

Enduring Play Season 2 Episode 2_ Adanna Nedd

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SPEAKERS

Cheryl Platz, Enduring Play Computer, Adanna Nedd

Enduring Play Computer 00:00

Initializing enduring play podcast season two, engine decompressing, audio, synchronizing waveforms, articulating splines, watching podcast lobby.

Enduring Play Computer 00:16

Welcome back to enduring play, the podcast, where we explore what it takes to create video games that don't just survive but thrive. I'm your host, Cheryl Platz, video game designer, director and author of The Game Development Strategy Guide from Rosenfeld media and during play, season two is about scaling our game development ideas beyond the individual. A common thread through most of our conversations is the collective through communities of game developers, through game education, through games research, and through the events and systems that support the releases and people making our games. Few games are released in a vacuum. So how do we scale together? This week's guest is Adanna Nedd, Narrative Designer, games writer, games researcher, with an encyclopedic knowledge of current games. If you don't come out of this episode with a new game you want to play, I would be deeply shocked. While adana's research focuses on the experience of players of color in video game spaces, her knowledge is expansive, and the conversation we have today applies to everyone who's listening. We talk about generational gaps in gaming. We talk about consoles. We talk about AI. We cover self expression, game economies, narrative design. There is so much here for you,

E Enduring Play Computer 01:34
loading episode preview

A Adanna Nedd 01:36
games like Undertale that are, like, really artistically simple and like, a lot of the appeal is through, like, the funny dialog, the deep story. And I think it's going to be especially interesting seeing like you for consoles, especially with all of the chip shortages and all, like, rising prices, I think a lot of companies are going to have to slow down.

C Cheryl Platz 01:55
Let's get into the game.

E Enduring Play Computer 01:57
Player One, Cheryl Platz, pronouns, she, her player two. Adanna Nedd, pronouns, she, her. podcast level start.

E Enduring Play Computer 02:09
Welcome back to enduring play. I am so excited to have Adanna Nedd with me here today. We first met at GDC last year, and you highlight such important voices, fans, so many different disciplines, and this is going to be such a fun conversation. Thank you for being here.

A Adanna Nedd 02:25
Yes, I'm so excited. I'm Adanna Nedd. I'm a games writer, Narrative Designer, and games research, sure, based in the US. My research focuses on a lot of like, the different experiences players of color have, both in virtual game spaces and in person when playing video games. And my writing focuses on a lot of fantasy, but I'm super, super excited to be here and see you at GDC next week. Very excited

E Enduring Play Computer 02:53
launching podcast level one, the intersection of identity and self expression in video games.

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Enduring Play Computer 03:02

You mentioned your research focuses on the experiences people of color have, especially in gaming spaces. How do you approach that? Like, let's just get right into that. Like, that's a huge space. Like, as an independent researcher, are you designing your own studies? Are you working with companies and they're recruiting you? Like, how do you approach that body of work,

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Adanna Nedd 03:21

usually it's a lot of independent study. Back when I was still a student in undergrad at university, I was part of a research fellowship called the iSchool inclusion Institute. I think my research project there was before. When I was first in undergrad, I didn't know that games writing was an actual job, but I saw games, research was an actual job. So I was like, Okay, I still want to be involved in games so I can do research. And my first big research project was looking how players of color when they're in online multiplayer games like Overwatch, Fortnite, things like that, and they have the in game skins with are the cosmetics that you can put on your avatar. Even though they don't offer any sort of in game advantage, like a power up, they change how you look. And what we were looking at was when the cosmetics available aren't very diverse, and there's only a few options available for non white, non male players, does that mean they have to pay more and play more in order to get skins that actually represent how they look like in real life? And it was really interesting because it was in an intersection between like, player identity, player purchasing practices and representation within Media, specifically games, which I know have been a lot of popular topics lately. At that time, I hadn't really seen things that explore the intersection of all these and how they might impact each other. And after we did a mixed method survey, so it was qualitative and quantitative, we were looking at how much money players would spend per month, and like what specific skins they would spend it on the games.

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Enduring Play Computer 04:47

That's such helpful insight for people who are trying to build games and game economies driven by self expression.

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Adanna Nedd 04:54

And then, after we reviewed all the submissions, we ended up with 158 total. All of you had to, like, cut some out because they were talking about games that weren't exactly on topic, like Farmville, for example, animals don't really have they have their skins, but that's not really the same as, like, representing yourself. And what we saw was, even though the majority of players that we interviewed said that they don't pick an in game spin to represent themselves, they more pick it based on, like, aesthetic purposes, but it's like, oh, this is how Halloween skin. I like Halloween, so I'm gonna go for this. But the majority of players also agreed that there needs to be more diverse representation within games. And we actually coined two, two terms, which was privileged allyship and quasi acceptance. Quasi acceptance specifically was where players of color have accepted that they're not the focus, they're not going to be the default, they're not always going to be represented in games, but they still seek out games where they are represented and privileged. Allyship was where a lot of white respondents, even though they were like, Yeah, we do need more diverse representation. Games, they also don't see the big deal because they've always been represented as the default within games. So when you're always represented, you don't really see or know why it may be important for others who haven't been represented to be represented.

E

Enduring Play Computer 06:13

Well, for people looking to build self expression systems, learning that their players aren't looking for a one to one representation of themselves, but instead are looking to go beyond actually opens up a ton of potential that explains why self expression is such a powerful driver of game economies.

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Enduring Play Computer 06:35

Podcast level paused begin host commentary.

E

Enduring Play Computer 06:38

Let's take a second to dig into why players might be attracted to the concept of self expression that is representative but doesn't directly align with their real life self. There's a concept in psychology called the Proteus effect. The term Proteus effect refers to Proteus, the son of Poseidon, the Olympian, god of the sea, and Proteus could change his shape at will. The Proteus effect refers to a phenomenon where players start to take on the characteristics of the avatars they're using in a game. So let's say maybe you are not super self confident in a romantic capacity, but you choose an avatar who's just a total babe, and suddenly you're confidently flirting with everybody in the room. That's the Proteus effect. It's a documented phenomenon. It's not fully understood, but documented. It's so players who don't necessarily understand that this is a thing probably do feel that sense of like empowerment when choosing self expression that gives them access to these parts of themselves that they didn't know they could access. And this speaks to why self expression is such a powerful motivator of play.

C

Cheryl Platz 07:56

Has any of the research you've done indicated what types of content are more engaging or more authentic? Because technically, the space is infinite, and you mentioned earlier, like, Oh, I like this Halloween thing or, Oh, maybe it's not necessarily what I look like, but what does resonate with gamers?

