

Team Cherry interview with Kotaku Splitscreen (2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bQP2rmNBpI>

Interviewer: Kirk Hamilton

Guests: William Pellen and Ari Gibson

0:07 Kirk Hamilton: Hollow Knight is a runaway indie hit and a truly wonderful game as listeners to this podcast doubtless know from listening to me and Jason rave about it endlessly. The game is a side-scrolling Metroidvania set in the mysterious underground insect kingdom. It was developed by the Australian indie outfit Team Cherry. It was partially funded by a 2014 Kickstarter and then released on PC in 2017, where it quickly became a commercial and critical success. It reached new echelons of both of those types of success when it came to Switch back in June, which is when I finally managed to play it. It is a very big and dense game, yet it was primarily the work of a very small team, led by two guys that I'm very excited to have on the show with me today. First, from Team Cherry, we have William Pellen. Hi, William!

0:49 William Pellen: Hey, Kirk. Thanks for having us.

0:50 Kirk Hamilton: We are also joined by William's Team Cherry co director, Ari Gibson. Hello, Ari!

0:54 Ari Gibson: Hello, Kirk. Great to be here.

0:56 Kirk Hamilton: I'm very happy to have you guys here just to sort of geek out about this game. I think it is really, really good. And I guess let's just start, can you just tell me some of the genesis of this idea, a game about a kingdom of bugs. Where did the idea come from? How did you come up with that?

1:11 William Pellen: Yeah. So Ari, and I had done a few game jams probably during 2014. Just you know, we started talking about both wanting to. Yeah, I've been doing some games as a hobby thing. And Ari been working like as an animator, but also working on games doing cutscenes and things. Yeah, so we're interested in trying out working together on something small. So, you know, we've got game jams

hosted here in Adelaide. And the very first one we did was, was a Ludum Dare? Was it? Or was it Global Game...? I can't remember. But the theme was Ten Seconds. And so the idea we came up for... it's a game jam that we had the 72 hours to create like a quick game. So it was me, Ari, and another friend of ours, Rohan, working on it. And the theme was Ten Seconds. And the game we built was a sort of just like a really short flash game. We played as a little bug knight character that went around eating cherries and had to eat cherries every ten seconds otherwise he turned into dust. And that was kind of the beginning of the idea of like the bug thing.

2:21 Ari Gibson: Yeah, so that not only was that was our first short game together.

2:22 William Pellen: Yeah.

2:23 Ari Gibson: The main character is actually went on to become the Hollow Knight.

2:25 William Pellen: It is exactly called the Hungry Knight.

2:27 Ari Gibson: That game is called Hungry Knight. And the character is...

2:35 Kirk Hamilton: Oh I think, I feel like I've heard of this. I remember people were talking about it.

2:39 Ari Gibson: Yeah, so the character is, is actually the same sprites that we just hacked up and used for a further Game Jam.

2:44 Kirk Hamilton: Oh, that's funny.

2:46 Ari Gibson: I can't remember but this one, I can't remember what it was. But the theme for that one was 'Beneath the Surface'. So and from that the intent was to make a platformer, reusing the sprites of that character, giving it a jump and what not. And though we didn't make the cutoff time for the jam, we just ended up developing that further in our own time. And that eventually became the game, Hollow Knight.

3:12 William Pellen: Yeah, the basic idea that we had, which was a bug knight in a bug world and thinking about the type of game that could create the theme 'Beneath the Surface' was that's kind of the genesis of the thing that became the Hollow Knight.

3:25 Ari Gibson: The bug thing is likely also, just because you have this the Game Jam restriction. Yeah, so it's not some grand plan. It's just that when you're thinking, oh, we've got 72 hours, you tend to think of what can we make quickly and easily. And bugs were just something, one, they're like small so probably your brain goes to that anyway. But they're also easily... they're kind of easily captured. You can pretty much just draw an oval and put two lines through the oval, and you have something that already looks like a bug.

3:53 Kirk Hamilton: You say it wasn't, you know, it was obviously was a game jam game. It is very small. How did it balloon to the size of the game that you wound up making into Hollow Knight? And then how did... where did that happen, that scope increase?

4:05 Ari Gibson: That's just how we make things. Everything is just built...

4:09 Kirk Hamilton: They just get uncontrollably big.

4:11 Ari Gibson: We just allow that to happen, I think it's more it's more like we have a very simple core to Hollow Knight. It's really like, which there's a big door to the boss and there's three keys to open the door. And then along the way, we come up with things that make us laugh or I think are interesting. And we just go for it until they're too tired to do anymore.

4:34 William Pellen: The core of it yeah, it was right there from the start, which was there's some kind of plague in this insect world. There's a big door, the source of the plague is there behind it. And there's three, you know, these three guardians or dreamers that ended up being called that you have to go hunt down to defeat and then you can open the door and fight the last boss. We just kept working on it, you know, towards the end of 2014. And then eventually it got to a point where we thought, you know, if we had a Kickstarter that we could kind of gauge the market and see if we can get enough cash to just build it into like a small, two or

three-hour kind of product and deliver. And then you know it just became... It got filled out. It got inflated, but you can see like that that skeleton of the original game is. The basic idea is all that it's just yeah, it just kind of expanded outwards as we filled it with stuff.

