

# Enduring Play S2 E8\_ Timothy Staton-Davis

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Game development, cultural technical game designer, melanated game kitchen, hyper local design, cultural consultation, game education, community building, black in gaming, game production, narrative design, workplace trauma, microaggressions, game jams, multimodal storytelling, AI in gaming., Black and Gaming, Melanated Game Kitchen, Patreon, Kickstarter, video content, culturalization, game curation, educational work, newsletter, steam, podcast, Cheryl Platz, game development, Rosenfeld Media, Enduring Play.

## SPEAKERS

Timothy S. Davis, Cheryl Platz, Enduring Play Computer

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### Enduring Play Computer 00:00

Initializing Enduring Play podcast season Two engine. Decompressing audio. Synchronizing waveforms, Reticulating splines. Launching podcast lobby.

### Cheryl Platz 00:12

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. Enduring 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?

**C** Cheryl Platz 00:53

Today's guest, Timothy Staton-Davis, took his experience working on some of the top action games of the past decade: God of War: Ragnarok, MARVEL's Avengers, and most recently, the upcoming action RPG Wu-Tang: Rise of the Deceiver with Brass Lion Entertainment, and parlayed all of that into creating a unique role as cultural technical game designer and creative director of the Melanated Game Kitchen collective in Los Angeles. Timothy helps teams create culturally aware, rich, unique games, and that is so important in an era where AI can help us create very vanilla games. It is hyper local, hyper unique stories that will resonate and take us into the next generation of gaming. It is people like Timothy that can help us get around the homogeneity of LLMs and get back to grounded storytelling. And of course, Timothy is an educator and a community organizer, so he's perfect for this season. We are better as a collective

**E** Enduring Play Computer 01:53

Loading episode preview.

**T** Timothy S. Davis 01:55

At some point someone mentioned this feels like get out, because I think Jordan Peele, as an example, has threaded that needle really well with his movies of presenting things that are very personal to certain groups of people, that maybe everyone doesn't notice. and doing it in a way that's entertaining, scary. But also makes you be in that character's experience, by putting yourself in that experience, which is a very unique thing in games, especially: you have to, like, choose actions to take, and think about why they take those actions, that process hopefully enables that like kind of learning.

**C** Cheryl Platz 02:29

Let's get into the game.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 02:32

Player one, Cheryl Platz, pronouns, she, her. Player two, Timothy Staton Davis, pronouns, he, him. Podcast level start.

C

Cheryl Platz 02:44

Welcome back to Enduring Play, the podcast where we discuss what it takes to make games that don't just survive but thrive. I am very excited today to be here with Timothy Staton-Davis, Creative Director and co founder of Melanated Game Kitchen, alumnus of the Entertainment Technology Center over at Carnegie Mellon, there's so many other titles and things that you have done and seen, but I'm going to let you cover that in a second. Thank you for being here today Timothy,

T

Timothy S. Davis 03:06

Absolutely. Thanks for having me. Also. Shout out to the Entertainment Technology Center, right?

C

Cheryl Platz 03:12

Yes, you know one of the OG places where you could really get that cross disciplinary exposure. One of the things that really struck me at GDC was how many more programs there are that are multidisciplinary there, and I'm really glad about that, because that's what makes games thrive. But that's one of the things I really appreciated about our time at the Entertainment Technology Center. So I always like to give my guests a chance to introduce themselves to the audience in their own terms. So if you were at the Game Developers Conference and you met somebody for the first time. How would you introduce yourself and your work to them?

T

Timothy S. Davis 03:44

I think typically, depending on who I talk to, I kind of switch things up a little bit. But generally speaking, I'm a cultural technical game designer - Kind of TM, created. I do cultural consultation, also game design consultation. Been making games for about like, 10 ish years at this point, working largely within different game design disciplines, primarily a lot of action games in particular. So worked on God of War, Ragnarok, most recently the Wu Tang: Rise of the Deceiver, action RPG that's still upcoming, spent time on Marvel's Avengers, Halo infinite, and got a chance to work at Monolith before they had closed down on the Shadow of War game and got a chance to just do a lot of combat action focused design and systems design kind of stuff. And eventually making my way to just kind of combine a lot of those things into, like storytelling as a whole. And at this point now, I kind of have a larger focus on bringing all those things into play for a more like cultural perspective for games and making sure that they're accurate and expressive of different backgrounds and stories, stories from people's different experiences into gameplay experiences. And yeah, at this point in my career, I've been heavily involved in diversity initiatives, pretty much since I started working in games, just kind of like getting more. Are people of different backgrounds into game making and supporting us in that process. So I'm currently on the board for black and gaming, which is a nonprofit organization focused on black diaspora and helping and supporting those creators and helping us to bring opportunities for them. And then, as you mentioned before, Creative Director and co owner of the Melanated Game Kitchen which is a collective and studio that's offering different types of co-development services, but we're also doing our own games as well that are focused on cultural storytelling in particular. So yeah.

C

Cheryl Platz 05:32

it's so many things. Thank you for what your pitch is very well refined for it's such a diverse set of experience I think that would take me like, four minutes to walk through. So I salute you.

E

Enduring Play Computer 05:45

Podcast level one, intersecting cultural design and technical design.

C

Cheryl Platz 05:50

You know, one of the questions I had right up front, and you got to this a little bit, but I want to lean into it a little bit more specifically. When I was looking at your background, there was this reference to the role of a technical cultural game designer, right? And that sort of dances with some roles people may be familiar with: technical designer, cultural design, and I wanted to lean into that a little bit more. How do you describe that role? Is it two different roles? Is it one combined role? Or how did you discover this line of work?

T

Timothy S. Davis 06:16

Yeah, it's still an evolving thing, right? Because it's kind of like a phrase, a term that I've kind of made for myself, that I felt was like descriptive of my background and what I do and the things that I know. I'm a computer science major by, you know, and programmer by trade. And eventually I started focusing more on game design as a whole, and the whole technical design of like, you know, creating tools, creating prototypes, helping to enable the development process more easily, and being able to, like, make my own things. And so focus on the technical designer aspect of things. And that was pretty much my focus for like, a long time. It's like, you know, skills, how do I help support to make things in the games? And like, be a designer who can build stuff as well as create ideas, right, which is highly valuable. And then as I began to focus more on storytelling, I started bridging the aspect of, like my culture, but other people's culture, and how to interpret and integrate different backgrounds and different experiences into the game experience as a whole, right? So I think, like kind of examples of that kind of lean on, you know, we see a lot of games that kind of explore, you know, like Middle Earth, or things that explore, you know, sci fi, these like ideas, like these worlds, right? And finding ways to like, bring those lore, bring the characters into the actual like gameplay moments, right? And make that kind of feel like it real, and make it feel connected to those characters and like that world that is built on, right?

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Enduring Play Computer 07:46

Loading podcast level two, cultural technical design case study

C

Cheryl Platz 07:52

That is so interesting. Can you give an example of a game or experience that you think reflects the ideals of what good cultural technical game design looks like in practice.

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Timothy S. Davis 08:02

One game that did a great job at that recently. Was Despelote which came out last year, which kind of, like, takes this core experience of living in South America, and then like that is the gameplay of like going through that experience, and like the actions that you do are what those characters do. And you hear the sounds and you get the visual elements that are, like, very unique to that experience. And so it's heavy. I emphasize bringing those things together. How do you make that happen? How do you design those things to happen? How do you connect the narrative and the gameplay together so that they all support each other over time and still support that like, core experience that you're trying to give of, like that background and that culture, you know, and this expands culture from a very large perspective for people. So that's, like the really fun part, really unique things about games, in particular loading,

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### Enduring Play Computer 08:52

Podcast level three, localization and hyper local design.