A

Adanna Nedd 08:17

I think it definitely like depends, game by game, because I know more for console games, whenever there's DLC, most people are more focused on getting, like, additional build out, like a more like an extra campaign, whereas with like mobile games or free to play online multiplayer games like Overwatch Marvel rivals, Apex legends and like spending only a little bit of money for, like, in game skin seems like a lot more palatable to them, because it's like, oh, I'm only spending like \$5 but now I have this permanent cosmetic. It's for a character I like playing. It was also interesting because some players use it to differentiate themselves. It's part of I know for Overwatch, at least, they used to do this. I don't remember if they did, but if you got enough competitive points in a certain character, you could get a cosmetic that was gold to like, show that you were expert at this character and things like that. I know Marvel rivals has the Lord icons, where, if you put enough time playing into a character, you get a specific icon that's different from like the general players that play it. So I think part of it is like also showing off in the extent like to play your skill and things like that. Oh, I'm better at you this game. I've played it longer. This is a character I've played longer. Or it could be shown like, this is a character I like more because I've invested more money into it. So I think that's another research thing I like to explore is like, what's the point where you'll pay for DLC and how much you'll pay for it? Because usually it's around I've seen like, things like from five to like 10 to like 30. I know that it's always varied. And now you also have things like like Nintendo online PlayStation Network, where, if you have the subscription services, you may get discounts on future DLC. So it's interesting seeing how the player the economic market of games. Is changing, both in, like the base games, additional content and things like that, and even, like completely separate but still connected markets like Twitch, streaming, things like that,

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Enduring Play Computer 10:14

launching podcast level two queer representation in video games.

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Adanna Nedd 10:21

So that was a really cool research project. I'm actually working on another survey that I presented at GDC, which was about how queer players felt about queer romances and games. It was right after Baldur's Gate three came out, which was really cool, because it was seeing like, a combination of like, whether it was able to like, match their gender presentation in game through like character customization options, or whether it was, like, how deep the romances went with a panel of other queer developers, and that was really, really cool, especially talking other Indies and like, oh, how should you work like, queer representation into your game? Where, like, the blind spots? Because with all of these, like, player sexual romances, I know there's a lot of discussion about that on like, how does it really count as a queer romance? And I feel like there's space for both player sexual romances and direct specific sexuality specific romances. Because even though it's the focus, a lot about like, the player specific in game, at one point in time, players can transition. They can change their sexuality. And I think an interesting thing is seeing players replay these same games and romances as they've changed, and see like how their perceptions of themselves, the relationship and the character has changed. So I believe there's space for both broader and more specific types of game romances.

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Enduring Play Computer 11:32

It was so interesting you exploring these topics, especially around Baldur's Gate three, which was such a breakout hit. There's this GLADD study from 2020 and it said that one in five active video game players are LGBTQ, but less than 2% I think, at the time of games on major consoles and PC had LGBTQ characters. And so you see a game like Baldur's Gate three, which was just fully embracing queerness in a way that allowed you to fully explore that through replayability and through narrative trees, and it's one of the breakout hits of the year that reinforces one of the other things that that GLADD study said, which said that large margins of both LGBTQ and non LGBTQ gamers agreed that they appreciated how gaming allowed them to experience perspectives of people different from themselves. It looks like 80% of LGBTQ people said that at 67% of non LGBTQ gamers agreed that they liked how gaming allows them to explore those perspectives. In this research, you telling me, folks, you helping people understand how to provide this representation is helping them understand how to tap into a market that's deeply underserved.

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Enduring Play Computer 12:49

Podcast level paused, begin host commentary.

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Enduring Play Computer 12:53

Pflag.org, defines queer as a term used by some people, particularly youth, to describe themselves and or their community that has been reclaimed from earlier negative use. They point out that the term is valued by some because it's defiant and also inclusive of the entire community without requiring labels, and can help people who are sort of fluid, but others still view it as an insult, as with many terms referring to marginalized communities, no, let the people you're referring to lead the way and lead with respect.

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Enduring Play Computer 13:29

Launching podcast level three, the post pandemic experience of black game developers.

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Enduring Play Computer 13:36

It's a particularly tough time right now in this industry, but in every industry, around topics like diversity, equity and inclusion and identity, is any of your research touching on navigating those topics in this new climate?

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Adanna Nedd 13:53

Another research project I'm working on that hopefully the survey will go live after GDC is discussing the experience of black game developers in the industry, especially in comparison from like 2020 to now. Because one of the things I specifically wanted to highlight was after 2021 2020 with the George Floyd summer, there was a lot of money that was said to be supporting Black people within the game space. And now we're in a point where it's like the pendulum is on the opposite way, where, like, a lot of dei programs have been cut off. There have been anti di sections in gaming, and now a lot of that money is being invested in AI, instead of developers both black and developers of all colors. So many, so many interesting things to research in games.

C

Cheryl Platz 14:32

Now, some of those topics you're not glad you have to research, like, where did the George Floyd Money go? But important questions to ask, especially when we you know, there's so many game developers that need the support right now more than ever,

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Enduring Play Computer 14:46

launching podcast level four, tracking player cycles in Deep Space.

A

Adanna Nedd 14:55

I know love in deep space is a really big game. It's a dating sim type game where they're like. Five love interest currently, they raise their relationships. But it also is a really good productivity app. There's, like, a little calendar. You can schedule reminders. It's actually, like, really, really useful. There's even a period tracker that's really, really accurate. That's the reason, I doubt, because I wanted to see it was real. I thought it was a joke, but it's real, and it's like the in game anime boys will like, comfort you. But it's also completely accurate. It's really good, and I think it's interesting that you have now these female player focused game designs that a lot of male designers wouldn't even think of, but that's still a really big draw, because a lot of period apps are terrible, and having an app that's not only works, but it's also part of a really fun game is interesting. And wow,

C

Cheryl Platz 15:39

I didn't expect the conversation to go to period tracker in games, but like that's certainly a statement about representation in gaming. And for people who are listening and might not have that context, just think of it like this. If you had a really, really bad chore you had to do once a month, and an app could make it, make you look forward to that. That's a gift, that's a that's a joy, and you're talking about anime boys, talking you through that? That's amazing.

A

Adanna Nedd 16:09

Yeah, it's really interesting, as we're seeing, I think a push. There's also a push in more lifestyle adjacent games. I want to say, like, I know there's Pokemon sleep which I use, which actually, like, helped me get my sleeping schedule back on track, because, like, oh, I want to catch all the cool Pokemon, and they only appear when you actually go to bed at your set bedtime. So I think it's really interesting how, especially in like the mobile game space, you're seeing not just like little games like game games like stuff like Candy Crush things like that, but you're also seeing all of these lifestyle apps that have been gamified, and it's gonna be interesting to see how they evolve in the future,

C Cheryl Platz 16:44

There's like focus apps. The line between game and app is changing, and that's true too with cozy games, right? Like there's so many games that don't even have a win condition anymore, but that's all good. The more the Merri, the more people who consider themselves gamers, the more who are here, the more joy for game developers and players together.

E Enduring Play Computer 17:04

Podcast level paused. Begin host commentary.

E Enduring Play Computer 17:09

Of course, when the subject of Pokemon comes up, I must remind folks that while I am technically employed by the Pokemon Company International, this podcast is neither endorsed nor sponsored by my current employer, and all opinions expressed here are either my own or my guest's own. In general, as a matter of policy, I do not discuss Pokemon games on this podcast, but I won't stop my guests from bringing them up, because they're a major part of the industry.

