



# VOLITION 2014 GDC SESSION INFO

## Super Powering the Saints: Animation Direction of Saints Row IV's Super Jumping

Zach Lowery – Saints Row IV Animation Director

Thursday, March 20 – 12:05pm to 12:30pm  
Room 3016, West Hall

Format  
Session

Tracks  
Visual Arts, Design

### Talk Description

What do you do when your animation direction conflicts directly with a key feature being added within your game? How do you approach gathering reference material when the animations requested aren't even humanly possible? These are two of the unique challenges that faced the Volition animation team during the early development of Saints Row IV's super jumping movement system. This presentation will cover how the Saints Row IV animation team took a different approach to gathering reference material when traditional methods were not working, and how they applied their "comfortable and confident" animation direction to a world filled with superpowers, without making a super hero game.

### Takeaway

This presentation will give attendees insight into what it was like to develop the super jumping movement of Saints Row IV from the animation direction perspective. It will cover unique challenges, such as the trial and errors of finding reference material, merging existing animation direction with new somewhat conflicting features, and avoiding becoming a bottle neck for other disciplines.

### Intended Audience

This talk is for everyone who is interested in learning more about how Saints Row IV developed their Super Jumping movement system and the animation direction that went into bringing it to life.



### Bio

Zach was born and raised in the mean streets of Ponchatoula, Louisiana, and Zach always had aspirations of holding a career that never felt like he was actually working. After failed attempts of becoming a bass pro fisherman, illusionist and professional wrestler, Zach chased after his true love, video game development. Zach has worked on the entire Saints Row franchise, starting out as an animator focused on cinematics on SR1, transitioning to an in-game animator for SR2, and then leading animation teams for SR3 and now SR4. While some days certainly do feel like work, most days are spent living a childhood dream, and he wouldn't trade that for anything. When not working, Zach can be found playing games, spending time with his family, eating fruit snacks, singing the Beastie Boy's hit "Paul Revere," or a weird combination of all four.



# VOLITION 2014 GDC SESSION INFO

## Volition's Challenge: Defining Project Vision

Greg Donovan, Senior Producer

Friday, March 21 - 10:00am to 11:00am  
Room 2010, West Hall

Format	Tracks
Session	Production, Design

### Talk Description

This talk will explain the challenges Volition has experienced throughout the years when it comes to establishing a strong and clear project vision. It will illustrate the tools we currently use to help communicate the project vision, talk about the challenges and iterations we went through to get where we are today, and discuss the continued improvements we are making to our vision tools and processes. We'll use specific examples from the Saints Row franchise as well as a post-apocalyptic game that was ultimately cancelled to illustrate our history and improvements in this challenging, and arguably abstract, area.

### Takeaway

It is expected this lecture will provide meaningful insight, actionable ideas, and potential solutions for attendees such that they can improve their own processes and best-practices when it comes to establishing, communicating, and defining a "Project Vision".

### Intended Audience

This lecture is intended for all disciplines and levels. It is believed the subject matter will pertain to large studios, independent developers, and publishers alike precisely because we all need to have a vision for the products we create.



### Bio

Greg has worked in the video games industry since 1999, on both the publisher and developer sides of the business. He has been at Volition since October, 2004 where he was the lead producer on Saints Row: The Third, Saints Row 2, and Saints Row: Enter the Dominatrix before it was merged with Saints Row 4. He is currently working as the lead producer on an unannounced Volition project. Before joining Volition, he was employed by Volition's then-parent company, THQ, as an external producer. Prior to working in the video games industry, Greg worked at an independent film production company in Los Angeles. Originally from the Cleveland, Ohio area, he attended graduate school at Chapman University and holds a BA from Colgate University.



# VOLITION 2014 GDC SESSION INFO

## Technical Artist Roundtable

Jeff Hanna, Senior Technical Artist III

Wednesday, March 19 – 5:00pm to 6:00pm  
Room 112, North Hall

Thursday, March 20 – 5:30pm to 6:30pm  
Room 120, North Hall

Friday, March 21 – 10:00am to 11:00am  
Room 124, North Hall

### Tracks

Visual Arts, Programming

### Talk Description

The roles of technical artists continue to change and grow. Each project brings new opportunities for TAs to improve the lives of the artists around them and help increase the quality of the game. With responsibilities like content creation pipelines, look development, and the creation and management of asset tracking systems; increasingly, the lines between programmer and artist are blurring for technical artists. Tool creation, scripting, shader creation, working with both programmers and artists, and managing workflow are all skills required of a modern technical artist. This roundtable will bring together technical artists from across the industry to share their knowledge, experiences and tips for being the best at their jobs.

