

CD PROJEKT RED STORY

From the underdog to the sinner



The beginnings

The mid-1980s. Poland is under communist rule, the country is controlled by the Soviet Republic. Travel abroad is severely restricted - getting a passport is almost a miracle. There are only two channels on TV, both state-controlled, airing government propaganda. Empty shop shelves, rationed goods, and the average salary is 25 dollars or so. One dollar is around a bottle of pure vodka or two to three loaves of bread. It is when places burst with youthful energy in one city after another, a desire for technology and dreams of the rich West emerges. Computer bazaars. Meeting places for computer freaks to swap pirate copies of games and software. At that time, the Polish legislation is missing anti-piracy practices, so no one is concerned about the consequences, and pirate copying is on a massive scale.

"Although there was a crisis growing far and wide the communist Poland, the bazaar was in a bull market for years, with turnover and profits rising every week. A teenager would earn more over a weekend than their parents over a quarter of a year. For many dealers, and let me remind you they were often very young people, that was the first money in their lives they made working", says Jan Popończyk, the founder of the bazaar.

Among the sellers are Michał Kiciński and Marcin Iwiński. They are high school classmates, too. "People, and in fact the kid computer fans from all over Poland, knew one another. I say 'kids' because we were 15-16 or so at that time. We were all like such film nerds. We wanted more than just to buy games. We also wanted to improve and develop them. It is just because they were scarce and of low quality. To develop a game, you have to learn how to program", recalls Grzegorz Zajączkowski, a dealer at the Wrocław bazaar.

But there was not much anybody to learn from, so they started off by learning from each other. Such was the beginning of the demoscene.

At the beginning of 90, the political climate changed with a new copyright law on the horizon. Iwiński and Michał Kiciński also see that the law is about to change soon and make a switch to legal software. Meanwhile, they discovered CDs and, with the first turning point for the gaming industry, the new copyright law of 1994, they established the CD Projekt company.

The turn of the century is the time when the Polish firms have to pivot, much as they do not realize it yet. CD Projekt catches up with Andrzej Sapkowski and they buy the rights to make "The Witcher". Sapkowski himself does not remember the meetings with young entrepreneurs, but he recalls the very atmosphere: "I don't deny they greatly influenced my perception of the, as you put it, 'gaming industry' and the industry representatives. Let me put it this way: I grew prejudiced a bit. I will not go into details", he answers the question vaguely.

When "The Witcher" was out in 2007, its demo was an insert included with "Gazeta Wyborcza", the largest opinion maker daily in Poland. Thousands of copies are sold and CD Projekt comes out to the top. Frankly speaking, there are problems with the ill-printed packaging of the collector's edition. Still, Michał Kiciński is "awfully sorry" on Gram.pl (which was then owned by CDP), he promises to mend their ways and points out that the bugs will be patched. The reviews are rather favorable: as much as 9.7 at Metacritic, although the reviewer journalist granted 81%.

The 2010s were a real golden age for Polish game dev. Their beginning marks a transformation of the former bazaar dealers into fully-fledged businesspeople. Still wear t-shirts on a daily basis, but with millions on their accounts and inclinations for the professional market - a stock exchange market. No wonder, as the budgets amount to tens of millions of zlotys. Teenagers from the computer bazaars thirty years ago not only took over the business. They developed it from the start in their own image, often contrary to how the gaming industry operates in the West. They were also able to learn about the free market and capitalism more quickly than the rest of the citizens - as early as the end of the 1980s.

Emerging problems

February 2020. In three weeks, Europe will be facing lockdown. Still, for the time being, the news of the China virus does not raise such emotions. But the media get carried away: with a value of almost 32 billion zlotys [8.2 billion dollars] (based on stock market price), CD Projekt is more valuable than Orlen, the very state-owned giant.

The stock exchange is going crazy about CD Projekt for the whole of the past year. In August, the price per share jumps up to 462 zlotys, which is, almost by 200% year-over-year. Slight declines follow, but before the very release of "Cyberpunk 2077" which had been waiting for eight years, the price is jacked up to 464.8 zlotys.

Except that instead of a great success, "Cyberpunk 2077" sets off a wave of criticism and players' complaints. Sony withdraws it from its PlayStation Store, and the company's price plummeted by more than 40% over two weeks. Hoping for further gains, the investors are outraged. And the more outrage and the more criticism towards "Cyberpunk 2077", the more American lawyers well-trained in class lawsuits see a great opportunity to fight for damages.