C

### Cheryl Platz 08:58

There's so much there. When I was working at Riot there, seeing how valorant found its success. There was a lot about the hyper local, like finding local designers to help create characters that felt like they were resonant, but that was more of a storytelling focus, right? Like, what's really fascinating about what you just described was it's it's taking that that, like hyper local or hyper cultural focus. And then, because you are also someone who understands the engine and understands the technology, you can say like, "Yes, I understand what this culture or this, this locality or something is trying to say. And here are the specific game mechanics, or the specific way I could change this engine to make this feel completely unique and completely immersive." Am I interpreting that Right?

T

### Timothy S. Davis 09:40

Right, Right, yeah, exactly, exactly. And it has like, it, there's so many different pieces to it, right? Because this also gets into the localization piece of it too. You know, those of us who kind of focus on like, you know, when you localize something, how do you also make sure it's relevant in the culture. And so I think it's like, the term is like, culturalization at this point for that. But like. You know, it's also about like, the process of translating the information, which, you know, I work with friends who like do translations. But then it's like, how do we make sure that that the new words or the new verbiage or the the aspects of the experience are, like, relevant for those people, or that is not offensive for those people in that location, right? That's like, also part of it too. It's like, a lot of like, multifaceted pieces,

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### Enduring Play Computer 10:24

Loading tutorial level: the rise of Raze at Riot Games.

**C** Cheryl Platz 10:29

During my tenure at Riot Games in 2022 VALORANT launched the agent Raze, who is positioned as a dancing Salvadorian duelist. As a reminder, this podcast is not sponsored or endorsed by any past or present employers. In a case study about the design and launch of Raze, the team behind her design shared how they collaborated closely with Riot's Brazilian team to figure out how to represent her, from the selection of her hometown to groundbreaking collaborations on the music she listens to, the work they did on this agent was guided directly by locals from the region Raze is based in a manager of brand management from the Brazilian team in Sao Paulo Rodrigo Friggi said, "The valorant team came to the Brazilian office and asked, Should she be from Sao Paulo Rio or Salvador? The team came to us for help, for references, for decisions that meant a lot to us, and we were able to help make an agent that means a lot to Brazilian players. It may sound counterintuitive, but in order to truly be global, we have to be hyper local." Think about that. To be global, we have to be hyper local in a world where AI can generate infinite stories, these deeply authentic, deeply grounded stories are the ones that will resonate not just with those who live them, but with those who cannot live them, but appreciate the chance to experience part of that magic.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 11:38

Podcast level four, culturalization and transcreation.

**C** Cheryl Platz 11:43

So the culturalization part, a term I've also heard is transcreation. Are those two things related? Have you heard that before? Are those potentially different things?

**T** Timothy S. Davis 11:53

Sounds similar. I haven't heard transcreation before, but it sounds like it's translation, transcreation, yeah, uh-huh. I'ma double check.

C

Cheryl Platz 12:01

It might be in the same space, OK. I'll have to dig into that more. So well, why don't we dig more into the culturalization piece of it? So I think I understand what you're talking about, but I wanted to get more into it to A) challenge my assumptions and B) so our listeners can get a richer sense. Because I remember what it was like when I was working on Sims games and learning how to simultaneously ship a game on multiple platforms, and my having my mind blown for the first time, like 2003 when they were like, "Yeah, we changed some of the skins for the characters and some of the cultures, because there's different cultural norms." I'm like, "You ship a different game on different cartridges?!", Just different - like, I was baby. But in my brain, obviously, we're much more sophisticated now. But basic concept, am I? Am I on the right track?

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Timothy S. Davis 12:44

Definitely? Yeah, it's always super surprising when those things happen that like you didn't - Sometimes you just don't know about it, especially when it comes to, like, Asian countries in particular, because it can be like, a lot more, like strict about things, you know, or like, certain things that, like, I didn't know that that particular color combination meant this, or was offensive in this way, or it was like, you know, you don't know until you make it and then look into it, you know, and then someone tells you, o'h, yeah, that's not good, right?" Or "this, this means this," so, yeah, that's, that's largely, that's part of the process, for sure. I was thinking about, we were working with someone in the title that's very much production and development, but they're like, kind of dealing with this whole thing of, like, mixed race, mixed ethnicity for their character, their main character. And it's kind of like, you know, based in Japan, and we have friends that we work with in Japan. We're also from the US, so we kind of have, it's kind of like, cross cultural kind of combination thing going on. We have these conversations. And so some of like the nuance for the character, and also like how they would approach the narrative situations if they were, like, someone who was mixed race but also born in Japan. So like, what are the dynamics that come with being that based on the cultural situation in that particular location, right? It's like, okay, like, "here's how people would approach her, if you know this thing happened because of this background, and how like this would be perceived in their culture," versus like, if that, if we put that same character in the United States, it wouldn't be a big deal at all. We would probably wouldn't think anything of it for that particular scenario. So it's kind of the thing. It's like, okay, let's talk about it. And like, let's also make sure we, you know, pull in a couple people that we can reach out to to can add a little extra context from that perspective, or from that generational perspective in particular. So that's kind of, like, the kind of research that's like, important to do and like to identify. Like, how do you, like, build these things out for the characters and for the citizens, for the scenarios? Yeah.

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Enduring Play Computer 14:42

Podcast level paused. Begin host commentary.

C

### Cheryl Platz 14:46

We've touched on culturalization in gaming in previous episodes, like season one episode four, where David Ventura's company helped studios navigate the transition between European and Asian cultures. The nuance of Tim's work as a Cultural Technical Designer touches on similar themes, but perhaps from the inverse. In many cases, he's working to make a game more nuanced and specific and authentic, and then partner with localizers around the world to make sure that authenticity translates across cultural boundaries. For example, a cultural consultant like Tim might help a game develop a hyper local narrative around a very specific neighborhood in the US, and then when that game wants to ship in Japan, they might work with the studio like David Ventura's Ichigoichie games to figure out how that very specific story's emotional art can translate across cultural boundaries while honoring any local laws, customs or norms. As a gamer, you're typically only ever interacting with one version of your favorite game, so you might not even know that the stories, characters or even gameplay you're familiar with plays out differently in other locales. But that's been true at some level for decades. One of the most classic examples of this switch is is the O and X buttons on Playstations. If you've ever tried to use Japanese and English PlayStations, you may have noticed that those two buttons don't always behave the same in different regions. O is typically select on Japanese consoles, but x is typically select on Western consoles. This might be because in Japan, school tests are marked with a red pen with a circle next to correct answers, and that level of detail is why the work that Tim does is so interesting and important.

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### Enduring Play Computer 16:23

Loading podcast level five: making the case for authenticity through impact.

C

### Cheryl Platz 16:30

We've had film for a long time, and I think there were cultural consultants for film, but it's so much more important I think when players are embodying these characters, and they're living these experiences, the fact that, like when we were in an avatar, we can end up embodying those characters. So what if the character, or what if the environment doesn't match reality, or if it's causing cognitive dissonance, or it's causing us to misinterpret how a culture really exists. Like, I think sometimes people might think like, "why is this important? Or, why is this so hard?" Do you find that you have to pitch people on the importance of this? Like, how do you find how do people find you and find your business? And how do you convince them that this is something that's necessary and needed?

