Transcript

(Intro music)

Ally

Welcome to the Digital Creator Podcast, the show where we spotlight students working on cool digital projects. I'm Ally, a consultant at the Digital Knowledge Center where we empower students to be digital creators. Today's guests were inspired by 2008 internet culture and created a webcomic showcasing some aspects of what the web used to be like.

Liam

My name is Liam Kiely. I go by he/ him pronouns and my major is in international affairs and geography with a minor in conflict and security studies. I'm also a 2023 grad. I just finished my at least first leg of my thesis, and so I hopefully, will be done very soon.

Gene

My name is Eugene Hlaing. I use he/him pronouns, and my graduating class is 2023. I am taking my last semester right now. And my, I double majored in historic preservation and accounting with a minor in museum.

Ally

Studies congratulations to both of you. So how did you guys connect and at what point were you like, hey, Web comic, let's do it?

Gene

So, we met.

Liam

It's a long process.

Gene

It's a really long time. I think that we've been friends for. Over 10 years now. Yeah. So we met in, I think, the summer between 4th and 5th grade, right at an archaeology camp at William and Mary that we went to and I chased Liam around with a pen. Allegedly. I don't believe it, but this has been the common narrative.

Liam

I do remember that happening.

Gene

Yeah, and I don't.

Liam

Yeah. So, we we met, yeah. And that that summer at that little camp, it was only for a week, though. And when we like, I guess, properly, got to know each other was because we happened to go to the same middle school. And so, I think we like show up the first day I arrive in like an algebra class or something like class pre-algebra two or something, yeah.

Gene

You arrived in pre-algebra.

Liam

And then I'm like, oh. I remember you.

Gene

So we became friends in the 6th grade. Really close friends, and then we stopped talking to each other because Liam didn't Skype me for the summer, which is a very 2012 sentence to say. Yeah. And then we reconnected. Again, we were sort of enemies for two years and we were connected again in the 9th grade.

Liam

Well, you didn't talk to me for like a few months, but when we did start talking to each other again. In German class the same year so we did talk to each other in the 7th. Grade we just weren't that close. Yeah. We would kind of talk occasionally and then towards. High school proper. We started talking again because we were both in the same club, which was model United Nations. And then yeah, but yeah, it just it just so happened to happen, I guess and then kind of by chance, we both went to the same college.

Ally

So you guys didn't coordinate that, it just happened?

Gene

It just sort of happened. I didn't tell because I went here because of the museum studies and historic preservation program. I don't think I told Liam. For like 2 weeks after I made the decision, I didn't really know if you were really going to UMW at that point either. It was sort of like. A thing that happened.

Liam

Yeah, we were just kind of like winging it. And so we ended up at the same place and then we ended up working on, I guess, carrying forward some of the stuff we did in high school.

Ally

Can you describe a little bit web comic what it's about? Maybe what inspired it just anything that you want people to know about what you guys are doing!

Liam

OK, so I guess just to start off, a lot of the web comic creation process and most creation processes are just like like a series of what ifs, and essentially, we were like, what if there was a guy who sucked really hard, but also going all the way back to about like a year ago when we initially like brought up the project just at all. We were like, alright, what if there was a guy who was making it **two gamers on a couch** kind of web comic, but he hated Obama so much and got so mad that he won that he just kind of left the Internet and stopped making his whole thing. And it was like kind of a joke to just be like, oh, yeah, that doesn't happen in the two gamers on a couch web comic. But eventually we were like. No, actually, that'd be kind of a fun way to to to mix together some of our interests for the creation of a web. Yeah. And we've been expanding on it since.

Gene

Pretty much that day, we kind of sat on the idea and we cause again like like Liam said, it was just sort of a joke that was thrown out. And for the rest of the day, we just kept drawing little pictures of like, what the, you know, guy like would look like and how he would draw himself. And like you know, what kind of jokes he would make or making little comics and stuff and we would bring it up every now and then after that, as just like a oh, this is something that, you know, we should maybe work on because Liam and I've been talking about working on projects for a while. It's just that we didn't really because we were full time students. And there's not very much time for working on, you know projects for fun. So, it wasn't until I think, Mid-summer this this year that we learned about the DKC fellowship, and I hit Liam up was like hey, this is, you know, what we're doing is digital. We're going to need a website. We're going to have to make the comics digitally. It is in a form. A narrative about Internet subcultures in 2008. So, what if we did this? And, you

know, we had this kind of back and forth about whether or not they would accept it because, you know, being like, "yeah, we're going to make a comic about a guy who really hates Obama." It's not really something you get, like, a fellowship for. But we emailed Cartland, and he said it was cool. And then we just started up on it circa three months ago now. Yeah.

