Postmortem: Moon Studios' heartfelt Ori and the Blind Forest

Thomas Mahler is CEO and Game Director at Moon Studios.

Introduction

"It's supposed to be hard."

We started Moon Studios in 2010. Back then, we knew little about the journey we were to embark on. We started this venture because we felt that we had something to say and we had a need to get that out of our system. We knew we couldn't create the projects we wanted to work on as employees of other companies, so we were left with no choice but to create our own studio and start working towards our goal.

A couple of times in your life, if you're lucky, you get to work on something that matters. Something that you do not just do to make a living, but to really change perceptions. Whenever passion and talent is driven by that goal, something truly special happens.

We chose the name 'Moon Studios' to always remind us of our roots. We knew we wanted to create a studio that sets out to make games that people will truly care about, that - we hoped - might just help to change the industry in its entirety. We had some experience in making games already and we knew that it'd be extremely difficult from a development and from a business perspective to fulfill that goal. Then we remembered the famous Kennedy speech:

> *"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."*

Little did we know... Now that we look back at *Ori and the Blind Forest* [trailer], we are proud of what we accomplished. We created the game we wanted to make, we worked together with our publisher, Microsoft, faced all the challenges and eventually succeeded.

Ori and the Blind Forest went on to become a critical darling that rated very highly, was featured at all the important press-events like E3, Gamescom, PAX, etc. and now has a big following of fans already clamoring for a sequel!

One of our proudest moments: After showcasing Ori and the Blind Forest's trailer at E3, the gaming press reacted extremely positively with countless 'Best of Show' awards.

What Went Right:

Talent Acquisition / Working Environment: This has to be the most important aspect of any studio when talking about 'what went right' if one is talking about the development of a successful game. We were very lucky to quickly entice people with our story and acquire the talent that makes up Moon Studios.

Moon Studios started as a rag-tag group of people who came from various places. Literally from various places, since we quickly decided that for Moon Studios to have a chance in today's market, we needed to play a different game than all the other studios are playing. We decided that we would not rent an office somewhere and only look at the local talent.

Instead, we learned from our experiences in other game studios and came to the conclusion that we should form a 'virtual studio', so we could acquire talent from all across the world and have everyone working together over the internet.

Due to our distributed nature as a 'virtual studio', many Moon Studios employees met each other for the first time in person at E3 2014.

We quickly made some great hires. We started very, very small and only worked on prototypes. One of the prototypes that eventually showed the most amount of potential was a project named 'Sein'. It was pitched as a mix between a 'Metroidvania' and a platformer where the player plays a forest spirit and we decided that we wouldn't innovate for innovation's sake, but we wanted to create a love-letter to the 2d games we grew up with. We wanted to look at games like *Super Metroid, Symphony of the Night, Super Meat Boy* and see how we could take these influences and improve upon them in meaningful ways.

That vision set the stage and within weeks, we had a platformer demo ready that we used to acquire more people. Eventually, we pitched the project to Microsoft and negotiated a publishing and development deal with them.

In the end, Moon Studios became the studio we wanted to create: The talent at Moon Studios is made up of passionate individuals that carry a lot of responsibility and always have a say in everything we do: Another lesson we learned from our experience at other game development houses. We expect every person in the studio to have a voice: If you don't like something we're doing, speak up and you will be heard. Every person we hire at Moon Studios has to have that mindset and has to have the passion, the drive and the talent to create something truly special with us: We want to make games together that none of us could create on their own.

This is as good a place as any to say a heartfelt 'Thank you' to everyone who poured their hearts and souls into making *Ori and the Blind Forest*. We hope that we created something that people can be proud of, that they'll want to look back on every now and then and that they will maybe even tell their grandchildren about.

Working with Microsoft: For any small startup, creating a first party exclusive under a huge umbrella such as Microsoft is scary. So we asked ourselves all the scary questions:

Will Microsoft allow us to make the game that WE want to make?

Will Microsoft now have a say in our creative vision / Will they understand OUR creative vision?

Will Microsoft force us to make decisions we don't want to make?

Will they give us the time to really make a good game?

Will they market our game properly or will we be treated as a small, insignificant title in midst of all of their big AAA IPs?

