

Could you please present yourself to our readers?

Hi, I'm Gabriel, I'm the creator of Jettomero: Hero of the Universe.

What's your background in videogame industry?

It's been a cool journey. My first industry job was working at Electronic Arts doing QA. I did that for several summers while I was going to school for video production. When I graduated I kept working there for a while but there didn't seem like any opportunities to move into other areas, so I quit. Less than a year after that I got a job doing QA at a much smaller AAA studio, Slant Six Games. Fortunately at that studio they were much more nurturing so I had a chance to learn a lot more about the tools, specifically in audio which was my main interest. Eventually I got promoted to be a sound designer and started playing with Unity a bit, but shortly after that the whole studio went under. Since I didn't have enough experience to get a job elsewhere as a sound designer, I decided to spend my unemployment learning Unity, so I made my first game in ~6 months, which was a tough learning process but also very fun and rewarding. I published on mobile, PC and Ouya. After that I managed to get a job working for one person, doing creativity apps for kids, which gave me a great opportunity to continue to build my experience and skills in Unity. I was always working on my own projects on the side too, so eventually that job ended which was when I got serious about finishing Jettomero.

Do you play games nowadays or work is too much to allow it? If yes, what are you currently playing, and what's the 5 games stuck in your memory, be they good or not.

Playing games is very important to me, both for my mental health and for research, so I try to play something every night. Lately I'll admit I've just been playing a lot of Rocket League, but normally I try to play a range of things. Looking back over the last 6 months... I was hooked on Tharsis most recently, it's essentially a digital board game but extremely challenging. I finished Humans Fall Flat the other week which was a lot of fun, especially playing co-op. Donut County was a well executed premise too. Gorogoa was amazing, really unique puzzles and beautiful artwork. And I loved Prey, I'm a sucker for Sci-fi.

What would be your dreamed game?

It's difficult to say because sometimes I want something casual and other times I really want to dig into a game for weeks. I'm not big on online in general, but I love more unique online interactions like in Journey, or even a game like Dark Souls. I think my dream game would involve some kind of interesting online component that is non-competitive or cooperative in some way, but plays on ideas around human interaction. I think games present a very unique way for people to bridge their differences through sculpted interactions and I've love to see that expanded in future games.

What do you enjoy outside of video game?

I love making music. I have a home studio with a collection of small synthesizers that I've been slowly growing. I find it very relaxing to create live electronic music. I also love playing board games and card games with friends. It's a fun way to socialize. And I guess I try to watch a lot of movies too, partly for research and partly for fun.

How much time did you take to complete the game?

When I started working on Jettomero I was working a full-time job, so development was pretty slow at the start. But overall it probably came to around 2 years to finish everything from concept to publishing.

In the Reddit's AMA, you told people you had limited artistic capabilities, yet your game looks like no other and has a welcome simplicity in its drawings and an efficiency that makes nearly all screens a work of art. Is it false modesty, lack of perspective to truly judge oneself or just a goal you're reaching for not yet attained? If it's the latter, on what are you workin' to improve yourself?

I don't think I'd be able to get a job as an artist, because I don't have the experience or technical skills. I know how to do 3D modelling, but it's all self-taught so I'm not very efficient. I know how to use photoshop pretty well, but my drawing skills aren't anything special. I will say that I have a good eye for things, so in my tinkering with designs, I know when I've found something that works well. So if I keep my art within a set of constraints I think it can stand up, I'm just not a robust visual artist so much. Jettomero ended up looking the way it did mostly because that was the best and only way I could make it work. The more work I do the better I get, but since I'm so often bouncing around between design, code, music, art, etc, I don't have a lot of time to focus on my artistic abilities, so I'm always looking for unique angles that play to my strengths and simplicity.

What influences did you have at the beginning of the development? Did they evolve during the life of the project? Your game reminded me a lot of the Twilight Zone and sci-fi stuff of that time period.

Originally it was going to be a pretty simple 2D mobile game about never being able to win, and accidentally killing lots of tiny people. But then I wanted to make a game borrowing elements from Proteus, Hohokum and SoundShapes, so it became a mash up of those directions. As the art and gameplay took shape I started incorporating a bigger vision, and took things a lot deeper. I definitely looked into a lot of references from the history of sci-fi, and as things started to develop a distinct flavour I would hone that based on other similar examples. It was a very organic process, so things were constantly shifting in all areas of development based on new sources of inspiration.

The dichotomy between this peaceful robot full of good will, the quietness of space and the destruction the player can do is one major thing in the game. Which came first in your mind? Was it planned like this since the beginning?

The tragic/comedic destruction was the starting point I think. But as soon as I started making the game, I knew that I wanted it to revolved around a beautiful and musical universe, so that it could be a relaxing experience too. It was a nice balance to the sad nature of the game's protagonist. It let me dig pretty deep into some dark places while still maintaining a calm and uplifting feeling.

Is the story totally imagined or did you build on personal experiences?

I don't think anything is based on particular experiences of mine, but certainly there's inspiration taking from my fears and anxieties. In some ways maybe writing Jettomero's story was therapeutic for me as well. The story is also definitely inspired by human history as well.