Ally

So, talk a little bit more about how you found out about the fellowship. Did someone tell you about it? Did you just stumble upon it? How did you first learn about it?

Liam

Yeah, that's all you.

Gene

Yeah, I I need to remember. I think that it was at the time I was working on my own thesis, which was about the archiving methods of cyber stalking communities online. And I was thinking, "OK, well, you know, this is really interesting. This is kind of like digitally focused." And I was looking around for resources that UMW might have specifically about the Internet and Internet subcultures. And I followed a rabbit hole, somehow, I really do not understand where that went. But at some point. I got to the DKC's website and then followed another rabbit hole of like, oh, what resources do they have? I've been here for four years and I never really took advantage of any of them. I'm a little curious now and I saw that they had a Fellowship. And I was like, well, what's that about? So, I sort of looked at that, I think around the end of when I was working on my thesis, and it wasn't until the middle of summer when I was kind of like looking around at stuff again because I knew that this upcoming semester, I'd only have one class to take. I was like, OK, so now I guess this is the time to take advantage of those. You know DKC resources, and I was like ohh the fellowship. That's a thing that's around that I remember thinking about two months ago. Why not bother Liam about it?

Ally

So, with any project there's bound to be some obstacles, challenges. Can you guys think of any specific moment where you just hit a bump in the road and how did you overcome that in your process of making the web comic? Or distributing it or or anything like that.

Liam

I guess I'll start off with one which is it's a difficult one to overcome because it was mainly mainly about like it really just time management. I think just trying to make sure that you're

you're you're working on the things you need to when you when you need to and that's definitely been a challenge in the past. And so like, you know, even to now just trying to split up your time between, you know, different things like, you know, I was I was. Again, working on my thesis for the vast majority of of this semester, and it can be quite involved and so naturally you can get a bit kind of. You know, one track minded about it and I certainly know that, especially if you're like just working or if you're just focusing on like one or two classes, you can kind of allocate almost all of your time towards that one thing cause you're like, well it's it's more important. You know, it's like it's more immediate, but over time we're just kind of like well. One of the things that really helped was as we were kind of like talking about our different like methods of making things, we were talking about like our different methods like the Gene method and the Liam method. And one of the things that really helped me was the Liam method is kind of throwing everything that you can at the wall and seeing what sticks. But it also allows for you to kind of throw whatever you want at the wall. Whenever you choose to so you know I'll be in the middle of working on something and I have been in the middle of working on something and then been like I should probably just like work for like 5 minutes on this thing. You just chip away piece by piece on, you know, what is ultimately a creative project that require. Is just pieces of different things that we throw together through either like, you know, fake forum posts or through, you know, just like, you know, bits and pieces of like, you know, the the the character story, you know, bits of dialogue through, like, you know, instant messengers and things like that become a lot easier. If you just kind of go like you'll always have like a little bit of time on top of whatever the thing is, it's dominating your schedule. So that's at least been somewhat helpful. It's just being like let's just throw everything that we can, you know together and find the time to actually to, to, to move around it rather than just making a definitive schedule and being like, "Oh yeah, that's the only time I will work on it."

Gene

And in a kind of opposite way. Having a definitive schedule of when I was going to work on it worked better for me because I in this past semester was, you know, had my last class, but also was working full time in Richmond. So, a lot of that time was used commuting. So having for me personally, you know, like, OK, I'm going to get back from work and I know for a fact that I have to work on this and there's nothing else that I'm. Allowed to work on for like. Two or three hours, you know, just every now and then every like, you know, once or twice a week or something like. Just between the stuff that I was doing and like the commuting was helpful for the way that I worked. Where you know, when we talked about the Gene and Liam method, the Gene method is a lot more focused on you know this like larger sort of narrative arc of OK, you know, our protagonist starts off here and we know that there's, you know, this triggering action point that's going to happen. So, what is that

triggering action point? What's going to happen in the in between? And It was really helpful that we could kind of that our methods of working sort of, Kind of complemented each other in that way because Liam could sort of just throw out like, OK, this, this, this, this and this should happen. And you know, here's, like 10 different comic ideas. And it was really nice for me to say, OK, well, I have this graphed out of our protagonist here. He needs to be here. Let me take, like, three of those Ideas and try to place them in this like narrative. So, that was really that was really.

