Tumbleweed Express: A Tale of 54 Game Jams

Matthew Louis Mauriello
Project Manager (@mattm401)

IGDA DC Chapter Meeting
June 28th, 2016 (@IGDA_DC)
INTRODUCTION

Matthew Louis Mauriello
PhD Student, Comp Sci. (HCI)

Design Thinking Process
Image by Stanford d.School

Deceptive Driving (2010)
Beans vs. Waffles (2011)
This is a story about how a bunch of strangers got together and made a game about a train by working ~(once a month) over 4.5 years.

...it’s also a story about how I learned what it means to be an amateur.
As indie game developers you may have been involved in a number of projects that implode or become inactive; for many reasons, this is a common experience within our community.

This certainly happened to me right before my transition from IGDA Albany to IGDA DC.
After Global Game Jam 2010, IGDA DC heard from many of its members that they did not know how to fully participate in a large game jam.

To address this issue, the chapter decided to organize a few small game jams leading up to the next Global Game Jam.

This was my first project with the chapter, which lead to a short tablet game being published on the App Store.
Based on the positive reception of this first game jam, we decided to hold a second.

What happened next was the **genesis of** the project **Tumbleweed Express** and the founding of **The Dirigiballers, LLC**.
Hey Sam,

I think I could host the next game jam at my place...

Cheers,

~Matthew Louis Maurillo, MS
Department of Computer Science
University of Maryland
A.V. Williams Building, 4122
College Park, MD 20742
http://www.cs.umd.edu/~mattrm/
Twitter @mattm401
TIMELINE

**Tumbleweed Express:** 1 – 54 Game Jams
**Tumbleweed Express:** 1 – 54 Game Jams

- **Year 1:** Design & Prototype (2011 - 2012)

**TIMELINE**
INTRODUCTION

(VERSION 0.0)

CASH: 2241
HIT POINTS: 8
TUMBLEWEED EXPRESS: 1 – 54 GAME JAMS

Year 1: Design & Prototype (2011 - 2012)
- IGDA DC
- IGDA Bait.
- Gamescape

Year 2: Development & LLC Formation (2013)
- MAGFest
- TMG

Year 3: Development & Iteration (2014)
- Gamescape

Year 4: IGF, Kickstarter, & Steam Greenlight (2015)
- MAGFest
- VGU
- BFIG

Year 4.5: Steam Release (2016)
- IGDA DC
Development Team

Project Management Team
Matthew Mauriello (Lead)
Ben Heard
Jacob Clayman

Design Team
Jacob Clayman (Lead)
Andy Varshine
Ben Heard
David To
David Weiss
Duy Le
Greg Morningstar
Keelan Downton
Matthew Mauriello

Programming Team
Matthew Mauriello (Lead)
Ben Heard
David To
Jacob Clayman
Jon Heard
Keelan Downton

Audio Team
Sam Miller (Sound Lead)
Stephan Nettekoven (Music Lead)
Jacob Clayman

Voice Actors
Anistasiya Rul as Xenia
Arnoud Moes as Drillcar Jim
Greg Morningstar as The Narrator
Jacob Clayman as Sneaky Pete
Kilian Berthold as Dirigibaus

Contributors
Arnoud Moes
Bo Banducci
Brenna McNally
Christopher Bruser
Christopher Hayes
Dan Hertzka
Mason Booker
Mike Willis
Sam Levine

Special Thanks
Friends, Family, and Fans
IGDA Baltimore
IGDA DC
IGDA PA
MAGFest Indie Videogame Showcase
Baltimore Gamer
David Rumsey Map Collection
TIMELINE

Year 1: Design & Prototype (2011 - 2012)

Year 2: Development & LLC Formation (2013)

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Year 4.5: Steam Release (2016)

