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### DEMAN Live: Interactive Entertainment with Epic Games with Duke Gaming & Innovation Co-Lab

#### 00:00 DAVE KARGER

Welcome to DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, Duke alum and host on Turner Classic Movies. DEMAN is the Duke Entertainment, Media and Arts Network. And it's the University's hub for the creative industries. On this show, you'll hear a past episodes of DEMAN live, which includes panels and one on one chats with alumni. Thanks so much for listening and enjoy.

#### 01:45 ABHI SHAH

All right. Welcome to DEMAN LIVE. We've got an incredibly talented group of folks. With us here today. Couple blue devils, working at Epic Games, which publishes a small game that you may know called Fortnite. Just kidding. Yeah, it's one of the world's most popular games as well as maker of the Unreal Engine. I'm Alicia D class of 2016. I'm tonight's moderator. I'm based in Seattle, where I work for Xbox Game Pass and content planning portfolio. Before we begin, I want to thank our co sponsors for tonight's event, DEMAN, Duke Gaming and the Innovation Co-Lab.

#### 03:14 ABHI

So let's jump right in. Chris, you're head of Epic's Mega Grants Program. I'd love you to just describe your current role briefly, and give folks an overview of of your program and what it does.

#### 03:30 CHRIS

Yeah, for sure. Thanks. Thanks, Abhi, and good to be back in the Duke community. It feels like a long time ago in 2009 When I graduated, but it's exciting to come full circle today. So a little bit about Mega Grants program. So it's \$100 million fund that Tim our CEO started three years ago. And really the goal was to fund creators and then developers doing amazing things with Unreal Engine and related 3-D technology. So a fun set aside to really catalyze innovation in the space. And that covers a wide range of types of applicants and recipients. So we funded everything from small indie game developers, people building tools, and open source products, you know, in automotive and media and entertainment, so really covers a wide range of product types. And really, you know, the overall goal is, again to catalyze innovation. So, really cool program to run. In that role, leading the team that manages both the kind of strategy and operations for that program. So getting hundreds of applications in a month and really, you know, identifying what we think are the most promising innovative projects so it's been a really fun experience for me and you know, been able to support some some awesome creators around the globe. So we've we've, you know, covered every corner of the globe with with the, with the program. And like I said, You know, I, we we got a success story from a recipient the other day who built a plugin for Formula One. And their plugin has been seen by, you know, hundreds of millions of people in 20 Formula One races last year. So definitely really inspiring

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program to be a part of. And I think we're very much in the early innings of real time 3-D as Unreal Engine is an important piece of that. So it's, it's been an exciting ride for me so far.

05:29 ABHI

Sweet. And yeah, it seems like the program, yes, spans industries, game developers, but also creators beyond gaming. But just in general, like going to gaming kind of more specifically. Now, there's a broad audience here today, Duke students, you know, what pathways do you recommend for starting your career in gaming? You know, a lot of people may not necessarily think of gaming as a job right immediately. But it is, yeah, totally place where you could have a career? How do you? How would you recommend kind of breaking in? Yeah, it's a really good question.

06:03 CHRIS

The cool thing about gaming is, I mean, I was a big gamer, when I was younger, in my high school and college years are playing Halo and central campus with my friends at Duke. So it really brings me back. But, you know, I think that gaming, we're starting to see the lines blur, and in terms of interactive, interactive media, and entertainment. So I think the experience that you can see when you go to the movie theater is starting to blur that have with the video game, and it's all just gonna become one big, cool ecosystem. And I think as a result, what I've seen about with gaming is that it's a really unique industry, you have, you have the creative side, the folks that are developing the games and building the artwork, and actually, you know, creating that part, then you have the folks that are working on how do we get this to an audience and scale? And what are the monetization models look like. And then, you know, my entry point was, was more on the strategy side of things. So I was in management consulting before coming over to Epic. So I joined more on the Strategy and Finance side of the organization. And that has evolved into this Mega Grants role. And Epic is a unique place where there's just so much room for growth, that I think there's a lot of cool opportunities that pop up on the way. So I think my advice would just be there's many entry points and whatever you're passionate about, and wherever your skills align, I think just going out there and finding cool opportunities, whether it's at a large triple A game studio, whether it's a small, scrappy startup, I think there's no shortage of opportunities. And, you know, just, just be proactive. I think there's, there's lots of stuff out there that you can get involved in.

07:43 ABHI

Yeah, I love that. I love the idea of there being many entry points. Yeah, I love that you talked about your, your background in management consulting and how that was a direction, I do want to switch over to Karen, you know, who maybe took more of a traditional creative path and, and wound up at Epic with Karen, I would love to hear about your story, your journey and how your career experiences, Pixar, Google and how you ended up at Epic, we'd love to hear about your path.

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08:11 KAREN

The twisty winding road. And I always start with animation, because that's where I and I always like to say that's where the wind blew me after school. And I found myself working with people who did traditional animation, and then digital started. And that led to the job at Pixar, where the emphasis was really about storytelling, and world building, and, you know, characters with emotion. And, you know, being a part of those teams was very exciting. And taking that into sort of the Google experience where I was able to help build a creative team there and bring in other storytellers, and experiments and VR in different types of screens, you know, the big movie screen, and the little tiny mobile screen and screens in between. And that's where my first experience with real time happened. And that was several years of really seeing that as just, you know, revelation in media and entertainment. And that then led to Epic, and specifically this shorts initiative that Epic was interested in doing that does sort of draft off of the Mega Grants and mechanisms is as well in foundations. So we're able to with this initiative be a bit more targeted in media and entertainment at an animation and bring the engine into that industry. From a practical standpoint, studios pipeline. This is what this looks like.

