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https://www.linkedin.com/in/haodongliao/ | https://medill-east.github.io/about/
MSc in Computer Science of Copenhagen University (2020.09 - 2022.06) |
BEng in Computer Science and Technology of UESTC (2016.09 - 2020.06)



SUMMARY

A technically-proficient Game Designer with 3+ years of AAA experience at Ubisoft, contributing to Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora (Main / DLC1 & DLC2 / Expansion). End-to-end ownership for a key boss fights, high-stakes elite territories, encounters, skills, and spawning systems - from paper design & blockout to scripting, iteration, tuning, and ship. Notably driving a 300%+ performance increase in the spawn system. Known for bridging systemic design with narrative depth to create emotional resonant experiences. Inspired by Carl Jung, I am motivated to bring thatgamecompany's emphasis on "timeless interactive entertainment" to life together with you. Check [the light of my life](#) to know more about me if interested.

CAREER

Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora (MAIN | DLC1 | DLC2)-Game Designer | Ubisoft Shanghai

2022.09 - 2025.12

• BOSS Fight Design

- Owned and architected a key boss fight from concept to final release. Engineered a four-act narrative structure that culminated in a unique shooting puzzle, resulting in a climactic battle sequence praised during playtests for its compelling pacing and thrilling player experience.

• Level Design & Environmental Storytelling (Thanator & Aerial Predator Territories)

- Level Design:** Designed 18 unique predator territories that integrated high-stakes combat into the open-world loop, creating memorable, high-difficulty encounters that drove exploration through significant challenges and rewards.
- Environmental Storytelling:** Orchestrated environmental assets (e.g., corpse placements, wreck sites, VFX) to build silent narratives that non-verbally communicated threats, guided players to high-value resources, and directly influenced their behavior.
- Puzzle Design:** Integrated puzzles with systemic design to offer player agency beyond combat, such as a high-risk stealth puzzle in a boss zone, and an emergent scenario where destroying environmental objects altered creature AI from hostile to neutral.

• Quest & Encounter Design

- Zakru Painting:** Transformed a standard encounter into a multi-part narrative quest by designing a dynamic NPC interaction loop and embedding narrative hooks, converting a minor interaction into a memorable quest that drove player exploration.
- Legendary Creature Skill:** Led the cross-functional design and implementation of a unique "mesmerizing" creature skill that temporarily reverses player controls. Created an exotic combat identity for the legendary creature, forcing players to adopt new tactics.
- Environmental Challenge:** Designed tactical combat by creating synergies between creature and environmental hazards. Placing sound-sensitive creatures in noisy areas or charge-proficient creatures near explosives. Rewarding players for using the environments a weapon.
- Contextual Storytelling:** Engineered a dynamic spawning system for DLC2 to tell an evolving, non-verbal story, altering wildlife AI (from peaceful to fight) based on RDA invasion levels to make the world feel reactive and visually showcase the invasion's ecological impact.

• Systems & Performance Optimization (Wildlife Spawning)

- Maximize Encounter Rate:** Designed and implemented a predictable spawning system to guarantee consistent wildlife encounter rates, enhancing the open-world's vibrancy and providing designers with precise control over player experience and pacing.
- Optimize Spawn System:** Boosted the wildlife spawning system's performance by over 300% by re-architecting its validation logic. This critical optimization drastically cut down team iteration times, directly accelerating the prototyping and polishing workflow.
- Spawning Validation Pipeline:** Authored a data validation pipeline to proactively detect issues in wildlife distribution, empowering the design team to implement complex scenarios with confidence while mitigating production risks.

PROJECTS

Emotional Game Design System, EGDS - Creator

Inspired by Jenova Chen, I am developing a systematic framework to structurally design emotional player experiences. EGDS aims to provide practical design levers (narrative, gameplay, aesthetics) by deconstructing high-level emotional arcs down to the objective reasons behind subjective feelings.

Design & Analysis Blog

Actively maintains a professional blog with near-weekly posts featuring learning notes, game analysis, design thinking, and personal showcase. This practice reflects a commitment to lifelong learning by consistently documenting learnings from games, reading, and other life experiences.

Playable Demos - Developer

I have the passion and long-term commitment to achieve my goal of helping people understand themselves better :)

• Slices of Shadows - Solo - Designer & Programmer (2025.08)

A narrative-driven game that uses shifting narrative perspectives and a plot twist to explore the theme of embracing the unknown parts of oneself.