5:23 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I can see that. I mean, it isn't that's like, I feel like that's a really old story that's going all the way back to that Double Fine Adventure where they're like, yeah, we'll just make a little game for a documentary, and then it, you know, expanded into this massive thing. Did you always planned to make it a Metroidvania? I mean, there are these sort of very distinct elements in the game, you know, this sort of souls mechanic with losing your geo when you get killed the way that it's very clearly inspired by those sorts of, you know, Metroidvania, Castlevania, Metroid games? Were you thinking about that as you were, you know, coming up with the game and fleshing it out, like during that initial Kickstarter pitch, or did that come later?

5:56 Ari Gibson: I think at that point, it was already using the Metroid template...

6:00 William Pellen: We had a bunch of games. I mean, there's like a bunch of games that we kind of both liked and that we based a lot of the stuff in the game on.

6:06 Kirk Hamilton: What are the games that people... everyone says it's a Metroidvania, but what are the games, the influences that people don't always immediately identify.

6:12 Ari Gibson: We cite three primary references and those references are Zelda II, Metroid, and Faxanadu, which is another NES era adventure type game, probably the, and I think the other big influence that ended up being in there is Mega Man X.

6:28 William Pellen: Yep, and then Mega Man Zero as well.

6:29 Ari Gibson: And Mega Man Zero. So that was, that probably wasn't something that we decided at the start, we do end up... we probably did end up referencing that quite a bit in making the game. It's funny because we say Zelda II and everyone goes, oh, man, Zelda II. Every time we say Faxanadu, which is probably the one that is most closely aligned to everyone just goes, oh, what? Ah.

6:51 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I actually don't know that game. What is what's Faxanadu. Tell me a little bit about this.

6:54 William Pellen: It's pretty similar to Zelda II in a way in that it's like a 2D side-scroller on the NES. You're like a little guy with a sword and a shield. And the world is like a huge world tree that you start at the bottom, you climb up. It doesn't have levels and stuff, though. It's like a world that you travel through and go onto the tree and find dungeons, and then move on to the next town, get some new armor and stuff.

7:18 Ari Gibson: Yeah, so Hollow Knight is a bit of a, it's sort of an inverted version of that, where that one's about kind of reaching the top to an extent. This one's about descending down further and further.

7:30 William Pellen: And yeah, so when we're making the game, obviously, yeah, like the blueprint for it was a lot of those games like Metroid and Castlevania, but we weren't super conscious of like staying true to the genre or anything like that, you know. If it was just, you know, what we thought would be fun, or what made sense, what we wanted to make.

7:49 Ari Gibson: Yeah, the blueprint is, you get a double jump, and you get a dash at some point. And those can help us just pass out the content a little bit more. Though, ultimately, as we kept building the game, we started breaking a lot of that down and allowing people a lot more choice anyway.

8:07 William Pellen: Yeah, and like chipping away, like, I mean, the basic outline of the game at the start, especially because it was really small. It was like a much more rigid kind of traditional, this power up first, then this power up, then this power up. You could follow that through the game. And then you know, as the game expanded, and as we kept working on it, we kept finding interesting connections between areas that didn't exist. So we kind of chipped away at the floor or the ceiling, to kind of allow you to move between areas a little more freely.

8:31 Kirk Hamilton: Man, I want to ask a million questions about the map. But I guess I want to ask about the story first, because I think I've seen somewhere

that you guys said that, you kind of came up with a story after you had designed everything, and sort of built the story more, you know, just like the scaffolding was already there and you put the story on top of it. Can you talk a little bit about just your process for writing the story of this game?

8:51 Ari Gibson: Yeah, I've seen that quote as well. I think that that's possibly a little inaccurate. It's more like we...

8:58 William Pellen: It's more like the details came after.

9:01 Ari Gibson: Yeah, it is. It is, there is narrative, but it's kind of like it's like swimming, you know, it's all sort of swimming around. And it's a bit... it just wasn't locked down, that was probably the point of it. And then as and it wasn't until we got to that very last point, that we started locking things into place after we had a lot of the bones of the game.

9:20 William Pellen: An idea of how you move through the world. And you know, which order you encountered things.

9:26 Ari Gibson: Yeah, yeah. So we just didn't let...

9:27 William Pellen: It's changing constantly.

9:28 Ari Gibson: We just didn't, we didn't want to be impeded by a narrative that we'd set up earlier, and then have a realization or learn something in making the game and want to go down a tangent, and then find out that we couldn't, because we had some story, like some narrative construct that prevented us from doing that.

9:43 William Pellen: Yeah, I mean, the core of it, you know, we sort of kind of mentioned it before, but the core basic idea of the story and the setting was there from the start. And that's, you know, what we built from for most of development. And then yeah, as we sort of built new characters, new areas and kind of created the world in the way that we tried to, you know, think about when we're adding bits to the world, kind of what makes sense for this kingdom to have. And that starts to kind of inform the history of the world and stuff. And you know, even just things

like, as we worked out the mechanics of the game, things like, you know, you can heal yourself by absorbing soul from creatures and stopping and focusing. And that stuff started to then inform, you know, why can the character do that? You know, what makes sense? If you can get soul from these other sources around the world, you know, when you find a spell, why, what is this spell doing that? You know, what connection does it have to the other spells of the world and stuff like that, and things just kind of piece themselves together.