It's quite different than regular movie making an animation making pipelines and or put it in the hands of specific creators and just say, what would you do With this technology, and then we have a feedback loop. So it's out in the wild our technology and our way of thinking is out in the wild. We observe, we watch, we help we support we love, we nurture. And that feedback comes back into into our teams, you know, as well. And so all of that is, you know, part of my day today, as well as just sort of keeping an eye on other content and IP opportunities related to you the Unreal Engine and all the way into the game and into Fortnite. Yeah, a lot of years shrunk into a few minutes. So I hope that was okay.

10:36 ABHI

100%, like, it sounds like started out in traditional animation and started to see how different processes pipelines were potentially getting, you know, revolutionized or adjusted with kind of Unreal Engine. Right. And I actually wanted to ask you about that, you know, just more broadly, how do you we were hearing about you Unreal Engine being used in commercials, films, everything from the Mandalorian to Ford versus Ferrari? Can you talk more about, you know, how it's transforming industries, like your creative industries in general? And yet also, I would love for you to touch more on your sponsored shorts program, as well.

11:13 KAREN

Yeah, you bet. Yeah. There's, there's like the very short answer, and then there's the very long fast answer. So you know, the short answer is spent a long time coming, it's, you know, wrapping your head around as a creator, someone who tells stories, putting them in a Game Engine, real time environment is a different, it's a different thing, your, you know, in a world in your the world that you created, perhaps even literally, inside the creators that you creations characters that you created. And it's an

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end, since it's a real time, you can literally, you know, I'm sure your audience knows this, but move lightning around and change, you can work very fluidly, very, very iteratively. And very collaboratively. And in the traditional pipeline, almost every phase of production is quite siloed. And depending on where you are, that can be a lot of people that can be, you know, a smaller number of people, but something has to sit in one area of production before it moves to the next one, the next one, you know, over time, if you're making a feature film, a lot can change. And it doesn't allow for that iteration, where if you're in a real time environment, all bets are off, you can you can move quite quite differently. And very practically, you take a lot of work that you may have not seen until you're way down at the end of the pipeline post production, you're moving that into pre production.

So we're kind of playing around with that thinking of post as the new pre and, you know, and then just simply using the tool as a story exploration tool, you know, you're again, in that world of your story, what is your character doing? Well, they're doing this or doing that. And nevermind the wider, Epic ecosystem, which is vast and very indie friendly. And you can, you know, and acids and things work across ecosystems. So that's, it's just really, really, really cool. And I think we're at still at the, you know, beginning of just this thing that's just taking off and I think is really going to change certainly, content of the future, the way you do it, and the way it's presented out into the, into the world as well. So that's why I'm so excited, transitioning over into the shorts program. You know, you we get to, we're so lucky and the culture, but also I think Epic is just such a generous company generous because of the grants, but also generous of thought and in their openness, and then they're, you know, real hunger to, you know, have folks and have artists and have gamers and have everyone explore the Engine, you know, and, and push up against it and find the spaces where there might be blind spots, and you make the product better. So it's just just very fascinating. As those which I don't know, that you haven't other sort of creative endeavors, a lot of things have quite, you know, walled gardens around them. And this culture, I think, maybe again, that's from gaming is quite different. It's quite, it's quite generous in all those ways. And so, you know, the, the shorts initiative initiative endeavors to, you know, to match that and to support these these projects in a variety of ways. And, and at the end of a project, if all goes well, we can celebrate it together and do even, you know, co marketing or show them at film festivals or kind of help, even, you know, participate in that that part of the, of the production as well. So, hope that answers.

14:38 ABHI

Yeah, I think that was great. I love how you you mentioned that, you know, called technology is transforming some of these pipelines and I love how it's like, oh, we'll figure it out in post that's becoming more of a trend and how you're also empowering Yep, sometimes it you will have the creative risk taking happens with a solo person that jumps in tries to do something crazy. We see that in gaming all the time. Totally. And I think you're empowering the creators.

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15:07 KAREN

I think it's a quote I've stolen. But it's something that I try and, you know, professionally follow. It's, if I have questions, I go to artists. So that's, I think, the type of, you know, brains that it takes to open up something new and ask new questions. And when you merge that with, you know, some new technology, and I've just done that all in my entire career from Pixar to Google to here and places in between, you know, when you get that, right, really exciting things can happen.

15:36 ABHI

Yeah, we're gonna we'll come back to this. I think we're scratching the surface as well on that topic, and you know, about creative risk taking and but I, you know, Jay, I do want to get you in the next year. So I'm gonna ask a broad question, Chris. Karen, great for you to jump in. But Jay would love you to lead. Yo, we've got a lot of students here. Watching, you know, what's, what's one example of how your degree helped you and your profession? And kind of a broader question, what type of degrees are companies like epic, you're seeking in this industry beyond, you know, call it engineering, computer science, one might stereotypically assume companies like this are looking for?

