HOW TO MAKE
A VIDEO GAME
IN A WEEK
USING BUILDBOX

by Rachel Kaser

How to Make a Video Game in a Week Using Buildbox

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Creative inspiration can strike when we least expect it. An idea for a great game can come to you when you're going about your daily life, but you might think you cannot follow through with it because you have no experience making games.

It is understandable to be daunted. With game development getting more and more prohibitively expensive and the market being saturated, this can make the average person conclude that the task isn't for them, no matter how good their idea might be. And while there are **several free game development tools** out there, they can be too complex for someone with no background in coding.

But don't give up yet! There is a program that makes it incredibly easy for even those with absolutely no experience in game-making to design a video game. It's called **Buildbox**.


Watch the YouTube video here: **What is Buildbox?**

Buildbox: Game-Making Made Easy

Buildbox is an all-in-one game-making tool and asset package that is designed to be user-friendly, even for people with no coding experience whatsoever. With it, games can be conceptualized, designed, and built in a matter of days or even hours.

Buildbox's core appeal is a drag-and-drop interface. You can drag a file from elsewhere on your computer into the Box, and then you will be given the option to decide whether it is classified as an object, background, character, or action. From there, you can move the assets around as you like, building the game world as easily as you would put together a model or paint a picture.
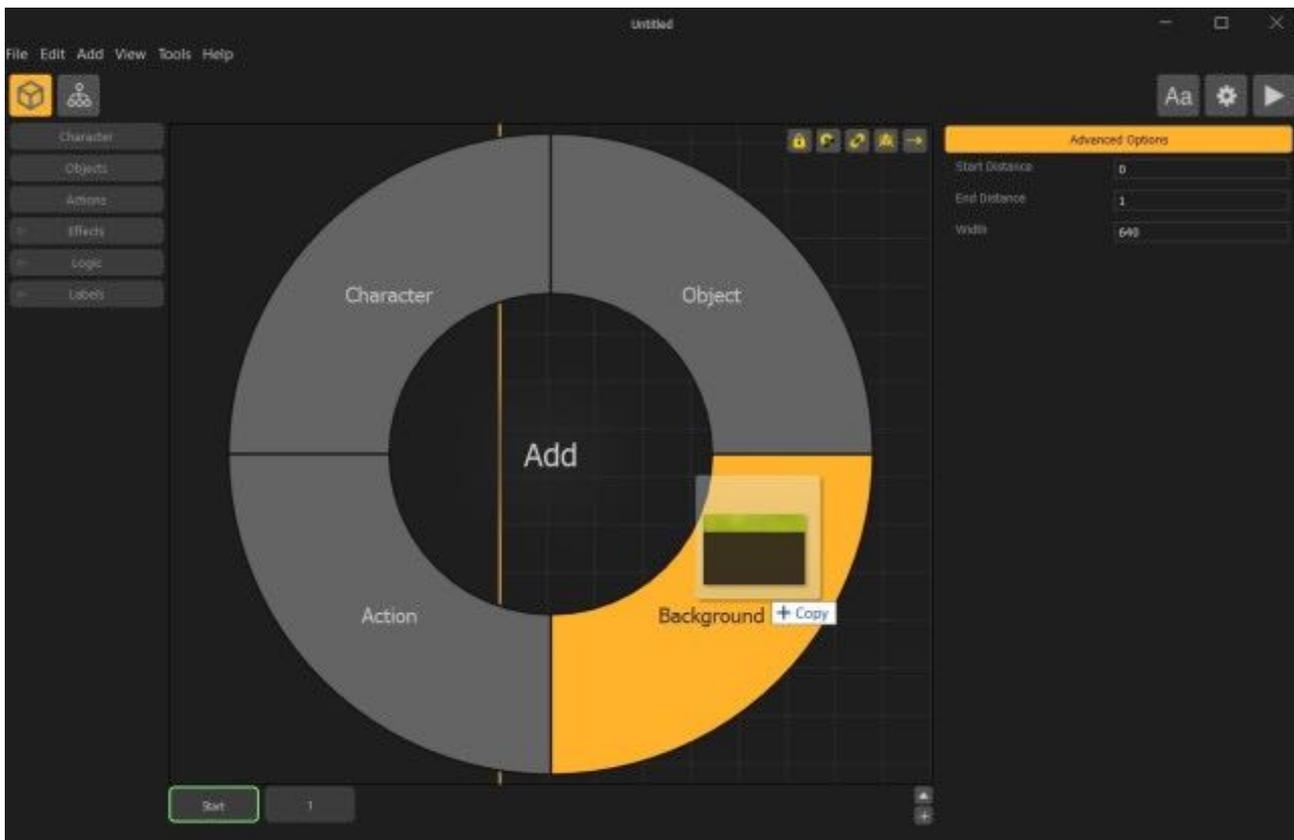
Because Buildbox is simple to use, it might be easy to assume that it is not complex or deep. But it is equipped with a number of tools designed to make your game as complicated as you want it to be. You can build your game in different dimensions, add advanced animations, and even put in a pay-to-play monetization system.

