

Screen Australia announces over \$3 million in support of the digital games industry

Thursday 20 July 2023: Screen Australia has announced \$600,000 through the First Nations Games Studio fund and additionally over \$2.4 million of funding for 21 games through the Games: Expansion Pack fund. The games span a wide range of genres and platforms and are being developed by teams from across Australia.

First launched in March 2022, Screen Australia's [Games: Expansion Pack](#) is targeted at emerging or small to medium independent game studios and provides direct funding for original Australian games with budgets below \$500,000. It has distributed over \$8 million to 62 Australian games since its inception. Screen Australia will reopen games funding rounds on 2 October 2023.

Screen Australia announced today two successful studios that have been selected to each receive \$300,000 through the First Nations Games Studio fund. They are GUCK and Awesome Black. [This fund was launched in May](#) to support games studios led by First Nations game developers and is the first of its kind on a national scale.

Minister for the Arts, **Tony Burke** said, "It's fantastic that Screen Australia now has the funding it needs for video games. That's why we set up these dedicated funds for this growing and important industry - supporting local games developers."

Screen Australia's CEO **Graeme Mason** said, "It was amazing to see the high volume of incredibly strong applications for this latest round of Games: Expansion Pack and also for the inaugural First Nations Games Studio fund. These projects and these studios represent a fantastic mix of exciting games from talented creators around the country and it is great to be able to support them to accelerate their skills and talent, and to bring their creative visions to life. We are so proud of the level of talent in the games industry in Australia, and feel the best is yet to come for our games developers both locally and on the international stage."

This announcement comes after the Federal Government introduced the Digital Games Tax Offset to provide projects with budgets over \$500,000 with a 30% tax incentive. This investment has been coupled with an additional \$12 million over four years from 2023/24 to support digital games developers and small and medium independent games studios through Screen Australia.

It was recently outlined in the [2021/22 Australian Bureau of Statistics film, television and digital games survey](#) that Australia's digital games sector has experienced substantial growth since the previous 2015/16 survey. It reported that the sector experienced a 265% increase in income, a 68% increase in the number of games produced and a 203% increase in employment amongst digital game developers - the largest growth across all sectors in the Australian screen industry.

The studios funded through the First Nations Games Studio fund are:

- **GUCK (VIC):** Based in Victoria and led by company directors Hayley Percy (Wiradjuri) and Kati Elizabeth, GUCK have spent the past four years heavily investing into professional development, pre-production, community collaboration and consultation. They are currently working on an Aboriginal-led mobile game *Future Folklore* where all positions of leadership on the game are held by First Peoples and is governed by the Blak Cloud advisory board. GUCK currently employs eight First Nations on-going staff and a wide range of additional First Nations casual staff and contractors, and are committed to supporting people from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups. GUCK are excited to share more details about their new game over the coming 12 months.
- **Awesome Black (NSW):** Awesome Black is a creative social enterprise developing original First Nations talent and unique storytelling content across a variety of mediums including podcasting, literature, video gaming and XR, music, photography and digital art. Awesome Black is dedicated to building pathways towards equitable access to authentically represented, resourced and compensated First Nations participation in all creative industries. Awesome Black is committed to developing best practice programs, networks, skills and tools within First Nations communities to

provide current and future generations with sustainable avenues for employment, creative expression, financial security and storytelling.

The projects funded through the Games: Expansion Pack are:

