

# GAMERella Podcast E02

## Sean Walton – Climate Jam, Wales

- 1 **Intro:** 0:04 *Welcome to the GAMERella Podcast. I'm Desirée De Jesus, and*  
2 *in this episode, I talk with Sean Walton, educator, game designer*  
3 *and co-founder of Pill Bug Interactive about learning from*  
4 *failure, using games to communicate the complexities of climate*  
5 *change and his path through academia to game making and*  
6 *alternative Game Jam organizing in Wales.*
- 7 **Desirée De Jesus:** 0:27 Sean, welcome to the GAMERella Podcast. I'm so excited to  
8 have you join us. We're really great fans of your work on climate  
9 change and alternative game jams. So why don't you introduce  
10 yourself to our audience?
- 11 **Sean Walton:** 0:42 Thanks so much. So my name is Sean Walton. I'm an academic  
12 at Swansea University in Wales in the UK, in computer science.  
13 And so I am an academic, I'm an educator really. I have been a  
14 teacher. I was a school teacher then I became a kind of university  
15 academic lecturer. And also, I do a bunch of game stuff like on  
16 the side for fun.
- 17 **Desirée De Jesus:** 1:09 Love it. So as I was looking at your bio, I noticed something  
18 mentioned as Pill Bug Interactive. What's Pill Bug Interactive?
- 19 **Sean Walton:** 1:21 So Pill Bug Interactive is like a super tiny game studio that I  
20 founded so many years ago, I can't remember. Like, 2018-2016?  
21 I didn't even know. A while ago. It's me and my friend Dave,

22 who is also an academic in creative writing. And so far we've  
23 released three commercial games, the most recent, which is a  
24 making it home, a vehicle building game, where you're a ladybug  
25 with family problems trying to get home in time for her  
26 daughter's birthday.

27 **Desirée De Jesus:** 1:53 How did you come up with that one?

28 **Sean Walton:** 1:54 It was our third game. What we noticed with our second game  
29 was we couldn't get streamers to cover it. It was kind of an arcade  
30 game called cycle 28. We're proud of it. It's small, tiny. But I  
31 think it was one of those, like, it was hard to pinpoint a type of  
32 person who would like it. It's like, "Do you like fun? Well, then  
33 you are probably going to like this." So when we looked on  
34 YouTube, and everyone's playing building games, and so we had  
35 this idea of let's make a building game where you build this  
36 vehicle as you're traveling somewhere. And then from that we  
37 kind of like to... Because Dave is a writer. So Dave, he writes  
38 novels, and is in academic creative writing, so we're always kind  
39 of thinking of a story. And then we kind of got to this idea of a  
40 journey. And then I think it came from like, we just met an artist.  
41 And we were like, "What do you like drawing?" We asked her.

42 **Desirée De Jesus:** 1:54 You' were just vibing.

43 **Sean Walton:** 2:00 Yeah. And so she was like, "Kind of just like playing with the  
44 idea of some bugs." And we were like, "What about a ladybug?"  
45 And then it kind of went from there. But we realized, of course,

46 that having bugs in your game is probably a silly thing and that  
47 not many people... There aren't many Ladybug games out there,  
48 it turns out.

49 **Desirée De Jesus:** 3:07 No. But that's one of the things that makes it unique. I was  
50 wondering with the ladybug, was their interest in bugs in general.  
51 I guess, very silly question but just thinking about Pill Bug  
52 interaction as well.

53 **Sean Walton:** 3:19 Yeah, that was the other thing. I think it was like the bug thing is  
54 almost a theme by mistake or by accident. And the other problem  
55 with Ladybug is then Lady Bird in England.

56 **Desirée De Jesus:** 3:30 That's what I was thinking. Yeah.

57 **Sean Walton:** 3:33 And with our initial marketing, everyone was like, "What's a  
58 Lady Bir?". So we had to kind of switch to Ladybug.

59 **Desirée De Jesus:** 3:39 So what's the gaming scene like where you are?

60 **Sean Walton:** 3:42 Where I am, I suppose it is important to say first... So in Cardiff.  
61 I'm based in Cardiff, near Cardiff, even though I work at  
62 Swansea University in Wales. And it's quite small, I think would  
63 be fair to say. There's kind of two big studios that I can think of  
64 Wales interactive, and tiny rebel games. Tiny rebel games also  
65 make amazing beer. They started a brewery which is a great  
66 story. They started out making games. Now they make beer as  
67 well. Lots of..

68 **Desirée De Jesus:** 4:10 But they go well together.

69 **Sean Walton:** 4:12 Yeah. And all their beers are based... a lot of them are based on  
70 characters from games. So they've got a peach sour, from  
71 Princess Peach. And then they have Hadouken for Street Fighter.

72 **Desirée De Jesus:** 4:24 Oh, wow.

73 **Sean Walton:** 4:24 But super nice beer. And so it's those two kind of main studios.  
74 And then the rest is really... There's this kind of core community  
75 of both people who play games and kind of... It's all based a lot  
76 around the universities and the students. And there's University  
77 of South Wales with a really good, well respected games course.  
78 And a lot of the academics there, they've put a lot of work along  
79 with some community groups, the arcade vaults, which is this  
80 kind of community... I can't remember the name of it, the legal  
81 term but they are not for profit. They are a community interest  
82 group; I think is what it's called. And they run a thing called  
83 Games Wales. And they have a space in Cardiff. They run events  
84 there, which has been this really nice kind of warm group.

85 **Desirée De Jesus:** 5:15 So there's a welcoming community?

86 **Sean Walton:** 5:18 Absolutely. Yeah. I always tell my students you should totally  
87 join and go along to a meet up, and just kind of get to know  
88 people. I think we've always felt it but when we launched our  
89 second game, it totally bombed. And we didn't sell many copies  
90 whatsoever. And like many people in our situation, at the time, it  
91 was very... It's still very hard to sell games. And kind of the way  
92 the community rallied around us, we were not expecting and we

93 had ... It wasn't just the other game creators, but they were these  
94 game groups of players. So there were, when we released the  
95 game on Nintendo Switch, there's the most amazing community  
96 of people who play Nintendo, and they invited us to one of their  
97 sessions. They're like, "Guys come along. We're getting  
98 together." And they do this every month. And it was just seeing  
99 this age range of... There were people, probably 11-12 year olds  
100 being dropped off by their parents right up to people, kind of  
101 older than us. And it's just really nice to be a part of that. And to  
102 see how excited they were that, "Hey, you're here. You live here.  
103 And you're making games and I bought your game, because you  
104 live near us."

105 **Desirée De Jesus:** 6:32 Well, you're casting this vision, right? You're showing that game  
106 making is something that's accessible. And I know for myself, I  
107 kind of fan girl a bit when I meet someone who's worked on a  
108 game that I've enjoyed. You just feel like it's this chance meeting  
109 with like this brilliant, and talented individual. So I completely  
110 get that. I am curious, though, you were saying that the game  
111 bombed yet you were experiencing this great support from people  
112 who were enjoying the game. Do you know why it bombed? How  
113 are you thinking of the word bombed here?

114 **Sean Walton:** 7:07 Yeah. That's an amazing question that we are always asking  
115 ourselves. Because the one thing we're still not quite sure on as  
116 kind of Pill Bug; what is success for us. Because Pill Bug doesn't  
117 make enough money to pay the rent. It's a side hustle. So for us,

118 I guess bombed was just not selling many copies. It's almost  
119 embarrassing. There was a feeling I get like that was... I guess,  
120 that's the real feeling of, I remember feeling at the time is feeling  
121 embarrassed of spending... One of the things when you're  
122 marketing a game or something, I guess, with everything you  
123 have to kind of always put on this outer appearance that things  
124 are going great. And you have to be like, we're doing amazing,  
125 and then you just don't sell many copies.