TUMBLEWEED EXPRESS: 1 – 54 GAME JAMS
**Year 1: Game Jam 1**

**(1) Pitch Projects**
Quick Sketches

**(2) Present Ideas**
Group Discussion

**(3) Ideate**
Prioritize Features

**(4) Build**
Rapidly Prototype
Year 1: Game Jam 1

(Version 0.0)

(1) Pitch Projects
Quick Sketches

(2) Present Ideas
Group Discussion

(3) Ideate
Prioritize Features

(4) Build
Rapidly Prototype
Year 1: Game Jam 1
(Version 0.0)

CASH: 2241
HIT POINTS: 8
**GOALS:** EXPECTED PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. Make a fun, 3D game about a train in approximately 3 years time.
2. Submit a build to the Independent Games Festival (IGF).
3. Complete the project with support for Windows, Mac, and Linux.
4. Release the game on Steam.
Year 1: Create Game Design Document

(Version 0.1)
Year 1: Game Jam 8

Continue Game Jams
One Weekend A Month

Prototype, Evaluate, Iterate
Incremental Progress
Year 1: Game Jam 8

(Version 0.2)

Continue Game Jams
One Weekend A Month

Prototype, Evaluate, Iterate
Incremental Progress
Year 1: Game Jam 8

(Version 0.3)
“Hi & good day to you!

I’m proud to announce that you have been selected to be a part of the new Indie Game Showcase for Magfest 11!

If there are any questions prior to the start of Magfest 11, please don’t hesitate to email me directly. Thank you for your time and congratulations!!!

Cheers,
Gabriel G.

Indie Game Showcase.”
**Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 Game Jams**

**Year 1:**
- Design & Prototype (2011 - 2012)

**Year 2:**
- Development & LLC Formation (2013)

**Year 3:**
- Development & Iteration (2014)

**Year 4:**
- IGF, Kickstarter, & Steam Greenlight (2015)

**Year 4.5:**
- Steam Release (2016)

- IGDA DC
- IGDA Balt.
- Gamescape
- MAGFest
- TMG
- Gamescape
- MAGFest
- VGU
- BFIG
- IGDA DC
**Tumbleweed Express:** 1 – 54 Game Jams

- **Year 1:** Design & Prototype (2011 - 2012)
- **Year 2:** Development & LLC Formation (2013)
- **Year 3:** Development & Iteration (2014)
- **Year 4:** IGF, Kickstarter, & Steam Greenlight (2015)
- **Year 4.5:** Steam Release (2016)
To start, the team prepared for MAGFest 11.

Team members worked constantly over the winter holiday period to complete the first full demo of Tumbleweed Express.

(This was the 1st of many crunches that preceded our deadlines.)
VIDEO AVAILABLE AT: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49_O Ud93U20
Reflections: Things Learned
REFLECTIONS: THINGS LEARNED

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
Year 2 - 3: MAGFest 11

VERSION 0.4
Year 2 - 3: Collecting Feedback

(Version 0.4)
“Are you guys on Twitter?”
“Are you guys on Twitter?”

No. Oops!
1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
Years 2 -3: After MAGFEST

1. LLC Creation & Work Agreements
2. Process MAGFEST Feedback
3. Update Game Design Document
4. Join Social Media
5. Migrate to BitButcket & Utilize Ticketing
6. Roster Changes & Hiring Developers
Attendees of MAGFest played 196 games of Tumbleweed Express and generated 259 unique tickets that included: feedback, feature requests, bugs, and user experience issues. After cataloging these issues, the top items included:

Add Radar; could be a purchasable option (14 Requests)
Boss needs indicators for where to shoot and colliders (8)
Destructible spawners (8)
Mouse sensitivity needs to be adjustable (7)
Iterate on design of battle menu; it's confusing (6)
Weapon switching is slow and cumbersome (5)
Put on Steam with achievements (4)
Drillcars are very aggressive (4)
Track switching and destination control (4)
...
Customization: 2012

Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFBr2-WyYbI
YEAR 2 - 3: EXPERIMENT

