

# WEST OF JUPITER

Project Overview & Status

GDC 2025



# The Game

*West of Jupiter* is a premium single-player space simulation, targeting PC, console, and VR. The player takes on the role of a Bounty Hunter in a space western universe. As a new arrival in a distant region of space, they must talk, fight, explore and trade to survive and thrive amidst an eclectic cast of alien inhabitants and factions.

At the heart of *West of Jupiter* sits a novel natural-language dialog system, built on Dog Street Studios' proprietary character simulation technology. The player's conversational interactions with the denizens of the game's setting are the engine that drives the core game loop and player's other activities, which include exploration, ship management, and combat.

Gameplay inspirations for *West of Jupiter* include **Star Control II**, **Sid Meier's Pirates!** and **FTL: Faster Than Light**.

# The Potential

With the rise of LLMs, there is growing interest in natural-language NPC conversations, with middleware offerings from companies like Inworld AI and nVidia.

What we *haven't* yet seen is deep engagement with the question of how to actually create games with these systems. When a game offers free-form dialog with NPCs, what promises does that design choice imply to players – and how should the rest of the game be structured to fulfill those promises?

*West of Jupiter* is our answer to these questions. At a time when the industry is searching for new ways to engage players and drive growth, we believe *West of Jupiter* is an important and groundbreaking title that charts a course to unlock truly new forms of single-player gameplay.



# The Characters

*West of Jupiter* features a large cast of characters from three alien species – Wefshox, Ghesla, and Roon. The characters are partly randomized, varying from playthrough to playthrough.

Characters have dynamic lives, goals, knowledge, political opinions, and relationships. A key strategic element of the game is the player's management of their relationships with these characters, involving difficult trade-offs and deft conversational maneuvering.

Characters' daily lives are dominated by their professions. There are Marshals and Deputies, Merchants, Pirates, Mechanics, Bartenders, Business Moguls, and other Bounty Hunters, among many others.



# The World

The universe of *West of Jupiter* is a space western with a dash of cosmic horror, inspired by *StarCraft*, *Firefly* and *The Mandalorian*.

The game is set on the galactic frontier, far from the heavily-populated Core Worlds. Here **Writhe**, a chaotic and psychoactive energy force, dominates, and writhic life roams the planets and the space between the stars.

The game's economic and political landscape is dominated by two forces: the Core Worlds, harboring imperial ambitions towards the frontier, and the Writhe Ecology, the source of the region's wealth as well as of terrible danger. Characters hold a wide range of views on both of these forces, which is a source of much political and interpersonal conflict – conflict in which player will inevitably become entangled.

# Game Structure

*West of Jupiter* is a spaceship sim. On their ship, the player sees a first-person pilot view, in which videocalls and FTL-style tactical combat take place. Combat gives a sense of urgent strategic thinking, like a short game of speed chess. Even here, dialog is emphasized – the player and their opponent can engage in videocalls for negotiations, taunts, etc. during combat.



FTL-style combat from 1st-person perspective (UI concept)



Bar environment (current prototype)

The player also visits space stations and colony towns, which feature adventure-game style gameplay. Environments are seen from fixed first-person perspectives and the player interacts with characters and the environment by clicking. There is no combat here – the main activity that takes place in these environments is conversation.



# Conversational Gameplay

In *West of Jupiter*, we are building gameplay around words, not for their own sake (as in a language-themed puzzle game), but in rather in the context of a simulated game world, to allow the player to use free-form language to express themselves to characters and interact with the simulation in a richer and deeper way than would otherwise be possible.

Every conversation in *West of Jupiter* is a game in itself, in which the player and their interlocutor take turns making “conversational moves”, simply by speaking naturally. As they master the game, players will build up a rich repertoire of conversational moves, such as greeting, praising, insulting, threatening, reassuring, making accusations, and many others.

# Trading

If there's one conversational interaction that is truly at the centre of *West of Jupiter*, it is trading. Beyond money, resources and equipment, tradables include **information**, **political access**, and the completion of **tasks** (the trading system entirely subsumes a traditional mission system). One-sided trades (gift-giving and making demands), are also part of trading.

Bargaining is commonplace – the player can bargain for a higher reward for performing a task, or ask for valuable information or access to a reclusive faction leader, instead of a monetary reward.

But they must choose their words carefully: try to drive a hard bargain, or be more generous? That depends – on how much leverage they feel they have, how they think the other person will react, how much they value good relations with that person, and on the kind of person the player wants to be.