126 **Desirée De Jesus:** 7:58 Well, you want to instill confidence in what you're doing. Right?

127 **Sean Walton:** 8:02 Yeah.

128 **Desirée De Jesus:** 8:02 Of course. So if we could backtrack just a bit, how did you  
129 become involved in gaming? What was that moment where you  
130 were like, yes, I love this?

131 **Sean Walton:** 8:14 There's kind of a couple of moments. The first one is when my  
132 parents bought me an Atari ST when I was like - I don't know -  
133 eight or something. Right?

134 **Desirée De Jesus:** 8:25 Do you still have it?

135 **Sean Walton:** 8:26 No. We sold it at some point to someone. But I keep thinking...  
136 We stream, and I keep meaning to... The thing I remember about  
137 it, is that the Atari, for the listeners who don't know, probably  
138 more people have heard of the Amiga than the Atari ST but it's a  
139 very UK platform that didn't really make it elsewhere. And so if  
140 you think about it, you can kind of say it's an Amiga, right? And  
141 I remember the box and on the back there's screenshots of all the

142 games you could get for this thing. And I remember, just  
143 imagining many of the games, I never even tried or bought, but  
144 just imagining what those games would be and what they would  
145 be like to play. And I keep meaning to find a picture of that box  
146 and then on an emulator play through all those games to see if  
147 my childhood imagination was anything like what they were.

148 **Desirée De Jesus:** 9:18 You should do it. I completely support that.

149 **Sean Walton:** 9:21 Yeah, it's on my list of trying to figure out Atari emulation. And  
150 the thing I remember is... For those who don't know, it basically  
151 was like a massive gray keyboard with a disk drive on the side  
152 that you plugged into your TV, and a joystick with one button  
153 sort of thing. And what my dad would do is - I didn't know where  
154 he got them from, but he'd always come home with a box of  
155 floppy disks that would just be random games and stuff. And so  
156 thinking about it now, it's almost like just browsing. It's almost  
157 like getting a game jam. It's almost like getting all those games  
158 from a game jam where you have this big pile of them that you're  
159 just playing through. And I would do just put a game in and play  
160 the first 10 minutes and then get stuck or whatever. And I think  
161 that's when I really got into it and then started design... Not... I  
162 guess, I think a lot of people who played games did it. It's like,  
163 I'd get graph paper and kind of design games on graph paper.  
164 And me and my friends would be like, "Oh, let's design a bunch  
165 of these levels and send it to some company." I can't remember

166 it. The people who did Lemmings, I remember. I can't remember  
167 what they're called, but...

168 **Desirée De Jesus:** 10:27 So you mailed them?

169 **Sean Walton:** 10:27 No, we never did. But we'd kind of like make these things and I  
170 guess we didn't. I remember as well buying I guess a disc that  
171 had Visual Basic on it or something, or some programming  
172 language, and then thinking that I'd make... Because I had no idea  
173 as an eight-year-old how you made games. And buying it, I'd be  
174 like, "Oh, I can't do this." Like, I don't know what this is or how  
175 to even start. So then kind of just, I guess, forgot about making  
176 games for a while and then just played them and enjoyed them.  
177 And then the other moment was actually a lot further, more  
178 recently, when I was a teacher. So this was maybe 11-12 years  
179 ago, and there was a year where a bunch of games came out that  
180 really changed the way I looked at games. And those games were  
181 the original Mass Effect, BioShock, and Portal. I think it was the  
182 first Portal. It was that same year that all those games came out  
183 at the same time. And the thing about all those games, and the  
184 thing that Mass Effect, kind of I realized was how attached you  
185 got to the characters versus a TV show, or a film. I guess back  
186 then that was before now TV shows that have kind of almost  
187 overtaken film in a way in my mind, in people-- But back then it  
188 was kind of very much comparable to a film.

189 **Desirée De Jesus:** 11:46 It's debatable.



190 **Sean Walton:** 11:47 Yeah?

191 **Desirée De Jesus:** 11:48 But for sure, there's this emotional connection that you're having  
192 with these characters is quite unique, the things that you  
193 mentioned.

194 **Sean Walton:** 11:58 Yeah. And I think a lot of it is about the length of time that those  
195 characters could grow compared to and watching a two-hour  
196 film. It was like thinking you just can't do this in a film. I think  
197 BioShock it was the... The thing that I got with BioShock, that is  
198 the way I remember realizing there was a point in the game where  
199 I was feeling something, and I was really feeling it and thinking  
200 it and thinking, "Why?" And a few hours later, it revealed that,  
201 that feeling was clearly designed. There's a reveal BioShock that  
202 I... And I was like, "Oh!" So they were deliberately making me  
203 feel that way through very clever game design. And that's what I  
204 found really fascinating, was that idea of designing a feeling, like  
205 designing an experience to make someone feel a thing. And how  
206 on earth you even begin to do that. And I think that's where I was  
207 like, "I need to do something in games." I need to know how to  
208 do this. I need to make games, basically.

209 **Desirée De Jesus:** 12:57 What do you think it is about feeling that is special as you're  
210 playing a game, versus maybe not being as emotionally invested?

211 **Sean Walton:** 13:08 Something I've been thinking about the past month or so, maybe  
212 a bit longer, is I've been just bouncing off games. Really just start  
213 trying to play something and just maybe playing for an hour or

214 two and just bouncing off it. And I think it comes down to that.  
215 I've been bouncing off games that haven't made me feel anything  
216 or haven't given me a chance or the space to do that. I think it's  
217 about the player agency and the idea that you have choice and so  
218 that's something you can explore and you can use that to make  
219 people feel different things. So a game that's been really  
220 profound for me is a game called Outer Wilds. That game has  
221 made me think about grief in a completely new way. And that  
222 through my own actions in a very strange way and in a very  
223 clever way. And then the cleverest thing about it, is it does it so  
224 well. And then there was that they had a DLC that released this  
225 year. And they just went and did it again, right? So that they-- I  
226 just went through the whole thing, and it's like, you've got me  
227 again. You made me... I knew and still you did it. Compared to  
228 like, I think games that have to be because of the amount of  
229 money they cost to make, they have to make them so focus  
230 groups that actually, it's your lead. You're very much like go to  
231 the big tower, climb up the tower, push the button, here are a  
232 bunch of icons on the map, and now you do all this. Then this is  
233 always going back to the film of like - There's nothing wrong  
234 with that. And I'm not saying that one is better on the other - But  
235 for what I'm looking for, it appears to be an interactive thing. But  
236 really, it's a very tailored, designed thing but not in that same  
237 way that of designing a series of emotions but designing a, you're

238 going to see this, then you're going to see this, then you're going  
239 to see this.

240 **Desirée De Jesus:** 14:49 Yeah, it's guiding you along a different path of engagement. So  
241 I'm hearing about the ways that games have kind of prompted  
242 you to think more deeply about what it means to play games,  
243 what it means to not so much experience yourself, but to have  
244 kind of a clear understanding of things outside of games, like  
245 grief, as you just mentioned. So even though when you were  
246 younger, you and your friends were kind of playing around and  
247 designing levels, what led you to kind of take that leap or that  
248 step to say, "You know what? I actually want to make games."  
249 How did you make that transition? Or is it something that was  
250 kind of always playing in the back of your mind? Like, oh, I  
251 would have done this differently, or maybe this level should have  
252 had this, that would have made the game so much better.