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Timothy S. Davis 17:16

Yeah, that's such an interesting question, because I think it's like a continued thing that's evolving based on, like, just like the social landscape in the world, right? Because I know for me in particular, like I just kind of, I think it's been maybe about a year and a half or so that I started actually, like offering this as a service for other creators or other studios, right? And so, you know, there's other people who are colleagues, who have been also doing cultural consulting for different things. Like, for example, Spider-Man, Marvel's Spider-Man, like the Miles in like Spider-man 2, they had cultural consultation for, like, New York, right? And for also, like getting like Miles' Spider-Man character correct, and his family dynamics and stuff like that, you know, and building out quests and all that. And so, you know, I think in those situations, right? Like, the studio is like, they understand that the fans want an accurate character, and they want to make sure that they're represented correctly, to fit the comics, you know, largely correctly. And also feel like it's like real, you know, make it feel like true. So their focus was, "I want a real New York", right? And "I want a real New York and our characters to be real." And so they knew that they needed to find people to bring in, to capture that essence properly, right? And so I think in those cases, yes. And there's a lot of proven case that there's a lot of value in that, because when it's accurate, then the people who understand this character understand this world the best.

T

Timothy S. Davis 18:44

You know, even for all of our you know, books turned movies, books turned games, we see that when it's done well - accurate to the characters in the world - people will see it. People spend money on it, but it was not. People will trash it. They will not respect it as much. And so there's obviously a big value, but it's been a large thing of presenting it in the way... we're still kind of like in the battle of presenting it that it has value, even though it's proven, there's still some kind of like dynamic with from the big business perspective, that is not assumed or is not thought about initially. So it does take some work, as far as like, even on my part of like, how do I present the information in a way that makes them understand what this does for their experience and like, why this is important and why this ultimately may likely lead to more sales down the road, essentially. And it is like, largely about some language adjustments for how I write things out in a way that is tailored to different people or different businesses, or the description of, okay, the impact that is going to give for your company, right? And here's how this will fit in, and is largely having to pitch it in that way every time, still, so is, is tricky. Still, yeah, yeah.

C

Cheryl Platz 20:00

It's funny how the impact thing, being able to phrase what we want to do in terms of the impact is going to have is one of the hardest things we do in any corporate or business environment, like when I coach my direct on the annual review process and stuff: "Okay, apologies, because this is going to be really this is going to feel really corporate, but let's reframe what you're saying in terms of impact it had on the other people. This is a really good list of tasks. What did it do?" I hear that in what you're saying, like, you had to go through that whole process so that you convey, like, "yes, we do all these things, but here's what it's gonna do for you," that like, secret sauce of what it does for you, as opposed to what I can do be able to change that mindset has been so transformational in like, every business I've been in and every group I've been in, and it's cool to hear you talk about how you're doing it for your space and your very unique context,

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Enduring Play Computer 20:47

Loading podcast level six: leaning away from AI to complete the cultural loop.

C

Cheryl Platz 20:55

And I wonder too, like when you talk about the value of the work that you do, it feels like whether it's explicitly stated or not, whether you're on this trajectory towards even higher importance. Because some of the conversations I'm having are around the effect of AI, right? And the loss of authenticity, right? Like, if two outputs are the same, what like the human and the non human? The authenticity, it's the groundedness. That's the only thing that differentiates them, and it's the work that you do that makes sure it's grounded in real human experience. So it feels like the types of work that you do, it's going to be more important than ever to make sure that we haven't been pulled off the path by some random like chat GPT brainstorm that's telling us about a root world that doesn't exist.

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Timothy S. Davis 21:44

That's true. That's true. Yeah, that's the that's the thing. Like, everything needs, like a human touch to it. Even even research, you know, you're doing research on a topic or a group of people - it's largely been proven. And you know, a friend of mine, jeris, he does a lot of work in regards to like art, 3d art, but like that's focused on Africa, or pulling from Africa, and like their culture, and a lot of things that will come up is that, like, if you just search for things normally, when you're trying to dig into like detail on a world, you know, this is fictional and non fictional worlds and backgrounds that you may not find All the information just on a normal search and just on checking one of the AI logs, and like, hey, "Search this for me. And pull this up," and you'll get some stuff. But it's just going to be like, very surface level. You're not going to capture, like, a lot of that more detail of like, the people who are actually, like, immersed in this world. It's not going to, like, cut it. It's going to be like, very like, you know, caricature, you know, of it. And so it does require another level of digging, or just like talking with the right people, or getting the right books or the right reference material to properly, you know, represent what you're building it off of, you know. And sometimes that requires, like, reading actual, like, physical thing somewhere, or going to a library, or, like, having the right interviews and reaching out to the right folks who have that lived experience, or have that like tome of knowledge, to like, ask them the questions, and like, get the details from them directly. And that takes time, and it takes some effort. You know, folks who are trying to, like, be quick about it are not going to get just with a simple AI search and compiling of that information, no matter how much they do it, and it's just not going to pull from the right sources. If you're going to, you know, you can use the tools to do some of like the groundwork, but you have to dig into more to capture the essence better. And people, people notice it. I think it's like very largely the case. It stands out.

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Enduring Play Computer 23:40

Loading podcast level seven: specificity, immediacy and speculation.

C

Cheryl Platz 23:47

I'm glad you brought up some of the techniques you use, because I think that - to bring the AI thread along - one of the weaknesses of a lot of these AI tools is that many of them, the way they're trained, they sort of have an expiration date, right? Their models run out of runway. I love the examples where people ask a AI what date it is, like Gemini or something that's like, "it's 2024" but if you're doing research for a game and you're asking about cultural conditions, and your AI thinks it's 2024 and you don't do the groundwork? It's super old, and everybody's gonna know and the thing they know the most about is popular culture. No one's forgiving if you go put flossing in your game, right?

T Timothy S. Davis 24:22  
It's old!

C Cheryl Platz 24:24  
God, who did they get? It's a great example of how you ensure even in this era where all the information is theoretically available to you, you got to do the work, because life is constantly changing. Life finds a way, people are evolving. And the best insight is the stuff that just happened,

T Timothy S. Davis 24:42  
That just happened, right, right? I very much agree with that. Very much agree, I think a lot about from time to time, I like to, like, dig into some, like, the futurism stuff a bit, right? Some of the like prototypes, and any things that I've worked on in the past, and probably will work on still is like, things that are like hypothetical "what ifs" type of scenarios, you know, what if this culture evolved into 100, 200 years in the future? Of what did these kind of things happen in the past and now, what it would look like in modern day? You know, these kinds of explorations, and they're really fun to do, but it does give me to the thing of, you know, specificity, because if you change, just like small things, you know, for example, you know, if certain foods did not make their way over to the US at a certain point, right? And like, what would the what would the food look like? What the recipes look like, actually in the world? And then, if you had a game based around, you know, modern day, what would the characters actually be eating? Now, if that happened, right? Yeah, you could, like, do a quick search of like, Oh, what if this happened, and then, you know, plug it into chat, GPT or Claude or something, and see what comes up. But you have to ask a very specific questions to kind of build on top of, okay, so if these foods did not cross over and they stayed here, then, okay, what would it be here? And then how would that evolve over time? You have to, like, specifically track that and build that kind of like case of what it would be, and then you can form, here's what it would be like in 2026 you know? And it's an interesting process to think like that, like trying to build those kinds of ideas out. Also, if you're using any AI tools, you have to guide their hand along the way with that process, I think, to figure out those answers

E Enduring Play Computer 26:21  
Loading podcast level eight, confronting the nuance in AI use ethically.