• Eric the Office Breaker - Team Size 2 - Designer & Programmer (2025.08)

A screen-click game for GMTK Game Jam 2025 - Loop. Using ironic gameplay where the player must break things while not being caught to convey a theme of embracing life.

• Simulator of the meaning of life - Solo - Designer & Prompter (2024.02)

An interactive experience to ask 11 unavoidable questions in life to help answer "What is the meaning of life?". Hoping to hint player at the unlit path from answers by connecting their answers to philosophical references, because "What you are thinking may be answered thousands years ago".

• Earn the Name Back For Shadow Puppets - Team Leader (5 people) - Designer & Programmer (2022.06 - 2022.07)

A 2D Metroidvania-like action-adventure game, combining a unique shadow-play aesthetic with a hidden story.

• Yin Yang Messenger - Solo - Designer & Programmer (2022.02)

A 2D puzzle-platformer, featuring a core mechanic of switching between "Yin" and "Yang" states to interact with different creatures and spirits to solve challenges and deliver the message to the dead.

Paper Designs - Designer

Pull the Triqquer (2024.01) | Passwords (2024.01) | Maze of Yin & Yang (2023.11) | Bomb Puzzle For MacGyver (2023.11) | Tear-down Collections

WHY CHOOSE ME?

Matched Vision

I have the passion and long-term commitment to achieve my goal of helping people understand themselves better :)

Slices of Shadows - Designer & Programmer (2025.08)

This is a screen-click game based on the theme of GMTK Game Jam 2025 - Loop. I hope to touch people like me.

- **Different Narrators:** Not only the avatar, props and other versions of "you" are also the narrator, to deliver messages from different perspective.
- **Different Narrative Methods with A Same Goal:** No matter it is direct methods with twists (be hunted - neutral - chase back) or indirect ways with metaphors (all the narrators are a slice of you), all the messages delivered are trying to reveal the deep, hidden nature part of you.

Simulator of the meaning of life - Designer (2022.11 - 2024.02)

To help people answer "What is the meaning of life?" I created this demo to ask 11 unavoidable questions in life.

- **Personalized answer:** choose from the given answers or write your thoughts; it all depends on you.
- **Philosophical Reference:** answers refer to one of the philosophers' thoughts. "What you are thinking may be answered thousands years ago".
- **Meaningful Summary:** Everyone is unique and undefinable. But I hope the summary can hint at the unlit path.

Emotional Game Design System, EGDS - Creator (2024.04 -)

Inspired by Jenova Chen, I am creating this to deconstruct emotional experiences and hoping to shed light on how to design them structurally.

- **Clear Top-down Experiences Hierarchies:** Emotional curve -> emotional experiences -> subjective feelings -> objective reasons -> design levers (narrative/ gameplay & challenges/ aesthetics).
- **Practical Design Levers with Consensus:** By analysing and deconstructing shared objective reasons for subjective feelings from different references, I hope to provide useful design levers to help create memorable emotional experiences.

Keep Learning - Lifelong Learner (2021.07 -)

Game development is a complex engineering problem, which is a perfect playground for a lifelong learner like me :)

- **Input:** Games deliver messages through experiences, which could be enriched by playing, reading, watching, thinking, or just simply living.
- **Output:** Ever since I plan to join game industry, I keep posting notes, showcase, analysis, and thinking on games almost weekly on my [blog](#).

Reliable Expertise

Experiences across co-dev AAA titles, small team, and solo projects strengthen different skills of mine.

Stable Collaborations & Delivers

Game Designer -

- **Mastodon BOSS Fight (Flow/ Behavior Design):** I am the design owner of Mastodon BOSS Fight in expansion (*From the Ashes*). Responsible for the flow, gameplay, and behavior design.
- **Epic Wildlife BOSS Fight (Level Design):** I am the level owner of all Thanator (6) and Aerial Predator (12) territories across Main, DLC1/2. Responsible for level design and script maintenance.
- **Wildlife Exploration Quest (Quest Design):** I am the design owner of exploration quest (zakru painting) in DLC1. Responsible for the exploration flow, interaction mechanics, ingredients needs, and script maintenance.
- **Wildlife Encounters (Encounter Design):** I am the design owner of all wildlife encounters across DLC1/2. Responsible for the encounter reuse, distribution, and script maintenance.
- **Wildlife Ingredients (Ingredient Design):** I am the design owner of wildlife trap in Main, and Echo Stalker burrow in DLC2. Responsible for its mechanics and script maintenance.
- **Legendary Wildlife (Mechanics Design):** I am the design owner of all legendary wildlife across DLC1/2. Responsible for its enhancement. Especially new gameplay of mesmerizing skill of legendary chameleon crawler in DLC2.
- **Wildlife Distribution (Numerical Distribution):** I am the design owner of wildlife distribution across Main, DLC1/2. Responsible for tweaking the wildlife spawn and encounter rate, spawning system maintenance and improvement from design perspective.

