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THE WOMEN IN GAMES AWARDS ARE BACK Go to www.womeningamesawards.com to nominate 03 The Editor

A bit early for a rant?

04 Critical Path

The key dates this month

08 IRL

We can see each other again! Sorta...

12 Ins and Outs

The latests comings and goings

13 Rising Star

Creative Assembly's Annie Heijna

14 Levelling Up

Piepacker's Alexandre Do-o Almeida

15 Recruiter Hotseat

Rocksteady in the hotseat











18 Cloud Imperium Games

Manchester signs Star Citizen

24 Cinecittà Game Hub

Building the Italian games industry

28 TikTok

Top tips for the social media sensation

32 EA

Positive Play in games

36 mod.io

Modding support

40 Access All Areas

Our new focus on accessibility

42 The Art Of...

Carrier Command 2

46 When We Made...

Murder By Numbers

50 The Final Boss

Media Foundry's Mike Gamble

"The most popular female videogame character in the world right now, apparently, is Bayonetta. That's the deeply cool, self-assured, ass-kicking Bayonetta that should by rights appear at the top of any game character list"



TheEditor

Search me! Second issue in and I'm already having a rant

In the run-up to Christmas there wasn't a day that went by when I didn't receive an email citing the latest report into what the most popular trends were in tech and games. Each press release, almost without exception, mentioned that the attached study was based on search data. In other words – to my mind, at least – they were trash.

Don't get me wrong. I don't have a problem with search data. It can of course be very useful to know what terms people are using to find stuff, perhaps so you can cram a few more of them into your product page. My problem is in appropriating search data to highlight barely related trends or claim some sort of spurious fact.

For example, I received notice of a study one cold, winter morning (apparently commissioned by a certain nationwide electrical goods retailer), that suggested that VR headsets were the most popular gaming accessory of 2021. This was based on the term "VR headsets" coming top in more searches compared to the likes of "gaming keyboard" and "gaming chair". This intrigued me, so I had a quick look at ahrefs, as you do, and lo and behold, the numbers checked out, but only if you bundled up various related terms and included global search data from across the entire span of recorded search history. "VR headset" is more sought out than that "gaming headset" right now, sure, but only just. Go back to December 2016, however, and the search volume for "VR headset" was three times higher, while for "gaming headset" it was 50 per cent less.

Received on a less cold but equally wintery morning was a study that listed the most popular female characters in games, based on, you guessed it, search data. The most popular female videogame character in the world right now, apparently, is *Bayonetta*. That's the deeply cool, self-assured, ass-kicking *Bayonetta* that should by rights appear at the top of any game character list, but also the character who's not appeared in a game since 2012 on the Wii U (unless you count *Smash Bros*, anyway) and who also shares her name with a much anticipated sequel that's coming out next year. The top *Bayonetta*-related search term that isn't simply "*Bayonetta*" is "*Bayonetta* 3" (due 2022). Next comes "*Bayonetta* 2" (2012, Wii U). As you might forlornly expect, the most popular search terms relating to *Bayonetta*'s character are less than savoury.

Internet search data is no measure of popularity, except for what is being sought for on the internet, and the broader the terms, the geography and the time frame, the more useless the data is at facilitating conclusions for anything other than vapid search-based studies.

If you're a retailer who sells gaming accessories and you want to know what the most popular gaming accessories of the year are, you're clearly doing something wrong if you're having to canvas the sum of all global brain farts since digital records began. And if you want to know who the most popular female video games characters are, unless you ask people directly and unambiguously, the eponymous ones will top the list without fail, especially those with a game to promote.

Richie Shoemaker richie.shoemaker@biz-media.co.uk

Critical Path

Here are the key upcoming events and releases to mark in your calendar...

Weird West

This dark fantasy reimagining of the Wild West comes from developer WolfEye Studios and publisher Devolver Digital. In *Weird West*, lawmen and gunslingers share the frontier with fantastical creatures, each playing with their own rules and their own peculiar motives. Players can form a posse or venture forth alone into the otherworldly confines of the Weird West and make each legend their own.