Fortunately, we quickly found out that Microsoft understood what we wanted to make and allowed us the freedom of creation: The freedom to explore, the freedom to fail and the freedom to learn and improve. Once a week, we sat down with our producer, Torin Rettig, to chat about what happened this past week. We showed Microsoft all the materials we created, told them about what our current issues were and what we're trying to accomplish within the upcoming weeks, explained to them what we were struggling with and what we wanted *Ori and the Blind Forest* to become. It was a surprisingly straight-forward working relationship and Microsoft ultimately never forced us to do something we didn't think was right for the project.

Two years into production, Torin was moved off the project to now dedicate all of his time to *Killer Instinct*. Again, we were scared that - maybe now - Microsoft would start forcing us to make moves we didn't want to make.

Daniel Smith became our new producer. He quickly told us about his love for games like *Ori*. We came out of this introduction with the feeling that Dan 'got it' and he also made us understand that Microsoft is still fully behind our vision. Little had changed: Microsoft still very much supported our vision. Microsoft gave us resources when we needed them, but never gave us anything but suggestions and personal feedback when it came to the game's design.

Even with the management change, we were still fully in charge of development. We were living and breathing *Ori* 24/7 - We felt that there was no way Microsoft or any other 'outside' party would be able to understand as well as we did what we wanted to create - And we felt that Microsoft understood that and we hugely appreciated their trust. For them, investing into our small indie studio with people scattered all across the globe and at the same time completely trusting us to create something special was probably a big leap of faith and fortunately, it worked out for both parties.

Shortly after the management change, the noises around a new Microsoft Platform became louder and louder. Now we were worried that we were locked into our contract and that we would have to ship *Ori and the Blind Forest* on Xbox 360 after the new platform would be on the market. We thought *Ori and the Blind Forest* would be a great title for the new Microsoft Platform: 2D platformers made a big comeback in recent years and we would possibly be the first 2d Platformer on Microsoft's new machine. We also thought that we could probably do a few things on the new hardware that we weren't able to do on the Xbox 360… So we quickly voiced these concerns at one of our producer meetings.

That's when we were introduced to Mark Coates: Mark sat down with us and presented an Xbox One pitch to us before anyone in the press knew any concrete details about Microsoft's new machine. We were pleasantly surprised that Microsoft would share information like that with an up-and-coming independent game developer and that they ultimately allowed us to change our contract. Ori was re-targeted to launch on Xbox One and PC simultaneously, a first for Microsoft. On top of that, Mark became an important partner - and a friend - who always had sound advice and from that point on, both Dan and Mark were available for us.

Daniel Smith and Mark Coates from Microsoft gave feedback and advice and quickly became an integral part of the team. Here shown at the Launch Event held for us at Meltdown Comics in Los Angeles.

And then a few things happened that proved the working relationship with Microsoft really paid off for us in ways we could have only dreamed of when we started development: E3 2014 was discussed and the opportunity was brought up to finally show off *Ori and the Blind Forest* ON STAGE at Microsoft's big press conference.

For years, whenever I went to the movies with friends or my brothers, I always dreamed of maybe one day seeing one of our own creations up there on the big screen… I daydreamed what that must feel like and how I'd look through the audience to judge people's reactions. So when we heard that we might get the chance to reveal *Ori and the Blind Forest* for the first time at an event like E3, on that huge screen in that massive hall with all these people, we couldn't believe our luck!

We decided to cut together a trailer based on the materials we already created and Microsoft was so impressed by it that they actually discussed to maybe even start the E3 press conference with OUR trailer! Ultimately, Microsoft decided to feature the next iteration of *Call of Duty* instead, but we still got a great spot towards the middle of the conference. A little later we found out that Microsoft would even create bracelets for every person in the audience: When our trailer came up and all the lights from the Spirit Tree started to light up, so did all the bracelets and the entire room was suddenly brightly lit while people started cheering and applauding. As I looked through the audience, trying to judge their reactions, I couldn't help but tear up. For the first time in 3+ years, it felt like the hard work had finally paid off. I was relieved. It felt like what we were working on was suddenly 'real'.

E3 2014: When the Spirit Tree scene was shown, the room darkened and a flood of orange lights from the bracelets Microsoft made filled the room!

Our showing at E3 was a huge success, people finally knew what we were working on, we got an amazing amount of awards during E3 and the *Ori* E3 trailer that we poured our hearts and souls into was widely regarded by many press outlets as the best trailer of the whole conference. Ori immediately found its fans and we were incredibly pleased to see that - still on the very same day - people already created some amazing fanart for *Ori*!

I think it's safe to say that we wouldn't have had these opportunities if we wouldn't have signed the game with a big publisher such as Microsoft.

