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Tech 1010
Dr. Bret Swan

Design Thinking

For this assignment, I decided to interview Sammi Riff, a game developer at an Oregon-based studio called Soma Games.

Assignment questions:

1. What role does design thinking play in your job or field?
 - a. Design is the very root of what makes up a video game. You must design aesthetically to appeal to your audience, you must design with clarity in mind, you have to design your story plot, characters, environments, and puzzles. In games, perhaps the most important aspect is first empathizing with what your end users or audience want out of a game, then researching methodologies on accomplishing that.
2. What are challenging aspects of your job?
 - a. The most challenging process is probably iterating on ideas to nail down what works, what doesn't, and what is best suited for your end goal. A lot of content gets cut or scrapped if it doesn't fit just right. Sometimes letting go of content you were passionate about is the biggest struggle when it gets cut.
3. What are your favorite parts of your job?
 - a. I personally love the creativity of my career. I get to start with just a spark of an idea, and see it through until it becomes an amazing full fledged "bonfire" so to speak. I love looking at a finished project and getting to think "I made that!"
4. What would you recommend, in relation to design thinking, to someone going into this field?
 - a. My biggest piece of advice is "PUT YOUR EGO ASIDE!" When you are in a creative field like game design, especially when working on early stages, you can't get overly attached to what you are coming up with. Your designs may all sound amazing, but a lot of it won't make it past even the brainstorming stage. If you let that get to you because you were so attached to all the ideas, you are going to suffer a lot and feel constantly rejected.

My own questions:

5. When in the design process while working with a team, how do you overcome conflicts of ideas?
 - a. Well, because we are working as a team, it really helps to have a team lead who has the final say in what moves forward and what doesn't. But in that regard, the team lead has to have everyone's respect or at least

*This is referring to The Lost Legends of Redwall: The Scout Acts I, II, & III.

acceptance that they are going to make hard decisions that people may not like or agree with. But when we are just hashing it out between team members avoiding conflict can be a bit messier. Communication (especially right now with a lot of people working remotely), can have misunderstandings, so you have to work on being very clear, and also not assuming the worst tone possible when someone criticizes your work.

6. If team leads make final decisions on certain aspects of a project, who is in charge of merging all those aspects together?
 - a. The Product Manager (who for us is Chris) gets the final call on decisions for the overall product and deals with the legalities of licensing and review - or if it were an original IP - kinda makes sure we adhere to the "brand" we want to present. Some of these duties overlap a bit with the founder/CEO position but as we grow I notice Chris has passed off "product manager" to others who then take care of the vision and execution, but still go through him to check in with the 3rd party license review, so those seem to be slightly separate duties.
7. Which part of the design process takes the longest?
 - a. That's a good question. It can actually vary a lot depending on what exactly the project is. Some projects take a significant amount of preproduction, like brainstorming, narrowing down guide books or parameters. Sometimes preproduction carries on through production and things have to get tweaked down the line once ironed out. Or that stage could be really short and we can jump to the next stage really quickly. One good example is Act I versus Act II & III*. Act I is still technically being updated because we are polishing decisions from preproduction. Those decisions were made because of something IN Acts II & III, so it is already built into those later installments. Act I has taken a lot longer to complete than Acts II & III, which have gone super fast because much of the early stages of the design was already planned out.
8. In the testing phase, what sorts of things do you look out for?
 - a. Testing is a can of worms. The biggest thing is you have to identify any game-breaking bugs, first and foremost so it can be fixed right away. Like a spot in the game map that allows you to teleport to the end of the level. Sometimes things like that are put in by developers to make working on the game easier, but we have to make sure they are taken out so players can't use them. Next, I think is testing the flow, and getting beta tester feedback, so if something was unclear, or they found a glitch, or smaller things like that. Testing seems to be a process that can last longer than anything else because even if you think your project is finished, the wider public has a real knack for trying things we never imagined and winding up breaking the game. Like the other day, someone figured out how to use the moment between a menu closing and returning to gameplay to climb a completely vertical surface. Small stuff like that just has to be sent back up the pipe and addressed when we can spare the time.

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