16:13 JAY

Sure. Thanks so much, Avi. And I want to echo Chris's sentiment that it's just so good to connect with the Duke community. It certainly is a huge part of my my history and who I am now. So it's really great to be with you guys today. So how my degree has helped in my profession. From a very practical perspective, studying engineering is a monumental differentiator, I think, at least in the legal industry, you don't see a lot of engineering to law, sort of career paths, or certainly not to the extent that you would see in some of the other liberal arts fields and working at a tech company and advising on technical issues, dealing with software licensing agreements, and talking to engineers every day. All of these are greatly impacted by my experience as an engineer, at least having some basic understanding of programming concepts and languages and just being able to speak that language, even if even if it's at a shallow level. Being able to do that is really what has really helped my degree and differentiates me, I think, from other lawyers, without those degrees, not say that there aren't others at Epic with the same qualifications. But that's been that's been huge and a little bit more abstractly. I think, the engineering training kind of teaches you how to solve problems, right? You don't you break problems down into its constituent parts, and solve them one by one, and then you can apply that across virtually every field and law is no different. So I think those are two kind of concrete examples of how my degree has helped.

17:52 ABHI

That's great. That's great. Chris, would you like to jump in or add anything briefly out to that?

17:58 CHRIS

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Sure. Yeah, my, I had a weird combination of I was an economics major and chemistry minor, which meant I was pre-med, but really on the fence about it, and you know, that that is less of a as practical set of skills, but more I think, echoing Jay's point on the problem solving piece, you know, my time in tragic consulting, and then also spending some time on Epic strategy team, I've covered a wide range of problems, Jay and I collaborated on some legal related or illegal related project I've done, you know, market market entry for international and really, that's about, you know, ingest, you know, a lot of different data, whether it's structured or unstructured, whether it's, you know, quantitative or qualitative, drying out insights, and then, you know, coming up with conclusions and plans and I think that that really is I think about my days in organic chemistry, it's like how do I take a set of principles and rules and actually get from point A to point B, which at the time was really painful, but now I realize that that sort of challenging problem solving is what makes me tick and what gets me excited so it's definitely helped me in my days that I see Jay is laughing about the organic chemistry aspect.

19:15 JAY

Oh boy, the date the days of Orgo.

19:19 ABHI

Yeah, there's a lot of Duke students saying on me right now. Yeah, I love the narratives merging, Jay, I love how engineering is helping define unique skill set in called the legal space. Chris, I like how it's a you know, it's a skill set and that you're developing less about called the specific degree you know, something that it's the skill set and thinking and process that you learned in organic chemistry could apply later on. Karen, would love to hear from you as well. You know, how your degree like what degree did you get and how did that help? Or not? Great to, great to hear from you as well.

19:56 KAREN

Sure. Um, I did not take Organic Chemistry, or engineering, and, but I do work with Well, I don't work with chemists at all. But of course, I do work with engineers and have and really appreciate that complex problem solving and this sort of literal nature of that, because that's, that's producing, and that's building something, you know, taking a complex thing and putting it into pieces and explaining it back to somebody sort of step by step. I would add, though, you're working, you know, in the arts, you're working with people, and you have to have a lot of trust and a lot of trusting of the process to ultimately get, you know, somewhere that's really, maybe only one person's vision. And to that end, really being able to articulate your idea, cool about it, you know, build trust amongst the team, I think those are things that you learn through experience, you know, regardless of what you're, you know, you're studying at school, and I always like to advise folks to, you know, just, you know, just work on writing really clear sentences.

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Very basic, but, you know, and just, and just, and just that collaboration, because it's never, ever, you know, watch credits in a movie, which credits in anything, and it's just the hundreds of people, and it really does take all of those people, and then some, right, so anything that helps you, you know, put a show on, regardless of what the show actually is, you know, and that, you know, you, you know, you're following those steps to actually execute that, that's, that's, that's, I think, the combination here that makes something like the products and things and programs and Epic, you know, puts on in any in anything in the media entertainment or games, companies, products, you it takes that collaboration, so you have to learn to communicate, right, and you have to learn to, you know, have some flexibility in all of that, right. And, you know, it all kind of hope, you know, from a producer standpoint, too, but even from a creative standpoint, make sure if it's kind of rowing in the same direction, right. And it may take some hurting in that way. So that that's what I like to say to my engineering or chemistry friends.

22:09 ABHI

Yeah, I'm smiling, because I know, again, some of these Duke students on we probably have like, 10 page papers, and you know, they're thinking about how they feel, you know, get get to that 10 pages. Yeah, those 10 pages, but yeah, conciseness clear communication, super valuable skill set.

22:24 KAREN

Well, and it's very basic, but just the iterative process things, you just don't hit it out of the park, right? It takes the, you know, writing is rewriting conceit, right? But that applies to everything right. And also not being afraid to share your work, I think, early on, no matter what field you're in, there could be hesitancy to that, but it only gets stronger when you when you can defend it, right? So I think that works across technology and and the creative fields.

22:51 JAY

Yeah, I'm so glad you brought up writing. And I'm sure that most of us who are students lament all the writing that you have you have to do for school, but there's a reason that's part of your training. And across, at least the the fields that I've worked in, whether it's engineering or law, writing is the consistent thread of like, possibly the most important skills like communication, generally. And the one of the primary or four primary forms of communication you'll engage in is writing. So being able to write concisely and clearly is practically speaking, one of the most important things you can learn how to do. Karen: Yeah.

23:26 ABHI

And particularly, I know a lot of creative folks, creative students on this call. Right? Yeah, Chris, and Karen, we've got you from making bigger grants and the sponsored shorts, you're you're considering your applications, right? From creatives and pitches, if you will. I would imagine, you know, how they

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communicate their pitch and their project to you is super important. And a large factor in whether you move forward or not, is that fair?

