

= Jenova Chen =

Xinghan Chen ( simplified Chinese : 陈星汉 ; traditional Chinese : 陳星漢 ; pinyin : Chén Xīnghàn ; born October 8 , 1981 ) , known professionally as Jenova Chen , is a Chinese video game designer . He is the designer of the award @-@ winning games Cloud , Flow , Flower , and Journey , and is co @-@ founder of Thatgamecompany . Chen is from Shanghai , where he earned a bachelor 's degree in computer science with a minor in digital art and design . He then moved to the United States , where he earned a master 's degree from the University of Southern California 's Interactive Media Division . While there he created Cloud and Flow , and met fellow student Kellee Santiago . After a brief period at Maxis working on Spore , he founded Thatgamecompany with Santiago and became the company 's creative director . The company signed a three @-@ game deal with Sony Computer Entertainment , and has sold Flow , Flower , and Journey through the PlayStation Network .

As Chen was born in a culture other than the culture he now lives in , he tries to make games that appeal universally to all people . His goal with his games is to help video games mature as a medium by making games that inspire emotional responses in the player that other games are lacking . Although he and Thatgamecompany can and have made more traditional games , he does not plan on commercially developing any of them , as he does not think that it fits with their goals as an independent video game developer .

= = Biography = =

Chen was born in Shanghai on October 8 , 1981 , and lived there until 2003 . His parents were " a middle @-@ class family " , and his father worked in the software development industry , having previously worked on " one of the earliest giant computers in China " . Although Chen was interested in art and drawing as a young child , his father influenced him towards computers , entering him in programming contests from when he was 10 years old . He found himself interested in video games that he saw there , but was not as enthusiastic about programming . While a teenager , he had deep emotional experiences with games that he played , including The Legend of Sword and Fairy , which he ascribes to the fact that he was not as exposed to books , films , or life events that other people would have had those experiences with . These experiences drove him to try to create those types of feelings in games as an adult , when more emotional maturity had caused his " standards to rise " in what would move him in a game . It was during high school that he chose the English name Jenova after a character in Final Fantasy VII , wanting a name that would be unique anywhere he used it as there were " thousands of Jason Chens " .

He earned a degree in Computer Science & Engineering in Shanghai Jiao Tong University , which due to his background in computers he found " quite easy " , but describes himself as spending much of his time there teaching himself digital art and animation , and later did a minor in digital art and design at Donghua University . Still interested in video games , he was involved in making three video games as part of a student group while in school . Upon graduating , he had trouble finding a job in the Chinese video game industry that combined his interests of " engineering , art , and design " , and additionally felt that " very few games [ had ] actually achieved those qualities that would be interesting to an adult " . He also considered working in digital animation for films .

He then went to the United States to earn a master 's degree in the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California . Chen studied in the Interactive Media Program , a new division of the School of Cinematic Arts . His intention at the time was to use the degree to get the kind of job he wanted back in China . At USC , he became inspired when he went to the Game Developers Conference , where he positively compared the games he had made in college with the student work present at the Independent Games Festival portion of the conference . While at USC he met Kellee Santiago , another student in the same program , and the two decided to work together on games that would be outside of the mainstream . Their first game , which won a grant of twenty thousand dollars from USC to produce , was Cloud , released in 2005 , which " focuses on a young hospital patient who soars in his mind despite being trapped indoors " . The idea was partially based

on himself , as when he was a child he was often hospitalized for asthma . It was designed as an attempt to " expand the spectrum of emotions video games evoke " . At a student showcase at the Game Developers Conference , Chen and Santiago showed the game to a representative from Sony , John Hight , saying that it was the first game in the " Zen " genre . Hight was interested , though no deal was forthcoming . The game won the Best Student Philosophy award at the Slamdance Guerilla Games Competition and a Student Showcase award at the Independent Games Festival , and was showcased on Spike TV , G4TV , and CBS Sunday .

