

Jimi Stine's

ZAPPER

With JUNE HONG *and* ERIK MILLER

All dialogue written side by side represents simultaneous speech.

Bolded text indicates sound effects.

Jimi Stine's Zapper is a post-postmodern video game about ego, art, and the performance of creation. It is presented as a mediocre clone of Tapper featuring the eponymous "auteur" as the player avatar.

Writing, direction, and audio design by JIMI STINE

Art by JUNE HONG

Programming by ERIK MILLER

I. HOLDING IT TOGETHER - 5 MINUTES

It's the Start screen with attract mode and **theme song** playing.

"Press Space" is blinking on the screen. When they do, the title appears with an **audio flourish**.

We textually and visually describe the controls on-screen.

We recommend headphones.

Countdown from 3, 2, 1...

Round 1

Fade in. Two electric poles sit on either side of the screen with wires running across at two different elevations. Crows run down the wires left to right, and the player must zap them before they reach the end.

Let the player play the game, no V.O.

1 minute, 3 lives.

Round 2

Moderately more difficult.

1 minute, 3 lives.

The game over or win screen appears,

If won:

JIMI

Ooo nice job. Looks like you're pretty good at my game-

If lost:

JIMI

Hm, looks like my game's gotten the better of you-

Then:

JIMI (CONT'D)

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I hope this doesn't throw you for too big a loop, but hi, I'm Jimi Stine, and I made Jim Stine's Zapper.

And **angelic choir sings a note** as the title card fades up.

JIMI (CONT'D)

You probably know it's called *Zapper*, and as you probably thought, it's an arcade game, but as you probably didn't realize, it's got a bit of a twist.

Beat.

JIMI (CONT'D)

Which is me. And with *Zapper*, my aim is to tell you about my design philosophies, where the industry as a whole is headed, how I achieved perfection, and how you can too. Obviously, we've got a lot of ground to cover, so let's get this show on the road, huh?

Round 3

If won Round 2:

JIMI

First things first, let me add a little complexity here-

Tap and two more wires appear on-screen.

JIMI (CONT'D)

You seem like you can handle yourself, so let's see how you handle two more wires, the rest of the mechanics are the same.

If lost round 2:

Loads level with 4 wires on screen.

JIMI

I think we might need to keep the training wheels on you for another round or two, so let's actually take these out.

Tap and the top two wires disappear, a beat later and the game starts (player can move and the crows start spawning)

As JIMI monologues, the background slowly crossfades between photos of Tapper, the Brooklyn skyline, and eventually to *Zapper's* own title screen, again.

Royalty-free smooth jazz begins to play.

JIMI

So, what *is* Zapper? Well, *obviously* it's a simple clone of the arcade classic, Tapper. I actually remember the very first time I played Tapper... it was just a few months ago, but it honestly feels like a lifetime. The cabinet was in the dimly lit cavern of an arcade bar deep in the heart of Brooklyn, New York. I like to go there and just stare at the screens sometimes, you know? Usually? I don't even play anything, but that night was different. I know how it sounds, but I could feel the illumination of Lady Inspiration's lightbulb going off over my head. What if, I thought, what if I made the same game, but 35 years later? What could I change? What could I improve? And with that,

Snap!

JIMI (CONT'D)

Zapper was born.

The player finishes the level.

On the win/lose scream **win or lose sound effect repeats** and nothing shows up on-screen, this goes on long enough for players to honestly think something is up, but not long enough for them to actually quit.

JIMI

stammers

Frantic keyboard typing and the **sound finishes playing**. On-screen, concept art sketches begin to crossfade between each other.

JIMI

Right, right, so like I was saying, I decided to make Zapper and started drawing up some concepts. As you can see--

JIMI (CONT'D)
 you could really tell
 that excitement was
 in the air the day I
 spread the word, it
 was-

JUNE
 Dude, what? You
 couldn't even draw a
 cat, let alone
 concept art for your
 own game.

JIMI
June what the hell?? I'm in the middle of recording.

JUNE starts to say something then just sighs, he can't be bothered to deal with JIMI's antics.