Positive subversion could be a good sentence to describe the story of the game. Is it something you felt, you wanted to tell? Or is just me?

Absolutely. I think I'm an existentialist, but I don't appreciate nihilism. They're both similar in some ways, but existentialism feels empowering where nihilism is hopelessness. I find it's incredibly liberating to identify the natural absence of meaning to life, and to then be able to choose your own meaning and live by those rules. It's not always easy, but feels like the path

of greatest freedom. There were a few different things I was trying to subvert with Jettomero but I tried not to dwell on cynicism for too much of it, and wanted to give players the power to feel like they could push through their fears and failures.

What meaning(s) do you want the player to get at the end of the game? From the user reviews you have certainly read since the releases of the game, do you think your goal was a success? If no, what would you do differently?

I didn't necessarily want to send any specific messages by the end, but I wanted to create an emotional and philosophical setting where players might be able to think about some of the themes in a meaningful way. It's hard to say whether this was a success, since I think many players may not have been looking for an experience like this so they never found it, but hearing from a few people I think there have been meaningful experiences, and that feels like success to me. I don't know if I would have done much differently. I think video games have a long way to go in creating meaningful dialogs the way many films do.

What's what the hardest part of the development? The easiest? The more fun? The more boring? And why?

I think the hardest part of development might be trying to take all your ideas and finding an effective way to combine them, while removing concepts that might not work, and adjusting your vision as you go. Making a cohesive experience was something I struggled with on this game, given how unconventional it was in many ways. The easiest part of development and the most fun is probably always prototyping new ideas. It's an opportunity for pure creativity and it's all about opening doors to new possibilities, letting your ideas flow freely. The most boring part of development is definitely finishing the game and preparing it for launch, especially when you have to work on ports and fix up things so that it runs properly across all platforms. There's no creativity at this point and you just want to get the project out the door.

Are you satisfied with the released game? Is there things you would do differently if your current self could give advice to your former one?

In some ways I feel like Jettomero may have been flawed from the start, but based on what I set out to accomplish with the experience I don't think there's really anything I would have changed. I'm still very proud of the finished game, and the whole process taught me a lot along the way so I think it was an important experience for informing my future projects.

Nindies didn't put Jettomero upfront, at least in their European videos. Did you contact them? If yes, do you have advice for fellow developers who would like to benefit for these kind of promotion?

I didn't even know about Nindies at the time. I should have tried to contact them, and maybe I still will. I was very fortunate to have Nintendo put my trailer on their youtube channel when the game launched, which has helped get a lot more eyes on the game. I don't think I'm especially good at promoting my work, but I'd encourage other developers to always seek out every possible opportunity for showcasing their games.

Are the sales figures from your game enough to live and work on your next project? If you have the Switch sales numbers, is the Switch wizardry (indies selling better on this platform) doing its effect?

Since I went fully independent (~21 months now), I've lost money, but sales are still helping me quite a lot. I don't think Jettomero will ever be able to support me fully, but I saved up money from my last job so I might be able to finish another project before I need to look for a

full-time job again. After the opening weekend on the Switch the sales haven't been exceptional, it looks like I've sold just over 350 copies so far, which more than covers my expenses for porting the game, but will only cover a couple months of rent beyond that so far. I'm still optimistic that the Switch release will find a more receptive audience eventually.

What are your plans for the future? Do you have a videogame project in the pipes? Could you tell us more about it if possible?

I've been working on a new prototype since May, which I'll hopefully be able to continue with full-time until it is finished. I'm taking some ideas from Jettomero, but this time I'm trying to create something that might appeal to a larger audience, and address a lot of the complaints that people had about Jettomero. The premise of the game is to breed and mutate kaiju-like monsters in a lab and then send them out on missions to destroy cities. So far I'm really excited with how it's coming along. I think it should be a lot of fun, but definitely a very different game from Jettomero.

What advice would you give to new indie's developers?

The biggest advantage you'll have as a small indie is that you can afford to take risks that big studios can't. So make something unique. Don't kill yourself trying to make the game, because there's no guarantee that it's going to pay off. The most important thing is to have fun with it; it will show if you love what you make. If you're making your first game, don't try to make anything too big. By the time you're finished you'll have learned a ton and will be much better equipped for making something even better next time.

What's happening in Vancouver? Between Klei, Red Hook and you, there seems to be a very active videogame scene releasing pure jewels (and we're probably forgettin' some due to our french location). Do you kill the bad developers of the area? If yes, do you feed them to Pacific' sharks?

Yeah, there's some amazing studios and smaller teams/indies here in Vancouver and I'm lucky enough to have been able to get to know a lot of these people over the last few years. It's generally a great place to be making games right now with the size of the community, and there's a lot of job opportunities for the industry here which makes me feel a lot safer taking risks with my own games. As far as I know no one has been fed to the sharks yet.

Lastly, but not the least, between Jettomero and Jaegers from Pacific Rim or Godzilla, who would win?

Jettomero is technically indestructible, so whatever the fight looked like, I think Jettomero would probably end up coming out on top, even if it was an accident. That's assuming you're talking about all of them fighting. If they were competing to walk in a straight line then I don't think Jettomero would stand a chance.