C

Cheryl Platz 26:27

That's a really interesting use of AI, because, you know, the weaknesses of AI being a statistical model, being trained on things, maybe lean into that as an actual valid use case, because it's like what would be a probabilistic outcome if I changed this one piece, go back through all the data and run it through all the language again and see how humans would react if I pulled french fries out of out of the two that's that's really interesting. And you're basically running a simulation at that point, but doing it with prompt engineering, that's a very cool exploration of how modern tools help and hurt, and, you know, there's, there's a lot of nuance in the world right now, right?

T

Timothy S. Davis 27:05

A lot of nuance. There's a lot of nuances, and a lot of people who are trying to, like, not pay attention to that nuance, you know, who say it doesn't matter, right? I know me and my team are, you know, and a lot of other studios, you know, in the larger: the conversation is "okay. How do we use these tools in a way that is equitable and good? How do we define how to use these tools in a way that is good and not stealing from other people and not doing harm?" And so it is up to us as the creators who are... who care to figure this stuff out, because the others who don't care are going to abuse it as much as they can, right? And so, you know, we're talking. And we're exploring and keeping note of the different tools as they come out. And some of us are using some of them and trying them out. And like, ways of like, how can we utilize them in in small ways? And that feels good and is right for everybody. So it's a constant conversation, I think. And we a lot of it is like, kind of private testing, of exploring, like, "Okay, what we did it with this, and what can it do this way?" And, "Oh, is this too much, or how's our data being used here? Do we want to not, you know, do it this way", right? So that's kind of like a continued conversation and evolution we're figuring out too, yeah,

C

Cheryl Platz 28:17

in my personal, very, you know, individual life, talking to people about the use of AI the common concerns time and time again, are models are trained unethically, without consent, which is not something that's easily changeable, the environmental impact, which is not something that easily changeable. And then the how the data is handled, which is something that you can be... like read terms of service you can prepare for on those first two counts. I'm not going to ask you to endorse things, because that's not, that's not what we're here for. But like, Do you have a perspective on the... do we need sea change to get to a point where these tools are meaningful and useful? Some folks are like, "It's irredeemable. We can't use the current generation of tools because we just don't know where it all came from."

T

Timothy S. Davis 29:00

Yeah, and I go back and forth, because I have people in our collective who, you know, feel both ways about it, too, right, especially the artists in particular, because they've been stolen from the most, and they've been impacted the most, I think is, like, really, really frustrating on from for them, and I feel it, and it's like, you know, I get that. It is tricky, and I'm very adamant about language around any... everything, really. But this stuff, in particular about technology, the language that we use to define things. I'm very adamant about in most conversations I'm having, what particular tech are you talking about? Right? Are you talking about generative AI? Are you talking about LLM models? Are you just talking about AI tooling that we've been using for years in different ways, that we've made locally, right? That is important in conversation, especially as like, social conversation, for making sure people have knowledge of how to use terms, you know?

T

Timothy S. Davis 29:47

And so you know, I talk about this and say, "As long as we're paying attention to how our data is being used, and doing what we can do to protect our data, to protect our people, make sure stuff is not being, you know, used in a certain way, as long as we're not doing things that are going to exacerbate harm intentionally, then you know, we can explore the details," right? So we can get clear information about, "Oh, this stuff stole from these artists and did it this way, and then their company is investing in things like this." It's like, "Well, okay, we should not even entertain it." And then areas where it's like, "Okay, we can see that this company hasn't done anything bad like this stuff yet. Maybe we can mess with the technology, but let's also be cautious and how we use our data and how we mess with it and not be dependent upon it if something does happen." So largely, how do we build our own things as well locally to make sure that we build our own pipelines for things and still, you know, have a backup plan if stuff goes south as we're exploring the technology? Yeah, that's kind of the perspective I've taken on a lot of it.

C

Cheryl Platz 30:59

Thank you for navigating that with me, these conversations are so challenging to have without leaning into the strong emotion... It's so easy to just be like, "I don't, don't like it, I don't want it," right? Like, I have wanted to have that reaction too. But also I understand that if we don't engage in those spaces, other people who aren't going to treat the technology ethically, will just continue to consume all the oxygen and do the things. And so those of us who are... like it is BECAUSE we don't like having the conversations that we have to go have the conversations and deal with the things. So thank you for navigating it with me, even though, you know, sometimes it's not always, it's not always the favorite thing. And sometimes, as game designers, we have had AI in our life. In the past, I've designed games with, like, little autonomous creatures in them that did things. And now I'm like, "What do I call that? So people don't hate that." What is right? Like, what? What am I gonna do with that word? It was AI then...

**T** Timothy S. Davis 31:53  
It's still a term!

**C** Cheryl Platz 31:54  
And now... it's an interesting thing, especially game development, where you're like, suddenly the thing that I'm doing this whole time is not, not allowed. Okay, we were fine with that yesterday. You liked NPCs. You liked it when they were talented and good at competing. And now, now you do not want anything with those two letters. So yeah, nuance is our friend. We don't want to do the unethical things, but we would still like single player games. So we gotta figure that out.

**T** Timothy S. Davis 32:20  
Very true.

**C** Cheryl Platz 32:20  
Figure it out.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 32:23  
The narrative design of clock out at two.

**C** Cheryl Platz 32:28  
Let's talk some more about your specific work, because there's so much interesting here. And one of the games you were promoting at the time I was looking into your work is clock out at two. And this game helps you tell the story of working as an afroLatina, and I think especially after the conversation we had earlier in this podcast, I would love to hear more about how game design choices are specifically helping you tell the story of living life as an afro Latina in the workplace like that. Maybe that can help people understand your very specific sort of perspective on your skill set and how it's coming to bear on storytelling and giving people a visual lived experience.

T

Timothy S. Davis 33:09

Glad you brought up Clock Out at Two. Yeah, I would say it's kind of like our flagship title, as I've been telling people a bit at the moment, it is a collaborative game project between our studio, melanin, the game kitchen, and our sister studio, borderless studios, and we've been working together for a while now on various things, but this is, like the big project we've been building together. And clock out at Two is a narrative, adventure, Thriller game experience that you are surviving the corporate machine - uh, your workplace - to essentially clock out of work by 2pm essentially. And we kind of consider it akin to, for folks who, like, are in film, right? We kind of say, oh, it's like, Get Out, you know, Jordan Peele, and then kind of meets, like Severance, which is like, also on the craze the last couple years, and the kind of, like a combination of those kind of two things. Because as your character, you're navigating a workplace where your experience of it is different from everybody else's, and so we're kind of playing into that, because things are not as they seem. Things are dark that are happening, and how you experience the things and how they're directed towards you is in a way that's very harmful, in a way that's deceitful, and maybe it's not intentionally done that way, but because of your background, who you are, you're experiencing microaggressions, and the way that that shows up in your body, how that shows up in your perspective, how that affects your mental health and well being affects your progression in the game, right? And so that's the interesting dynamic that we're playing with.

E

Enduring Play Computer 33:10

Narrative cutscene: Get out, Severance, and storytelling.

C

Cheryl Platz 33:56

Let's get some context on those two pieces of media to mention to help you fully appreciate this next case study, Jordan Peele's Get out is an Academy Award winning psychological horror film from 2017 where racial relations became a key plot point. Not everything or everyone is as they seem in Get Out. Severance is a popular recurring series on Apple TV that centers around a workplace Lumon Industries, where certain employees choose to become "severed" so that they have no connection to or memory of their consciousness at the workplace. These versions of themselves are essentially adult children, and this leads to heavy use of gamification to motivate productivity, since typical techniques like promotion and money won't work, plays are tracked on their completion or mastery of particular files and pitted against each other competitively for prizes and recognition. There's even a pixelated cinematic of the company founder for a job well done at the end of some tasks. While Jordan Peele's Get Out is probably being brought up for its relevance to the racial context in clock out at two, and how both pieces of media are trying to get people to see perspectives they cannot live. Severance is a really interesting look at the darker side of gamification and power dynamics, in addition to the suspense it brings to the table.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 34:41

Podcast level 10: exploring the workplace with game design.