May 2015. The first two "Witchers" were followed by huge success, but it is "The Witcher 3" released in 2015 that makes CD Projekt Red world famous. The atmosphere is great because much as the release of "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt" is traditionally delayed, it turns out to be not so much a success, but a spectacular success. As early as a week before the premiere, the pre-orders amount to a million copies. Three and half a year of work and a budget of more than 306 million zlotys [100 million dollars] will break even with no major issues as early as in the first year. What is more, even today the game is a cash cow. A total of 28.3 million copies of the game have already been shipped to customers over the five years following its release.

The company is investing again.

In people. Between 2014 and 2020 the headcount grows from 400 to almost 1200 persons. The company also attracts increasingly more employees from around the world: in 2019 it is 256 persons, that is, 23 percent of the team.

It invests in development teams for whom studios in Kraków and Wrocław are opened. The latter team is formed in 2018, following an investment in an already-running company, Strange New Things. A moment later the Reds also take over Spokko, a developer studio that specializes in mobile projects.

And they invest increasingly more in marketing. After all, it was as early as 2012 that Iwiński announced that the company, particularly its most advanced and experienced developer teams, was working on a brand-new product: "Cyberpunk 2077".

And when Keanu Reeves appeared on the stage at E3 fairs in 2019, during a demo of the nearing game, it was a breath-taking moment not only for the fans but primarily, for the investors.

CD Projekt itself is not losing momentum, either. The more its shares rise, the more often voices are being heard from the deep inside of the company that this time, it is not just about climbing K2. It is a fight for the world summit without oxygen on top of it. Subsequent postponements of "Cyberpunk 2077" release dates, management officially admitting that employees need to crunch, and finally the long-awaited premiere. Only that instead of a spectacular success, a wave of players' complaints, apologies, and promises of fixes followed. An overinflated balloon bursts out with a bang. And so does the stock market bubble.

The valuation of the company at the record evaluation of 450 zlotys [115 dollars] per share reached almost 47 billion zlotys [12 billion dollars]. The numbers plummeted over a few months. Today, the company's valuation is around 18.7 billion zlotys [4.8 billion dollars] and the price slightly exceeds 186 zlotys [48 dollars]. A real roller-coaster rally begins. Elon Musk twists that CD Projekt is incredible, and the shares jump up. Sony withdraws "Cyberpunk 2077" from PlayStation Store, they go down. The company releases patches with fixes and the price is up again. And what is missing from the frenzy around the Reds is only a hacker attack. This not only sends the stock market wobble again, but it also attracts investigators and controllers to the company. Plus, threats of lawsuits for deliberate manipulation of the stock market.

Some of them fobbed us off saying that the procedure was still at an early stage. But the majority of them fell silent. In its annual financial statements, CD Projekt does not mention whether they have the funds to cover the costs of court cases or damages if any.

The crunch

Developing "Cyberpunk 2077" people have been working for a dozen hours a day. One day one of them stands up after eight hours and leaves. To everyone's surprise. Maybe something at home? Or he had to fix something that's just cropped up? The next day, the story repeats itself: after eight hours, the programmer is done. And the same on the third day. Finally, someone bursts out: "What's up with you, man? We're working our asses off, day in, day out, and you are leaving after eight hours?!" And the developer replies: "Chill out, it's my holiday!"

But it started much earlier. It was 2004 and a dozen people or so were working on the game. As the months went by, new people came in, but still, the release date had to be postponed. 2005 came, then 2006, and "The Witcher" was still a mess.

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And the developer replies: "Chill out, it's my holiday!"*



Lack of vision was the problem, as Jacek Brzeziński, the then leader of the entire project, puts it. "What kind of game are we actually making? What camera and controls will be there? What will the quests be about and how many will there be? What will matter in the game mechanics and what will matter less? How long will the plot and the game itself be? Finally, we started answering the questions. We had to because it was already clear we couldn't afford to make this game for another three years but had to finish in a year. And then, the crunch was a must", recounts Brzeziński.