10:45 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, it feels a little bit like, and I'm basing some of this on reading the AMA you guys did, which listeners, they did an AMA that's pretty cool. You should check it out. And it sounded in some ways, like you were talking about the story as if you were also discovering it, which I think is a feeling that a lot of storytellers have, like have when they're writing a story. You kind of, it almost feels like some of the story was just there, and you uncovered it. And in the process that you're describing sort of sounds like that. There was some questions, I don't remember the specifics, but that's probably fine for my purposes here. But it almost sounded as though you weren't sure the answer, because it's left ambiguous, you know, a lot of the story is left, you know, with sort of not filled in and ambiguous. And I thought that was just fascinating to see someone who controls this fictional universe and wrote the story kind of say, well, I don't know actually, I'm not sure about that. Do you feel that way about the story? That there are things about it that you don't know for sure, you know, some of the unanswered questions that people have?

11:41 Ari Gibson: Yeah, I think, absolutely, we have, we have our own theories. And perhaps in some of those William and I diverge.

11:47 William Pellen: Your own theories about your own game.

[INAUDIBLE]

11:50 William Pellen: We can disagree on stuff as well.

11:52 Ari Gibson: That point of exploring the narrative goes into it, the way we build the game, which is the game... building the game is actually just like explore being pioneers in this world and where... and it works perfectly, because it's like a cave

system. And you're basically as you're building these new areas, you're just digging into these new caves, and finding out for the first time, what is actually in there. And because we had such a fluid, kind of light and easy creation method, obviously, there wasn't a lot of time, but it was a pretty simple process. We could just... A lot of the world was built from us saying, "Ah, I got to the end of this pathway." But what could be beyond this path and then finding out as you travel. So like, "Ah, there's this... I'm in a, I'm in a tramway, but this tram, this tram path has been all ruined, and they've stopped development. But what stopped this development?" And then you think, "Well, I would love to see what's on the other side of that." So you build that out yourself. And then by the time you get there, you're like, "Well, look, I found an interesting character here." And then...

12:54 William Pellen: Yeah, it's about allowing ideas to lead on to other ideas. I mean, another one is, you know, we had the idea, I think, pretty early on about having like an underground city that is perpetually raining, which is The City of Tears, which is like kind of a centerpiece of the map.

13:07 Kirk Hamilton: Oh yeah.

13:08 William Pellen: You know, and then eventually, the question comes up, which is, you know, where is the water coming from? So the idea is, oh, well, you know, there must be like, some body of water somewhere, and it's raining down. And we can have a character mention that, and then that's enough for that we thought, well, there was actually a space on the map above the city. And it's kind of a cop out if you don't actually ever see this body of water. And so we add it. And then that, you know, by adding that lake, you kind of get a lake shore area as well. And then that naturally is kind of because it's sandwiched between areas, sort of think about what would actually be connected to, you know, if characters are visiting this lake, as some characters do, where would they actually be traveling through. Stuff like that.

13:45 Kirk Hamilton: I love that if I mean, I specifically love that specific thing that you just talked about the location of the lake above the city. I think I've talked about that on the podcast before. That's a wonderful little touch. And I like that you're talking about the process of storytelling, which a lot of people would describe as feeling like excavating a story. And then you're literally, you know,

excavating, because you're writing a story that's underground. So that's very cool. I know that the two of you weren't the only ones who made this game. And I feel like I should just ask, who are the other, I think I know the names of the people involved, but who are the other people that you feel should sort of get recognition for working on the game as well?

14:22 William Pellen: Yeah, so after we did the Kickstarter, we sort of started working on the game, probably. We got an office in town. We brought in Dave Kazi. He's a friend of mine. So he was the technical director. One of the big reasons that we... because we had been making the game in Stencyl, which is like a program kind of like GameMaker, because I used it and you know, I'm not, I didn't know how to code or anything. But, you know, it has like a one of those interfaces we can just like snap bits of logic together, and I could do that. But you know, during the Kickstarter, we realized that in order to be able to kind of work on the game at the bigger scale, and also get it on to consoles and stuff, we had to work, we had to move to Unity. So, David used Unity. So we brought him in. So for the duration of Hollow Knight that the three of us were the ones working on the game full time. We also brought in Chris Larkin, who's local as well, who did the music and sound design. I think maybe he approached us during the Kickstarter.

15:24 Ari Gibson: I, yeah, I'd previously worked with Chris so...

15:26 Kirk Hamilton: How did that happen? How did you meet him?

15:29 Ari Gibson: I had done a lot of animation work with Chris and he'd worked on things with me in the past. So I had a relationship with him. This is obviously a much larger body of work than he'd produce with me before. But I certainly knew that he was up to the challenge.

15:45 William Pellen: Yeah, he sent us some speculative kind of, like musical sketches type of things like...

