

**RICHARD
EBERHARDT:** My name's Rick Eberhardt. I'm the studio manager for the MIT Game Lab. I've been with the lab since 2007, 2006, so since we formed a long, long time ago. Before I worked at the lab, most of my background has been doing information technology for academics, institutes, so colleges and universities. I always had an interest in games.

I actually had a cultural studies degree in college for my undergrad. So coming to the lab, working at the lab for that first year as a system administrator really opened my eyes to all the different things games can do and the different potentials games have, but also made me realize I can actually start making these kinds of things on my own too. So since I've started working at the lab, I've taken on more duties related to project management, things I'd already done a lot in IT-- managing people managing projects.

I teach this Creating Video Games course, and for the most part in the course, I'm interested in teaching the product management techniques, but also the soft skills and the social skills. I'm an introvert. I have a really hard time having conversations with people.

And I've had to, in my years in my profession, figure out ways to not let that be a restriction, and actually use that to my advantage when I'm talking with teams. And I find it really successful, actually, in game development. I don't know if it could be successful elsewhere, but there's a lot of other like-minded people like me in game development. So it's good to have, for me, to be able to use those skills in that setting.

The other advantage I have at the Game Lab is I get to do research. I get to help with research on various different types of projects. So my personal research interests tend to be towards closer to what this class is talking about-- this meaningful decision making. I've done some research in using board games to teach decision making, in particular, like economic concepts, like opportunity cost.

I'm interested in social experiences in games, and cooperative gameplay. Past games I've worked on have been about all sorts of different things. So anything from tools to help game developers make 3D characters animate faster-- basically to speed up the workflow process-- to games about depression and games about other serious topics. I really like working with researchers. I like working with clients, and I like making games.

What am I playing now? So I am playing this game called Gridland, made by the same developer who made a previous game called A Dark Room. It's kind of difficult to describe. It's basically a match-three game where you're like Bejeweled, you're matching gems. But there is a small supply chain mechanic going on in the background.

Where as I have the gems combined, I can upgrade my weapons, and I can upgrade my armor. And then when night comes-- so I'm matching gems in the daytime to upgrade things-- and when night comes, I'm matching gems to summon enemies and to kill enemies. So this Gridland game has a daytime and a nighttime view of the game.

And what I find really interesting about it is that all my decisions I make in the day are going to have some kind of influence in my nighttime decisions. So as I make my daytime experience easier, I'm actually making my nighttime experience harder. So it's just a really interesting little challenge that the designers put for me to try to solve.

So outside of the class, the kinds of games I'm making are non-digital prototypes, so card games, in particular, that are experimenting with things like a tech tree and a 4X-style game. So if you've played a game like Civilization, or StarCraft even, they'll have these tech expansion trees. So I'm playing around with designing a game that's largely just the tech tree. I'm doing that with a coworker here, Drew.

I've also got a game I've been working on, off and on for the past couple years, about managing cities-- about three players trying to manage a city. They're counsel people. I'm trying to convince the mayor about what decisions the mayor

should make for the city, but, unfortunately, the mayor is just the role of a six-sided die. So you can try to convince him or her what you want, but it really doesn't matter because the mayor's got its own agenda. So then you're trying to solve the problems with the city, while also trying to solve your own personal-- trying to basically get political gain while solving the city's problems.

There's a lot of different co-op experiences out there-- from anything from over the table like cooperative board games to couch style co-op in front of the TV. I'm trying to think my favorite co-op experience is definitely not Pandemic, which I think we're talking about in class today. I have a hard time deciding what my favorite co-op experience is because so often, one of the challenges of co-op games is somebody takes control, and somebody says what the whole everybody on the team is going to do.

And unfortunately, I'm one of those people. If I know the game, I'll start being bossy and I'll take over. And what I'd love to see more co-op games do is put in mechanics to prevent me from being a jerk. Or enable other people to override my jerkiness somehow.

So the thing I look forward to most in this class every year is the playtest sessions, especially when it's the first time the team has brought the game into the class and they're putting it in front of new users, which we only have a couple opportunities for each project for that to happen in class. After that everyone in the classroom has seen the game before, so they are not giving the same kind of feedback. And what I really like about it is when the games come in and they just don't work. They're broken horribly.

Not when it's the technical problems-- not when it's the code crashing or it's the broken build. That's actually really sad, and I hate to see that. But when it's a design issue, when they thought it was going to do this one thing and see the game doing this other thing, or they see the players doing this other thing, it's at that point that the students understand that OK, people do people things. Humans are human, right? You can't always predict everything that they're going to do.

But also that the systems that they created are actually incredibly complex. So the things that they need to do to fix the systems are going to be reducing mechanics, removing things from the game, making it a little bit more simple, so that they can predict a little bit better about what's going on. But then on the flip side of that, though, there's sometimes when you see something happen in the game, and you just get this emergent gameplay that is better than what they were going for.

They didn't realize they wanted it. When they see it in action, they're like, oh, this is actually really great. What can we do when we're finishing this game to really capitalize on this mechanic or this system that we just didn't even realize was there?

I really like systems. Outside of the class, I think this might be the thing that I actually, I always had in some capacity. But really coming to MIT, working at MIT, it's much more part of my life is seeing the systems that surround us and the systems of history. I've always had an interest in history, and a little bit of interest in anthropology.

But reading Charles Mann's books about 1491 and 1493, what happened during the Colombian Exchange, when all of these different ideas and products and agricultural things swapped places from East to West, from China to the Americas to Europe. There's just some really interesting systems. And a lot of the problems we're facing today are the direct result of that big expansion of ideas and trading of ideas.

So I've always been interested in those kind of things. And I'm watching *The Wire*. I really like *The Wire*. And just seeing the systems that are involved in city planning, in police work, in education, in all these civic institutions that we just take for granted every day.

Yes, *The Wire* is a very critical and a very pessimistic view of it. But it is a great expression of just how all of these problems are connected. And some of the problems that we are facing right now, it's just we can't see the connections. And I hope that, at least with games, with playing games, with making games, people can better understand how those systems work.

For the future of games, games as expressions of systems, games as ways of exploring the world around us. We've always-- 1,000 of years ago, we used games as ways to communicate with each other, to have rituals with each other to better connect with each other. And I think we can do that with just games in general-- not just video games, but all sorts of different kinds of games.

So seeing that come back to both what people are talking about when they talk about games in mainstream. Other than just this thing that's done for fun, it's actually this thing that's very important to human daily life. And we've been doing it for years. It's just it looks different now, but it's still based on a lot of the same things.