Again, at this point we would like to reach out and thank everyone at Microsoft who supported our vision and helped us making a game that we hope everyone at Microsoft can be proud of!

Prototyping / Early Implementation: At Moon Studios, we are big believers in Rapid Prototyping and Early Integration: Whenever we have an idea for a game, we immediately get going on it without having to first write tools and set up the tech to start working.

Similar to how an animation studio first storyboards their films and only goes into production once the animatics actually work and 'feel' right, we take a similar approach to development. We start with a very, very basic demo and put everything we have into making sure that this base version already 'feels' completely right. This means that we try to tackle the controls and the interaction with the world and only when that already feels fun (even if you're playing a gray box in a gray world), we actually start producing real assets.

In a lot of ways, introducing graphics, story, etc. is all just 'plussing' the core of the work, which should always be first and foremost based around one thing and one thing only: Interactivity.

On *Ori*, we already were pretty convinced very early on that we'd have a success on our hands, simply because a few weeks into production, we already had a platformer demo that - we thought - felt better than even *Super Meat Boy*, which we held in high regard. We adored Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros 3.* and we very much liked what Edmund McMillen and Tommy Refenes were doing with *Super Meat Boy* - but naturally, we wanted to take everything a step further.

Also worth mentioning was that we initially did a lot of 'Animation Design', which basically just meant that we had our animator, James Benson, create little videos of how *Ori* could interact with the world, the enemies, we had him animate ideas for abilities we wanted *Ori* to acquire over the course of the game. Since these were videos

and we didn't have to commit to a full set of in-game animations yet, we were able to have the entire team at Moon look at these videos and decide on which moves and abilities had the most potential. This could probably be compared to 'storyboarding gameplay' - Instead of having to create animations for tests that we'd then probably throw away in favor of things that worked better, we simply created throw-away videos that helped us figure out how *Ori* should be able to traverse through the world and interact with his environment.

Creating an early prototype that was focused to show the entire team AND our publisher that we've got a really hot iron in the fire proved extremely useful. After we had something insanely fun to play, we had this intrinsic feeling that we could definitely pull it off and Microsoft was able to just sit down and play what we had created and understand that we weren't just daydreaming.

What Went Wrong:

Unity: When we started Moon Studios, we knew that we wanted to focus on creation. We didn't want to be one of the 'tech' focused companies that sell their games based on some amazing technology they created: No, we wanted people to measure our performance based on one thing and one thing only:

"Are we creating a truly special experience for people out there?"

For that reason, we quickly decided that we'd use Unity instead of even thinking about creating our own engine. We did not want to invest a year of work into our tech before we could start creating. We immediately wanted to start working on prototypes and get good results that we could pitch to publishers as soon as possible. Unity provided us with the tools to do all of that.

Deeper into production, Microsoft and the Unity Team actually struck a deal to bring the Unity engine to all Microsoft Platforms, including Xbox One, which was of critical importance to us, since we wanted to release on Xbox One and PC simultaneously. Once the deal with Microsoft and Unity was in place, we were actually able to directly speak to some of the Unity engineers and even had them do some work for us that helped us port Ori to Xbox One and ship the game at our target spec of 1080p @60fps.
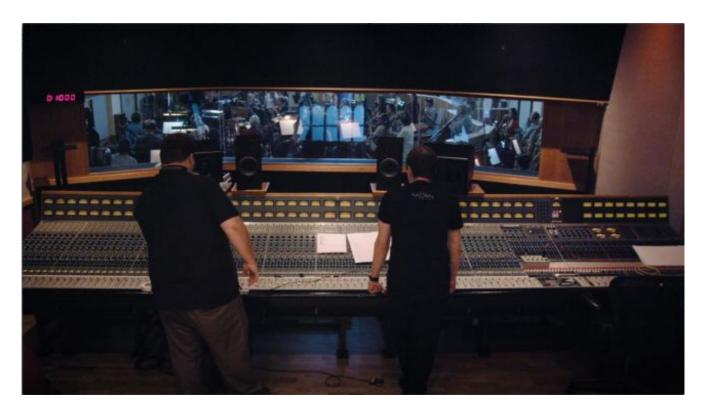
Using middleware technology has its ups- and downsides, but for us, being able to immediately get to work and prove that our idea would work and would be fun to play was incredibly important.