E Enduring Play Computer 17:35

Loading podcast level five, the economics of self expression in gaming,

C Cheryl Platz 17:41

going back to the cosmetics and games for a second, because one of the things I talk about in my book is the economics of games, which is something that people don't like to talk about. I understand that, you know, we want to talk about the art of games,

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Adanna Nedd 17:55

but also the business side is also a really big part. Because part of why we like those skin specifically is because in their heyday, and, like, the beginnings, because this research was done around, I want to say 2017 2018 so like, right around when Overwatch first came out, and that's when they were making hundreds of millions of dollars off of all their loot boxes and micro transactions. And that's when they really became popular, and when the stigma around them started to switch more. Because before that, there was a lot of like pushback to like DLC microtransactions, like, oh, think once the game set, I'm paying this one price, and it should be set. But now we have like additional content like DLC, which may add more story content, may add more cosmetics, may add things like that, which I think is really interesting, because I think that's also a part of game development and development cycles have just gotten so big these days that instead of like, churning a game out in one to two to three years, now it's like four to five to six to seven. So instead of starting a new game, it might be more economically stable. It makes sense to just build DLC like Mario Kart eight and Mario Kart world building DLC packs to give off, instead of, like, having to start an entirely new game from scratch.

C

Cheryl Platz 19:03

When you talk about Marvel rivals and like, the Lord icons, are those things that people are paying for because, because they earned them, they have the right to pay for them, or do they get them for free because they didn't?

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Adanna Nedd 19:15

So for the legendary items in Overwatch, as you like, level up you get in game currency, specifically for being competitive, and then you can buy it once you have enough, so you have to play enough. And for Marvel rivals, you get the Lord Skin for free, and there's no way to buy it, so it's specifically a skill check. Whereas there are other, like fancier skins that you can just you can either grind in game to get them for free, or you can just pay for them and get the Battle Pass and get them upfront, get boosted exp, so you like, earn the skins and everything faster.

C

Cheryl Platz 19:45

And it's interesting a form of competition that isn't as head to head. And one of the big trends I've seen in the data is people aren't as motivated by head to head competition. And yes, they are. The skill check, right? It is still, let's mark arrivals. You're still competing, but showing off to people. It's. Doesn't require you to actually compete against somebody to show them you're better than them. You're like, look, look how much work I've put in. Here we go. I've got my shiny skin

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Enduring Play Computer 20:11

loading podcast level six pay to accelerate gaming economies.

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Enduring Play Computer 20:18

This economic conversation is really interesting. Has any of your research also hit something I called in the book, pay to accelerate. So games where you're you're paying,

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Adanna Nedd 20:27

yeah, where you can, like, pay to, like, get stuff faster. Like, I know the Battle Pass and Marvel rivals. It's like, a big example of that, since they have friends, it's like, instead of, like, grinding more hours, I can just play for half the time and then get all the like, skins and stuff I want. And you can, like, look and see beforehand, like, oh, what skins are available. So then players can decide if it's worth it. Well, previously, in like, 2017 with like, Overwatch, you had the loot boxes where they were randomized, and you could, like, buy sets and like, if you bought more loot boxes, you'd be guaranteed, like, oh, you get, like, a gold item or a rare item, whereas now it's a lot of like, we're going to show you how much this costs, and we're going to lower, I think with Marvel rivals, it's like, it's so popular, we can have these battle passes, and these skins be so cheap because so many people are buying it, it's going to make up for it, especially because these, like, in game skins don't, aren't like, easy to make. They have to like, they have designers that have to like work on them. They have to make sure they like work in game. They're not blocking any character animations, things like that. And even though it's a lot simpler to make after you like, make the base model of the character, it's like, you have to balance like, oh, we want to make a fancier skin so players are more inclined to buy it. But we also don't want to make it too fancy that it's too much work or interferes with like other core aspects of the gameplay.

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Enduring Play Computer 21:45

Loading podcast level seven, shifting perceptions of video game value.

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Enduring Play Computer 21:53

Does your research show changing attitudes towards pay to accelerate or the cosmetics over time? You mentioned Marvel rivals, which is a fairly recent game, and you also mentioned changing price points. And that's another thing I've seen discussed on LinkedIn recently too, is changing price sensitivities. Do you feel like the market's shifting at all?

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Adanna Nedd 22:12

I definitely think the market's shifting. I'd actually, at some point I love to, like, go back and see how the attitude on skins has changed in over seven, eight years, because I think it's also part of we're at a point where a lot of younger gamers, lot of children, are playing online for free, either like on their parents computer or on iPads. And they've grown up with this. They've grown up with buying in game skins, especially for free, games like Fortnite, so they're made more open and amicable to buying them. There's like, an older gamer who's used to just buying the game and everything's all there in the box. May have more pushback, but I think the other really interesting aspect is just how much the price of games has changed and the perception of it. I know there was the big push now a lot of like AAA party games are 60 to \$70 now, and when you adjust inflation, even though it's not that different from first party console games from the early 2000s 70s, 80s, now that, like a lot of people aren't making as much we're like in a recession, that mo is costing more, so players are expecting more from these games, even though that's not necessarily something that's like the fault of the designer that like the price of it went up because of technology changing prices of chips. I know like chips and computers are rising in price, and there's a lot of speculation on how game console prices will rise. But I also think games are a very interesting avenue for this, because it feels like every other year there's a discourse about games prices and things like that. But once you buy a game, most of the time, if it's like a physical console game, you own it forever. Like one thing I think we're going to see is a lot of people pulling out their old systems, like their fees, their DS, as they start playing my three Ds a lot more and playing that, because once you buy it, you can use it until it breaks and has a much longer shelf life.

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Enduring Play Computer 23:59

With hardware and hard drive prices going so high, that's a really interesting observation about a potential emergent behavior people going back to ritual consoles, or people just hanging on to this generation of consoles as long as possible, especially because it felt like for a second the industry was ready to move on to the next generation, and now we're starting to hear about console replacement cycles being postponed,

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Adanna Nedd 24:25

like people are hesitating, but it's like you can with old games. I started playing a lot of like my old DS games. It's like they still run fine. You got it like 1015, years ago, and they're fine. And now, I think the other thing is, besides things like games pass with movies you have streaming and you only pay like, X amount of dollars a month, and then you can access all of these movies with books you have, like, similar subscriptions, like Audible and things like that. But if you want to, like, buy a game and keep it in, a lot of games aren't available on these subscription services. It's a lot harder. It's a lot like, you can either, like, maybe wait for a sale, see if it happens in a few. Month, so you can get it and play it now. So I think it's really interesting, because I feel like gaming is a luxury hobby, but it's also a hobby that once you hit that base, you get the console you want. The prices of stuff you get, they like last longer than like, other things. If I was, like, going out with like, three other friends to, like, go out to a movie at this point, movie takes like, 15, \$20 that's like, still like the same price of a game. And once the movie's done, that's done, but if I have a game, I can play that for as long as I want, once I have the system and the console. So I think it's all really interesting.

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Enduring Play Computer 25:40

Launching podcast level eight, video games as art form.

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Adanna Nedd 25:45

Now we're in this weird point where games are like finally being seen more as art and not just like a leisure fun activity like I know, in 2020 back when like Animal Crossing came out, that got really big. So now a lot of more casual players are getting into games. And it's also now you're seeing things like expedition 33 with, like, all the voice acting, all the mocap, all the cinematography, and all the things you can the stories and the things you can do through a game. And I think the perception is shifting, especially in like, other spaces, like academia. Now we're seeing academia cinema. We're seeing a lot of like, video game adaptations, like, I know they just showed the first clips of like, the god of war. There's the Mario movie coming out in a month. Think it's gonna be really interesting as games like shift more and more into the modern spirit, even as we're having more and more of these layoffs. So it's like building the train tracks while you're the train still going, but you're like running out of tracks, but the game, the train's going even faster.

