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'Zombie' gamers among the caps and gowns

Creators of Web 'Oscar' winner among those getting degrees today

By James Boyd
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His name is Spencer Stuart, but you may know him better by his alter ego, Spencer Striker.

The Indiana University student will earn his Master's in Immersive Mediated Environments (MIME) today, but that's only one among many recent accomplishments.

Fifteen months ago, as a student in the department of telecommunications, Stuart created a Web site called GameZombie.tv.

In an industry in which many start-up ventures fail, GameZombie.tv has flourished online, earning a coveted 2008 Webby Award last month. The Webby is the Internet's version of the Oscars, recognizing the best of the best in a field with millions of contenders.

The site is a multimedia show that centers on the video gaming world. It takes about 30 other IU students — many of whom receive internship credit — to produce and edit the content.

To date, the site has created more than 150 videos, seen by more than a million viewers from across the globe.

"Fifteen months ago, I was brainstorming, trying to come up with a really cool idea, and that was to sustain a two-year master's project," Stuart said this week. "I was looking at video game review shows, but most of them had huge bankrolls behind them. And most of the material they're creating isn't that strong. There's no emphasis on things like lighting and editing. I said, 'We can do better than that!'"

So began GameZombie.tv.

The shows feature top-notch editing and special effects, along with interviews from some of the gaming industry's biggest names.

They are hosted by IU student Jessica Frasher, who will graduate with a bachelor's degree today.

"I started the summer before my senior year, after I saw what they did with video editing," Frasher said. "I saw their Web site, saw what they had done. I went to a meeting they had and everyone seemed really nice. So I went ahead and started editing video, which led to me getting in front of the camera. Now I do a little bit of both, which is really cool."

Stuart views the site as a cross between "game journalism" and cutting-edge entertainment.

Reviewers have covered some of the biggest gaming conferences around the country, and landed one-on-one



Spencer Stuart, who started GameZombie.tv, talks with video editor Stan Sevostyanov while their team works on an upcoming issue of the online video game review and broadcast. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times
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Andrew Benninghoff works on motion graphics for GameZombie.tv. The site's creators will be among those graduating from IU today. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times
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Jason Lataillade also graduates today. He's the site's lead video editor and game analyst, and said the experience at GameZombie.tv has been one he'll never forget.

"The experience has just been great," he said. "I've been a video game fan since I was about 5. It's my lifeblood."

Like most others who work on the site, Lataillade has found a way to merge his multimedia skills with his passion for gaming.

And there's always a challenge.

"We're just trying to stay original and creative," he said. "There are so many ways we can make these videos so similar to what other competing sites are doing. I think the toughest thing is trying to be original. There's so much potential with the site, and so many people working here that want to see it go far."

Put Thom Gillespie in that category. The director of IU's MIME program also serves as the site's associate producer.

"I never dreamed that Game-Zombie would be a Webby winner, but it was always obvious that this project was wildly creative, almost as creative as Spencer himself," Gillespie said. "GameZombie is the first big thing Spencer has created. It will not be his last."

Stuart believes the site can succeed after he graduates, and he intends to continue working for it. In fact, MIME has already approved a class beginning in the fall — to be taught by Stuart — that functions around GameZombie.

"I think there's no reason Bloomington can't have a really strong business and media company," he said. "We're going to remain a hybrid of successful functioning. We work our butts off, and we're proud of what we've accomplished. This is just the beginning. We just want to see how far we can push this thing."

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