WARHORSE WORLDWIDE PITCHING TOUR 2013

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 5:19 pm UTC Nov 21, 2013

Me and an unnamed publisher.

Last time we left off just at the point when we were embarking on a pitching tour of publishers to try and push our game on them. So it's obvious what's coming this time. Yes, you are about to find out what was conjured up at those mysterious meetings with the people who decide what games you get to play. Will ours be one of them?

We were fairly well prepared for the trip – I would say even well above standard. We had a working version of the game that looked good and contained a half-hour quest with all the basic game mechanics fully functioning, a several minutes long trailer, lots of screenshots, a presentation and a nice flyer on luxurious paper – all data recorded on flash disks shaped like gold bars and packed in leather cases. You've got to make an impression, and when I compare it to how we pitched other games in the past, this is a whole other league (you can read about the preparation of these materials in our previous blogs here and here). Read more...

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VIDEO AND CABIN FEVER

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 9:26 am UTC Sep 27, 2013

An image from our storyboard, this one was not drawn by me

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A strict deadline for all things to come together invariably leads to "funny" situations. You may for example have fully functional pathfinding and a completely operational crafting minigame and when combined into a single whole, both will stop working for some unfathomable reason. The likeness of that happening increases with the number of systems that are being joined together, as a result, when everything is merged, nothing works.

It goes without saying that the bar goes up as well. You stop overlooking "tiny" glitches like clipping (graphics that vanish when they get too close to camera) in combat. It didn't bother anybody so far, everyone was happy that it's possible to fight at all and we saw superficial stuff, like two weapons intersecting each other, as something to be fixed later. But when you show the game to somebody, the clipping and the weapons intersecting each other are the first things they're going to notice in combat. It doesn't matter that no other game ever had combat like this: it flickers and looks unfinished, so it must be rubbish. Read more...

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POWERPOINT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 12:18 pm UTC Aug 2, 2013

A fetching slide from our presentation

In the last entry I covered our overall strategy and how we started to get ready for pitching the game to publishers, I talked mostly about the game demo. But there is more to a pitch than just a playable demo, it includes various documents, screenshots, artworks and most importantly a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes everything in a nice and accessible way and which may be the most important thing of all. We are going to discuss the video next time, today, I am going to submit for your reading pleasure an essay on working the PowerPoint. It's gonna be exciting!

If you want to be successful, you have to know how to sell yourself. You know the drill: Elevator pitch, describe your project in one sentence, what are the most important features of your game… If you want your game to see the light of day eventually, you have to have all the answers at the ready. For some games, based on one or two central ideas, this can be done more-or-less easily, but it's a daunting task for an RPG where the combination of everything that goes in is more important than any single part. Read more...

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LOOKING BACK

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 4:30 pm UTC Jun 24, 2013

Real screenshot from our game

Long time no see! We've been silent for five long months, and you're sure to wonder why. What was going on here? Why this long pause? To put it simply: we've been quite busy. We were finalizing the game prototype for a Publisher pitch that our future basically hinged on, so we were focusing on that and blogs unfortunately had to be sidelined. Besides, we didn't want to publish too much information at that important moment as it's certainly better when your potential partner learns the salient facts from you directly and doesn't have to hunt for them on social media. Now we finally have some time so I'll try to catch up and write an account of what was going on here.

As you may know, we are a startup financed by a private angel investor. We received funding for development of a prototype to demonstrate to Publishers. If they're interested, (i.e. willing to finance at least some of the development and publish the game), we move from prototype development to full production and you'll get your game. If they're not interested, we don't move anywhere and you'll get nothing and we're out of business. Of course, there are other alternatives, like Kickstarter, but this is not what we're focusing on right now. Read more...

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WE'VE SPRUNG A LEAK!

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 4:21 pm UTC Dec 11, 2012

A screenshot from the leaked video. The image quality is not indicative of our current visual fidelity.

