

# GLGX ZINE



# What is This?

About a year ago, a group of Michigan based indie devs had the idea to put on a game dev convention. And then for reasons that have been lost to the sands of time, the world shut down and organizing a large gathering of people could no longer be done ethically or legally.

But it's a new year and we are back, all thanks to the power of the internet and our unwavering spirit!

The event is GLGX, the Great Lakes Game Expo, a fully online con. Hopefully it will be the first of many and the only one that will require us to all be in separate rooms. It's a virtual space for anyone that loves making games, playing games, and sharing their love of making/playing games. You can find more info at our site: [glgx.dev](http://glgx.dev).

And this is the GLGX 2021 Zine. It exists because I wasn't about to pass up an excuse to put together a zine. Although it's in the form of a file right now rather than paper and ink, you can still get the full experience by printing it out, handing to yourself, flipping through it and then dropping it on the ground as you walk somewhere for someone else to pick up.

Thanks for reading!

Steven Zavala  
Co-Organizer of GLGX



# Beards, Bros, Bearing with Bad Feedback

A Conversation With Brett Pennings, One Half of Bowlcut Studios

by Steven Zavala



If you're looking for a chaotic brawler, full of mind games, fireballs and giant frogs that radiate healing energy, to play with your 9 closest friends then there is no better choice than MageQuit. Available on Steam and Xbox One, this wizard themed party game is being developed by the duo of brothers Brett and Chad Pennings, who comprise the Michigan based indie team Bowlcut Studios. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Brett, the programming half of the team, to discuss some unique aspects of its development.

SZ: I know you and Chad had another project you were working on before MageQuit. I had seen a bit of it but could you describe what that was?

BP: When I started my job in web development my brother Chad wanted to start making games--so this didn't have anything to do with me at first--but he didn't know how to program. I tried to teach him javascript so he could make a browser based game but that did not take so I started taking the art assets that he was making and then I was programming them into HTML canvas. Before that actually, I had attempted to make MageQuit in Unity. This was probably 8 or 9 years ago at this point. And it was just really, really bad. The reason I did it was that the Ouya recommended Unity and the Ouya was originally my kick to make the Warcraft 3 mod "Warlocks" for console. And it sort of evolved and we started working on Feisty Fist which was a 2D platformer. But as we were working on it, I started reading some books on game design and realized that we were approaching it completely backward--Chad just sending me art that had nothing to do with anything. We pretty much got done with it but it was a combination of me realizing that it wasn't a good game and the Apple store wanting you to pay \$150 a year to keep your game on there. And I know I was the type of person that would say "I made this so I need to keep it on the store"--

SZ: And you end up making negative \$400 over its lifetime--

BP: Exactly. So I didn't want to put it up.

SZ: What made MageQuit different? Why was it worth pursuing?

BP: I realized from the first attempt that one of the big things we were missing was “cast time”. This was something that existed in the mod but I didn’t realize how important it was. The idea that when you cast a spell there is a certain amount of time before it actually goes. It’s weird because so many games get that wrong. When there’s a pause there’s room for mind games, there’s room for anticipation. We realized once we started doing that that the game is actually based on anticipation. When we started designing new spells we kept that in mind so all of our newer stuff is better than the first stuff we did. In game you can tell what elements we started on because they get more complicated and more interesting.

SZ: One thing that’s interesting about Bowlcut is that you and Chad are brothers, which is a pretty unique setup for a game studio. What’s it like working with your brother compared to other teams you’ve been on?

BP: In general the best and worst thing about working with family is that you can’t get away from them. It holds you accountable, which is on the good side, but if things go wrong with the project you can sour a relationship that you can’t sever--not that that’s healthy but--

SZ: No, I get it. No matter how this turns out, you might not be coworkers but you’re still brothers.

BP: Exactly, but fortunately Chad and I share a very similar vision for how the game plays out. There was a point when I was too much of a control freak when it came to the art. At one point, I was like “you know what, I’m going to let Chad do it in his style and that’s going to be the style.” And that was when we transitioned to the low poly look from the pseudo realistic hand painted look. We were using an asset pack at first and I had done the level design and made it look goodish. Looking back at it, I think it looks awful but at the time I thought it looked good because I had been staring at it for so long. So having a mutual respect where you say “I’m going to defer to what you think looks good and we are going to run with it. I guess that’s less about working with my brother but that’s just how the dynamic is now. He has final say on art and I have final say on design.