**C** Cheryl Platz 34:41

Tell me more about your role on clock out at two, and how you're lending all of your various talents to make this story real.

T

Timothy S. Davis 34:41

And it's really interesting to be working on this because I kind of function as, like one of the game designers on it, along with our, the owner of the studio and narrative design lead creative director of the game Mac, is kind of finding ways of like telling an interesting story. It deals with, kind of like a butterfly effect scenario of having to repeat the day until you can succeed. And so having, having to tell the story of these interactions that you interact with. You know, very nice white man, cis white man, but his interactions with you are much not wanted a lot of his advances on your character. And then also dealing with HR and how they treat you when dealing with company policy in a way that tries to suck out your own personality, you know, right? And so we've kind of played around with, of course, having a narrative that shows these incidents, right, and how that affects your character, but also you know how as a person, you can grow and learn how to navigate these situations and how to get through your own personal traumas that you've experienced as a result of living in this lifestyle, and find a way to navigate it, where you can come out of it and survive, right? Because it is a survival process. So we've kind of integrated some different systems into it to kind of like reflect that survival process of how different things that you can add to your traits and to your character and stats that can help in different scenarios and help with different conversations and help you to advocate for yourself in different ways. We took an inspiration from other RPGs. You know, I've even had a conversation like some stuff, like *Disco Elysium*, for example, or other like roguelike experiences on, you know, ways that we can represent the character through systems, right? And also playing up on the thriller element of things, of like, you know, using art, using animation, and in the conversations, and the different things that you can select in conversations, as far as you know, certain things that you can and can't say, and if you say something that is aggressive towards a certain person, even though you said it, even though that's the right thing to say, and you know, as you feel or that's appropriate because of stress that you're experiencing as your character, and because of the social dynamic that's happening between this character and you, it will affect you negatively in the story. So we're trying to find ways to like systemically, adding these pieces and adding these, you know, ways of tracking information and giving you choices that reflect who you are as a person, but also reflect the dynamic to represent that experience. So people who have experienced it before in real life will understand it - deeply. And we've seen this happen in our play testing, you know, our demos at different places that we, you know, shown the game so far right? And people who have not experienced this will be like, "Oh! that's what's happening here? With this? You know, I didn't, I didn't think this was, I didn't think this was a bad thing when it happened to this character, you know, as as we were talking. But actually, I was like, No, you got to back off. Or, you know, you gotta leave me alone," or, no, you know, like they're feeling for the main character in a way that maybe they hadn't thought about in the past, you know. And so we think it's trying to strike a nice balance between, like, that's why it's a hard thing, trying to strike a nice balance between those interactions and making it somewhat educational, of, like, understanding this experience, but also like, the fun aspect of having to figure out how to navigate this stuff and how to win and how to, you know, become a better like person you know, or in that process. Yeah.

T

Timothy S. Davis 34:41

Podcast level 11: education as a motivator of play

C

Cheryl Platz 35:27

sounds so interesting. It sounds like there's game mechanics that teach personal resilience, right in an educational... which is when I talk about the motivators of play in my book, and one of the reasons people are coming to games in more more ways, is education, and it's because games have become more sophisticated. Sometimes it's the brute force of Duolingo just has 100 languages. But there's also this really intentioned craftsmanship of "how do we build a game that will guide you through A difficult situation and help you get to the point where you can see a metaphor about life and go through difficult situation in a safe space enough times that you can apply that life skill in a different way next time." And it sounds like this is a really interesting environment for that."

T

Timothy S. Davis 40:15

Exactly that, exactly that. Yeah, it is a needle to thread, of course, for this kind of stuff, which is why, you know, at some point someone mentioned this feels like get out. Because I think Jordan Peele, as an example, has threaded that needle really well with his movies of presenting things that are very personal to certain groups of people, right, that maybe everyone doesn't notice or realize, but doing it in a way that's entertaining, scary, but also makes you be in that character's experience. And so by putting yourself in that experience, which is very unique thing of the games, especially, you have to, like, choose actions to take, and think about why they take those actions, right? That process is - hopefully enables that, like, kind of learning just by doing it. So that's the part that's fun and also challenging at the same time.

E

Enduring Play Computer 41:07

loading tutorial level: multimodality.

C

Cheryl Platz 41:11

I'm about to use the term multimodal, and I recognize that not all of my listeners are as much a nerd about that term as I am. Life is inherently multimodal. Well, maybe not this podcast. Multimodal interactions involve multiple modes of input or output, sequentially or simultaneously. That might mean static visuals, animated visuals, haptic physical feedback, kinetic physical feedback, auditory feedback, or other modalities like ambient interactions. Games are generally deeply multimodal. You are taking player input for one or more sources and giving the player multiple forms of feedback, like animated visuals, vibration or audio. My first book, *Design Beyond Devices*, is all about multimodality and cross device experiences. As I've always been fascinated by experiences like the bridge of the Starship Enterprise, and that took me to working on experiences like Cortana and Alexa. And those experiences were made possible by my time working on a launch title for the very multimodal Nintendo DS. Most of your players and their devices have many senses, sensors and outputs. How many of those are you using to the fullest? This is not an endorsement of having players lick their devices, by the way.

E

Enduring Play Computer 42:13

Podcast level 12, multimodal narrative for suspense and immersion.

C

Cheryl Platz 42:20

How do you approach your visual and or your multimodal presentation? Is it like, immersive? Is it mobile? Like, because you mentioned microaggressions and you mentioned mental health, and that struck me because it's like, how do you convey how do you convey that? Like, how do you convey the impact that this is having to someone with a different cultural identity than the player who might process that differently than the character,

T

Timothy S. Davis 42:44

Right, Right. Yeah, for us, we've taken an interesting angle at it. I think different creatives would do different things with it, right? So our inspiration initially was like leaning into the art aspect of the horror aspect of it. That's why I call it a thriller, because it's not like a scary game, per se, but it's got stuff that doesn't - that's not right, you know, things are off, you know, and leaning into that kind of thing of like, "this is what it feels like to be in this situation." It feels creepy. It feels like you see things that other people don't see. And how does that affect your mental health. When you know, you tell someone, "This is who this person is, this is how they are to me, but then they never see it that way," right? And how kind of scary that kind of feels, you know? So we're leaning, kind of leaning into the art aspect of like making that feel kind of creepy, and making characters seem different than they actually are on the surface, right? And that's kind of like that kind of horror element of it, of using art as a way to kind of communicate that. And the team's done a great job at messing around with that, like aspect of it, and the art style of that, you know, it's kind of like a very like 2d focused art style, not like a cartoon per se, but it's kind of got that vibe and kind of capturing that feeling of unease, and so that that kind of helps a lot.

C

Cheryl Platz 44:01

2D seems like, I mean, there's probably no right or wrong answers, but our collective experience at the Entertainment Technology Center, one of the things I liked about our storytelling classes, they leaned into Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud and the whole

T

Timothy S. Davis 44:14

Oh yeah.

