES LANDINO

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST - HYRULE CASTLE (COURAGE)

The first time I heard this piece I couldn't stop listening to it. It was seriously on repeat for the rest of the day and most of the week. This is my kind of arrangement. Incredible chord substitutions, excellent use of original sounds, the use of silence, and doing weird stuff like putting a live cello into EDM. Every time I've seen Landino I've made a fool of myself as he is one of the only people around whom I am starstruck.



PASQ242

FINAL FANTASY - PRELUDE (REFRACTIVE)

This one always gets me. It's not super high quality in terms of sample rate/sound quality, but I always feel the weight of the emotion in the track. I feel like it can evoke nostalgia for a game you've never even played. Excellent pacing and layering- the bass doesn't even come in until the two minute mark. Never found out much about Pasq242 but this arrangement lives on deep inside my heart.



RETRO REMIX REVUE

SUPER MARIO RPG - SAD SONG/FOREST MAZE

RRR seemingly came out of nowhere with back-to-back album releases of incredibly tasteful arrangements and astounding production quality. Blaine McGurty's arrangement and piano performance ooze emotion, giving sincerity to this tragic theme used as tongue-in-cheek comic relief in the game. Pensive and poignant. And the latter half is just a perfect "cover" for fans of the original mystical mushroom march.





5

MEGAN MCDUFFEE BANJO-KAZOOIE - SOUL TAKER

This one hit me from left field. It's rare that a VGM arrangement breaks out of the dismissive "instrumental background music" label. But here, video game composer McDuffee took freaking Banjo-Kazooie of all things and turned it into a dark electropop revelation that belongs on every Halloween playlist. Magnificent execution, and her lyrics and vocal performance are excellent, without *witch* this wouldn't work!



JAKE KAUFMAN FINAL FANTASY VI - THE IMPRESARIO

A truly magnum opus in the world of VGM arrangements. What if Queen performed the opera from Final Fantasy VI? Game composer Kaufman has always pushed the envelope with ambitious arrangements, but something about teaming with Tommy Pedrini (vocals) brought his best. Fans of the game, Queen, theater, musicals - I can't imagine anyone not getting on board for this one. I always loudly sing the words I know and squeeze out tears every time it comes on. Pure brilliance.



6

MAZEDUDE SUPER METROID - DIESELBRAINAGE

The original "Mother Brain" piece from this game terrified me as a young teen. It is so menacing. So turning it into a dark drum 'n bass track with its odd time signatures and disorienting sound effects is my kinda nightmare. Put on some headphones and blast this on a nightwalk to get your blood pumping. The sound design here is untouchable. Mazedude knows his stuff. And I always love a good music/song tag.



7

DONI DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2 - TRY HARD

This one is tough. Most of the tracks on this list are about the emotion that these arrangements pull out of me. This one might be the strongest of them all. This slow, but driving arrangement of "Stickerbush Symphony" just pulled at my soul. And then finding out more about the vocal samples used in the track - they are from the 1982 animated film "The Plague Dogs," and read up on that if you want to feel the added weight of this juggernaut. What a transcendence.



8



9

BLUE ISLAND CHRONO TRIGGER - SECRET OF THE FOREST

Couldn't be a top list without an arrangement of my favorite (okay, here I will concede on favorite) VGM of all time - "Secret of the Forest." I'm up to five or six arrangements of the tune that I've recorded myself, but this arrangement and performance by Reuben Gingrich and the gang puts the original composition into the R&B/Neo Soul context flawlessly. This is the kind of production quality I've always wanted to have but never quite pulled off. The Fender Rhodes solo here has permanent residence in my brain. Composer Mitsuda himself enthusiastically approved.



GENTLE LOVE SUPER METROID - MOTHER BRAIN

I know, it's kinda crazy to include another arrangement of a theme already on this list, but when you listen to this, you'll hear why it makes sense. The first time I heard this I laughed for a long time. Taking a horrifying final boss theme and turning it into an overly saccharine, cheeky walk through the park on a sunny Spring day? Yeah, that's my kinda arrangement. It just goes to show that these game themes have touched so many people in so many different ways and will continue to inspire generations to make their own art. Pick up your brush - what will you make today?



10

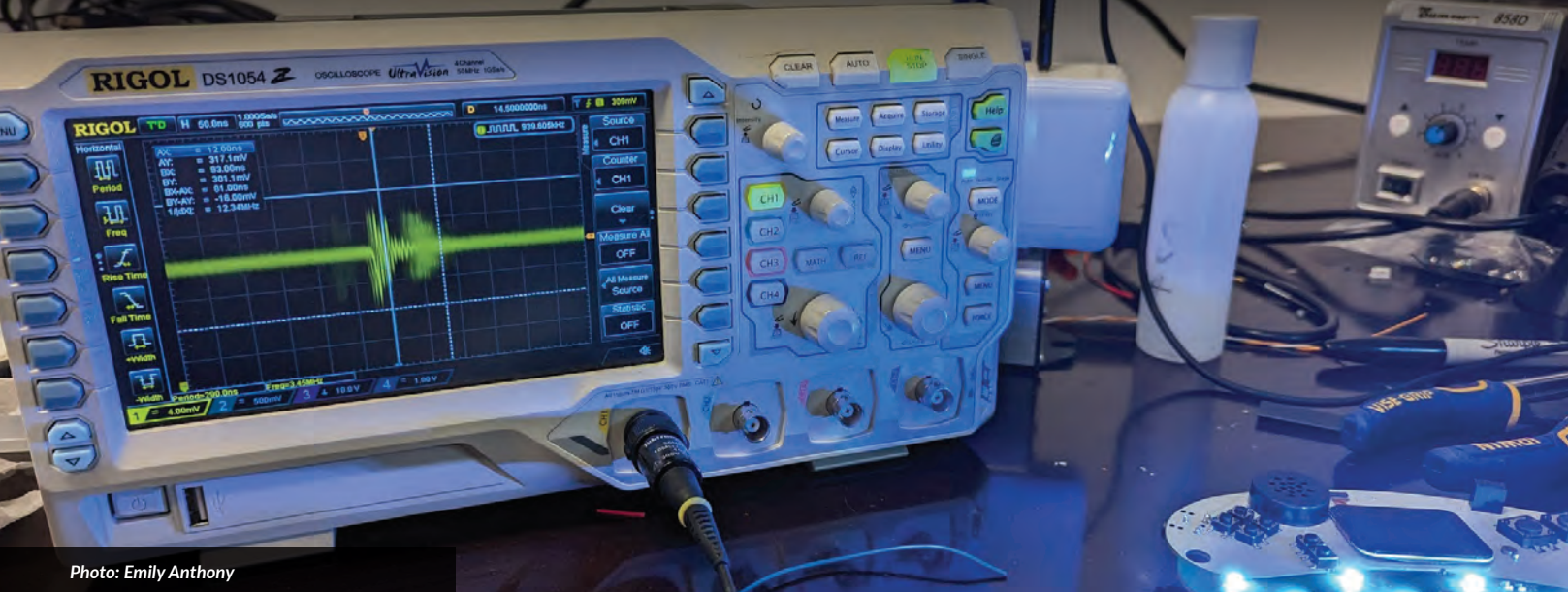
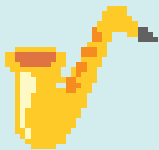


Photo: Emily Anthony

MEET THE DEVELOPERS

THE MUSIC OF THE SWADGE

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH DEVELOPERS DYLAN WHICHARD, JOE NEWMAN, ADAM FEINSTEIN, LIVINGSTON RAMPEY, AND EMILY ANTHONY



DYLAN

We've been using MIDIs as an intermediate format for composition of Swadge music and sound effects since we started putting buzzers on the Swadge for Super 2023. In the 2023 process, a MIDI file was created, and then it was translated into a custom format square wave to adapt it to Swadge. This was due to hardware limitations; the chip on the Swadge only generated square waves, and therefore all sounds had to be reformatted to match this shape and sent to the buzzer. This was great for the chiptune buzzers, but it had a lot of limitations. Adam and I wondered how we could improve that and use the functionality of MIDI, and support it directly.

EMILY

We demo new and niche features on the Swadge by creating what are called SAOs (simple add ons) that plug into the rectangular connectors on the Swadge. These interface with 6 pins to the ESP32 (the processor) and can perform a variety of functions. Adam designed an SAO with an audio chip, a headphone jack, volume control, and connectors to interface to enable audio development back in February right after

Super 2024. These SAOs are cheaper to produce than the Swadges, and can enable flexibility in development. We are able to plug these into gunships or squarewavebirds to do development on representative hardware, as the 2025 Swadge prototypes aren't created until August.



SAO in action. (Photo: Emily Anthony)

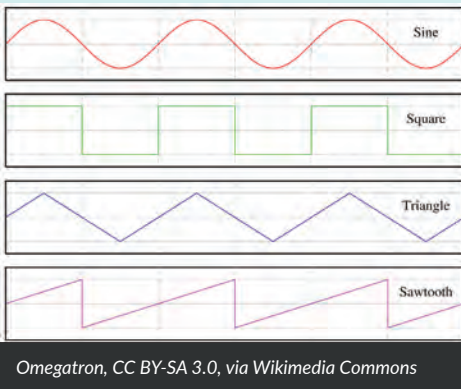
The SAOs whine like crazy. Turns out, it's really hard to deal with unintended noise from the processor, the LEDs, and everything else that is oscillating over data lines on the board. The speaker and amplifier lines are very sensitive and pick up everything. Noise mitigation is very challenging, and there's a level of "good enough" one must accept to trudge forward with the design. I logged lots of hours on my oscilloscope learning about signal processing and filtering techniques; filtering audible noise is

“Some solutions require precision, and apparently others require a sledgehammer.” - Emily

hard when the entire purpose of the circuit is to, well, create audible noise. Tamping out the “bad” noise and improving the “good” noise became a combination of careful routing of PCB traces on the Swadge, isolation techniques with planes and holes in specific areas of the board to disrupt noise traveling across it, and slapping the biggest, fattest capacitor I could find on the power line. Some solutions require precision, and apparently others require a sledgehammer. The Swadges for Super 2025 still sing a little when turned up to full volume, but it's much better than before.

DYLAN

If you have ever owned a keyboard with pre-programmed instruments, you'll recognize the sounds as they are sourced from a very old thing called General MIDI. That is why a keyboard may have had bird tweets, helicopter sounds, and other strange noises, as General MIDI defines 128 “instruments” to choose from.



Omeatron, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

The sounds for the instruments on the Swadge came from Adam. He created wave table sounds, which is the sound wave you'd see in Audacity when playing the sound. It's the same way you'd have a square wave, triangle wave, or other; it is just a specific shape that is unique to the instrument.

 I took the MAGFest logo and created a waveform for it; I think it sounds a lot like a harpsichord." - Dylan

Adam recorded a small clip of each instrument from MIDI, and we used those to make the tables of instruments for the Swadge. There's not a lot of difference between a grand piano/organ/electric piano in the Swadge due to the limitations of the speaker, so we combined them to shrink the list of instruments and percussion. Long-time fans of the Swadge may recall the King Donut Swadge from 2017 was a synthesizer; we carried over some drum sounds from that piece, so he lives on into 2025. Later, we expanded it to add the custom square wave and sine wave to create more distinct sounds. I took the MAGFest logo and created a waveform for it; I think it sounds a lot like a harpsichord. I also added a Colossus roar sample, though I am not sure if it made it in the end. I really like these custom waves because they remind me of old school keyboards and chiptune-y sounds.

ADAM

As the fearless leader of the Swadge team, it's a part of my role to encourage folks to use all the Swadge capabilities: the speakers, tilt controls, microphone, etc. We had this MIDI support that

we worked on plus the speaker, so there was no question that a Sequencer would make it to the Swadge. I am not a musician in any way, shape, or form, and I had it in my head that non-musicians cannot write instruments. I was idly internet-ing one night and searched "online sequencer." I played around with it for 5 minutes and thought "this isn't so bad." This isn't a complicated instrument; you just put cells on the grid and then it sweeps by and plays the sounds. It's basically Mario Paint. That night was weird - it just clicked - and I got moving on the Sequencer. It gets complex with time signatures, tempos, note length, and more, but the functional baseline is easy. I put it together in about a week, and I had folks like Dac and Joe playtest it.

One thing I got hung up on was which instruments out of 128 + percussion to put on the sequencer. As Dylan noted, some instruments sound very similar on the Swadge, unfortunately. I settled on selecting 6 instruments, and my next step was to pick them.

How does an untrained ear parse 128 instruments and percussion to pick 6? I had a couple of different approaches, but as a non-musician I was inclined to have someone (or something) else do it for me. I was doing all sorts of really wacko math to try to analytically suss out what are 6 interesting sounds, such as K-means clustering of the frequency spectrum of each instrument. The logic was that corresponding frequency clusters had similar sounds, and I could choose the most central of each cluster. It felt very much like a college project in a lot of ways; and, much like a true college project, I didn't have much to show for it by the end of it.

Notably, the clustering algorithms kept on saying that I should pick shakuhachi as an instrument.



Yuzu696, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

In the end, I chose very simple instruments:

- | | |
|----------|--------------------------|
| 1. Piano | 4. Triangle Wave (Synth) |
| 2. Brass | 5. Bass |
| 3. Sax | 6. Drums |

Regrettably, there are no Japanese bamboo flutes in the Sequencer.



DYLAN

What's cool about MIDI is that you can implement as little or as much as you want. It gave me the opportunity to try dynamic sound to play back the same MIDI file as the Swadge progressed (I played a lot of Smash Mouth over and over), where I was adding features to make it sound better at each step. One funny thing is that I don't have a music theory background, and I got very far into the project ignoring it. I got to the point where I need to understand a time signature and was like... what?? So I had to learn a little bit of music theory on the fly.

The result of the team's work was 24-voice polyphony shared between non-percussion channels, eight additional voices are reserved for percussion only, plus pitch bend and aftertouch. The Swadge's 8-bit audio synthesizer supports up to 16 MIDI channels, with channels 10 and 11 reserved for percussion. By default, channel 1 through 9 are configured to use the MAGFest instruments in order.


It was important to me to make it as easy as possible for composers to run the Swadge emulator and hook it into their systems. The 2025 Swadge does support MIDI over USB; I have a keyboard that I can plug into my computer, then plug the Swadge into the computer and jam out on it. Currently it does not support direct connection as you need a computer or adapter, but I'd like to see an SAO built someday to support it. Connection to Logic didn't pan out as well as I hoped, as support for MIDI in these programs is all over the place. I didn't know what musicians would want, so it was good for Joe to serve as the subject matter expert to translate what I offered and to make sure it was usable by the musicians.

JOE

I've been attending MAGFest since MAGFest 6, and I've known Adam for years. He would always just have cooler and cooler things that he engineered and would bring to MAGFest, so it was a natural progression for him to get involved with the Swadge. A few years ago, Adam got me involved doing a tune for Swadge Bros (Swadge 2023), which then led to me doing all the music for MAGTroid Pocket for the 2024 Swadge. It was one of those really, really cool, easy collaborations where everybody was firing on all cylinders. Naturally when the Swadge gets released, we're like, well, what would we like to improve upon? What would we like to iterate on, expand on for next year?



There was a near-unanimous desire on the Swadge team to invest in music with it being for the music *and* gaming festival, after all. The big innovation for the 2024 Swadge was going from one buzzer to two buzzers. The team asked: what if we actually had a real sound module on here and could do real chiptunes equivalent to a Game Boy or something, something that you would really want to listen to as a source of music? That's one of the biggest hardware leaps that we've made in switching to a full speaker with a headphone jack. It's actually more advanced now than a Game Boy would be in terms of its sound capability.

 *I wanted all the music I made on the Swadge to have at least some shared DNA."* - Joe

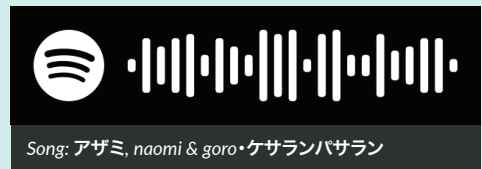
Last year when I was writing for MAGTroid Pocket, it was a specific game that had a specific arc, and most of my work was within that one game. So the challenge was being thematically consistent and writing level music that could tell a story. That was a really cool challenge to figure out how much diversity I could bring to the soundtrack, given that I only had two square waves to work with. The challenge this year was kind of the opposite: I have all of these musical tools at my disposal, but we don't have one single flagship game to use them on. Instead, I had lots of bite-sized games I'm working on simultaneously. The way I decided to tackle this is to kind of emulate the classic Nintendo approach of theme and variation.

If someone plays a modern Nintendo game like Yoshi's Crafted World, there's just one main theme and it's just reworked to fit into every different

genre and in every different instrumentation possible. That's sorta what's going on in all of the mainline Swadge games this year. Usually, composers will make a bunch of themes and then make a final medley of them for the credits; in my case, I worked backwards by making the credits theme first, then chopping up that theme into individual musical ideas, then challenging myself to make an entire song using each idea. I wanted all the music I made on the Swadge to have at least some shared musical DNA... and writing this way also helped overcome some writer's block. The theme and variation is probably so subtle that nobody will recognize it, but for the true music nerds, they can feel that there's at least some thematic consistency amongst the different games.

I still think the credits song is the song that I like the most because it's so full of ideas. It contains a lot of really subtle nods to my favorite Sega games. I have references to Super Monkey Ball (specifically, the song "Space Case" from Banana Blitz), the Racing Hero Sega arcade game, and Sonic 1. The bridge is a reference to a chiptune artist named Snail's House, from a piece called "Restart". I really enjoyed that song's chord progression and wanted to do something similar. The 2048 song uses the bridge of the credits as the melody, but the chords and harmonic structure are inspired by the song "azami" by Japanese group Naomi & Goro. And, of course, the melody contains what's affectionately known as a "34518" - it's a little in-joke among a certain group of VGM musicians.

The next big challenge was roping in more composers to support work on Swadge Hero. I reached out



to the folks on the Dwelling of Duels Discord (an online VGM cover competition and community) and people bit immediately. My good friend Logan "Biggoron" Tucker was an incredible help with the entire process, and even jumped in to do some killer tunes for Chowa Grove that really took advantage of Dylan's General MIDI instruments. The trickiest part about it was assembling the pipeline because there are a lot of really talented composers and arrangers, but not everybody is an expert in MIDI or in creating tunes that work within the limitations of the hardware.

SWADGE HERO SONGS	
SONG TITLE	CREDITED COMPOSER
Chowa Grove	Newmajoe
Hot Dog credits	Newmajoe
Chowa Racing	Logan "Biggoron" Tucker
Pango	Newmajoe
The Devil's Lullaby	Mel Decision
Starfest Magway	Ronin Op F
Wake Man Stage	jnWake
Ocean City 1989	Carrie Wood
The Dance of the Cremulons	Mattmatatt
Let it Bleed	TheManPF
Revenge	Rampey
Pain	Rampey
San Pablo Sunrise	Ian Cowell
Gunship credits	Newmajoe



RAMPEY

I wear many hats. I am a classical composer as well as for VGM and film and media. I am a video game developer in DC, I am a youtuber, and I have been doing music for 10 years. I was self taught in production until college, where I studied Music Technology.

I composed several pieces for the Swadge, mostly for Pango. Specifically, I wrote:

Pango	Chowa Grove
Faster	Dancing
Speed	
Jumpstart	
High Score	Big Bug
Game Over	Dr. Garbotniks Home
	Dr. Garbotniks Home 2



As well as Revenge and Pain for Swadge Hero.

For Pango, knowing he was the titular character alongside the Sonic theme, I wrote what I felt was a Sonic-core song: electro-rock meets slightly EDM. I wrote "Faster" and "High Score" with a connection between the two. "High Score" would be playing after "Faster", so I wanted to make sure it had the same "Gotta Go Fast" pumping drive with a heavy emphasis on the beat. The way I used the instruments is the same throughout the two, and all the different waveforms serve different functions.

When working on "Dr. Garbotnik's Home" for Big Bug, which is the spaceship theme, I was tasked with writing a jazzy-piano-ish-scene. There's no proper piano sound that feels "right" in the General MIDI instruments for this sound. Instead, I used sine waves to get close to a piano, so I did chords with that. Then I took the piano bar vibe, kind of like a jazz lounge, and sought out soft sounds. A lot of triangle, sine wave types of sounds were used in the end:

Hot Dog Credits

Composer: Joe "Newmanjoe" Newman

Intro
♩ = 167
Sonic the Hedgehog / Big Bug

A Super Monkey Ball / Pango
2nd time add Pixel melody (not transcribed)

(little foreshadowing of Pango Level Clear later!)

Racing Hero / Chouza Grove

B "Restart!" By Snail's House / Chouza Grove

2

3-4-5-1...

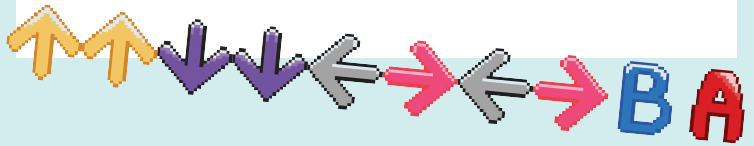
C "Azami" by Naomi & Goro / 2018

Pango Level Clear!

once more, with feeling (and Pixel!)

Racing Hero / Chouza Grove again

Loop forever!



things that ramp in with no dramatic transitions.

Composition of the pieces for Swadge Hero was a challenge. With the 8 bit sound you don't exactly get an electric guitar sound, but I wanted to emulate a metal band for those pieces. For the electric guitar I used the sawtooth wave. For the vocals, I did a triangle wave. For the drums, I used the existing percussion, and that's like the only thing that was semi 1-to-1. For the keys I used the sine wave again, similar to the logic with Big Bug, as I think the sine wave is the closest approximation to the Rhodes Piano. I wanted to do a slap bass but failed, so I used square waves instead to emulate it.

We used a lot of third-party tools to bridge together our compositions with the Swadge and Swadge Hero. The general process was to output DAW from Logic, import it into a program called Signal, and then use it to generate MIDI for the Swadge. Joe was able to work through these challenges with us and get it sorted. I really appreciated how he organized the composers and helped us work with the developers and other artists. Chatting with people is so much more fun and you learn so much and make friends.

ADAM

Swadge Hero was somewhere between cop-out and necessity for the 2025 Swadge. As I noted, I want to encourage usage of all the cool hardware we put on the Swadge, which included the new sound features. We played around with concepts

of a rhythm game as early as the chainsaw swadge from Super 2022, where we had a game where you just hit buttons in time with floating arrows/skulls. The chainsaw didn't even have sound so all the cues were visual.

Someone floated a music game, and it felt like a natural fit for MAGFest but we always passed on it because it's not that exciting (to me) to create. Once we had full speaker/MIDI support, it became hard not to do that. I played a lot of Guitar Hero and DDR when I was in middle and high school, so I knew exactly what I wanted Swadge Hero to look like. It was very easy for me to sit down and just do it.

Thanks to the power of open source software, we didn't have to build a note charter. A developer named Freddy Haas wrote a MIDI to Clone Hero note charter, so they already did the hard work of taking a MIDI file and generating notes that are challenging and fun to play. We simply used their tool: it's called ".midi to Clone Hero" and can be found on GitHub.

After passing the MIDI through this tool, we manually evaluate and adjust as necessary. Rampey would create note charts that were too hard, I'd tell him to fix it, and he'd create custom ones that ended up being too easy. There was a lot of playtesting of this mode in particular and we got it sorted in the end.

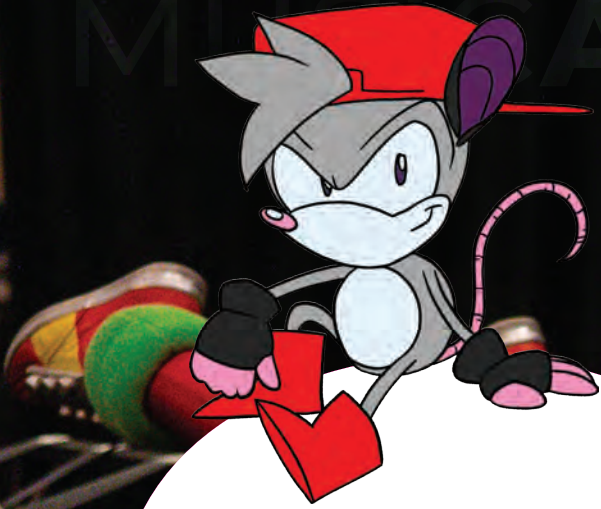
Swadge Hero isn't a super complex game. It's only single player, and if I had more time I would have

EE *It's actually more advanced now than a Game Boy would be in terms of its sound capability." - Joe*

implemented tilt controls or touchpad integration. I was trying to find a way to incorporate those that meshed well with the note charter, but I came up empty. I was thinking about something like in Guitar Hero where the player can accumulate star power and then get bonuses, where we could have used something like tilt to activate it. Unfortunately the note charter doesn't support the stars, so it required more work than what was feasible to modify it to support this. It's a similar problem with the touch pad, where we could have implemented pitch bending; unfortunately the average person only has one thumb on their right hand and it can get clumsy when asking them to hit A or B as well as engage the C pad.



MUSIC AND GAMING



(and) features departments in the MAGFest space that are neither Music nor Gaming. The (and) departments enrich the MAGFest experience in a variety of ways.



Meet Jasper and Percy, MAGPIE's new mascots and keen-eyed ambassadors of shiny treasures and inclusivity. (Illus. Kaitie Lawson)

(AND) NEW FOR SUPER 2025:

MAGPIE NEST

Leon van der Goetz is the Executive Director of the NoVA Prism Center, a Fairfax County community center serving Northern VA LGBTQIA+ folks. Additionally, he serves on the MAGFest Board of Directors as Secretary, and founded the MAGPIE Nest.

First thing's first. What does MAGPIE mean?

The official name is MAG Place for Inclusion and Equity. The casual, easier to remember one is Mag People Including Everyone.

What is the mission of the MAGPIE nest?

The idea is to serve as the core of diverse content at MAGFest. It is a safe space for folks to come together, relax, and build community. It's also a place for allyship to invite folks into community and connection to uplift the diversity that the MAGFest community has to offer. This provides a home base and proof of the experiences at MAGFest that may not fit the "gamer" stereotypes.

We want to contextualize marginalized groups at MAGFest, and are looking at not only LGBTQIA+ communities, but also people of color, parents, disabled folks, women, neurodivergence, and more.


Why does MAGFest have a place for inclusion and equity?

I personally have experienced discriminatory behavior from attendees and others at MAGFest, so having a space that is dedicated for safety and not worrying about some rando coming around the corner saying something cruel is very important. People need that opportunity to be themselves and celebrate who they are.

I have felt strongly for a while now that MAGFest needs a space like this. The Trans & GenderQueer meetup has been massively popular, so the demand is there. Other meetups had been formed via staff planning events, and they were so successful and positive, so we wanted to bring that energy to the attendee base. We initially planned these as smaller, late night meetups - like, in the

Museum at 2am, and we filled it! That made me realize that we need a dedicated space.

Part of why we are building the space is recognition that while we try to make MAG as safe and comfortable and welcoming as we can, there still lies a lot of value in space that is explicitly welcoming and safe for people.

 *People need that opportunity to be themselves and celebrate who they are."*

How does MAGPIE contribute to the event?

One of the things we are doing for Super 2025 is integrating content submissions. We will be featuring a lot of meetups for communities and intersections of other communities in conjunction with a couple of departments, such as Panels. This year we are trying to "see what sticks" so our content in the future will better reflect the community.

In the future, we aim to aggregate content from MAGFest community submissions specifically for MAGPIE Nest, rather than just parsing existing submissions for mission-fit content.

Can you highlight anything that will be at the Nest, or recommended by MAGPIE?

Items in Guidebook will have a MAGPIE tag. We will be hosting several events either in the space or elsewhere (the room is tiny). Details can be found on Guidebook for times and locations, but a few events to highlight are:

- "Blue Hair and Pronouns" the Fire Emblem Experience
- MAGScouts parents meetup

- The Importance of Girls' Games & Media
 - Writing to Create and Writing for Gender Expansive Characters in Video Games
- We will provide a reading space with content from the NoVA Prism Center private library and a social spot in-between scheduled events.

What do you hope folks will take away from a visit to MAGPIE?

I hope people will come away with a realization that regardless of their perspective and why they attend MAG, they are not alone with why they participate in the community.

I also hope people can get resources on how to serve themselves and their local communities. The goal is to build a library of grassroots organizations who are mission-aligned and show off who they are and what they do.

Finally, I hope people come away with greater understanding and empathy in having opened up to the breadth of people and experiences and perspectives that make up MAGFest.

Where is the MAGPIE Nest, and what are your hours?

The MAGPIE Nest is at the top of the convention center space in National Harbor 14. Please stop by, hang out, talk to folks, explore the space, and sample the library.

MAGPIE NEST HOURS

THURSDAY
12PM TO 2AM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY
8AM TO 2AM

DRAW YOUR OWN OC!

(AND): DRAW YOUR OWN OC

Grab a pen or marker and use this familiar pair of eyes (or, wait, is it one big eye...?) to design your own original character in the style of Pango and his pals!