Rainbow Six Extraction

The latest title from Ubisoft, a spin-off of 2015's *Rainbow Six Siege*, is a three-player tactical cooperative title in which players must infiltrate an alien-infested location to complete their mission: collecting samples, gathering materials and intel. The game was first shown at E3 2019, but was delayed out of its initial 2020 release window.



JANUARY 11th

12th

20th

Monster Hunter Rise

Monster Hunter Rise is making its way to PC, after hitting Switch in March last year. The sixth mainline entry to the Monster Hunter franchise was warmly welcomed at launch, introducing new features and mechanics, including a new animal companion called a Palamute that can be used to ride across the map or into battle, and the use of Wirebugs to traverse the world and mount and ride certain monsters.



Pokémon Legends: Arceus

As if November 2021's release of Pokémon Brilliant Diamond and Shining Pearl weren't enough, this historical take on the franchise is hitting the Switch and redefining my life this month. Legends: Arceus takes place in a long-gone era in the Sinnoh area, tasking the player with completing the region's first Pokédex.





Dying Light 2 Stay Human

Developed and published by Techland, this is the sequel to 2015's Dying Light, coming to PC, Switch as well as Xbox and PlayStation consoles. The survival horror title is set 20 years after the original, starring new protagonist Aiden Caldwell. The player will have to make a series of choices during the game, choices that can have far-reaching consequences.



28th

1st

4th



Life is Strange Remastered Collection

This collection of titles combines remastered versions of DONTNOD's Life is Strange and Deck Nine's Life is Strange: Before the Storm. Published by Square Enix, the games detail life in Arcadia Bay, including the mysterious disappearance of Rachel Amber. The remasters include enhanced visuals, improved character animation, updated and refined gameplay puzzles, and engine and lighting upgrades.



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Printed by Buxton Press Ltd

Biz Media Ltd, 44 Maiden Lane, London, WC2E 7LN

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We're Playing...



Sadly I haven't progressed any further in Far Cry 6, but I did treat myself to some prescription VR lenses so I can play the new Lady Gaga DLC in Beat Saber without my eyes freaking out. I also picked up Smash Drums, another VR rhythm game, but it'll have to wait until I've nailed expert-level Rain on Me, naturally.

Richie Shoemaker, Editor I'm struggling to remember life before Halo Infinite. Who was I, before my every waking moment was dedicated to working my way up the Battle Pass? Before I screamed at the screen for people to play the objective, before I fell in love with Tactical Slayer mode? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I never want to go back.

Chris Wallace, Staff Writer





A certain Warzone fanatic may have left MCV/DEVELOP for pastures new, but at least one member of the team is staying true to the Warzone cause. I've also been working my way through Rider's Republic, as well as Tails of Iron – check back on the October issue to read more about that!

Alex Boucher, Senior Business Development Manager

Paws the game 💥

The best furry friends the industry has to offer. Send yours to chris.wallace@biz-media.co.uk



Pet: Zoey Owner: George Corner Owner's job: Trade Event Account Manager, GamesIndustry.Biz

Zoey likes taking part in Teams meetings, zooming around while important pitch meetings are taking place.



Pet: Reginald Owner: Stijn Vervaet Owner's job: Senior Producer, Bossa Games

This distinguished gentleman is Reginald, who is very territorial and was stumped when a secret Santa Millenium Falcon landed in his backyard!



Pet: Pepper Owner: Fern Thallon Owner's job: Marketing Curator, Numskull Games.

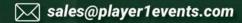
Pepper likes to pester her humans for Dreamies and sleep with her front legs out in front of her. Pepper is scared of leaves and loves watching nature shows.



PC - PS5 - XBOX SERIES X -NINTENDO SWITCH VR - MONITORS - SCREENS- PERIPHERALS

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Thanks to Andrew Batu, Lauran Carter, Jason Lord, Stuart O'Brien, Jamie Sefton and Dominic Shaw

GUILDFORD GAMES AWARDS

December 2nd

Launching the Guildford Games Festival (Dec. 3rd) was its awards ceremony, which saw more than 80 attendees enjoying specially created cocktails and mocktails. Professor Elemental kicked off the evening off with his very own, terribly British brand of hip hop, before he was joined by Liquid Crimson's head of comms and host of the Festival – Lauran Carter. Worthy winners included Holly O'Neill of Stellar Entertainment, Ben Huskins of Two Point Studios, and Amrit Bajwa, Selen Ceri and Poppy Tilbury (and more besides) of Supermassive Games.













