





# #9

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**Special Thanks**

To everyone who has waited patiently. Thank you for bearing with us whilst we took the time to prepare for year three. We promise to keep bringing you Debug long into the future!

**The Fine Print**

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to a T

The creative genius behind *Katamari Damacy* and *Noby Noby Boy* on leaving playground-style games behind to find the project he always wanted to make: *to a T*.



RELEASED  
MAY  
2025

# THE EMPYREAL MARCH

## MASSIVE WEAPONS AND MYSTERIOUS MONOLITHS? EMPYREAL HAS US INTRIGUED

**N**ot heard of Silent Games? You would be forgiven for that, as *Empyreal* is this Newcastle-based developer's first game. Set up in 2018, Silent Games was born from a love of Action RPGs, and that's the genre they're currently focusing on.

Usually, the quickest and easiest way to understanding something is to go straight to its creator, so here's *Empyreal*'s Creative Director, Joseph Rogers, to explain more about the game: "In a nutshell, *Empyreal* is a third-person Action RPG about transcendental revelation." Hmm, okay. That might need a bit more explaining...

You play a character that's been called up for an assignment. A monolith has been discovered on an alien planet, and assuming there's likely to be a bit of ruckus of biblical proportions, you've been hired to go in, clear the place out and uncover its mysteries.

Taken from a recent developer playthrough video, Rogers said: "The goal was to create something that felt so strange and so unusual, some of the inspirations being megalithic architecture in the real world. When you look at some of the structures they have in South America or Egypt, the truth is that we still don't know how they built those things, so they can feel a bit strange and unsettling."

The game starts with a cut-scene explaining more about the story, then it's straight into a detailed character creator. This also includes a comprehensive 'Character Background' option,

including a personality breakdown. Character types include 'Charming Prankster', 'Morose Rogue' or – and this is our personal favourite – 'Inebriated Rambler'. But pleasingly, there is a point to all this, and the gameplay can vary depending on the character type you choose. When talking to NPCs, you'll occasionally be given the option to respond based on your character type – and the advice from the developers is that you should always choose this option to help build trust with the other characters in the game.

NPCs are important in *Empyreal*, as all the characters have their own quest lines, and they've all got multiple endings – so you never get the same playthrough each time you complete the game. Their adventure will develop alongside yours, and your interactions with them will have a direct effect on their outcome at the end of the game.

Each major NPC also had their own entry in *Empyreal*'s extensive Quest Log, so not only can you get a summary of your game, but you can also find