MAGFEST POWER TIP: Need a marker? Stop by Makerspace! While you're there, ask for the Origami Hot Dog special! (Seriously!)





Heroes and villains alike roam the halls of MAGFest. (Pango even told us that the person on the right reminds him of Dr. Garbotnik somehow.)

COSPLAY ALWAYS MEET YOUR HEROES

Interview with Cailin Redtail

What's the mission of the cosplay department?

Cosplay is for everyone!

Regardless of skill, race, gender, body, age, or other we try to promote an all-inclusive environment to give everyone a chance at the spotlight. Cosplay is about feeling the best about yourself and showing off what makes you happy, whether it's creating or just dressing up and being someone different for a day.

Why does MAG have a cosplay department?

Our job is to do Cosplay in a very MAGFest way. We do that through tying in the game and music spirit into all of our content, guests, and panelists.

Cosplay at MAGFest is a lot bigger than it was in 2020, 2016, and prior. What drove that change?

The Cosplay Department was officially founded in 2016, after being a part of the Panels department previously. By then, I had been running the contest for about 5 years and decided to establish the department. That year, I also introduced the repair table in the marketplace, which was a success, though we were so busy we blocked the aisle at times.

Fastforwarding to 2020, we had expanded the cosplay repair table and partnered with Charity for use of their space. In 2016 we were still doing the Cosplay Roast; over time I felt it was not in the spirit of "Cosplay for Everyone", so it was dropped by 2020. We still had the Super Cosplay Fight (the in-character cosplay contest), and started to bring in more cosplay-centric



Flick from Animal Crossing, out on a bug hunt. (Photo credit: Melanie Judd)

panels and events like Cut-Throat Cosplay and Cosplay Dance-Off.

At Super 2023, we broke ground again and had a cosplay-specific guest for the first time, Sayakat Cosplay. At Super 2024 we had two: The Legend of Emily and Yaya Han. Sayakat and Emily offered workshops

in foam and electronics respectively, and Yaya was a wonderful host for the in-character cosplay contest.

Super 2025 marks more firsts, and more content than ever. We have expanded stage performances and the cosplay contests. We partnered with Arena for the Final Fantasy XIV dance party, where we will host a quest for attendees with games and fun interactions. There are more - check Guidebook for everything tagged with Cosplay.

What has changed with the cosplay performances and contests?

With the addition of the XP Stage, MAGFest has opened up new opportunities for many departments to host stage events that were not possible before. The Idol Showcase is one. It is not a contest; instead, it is a stage performance featuring around 10 idol groups. To stay true to the spirit of Music and Gaming, acts incorporating video game characters, songs, and idols were given priority.

Participants do not need to have crafted their costume to take part in the Idol Showcase or the In-Character Contest. That is where the Craftsmanship Contest comes in, requiring at least 50% of the costume created by the contestant.

For the Craftsmanship Contest, we have switched to juried, pre-event sign-ups. In previous years, sign-ups were taken at the cosplay repair table during the event. Participation has grown considerably (over 80 at Super 2024) so adjustment was necessary. Each

contestant is assigned a scheduled evaluation time slot where they will have 5 minutes to discuss their work with the judges. This replaces the previous format, where contestants were lined up for a sequential evaluation. Otherwise, the contest remains the same, with winners announced at the end of the In-Character Contest.

You mentioned the cosplay repair table. What can I do there and where is it?

Cosplay Repair is open for all wardrobe malfunctions, broken props, popped seams, and more. Attendees are permitted to use the supplies at the table (except the sewing machine, where Staff will use it) and can get assistance with a variety of needs. The table is set up right outside Registration in Hall E. Conveniently, this is also where prop check is set up, so if you have props to go with your costumes come by and get them tagged.



Fun for all ages: Princess Peach, Luigi Mario, and Yoshi



Always accurate.



Sonic brings the moves to the Cosplay Dance Off

COSPLAY REPAIR HOURS ARE:

THURSDAY

12PM TO 10PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY

10AM TO 10PM



Akuro Art Princess Daisy, Peach, and Rosalina



This cosplay group is a master of unlocking memories of the Resident Evil series



2B from NieR:Automata



Astarion from Baldur's Gate 3



Throg/Simon Walters from Marvel leaps into action



We sure hope this group of Lethal Company cosplayers made their quota.



Taking control with this Playstation kimono design



Fairy Vaporeon costume from Sunset Dragon art



A cosplay reunion with Sephiroth from Final Fantasy 7



Malon from the Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time



A Tails and Sonic kigurumi duo make the elevators go fast!



Mighty Morphin Power Rangers cosplay group



Vincent and Panam Palmer from Cyberpunk 2077



Make cool things and meet even cooler people in the creative factory that is the Makerspace

A MAGFEST INSIDE LOOK AT THE

MAKERSPACE AND MAGLABS

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

Interview with Jared Geinosky

What is the mission of the MAGFest Makerspace?

Makerspace is about showing attendees that anyone can make things. We see cosplayers, artist alley, and other talent at the event with these amazing costumes, beautiful music, and incredible art. We want to give people an opportunity to try some of these crafts with a low barrier of entry by providing equipment, materials, and education to learn these things.

Why does MAGFest have a Makerspace?

The Makerspace is a place for people to do what I call "making gaming culture." MAGFest is celebrating gaming culture, but it's mostly consumption where you're watching panels, you're watching a band, you're playing a game. The Makerspace is the place to make and appreciate your own gaming culture. Folks think they don't have creativity, but we want to show people that there's so much more to the fandom than crazy costumes, 3d printing, and more.

Additionally, it's an excellent way to socialize and collaborate with other makers. Say there's a bunch of people at the crochet table, and some of them are folks who carry their yarn and needles everywhere just hanging out. This is just their happy place. Then, there are beginners who the experienced folks teach, and they get to know each other.

The Makerspace has been growing for years. Can you tell us about its history?

Makerspace was born at MAGLabs. At Super MAGFest 2018, Makerspace was 100% workshops and nothing else. There were a bunch of times where I'd walk out into the hallway, see the line, and say "oh my, there's a lot of people here" and then realized I needed to track headcount in the space. I didn't want to upset the fire marshal. Lines were crazy, and it showed us that we had something here.

 *Folks think they don't have creativity, but we want to show people that there's so much more to the fandom than crazy costumes, 3D printing, and more."*

When we opened the area, we moved into handcraft sort of stuff: yarn projects, paper, things like that. Adding more electronics content in 2024 and game development in 2025 has been a milestone to me, personally.

What will Makerspace offer at Super 2025?

We will have two panel spaces for 2025. Some of the topics covered will be:

- Machine sewing a dice bag
- Crochet and Knitting
- Soldering
- Armor Academy
- Game Development

I want to highlight Armor Academy and Unity in particular. Armor Academy is back after a short hiatus, and they will be doing several workshops. They're so high energy, we love them and are so excited they are returning. Unity is joining us for the first time and teaching the basics of game development with a web based sandbox.

We've partnered with a couple of departments for some of our content: Cosplay was always a natural one, and this year we are also working with Arena. There will be a bracelet activity to support the dances hosted by Arena, and we will be hosting some stuff at MAGProm.

Otherwise, we have open work areas for various crafts and activities, including papercrafts, yarn, painting, electronics soldering, 3D printing, and more. Most of our materials are available free of

charge, and folks can make whatever they'd like. We can do this thanks to all the donations we receive from fellow attendees.

In addition to the workshops and partnerships, we will have various meetups, such as:

- Yarn craft
- Battle jackets
- Bling your CPAP

Wait, Bling your CPAP?

Yes - one of our staffers is hosting it. She started coming to MAGFest with her daughter, and now their whole family comes, including her daughter's husband and their child. She's been working at Makerspace for a couple of years. It's crazy, but she was telling me how somebody had made a joke about Bling your CPAP in MAGFest 41+ (a Facebook group). I'm like, yep, we need to do that. So, we are inviting folks to bling their various devices: CPAP, cane, whatever they want.

Okay, now let's talk about the exciting news. MAGLabs is back! Can you tell the reader about it?

The vision for MAGLabs is 80% making, 20% consuming. The focus is on modders, indie developers, retro indie, unique ways to make music, instrument crafting, and more. We are looking at how we can involve the indie departments like MITS and MIVS. We will offer a broad variety of panels and classes, not just intro courses but multiple levels - 101, 102, 103, to go more in-depth. We hope to bring in academic workshops on writing for games, liter-

ature, and music, plus talks on game development and industry business. We intend to offer more opportunities for makers to collaborate, such as running a game jam, problem solving, and making. In short, at Super, Makerspace is mini MAGLabs.

We are starting with a 1 day event to relaunch the MAGLabs brand, similar to BitGen Gamer Fest. When we were looking at venues, we already had a relationship with Peabody Heights Brewery for a potential beer partnership. They let us know that they had event space to host, and we jumped on it.

In the future, we are looking to grow MAGLabs back into a 2 or 3 day event with deliberate decisions along the way regarding growth. I was a part of the leadership team for Labs before we closed it, and I felt the vision was pretty confused by the end. One thing that stuck out to me was how folks really appreciated the maker aspect of Labs. The Makerspace was born from MAGLabs, so we are continuing that vision and transitioning Labs from a "mini MAGFest" vibe to a maker experience.

Where is Makerspace at Super, and what are your hours?

Makerspace is on the Expo level in Eastern Shore rooms 1-3 and open 10am to midnight. This is commonly known as the lower atrium area, and is next to the doors which lead to the Tabletop Gaming area in Riverview.



CHECK OUT THE MAKERSPACE!

**LOCATION:
EASTERN SHORE ROOMS 1-3**

**HOURS:
10AM - MIDNIGHT**



Registration: the calm before the storm. The Reg team will go on to check in more than 24,000 people over the four days of MAGFest.

WHAT REALLY GOES INTO SETTING UP FOR SUPER MAGFEST?

Peter VanderKley is Co-Department Head of Logistics. He has been doing Logistics for Super MAGFest for the past 8 years.

Super MAGFest is a large event (over 20,000 badges sold last year), and it all takes place in one space. There are so many different activities and so many different things that need to be in place physically. How do you actually make that happen?

I like to think of Logistics as the first physical step in making MAGFest happen. After lots of planning all year, we start bringing gear from the warehouse to the Gaylord. Once on site, equipment is distributed to the different spaces for those departments to set up!

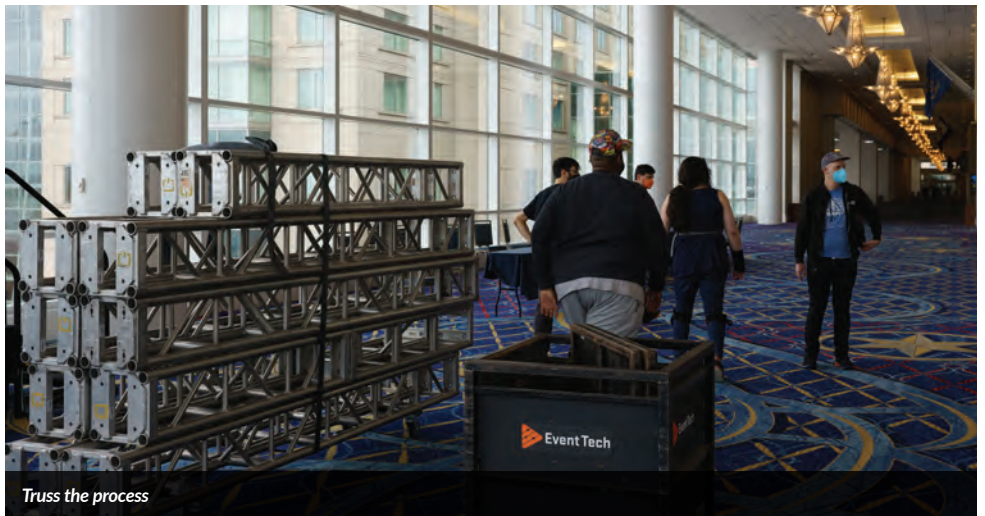
How long does it take to physically set up Super? Are you still setting up while the fest is open?

We're on site and running trucks the weekend before MAGFest even starts. We're turning over trucks like clockwork right up to when registration opens. Luckily the majority of our work is before and after Super; there's very little we do during the weekend.

How long does teardown take? Is it similar to setup? Which one is more challenging?

Teardown is much more challenging. We take about four or five days for load-in, and for load-out we have to do the same amount of work in half the time. What goes in, must come out!

There are so many arcade cabinets at Super; where do they come from and how do you get them to the Gaylord?



Truss the process

While some are property of MAGFest, many are brought by collectors. Some collectors have their own trailers and rigs, and MAGFest will also provide box trucks to help shuttle cabinets around. Arcade cabinets are the hardest gear to bring in. Cabs can be big, heavy, and awkward, and they require care to preserve their aging parts. Aside from that, most of our equipment is on pallets and is easier to move.

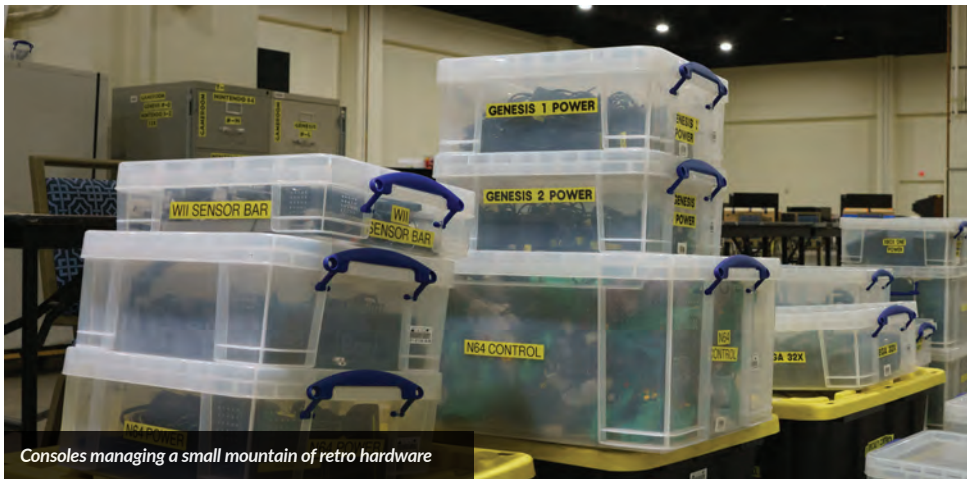
What's the biggest challenge when it comes to load-in and load-out?

Timing is the biggest obstacle we face. We know well ahead of time what we need to bring from the warehouse, so there are few surprises there. Making sure we move everything we need

without overworking ourselves too much is our constant challenge.

If someone wanted to start a new activity at Super, and they got the approvals and the funding for it, but it involved bringing in a large item or multiple large items, how would they work with your team to make it happen? If it helps, you can imagine that the item is a large trash compactor made by a certain refuse-based villain organization, and it eats the hopes and dreams of attendees (and also little tokens that make it light up and go whirrrrr).

The question would be: Where to keep it? The warehouse is bursting at the seams and we are in dire need of more space. We usually use 24' box



Consoles managing a small mountain of retro hardware

trucks to move everything, so this “trash compactor” would have to be movable by volunteers in a truck of that size.

I heard that one time, the expo hall flooded. What was up with that?

In years past, MAGFest would take place immediately after a big holiday event at the Gaylord called “ICE!” This particular year, there was a massive slide made of real ice in one of the expo halls. When the event concluded and MAGFest started loading in, we think the chillers were turned off, and all that ice melted with nowhere to go. Water started seeping through the bottom of the air walls, flooded extension cords making them spark, and we frantically mopped, vacuumed, and swept

water away from our cabinets. We called it “The Lake” and haven’t seen an ice slide since!

What’s your favorite/least favorite thing about working in Logistics?

One of my favorite things to see while working in Logistics is the passion our volunteers have in making MAGFest happen. So many of our crew are eager to jump in and help out with the task at hand, and I believe it’s that passion that makes MAGFest a one of a kind event and community. The biggest thing I can lament is how much work it takes to pull MAGFest off and the toll it takes on our volunteers. By the end of load out, we are all exhausted.

What do you wish attendees knew/appreciated about what it takes to set up for Super?

Logistics might be one of the least attendee-facing departments in MAGFest. For me, being able to contribute in such a pivotal role is deeply gratifying in itself. While we may be mostly invisible to attendees, seeing everyone enjoying MAGFest is the best kind of attendee appreciation.



Gotta go fast with so much to set up!



Chipping away at the Chipspace stage setup



THE MAGSTOCK ARG BRINGING VIDEO GAMES IRL

Silviana Russo is a New York-based film, television, and livestream producer. She is the creator of the 2024 MAGStock ARG, which was inspired by the games The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild and Tears of the Kingdom.

What is an ARG and why is it part of the programming at MAGStock?

ARG stands for Augmented Reality Game, but really we're talking about an immersive experience that takes place in real life and has gamified interactions for participants. This art form is pretty new, so the terminology hasn't all been figured out yet! MAGStock is the perfect setting for an ARG because you gather a few hundred people in a small area for a whole weekend. The theme provides an opportunity to recreate the feeling of playing that specific game, which is pretty special.

How did you recreate the feeling of playing LoZ: BotW and TotK? That seems pretty challenging, since they are both open-world exploration games?

The open-world exploration part actually lends itself really well to an ARG because life is an open-world exploration game! I'm kidding, sort of, but people really can walk around and explore Camp Ramblewood, where MAGStock takes place, so the trick is to fill the space with things for people to find. I recreated the feeling of exploring the map and discovering memories, by filming short videos and then putting QR codes at various places around the campground. And, the rest of the team (namely Jo Bair) recreated the feeling of finding Koroks and collecting seeds by hiding "Seedlings" all over the grounds and creating various small puzzles that needed to be solved in order to collect their "kernels."

Which, of course, Link needs to expand his inventory...

Exactly. "The Firekeeper" needed "Seedling Kernels" to expand his inventory, and in exchange, he helped the players complete the overall objective of the game. (Shoutout to Socks Magocs, who 3D printed 1,000 "seedling kernels" for this.)

This is quite involved. Is this the first time that MAGStock has had an ARG?

Nope! MAGStock has been doing ARGs for years, but for 2024, we took it to the next level. It was the first time the ARG had a narrative, and also the first time it had a finale event.

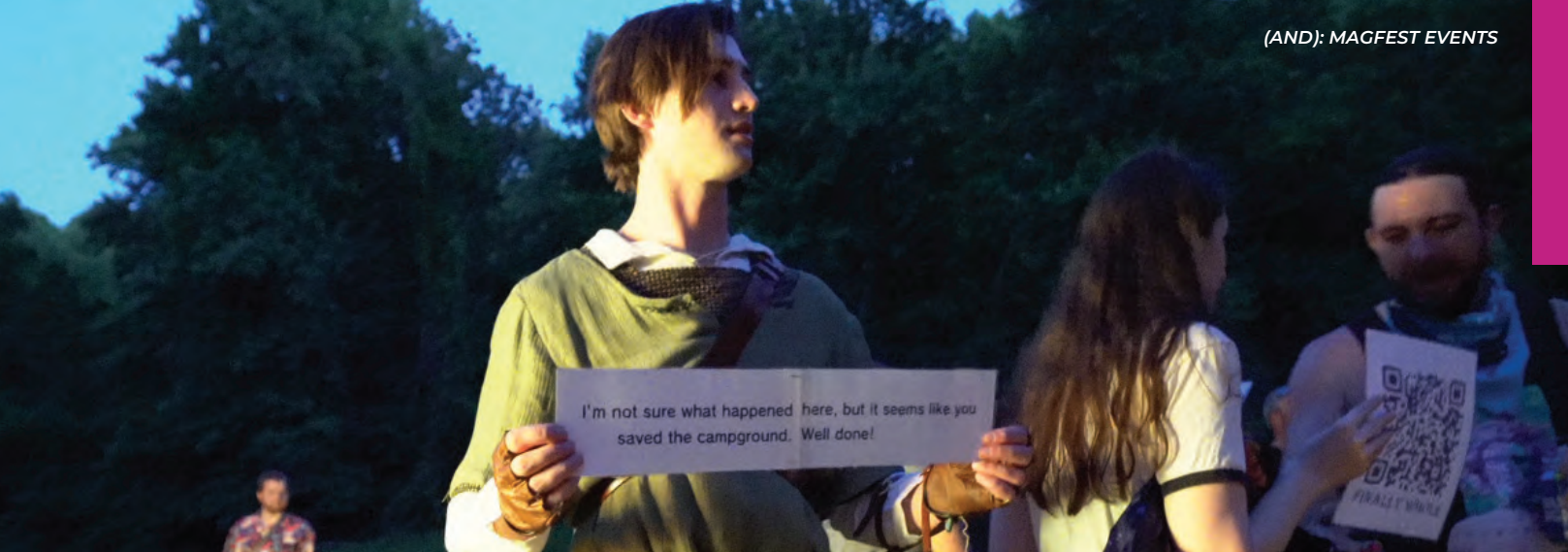
What's the purpose of including a finale event?

We don't give out a big prize for completing the ARG, so instead we have a narrative prize. Everyone comes together to see the result of their efforts, and celebrate finishing the game. Players want to know that their actions affected the game, and a finale does that. For 2024, we built a giant bonfire and then everybody threw rainbow fire packets into it and made it "magical." We even had two different endings prepared! But, don't worry, the players worked hard and got the best ending.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MAGSTOCK'S 2024 ARG:

Scan this QR code to watch the video "memories" on the MAGFest YouTube channel:





Should we expect the same for 2025?

The theme this year is horror, and the game that I'm taking inspiration from for the ARG is Dead by Daylight. Since MAGStock takes place over the weekend of Friday, June 13th, you can expect a lot of spooky summer camp vibes. We'll definitely

include a big finale event, but don't expect a rainbow bonfire for this one, it will be all new! We'll have more resources this year, so I'm planning to go all out. Participants can expect an immersive, spooky (but not too scary) experience, where they will have to work together. That's all I can say right now!

Can you give us one spoiler, please?

Nope!





West Coast Best Coast

Long Live MAGWest

I wouldn't miss this every fall, no question. It's usually still warm in the South Bay around this time, the sun's out, and the doors are wide open to discover something new. A few things that stand out are hard to explain to anyone who hasn't been: Never thought I'd end up on a party bus heading to Taco Bravo in Campbell, CA (a Silicon Valley staple) and I never imagined I'd be cool enough to hang poolside, listening to gamer mixes of all my childhood jams and sometimes being invited impromptu to jam with musicians performing them. It's pure paradise – a weekend where you truly feel like you belong.

*by Veronica Tyler Christie otherwise known as "V"
Programming Division Head for MAGWest
MAGFest Inc Board President*

Pool Parties, Music Jams, and All-Day Gaming – Oh My!

MAGWest is the West Coast counterpart to MAGFest, a three-day event celebrating video game music, gaming, and you!... yeah, you! Since its debut in 2017, it has offered 24-hour gaming action, including consoles, arcades, LAN parties, live video game cover bands, chiptunes, and memorable guest talent. As a non-profit festival run by fans for fans, MAGWest focuses on community, avoiding corporate sponsorships and overcrowded show floors. This festival brings a unique, tailored experience to West Coast locals, making it more accessible and specifically curated for the region. This festival may be small, but it's mighty and full of potential for everyone involved. Still in its early, opportunistic era, MAGWest offers plenty of chances for attendees to jump in and become part of the performances and sometimes even panel discussions! It's not just about the jams – MAGWest has hosted community orchestras, choirs, and nerdcore cyphers (to name a few activities) where attendees, with a bit of confidence, can jump into the experience. These moments quickly manifest into unforgettable collaborations, creating long-lasting memories that stay with participants long after the event ends.



MAGWest has been rocking the West Coast for over 5 years!



'West is Here to Stay

MAGWest has been rocking the West Coast for over 5 years! Since its inception, the festival has emerged as a dynamic force in the local video game music scene. Each year, MAGWest continues to grow, but the heart of the event remains unchanged: celebrating the love of gaming and embracing the community that fuels it to thrive.

Despite challenges, including hosting two virtual events during the pandemic, MAGWest has not only survived but expanded, offering year-round content in the San Jose area through mini engagements like MAGJams and partnerships with local establishments and events such as Eastridge Mall, Garden at the Flea, and Viva Calle SJ.

So whether you're a West Coast local or making the trip from across the country, now's the perfect time to mark your calendar for another unforgettable experience.

The invitation is simple: ~Come through.

MAGWest 2025 Dates
August 8th-10th



Cool but like how do I get in on this?



Subscribe to the newsletter! We share registration dates, artist and content applications. That's the best way to know when our website is refreshed ;)





STAFF OPS:

THE PARTY NEVER STOPS

MAG STAFF IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

“I VOLUNTEER AT MAGFEST BECAUSE...”

DID YOU KNOW

that Super MAGFest is run by over 1300 volunteers? Volunteers have created and curated so much of what you see and experience at the event. Our staffers do it all: they book performers and guests, coordinate panels, set up and coordinate the gaming hall, jury the marketplace offerings, and provide security and medical attention to keep us safe!

All MAGFest events are built on volunteer participation, so we encourage every attendee to get involved. Volunteers at MAGFest events get free food, drinks, discounts at our merch booth, their own custom merch, and can even be eligible for badge comps and early access to hotel rooms!

MAGFest has dozens of departments working together in tight coordination to keep every fest running smoothly. If you want to be a part of making Super MAGFest happen, stop by Staffing Operations in Azalea 2 during the event, or email us at stops@magfest.org during the year to get started!



STOPS staff are always happy to help you in Azalea 2!

I've worked other conventions and I wanted to give back to my favorite one. It felt like a good opportunity to get involved and experience the convention in a new light.

Magfest is the best event I have ever been to/volunteered at in nearly 40 years of con going and volunteering. I want Mag to continue to be so. There is just something special about our Fest culture.

The community and energy of the event is unmatched. I honestly don't participate in a ton of the content at magfest, but I love working on it because of the collective summer camp staff energy. Delivering the experience we produce for 24k people feels great.

I enjoyed helping create a space for the attendees to chill and relieve their childhoods.

Because I like to be involved and meet new people and give back to an event that brings me such joy.

I am honored to contribute to creating such a magnificent cultural icon full of amazing people and fun times.

Because it is a unique event with tremendous potential.

This is my way of saying thank you for all the work that MAG does to keep this alive. THANK YOU!

I like the other staff I work with, I like the chaotic intensity of it when it is underway, I like interacting with attendees and having an impact on their experience and their perception of the event. I guess I just like to work as well, boring as that may sound. It is also a nice change of pace from my day job.

I get to use my creative side that is sorely under-utilized at my day job.

I volunteer to make a great event for others, to help towards making MAGFest amazing and doing something I am passionate about and letting my creativity run as wild as it can be whilst working in a great team with equally passionate people.

Because it is a curated space for like-minded nerds to socialize and partake in old and new passions alike.

It's a local event I love that allows me to immerse myself in helping other nerds and geeks enjoy what they love.

At first it was just to get a Free T-Shirt. Now it is because MAGFest is in my Soul.



Dac & Big Adam, Charity Auction's unhinged emcees and auctioneers, safely stored in their packaging while being held by their human doppelgängers.

FEELING CHARITABLE AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE CHARITY DEPARTMENT

MAGFest Power sat down with MAGFest's Charity Department, the incredible folks who oversee MAGFest's ongoing charitable mission in support of Child's Play Charity. (They're also the ones who raise even more money with the wild ride that is the annual Charity Auction.)

How do you source donations?

We have a team that contacts developers, publishers, artists, and musicians throughout the year. Because of how goofy we are, and because of how different we present things, sometimes it's hard to get larger companies on board. Then they see a video of what we do, and they get it most of the time. Over the years we've been lucky enough to establish rock solid relationships with a few heavy hitters in the gaming world, and we couldn't be more grateful. Some of the consoles we get actually come directly from Child's Play, who in turns receives them as donations from the console makers. We also have some warehouse contacts that look to clear storage space for a tax write-off, and thus is the source of mystery prizes. A lot of hard work, good humor, and huge hearts.

What kind of items are accepted or not accepted?

We take dang near anything, as long as we think we can either sell it because of it's real world value, or because Dac and I can make it fun enough in some goofy way to get the crowd to meme bid. Both raise money for charity, so I don't care which way we do it. I mean we have literally sold garbage for a few dollars. We do tend to turn some smaller perceived value things away now, as we have been getting more and more actual value donations. We still have plenty of trash though, never fear.

What's the highest amount of money an item generated?

Every year this record gets broken. Every, single, year. And it's always been the same thing since we started doing it. The Adam Chase VIP Experience. Yes, it has a dumb name that no, I didn't come up with. It's a few badges, a room or two, parking, food, and a personal tour / QandA with me of MAGFest. It's a lot of fun, and so far all of the winners have been awesome. We always wind up somewhere cool, and something dope



Dac hypes the premiere issue of a little MAGZine called "MAGFest Power!" [Editor's Note: Sounds pretty cool. We might have to check it out.]

always happens. I think this past year the whole package went for just over \$10,000 It was a truly magical moment.