Maciej Miąsik, the then production lead: "Time was definitely running out, pressure from Atari, the global publisher of "The Witcher", was rising. So, the crunch was the only solution we could think of. I would say: "In a nutshell, you have to work your ass off, quit whining, and worrying because there is no other option". Everyone was OK with that. But I'm not saying, they were happy about that."

Even if they were not, the great atmosphere of the CDPR office came as consolation. Michał Gembicki, who just joined the company in 2006, remembers it well. "Be it just because every Monday we would share breakfast together. The then head of production would bring a few dozen eggs to make scrambled eggs for all the volunteers. It was truly exceptional as such things were not in the office culture of those days. You could feel it is a company with other values", mentions Gembicki.

Brzeziński is of the opinion that, but for crunch, "The Witcher" would never have been completed. It was necessary because a young company was at a loss to schedule the work, calculate the time needed to complete particular tasks, and reasonably divide it among people. But the romanticism of the whole process was helpful indeed. "They would come to their dream workplace, they were enthusiasts, and, in a way, they drove themselves into this rhythm of perfectionism and workaholism. But it is those who decided the crunch, including myself, that bear more responsibility. If we had known how to manage, we would have told them to go home. But, of course, that was not the case", says the developer bitterly.

The romantic phase was followed by a pragmatic crunch. The important reasons for months-long overworking on the first part of "The Witcher" included the desire to make the best game possible. Much to the players' utmost satisfaction, as they are what CDPR values the most.

"They had no typical businessman attitude. They would be taking the perspective of game fans and committed users. While working on "The Witcher", Michał Kiciński insisted that all the controls could be entered from the mouse position, and that was quite unusual. He wanted the game to be more accessible. That was about adopting such a casual trend. They wanted to attract many people to their elaborate RPG", says Marcin Kosman, a journalist, and author of the book "Not Only The Witcher. History of the Polish Computer Games". And what did it all come to? When "The Witcher" graphics leaked once, the highly committed fans urged each other not to spread the leak.

It was already practical knowledge from the employees' perspective: you have to crunch, otherwise, there is no chance to meet the deadline. So, when the company announces it will be embarking on Geralt's adventures, part two, crunching becomes the daily bread.

While still working on "part two", some managers are losing their zeal. Jacek Brzeziński doesn't make it to see the end of game production, either. He leaves as he cannot come to terms with the management board on the completion of "The Witcher". "We came up with a reasonable plan for intensive works, but also allowing for some safety buffers. We calculated how much time you needed to cater to the employee's work-life balance, too, because we needed them fresh, relaxed, and not burnt out from the start. But the board forced a shortened deadline. It made no sense. Who, in their sound mind, signs up for crunching? Not me", says Brzeziński.

Szymon, a graphic designer (he wishes to remain anonymous), was employed full-time. He is straightforward about what he found: chaos and nerve-racking. "Turning ideas upside down, wasting time and people's work. No discussions, make-it-or-break-it attitude: either you do it, or you are sacked under the pretense you don't share the team spirit", he recounts. Ever since pragmatic crunch at CD Project has been overlapping with the panicky crunch. Depending on how much the employees are committed and the deadlines are tight. What is more, starting in 2017, this working model becomes an infamous flagship of the entire company.

"Crunch is like drugs. Once you start, it's hard to quit it", says Janusz Tarczykowski, the head of Rock Square Thunder studio (in gaming since 2014). "Occasional crunch may work, but a prolonged one is ineffective and misses the point. And long crunches are customary for CDPR. They make each game on a so-called death march. Their goals and objectives for each consecutive project are too ambitious, which makes them take it to the extreme and take a risk. You pull it off once, twice, and a third time, so such a working model is established. The risk paid off. And if so, they thought that this is the way it works", he adds.

Maciej Miąsik is of the opinion that CDPR is not transforming the management model because such a working culture has simply satisfied the board over the years. "It would spawn success after success, a lot of awards and money, so there was no motivation to change the business model if it worked so well. And so, it worked until 'Cyberpunk'", says Miąsik.

Over the years, CD Projekt has also developed two faces. One is facing customers to whom the Reds were ready to literally make heaven come true.