253 **Sean Walton:** 15:39 I guess it's always been in my mind, right? So it's always been  
254 kind of thinking about, "I have the skill set, I think to do this."  
255 Which was actually I was wrong about that. I was a programmer.  
256 Games are way more than programming, is the thing that I've  
257 learned. And the programming, as I would often say, is, "It's a  
258 thing, but it's definitely not the most important thing in making  
259 games." And people often think it is. So I'd been thinking a lot  
260 about, "I should have the skill set to do this, so why don't I just  
261 try it." And the thing that actually made me do it was not a happy  
262 thing. So I'd suffered from chronic pain for a while and I needed

263 something to take my mind off it. And so I was like, “Why don’t  
264 I make a game? Why don’t I learn how to make a game?” And  
265 so I did a Udemy course or something, like how to make a  
266 JavaScript game sort of thing. And I made this ridiculous... I  
267 wouldn’t even call it a game. It’s was an ecosystem evolution  
268 simulation thing.

269 **Desirée De Jesus:** 16:35 I’m so curious.

270 **Sean Walton:** 16:37 Yeah. And I embarrassingly called it Waltania. It was a silly  
271 thing. And it looked horrible. And it was like, whatever. It was a  
272 mess. It was an absolute mess with a 100 menus and you create  
273 animals and plants. And the idea is that you’re trying to get these  
274 things to evolve, and for a stable ecosystem. And stuck it on  
275 Reddit. And it did really well. And lots of people... To the point  
276 where someone broke it.

277 **Desirée De Jesus:** 17:04 That’s amazing.

278 **Sean Walton:** 17:03 And it was like, “Wow.” And I guess this was around Minecraft  
279 time. So when Minecraft was like, “I’m just sending some  
280 random guy, some money into his PayPal account to play this  
281 game.” And so this idea of kind of early access, I guess was just  
282 starting to be a thing or this idea of paying, or just giving a  
283 donation to some random person. And so I put on a PayPal like,  
284 “Hey, do you want to support this game?” and someone gave me  
285 20 quid. And I was like, “Oh, someone’s given me money for a  
286 thing I made. This is incredible.” And then from that point

287                   onwards, I was like... I think I kind of didn't do it for a while. I  
288                   was doing my PhD at the time so that was quite intense. And as  
289                   you know, it kind of went to the side. But then a bit later, another  
290                   not very nice thing happened. I was kind of... In academia, jobs  
291                   are often quite short term. And I was a researcher at the time. And  
292                   so I was coming to the end my contract. It was going to be very  
293                   redundant. And I was like, "Do you know what? I need to get  
294                   back into making games. I'm just going to learn unity and make  
295                   something." And I remade that game in unity in 3D. And put it  
296                   on itch.io for free, but pay what you want. And at some point, I  
297                   was like, "I have \$100." People had been paying, and I have a  
298                   \$100. I could pay someone to do some music. And so I did that.

299    **Desirée De Jesus:** 17:04    They believed in you. I love it.

300    **Sean Walton:**       18:06    Yeah. And then this one person, this small streamer on Twitch,  
301                   streamed the game. And they were like, "What are the best free  
302                   games on Itch Sort of thing. And they said that my game was the  
303                   best free game on Itch.

304    **Desirée De Jesus:** 18:35    Oh my goodness.

305    **Sean Walton:**       18:37    And they said, "Oh, he should totally put this on Steam." I was  
306                   like, "Oh, should I?" And I tried. And I did. And then I had to  
307                   start a company because I'm on Steam. And then the steam  
308                   launch went really well. And so it kind of built from there. That  
309                   was the kind of journey to making games, I guess.

310 **Desirée De Jesus:** 18:59 Yeah. So starting out of that season where you were exploring  
311 ways of, I guess, managing different life experiences and then  
312 seeing such a positive reaction from people. Wow, that must have  
313 just been really encouraging and kind of affirming. Like, yeah,  
314 this is something I'm supposed to be doing.

315 **Sean Walton:** 19:16 It felt like it was something I was good enough to keep doing, I  
316 guess. I'm not trying to like... That always sounds really kind of  
317 cringe when I said that. But there was a feeling of people were  
318 encouraging me and still do. And it still blows my mind. It  
319 absolutely... Like there's a lot of negativity. There's a lot of  
320 negativity, particularly the first game. I mean, there's angry  
321 people on the internet and they are going to be angry at you for  
322 no reason. And that's a downer, which isn't actually that's kind  
323 of... It's more than a downer. It's very serious, but we still have.  
324 Like we have a small community but so many studios. It's a small  
325 community of people who want us to succeed and that's really  
326 weird. It's amazing and it's strange. We have a Patreon and  
327 people pay money to us every month and it's amazing. And I  
328 realize Dave my business partner he doesn't understand why  
329 people do it. And I realized, I pay in a bunch. I have a bunch of  
330 Patreon patrons that I'm paying, however much a month and  
331 some of the stuff, I don't even consume their content. It's just  
332 nice. People just want to be supportive of each other and there  
333 seem to be people who can, that do and that's really nice.

334 **Desirée De Jesus:** 19:16 But it also means that you are making a difference for people.  
335 There's something that you're doing that's resonating with  
336 people on some deep level for them to give money. Right?

337 **Sean Walton:** 20:04 Yeah, it is. And I remember, there was once... So I said, our  
338 second game bombed, right? Really didn't do well. But the thing  
339 I always look back to, this is something that nothing is going to  
340 take away, there's a video someone did of the game. And this is  
341 a guy who did a video of our first game. And I think that's another  
342 thing that's great. And you can do a video of any game, and it's  
343 better to do a popular game because you can get more views. But  
344 people who take the time-- Yeah, a YouTube, yeah it was a play  
345 through on... So this was kind of before Twitch became the kind  
346 of main way that people do that sort of thing; let's play. So this  
347 was kind of when YouTube Let's Play's was the big thing. And  
348 he did a video of cyber 28. And even though he almost was in  
349 tears, for how much it reminded him of a time in his childhood.  
350 And I was like, "Wow, that's like a thing that we made, had an  
351 emotional effect on this person that I never going to meet." But  
352 still messaged me on Twitter every now and again, or likes a  
353 tweet every now and again, or is trying to support by telling  
354 people, "Go check out their stuff."

355 **Desirée De Jesus:** 20:04 That's amazing.

356 **Sean Walton:** 20:11 Yeah.

357 **Desirée De Jesus:** 20:11 So then how did you make the shift from making games to then  
358 helping other people make games?

359 **Sean Walton:** 22:07 So what ended up happening, so I was getting made redundant  
360 from my research position, and it was to the point you're like,  
361 very... I mean, I was really lucky. I only ended up being  
362 unemployed for about a week. And I ended up getting this  
363 lectureship position that I've got now. So had plans for like,  
364 "Right, okay..." Because I used to be a teacher, so I was like,  
365 "Okay, I can do some supply. That'll pay the bills. I'm going to  
366 really push on this game stuff because people seem to be liking  
367 it. I made this much money a month. Maybe I can do it. It's an  
368 opportunity. Losing my job is an opportunity." Again, incredibly  
369 privileged to be able to say that...

370 **Desirée De Jesus:** 22:42 But it was an opportunity to pivot.