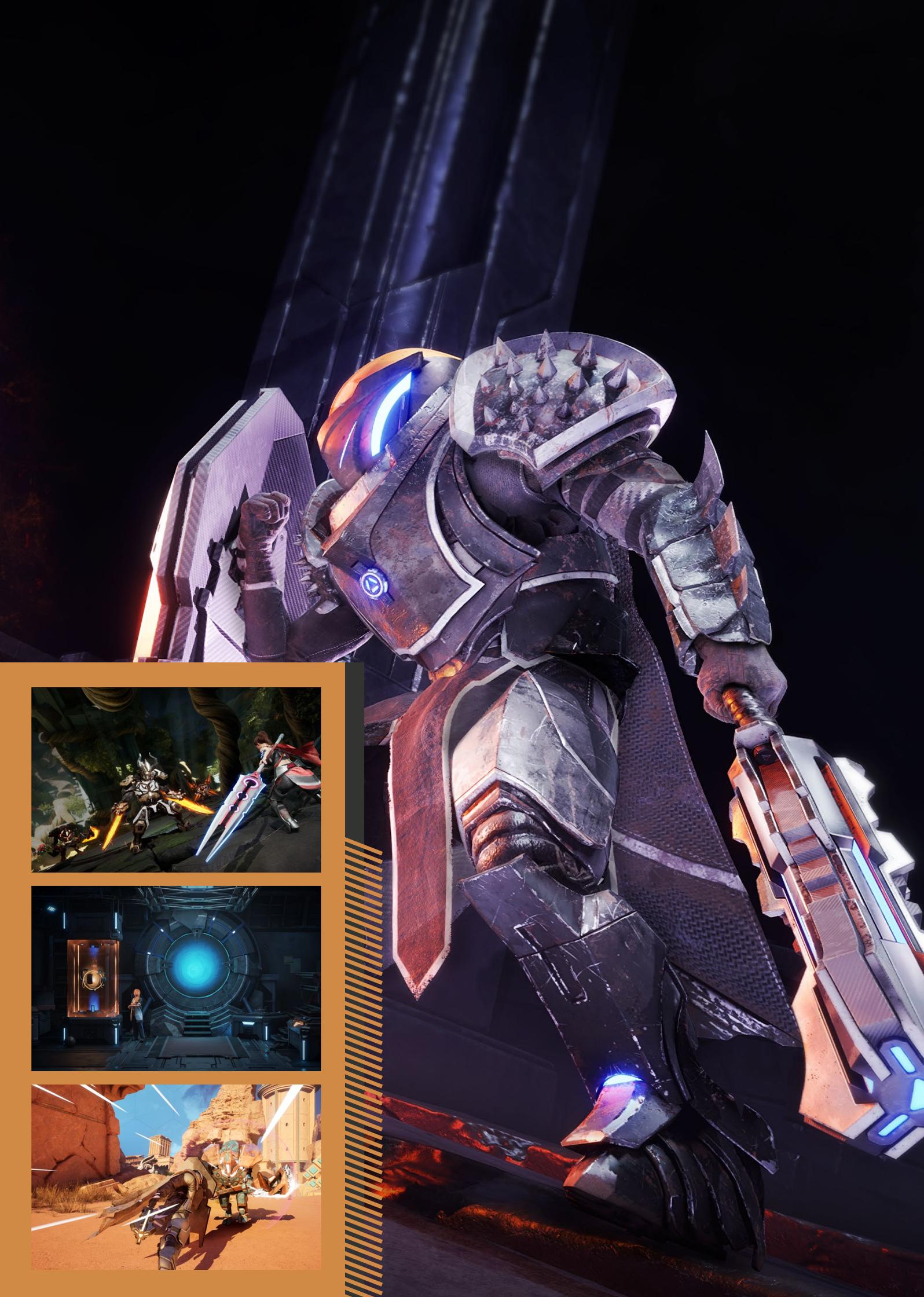
### INFO

**Developer**  
Silent Games

**Publisher**  
Secret Mode

**On**  
PC, PS5, Xbox  
Series X/S

**Demo**  
PC





# CAN I... MAKE A GAME?

YES YOU CAN

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GameMaker makes game design simple - all you need is an idea!  
Enjoy free tutorials and join an active community of creators.  
Follow in the footsteps of your favorite indie classics, such as  
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It's 100% free. No credit card required.



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# YOU GUYS NOT HAVE PHONES?

Here are some absolute mobile gems  
that you may possibly have missed

1

## TILE TALES: PIRATE

There are two types of mobile games: ones that are perfect to play on a small touchscreen, and ones that are ported from console/PC to phones and are often rather bobbins. Thankfully, *Tile Tales:*

*Pirate* is the former, and neatly avoids any bobbin-related woes.

After crash landing his boat on a mysterious island, our pirate hero must navigate said island looking for treasure, surviving an increasing hostile environment, and escaping with his

life and a fair stash of booty. As you can imagine, this is not a straightforward task.

There are nine areas in total and a whopping 90 levels to play through. Navigating through the areas/levels is done by sliding tiles around to carve out a path for the pirate to follow – a perfect gameplay mechanic for the touchscreen. These will direct you naturally to potential treasures, but you'll need cunning to avoid being eaten, crushed or cursed.

*Tile Tales: Pirate* has a great art style and the gameplay is perfectly suited to short phone-based bursts. Recommended.