Iterative Mindset From Playtest

I have the iterative mindset shaped from the process of playtest. Click to check my methodology.

Global Perspective on Production & Collaboration

I have grown a global perspective on production & collaboration when owning features. Click to check my thought on [How to Implement a Feature From A to Z Together with ALL Job Families](#).

Solid Comprehensive Capabilities

Experiences from both academic and game industry enables me to be a team player and think rationally.

Cross-Functional Team player

Experiences from a cross-country co-dev AAA game development team enable me to think from an global perspective. Owning different scale of features also enables me to put myself into different shoes and think from various job families' perspective.

Rational Thinking & Reasoning

Over four-years of academic training enables me to think in a rational way, which also strengthen my deconstruction ability on experiences.

WHY JOIN YOU?

Touched by "The Alters"

You have what I am Interested :)

- **Identity Paradox:** Who am I, and who are you? Partially shared experiences and different decisions leads to different versions of me. I never regret,

but it is very interesting to see and think the results of "what if".

- **"Know" Yourself In Advance:** Being familiar with all different life paths gives me the full visibility of who they are and what shaped them. This is a vital mechanic that drives all the decisions.
- **Control or Under-control:** You may think you are the boss, but everyone matters. You may think you can handle the situation, but nature will crash you in seconds. You may think you have the card to negotiate, but all the things may have a destiny from the beginning. Those sparked experiences are charming.

Meaningful Entertainment

A good movie is a good story well told. I believe a good game is a good story worth experiencing.

I tried to find the word for describing what means for a good game: memorable narrative, enjoyable gameplay & challenge, and pleasant aesthetics.

Thanks to you, I found the elegant saying for a good game - meaningful entertainment.

WHO AM I?

What does game mean to me?

As a powerful multi-modal media, game has the potential to deliver messages in a welcomed way. I hope player can enjoy when playing, and keep thinking after played - to care about those unavoidable questions: who am I, why should I live, what am I living for...

My Vision

Inspired by Carl Jung, I hope to help people like me to understand them better.

My Goal

I am creating games and relevant content to deliver messages obviously or hiddenly.

My Method

I am building and practicing [Emotional Game Design System \(EGDS\)](#) to deconstruct emotional feelings and experiences, and summarize practical design levers for creating dedicated emotional feelings. I am trying to create memorable emotional experiences with it. Hope this could also benefit game industry.

EDUCATION

University of Copenhagen (2022 U.S. News Ranking 37)-MSc in Computer Science - HCI Track 2020.09 - 2022.06

- **Related Courses:** Advanced Topics in Human-Centered Computing, User Interface Technology, Mobile Computing
- **Device Experiences:** Ultraleap, Oculus Quest 2, HTC VIVE Pro, Ender 3 Pro 3D Printer, ESP32, Arduino
- **Master's Thesis:** [Improving the User Experiences in VR by Affecting Time Perception With High Social Density](#)

University of Electronic Science and Technology of China-BEng in Computer Science and Technology 2016.09 - 2020.06

- Excellence Prize of 2018 Ubisoft AI Hackathon
- Merit Scholarship of UESTC for 2017-2018, 2018-2019
- Second Creative Prize of the 3rd "Internet +" Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition of UESTC for 2017
- Merit Member of Tencent "Rhino Bird" Research, Learning and Training Program for 2020

SKILLS

- **Languages:** Chinese (Native), English (Proficient)
- **Softwares:** Snowdrop, Godot, Unity3D, UE5, Miro, Jira, PowerPoint, Xmind, Markdown, Axure, LaTeX, SPSS
- **Programming:** C#, Python, Java, Haskell, Prolog, HTML5/CSS
- **Graphics:** Adobe After Effects, Premiere, Lightroom, Photoshop