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Enduring Play Computer 26:46

Tutorial level, the spectrum of gaming graphics,

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Enduring Play Computer 26:51

one of the tools I provide in the game development strategy guide is called the spectrum of gaming graphics, and it helps you depict what conscious choices you've made about your video game and its graphics as an artistic choice, and not just, hey, my graphics are good. There are four quadrants, artistic, impressionistic, realistic and classic, and you plot your game on the graph based on how much your game attempts to be like real life and how optimized or rich your graphics are. It's a really helpful tool for game developers who are looking to explain that not everything needs to be incredibly high polygon, high resolution to be good.

C

Cheryl Platz 27:31

One of the things that's been really interesting too, while researching the book is like Claire obscure, right? Like games like that, our sports games and stuff pushing us to super realism, and at the same time, it feels like we've got this other end of the spectrum, also pushing you've got games like ooh or animal Well, you could put that on a Game Boy cartridge and ship it. And some gamers, I think, are struggling with this, and I don't know what your perspective is on this, the way I'm kind of coping with it is we've got to had an industry who's sort of socialized everyone to just associate good graphics with good and they've done that for years, and we haven't given anyone a method for saying, also, simple can be good. It's fine. That's a valid choice. What's your take on, like, all of that because, because I had to, like, do a whole thing in the book about, like, impressionistic graphics are fine too. Artistic are fine too. It's not just all like, realistic. What are gamers thinking about that? What are casual gamers thinking about that?

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Adanna Nedd 28:24

I think this is super interesting, especially when there was, like, the news that the PlayStation six is being pushed to 2030, and a lot of people like, why would I jump to a new console, if not games? Because we're hitting the point where, in the past 2030, years of games, one of, like, the biggest ways to show what a game was doing was that it was doing something new, whether it was like, through the graphics, the music and a lot of that console wars, I'll say like between that was like, which has the best graphics, which game looks the coolest? How does it feel? Because we went from games like Doom and now we have stuff like, every game has 3d models and colors. Every game has music that's like, actual, like, orchestra music, and not necessarily just eight bit sound things. And I think it's interesting, because we've hit the peak of realism, where everything looks so realistic, it's like, okay, we spent all this money developing making it all look realistic and super responsive. Now, where exactly do we go from here? Now that you can't really show that as a selling point anymore, because now, like, with every a lot of chip AAA games being super realistic, very interesting, as someone who played a lot of Nintendo games which were a lot more stylized and not necessarily realistic, because I was like, I don't mind when games look realistic. And it's like, as long as the game looks good, I'm fine with, like, trying it out and playing it. And I think what's really, really interesting is now, especially now that Indie games are becoming more popular. I know Stardew Valley just turned 10 years old, and it has very simple, very pixel art, but it's still very beloved, because people love playing these types of games.

E

Enduring Play Computer 29:52

And there is so much to unpack about Stardew Valley. We streamed that on my channel for ages, and Shane was my guy, but that's the thing, right? You don't need good graphics to have good storytelling or emotional resonance. There were so many different forms of gameplay. You could do gardening or you could do combat and dungeons, right? And so it really appealed to a lot of different motivators of play for folks without really having to lean into immersion. So it still succeeded without spending hundreds of millions of dollars on graphics.

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Enduring Play Computer 30:27

Launching podcast level nine, the shifting role of platform exclusives.

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Cheryl Platz 30:33

You know this, but some of our listeners may not. Most of the most dominant graphical games are platform exclusive because you need to be overly specialized, you need to get every little bit out of the graphics processing unit and the CPU as configured on a piece of hardware to really push the envelope on graphics. When you are trying to ship on multiple platforms, you often get a lower common denominator form of graphics. So it's usually those platform exclusives that are pushing the graphical envelope. I love great art, great graphics, but it's also deeply expensive. You look at the Spider Man two budget, right? And I had friends who worked on that great work, but if we all made that we would get, like, one game a year.

A

Adanna Nedd 31:13

Think it's interesting, because there are some gamers that think, as you said, that graphical fidelity is an equation to quality. And that's not necessarily true. That just shows how much resources they were willing to put toward making the graphics and making everything look good, because you have games like Undertale that are, like, really artistically simple, and, like, a lot of the appeal is through, like, the funny dialog, the deep story, and that's just a different avenue that the developers put their energy in because they knew that's what they wanted to showcase with the game. So I think it's going to be especially interesting seeing like future consoles, especially with all of the chip shortages and all like rising prices, I think a lot of companies are going to have to slow down on things like newer console releases and building games libraries as like a way for players to pick. This is the console I want. I got a Nintendo Switch to on launch because it's like, I know I like Mario Kart. I know I like the Mario games, the Zelda games, things like that. And I'll have friends that I'll be able to play with. And even if I have to wait a bit for these games, I'm still going to get a quality game that I'm going to enjoy. So I'm fine putting out all this money now and waiting and like investing. And now I think with games like PlayStation five and Xbox 1s series X, I think that's the newest one. Is that they have all of these graphics the Playstation has, like the Final Fantasy seven remake trilogy. There's the new Resident Evil game that just came out. And now you have all of these games like, I know GTA is like the big game of this year on the horizon. But when you don't have those games to really push players to pick one console over another, it's going to be much more difficult, especially now is like the Nintendo Switch two is getting stronger and being able to run more first party games that may not have been able to before

E

Enduring Play Computer 32:58

launching podcast level 10, narrative design across disciplines,

C

Cheryl Platz 33:03

and maybe this is a good transition to some of your your background, because you're not just research, right? And being a games researcher is enough for a whole full time job. It's that there's nothing just about it, but you also do narrative design, and one of the things we talked about in last season was about narrative design and game writing, the differences between them, and when you have infinite choices for what to do with game graphics, part of it's like, what what serves the narrative. And so maybe you could talk a little bit about how you would approach this space. How do you think about game graphics and where you would place a game to serve a particular story.

A

Adanna Nedd 33:43

I think it's very interesting, because I think a lot of like games is just like a balance beam, because you only have so much money and so much time you can work on this game, and you have to make you're trying to make the best product possible in that time and in that budget. And a lot of times with like games, writing and narrative design, there's a lot of a lot of overlap, but there's still different. Like games writing is like, actually writing the text and everything in the game, and a lot of like, actual what people would think of like a traditional writer, whereas narrative design, it's not closer to like game design, where you're looking at, okay, how are we going to implement this narrative and showcase it in the game. Because I know a lot of games, it's like, I want like players will say, Oh, I really wanted to like this story, but it wasn't written well. And it may not necessarily be that the story wasn't written well, it just wasn't really designed well to be experienced by the player in this game. An example of a narrative mechanic that the combination of games writing and game design is in Ghost of yotei, which was the big PlayStation game from last fall. One of the mechanics they have is that as you're like, exploring the open worlds, you can like, experience memories of the character and like stuff she went through before she, like, went on this path for revenge, which I think is really cool. But I think the problem is sometimes they're not as. Direct, like there are some that happen on the main story, but since it's a lot of, like, open world free writing, you can miss some of these, and because you can miss some of these cut scenes, you can miss context of things, and sometimes other narrative and emotional beats don't hit as hard, because they have to be experienced both way a player who hasn't seen, like, all of the different past things, and a player who maybe has seen all of it, so you have to, like, balance these, like, two different type of player narratives, and you're not sure which one or how they're going to experience it. There's like, advantages in having, like, a free roaming, because you can, like, choose your path a little bit in choosing, like, which enemies to go after first. But because of that, it also weakens the narrative, because you can't really control how the player is going to hit these narrative beat. There's a recommended path that the player nudges you towards the easier one, but you can go and like, try doing the harder one. If you're more like an experienced player, then even though there's more challenge within the game, Dory is a bit weakened, because you're having a lot more emotional weight to the story, and you've only really just begun,

E Enduring Play Computer 36:02
launching podcast level 11, from yellow paint to Yellow Birds,

E Enduring Play Computer 36:08
this being one of the many hats you wear. You talked about Writer and Narrative designer and researcher. How do you balance all of these different perspectives and skills when you're working on games? Do you find yourself kind of kind of switching between them. Are you working on different projects at different times?