Liam

Nice. It's kind of helpful if one of us again, I say one of. For myself, for the organization to come afterwards and for for him the organization to come before, because in that way, you know, like you know, while he's tracking things along, I can say, well, this would be interesting to happen here or, you know, while I'm writing everything that I can out and have a billion little notes, you can say, well, would be interesting for this to happen. You know, like at this point or you probably shouldn't include that or it's like, I don't know what that is, that kind of thing.

Ally

So, in terms of the like actual digital creation of the web comic, how do you two work together? Is there one who? Like mainly does the like art aspect. Do you both contribute to that? Just speak to that. And how did you guys land on that? Did it come naturally or was, you know, did anybody ask to do something?

Gene

Yeah. So we pretty much the way we split it up came pretty naturally when it came to the art. We already knew that I was going to be the one mainly taking control of, you know, like the character design. You know how things are going to look, stuff like that. That we kind of just naturally ended up having Liam do a lot of the writing in the perspective of the archivist. The secret about Liam, I say he's a very good writer, so he kind of ended up really embodying that perspective really well. Especially because this is set in 2008, it's about a subculture that neither of us were really super involved in. It kind of made sense that, OK, I would sort of deal with the art direction of stuff. Look at content from 2008 and comics from 2008, see how they work together, see, like, what are the trends at the time for digital artists. And it made more sense for Liam to kind of look at, OK, what's the vocabulary of the time that they're using? What's the slang? What's you know what? Like games, are they playing and how are they talking about it?

Liam

No. Yeah. Figuring out that split is something that's that does come kind of simply. If you definitely just kind of accept it's like I I can't, I probably can't not work on that part comes with an aspect of our, of like the way that the comic is set up that we have, you know, multiple narrators. So, we have like our main little guy who's, you know, annoying and, you know, writes his little gaming web comic. And then we have our archivist, who runs the website, who, you know, speaks to the context that he wrote his little thing in. And everyone's reactions to it because, you know, like Eugene was talking about the cyber stalking community that he was studying. You know, we we're incorporating part of that kind of Internet harassment aspect to to it as a method of Internet preservation in a way. So, the archivist keeps track of the forum posts and those instant messaging chats, and, you know, screenshots of of, you know, artwork in the process. And like, you know, saved images. And you know, what have you. And then putting that below the actual comic itself. And so like, you know, when it comes to like. A lot of you know the. The work that goes into, it's really threefold. It's like a lot of writing. It's a lot of the website itself to make sure it looks, you know, to the period and then the actual comic, which again you, you were just like, I'll see, Gene, I'll look over to him working on like a computer and he'll be reading like, some awful forgotten Web comics from like 2006 that everyone said was both evil and disgusting and

Gene

And It was.

Liam

And it absolutely will be. It's just like. I wonder what kind of little jokes they're making?

Gene

Yeah, the biggest learning curve has been how to research what things were like on the internet in 2008 and prior. Especially because right now we're kinda in this y2k renaissance and 2008 is in this weird middle child predicament where it is right after the time period that people are really into when it comes to "oh y2k fashion" and you know whatever. um but it's also like kind of still recent enough that there is not very much information about it that's accurate. So, it kinda gets this strange treatment where ya know 2008 is lumped into what it was like in 2001 like but at the same time it's like cause we were 7 in 2008 so it's kind of like um it's really weird looking at that time period especially because when it comes to recording that information as well it's like late enough that a lot of internet preservation didn't really seem to take hold at that point. So, you know with things like "know your meme" at least stuff like that you see a lot of stuff from like 2012 and afterwards or maybe 2010 but it's a lot harder to find things from before that period of time

so it's been interesting having to get a sense of what this period of time was like that you lived through but in a very like childlike sense,