23:54 KAREN

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So that's where that clarity comes in the vision, you know, willingness to put yourself out there. But yeah, communicating that clearly. And, you know, and getting folks excited about it. A lot of these grants are, you know, they're meant to be entertaining games are meant to be fun, but even taking the skills and putting into architecture architecture, for example, or the automotive industry. It totally applies there as well. There's design, there's communication, there's ideas there, there's collaboration there. There's beauty there, there's emotion there, right. So being able to communicate all of that is critical, and you're right we do we get a lot of, you know, pitches and the stronger ones are, you can tell are, have been iterated on and have been refined and have been edited and have been reworded to just make sure that it's you know, making its its point.

24:56 ABHI

I love it. I love the themes. You know, no matter your degree, call it Some of the core principles here clear communication, being strong, yet concise. I think I'm ironically, you know, failing here, but clear, clear community structured thinking to problem solving from Chris, you know, how do you how do you break down a problem in a structured fashion? And then from Jay, you know, how do you how do you kind of, if you're an engineer, maybe how do you take a skill set, and make that kind of a unique aspect about you, and in another kind of larger field. So I'm like, I like the variety of answers we got here, I'm going to go ahead and steer us back towards, you know, epic, and their mission of kind of empowering creators, and particularly with the mega grants and sponsored shorts here. So you know, epic, its recently acquired some artists focus platforms, Bandcamp, ArtStation, it seems like you might be rubbing shoulders in Cary, North Carolina with a lot of different or wherever you might be remotely with a lot of different creatives in the company, right? So it just be great to understand, hey, what type of creative roles will exist within a company like epic? What are the types of types of folks that are operating there? You know, Karen, we know that you're in the animation industry, but great to kind of get a broader kind of background of who's, who's there.

26:17 KAREN

I'll give it a go. It's big-ish company, and to visual company, and engineering and code, as well. So there's all types of opportunity. And the game, of course, right, that takes art, and creative vision and execution, to produce things for, you know, for exactly that. So those are all their entry points there, there's marketing, which is a big deal, because you're focusing a team and language on a frame of something, you know, something that you want an industry to accept, and you want to sort of change hearts and minds. And that's super exciting. So there are creative roles there as well. And I think also just, you know, your first I'm just sort of speaking to a student point of view, right now, I think, your

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first your first job, or your second or your third, you know, sets some sort, of course, but there's so much still more that that thinks, you know, can lead to and you might pivot to you might think you're going to be an engineer, and then you're going to be an awesome lawyer. Right? And so are you, you think you might, you know, want to, you know, work in marketing, but really, you end up writing children's books, because that's just where your path took you. And I would just say, there's so much urgency to figure things out, right? Versus to sort of like, you know, who am I with? Who am I working with every day? How do I participate? How is this collaboration? Am I learning? Am I growing? Am I you know, and that's and that shouldn't be a struggle, right?

If you don't know everything, so I hope I'm not on a tangent right now. But I think it's important to emphasize that it just says you there, there there, just because you're one decision opens up a pathway of perhaps many other, you know, inevitabilities, right. So one creative role may lead to, you know, something you just hadn't expected, because you opened yourself up to, you know, put yourself in that in that kind of maybe vulnerable, you know, position. But anyway, but to answer go back to your original question, I think there are a lot of those roles. And now epic, you know, is growing this ecosystem through either acquisitions or partnering with places, you know, yeah, of course, that's all these other creative and other roles are, you know, are opening and then Then what will we do together and then that's sort of a new territory, right, and sort of fresh snow in a way.

28:56 ABHI

I want to I love the threads. You mentioned, like just larger note that a gives creativity that can exist in all roles, but also appreciated kind of an overview of the more liberal creative roles that Epic.

29:08 CHRIS

Oh, they'll jump in if I could, just 'cause what Karen said resonates with me so much in terms of just that process of career exploration. I mean, I graduated in 2009. During the last financial crisis, I thought I was going to go into a finance role. That didn't happen. So I went to I was a teacher in the Dominican Republic for a year and that was one of the coolest years of my life. And, you know, from there, I went to work for a payments software startup in Colorado, and then you know, and now I'm here at Epic so there's no linear path. And I think a lot of the fun for me has been that process of exploration. So totally agree with Karen in terms of working on Cool, cool, interesting projects that you're excited about with with great people, you know, you follow that thread and I think you'll you'll learn some work Great, definitely don't feel like you have to get it figured out from the first year out of school.

30:07 ABHI

I love that, Chris love that. We talked about your career journey. And now that we're on that topic, like actually would like to tag J. Yeah. How did you get to become? Yeah. What was your journey? Was

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it also zigzag? How did you go from engineering to law? How did you end up as Senior Counsel at Epic? I'd love to hear your story as well.