(Supplies: 4000
Cash: 0
Accuracy: 0%)

Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vmDlYWgopA
**Goals:** Expected Project Outcomes

1. Make a fun, 3D game about a train in approximately 3 years time.
2. Submit a build to the Independent Games Festival (IGF).
3. Complete the project with support for Windows, Mac, and Linux.
4. Release the game on Steam.
GOALS: EXPECTED PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. Make a fun, 3D game about a train in approximately 3 years time.
2. Submit a build to the Independent Games Festival (IGF).
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**Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 Game Jams**

- **Year 1:** Design & Prototype (2011 - 2012)
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Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 Game Jams

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- BFIG

Year 4.5: Steam Release (2016)
- IGDA DC
Year 4 – 4.5: Submit to IGF
(Though unsuccessful, it was good for productivity to have this as goal)
Year 4 – 4.5: Setup Steam Greenlight
(Helped us move towards release and expand the community)
Year 4 – 4.5: Run a Kickstarter
(Attempted to acquire funding and increase momentum)
The Dirigiballers have chosen Kickstarter as a funding platform because we view it as the most efficient and intuitive tool to engage with our audience; additionally, we think it fits in best with our unique development style and we hope to meet people who are passionate about the project through this venue. We also hope that you will enjoy the list of backer rewards that we have planned as they were very fun to come up with!

The lion’s share of the funding we receive will go directly towards the final production and release of Tumbleweed Express, which includes: commercial licenses for the development tools we use, some hardware needed for testing, help with attending conventions, and the marketing that will help increase exposure enabling the project’s success! Below is the total rundown of the development aspects that your donations will be funding.

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Stretch Goals

$30,000
In-Game Developer Commentary

$35,000
LOCKED

$45,000
LOCKED

$60,000
LOCKED

$80,000
LOCKED

$105,000
LOCKED
## Stretch Goals

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Tumbleweed Express: The Steampunk Railshooter
by The Dirigiblers, LLC

Final Days!
TUMBLEWEED EXPRESS
The fastest gun in the west

79 backers
$5,452 pledged of $24,000 goal
0 seconds to go

Funding Unsuccessful
This project's funding goal was not reached on October 2, 2014.

Trains with guns on them in the Wild West! Shoot, upgrade, customize, and mount up to defeat brutal outlaws and ruthless businessmen!

The Dirigiblers, LLC
First created | 29 backed
dirigiblers.com

See full bio Contact me
REFLECTIONS: THINGS LEARNED

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
3. Developing a project takes more than having the code, art, and audio.
Welcome! This blog has been created to chart the development of Tumbleweed Express, a "Travel Defense" game in which the player controls a steam-powered train that travels along the countryside utilizing mounted weaponry to fend off attacking enemies in a "Western Steampunk" setting. This project originated at the 2011 Fall Game Jam that was hosted by the DC Chapter of the International Game Developers Association.

Saturday, October 4, 2014

Post Mortem: How to (not) get funded on Kickstarter in 30 days

On Thursday, October 2nd at 2:00p.m. EST the Tumbleweed Express Kickstarter campaign ended unsuccessfully having reached ~22% of its funding goal. Firstly, I want to express my sincerest gratitude towards everyone who supported us during our campaign. The help we received from total strangers was powerful and surprising and the support we received from friends and family was heartwarming and encouraging. We met lots of new people, formed friendships and connections, and strengthened our ties with the communities that we came from. However, due to the all-or-nothing nature of Kickstarter we unfortunately will receive none of the amount that was raised.

