

# MICHAEL HIGHLAND

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I am a game designer with ten years experience working with game studios, tech startups, as well as artists and academics. I most recently served as Lead Designer at thatgamecompany, where my work focused on multiplayer gameplay systems with the goal of evoking emotional and social engagement. Prior to thatgamecompany, I started Futureproof, a research project focused on fostering relationships with technology that serve people's growth and well-being. I offer a balance of technical fluency and creative vision, grounded in a humanist approach to technology.

## EXPERIENCE

### thatgamecompany

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A venture-backed independent game studio focused on emotionally engaging games based in Santa Monica, CA.

#### Unannounced Project

Lead Designer June 2015 - December 2016

Managed the design team and worked with the company's founders to determine the narrative and direction of the game.

Feel Engineer March 2013 - June 2015

Prototyped realtime multiplayer gameplay systems including touch-based controls, 3D character movement, and level design. Directed internal and external play testing.

### Futureproof Co-Founder 2011 - 2013

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Research project to develop tools and resources to foster greater awareness, intentionality, and well-being around technology.

#### Awareness

Created a cross-platform desktop app to encourage regular breaks without unwanted disruption. Top paid health and fitness app June 2011.

#### Gadget Rules

Researched and wrote actionable practices for using technology in a healthy way.

### Port 127 Creative Director 2009 - 2011

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An independent game studio based in Philadelphia, PA.

#### Hipster City Cycle 2011

Designed and produced a retro style indie game about biking in Philadelphia. Led a team of five from conception to launch. Sold 5000+ units with a 4.5/5 iTunes rating.

### Game Designer Freelance 2006 - 2009

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Consulting in interactive media design for web, mobile, and game consoles.

#### Leela Curious Pictures 2011

Worked closely with the creative director to provide design guidance and critique for this yoga and meditation based video game for XBOX360 & Wii.

#### Blade Runner Warren Lieberfarb 2006-2009

Researched and conceptualized a new AAA video game set in the Blade Runner universe. Pitched concepts to game studios on behalf of the film's owners.

## TALKS & PUBLICATIONS

### Breaking Realities

For *Video Games and Consciousness*, Nova 2012

A book chapter comparing the subjective experience of video game play with other altered states of consciousness.

### The Enlightened Gamer

TEDxPenn, 2010

A TED style talk on the unintended spiritual aspects of video games.

### Game Buddha

Ignite Philly, 2010

A "pecha kucha" style talk on lucid dreaming and how to frame video game play as a meditation practice.

### Communicating Inner Experience with Video Game Technology

Heidelberg Journal of Religion on the Internet, 2008

In collaboration with Dr. Gino Yu, this article details the modalities through which video games can communicate ideas and beliefs.

### As Real as Your Life

TED Conference, 2006

A short documentary film chronicling my own relationship with video games and the effects gaming had on my values and world view.

### Simulation and Identity

RES, UPenn Undergraduate Research Journal, 2006

An essay contrasting the subjective psychological effects of playing narrative vs. simulation based games.

## TOOLS & LANGUAGES

XCode, Adobe Creative Suite, Perforce, Git, Final Cut Pro, Digital Video and Photography Production, C++, C#, ObjectiveC, HTML, CSS, Javascript, jQuery, Ruby on Rails, PHP, MYSQL

## EDUCATION

### University of Pennsylvania BSE 2008

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Concentration in Digital Media Design; recipient of the 2007 Dawn Becket award for excellence in this major.