Where do donations go?

ALL net proceeds (ALL money left over after recouping the costs of Charity Operations) go DIRECTLY to our besties at Child's Play Charity. We have ALWAYS worked with them, all 18 years, and we have ZERO plans in changing. They are simply a fantastic organization, doing amazing work for children in need, and we fully support their cause.

Top 5 most interesting items donated. What made them stand out?

The one of a kind Doom Eternal Nintendo Switch, a Final Fantasy 1 (Famicom) signed by Nobuo Uematsu, The NBA 2K Kobe Bryant plaque, and the real katana signed by Ninja Sex Party all come to mind. Along with a TON of priceless Protomen merch. We've been lucky to auction off some things that have gotten the crowd WILD, and the bid wars tend to be a TON of fun.

How much Dac+Adam apparel has been auctioned off to date, and how much of that was against your will?

A. Lot. I know for certain I've defaced several of his hats. I think we've sold most of those with the exception of the original one. He will keep that forever, and I won't sell it. He's actually only ever sold the pants of off my bod once. And then the back pocket, after having ripped that from my butt. Separate transactions, and buyers, of course. Don't think these are the final numbers. We've got plenty life in us yet, and I'm sure I will draw nonsense on something of his again.

What events are happening this year for Charity?

The raffle, Child's Play, Cookie Brigade, and making it's return after a WILDLY successful debut, Tattoos for Charity will all be in Expo C against the front wall, Thursday-Saturday. We draw the raffle Saturday at 8pm at the raffle table.

The auction will be in Panels 1 (Cherry Blossom Ballroom) at noon on Sunday. DON'T BE LATE, as we've got some surprises in store right from the beginning.



Come score one-of-a-kind prizes, like last year's MAGFest Prime theme poster, autographed by a huge list of MAG guests!

YOUR LAST **HEART**.
THE **BOSS DOOR** AHEAD.
IT'S TIME TO DRINK A
POTION.



AVAILABLE IN THREE HEROIC FLAVORS



OCARINA OF LIME



SKYWARD STRAWBERRY



MAJORLY MANGO

IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE... **DRINK THIS.**

blam



SEVEN SAGES' WARNING: BLAM IS BREWED IN HUTS THAT MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF RED AND BLUE POTION AND/OR MAGIC POWDER. DO NOT COMBINE BLAM WITH ANY OTHER INGREDIENTS AT A COOKING FIRE. DO NOT DRINK WHILE IN WOLF FORM, DARK WORLD BUNNY FORM, WHILE MERGED INTO WALLS, OR WHILE WEARING ANY TRANSFORMATIVE MASKS.

DON'T MISS THE GRAND OPENING OF
OUR NEW LOCATION
AVAILABLE AS SOON AS WE CONQUER THE VIRTUAL HARBOR!



**WE PUT THE
JUNK IN
JUNK FOOD**

ASK YOUR SERVICEBOT ABOUT OUR SPECIAL VALUE

**NEVER-FRESH
BARGAIN BARREL
MYSTERY MEAL**

LITE SNACKS

- 1-LAYER BEAN DIP
- MAGSOUP
- CHILI
- ANTS ON A LOG (CAUGHT FRESH DAILY)
- ANTACIDS
- EGGS (EXTRA AGED)

SALADS

DRESSINGS:

Oil (Choice of: Synthetic or 5-W30) & Vinegar

- CHARRED CHARD STEMS
- HARBOR ALGAE
- MULCH & YARD CLIPPINGS

FIXIN'S

- CATTLE CORN
- CAT FOOD (CHOICE OF: WET OR DRY)
- BANANA PEEL
- POTATO STARCH
- DEHYDRATED COUSCOUS
- EGG SHELL QUICHE

DRINKS

- HARBOR WATER (UNFILTERED)
- DOG WATER
- RECYCLED COFFEE
- BOTTLED H²SO⁴
- PRUNE JUICE
- GARBAGE WATER
- CRAB JUICE
- MTN DEW
- GOO (BLUE / GREEN)

SPECIALS

1 Garbage Plate

2 Fiery Guy Special

3 Hot Dogs

SIGNATURE

4 Club Sandwich
(Membership Required)

5 Garbotnik Special

6 Crab Cake
(Choice of: Chocolate, Vanilla, or Marble Swirl)

DISCOMFORTS

7 Slop in a Trough
(MAY CONTAIN: Trough Slop)

8 Fried Harbor Monster
(Farm-raizing)

9 Steak
Available in:
• Extra Well Done

JUNK FOODS
Le Dessert de Garbage

- HOT SLUDGE SUNDAE
- BANANA SPLIT
(CHOICE OF: PARTIALLY EATEN, PARTIALLY ROTTEN, OR PARTIALLY EATEN AND ROTTEN SWIRL)
- DIRT CAKE
- ROAD SLUSH PIE
- MOUSSE EMOJI PIE
- FRESH-PICKED ICICLES
- YELLOW SNOWCONES
- MUCK DU JOUR

Who's your MAGFest Sweetheart?

Take our **FAST** and **foolproof** quiz to find out!



1 How do you spend your ideal free time?

- a. Working on cool projects that could change the world.
- b. Hanging out with friends and just going with the flow.
- c. Daydreaming about your next big adventure!
- d. Plotting... harmless, totally-not-suspicious plans...

2 What's your favorite way to get around?

- a. Strolling and taking in the sights.
- b. Skating, scooting, or riding a bike – efficient and fun!
- c. A cool car or ride that turns heads.
- d. A custom-built contraption I definitely didn't "borrow."

3 If you were a superhero, your power would be...

- a. Unstoppable determination.
- b. Unstoppable snacks.
- c. Unstoppable creativity
- d. Unstoppable scheming.

4 What's your favorite thing to snack on?

- a. Something really nutritious, even if it isn't the most delicious.
- b. Whatever you can scavenge– waste not, want not.
- c. Sweet treats you can share with friends.
- d. Garby's Rum Ham Sammich

5 Your dream date would be...

- a. A private dinner where you're the center of attention.
- b. A laid-back picnic with a stunning view.
- c. A fun, creative outing like painting or building something together!
- d. A VIP tour of somewhere extremely important.

6 What's your idea of a perfect gift?

- a. Something handcrafted with care – you appreciate effort.
- b. Something quirky and unexpected, like a mystery box!
- c. A heartfelt letter full of admiration.
- d. A grand, over-the-top gesture that screams, "I'm amazing!"

7 Which of these songs best describes your vibe?

- a. "Don't Stop Me Now" – Queen
- b. "Walking on Sunshine" – Katrina and the Waves
- c. "Eye of the Tiger" – Survivor
- d. "#1 Crush" – Garbage

8 What's your favorite MAGFest activity?

- a. Playing indie games and meeting their creators.
- b. Hanging out in the VR MAGLord with other virtual attendees.
- c. Singing my favorite song on Rock Band and showing off.
- d. Taking over the main stage (figuratively... or not).

9 What's your go-to party outfit?

- a. Something practical but stylish.
- b. Comfy and casual – you're here to vibe.
- c. Bright and colorful, with lots of flair.
- d. A power suit or lab coat.

10 What's your idea of the perfect pet?

- a. Something low-maintenance but full of personality.
- b. An animal that's scrappy and resourceful.
- c. A whimsical creature, like a mini dragon!
- d. Does a robot raccoon count?

11 What's your dream vacation?

- a. Hiking in the mountains or exploring a national park.
- b. A cozy beach getaway with plenty of food trucks.
- c. A bustling city full of art, lights, and inspiration.
- d. Somewhere exclusive where I'm in charge.

12 What's your favorite color?

- a. Earthy tones like green and brown.
- b. Neutral grays and soft pastels.
- c. Neon pink and electric blue.
- d. Garbotnik Orange™

13 If you ran a business, it would be...

- a. An outdoor adventure company.
- b. A quirky thrift shop with cool finds.
- c. A creative studio full of art supplies.
- d. A fast-casual dining empire with my face on the logo...

14 What's your biggest strength?

- a. Problem-solving under pressure.
- b. Staying calm and collected in any situation.
- c. Inspiring others with your enthusiasm.
- d. Delegating tasks while claiming all the credit.

15 How do you feel about teamwork?

- a. Great, as long as everyone pulls their weight.
- b. Awesome – as long as snacks are involved.
- c. Love it! More people = more creativity.
- d. Great, as long as everyone pulls my weight.

16 What's your dream goal in life?

- a. To achieve something meaningful and leave a legacy.
- b. To live simply and enjoy the little things.
- c. To spread joy and inspire others.
- d. To rename everything in my honor.

17 What's your favorite type of music?

- a. Something upbeat and adventurous.
- b. Laid-back tunes with a funky groove.
- c. Pop or dance tracks with lots of energy.
- d. My own dramatic, self-composed soundtrack.

18 Your ideal movie genre is...

- a. Action-packed and full of adventure.
- b. A quirky comedy with lovable underdogs.
- c. Something bright, feel-good, and maybe animated.
- d. A high-stakes thriller where the genius wins.

19 What's your favorite way to relax?

- a. Taking a long walk and clearing your mind.
- b. Curling up with a cozy blanket and some snacks.
- c. Working on a creative project or crafting something fun.
- d. Laughing triumphantly while reviewing your to-do list (conquer the world, etc.).

20 What's your signature catchphrase?

- a. "Music to move, grooves to groove!"
- b. "Time to sneak, snack, and strike!"
- c. "Stay cool, stay fluid!"
- d. "Garbage in, garbage out—just like you!"

ready for your ROMANTIC RESULTS?
 turn to the next page to see who you paired up with!

if you picked mostly...

Who's your MAGFest?

YES! IT IS ME!



It's always been me...
XOXOXOXO,
DR. G

the wait is over! here are your...

ROMANTIC RESULTS!

we've asked **EXPERTS** from around the world with the

if you picked mostly...



B

You

E

What are you trying to receive

if you picked r

You've matched with...

DR. OVO GARBOTNIK

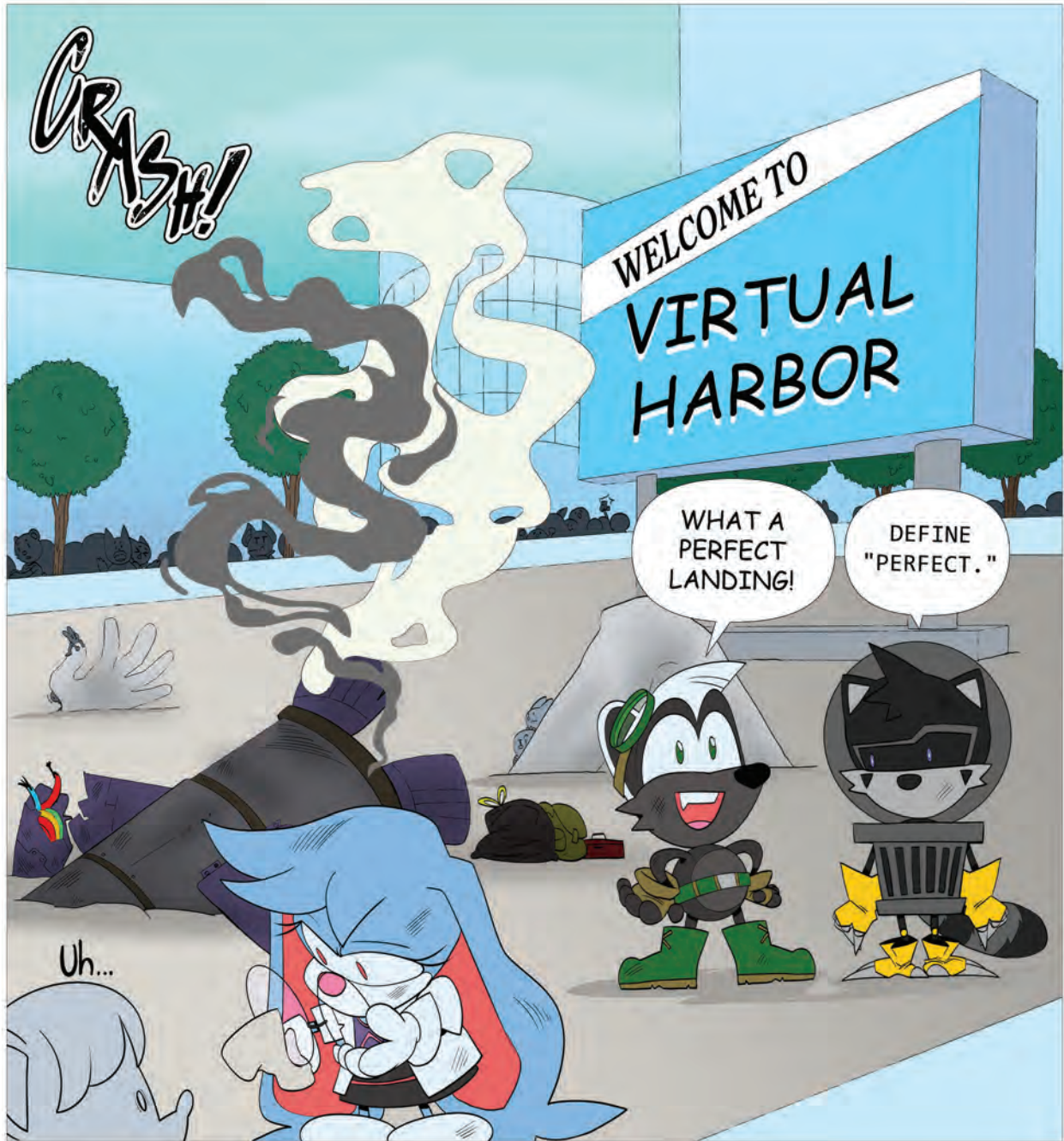
Look forward to an evening of fine dumpster dining, karaoke, and the robotic subjugation of any cities, people, or animals that stand in the way of your romantic time together!

The brilliant and misunderstood Dr. Garbotnik might not be everyone's cup of tea, but why bother with tea when you can enjoy a relaxing Garbage Water together with this tantalizing titan of trash?



D







HAH!
"GARBOTNIK HARBOR."

EASY-PEASY!

RATTLE

WHOA!!

GASP

WELCOME TO
VIRTUAL
HARBOR



HEY!
THIS ISN'T
CLEANING UP--
IT'S VANDALISM!



NEW SIDE MISSION:
GET PESTO TESTED



I DON'T NEED
ANY TESTS,
PANDA!



I HAVE OTHER
IDEAS, TOO!



MODIFIED VACUUM
TEST #3.2

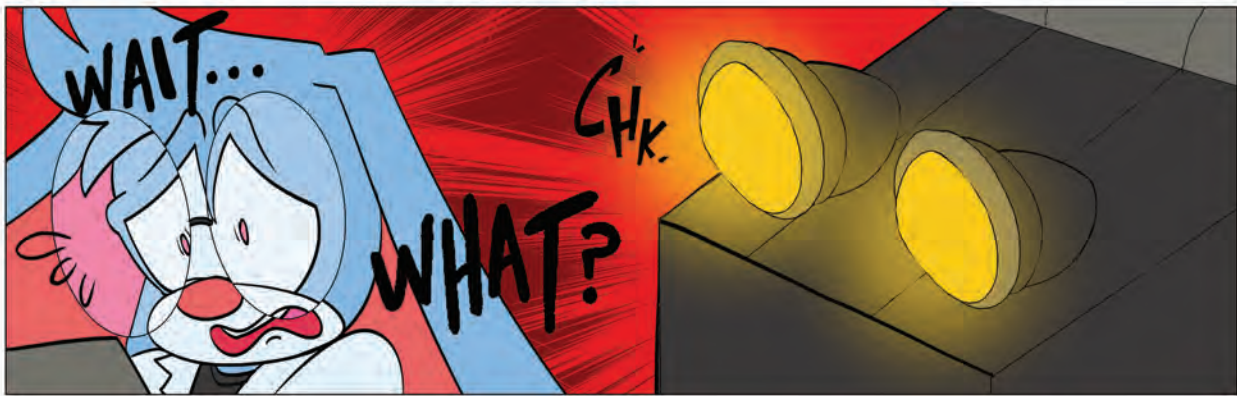




MEANWHILE...

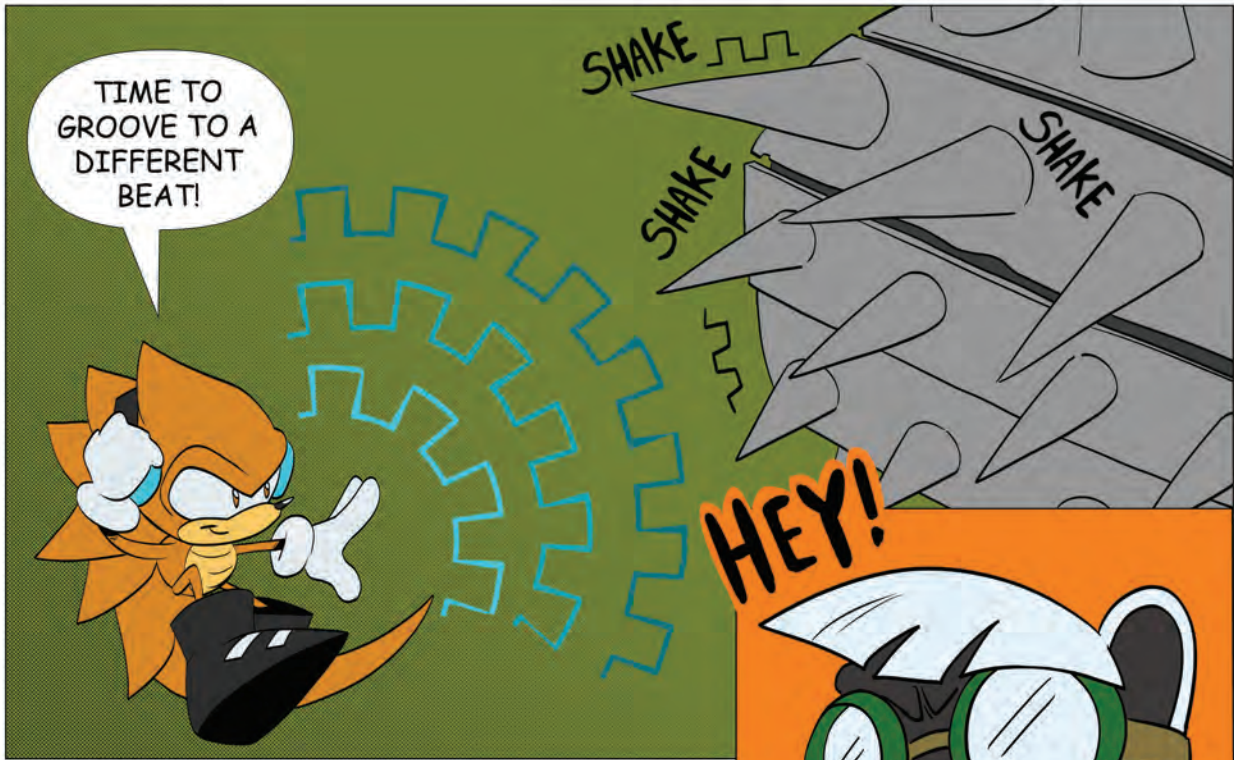


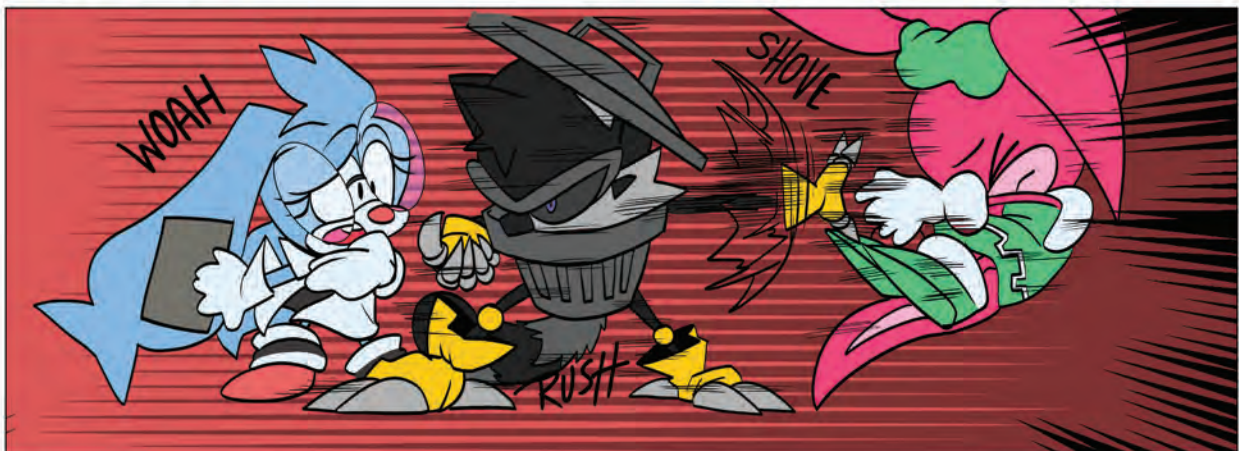


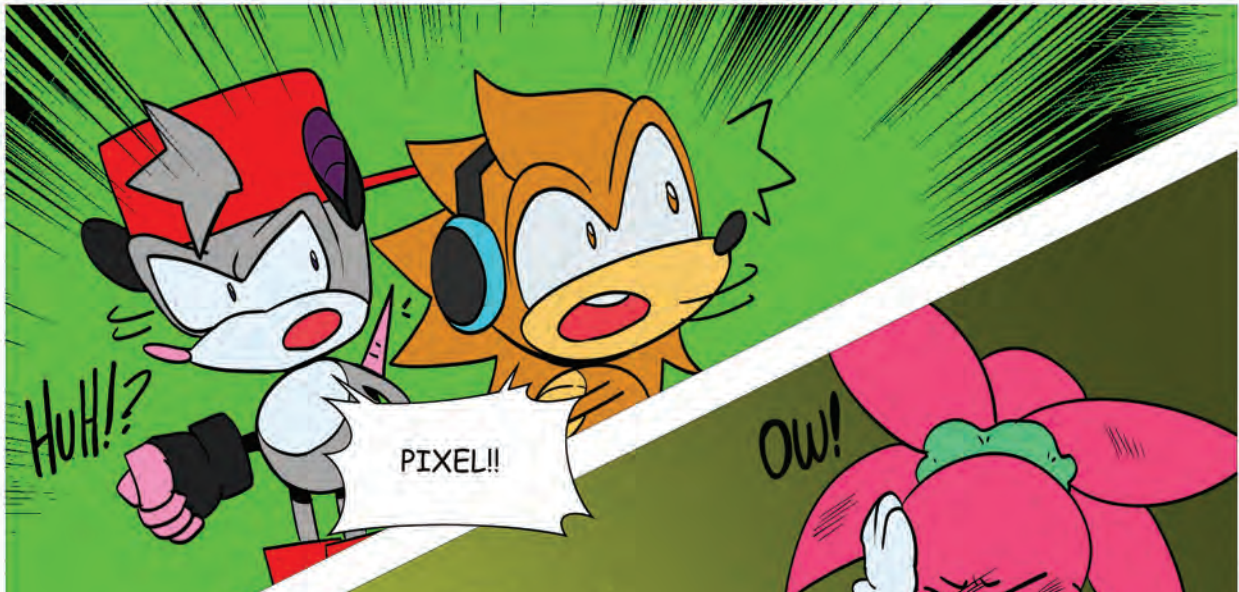












HUH!?

PIXEL!!

OW!



WOAH
IS SHE OKAY?

SHOVE LEVELS
MINIMAL... ENEMY
SHOULD RECOVER.

OKAY...



grips

GASP-
I MISSED
HIS CALL!

tak tak

BRRR...
BRRR...



HELLO?

TSK

I GUESS YOU CAN'T
LEAVE ANYTHING TO
YOUR MINIONS
THESE DAYS...





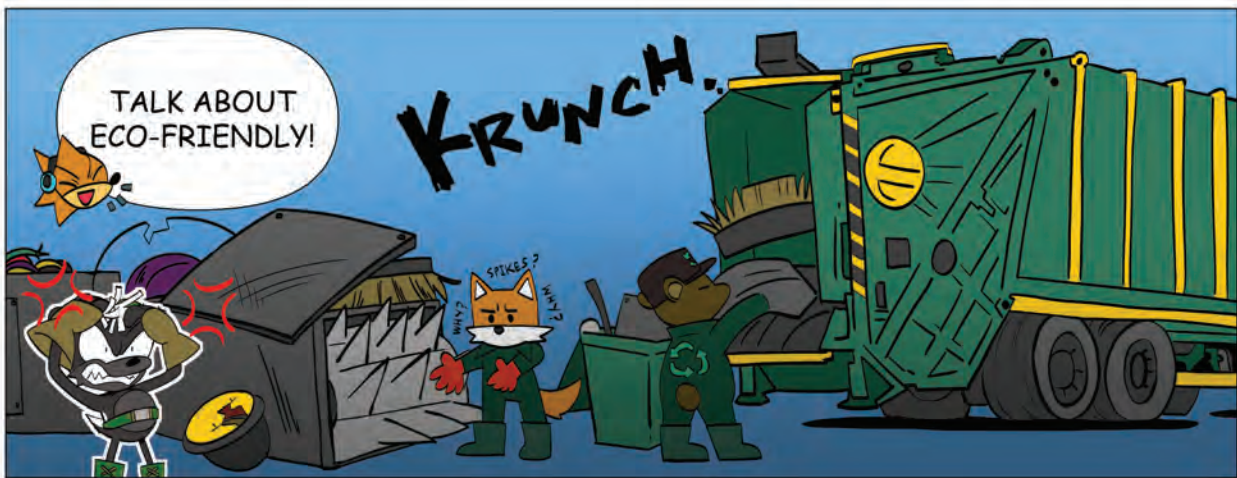
Tsk
CAREFUL,
DOC!



YEAH, GARBY,
YOU'RE TOO
LATE!

WE'RE ALREADY
UPCYCLING YOUR
SCRAP INTO
SOMETHING
ACTUALLY USEFUL!

SNORT



TALK ABOUT
ECO-FRIENDLY!

KRUNCH.