Ally

I was 4 so

Gene

Exactly

Liam

 Yeah, cause I think there is also a point there to be made, this is something Gene can speak a lot to, uh but just as a mention some of the bigger historical events of like the **housing crisis and you know Obama's election, um you know there's like the Russo-Georgian War** things like that that are like huge they're big um but you know obviously there are historical records there's books written about these topics. But on the topic of internet preservation which is something we are trying to utilize as a story element as a narrative piece you know there's gonna be information missing there's gonna be dead links there's gonna be images that aren't available things that weren't saved at the right time and are inaccessible and therefore you can't exactly trust the narration to begin with. Um you know there is also just that element of like a lot of that um stuff is starting to go away as well as forums start to go away because they run out of money and a lot of older platforms for congregation and what not increasingly become shut down or are put behind something else rebranded etc. So, a lot of those kind of first-hand accounts end up kind of going away. Uh and so in a way and in a sense, it is almost harder to get these kinds of primary sources of like what was it like beyond people being like "aw yeah I remember it" kinda based off of like historical/ like nostalgic vibes of like "oh yeah we were always talking about Scumbag Steve" and whatever. Um and so it's like kinda funny but that's definitely been a part of it that it think yeah, we have tried to incorporate definitively into the narrative because things are disappearing and it's become a bit harder.

Ally

Last question for you guys to wrap things up: What has been most rewarding for you through this process? What from that like, what has what has grown from that for you guys?

Gene

I think it's certainly, you know for the last four years that we have been in college in the last like you know cause we have been like pretty close for the last like five years. We have talked about doing a project. Like a large scale project together because we've always, we've always been pretty creatively similar. For for a while, for the time that we've known each other, we've had generally the same interests and we just sort of work really well together. So this has been kind of on the back burner for about four years. But again, you know, going to school and having our own things to deal with, got in the way. So finally, being able to say, "OK, we're going to work on a creative project together and actually commit to it" and to kind of see how all of it is wrapping up, but also learning more about how we work together in like, you know, the sense of making a creative project has been, it's been very interesting. It's been very rewarding to finally. Do that after a good number of years, knowing each other. It's very it's very nice.

Liam

Yeah, yeah, I would definitely say First off is is more just shout out to the DKC. Everyone here is really cool. You guys all have really cool stuff and you know you get to to mess around with some really awesome things. And that was one thing we kind of learned were like shoot. We granted we kind of came here during COVID. So like you know we we had one normal semester and then 1/2 of a semester that then sent us home on. It was like March 12th or whatever in 2020 and from then until just about probably our junior year, I would say or probably like halfway through our junior year, things finally got quote unquote back to normal. So it was kind of unfortunate that we then were like "damn DKC is cool as hell", we We we really wish we could have mess around with a lot more of the stuff that was here, you know, before we're leaving now and it would be kind of weird if we were hanging out here. Yeah, that's definitely been part of it. This has been like, uh, the DKC is really awesome. They have some really cool stuff that we kind of wish more People knew about.

Gene

Especially because you know both of us, the fields that we're in with Liam in geography and international relations and me with accounting and historic pres. as much as there is an art to writing about buildings and terrorism. It's not quite the same as making a web comic, so kind of being able to actually flex those creative muscles that we kind of have let atrophy for a while. Yeah, it's it's really nice. It's it's been really good to see that we're actually kind of capable of committing to this project and doing it. And yeah, when you're working on something, especially something that's new, like you learn as much about

yourself as you do about, you know, this thing that you're creating with another person, it's it's neat.

Liam

Yes, and one last final note. I think that as we've been making this thing. About a guy who sucks, I think that we've learned a lot more about the guy who sucks within all of us and the fact that he's always there making a really crappy web comic and it's your job to to to make him make a better one. And maybe that's maybe that's the Goal we've learned ourselves.

Ally

Maybe the web comic was the friends we made along the way.

Liam

Exactly.

Gene

so true, so true.

Ally

All right. Well, thank you guys so much for sitting down with me today. Great conversation. And for those listening, take Liam's advice, come on down to the DKC. You never know what you'll find here.

(outro music comes in and fades out)

This has been the Digital Creator Podcast. You can find a transcript of our conversation and more about this project below. This podcast was produced and edited by me, Ally Hamilton, with help from the resources at the Digital Knowledge Center. Are you interested in becoming a digital creator? Do you have a cool project you want to share? Go to **dkc.umw.edu** for information on how to get started! Thank you for listening!

(outro music fades back in)