JIMI
 Let's just get back to the game.

Round 4

The same amount of wires as the previous round.

JIMI
 Like I was saying, I knew from the start that this would turn out to be something special. I had the perfect foundation, and just the right design insights to take that foundation, and make it a sensation. I've always thought that game design is the highest form of design. Richard Wagner called opera the gesamtkunstwerk, or "total work of art" due to its interdisciplinary nature and, well, I think--

Bird flood! Hordes of crows being spawning, they go somewhat slow, and every time the level resets from Jimi trying to fix it, something about it changes, the birds get bigger, the bird sprite is replaced with the player sprite, etc.

The **caws of crows** build towards a fever pitch. Lots of **keys tapping frantically along with mouse clicks**.

JIMI
 (trying to hold it together)
 Um, um, that, uh, really, you know, uh really the gesamtunstse, the gesamt uhh, the thee theee- OKAY.

TAP Screen goes to Unity Blue, and the **birds abruptly stop**.

A new level is loaded in, it's plain Unity Blue with poorly scaled sprites creating the same level layout in the abstract.

JIMI

So to illustrate, exactly what I mean, um, this is just a very uh, a rudimentary prototype of what you were just playing, aaaand, and it shows um how complex everything really becomes when you uh, involve the total work of art in terms of visual refinement. It's not often that I let folks in behind the curtain,

JUNE **approaches the mic** as he speaks, moving from the back of the room to right up on the mic beside JIMI.

JIMI (CONT'D)

but I think you've
come-- hey can we not
right now? *June Hong*
for the last time. I
swear to--

JUNE

Aw dude is that the
prototype scene??
Those colors look
horrible lemme
just...

There is some **fumbling at the mic** and we here more **clicks** as the colors change to something less horrible.

JIMI (CONT'D)

Get your hands off my
game, *get your hands*
off my game!

JUNE (CONT'D)

No, hey it'll take
like two seconds, I
just love this
palette.

Beat.

JIMI (CONT'D)

(away from the mic)

Ok. Group meeting, *right now*.

A beat as JIMI turns back to the mic.

JIMI

Ahem. I'm ah, well as I'm sure you'll understand, making a game can be a lot like herding cats or explaining *Infinite Jest*. Now if you'll excuse me...

We hear JIMI **get up and walk away from the mic.**

In the background, hushed tones...

JIMI

Ok June? Enough of the shenanigans. And you-- Erik "I can program anything" Miller. What the hell was that back there with the crows? You said this build would be stable for the recording? We only have the booth for like another 20 minutes.

ERIK

I don't know what you want me to do about it...what did the error log say?

JIMI

It *said* there were too many damn birds!

Beat.

JIMI (CONT'D)

Is the rest of the game okay?

ERIK

It should be.

JIMI **sighs** deeply.

JIMI

"It should be," he says.

JUNE

Hey what did you mean by "shenanigans"?

JIMI

June could you *please* stop talking?!

JIMI **gets back up to the mic.**

JIMI

(deep breath)

As you can tell, making games is *hard work*. So hard in fact that yes I have enlisted some help to take care of the smaller, less important things that suck up lots of time like art and programming, that are subservient to the *idea*.

From the back of the room.

JUNE

Dude, do you hear that?

ERIK

Yeah doesn't sound like the script we wrote together...

JIMI

Which leaves me more time to come up with ideas and perfect my designs. But enough about that, now it's time to move on, just as life sweeps us along, to *work*, to feed the machine.

We hear more **typing and clicking**, but nothing too frantic.

And suddenly we start to hear the **initial monologue** again, and another play stacks on top of that, and another and another, "So what *is* Zapper," over and over again until everything is a blown-out garbled mess that we can just hear JIMI above.

After **one or two loops**, again, long enough to seem legit, but not too long...

JIMI

Oh come on. *ERIIIK*, what have you done?

JIMI (CONT'D)

Do you know how to
get it to stop
looping the thing? I
have-- no wait, Erik
don't d-

ERIK

What did *I* do? You're
the "Sound Designer"
Just hit stop. Here
let me do it.