'LEMMINGS: CAN YOU DIG IT?' WORLD PREMIER

December 2nd

The Dundee Contemporary Arts Cinema played host to the world premier of the documentary Lemmings: Can You Dig It? On hand afterwards to discuss the creation and legacy of the DMA Design classic were ex-DMA legends Gary Penn, Gary Timmons and Russell Kay, with Abertay University's Charly Harbord chairing the AMA session. The documentary will be available from February 14th, 2022 - which also happens to be the 30th anniversary of Lemmings' original release. That's Gary Timmons pointing out some local landmarks, such as the world famous Lemmings statue and what was DMA's old office.



PRMAGEDDON

December 2nd

A staple of the London pre-Christmas calendar, PRMageddon was back in 2021 after an enforced hiatus. An evening of drinks, festive nibbles and catching up with industry friends took place at Bar Elba in Waterloo, which saw around 50 gaming and esports press and PRs attend, including our very own Chris Wallace (10 points if you can spot him).



GAMES REPUBLIC BUSINESS EVENT

November 18th

Yorkshire and Northern games business network Game Republic held its first in-person event in Leeds for 18 months at the Belgrave Music Hall in Leeds. The well-attended event featured presentations by the likes of Simon Byron from Yogscast Games, Laura Harper from Irwin Mitchell, and Michelle Cooper from the Department for International Trade. Afterwards companies including Radical Forge, Red Kite Games, Team17, PitStop Productions, Escape Technology, Fourth Floor Ltd, Curve Games, Barclays and more networked while enjoying drinks and scoffing pizza!











#RAISETHEGAME FESTIVAL OF FOOD

October 27th

Partners and supporters of Ukie's #RaiseTheGame pledge were invited to an evening of fine food from around the world, enjoyed alongside fine company from those in and around Develop:Brighton. Attendees were able to network, mingle and connect at an event made to be as inclusive as possible - everyone was welcomed!















#RAISETHEGAME & WOMEN MAKING GAMES KNOWLEDGE **DROP MEET-UP**

October 28th

Open to all that are interested in Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in games, this relaxed and family friendly event was held at Brighton's Harbour Kitchen & Bar during Develop:Brighton. It was a great opportunity to meet and chat with like-minded people that featured a brief presentation from the Women Making Games and #RaiseTheGame teams, plus plenty of opportunities to eat, drink and mingle, of course.











Ins and Outs: Industry hires and moves











LUCY JONES (2) has joined the YRS TRULY team (see page 28 for more from them!) as their creator campaign manager, from her previous position at Game If You Are, where she was senior marketing manager.

TechRadar.

Merge Games has hired **CALLUM AYERS (3)** as their new product manager. Ayers joins from PQube, where he has worked for the past ten months

ALEXANDER HAINSWORTH (4) joins as associate product manager. Prior to joining the team at Merge Games, Hainsworth was working at Digital Tales where he was junior marketing manager.



who joins the team as their new community manager. Aindow joins Merge from ReedPop, where he worked for three years, most recently as celebrity talent manager for MCM Comic Con.

Still at Merge Games, **ALEX HARKIN (6)** joins as production coordinator.

Prior to joining the Merge team, Harkin was working at Traveller's Tales, where he spent the past four years, most recently as junior project coordinator.

Finally, Merge Games has promoted **ADE LAWTON** (7) to head of publishing, as part of a year of rapid change for the company, which was acquired by the Swedish group, Zordix, in May this year.

"The promotion is well-deserved," said operations director and co-founder Joanne Keighran. "Ade is steeped in what makes a great indie game, and also a kind, effective manager who can balance pipeline management with teamwork and positive career development."







BAFTA Chief Executive **AMANDA BERRY OBE**

(8) has announced that she intends to step down from her role in the autumn of 2023 – after 25 years at the arts charity. "As we approach BAFTA's 75th anniversary next year I have reflected on what I, Kevin and the truly brilliant team at BAFTA have achieved, and it feels like the right time to plan to pass on the mask," said Berry.