Brett (left) and Chad (right) in their fully loaded hatchback on the way to demo at another convention (back when that was something that could be done)

SZ: I feel like it's kind of a short cut to that. Since you already had that respect for each other you don't need someone to prove to you their ability.

BP: Yeah, on the other hand when we first started MageQuit, Chad was just doing his first Blender tutorials so he had very little experience in animation and creating assets. Obviously over the last 5 years he's gotten way better at it. To answer the other part of your question, every other team I've been on has been for money specifically and has not been working on a game. I will say that I don't dread meetings with Chad whereas in the past with meetings I just can't.

SZ: I like what you said about deferring to each other's judgement. That's how I approach it when trying to direct artists in my own projects. I'll have a rough idea of what I want but I'll leave it up to them since I don't have that kind of artistic vision for like color or composition.

BP: Honestly I think artists appreciate that way more than someone that has minimal knowledge in the field but thinks they know a lot. A lot of times I'll end up concepting--I used to draw a lot growing up so I know it's kind of weird being the programmer and doing concept art--but I'll draw something out and send it to him and he'll turn it into something really cool. He definitely has a style in his art. I think the best adjective to describe is "feisty". I think that's how we named the first game [Feisty Fist]. He was trying to make it as feisty as possible.

SZ: One part of the ongoing development of MageQuit that I have been especially impressed with is your ability to grow and maintain an audience.

BP: It's honestly been a huge trial and error. It's definitely made me appreciate the role of community manager. When you're forced to do it yourself you realized what a different skillset it is. I remember seeing in the GameDevMI discord people saying it would be so fun to grow an online game community.

SZ: I've specifically thought the exact opposite thing. The one benefit of game dev is the lack of interaction with strangers and now you have to specifically appeal to strangers. What methods have worked? What have you tried?



BP: We've tried doing giveaways on facebook which got us a big influx of players but they didn't stick around because they didn't owe us anything, they got a free copy of the game. It's interesting how much more invested people are when they put money into a game even if it's only 10 or 15 bucks. They're willing to sit through a tutorial, they're willing to spend time learning how to play before they make their judgement. 90% of our hardcore players come from events like PAX. I do think events are specifically good for us because it's a 10 player local party game so it will draw a crowd and players get rowdy.

People will ask for things they don't realize they don't want. A lot of people were asking for ranked in MageQuit. Given the number of players we had at the time I did some calculations and realized that there was no way we could do premade ranked threes, where people could form teams of three and hop in and get a fair match. That's mostly because of the huge difference between player skill at the time. If there's one very good premade team and one mediocre one the new players are just going to get stomped and then they are going to leave the game because they had a bad experience. So we did 1 v 1 ranked. At first it was great. But then the people who were asking for it, the top players, they all thought they were the top player. And then they realized who the top player was and whoever was below them would match up with them. So those people would stop playing since they were getting wrecked by the top player. And that worked its way down through the playerbase.

Similar situation, we started a regular season for the game through a company called Indie Gaming League. When we first did it we had 30 teams for 3 v 3s. So we had 3 divisions. At the time we had no way of knowing how good players were so we kind of guessed as to what division to put people in. And a lot of people had a bad experience because their divisions were assigned improperly or there was still enough disparity within a division that people were being destroyed. That's to say that it's important to know what your game is and what your game isn't. I'm not saying MageQuit is not a competitive title, but that's not what we designed it to be in the first place. You're supposed to play it with your friends.

Things that have worked are community nights. We have them scheduled twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. We have a player role people can add themselves to and we will ping that and hop in voice chat and play. We started doing a regular tournament. We found the most fun way to play the game is typically 3 v 3 but the issue with that is when you have premade teams you have power teams that form and they end up in the finals every time. So we came up with a tournament format called "shuffle". It randomizes who's on your team each round and sorts players by total skill so you end up playing a team that's roughly as good as you. What that does is when you get to the finals it's not the top 6 players, it's just 6 players that happened to not lose because they were on a good team. It mixes players up so you get to meet new people and it makes close matches and makes it fun to watch



SZ: Since MageQuit is both a competitive game and has opportunities for ways to expand, there are a lot of things players could provide feedback on. How do you manage players' suggestions?