Music / Working with our composer: During our earliest days, we saw Gareth [Coker]'s work on one of the many 'Modding' sites: Gareth hadn't yet made a name for himself and had only worked on some smaller game mods, but his music stood out compared to all the other composers.

I approached him and told him about *Ori and the Blind Forest* and our vision behind game development. He seemed interested and quickly started putting together some melodical ideas that showed potential.

When I wrote the story to *Ori and the Blind Forest*, I often listened to music from film composers such as James Horner, Thomas Newman or James Newton Howard in order to get inspiration. I was also inspired by films like 'The Lion King', 'The Iron Giant' and a few other films that featured 'epic' storylines that were based on depicting core human issues. We knew that we wanted to touch people's hearts with our story and we understood that music would have to be an integral component if we were to accomplish such a feat. Just like a film's score completely changes a film in the editing process (due to the music being used as another tool for storytelling), we knew that Ori's score would be another tool at our disposal that we could use to tell our story.

Because of that, we started putting a deal together with Gareth that allowed him to stay on our team throughout the entire development process. He was able to read the very first story drafts, he was constantly able to play any builds we made and he joined our meetings and kept up to date on the experience we wanted to create.

We

were so impressed by Gareth's work that we scrambled our finances together to allow Gareth to record Ori's soundtrack with a full orchestra in Nashville.

Soon, we started storyboarding most of the story-sequences that were to be made in-game. This is when Gareth's work really started to shine: We made animatics out of our storyboards and had Gareth write the music specifically for these sequences. It was a back and forth process: We allowed for the music to inform the stories pacing and vice versa. We were so proud of these animatics that we started to share them with our friends and families and quickly saw how big of an emotional reaction they created.

Ultimately, the biggest thing we somewhat intuitively got right and that other people could learn from is that using music as another storytelling tool can be critically important. *Ori*'s story is a very powerful, allegorical tale, but we chose to tell most of the story purely through animation and music, not necessarily through clever dialogue.

Many times in a AAA game production, a film composer is hired who then writes the title music for a game, but then the film composer has little to say when it comes to the story, specifically the pacing of the story. Films often only really start to really 'work' in editing - That's when all the pieces come together to form a 'gestalt', a whole. That's when the magic happens.

In games, 'editing' isn't necessarily a common practice - Of course some studios rely on storyboards, but rarely are fully scored animatics made that then translate in the same way into the game, a practice that helped us tremendously.

If we want to tell powerful stories that elicit real human emotions from people, music is but one more - yet one of the most important - tools in your arsenal to accomplish that feat and should be treated with the same respect that the script and the animation receives.

Bugs: This has hit us somewhat surprisingly. *Ori* went through a lot of playtesting before release and we felt pretty safe that not too many people should encounter any bugs. Once we shipped *Ori* and hundreds of thousands of people bought the game, some people started complaining about bugs. Now, the numbers of people that found issues were still fairly small in comparison, but once you have hundreds of thousands of people playing, even if a bug is extremely rare, someone ought to find it…

Case in point, within days after release, people found every single one of the exploits that allows players to sequence break. We actually knew about most of these little 'glitches', but we consciously left them in the game, because we knew that these things wouldn't affect 99.9 percent of the people out there, but the 0.0 percent of

players who're into doing hardcore speedruns could use these exploits to beat the game in ridiculous completion times.

We obviously immediately started working on a patch to fix the bigger issues that stopped people's progress, but it hurt us that some of our customers encountered issues nonetheless. We all felt somewhat heartbroken: At a time when we thought we all deserved a break after years of hard work and had just brought our baby to the world, we had to deal with setbacks and rightfully upset customers. This incidence definitely taught us a few valuable lessons for the future.

Wearing too many hats / Development time: Yet another big lesson we learned. When we founded Moon Studios, we knew that we wanted to keep the development team as small as possible and only hire people that were multi-talented and super passionate in order to create somewhat of a 'dream team'. And while that strategy worked out as planned, what didn't work out was that - in the end - *Ori* had around a 4 year development timeframe, from the very early prototypes we created, to pre-production, where we tested out all of our systems, wrote the tools we needed and figured out our pipeline, to the actual production, where we created all the assets and ultimately finalized the game.

The reason why it took so long is simply a matter of time and resources. Even the most talented, most efficient people only have 24 hours per day and time is easily our most valuable resource. Hiring multi-talented people proved to be extremely beneficial, but at the same time, if a person is in charge of 2 tasks, the moment he starts working on one task, he has to neglect the other.