Also leaving BAFTA is chief operating officer **KEVIN PRICE (9)**, who will leave in September 2022, after 20 years working alongside Berry at the charity. "We shall look back at the 2000s, 2010s and the early 2020s as the 'Berry years' and I feel privileged to have been part of that journey," said Price.

There's a new face at BAFTA, with **LUKE HEBBLETHWAITE (10)**joining as head of games. The former Ukie insight and innovation manager joins BAFTA at a pivotal moment as it aims to consolidate its position as the foremost global cultural organisation in games.







Developer Keen Games, the studio behind the award-winning Portal Knights, has announced the hire of new creative product manager DAVID WELCH (11) as the company looks to take its first steps into the world of self-publishing. Welch arrives at Keen Games with a wealth of experience after a twelve-year stint with 505 Games

London based mobile game development studio Hutch has announced the addition of three new senior hires. First up is **CHARMAINE ST JOHN** (12), who joins as head of people. St John kicked off her diverse, and 20-year long, career in HR at M&C Saatchi, and has since worked across a wide variety of companies and agencies, such as PHD and Fuse.

Next up is **DAMIAN HOSEN (13)**, who joins as game director. With an extensive portfolio of game companies under his belt, including Sony, NaturalMotion and Sumo Digital, Hosen brings more than 25 years of expertise to Hutch.









Finally at Hutch, **APRIL HUANG** (14) joins the team as a licensing manager. Huang started her career in games at Codemasters. Over a ten-year period, she worked on all major titles in Codemasters and advanced from an initial research role, to a senior licensing executive role overseeing all *F1* titles.

It wouldn't be Ins and Outs without a league of hires over at Splash Damage, and here's just a sample of the new faces. **DIRK LALLEMAN** (15) joins Splash as associate lighting artist. Before starting at Splash, Lalleman was studying at the Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Another fresh face at Splash Damage is BRITNEY MARTIN-SMITH (16). Martin-Smith started off as a game design student, and is now moving up into games production

Finally at Splash, **JADE GUNNER (17)** joins as assistant audio designer, having previously interned at Criterion Games.

Got an appointment you'd like to share with the industry? Email Chris Wallace at chris.wallace@biz-media.co.uk

RECRUITMENT Rising Star

Every month, we pick the brain of an up-and-coming talent

Annie Heijna, associate animator at Creative Assembly, talks about finding a love for animation in unusual places, and the importance of a supportive team

How did you break into games?

I studied Biomechanical Engineering at university. I did my dissertation on motion capture and gesture recognition using the Kinect SDK to allow children with Cerebral Palsy to play games to make mobility training more engaging. This was the first taste I got at game development, albeit in a medical context. It brought on the realisation that I wanted to do something in game development, but something more artistically oriented. After I graduated, I went to Vancouver to learn animation - and knew after my first lesson that I wanted to be an animator, to create content that I myself loved. It was an intense year of learning animation from scratch - but it paid off and I landed my first job as a trainee at Creative Assembly!

What has been your proudest achievement so far?

Honestly, becoming a part of the animation team here in Creative Assembly.

"Throwing ideas at the wall and seeing what sticks is great fun, especially when you've got a hella talented and supportive team surrounding you."

What has been your biggest challenge to date?

Learning about implementation and requirements of animation in a game engine that abide by the gameplay rules. It can get very complex and it's a steep learning curve. It's an ongoing challenge - but I really enjoy it and it is very rewarding.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Exploring ideas and finding creative solutions to the briefs

and restrictions we need to work within. Throwing ideas at the wall and seeing what sticks is great fun, especially when you've got a hella talented and supportive team surrounding you.

What's your biggest ambition in games?

In all honesty - I'm still figuring that out! You don't know what you don't know. I've experienced so many facets of animation that sit within game development. One of my biggest ambitions right now is to have a AAA title shipped, seeing people enjoy all of the work going into creating our multiplayer sci-fi shooter.



What advice would you give to an aspiring game animator?

Knowing your craft isn't the whole equation. There's no doubt that an animator can animate - but what is especially valuable is how you problem solve and work in a team. That's where the differences lie between an okay animator and a great one. Knowing the departments that work alongside your own and the basic laws of physics helps with analysing and making creative decisions on a higher level. As Picasso is quoted to have said 'Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.' It's okay to not know something, but there's a difference between not knowing something out of ignorance versus it being something you couldn't have known.

