

Josh Stead-Dorval, Personal Statement
Master of Science, Game Design and Development
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My name is Josh Stead-Dorval, and perhaps unsurprisingly, I love video games. I love the way I feel when I play my favorite video game: for me, it's an all-encompassing, fully immersive, out-of-body experience. Growing up, I took this experience at face value. I didn't examine why I felt this way when I opened up *Overwatch* or *The Stanley Parable* or even *Mariokart Wii* – I just played those games because I loved doing it.

But in my freshman year of college, thanks to an introductory writing course on video games and play, I got a chance to study first-hand why I loved games, as an extension of why audiences around the world love games. For me, games represent an unparalleled opportunity for new and innovative ways to tell stories, in a medium that is more engaging, immersive, and widely accessible than any on the planet.

It was then that I began to realize a career in narrative design was waiting for me. Over the course of my undergraduate years, I've fallen more and more deeply in love with the art of making games and telling stories within them. Alongside a physics degree and intense musical study, I researched, wrote papers, delivered presentations, and filmed video essays about narrative immersion in digital mediums. I conducted live play-throughs of video games, in classrooms and conferences, to highlight their unique potential for storytelling. I took every class I could to learn about designing and developing games, exposing myself to as many platforms for making games as I could, and on top of that I channeled years of interest in creative writing into Twine to make interactive games and narrative experiences.

These developing passions, and my drive to pursue every opportunity I could, led to a Zoom meeting in November of 2023, when I was invited to join a project at RIT's MAGIC Spell Studios that sought to use everything I love – games, storytelling, and crafting immersive experiences – to do some good in the world.

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Peaceland: Choose Your Memory was a gamechanger for me. I got to be a part of the development process of a large game project from the very beginning. Alongside our faculty project supervisor – one of the world’s leading experts in peace building – and some brilliant peers from RIT Kosovo, I got to research, design, develop, and present inter-institutional workshops to generate ideas and structures for this game. Then, over the summer, I had the privilege of joining a team of RIT game designers and developers as a Narrative Design Lead to turn our project supervisor’s vision into a playable demo. I presented at *Narrascope*, a conference dedicated to interactive storytelling, with our project supervisor about telling empathetic stories in video games. I attended *Games for Change 2024*, met industry leaders and international advocates for social change from around the world, and shared our team’s vision for *Peaceland* with them. And I’ve continued to work with the team beyond the summer; even today, I still serve as an external narrative designer. Engaging in this project has meant the world to me, and it has also revealed everything RIT and MAGIC have to offer a budding designer such as myself.

In short, everything I was researching and presenting on the power of video game storytelling, and all the hands-on experience I was getting across a multitude of media, came together on this project for a beautiful purpose: to connect people across ethnic boundaries in post-war zones. For me, it confirmed that narrative design is what I want to do with my career and that RIT and MAGIC are a font of opportunity to create that career for me.

But perhaps most importantly, creating games and telling stories to do some good in the world confirmed values that I now hold central to my philosophy. I believe the most powerful stories are rooted in the truths of human experience. I think the world is changed by everyday people feeling the truths they don’t normally live. And if video games are the most powerful and immersive storytelling tool we have, then I want to change the world one game at a time.