

Josh Knipstein

Game Design Lead - Gameplay, Level & Systems Design

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Game Design Lead with 8+ years across gameplay, level, and systems design. I've led teams through world builds and full game loops, shipped player-facing creation tools used by a full dev team, and mentored designers at every studio I've worked at. Comfortable owning a feature from concept through live iteration, and leading cross-functional teams to ship it.

EXPERIENCE



CREATE AVALON CORP | Remote/Orlando, FL

Lead Game Designer | Nov 2024 - June 2026

AVALON

Unreal Engine 5 | PC | MMORPG | UGC

- Served as main vision holder and primary design liaison between the C-Suite and internal dev team, coordinating priorities across design, engineering, art, and production.
- Took full ownership of Avalon's player-facing UGC toolset (Creator Mode) post-Vertical Slice, leading a ground-up revamp of the HUD, controls, and core interaction systems. Redesigned existing mechanics, resolved pain points identified during the VS, and introduced new features to bring Creator Mode from prototype to a polished, shippable state.
- Led world-building and population of Elysara (6 km²), Avalon's first playable world. Defined pathways and POI layouts across 11 zones, set zone level bands for progression pacing, and established the roadmap for transitioning the team into a Cyberpunk-themed world.
- Designed Avalon's Land Claims system allowing players to claim and customize plots of land that dynamically load per server, including boundary visuals, placement audio, and an MVP claims management menu.
- Designed and balanced the Harvesting & Crafting loop, establishing collectible standards, tool requirements, and resource quantities, and tuning resource spawns across maps to match per-zone player level bands.
- Mentored designers through regular 1:1s and feedback sessions, fostering skill development and professional growth.

Game Designer II | March 2022 - Nov 2024

AVALON

Unreal Engine 5 | PC | MMORPG | UGC

- Joined as the first designer at a remote-first startup; established standardized practices for documentation, design reviews, and playtesting. Co-authored the project GDD to align product vision, core pillars, and onboarding standards.
- Designed and documented the foundational systems underpinning Creator Mode, including object placement, real-time collaborative editing for up to 25 simultaneous users, and the physics and snapping systems that made iterative building feel intuitive.
- Designed the Prefab System which allowed creation, sharing, and editing of grouped content where up to 1,500 unique assets could be combined into a single shareable prefab, fully remixable by players.
- Designed Merlin, an in-game visual scripting system that let players build custom gameplay logic like monster spawners, teleporters, and timers through a no-code, card-based system of events and actions.
- Served as product owner for all building kits, managing internal and external art teams from inception to ship. Personally oversaw Village, Dungeon, Castle, and Cyberpunk Skyscraper kits; identifying assets per kit, reviewing revisions, and ensuring quality and gameplay standards were met across a multi-genre asset library.

- Established building block standards defining dimensions, magnet point placement, and interchange rules for every structural asset type (walls, floors, foundations, roofs, etc.), enabling themed kits to be fully cross-compatible. Co-built an Editor Utility Widget that automated asset ingestion by tagging blocks with type, kit, size, and properties, reducing asset integration from a manual engineering task to something any team member could perform.



Cyberdream VR | Orlando, FL

Senior Game Designer | January 2021 - March 2022

Emerge Home

Unity | VR | Multiplayer | Social | Party

- Served as senior designer on the project, running it day to day with the producer and leading the minigame team, building a multiplayer VR social platform for the Quest 2 around a custom haptic peripheral that emitted sound waves players could physically feel.
- Designed 5 Mario Party-style minigames each built around a unique mechanic combining hand tracking with haptic feedback (e.g., pulling back to throw a dart, with peripheral intensity increasing as draw distance increased).
- Designed the platform's social layer: 2 themed gathering rooms with seating and chess, connected to Emmerge Party, the hub where players could launch into minigames together.

Level Designer | September 2018 - December 2020

Virtual Battlegrounds

Unity | VR | Multiplayer | FPS

- Designed, integrated, and optimized 6 POIs across a 4 km² map, including major set pieces like a warehouse district, asylum, and mid-sized town.
- Owned the full POI lifecycle from Probuilder blockout to final playable state; established POI guidelines and supervised intern designers on smaller implementations.
- Pitched and led implementation of a zipline traversal system built around a network of transmission towers, each featuring a designed defensible platform. Laid out the full tower network across the map and supplemented it with point-to-point ziplines within POIs for shorter traversal boosts.
- Designed and balanced loot distribution across the map, assigning tiered loot to POIs to drive player routing and risk/reward decisions; tuned ring closure mechanics for improved game feel and pacing.
- Used Vegetation Studio Pro to define and implement 6 biomes across the map, establishing per-biome foliage types, spawn density, and orientation rules; modeled and integrated environmental props and set pieces.
- Contributed level design, asset work, and documentation to three additional contract projects: an asymmetric VR/mobile horror game, a military TC3 medical training simulation, and a safe-driving VR simulation.

SKILLS & TOOLS

Design: Systems Design, World & Level Design, UGC Gameplay & Tools, Combat Design, Blockouts, UI/UX Prototyping, Design Documentation

Engines & Tech: Unreal Engine 5, Unreal Engine 4, Unity, Blueprint Visual Scripting, Unreal PCG, HLOD & World Streaming

Tools: Confluence, Jira, Plastic SCM, Perforce, Autodesk Maya, Adobe Photoshop, AdobeXD, Miro, Probuilder

Leadership: Cross-functional team direction, stakeholder communication, mentorship, usability evaluation, sprint planning

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Bronze Award - Steam Best of 2020 VR Games, *Virtual Battlegrounds*

Best Game Designer - UCF School of Visual Arts & Design 2018

Best Student Game - Serious Games Showcase & Challenge at I/ITSEC 2017, *Tootin' Pooches*

Shipped Titles - Virtual Battlegrounds (2020, VR), Emmerge Home (2022, VR), Avalon (2026, closed alpha)

EDUCATION

Digital Media B.A - Game Design | University of Central Florida | 2013 - 2018