A Adanna Nedd 36:24
It's nice having all of these perspectives, I think, which help really conceptualize and think of, okay, how should this game work? How are players going to react to this? What are players expecting? Are we going to either meet their expectations, subvert their expectations, or do something completely different? Because I think one of the most interesting parts about doing games research and also being a game developer and also a player is that one of the things players seem to don't like is yellow paint whenever there's, like, a lot of yellow paint in a video game, directing them where they need to go, because it's like, too easy. It's too obvious, things like that. But as like a researcher, as a player, if you're trying to get a player to turn around without, like an audio cue or a voice acting, and you need, like, a very quick fix, putting something with a bright color or, like some players will, like, impulsively check behind waterfalls, because that's where all the treasure is.

E Enduring Play Computer 37:16
Podcast level, paused, begin host commentary

C Cheryl Platz 37:20
in season one episode, one of enduring play, we talked with Celia Hodent, PhD, about the yellow paint meme in gaming and what it meant for cognitive psychology and player onboarding. So check that episode out. If you want to learn more about the yellow paint problem in detail,

A

Adanna Nedd 37:37

you need a shorthand way to just get your player to do X and Y and like, move in this direction. I think that's fine, because at some point it's like, sometimes you want to do the simple, the simple solution, so you can build up to something more complex. Like, I need this player to take this left path first, so I'm gonna put like, enemies, or maybe yellow paint or something, so that something, maybe the right path opens up later, it's locked, or anything like that. So just part of game design is part of anticipating what players are doing and trying to nudge them in the right direction, especially in this age of like, triple A games where it's a lot of like open world wandering, doing whatever you want, like in tears of the kingdom and Breath of the Wild. Once you finish, like the little tutorial area, you can do whatever. You can go straight to Ganon if you want, and you have to make a fun experience for players that do experience the story, and maybe players that only like do a little bit and then immediately run after all the bosses. I think part of narrative design is fitting the narrative in games, especially when players may or may not be as interested in the narrative as you want them to be.

C

Cheryl Platz 38:38

How do you make it worth players while to not go to Gannon right away, and if you don't, why did you spend all that time doing all that other development? How do you know, as a game developer, it's worth supporting both? There's no right or wrong answers, so you have to know what's important to you, what's important to your players. But you also talk basically about, like leading with curiosity, about figuring out where the good friction is, because we talk in the first season the podcast about UX design versus game design, and I got that a lot in interviews, right? Because I was user experience director before I went on to creative director, they're like, Oh, well, what's your take on game design versus user experience design, expecting me to be like, Oh, they fight. No, no, they're great. They combine game designers use friction for intentional purposes and user experience designers find the friction we don't want get rid of it together. Game exists,

A

Adanna Nedd 39:28

I think a funny example of that, especially with encouraging curiosity in players, is in Ghost of yote, there are these Yellow Birds, if you're near like something you haven't unlocked yet, whether it's like a hot spring where you can get more help and maybe it's a town, they'll like, fly around and they'll chirp. So it's a very clear and distinct audio cue. So if it's like, oh, there's something I haven't discovered here, you can either continue on whatever you're doing, or you can go and follow the bird, and they'll always be in a certain vicinity of that new thing that you haven't found. So it's nice where it's in a way that it's oh, this. Is the game is letting me know that there's something here I haven't discovered yet, but this flag is always going to be here. So I don't necessarily, if I'm like, busy doing like, a main story point, I don't necessarily have to go and explore it now, like I can explore it later if I want to just put a mark on my map and come back, which is really, really neat.

C

Cheryl Platz 40:17

The nice thing about that is it solves the problem in a context that feels like it doesn't break immersion. And maybe that really gets to some of the things that players don't like about yellow paint. The players who get offended by yellow paint probably, I mean, I might be speaking for them, but that probably breaks their immersion a little bit, because they're like that yellow paint doesn't belong there. And I want to feel like I was adventuring, and you just slap that on there like it was graffiti, but the birds belong there. And it's not weird to think that birds would be chirping around something interesting. Birds chirp at everything. And so you can create those patterns. You're like, all right, nature. You're doing your nature thing. That's fine. I'm not offended. You can continue to do it. And that's that's lovely.

E

Enduring Play Computer 40:57

Launching podcast level 12, the power of audio design,

C

Cheryl Platz 41:02

and I love the multi modality of it too. Like the whole first book was on, like, multi modal audio gets overlooked so often. And sure, some people are going to have muted but for the people who don't, that's another way to nudge folks changing music, changing sound.

A

Adanna Nedd 41:16

Yeah, I think audio games and cues is really interesting, especially when I feel so not underutilized, but in a way, it is underutilized, especially when you have, like many of game's most well known soundtracks, you're very big boss wise one Winged Angel from Sephiroth. It's like megalovania from Undertale. And I think there's, I think audio and narrative design is a really neat year, especially when it comes to things like voice acting and things like that that we're really gonna see more of, especially as we have some of these bigger scale games and things like that. I know the spidey sense, for example, and the Spider Man games, things slow down, and things like that. There's an audio cue, and it's interesting to see just how far you can push, like, the different ways you can communicate with a player without, like, putting text on a screen or something directly in front of them.

C Cheryl Platz 42:03

Different ways of communicating with players without putting text in front of them speaks to the most sophisticated narrative design, right? Like I was playing next fast the other day, right? And there was a game I had really been looking forward to when I was streaming it. My My community was like, there's a lot of text, yeah, it's a lot to show not tell, right? Like, that's, it takes so much coordination. It's being close with your artists, close with your audio designers, close with everyone that's you're designing a movie and a cloud service at the same time. But the ones who do it, the ones who are able to pull that off is really great, right? Like, Stray was a game that showed more than tell, it's sending. There was text, but a lot of it had to be showing because it's cats don't read.

A Adanna Nedd 42:44

Yeah, cats can't really read or listen. Speaking from experience.

C Cheryl Platz 42:48

That's a great example of, like they had narrative. There was a strong through line in that game, but they had to tell it in other ways and without text. Is that's like a great example of that, that doing other things, getting out in front of the people in other ways,

E Enduring Play Computer 43:03

launching podcast level 13, solving the game discovery problem with community outreach.

E Enduring Play Computer 43:11

You were recently nominated for a black in gaming indie developer award. Can you tell me more about that award nomination and what that organization means to you and your work?