371 **Sean Walton:** 22:43 Yes, it was an opportunity to reassess and change and do  
372 something else. But I didn't. I got the job. And so I got this job  
373 as an academic in a computer science department whereas, before  
374 I was in engineering. So I was like, "Huh". In the department I  
375 was in, when I was doing my PhD, I was very much told... So the  
376 thing was academia, for your listeners who don't know, kind of  
377 this idea of academia in a way simplified is, you're trying to build  
378 a profile for yourself, to say, "I'm a world leading researcher, so  
379 hire me in your university and everything." So, I was always told,  
380 you've got to pick an area and stick to it and be like, this is your



381 niche. My niche was mesh generation, and computational fluid  
382 dynamics, and I love it. And it's still kind of my niche. And  
383 actually, that is good advice despite what I'm about to say, which  
384 is, when I moved to computer science, there was very much...  
385 The person who was in charge of the department of the college  
386 of science, who is a computer scientist himself, was very much...  
387 And this blew me away in the job interview. He said, as I was  
388 talking... They ask you things like, "Oh, yeah, what are you going  
389 to do? What kind of research you're going to do?" And he just  
390 stopped and he said, "Right, I'm sick of your research. I put you  
391 in a room with this guy and this guy, what are you going to do?"  
392 And what was amazing...

393 **Desirée De Jesus:** 23:47 That's a curveball. That's so--

394 **Sean Walton:** 23:49 Yeah, and I stopped, and I kind of almost said to him, "You're  
395 telling me I can do what I want?" And so then he told me  
396 afterwards that the reason he gave me the job was not because I  
397 had a good answer, but because clearly, I was excited by the fact  
398 he'd ask that. And so they were very much encouraging us to  
399 move out of our areas and kind of try other things. And so I was  
400 like, "Okay, well, one area, I can move out into games  
401 somehow." And so I started a three or four-year plan that  
402 eventually led to me getting a module where I teach game  
403 development now to students in the department. Which I think is  
404 one of my proudest achievements of political wrangling around  
405 the university to eventually get made that happen. So I kind of

406 got into teaching it through that kind of route of like, “Okay, well,  
407 my day job is an educator so I can kind of bring the outside stuff  
408 in.”

409 **Desirée De Jesus:** 25:03 But that was really... Not even sure what the word is. Surprising,  
410 unlikely, magical, kind of encounter to be given that space, to  
411 then...

412 **Sean Walton:** 25:17 Yeah.

413 **Desirée De Jesus:** 25:18 Wow. That’s incredible.

414 **Sean Walton:** 25:21 Yeah, really again, really lucky and kind of privileged to be in  
415 that situation where it could do that. I mean, it wasn’t a great  
416 career move. In terms of academia, it wasn’t a good career move.  
417 I should have stuck with my niche. And I’ve had to kind of go  
418 back to my niche because actually, there isn’t much accepting of  
419 people switching subjects, it turns out. It’s very hard to kind of  
420 enter a new subject. And there’s a lot of gatekeepers, you have to  
421 kind of navigate. And for the most part, I think the games  
422 research areas really, actually been incredibly supportive,  
423 compared to me trying to get into other subjects. But also, more  
424 internally at the university, I think they want... I’d have been  
425 better off if I’d just stuck with the CFD, right? And really  
426 concentrated on that.

427 **Desirée De Jesus:** 26:06 Better in terms of?

428 **Sean Walton:** 26:08 Money. Promotion. All this kind of like career progression.

429 **Desirée De Jesus:** 26:13 But on the other hand, you are kind of being fulfilled by the work  
430 you're doing, right?

431 **Sean Walton:** 26:20 Mmm.

432 **Desirée De Jesus:** 26:22 And that counts for something.

433 **Sean Walton:** 26:24 Yeah, I think that is ultimately that I'm motivated to do what I'm  
434 doing.

435 **Desirée De Jesus:** 26:30 Yeah. It's such a tension, isn't it? Something that we have to kind  
436 of figure out, what's worth kind of pursuing in that institutional  
437 aspect, versus the pieces that really help you feel alive and like  
438 you're making a difference in the world. So if we could switch  
439 gears a bit to talk about climate jam.

440 **Sean Walton:** 26:54 So climate jam was a game jam, we ran in 2018, where we  
441 wanted developers to make games to communicate the  
442 complexities of climate change. And where it came about from  
443 actually follows on straight from the conversation I had in that  
444 interview, which was... So I started as an academic and there as  
445 part of... So something that is run in Wales is something called  
446 the Welsh Crucible. And it's a quite intense Academic  
447 Leadership Development Program. And the idea is they get  
448 people from lots of early career academics together, and they  
449 train them in all the kinds of like, how to be an academic sort of  
450 stuff, and...

451 **Desirée De Jesus:** 27:35 All the important stuff.

452 **Sean Walton:** 27:37 Yeah, and really like... I mean, that whole thing was such a  
453 profoundly... My life... It completely changed me in a lot of ways.  
454 It was a very powerful experience. It's where I met Dave, who is  
455 my business partner now. I met him on the Welsh Crucible. And  
456 it's where I met the people who we organized climate jam with.  
457 And so the way the thing was structured was, there was a bunch  
458 of different events throughout the year, and we'd all travel away  
459 and all be locked in a hotel together, right? And do a bunch of  
460 stuff. In the first one we all kind of talked about what our research  
461 area was. We had to do a PechaKucha, that kind of like three-  
462 minute automatic moving slides. I just launched the first game  
463 for Pill Bug and that was in my mind. I was like, "Do you know  
464 what? Screw it. I'm not going to talk about... I'm just going to  
465 talk about games." I can talk about... I think I kind of mentioned  
466 some CFD at some point, but mainly talked about the games. And  
467 so then what happened was all throughout that event, lots of  
468 academics in different areas, were kind of coming up to me and  
469 saying, "Do you know what? I think it'd be great you to make a  
470 game about "insert my area of research here"."

471 **Desirée De Jesus:** 28:44 Of course.

472 **Sean Walton:** 28:45 Right? Which happens a lot. It happens a lot. I don't know if  
473 people who ask that realize how much it happens. But sometimes  
474 I do say... Sometimes I've said yes, and it's gone okay. But in  
475 this case, what really got me was... So David, David Reynolds,  
476 who is a different David to the one that I ended up going into

477 business with. So he's a climate scientist. And he was very much  
478 very worried about as were all the geographers and all the climate  
479 scientists at that event, very worried about climate change. Like  
480 all. If you speak to any academic in that area, and they will tell  
481 you how worried they are. And particularly at that time, the thing  
482 that was really worrying was the public perception and how  
483 wrong it was. And how a lot of people didn't understand climate  
484 science, because it is hard. It's understandable. And the thing that  
485 they found was that a lot of people thought that scientists  
486 themselves didn't agree on it, which is not true. Well, other than  
487 scientists always... I think people don't understand that scientists  
488 can disagree and that's part of science in a way and so they  
489 perceive that as well, "They don't know what's going on. So how  
490 can they tell me to stop---?"

491 **Desirée De Jesus:** 30:01 Right, that everyone's supposed to agree for it to be true.

492 **Sean Walton:** 30:04 Yes. Exactly. So what we ended up doing was we made a team,  
493 so that this whole event at the end, you could apply for some  
494 money. And we met a group of people who we had... So me as  
495 the person who kind of knows about making games, David who  
496 is the climate scientist, and then lots of other people who were  
497 involved who were more psychologists. There was quite a lot of  
498 us. There's was I think nine in total. And a lot of these people I  
499 worked with, I've worked with afterwards on different projects,  
500 and it's been amazing. And to meet people that have a very  
501 similar mindset. So like Sarah Dorson and she works in how

502 children learn through play. So that's obviously very relevant to  
503 kind of educational games and those sorts of things. So we talked  
504 about the idea. David was like, "We can totally make a game  
505 about climate change." Because that makes sense. We could  
506 simulate it, and stuff. And that was like the one, I was like, "Yeah,  
507 no, this is an important thing to do." This is compared to...  
508 Everyone's research is important to them. And that's important,  
509 right? Otherwise, they won't be doing it but it felt like that was  
510 like a priority. If I had time to work with someone it was going  
511 to be the climate change person, I think.

