Jonathan Spira

Hello! Thank you for sending me a response email. Below, I’ve answered your questions. I look forward to hearing back from you!

-- Jonathan Spira

***Background and Design Experience:***

*1. Tell us about any previous game design/level design experience, including which companies and/or projects you've worked on. (max 250 words)*

I have worked as designer on two titles: *Midnight Wave* and *Scions*; on the former, I programmed and helped design tactical encounters. On the latter, I helped with world building. I am extremely interested in getting more design experience, especially of a practical nature; however, most of my experience has been working as a programmer, both on the above titles, on others, such as two current projects, a video game port of a board game named *Churchill* for GMT Games, and port of a game called *Ravva* to Xbox One.

Personally, I have also designed and programmer multiple smaller game, available on my itch.io page (<https://sanbox.itch.io/>

), and am currently working on a large game inspired by the Outer Worlds and Hitman, called “The Clockwork”.

I understand that hiring someone who has largely worked as a programmer is a difficult decision, and from your perspective, it can easier to choose someone with more obviously applicable experience. I hope to show in the below areas that I have the design chops for your project, and that my experience working on games as a programmer allows me to be an excellent addition to your team.

*2. Most of the Gestalt team is scattered around the globe. Have you had any remote work experience? (max 150 words)*

Yes – all of my work has been remote. I am accustomed to working using shared planning applications and have personally used HacknPlan, Trello, and Quire. I can comfortably make schedules and discuss goals with teams over Discord or email throughout my workday, in addition to calls and other discussions. Most of this stems from translating my experiences working in the New York District Attorney’s Office before law school (I had another life, almost becoming a lawyer, before deciding I wanted to make video games) into the virtual space.

*3. Tell us about your best and worst level/game design experiences. (max 250 words)*

My best design experience has been ongoing on my own project, The Clockwork, which is a completely non-combat experience where the player, born a peasant, discovers that their father is now late King, and they have been named Heir. They have three days to survive, sit on the throne, and have the crown put on their head, all the while exploring the Clockwork Tower which seems to control their world. It’s been a blast to design!

My worst design experience is a job I don’t list. I was hired for a multiplayer game to do level design. I was thrilled to have something to put on my resume, but the job became a nightmare, as my boss did not understand how to schedule or explain tasks. Frequently, “less than an hour” jobs became multi-day projects, struggling through his notes. Once, after designing a new sword, when asked if it was done, I told him “Let me get in game to make sure it feels right”, to white he responded, “Who cares – are the numbers on the Excel spreadsheet balanced?”. I tried to salvage the situation, but ultimately, the relationship proved untenable. It demonstrated to me the importance of good leadership, and, most importantly, the ability of a good boss to trust employees.

*4. As succinctly as possible, what do you think makes a for a great level/area? (max 250 words)*

It sharpens the experience of the game, providing both a playground and a guide to the player. The best gameplay pushes the player through the door unconsciously, and only after opening it and seeing Firelink Shrine, makes them realize what a journey they’ve taken.   
  
***Narrative & Games:***  
*1. Sort these franchises from your most to your least favorite and explain why: Final Fantasy, Star Wars, Blade Runner, Mad Max (max 200 words)*

**Star Wars, Mad Max, Final Fantasy, Blade Runner.**

Starting from the bottom – I have only seen the original Blade Runner, which is a film I did not like. I think it was too heavy on world building (a very cool world though!) without enough plot. It is telling to me that the best line from that film, in my opinion, (“Tear in the rain”) was ad-libbed. However, I have heard excellent things about the sequel.

Next, Final Fantasy – once again, I haven’t played every FF, but many of them (I loved FF8, and who doesn’t like FF7) are fantastic story adventures. Generally though, I am not the biggest fan of classic JRPG mechanics; I think many JRPGs favor repetition over novel experiences, which can make the games overly long, yet without content.

Next, Mad Max. I actually have found the older films to only be okay, but *Fury Road* is such a stunningly, near perfect film that it is difficult for me to not love Mad Max. I have never seen a movie so deftly question its characters, its world, and so well point the finger at the protagonist and the audience. The story begins about just a man abused by his world and ends as allies fight back against their collective oppressor.

Lastly, I love Star Wars the most on this list. The original trilogy shaped my childhood deeply (eclipsed only by Lord of the Rings), the prequels only eroded it slightly, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the two newest films. None of these movies are as good, in my opinion, as *Fury Road*, but when comparing franchises as a whole, Star Wars’ consistent quality wins out.

*2. Choose a single game or film out of your favorite franchise from above, and explain why it is your top choice. ( max 200 words)*

I think the best Star Wars film is Episode V, but my favorite Star Wars movie (get ready) is the most recent: Episode VIII. I realize that it’s not everyone’s favorite, but I *adored* how it undermined the audiences expectations. I think some of the best art surprises the audience, and Star Wars, after seven films, seemed like it was all out of surprises. Episode VIII brought those surprises back. I don’t necessarily agree with everything in the film (many fans did not like Luke’s portrayal, and I generally thought the pacing of the movie by the middle was quite poor), but its courage that take all the portrayals of what a “hero” should be and throw them away was breathtaking, for good and for bad. To me, it was invigorating, and it’s left me thrilled for the finale.

3. What is your favorite Metroidvania game and why?*(max 200 words)*

I’m sure others will give the same answer, but: *Hollow Knight*. It was mysterious and filled with wonder – it also allowed the player to discover the intricate connection between the levels, making the world part of the gameplay experience in a meaningful way. My eyes opened wide as I fell into the Abyss at the bottom of the world, and I remember feeling so high up when I was at the peaks of the mountain, even though it was only a video game. That deep, interconnected feeling, which metroidvanias explore best, is omnipresent through Hollow Knight – every path feels like a part of the world, and the world keeps looping and looping back on itself. It’s a wonderful experience.

*4. What are your all time three favorite games, in any genre, and describe the main thing you love most about them (don’t worry if they aren’t Metroidvanias, 2D games, etc – be honest with this one)! (max 200 words)*

*The Outer Wilds, The Witness*, and *Bioshock*. For *Bioshock*, it was the “would you kindly moment” that demonstrated to me what video games could be. Many people talk about it as a crazy twist, but I’ve never seen it that way – it was a commentary on me, the player. I could take that golf club and beat a man’s face in with it, because the video game told me to, or I could turn the console off and walk away. They said “would you kindly”, so I did it. *Bioshock* was about control, and it’s great trick was showing me, the player, how the game controlled me.

For *The Witness* and *The Outer Wilds*, I loved how they were essentially metroidvanias, but where the tools you learned were knowledge. As a designer, it’s also hard to not respect a game which doesn’t have any combat in it, but still provides a satisfactory experience (not that I have anything against games with combat in them!). It’s difficult to talk about the experience of beating the *Outer Wilds*, but it was one of the most beautiful experiences I’ve ever had in any game.

***Practical Design:***

*A World Map*

Below is a chart of five areas, plus a sixth area that isn't specified. We'd love for you to answer a few questions about how you'd assemble these areas into a World Map! For additional context, think *steampunk*. *Gestalt: Vanguard* is set in a steam punk-inspired world, heavily influenced by the franchises mentioned above.