"We are rebels!" is still CD Projekt's slogan, and such is the conviction deep down in its DNA. Such is Kiciński's LinkedIn tagline and such a slogan he would display on his t-shirts. And it actually continued so somewhere until 'The Witcher 3' was released", says Radek Zaleski, with CD Projekt from 2012 to July 2013, today at Netguru, a company that creates software for business. He explains what being a "rebel" is to stand for: "For years it was like us versus the bad world of games, us versus unfair communication with gamers. CD Projekt firmly believed that. Except that they are a gigantic, listed company with a big tax responsibility and liability towards investors. The market does not perceive them as a small and independent studio anymore, but a corporation which can afford Keanu Reeves".

However, the other face of the rebel, the one facing its employees, was not that bright or smiling. So, it promised a lot with its flirting smile, it knew how to attract even the biggest talents in gaming. But equally many talents left the company. "Really, crowds of people have been working there already. It is not a nice start-up anymore nor an indie studio in which you work, because you want to do something cool. It is a factory of games with strict requirements for particular products", explains Grzegorz Zajęczkowski, the Digitisation Leader. "It is not a passion to discover the new worlds of "The Witcher", but a timely delivery of Night City components that counts", he adds.

In mid-2019 the studio's executives promised to change the working style. But the promise was only a few months lived. The closer to the "Cyberpunk" release, the harder work. "We have a reputation for respecting our customers. I would also want us to have a reputation for respecting our developers, too", said at the time Adam B, " said member, who took upon himself the criticism for breaking the promise.

Pressure from investors was rising. It was rising on the part of the cherished gamers who would sometimes welcome the postponement of the "Cyberpunk" release with threats sent to CD Projekt's employees. The crunch became panicky now. At two months before the scheduled premiere, the company announced it was prolonging the working week up to six days. "The 'Cyberpunk' team will be happy because they're working day in, day out, so ... it's one day off now", said sneeringly the former employees who knew the open secret: some had been working on "Cyberpunk" at night and during weekends for more than a year then.



Andrzej Zawadzki
@ZawAndy

This is one of the mildest messages some of us got.
There were far, FAR worse. Every single one is being reported. We will not let it go through.
Do not treat it lightly. Do not ignore it. It is serious.
That said, I'm off TT for couple of days. Take care.
#Cyberpunk2077

Przetłumacz Tweeta

I know where you live bro release the game or your finished

Release cyberpunk or you and your family will be persecuted

I will burn you alive if you don't release the game

2:18 PM · 28 paź 2020 · Twitter Web App

"Cyberpunk 2007" hit the market on 10 December. Before the release, eight million copies were sold, and another five million within ten days following the debut. However, a large number of players and reviewers were, to put it mildly, highly disappointed. They would point out the errors, bugs, and shortcomings. They accused the company of having sold an unfinished product, totally different than earlier advertised. All of this reignited a discussion on how CDP was treating its employees.

"I know that, in Adam Kiciński's opinion, crunch is necessary to refine the project. But after what happened with "Cyberpunk", he may ask himself is this the very component that is central to the quality?", points out Jacek Brzeziński.

The sins

THE SIN OF ENVY. THE BOARD'S IRON GRIP

The company employees say that the problems of "Cyberpunk 2077" are a replay of "The Witcher 3". In the opinion of many employees, there is one main problem CD Projekt (and, consequently, "Cyberpunk 2077") has. The board is keeping in iron grip the vision of what the product is to look like. Sometimes, it has the advantage that not only the grass-root employees are gaming the game. "The managers and team leads are also working on it, be it in the phases of developing consecutive demos. It lifts up the spirits", we hear the employees saying.

However, it is more often the case with "The Witcher 3". "Some board member said one day: "What if the Witcher could dive?" It sounded great, except that it was about some totally new quests, an environment to be designed. A lot of work to do. Someone got carried away with imagination and you had to shift the premiere", says one of the former employees. As he says, the same was true for "Cyberpunk 2077": "The executives were extravagant with elaborate ideas which delayed the works".

The employees remember that with "The Witcher" it was Marcin Kiciński who inspired the most but was also making utmost confusion in how people were working. "He would pop in like a meteor with his ideas and turn everything upside down", recalls Ryszard Chojnowski, the then-project lead.

Except that, it is one thing to have a less than 30-year-old founder of a company making its first game, and quite another to have executives with over twenty-five years of experience in managing a large company (a company that has been listed for a decade, on top of that) creating a game on which the situation of almost 1200 employees and the money of thousands of small investors depend.