- **Ailuri (NSW):** A 2D, hand-drawn cooperative exploration platformer where players take on the role of the titular Ailuri, a red panda who rescues endangered animals. In order to protect this fantastical world from environmental destruction, players will need to take control of the small but mighty hero to complete vast levels, rescue adorable animals and defeat massive bosses. The team consists of creative director Liezl Ronquillo, composer Thomas Connell, lead programmer Tyrone Sobb, quality assurance tester Austin Blakemore and 2D Artist Lily Anderson. This project has previously received assistance as part of the Incubator Program from the Academy of Interactive Entertainment.
- **Covert Crew (WA):** This role-playing, story-driven game is created by solo developer Daniel Pratt and combines the flashy, action-packed world of superheroes with the methodical play of a turn-based strategy game. Set in a near-future fantasy world, the Covert Crew is a team of unconventional heroes, motivated by good rather than fame and greed. In this game, players recruit a diverse cast of characters from different backgrounds who possess unique superpowers. Together, they must learn to co-exist as a team while working in the shadows in order to stop a villainous syndicate aiming to upset the balance of power.
- **darkwebSTREAMER (SA):** From *We Have Always Lived In The Forest*, *darkwebSTREAMER* is a horror RPG streaming simulator and a spooky love letter to the old internet. Players take on the role of an occult streamer on the dark web, whose mission is to find the weirdest, creepiest stuff on the internet, bring it back to their stream and impress their viewers enough to make it to the #1 ranked streamer on the internet. However, the supernatural is real - the more players engage with the darkness of the web, the more they will find their apartment stalked by demons, spirits, crazed fans and online enemies as they strive to become the #1 streamer. Fully procedurally generated, the game creates a brand new and unique story and experience - every time. *darkwebSTREAMER* is led by Chantal Ryan and has been financed with support from the South Australia Department of Trade & Investment and the Adelaide Economic Development Agency.
- **Delphinium (SA):** This is a narrative-driven farming simulator with unique, dialogue-based mechanics driving an emotional story from producer Heidi Borge of CinnaDev. *Delphinium* follows the character of Haiyan as she returns to her home village in the aftermath of a life-changing event. There, Haiyan finds other people with struggles both similar and entirely different to her own, and takes it upon herself to meddle with her fellow villager's interpersonal lives and relationships in the name of helping them out.
- **Drăculești (VIC):** From new studio Fine Feathered Fiends led by creative director Mads Mackenzie, *Drăculești* is a horror-romance visual novel adaptation of the classic novel, *Dracula*. Set in the frozen mountains of Romania, players take on the role of exiled English solicitor Roger M Renfield as he visits Castle Dracula to meet an eccentric new client. But this is no ordinary place, and no ordinary assignment. Along the way, players will meet four tantalising and terrifying companions, and either struggle through madness and despair to earn Renfield a happy ending, or let him succumb to his fate.
- **Dryft City Kyngs (VIC):** From Nonsense Machine, this story-driven adventure game combines role-playing and racing elements to create a unique open world where the player can progress and explore at their own pace. Set in the eponymous Melbourne-inspired Dryft City during the late 2020s, a lifelong office worker yearns to break out from their mundane life to fulfil their true calling: to become the best drift racer the city has ever seen. The team consists of project lead Nicholas Greber, graphic artist Samuel Wright and UX and narrative designer Ruimin Guo. It has been developed with the assistance of VicScreen.



- ***Feed the Deep (QLD)***: Created by solo developer Luke Muscat who brought *Fruit Ninja* to screens across the globe, *Feed the Deep* is an underwater exploration roguelike survival game, where players can dive into the darkness in search of resources, upgrade equipment and discover the strange mysteries and secrets below - waiting to be found and understood. *Feed the Deep* has been developed with support from Screen Queensland.
- ***The Godfeather: A Mafia Pigeon Saga (NSW)***: From Hojo Studio, *The Godfeather* is a mafia pigeon roguelike comedy game where players take on the role of a humble associate in the pigeon underworld tasked with taking back the Old Neighbourhood from its enemies. Combining elements of stealth, open world exploration and poop (lots of poop), the player's feathered legend grows as their pigeon uncovers the dark secret at the core of the Pigeon Mafia. The team includes CEO/MD/founders Richard Salter and Jola Szymanska, executive producer Stephanie Salter and community manager Shoshana Lewis.
- ***Incolatus (WA)***: After crash landing on a strange and alien world now overrun by a despicable corporate entity, players must work their way through the planet and retrieve the parts needed to repair their ship. The faster players move, the stronger they'll become. Just. Don't. Stop. Moving. *Incolatus* is being developed by Funny Fintan Softworks, with the team consisting of creative director Jane Kennington and lead developer Zia Daud.
- ***Letters to Arralla (VIC)***: Created by Little Pink Clouds, *Letters to Arralla* is an exploration role-playing game where players take on the role of a newly recruited mail-turnip responsible for delivering letters, parcels and packages to the island's charming residents. As players soak up the sunny views and meet the interesting townsfolk, they begin to inadvertently help and heal the town through the process of kindness, friendship and express delivery. The team consists of creative director Chantel Jasmine Eagle, lead programmer Rhiannon Ross, narrative designer Alex Minenna, consultant Phoebe Watson, composer Danna Yun, sound designer Ben Houghton, technical director Michael Krekelberg, 3D artist Bailey Mogensen, marketing illustrator Monica Keeler and tech support Nat Bott. It has been developed with the assistance of VicScreen.
- ***Memory's Reach (VIC)***: An exploration-based puzzle adventure game from lead developer Ben Droste of 100 Stones Interactive. After a cryptic signal reaches out through the void, players are beckoned to a world of ancient alien megastructures - a beautiful, awe-inspiring sight devoid of even a single sign of life. From there, players can explore labyrinthian megastructures, brave perilous alien technology and solve mind-bending puzzles in this cosmic sci-fi adventure to discover the fate of a doomed civilization.
- ***Mouse Game (working title) (SA)***: From creative director Daniel Freer of Pond Games, *Mouse Game* is a 2D action-adventure platformer starring a tiny mouse who explores a strange, interconnected world. Players can uncover the truth of this landscape and their place in it through exploration, discovery, combat and platforming challenges.
- ***Neyyah (WA)***: *Neyyah* is a first-person point-and-click adventure game, set within a mysterious puzzle-laden archipelago. Through unique storytelling, puzzle-solving and world-building, the game offers players hours of non-linear gameplay as they grapple with the ambiguous ethics of truth and illusion. Created by Defy Reality Entertainment, the team includes lead developer Aaron Gwynaire, creative director Nanci Nott, business/artistic consultant Xanthe Turner and consultant Azalia Turner.
- ***Outpost (ACT)***: Set in the spine-chilling tendrils of a desolate Antarctic base, *Outpost* is a psychological thriller game that follows Indian Australian Pete who is running away from a family health diagnosis. As he uncovers the mystery of why this base has gone silent, Pete must learn that he can't run away from his problems - finding out whether he will repeat his mistakes when presented with the choice of self-preservation or helping those in need. The *Outpost* team includes creative director Peter Menhennitt, lead programmer Calum Spring, lead narrative Asheesh Saxena,