WORDS JAMES LIGHTFOOT

# WHEN GAME DEV GOES

James Lightfoot is one half of Lightfoot Bros Games, publishers of *The Mystery of Woolley Mountain* and *Sleepytime Village*.



巫雷山  
奇遇记

# WRONG



It was 2015, and I felt an itch that I needed to scratch. I had a huge creative outlet through playing in a band but I felt I had another need; another desire to free myself from the shackles of corporate work. I wanted to make games again.

I say 'again' because I used to try making games when I was a chubby 10-year-old obsessed with my ZX Spectrum 48k+, feverishly typing in pokes and BASIC code from *Crash*, *Sinclair User* or *Your Sinclair*. I then set about making my own games, lovingly creating cassette artwork and boxes way before even writing a line of code (patience, we'll get to that). When I did start coding, my games were even more BASIC than BASIC, but I adored the process.

I made three games that I recall: 'Tagger', 'Cars: The Remix' (still unsure why it was called 'The Remix' – there is no sign of any other version), and 'Ghostbusters'. The latter was a text adventure in the style of *The Hobbit*; I think I only created seven screens, and you could type

anything into the text parser and successfully advance to the next screen. Needless to say, they were all awful, but they all had spectacular inlays.

Anyway, back to 2015. I started learning Unity, C#, and the ways of modern game development. After a couple of false starts, I found *Adventure Creator* on the Unity Asset Store and began my journey into creating my own point-and-click adventure game.

One successful Kickstarter later, I was deep into game dev life. Then I started making mistakes, and my game development was, unbeknown to me, going wrong. Oh, the price I would pay...

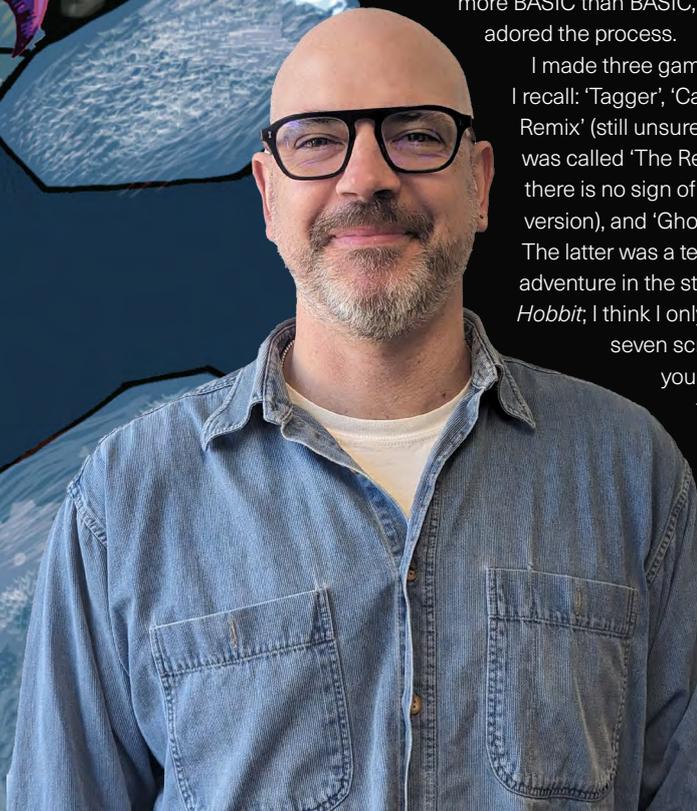
### ### V1 – WIREFRAME YOUR STORY

I have little patience – maybe it's undiagnosed ADHD – but as the coder, writer, and artist, I constantly jumped between tasks, mostly getting distracted by the art. Eager to see the game come to life, I spent too much time on backgrounds early on, only to later realise I needed new locations or puzzle tweaks, leading to wasted effort redrawing or scrapping assets. The lesson? Always wireframe everything first. Map out the entire game, test it thoroughly, and only start on final art once the story and puzzles are locked in, otherwise, you're setting yourself up for failure.