512 **Desirée De Jesus:** 31:19 Also, the real world connections are very pressing. There's  
513 something that's immediate, that people can see as being  
514 relevant.

515 **Sean Walton:** 31:27 Yeah, exactly. And I think part of that whole thing is going back  
516 to what we were saying before about this tension between doing  
517 something where you feel fulfilled, and you're doing something  
518 good, versus doing the thing that's going to get you lots of  
519 money. And the thing that's going to get the money, what I was  
520 doing was designing things for aerospace companies that create  
521 a lot of carbon so there was also probably that tension going on  
522 in my head that actually I had a research grant making better jet  
523 engines. And to be fair, some of that, and now a lot of my work  
524 is in aerospace, but to do with things like wind turbines and trying  
525 to reduce the carbon footprint of things.

526 **Desirée De Jesus:** 31:27 Right. So kind of that melding of those two areas for you.

527 **Sean Walton:** 32:17 Exactly. And so as a group we kind of talked about... We started  
528 out with this idea of we're going to make a game. And then at  
529 some point, we decided that with this idea of having a game jam.  
530 We didn't really understand how games can be used to educate.  
531 Lots of people who've done research in the area. And it's still  
532 actually quite an unknown area, in a lot of ways.

533 **Desirée De Jesus:** 32:43 It's developing.

534 **Sean Walton:** 32:44 Yeah. And so we thought, "Well, wouldn't it be great if we had  
535 a whole bunch of different games with different mechanics that  
536 we could compare? And see if we could figure out what are the  
537 kind of most effective mechanics for changing people's minds."  
538 And we thought, a really good way of getting a lot of people to  
539 come up with a lot of ideas is a game jam. And so we ended up  
540 applying for a grant to fund it. And an important thing, for me, as  
541 the person who's involved already in the kind of games  
542 community in Wales and stuff is, feeling like the people who  
543 entered the game jam would get something out of it financially.  
544 Because I think very explicitly, we should apply for money  
545 because it feels a bit like we're asking for free labor in a way.  
546 We're saying, "Hey, go make these games for us. And then we  
547 can just go do our research paper, and you can go away and do  
548 whatever." We didn't want to be like that.

549 **Desirée De Jesus:** 33:35 Right. Extractive.

550 **Sean Walton:** 33:37 Yeah. And the kind of thing we wanted to do with it is we said...  
551 Firstly, we had some prizes. And we kind of valued those prizes  
552 at how much a unity license costs. So we tried to have it relevant  
553 to game developers. So we had these prizes, but then also, we  
554 said, “And at the end of it, anyone who’s interested, if you’ve  
555 made a really good prototype, we can help you apply for money  
556 from an educational grant.” Because grant writing is our thing.  
557 That’s what we do, right? So we can help you apply for grants to  
558 get money to make these into bigger games. We don’t want you  
559 to just do this and then stop.

560 **Desirée De Jesus:** 34:11 I mean, if I was participating in a game jam, that’s like gold,  
561 having that opportunity to take something that you’ve made and  
562 make it even better, like to have money to do it so it’s not just  
563 that kind of side hustle. Maybe someone will give you money  
564 through as a patron.

565 **Sean Walton:** 34:30 So no one actually took us up on that.

566 **Desirée De Jesus:** 34:32 What?

567 **Sean Walton:** 34:33 Yeah. So a few things happened.

568 **Desirée De Jesus:** 34:35 Are you kidding me?

569 **Sean Walton:** 34:36 No. I think people... There were a few... There was some  
570 definitely good... And there are some really good prototypes too.  
571 I was really surprised. But no, no one did.



572 **Desirée De Jesus:** 34:47 Well, why do you think that is? Do you think maybe that people  
573 were still thinking about it as just something that was fun to do  
574 versus this as a potential career path?

575 **Sean Walton:** 34:58 I think you've got it there that to be honest. I think that's it.  
576 Because this was a research project for us, we actually did some  
577 surveys with the participants before and afterwards. And so we  
578 got some pretty good data on what their motivations were for  
579 doing it. And for most people, the motivations were to make a  
580 fun game. Like the motivation wasn't the climate change aspects  
581 so much, even though there were a few notable exceptions. But I  
582 think there's a double thing of either game designer who if it was  
583 a career, they didn't want to make educational games. So they  
584 didn't want to lock themselves into that sort of contract,  
585 potentially, if they apply for money. And the other one is, like  
586 you said, it's not a career, I'm just doing this for fun. It's a hobby.  
587 And there is a scary... I realize as well now, even me and Dave,  
588 we think, "Well, why are we not selling lots of copies? And it's  
589 because we don't have enough money to market these games. So  
590 why don't we go to a publisher?" And then we think, "Well, if  
591 we go to a publisher, we've suddenly got that pressure of  
592 someone else paying money for it." So then we've got deadlines,  
593 then we've got this other stuff that actually I've got enough  
594 deadlines. I don't need to have more deadlines in my life. So  
595 maybe that could have been also the thought. But I do think it

596 was important that we offered it. And I'm glad we did, even  
597 though no one took us up on it.

598 **Desirée De Jesus:** 36:20 So I was reading that climate jam was described as a slow jam.  
599 What's a slow Jam? Why did you make that decision?

600 **Sean Walton:** 36:29 So a slow jam... And I'm not sure if it's actually a term. I can't  
601 remember if I found out that there was a term or we just made it  
602 up.

603 **Desirée De Jesus:** 36:35 I think of slow jams with music.

604 **Sean Walton:** 36:37 So most game jams, to my knowledge at the time, happen in a  
605 very short space of time over a weekend. And I have confusing  
606 feelings about how that is encouraging crunch culture. And is that  
607 a good thing to tell people, it's okay to work all night and have  
608 pizza in a room? And are we actually breeding that culture that is  
609 so negative in game development? I'm not necessarily saying we  
610 are. I just have confused... Even at work, when we do things  
611 where we get the students to do Google hackathons. And we buy  
612 a bunch of pizza, and they stay there all night. And it's like,  
613 "Well, we're encouraging that negative behavior that  
614 programmers are associated with." So a Slow Jam takes... We  
615 said that you have a month to make it. And so the reason was we  
616 didn't want to exclude anyone based on they can't just spend a  
617 weekend doing it. And even personally, I don't enter game jams  
618 and largely because of that. Maybe if I was 20, something, if I  
619 was younger, and had no responsibility...

620 **Desirée De Jesus:** 37:42 Unencumbered completely. Yeah, but I get what you mean.  
621 Yeah, it's something that we've been doing with GAMERella  
622 that Gina feels strongly about is making sure that people work  
623 within a particular schedule, so there's space for fun and  
624 interaction, and rest, because rest is such an important part of who  
625 we are as human beings. And that's something that I really  
626 appreciated about GAMERella's approach is really honoring the  
627 whole person, and not kind of making you just a game maker.

628 **Sean Walton:** 38:15 Yeah.

629 **Desirée De Jesus:** 38:15 But yes, please continue. So slow jam, so it was spread out over  
630 a month. So people could come in as they needed.