A piece of our "next gen" video from the game has been leaked! This means that anyone who's been waiting for a chance can finally see at least a fragment of what we're doing and judge whether it's worthwhile keeping an eye on us or not. To pre-empt any rumours and misinterpretations of this tiny bit of the environment on show, taken out of the context of an hour-long presentation at a game industry conference, it's best to clarify just what's going on here and how our game is looking, and to recapitulate on the development so far, which I wanted to do anyway. So here we go.

Last weekend there was a small gaming conference for developers and students in Prague, Czech Republic, where we have our HQ. Alongside colleagues from 2K Czech, Disney, CD Projekt RED, Cauldron and others, we were also amongst the speakers and we had a whole five presentations on the agenda. The Czech game scene is small and development needs support, so we took it from the ground up and described the work on all aspects of a modern game from a purely practical perspective. I gave a talk on game design and tried to describe as accurately as possible how it proceeds. So as not to just blandly theorize, I showed our design documents. Viktor Bocan followed up with a description of how the game design is brought to life by means of the script and Roman Zawada, our main technical graphic designer, demonstrated how the stuff that has been designed is fleshed out in the form of 3D graphics, which he illustrated using the very piece of terrain that was leaked in the video. Michal Hapala, one of our programmers, then described the work of the programmers with a

licensed engine and showed everything we were customizing for our game (and there's lots), while Martin Klíma described how we function on an organizational level. Read more...

34 Comments

COLOGNE REVISITED

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 12:17 pm UTC Oct 25, 2012

The author, beset by a gang of teenage zombies. Gamescom is not for the faint of heart.

Things have been pretty hectic around here the last couple of months. Warhorse is up and running and the hour is fast approaching of planned completion of a very important milestone – the 'Vertical Slice' which we've been working hard on 24/7. As the name implies, a Vertical Slice is a cross-section of the game and should be a very polished demonstration of all the game's basic mechanisms, its graphic look and its treatment of the important elements. For us, this means generating quite a chunk of art (in an Open World game doing one level is not exactly an option), scripting into it a representative quest, which will contain all the important game mechanisms, such as complete control of the character, the dialog, the combat system, AI controlled NPCs, and throwing in an animation sequence or two, voiceovers and user interface. As far as possible, the whole package should look as good as the finished game. In the case of a shooter, we'd simply do one level and exploit lots of mechanisms straight from CryEngine; with an RPG it's a bit more complicated than that. For example, we had to program a very complex dressing system, which you won't find in any 3rd party engine. But such is life. Read more...

5 Comments

CRUNCH AS A PENANCE

Filed in Developers' diary by Martin @ 8:46 am UTC Aug 30, 2012

The most depressing thing about the recent kerfuffle about Zynga's disgruntled workers were not the comments of Niko Vuori, Zynga General Manager, who assured the sheep in his flock that "NO ONE IS FORCING ANYONE TO WORK HERE AGAINST THEIR WILL [sic]", but the reactions of other developers to the effect of "be a man, dude, game development is not for wimps", followed by the yarns of the saintly days of yore when we all slept under our desks, ate cold pizza and ain't seen the sunshine since I don't know when. Read more...

Niko Vuori, General Manager at Zynga

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OVERKILL DESIGN

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 1:42 pm UTC Aug 7, 2012

I'm an eternal malcontent, hater and troll. When I look at something, I immediately know that, if I'd done it, I would have done it differently and naturally better. I take to few things that I would not tinker with and simply enjoy them for what they are. Many people have a problem with that and I'm not even very surprised by it. Not everyone has a need to consider things in such detail; most are content to enjoy by their reaction and grouches like me pointing out the errors only spoil their enjoyment. Who does it bother that half-naked barbarian women are running around in three feet of snow in their favorite RPG? Maybe only miserable female cosplayers who decide to have their picture taken for real in a fur bikini in a snowdrift and discover that at -20 degrees it's good to be wearing more than a thong, tassels over your nipples and a helmet and that their sword has frozen to their hand.