During the early development phase of *Ori*, only having a very small group of people in the studio worked out extremely well, since the workload wasn't that heavy yet. Everyone had a fairly overseeable amount of tasks and nothing had to really be put on hold, simply because we were still trying to figure out our world, the design and the technology we needed to make the game.

But once we went into production, especially the later parts of it, hiring more people could have significantly cut down our development time. At that point though, we neither had the resources anymore to hire more people, nor did we have the time to train new people.

Having said all of that, we're still very cautious of growing the studio on a per project basis, simply due to the fact that growing too fast too quickly has been a recipe for disaster for way too many studios that came before us. At the same time, we learned the lesson that even extreme passion doesn't buy you more time in the day.

Conclusion

Handling Passion / Crunch: The whole crunch topic is a difficult one to reflect upon. Every studio I ever worked with obviously waved the flag of 'Crunch = Bad Management!', but at the same time, every project I ever worked on involved at least some crunch time.

The problem the industry faces is that game development is almost impossible to properly plan. There is just no way of knowing exactly which issues you'll run into, how many resources _exactly_ will be needed to finish the production, etc., especially if the production time is a rather lengthy one. The longer the production runs and the more unknowns there are to figure out, the harder it is to come up with a somewhat decent production plan. The unknowns are usually what leads to issues, which then again might just lead to people having to crunch in order to ship.

Obviously we don't like crunch. We don't enjoy crunch. We don't want our people to work crazy hours. Having said that, we ultimately did have to crunch a couple of times during development in order to actually finish the game. The way we deal with it at Moon Studios is fairly simple. We try to plan properly. We try to plan extremely carefully, allocate buffers for eventual overtime work and we are always trying to be 100% open and honest with everyone in the studio.

Everyone at all times knows exactly what state the project is in, what tasks are still upcoming and the quality we expect from our team. We deal with people on an individual basis: If a person doesn't have a good day, feels sick or just needs a day off for whatever reason, that's perfectly fine with the entire team.

At the same time, everyone in the team carries a personal responsibility: They're the ones that are in charge of this or that aspect of the game and if they fall behind, they know it and they might affect other departments. In the end, you need to give people that responsibility and also let them judge for themselves in good faith: They'll make their own schedules and they probably fall short a few times, but every time they fall short, they'll learn and make a better judgement call the next time around.

We also pride ourselves on letting everyone at Moon Studios make mistakes. In fact, making mistakes is somewhat expected: Very rarely is something an artist, a programmer, or a designer makes 'final' on its first iteration. Everyone at Moon can have a say in all major aspects of development and if someone brings something up as a potential issue, the parties that have something to say about it start to interact with one another.

That amount of freedom comes at a price: It can mean that reaching the level of quality we expect from people can take a little longer - The results speak for themselves, but every bit extra adds time to the development schedule, which means that things can start to lag behind.

Dealing with so much talent and trying to give people the amount of freedom it takes to create the best work they've ever done puts you into a very difficult position: You want people to love what they're doing, you want them to do the best work of their lives and you want them to stay happy, but obviously not everything always works out that way. We still think that we have a great working relationship with everyone at Moon, but at the same time, we do make people very aware of the fact that we expect a whole lot from everyone who joins Moon and that can sometimes be stressful, especially when deadlines come into the picture.

In the end, we think it's worth walking that extra mile, doing that bit of extra work in order to create unforgettable experiences that everyone can be proud of - but as a studio, we have to be aware of the danger of people potentially burning out or feeling too stressed at all times.

Growing the Studio: This is also something we're going to change in the future. _Ori_ started as a small, scrappy project and we were still a small, scrappy studio. We went all in - which also meant that we put all our eggs in

one basket. That meant that *Ori* was our only focus for the entirety of the production. That can be a daunting proposition when a game has a development cycle that takes as long as *Ori*.

Looking forward, one of our major goals is that we give people a bit more freedom to explore. While we always want to develop our games to the fullest of their potential, we also want to ensure that people have something to dabble with when they feel like their brains are about to burst, a phenomenon that most developers know all too well.

Many times in production, it helped to just take a weekend off to either work on something else or do something completely differently. There comes a time in production when your brain is so filled up with all the information from the project you're currently working on that you start becoming blind to the issues right in front of you. In these cases, it helps tremendously if you allow your brain to get engaged with some other matter. Inspiration can come from many places and in order for people to stay balanced and inspired, they need the freedom to explore. Maybe do some work on other projects or maybe just have some time to recharge their batteries.