A

Adanna Nedd 43:19

Yes, black in gaming foundation. It's an organization that I've been involved in with the past few years, mostly to support different black game developers at different stages in their career. I'm super honored and excited to be nominated for the indie developer award. And I think it's especially important to highlight indie developers, even if they're not working on the, you know, the big AAA games, they're still imparting important work and design in this space, which I think is really, really great. And one of the things that I'm doing with them is doing different black developer panels at different conventions. I've done some mag fest, stream, con PAX West, a lot of different conventions. Because one of the things that's been really interesting that I've seen is that a lot of black players want to see more games, but they don't necessarily know where to look for the developers that aren't working on the triple A titles or, like, the big titles that you see commercials for. And it's like, if you're not, like, a PC gamer, and you don't really know about marketplaces like steam or ish.io you're not really going to know until you like, explore these spaces. So having developers able to, like, talk to players directly, especially when they're like, you know, busy working the game, keeping the studio float, all that, I think it's a really cool way to not only connect with players, but also spread the word on all the cool and interesting games and things that are happening in the space,

E

Enduring Play Computer 44:39

launching podcast level 14. Variety is the spice of indie game life.

E

Enduring Play Computer 44:45

What excites you most about what's happening in this space right now? Are there breakthroughs or trends or pockets of the community that are really blowing up?

A

Adanna Nedd 44:53

I think one of the biggest things is how accessible game development is now. Now you have a lot of tools like. Unity, Godot, unreal, RPG maker that you can just download on your personal computer or laptop, and you can just start playing around and making a game. And one thing that I've been trying to like stress is that you can also use games as an out, an art form, or an outlet. You don't have to make games as a way to like, as a commercial way or a way to make money. You can just make it discuss an experience. And I think that's really, really cool, because I feel like we're only just beginning to show the ways stories can be told in games. And Roger was a really good one I've played. I'm not going to spoil what happens in it, but seeing the UI change in everything as it's telling it's very short but very poignant story, I think, is really, really cool, especially with the simplicity of it. Because I think one of the interesting things is that Pokemon just turned 30, and we're hitting a point where a lot of the gamers that were kids are like adults. They're gaming, and they're having their own kids, and now you're seeing a lot of older people getting into games. I know there's a grandma streamer that does like Dark Souls or Bloodborne or one of those games. And I think it's going to be interesting where it's like, are we going to see a genre you have, like, senior-likes, where it's like, games for seniors?

E

Enduring Play Computer 46:08

I love that. And to the point around sort of the variety that comes from indie gaming, if you don't need to spend \$300 million making a game, you can take bolder choices, you can target smaller audiences, and these really cool things like and Roger can come out of that. And sometimes those wacky, smaller games end up breaking out into the mainstream,

E

Enduring Play Computer 46:29

launching podcast level 15 gaming for health and generational well being.

E

Enduring Play Computer 46:36

Then it's like, not just Candy Crush or things like that, but what if there was a Legend of Zelda where you where you could play with like, one button? Or fighting games that you could play, even though, I'm pretty sure there's also, like, a senior home that was like doing fighting game competitions, because it's not just because of the leisure thing or also because of how less physically strenuous gaming is. It's also because of the cognitive impact as well. I know there's Dr Rachel Kowart, who does a lot of cool research stuff in this space, highlighted that I think there's, there's a university. I cannot remember which university, too many universities, but it's studying the different cognitive skills that games can give you playing it, whether it's like multiplayer online games like Fortnite or things like that that raise like, your reaction time, your ability to like, recognize things, whether it's like a physical cue or an audio cue, and react to that, which I think is really, really cool.

E

Enduring Play Computer 47:27

Tutorial level the cognitive benefits of video gaming.

C

Cheryl Platz 47:32

There are actually several universities looking into the cognitive benefits of gaming, as Adana, describes the University of Colorado, Boulder is looking into this and comparing different genres of games like action puzzle and, quote, unquote, other to see whether there are different cognitive benefits for different genres, while not all of their results or conclusive spatial reasoning seem to benefit consistently across genres. Canada's Western University reported in 2024 that people who played video games regularly. So five or more hours per week for a single type of game performed cognitively on average, like people who were 13.7 years younger and people who engaged infrequently with video games, less than five hours per week across all games performed like people five years younger. So playing video games made you cognitively younger, which, by the way, is a good thing in this context. This was a large scale study with more than 2000 participants around the world.

A

Adanna Nedd 48:29

You only really see that in the context of eSports and competitiveness, but you're not seeing how it like affects you in like, your day to day life. Like, is all this brain activity good to like prevent all the drain from screen time, having your eyes adjust to like all the blue screen light, or maybe prevent things like dementia or other types of diseases and other things that can happen to the brain because the activity that it requires. So I think it's really, really neat seeing all the different avenues that you can analyze games through. I know just dance, which has been going on forever and ever, even though a lot of normal gamers aren't really into that. One thing that was really neat that I learned is that a lot of hospitals will have wiiies and use it because they're so cheap, and it's great for using for like physical therapy, for like patients, because all you need is a TV, the Wii controllers, and then you set it up. It's nice, it's active, it's not too strenuous. So it's like, a great way for patients to not only have fun, but also get physical activity. And I think it's going to be fitness. Games have always been a thing, but I think it's going to be interesting seeing how games can be used in a clinical space, especially to assist people with everything, getting so technology focused,

C

Cheryl Platz 49:34

so many things there. Oh, first of all, and Roger, go play it. I'm not going to spoil things, but I agree with you completely, and it's only like one or two hours of your time. So if you Yeah, it's like a very short game, if you want your mind blown by, like, what is the way indie game storytelling can change your perception? Go do that. Excellent. And the healthcare implications of gaming, and I miss my connect, like, there were some really good fitness things on the Kinect that. And. Learned yoga from the Kinect. I had someone compliment.

- A** Adanna Nedd 50:02
Yeah, it's like with the Wii Fit, I'm interested because I know, like, the switch had, it's not Wii fit, but like, the thing with the ring
- C** Cheryl Platz 50:09
Ring fit, yeah, I had that.
- A** Adanna Nedd 50:13
I had that, yeah, and I, like, used it during a pandemic. I need to get back into it. But it's really interesting how, sort of, like, in the beginning with all these lifestyle games and fitness games, a way to gamify all of these things is making it more accessible and easier for people to keep up. And it's also a competitive thing too. Like, because if you're doing a streak, your friends can see it. So it's like, a way to, like, keep doing things with your friends.
- E** Enduring Play Computer 50:36
Podcast level 16, companionship and relationships through gaming.
- C** Cheryl Platz 50:41
One of the other elements of aging can be loneliness, and one of the more modern motivators of play I talk about is companionship. You know, one of the reasons I think Animal Crossing popped off in 2020 was because we were all isolated.
- A** Adanna Nedd 50:55
Yeah, we're all stuck in but we can all visit each other's islands.
- E** Enduring Play Computer 50:59
How do you see people exploring companionship in games right now.