PLAYED GAMES

- **RPG:** Assassin's Creed (3|4), Elden Ring, Nier: Automata, *Diablo III*, Control, The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild
- **Rouge-Like:** Hades, Death Cells, Wizard of Legend, Children of Morta, Tribes of Midgard, Curse of the Dead Gods
- **AVG:** Death's Door, *Florence*, GRIS, To the Moon
- **FPS:** *Gunfire Reborn*, Deep Rock Galactic, Borderlands (2|3), CS: GO, CS: Condition Zero
- **MMO:** World of Warcraft, Aion: The Tower of Eternity, Dragon Nest, Soul of the Ultimate Nation, The World Of Legend

PROJECTS

Game Demo - 《Yin Yang Messenger》 -Game Designer & Programmer 2022.02 - 2022.02

- **Project Introduction:** This is a 2D platform & puzzle game. As a messenger that can switch between Yin and Yang states, the player needs to interact with different creatures or spirits, and finally complete the message delivery.
- **Story Design & Character Ability Design:** Design clear message delivery tasks for the player. Character ability design includes states switch between Yin and Yang; the vicious dog - chases Yang and escapes from Yin; the kind spirit - follows Yin; the pig - driven by the kind spirit; the evil spirit - take over control; the naughty spirit - reverses control.
- **Program implementation:** Use Unity3D as a development tool to build interactive logic, cooperate with the Tilemap tool for scene design, and use the TimeLine tool to build visual guidance.
- **Showcase Video and Demo Link:** [Analysis in Chinese](#), [Demo Video in Chinese](#), [Demo Link](#)

Perfect World Game Creative Competition - 《Clay Craft》 -Group Leader & Game Designer & Programmer 2018.05 - 2018.05

- **Project Introduction:** This is a 2.5D platform-adventure game that combines narrative and collection elements. Players can design the shape of the clay dolls and obtain different abilities accordingly, so as to control it to pass the level.
- **Storyline and Character Ability Design:** Use memory fragments as a clue to advance. Arrange the main storyline of "Collect the fragments - Recall the joy of childhood". Design three special abilities according to clay's shape.
- **Project Management:** Assemble and manage a 5-person team, produce a division of labor schedule, and develop a schedule with dimensions such as "role", "task", and "deadline".

- **Level Design:** Draw flow charts based on "story introduction", "beginner guidance", "character customization" and other processes, and complete level design for scenes such as "desk" and "bedroom".
- **Program Implementation:** Use C# to improve the physical deformation plug-in in Unity3D to realize the customization function of player character shape. Use the TimeLine tool to build a narrative plot.

GGJ 2018 China X CiGA - Chengdu - 《For Love》 -Game Designer & Programmer

2018.01 - 2018.01

- **Project Introduction:** This is a screen click obstacle avoidance mobile game that simulates the conception process. Users need to avoid obstacles by clicking on the screen to reach their destination.
- **Gameplay design:** Design a gameplay that takes the click position as the force center and exerts an outward force to push the player forward. The player needs to constantly avoid obstacles and finally reach the destination.
- **Program Implementation:** Implement random obstacle generation code in Unity 3D using C#.
- **Showcase and analysis (in Chinese):** <https://medill-east.github.io/2021/10/26/for-love-demo-showcase-and-analysis/>

ACADEMIC

Data-Driven Spatio-Temporal Analysis via Multi-Modal Zeitgebers and Cognitive Load in VR

2018.11 - 2020.03

- **Research Content:** Using light intensity and clock ticks as time-influencing factors to explore their potential to influence subjective experiences of time and presence in virtual reality.
- **Project Management:** As a team leader of a school-level project, build the multidisciplinary team from scratch. Arrange weekly meetings, assign tasks accordingly, and plan the schedule.
- **Experimental design:** Proposed the research question of "Is there a way to affect the user's time perception in VR". Use time impactors and cognitive load as independent variables, use time estimation and presence as dependent variables. Design pilot experiment to screen participants.
- **Data Analysis:** Combined SPSS and Excel to analyze data. Used methods such as MANOVA to construct multiple linear regression equations, and paired sample T-test to test significances.
- **Publication and Patent:** The paper written as the first author was accepted by IEEE VR (a top-level VR field conference, [link to the paper](#)), and related work was successfully applied for a Chinese patent ([link to the patent](#)).