### ### V2 – HARD-CODING TEXT / CONSIDER LOCALISATION

I can forgive myself for missing this as a novice game dev, but it's still a BIG mistake that can affect everything.

Imagine this: You create a puzzle in your game using Scrabble pieces. The player collects pieces across different

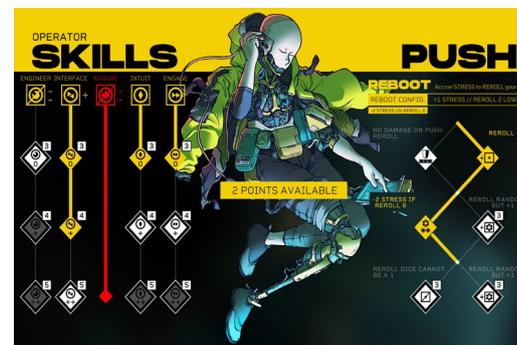




# ATMOSPHERIC AND ENGAGING, BUT CAN **CITIZEN SLEEPER 2: STARWARD VECTOR** IMPROVE ON THE ORIGINAL?

**C**itizen *Sleeper 2* builds upon its predecessor, delivering a strong sequel with an expansive narrative and improved gameplay. So it's fair to say that the answer to the question above is a resounding 'Aye', but I'm sure you won't be satisfied with that, so let's go into more detail about the game and its improvements over the very competent original *Citizen Sleeper*.

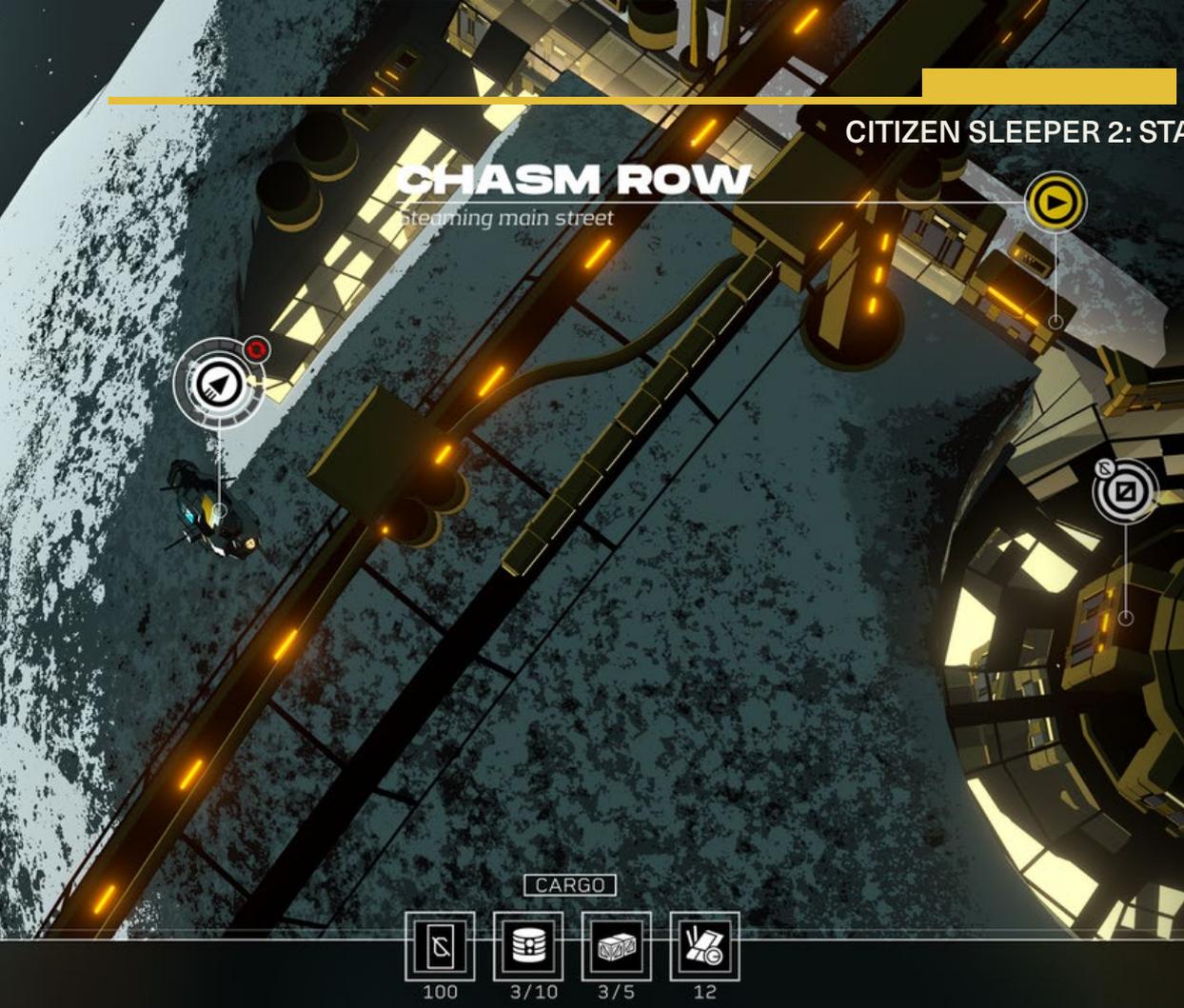
Players control a 'Sleeper', an emulated consciousness within an artificial body, navigating the lawless Starward Belt filled with colonies,