631 **Sean Walton:** 38:22 Yes. And it was completely remote as well. And this is kind of  
632 one of the downsides of doing it that way where it sounds like,  
633 the way Gina's organized it, is with a schedule, where people  
634 come... That seems a much more sensible way of doing it.  
635 Whereas because and this is just kind of the way I'm wired, and  
636 my teaching style is very hands off. And I'll show you the door,  
637 and you walk through it sort of thing. And we've got a month, so  
638 you know how to do it, you can organize your time. And I think  
639 that lack of structure, meant we had quite a high drop off rate,  
640 even though there were still quite a few games. There were a lot  
641 of games submitted. So 50 people said they were going to do it,  
642 and then about 12 people actually did it. So I think some more  
643 structure and a physical... We were going to do a physical event

644 too, for many reasons we couldn't pull it off. We were going to  
645 have a physical location for people who were in Cardiff, for  
646 example. Because it was global. We kind of opened it up to  
647 anyone.

648 **Desirée De Jesus:** 38:46 And where were these people coming in from?

649 **Sean Walton:** 39:26 All over the place. I think we had someone from like, every  
650 continent. It was in the paper we'd written all the different  
651 demographics, but we had like a wide range of people which is  
652 good. And that was the aim of doing it slowly and over a long  
653 time and remotely, it was to get this big range of people and  
654 different participants and different ages and that I think we  
655 succeeded from that point of view, but then having that long  
656 length of time people just kind of trail off and there wasn't a... I  
657 don't think we did a very good job of building community around  
658 the game jam. Games were made but no one knew anyone else  
659 that was even doing it. It was very separate, and I think that's a  
660 limitation. And it's really hard to do that online. Like I've  
661 managed it once maybe to make that work.

662 **Desirée De Jesus:** 40:13 And what did you do to make it work? What was the thing that  
663 made it work?

664 **Sean Walton:** 40:19 Well, so I think it was the context. So this was a game jam I ran  
665 early on in the pandemic. So I am an Academic Lecturer in  
666 computer science, and every year we would get together. And the  
667 third years, will go to a kind of residential, where they will say,

668 “This is what I’m doing for my project.” And we’d have a  
669 physical game jam with hardware, this Arduino board, an old  
670 Gameboy. It’s super neat thing. They’ve got a screen with four  
671 or five pixels on or something. And so I said, “I’ll run a game  
672 jam online for them instead.” And so I think just... It was short.  
673 It was one that would be kind of a crunch jam, I guess. Well, no,  
674 I gave a schedule. I did actually give them a schedule. And I said,  
675 “You should between this time and this time work on your  
676 game.” And I was like, “If you want to do outside of that, I’m not  
677 going to stop you. But this is when...” Like I put... I did exactly...  
678 So they had a time and I set up a discord. And I set them all up  
679 in groups. But to be honest, I think that Game Jam because it was  
680 in the pandemic, and it was early in the pandemic, it was more  
681 people got together to just be together at a difficult time. And the  
682 Game Jam was almost secondary. But it was a really nice  
683 outcome of that whole experience. Because at the end, there was  
684 much more interaction within them all. Because they were  
685 talking to each other, and there was a discord. And then at the  
686 end, I did a Twitch stream where I went through all their games.  
687 And it was just fun. It was just nice. And it was a really nice  
688 memory of that time, and that everyone was struggling. And like  
689 we were all just... And the theme was 2020. It was in 2020. And  
690 so I think everyone just got a chance to let off some steam and  
691 laugh at everything. And so there was games about collecting  
692 toilet paper and things like that. It was nice. It was a really nice

693 community's thing that... Again, easy to create when I knew  
694 everyone. Everyone knew me as well so like they all...

695 **Desirée De Jesus:** 42:30 Had a connection with you. Yeah. So what would you say were  
696 the main takeaways from that? Maybe that could be applied to a  
697 context in which people don't know who you are as well?

698 **Sean Walton:** 42:44 Well, one takeaway would be actually that I put them all into  
699 groups. So they actually didn't get to choose who they were  
700 working with, which is a technique that kind of teachers will tell  
701 you, is... It's quite, and it doesn't always work, I suppose, but at  
702 least if you've got a group of people who've all signed up to a  
703 game jam, they're probably okay with the idea of being put into  
704 groups. And maybe that is part of it is because you kind of got to.  
705 You've got to engage with everything, if you don't have  
706 someone's phone number, because you kind of have to turn up to  
707 the space. And in that case, the space was discord.

708 **Desirée De Jesus:** 43:21 Right.

709 **Sean Walton:** 43:22 So they had to turn up there and they had to talk to each other. So  
710 that's probably a takeaway. The short time did help. That kept  
711 them focused and on task.

712 **Desirée De Jesus:** 43:30 I imagine it feels more manageable that way as well. Just kind of  
713 to know how to kind of manage your time with the different  
714 deliverables at different stages.

715 **Sean Walton:** 43:40 Yes, absolutely. And on retrospect with the climate jam, if you  
716 give someone a month, they think that it should take a month, not

717 here's a month, just spend two days on it but anytime in that  
718 month, and the people don't see it that way.

719 **Desirée De Jesus:** 43:53 I think I'm one of those people. That's just a light bulb moment  
720 for me. Right, it doesn't have to take a month.

721 **Sean Walton:** 44:00 And it's really hard. You can say that. And we're all the same,  
722 right? We're wired. No one's wired in the way that they would  
723 just do it in the first two days and then forget about it for 30 days  
724 or whatever.

725 **Desirée De Jesus:** 44:12 So I imagine that during this process, people were and maybe  
726 we'll talk about this more recent one during the early stage of the  
727 pandemic alongside climate jam. But I imagined that this was a  
728 way that people were cultivating confidence, maybe even  
729 discovering new skills. But perhaps because this was more of an  
730 academic context maybe there were people thinking about how  
731 could I do this as a career? What did people's responses to these  
732 game jams mean to you as someone who is creating space for  
733 game making?

734 **Sean Walton:** 44:50 Everything, I guess, is like it's the most important thing. I think  
735 that's the one takeaway to think about what it is that people are  
736 going to get out of your Game Jam rather than what you're going  
737 to get out of running it, is the way I would kind of express it. And  
738 I think it's easier for me to think about this in the context of my  
739 students because I know them and I know their confidence levels,  
740 and I know how to... So the thing I always kind of say to them is

741 that there's this problem, and it's a problem I had and had to get  
742 over, is this kind of - I don't know who... I didn't come up with  
743 this - but this idea of a taste barrier. So let's say you really want  
744 to learn the guitar. Well, if you want to learn the guitar, you know  
745 a lot about guitar music already, and you have pretty good tasting  
746 guitar music and can tell when a guitar sounds bad. But when you  
747 first start learning, you're going to be sounding awful. Terrible.  
748 And you want to know it better than most people. And so some  
749 people, that's where they get to, they play Smoke on the Water a  
750 few times, and they stop. But if you continue, you get better. But  
751 then also your taste improves, you are kind of constantly chasing  
752 and that's why artists are miserable is that they never get good  
753 enough and why we all hate our work and get impostor  
754 syndrome. And all this kind of stuff comes from that idea. And  
755 so I said, "This game jam, you need to push through that barrier.  
756 It's just a two-day thing. You're going to push through it. We're  
757 going to play it together. And that's it. Who cares if it's...? It's  
758 going to be bad. The thing you make is going to be bad. And  
759 that's all right."

760 **Desirée De Jesus:** 46:26 That's such a tough line to cross to be able to just kind of let the  
761 work be about the work, and kind of the pleasure of making and  
762 then play.