Recently, MakeUseOf was given the opportunity to build a game in Buildbox, so that we could all see how easy and intuitive it was for ourselves. Several of us contributed, including Ryan Dube, Angela Alcorn, Tina Sieber, Christian Cawley (who has some **experience with video game construction software**), Ben Stegner, Brad Jones, Matthew Hughes, and myself. The actual game building was done by our own Azamat Bohed.

We would all like to emphasize that we are not professional game-makers or developers. Some of our fellow writers have some experience with more **complex game-development software such as Unity**, but when it comes to such a project, we had very little idea of what was involved. We wanted to see if Buildbox really was accessible to people who had no experience building a game or doing the coding work necessary. We think it is, though one does have to be willing to read the literature and watch the tutorials to get the hang of it.

Getting Started

The game design can begin with something like an image. It can be a character sketch, a beautiful background, or an in-game object. Bohed, however, recommends planning extensively at the beginning. "It's better to make some drafts of the game, take notes," he says. "Like, 'What's the best orientation for the game…horizontal or portrait? How does the player proceed through levels? What are the enemies like [if there are any], and how do they interact with the main character?', etc."
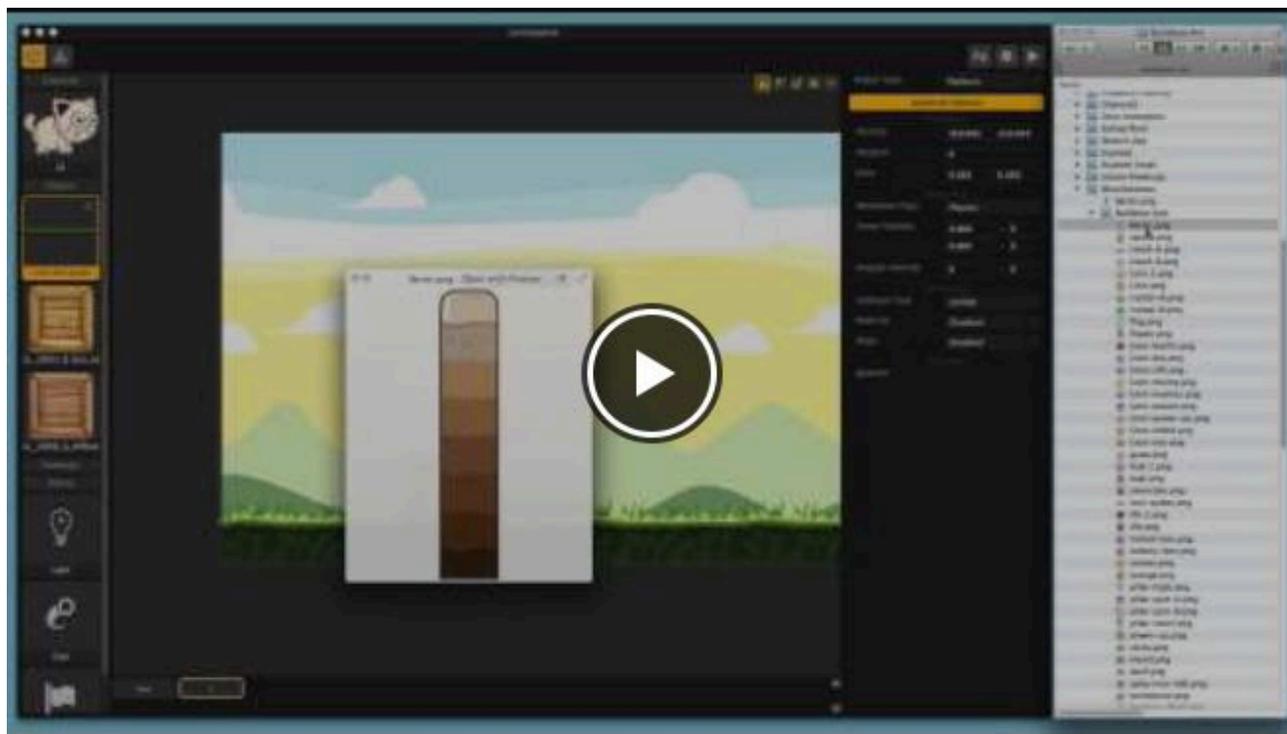
Watch the YouTube video here: **Making Your First Buildbox Game**

Bohed compared doing creative work within Buildbox – as opposed to with other resources before you start the building – to cooking with guesswork, as opposed to a recipe. While you may be able to indulge creative whims, it can make the process more arduous than it has to be. "Its user-friendliness and no coding requirement can drive you crazy thinking about which game to create just because there are so many possibilities", says Bohed.