C

Cheryl Platz 44:14

Like, you know, "Hey, the more richly rendered you get, the harder it is to project yourself into a story." And so that seems to make a lot of sense to me. If you're asking someone to project them into a story that is very much not themselves, keeping it low fidelity, in a way, makes it easier for their brain to say, like, "Okay, cool. Maybe I can slot you in here. It's not, it's not a fully 4k realized, like, life thing." It's you're like, oh, "It's comic, it's story. I can find space." So that that vibes, that makes that makes sense. It's really interesting. And the

T

Timothy S. Davis 44:47

Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz 44:47

And the "oh, that person, that person seems fine to me." Like, yeah, yeah. I mean, that's resonant in a in a way, I wish it wasn't,"

T Timothy S. Davis 44:57

Right? Mhm.

C Cheryl Platz 44:58

But I'm glad you're trying to give some people that that perspective and feeling like, Okay, fine. Maybe society is... hasn't recognized that people can be different ways in different places. We will just just teach it in game mechanics. Fine!

T Timothy S. Davis 45:14

Right? Fine. That is so funny.

E Enduring Play Computer 45:21

Podcast level, paused begin host commentary.

C

Cheryl Platz 45:26

As we shift gears, let's reflect a little bit on the season journey thus far, The nuance in the game mechanics. Tim talks about in "Clock out by two" workplace trauma microaggressions, navigating workplace systems, reflect a desire to help others see a complexity in the system that is not always accepted at first glance. I can't know what these designers have lived through, but as a disabled woman leader in tech, I know I've been quote, unquote accidentally fired, coming back from Disability Leave, denied accommodations, ignored, had my rights violated, and all by people who seem nice to others. Most of these cases were because the companies I worked with didn't have proactive people partners like Amy White from season two, Episode Six, who look to prevent problems instead of just react to them. And I think this is a chronic problem in gaming because we're so focused on the game and not the long term. I know I'll be playing Clock Out at Two to see how this lived experience, through Afro Latina eyes, contrasts or aligns with my lived experience, as this is one of the only ways for me to do so. And for those who are lucky enough not to live these experiences at all, games like this not only give you a chance to explore suspense and mystery, but maybe even build some new resilience and empathy you can take with you without having to build that lived experience. That modern motivator of play, of education I talk about in my book? Games don't just have to be comforting or fun. They can make us better, too.

E

Enduring Play Computer 46:42

Podcast level 13: Introducing Black in Gaming.

C

Cheryl Platz 46:47

You mentioned that you're on the board of black in gaming. Tell me more about your work with that organization.

T

Timothy S. Davis 46:53

Yeah, Black in Gaming as a nonprofit has been around for over a decade, technically, and have been doing a lot of things, heavily at GDC, in particular, they're the founders and continued hosts of the Black in Gaming Awards, which is an award show that gives recognition to people who are doing great things in the Black game industry. For me, perspective, I joined the nonprofit as a community member initially, and also kind of helping with a lot of their online community building for Discord servers and that space, and kind of bringing more of us into the space, collaborating, supporting each other, and just kind of providing like a safe space to talk about things and figure stuff out and navigate the industry. And so it's grown as far as like a community space, substantially since 2020 at this point. Also, our nonprofit is in this growth period as well. I joined the board last year, along with some other colleagues of mine who we've been working together and in our focus largely is to support Black game creators and then also provide them opportunities.

T

Timothy S. Davis 47:52

So we have a couple different areas that we focus on, largely in particular. One is, like a big thing is like, investment and funding of people, because oftentimes marginalized communities, we don't get as much funding for our projects. And opportunities for funding in particular is also a big one, and so we do that via collaborations and also sponsorships and other things that we're working on to do. And then also having to deal with the promotion of creative works and promotion of individuals who may not get the same kind of recognition that we would get in other spaces, you know. So we focus heavily on that. Also, safety is a big one, as we may have seen. I think all of our affinity groups that we've also cross collaborated with all kind of have a focus on this that you know, those of us have different backgrounds have experienced a lot of hate online for various reasons, and the games that we release sometimes aggrner that hate, and our companies don't always support us, right? So outside entities that exist to help provide that support, and so we're bolstering that effort to do more of that. Like, who else is it going to come from in a lot of cases? And then also doing efforts to just increase representation of different people, different experiences and different backgrounds in the game industry as a whole and in the games that we make as well, and helping to bridge those gaps, helping to fill in, provide, you know, resources and provide opportunities for studios and other individuals to be encouraged to do so best practices, all that kind of stuff. There's a lot of different areas, and we're collaborating with a lot of different organizations, you know, like sister organizations, who are also passionate about improving representation and improving opportunity within the space for creators. We just had a great event back at GDC, which thinks just a sign of the times right, where we collaborate with Latinx in Gaming and AAPI in gaming as a group collaborative event that we put on to provide a showcase and provide talks for developers, especially indie developers, to have a space to share their stuff and to have a focus on what we were creating as a whole, and then also collaborating with other organizations to get that stuff out, even from a bigger audience as well, you know. So it's largely about that stuff, and if anyone wants to support, obviously, we're taking donations, and all that is a 501, c3, nonprofits. So, you know, Link, provide the links and stuff like that. But very passionate about trying to help to push that stuff further continued every year.

T

Timothy S. Davis 50:25

TKTK: shout out to episode 4, Cristina Amaya, Latinx in Gaming

E

Enduring Play Computer 50:33

Podcast level 14: Collaboration across nonprofit video game organizations.

C Cheryl Platz 50:33

I love the approach to collaborating with other organizations. It's so smart, not trying to take everything on, but being laser focused on "What is our unique perspective, and then how do we get all these other organizations together, and better than the sum of the parts?" It feels like there's this new generation of nonprofits, maybe not since the pandemic, but I don't know the last decade or two, but understand that they don't all have to be monolithic, that they each come in from a very unique perspective.

T Timothy S. Davis 50:56

Yeah.

C Cheryl Platz 50:57

"What does this group of organizers bring? How does this group of organizers, work with this group of organizers and collectively, how do we solve problems? What do you think is unique about black and gaming's perspective?" When you mentioned, like, partnering with these other groups at GDC, like, what's your specialty?

T

Timothy S. Davis 51:13

In particular there is a focus on, I think this, like educational aspect and community building in particular, because, as you mentioned, right? A lot of us had kind of conversations over the like, you know, half decade, and plus, like, early on, there was not a lot of different people that were creating organizations help these issues, right? You had one maybe, because you had to find people, right? And there was a lot of opportunity for us to even stay in the industry for a while, right? And so over the years, now it's like a lot of different orgs that have popped up who have this type, you know, intersectionality of it all. So it's like, okay, there's a group for women in gaming, there's a group for Black women in gaming, specifically as a group for just Black and gaming, right? And all these different groups. And so we have kind of taken, you know, myself and others we've been talking about, like, how can we collaborate more? Because we don't have to do everything at just one organization. We have specialties. You know, our specialty, for example, the educational aspect, and like helping to provide space and resource is, like, a big thing, because there's not a lot of bridging of gaps between college or high school and like becoming a professional, and then also the other part, largely as well as like, support for Black creators. So just with our community space as a whole, it's provided a supportive space for early career and mid career creators, right? To like, have people to talk to, have people to learn from, and hopefully find mentorship along the way. And we're trying to expand that effort more to provide for, you know, all pieces of, you know, someone's career as they become senior, you know, everyone there's- to level up, you need some push. You need someone to help pull you along sometimes, otherwise, it's really hard. And so we're doing more stuff to support that effort in a way that's, like, more systemic, or, like, more intentional, and so that's part of it. But then we collaborate with people like Black Voices in Gaming, who've had a big focus on providing money opportunity and showcase opportunity for indies. So collaborating with them on like, "How can we help elevate their work? How can their stuff elevate more of what we're doing? And how can we bring in more funding," and all that kind of stuff, you know. So we're still figuring out all the, like the jigsaw puzzle, so to speak, like where everything fits, and how to make sure all that happens, but we're doing it. And I think that's like, really important part is, like the intention of making sure that we're all doing pieces of that puzzle, sharing, so to speak, along the way.