Mostly I felt relieved at the end of it, as the negative emotions of frustration and disappointment had already run their course leading up to the final hours of the campaign. Despite the technical failure of the campaign however I do want to stress that this past month was the most successful, intense, and positive marketing push that our project has had in the three years we've been working on it. That said, I want to evaluate the campaign and give my impressions on what happened using the following categories:

What I Know We Did Right: Actions we took that tangibly benefit our campaign
What I Think We Did Right: Actions we took that, while imaginably positive, did not appear to tangibly benefit our campaign
What I Know We Did Wrong: Actions we took that tangibly hurt our campaign
What I Think We Did Wrong: Actions we took that, while imaginably negative, did not appear to tangibly hurt our campaign
Having an unsuccessful Kickstarter was still valuable because the project’s audience expanded and the team better understood what fans wanted. However, it was time to return to the game design document and scope back (e.g., by removing experimental features like VR and Co-Op).
\textbf{Year 4 – 4.5: Pressing On}

Thanks to the project’s expanding community and the team’s continual updating of the project, social media, Steam Greenlight, etc...
Your title, "Tumbleweed Express," has been Greenlit!

To continue, you will need to complete the necessary digital paperwork to sign up as a new Steamworks Partner.

Before you get started, you may want to check out this page of frequently asked questions:

At the end of that process, you'll have an appID and account in the Steamworks Developer Program with access to the necessary SDK, documentation, and configuration website to prepare your application for launch.

To continue, please return to your item's page in Steam Greenlight (and make sure you're logged in with the account that submitted the item), where you'll see a big button to continue this process.

This series of web forms is a new process that we are testing out. If you have any questions or encounter any issues while completing the forms, please contact us at

Sincerely, The Steam Business Team
**Reflections: Things Learned**

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
3. Developing a project takes more than having the code, art, and audio.
1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
3. Developing a project takes more than having the code, art, and audio.
4. Persistence is important.
Year 4 – 4.5: Remote Jams Begin

(Version 1.0)
# Year 4 - 4.5: Data Driven Timelines (Version 1.0)

## Tumbleweed Express Team Schedule

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Tumbleweed Express

Trains with guns on them in the Wild West! Shoot, upgrade, customize, and mount up to defeat brutal outlaws and ruthless businessmen! Tumbleweed Express is a tower, or travel, defense game set in the American West.

User reviews:
OVERALL: Very Positive (57 reviews)

Release Date: May 31, 2016

Popular user-defined tags for this product:
Indie, Action, Adventure, Singleplayer, Trains

Tags you've applied to this product:
+ Add your own tags
Tumbleweed Express

Trains with guns on them in the Wild West! Shoot, upgrade, customize, and mount up to defeat brutal outlaws and ruthless businessmen! Tumbleweed Express is a tower, or travel, defense game set in the American West.

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Goals: Expected Project Outcomes

1. Make a fun, 3D game about a train in approximately 3 years time.
2. Submit a build to the Independent Games Festival (IGF).
3. Complete the project with support for Windows, Mac, and Linux.
4. Release the game on Steam.
THE DIRIGIBALLERS PRESENT

TUMBLEWEED EXPRESS
The fastest gun in the west

RELEASE DINNER: MAY 31ST, 2016
(Team and Friends)
CONCLUSION: WHAT I LEARNED

Amateur (noun): The English word amateur came from a French word which in turn came from a Latin word that meant “lover.”

In English, amateurs are so called because they do something for the love of doing it and not for pay. (Merriam-Webster)
**Tumbleweed Express:** 1 – 54 Game Jams

Year 1: Design & Prototype (2011-2012)
- IGDA DC
- IGDA Balt.
- Gamescape
- TMG
- MAGFest

Year 2: Development & LLC Formation (2013)
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- Gamescape
- TMG
- MAGFest

Year 3: Development & Iteration (2014)
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- IGDA DC
- Gamescape
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- MAGFest

Year 4: IGF, Kickstarter, & Steam Greenlight (2015)
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- MAGFest
- VGU
- BFIG

Year 4.5: Steam Release (2016)
- Year 4.5: Steam Release (2016)
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**Year 4.5:** Steam Release (2016)
- IGDA DC
Thanks for Listening!
Questions?