Personally, whenever I feel like I'm getting to this point, what helps me to see things clearer again is to work on something different for a while. You're immediately faced with a different set of challenges, become extremely excited again and often times this results in your brain going into ultra-efficiency mode, when prototypes are quickly being churned out and issues are quickly being solved, probably simply because the brain is so relieved that it doesn't have to run the same circles again and again.

This is why we ended up having multiple extremely interesting prototypes lying around, some that are already fully playable, that are already really fun to just sit down and play and some that are in an earlier concept stage, but that still show a lot of potential.

In the future, we'd like to integrate that approach into our daily development schedule: We will have one project as our 'core' focus that gets our full attention, but then we'll also have a smaller team of people working on a sub project and we'll allow people to jump between the two. That makes sense both creatively and in terms of the business, so that we don't have too much downtime anymore in the future between projects and so that we don't again have to put all of our eggs in one basket.

The other advantage this approach gives us is that we can simply spend a little bit more time on IPs that simply require longer development schedules. Whenever you create a completely new IP that's set within a completely new world with completely new characters, you need to give these projects the time they need to evolve, while you can - in that prototype phase - still keep the development team fairly small and the budget for these prototypes fairly low, which is ideal for both the developer and the publisher, since there's little risk-taking involved for either side.

Marketing / Getting people excited: A lot of people might wonder why we're criticizing our marketing efforts, seeing as we were featured in big ways at every big press event in the last year. And while that gave us a great amount of exposure and we'd definitely like to do the same thing again with our upcoming titles, we absolutely see ways where we could've done more to get people a little bit more excited.

Even with the exposure we got by showing *Ori and the Blind Forest* in prominent ways at E3, Gamescom, PAX, GDC, etc., there were still quite a few 'hardcore' people that haven't even heard of *Ori and the Blind Forest* by the time we released it. We didn't engage with our fans through social networks until after our E3 showing, we focused primarily on the 'major beats' in our marketing campaign and had little to no time to engage with the crowds that aren't reading forums like NeoGAF or visit sites like IGN, Gamespot, Gametrailers and the likes.

Another thing we regret not being fully prepared for was the entire merchandise angle: *Ori and the Blind Forest* could've been a great title for merchandise. We all would've loved to create *Ori* plushies, T-Shirts, mugs and so on and so on. We got literally hundreds of mails from fans asking us for these things and we just didn't have a good answer for them. We were solely focused on development and we still are. But we should have reached out to third parties and worked together with Microsoft in order to look at all these opportunities.

Shipping *Ori and the Blind Forest* marked the end of a 4 year long journey for most of us at Moon Studios. What

started as a small idea quickly became more than any of us had ever dreamed of. Not often in life do you get the chance to work on your dream project, to work on a project that touches people's hearts and minds, that makes them laugh, that makes them cry and maybe - just maybe - even inspires them.

Ori was such a project and will forever be looked up upon as the first game ever made by the then small and scrappy game development house Moon Studios.

Around 4 years ago, we set out to create our own games studio. We didn't want to take the easy route. We knew that we wouldn't take any shortcuts. We specifically set out to do it the hard way. We wanted to create. We set-up a tight-knit family of developers from all around the world that showed love and passion for the work they were doing.

The end of a

journey: We celebrated Ori's launch on March 9th at Meltdown Comics in LA: Daniel Smith, Thomas Mahler and Gennadiy Korol

The people at Moon Studios are - without a doubt - some of the best and smartest people I have ever had the pleasure of working with and I couldn't be prouder of the feat that we accomplished. Whenever a small group of talented people comes together and really gets a chance to change the status quo, something magical might happen. I hope Ori and the Blind Forest will remain a project that - even though, or especially because, we had both good and bad times together - everyone can look back on fondly, even after years have passed and we've all grown a little older.

And yet… there's still that light in the distance that we are constantly moving towards. Even though our lives have completely changed, the reason why we started Moon Studios is still there. We will remain humble and grounded, for the best is yet to come and we hope that we will get another chance to work together again on a project that once more inspires our audience and reaches their hearts and minds.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our fans for their heartfelt support throughout and beyond the development of *Ori and the Blind Forest*. We are constantly amazed by the kind words we're receiving, by the fanart, the medleys, the stories you send us and all the other things you create inspired by *Ori*.

To all of our *Ori* fans: There's no way to express accurately how much we appreciate your support and how much it means to us.

Thank you so, so much.