**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

**Neo Cab**  
A cyberpunk narrative about emotional survival in an automated world.

CITIZEN SLEEPER 2: STARWARD VECTOR



INFO

**Developer**  
Jump Over the Age

**Publisher**  
Fellow Traveller

**Price**  
£20.99 (PC version)

**Released**  
Out now

**On**  
PC (tested), PS4/5,  
Xbox Series, Switch

**Demo**  
PC



STUNNING WORLDS

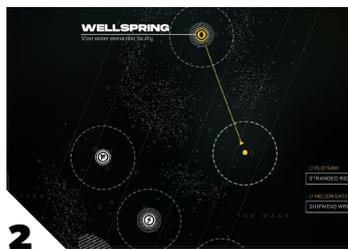
Astonishingly, when you consider how epic the gameworld in *Citizen Sleeper 2* is, the game has once again been created by one person: Gareth Damian Martin. He has been joined by renowned comic book artist, Guillaume Singelin and the superb composer Amos Roddy – both of whom also worked on the original game – but the coding and world creation is pretty much down to Gareth alone.

Gareth is the winner of GDCA and Indiecade awards, and has been nominated for a Games Award, multiple IGF Awards, a GDC Award, and four BAFTAs.

MORE INFO



1



2



3

stations, and pirate outposts. The game explores themes of capitalism, survival and what it means to be human, with every decision impacting the world around you.

The core RPG mechanic uses dice for skill checks, and rolls are influenced by various factors like health, stress and available resources. This refined dice-based system makes decisions more strategic, requiring you to balance your physical and mental state, faction standing and more with the resources at your disposal.

A new standout feature is the Ship and Crew system, where players recruit crew members with unique skills to accompany you and **help you tackle high-risk missions [1]**. Crew members also have their own personal status and stress, affecting both your success and relationships, so there is quite a bit to consider.

The game also offers greater freedom in exploration, with **multiple hubs to discover and factions to interact with [2]**. These provide diverse economic opportunities and challenges as you navigate the universe. Character interactions are deeper, with meaningful choices shaping the narrative.