The software comes with enough pre-built assets to be able to build a game without creating additional characters, backgrounds, or objects, but the MakeUseOf game does have a few assets hand-made by Bohed in **Adobe Illustrator**. But before he started putting together the nuts and bolts of the game, we had to do some of the on-paper planning that Bohed mentioned.

The planning became very ambitious, and not everything we talked about is used in the final product. We started with the idea of a "cave platformer," and the seed of the game's story came from Christian Cawley.

"A spaceship, cyborg or character in an exo-suit would be my preference. Perhaps riff on some classic 80s/ 90s shoot-'em-up tropes. perhaps even 16-bit music if possible." – Christian Cawley

The idea of doing a pastiche of genre tropes got us started, and we started asking each other questions to get a more complete picture.

Ryan: "We need a storyline, characters, etc. what are we doing in a cave? Who is our main character? Who are the enemies? What is our goal?"

Ben: "*Our character has lost his memory and is stuck in a cave. There aren't many enemies, but it's a puzzle-platformer where he has to use his surroundings to escape. The goal is to find a way out and figure out what happened.*

"*[Or] our character is in a cave on Mars or some other planet and is trying to do research there. Enemies include any kind of strange-looking aliens we can dream up, and the goal could be to find four artifacts (or something similar) of the planet.*"

Rachel: "*Maybe the protagonist is part of a mining expedition and must rescue their colleagues after a cave-in. We could implement a limited lighting system. Also, the deeper the character goes, the weirder the alien enemies get.*"

From this, we spun a fanciful story about a genderless astronaut/miner getting trapped in a cave-in and having to search for supplies of oxygen while simultaneously rescuing their colleagues and trying to figure out what really happened, picking up some clues as they delved deeper and deeper searching for a way out.

Not all of this made it into the final product, because we only had so much time. After we had the basic story idea down, we all tried to get in on the details. It got a bit absurd at times, but we knew all of the ideas were theoretically possible to fit into Buildbox, and we also thought it would be better to have too many ideas than too few.

Game-Building 101

Once we had all of the planning done, it was time to actually build the game, and Bohed took over from there.
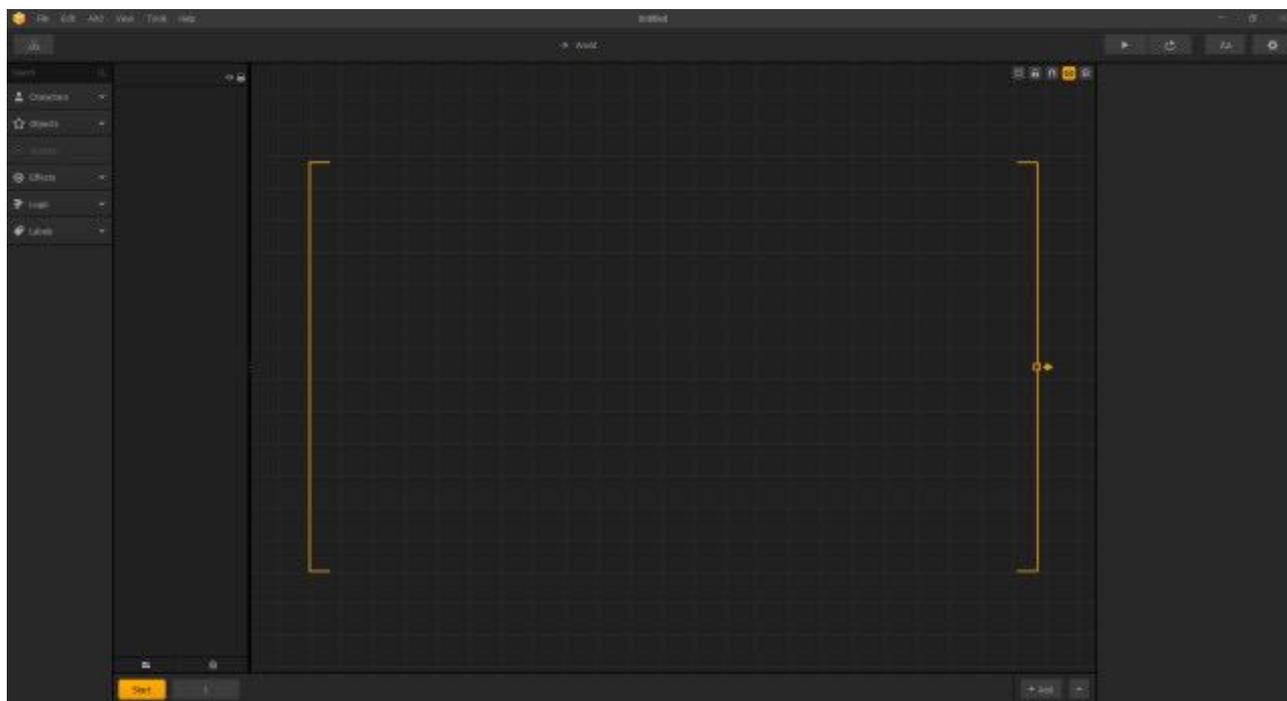
According to Bohed, it's very easy to get started from the provided materials available. He says, "I started with video tutorials, which are available at their official website. Trey [the guy who created Buildbox] explains the basics of how to use Buildbox. These are pretty short and simple video tutorials, yet they're enough to get started."