30:24 JAY

Sure. Well, you know, the funny way that I explain it usually is when I when I got to engineering school at Duke freshman year, I was taking EDR 53. It didn't take much time for me to realize that everybody else was smarter than me. Right? Everybody else seemed to know what they were doing. And this was all fresh stuff. I came to enjoy it, I came to learn a lot. But you know, the funny way I tell it again, it's like I'd say go to law school because I wasn't good enough to be an engineer. There's a there's definitely a grain of truth to that. But but the real story is that it's a little bit boring. Honestly, I had a mentor figure in high school who was really influential on my career path. And he was a patent litigator. So he had studied engineering, gotten actually a PhD in Engineering, and going into law. So going into my undergrad, that was kind of one of the many paths that I was considering. And then you know, considering how much smarter everybody else was, I did what everybody you know, what all other law students do, it's just people, I don't know what else to do apply to law school, and I kind of ended up there. But it was, you know, I had, I had that in the back of my mind. And it just happened to work out. And it's a good, it's a great intersection to live in, again, because of that differentiator within the legal field. If I practice patent litigation for four years, and in many ways, having a hard science degree is required. If you want to practice patent prosecution, which is the process of applying for patents, you need to take the Patent Bar and take the Patent Bar, you have to have a hard science degree. So it's been hugely helpful to have that. And that's just kind of how I ended up there was, you know, half planned and half coincidental. But following on the sort of same thread that Chris and Karen are touching on in terms of just how the where the winds may carry you, in terms of your career, epic was certainly that for me, I grew up super into video games, Halo was a huge part of my college experience as well. But it was always kind of like something that I suppressed, especially when it comes in terms of like, a professional, professional identity or a career path. It was something I was never comfortable expressing, oh, I want to get into gaming. For some reason, I found that, I don't know, embarrassing, or something. And in hindsight, that was just so silly, right? Because gaming is a bigger industry than I think, you know, television and movies and other media, media industries combined. It's ginormous. And not not only that, you know, it's Yes, the question earlier, I'll be about, like, what sorts of degrees are useful for gaming, but there's really not a limitation on the types of degrees that can be helpful, right? It's just anything that can help a company. Right? There's, there's so many operational things that have nothing to do with the actual gaming side that that we have a need for so there's, there's not that limitation. We I do you know, I I ended up at Epic, just kind of on a whim applying to this position in secret because it had always been kind of a dream of mine to work for a gaming company. And it's probably one of the best decisions I've made in my life.

33:40 ABHI

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Yeah, I love that appreciate like, Karen your journey and also cool to see kind of a passion. Yeah, resurface and intersect with with your career. Alright, I have one last question. You know, for folks, just, hey, are there though, that you all have seen a lot of different projects, you know, across across your work, any projects that you're working on? And, you know, Chris in gaming, or just in general, Karen, Jay, like, any anything that you're working on that you might want to think that you could give us the cheer on that you're like super excited. Anything that you could potentially share? Give us? Yeah, heads up on it to look out for. We talk about heavy object. Oh, good. Oh, God. If not, I can move on. But yeah.

### 34:27 CHRIS

I mean, I think as it pertains to the mega grants program, I mean, I'm just excited to you know, a lot of the the great stories of our recipients, I think there's some really interesting compelling stories that are surfacing and getting more of those out into the world and telling the story. So I'm excited about that and just continuing to build a community amongst the migrants recipients and you know, on a personal more or more personal level that the The real time 3d and Unreal Engine ecosystem is crazily complex I mean is every single vertical that we're in has its own tech stack and workflows and lingo and file formats. And I'm just immersing myself in that ecosystems information, just getting wrapping my head around that. And in a way where I feel really conversing is something I'm personally excited about.

### 35:25 KAREN

It's a great answer. And I would just, there's, there's, there are a lot of fun projects coming out over this year, as a result of a lot of the mega grants work and support. Some of those make their way on to, you know, a resource spotlight section at the, at the Unreal Engine web or Epic Games web website. So if you don't, if you haven't looked there, that's a great resource for great Creator stories. You know, we feed your folks on all the social channels, you know, from Instagram stories to work that we post on YouTube, that's wonderfully, you know, put together thoughtfully put together. And some of it is a deep dive. And some of that is more of a hand. But there's a very consistent drumbeat of assets and technology that's there, you are free, go for it, knock yourself out, you know, for creators, you know, to play with. And so I would say that's a really nice hub of information for folks who are interested in learning more specifically about Unreal Engine, real practical ways, a lot of tutorials, our fellowship and education opportunities are huge and generous as well generous of thought and generous, just in that they exist. Right. So just another thing that we're always excited to point folks to and then as the most current, yeah, information.

### 36:51 JAY

Yeah, I genuinely believe that the Unreal Engine has the greatest potential out of any product that exists out there to become the ubiquitous platform for 3-D real time content. And one of the ways that kind of unexpected ways that I see that sort of actualizing is the HMI field, which is human machine

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interface, but we kind of use that to describe essentially infotainment centers in vehicles, right, the screens that you see in vehicles, I think the ways that that's going to evolve in terms of what sort of things you see on the screens, and how those screens are presented to you, whether it's in a windshield display, or on the dashboard. We have a number of licensees that are automobile manufacturers that are using Unreal Engine in their vehicles now that are going to come into production in the next few years. And that's that's really exciting for me.

37:45 ABHI

Sounds like no matter what industry you're in, if Duke folks that are on the call, download Unreal Engine, maybe one of the projects we'll see in the future will be from someone on the call right now. So yeah, thanks. Thanks for that. Thanks, Chris. Jay, Karen. Now to the fun part here, we've got a few rapid, rapid fire questions here. So gonna keep it to like one sentence, short response rapid fire questions here. Then we'll get to q&a. I see some great questions in chat, please put questions in chat for q&a After this rapid fire section. And then we'll have also raffle winners announced at the end by by Michael Topper, president of Duke Gaming, so, alright, first question. rapid fire. What's one piece of advice for students that are hoping to build a career in gaming? What's one piece of advice you have? Chris, let's start with you.