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sound designer Nic Dullow, game designer Jarrod Farquhar-Nicol and voice artist Emilie Martin. It is financed with support from Arts ACT.

- **RPG Game (working title) (SA):** An open-world fantasy RPG created by Killerfish Games. The team includes executive producer and lead designer/developer Paul Sincock, COO/designer Fiona Sincock, art producer Justin Wight and art director Troy Bellchambers.
- **Shrine House Keepers (WA):** From Hungry Sky and Milktooth Arts, this is a rogue-lite, deck-building game where players take on a role as a member of a diverse "found family" of Shrine House Keepers led by The Parriarch. Together, they are tasked with maintaining the Shrinelight network, a spiritual energy that flows through sacred sites, special places and shrine houses. By traveling to different locations, gathering resources and completing errands, the player helps restore balance and harmony to the network. *Shrine House Keepers* is by design director Nick Lowe, technical director Jack Casey, creative director Campbell Whyte, art director Elizabeth Marruffo and production director Minh Tran.
- **Spiritwell (VIC):** A role-playing, story-driven adventure-comedy exploration game from solo developer David Chen where players play as a meek child who runs away from home and falls down a mysterious well into the spirit world. Along the way, players will meet a vibrant and humorous cast of characters while playing through tailor-made gameplay sequences and uncover an inviting world filled with strange and dark secrets. *Spiritwell* is developed with the assistance of VicScreen.
- **Sundown (NSW):** This story-driven, exploration adventure game invites players to play as Mary, a would-be astronaut who was never able to go to space. Mary is 93 years old and living with dementia when players pull on her slippers to traverse memories and hallucinations in a last-ditch effort to get to space. *Sundown* is being developed by experience design studio S1T2 (Story 1st, Technology 2nd) with a team including creative directors Christopher Panzetta and Mike Daly, technical director Liam Stephens, art director Oscar Berman, narrative lead Aiyana Merlo, lead producer Natalie Robinson, business lead Jananathan Kandasamy, technical artist Stephen O'Callaghan, motion lead Nicky Tunpitcha and real-developers Luna Joy, Ashley Sewell and Iris Li.
- **Taming Yore Dragon (SA):** This educational adventure platformer from My Colourful Mind is set in the fantastical land of Yore, that was once full of colour and life and inhabited by fantastical creatures roaming the lands. But after the evil dragon Deimos took over the land, players will need to rescue allies in order to conquer and overcome Deimos - bringing light and laughter back to a world crushed by constant sadness and despair. *Taming Yore Dragon* is from lead developer April Benjamin and narrative designer Edward Korhonen-Bannister.
- **Tempopo (QLD):** From Witch Beam Games, the studio behind *Unpacking*, comes the wholesome puzzle game *Tempopo* where players rescue musical flowers across sky islands. The team includes lead designer Sanatana Mishra, audio director Jeff van Dyck and lead artist Nicole Stark. It has been financed with support from Screen Queensland.
- **Tempus Rail (SA):** This story-rich, first-person, roguelike deck builder set in the Wild West on a train travelling through a temporal rift. Trapped in this temporal loop, players must use strategies to fight their way to the front of the train and destroy the engine before the day resets. *Tempus Rail* is created by Joseph Roberts of Pixel Drip Games.

For the full list of funded projects across the 2022/23 financial year, please see the Games blocklines [here](#).

To hear more about Screen Australia's Games funding, listen to the Games Funding 101 episode of the Screen Australia podcast [here](#).

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