When you create a new project in Buildbox, you're given the option to select the type of game you want to build, just as a way of getting you started. You have options to create endless single-worlds, or finite worlds – or "levels" – for the player to complete. Then you have a menu tree screen that resembles some game-making software for text adventures.

Watch the YouTube video here: **Using Creator - Buildbox 2 Tutorial**

Once you decide that and open up the menus, you can get started on the basics. These include a background, characters, objects, and animations. When you begin your project, you can start by selecting the dimensions of the plane on which you want to work — though the 3D option is more of a perspective trick and is still two-dimensional. Then you select a background image, and lock it in place.

Sometimes the basics are not enough, though. When you need to undertake anything more complicated, it can make your head spin. Fortunately, Buildbox has a large and welcoming community that has asked and answered almost every conceivable question. Bohed was able to find answers to most of his questions with a forum search and a look through the detailed manual.

As mentioned, going into Buildbox cold without consulting the accompanying literature can belie its purported ease of use. I also tried it in my spare time, and found myself continuously clicking over to YouTube to study the tutorials because I couldn't make heads nor tails out of the options.

Attention to Detail

Bohed wanted to make sure that our game wasn't entirely constructed with the Buildbox art. "I created the main character in **Adobe Illustrator** [**which Bohed has written a guide on**]… Buildbox comes with its Art pack which has enough media assets in it to create a full game without even using any extra software, but I thought I wanted something of my own, so I created the character, background and a few other elements myself."
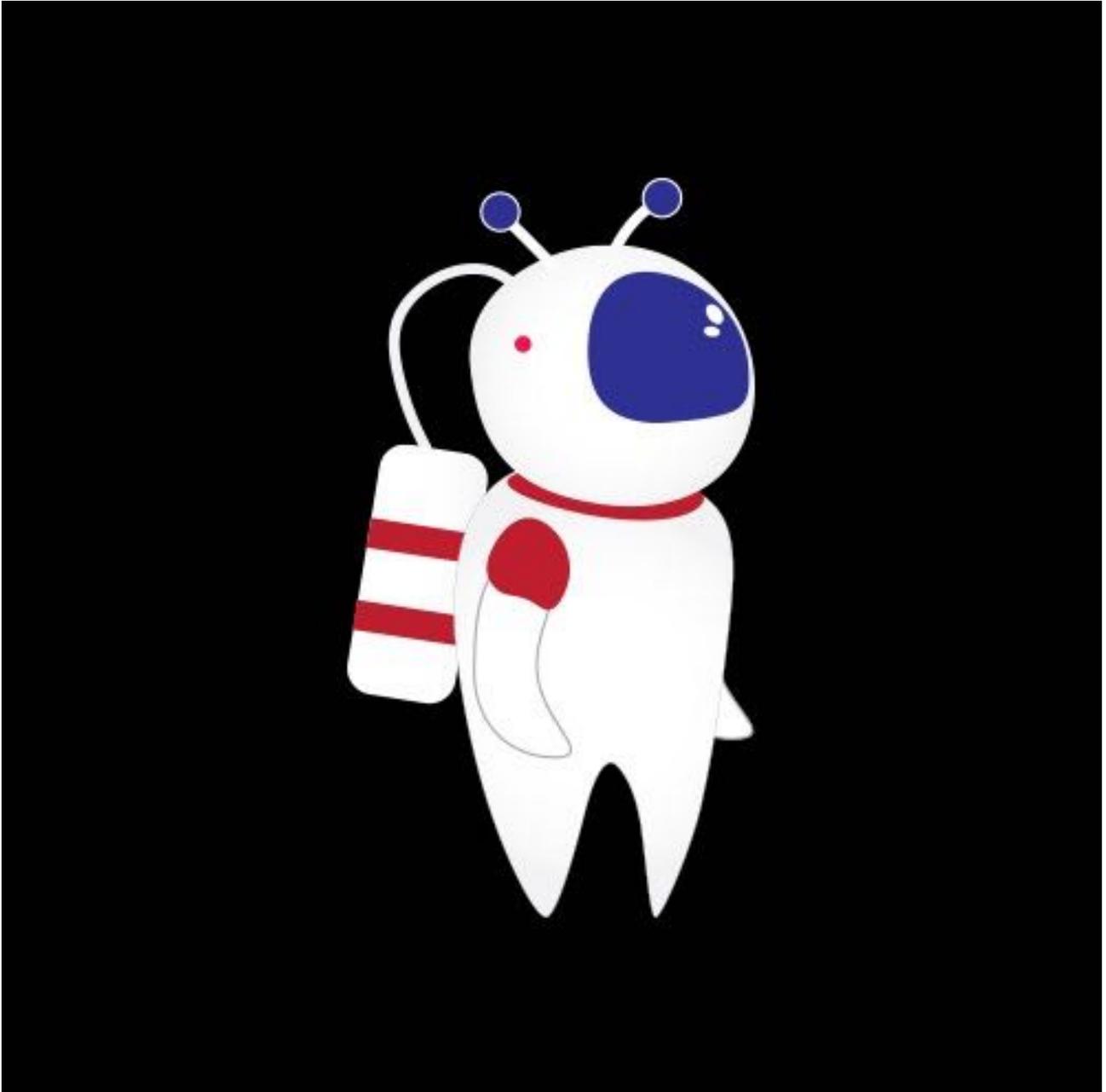
Characters in Buildbox have optional animations, meaning you have to put in different variations of the character's model to simulate movement. This was a challenge for Bohed: "I knew I had to create the animation for movement, jumps, etc., and it was pretty tough for one with no experience in animation (that's why the character in my game moves so funnily and unprofessionally)."