### Takeaway

Participants will learn what common skills effective technical artists share and how to apply these skills to their specific company.

Participants will leave with a better understanding of tech art and the value it will bring to their projects.

### Intended Audience

This roundtable is open to technical artists who strive daily to improve workflow, increase efficiency and maintain art production pipelines. Artists and programmers are welcome too, as their thoughts and expectations will help define the roles of all technical artists.



### Bio

A nineteen year veteran of the video game industry, Jeff has worked for many notable companies including THQ, Sony, Electronic Arts, and News Corp. He currently works as a senior technical artist for Deep Silver Volition. At his job he strives to identify new tools and processes that can improve game visuals and benefit artists. Jeff is involved with many game development community sites such as ScriptSpot, Autodesk's Area, and Tech-Artists.org. He is a member of the Game Developers Conference advisory board and also sits on the curriculum advisory board for the College of Technology at Purdue University. He was awarded an Autodesk 3ds Max Master award in 2007 and was named an Outstanding Alum of Purdue University's College of Technology in 2012.



# VOLITION 2014 GDC SESSION INFO

## Free Range AI: Creating Compelling Characters for Open World Games

Aaron Canary, AI Programmer (with Jeet Shroff)

Tuesday, March 18 - 3:00pm to 4:00pm  
Room 304, South Hall

Format	Track
Session	AI Summit

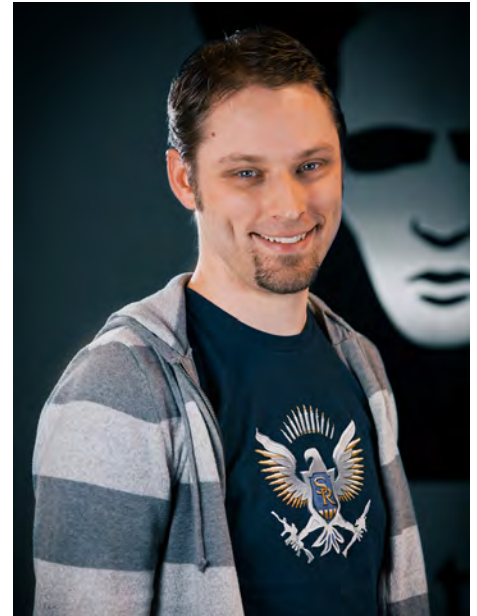
### Talk Description

When game worlds were simply linear presentations of rooms and corridors, it was acceptable to create AI that existed solely in those confined spaces, with controlled gameplay and defined player experiences. As the industry moved to more open world games, static set-piece characters quickly broke the intended immersion of a "living, breathing world." Developers wanted to give the impression that the AI was living in the huge, dynamic world that they inhabited, as well as to allow for non-linear play choices and emergent end-user experiences. The quandary was developing a system that allowed ambient AI and undirected systemic gameplay, but still supporting structured narrative.

This two-part session features developers who have worked on games such as Far Cry 3, Saints Row 4, and upcoming titles from Avalanche Studios, and will show concrete examples of how notable open world games provided characters that offered dynamic gameplay opportunities while still preserving scalability of design and fidelity.

### Takeaway

Attendees will come away with an understanding of cutting-edge techniques that have been used successfully in open world games, as well as ideas for implementation into their own games.



### Bio

Aaron Canary develops gameplay, AI and procedural systems at Volition. Since 2007, he has worked on Red Faction Guerrilla and Saints Row 2, 3, and 4. Aaron has his Master's Degree in Computer Engineering from the University of Louisville and continues to study machine learning techniques in hopes that it will someday find a purpose.