A

Adanna Nedd 51:04

I think there's so many different things actually for a college class, because it was right at the same time as a pandemic in Animal Crossing. My like final research project for that class was seeing how couples that were either in person or long distance relationships, the effect that playing Animal Crossing you leave together had on that relationship. A lot of the majority said it was like a positive experience. And one of the interesting things that was mentioned, that I didn't really think about, was that a lot of partners would get gifts in game for their partners, and because they didn't have to spend real life money, it was a way that they could show affection, show effort, and help them. But it didn't necessarily, like, cost them money in real life that a lot of like, real life, dates and things cost. And I think that's one of the other reasons why games will be more popular, especially I know, like, Pacoia is, like, coming out this week, and I'm like, so ready to, like, not leave my house build my fun little Pokemon Island. It's gonna be great. And, like, one of the interesting things is that a lot of outside, not outside, but a lot of other type of events. I was trying to go bowling with my sister and a few of my friends, and that cost and for four people for two hours, shoe rental, Lane rental, it was like 200 something dollars, which is wild, whereas, like, if I have my that's half of a switch to That's wild. It's like, if I have my switch to with my Mario Kart, I can socialize, but I can play Mario Kart with my friends. I can play Splatoon with my friends. I can play Mario Party. And I think the other interesting thing is, is now that you have a lot of online gaming, social platforms like Twitch and discord, I don't necessarily have to like go and like connect and play with someone. I know I can go online, find a Mario Kart specific discord, and connect and race with people that I don't even know. And I think one of the other things is like to tie this back on to love and deep space. It's not just about how they connect, but it's also a little bit of emotional fulfillment. I know with love and deep space, it's super popular because it's like you have these little anime boys, and you can break their relationships with them. They write little love notes and things like that, which is cute, and I think especially as you have like this loneliness pandemic and this push of AI partners, which are like completely different, since it's like an AI and it's like, really meant to just say whatever it wants to keep you using it, whereas with like the other games, these are all like written and tested by people and things like that. It's all like, verify there's going to be their content. Guardrails are much more streamlined than say, like, an AI partner that can go completely off the rails. I think it's really interesting, because we're seeing all these different ways that games can connect people. There's like, positive and negatives for this. There are, like, some regulations. So I'm interested to, like, see how things will like be updated or changed. Like, will you be able to marry this ring of AI thing? I don't know. I know like, you lose, like, my body pillows and stuff. I don't know how AI factors into that, or even, like, virtual characters as like, especially as things get more and more expensive, I think investing games not just as a way of leisure, but also as a way of like, communication and connection, is going to get extremely popular. And you've seen it with like Twitch communities, where like people, like follow the same streamer, like playing the game, chat to each other, things like that. So it's going to be very like interesting to see how and more of these, like community focused if multiplayer games pop up, because I know, since Animal Crossing is so popular, I think that's also why they made Picopia, because they were like, We're gonna make Animal Crossing with Pokemon and have people that can visit their islands and play with their Pokemon. And like, people are gonna love that. And they I've seen really good reviews. I'm so excited. I'm so ready to play and build my like, Pokemon Island Adventure.

E

Enduring Play Computer 54:42

Podcast level 17, the AI pinata problem.

C

Cheryl Platz 54:48

There's a lot of anti AI sentiment in the industry, and I am not here to cast judgment on anyone for their opinions, because it's a fraught time, but I'm curious about your observations. It sounds like like the. Space for AI when AI is doing something that is uniquely AI versus where AI is like doing textures that a human could do. But maybe I'm misinterpreting that. What is your what has your experience been when you're looking at how the community is reacting to the use of AI technologies around gaming?

A

Adanna Nedd 55:19

It's funny because before I researched games, I was actually studying AI and a lot of predictive algorithms. Because my previous research at Penn State was looking at biases in AI, specifically in hiring platforms within tech companies, where a lot of these different types of HR review algorithms if the name wasn't feminine, or maybe if it was more ethnic than other names, even if all of the experience talent and skills were the same, that resume that didn't have a male name was less likely to get pushed on to go to the next step and things like that. And it's because it all of the resumes it was trained on would have, of course, majority male names. So if it doesn't see or recognize a lot of female names it's gonna see, oh, this doesn't align with what I'm looking for. Therefore, it's wrong, even though it's not wrong. And I think seeing it's only gotten magnetized now with generative AI, which I'm not really a big fan of, between like the environmental impacts, and how it's like a lot of seeing a lot of artists work, and how the push to use it isn't necessarily like make things easier. Rather, it's like cutting out, like designers artists, so they don't so companies don't have to pay as much. And I think the problem with games is that games have used a lot of different like types of algorithms and things before with enemy AI when like games like whether it's as simple as Pac Man or games as complex as God of War. And I think one of the things about procedural generation and things like that is it's very different from generative AI and like things like chat GPT, because those were all created procedural AI. These were all created by people who, like, knew what they were doing, games designers that were focused even if something designed isn't something they expected or something they predicted, it's all going to be within, like the Spear of what they wanted within the game. When I was talking to a class A friend was hosting, the way I described it is, like with procedural Ji it's like you hit a pinata. You're not sure what candy is going to come out, but you know there's going to be some type of candy. It might be Skittles, it might be Hershey bars. Might be Reese's Pieces might be peanut M M's where generative AI, you might hit the pinata, and a lot of tarantulas might pop out because there's not there. Scott rails aren't really there. So you're not really sure what could come out, especially when AI has things like hallucinations, or it comes up with things completely random without consulting any data that it's received. And I think especially as we're like, making gains that are more have more depth, more like attachment, and even just in like testing games, AI is not really a good fit, because one thing AI often lacks is context. It may see patterns and see, like a lot of people are doing it, but I can't think it. Can't parse why this context is happening. They'll say, oh, a majority of players, when playing Mario Kart will go towards the item box. So this is the correct way to go. It's not necessarily that they just know, if they get the item box, they can get an item which can help them and give them an advantage. And even though they don't know what the item is, it's still going to give them an advantage over other players who don't have an item game development like as we said, players hate yellow paint, but try getting a player to turn around. And when AI has these errors, you can't really diagnose where that error come from. If you, like, added came from. If you were, like, talking to a program and be like, Oh, I coded this to do X and Y and Z, but somewhere between y, it got the wrong value. That's why everything broke. And then if you acts like AI, it's like, Oh, why did this break? It's gonna be like, Oh, I don't know. I just got this data from somewhere, even though I think there's this big push for generative AI, I think there needs to be a lot more regulation and a lot more fine tuning. I'm sure there are, like, some uses, I know, like, there's some uses in, like, the medical field for, like, predicting types of cancers that will pop up and things like that. But it has to be regulated, and you also have to analyze the biases of these things that were made so that way people aren't inadvertently harmed whenever they use them.

C Cheryl Platz 59:09

And one thing that you know, and I know, but just to remind listeners, the publicly available generative AI models, many of them suffer from a lack of what we call observability, or explainability, like they just do stuff, they're a big pulsating blob of probability they don't have, like, a lock of why they do things to just do it, like,

A Adanna Nedd 59:27

when the general AI, like, gives you the spider pinata, it's like, oh, this is something small that fits in a pinata. Why doesn't the human want this? Not knowing, it's like, I want candy, not spiders. Well, 77.5%

C Cheryl Platz 59:42

of all the websites I viewed like spiders in holes this size.