**The visuals and soundtrack are great [3]**, enhancing the atmosphere with vibrant art and an ambient score that heighten the emotional stakes. *Citizen Sleeper 2* successfully blends narrative depth with strategic gameplay, improving on the original and offering an engaging experience for fans of interactive storytelling and resource management. [▶](#)



Daniel Crocker

**The Red Strings Club**  
Craft drinks and uncover secrets.

**Disco Elysium**  
A narrative-driven RPG with deep character interactions.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Jump Over the Age previously developed the prequel, *Citizen Sleeper*, focusing on escaping corporate control within a confined space station.

# SHIPPING YOUR GAME SOON? SAIL WITH PIRATE PR!



**WE'LL HELP PUT YOUR GAME  
ON THE MAP OF PRESS & CREATORS!**



**PIRATE PR**  
GAME MARKETING  
WE PUT THE **ARRR** IN PR



Marc Jowett brings us a whole load of **new stuff** to play on **old stuff**

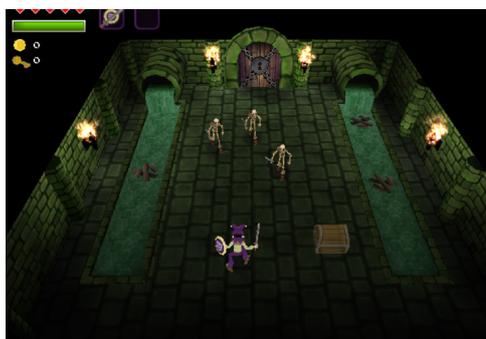


## HarleQuest!

**Developer** ORC FACE GAMES **Publisher** ORC FACE GAMES  
**Retro** DREAMCAST **Modern** STEAM **Released** 2025

**At the recent Debug Awards, I had a chance to have a go on the latest build of the ambitious 3D roguelike dungeon crawler *HarleQuest!* and have a chat with the Orc Face Games team.**

I am given a random weapon to start with, and in the build I played, it was either a sword, a bow and arrow or a sceptre – there are more weapons that eventually become available as you progress through each room. Developer Ross Kilgariff revealed to me that they plan on having



16 different weapons for the final release.

The random generation of your starting weapon adds an element of chance that can either help or hinder you. Some enemies are weak against certain weapon types, and some weapon types are weak against certain enemies. You could start a game as a killing machine or having to use stealth.

Talking of stealth, I learned very quickly that you cannot just go in gung-ho with *HarleQuest!*. You have to run at times but sometimes, you have to pick off enemies one at a time.

As I was getting to grips with obliterating the smaller enemies, a massive executioner suddenly appeared. He is slower than the rest as you would imagine, but the range of his weapon is huge. I have to choose my next move very wisely to avoid getting skewered.

Orc Face Games have the game running at a silky smooth 60fps on the Dreamcast, so *HarleQuest!* handles very well, which is good news for a dungeon crawler.

The attention to detail on the graphic side of things is a thing of beauty, with stone floors and the brickwork on the walls having a gorgeous amount of detail.

*HarleQuest!* runs on an engine that Orc Face Games have created specifically for the Dreamcast, and based on the latest version I have played, this could easily be one of the best retro indie titles we'll see in 2025.



MORE INFO



Robby Bisschop – Pirate PR

# WHY EVERY GAME NEEDS A PRESS KIT

Robby Bisschop is a Belgian PR and communications expert at Pirate PR, a company he founded to help indie game studios with their marketing needs. It's a shame when great games get overlooked, so he's always happy to lend a hand (or a hook!) where possible to help them navigate the unruly waters of the internet.

# W

ay too often, I see games without a proper press kit, and honestly, that's a huge missed opportunity. A press kit isn't just a convenient resource for journalists and content creators, it's an essential tool for your success. Whether you're submitting your game to an award show, reaching out to

media, or preparing for an event, having an up-to-date press kit will save you time, eliminate headaches, and help make your game more discoverable.

Imagine this: A journalist is interested in covering your game, but they need assets – key art, screenshots, logos, or even just basic details like the release date. If they can't find this information quickly, they'll move on to another game. The same goes for content creators looking to showcase your game in a video or stream. If they don't have easy access to high-quality visuals, B-roll footage or trailers, you're making their job harder, and reducing the chances of getting featured.