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THE SIN OF PRIDE. BITING OFF MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW

The original plan to make “The Witcher” in a year and to release their first game by a team of no more than four, may have been considered delusional fantasy. However, it may have also been a manifestation of great pride. It ended up in five years, with almost a hundred employees, and a 28 million zlotys [10 million dollars] investment.

The same fate befell “The Witcher: Enhanced Edition”. In early 2008, it was announced due in May, to be ultimately released in autumn. Whereas the premiere of “The Witcher: Wild Hunt” was postponed twice. Each time, once success was achieved, they would forget the initial leap with “The Witcher”, which turned out to be a headlong leap.

It was forgotten so effectively that the ambitions with “Cyberpunk 2077” were already flying high. While the inspiration comes from Mike Pondsmith’s now-classic Cyberpunk 2020 gamebook, that is not why 2020 was chosen for the release. On the contrary: for a long, it would have been argued that the new title would premiere in 2019.

Quite contrary to the hearsay that had been leaking from the HQ for a long time that the production of “Cyberpunk 2077” was not going very well. The game was being developed on CD Projekt’s own engine, so all the mechanics had to be made from scratch. And a game from the first person’s perspective differs from the third person “The Witcher” had. It is an entirely different scale of objects, the mechanics of shooting, hand-to-hand combat, and any activities. When CD Projekt went for “Cyberpunk 2077”, none of these mechanics were accessible for starters.

Janusz Tarczykowski, the head of Rock Square Thunder studio, adds: “Additionally, they shot themselves in the foot inserting a multiplayer, which is a mode involving gameplay for multiple players. The problem was the physics for a multiplayer differ a lot from those for a single player. What you need in-network gameplay for instance, is determinism. A game’s physical engine works so that the physical reactions slightly vary from one computer to another, it is not repeatable.”

So, CD Projekt developed at the same time both the game and the engine itself, the tool that is used to develop the game. Even if the designers come up with something, there is no way to test it if the engine is not there yet. So, people are waiting for the team to work on it, except that when the engine is finished, there are always some errors and problems you have to solve. The circle is complete.

“There is a rule in programming: you will never build a complicated system from scratch. You can tell it by Amazon which set up its own games studio and claimed from the very beginning that it would make super-size productions. They employed great experts, pumped in a lot of money, and thought that was enough. Meanwhile, you have to move step by step”, says Tarczykowski.

THE SIN OF AVARICE. THE MORE PROJECTS, THE WORSE

Hardly today anybody remembers that after the premiere of the first part of Geralt’s adventures in 2007, the Reds set about not only fixing the game full of loopholes but started working on part two almost right away. And as it wasn’t enough, a year after, they took over Metropolis studio which was working on “They”, a game they had already messed up a bit.

“The idea was to sell the game to a publisher, so they started looking for one. Still, whoever turned up, the answer was ‘no’. After a while, there wasn’t much you could do about it anymore. The situation was not good enough to fuel the project with extra funds. All of that was happening against the background of serious problems related to the preparation of the console version of the first “The Witcher: Rise of the White Wolf”. This console work CD Projekt decided to outsource to Windscreen Games, a French company. The idea sounded reasonable: the Reds were not competent enough, so the French were supposed to be the professional assistance. But it turned out that the company had not been adequately screened. Finally, CDP people on the spot in Lyon checked the work progress. And it turned out to be a big eyewash.”

In this way, a conflict with the French came right on top of game production, box-based distribution, plans for the company’s own digital distribution service, “The Witcher 2” and a couple of other projects. Not only is a vision of a console version of “The Witcher” moving away, but, as if that was not enough, Widescreen Games ... are not returning the money invested in them.

In this way, the conflict was defused indeed, but “The Witcher” for the console ultimately never came into being. What is more, with the entire project, CD Projekt was out of pocket a million dollars or so.

And they would nevertheless continue the mistake of a multitude of projects underway. Instead of completing “The Witcher 2”, they got around to part three and the remake of part one.

If you take a look at the history of the Reds, the number of ultimately successful games almost equals that of failures. They never finished nor did they release, in spite of having spent more or less money on "The Witcher: Outcast" (add-on to part one), "The Witcher: Rise of the White Wolf" and "They". Plus, hardly anybody today remembers such games as "The Witcher: Battle Arena" (for mobile devices), "The Witcher: Versus" (a browser game), or "The Witcher: Adventure" (tablets).