BP: This is something I have definitely gotten better at. We do get a lot of feedback and I have to remember to not take things personally. First, it's important to address the intent behind the feedback, not the feedback itself. People tend to try to provide a solution as a suggestion rather than tell you what the problem is. When you get that feedback you need to figure out what their underlying problem is. You also need to consider the experience level of the player suggesting it. If it's a new player, that's important--that's onboarding. What is not important is a new player giving you balance advice because they have only played the game a few hours and they don't know all the possibilities. Don't dismiss any ideas because a lot of times even half baked ideas can spark something in your mind that can turn into something awesome. A lot of more hardcore players are not quiet about bad feedback. If a new player comes in and spouts off bad ideas, we'll have 7 or 8 people who are just like "no, I very much disagree with this." I use this as a litmus test that I wasn't just taking it personally, it wasn't good feedback.

SZ: So to wrapup, what's next for MageQuit that you can share?

BP: I'm putting the finishing touches on a new element: Metal. The fun thing about adding a new element to the game is there's exponentially more combos that are possible. I don't mean just your spell loadout I mean specific spells you can cast in a certain order that is greater than the sum of its parts. The utility spell for the new element is called Reflex. You throw one of those doctor's hammers and it forces them to cast the last spell type you used. So if you used a movement spell and then Reflex, it forces them to use their movement in whatever direction they are facing. If you aren't paying attention you can cause someone to use their ult in your face and it can backfire super hard which for me is the most interesting type of spell since it has extreme upside and extreme downside which can lead to ridiculous situations. Someone discovered right away that the Steam ultimate, which is called Sunder, if you hit someone it creates 2 copies of you and you teleport into a triangle around the person you hit and you can cast a triple spell. So someone realized I can use Sunder and Reflex someone and make them use their ult 3 times in a row. Which is something I hadn't anticipated at all. We are looking to launch on Switch this year but we don't know when that is going to happen.

As I said earlier a lot of our audience comes from events. When everything got locked down that was right after PAX East where we had a lot of people at our booth playing it so then everyone was home and a lot of people were playing MageQuit and we had a huge spike in players. But then as time went on we weren't able to go to events which was kind of the life blood of the game. We're hoping to get back out there once that's a possibility.

Hey there! I'm Lily, and today we're going to be learning how to

# BUILD A BOSS!



Bosses make up some of the most memorable parts in a video game. Years after we've put it down, we can still describe the struggle and triumph of defeating our favorite evil-doers...

But what makes a boss a BOSS?

## What's a boss?

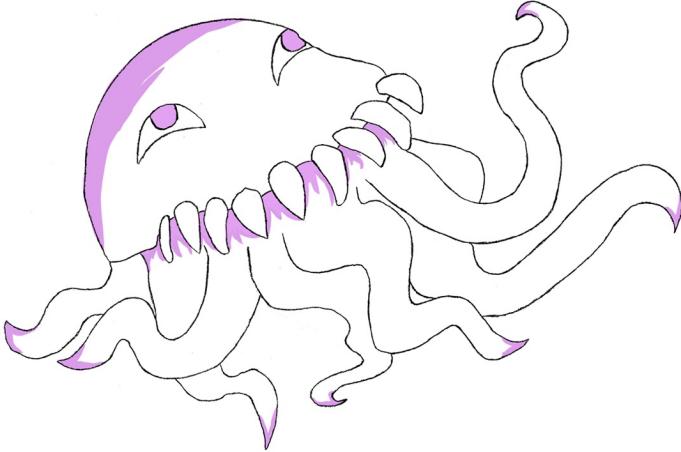
See, every great boss does two things: They test what the player has learned so far, and they act as an strong emotional peak!

Any challenge can be a boss! Villains like Sephiroth and Ganon are great examples as the antagonists of their respective games, but a particularly challenging puzzle or obstacle can be a boss, too! The Summit in Celeste is a great example of a final boss without a villain, as the player travels through a gauntlet of tricky challenges using everything they've learned.

Your boss should be at a peak of your game's difficulty curve, while also focusing on creating a swell of your game's core emotions, such as triumph, cleverness, or fright. A boss that evokes strong emotions will be remembered long after they're gone!