15:51 Kirk Hamilton: Was it like recordings of him? So I have to ask is the Flukemon...? I feel like I need to interview Chris because I love his music and I love the sound he designed for the game. Is the Flukemon sound effect, that horrible, horrible sound effect. Is that him?

16:05 William Pellen: Is that when it's when he is walking around with this?
[MAKING FLUKE SOUND]

16:08 Kirk Hamilton: Yes.

16:09 William Pellen: That's me.

16:10 Kirk Hamilton: That's you! Oh, man, that was one of my burning questions was who created that? So whose horrible mouth am I listening to? So it's you? Oh, that's very funny.

16:18 William Pellen: We yeah we did a lot of the voices most of the voices. I mean, Ari mentioned it before we started, but we do them here in like a little cramped kitchenette with a mic. Yeah, so like, I mean, the most of the game is voiced by Ari, me and Makoto, who shares an office with us. She's like an illustrator. She did voice like Hornet, and probably 90% of the female voices in the game. And then we also got, like, friends and family. And so my mom did a few voices.

16:45 Kirk Hamilton: Oh, that's awesome.

16:46 William Pellen: Yeah, my wife Vicki did Iselda up in the mapping shop. Dave did Cornifer.

16:52 Ari Gibson: That's true. Yeah. So yeah, we just, we pretty much got everyone to do every voice they possibly could.

17:00 Kirk Hamilton: Just like, it's just like what's the weirdest voice?

17:02 Ari Gibson: We were so..., we had like five people or six people stretched to do sixty characters or whatever it was, it was.

17:07 William Pellen: Yeah, I remember. Because we're doing it during summer as well. And we had to turn off the air conditioner because it was too loud.

17:12 Kirk Hamilton: Oh yeah.

17:13 William Pellen: So I was in the kitchen just making these croaking and gargling and dying and screaming noises.

17:20 Kirk Hamilton: Oh, man that's really cool. Yeah, I like all of the human sounds in that, those games, have you played any of those like Machinarium or Botanicula? Any of those games that do a lot mouth sounds for their sound effects. I've always loved. Or the old SimCity the bzzztt sound, that's just some person doing it, I think it's actually maybe...

17:37 William Pellen: Yeah, you are getting some mileage out of really simple like a small amount of really simple voice clips.

17:43 Ari Gibson: You also get much more of like a human kind of connection with the characters in the world, like the best thing we could have done to make these bugs relatable, is just give them human voices, and maybe in the cheapest thing we could have done as well.

17:55 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, it's kind of... that's cool how those things tend to kind of dovetail sometimes. So getting back to the story and the way that you kind of designed this world, there's so much in this game that's very easy to miss. And we've talked a lot about with a lot of game designers over the years about how you kind of reconcile wanting people to see everything and, you know, knowing that you kind of can't just make them see everything or you ruin some of that mystery and some of that surprise. How did you approach that balancing act as you were making the game knowing that there are just some secrets that some people will just or a lot of people maybe will just never see?

18:27 Ari Gibson: We didn't stress too much about it. We definitely don't think that... we didn't build something, it's probably obvious from the game, that we expect people to see everything as they go through. What all we think is, as we're making content, is that someone will probably see this stuff. And if people come upon it, and uncover something new, and feel like maybe this is something that not everyone has discovered, that makes it more special for that person. Yeah, it makes the experience a lot more impactful than feeling like, I found this thing, I've seen

this thing, but everyone's probably seen this because the director's hands have nudged me to see it.

19:13 William Pellen: It's like that feeling of... I mean, one of the things that we kind of liked about playing old games like Zelda II or Faxanadu as a kid especially because like, you know, games are kind of really new back there, obviously. So the rules aren't really set in stone, not like it's not like now everyone's super savvy is the feeling that there could be anything like hidden around the corner or there could be any like crazy secret or weird creature and stuff. And so in like in an attempt to replicate that we just tried to make sure that there was stuff in the world. So that if you, you know, the people had the feeling that if they did find a breakable wall or whatever or like hunt out a secret there could be anything behind it. It could be a stinky egg or it could be a whole new like area with its own boss and stuff like that.

20:00 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I feel like the hive is a good example of that. I stumbled on that and it doesn't, you know, I think I played it after, on Switch. So after all the DLC was out, and there was kind of more to do there than I think there was initially when the game came out.

20:11 William Pellen: Yeah, we added a boss in some like a visual overhaul.

20:47 Kirk Hamilton: A boss that was surprisingly hard for me actually, I'm not really sure why. When I looked back at the fight, I was like, it's a pretty straightforward fight. I don't know why it was tough for me. But that feeling of sort of, you know, I think I blasted through a wall and then suddenly realized, oh, there's this whole other area there, was definitely cool. Though I guess I could see both sides of it. But like, did you ever feel like there was a time where you were, I don't know, like holding people's hands too much, and you had to walk that back, like you've had to kind of step back and say, no, they'll find it or they won't, and it'll be okay?

20:44 Ari Gibson: I don't think we ever felt like we were railroading people or anything.