But they insisted on "Gwent", a Witcher card game. A game with quite a good rating, yet a bottomless pit

Many people are telling us that "Gwent" was the essence of problems with project management at CD Projekt Red. "The board insisted that it be a card game for the console, although it didn't add up because it's not a game type for such devices. A huge amount of money, work, and effort was put into it, and finally, not much came out of it. What is more, at the same time works began on 'Cyberpunk 2077' which cannibalized 'Gwent', particularly marketing-wise", says another employee of CD Projekt Red who worked on "Gwent" for some time.



THE SIN OF UNSUSTAINABILITY. NO WORKING CULTURE

Cyberpunk conclusively demonstrated a philosophy that had been around at CD Projekt for years: "you will fit, go ahead!" Particularly with respect to HR management.

And it is not even crunching itself. But it is also about the fact that even when working after hours, the company does not manage to distribute the load evenly. "The point wasn't to work much, but to work much within specified time limits. If you turned up at 5 AM to work in silence when the office was still empty, nobody saw it, and no one appreciated it. On the other hand, if you were sitting past 8 PM, your hard work was already recognized" - we heard from testers who worked back then on the second and third parts of "The Witcher".

Although the company had serious financial problems then and it had to lay off people, it would still place more work on their shoulders.

At the same time, even the company's board would not pay themselves salaries and focused on a desperate search for an investor. One of the attempts was to invite Zbigniew Jakubas, a millionaire, to the company. The businessman went back to the visit in our interview. "I walked through the entire floor where they worked, and they didn't even lift their heads from the screens. Typically, when there is a person from outside the company, it draws people's attention. And I felt a grenade could go off there and nothing would happen", he said. In fact, it was the board that ordered the employees not to hang around or enter the kitchen, just to work diligently.

But stories about people so trained to work hard that they worked 40 days in a row without a single day off are less funny.

The switch from "Gwent" to "Cyberpunk 2077" was like out of the rain into the gutter. "It is obvious that crunch had been around there for a long. But the worst thing is, at the same time the company's board in 2019 made a public pledge that there would be no such practices, and that crunch would only be for those who consented", one of the employees sighs. Still, the closer to the "Cyberpunk 2077" premiere being postponed, the more the voluntary character of crunch became a delusion.

THE SIN OF WRATH. EVERYBODY HATES CD PROJEKT

All of this ended up for CD Projekt with perhaps the worst blow of all: a failed game meant that the beloved, pampered gamers, for whom the company had, after all, crunched staff, turned their back on them.

"The bar was set so high; it was difficult to meet the expectations. It's hard to be on top all the time", says Grzegorz Zajaczkowski, the Digitisation Leader of the European Commission. And he goes on to add that gamers like underdogs. As long as you start from this position, you are a beloved developer. "And once you become a leader, people are not that understanding anymore. And every mistake is taken out of proportion", he recounts.

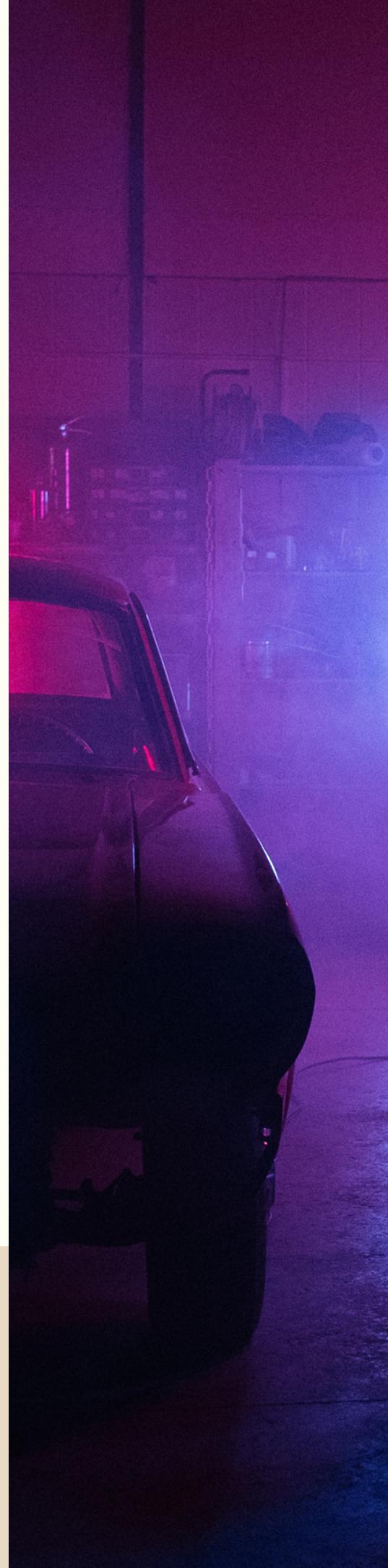
As if there weren't enough problems, the home office and no control over the company processes resulted in cyber-criminals sensing security loopholes. "Frankly speaking, when COVID-19 outbreak, I thought it would be bad. Why? All the company's resources were taken outside, so it was far easier to find a vulnerability. The likelihood of someone out of the tens of employees missing something is significant, and when we connect through an external system, be it VPN, the protection is lesser than under traditional conditions. But the fact that an attack on quite a substantial scale was allowed to happen, does not reflect well on the company. After all, it is a big, listed company. It should have more risk analysis experts on board, even for the most improbable scenarios", says Ryszard Chojnowski.