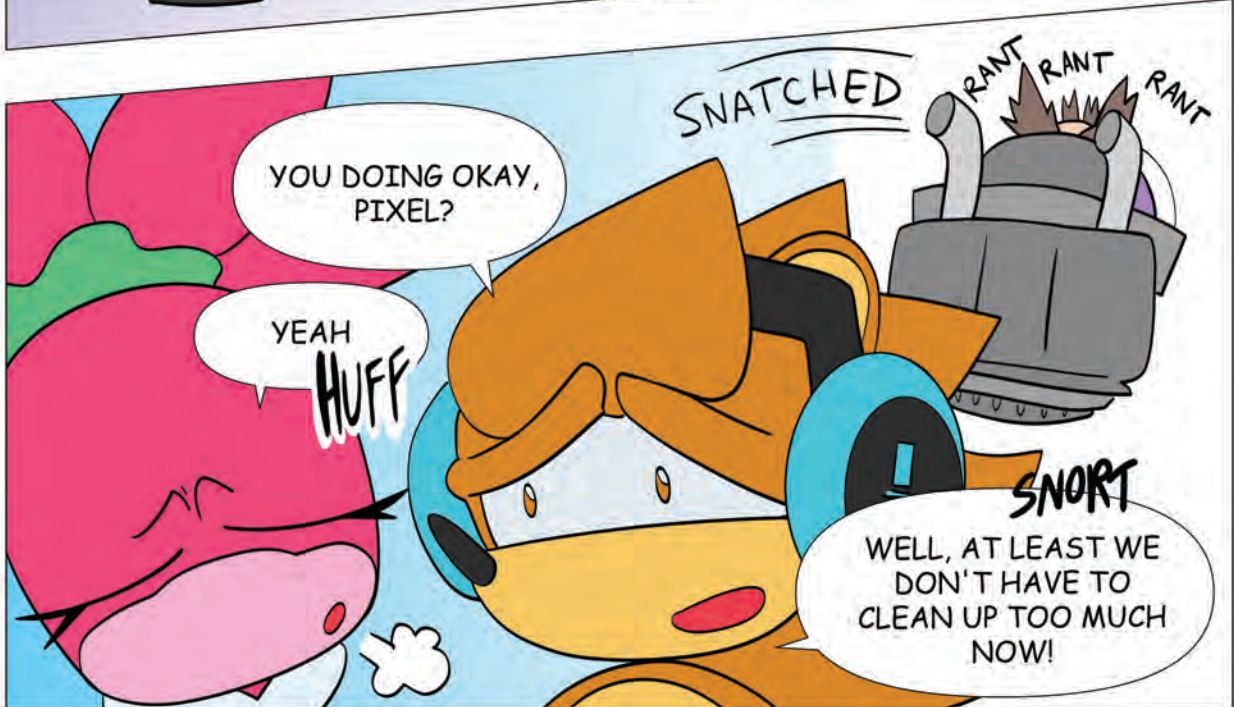
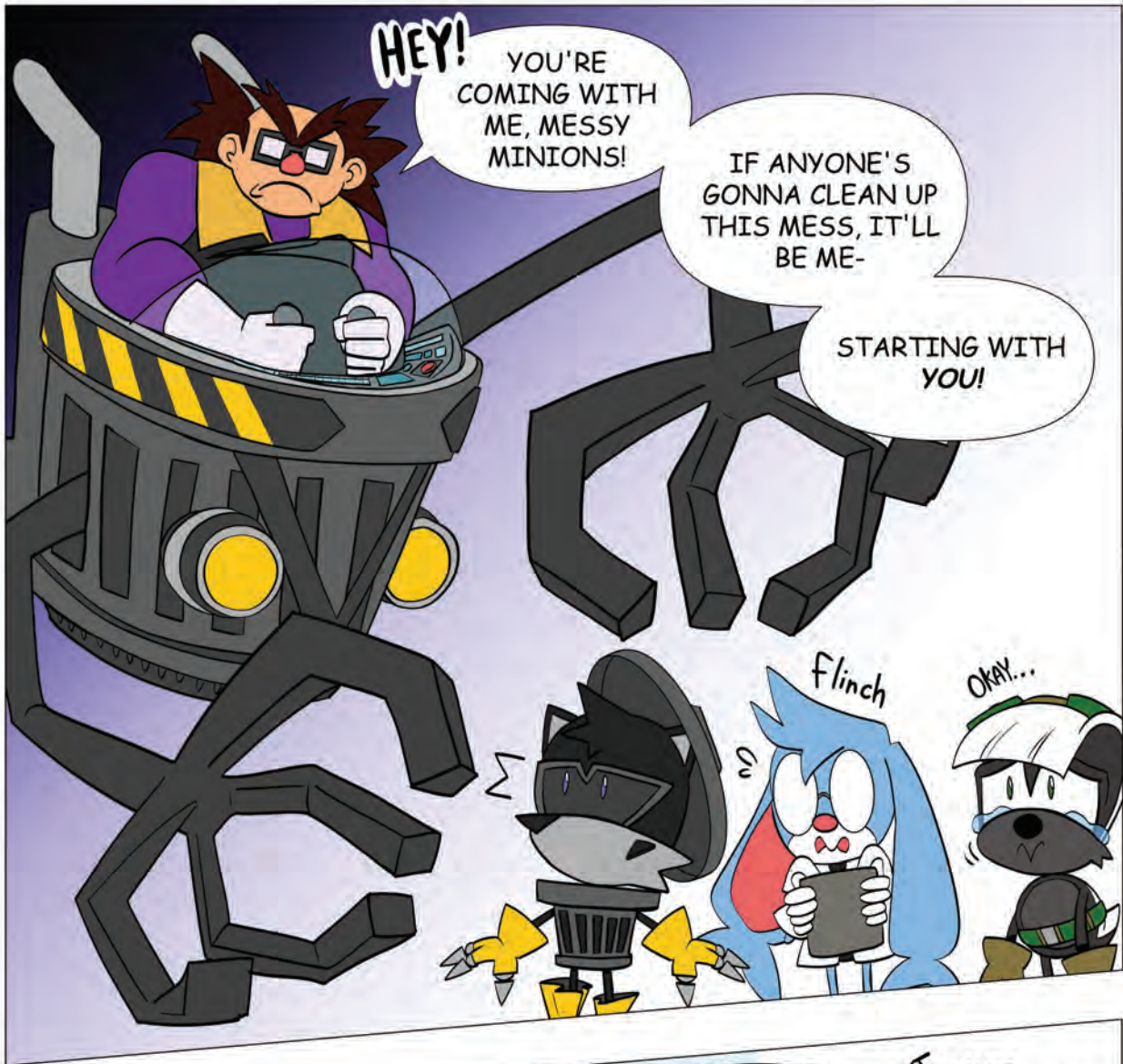
THIS IS WHAT I GET
FOR TRUSTING A
COUPLE OF HAPLESS
TECHNOWEENIES
WITH MY GENIUS
PLANS!

YOU BETTER HAVE A
GREAT EXPLANATION
BEFORE I DECIDE
YOU'RE BETTER OFF
AS SPARE PARTS!

PATHETIC!

O.O

T.T



Y'KNOW, I HATE TO ADMIT IT, BUT PANDA'S SCULPTURE KINDA WORKS.

Awwhh

YEAH, IT'S CHAOTIC, BUT IN A FUN WAY!

I'D CALL IT 'INDUSTRIAL CHIC'

EHHH...
I'D CALL IT 'TRASH PANDA NOUVEAU.'

BUT HEY, IT'S BETTER THAN 'GARBOTNIK'S TECHNOWEENIE CLASSICS.'

TRUE. SPEAKING OF CLASSICS, ANYONE ELSE STARVING?

TOTALLY. WHAT'RE WE IN THE MOOD FOR?

AS LONG AS IT'S GARBY'S, I'M IN.

BUT I COULD GO FOR TACOS...

NEXT TIME, I'M PICKING THE RESTAURANT.

Chu!

AND POE, STOP SNACKING-

WE'RE EATING IN FIVE!





GAMING is the center of the MAGFest galaxy, bringing together all different groups, genres, and generations. Get ready for consoles, indies, arcades, and even MAGFest's own custom games on the Swadge. *Game on!*



MUSIC AND GAMING

FIRST UP: IT'S THE

SWADGE SHOWCASE!

SPONSORED BY

SWADGEMAN

YOU KNOW WHAT
TIME IT IS!
IT'S...

SWADGE TIME!

HOT DOG! Check out all of the exciting games, music, utilities, and more that MAGFest's own Swadge team has cooked up this year! And don't miss the fun—swing by the MAGFest merch booth and grab a Swadge for yourself today!





DEVELOPER PROFILE

NAME: Emily Anthony


IRL: Mechanical & Systems Engineer

SWADGE TEAM SINCE: 2022

LINK: www.thelegendofemily.com

BEHIND THE SWADGE

A HOT DOG? REALLY?

 **Emily** Apr 2nd, 2024 at 10:41 AM
I'd be lying if I said if the phrase "hot dog swadge" didn't get written down in my notes for 2025.

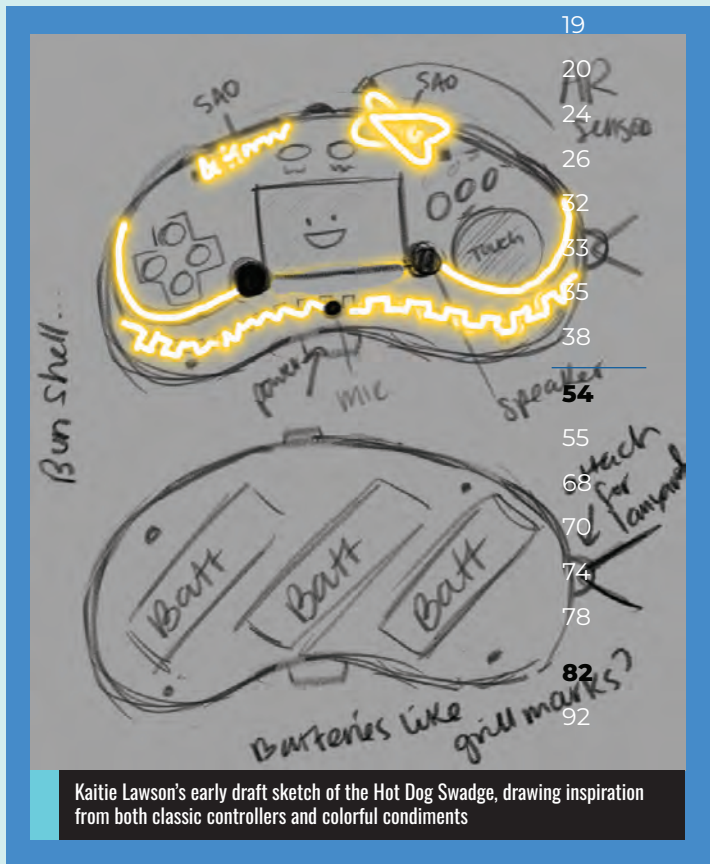
Shape brainstorming is one of the first tasks of the Swadge team after the theme comes off the roller. We knew the theme months before the attendees, so we started grilling as early as March or April. Ballpark concepts were launched, including:

- Sonic Ring
- Chaos Emerald
- Chili Dog
- Dreamcast Controller
- Genesis Controller

These ideas were evaluated primarily for ergonomics, as Swadge has evolved over the years from a blinking swag-badge to an indie gaming console. Frankly, feedback from attendees indicated they were becoming too beefy, so we looked at reducing their size to ensure they were kosher.

The concepts were put up to a vote, and the chili dog ate up the contest. So, you can flame the 21+ folks from the Swadge team who voted for this corn-y idea, not just me. We can ignore the detail that I stuffed the sausage initially, and we can instead pretend that it came to us in a collective hallucination where the Swadge sang "Oh I wish I was a legally-distinct weiner..."

Kaitie fried up some inspiring sketches which merged the Genesis



Kaitie Lawson's early draft sketch of the Hot Dog Swadge, drawing inspiration from both classic controllers and colorful condiments

Controller with the Dog. We particularly relished in the ABC buttons as a Sega nod. The team wanted to see the controller's quirk land on the Swadge, so players will see that feature carried to the touchpad labeled C.

My stupid brain started working on something bun-believable as I experienced frustrations designing the PCB to fit the billion things that


were now on the board including a speaker, aux port, condiments and more. I craved more space.

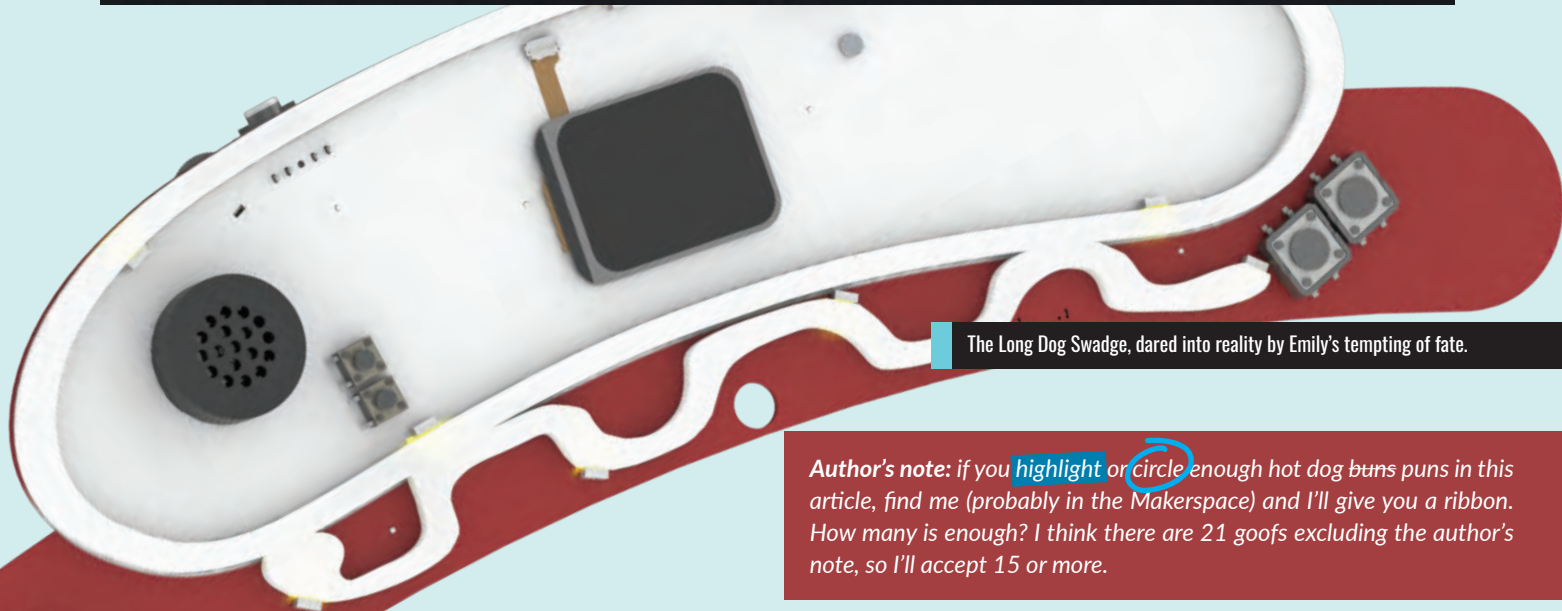
As a monkey's paw curls, so spake I the long dog into existence. This was offered to the folks eligible for the Crazy Person merch tier, which are the people who get all the gourmet fixin's by supporting the event through the

highest tier of merch pre-order.

One day my cheesy ideas will ketchup to me, but until then I will continue to deliver my best/wurst.

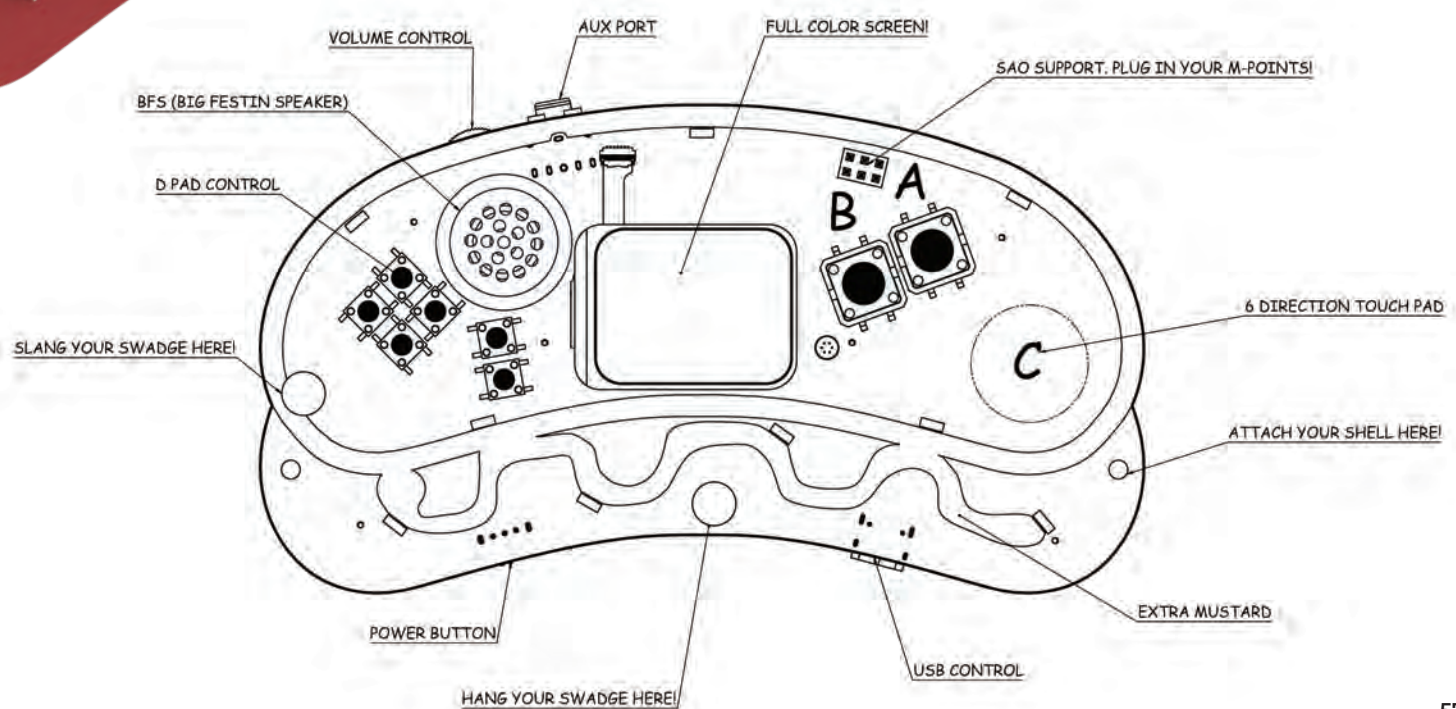


 **Emily** Aug 16th, 2024 at 5:08 PM
MAYBE I COULD FIT ALL THESE TRACES IF THE SWADGE WERE A FOOT LONG



Author's note: if you highlight or circle enough hot dog buns puns in this article, find me (probably in the Makerspace) and I'll give you a ribbon. How many is enough? I think there are 21 goofs excluding the author's note, so I'll accept 15 or more.

MEAT YOUR 2025 HOT DOG SWADGE:



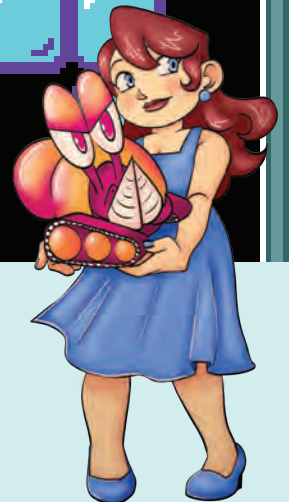
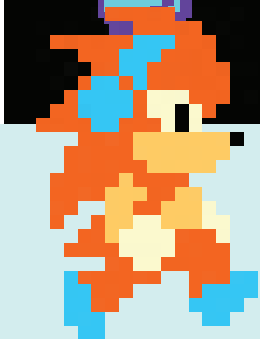


Illustration by Kaitie Lawson

MEET THE DEVELOPER: PANGO

FROM PENGU TO PANGO

INTERVIEW WITH DEVELOPER JON VEGA

Pango's story begins with MAGFest. One of the staples of the arcade was a game called Pengo, a 1982 classic from Sega. While the game is not as well-known as Pac-Man and others, I found myself playing it at MAGFest and quickly appreciated its charm. The game features procedurally generated mazes, strategic gameplay, and more. Unfortunately, Pengo hasn't appeared at the Retro Arcade since around 2019, meaning attendees no longer have the chance to enjoy it at MAGFest.

Over the years of developing Swadge games, my main motivator has been frustration. I was

frustrated by the lack of access to Pengo on modern systems, as there are virtually no ports, except for a Japan-only Switch version with 8-player multiplayer – which, frankly, is not quite the same experience.

Another reason I developed Pango is because I have a toddler now, and I simply do not have as much time to dedicate to Swadge game development as I used to. Random maze generation helps alleviate the burden of level creation, making levels both fun and challenging for the player while reducing my workload.

The Super 2025 mascot Pango the Pangolin was named independently of the game, but it ended up being a perfect fit for building a Pengo-inspired clone. A bit of serendipity, a dash of frustration, and a heap of MAGFest nostalgia all contributed to the creation of Pango.

“ I was frustrated by the lack of access to Pengo on modern systems, as there are virtually no ports, except for a Japan-only Switch version.”

TIPS FROM THE DEVELOPER



Spawner blocks are rainbow flashing blocks. If the player breaks spawner blocks adjacent to others, all the blocks around them will break. This causes a chain reaction and breaks a ton. There are huge bonus points if you line up more than two.



Enemies will not break through spawner blocks; use this to your advantage.

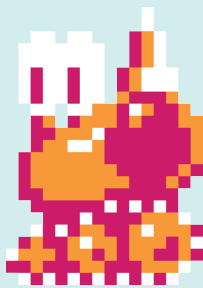


If the player runs out of blocks, they will lose a life, but they will move to the next level.



As with all of my games, there is a debug mode at the title screen. Go get your swadge from MAGFest past and try on Galactic Brick-down or Swadge Land. You can access it with a well-known code.

I spent the first four months of the Swadge development cycle focused on the enemy AI, ensuring the enemies were aggressive enough to keep the player constantly engaged. The logic behind this is quite complex, allowing difficulty settings to be adjusted for each



level. Balancing the difficulty curve is tricky – the game needs to get progressively harder, but the rate at which it does must be finely tuned.

The final level scaling consists of 8 parameters:

- Colors of the blocks
- Number of enemies to defeat
- Number of enemies to spawn
- Enemy speed
- Minimum and maximum time for an angry enemy
- Minimum and maximum number of enemies angry at once

I designed the difficulty table to be non-linear. Occasionally, the player gets a break before the challenge ramps up again. For instance, after facing 3 enemies, the player might only encounter 2 faster-moving enemies, then return to 3 enemies, and so on.

The game's vague storyline centers on Garbotnik, who invades a restaurant to steal hot dogs. The player's role is to protect the freezer from his robotic minions. To score points and defend the restaurant, the player pushes blocks at enemies. They can rack up a lot of points if the blocks hit multiple enemies with a single push. I recommend

deciding between the 3 scoring strategies (lining up enemies, lining up spawner blocks, completing the level quickly) based on the situation that the level presents you. Sometimes it might make sense to switch between strategies mid-level, or even combine them. With random levels, you never know ahead of time which will be the best!

The game's vague story is that Garbotnik has invaded the restaurant to steal hot dogs, and the player's role is to protect the freezer from his robots."

Additionally, the quicker the player clears a level, the more points they earn. As blocks are destroyed, a hot dog appears after a certain percentage of blocks are broken. Be sure to grab it for extra points!



Above: A Pengo arcade cabinet, one of the games that inspired Vega's Pango game on the Swadge
(Photo: "Blackpool Arcade Club" by retroreloads, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)



DEVELOPER PROFILE

NAME: Jon Vega

URL: Software Engineer

SWADGE TEAM SINCE: 2022



MEET THE DEVELOPER: HUNTER'S PUZZLES

A PUZZLING DEVELOPMENT

INTERVIEW WITH DEVELOPER HUNTER DYAR

My journey into game development was unconventional. While many begin with a programming background, mine is in art—I was previously a professional photographer. Over the past five years, I've dedicated myself to learning and advancing my skills in computer science and software development. Currently, I am an Assistant Professor of Immersive Media at Chatham University, where I teach VR/AR technology, Unity Development, and Photography.

I became good friends with Dac (MAGFest Director of Communications) through our shared interest in Rocket League. One day, as our group was discussing tickets and hotels for an event, I first heard about MAGFest. Then, out of the blue, Dac reached out to me and

asked, "Hey, what are you doing this weekend? Do you know C?"

And that's how I ended up getting involved with Swadge.

The first game I built for Swadge was Picross for the Squarewavebird from the Super 2023 event. Picross is in the Sudoku family of puzzle games, where the player fills in grids to create a picture based on clues given to them in the form of numbers. After Picross, I teamed up with another developer to create a larger puzzle game for 2024. The concept was a puzzle world with different locations and game modes, connected by a story. We developed an engine for generating Sokoban-like puzzles, a Japanese game where a warehouse keeper pushes crates

into designated spots. Though Sokoban is a licensed term, it's often used colloquially for such puzzle types. While I never intended to call it a Sokoban game, the dev branch was named Sokobanabokabon (Editor's note: we should have kept that name). I later reduced the scope for the 2025 Swadge to one game mode, dropping the story and renaming it Hunter's Puzzles.

The base principle of Hunter's Puzzles is that the player must paint the entire floor in each level by stepping on a section of floor. The player cannot step on a section of floor which has already been painted. In graph theory, this is called an Eulerian Path, where a path can be drawn to navigate all edges of a shape exactly once.

TIPS FROM THE DEVELOPER



The first thing to look for is an empty space with 3 sides (like a U or C) - once you go there, you cannot go back. Do not enter until the very end. If you see two of those, the puzzle is impossible to solve, and you need to restart.



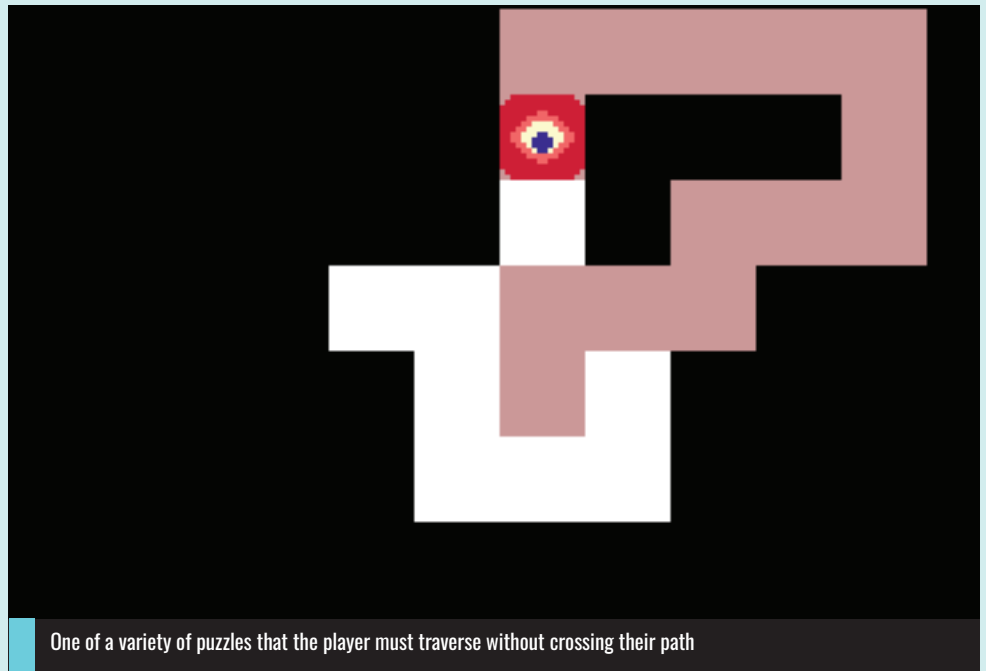
The blocks are often red herrings. Focus on the floor and manage the blocks second.



Progress autosaves when the player goes back to the overworld.

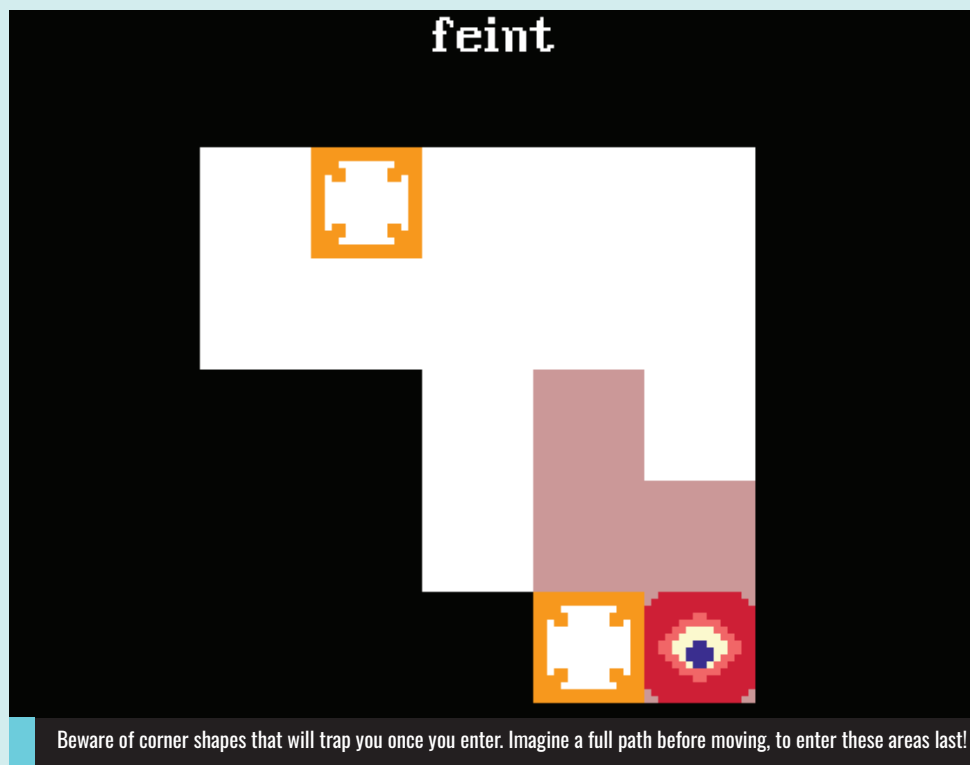
Hunter's Puzzles is not a Sokoban game at its core. The presence of blocks in the gamemode is only to serve as an obstacle and a challenge in each level; they do not need to arrive at a specific destination in the end. There are three types of blocks: normal blocks which are pushed and slide one spot, sticky blocks that attach themselves to the player, and sticky painter's blocks which can paint floor spots which may be inaccessible by the player in normal conditions.

Each of the levels were authored. There are algorithms to be able to determine whether a shape contains a valid Euler Path, but when the shape of the level changes with the movement of the blocks, the solvers get more complex. As my expertise is in Unity, I first built this game there to create and test levels. This principle is something I teach to my students: when learning a new technology, do not do iterative creative work like level generation. Instead, use a tool you already know for creative work, and then learn a new tool to implement that drafted concept. Doing both at the same time is how the developer gets overwhelmed; it's like an infinite canvas. So, I would work in Unity to evaluate game mechanics and level design, and then I would return to the Swadge environment to implement those changes using my existing C knowledge, or learning something new when necessary.