If you see our game in action, you can also see that our character retrieves coins, which is a far cry from our original idea of oxygen tanks. But Buildbox has special properties made particularly for "coins," a.k.a. items that can be used as in-game currency or reward. With coins,

you have the option to use collected coins later to buy other assets in-game, and you have the option of using them for freemium content (though we caution anyone who wants to do so, since we've previously warned gamers about the **downsides of freemium games**).

In addition, there is an almost dizzying amount of customization for characters. You can adjust everything from their shadows to the sounds they make when they hit jump and hit the ground.

Objects also come with a huge amount of options. You can choose how they behave, if they're stationary or run on paths, and if it interacts with the player when they touch it.

Bohed was especially creative with objects in our game, giving environmental objects varied movement paths and adding quite a bit of challenge to some of the jumping puzzles. We were also able to include our in-game colleagues to rescue, but unfortunately, since both enemies and NPCs are classified as "objects" rather than "characters," our astronaut can't interact with them beyond bumping into them to in-game cheers of gratitude.

You even have the option to put together a flashy menu for your game. There is a detailed layout dedicated to giving your game a consistent overlay and user interface. The one Bohed used in our game has a mute option and is fairly detailed on its own, and I can only imagine what he could have done had we had access to the flashier animations available in Buildbox 2.0.

Watch the YouTube video here: **Menu Editor - Buildbox 2 Tutorial**

Level 2.0

At the time of writing, Buildbox is currently available in 2.0 status. We made our game in an older version, so there have since been a number of changes and improvements made to Buildbox that will make it even better than it was when we used it.