763 **Sean Walton:** 46:35 Yeah. And there's a lot of vulnerability, I think. And that's why  
764 a lot of people find it difficult is that you... And I still find it now.  
765 Like I said, when I talked about cycle 28 bombing and that



766 feeling of embarrassment, I had no reason to feel embarrassed. I  
767 made a thing. Like I made a thing, and it's online, and it's on  
768 Nintendo, and it's there right next to Mario. I shouldn't be upset  
769 about that.

770 **Desirée De Jesus:** 46:57 Quite an achievement.

771 **Sean Walton:** 46:58 It's that and I think, maybe in the one that was in the pandemic,  
772 I think everyone was feeling more vulnerable as everyone's  
773 defenses were down. I don't know about you, but I feel like my  
774 defenses had been eroded by that by just the whole thing. And so  
775 that kind of face you put on was gone. And so it was just, I'm  
776 here, and it's me. And that I think maybe helped. I think if the  
777 students were feeling similar things, they should be like "Oh,  
778 whatever. This is my toilet roll game."

779 **Desirée De Jesus:** 47:30 Yeah.

780 **Sean Walton:** 47:31 Have fun.

781 **Desirée De Jesus:** 47:32 I hope that this is a game that our listeners can see. Maybe we  
782 can access it.

783 **Sean Walton:** 47:36 -----I think there was a game where it was like Space Invaders,  
784 but it was toilet rolls. Maybe that was the thing. I don't know  
785 where they all are. They might be online, I think. I don't know if-  
786 -----

787 **Desirée De Jesus:** 47:50 Maybe you can share the link with us. Oh, okay.

788 **Sean Walton:** 47:52 Yes, if it's not private, I'll just share the link.

789 **Desirée De Jesus:** 47:54 Yeah. So I'm wondering, also, if you could share with us, perhaps  
790 something that was surprising, in a positive sense that came out  
791 of the game jam, as well as something that was maybe a bit more  
792 challenging, and you're like, "We're not doing that again."

793 **Sean Walton:** 48:18 So the surprising effects of climate jam. So I said earlier that a  
794 lot of the people who were in it, they were motivated by just  
795 making a fun game and didn't really care about climate jam.  
796 There was a notable exception. And it turns out, one of the people  
797 who entered was a science writer. And he actually wrote an  
798 article for Wired on climate change games, like coming off the  
799 back of climate jam, where he mentioned climate jam in there.  
800 And so that was like a really nice, positive publicity thing. And  
801 then, on the back of that, I got an email from someone... It was  
802 really funny. I got an email from someone, and she said, "Oh,  
803 would you do an interview about climate jam?" And I said, "Oh,  
804 yeah, sure." And she said what the publication was, and  
805 everything. And I was like, "Yeah, that's fine." And I emailed it  
806 to like the other people who were doing the jam, the other  
807 organizers. And one of them, Claire was like, "Oh yeah, wow,  
808 can I come with you and be on it?" And she turned up to my  
809 office, and she said, "You realize what publication this is?" And  
810 it was like the proceedings of national American science or  
811 something which is one of the highest cited journals in the world.

812 **Desirée De Jesus:** 49:30 Oh wow.

813 **Sean Walton:** 49:31 And the writer, I Googled her. So Claire sat down with me and  
814 was like, “Have you Googled this person?” And it’s someone  
815 who writes for New Scientist and all this stuff. And I was like,  
816 “Oh.”

817 **Desirée De Jesus:** 49:40 Oh wow. In a way, you were still kind of ticking those boxes in  
818 that academic institutional column, as well.

819 **Sean Walton:** 49:54 Absolutely. Yeah. I got that.

820 **Desirée De Jesus:** 49:56 Winning all around. I love it.

821 **Sean Walton:** 50:00 Yeah, that’s a definite esteem measure. So that was really  
822 positive. And that was nice. And like some other things of, like  
823 going... So I said about the kind of games culture in Wales and  
824 the meetups. And I remember going to a meet up. And they ran a  
825 game jam at the meetup. Probably the only game jam I’ve really  
826 done where we’re making physical games rather than... And the  
827 guy I was with, we were kind of just... I was working on this  
828 game with him. And then at some point, he was like, “Oh, you  
829 know, I’m this person who entered climate jam.” I was like, “Oh,  
830 you are.” And so he’d entered a game, and we had a discussion  
831 that he really enjoyed it. And it was a chance for him to kind of  
832 try this idea he’s been having. He didn’t finish the game, but it  
833 didn’t matter. Like he still has worked on the game afterwards  
834 and he’s finished it now. So that was just a nice kind of like, a  
835 link there with someone local. But so the challenging thing, and  
836 the kind of the takeaway of what we do differently is, so we

837 offered prizes, right? And this was, I think, my bad decision,  
838 which was, I didn't want to give prizes out based on how good  
839 the games were. I just wanted it to be like... We only had a limited  
840 number. And so I was like, I think we should just randomly give  
841 them out to anyone who's entered and submitted a game. Of  
842 course what I didn't understand, and was silly and naive about  
843 was people entered a game that was just like garbage games,  
844 because they would then be entered into a prize draw, and there's  
845 only 12 people so that's pretty good odds. And they were very  
846 much trolling us. I mean, they were internet trolls, and it turns  
847 out climate change stuff does bring out a lot of those people.

848 **Desirée De Jesus:** 51:48 I was going to ask about those, whether you received those kinds  
849 of responses.

850 **Sean Walton:** 51:53 Yes, absolutely. And I think they answered the survey in a way  
851 that I think was trying to screw our results up. And that was quite  
852 negative. And I think, I guess at the time as well, something I  
853 didn't realize is, we had a lot of people who entered a game, it  
854 was clearly a game they'd been working on, but struggling to get  
855 noticed. So they go on and enter into every single game jam they  
856 could find. And so some of them were just like, well, this has  
857 nothing to do with climate change. This is just your game that  
858 you're trying to get people to see. And other ones that were like,  
859 at the time it was when player unknowns' battlegrounds had just  
860 come out and fortnight, and it was like everyone was making  
861 battle royale game. And so someone entered the thing that was

862 like, it's a battle royale game, but the island is getting smaller  
863 because climate change? Yeah, clearly it's a game you can buy  
864 off the shelf.

865 **Desirée De Jesus:** 52:53 A bit of the stretch there.

866 **Sean Walton:** 52:54 Yeah, it's one of those things, you could buy the game off the  
867 asset store and just change it a bit. But I mean, like, if that was  
868 the worst thing that happened, it wasn't so bad really.

869 **Desirée De Jesus:** 53:02 I mean, it's still disappointing. I hear that there's some  
870 disappointment with how people choose to engage. I mean, I  
871 would even go as far to say, it's like a little disrespectful, like the  
872 idea like they're kind of trying to game the system, in a way.

873 **Sean Walton:** 523:15 Yeah.

874 **Desirée De Jesus:** 53:17 But at the same time, it sounds like it was still overall a positive  
875 experience. That there were some... That there was like, minimal  
876 damage let's say.

877 **Sean Walton:** 53:26 Yeah, absolutely. It was all really positive. And there was even  
878 another group... There's a startup group in Swansea. I'd started  
879 kind of developing a bit of an outreach relationship with them.  
880 Because I would be telling my students, go and hang out in this  
881 startup space, and they do meetups and stuff. And so they were  
882 like, "Oh, I heard about climate jam." They ran some game thing.  
883 There was like a Wales tech week. And they ran a games  
884 something. It was long time ago. But that was nice. It was in the  
885 middle of Swansea. And we just had a laptop with all the games

886 on climate jam, and people just came in and played them and, it  
887 was so nice. It was like that really cool thing of all my different  
888 worlds colliding of like, I was there as an academic but then  
889 people from that Nintendo group that I told you about, the really  
890 nice player group, they were actually... most of them lived in  
891 Swansea so they were all popping along because I tweeted about  
892 it on the Pill Bug account. And so it was just nice. And that all  
893 came from this game jam.