# Information

There are subtleties even to the simple act of asking a question. The answer may be a lie; the player can watch carefully for “tells”, but they will be subtle if speaking to a good liar; they can also accuse the other person of lying, but at the risk of ruining the relationship.

A price may be demanded for the answer, which initiates a trading interaction. It may also matter that, by asking the question, the player is revealing that they don't know the answer – in which case they may need to find an alternate way to get their interlocutor to reveal the information.

The player may also be asked questions themselves, in which case they have the option of answering truthfully, coming up with a lie, refusing to answer, or demanding a price of their choice (not necessarily money) for the information.

# Conversations

Conversations take place both as ship-to-ship video calls, and in-person in space station bars and other locales. During conversations, the player sees a shoulders-up view of the other character, focusing on the character's face.

*West of Jupiter* characters are lively and well-animated, with distinctive personalities. During conversations, characters express their emotions and feelings about the player and other characters, both verbally and through non-verbal cues like facial expressions and tone of voice.



Player input is provided in natural language (voice input). The alien characters respond to the player with audible speech in their own alien language with English subtitles.

# Design Pillars

## Immersion

*West of Jupiter* transports the player into a different world. "Virtual Reality" in the original, purest sense.

The natural-language conversations, 1<sup>st</sup>-person view, and player driven gameplay all work together to eliminate distance between the player and the game universe.

## Interesting & Consequential Decisions

The player is always making interesting choices, from big strategic decisions to high-stakes minute-to-minute moves during conversation and combat.

Decisions are not only interesting, but also consequential, with effects that ripple out into the game world.

## Natural Language at the Heart

The player's natural-language interactions with other characters are the heart of the game. They are the engine that powers the game loop and drives the player's other activities.

*West of Jupiter* relies on the power and flexibility of natural language. It is a game that would not work with any other conversation interface.

## Balance & Momentum

The elements of *West of Jupiter* are balanced in time and complexity. Each activity takes just the right amount of time - long enough to feel interesting and meaty, but not so long that it overwhelms the rest of game.

This gives *West of Jupiter* a fast pace and a "just one more turn!" quality.



# Design Pillars

## Rich and Distinctive Characters

The setting of *West of Jupiter* is populated by a large cast of memorable, lively, distinctive, emotionally-rich, well animated characters that drive the dynamically-created story of the game.

## Living World

The world of *West of Jupiter* feels alive around the player.

Characters have jobs and habits that they continue to engage in as the player moves through world. The game's locations feel lived-in, and have details that hint at how people live in this universe.

## Cinematic Action-Adventure

*West of Jupiter* makes the player feel like they have been dropped into a *Star Wars* movie, with high-quality graphics, sound design, special effects and character art.

The tone is fun - neither extremely dark and serious, nor cartoonish. It has the action-adventure feel of an *Indiana Jones* or *Star Wars* movie.

# The Tech

*West of Jupiter* is built on Dog Street Studios' proprietary character simulation technology, which comprises two core pillars – language processing and knowledge modeling – along with a suite of supporting tools.

Our technology uses **symbolic AI** approaches that do not involve training a model, and which do not use LLMs or any other generative AI components. This eliminates legal uncertainty, and more importantly, ensures our NPCs behave robustly and predictably – crucial if they are to serve as the foundation for real gameplay – while simultaneously giving the player unparalleled freedom of expression in conversations.

The system runs entirely on the player's own machine with no dependencies on cloud APIs or other network services.

# Current Status & Plan

In early-mid 2024, we focused on solidifying our AI technology, particularly the knowledge-modeling pillar. In late 2024, we shifted focus back to *West of Jupiter*. We are currently driving toward a playable prototype including all of the game's core systems, while refining our AI technology as needed.

We are also building awareness and community, taking a “slow burn” strategy to begin with. Once we have a complete prototype and greater visibility into production costs and scheduling, we will explore a wide range of funding options in earnest, including publisher funding, strategic partnerships, and crowdfunding.

At it stands today, although early, we believe *West of Jupiter* represents an exciting opportunity for the right investor, publisher, or strategic partner, as a low-cost way of investing in an exciting path forward for single-player gameplay.



# GDC Goals

Our goals at GDC 2025 include:

- Generating interest in the game and growing our community.
- Making connections with publishers and other potential production funding partners.
- Exploring possible strategic partnerships.
- Discussing the design implications of natural-language dialog systems with other interested game design professionals.



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