20:47 William Pellen: Yeah, I think it's easy to underestimate how good people are finding stuff. I don't think we over hid or under hid anything. But you do like once

you actually have people playing the game, you realize that something that you thought would take, you know, a week or two weeks to get found, it's actually more like an hour even before people start like, data mining it and stuff people you know, smash through everything.

21:09 Ari Gibson: Yeah, we certainly recognize that the internet is there and will always display everything that exists.

21:15 William Pellen: And yeah, if you want to go online and sort of look up everything you've missed or you know, play along, then yeah, that's cool. But at the same time, you know, if you're keen on just going through blind, and muddling through, and you managed to stumble on one or two kind of really surprising things, then that's cool as well.

21:32 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I think I kind of muddled through for about 80% of the game. And then there came a point where I just had to start looking stuff up. Are there any secrets in the game that people have not yet found?

21:42 William Pellen: No.

21:43 Ari Gibson: I don't think so.

21:44 William Pellen: Yeah. Because it can get data mined.

21:48 Ari Gibson: Yeah. I mean, people dug up rooms that were half finished. There were just disconnected from the game. Like every everything gets uprooted at like the base level. It's ridiculous, though. Some of the stuff, half of the stuff that these the people have modded out of the game, we couldn't even remember it was still in there ourselves.

22:11 Kirk Hamilton: Like “we made that? I don’t even remember that existing.”

22:14 Ari Gibson: Yeah.

22:15 Kirk Hamilton: That's funny. I have a few specific questions about things in the game that I'm just sort of wondering about. First one, how did you decide

where to put a stag station? I've always imagined that this is a challenging problem with a game like this where you want people to have to travel, but you don't, you know, you don't want them to be right next to where they're going to be. You don't want them to have to travel too far. So how did you make that decision? You know, where does each stag station go?

22:40 Ari Gibson: There's a few elements to it. One is what feels natural within the world. Then the other one is we have to test the game ourselves for months and months. So we like as testers, it's really annoying if there aren't enough quick ways to get to places. So we probably end up incorporating that idea as well. And then that idea ends up probably feeding through to just player's experience, which is making sure that there's... because we're making sure for ourselves that we have like a reasonably quick access to every part of the world, then players get to experience the same sort of balance.

23:20 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, and I think you guys added one after the fact that it was at the hidden station got added in a DLC. Was that sort of based on that same feeling?

23:25 Ari Gibson: Yeah, that was a lot... Yeah, that and from and realistically, that was one of the ones that made sense

23:32 William Pellen: I think we had kind of discussed maybe adding one before like there.

23:36 Ari Gibson: I think like, we thought it was in conflict with the tram access. But I think the tram access ended up being a little bit more hidden or so.

23:45 William Pellen: Yeah, I mean, a lot of people never get the tram pass.

23:47 Ari Gibson: Yeah.

23:48 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, the tram is funny, right? Because it's like a second fast travel system that makes sense in the world. But it does... it is you know, you have two fast travel systems. So, I could kind of see that.

23:56 William Pellen: Yeah, maybe it felt like the grounds of the palace. It kind of felt like it made a bit more sensitive to slightly more remote and didn't have like a stag station right next to it. But yeah, like I think yeah, after a lot more people played it, we thought about it, we thought it was a decent addition. So we put it in that as part of that first content.

24:18 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah definitely. It was definitely valuable for me. Okay, next one is what was the process like fine tuning the sword attack? I've I really like amazed by how good it feels to swing your sword at something. And part of that is the way that it knocks your character back. How did you approach balancing that and making that work the way that it does?

24:38 William Pellen: It was in there pretty quickly. I mean, the basics of your sword attack were one of the first things that were made, and I mean, Ari mentioned Mega Man before, and the control of the character with was always meant to be have that kind of like that really sharp deceleration, sharp movement and those like really quick actions. That is why you got like a quick sword slash. And then I think I was fighting there's like an early boss, Gruz Mother, that's like a big fly. And I was getting really annoyed because it kept flying over me. I couldn't attack upwards so I had to like so I coded in upwards attacks and downwards attacks.

25:12 Kirk Hamilton: Like damn it I'm adding the ability to do it.

25:13 William Pellen: Yeah, I mean, like Ari said, it's kind of by playing something a lot and being a player in it you start to see the gaps pretty often. And kind of going back to your point after I added a down attack as well, because I was getting annoyed with enemies below me. And then I had that thing where, you know, you attack an enemy downwards, and then you damage it but you fall into it as well which felt really bad. So we put in like a bounce that propelled you upwards.

25:37 Ari Gibson: Yeah and then the recoil that comes from a side slash it was actually built from our first playtesting of the game.

25:43 Kirk Hamilton: Wow! Really?

25:44 Ari Gibson: So the recoil was that players would often, especially players who aren't used to the sort of the zoning of the game would run into enemies.

25:54 William Pellen: So they'd [walk] right and mash attack.

25:55 Ari Gibson: and then and they keep trying to attack the enemy and they just end up taking damage because the game has contact damage. So initially, there was the idea of a small bump, but it also gives you that the added benefit of more physicality, of more feeling like you actually exist within the world.

26:08 William Pellen: It's also consistent with the down bash, the bouncing down slash to the fact that that made you bounce and attacking sideways didn't, that was really weird to me.