C

Cheryl Platz 53:37

That's great. Thank you for walking me through that. And again, it was such a clear vision.

E

Enduring Play Computer 53:42

Podcast level 15: teaching video games at the University of Southern California.

C

Cheryl Platz 53:50

Speaking of education, you recently started teaching at USC. Is that right?

T

Timothy S. Davis 53:54

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. University of Southern California, yeah, yeah. Their games program.

C

Cheryl Platz 53:59

Can you talk a little bit about that addition to your already considerable resume?

T

Timothy S. Davis 54:04

Yeah, I just started teaching this semester as an adjunct professor. I think it's a course that's focused on game production and design. So there's students, they group up at the beginning of the semester, and they have to finish a project by the end of the semester, groups of two, and it's been a fun experience so far. I got kind of inspired by a few other colleagues of mine who were at Brass Lion also, and they had been doing some teaching at USC over the past couple of years. I think they're alumni as well. So I kind of started to take this stint from non AAA work for a while, and kind of going independent and doing this studio stuff on my own, I had, you know, some space. And I was like, "Oh, let me see, you know about adjunct stuff and trying out the teaching process." I kind of do some light teaching, so to speak, in all the projects that I'm in, if I'm working with people who are not at the same level as me, right? In terms of showing good production process and showing the design and documentation and how to have those like proper soft skill conversations in particular. And so I thought a natural thing was, okay, we could try the teaching thing and do that there, in a way. And so it's been a good experience. So far, I started doing that and had a good class of students and a lot of interesting games that they're working on, and just trying to kind of navigate that, the process of being a teacher, and how that comes along me being called a professor, you know, so that's been pretty interesting. I might, I might also I might teach next semester as well, kind of have some conversations about that. So, but yeah, it's been an interesting way of, like, taking all the things that I've been doing and learning and still learning, and bringing it to the bringing it to the students, and also giving them some industry perspective along the way. Since I'm still making stuff right, I think it's important for teachers to have some perspective in the actual, like, world of the industry, you know, as much as possible, too.

C

Cheryl Platz 55:57

Thank you. Well, your students are lucky to have you, and I very much connect with the perspective of, like, ah, yeah. I'm also still learning the things, because in my own teaching perspective, one of my favorite things is when my students do their their end of quarter presentations about the games they've done case studies on I'm like, "I have learned some things about games I have not played yet, and perspectives." And it always expands my horizons. But every year -

T Timothy S. Davis 56:21  
True.

C Cheryl Platz 56:21  
People's perspective on gaming changes. They're always the same age, but I'm getting and that's a gift, right? Like, it challenges me more every year to like, "Nope, gotta update my perspective. Gotta research a little bit harder, gotta push the content different ways."

E Enduring Play Computer 56:39  
Podcast level 16, the pre production soap box.

C Cheryl Platz 56:44  
I was just talking with another educator. You mentioned documentation, and you're teaching. You mentioned production was a role in the course. I'm gonna get on a soapbox for a minute, because we are both practitioners. We're in the space, we're doing the stuff. And I don't know if you run into this, but as somebody who runs game teams. Sometimes I'm like, "Hello, let's do some ideation. I would like you to document your ideas." And I get some resistance, like, you know, "Hey, this is slowing me down. Hey, this feels like a lot of process," you know. And what I was telling somebody else was like, I'm grateful that I've done this enough that I have the faith to slow it down up front, it speeds us up later. But I wonder, what like is this, something that you've run into, like, what's your take on documentation? Because in an agile world, right? Like, we're up against, like, also: agile exists. We're being told we should do sprints and we should just be lightweight as heck. And so we have this sort of conflict. I mean, when I started doing game development, it was like, here's my my 60 page game design document, with all of its satellite, like, game design documents. And then I came back into game design. I was like, "Where did- we're just vibes now?"

T

**Timothy S. Davis 57:52**

Vibes. oh boy, oh boy. Yeah, that's so true. That's so true. You know, at least for this class so far is interesting because it's a games program. But not everybody in my class is in the games program, right? I have a couple film students. Have a couple of students who are like, CS or art students, so it's kind of a mix of that. And so some of them have done the process before, and some of them haven't, as far as, like, making a game or doing the whole production, you know, process. You know, my course is based on -largely our main text is A Playful Production Process by Richard LaMarchand, great book. I never read it when I was in school, you know, I started off with the Art Of Game Design as like my Bible, and then kind of learned the production as we went in our classes, but looking at us, oh, yeah, that's all the right things, yes, that's perfect, you know. And so at least in our assignments. Well, you know, we've, like, made it so that they've had to do these processes and, like, you know, submit them to me to review, right, to make sure it's like, "Hey, this is, this is enough detail, or is like, Oh, y'all didn't explain anything here." And making them, like, think about it. And so I'll have to, like, talk with them. At the end they'll say, like, "Hey, do you think this helped right, as far as- to make your games right?" Because we check, we I check with them every week. They check their work. They have a new build for their game to look at. And so some of them have done better than others in terms of cohesion of their experience. And I think the ones who have done the best job have had the most information up front, right, and the most research up front, right? That was like, "Oh yeah, there's going to be like, Here they're going they're gonna be mechanics. Here's some of the reference material of the what they look like. Here's some of the level ideas that we have, right? And kind of having a good vision of that up front," versus the ones who kind of, like middling a little bit, and, you know, that went on as like, "oh yeah, this is not this. And, oh, okay. Like, there's not as much here" because, you know, and having to kind of give them a little bit more guidance along the way, of, like, "Hey, move this direction. Or think about, or did you already think about this stuff? You know? Did you think about these levels? How many do you want to have? What's going to happen in them? Right?" You only have too many weeks left, you know. So.

E

**Enduring Play Computer 59:57**

Podcast level 17: Simpler scoping for better games.

C

**Cheryl Platz 1:00:02**

And there's this truth around, like, prototyping is great, right? But how many games have prototyped themselves to death? I'm not going to point out any names, any games or companies I've worked at, but, like, we can be too precious. Sometimes, if you don't have a full idea, you can go and explore things. But sometimes it's - simplicity is great. Simplicity is great. That is,

T Timothy S. Davis 1:00:16  
Simplicity is good.

C Cheryl Platz 1:00:18

I have said that sentence many times this week alone. Just friends, friends, clarity is gift sent. Do one? Do one or two things really well. Instead of this laundry list of things, sort of a lot, especially when you have a lot of people trying to collaborate on something, and two people isn't a lot, but it is also a lot because they are two different humans with two different ideas about stuff. So if you have a clearly identified idea, or one or two clearly identified ideas, your odds of success are much higher than "Here is my complicated List of 72 points of game design." Good luck with that.

T Timothy S. Davis 1:00:53

It's so true. And it's interesting, because I help host game jams on their annual basis, either like tiny ones or, like, longer ones, you know, and it's been like a continued process since in the last four years or so, I think, at this point, outlining process of a game jam, and also, like, recommendations of how to do a game jam and how to maximize your time and how to handle production for a jam with your team. And like, not over scope, right? Not do too much. How many people are you going to have on your team? Have on your team, right? Okay, this is how much time you have. Remember, this is submission window. This is your creative window, right? And you need to move into the space, right? And here's how much time you have during the week, because you're also not doing the Game Jam every day. And these kinds of things, you know. It's a process of, like, elimination, of like, how many people do you have? And then, okay, cut back your expectations of what you can get done. You know, same thing for the class, right? It's like, hey, that's too much!