Watch the YouTube video here: **Buildbox 2 - First Walkthrough**

One of the most interesting changes to 2.0 is the multiple character settings. You can now make games that have more than one playable character, each with different settings and powers. You can also make it so that some characters are only unlocked with certain conditions, or if they must be purchased with in-game currency.
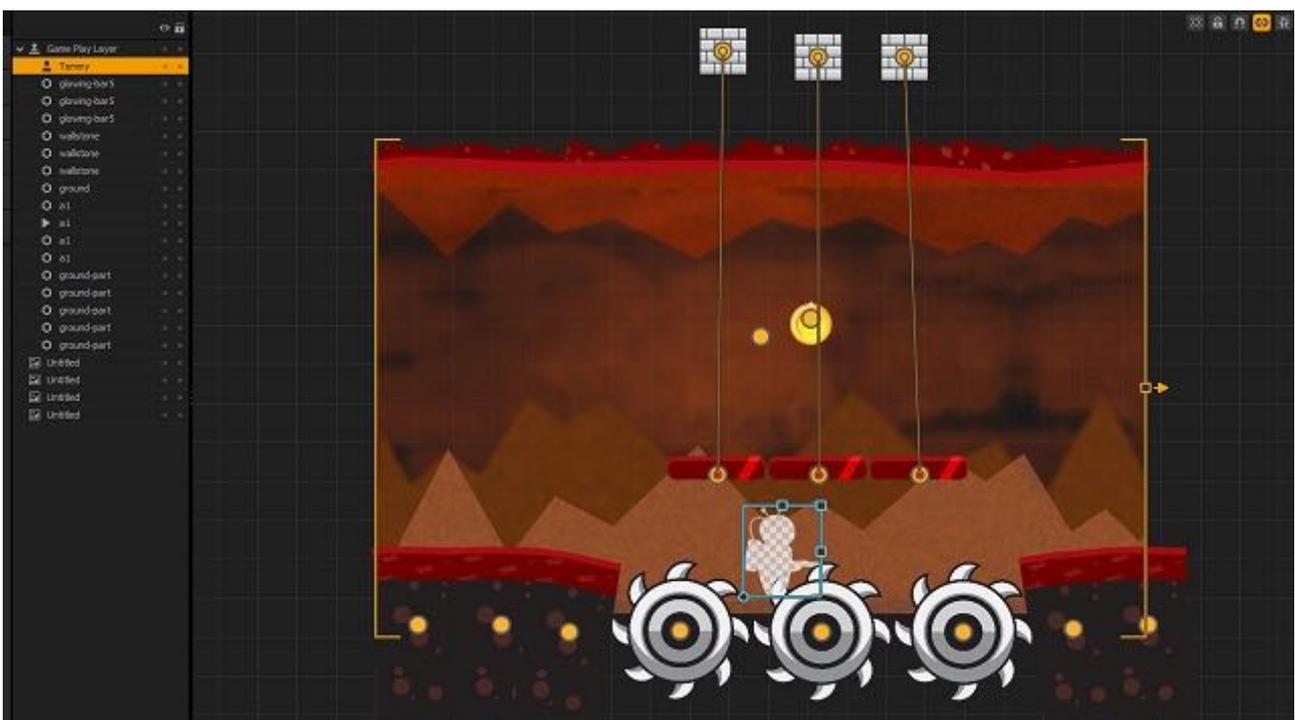
During a conversation Bohed had with the developers, it was revealed that a few things that would be possible with Buildbox 2.0 that weren't possible with earlier versions. Here are a few things that are currently available that further refine the game-making process in Buildbox:

- Reward items can now spawn from defeated enemies

- Options for turning off sound effects and music

- Being able to see the name of the item when you select it in the editor

- Allowing items to be locked in place in the same manner as the background, as well as hidden

- Selecting multiple items (now Bohed can do it)

Bohed still had a few reservations about Buildbox 2.0, but he notes that it has a saving grace: "Buildbox crashes, I'd even say frequently. Even after 2.0 update (which is a really huge and awesome update) it still crashes every now and then. But it has an autosave feature, so when you reopen Buildbox it asks if you want to open the most recent save."

Finished Product

This is the final product produced by our team with just a short amount of experience with Buildbox, called – in the spirit of simplicity – Cave on Mars.
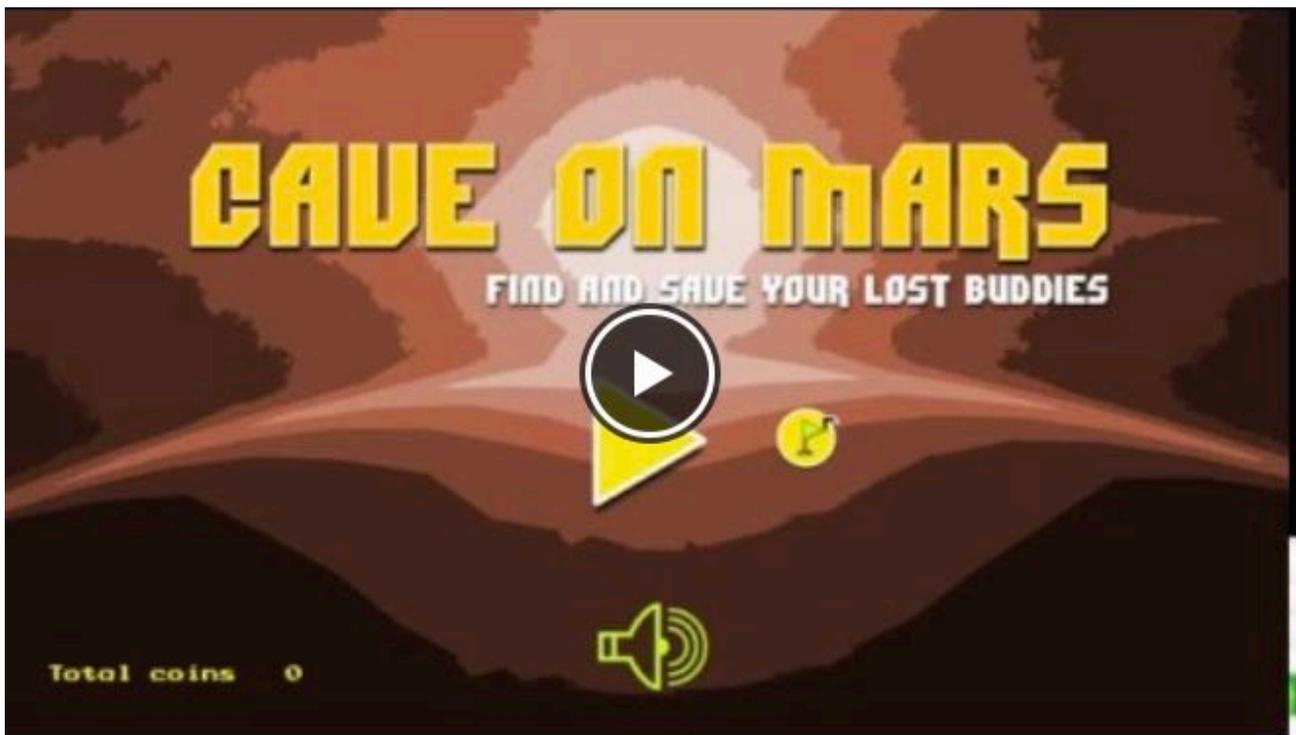
Watch the YouTube video here: **Cave on Mars**

