

The Inspiration Behind the Game:

A Profile of a Video Game Developer

By: Elizabeth Ryan



For nearly twenty years, Brian Pelletier worked in the retail game industry creating mature-rated video games. After his sons were born, he decided to switch directions and aid the Games+Learning+Society in creating educational video games.



Brian Pelletier, Creative Director and Director of Game Development at the Games+Learning+Society.
Photo: Elizabeth Ryan

Comic books and arcade games have always intrigued Brian Pelletier. When arcade video games hit the stores in the '80s, Brian was the first to be there and the last to leave. Adventure, problem solving and, of course, defeating the zombies and bad guys were what he loved best.

Sitting at his off-white desk amid intricate black-and-white sketched *Fantastic Four* comics and computers flickering with vividly colored comic-book screensavers, Brian is living his childhood dream. As the Creative Director and Director of Game Development at the Games+Learning+Society (GLS), he applies his lifelong interest in comics, art and video games to the immersion of education and technology into interactive, enriching video games for children.

A Wisconsin native who attended Madison Area Technical College for art, Brian first began his professional career as a freelance illustrator -- hence the impressive comic book illustrations framed on his desk. He went on to specialize in video game design and artistic direction in the retail game industry for 18 years, particularly in mature-rated video games.

But something did not feel quite right.

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"I wanted to create something my kids could play. By me creating only mature-rated games, this couldn't happen. So I set out to find something else,"
Brian explained.



This “something else” is the Games+Learning+Society. Brian began working with the GLS in the fall of 2011 and has not looked back since. As the Creative Director, he uses his specialties in art and retail game development to combine immersing games with learning and social impact.

“Before I began my work here, I heard about the GLS and Kurt’s [Kurt Squire, the director of the GLS] vision to create games that could transform learning. I wanted to create something that could benefit my children.”

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In fact, Brian’s sons are his main inspirations for his work done at GLS. Brian often brings his work home to them so they can play and critique it. Knowing that games can inspire children to acquire problem-solving skills and can create the desire to learn more is what drives Brian’s career.

“How cool is this,” Brian begins. “When my son was just about five years old, he was playing *Plants vs. Zombies*. The game became so interesting to him that he took matters into his own hands to learn more. With this tiny almanac that was included with the game, he began researching just which plants could defeat the zombies, which zombies would defy the plants. This game motivated him to go and research for himself just how to overcome obstacles... at five years old!”

Brian told Kurt Squire about this incident in his in-

terview for the GLS. Squire immediately hired him.

The GLS seems like the perfect match for Brian Pelletier. “You know what drew me here in the first place?” He asked. “The fact that everyone here recognizes that all games of any sort can offer some type of learning or instructional value. The problem solving, the background stories, the critical thinking challenges -- that’s what teaches kids things. You just have to think critically. Overcoming the obstacles is possible.”

The Games+Learning+Society



The GLS is located at 1401 University Ave
Photo by: Elizabeth Ryan

The Games+Learning+Society is a research area of the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery. The team at GLS creates games for learning and studies game-centered learning systems with cutting edge research and a unique work environment. It is co-directed by Constance Steinkuehler and Kurt Squire.

For more information on the Games+Learning+Society, visit <http://www.gameslearningsociety.org/research.php>.