If there's a rising star at your company, contact Chris Wallace at chris.wallace@biz-media.co.uk

Levelling UP

Cherry picked advice to help you reach the next level in your career

Alexandre Do-o Almeida, product manager at Piepacker, talks about his changeable role, the need to be flexible and the need for a positive team dynamic



What is your job role and how would you describe your typical day at work?

I'm fortunate because I find my role at Piepacker super interesting. I'm a product manager which means I handle the roadmap and the life cycle of all the platform's features, from conception to launch – I also deal with the unexpected issues that might arise up to the day we officially launch.

As a part of the co-founding team; I was there at the very beginning of the adventure meaning I was able to play different roles within the company throughout the journey. Previously, I was a full-stack developer and also lead of the QA team. These different positions have brought me a deep understanding of Piepacker's code as a whole, and enabled me to have my hand in various aspects of the platform, sometimes developing small features

from time to time. Last month, for example, I developed the leaderboard rush.

My tasks have me working with every single team in the company, and because of this my job can change quite often. I implement new games on the platform (from the engineering side but also in the design), I conceive new features, like our future integration to Twitch or Discord, I am at the heart of the longterm strategy and vision of development and manage prioritisation, I study user feedback, I organise the work plan with engineers, and discuss with them the ways we could improve our internal process. Just to name a few of my tasks! We have lots of flexibility at Piepacker, I spend a lot of time in meetings with different teams, and I can adapt my schedule for solo tasks as I want. That's one of the advantages of working from home!

What qualifications and/or experience do you need to land this job?

I believe that the first skill you need is flexibility: you have to enjoy working on very different subjects, learn to adapt to a changing work scope, you should put yourself in a specific mindset and actively look for changes rather than resist them.

This is invaluable to anyone who works in a startup. As a product manager, it's important to be comfortable with discussing issues, debating, data analysis, reflecting upon your practises, and reevaluating your approach.

You really need to have strong team working skills and take pleasure in collaborating with people who have different backgrounds and attitudes. The goal is to create team synergy and play on collective intelligence. All in all, any experience in management, project

management, or leadership is very useful but having worked in engineering, design, or even marketing is almost always a plus to build a multidisciplinary product team.

If you were interviewing someone for your team, what would you look for?

Corporate culture is paramount to guarantee sound cooperation. Within the product team, I want to maintain a positive team dynamic. At Piepacker, we prefer passionate, reliable, benevolent, and open-minded people. We look for a few important soft skills such as diplomacy, the ability to carry debate, but also passion, interest, and proactivity.

I think that a deep understanding of the job is key to being able to showcase how previous experiences might answer the needs of a company at a given time. It's a general truth but, in my experience, diverse experiences can be highly beneficial to an end product if they are put forward in a smart way.

What opportunities are there for career progression?

As for many occupations, career opportunities go towards management or specialisation. A product manager can go on to become VP of product management, Product Director, or chief product officer. Then, the tasks will veer towards people management and will also include the study of a global strategy for the product. Another possible evolution is towards a specific field, such as UX which will require a closer work relationship with designers, or such as Analytics in cooperation with product analysts. There are lots of opportunities out there, it just depends on the individual, their preferred sector and the company itself.

Want to talk about your career and inspire people to follow the same path? Contact Chris Wallace at chris.wallace@biz-media.co.uk

Recruiter Hotseat

Rocksteady is hiring! Bex Holland, lead recruiter at WB Games, gives us the inside story on the Suicide Squad studio

What differentiates your studio from other developers?

I think that Rocksteady goes beyond just being a game developer. Although making games is what the company's known for (and is pretty great at!) I think there's a true care for each individual here; for their happiness, wellbeing and also in wanting to see people advance their careers at Rocksteady, which the outside world doesn't always get to see. So although they're most known for being the creator of the Arkham series, Rocksteady is also the home to 250 staff members and the importance of each individual is not taken for granted here.

How many staff are you currently looking to take on?

As we're gearing up to release Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League later this year we've opened up lots of brand-new positions to help finish this super exciting title off! We currently have around 50 open positions across all our disciplines so if you're a senior engineer looking for your next move, or a graduate artist looking for your first break into the industry we've almost definitely got a role open for you.