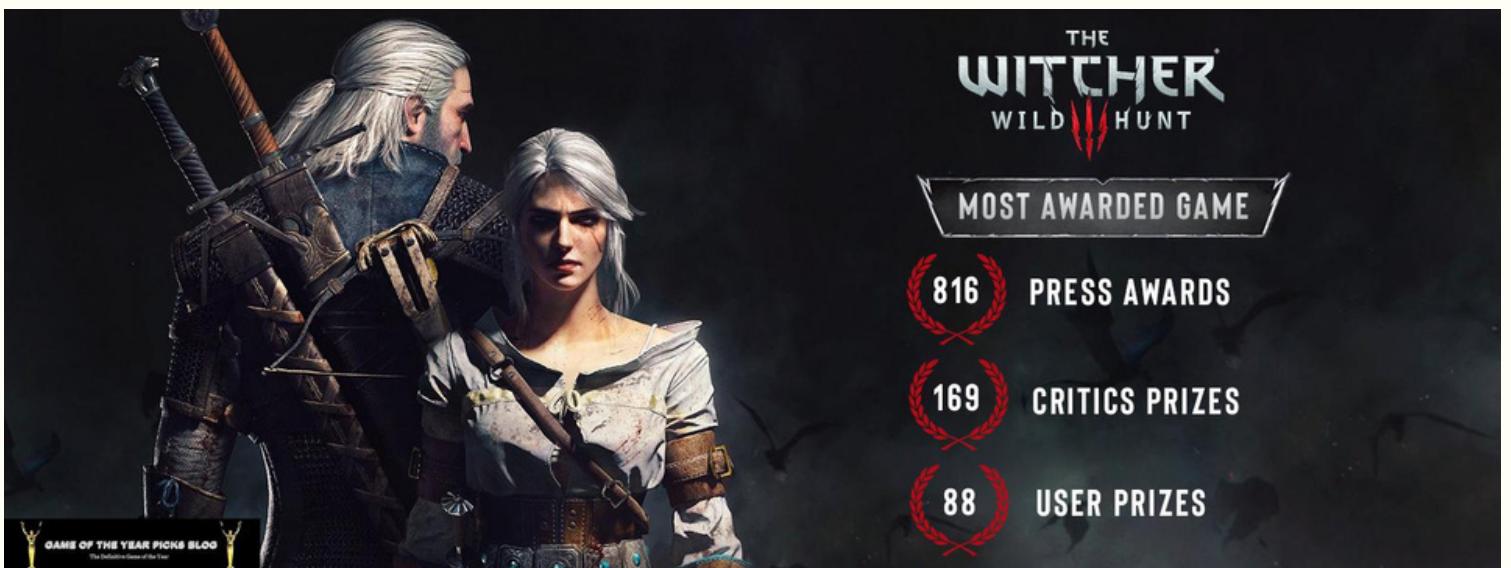
The company has lost some of its HR data, salary grid is a much more serious problem than game codes leaking (nobody will set up a pirate version of "The Witcher" using these solutions).