26:17 Ari Gibson: There was for a long time near the start, there was a weird issue where you could slash very quickly in succession. And it made balancing really difficult at the time because...

26:25 William Pellen: We did slow down the slash.

26:27 Ari Gibson: Yeah, so that ended up getting slowed down a lot and players with some players would just jump in there and wail away on these bosses and they would die super quick. And if this became... and then others who were more cautious would really suffer.

26:39 Kirk Hamilton: So that's funny because I feel like there are charm combinations that I use sometimes that let me do just that. But I just had to actively equip them, right?

26:45 William Pellen: That was like the normal slash.

26:47 Ari Gibson: Yeah, yeah, that was our way of things like the charm. The charm stuff was really, some of it was our way of bringing some of that stuff back because we enjoyed it.

26:54 Kirk Hamilton: Interesting. And makes sense.

26:58 William Pellen: And going from that as well, another thing that Ari kind of noticed pretty quickly, so once we've gotten all that physicality in for the nail, for the sword, of you bouncing off enemies and stuff, it became it started to seem really weird that you would attack the terrain in the world and you saw it we kind of just go straight through which is what happens in like a 2D game. You know, and it made everything feel kind of flimsy or empty. So we added in the you know, the little dunk when you slash the wall, and you get like a little bit of dirt plonks off and you get knocked back just a little bit.

27:29 Kirk Hamilton: All that tactile stuff feels really good. I feel...

27:31 William Pellen: Yeah, so I mean, the attack itself is like the simplest thing in the world, you know, the slash turns on and off in like 0.2 of a second or something. But it's you know, by making things really like everything around you really reactive, that's what actually makes it feel good to do. And again, it's playing it a million billion times there as we're testing it, it kind of got us to think about what is, you know, kind of occupies you, and feels fun, and makes you keep playing and that stuff like being able to bounce off enemies, smacking the wall and bouncing off, having lots of barrels and grass around that you can cut and break, and you can watch all the bits and pieces flying around.

28:05 Ari Gibson: Having great hit reactions from enemies and a fantastic sound effect for the hit of the crunch of your weapon against an enemy's shell.

28:14 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I was gonna ask about that. Sometimes when you get hit that low pass filter is really really intense. It was I mean, did you worry that that was too intense? I feel like a lot of people say they thought they died the first time they get hit.

28:25 Ari Gibson: That kept getting escalated, because...

28:26 Kirk Hamilton: Really?

28:28 Ari Gibson: Yeah, because that was because your health is so low in Hollow Knight. And each health is... each of your masks, your health indicators is so integral

and important that we needed to convey that really, really well and really clearly. Because it can be a big deal to take two hits in the game, you could potentially suddenly be on half your health.

28:51 William Pellen: We also laid on a lot of low health effects. Yeah. Like we had issues with people not realizing that they had one hit left, which is fair enough, because it's like a tiny white mask in the top left.

29:01 Ari Gibson: Yeah, so it's, a lot of it is just keep saying, remember to heal basically like...

29:07 William Pellen: Your brain is sort of like counting the amount of times you've seen this, oomph, oomph, oomph. You know how much health you have. So it kind of helps that.

29:15 Kirk Hamilton: What was the thought process behind Millibelle the Banker and coming up with that, I think that's one of my favorite video game jokes I've encountered in a long time.

29:24 Ari Gibson: What we were talking about [adding] a bank and then and then Williams, something was like, oh, yeah, what about a bank and the retort was, well, only if she can take your money. And then probably and then it spiraled from there. And I should say William was the one that pushed for. Obviously this is a spoiler.

29:43 Kirk Hamilton: That's okay. We can spoil stuff.

29:25 Ari Gibson: There's a method to track her down and retrieve your money. I was all for her just vanishing...

29:48 William Pellen: Disappearing forever.

29:51 Yeah, yeah. Vanishing into the night. So you can thank William if you manage to...

29:55 William Pellen: That would have been a different kind of funny. Just no closure on that.

29:58 Kirk Hamilton: It would have still been funny, but it may be a harder joke to laugh about. That's funny. That's cool. So I have a few questions about the future. So you guys are doing a Hornet Expansion. Is that that's still happening?

30:10 William Pellen: Yeah, we're working on that.

30:12 Kirk Hamilton: That is super exciting. And can you give us any sense of when it might be out?

30:20 Ari Gibson: Hmm. Well, no. Because we don't know.

30:22: William Pellen: Yeah, we don't want to start giving out dates until we're pretty we're pretty confident. That, you know, is meaningful.

30:30 Ari Gibson: We also got slogged a bit this year with our Switch, PlayStation and Xbox development. So, even God Master God Master obviously experiences significant delay as a result.

30:44 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, it sounded like that was a challenge, you guys changed the name, what was the process there? Maybe.

30:51 Ari Gibson: The process was us receiving one of those sort of standard legal emails that cease and desist. Yeah.

31:00 Kirk Hamilton: Okay, because they had the same name as something else.

31:00 Ari Gibson: At 10:30 at night and William giving me a call and saying, "Hey, did you see that email?" And us having just submitted the game two or three days earlier, and basically being too sorry to Nintendo, and...