894 **Desirée De Jesus:** 54:30 It sounds like the community is a really important part of this  
895 process. And as well as like, not a treat, but like a bonus in a way,  
896 kind of seeing these communities formed out of game jams and  
897 these unexpected connections that you're having in different  
898 spheres. So what is one thing that you wish that you had known  
899 before you began this whole journey of organizing game jams?  
900 What's something that you think people should know?

901 **Sean Walton:** 55:08 The only thing really was that idea of people using game jams as  
902 a discoverability tool for their game. I think that's something I  
903 wish I'd known. And I kind of did. That's the thing. Because I  
904 thought about it for my stuff, and I didn't think anything about  
905 doing it. But I remember thinking, are those Game Jam games  
906 getting more... Like they're just getting publicity. Because  
907 they're Game Jam games. I wish I knew more about that when  
908 running it online, and then maybe it would have been better in  
909 person. I think that's the only thing really and the prize, because

910 those were the only two things that I think were negative, was  
911 that prize issue.

912 **Desirée De Jesus:** 55:46 The prize issue being?

913 **Sean Walton:** 55:48 The idea that it was just random prices and not based on quality.  
914 So I think you just got to have that. I think clear instructions too  
915 probably. I think my approach is always hands off. And perhaps  
916 that doesn't always work. So I think that I need to change that,  
917 generally.

918 **Desirée De Jesus:** 56:06 It's a delicate balance, especially as an instructor.

919 **Sean Walton:** 56:09 Yes. I think my problem is, like---- Yeah, you've got to kind of  
920 give them that chance. But I think I'm always like, I like to set  
921 something up and just sit back and observe what happens,  
922 because I'm a scientist, but that's the thing I do. But sometimes  
923 you just can't do that. So I think that's the main thing. I think it's  
924 just thinking about; would people use this to game something.

925 **Desirée De Jesus:** 56:34 Well, thanks so much for those tips. You've given some really  
926 practical advice based on your own experience. And these are  
927 really great stories that I think our listeners will be able to relate  
928 to. So how can we support your work? How can we find you?

929 **Sean Walton:** 56:49 So the best way to support us is to check out our games on Steam.  
930 So if you go to [pillbug.zone](http://pillbug.zone), which is a website address, and there  
931 you can find links to all this stuff. And that's one of the best way  
932 to support us. And just generally, if you buy indie games and  
933 review indie games, so not just like... Because I think just

934 generally supporting, it makes such a big difference. Like it  
935 makes a huge difference, even if it's just a very short review, that  
936 really helps everybody. And so you can find me on Twitter at Dr.  
937 Shawn Walton. Sean, S-E-A-N. And we stream on Twitch, we  
938 talk about game design, and other things every Tuesday night at  
939 pillbugint. And we're also on TikTok @pillbugint. If you want  
940 to see our weird Ladybug game, it's all there.

941 **Desirée De Jesus:** 57:40 I wish that we could keep talking though. I have so many more  
942 questions for you. I love hearing about this. But we've come to  
943 the end. And, again, just want to thank you so much. Can I be a  
944 bit naughty and just ask one more question, even though we're  
945 wrapping up? What does Game Jam organizing look like for you  
946 going forward? I wouldn't say that we're necessarily in a post-  
947 pandemic moment but kind of trying to move in that direction.

948 **Sean Walton:** 58:09 I want to do stuff in person. That's, I think, the main thing for  
949 me, which I've just tried and failed to organize a game jam to do  
950 with... We're trying to get people interested in their local heritage  
951 here in Swansea. Because there's a lot of industrial heritage. And  
952 one of the ways we would try to do that is to... We've got lots of  
953 really cool 3D assets of like, some old copper works, and  
954 buildings really cool stuff. And so we want to try and give them  
955 out to the community and say, "Hey, make something with this.  
956 We don't care what. Just have fun." And we tried to do it, but we  
957 got like zero people. Well, I think, one person signed up, and  
958 we're all kind of reflecting on it.



959 **Desirée De Jesus:** 58:13 What do you mean? Like you put out a call?

960 **Sean Walton:** 58:20 Yes, we were targeting schools and colleges.

961 **Desirée De Jesus:** 58:58 Okay.

962 **Sean Walton:** 58:58 And, I think one person signed up. And I think we all kind of  
963 figured it's because of the kind of the collective trauma of the  
964 pandemic. I think, everyone's just too busy. And it's too much  
965 now. Right? So I think one thing, we kind of... There's kind of  
966 two things going forward, we thought about was, one... There's  
967 kind of two extremes in my head, because taking this specific  
968 example because this is one that we want to run is either, A) we  
969 open it and don't have a deadline or anything. We just say, "Hey,  
970 here are these assets. Make a game with them. We will support  
971 you. We will show your stuff off. You come and visit. you. But  
972 we want you to use this stuff and make something cool. We'll put  
973 it on this website." Like a more kind of open, just keep going  
974 whatever. And the other extreme is, I want to do a game jam in  
975 person with people in a room. Like I think that's going forward  
976 what I want to do. And yeah, I guess, I don't know how I feel  
977 about the general games but for me, that's what I'm... If I'm  
978 doing it again, I think I want to do something in person.

979 **Desirée De Jesus:** 59:11 So in this version of something that's kind of an extended slow  
980 jam, would there be things like workshops along the way for  
981 people to check in?

982 **Sean Walton:** 1:00:18 I don't know. It would almost be the ultimate me hands off. Like  
983 it would be that mindset turned up to 11. So I think what we'd  
984 probably do... I think it would be a case of... With the one that we  
985 only had one person sign up to, we were doing things like saying  
986 like, the kind of prize was... Because it was schools, saying we'll  
987 host you at Swansea Uni for the day and like, show you around  
988 all that stuff. And I think it would be more about trying to build  
989 a community around those assets, which is hard. Building a  
990 community is like really, really difficult. Or I think we'd want to  
991 do something where... But you'd wait until there'd be enough  
992 games, right? To then we've got a bunch and now let's do  
993 something with them. Or I'll stream them on twitch or we'll do a  
994 thing or give something back to... Like I did with the Game Jam  
995 games, I streamed them all as like a thank you because I think  
996 seeing people play your games is really profound. So I went  
997 through and played every single game and put that up on my  
998 YouTube channel for them. And so I think I'd do something like  
999 that. It would be like we change it as we went and see what  
1000 worked and what didn't and kind of just keep messing with it  
1001 until...

1002 **Desirée De Jesus:** 1:01:35 Well, I think it makes sense, as many of us are kind of trying to  
1003 find new ways of connecting and having shared experiences  
1004 through media making in this cultural moment, this global  
1005 pandemic moment. So it makes sense, but it's something that you  
1006 are kind of working out, well, what does a game jam look like,

1007 and what does it feel like, and what are the kinds of incentives  
1008 people need to get started or finish. Yeah, but these are great  
1009 things for us to continue thinking about. So yeah, it's been great  
1010 talking with you. Thanks for letting me ask those--

1011 **Sean Walton:** 1:02:17 Cool. Thank you very much.

1012 **Desirée De Jesus:** 1:02:19 Thank you.

1013 **Outro:** 1:02:20 *And that wraps our conversation with Sean Walton. Thanks so*  
1014 *much for listening to the GAMERella podcast. And don't forget*  
1015 *to check out the online resources for this episode.*