A press kit is also invaluable when submitting your game to events, competitions or platforms like Steam and console storefronts. Many of these require specific assets, and scrambling to put everything together last minute is stressful. Having a well-organised press kit ensures you're always ready to make a great impression.

One of the biggest mistakes developers make is assuming that a Google Drive, OneDrive, or (shudder) Dropbox folder is enough. While these can be useful for hosting large files, they're not visually appealing or easy to navigate. Press and creators shouldn't have to dig through a maze of folders just to find your key art.

Instead, consider a visually structured press kit hosted on a dedicated page. This makes it easier for media and influencers to find what they need, increasing the likelihood of your game being covered. There are plenty of great tools out there, from *presskit()* by Rami Ismail to *Press Kitty* by Ashely Gwinell or Notion-based templates that are easy to copy and adapt.

Here are some ways it'll help you to have a Press Kit at the ready:

**Press Coverage** – Media outlets need assets fast, and a press kit makes their job easier, increasing your chances of getting featured.

**Content Creators & Streamers** – YouTubers and Twitch streamers often look for official assets for thumbnails and video edits. If you provide high-quality materials, your game will look more appealing in their content. B-roll can help them make videos of content far into the end-game

**Award Shows & Events** – Many competitions and festivals require the same promotional materials.

**Investor & Publisher Relations** – If you're pitching your game to potential partners, a press kit shows professionalism and helps communicate your game's vision effectively.

Once you have a press kit, don't just let it sit there. **Use it!** Include a link in your press releases, on your website, on your key request forms, in every email where you send out game keys and on external key request platforms like Keymailer and PressEngine.

And most importantly: **Keep it updated!** If you release a new trailer, remove the old one. If your game evolves, update your screenshots to reflect its current state. The worst thing you can do is have outdated or missing information.

Your press kit should be **one click away** from anyone who needs it. If people have to dig through emails or search multiple pages to find the assets they need, they might give up. A great press kit is clear, concise, and accessible from any device.

By having a well-maintained, visually structured press kit, you're making it so much easier for press, creators, and potential partners to engage with your game. It's a simple step that can lead to big opportunities. Don't skip it!

So that's the **WHY**. If you're wondering **WHAT** exactly should go inside your press kit, scan the QR code just to the right here for a complete breakdown.

<https://piratepr.com/treasure-trove/what-needs-to-be-in-your-press-kit>





**Edd is an award-winning UI Designer currently at Radical Forge, and has worked on titles such as *Prison Architect 2*, *Loco Motive* and the LGBTQ+ visual novel *Call Me Under*. He is also the creator of the Game UI Database, the industry-standard reference tool for game designers worldwide, and author of the upcoming book, *Game UI Bible*.**



**One of my biggest bugbears with the gaming industry is that, despite the vastness and complexity of UI design as a field, many of us are still expected to implement our own work in the engine. Now, this isn't a problem if you already know how to do it, but when studios advertise roles requiring artistic ability, a vast knowledge of design patterns, typography, control**

**schemes and navigation, I find it a bit ridiculous to also expect proficiency in a game engine on top of it all. Not to mention that implementation work is just not fun or conducive to the creative experience of UI or game design. In fact, it's a snooze fest.**

However, what stresses me out even more is the process of handing my work over to a programmer and praying to the interface gods that it will end up looking okay in the final product.

There are swathes of games I've worked on throughout my career that I just don't mention, simply because the end result didn't reflect my work. One game in particular years ago was even featured in a Nintendo Direct, but during the implementation process, the font was replaced with one that was barely readable in handheld mode on the Switch. Many would say "it's just a job", but the thought of someone pointing at that and saying, "Well, the Game UI Database guy isn't very good, is he?" is pretty horrific. I certainly wouldn't be asked to write any more columns!