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A LESSON IN CARTOGRAPHY IN POTATO LAND

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 12:55 pm UTC Jun 21, 2012

Cryengine? Unreal? Reality, and it is going to stay out of reach for some time in this level of detail.

You are Krutor, a wild barbarian from the land of Morkroch. You have travelled a very long journey, across high mountains to the famous imperial city of Lhota, the capitol of the world and largest agglomeration in the known universe, whose fame touches the stars.

The city consists of precisely fifteen buildings (one of which is the imperial palace); the town is inhabited by 30 NPCs, including Emperor Lojza, Archmage Lotrando and all of the members of the guilds of thieves, mages and warriors.

You visit the emperor, who sits alone in the throne hall, and he assigns you with an quest. The land is terrorised by an evil dragon from hell and Lojza is powerless. He has sent an entire imperial army against it, but the monster has killed all five soldiers. Now, he needs a hero like you! You have to find and climb the mystical mountain, Lohen, on which no human has ever set foot, and behead the dragon. Read more...

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CHOOSING YOUR RELIGION

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 8:34 am UTC May 10, 2012

Screenshot from CryEngine 3 from Crytek's promotional materials. (© Crytek)

This time, I won't be bitching about the evil game industry and how things suck for a change, but surprisingly, I will tell you about how great everything is.

INTERMEZZO I

We'll have to go back in time to August 2011, when we were establishing the company. At the time, Warhorse was becoming reality but it wasn't incorporated yet, so we were still just a bunch of unemployed guys.

But we needed to get going in order to be able to start testing the technology that we'll use for our game from day one when our people arrive in the office and we needed to start negotiating with all of the technology providers. So we printed nice looking business cards, created the website to look like an actual company and went to Games Convention in Germany to do some business. Read more...

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CHECK YOUR PEOPLE

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 3:08 pm UTC Mar 19, 2012

HOW TO MAKE CALL OF DUTY KILLER FOR LESS

So, how many people do you need to make a triple-A game? In the last century it was anywhere from one nerd, to "big" teams of 15 to 30 pizza-eating individuals in a garage. I remember my reaction, when I saw Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge for Atari ST, back in the days when games were made by two people – a programmer and the guy who did everything else – while Daley was done by a team of five and the graphics were completely digitized. My first thing thought was: "Oh boy, nobody needs artists anymore, the good old days are gone..."

Screenshot from Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge, a high-budget, AAA, blockbuster hit from 1988

Luckily, I was very wrong. At the time.

A few years later, during high school, I worked on an Eye of the Beholder like game. It was just me and two coders. Later we worked on an Elder Scrolls Arena clone. The programmer was 14 years old, and did awesome work on the engine side. Neither game was ever finished, we were just naive students with zero funding, working on them in our spare time, but even the big games were developed by just a few people in those days. Just look at the credits – Doom was developed by ten people, the first Elder Scrolls or Duke Nukem 3D by 15 developers and those were the biggest games. Read more...

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LET THE STRUGGLE BEGIN!

Filed in Developers' diary by Dan @ 12:04 pm UTC Jan 20, 2012

A lot of people send me emails that go something like this: *"Dear Mr. Vávra, I have a great idea for a brilliant game that no one has created yet. Could you please give me some advice as to how I could get it made?"* I'm never really sure how to answer them as I was asking myself the same question for years. And these were not the years before I started making games; this was when I was actually making them. How the hell can I create the game I want to create?

The author giving a lecture about game development; a topic he is sometimes not so sure about himself. Photo: Jaroslav Wagner

Two years ago, I decided I have "found" the answer. I have to do it myself. After ten years in the games industry and a couple of million games sold, I should know how to do it. So I packed my stuff, left a well-paid job at one of the top five publishers, with a view to starting my own company and doing things my way. Yes, I am that naive idiot! Read more...

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