# Character!



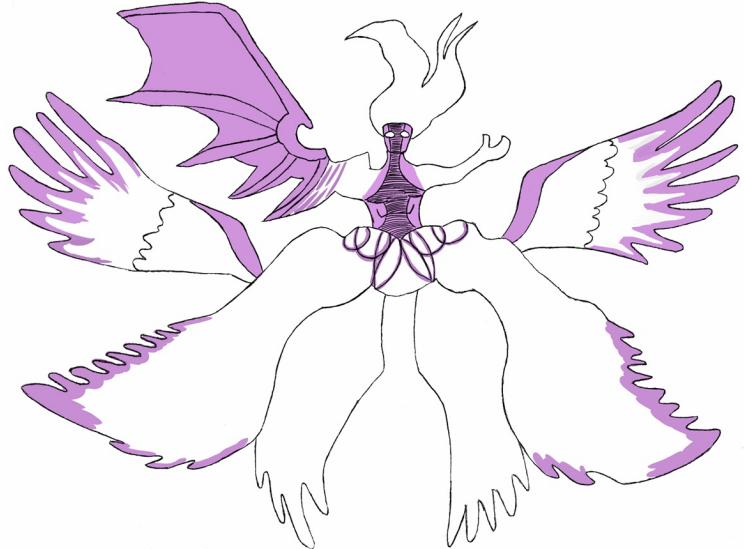
Players are more likely to remember a boss with some personality. Have your boss interact with the player long before the fight to taunt and flaunt. Have townspeople spread hushed rumors about the boss. Have the boss return a second time, seeking revenge!

Weave them into your plot as much as possible. A vivid character will stay with your players longer than anything else.

# Design!

Distinct audio and visual design is also important for a boss. Try a unique musical theme that matches the tone of the encounter. Try a unique visual design with colors that pop or an imposing silhouette. Even a unique stage layout - such as switching from a cramped corridors to an open field - will tell your player the stakes are higher.

But be careful and plan ahead. Scope creep is an even bigger risk with bosses!



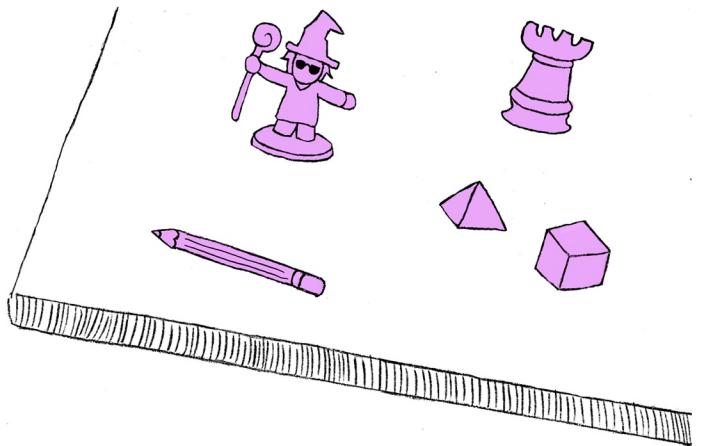
# Gameplay!

A boss should challenge the player to reach their full potential. Design your boss as a "final exam" that asks the player to prove how comfortable they are with your game and gives them a chance to show off. The boss should rely on mechanics the player is familiar with, but can use them in new combinations they haven't seen. Introducing new controls or tools during a boss will feel sporadic and unfair, so try to avoid it. The boss should challenge the player's mastery of existing skills.

Finally, make sure to give the player a quiet moment after the boss is complete. Let them catch their breath and absorb their accomplishment. Too much consecutive stress will become a blur and ruin the experience!

## Plan & Prototype

Wait! Before you begin implementing your boss, try "paper prototyping"! Get coins, dice, and game pieces, and use them to visualize the physical layout of the encounter. Use paper to sketch out hitboxes like sword swings and explosions.



It's important to give your boss a good mix of simple and complex abilities. For a furious action game, I recommend a few simple attacks, one tricky or super-powerful attack, and one flashy attack. For a slower, more strategic game, your boss can be more complicated.

When you first implement your boss, skip custom assets, and don't worry about balance! Just do enough to get it "feeling" like you intend. Use a debug menu to test and iterate quickly. Focus on big changes at first before worrying about detailed number tweaking.



And of course...

**Playtest,  
Playtest,  
Playtest!!**

Playtest early and often! Your testers will catch a million things you missed!