So why does this happen, and how have I learned to deal with it?

The most obvious issue is that programmers aren't designers. Sure, they're a bunch of clever clogs, but do they know what font kerning is? I think not!

To account for this, I've learned that I need to provide better context and instructions, often in the form of documentation or annotated screenshots. Style guides are incredibly useful here. Even at a

planning level, just simplifying font choices to a few set choices gives programmers clear rules to follow, reducing their margin for error.

The second issue is budget and resources. Depending on the studio's size, they may not have the staff to dedicate to UI implementation – their best coder for the job might be busy with another project, and they may have to assign some poor soul who absolutely loathes implementation.

In these cases, I try to plan ahead by designing the UI to be as modular as possible. If I can design it with reusable navigation systems, buttons, panels and menus, it significantly reduces the workload for the person implementing my work.

And finally, the least obvious yet far more problematic issue is when studios simply don't have a system in place that respects the complexities of UI/UX. Or worse, they completely underestimate its importance to the game.

Fortunately, this happens a lot less these days, but if you ever find yourself in this situation, here's my advice: advocate for a healthier culture surrounding UI/UX at the studio. The ultimate goal is to introduce a step in the development process that essentially gives you a platform for your feedback. You pass the work to the coders, they do their thing, then it comes back to the UI team for review. This ensures your voice is heard and, crucially, that the UI ends up looking like your mock-ups.

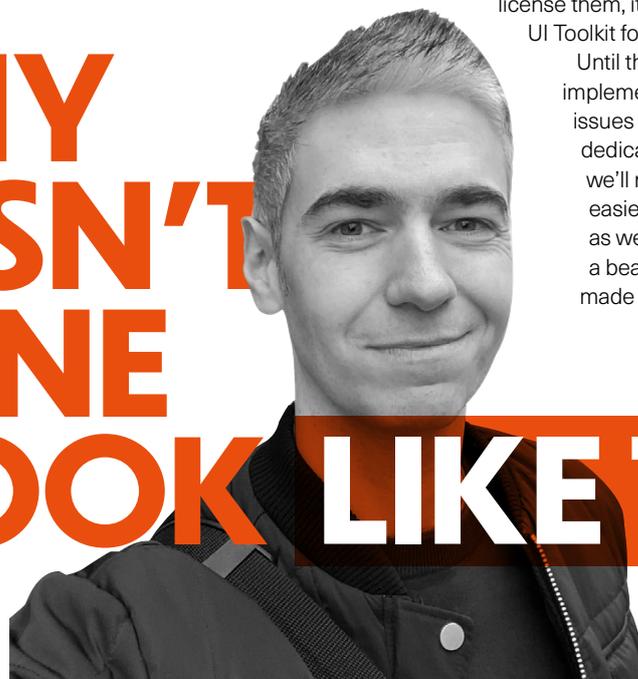
Ultimately though, none of these solutions are ideal, and I would love to see the industry reach a point where UI implementation is given the respect it deserves as a skill in its own right, rather than something we spring upon unsuspecting co-workers. UI implementation is arguably the most important part of the UI pipeline, and yet, we have very few specialists in the subject (and therefore, teachers), very few resources available to us, and the tools at our disposal are shockingly bad.

Premium middleware apps such as Rive and Noesis are doing a fantastic job of bridging the gap between designers and the engine, but unless you can convince your studio to fork out the cash to license them, it's back to work in the coal mines of Unity's UI Toolkit for you, I'm afraid!

Until the industry starts to recognise UI implementation as a specialised discipline, these issues will sadly remain. But with better tools, dedicated roles and a healthier mindset, hopefully we'll reach a point where UI won't only become easier to implement, it'll be much more enjoyable as well. After all, where's the incentive to create a beautifully intricate UI when someone will be made to suffer for it later down the line?

**Edd Coates**

**WHY DOESN'T MINE LOOK LIKE THAT?**





**debug** 9 772976 718005 09>