CS3012 Biography

Jamie Fristrom by Vahe Sasunts

Introduction

As far as games went in 2004, realism wasn't a key component at the time. Especially super hero games. This was something that Jamie Fristrom wanted to change. He was a developer at Treyarch studios who are owned by Activision Blizzard. He worked on the original Spider-man movie game and later went on to be the project leader of the Spider-man 2 game. Jamie was frustrated at the lack of realistic swinging during the development of the first Spider-man game. Web would attach to the sky giving the character on the screen a sense of floating or flying.

Jamie decided to take things into his own hands and spent days in his office developing a new method of swinging where the web would attach to buildings and Spider-man would hang of the web like a pendulum. He wanted to experience a sense of realism and knew that in order to achieve this the web mechanics and physics would have to be spot on. To achieve this he stayed back late in his office for a couple of days to make a prototype and show management what he was working on, however since the game was already in production and several levels had already been completed this idea was not given a green light by the management staff.

Spider-man 2

Fast forward to the development of Spider-man 2, Jamie had put himself forward to manage and lead the games development. He knew that in order to make Spider-man feel "real" he had to do take charge and define what he wanted in a swinging web mechanic. In his own words he describes that in order to make it feel real you have to make the players stomach clench up. Swinging from heights and adding a sense of speed to the game has to make players feel scared and nervous.

This was however kept a secret from executives and management at Activision for a long time until the mechanics were perfect. They did not want to see their work canned by the executives and so never demo'd the game prematurely. It was truly a revolution in game mechanics and inspired many more newer games to think differently and make fiction feel real. The game was nominated for Excellence in Gameplay Engineering by the AIAS and also topped many top-games.

Moving on

Following from Jamie's success at Treyarch he decided to quit in 2005 and start developing smaller indie games. He was a partner, technical director and designer at Torpex games. Here he invented the game Schizoid which was sold on the Xbox Arcade and was described as the

most co-op game ever. At PAX 10 this game was nominated as the best original and best co-op game in Xbox Live Arcade awards. In 2012 Torpex games was shut down.

Jamie did not let this stop his indie game making and founded the company Happion Laboratories. Here he decided to look back at the work he had achieved and one game that always stood out for him was Spider-man 2. He decided to build the spiritual successor to the game and this was going to be called Energy Hook.

Energy Hook was a game where players could swing across buildings and skyscrapers, much like spider-man 2 with an added jetpack and different objectives. This game was sold on the steam market and received mixed reviews averaging at 6/10.

Conclusion

What really makes Jamie stand out as a software engineer is how he engages with other developers. During his time at building Energy Hook, he would record bugs and show off the gameplay mechanics. It was open for all to see what was going on behind the scene.

For me personally I think Jamie showed great belief in his work. He had a vision for what a true Spider-man game should look and feel like regardless of how the executives felt. This really payed off for everyone involved in the making of the Spider-man 2 game. It became a cult classic and had fans around the world hoping for something similar to come out, however every other iteration of a new Spider-man game failed. They just didn't have that same wow factor that Spider-man 2 had. However that all changed when Marvel commissioned Insomniac games to develop the new Spider-man game for the Playstation 4. Insomniac games decided to do things right and were heavily inspired by the work done by Jamie and his team. The new game is a homage of Spider-man 2 and everything it stood for. There are many easter eggs found throughout the game that reference the old game and it really is amazing to see how a game released over a decade had been the centre of development for the new game.

Bibliography & Resources

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