38:38 CHRIS

One sentence I would just say, be proactive in your be proactive and get out there. There's tons of opportunities. Go find them. Email people sending LinkedIn messages, just be persistent.

38:58 ABHI

Like it. Hustle. Karen, how about you?

39:01 KAREN

Go for it, build it, just do it. Take it from beginning to middle to end. Who cares? If you hate it at the end doesn't matter. You made something and that's a huge achievement. So and it will serve as a forcing function for you know, decision making, you know, yes, I like this. No, I did. Oh, I have a calling card. Now Chris is gonna hire me. You know, whatever it is. So that's my advice.

39:21 ABHI

Great. Jay?

39:24 JAY

I hated this advice when I was a student because I was so bad that I can't stress how true it is. Don't underestimate the power of networking. Karen: Yeah, 100%

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39:34 ABHI

I'd also go that. I feel like I should be part of the rapid fire put myself on the spot. I'd agree and plus one, yeah, reach out network. You can learn so much in a 30-minute conversation and a lot of people will be willing to take take that call and paid for. All right, next question. Share the most challenging and the most rewarding aspect of your job. So two sentences, go for it. Karen, cool if I start with you?

40:00 KAREN

Yes, yes. Okay, so what are the most challenging? Abhi: most challenging and most rewarding? Two sides of coin.

40:09 KAREN

Okay, let's see most challenging, most challenging. There's just not enough time. Right? And yeah, maybe that's it. And then the most rewarding is enabling artists.

40:27 ABHI

Cool. J, how about you?

40:31 JAY

I think mine are the same for most challenging and most rewarding. But given how how on the bleeding edge of technology and innovation and creativity, that Epic is doing things that have never been done before.

40:45 ABHI

Cool, Chris, any additional?

40:49 CHRIS

On the challenging, definitely just the complexity of the technology in the ecosystem, and connecting, connecting all the dots, just learning that and getting deeper in that most rewarding aspect of the job at just leading such a passionate team of people, shout out to the MegaGrants team and all the great work that they're doing to run such a great program and the outcomes that we see with our recipients and some of the projects innovation innovation that we're enabling.

41:21 ABHI

Great, yeah, most challenging kind, not enough time, the day and most rewarding, great to see, you know, great creative, coming out of the Unreal Engine. Next question, what is the one way that COVID has shaped or is shaping your industry and your roles in the industry? And it's also something folks

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have asked as well, in a in chat. So how's How's COVID shaped your industry or your role? Jay, do you if we start with you, Jay?

41:50 JAY

Sure. I'll start with the obvious one. It's just it's just remote work, right? Well, before COVID, we only had lawyers in North Carolina and in Seattle, Seattle office. But since then, I can't name the number of cities where did not only attorneys, but you know, epic employees sit and I think it's a huge boost right to our resources and workforce, because we no longer have those geographical limitations. Karen?

42:19 KAREN

Yeah, I think it's accelerated what was already happening, which is that power of the indie artists and the tools that are available, and it's not just that part making it, but it's where it goes. So I think there's a lot I think it's fueled that.

42:35 ABHI

Cool, Chris?

42:39 CHRIS

I echo what Jay and Karen said. I'll also add just accelerating new modes of collaboration in technology mirror aboard zoom. It's it's amazing how quickly we've adapted to being able to work remotely effectively. If you'd asked me five years ago, if I could do that, I would have said no, you're crazy. But now it seems it just feels easy. It's it's cool. And we're such a global distributed organization that you could be problem solving. And someone in Singapore and someone in London at the same time, which is which is pretty awesome.

43:09 ABHI

Love it.

43:12 ABHI

Next question. This is this is a great one for one sentence answer. How will the metaverse shape the future of game design? And vice versa? So yeah, Chris, I'm gonna start with you on that one.

43:30 CHRIS

The the buzzword of 2021 is still the buzzword of 2022. I think just continuing to to blur the lines in terms of internet entertainment, interactive entertainment, I think it all just converges in one place.

43:49 ABHI

Great answer. Karen?

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43:51 KAREN

I think the sentence has the answer in it. So he inverted don't know that the metaverse is influencing gaming, but that gaming is going to influence whatever it is the metaverse is and I also don't think that that's a singular thing. I think it's a way that, you know, we're going to experience, you know, virtual, you know, world and, you know, hopefully it will be beautiful. And also the way just a way of encountering that versus you know, that we can go create it. It's not creating us not telling us what to do.

44:29 ABHI

Right, great. Jay?

44:36 JAY

I think breaking down walled gardens and the acceleration of interoperability between platforms, I think it's no longer it's not going to be acceptable for whatever becomes diverse to be a closed system. So whatever that is, has to be able to import and export content between you know, gaming platforms between social media platforms, you know, media and entertainment platforms, etc.

45:00 ABHI

Great, I'm actually gonna throw in my own one last Rapid Fire question of funnel in here. What are you playing? What are you watching? That's inspiring you lately, you know, Unreal Engine are not totally up to you if somebody made an unreal or not. Okay, Karen, I'll start with you.

45:22 KAREN

I'm trying to let's see, um, well, I'm taking some other language courses but I'm doing that live I'm not doing that. That's not I don't know that's answering your question. I just don't have a show I can admit to watching.

45:36 ABHI

Okay, Jay?

45:40 JAY

Horizon Forbidden West and Grand Trees Seven. I just bought a sim racing setup, but I'm super excited about

45:46 KAREN

Such a better answer.

