



Five minutes with ... James Ohlen.

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Meet James Ohlen, Co-Founder and Executive Creative Director at Archetype Entertainment.

- James was brought on to lead Archetype Entertainment when the video game studio was founded in 2020, as part of Hasbro's Wizards of the Coast.
- He was previously Vice President of Design at BioWare, Creative Director at EA (Electronic Arts), and founded the video game publishing venture Arcanum Worlds.
- Archetype was created with the goal of developing an original sci-fi IP. That IP – EXODUS, an action role-playing game (RPG) – is now set to release in 2026.

Hasbro and Wizards of the Coast are betting big on video games – and EXODUS' highly-anticipated debut is leading the charge.

Below, we check in with James on why he joined Wizards of the Coast, what inspires him daily, and what we can expect from EXODUS!

? What made you want to set up Archetype and be part of Hasbro and Wizards of the Coast?

I am a huge DUNGEONS & DRAGONS (D&D) fan and have Dungeon Mastered since I was a kid. When I initially left EA, I intended to retire from gaming but then... Chris Cocks made me an offer to join the team at Wizards of the Coast. He offered me the opportunity to build a new RPG franchise with the promise of creative freedom and significant investment. It was, as they say, an offer I could not refuse.

? What inspires you?

So many of the stories I see played out in tabletop role-playing games and games like Final Fantasy and Star Wars series inspire me. But the one thing from which I have gotten most of my inspiration is being a Dungeon Master.

Creating great stories from pure imagination, that allow a group of players to cultivate characters to go on adventures with crazy, yet cohesive, and emotionally resonant story telling is captivating. And, you never know where it will lead you...



? Tell us about EXODUS. What made you want to make this game?

EXODUS: The Traveler's Creed is set 40,000 years in the future, when travelers have fled Earth in search of a new planet to live on. So, that is the beginning of creating this world, and this story.

What really inspired me was having the luxury of getting to work with some of my favorite sci-fi authors, who influenced the setting and narrative style of the game. When I was first conceptualizing the universe of EXODUS, I really wanted to have some great science fiction minds engaged to help build this universe. I was specifically interested in working with people who would want to author books that could help support the universe and build its backstory.

We made a list of our favorite science fiction authors and put them into tiers, based on how much we admired their work. There were four tiers – I thought we would be lucky if we got an author from Tier 3. I was not dreaming about an author from Tier 1 or 2. Peter Hamilton was in Tier 1 and when I found out that working with him was actually a possibility, that was exciting for me. And then, we got him!

The fact that he wanted to work with us was extremely exciting. He helped us immensely in the creation of this universe by making it so much more believable and scientifically accurate in many different areas. So, it was a big win for us! I'm a huge fan and have read all of his books. Peter Hamilton created many of the unique world-building elements that are featured in the video game.

? How do you approach world-building? What can we expect from the world of

In terms of the world-building, this is a world that has been in nonstop transition. Some of the civilizations have already died off and there are just the remnants left. Other parts of this world might be just a few decades old, inhabited by humans who have just gotten off their Ark Ships and who were on Earth only a century or two before. The sky's the limit, which is cool because it means that there are so many different places and eras and civilizations that you can visit within the Centauri Cluster.

The Centauri Cluster is the only place within the galactic neighborhood that had worlds that were in the "habitable zone" – which is why the first of those who went out on an EXODUS on their Ark Ships were able to colonize those worlds and create civilizations.

Those civilizations grew until they were enormous and technologically superior civilizations, and they sent out what we call the "Green Signal" to the rest of the galaxy so that the other Ark Ships, traveling from Earth at that time, could come to this galactic "Eden."

The Ark Ships started arriving, but they arrived slowly over thousands of years. So, we have this interesting dwarf galaxy with thousands of star systems, empires, and organizations.

⚡ How does time dilation play out in the game?

We've made the capital city of the player's world, Persepolis, a major hub of their adventures and experience. You go off on your Exodus journeys and leave behind your city and some of your friends – and maybe even your family members – and you make choices regarding them.

For example, not everyone can come on an Exodus with you. You might leave some behind and when you come back, it could be a decade later or... it could be four decades later.

Those choices that you made while you were engaged in missions to gain ground against the enemies - the "Celestials" - will have impacted your relationships with people back home that are now a decade older, or three or four decades older.

How your city has evolved, how technology has been integrated into everything from the military to civic structures to lifestyle changes is almost immeasurable and impossible to predict. That is part of why, when the Travelers [the characters in EXODUS] return home, there is huge emotional impact.



? What was your vision for the Travelers?

We were creating the vision for the Travelers at the same time that we were coming up with the universe and figuring out what each player was doing. At that point, our Creative Director, Jesse Sky, got involved and he brought it all together.

When you enter the world, you're going to be part of an organization that travels across the universe and finds Remnants that have been left behind by past civilizations that you can bring back to help your world. At the same time, the Remnants will change the world in ways you cannot predict.

That adventure is the centerpiece of the IP because that's who the players are going to play as - and that's how the Travelers came about. Jesse has a really clever way of taking all the elements and figuring out how they work holistically and then coming up with something cool that players will want to be.



? Aside from EXODUS, what is your favorite game from those that you have worked on and/or developed?

If I had to pick one, I would have to choose *Baldur's Gate*. That project was early in my career, and it was inspired by my love for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, on which the game is based. Plus, I consider it one of the most fun development experiences I had during my time at [video game studio] BioWare.

Learn more about Archetype Entertainment & EXODUS [here](#).