# VOLITION 2014 GDC SESSION INFO

## Production Support Roundtables

David Cubberly, Associate Producer

Lisette Wells, Project Manager

### Tools & Processes:

Wed March 19 - 11:00am to 12:00pm - Room 122, North Hall

### Motivating & Managing People:

Thurs, March 20 - 2:30pm to 3:30pm - Room 120, North Hall

### Career Development & Advancement

Fri, March 21 - 11:30am to 12:30pm - Room 121, North Hall

### Tracks

Production, Business, Marketing & Management



## Talk Description

Each game studio has its own culture and way of approaching work. Video game development is complicated, and delivering high-quality content is not a solitary endeavor. Producers are highly visible and ultimately responsible for driving game projects to completion. However, unless the effort is small, it takes a solid group of people to keep developers motivated and productive. Production activities run the gamut from developing and maintaining schedules to coordinating outsourcing, and everything in between. This roundtable allows attendees to explore the various roles and responsibilities of individuals tasked with supporting production.

## Takeaway

This session gives participants the opportunity to network with peers and learn how other companies produce games. Attendees are encouraged to connect with the group by asking questions, offering comments and relaying stories about their own work experiences.

## Intended Audience

This is a discussion group for anyone who facilitates game production, as well as those who are interested in production as a career. The roundtable gives attendees a chance to talk to a diverse group of peers about job responsibilities, challenges and unique production experiences.

## Bio

Dave Cubberly and Liz Wells have backgrounds in programming, project management, business analysis, training and music composition, as well as nine years of combined game production experience. They bring facilitation skills and a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Production Support Roundtable.





# VOLITION 2014 GDC SESSION INFO

## Catastrophic User Experience Failures - A Roundtable

Jordan Lynn, Player Experience Manager

### Screwing Up the Basics!

Wed March 19 - 5:00pm to 6:00pm - Room 122, North Hall

### Screwing Up Your Game!

Thurs, March 20 - 11:30am to 12:30pm - Room 121, North Hall

### Screwing Up at Science!

Fri, March 21 - 2:30pm to 3:30pm - Room 124, North Hall

### Tracks

Visual Arts, Programming



### Bio

For the last 3 years, Jordan has been working as an in-house researcher for Volition, the developer of the Saints Row and Red Faction franchises. He runs a two-person department with an 8-participant state of the art lab featuring live streaming to our development team, rapid reporting, and real-time telemetry analysis. His long-term plan is to improve the state of the Games User Research profession in any way possible.

### Talk Description

Most GDC talks focus on amazing success stories and inspirational stories. Not this roundtable! Come talk about how to frustrate players, break your equipment, and get yelled at by your colleagues! Or, well, how to avoid those things.

### Screwing up the basics! (Wednesday)

Conducting user research: recruiting, lab setup, technology, execution.

### Screwing up your game! (Thursday)

Usability/UX best practices: combat, resource management, common sources of confusion/frustration, UI.

### Screwing up at science! (Friday)

Methods and communication: qualitative vs quantitative methods and how to get data to your team effectively.





# VOLITION 2014 GDC SESSION INFO

## The Physics of Fun: Vehicles of Saints Row

David Bianchi, Designer

Friday, March 21 - 11:30am to 12:30pm  
Room 2016, West Hall

Format	Track
Session	Design, Programming

### Talk Description

One designer, 90+ vehicles, and only 6 months to go. That was the scenario when coming onto Saints Row: The Third. Without a single vehicle with even first-pass handling and a brand new style to define and implement, there was no shortage of work ahead. This talk is about taking on an overabundance of especially difficult system design work and turning it into a large and worthy part of a successful AAA release.

### Takeaway

Design methods devised while working on vehicle gameplay, a particularly demanding example of system design. Included are how to break down technical formulae into something digestible, breaking up and taking on a wealth of work in passes, and insights from playtesting and internal review, and more.

### Intended Audience

This talk is intended for fellow designers, especially systems designers. Those working on vehicle design should be particularly interested, but concepts are general enough to be of use to all. It may also be of interest for gameplay programmers. No prerequisite knowledge necessary.



### Bio

Originally coming from a programming background, Dave is a 9 year veteran at Volition. In that time he's helped to develop a variety of gameplay systems, including vehicles, AI, weapons, super-powers, and Red Faction's destruction. Most recently he served as the Lead Systems Designer for Saints Row IV.

He has a particular interest in traversal gameplay design, and as Volition's sole vehicle designer was responsible for the vehicle gameplay found in Saints Row IV, Saints Row: The Third, and Red Faction: Armageddon.