## Transcript

45:53 CHRIS

I've been dabbling in throwbacks was playing some like old school Unreal Tournament the other day and just getting my butt kicked so bad.

46:02 ABHI

I like it. Chris, Chris staying on brand on games. I like it. Cool. Alrighty, I'm going to go ahead and move over to audience q&a here for the last, you know, 10 or so minutes? already getting started with the first one. Okay, but so how are independent game developers incorporated into the creative process? Within Epic? If so, how do you how do you interact with with independent game developers? At Epic? What does that look like?

46:37 JAY

Yeah, from from the Engine licensing side, we similar talking about, you know, third parties outside of Epic in terms of indie game developers, we don't really get involved in the creative process. But what we do is we support from a technical perspective, if they're using Unreal Engine, so there's lots of interaction and lots of support in terms of getting them on board in terms of how to use Unreal Engine and any bugs or optimizations they need. So there's lots of sort of interactivity in that sense, but it's there's not a lot of meddling in the creative process.

47:12 ABHI

Cool, Chris? Karen, anything you want to add onto that?

47:16 KAREN

It's similar for the media and entertainment space as well, maybe we do have some collaboration. So it gets a little, you know, ven-diagrammy there, but for the most part follows the same model.

47:30 ABHI

Cool. Um, any advice for people interested in writing careers in the gaming space? Any advice?

47:41 JAY

For writing careers? .

47:44 ABHI

Yeah. Anyone that's in writing specifically?

47:47 KAREN

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That's fun. I don't know as much about writing for games. But I do think that taking writing and putting it in a real time context is super interesting. Because I think that you because of that quick iterative process, it affects the writing and shout out to a program we did last year with Tribeca Film Festival that was exactly about this. And we called Writing in Unreal is just an idea I had. And we ended up developing it into a program and a way of approaching the engine for writers. And you can google that and see that there's some panels that might be fun, you know, to watch with some real practical advice, and people who are really doing that, not just thinking about doing it, but literally putting that into their tool chest. So I'd point you that way.

48:39 ABHI

Cool. This is a bit more of a tactical question. But you know, I, as part of the mega MegaGrants and sponsored shorts I met, you're looking at a lot of creators, you speak to the importance of personal projects versus calling classwork when kind of assessing credibility or breaking in. You call it someone that straight out of college, do? How do you evaluate portfolio?

49:10 KAREN

I'll see that first Chris, and then over to you. You know, a good idea is a good idea. And that doesn't mean that Oh, I like your story. But it could mean that it just means Oh, you're really thinking about using this technology in an interesting way. We, we want we want you to embrace it, and then we feel so confident in the technology, we know that it's going to be in a creator toolkit as you move on in your career. So I don't I don't know that I would add anything more just to that, you know, I would, you know, I don't know that we would say Oh, I'm a student, you know, but I would say that, you know, experience does matter as well. So, you know, just being honest with yourself and what you're trying to do I think will be important and it will come through.

49:58 ABHI

Cool. Anything else, folks, Chris?

50:01 CHRIS

Yeah, I mean, you know, maybe a little bit of the core of the question there is obviously I remember my my time it do get in your time is precious in the person's demanding, and there's a lot that's asked of you, and there's only so many hours in a day. And if part of that question is around, well, if I have hours to trade off, and do I spend them studying, or do I spend them working on my personal project? I mean, my answer is it everyone learns differently. And I know personally, that sitting in a classroom and listening to a lecture is not how I learned, I learned by actually better off sitting in a library and do problem sets by myself or getting my hands on something and building something. So you know, by no means so just go not go to your classes and flunk out. But But certainly, like, if you're talking about what is the difference between a 3.5 GPA, 3.3 GPA and having a lot of awesome side passion projects,

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like, go do the thing you're excited about, you know, like, at the end of the day, I think a number on a resume in terms of GPA is not it's not the end all be all. And I think, particularly in something like gaming, it's an industry where people really do appreciate the passion. And if you're like, hey, we'll get this awesome portfolio inside project that I have. I think that that goes a long way. So it's my point to not worry too much about grades.

51:27 ABHI

I like it. Going to like Epic, and yeah, the company, what like, what would you say is unique about the culture of epic as folks that might be interested in the company and is potentially applying one day ketose tell us about one or two things that you think makes epic, uniquely epic

51:43 KAREN

I'll repeat a point I made earlier, just because I think it's that I feel that strongly. That's, it's such a generous culture, very highly collaborative. So everyone is, you know, excited about a project, putting their best foot forward, you know, so I would say, and then I think that that's reflective. In the collaboration, too, we had outside of epic as well. So super generous of time, and thought and skill and expertise. It's remarkable. I've never seen anything quite like it.

52:28 JAY

I think one thing, or probably the most unique thing about Epic, and its philosophy is that we play the long game, we're in it for the long run. So whether it's about the way that epic treats its employees, or even the way that Epic treats its partners, or its consumers, the player, the player base, we aren't in there for short term game gain and to squeeze what we can out of you while we can, it really is about building the relationship and building the trust and respecting that person or partner in hopes that it pays off in the long run, right. And having that that one employee remain with you for 567 years is much more valuable than, you know, having that turnover and squeezing out what you can into and you know, crunching your employees essentially. So it's really a place that treats its employees well, and that carries over to how it interacts with its external partners too.