While I strive to follow best practices, there are aspects of Hunter's Puzzles that would lose points in my students' assignments. First, the sticky and painting blocks are introduced poorly and only used in a few levels. When implementing mechanics like this, a proper introduction for the player and reasonable usage of it is important. I kept them anyway because I enjoyed the feature too much. Second, the game lacks strong player motivation—it's not punishing, nor are there significant rewards

for completing puzzles; however, if you solve them all, find me at MAG and I'll give you a high five. Finally, I didn't use all of the Swadge's capabilities, especially the new music features. I intentionally left out audio to allow for quiet play in places like Panel rooms. I would love to add a physical mute button so players can choose when to enjoy sound without disturbing others. Maybe someday!



DEVELOPER PROFILE

NAME: Hunter Dyar

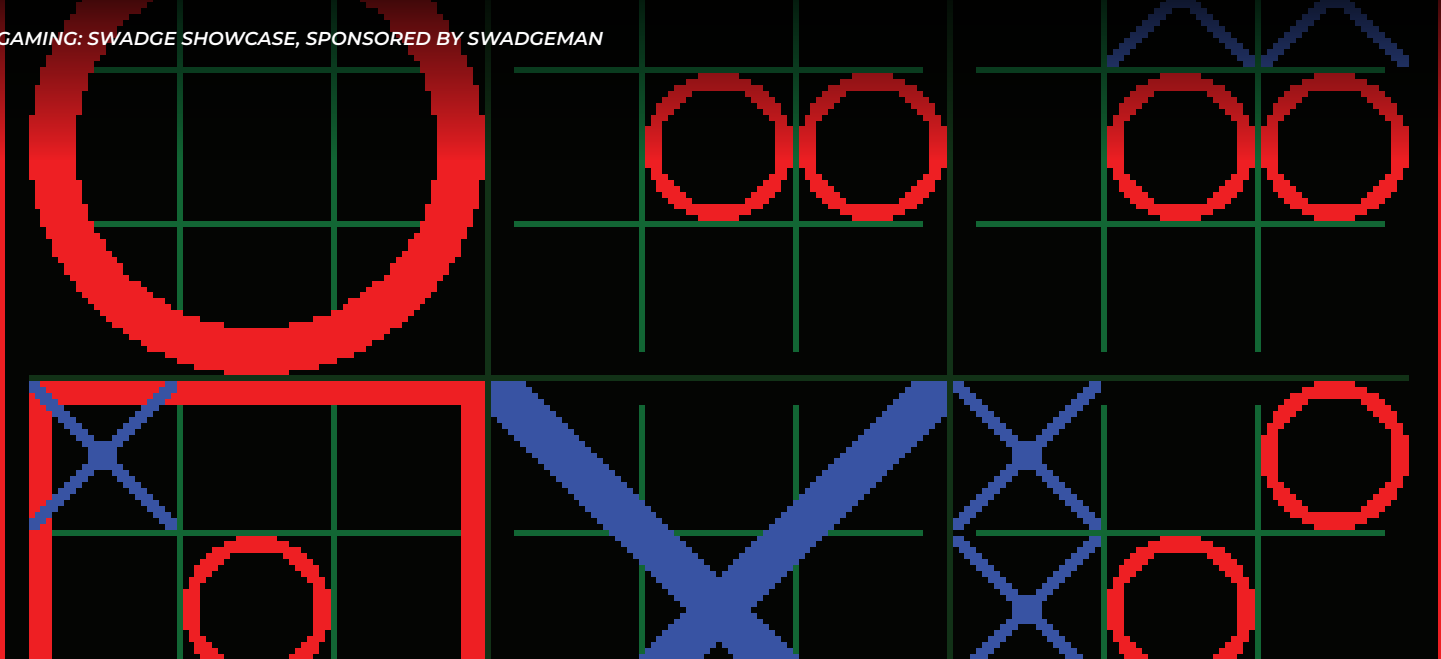
IRL: Professor

SWADGE TEAM SINCE: 2022

LINK: <https://hdyar.com>

HUNTER IS A PANELIST IN 3 EVENTS AT SUPER 2025:

- A Crash Course in Designing for Virtual Reality: Why Laser Pointers Suck and We Can Do Better
- The Classroom will be a changing: VR in Education & Training
- The State of Virtual Reality 2024 and Beyond



MEET THE DEVELOPER: ULTIMATE TIC TAC TOE

X RECURSIVELY MARKS THE SPOT

INTERVIEW WITH DEVELOPER ADAM FEINSTEIN

I wanted to make a pinball game. A perceptive reader will note the article title and ask: why Tic Tac Toe? First, a story:

My first MAGFest was 2015 where I saw these PCBs floating around hanging on badge lanyards. That was the first Swadge: a Charles Lohr special that was just a neat, unpopulated PCB. I wanted to get my hands on one of these and could not because you couldn't buy them; I don't know if it was because they were staff-only, or a merch tier. The next Swadge (the Castlevania one) I saw but failed to buy. So, for the King Donut in 2017, I promised myself I'd get one but it turns out they were late to the event due to manufacturing problems and mine arrived in the mail two weeks

later. This didn't quite have the same effect as having it during the event, so it occurred to me that this was a volunteer organization and while I didn't have a lot of skills I did have some that I could offer. So, I threw together a CV of all the bits and bobs projects I've done and sent it to them. This included my Pong shirt, which I built to impress my fellow MAGFesters. Turns out that was overkill, but then I joined the Swadge team.

Anyway, I wanted to make a pinball game. I always try to do a game that is more aligned with the theme, and the first game I ever finished was Sonic Spinball. I have a very distinct memory of playing that in the car on a family trip up to Cape Cod. I remember two things from that trip: beating Sonic



UTTT functions as a Tic-Tac-Toe board with 9 Tic-Tac-Toe boards built in. The player needs to create large symbols by winning the small games. The location of the move the player picks moves the active board to that board.

Spinball and thinking I am the best at video games ever, and visiting the Cape Cod Potato Chip factory where I got a free bag of potato chips.

TIPS FROM THE DEVELOPER



The box you place your marker determines the grid your opponent must play within. For example, if I place my X in the top-left box, Player O must play within the larger grid's top-left section.



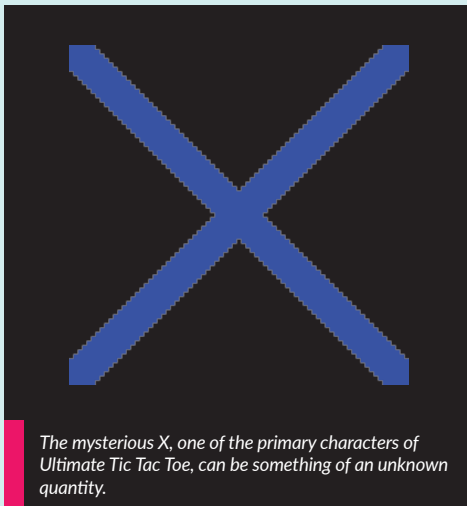
If that section of the larger grid has already been won, the next player gets to choose which section of the larger grid they play in.



Always think 2 moves ahead. Where you place your marker determines your opponent's field of play. Use this to your advantage - force your opponent into a move that benefits you!



Use these facts to your advantage. You can essentially force your opponent between a rock and a hard place - where no matter where they play in that section, you will be set up for a move of superiority.



I knew pinball was technically feasible because I played it on a Game Gear like 30 years ago and Pokemon Pinball on the Game Boy Color. It's possible on the Swadge, right?

I couldn't make it work. I hated the way it felt and I think that may have to do with the fact that I played just enough pinball that I know how it's supposed to feel. There was a wrongness that I could not shake. The physics were brutal, because a ball bouncing off a flat surface (like Pong) is easy to program. Getting it to follow a curve is so much harder. There were ways I could skimp on physics, but I wanted to do it the right way!

One case of skimping on physics is when the player pins the ball with an upturned flapper. In my pinball



DEVELOPER PROFILE

NAME: Adam Feinstein

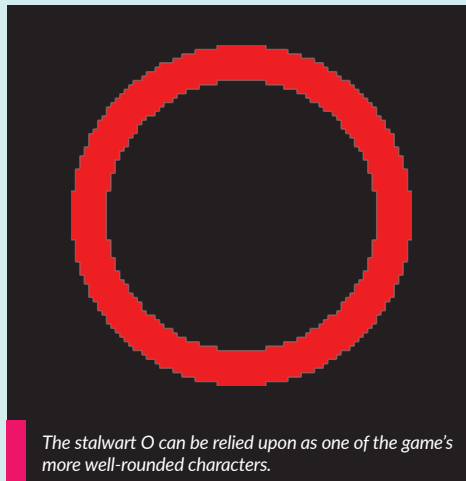
IRL: Electrical & Computer Engineer

SWADGE TEAM SINCE: 2018

LINK: www.swadge.com

game, the ball would violently wiggle as it made contact between the flapper and the table. I just want the ball to sit there. I went back and played Spinball, and it turns out it jiggles there. I booted up Pokemon, same thing. It jiggles!

At this point I had been living in a hotel for two weeks (not a very nice hotel, unfortunately) and had been plugging away at all the pinball physics. I finally got to my new apartment and kept plugging away at pinball physics. And I thought, okay, like, now that I have a more comfortable workspace, I'll be able to think and get through this and make progress. I got to a point where it just wasn't fun anymore. I was making incremental progress still, but I wasn't enjoying sitting down and doing it. It was just kind of giving me stress. I try to follow my own rule of, if I'm not having fun, don't do that thing. So, I dropped pinball.



The first game I wrote for Swadge was a reflex game for the Reflector (Super 2018). I thought it was the coolest thing that I was a relatively introverted dork at MAGFest, and now I could go around and anytime I saw someone else with a Reflector, I'd be like "hey, you want to play a game?" and if they said no, I said cool. And if they said yes, we played a game. I played a whole bunch that year and that felt really cool. I loved that interaction. So, I've always tried to build something that encourages people to interact with other people as an icebreaker. So, this year was Ultimate Tic Tac Toe. I was also happy about it because I had an itch that I wanted to write a tactics game.

Ultimate Tic Tac Toe is kind of like a tactics game, but very distilled. I also realized that we could just start putting board games on Swadges. Turns out,



board games are great for the Swadge because Swadge wireless is much better for asynchronous multiplayer than it is for synchronous multiplayer, such as Swadge Bros from the Squarewavebird. Before this interview I had not written Pass-and-Play, but since then I've added it!

UTTT has three game modes:

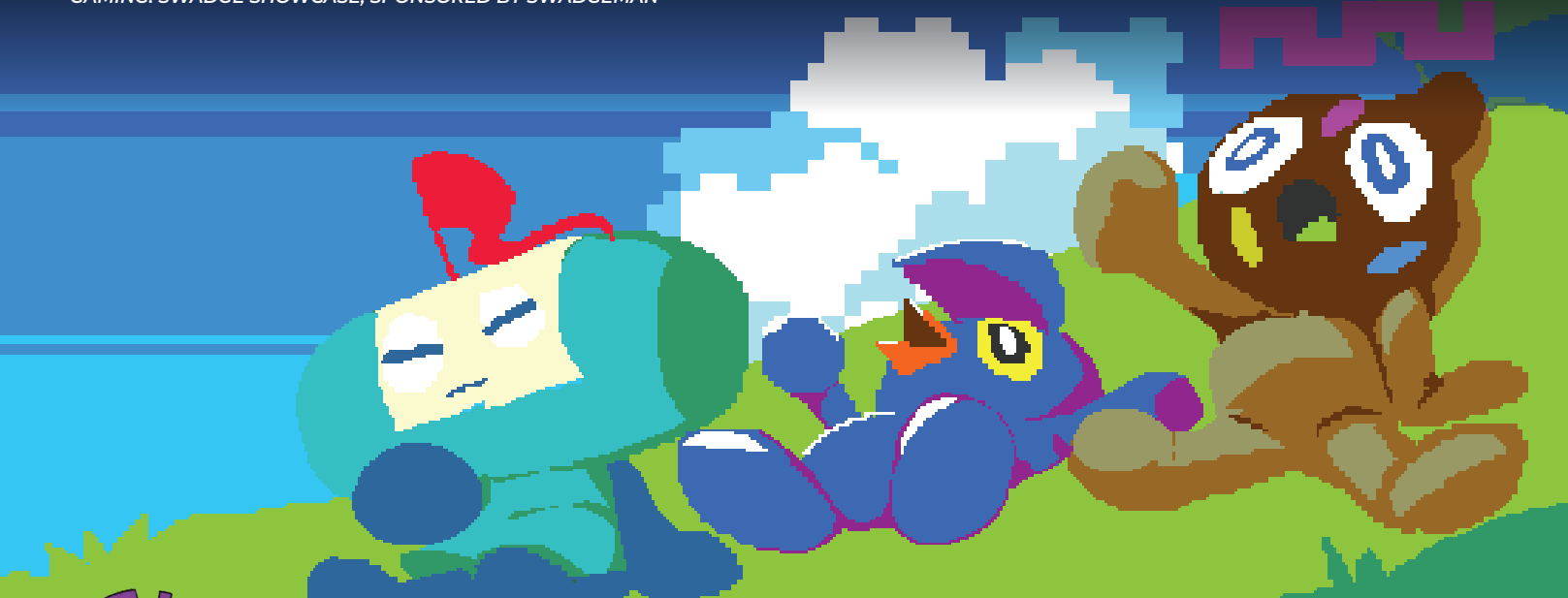
- Wireless Connect (Swadge v Swadge)
- Pass and Play
- Single Player with 3 difficulties against AI

Dylan wrote the AI for UTTT, and it's amazing. It's actually hard, unlike regular Tic-Tac-Toe.

UTTT functions as a Tic-Tac-Toe board with 9 Tic-Tac-Toe boards built in. The player needs to create large symbols by winning the small games. The location of the move the player picks moves the active board to that board.

Maybe pinball will return for 2026? Who knows.





MEET THE DEVELOPER: 2048 AND CHOWA GROVE

THE POWERS OF TWO (GAMES)

INTERVIEW WITH DEVELOPER JEREMY STINTZCUM

My background is in Electrical Engineering, and I enjoy making small devices and trinkets. My dream is to eventually start a cosplay business that builds microcontroller-based props. My friend has been going to MAGFest for a while and finally convinced me to attend Super MAGFest 2024. While buying my ticket, I saw the Swadge and thought, "Hey, it's one of those computer badges I've seen around!" So, I decided to grab one. I thought, "This is what they can do with that little chip? I want to do that too!"

I joined the team, and I was quickly surprised by how our games were built. I had expected small teams to create prototypes based on the event theme, then choose one main "feature"

game to develop together. Instead, I learned that each game was an independent project, with collaboration from artists, composers, and other developers.

When the theme was announced, I immediately thought of the Chao Garden. My most memorable Sonic experience was playing in the Chao Garden with my sister and two best friends. I loved the pet simulator concept and I felt this was something I could recreate for the Swadge. So, I designed it and named it Chowa to distinguish it from the original game. Initially, I called the pet "Chawo" (pronounced Cha-woh), but it felt awkward, so I flipped the letters.

After building the Grove prototype, I realized

just how massive this project was, so I pivoted to something simple, 2048. The game I always played in college to kill time was 2048, and I thought I could whip it up in a weekend. It took 6 weeks.

My most memorable Sonic experience was playing in the Chao Garden in Sonic Adventure 2 with my sister and two best friends.

Developing a game for the Swadge is very different than in a modern engine. Modern game engines provide so many tools to be

TIPS FROM THE DEVELOPER



The Chowa has 6 skills: Health, Strength, Speed, Stamina, Agility, and Charisma.



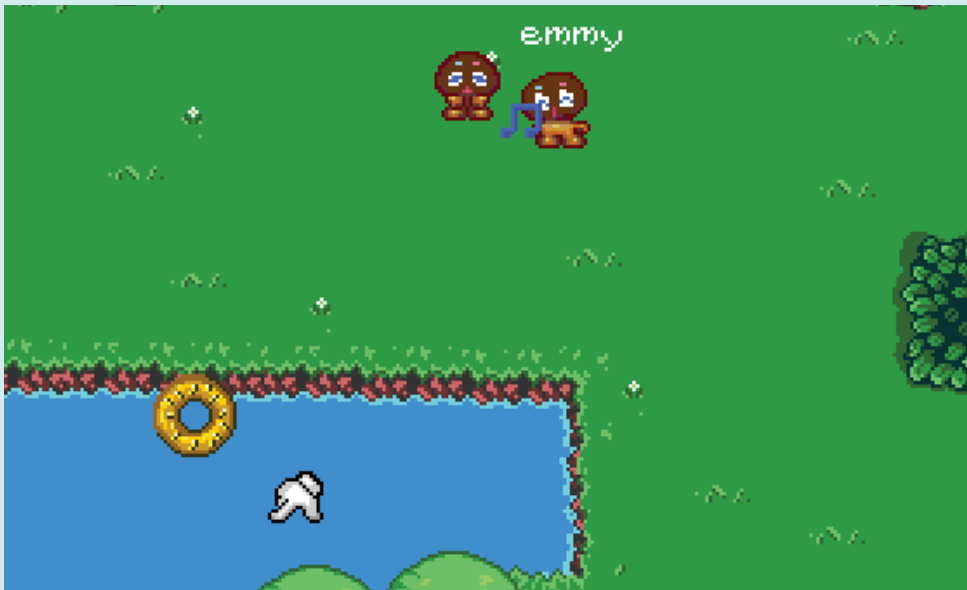
Chowas raise Charisma by chatting with each other.



Feeding the Chowa cakes and souffles raises their health.



Interact with the Chowa to increase their abilities in competitions, and use the rewards from the competitions to help raise the Chowa.



Chowa design concepts of some of MAGFest's mascot friends from across the years. (Illus. Kaitie Lawson)

able to visualize what you're about to do, but with Swadge it is a lot of build and rebuild to see what has changed. The hardest part of 2048 was getting the block sprites to interact properly when they slid and collided. I spent 3 weeks trying to get them to interact properly. Luckily I had help; I handed it off to Adam, who started the mechanic from scratch and managed to get it working after several attempts.

With 2048 completed, I returned to Chowa Grove to continue development. The game is deliberately easy—I do not want the pets to die just because the player rolled a bad set of stats, and it encourages playing in 10 minute segments. Some of the sparring can feel unfair at higher levels but, for the most part, it is simple to power up your character.

The cake and souffle sprites to feed to the Chowa are the most detailed sprites in the game.

I had big goals for Chowa Grove, and some items were cut due to time. Originally, we planned for 6 different sprites. I wanted each sprite to reflect different personalities based on the mascots, plus a child and adult variant. In the end, we

picked King Donut. If I had infinite time, I would have also introduced a peer to peer mode with the Swadge's multiplayer capabilities.

One thing I truly appreciated about the development of Chowa were the artists who brought it to life. I'm a "gray box" developer—everything functions, but it's all cubes, gray, and technically works, but looks pretty rough. The contributions of Kaitie and Greg, with their hundreds of sprites, background art, and more, as well as the composers for the music, made a huge difference.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

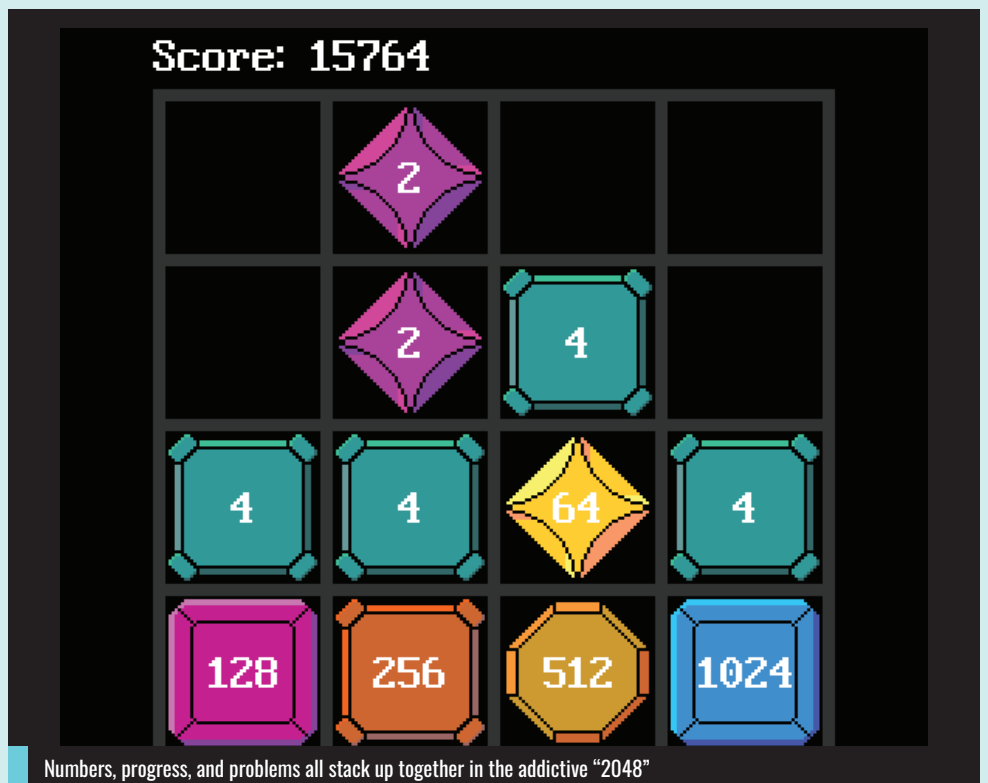
NAME: Jeremy Stintzum

IRL: Electrical Engineer

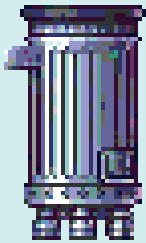
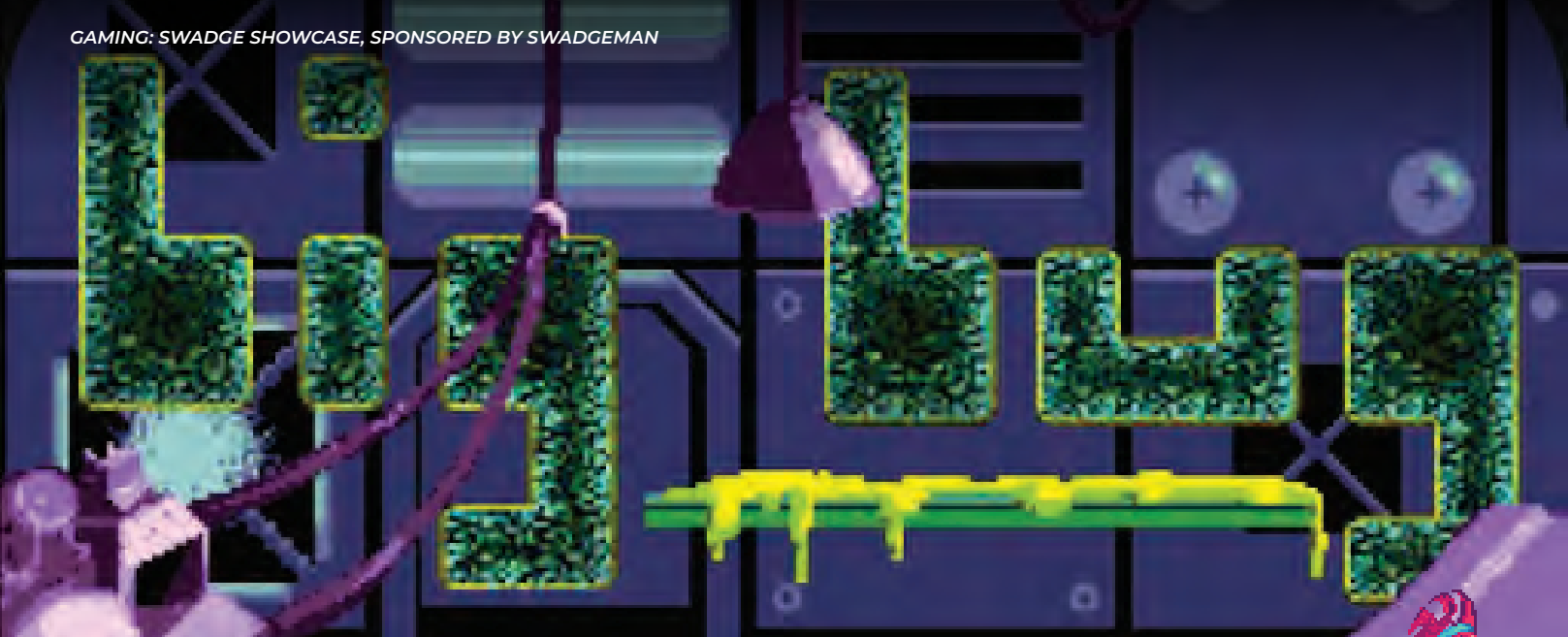
SWADGE TEAM SINCE: 2024

LINK: @condenseroverflow

<https://haltandcatchfire.square.site/>



Numbers, progress, and problems all stack up together in the addictive "2048"



MEET THE DEVELOPER: **BIG BUG**

HUNTING FOR BUGS

INTERVIEW WITH DEVELOPER JAMES ALBRACHT



Super MAGFest 2024 was my first event, where I immediately got involved in the Community Orchestra. I attended the spring MAGCon (MAGFest staff's planning event) and randomly joined a Swadge breakout session, which is how I found the group. As someone passionate about game development and design, I felt it was an incredible opportunity to make an impact on the 2500 attendees at the event who got the Swadge. The team is welcoming to varying skill levels,

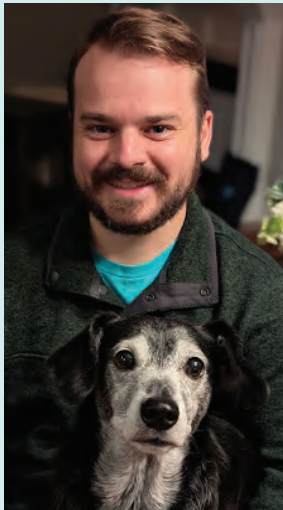
and I encourage other aspiring developers to get involved and ask questions with this supportive team.

It was daunting to figure out what type of game I wanted to make, and I started by thinking about old arcade games which could be reimagined for the Swadge. I thought of Dig Dug, which is a dirt digging game released by Namco in the 80's. The final product is very different from Dig Dug,

but that's where it got its general concept and namesake. Additionally, the player uses harpoons as a weapon as a nod to Dig Dug.

Other mechanics, features, and vibes were inspired by a few games:

- The floaty movement from Dome Keeper
- The level design from SteamWorld Dig
- Gameplay loops from Raven's Watch, Inkbound, Tom Clancy's The Division™: Survival.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

NAME: James Albracht

IRL: Violinist in the Community Orchestra

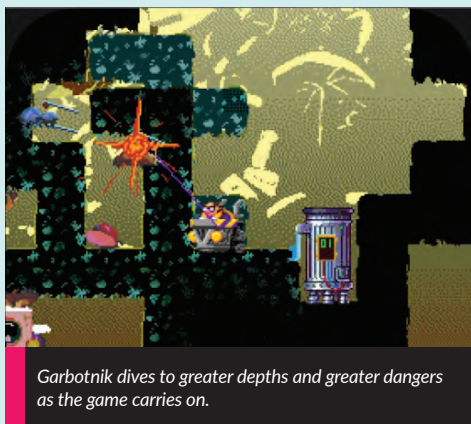
SWADGE TEAM SINCE: 2024

LINK: debrishauler.itch.io



SWADGE MUSIC: LIVE AND IN CONCERT

James arranged a medley of the MAGTroid Pocket soundtrack, the main game on the Super 2024 Swadge. Swadge composer Joe Newman and 8 other musicians will be performing this at the Small Ensemble Showcase. At time of printing, this is scheduled for Friday the 24th from 3 to 4:30pm, but as always check Guidebook for the most up-to-date information.



Garbotnik dives to greater depths and greater dangers as the game carries on.

The real magic happens when the building blocks come together and the game begins to take on a life of its own, growing into something greater than the sum of its parts.

I began developing Big Bug by creating a demo in two weeks. It is important to start with interactions that are inherently fun. In the early prototype, I thought of it as a bubble wrap popping simulator. My approach has been simple: I add features iteratively, based on my available time and skill level, gradually increasing the complexity of the game. The real magic happens when the building blocks come together, and the game begins to take on a life of its own, growing into something greater than the sum of its parts. To date, I've spent over a thousand hours on it.

One of the key strengths of the Swadge hardware is its ability to store a good number of sprites in SPI RAM. This allows for levels that evolve as the player moves through them, darkening as they dive deep into the trash. This polish adds an immersive

quality to the game and enhances the spooky atmosphere, as players struggle to track the bugs harder to see the further they dive.



Scattered throughout the levels are points of interest. Some are mazes, others are large rooms teeming with enemies in a horde, and there are various rewards to be gathered. At the top of the garbage patch, these areas are relatively easy to navigate, allowing players to "cheese" it by breaking through the garbage versus following the maze. But as they venture deeper, the winding caverns become more complex and are filled with denser garbage, making it much harder to navigate.



Ovo
With that kind of cash, I can recruit 200 professional bassoon players to the MAGfest Community Orchestra.

Peek into the inner life of ol' Garby with a large number of illustrated dialogue scenes!

When writing Dr. Ovo Garbotnik's dialogue, my intention was to make people laugh. You may notice something interesting about the dialogue moments if you play through more than once!