Big **thunk** and the audio stops abruptly. A beat later and the screen goes back to Unity Blue.

II. CRUNCH - 5 MINUTES

We hear what sounds like **someone bumping up against the mic.**

JIMI begins to go through a slideshow-like presentation.

JIMI

(clearly still a bit shaken)

If you've been paying attention, you might have noticed what this game is really about. If you haven't, maybe go back and play from the start again, or read *Atlas Shrugged* or something. For the intelligent, Jimi Stine's Zapper is clearly a piece of critical commentary on the nature of labor in our modern society, asking such questions as "how can a video game convince the masses to learn that they're all cogs in the capitalist machine?" To provide a little more background, in games there's a necessary evil called crunch.

Tap and CRUNCH appears on-screen.

JIMI

It's a problem in other fields, but is unquestionably both the most severe and the most common in the games industry. To further enlighten you, dear player...

Tap and all the sprites for the level, except the background, pop in.

JIMI

IIIII'm going to paint a picture, so before we get started, I need you to close your eyes, with me, I'm closing mine too...really, please, please close your eyes. Now, fix a scene in your mind's eye...

As JIMI describes the scene he slips into a mid-western drawl.

We see the game stop and the background gets dragged in. It appears that the wires have been replaced with conveyor belts and the crows with clocks.

JIMI (CONT'D)

You're just a blue-collar worker in a 20-acre factory that sprawls out in every direction, deep in the American

heartland. Maybe it's Kansas, or ah...Delaware...You punch in, you punch out. Day after day working like a dog for a man you can't stand. You're just trying to put food on the table for your wife and kids, they'd be destitute and broken without you, but how long can you stand to work like this? And don't even get me started on taxes! You get depressed and turn to drinking, staying out later and later, spending every cent of your hard-earned money. Can you see it? Welllllll open your eyes! There it is.

The mechanics here are the same as the first act, except now you can move out on the conveyor belts with the left and right arrow keys, just complete the clocks and then collect them, but don't let them fall! Get to work!

Clocks start spawning.

Round 1

The clocks come out rhythmically as if on a factory line.

1 minute.

2 conveyor belts running in opposite directions.

Mid-round:

JUNE

Hey, Jimi I was gonna head home a bit early today is that ok?

JIMI

Of course not. You're here when I'm here, and I'm gonna be here all night.

JUNE

But--

JIMI

Upupup!

JUNE

(sighing)

Fine...

The player beats the level and we load the next without a problem.

Round 2

JIMI

Feel familiar? Just doing the same thing over and over, part of the herd? Oh, what's that? You can't talk? Well, remember that time I told you that I was the twist? I'm actually only half the twist, because the *other* half is that now we're going to start a dialogue, you can answer yes or no. I only have one question for you: do you know what it's like to work at a job you hate?

A beat as nothing changes on-screen, the clocks still come at the same pace they always have.

JIMI

Uhm. That was really just a rhetorical question, obviously. And now toooo work through that experience here is some music...

Double click. Music by Richard Wagner begins to play. Then, trying to be quiet but still audible above the music...

JIMI

Guys, where the hell are my dialogue options?

JUNE

What are you talking about?

JIMI

We talked about this last week, we were going to have dialogue options appear on the chutes, didn't you guys add that in?

ERIK

I didn't think you were being serious.

JUNE

Oh, wait yeah I thought that was like a joke or something. We're making an arcade game, dude.

JIMI

It is *not* an arcade game, it just *looks* like an arcade game, that's the whole point! Jesus Christ...ok...can we just add them in now?

ERIK

I mean, probably not.

JUNE

Erik says no.

JIMI

Yeah I'm sitting right here, June. Okay fine, fine! I'll figure it out myself.

The **music fades down**.

We hear **scattered typing**.

JIMI

(on the mic)

Proof that if you want to get something done you gotta do it yourself.

The screen goes Unity Blue mid-play.

Round 3

The factory reappears, and there are now dialogue options on screen, "yes" and "no" over the cutes.