Chen felt that the reason that Cloud had been so warmly received was because the emotions it sparked in players were different than any other game available at the time , and believed that it was his " calling " to make more games that changed what people saw video games as . Chen went on to do his master 's thesis the following year in the concept of dynamic difficulty adjustment , where the game adjusts how it reacts to the player based on the past and present actions of that player . Chen illustrated his ideas with Flow , a Flash game made with Nicholas Clark . The game involves the player guiding an aquatic microorganism through various depths of the ocean , consuming other organisms and evolving in the process . It was released in March 2006 ; it received 100 @, @ 000 downloads in its first two weeks and by July had been downloaded over 650 @, @ 000 times . A PlayStation 3 version was announced in May 2006 as a downloadable game via the PlayStation Store , and was released in February 2007 . A version for the PlayStation Portable , developed by SuperVillain Studios , was released in March 2008 . Flow became the most downloaded game on the PlayStation Network in 2007 , and won Best Downloadable Game at the Game Developers Choice Awards .

After graduating , Chen and Santiago formed their own game company , Thatgamecompany , in Los Angeles where he still lives and signed a deal with Sony for three PlayStation Store games . The PS3 version of Flow was the first , and while it was in development Chen worked for Maxis on the game Spore . Upon Flow 's release , Chen returned to Thatgamecompany and began working on their second game .

= = = Thatgamecompany = = =

The next game , Flower , was Chen and Thatgamecompany 's " first game outside the safety net of academia " . Chen was the creative director in charge of the game , while Santiago was the producer and Clark was the lead designer . The company ranged in size from six to nine people at varying stages of the game 's development . Flower was intended by Chen to primarily to provoke positive emotions in the player , and to act as " an emotional shelter " . Chen described the game as " an interactive poem exploring the tension between urban and nature " . He decided on a " nature " theme early in the development process , saying that he " had this concept that every PlayStation is like a portal in your living room , it leads you to somewhere else . I thought ; wouldn 't it be nice if it was a portal that would allow you to be embraced by nature . " Chen designed the game around the idea that the primary purpose of entertainment products like video games was the feelings that they evoked in the audience , and that the emotional range of most games was very limited . To make Flower have the " emotional spectrum " that he wanted , Chen looked at the development process as creating a work of art , rather than a " fun " game , which would not provoke the desired emotions . In 2008 , during Flower 's development , Chen was named to the MIT Technology Review TR35 as one of the top 35 innovators in the world under the age of 35 .

After Flower was released to critical praise and awards , Chen and Thatgamecompany moved on to their next game , Journey . Journey was intended by Chen to focus on the element of communication and social interaction in video games . Since in most games the communication between players is focused on specific goals , in Journey Chen intended for the player to be able to either play alone or to come across other players , but not be able to communicate with them directly . Instead , players have to build relationships with each other through their actions , helping each other or leaving as they choose . Journey was released on the PlayStation Network on March 13 , 2012 , and has received critical acclaim .

= = Influences and philosophy = =

Chen plays a wide variety of video games , but he names his greatest influences as Katamari Damacy , Ico and Shadow of the Colossus . He also names Final Fantasy VII as an influence , and the game that he took his adopted name from . He personally plays games " competitively " , including titles such as Street Fighter IV and StarCraft . He feels he has a competitive nature , which he has turned towards " winning " at being a game designer by creating games that are unlike what is in the market rather than towards creating competitive games . As he was raised in China and works in America , Chen feels that he cannot fully relate to either culture as a game designer . As such , instead of trying to make games that fit perfectly with one culture he tries to make games that tap into feelings that are universal and independent of culture .

When Chen quit Maxis to re @-@ join Thatgamecompany , he did so knowing that it would mean taking less pay and having a less stable career . He felt , though , that it was important to the industry and medium as a whole to create games that provoked different emotional responses in the player than just excitement or fear . While Chen is not opposed to making action games , and his company has made internal " exciting " games that were well received at Sony , he feels that there is no point to Thatgamecompany commercially producing games like that instead of working for existing game developers , as they would not be making anything new that justified the cost of remaining an independent studio . Similarly , Chen does not intend for Thatgamecompany to make " big budget blockbuster games " , as the pressure on profits that that entails would stifle the innovation that he wants Thatgamecompany to focus on . Chen believes that for video games to become a mature medium like film , the industry as a whole needs to create a wide range of emotional responses to their games , similar to how film has thriller , romance , and comedy genres based on the emotions they provoke . He feels that there are only three ways for video games to impact adults in the same way they do children : " intellectually , whereby the work reveals a new perspective about the world that you have not seen before , " by " emotionally touching someone , " and " by creating a social environment where the intellectual or emotional stimulation could happen from other people . "