It's difficult to deny Dr. Garbotnik's genius... except perhaps when the word "culinary" is in front of it.

TIPS FROM THE DEVELOPER



There are heavy objects that can be dropped to eliminate garbage. They build up momentum the further they fall before colliding, so it's a fast way to get through the toughest blocks in the game. It's also a secret way to get more fuel if you squash a bug with a washing machine.



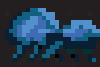
There are 4 different ways to hatch the egg in the tutorial: bump it, mine the dirt around it, shine headlamps on it, or shoot it with harpoons from below. Harpoons only pass in front of dirt when they have upward velocity. This was a subtle way of balancing the difficulty of diving deeper along with quality of life.



As Garbotnik returns to space to the death dumpster, a day passes. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday are trash days; that means sanitation workers will fill in the landfill, and the layout will change. But don't worry, you will keep all your upgrades. Go back to the death dumpster wisely!



The player's journey is limited by fuel, so they must scavenge for more within the garbage and, over time, improve their fuel efficiency with upgrades to be able to explore deeper.



For every 10 bugs you tow back to the rocket booster, you get a choice to upgrade your radar. Once fully upgraded, then every 10 bugs collected tops off your ammo.



The bugs are not very smart. If you line the booster up against a tall wall, the grabby hand can snatch some of the unsuspecting bugs without any effort at all from you! The garbage is connected between the foreground and midground. Try to tactfully make entire portions collapse to immobilize bugs clinging on!

WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE...

Logging countless hours playing board games about trains and settlers. Sometimes you just want something new and exciting. Sometimes your friends get tired of losing to you at the same games over and over again. Let's face it, you're too good! That's why we have the MAGFest Indie Tabletop Showcase! Invite your party over to the Riverview Ballroom and try out some brand new games from independent developers!

Oh no... SO MANY CHOICES!! Fear not - we have just the solution for you! Grab your favorite d100 and make a Chaos Magic roll to see what the universe suggests you try!

HOW IT WORKS:

1. Pick up a d100.
 - If you don't have a d100, either visit Marketplace or find a virtual die roller on your phone.
2. Roll that d100.
3. Look up the number rolled in the Tabletop Chaos Magic Table to the right.
4. **Play the game matching your number.**
5. Some numbers may have additional instructions, such as re-roll or add/subtract a d6. Do what the table says.
6. Once your friends are tired of losing at that game, roll again!!
7. Never Stop Blowing Up Rolling.

NO, REALLY, IT'S THAT EASY!

Roll that big ol' die and get to playing some of the newest, hottest, awesomest, indie-est games this side of the galaxy!



TABLETOP CHAOS MAGIC TABLE

d100	Outcome	d100	Outcome
1-2	Legends of Avallen by Adder Stone Games: A Celtic-inspired tabletop RPG where players create legendary heroes through creative, team-based gameplay.	51-52	Memoir Games by Memoir Games: A series of games that use personal memories to create stories and art through drawing and writing exercises.
3-4	Make Your Words Count! by Alpha Earl Apps LLC: Educational card games designed to enhance math, vocabulary, and social skills for classrooms and homeschoolers.	53-54	Dungeons & Dinos by Nomnivore Games Inc.: A fast-paced game where adventurers cause chaos while trying to defeat the Big Bad in a neighborhood quest.
5-6	Boiling Point by Anoba Studios: A fast-paced card game where crustaceans race to escape heat and battle chefs for revenge.	55-56	EMBERWIND by Nomnivore Games Inc.: A tactical RPG with easy-to-learn rules that offer deep strategy and customizability.
7-8	Frayed: Threads of Fate by ARGOT: A trading card game where new deities compete for followers using a thread-based resource system.	57-58	Nomventure by Nomnivore Games Inc.: A family-friendly game where players create adventures with adorable dinosaurs on a snack-hunting journey.
9-10	RetHELL by Arkidogo Interactive: A darkly comedic game set in the afterlife where players manage retail shops and vie for dominance.	59-60	Pango the Pangolin is summoned as your Guardian. Go to line 69.
11-12	TerraFyte by Arkidogo Interactive: A sci-fi game where players use cryptocurrency to hire mercenaries to save planets at war.	61-62	Love, Career & Magic by Pegasus Games: A storytelling game set in a quirky reality TV show with mythological creatures working modern-day jobs.
13-14	Battle for Justice by Battle for Justice: A strategic card game where players destroy monuments through well-planned tactical moves.	63-64	Terror Incognita by Project Labyrinth: A narrative-driven horror game where players navigate a dark maze to save a princess while managing their health.
15-16	BitterSweet by Coo' Games: A light, quick card game where players collect chocolates they like while avoiding those they don't.	65-66	Seas of Havoc by Rock Manor Games: A naval combat game where players compete to gain renown through shipwreck exploration and high-seas battles.
17-18	Lily Hop by Coo' Games: A card game where frogs race between lily pads to capture flies.	67-68	StarDriven: Gateway by Rock Manor Games: A dice-based SciFi RPG where players explore new worlds with a focus on tactical decisions and cooperative play.
19-20	Roll a d10. Add this to your roll and go to that line.	69-70	Haha, you thought we'd give someone this number? Roll again.
21-22	HEAT: High Excitement Action Tabletop by Cybernetic Coven: A cooperative RPG that recreates intense action movie scenes without dice.	71-72	Sunset by Forteller: A narrative RPG exploring memory, its loss, and the passage of time as characters reflect on their lives before death.
23-24	Pirates Dragons Treasure by Dark Port Games: A competitive card game where pirate captains battle dragons for treasure.	73-74	Did you know D&D was released in 1974? I didn't either until I made this table. Add a d6 to your roll.
25-26	SpellArms: The Trading Card Game by Evilly Enhanced Games: A fantasy-themed card game where players use magical weapons to battle in a royale with a unique deck-building system.	75-76	Beneath Nexus by Silverclutch Games: An asymmetrical dungeon crawl where one player controls the evil Blight Lord, and others reclaim a ruined city.
27-28	WTF in Crypt Crawl by FDS Gaming Tech: A tabletop game where players face cryptic challenges and strange encounters in a humorous setting.	77-78	Heavy Armor by Silverclutch Games: A tactical squad combat game where players control mechs in strategic battles on a hex board.
29-30	Nations and Cannons by Flagbearer Games: A 1776-inspired D&D setting where sword and sorcery meet the age of pike and shot.	79-80	Dr. Garbotnik presents his game: literal trash. Why aren't you clapping? Subtract a d10 from your roll, or roll again.
31-32	A Fir bolg becomes your Game Master. Add a d6 if you're excited by this, and add a d6 if you are not excited by this.	81-82	Alter Arms by Skrapped Games, LLC: A dynamic RPG where players transform into heroes with unique powers to battle alien invaders in dramatic showdowns.
33-34	Death Cap Sauté by Junk Food Games: A GM-less RPG where players compete in a deadly culinary contest using dice rolls.	83-84	Skrapp Packs by Skrapped Games, LLC: A card-based RPG where players gather random items and argue their usefulness to overcome crises.
35-36	Necromancer Heretic by Junk Food Games: A solo card and journaling game where players try to resurrect a lover while avoiding the king's guards.	85-86	SLAPSTICK! by Skrapped Games, LLC: A wacky RPG where cartoon characters' failures lead to environmental changes players can exploit.
37-38	You cast tone deaf at level 9. If you're a musician, subtract 5 from your roll and go to that line. If you are not a musician, add 5.	87-88	SpellBound by SpellBound: A deck-building game where players use spells and summons to gather resources and gain power in magical battles.
39-40	Bread by Knife Bunny Games: A competitive card game where players build an engine to survive a famine by managing limited resources.	89-90	Battle for Biternia by Stone Circle Games: A team-based strategy game where players use unique heroes to battle in a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena-inspired experience.
41-42	Conviction by Knife Bunny Games: A semi-cooperative card game where couples try to change each other's minds through strategic play.	91-92	Burned by Stone Circle Games: A psychological, strategic card game set in neon noir 80s Miami, where players engage in high-stakes duels.
43-44	Unraveled by Knife Bunny Games: An asymmetric game where players deduce clues and interact as a detective or suspect in a mystery.	93-94	Exit Vector by Vector Tridens LLC: A vehicle combat game set in a dystopian future where players control expert pilots on high-stakes missions.
45-46	Vibes by Knife Bunny Games: A card game where players match classmates to create the perfect group for an art class project.	95-96	Void Breakers by Void Breakers: A brutal, strategic brawl where players control interplanetary prisoners battling in an arena.
47-48	You turn into a potted cactus. Roll again.	97-98	Castlore by WSGames: A trick-taking card game where magical spells alter the rules and fate of each round for dynamic gameplay.
49-50	Toppings by Ludamus Games: A pizza-themed competitive card game where players assemble their perfect pizza with set collection and engine-building mechanics.	99-100	A crit? Really? Don't lie to the nice people. Roll again.

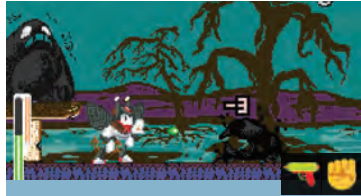
MIVS

Every year MIVS features indie games on desktop, console and mobile. Come see the latest from up and coming devs, play in tournaments and more!

MIVS is located in Expo Hall C.



PROJEKT GODHAND
Anarch Entertainment



Globlins!
Arkbuilder Interactive



Inkursion
BROKENCIGS



Lumina Rush
Battered Lute Studios



Goo Goo Grappers
Both Good



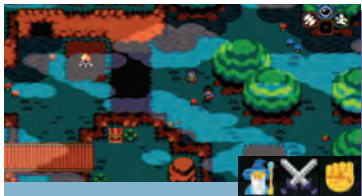
Advent of the Reaper
Brekies at Noon



Beatblock
BubbleTabby



Steel Carnelian
Catbird Soft



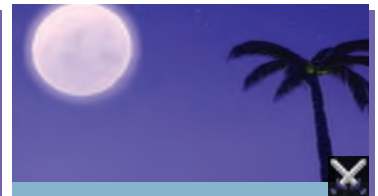
OTHER: Her Loving Embrace
Chimera Labs



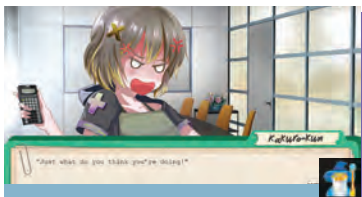
UNBEATABLE
D-CELL GAMES



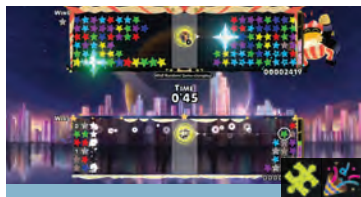
Rightfully, Beary Arms
Daylight Basement Studio, LLC



The Immaculate Drag
Discrete Infinity



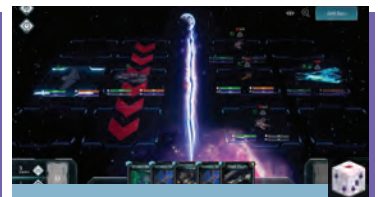
Don't Fraud My Heart
Dogwood Gaming



Scramble Star Crossing
Dusk Sharp



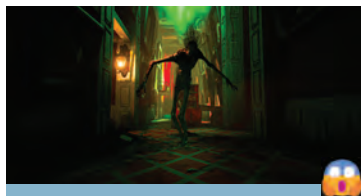
Bundle of Joy
Essay Games



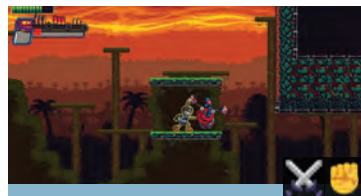
Aurora Nova
Ex Astra Studios



Hank Shaw: Private Eye
Exit 73 Games



Where They Go
Faire Noir



HeroBot!
FellsSword Games



Wish Creatures
Forte & Friends

MAGFEST INDIE VIDEO GAME SHOWCASE



Halloween on Sweet Street
GAME JOY

GAME GENRES AT A GLANCE



ACTION



PARTY



ROLE-PLAYING GAME



SPORTS



ADVENTURE



PUZZLE



REAL-TIME STRATEGY



TURN-BASED STRATEGY



HORROR



RACING



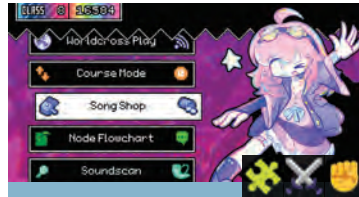
SHOOTER



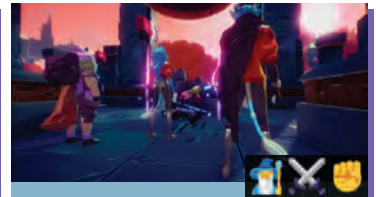
Boned
Guild Cheese



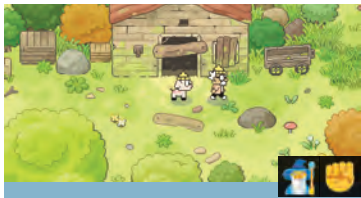
Geo Mythica
Guin Entertainment, LLC



vivid/stasis
Hajimeli



Hyper Light Breaker
Heart Machine, Inc.



Hermit and Pig
Heavy Lunch Studio



Toroban
Hebert Games LLC



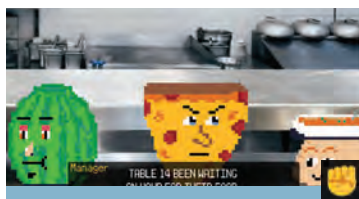
MINDWAVE
HoloHammer



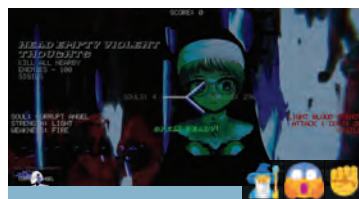
Mech Tech
Hotter Water Games



Hook Line and Sniper
tellatella & Justin1L8



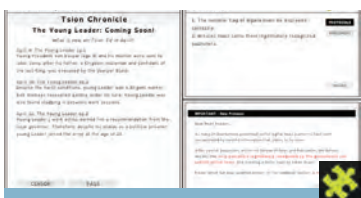
Taco and Bleu
Jara Bros Studios



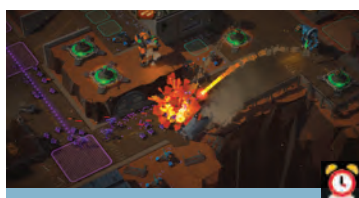
Liminal Void
Jeistar



Punk Juice
LEMON BOY Studios



Silencer
Little Lulu



Temporal Titans
Lost Tower Games



Lost Euclidean
Luminescence Games



Reflectile
Matter Games

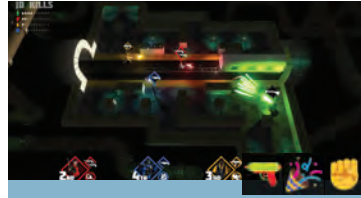
MIVS



Maximum Apocalypse: The Video Game
Mega Cat Studios



Ouros
Michael Kamm



At Sundown: Shots in the Dark
Mildbeast



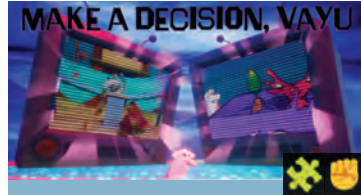
Ashcroft
Mosh Jason Games



Over Many Waters
MultiMediaVerse LLC



Bruisin' Cruisers
Neon Deity Games



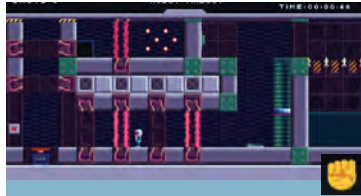
1000 Deaths
Pariah Interactive



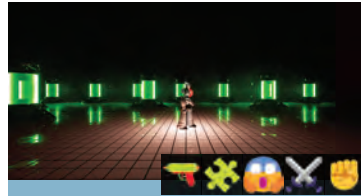
Rolus in the Outskirts
Penguins at Work



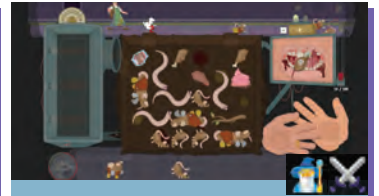
Kids of Karenow
Phat Games



Station Zeta
Porch Weather Games



Quantum Cortex
QCDev



Dunderbeck
RUST LTD



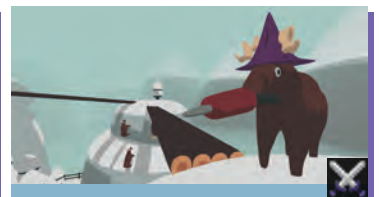
Angry Video Game Nerd 8-bit
Retroware



Kingdoms of the Dump
Roach Games



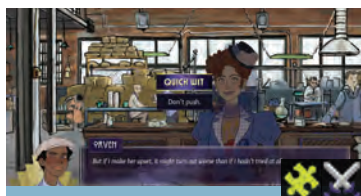
Pixel Noir
SWDTECH Games



Weird Meese
Secret Mollusk



Moosolutions
Send It Apps



Ventreville: A Cure for Sorrow
Spicy Bread Productions, LLC



Nekomancer of Nowhere
Standing Cat

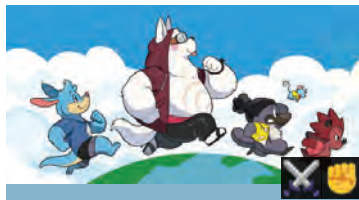


Taro the Sneaky Ninja
Starfall Studios

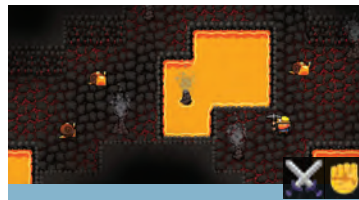
MAGFEST INDIE VIDEO GAME SHOWCASE



Timeworks
Starworks Studios



Breeze in the Clouds
Stormy Nights Interactive



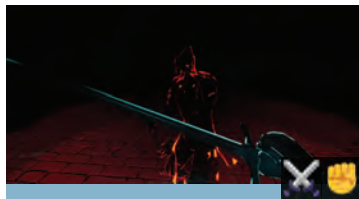
Below the Stone
Strollart Studios



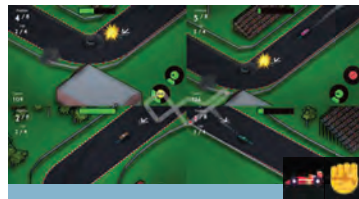
Closing at 2
Studio Ureka!



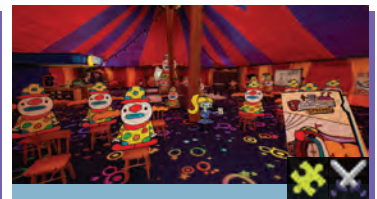
Pin City
Studio217, LLC



EchoBlade
Sunset Arctic Games



DRIFT BOOM BOOM
Team KD Games



Part of You
TeamSometimesY



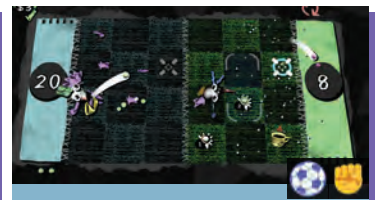
Fine Work
Tethys Games



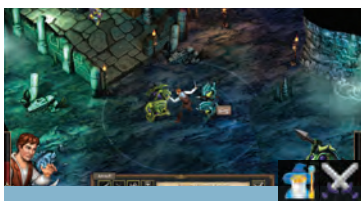
Starbright Agency
Thoughtful Bread



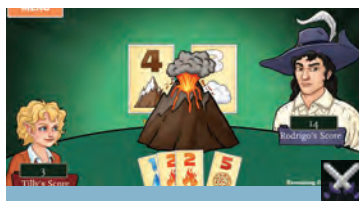
KISS U
Thurman Games



TORSO TENNIS
Too Much Tomato



Hero-U: Rogue to Redemption
Transolar Games



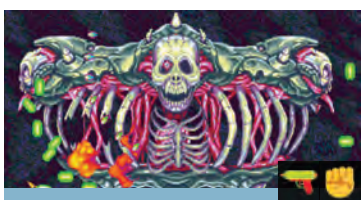
Summer Daze: Tilly's Tale
Transolar Games



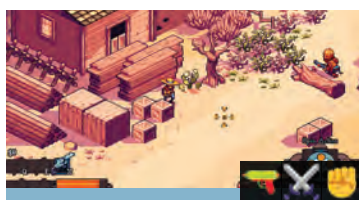
EOPRISM
Unexpected Accessories



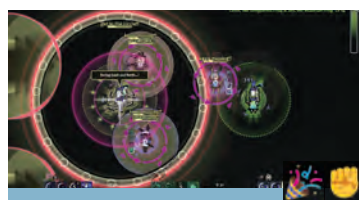
darkwebSTREAMER
We Have Always Lived In The Forest



ZPF
ZPF Team



Sunset Devils
illseer games



Rabbit and Steel
mino_dev



Super Duper Multitasking
yyrGames

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OVER 75 ONE-OF-A-KIND
PHYSICAL GAMES!

FEATURING

NIGHTMARE KART
QUANTUM JUNGLE
NIDHOGG II
BLACK EMPEROR
2P SCRAPEBOARD

AND MORE ?!?!?????!?!?????!?!!



LINE WOBBLER

BY ROBIN BAUMGARTEN

WWW.WOBBLYLABS.COM

The 1-dimensional dungeon-crawler that's often featured in MAGFest's Indie Arcade can trip up new players. Luckily for you, we're here with some tips and maps to help you clear the game like a champ!

PRO-TIP

Level 5 has a parade of more than 20 enemies. Be prepared to wiggle for your life!

Line Wobbler is played with a spring (originally from a door stopper!)

Shaking the joystick will cause your character to send out an attack to both sides, so go ahead, give it a wiggle!

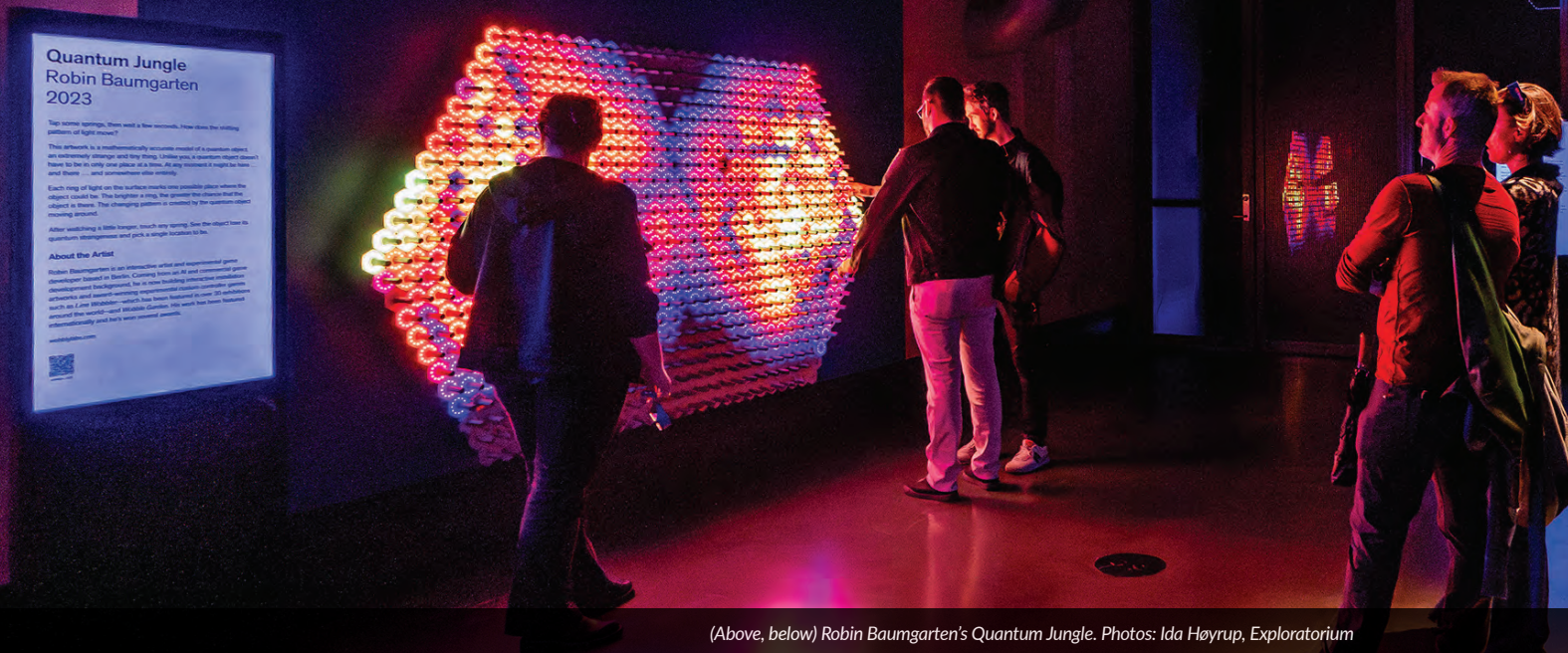
PRO-TIP

Take your time with the huge lava pit in level 4 -- there's conveyor belts on both sides!

PRO-TIP

Beating all 8 levels with fewer than 3 deaths will grant access to a secret bonus level!





(Above, below) Robin Baumgarten's Quantum Jungle. Photos: Ida Høyrup, Exploratorium



Comic by KAITIE LAWSON

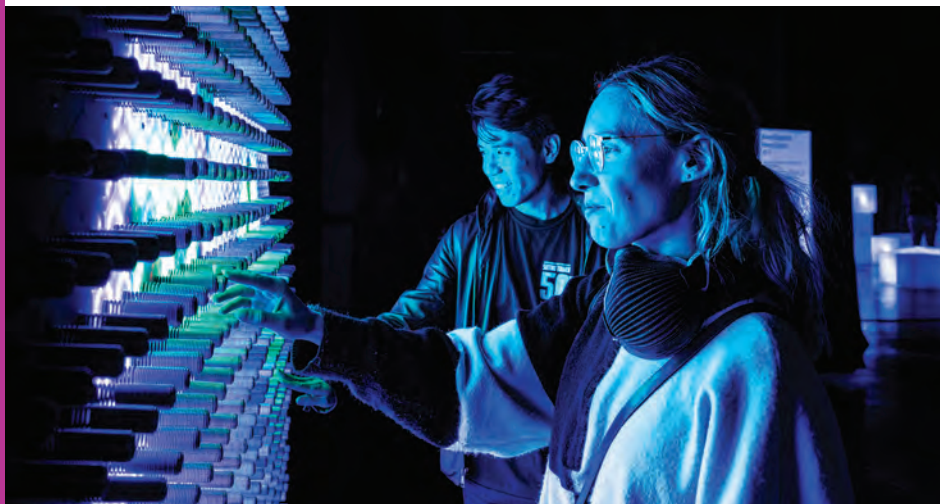
INDIE ARCADE ENTER THE QUANTUM JUNGLE

The MAGFest Indie Arcade is thrilled to welcome Robin Baumgarten to our space this year, bringing his Quantum Jungle to Super MAGFest! Quantum Jungle links thousands of LEDs with hundreds of touch sensitive springs to create an interactive art experience modeling the movement of quantum particles, where every swipe, tap, and flick of a spring resonates across the LED space.

Super-MAGFest-Expo-Hall-C regulars might recognize Robin's work from his 1D LED adventure game Line Wobbler, which has been in the Indie Arcade space since 2017!



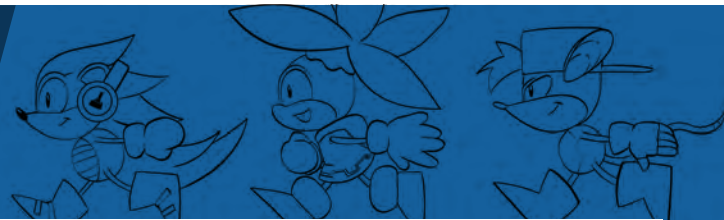
For more information about Quantum Jungle and how the wall simulates superposition, scan this QR code for details. To learn more about alt ctrl games, stop by the Indie Arcade in Expo C, or attend the annual alt ctrl panel (time and location in Guidebook).