## The Rule of Cool

The Kirby games are some of my favorite, and often break TONS of rules with their final bosses. The tone switches from slapstick to cosmic horror, and new mechanics are introduced at a rapid pace. And it WORKS! Instead of increasing difficulty in an otherwise friendly game, Kirby uses its final bosses as a mood curveball to glue them in your memory. Sometimes the best thing to do is to break the rules... but don't overdo it!



That's all for now. Until next time... be the best boss you can be!

# Friendship Quest

by Mike Klamerus

**Friendship Quest** is a two-player map-drawing game about two friends who are playing through an adventure game inspired by my experiences playing through Lucasarts and Sierra adventure games with friends and family.

## What is Required to Play Friendship Quest?

You will need paper, some pencils or pens, and a deck of cards with the Jokers removed. Separate the deck with one deck of playing cards with the Ace and Face cards (Jack, Queen, King) placed in one pile called the **Map Deck**, and the rest of the cards placed in another pile called the **Inspiration Deck**.

## Setup

The game starts with the two of you picking up a new adventure game by Yosemite Software by making up the title of the game and then describing what the game is about.

If you need help creating a computer game title, use this optional table. Roll a six-sided dice for each column to generate the title of the game you will play.

Series Title	Entry in Series	1 <sup>st</sup> Part of Subtitle	2 <sup>nd</sup> Part of Subtitle
Queen's Adventure	1	The Perils of...	Endless Gold
Troll Quest	2	Quest For...	The Tome of Love
Witch's Tale	3	Vengeance of...	The Cave of Mystery
Rogue's Journey	4	Escape From...	The Goblin Prince
The Bard's Song	5	Castle of...	The Blood Demon
The Wizard's Tome	6	In Pursuit of...	The Mask of Immortality

## Play

Before going on your adventure, answer the following questions together:

- Whose house are you playing the game at, and why?
- What made you excited for this game?
- What rumors have you heard about this game?

Take turns answering questions from the following list and drawing on the map until you reach the end of the list. For each question, draw a card from the Inspiration Deck and use it to help answer the question. Every time you answer a question, fill in part of the game's map. Draw a card from the Map Deck and use the suit and card number to determine the location on the grid that you will draw in, and use the Face card pile to determine the inspiration for the question you must answer.

1. This is where the game begins. Explain how your journey starts.
2. You recognize this scene from a screenshot on the back of the box. What was it about this screenshot made you excited to try the game?
3. Both of you are stuck on a puzzle and you figured out the solution between play sessions. How?
4. An NPC helped you on your journey here. Who was it and what did they do?
5. You had your first run in with the antagonist here. What happened?
6. You and your friend are stuck on a puzzle here and have been unable to think of a solution. You figure out the solution
7. You encounter a cutscene here that you think about for the rest of the week. What was it?
8. Your character has died here. What happened and how do you avoid it from happening again after loading your save?
9. Something happened here that made things awkward for you and your friend for the rest of the day. What was it?
10. There was a puzzle here that required you to call the game developer's hintline. How was your experience calling them?
11. How did you use your own personal experiences to help your friend when they were stuck on a puzzle here?
12. An NPC tried to stop you here. Who was it, what did they try to do, and how did you overcome it?
13. The game made you learn something about yourself here. What was it?
14. There was a big plot twist that happened here. Explain what it was.
15. You found an unimportant but fun secret placed by the developer here. What was it?
16. This is where the game ends. How? Were you satisfied with the game's ending?

## **Inspiration**

Use this section to help describe the things the two of you find while playing through your game. When you draw a card from the Inspiration Deck, look at the suit and number for suggestions for what you have seen.

### **Card Suite**

- ♥ Heart - Treasures, artifacts, unknown objects
- ♠ Spade - Buildings, monuments, statues
- ♦ Diamond - Magical oddities, fantastical creatures
- ♣ Club - Animals, people, plants

### **Number**

- 2 Spooky
- 3 Romantic
- 4 Ominous
- 5 Comedic
- 6 Heartwarming
- 7 Sad
- 8 Exciting
- 9 Mysterious
- 10 Bizarre

**Map**

After you have answered a question and have drawn a card from the Map Deck, use the card to determine where in the game's map you are adding to.

**J****Q****K****A**

♥			
♠			
♦			
♣			

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