Player can't move yet.

JIMI

Ok, now, shoot your answer. Have you ever worked at a job you ha--

Player move is enabled. But a half-second later we get a **clock flood**. It's loud and **factory alarms are going off constantly**.

JIMI

You've got to be kidding me! Alright well it works if you press harder, just gotta push through the onslaught of

everyday work! All you have to do is *work harder!!* You can do it come on you lazy piece of shi-

Skype overtakes the screen as a call comes in from some random Mr. seems important. It replaces the din of the factory with that **classic ringtone.**

JIMI

(turned around)

Erik is John Duffy from that publisher we emailed?

ERIK

Oh crap, yeah.

JIMI

Well, he's calling!

JUNE

Jimi, chill out. Erik and I can call him back outside.

JUNE and ERIK can already be heard **opening the door, walking out, and closing it behind them.**

JIMI

Ok-ok so I'll hang up? Wait no I can't it's on their--

JIMI (CONT'D)

(back on the mic)

Ok, um, I need you to hang up that call. Please. If you're not at the computer it should be around there somewhere, find it and hang up! For the love of God.

If they answer the call:

JOHN DUFFY

Hi, is this Jimi
Stine? ... Hello? Can
you hear me? ... Well
I got your email,
thought this was the
time you
mentioned...but
anyway look, I don't
really know what a
post-postmodern game
is and I really don't
see us publishing one
any time soon, so,
good luck. I guess...

JIMI

Hi hey uhh, wait no
of course he can't
hear me, our audio is
going to the
recording um...
Lalalalalala the man
isn't saying anything
and he's definitely
not making the
*biggest mistake of
his career* by
rejecting uussss

JIMI (CONT'D)

Great well he sounds like an idiot anyway. I'm sorry you
even had to hear that.

If they ignore it:

JIMI

Ok look it's really not that hard, just click the red
button... You have used Skype before right? It's the *red
button*, the one that looks like a phone being hung up
which is what you should be doing right now!

Eventually, Skype **cuts out on its own.**

JIMI (CONT'D)

Ok. Ok great, I guess June and Erik finally got through
to-

But he **calls back!**

JIMI (CONT'D)

Ahhhhh! Why is he calling back?? Ok well if you're not
gonna hang up I'm just gonna turn this whole thing off, is
that what you want? ... Is it?? ... You asked for it!

The screen cuts to black and then comes back up a moment later (with
unity splash screen played as video).

JIMI (CONT'D)

Ok. finally,

If they hang up:

JIMI (CONT'D)

Phew. Alright, thanks,

We cut back to the game and the **clocks are still pouring out**, the sound startles Jimi.

JIMI (CONT'D)

Now, what was I doing again? Oh yeah... Um I can fix this, it was just working a second ago I mean how hard could it be? Erik does this all the time.

A few more **taps** and the clocks disappear then start spawning regularly...

JIMI

Haha! Cool, ok. Now, one last time just answer th-

...but as soon as the player tries to hit them, nothing happens and they start floating off the end of the line instead of breaking.

Pounding the desk harder with each "no".

JIMI

Nooooo, no no no no NO. Hey Erik?! June????!!!

More **taps and clicks** and now the player sprite is coming out of the chutes. The player character itself is stuck in an animation loop. The title overlay appears along with that initial **audio flourish**, the **monologue** that had looped before comes back. (all hell breaks loose)

JIMI

It's just getting worse! Ahhhhhh this is *so stupid*! And it's not even my fault! I'm sorry but it really looks like this session is pretty much ruined. And you know what? I've had it.

JIMI starts to get choked up and can be heard **getting up and walking away.**

JIMI (CONT'D)

I just CAN'T DO THIS. HOW THE HELL DOES ANYONE FINISH A VIDEO GAME??

Beat.

JIMI (CONT'D)

I need some space to think. How the hell does anyone *think* in here? Jesus gaahh!!