A lot of the original story has not made it into the video below, but our little astronaut and their gun are present, as are the vicious Mars monsters and the cave setting. If you watch the video until the very end, you can see that Bohed also included a little surprise!

We were very pleased with the final product, short though it may be! It is also worth pointing out that this was created with just the basics in mind, and in a very short time frame with no previous game-making experience. So if we could make this under those strictures, imagine what you could do with more time and more complex goals in mind.
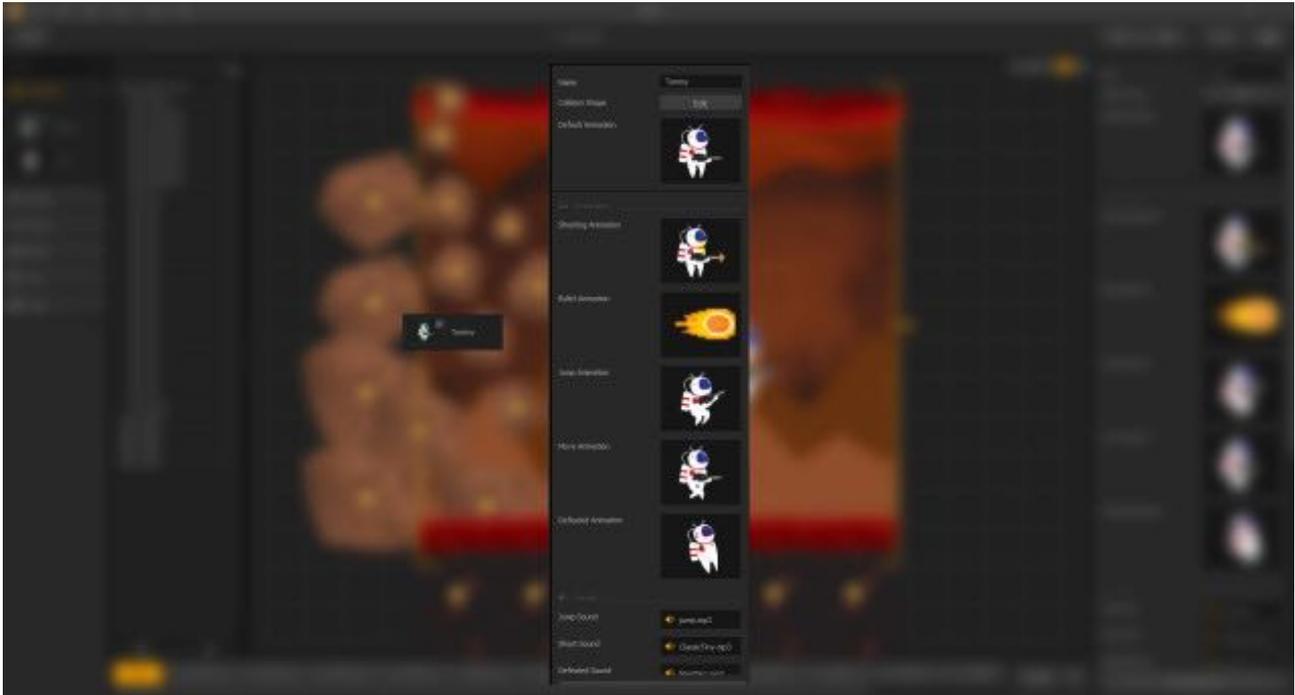
Exporting a Buildbox game is made just as easy as almost everything else in the process, with it being accessible from a drop menu that offers options for iOS, Android, Mac, and PC. Supposedly, the multi-platform support for your game makes both mobile and desktop versions of your game identical.

