

ERIK KELLEY

Game Designer | Systems & Gameplay Design | AAA Production and QA Background

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

AAA game designer with six-plus years developing in Unreal Engine 5 (C++ and Blueprints) across PC, console, and mobile, with shipped credits on Borderlands 4, Mafia: The Old Country, and TopSpin at 2K Games. Specializes in GDD authoring, systems design, rapid prototyping, playtesting, and balancing core gameplay mechanics, including systems design ownership on Ethos, an internally showcased live-service hero shooter. Later promoted to Assistant Producer, bringing rare cross-discipline fluency in Agile/Scrum production and full QA pipelines (regression testing, defect tracking in TestRail and Jira) directly into design work. Comfortable as a solo design owner or embedded in a cross-functional team, and one of few candidates who can credibly apply for roles across design, production, and QA.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Game Design Experience

Game Designer — 2K Games (AAA)

Jan 2024 – Dec 2024

Borderlands 4, Mafia: The Old Country, TopSpin, Ethos (Hero Shooter, internal showcase) | Las Vegas, NV

- Authored game design documents (GDDs), systems design specifications, content design briefs, and narrative design documentation across 2+ major AAA titles, with deliverables that directly guided engineering, art, and narrative implementation through multiple production phases.
- Prototyped, playtested, and balanced core gameplay mechanics through rapid iteration and structured user research, tuning player experience parameters in close collaboration with artists, engineers, and writers.
- Drove systems design on Ethos, a live-service extraction hero shooter that reached public showcase, and maintained design iteration, test coverage, and production documentation through the project's transition to reduced scope.
- Performed quality assurance across 5+ titles as an embedded QA analyst, authoring test plans, creating test cases, establishing test coverage, executing regression, smoke, and build verification testing (BVT), documenting reproduction steps, and triaging defects by severity and priority in TestRail and Jira.

Game Designer (Contract) — Death Death Studio

Jan 2023 – Dec 2023

Indie Action Game | Remote

- Led game design from pre-production through feature complete and commercial release as sole designer, owning all GDDs, systems design specs, mechanic prioritization, and feature scoping across the full development lifecycle.
- Architected playtesting frameworks and user research feedback loops, applying qualitative and quantitative player data to drive balancing updates, improve retention, and deliver measurable, player-centric design improvements.
- Managed production schedules, sprint planning, and deliverable timelines in a lean Scrum environment, directing collaborators across art, engineering, and writing under tight resource and budget constraints.

Production & QA Experience

Assistant Producer — 2K Games (AAA)

Jan 2025 – Present

Borderlands 4, Mafia: The Old Country | Las Vegas, NV

- Achieved an 80% implementation rate on presented design and workflow changes while coordinating directly with creative directors, discipline leads, and engineering as associate producer, driving milestone reviews and Gold milestone sign-offs.
- Translated playtesting results, player feedback, and QA findings (including reproduction steps and defect severity classifications) into scoped Jira tickets and updated schedules, then delivered stakeholder documentation in Miro and Google Workspace.
- Drove Agile/Scrum sprint planning, backlog grooming, feature tracking, and schedule management across 5+ simultaneous live titles in Jira and Confluence, improving task resolution through data-driven prioritization and proactive risk identification.
- Owned interdisciplinary dependency management across design, art, engineering, and QA, driving teams to feature complete, Alpha, Beta, and go-gold milestone commitments on schedule across multiple concurrent titles.

INDEPENDENT GAME DEVELOPMENT

6+ years of self-directed development in Unreal Engine 5 (C++ and Blueprints) across PC, mobile, and multiplayer platforms, with each project serving as an end-to-end exercise in systems design, level design, production planning, and implementation:

- Concrete Grind (Skateboarding / Sports): Built a physics-based character movement system, trick-chaining combo mechanics, score multiplier and progression systems, and original level design as sole systems designer and UE5 implementation owner.
- Hollow Ascent (Action Platformer / Speedrunner): Designed third-person parkour movement with integrated combat and a time-attack loop built around high-skill-ceiling progression, backed by enemy AI behavior trees, precision input handling, and checkpoint flow design in Unreal Engine 5.
- Dread Signal (Open World Co-op Horror): Built networked multiplayer architecture and cooperative gameplay systems in Unreal Engine 5, with horror design spanning environmental storytelling, narrative systems, dynamic audio for tension pacing, proximity-based threat AI, darkness and visibility mechanics, and co-op objective systems built to sustain fear and reward teamwork under pressure.
- Mobile Projects: Gesture-based input and touch UX design, short session loop design, monetization-aware feature scoping, and mobile performance optimization in Unreal Engine 5, covering the full development lifecycle from prototype through build submission.

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts, Design

Jul 2021 – Dec 2023

California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), Top-Ranked Fine Arts & Design | Valencia, CA

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Game Design: GDD, systems design, gameplay design, content design, narrative design, level design, rapid iteration, prototyping, playtesting, balancing, tuning, player retention, user research, live service design

Game Engines: Unreal Engine 5 / UE5 (6+ yrs, C++ & Blueprints), Unity

Programming: C++, C#, Python, Unreal Blueprints

Quality Assurance: Test plan authoring, test case creation, test coverage, defect tracking, bug triage, reproduction steps, root cause analysis, regression testing, smoke testing, functional testing, exploratory testing, BVT, submission testing, release candidate testing, severity/priority classification, TestRail, Jira

Production & Agile: Jira, Confluence, Miro, Google Workspace, Agile/Scrum, sprint planning, backlog grooming, milestone tracking, schedule management, stakeholder management, risk mitigation, feature tracking, resource allocation

Version Control: Perforce, Git

Tools: Blender, Photoshop, Shotgun / ShotGrid, video editing

Platforms: PC, console (AAA pipeline), mobile (iOS / Android, Unreal Engine 5)

ADDITIONAL

- One of few candidates with verified AAA shipped credits spanning game design, quality assurance, and production simultaneously at a major publisher (2K Games), bringing immediate cross-functional value to any team.
- Shipped a commercial indie title end-to-end as sole designer and production owner (Death Death Studio, 2023).
- Contributed to additional unannounced AAA titles at 2K Games under NDA, including an unannounced first-person shooter and an unannounced roguelike, working across multiple concurrent confidential projects under publisher-level asset security, compliance, and milestone reporting protocols.
- Holds a BFA from California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), grounding design work in a creative and visual communication foundation that's rare in the industry.