53:19 CHRIS

Yeah, echo Jay's sentiment there. And you know, I think Tim is a definitely a really visionary. He's a visionary. And he really is wanting to help create this, this open and very ecosystem, which I think is, is really cool and unique and is refreshing in a business context. And I think he feel that internally as well as it's like Jay said, our interactions with partners. And the, the one thing I'll add is just the it's just such an eclectic place. I mean, within the gaming industry, you bring so many different backgrounds, you have, you know, people with deep expertise in software engineering, you can, you know, program the physics engine within Unreal Engine, and then you have folks that are artists who are actually, you know, building our characters and our storylines and you bring all those people into one company, and

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it's really cool. It's just an eclectic place. I feel like you can learn a ton from everyone around you and definitely no, no, no boring days. And I always feel like I'm just showing up and learning something new every day.

54:25 ABHI

Speaking of that, like long term vision, and kind of where the industry is heading. Yeah, a lot of different concepts are mentioned interoperability, kind of, you know, enabling the creator, obviously, how gaming is going to shape the metaverse right. But what do you think are the challenges that are looming? That will need to be solved right what what are the big challenges in your path? You know, in the long game, so to speak.

54:56 KAREN

I think there's a list of technical challenges for sure. which I won't we probably shouldn't get into. I think there's language. You know, there's, you know, I think, you know, you have to think into it with international mindset, you can't think of it, you know, from the Northern American mindset of, you know, the long game that is. So I think those all add up. And I think there's if there's any new kind of communication mechanic that needs to be enabled to unlock, you know, whatever, this new future is going to be right. Has that have we found that isn't yet to be discovered?

55:41 CHRIS

Yeah, I think another thing I'll add to that, it's just how this whole how the whole ecosystem operates commercially, right? We're talking about in a version of the open Metaverse, so there's multiple meta verses, and you're removing between Roblox and fortnight. And these are things like how do you actually what's the monetization model? How is everyone participating that in a way that it's it's fair and equitable and kind of all ships rise? And I think that is no short undertaking in terms of coordinating with so many different players. So it'll you know, it's a long game, a lot of the, like Jay said, you know, a lot of the stuff we're thinking about at Epic is we're not talking one two year horizon, we're talking 5-10 year horizon. So it's, it'll, it'll be a long journey, but it'll certainly be a fun and dynamic one.

56:30 ABHI

So like my takeaway, and for folks on the call, it sounds like we're gonna need a lot of smart people from a lot of diverse backgrounds and expertise to come together, whether you're dealing engineering, technical side, , the business side, a lot of opportunity to have a hand in the long game here. So yeah, I appreciate that. And yeah, there's some good good comments in chat here. A lot of hey, how do we how do we do something? Yeah, hackathon with Unreal Engine, you know, some some good kind of comments out here in chat. I know there is one one question I you know, we epic and Microsoft, Xbox. Are. We go way back years before? Right? There is one question. For me on the Xbox side, I just quickly

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answer it. The question is, how did you get involved in the marketing business strategy side of gaming at Xbox? How does gaming marketing differ from other entertainment forums? Is good Jay, Karen. Chris, great to for you to weigh in, as well as quickly answer. For me my story, my journey. I applied to Mike, I studied math and art to the moving image film at Duke.

I applied to Microsoft, on a whim, my junior year. I actually talked to Amy Unell, I took her class, I was on a path, to probably go to New York City and trying to become a producer on a show or something like that, right? Try and grind my way in show business. But I applied to Microsoft on a whim. And I didn't even put two and two together that Xbox was under Microsoft, right? And so I get to the interview, and I meet a person from Xbox. And I'm like, Oh, wow, gaming is like a real thing that I could potentially work on. And one thing led to another, I got the internship, my junior year in marketing at Xbox. So another good case of math major, working on marketing, totally learned on the job. But you know, the core skill sets that we discussed earlier, clear communication, being able to think through problems in a really structured way. That's what really paved the way for me to get the opportunity and return full time.

I've been at Xbox for six years working in various roles as business planner, on our on our games, business, and marketing. And now I'm on the strategy side on Game Pass, working on content planning, acquisition, just really quickly on gaming marketing and how it differs from other entertainment. I'll just say the audience, you know, I'm sure there's a ton of gamers in the audience today and on this call, gamers, you know, are they know what they want? They you have to be very, very conscious of, you know, their needs and kind of their, their insights around them. And they'll they're very vocal, right, gamers will let you know if something isn't going well, where if they get feedback is very clear, very prominent. So as a as a marketer, as someone working in the industry, it's both exciting to know that you have a very active and engaged audience, but also a double edged sword and that, you know, you could quickly you have hear from them if you're doing things that they don't like. So, I'll say I'll say that you've got a very passionate and vocal base, particularly with gaming audience, I will say gaming is a broad field, right? You've got mobile gamers, PC gamers, console gamers, all types. So yeah, but pretty vocal. I'll stop there. Thanks so much. You know, Karen, Jay, Chris, it was so great getting to chat with you.

### 57:28 DAVE KARGER

That's it for this episode of DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, DEMAN is a signature program of Duke Arts and Duke Alumni Engagement and Development. Follow DEMAN on social and stay updated at DukeDEMAN.com, that's d e m a n.com where you can find our full archive of episodes. Thanks so much for joining us. See you next time.

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This episode was produced by me, Lilly Clark, in collaboration with Hear at Duke, Duke's student run podcast hub. Our theme song is "Carolina" by Cameron Tompkins.

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