According to their own website, you can put Buildbox games on Amazon, Steam, the App Store, and others. Bohed tested *Cave on Mars* on both Android and iOS successfully.

Get Started Right Now!

Bohed says, "Buildbox is a really awesome and powerful tool, which can be used by anyone who wants to create a game…I'm pretty sure there are lots of guys with cool ideas in their heads, but they just can't realize it because of the lack of coding knowledge and experience. But with such software as Buildbox this will change…If you've always dreamed of creating a game yourself, you'll understand."

No matter how much or how little experience you have with coding, programming, or game making, you can start Buildbox up and find yourself in the middle of making the next great mobile game in the time it would take you to make dinner.

The most famous Buildbox game currently on the market is *Color Switch*, but there are several others on the market that have achieved noteworthy success; including *Trump on the Run*, *Color Dotz*, and *APEX*.

Costs for licensing Buildbox start with an annual subscription that discounts the $99 monthly payment to $84 per month. If, after you make your game, you find you either can not or will not renew your subscription, you may cancel your subscription and your version of the software will return to demo mode. However, you will still be able to support your game and you still retain the rights to it. Again, any gains you make from your game are 100% your own.
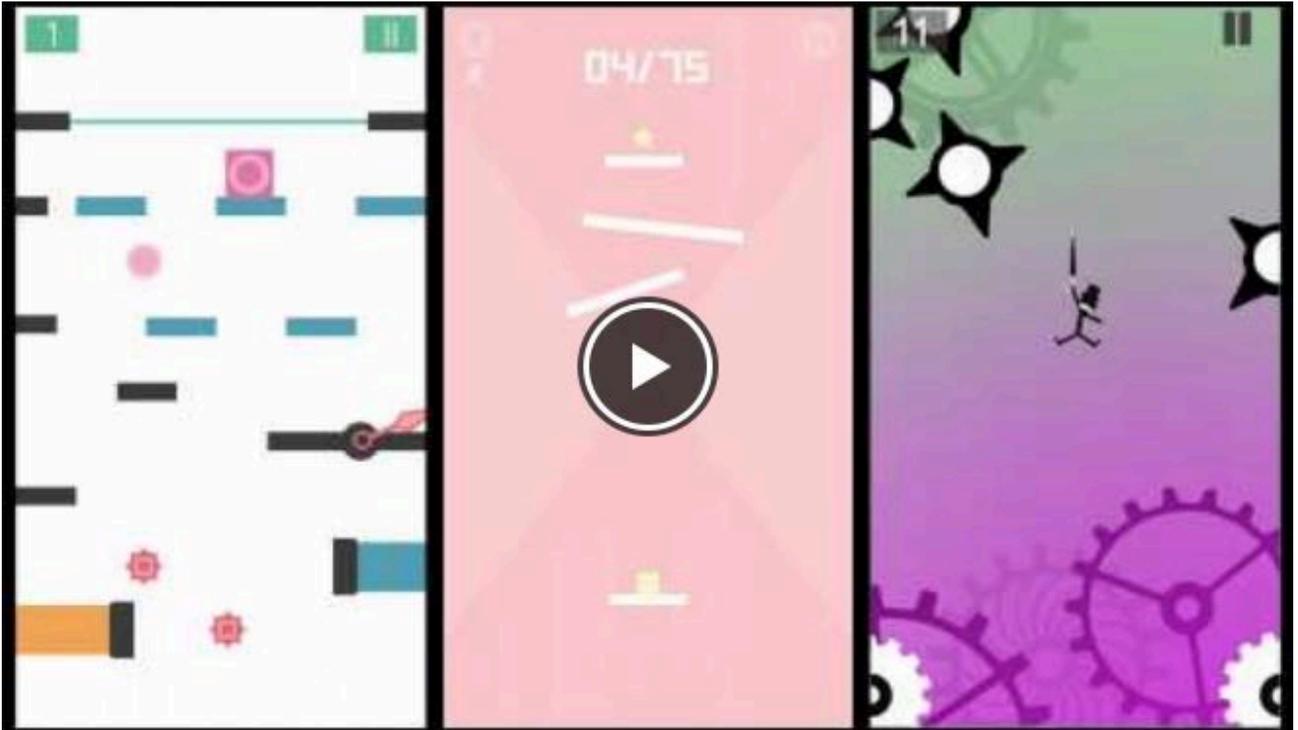
Watch the YouTube video here: **Buildbox - 2015 Showcase**

Buildbox 2.0 is currently available on the **Buildbox website**. You can get either a monthly or annual subscription, or you can buy a license outright. You get all of the assets with your Buildbox license, and you keep any money you make from your game. Get started making your game today!

Do you have any experience with Buildbox or a Buildbox-based game? Do you have any questions for us about our Buildbox project and how you can get started? If so, let us know in the comments section!

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