The **door slams.**

At this point the player is left alone. "*Is this the end of the game?*"

After a few beats the **door opens again** and we hear **someone walking up to the mic.**

ERIK

Oh, uhm I guess Jimi's kinda...lost it. Let's see what's going on here...oh what did he do to the code? I'm just... Here, the last scene.

III. Mount Perfection (something to be proud of) - 5 MINUTES

A mountain appears on-screen with climbing ropes creating vertical lines for the player to climb as they fend off falling boulders in place of crows/clocks.

There is a **low wind**. This gets louder with proportion to the player's height.

Leafing through some papers.

ERIK

Let me just take a look at Jimi's script... Ok. Uhmm.
 "There's an old quote from Salvador Dali, the surrealist, that goes, 'have no fear of perfection, you will never reach it.' Which is obviously false. Remember that time I told you that Me and dialogue options were the two halves of the twist? Well, actually, they were only two thirds of the twist because the last third... You've got to be kidding me with these twists... Ok, basically all you have to do here is move up along the ropes without getting hit. And you can break up the rocks with the, I guess it's the zap button from earlier.

Line 1 ends

As they finish the first rope, we start instantiating Jimi objects in place of boulders.

ERIK

Oh god, that is...that is way too many Jimis. Uhm, I-- what did he do to the assets? Ok hold on...no this will take way too long uhm, here I'm just gonna...

We hear some **quick typing and a few clicks** and the player is taken to a new scene. **The wind carries over.**

ERIK

(relieved)

Ok good, that was right here. Don't know why the wind is still playing but I mean I guess it's not breaking anything. This is removed enough from what's broken so just like, take 2 I guess.

Soft typing noises as the player plays for less than a minute.

ERIK

Ok there, that should be everything, I'll pull you back in here.

The player is sent back to the mountain right where they left off.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Ok, now you can just, well, you know...

The game runs smoothly for a minute.

JUNE **opens the door and walks back in** and approaches ERIK.

JUNE

Hey, uhh, did you see Jimi?

ERIK

No, he was gone when I came back.

JUNE

Yeah it's not good, man. I saw him on my way back from getting coffee. He was talking to himself, and I think he barked at me?

ERIK

What?!

JUNE

I don't know, I didn't say anything and came here to give you a heads up in case he's still--

The **door is thrown open**.

JIMI

I GOT IT.

More **strides towards the mic**.

JIMI (CONT'D)

But we're going to have to start from the top, I think I know how we can fit it all in before,

JIMI
 (CONT'D)
 we get
 kicked out
 of the
 booth. We
 kick the
 script,
 and I'll
 improvise
 the whole
 thing

ERIK
 Wait! The
 game is
 still
 running, I
 was able
 to get the
 mountain
 scene
 working

JUNE

 I totally
 called
 this,
 dude's
 lost it.

JIMI (CONTD)
 Wait run that by me again?

ERIK
 All I had to do was refactor this one part of the audio
 manager script and load--

JIMI
 Erik.

ERIK
 Sorry. I got the mountain scene working.

JIMI
 So they can beat it? Let's see what happens when they get
 to the top.

We wait until the player has gotten to the top of the mountain but
 cannot win due to infinitely spawning boulders.

ERIK
 See, Jimi? They're stuck because of the design, your
 design...

JIMI
 Wait. Wait, no this is perfect. They have to work just as
 hard as I did to make this game. This is what I was trying
 to figure out outside.

JUNE

By barking?

JIMI

It's called narrative design, June!

ERIK

I don't know what to tell you man, I mean I could disable the spawner, you know, just like let them keep climbing?

Here the game starts to break down again, but no one seems to notice right away.

JIMI

No, for the last time that would ruin the whole thing! And look at it, the game is all over the place again.

ERIK

Well that's because you just-

JIMI

It needs to be a *challenge* to overcome, a *struggle* to prove that perfection is what should be reached for and attained. Anyone who puts out a broken game is just lazy!

JUNE

Damn dude.

ERIK

Okay look I've put up with a lot here but you can't blame every project gone wrong on the developers! Just look at us!

JIMI

What do you mean, look at us? What's there to see? We're gonna nail this because we want to, because we're still here!