C Cheryl Platz 1:01:50  
Cut it back, cut it back!

T Timothy S. Davis 1:01:51  
Yeah,

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:01:51  
it's always okay to make people wanting more, right? But if you bite off more you could chew and you never finish it, then people will never want anything, because they will never be able to buy your game.

**T** Timothy S. Davis 1:02:01  
They'll never see it.

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:02:02  
And THAT is the industry for the last 20 years.

**T** Timothy S. Davis 1:02:05  
That's true. It's very true.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 1:02:10  
Final Boss level jam with your peers to find yourself

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:02:20  
Well, we're almost out of time. On that note, because you mentioned, you know, you're on your path to your education. You're doing game jams. Do you have any advice for people at that stage of the journey, doing early, early career, doing the smaller games, doing the game jams. Like, is there anything you wish you had known early on that you think could save people some time and pain.

T

Timothy S. Davis 1:02:41

So interesting. Yeah, you know, I started doing game stuff a little late. I mean, it could have been earlier, I feel like, and I could have, like, been a even better designer early on, right? Because I started in grad school. Technically, I did a little bit of stuff in undergrad, but it was not super formal. And so, you know, all the lessons I learned in grad school was like, oh, man, I wish I would have started some of this stuff. Started some of this stuff earlier, right? As far as, like, making a portfolio, right? And just, like, just making games with people, just purely just getting people together and making stuff together and exploring the tool sets and stuff like that. And so I always kind of advocate for, like, get started and make stuff with people, right? But I think early career wise, it's so tricky right now, because there's this dynamic of, you know, people trying to get into the industry as get their first job, which is a crapshoot, always kind of been a crapshoot, but even more now, right? And so that's a tricky dynamic that is, for that, at this moment, the thing that I keep falling back on is just getting together with other people who are doing that. And like, working together, and trying to find people of like mind to make things together and support each other in this process. And, of course, try to stay creative about how you apply your skill sets and things that you're interested in and you know, things that you have learned in in school or personally, in the game process, and like, thinking of ways that can be applied in different scenarios and for different opportunities.

T

Timothy S. Davis 1:04:07

Because, as we talked about earlier, with the consultation and like, the culturalization stuff, is the hard thing now, more so than what it's been in the past - it feels like for all creatives - is that we have to be our own advocates, even more than what we've had to do in the past. As far as like, knowing what we do, knowing the value in what we bring, and making sure other people understand it, too. And it takes time to figure that out, and it also takes a skill to like, chip away at that and how to present that and how to explain it to other people, and we have to do it in a way that's also online these days as well. And so as creatives, people who are indie and getting into the industry their first job, it feels like it's almost a requirement now that we have to be attentive to that piece of the puzzle. And, you know, do it with friends, do it solo. So I think that's the thing at this point that feels like valuable is to kind of keep that in mind. You know, be an advocate for yourself as much as you can, and try to find other people to do that stuff with in that process, who you can talk to, you can practice with and excel in that way. And I'm hoping that with the work that I'm doing personally, with our studio, with our nonprofit stuff, that we're also providing spaces for people to get that practice and get that experience and work with people like in like minded ways to level up, you know, either to get the job or to get the work opportunities or make work opportunities in that process.

C Cheryl Platz 1:05:41

Especially now that's such a great tie to the theme I'm trying to get for the podcast, which is that community, right? Like you're talking about connecting people. You're like, yeah, find people your peers, not the people like 20 years. Find people in the past with you now to build things with you now to help you figure out who you are, and to build that portfolio, to build that, build that collection of work you're proud of.

E Enduring Play Computer 1:06:04

Bonus level: proudest work.

C Cheryl Platz 1:06:08

On that note, I one last question I'll ask, What work are you most proud of?

T Timothy S. Davis 1:06:11

Oh man, I mean, it feels like there's a lot of things

C Cheryl Platz 1:06:15

That's good, that's a good problem to have!

T

Timothy S. Davis 1:06:16

Yeah, right. It's true. It's true. It's true. And there's different things I'm proud of for different reasons. So I'll say that as a creative in games, at the moment, I'm most proud of and I hope people will be able to see it, because it's not released yet, but I am very proud of the work I did at brass lion with the Wu-Tang action RPG, because I think that project represents the combination of all the things that I've kind of talked about today, from as a from a cultural perspective, from a gameplay perspective, from a narrative perspective, and from a intention. It is a is something that combines those things together in a in a way that's in a really nice package for everybody to enjoy. And so I do hope that when that releases, people will be able to experience that as a creative work. Obviously, worked on a lot of amazing projects, but that one takes everything into the pot, and so I'm very proud of that work. And then, of course, I think also largely, just like the community that we've built over the past five years or so in our Discord spaces, and just like the people that have been able to we've met and have been able to make connections, and that continued building of that community space, it was I remember when it was not much, and how hard that was, and how hard it was to keep it going. And been really beautiful to see how things have been blossoming and kind of take their own energy over time.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:07:39

I will keep my fingers crossed that we will all be able to see that culmination of all of the things you talked with us about sooner rather than later,

E

Enduring Play Computer 1:07:49

Loading final podcast level: links and follow up.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:07:53

How can people follow your work or participate in the communities you mentioned? We talked about your- the Clock Out At 2. We talked about Black In Gaming, like if people want to look into your class or follow you personally, and the Melanated Game Kitchen, so many things. What would you recommend?

T

Timothy S. Davis 1:08:07

Yeah, that you can find me on blue sky. Think I have some stuff on IG at Tim statis, T, I m S, T, A, T, I s on those platforms, and probably other platforms you can find our work on Black in Gaming, blackingamingfoundation.com and just look us up on Black in Gaming support us there, donate all that kind of stuff. And then for the Melanated Game Kitchen, we're on itch.IO, and also they're connected to most of my links as well. So just look us up on on Google. You'll find us there. We're also on YouTube. We'll be doing some video content soon, and also launching a Patreon for people to kind of get inside, look at what we're up to, and also the culturalization process and analysis games and those kinds of things, and curation, especially curating interesting games for people check out that they maybe haven't thought about and why they should check it out. So we'll be doing some of that stuff. Clock out at two: we're on Steam. Give us a wish list. We're we haven't announced a release date yet, but we're hoping towards the end of the year, if we're lucky, but we will be launching a Kickstarter spring, is our plan. So just keep an eye out for that. We have a newsletter and all that kind of stuff. So check us out on steam and yeah, hopefully ya'llll will be able to play updated demo soon.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:09:19

Can't wait. Well, thank you so much for your time today. This was such a fascinating discussion for me, and I learned a lot. And there's - I can't wait to play your game.

T

Timothy S. Davis 1:09:29

Appreciate it, Cheryl.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:09:30

And see the evolution of your educational work too. So thank you so much for your time. Timothy,

T

Timothy S. Davis 1:09:35

Likewise, thank you so much. I enjoyed it a lot.

C

### Cheryl Platz 1:09:37

Yes, continue exploring the craft of game development with my book that inspired this podcast, *The Game Development Strategy Guide* available worldwide from your favorite online bookseller or from my publisher, [rosenfeldmedia.com](http://rosenfeldmedia.com) and during play, listeners can get 15% off@rosenfeldmedia.com through July. July, 31 2026 using the code enduring play s2 check out season one of this podcast for the interviews that helped inspire the book, or tune in next time for interviews that help expand our understanding of what it takes to create games that don't just survive but thrive. I'm your host. Cheryl Platz, until next time, keep thriving,

E

### Enduring Play Computer 1:10:23

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