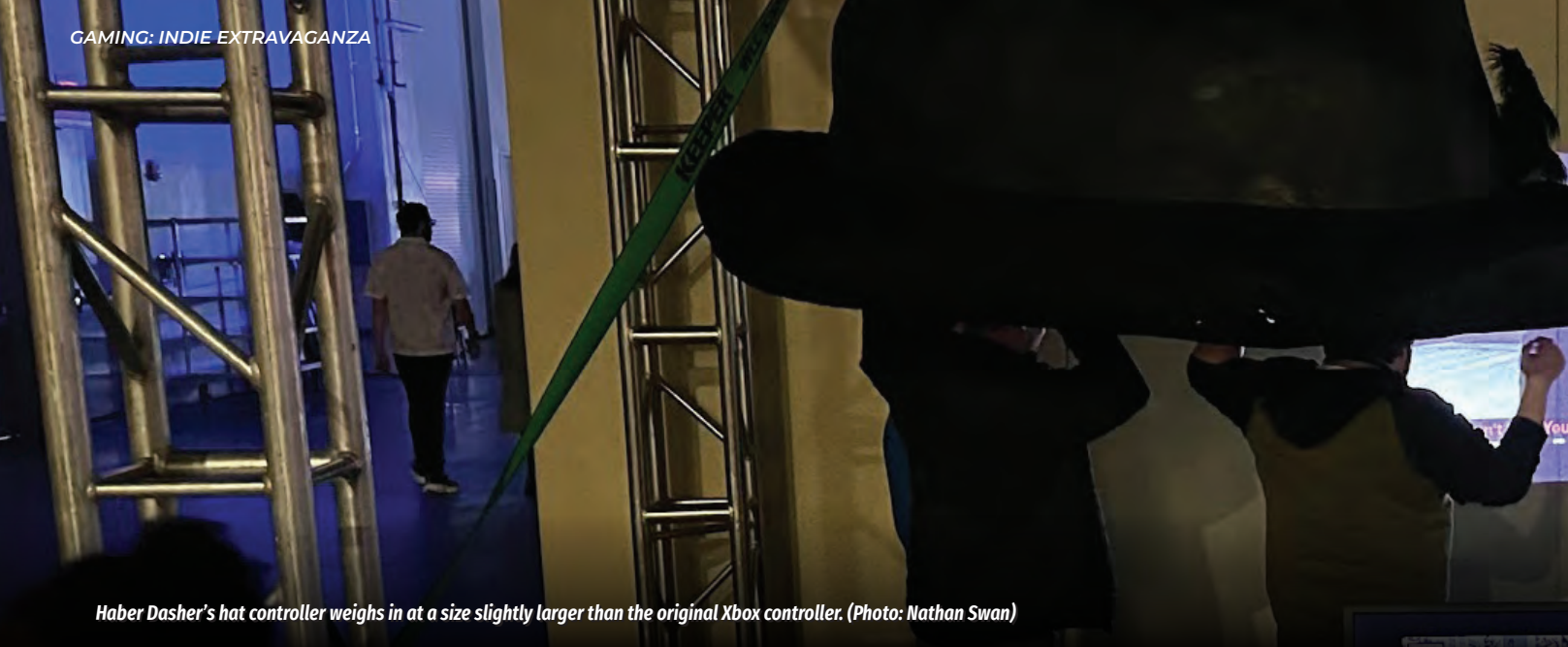


INDIE ARCADE TIME TO LEVER UP

We did a game jam! The MAGFest Indie Arcade has worked with NYC educational non-profit Arcade Commons to host an alt ctrl game jam, tasking jammers to spend a weekend making a standalone game for a novel controller using two levers, one button, and nothing else. Jammers ordered parts to make a small controller at home using slide potentiometers, followed a beginner-friendly guide to assemble it, and then designed games that would use this unique input scheme! Then MAGFest Indie Arcade built a cabinet that uses the scheme as well, so you can play those games at Super MAGFest 2025! Stop by the Indie Arcade in Expo C to try out the game jam games and get leveraging!

Want to learn more about hardware games? Follow the MAGFest Indie Arcade on Bluesky @mag-indiearcade.bsky.social





Haber Dasher's hat controller weighs in at a size slightly larger than the original Xbox controller. (Photo: Nathan Swan)

THE INDIE DEV BEHIND A BIG HAT GAME WITH BIG HEART INSIDELOOK AT HABER DASHER

Do you ever wonder where some of your favorite games got their start? We're not saying every blockbuster franchise started as an indie developer in Expo Hall C, but we are saying you need to check out what's brewing in the indie scene! While you're there, you may notice a giant hat. Stop by and meet Erin J.K. Truesdell, developer of the big hat game! Erin is an Assistant Professor of Informatics at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. We were fortunate enough to spend some time with Erin this year to get a behind-the-scenes scoop on her creation.

First off, many people simply refer to your game as the Big Hat game; but what is the actual title?

The actual title is Haber Dasher - which I have to credit my Ph.D. advisor for coming up with that title. I was fully set to call it "Business Guy", which is still the name of the executable file.

Big Hats are rare in modern video game design. What was the inspiration that led you down this path?

The coolest thing about my job is I get to do things that no one else would pay money for. I get to do stuff that you can't see on Steam, that you can only make one; and because it's research, I get paid to do that, and that means I get to explore what's possible. My whole dissertation was about how to develop weird controllers for collaborative play. I was really bored in class one day, and I started doodling. I came up with an idea of two stick figures wearing a giant hat, and it was perfect! Somehow my advisor was okay with this and enabled me to turn this idea into a full game.

Speaking of gaming and your career in academia, are there other projects that combine the two?

My dissertation was on alternative controls for collaborative play, and that still forms the foundation of my work today. My research now as a professor focuses on three main pillars, all of which are represented in Haber Dasher - Play, Interfaces, and People. Every project I do is related to one or more of those concepts.

Most game designers only have to focus on the 1s and 0s during development. Haber Dasher clearly also included quite a bit of physical work. What can you tell us about the build process?

There were no courses on how to build a giant hat, and I had never worked at that scale before. What I ended up doing was building a quarter-scale model ahead of time to do materials testing. I wanted to do the top out of chicken wire and the base out of foam board. The model worked, so I bought the foam board and went to get them laser cut. Laser cutters are only 3x4...

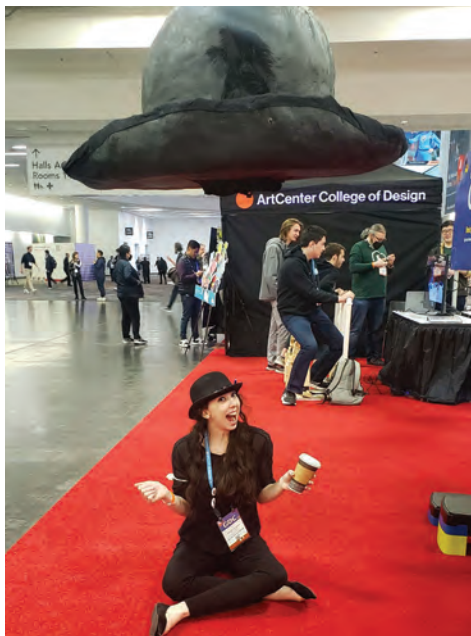


Haber Dasher developer Erin J.K. Truesdell

so I went back and forth. The challenge was working at scale because nothing is built to build something this large. I tested a couple different materials, and I ended up using spray foam insulation to sculpt the hat with a wire wheel for about a month. When it came to the surface, same thing, try a couple materials on the small scale first, and figured out lightweight spackle was the move. It was a leapfrogging process where as I'm doing one step on the big version, I'm testing the next step on the small version.

When did the public first get exposed to Haber Dasher?

The first thing we did was research studies. We brought in 30 people from Georgia Tech to play the game. We videotaped them, did a bunch of science on them, and there's lots of research papers you can read about that. The first big public outing was at alt.ctrl.GDC in 2023. We got a ton of attention and people loved it! I loved watching people walk by because they'd always make weird faces. My favorite part about being in the corner at MAGFest is watching people as they turn the corner and get really confused.



trially plastic wrap it. Now we have a custom built cargo trailer to accommodate the hat and hardware, and another arcade machine.

Can you tell us a little bit about the playable character, Zorg? Are we talking more “two aliens in a trenchcoat” or “left brain/right brain” control?

We’re feeling “two aliens in a trenchcoat”. Zorg is an alien - we conceptualize him as a two-headed alien for the purposes of the game; but it’s very “Men In Black” where the alien operates the human “body” like a mech from the cockpit inside the head. Zorg’s planet civilization watches a ton of movies from Earth, and they know that people with the power are businessmen, and the reason businessmen have power is because they do certain things. Things like having coffee and briefcases and taking them to the office. So they built Zorg a human suit to pretend to be a businessman and do all those things to gain power and conquer the world.

What tips would you be willing to share with new players before they assume the role of Zorg?

Walk in the street. The original plan for the game was to have a bunch of pedestrians milling around on the sidewalks and then a bunch of cars driving through the city. We playtested with just the pedestrians and realized if we put cars in the game, it’s going to become overly frustrating. It’s a physically taxing game to play. It looks easy until you try it. People spill their coffee a couple times and get mad because it’s a lot of investment. The pedestrians are programmed to just walk on the sidewalk, which lets you walk in the streets without hitting walls or pedestrians.

What is the typical play time for new players?



Photo credit: Drew Graham

The average is 6 to 10 minutes with some going as long as 20 minutes. The world record is 3:50, which two guys last year came within 1 second of matching. If you come in under 4:10, you should be very proud of yourself.

Can you tell us about any other/future games you have cooking, and will they ever be at MAGFest?

This is currently only in our research labs - Trip: A Cosmic Adventure for Two. You and your partner have landed on a planet where the atmosphere includes a bunch of hallucinogenic substances that are causing all kinds of wacky problems. The pilot has vertigo and can’t look out the front window, and the person looking out the window has to deal with the ship falling apart while vividly hallucinating. There’s a physical screen separating the players. The person piloting uses a balance ball, and the navigator has to instruct the pilot how and where to fly. There’s a lot of crosstalk, a lot of chaos, and a lot of screaming. We have some obstacles to overcome before considering it for MAGFest, but I think attendees would love it.

One final and light-hearted question: Describe the big hat of your dreams.

I would love to see an augmentable hat that could be mapped to a phone app. Something that does all kinds of weird expressive stuff. I want to have a scrolling marquee, spit weird stuff out, and have a goofy umbrella popping out of the top when it rains. A hat that enables me to do more shenanigans in my life.

Speaking of MAGFest, how and when did you discover MAGFest, and what was the process to get Haber Dasher considered, and ultimately accepted, to the Indie Arcade?

A long time ago as a developer in a group called Entrepreneurial Game Studio, every year a couple teams from the program would show at MAGFest. My friend and colleague, Steph, said I should submit Haber Dasher to MAGFest. I said, if they’re willing to accommodate my giant hat, I love going to events and talking about my work. Last year we made it happen.

You love bringing the hat everywhere you go. How do you transport everything from place to place?

At first we had to contract a freight company and custom build a forklift pallet, and indus-



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porkiatto

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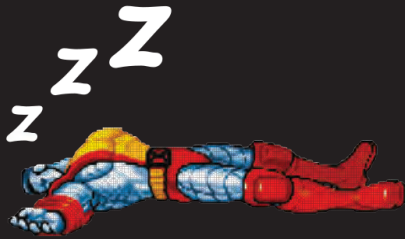
cherish

the BAKED BEAN CAFÉ

every savory sip

OF OUR
sweet, tangy treats

shhh. Colossus is sleeping.



do not
RRRHUUUOOAAAAHHHH
in hotel areas.

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TITANIC PROPORTIONS...



The Rippin' & The Tearin'

SUPER MACHIST
Pop in Jan 23-26



Comic by KAITIE LAWSON

DREAMING UP A THEME

THE MAKING OF



Each year of MAGFest is special, featuring a unique video game theme that colors everything from the floors to the concert screens. Dreaming up these themes each MAGFest is a full-year project that produces characters, stories, sketches, models, and even custom circuitboards.

Bringing the world of Pango, Poe, Pixel, and Dr. Garbotnik to life was a ton of fun and gave our MAGFest Theme Team a chance to riff on some of our all-time favorite video game designs, blending both retro game nostalgia and 2025 hype as they created a setting and team of mascots that could feel both fresh and also familiar.

In this section, we'll check out some of the behind-the-scenes artwork produced by our team this year in creating the fast-racing and villain-chasing world of MAGFest 2025!

ILLUSTRATION BY KAITIE LAWSON



PANGO

THE PANGOLIN



CHARACTER PROFILE

Pango isn't your average Pangolin. He's a no-nonsense, no-problem, can-do party pangolin who's as speedy as he is scaly.

With his glowing headphones and unstoppable energy, he leads his team with rhythm, creativity, and heart. Pango uses his soundwave powers to blast sonic booms or craft awesome melodies, keeping Virtual Harbor safe and the vibes immaculate.

When he's not fighting off Dr. Garbotnik's trashy schemes, Pango lives for high-speed adventures, rocking out to his Perfect Pangolin Playlist, and tearing up the MAGFest dance floor. Fast-paced games, wild beats, and good friends? That's his jam!

Pango doesn't understand the meaning of the word "quit," and he won't stop until he helps his friends get their home all cleaned up and cleared away of these treacherous and trashy trespassers!

FAVORITE FOOD

Swadge Dogs (or Long Dogs when he's feelin' crazy) with extra mayo

FAVORITE DRINK

Triple Gingerbread Sugar Cookie Porkiatto via the Baked Bean Cafe

FAVORITE GAME GENRES

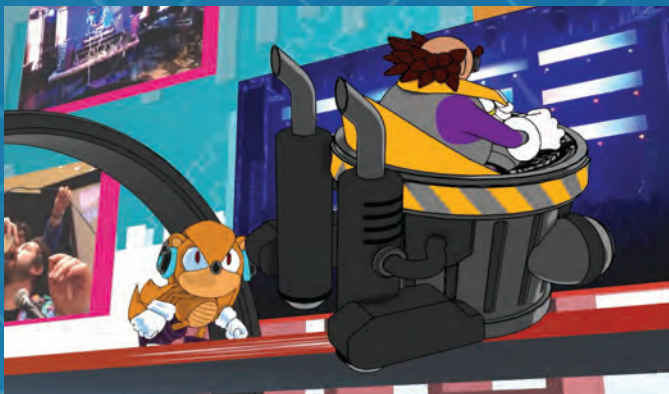
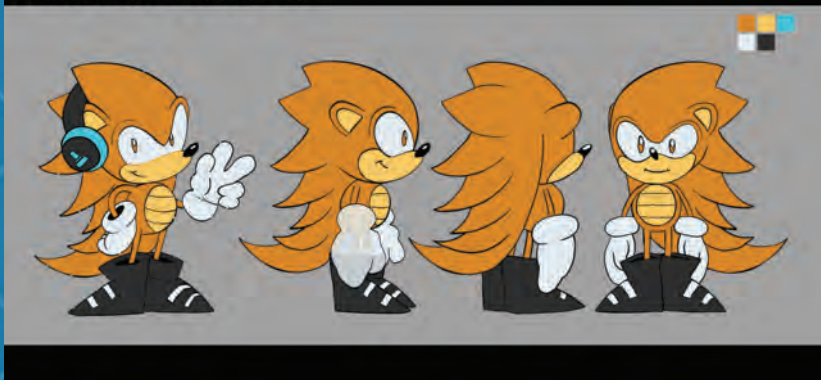
RACING! Also, racing.

FAVORITE MUSIC GENRES

Speed Metal, Speedcore, Speed Trap

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAITIE LAWSON

PANGO THE PANGOLIN



3D MODELS AND PIXEL ART BY GREG LORD



PIXEL

THE AXOLOTL

CHARACTER PROFILE

Don't let her adorable looks fool you—Pixel is a cheerful dynamo with brains, creativity, and water-based powers that pack a punch! The youngest of the crew, Pixel is a born tinkerer with a knack for combining art and science—the same talents that first led her to meet her friend Junior the Donut in MAGScouts. She is a born tinkerer, using her talents in both the arts and sciences alike.

Aquatic by nature, Pixel goes with the flow and brings positivity wherever she goes. Whether crafting protective bubbles, generating powerful water jets, or brainstorming a clever plan, she's always ready to dive into action. She keeps the team motivated with pep talks and her easygoing charm, even when Dr. Garbotnik's schemes get totally trashy. After a hard-earned victory, you can bet she'll be leading the celebrations with a big smile and her favorite tunes.

FAVORITE FOOD

Chili Dogs

FAVORITE DRINK

Anything pink, fruity, or brackish

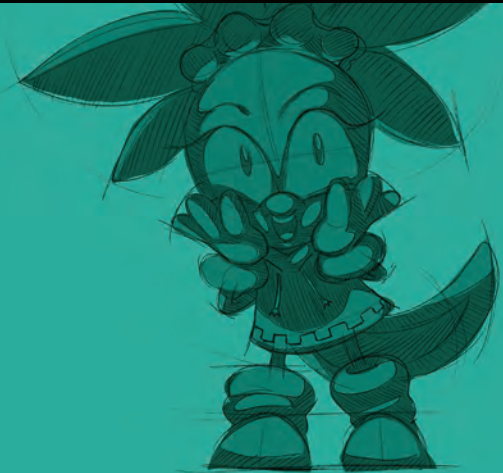
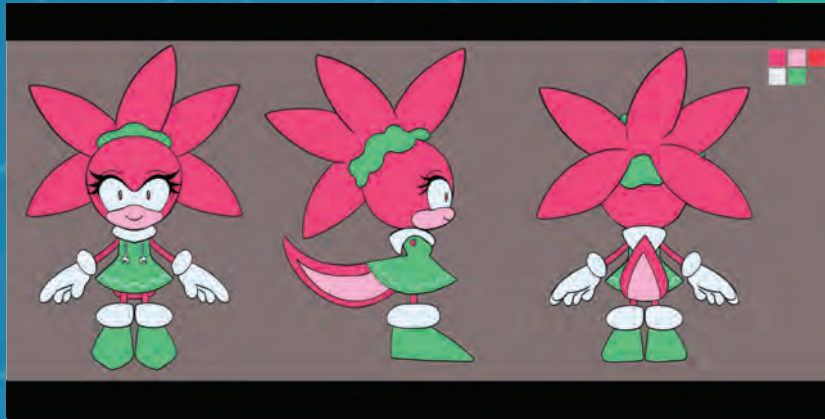
FAVORITE GAME GENRES

Dancing, Rhythm Games, and Board Games

FAVORITE MUSIC GENRES

Dance, Axolotl-Pop, Electronic, Musicals

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAITIE LAWSON





POE

THE "SPICY POTATO" OPOSSUM



CHARACTER PROFILE

Poe, the "Spicy Potato" Opossum is the fiery wildcard of the crew. Blending sly wit, natural stealth, and a knack for surprise tactics, Poe is always ready for action and glad for any chance to prove himself in a contest... or a fight!

Raised in a land turned to junkheap by Garbotnik's schemes, Poe has seen his share of both scraps and scrapes, and learned to fight and snack his way to survival along the way. When he found a home and friends in Virtual Harbor, he vowed to stand by Pango and Pixel to take out the trash—literally and figuratively.

Fiercely loyal and always ready to rumble, Poe is the go-to guy for when speed needs a little extra spark and when brains need a little extra brawn. He may be hotheaded, but he's got his friends' backs and trusts their plans—until it's time to charge into action and let his "spicy" side shine.

Oh, and don't let him fool you: his "bottomless stomach" isn't just comic relief. It's an art form.

FAVORITE FOOD

Anything spicy (the hotter, the better)

FAVORITE DRINK

Dog Water soft drinks, Hot sauce (neat)

FAVORITE GAME GENRES

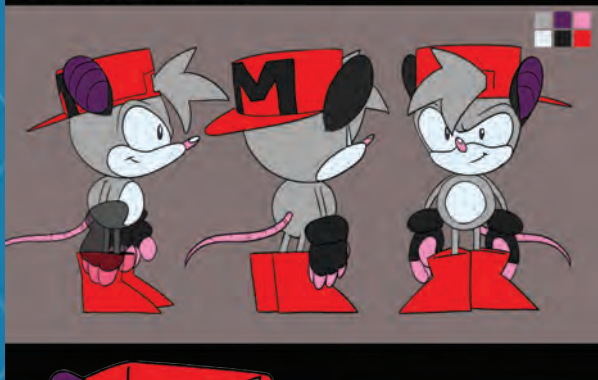
Arcade Beat-Em-Ups, Fighting Games

FAVORITE MUSIC GENRES

Heavy Metal, Nerdcore, Orchestral VGM

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAITIE LAWSON

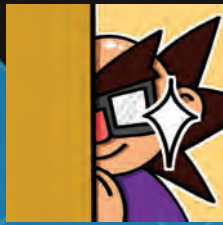
POE THE OPOSSUM



PIXEL ART BY GREG LORD



ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAITIE LAWSON



DR. OVO GARBOTNIK

THE TRASH MAN

CHARACTER PROFILE

The self-proclaimed "Genius of Garbage," Dr. Ovo Garbotnik is a man of vision. (He is also a man of many smells.) Garbotnik (or "Garby," as he hates to be called) is driven by a mission to transform Virtual Harbor into the ultimate waste-loving utopia: "Garbotnik Harbor."

Once a respected scientist specializing in waste management and mechanical engineering, his unchecked ego and grandiose ambitions led him down a trash-strewn path of villainy—abandoning such civilian pursuits and setting his sights instead on the far more lucrative and ego-affirming goal of global domination.

Garbotnik's diabolical genius lies in his ability to take trash and turn it into treasure—or, more accurately, towering piles of bizarre contraptions and robotic minions. From factories to power plants to resorts and convention centers, no facility is safe from being assimilated into his garbage empire, whose collective garbage output he then uses as the raw materials to create factories, robots, vehicles, and inventive menus for his beloved chain of affordably-priced trash restaurants, Garby's™.

As his empire grows, so do the bizarre creations he assembles from piles of refuse. From mechanical minions to outlandish gadgets, Garbotnik's inventions are always fueled by his obsessive need to recycle and reclaim—all in the name of his dream for world domination (and perhaps a little fame).

These glorious pursuits occasionally offend the local wildlife, of course. But what are they going to do? Assemble a resistance force of animals and music-loving, gaming-obsessed convention-goers to stop him? Ha!

FAVORITE FOOD

Garby's™ Fiery Guy Special

FAVORITE DRINK

His signature cocktail, the "Garbage Water"
(Ingredients: 1 part garbage water)

FAVORITE GAME GENRES

Global domination. [Editor's Note: His entire "recently played" list is all Dating Sims.]

FAVORITE MUSIC GENRES

The whirring hum of factories in full operation, the scurrying of fleeing wildlife, and karaoke nights.



PRISM

CHARACTER PROFILE

THE BRIGHT RABBIT

Prism the Bright Rabbit is a quiet genius who uses her exceptional coding and inventing skills to support Garbotnik's schemes. Although her clumsiness sometimes causes unintended chaos, her innovative ideas and sharp intellect often save the day for the villain's side. Prism's reserved nature masks a deep passion for creating, and she takes pride in her behind-the-scenes contributions.



PESTO

THE HONEY BADGER

CHARACTER PROFILE

Pesto the Honey Badger is Garbotnik's right-hand engineer, helping design and build his machines with unrivaled skill. He has a unique talent for repurposing forgotten machinery into new creations, often imbuing them with a spark of life. When he's not working in the lab, Pesto enjoys cooking, viewing it as another form of creative engineering. His loyalty to Garbotnik is unshakable, and he thrives on bringing chaotic ideas to life.



PANDA

THE TRASH RACCOON

CHARACTER PROFILE

Created from only the very finest of Dr. Garbotnik's prized e-waste and scrap metal, Panda the Trash Raccoon is Garbotnik's top robotic enforcer. Though designed to track and neutralize threats with unyielding efficiency, Panda's emergent personality shows surprising curiosity about the world, often pausing to examine things they don't understand. This quirk has made Panda oddly endearing, though it frustrates Garbotnik.



THE CHOWAS

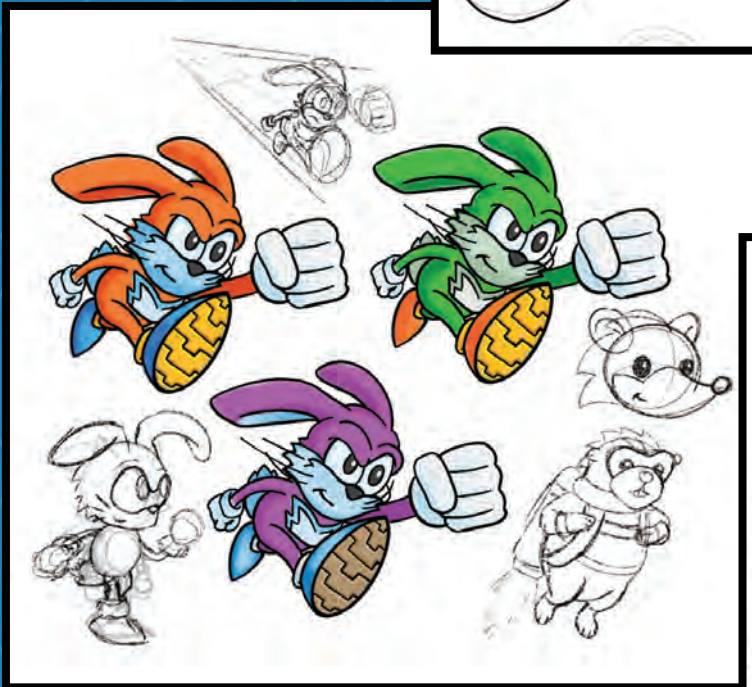
CHARACTER PROFILE

The Chowas are small, magical creatures who inhabit Virtual Harbor. They are curious and mischievous by nature, often getting into trouble but meaning well. They gravitate toward the heroes and lend a hand when needed, albeit in their own chaotic way. Chowas are beloved by the community for their cheerful demeanor and helpful antics.





Before we landed on our main hero, some of Greg's other concepts included a ring-shaped coiling snake (above), a rabbit (left, paying homage to the early designs of a certain speedy blue hero himself), a even jetpack-flying groundhog!



(ABOVE) ILLUSTRATIONS BY GREG LORD



Once the pangolin emerged as our team's favorite, it was just a matter of nailing down the details: the team experimented with some basic pangolin features including scales, nose shapes, claws, long tongues. The custom (MAGFest-logo-inspired) combat boots started during this round, and Kaitie's MAGFest headphones would join soon after.

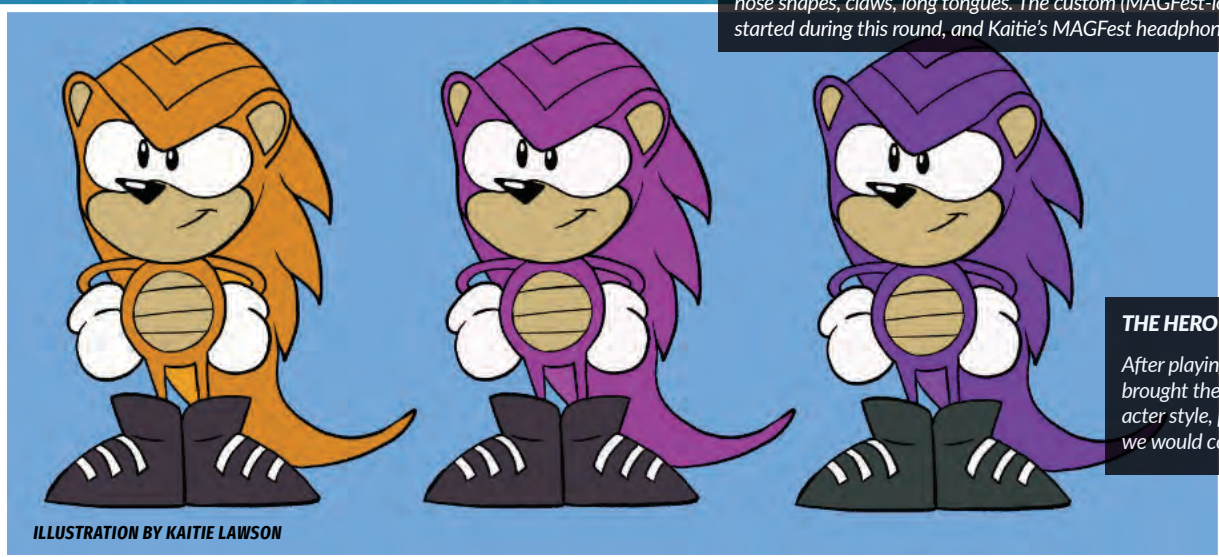


ILLUSTRATION BY KAITIE LAWSON

THE HERO EMERGES:
After playing with the details, Kaitie brought the design into the final character style, pulling together the Pangolin we would come to know as "Pango!"



Kaitie dreamt up a wide range of supporting character designs to fill out the cast, creating characters in a range of art styles as well as character traits and backstories to bring them to life.

LEFT: A range of music- and gaming-inspired characters in a modern style. These character traits would be adapted into the characters we know today as the artwork shifted toward a more retro/classic design style.