ERIK
 You call
 this
 nailing
 it?
 We're
 trying
 to get a
 recordin
 g
 together
 and the
 damn
 thing is
 falling
 apart at
 the
 seams!

JIMI

 Yeah I
 do
 actually
 call
 this
 nailing
 it, this
 is
 totally
 new
 terrain-
 -

JUNE

 Hey
 you guys
 realize
 the mic
 is still
 on
 right?
 Guys!
 Ohhhhh
 my
 Good.

The **door opens** again mid-argument.

ADMIN
 Hey uh, you guys are way over time. I didn't want to
 interrupt but we have other people that need the space in
 the next few minutes.

JUNE
 Oh. Uhh, right, thanks I guess.

JIMI
 Can we please please please just get 2 more minutes to
 wrap up?

ADMIN
 Okay, but in literally two minutes I am kicking you out.

ERIK
 Thanks.

The **door closes**. Everyone collects themselves.

JUNE

So much for having time to start a new recording...

JIMI

Okay, June? Credits.

JUNE

What?

JIMI

We need credits ASAP.

JUNE

What do you mean?

JIMI

I mean put some credits on their screen in less than two minutes! Chop chop!

JUNE

(hurriedly)

Uhh ok, uhh right, yeah.

JUNE is at the desk **typing and clicking**. The credits include ERIK, JIMI, and JUNE, but also the ADMIN and the BAND MEMBERS.

ERIK

Hey June, just... could you put the debug on the screen?

JUNE

Just a sec.

Clicks, and a small dev console type box appears on the screen with the controls to toggle around the scenes, now including the mountain.

JUNE

Got it.

ERIK

Mk.

JIMI

Hey, wait, June what are you doing?

JUNE

The credits?

JIMI

Here let me just -

JIMI **gets up on the mic**, sitting at the computer. While he's talking we see names getting backspaced or put underneath new titles:
Creative Director - JIMI STINE, Lead Writer - JIMI STINE, JIMI STINE
- as himself, Narrative Designer - JIMI STINE, etc.

JIMI

You know it's really all about the team here. And I am assuming this wasn't exactly the experience that you were expecting, and that is... well, the whole point! The only way to keep you from guessing where things were headed was if we didn't know where they were going either. That's the third twist! This whole thing was improved.

ERIK

Less than a minute to go here, guys.

JIMI

And uh, I yeah we totally didn't have a script that we were trying to read from the whole time or anything. Those papers? They were just a prop! Literally just a prop. Oh man, I really can't believe you believed that whole thing. I'm actually a really nice guy! And I mean the only reason we don't have credits in right now, is that if we did, and I wasn't typing them up, the whole thing would feel too pre-planned and scripted, I could have done it months ago for all you know! The woman playing the admin here is actually a friend of ours! Who would have known?!

The **ADMIN bust back in**, more than one set of footsteps are heard. From here until the end is bedlam, lots of **shuffling, things being knocked over, sounds of struggles**. The voices of ERIK, JUNE, and JIMI are

clearly being pulled away from the mic, JIMI only towards the very very end.

ADMIN

Okay that's it you three, these guys have been waiting patiently, but if you won't come out on your own you'll have to be forcefully removed.

JIMI

Well then come and get us!

JIMI turns back to the mic.

JIMI (CONT'D)

Okaaaayyy, well thanks for playing Zapper and-Erik hold them off!

ERIK

Ahhhh!

JIMI

And congrats on getting to the end and everything, it uh really means a lot if you made it his far! But like I said this is totally fake, we are definitely not getting kicked out of a studio right now.

JUNE

Erik, look out!

ERIK

Oh, gosh! We'll go we'll go!

JIMI

Follow me at Jimi Stine on twitter and stuff, I have a mailing list, and podcast!

ADMIN

That's enough!

The **door slams** and it's much more quiet. More **thumps on the mic** as the ADMIN turns the mic over to find the off switch

ADMIN

Hold on, how do you even? ... Oh.

Thunk, and the game quits to desktop.

END