Following the leak, a lot of people associated with CD Projekt began restricting their credit cards and IDs. This is how, for example, Marcin Kosman, a journalist, and a former CDP employee, protected his data. "Unfortunately, it was not the case that someone from the Reds got in touch first, warned us, and told us what to do", he throws his hands up.

The stock market's reaction to the release of "Cyberpunk 2077" was almost as hysterical: first, fueling the expectations, and then quickly overvaluing the shares.

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"Everything CD Projekt did before the premiere of "Cyberpunk" seemed perfect. Marketing, Keanu Reeves, presentations... The investors believed till the end that the game would be a tremendous success. There is only one official statement before the premiere that I do not understand. In terms of its possible stock market impact, obviously. In autumn 2020, when Adam Kiciński persuaded the game worked surprisingly well on the old generation consoles. It is hard to believe that a few days into the premiere he did not know the condition of 'Cyberpunk'", emphasises the expert.

As you watch such investor reactions, also those following a failed premiere of "Cyberpunk 2077", you can tell that the stock market players behaved as bit as if they were ... playing CD Projekt's games. As long as they believe in the games and the company, the price is on the increase. When they got disappointed, it began plummeting.

The Reds' shareholding is very diluted. Apart from the company's founders who hold less than one-fourth of the shares, there is a whole array of Polish and foreign investment funds. CD Projekt is a trendy and a liquid company. The daily shares turnover often reach hundreds of millions of zloties. No wonder that after a hugely disappointing premiere, the company was targeted by foreign funds selling short. So far, their strategy has been paying off, as from the release of "Cyberpunk" the stock market price of the Warsaw studio has fallen by over 60 percent. The wrath that poured out on the Reds for all the other sins of theirs may be the company's most serious problem today.

CDP Red redemption (?)

"CDPR is the most silver-tongued sonofabitches in gaming", says Marcin, a former tester. "The image they built around themselves ... 'We, the Reds, we are such 'from gamers for gamers' guys, we love you, here, help yourselves to the freebies, we're best of all, we care about you'. And there, on the inside, it's the worst sweatshop you can possibly imagine. Their damage control is such that, over the years to come, they will start releasing free add-ons, fix 'Cyberpunk'. In the end, they will rebuild it and the players will be happy again", he recounts.

These are sharp words, yet he is not the only one. Even Reds' supporters (and yet, they are supported by pretty much everyone, because it is a "company from Poland", "because 'The Witcher'", "because they made the Polish game dev famous") are quite bitter anyway about what has recently "cyberpunked" there in the studio.

"Until the day "Cyberpunk" was released, it was met with great respect and appreciation that the communication strategy of this company assumed the owners' contact with the market and the players themselves. Ever since December, I've been at a loss to understand what they've exactly been up to. Anyway, it was with the first, and the second "Witcher" that they screwed something up or had an epic failure (be it the figurines for the special edition that didn't arrive, or something was mall designed), and yet, they would always handle such crises perfectly. They made it and continuously cared about their image. I really don't understand why they haven't made it this time", sighs Michał Bobrowski, a board member of GRY-Online SA.

"It's not a company dependent on processes and structure. It's people-dependent. And maybe it's OK because it has to be agile", recounts one of the Polish game dev veterans, who for years been cooperating with CD Projekt. "They knew how to fall and pick themselves up. If necessary, they knew how to escape. After all, they have faced bankruptcy on several occasions, and they always dodged an axe somehow. And, last but not least, they always grew stronger. The point is you can't tell it now. First of all, you can't tell it by their brand-new strategy. I expected a bomb would go off, something that will blow you away and people will fall in love with them again. And this time, everything is so flabby, expressionless, and conservative. Sadly, you can tell they have no idea how to regain what they've lost, and what drove the entire company: the love of the gamers".



Links and references

Case Study was based on the series of articles in the "Spider's Web":

<https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2021/07/cd-projekt-story-witcher-cyberpunk>

<https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2021/07/cdprojekt-witcher-cyberpunk-nofilter>

<https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2021/07/cdprojekt-cyberpunk-witcher>

<https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2021/07/cdprojekt-sins-cyberpunk-witcher>

<https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2021/07/witcher-cdprojekt-cyberpunk>

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Picture from page 10:

https://www.reddit.com/r/witcher/comments/emr9ho/the_witcher_3_is_the_most_awarded_game_of_the/