BELOW: A range of animal character concepts to build on. Two of these would later become Poe the Opossum and one of Garbotnik's minions, Prism the Rabbit.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAITIE LAWSON

BELOW: The Garbotnik crew takes shape as designs emerge for the robotic raccoon, Panda; the well-intentioned Prism; and Pesto, the tough and grumpy Honey Badger. These characters gave the perfect chance to use favorite designs that weren't used for the main cast of heroes.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

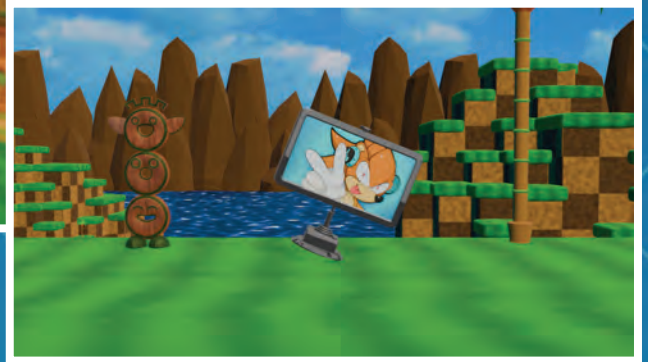
With all of the character designs in place, Kaitie gave the characters their first official group photo in this poster, designed for the Super 2025 theme reveal event, released in April 2024.



POSTER DESIGN BY KAITIE LAWSON



The first public teaser for the 2025 theme included a 3D animated scene that saw Pango speeding through a familiar world and spinning an iconic sign. (Past MAGFest heroes often make cameos in the backgrounds!)



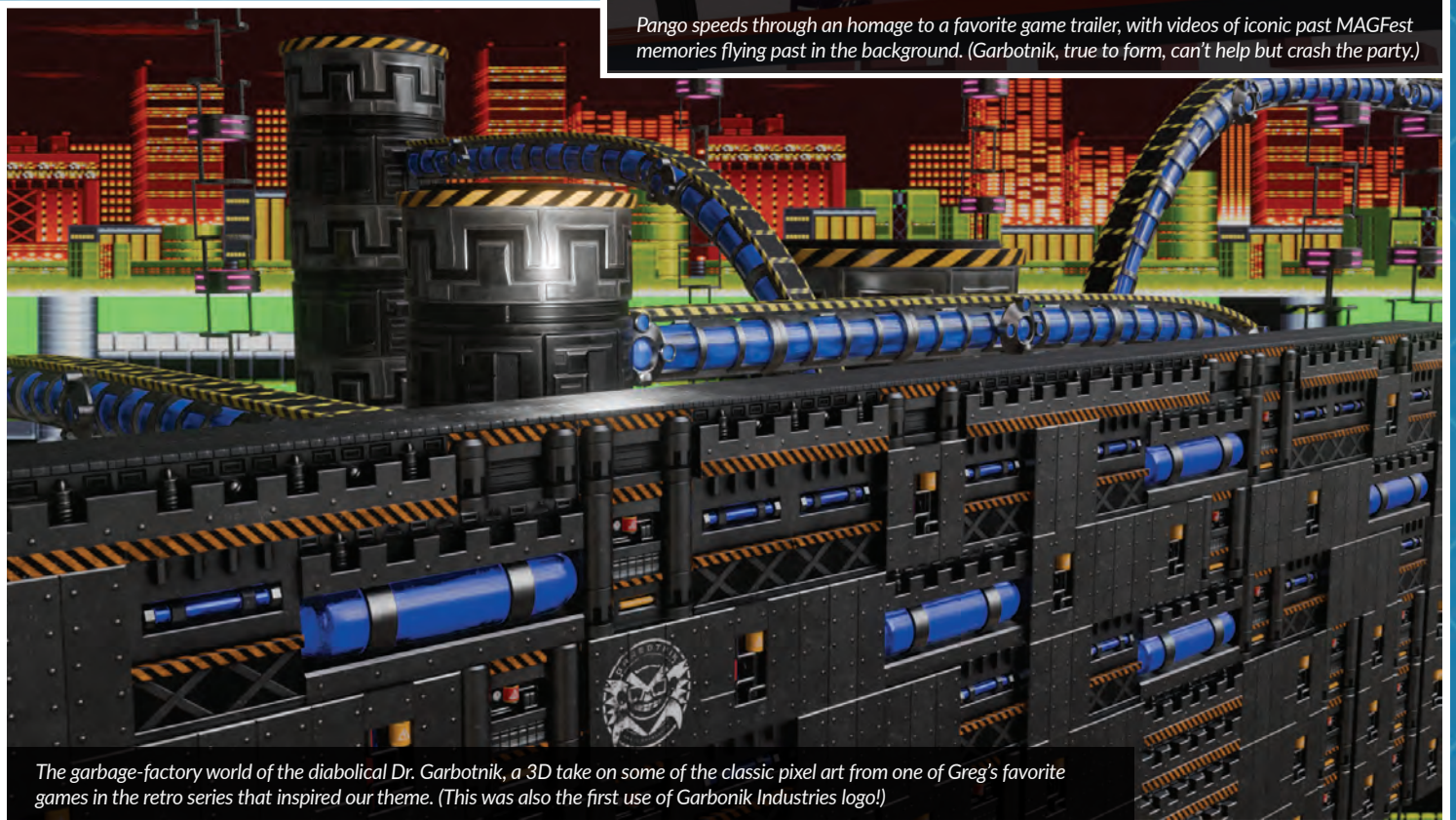
3D MODELS AND ANIMATIONS BY GREG LORD



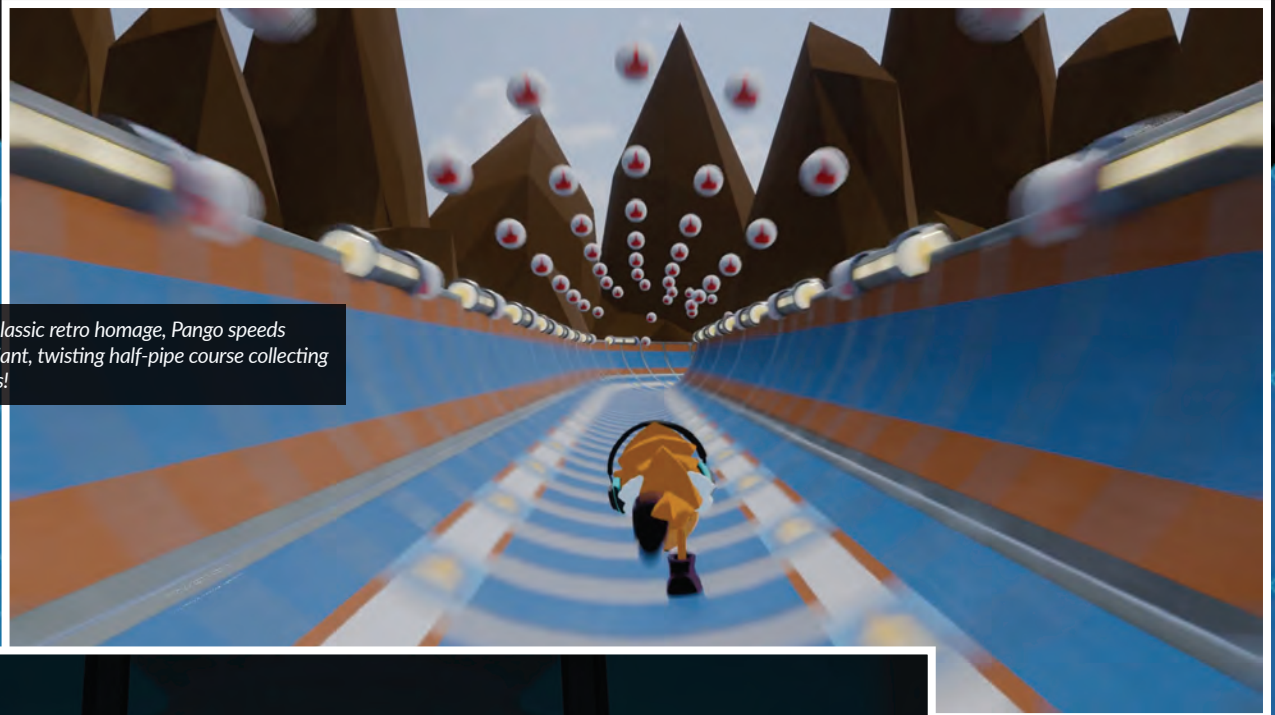
Garbotnik's 3D model was a perfect chance to play with the design of his Trash Pod hover vehicle. (And in proper Garbotnik vanity, the face of his pod might even subtly spell OVO, his egg-inspired first name.)



Pango speeds through an homage to a favorite game trailer, with videos of iconic past MAGFest memories flying past in the background. (Garbotnik, true to form, can't help but crash the party.)



The garbage-factory world of the diabolical Dr. Garbotnik, a 3D take on some of the classic pixel art from one of Greg's favorite games in the retro series that inspired our theme. (This was also the first use of Garbonik Industries logo!)



In another classic retro homage, Pango speeds through a giant, twisting half-pipe course collecting Donut Rings!

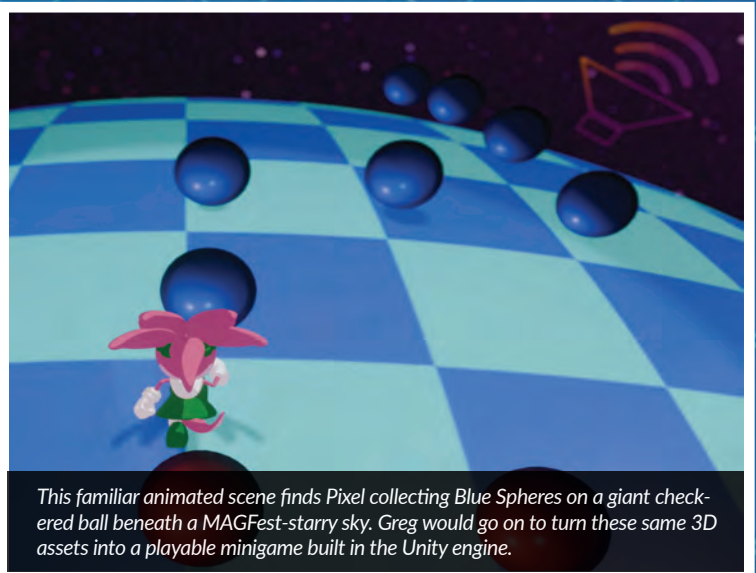


A scheming Garbotnik gets an ominously detailed glow-up in this villainous animation sequence.

3D MODELS AND ANIMATIONS BY GREG LORD



The full team 3D-rendered in a classic title screen scene!



This familiar animated scene finds Pixel collecting Blue Spheres on a giant checkered ball beneath a MAGFest-starry sky. Greg would go on to turn these same 3D assets into a playable minigame built in the Unity engine.

AFTERWORD

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITORS

Would you like to contribute to next year's MAGFest Power MAG'zine? Send us an email at magfestpower@magfest.org and let us know! You don't have to be a professional - just look at us! Some of us have no idea what we're doing!

THATGAMERGRL

First of all, thank you so much for reading! The MAG'Zine is a massive passion project for us all; we are so proud of what we've made. Hopefully, it's put a smile on your face and earned a place on your bookshelf!

The MAG'Zine was originally an art book for Super 2024. I was brought on to the team for that project as part of the Art Team (my day job is as a Graphic Designer) for Super, and my experience in print production. Even back then, we had big ambitions, but we were only starting to figure out what we wanted this project to be. The original concept was a way of showcasing all of the fantastic art that was created for the *Metroid Prime* theme and the Swadge. So much happened behind the scenes that barely saw the light of day. We knew we wanted to do something with it, so the idea of an art book was born. While we liked what we produced, we knew we could do MORE. If MAGStaff can be counted on for anything, it's taking the seed of an idea and going big or going home.... So when we had our launch meeting for this year's 'art book,' we wondered, "What if we just went for it?"

Most of the team were from a time when Fan Magazines were a thing. (Shoutout to the MAGFest 31+ crowd!) We remembered the excitement of getting interesting facts and Behind the Scenes info, our bedroom walls covered with the creased posters that came in special issues, but most of all, being able to go back time and again to the collected issues and re-read and re-experience it all again and again. We wanted to be able to give that experience to the MAGFest family, who either didn't get to have it the first time around or allow those who did a chance to revive it.

For myself, I'm always looking for ways to spread the love within MAGFest. It's part of my job as a Department Head for the Guest Department. Every bit of content I have hands in has the thought "what other departments can we support with this" behind it. The MAG'Zine was no different. Any chance we had for bringing in and putting a spotlight on other teams within MAGFest, we did it. My favorite articles in the Fan Magazines I read were the behind-the-scenes things. I loved reading about how people made magic happen. Where the creativity came from, how the production teams solved challenges, or even where the creativity came from. I gobbled it all up, and since that was what I was passionate about, that's what I supported most with this project. Ways of highlighting how others thought and felt about MAGFest, what goes into making this whole thing happen, and celebrating the intense amount of work that people pour into this org the other 11 months out of the year.

MAGFest's mission is "Making the world a better place through games," and it's something I believe in with my whole heart. My first MAG was in 2017, and it was the first place that, as a femme gamer, I felt not just welcomed, but supported and encouraged to be authentically myself. That feeling is why I started staffing, why I do everything that I do here at MAG (and it's a lot), and why I continue to pour every spare ounce of energy into this org and its

events. If I can give that feeling to even one other person, that's everything.

So thank you again for supporting this project and the team, and cheers to doing it again next year! Bigger & better than ever!

KAITIE

Hi, I'm Kaitie! I'm a Theme Team artist, Swadge artist, and manager for Registration at Super MAGFest. By Day, I work in academia; I'm a character designer and illustrator by night. You might have seen some of my work if you've been attending Super MAGFest since at least 2022! I'm passionate about video games, music, and the incredible creativity of fans and developers alike—it's what inspired me to pursue art in the first place.

For this magazine, I contributed artwork, the Operation: Clean Sweep comic, and several other pieces throughout (don't miss the MAGFest Sweetheart results page!). This year's theme is particularly close to my heart. Growing up, my first experience with video games, outside my dad's Duck Hunt, was playing Sonic 2 in my afterschool program. An older kid played on his Sega Genesis while I watched, captivated. Weeks later, he finally noticed my enthusiasm and invited me to play my favorite two-tailed fox alongside him. It was magical, and that game left such a lasting impression. I wasn't drawing then, but I would've filled countless sketchbooks with fan art if I had been!

When we chose this year's theme for 2025, I felt a surge of nostalgia and dove straight into sketching. I even used Post-It notes at work to refine ideas for the mascots—like how Pango's scales should work (spoiler: they kind of bend upward, but only when they want to!). Pango's a pretty rad dude, by the way.

Much like every Super MAGFest, I hope that attendees, guests, and staff feel the excitement leading up to and throughout the event. It brings me so much joy to see how we, as a community of nerds, come together to celebrate MAG, the Swadge, our favorite games, awesome musicians, and the ways we take over the Gaylord more and more each year. (We should totally make pins for the hotel staff someday!) Super MAGFest is like all my favorite things bundled into one place, and this magazine is packed with the same energy. It's thicker than last year's—last year was our alpha test; welcome to Beta!

JFRYE

I'm just happy to be here.

I have no expertise in graphic design, publishing, music composition, software development, hardware development, or any of the other amazing skills you've seen displayed throughout this magazine. Thousands of hours every year are invested into the things that we all enjoy at

Super MAGFest and beyond. Those hours are often filled with challenges, frustrations, design changes, and eureka moments - many of which you would never know about if you didn't ask.

It has been a pleasure talking with all the ~~sorcerers~~ creative minds and seeing behind the curtains of their ~~con-jurations~~ projects. To hear what went right and what went wrong, to see creative solutions to problems I didn't know existed, and to get a glimpse into others' creative processing has been eye-opening. I encourage you to seek out the people that create the things you love, ask them about their journey, and draw inspiration from them into your own creative works. Don't be afraid to make a mistake. Srsly, you *will* mess something up, and that's okay. You can share your mistakes with others - not that any of us stubborn types will ever heed a warning.

Anywho, I hope we have captured the passion poured into every one of them, and that you enjoy reading their stories as much as we love sharing them. If you liked the goofy stuff too, that's even better. Thank you for having me along for this ride. Maybe we'll do it again next year??

[Editor's note: Yes. Yes, we will. —GL]

HEATHER

Hi Everyone, I'm Heather! I accidentally end up in interesting situations by vaguely pointing my life in a desired direction.

I learned about Swadges a few years back and got super interested. That led to my first MAGFest in 2022 so I could buy one. I've been volunteering at events like this since 2002 so I signed up to do that as well. That gave me access to find the Swadge development team. I hung out in meetings and saw first hand the imagination and logistical effort that makes Swadges happen every year. Eventually I heard that they make a Swadge user guide. I don't program so good, but have been working as a Technical Writer for nearly half my life so I figured that was going to be my way to contribute.

This is a great time to mention that sometimes I'm afraid to ask questions when I'm not entirely sure what's going on. I just try to adapt and roll with it.

I misunderstood this MAG'Zine to be the Swadge user guide and jumped in with both feet. This is so much more than that. I fell into an opportunity to work with an amazingly talented group of people directing their skills towards a project they feel passionate about. I contributed a couple jokes here and there and a brief history of MAG-Fest themes. I have mixed feelings about my piece, but it's not world-ending. I've enjoyed this new experience.

I hope you enjoy this publication and have a great MAG-Fest!

AFTERWORD

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITORS

EMILY

My friends have compared me to a force of nature. It's really just a mixture of ADHD and too much time on my hands, but we will let them believe it's hurricane Emily deciding to do things.

MAGFest was one of those things that hurricane Emily decided to take by storm (ha ha ha) back in 2018 when I attended my first event. Over drinks at Otakon a couple years ago I joked with friends that it was in my 5 year plan to take over MAGFest as a funpost, but in reality I wanted to point more of my storm towards the event and volunteered the first time.

Three MAGFest Supers later, I am one of two Department Heads for the Swadge team, I was a cosplay guest at Super 2024, I work in the arcade and for the cosplay departments, and I teach in the makerspace. One of my less-public involvements in the event is with Theme Team, where we generate art, merch concepts, templates, etc for each of the themes for Super. When we selected Sonic back in March-ish, it felt magical already. The concept art was bright, zany, exciting, gotta-go-fest, meme-y, and silly. We needed silly after a couple of super-serious themes with Metroid Prime, Doom, and Smash.

I leaned into the silly, hard. Go read the dumb hot dog article. Just... look at the Swadge. It looks ridiculous. It's beautiful. Back in September-ish, Dac (Director of Communications) noted that we created so much asset data and work for theme team and he wanted us to push further if we could. Riding off the success of the art book and game guide for MAGTroid Pocket, the gang settled on the Magazine. Dac wanted to be completely hands-off, and entrusted this project to us and for that: hahahaha we got you!!!!

The mag was the definition of scope creep, but I loved working on it. Leaning into the vibes of the theme, I wanted to capture the joy, brightness, and excitement of it and try to force-feed the reader my love for the event. I conducted 12 interviews with Swadge developers, musicians, and department heads. I wrote over 13,000 words across 10 articles. I am tired.

Despite me being in leadership for Swadge, the (and) articles are actually the most important to me. The A of mAg-fest is where I've found my niche as someone who isn't particularly good at games and is remarkably tone-deaf with virtually no musical ability. Highlighting the departments who are the mortar of the foundation of the Music and the Gaming festival allowed me to make sure those departments felt seen, the attendees knew they were there, and to allow the average fester to peek behind the curtain. Highlighting the new department MAGPIE in our world that really needs that felt right. Shining a spotlight on Cosplay, the department that gave me an opportunity to guest at an event with 24,000 attendees, was so important to me. Propping up Makerspace, who is doing so much to share crafting with everyone and bringing MAGLabs back from the dead, felt like I was doing my part in a small way.

Anyway, I've yapped for too long. This MAGFest is special in a lot of ways, and the last way it is special is that I've finally convinced my brother to join me this year at the fest. His name is Tom or Tommy; please do not call him "Emily's brother", he has a name. Use it!

See ya at the makerspace.

GREG

My role with the MAG Staff started in 2020 as the modeler and Co-Dept Head of the "VR MAGLord," a project meant to capture the magic of MAGFest during a virtual year. My role as a Theme Team artist and designer/modeler/ animator for MAGFest has expanded into a wide range of MAG's creative work since then, but that same goal has shaped everything I work on: trying to translate the spirit of this incredible event and community into things we can share, play, look at, or even hold and read.

MAGFest Power started as a dangerously-last-minute and "probably-crazy-but-hear-me-out" kind of idea last year while I was playtesting and designing pixel art for Adam Feinstein's incredible Swadge game, *MAGTroid Pocket*. The notes and suggestions I wrote while testing the game kept reminding me of the player's guides I grew up with. And as each new section of the game added new artwork (to the already huge mountain of art assets that we all generated for last year's theme), it reminded me of an old wish I'd always had for MAGFest: *we should have an art book*.

Of course, these ideas last year came so late in an already busy cycle that it was borderline irresponsible to chase them down. So, of course, I did. I'm still incredibly proud of what we made, but it was definitely still an early idea in search of a proper execution. And a team to pull it off!

So here we are, a year later, and this wild little project has turned into a dedicated team and a huge collection of ideas. Given the fresh chance to dream this project up again this year, it was important to find the right shape for it. Last year's book was a kind of collision of goals—half Player's guide, half art book?—and it needed a more cohesive and resilient shape. And while it was styled as a "Player's Guide," we cheekily credited it to the (then-fictional) *MAGFest Power* magazine. And, sure enough, once this year's project was in full swing, a magazine seemed like the perfect shape of this project's future. So *MAGFest Power* was becoming real. It was just down to details.

As with most of my MAG work, the right starting point always seems to involve starting from nostalgia—looking back on favorite memories and letting that energy guide things along naturally and, hopefully, toward some end result that feels authentic. And when we're talking about gaming magazines, there's one perfect happy place that stands right out.

When I was a kid, *Nintendo Power* was the entire shape of video games as an emerging media/industry, and "gaming" as an emerging culture. It was a peek behind the curtain of a world that was otherwise a total mystery, even while it produced the greatest things I'd ever experienced. I was already in love with video games, and I knew that someone out there must be making them. But in a pre-internet childhood, the inner workings of that world were an impossibly locked door. *Nintendo Power* seemed like the key.

Before websites and social media, the gaming magazine seemed like the only possible way for a kid to actually connect to the larger world of gaming culture. The rest was a smaller world of neighborhood rumors, of guesswork and exaggeration about the little information we all had, and of skeptical stories from that one friend – you know, the one with that uncle that works for Nintendo, for real.

It was also the way to know about the games themselves,

which really might have been the most important point in the end. With no easy way to research any news for ourselves, each new video game that came out was a concept more than a certainty—often just a title and an exciting painting on a colorful box, tantalizing and thrilling, *awesome* until proven otherwise. A game's actual truths sat inconveniently (and expensively) locked behind glass cabinets on out-of-reach store shelves, the dreams of birthdays, allowances, and competitively scarce video store rentals.

There was also a drastically smaller gaming vocabulary to define and assess things. There were far fewer games to compare new titles to, and even the genres we understand today as second nature were still being invented, codifying themselves game by game as each new title either conformed more and more to a familiar shape, or brazenly invented a new one. Today we regard the games of that early era almost archaeologically—the game that first invented this or that convention, or the failed experiment that today seems ahead of its time. At the time, it was enough just to know if it was fun.

But *Nintendo Power* felt like having a friend that knew all the answers. They knew what games were awesome and they knew how to guide you through them. They knew the cheat codes and the passwords that felt like hacking. And, impossibly, they even knew the latest news and even the latest gossip about the games and new technologies ahead. (Man, I still can't wait for that Ultra 64.)

But the most important part was that it felt like a friend who was *just as excited about gaming as you were*. And even in the one-directional media of a magazine in a mailbox, holding those pages felt like being connected to a community that was not only *real*, but as passionate as you were.

MAGFest Power, to me, is an exercise in capturing that same community enthusiasm and pulling it out of time, some thirty-plus years forward, to bring back to MAGFest today. And there's a good reason for that.

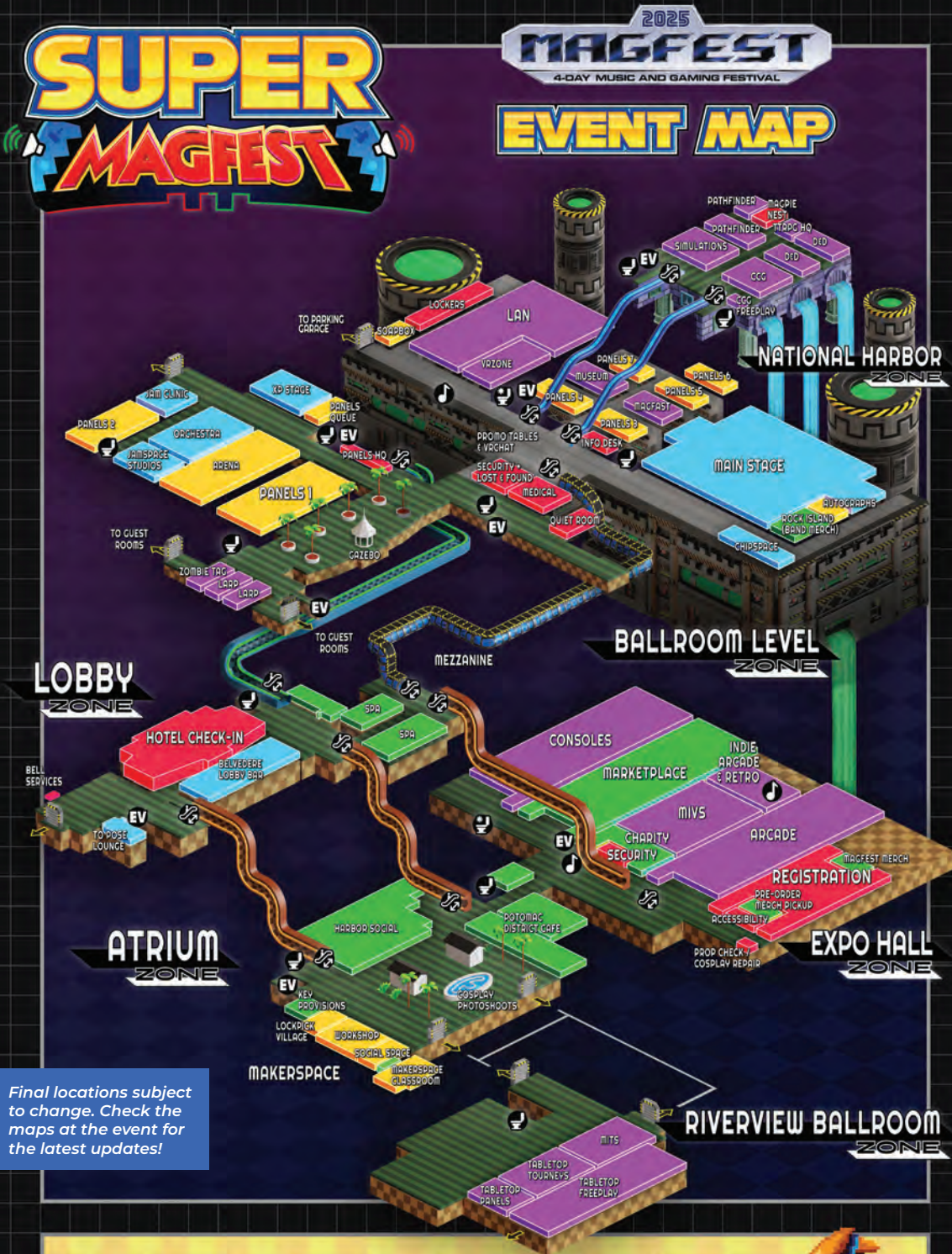
Over a whole lifetime growing up alongside gaming culture, MAGFest is the single greatest community I've ever found. When I'm here each year, I'm pulled out of time as well, and able to spend a few days happily basking in a collective energy of all of the music and games and memories and happy moments I've loved – and I'm spending them with people who love them all just as much as I do. It's a building full of people both playing and working hard to collectively conjure the spirit of that enthusiasm into music and art and games, all dreaming, building, and sharing together.

I've never found anything else like it. And it makes me want to work hard, myself, to try to help bring that energy and enthusiasm to more people, and to make it look as good as it can and feel as exciting as it can.

MAGFest Power, to me, feels like the perfect way to capture all of that magic and bring it to people the same way, and with the same love, as the classic magazine I grew up with.

I hope this little magazine offers that seem feeling: a glance behind the curtain at all of the music and gaming and "ands" that make MAGFest so magical. And I hope the pages themselves feel familiar, fun, and inviting, like the pages they're based on.

So, here's to the happy memories of a magazine from a different time—and the enthusiasm, lessons, and joy we can try to borrow from it today.



Final locations subject to change. Check the maps at the event for the latest updates!

MUSIC	GAMING	PANELS	SHOPPING	SERVICES	OFFICIAL MAGFEST SEAL OF QUALITY
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MUSIC: Interviews, articles and insights from some of your favorite musicians! Plus an all-access pass inside the minds and creative process of our Swadge music team!

AND a look at the unique departments that bridge our MAGFest communities between the worlds of music and gaming!

GAMING: Sneak peeks at the latest games from the MAGFest Swadge, and an expansive catalog of tabletop, arcade, and video games from independent developers!

- Check out activities, artwork, comics, and more!
- Read tips and advice from the experts!
- Meet the characters and villains from this year's theme!



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