

Jonathan Umar-Khitab

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Player-driven game designer crafting dynamic, flexible systems that blend emotion and gameplay to create deeply engaging experiences

Game Design: Level/Systems Design, Player-Driven Design, Mechanics, Documentation, Game Progression, Narrative, Traversal, Combat, Camera

Player Experience: UX Design, User Research, Game Feel, Flow, Balancing

Prototyping: Wireframes, Iterative Design, Flow Charts, Behavior Trees, Playtesting

Programming: Blueprints, C++, C#

Project Management: GIT, Trello, HackNPlan, Codecks

Tools and Software: Unreal, Unity, Figma, Maya, Blender, Clip Studio, Photoshop, Excel

Collaboration: Team-oriented, Agile, Cross-Disciplinary Communication

Personal: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Attention to detail, Animation, Acting

Experience

Game Designer | Our Passing Thoughts (Partnership) | Independent Studio **May 2021 – April 2025**

A cooperative first game where players pass abilities like jump between one another, allowing them to interact with the world and overcoming its seemingly impossible challenges.

- Designed mechanics and upgrades with intuitive depth—simple to understand, but flexible in use—to enable discovery, cooperation, and evolving strategies. Each mechanic solved meaningful problems, reshaped challenges, and supported a progression curve that made growth feel earned and exciting.
- Crafted a variety of escalating levels, and challenges around core abilities using implicit cooperative systems that encouraged natural collaboration. This enabled player agency through mechanics that supported fluid role-taking and mutual reliance, fostering organic teamwork.
- Created wireframes, design documentation, and system diagrams outlining features and needs for implementation. This enabled programmers to accurately build features, fostering an efficient feedback loop—resulting in well-tuned, engaging gameplay systems.
- Conducted and analyzed playtests, utilizing player behavior data to refine designs. This led to a smoother difficulty curve, fewer unintended behaviors, and an improved overall experience
- Collaborated closely with artists and engineers to develop locations, mechanics, interactable assets and other elements resulting in a consistent and unified player experience.

Game Designer | Unannounced Digital Board Game | Jumpbutton Studio April 2022 – August 2022

A 2–4 player deck-building strategy game (Chess × Yu-Gi-Oh!) where players draft unique tokens to create their loadout, emphasizing strategic positioning and replayability.

- Established core designs and systems based on in-depth research of a beloved IP, forming a foundation that authentically reflected its themes and lore. The result was an experience both fans and newcomers could embrace and enjoy, while still honoring the IP it's rooted in.
- Designed clear, intuitive rules for each game piece, creating a system that defined tunable values for balance while maintaining ease of use and enabling strategic depth through piece interactions.
- Drove iterative playtesting sessions to refine game flow, validate mechanics, and balance piece functionality, incorporating player feedback to enhance overall gameplay experience.
- Developed accessible tutorial scenarios that helped players learn key systems and interactions through hands-on, low-pressure gameplay, resulting in an improved onboarding experience.

Lead Developer | I want to Go Home | University of Ontario September 2017 – July 2019

A 2D resource management and decision-making game where players navigate two in-game weeks attempting to access temporary housing, while facing the challenges of youth homelessness.

- Designed and developed all systems, content, and tools with limited resources, clarifying goals to deliver a game that empowered players autonomy to approach and experience its challenges.
- Drove research and collaborated with subject matter experts to inform the game authentically represented youth homelessness across its scenarios, mechanics, loop, and overall experience.
- Conducted play sessions and developed a long-term evaluation method, analyzing gameplay data, interviews and information retention to understand how memory shaped user perception of events. This identified key emotional and cognitive moments, and assessed their effectiveness.
- Revived and led the development of a stalled game project, collaborating with contractors to design, develop, and deliver a final product aligned with project goals and requirements.

Projects:

Project Methoria – First Person Parkour Shooter (Unreal) – Fully Functional Parkour Locomotion System
Project Legacy – TTRPG – A personal project akin to D&D but reimagined to focus on player fantasy.
Kori and the Forgotten Tower – Unreal Engine

Education

University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Master of Science (Game Design)

Thesis: An Exploration into player's perception of emotional memories as they change over time.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10155/1145>

Game Development and Entrepreneurship, B.A. Information Technology (Honours)

Game Programming (Minor)