31:15 William Pellen: We had to pull down our submission, change the, remove the references to the old name.

31:22 Ari Gibson: And then we spent a morning talking to this lawyer about other names that we could use and every bloody name we came up with, the answer was,

"Ah no, that one's taken." "Ah no, that one's taken." But there is like a probably the end result of that was, though, the interesting part of that is because it's just the two of us, and Jack. So the three, who's replaced Dave now. He's helping us with the new stuff, because we're so small. We can make those changes very quickly. We can kind of be quite nimble. So it's not, it was probably it was a bit of a shock. But it's not something we can't adapt to within 24 hours. And I suspect that's probably the advantage of being a tiny team.

32:05 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I can see that. God Masters a better name than Gods and Glory, in my opinion, anyway, right? I think you picked it, you picked a winner. That is hard. That's like trying to name your band. And then you realize this another band called that and then you just spend a million years coming up with a name that you just don't like, as much as your original name.

32:20 Ari Gibson: No one trademarked it. Please.

32:24 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, so last future question is, do you feel like you have more stories to tell from this world? Or do you ever find yourselves fantasizing about just making other games, I would imagine spend, you know, many years working in this world of bugs and Metroid stuff. Do you have other stories to tell, or other places that you would like to explore?

32:40 William Pellen: Yeah, I mean, definitely got plenty of ideas, like more than we can make probably in the next ten years. But, yeah, we've I mean, we've got like, I mean, it's easy to kind of come up with ideas and stuff we've got. We've got one or two at least, that we're pretty pretty interested in moving forward with once we take a slight break from the world of Hollow Knight.

33:00 Ari Gibson: Yeah, probably the consistent thing is that they're loose. Like Hollow Knight., they're fairly loose frameworks to work within. So the Hollow Knight framework never, we've never felt it was restrictive on what we could create, or what we could add to it and just give it a slight buggy quality. And suddenly, it's all it's something interesting and distinct and part of that world. And we'll just make sure that those new worlds we're playing in allow us that same freedom.

33:25 Kirk Hamilton: Given that you guys have been so successful, I could see the temptation of expanding and hiring more people and becoming a kind of mid-sized indie studio, do you think about that or think about staying the same size?

33:35 Ari Gibson: We think about it. I think, all I think is we've got to not do that. It's just like a cultural thing, that the type of the game Hollow Knight, the game that we make that made that fortunately people quite like, it came about from us being the team, the team that is this big. And specifically, probably this team. And I think that as if we added more people and started delegating a lot of those tasks, the quality of the game would change. And for now, we'd like to retain the same sort of quality in future games.

34:10 Kirk Hamilton: Thanks. That seems like a wise way to look at things. So we're almost out of time, but I want to do a series of Lightning Round questions, which tend to... When I do Lightning Rounds, they tend to like turn into longer answers, but I always tell people to try to have short answers. So I'm just gonna ask you some questions mostly about Hollow Knight, about your favorite things, or whatever. If I asked your favorite thing you can each say one, if it's just the thing with one answer, you know, one of you can go. We'll go one right after the other. We're gonna try to get through them all. Are you guys ready?

34:35 William Pellen: Let's do it. Go for it.

34:36 Kirk Hamilton: Okay, first Lightning Round question. What is your favorite charm in the game?

34:41 William Pellen: Gathering Swarm.

34:42 Ari Gibson: Defender's Crest.

34:43 Kirk Hamilton: All right, what is your favorite region?

34:48 Ari Gibson: Kingdom's Edge.

34:51 William Pellen: Godhome

34:50 Kirk Hamilton: Okay, this next one, I think I know the answer. So I have a follow up prepared. But here's the question. What is your favorite enemy?

34:59 William Pellen: It's not. Hmm. I really like Flukemon.

35:00 Kirk Hamilton: Oh, all right.

35:06 Ari Gibson: Ah. Hmm. I like those giant spiders and I can't even remember what we called them. The ones where they're like heads down. Stalking...

35:12 William Pellen: Stalking something. Stalkers. Stalkers. Stalker's Devout? Stalking Devout?

35:16 Ari Gibson: Yeah, they're just weird and they're like, face splits open and is their arms.

35:20 Kirk Hamilton: Oh, yeah, I know those guys. I actually thought you're gonna say the Primal Aspid. Which is... That because my follow up question was going to be what is wrong with you? But you didn't say that. So that's not my follow up question. Okay, next question. Can you both beat every challenge in the game?

35:38 Ari Gibson: No.

35:39 William Pellen: I haven't done... I don't think I haven't done Path of Pain start to finish yet. I think or maybe I have. I did in the end.

35:47 Ari Gibson: You did it once.

35:47 Kirk Hamilton: You've beaten all the Godmaster stuff?

35:49 William Pellen: I haven't done. No, no, definitely not. Because I mean, if you're including like doing an all binding, like run then...

35:56 Kirk Hamilton: Oh, yeah.

35:57 William Pellen: I don't know if I'll ever do that.

36:00 Ari Gibson: We've made a friend of us. Yeah. Who's done a lot of testing on the game. Go through that gauntlet.