A Adanna Nedd 59:46

It's taking all these datas from different places, and because it doesn't have that context, it doesn't even know like if that data is relevant. Like, oh, spiders reside in habitats that are 51% similarities. Pinata. So this is where they belong. No, I think if you encounter a pinata, you'd be very if it was full of spiders,

C Cheryl Platz 1:00:08

I would, I would

E Enduring Play Computer 1:00:10

podcast level 18, growing yourself through multiplayer gaming.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:00:16

I don't know if you've noticed this, but a bunch of the people I talked to who are like games leaders like, Yeah, well, you know, I started in a world of warcraft Guild, and I don't know if we give this enough credit, like, there's a whole generation of leaders who learned to lead in massively multiplayer online guilds.

A

Adanna Nedd 1:00:34

That's actually really, really interesting, because I never really was one for, like, a lot of online games. I play a lot of like Co Op with friends, but online games like guilds. I know Final Fantasy 14 is also a super popular online game, but I think that's really interesting, that they learn their leadership from Guild because on the one hand, it makes sense. Have you tried to get five players to do literally anything at the same time? Very, very difficult, as gaming becomes more of a social activity, in addition to leadership one, you're going to have a lot more people learning, like, different social skills and learned behaviors from games. I think there's this. There's a genre of games. A lot of people call it like, friend slop. I don't really like the term slops. You have, like, a lot of these small, five to \$10 games on Steam, usually made for, like, multiplayer, and it's like things like key there are all of these, like, short games made specifically for experiences with friends and things like that. And I think it's really interesting because they're at like, a really small price point, like \$5 like, they're the cost of, like, a sandwich or a smoothie or something. And because they're so cheap, even if you only play it one or two times with your friends, and you decide, Oh, this isn't for me, or you keep playing, it feels like, Hey, it's \$5 I got my money's worth. This is fine. Then if your friend group enjoys it, great. If it doesn't, you go find another one. We're seeing like, more and more of these games, especially with people who aren't, like, directly from, like, a games or company background and not necessarily making it. It's like, some of it's like, oh, we just, we wanted to have, like, this experience to do with my friend group, so I just made it and shared it with everyone I know. There's one that released where it's like, you and your friends trying to hide a body because someone accidentally did a murder. There's one where you're all gnomes trying to, like, steal from a person's house and, like, evade them. So all of these different types of experiences and things like that, but specifically made for multiplayer experiences in mind is really neat, because I feel like between the single player, single campaign games and then, like the online massively multiplayer games, there's not really that much in between, between like games that you want to like play couch Co Op or with your friends or Things like that, like all of these specific, tailored experiences, besides, like, maybe, like the Jackbox games and things like that. So I think it's going to be really interesting when it's less of games targeted versus a specific person, whereas that's more like a specific friend group with like multiplayer, like little puzzle or party games,

E

Enduring Play Computer 1:02:59

final boss level, the controller cliff.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:03:02

As you look at these younger generations you mentioned, are there any other trends, like changes you see in the evolution? Because you mentioned something I see, which is that separation between older gamers who kind of grew up with a single player mindset and what younger gamers are willing to tolerate, right? Like, Oh, maybe I'm, I expect to be able to buy skins. Maybe I'm playing more free to play. Are there any other observations about what's changing?

A

Adanna Nedd 1:03:27

I spoke to an elementary school class a few years back. I was like, showing them, like, talking about game design and level design. And for an example, I brought my switch so they could play, like, Sonic one, so they could, like, run through a level, and then after, I would have them draw out a level with crayons. And the interesting thing was that even though a lot of the kids recognized Sonic as a character, they didn't know how to use controllers because they're so used to tablets. So when I showed them a controller, whereas someone who's like game for a while, I know like, okay, A to jump, B to roll, B to do the speed roll, things like that, a lot of newer gamers don't. And when I was also trying to show my mom, like, a game, like, she loves puzzle games, like, I don't know if you've done a little to the left, but like, cat puzzle game, she really loves it, but she doesn't really get game control. So I'm like, waiting for a mobile version to get that to her, because you have these controllers. And now there's like, a set standard, like, it's like the joystick with, like, your four simple buttons and then your controllers and then your D pad, which would make sense to someone who's game for a while, but if you're newer, and you're getting into that, that's an entirely new world for someone to get used to, which is really, really neat. Whereas, like, people who have, like, been playing fighting games for forever, if he's if you, like, tell a Street Fighter player, oh, what does down diagonal backwards. Me like, Oh, it's this special from Street Fighter. But if you sell that to a normal person, they're like, What are you talking about? So I think it's interesting how games have gone on for so long. And even though they've gotten popular, they're still, like, very insulated. So introducing more people, I think that's why casual games are becoming really popular. Because without, with, like, games. Like Pokopia, Stardew, there's not really a game over or a win condition. There's a lot more exploration, a lot more ways for players to, like, find their footing. They're not competitive, so they don't have to worry about going against players that are higher level than them. They can explore it and, like, take the games at their own pace and figure out how everything works.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:05:17

You Touch on something that's really important for the game developers who are but they want to make the competitive game, which is that, okay, well, maybe one of the reasons you're not seeing engagement as as high is because there's a generation of gamers who never got to the controller, so they've just been working with touch screens, maybe keyboards, if you're assuming they know how to use a controller, and you were like, I don't need to do a tutorial. Or, Oh, it's just instinctive for them to use a D pad and an analog stick. You may be cutting off a whole generation of players and then wondering why your game fails, and that that mindset of I don't need to teach players. I see that again and again and again. I don't know why people hate money. I don't know why you wouldn't want to have the honor of being someone's first exposure to a controller or a genre, it's the extra work. But boy, we all remember our first RPG. Like, if Sonic was your first action game, then you remember the coin sounds. Why wouldn't you want to embrace welcoming people in there? So that's a great insight. These kids are like, What? What the heck is that?

A

Adanna Nedd 1:06:19

Yeah, that's one of the advantages. I think a lot of cozy games and companies similar to Nintendo that have a more family focus have, because even though, in a way, making sure that tutorial is accessible, so that someone who's familiar with Siri, someone who's not, can still pick it up go play is like a really important skill. And now that games have become more popular, I think some people are forgetting that there are a lot of people that aren't into games. Games, even though they're more popular than they used to be, they're still niche and compared to other hobbies like sports, theater and things like that. So being able to describe what this game is especially to hit it that someone who's like me has never picked up a controller before they're five. They don't know what a button is, things like that, and having a way to translate and talk to players and communicate with them at all different levels of play is really, really important

E

Enduring Play Computer 1:07:08

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C

Cheryl Platz 1:07:13

Thank you so much for your time. Today, I am so grateful for this conversation. How can people follow you and your work? If they were interested by these insights that they want to see how your research or your work evolves.

A Adanna Nedd 1:07:24
So I'm on LinkedIn. I'm Adanna Nedd. That's a D, A n, n, a last name, N, E, D, D, and you can follow me on most socials. It's at a, f narratives,

E Enduring Play Computer 1:07:36
A, F, N, A, R, R, A, T, I, V, E, S,

A Adanna Nedd 1:07:42
and then you can also reach out to me at afnarratives@gmail.com always open to talk about games, research, all that fun stuff. And yeah, it was so lovely talking to you. Cheryl, so excited to see you next week at GDC.

C Cheryl Platz 1:07:56
Thank you, Adanna, The pleasure was very mutual, and I can't wait to see you

C Cheryl Platz 1:08:01
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E Enduring Play Computer 1:08:46
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