

A NIGHT OF THE INDIGENOUS

DEVS' TO REMEMBER

NAOMI JOHNSON | IMAGINENATIVE

Last year was the 20th annual imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, and it was my first as a staff member. That year was a whirlwind of learning, growing, and truly enjoying what the Festival and the organization is. When I was first hired to train alongside Jason Ryle as Associate Director, I saw the year and my role not only as an opportunity to absorb what information and knowledge I could, but also a moment to get to know the staff and program delivery across departments.

When Meagan Byrne (who was the iN Digital + Interactive Lead at the time) asked staff if anyone would be willing to participate in her conception of 'Night of the Indigenous Devs' event, I wholeheartedly volunteered. A long-time video game enthusiast (a bit on pause since the birth of my son Charlie), I was very willing to offer up "expertise" for the event. Not knowing exactly what I had volunteered for, I assumed I was entering a tournament-style event, where I would surely crush my competition.

I was immediately corrected that it was to be a cooperative effort with fellow staff member, the lovely Kaitlynn Tomaselli, our Digital + Interactive Coordinator. I had no say in whose game I was going to test in front of a live audience, but a huge part of me was thrilled to learn it would be a fellow member from my home community of Six Nations, Nathan Powless. His game, *Hold My Hand* is centered on your ability to communicate and cooperate with your partner. Kaitlynn and I spent quite a bit of time yelling at each other as we stumbled through the level. What surprised me most and what I truly believe is the genius of this game is the level of emotionality it draws out within only a short amount of time playing, emotional responses from both us as the players, and the crowd.

A surprising and potentially heartbreaking scene awaits those who can puzzle their way to the end. I won't spoil! The fun of "Night of the Indigenous Devs", was what most of us look for in a communal experience around interactive media. We cheer, we yell, we throw up our hands - and most of all we laugh and have a little bit of fun. Having the game developer front and center beside you while you discover their game, fielding questions from a live audience was something unique and wonderful. When I looked out into the crowd I saw diverse faces of all ages enjoying the gathering, smiles as they watched, questioned, and genuinely enjoyed themselves. When you are planning and working the Festival it is extremely rare you get to attend or partake in the events.

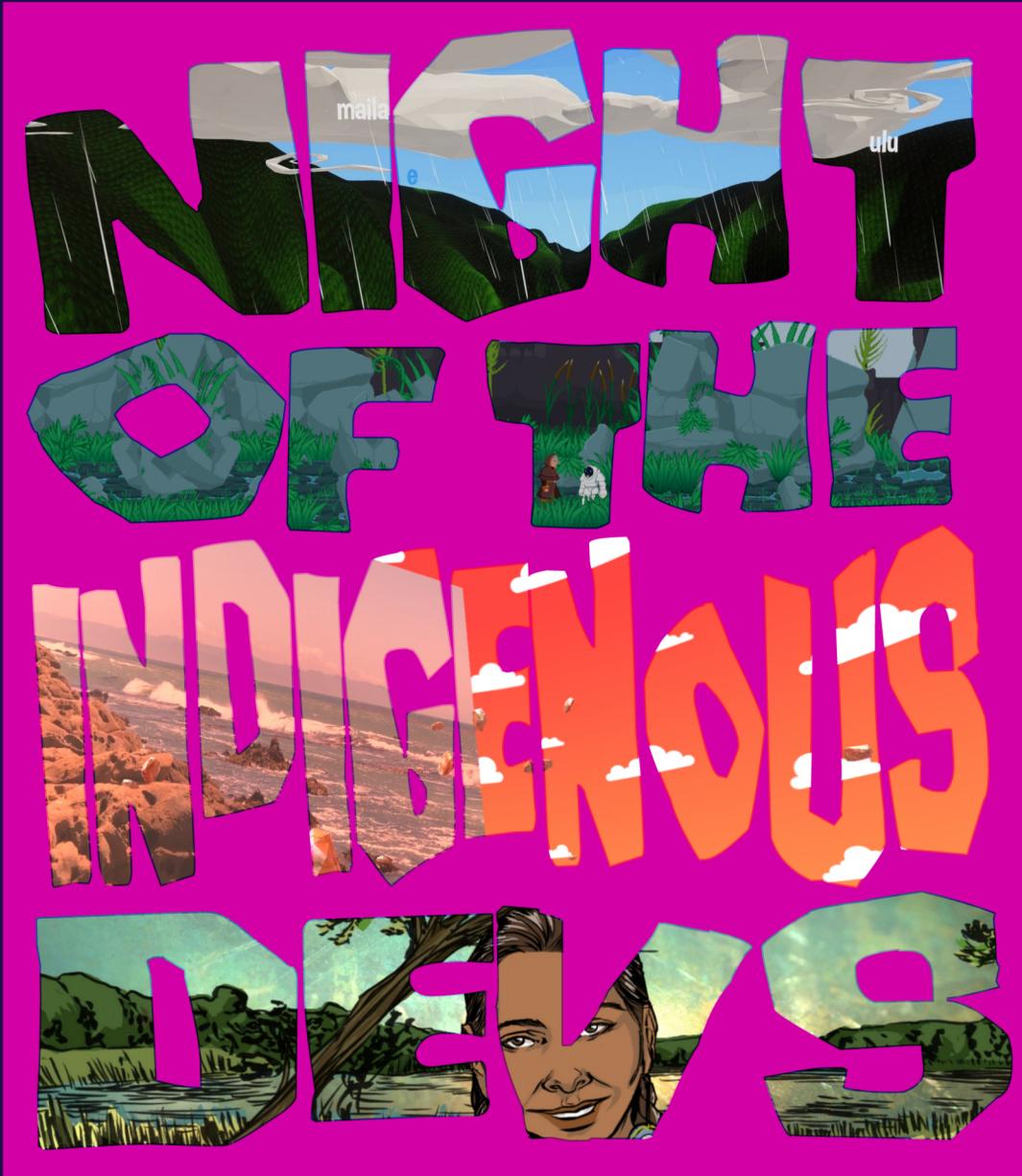
Our world as staff during Festival week is mostly spent running from venue to venue, moving through the crowds, hunting down people, and "putting out fires". It was a rare opportunity indeed to witness the successful Festival event and to be an active participant. Nia:wen Meagan for inviting me to be a part of it, and congratulations on an extremely successful first showing of imagineNATIVE's "Night of the Indigenous Devs."

I look forward to more!

Naomi Johnson,
Executive Director
imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival



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OCTOBER 25 ONLY

TIFF Bell Lightbox, Cinema 3 DOORS @ 5:30PM

General \$15 - Students/Seniors \$10 - Industry Pass Free

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2019 Promotional Poster, Courtesy of imagineNATIVE, Designed by Meagan Byrne