36:05 William Pellen: Yeah, I could if I wanted to. That's the answer.

36:08 Kirk Hamilton: Okay. Well, at Hollow Knight, I'm not really that good. And I watched a video of somebody doing the Absolute Radiance. But you know, if you get hit a single time you die. And I was basically screaming at an ever escalating volume the entire video. I'm sure you seen people doing this. It was outrageous. It was... Listeners, go watch it even if you've never played Hollow Knight, just go watch. Find a video of someone doing it, because it was the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen.

36:30 William Pellen: Ah yeah, people are amazing.

36:31 Ari Gibson: Yeah, we can't be like that. If we get too good at the game, we'll lose perspective on...

36:34 Kirk Hamilton: Right, you'll make it...

36:35 Ari Gibson: Yeah. We'll make challenges way too hard.

36:38 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I can see that. It's hard enough guys. It's definitely hard enough. Okay, next question. What happened to Quirrel?

36:43 William Pellen: We don't know.

36:44 Ari Gibson: Yeah, we're not sure.

36:45 Kirk Hamilton: Okay. Next question. Was the king having an affair with Herrah the Beast?

36:51 Ari Gibson: We probably shouldn't, we can't answer lore things too explicitly. You can make up your own mind.

36:58 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah. Okay. You can punt on that. That's fine. Okay, next question. When you go to fight The Radiance for the first time, Hornet yells something that sounds like 'get good'. Is she actually telling me to get good?

37:11 Ari Gibson: It's a happy coincidence.

37:12 William Pellen: It actually word "Gek du"?

37:17 Ari Gibson: I think I believe it's "Gek tu".

37:18 William Pellen: Oh, "Gek tu!"

37:19 Ari Gibson: Something like that, yeah.

37:20 Kirk Hamilton: It's not quite that but I... believe me I fought the Radiance like seven thousand times.

37:21 William Pellen: Which could be. I mean, we don't know what that means.

37:22 Ari Gibson: Yeah, that's true.

37:25 William Pellen: So it could be an equivalent kind of meaning to "get good".

37:29 Kirk Hamilton: She's psyching you up to go fight the Radiance.

37:31 Ari Gibson: It does seems too good to be true. Like, this has to be...

37:35 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, I did it so many times that I started hearing that and then realized that a lot of other people had heard it and pointed the same thing out online, but that's the thing. They're like, okay, I get it Hornet. I'm not good enough to beat the Radiance. Stop telling me to do that. Okay, next question. Do either of you actually use Nail Arts?

37:50 William Pellen: I use Cyclone sometimes for fun.

37:52 Ari Gibson: I use Great Slash.

37:53 Kirk Hamilton: Okay. Next question. Why were the Mantis tribe members unaffected by the plague?

37:58 Ari Gibson: There is a very good reason for that. But I don't...

38:00 William Pellen: Extremely good.

38:02 Ari Gibson: There is a legit...

38:03 William Pellen: Yeah. Yeah. I'm not being...

38:05 Ari Gibson: And nor is it that that far... like extreme...

38:10 William Pellen: You probably extrapolate why, but we probably won't. You know.

38:13 Ari Gibson: I think there may be something in the text that it sort of clarifies it.

38:15 Kirk Hamilton: Okay. Okay, last question. Is Grubfather a villain or is eating his grubs simply a normal thing for his species to do?

38:23 Ari Gibson: William?

38:24 William Pellen: Not sure.

38:28 Kirk Hamilton: Oh, you're not sure.

38:29 William Pellen: It's weird. It's weird. I was surprised when I saw it. We all were.

38:32 Ari Gibson: Yeah, it was quite a shock.

38:34 Kirk Hamilton: Yes, I was disappointed but then they kind of don't sounded like they're upset to be in his stomach was my thinking. So I started to then I felt

like I was rationalizing to myself that I'd watched this horrible thing and I really didn't want to believe it was bad. So you guys aren't sure.

38:45 William Pellen: Bugs do a lot of strange things. Who are we to judge them?

38:47 Kirk Hamilton: That's true. But they're bugs. They're not humans. That's that's that's a very that's probably a healthy way to look at things. Well, we're out of time, Ari and William. I really had a great time talking to you. I really really liked your video game. Listeners, go play Hollow Knight. If you haven't yet, what are you doing? It's very good. I guess we can keep an eye out for the Hornet DLC at some point in the future. Is there any where people can sort of follow you guys to keep an eye on what's going on?

39:13 William Pellen: Twitter is probably the best place.

39:15 Kirk Hamilton: Okay.

39:16 William Pellen: And we do have a blog. And normally when we post on the blog, we post it on Twitter as well.

39:18 Ari Gibson: And we will start talking about Hornet as we get towards... it being done.

39:26 William Pellen: Yeah. We like sharing stuff as we make the game.

39:30 Kirk Hamilton: Yeah, no, it seems like you guys were very open about everything. Well, cool. I'll put links to those things in the show notes. William and Ari, thanks so much for coming on the show.

39:35 William Pellen: Cheers, Kirk.

39:37 Ari Gibson: Thanks. Kirk.

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