What perks are available to working at your studio?

We're very fortunate to have lots of fantastic perks and benefits that come with working at Rocksteady, including private healthcare, dental care, lots of annual leave (about 40 days once you add it all up inc. Bank holidays), flexible working hours, and remote working options. We're also very fortunate to be part of the Warner Bros. Family which

means we get a tonne of extra benefits from being part of this group including private pre-screenings of WarnerMedia films, an employee only screening app (think Netflix but for all Warner films/shows) and, my personal favourite, access to the entire back catalogue of DC Comics!

What should aspiring devs do with their CV to get an interview?

2021 was a really exciting year for us as we opened up a tonne of junior positions, so we've actually been talking about this a lot over the last 12 months. The single best piece of advice I can give to graduates starting their job search is to tailor your CV, portfolio, cover letter to the studio you're applying to. It's a bit of extra work but it really goes a long way to helping you stand out from the thousands of applicants we have for our junior roles.

How has the pandemic affected recruitment at your studio?

So, as we all know with folks being stuck at home, we've seen more and more people playing games, which means as an industry we've all been hiring a lot more; we're seeing much more competition for talent which means we have to become more and more forward thinking to our approach to recruitment. The biggest change we've made as a studio has been our approach to remote working; pre-Covid we didn't really ever consider the possibility of having a global team working remotely from different corners of the Earth but fast forward two (ish) years and we've got Rocksteady employees based all over the place!



Bex Holland, lead recruiter WB Games

What is the culture like at your studio?

As Rocksteady employs people from all over the world, the culture is really a combination of everyone's backgrounds and interests. There are numerous social clubs and events, from yoga to football to board games club for everyone to get involved in and if you'd like to start a club that you have an interest in but doesn't yet exist, all staff are welcome to do so! Although the pandemic has hampered some in-person celebrations recently, the studio has still celebrated such events as Black History Month with guest speakers throughout the year, as well as a bauble and wreath-making event to celebrate the holidays!

If you'd like to feature your recruitment team on this page then contact Alex Boucher - alex.boucher@biz-media.co.uk

Debugging D&

Rina Goldenberg Lynch, Founder and CEO of Voice At The Table, talks to Amiqus' Business Manager **Liz Prince** about why diversity matters, while offering some valuable advice to studios...



liz.prince@amiqus.com



WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A STUDIO MANAGER OR OWNER WHO DOESN'T SEE ANY BENEFIT IN D&I?

The business case for Diversity and Inclusion is now overwhelming, so if someone doesn't see it, I interpret it as not wanting to see it. Typically, this happens when things are still going well, and the need to 'break' or change' the

existing culture doesn't appear to make sense.

But those with a vision for the future understand that a business that wants to survive and thrive has got to start the journey towards greater diversity and inclusion now. In fact, if they have not yet started this journey, they might start feeling the squeeze very soon. Particularly when it comes to attracting and retaining top talent, diversity and inclusion play a huge part. Today's and tomorrow's talent want to work for a business that's dynamic, creative, innovative, vibrant and ethical.

And then there's the audience, of course. Any business that wants to grow or diversify its client base has to create games that appeal to a greater pool of customers. And that's difficult to achieve if you don't know what they want. A diverse and tuned-in (i.e. inclusive) workforce will be more empathetic and hence, will be able to better-relate to a more diverse audience – and therefore deliver a more diverse product.

SOME MIGHT SEE D&I AS 'WINDOW DRESSING'. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON COMPANIES WHICH AREN'T ENTIRELY AUTHENTIC ABOUT D&I?

Window dressing is, frankly, a waste of resources. These are ad hoc, often quite expensive, initiatives that don't change the culture and, as a result, fail to make use of the diversity that they might attract.

The whole point of initiatives like inclusion is to allow a business to tap into the diversity of its people, to benefit from their divergent thinking and insights. That is where the benefit of a diverse workforce lies.

If a business is putting on events or sponsoring awards or pledges without addressing inclusion in the heart of the business, it is not benefiting from Diversity.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN EMBARKING ON A D&I JOURNEY, WHAT ARE YOUR 5 TOP TIPS FOR TAKING FIRST STEPS?

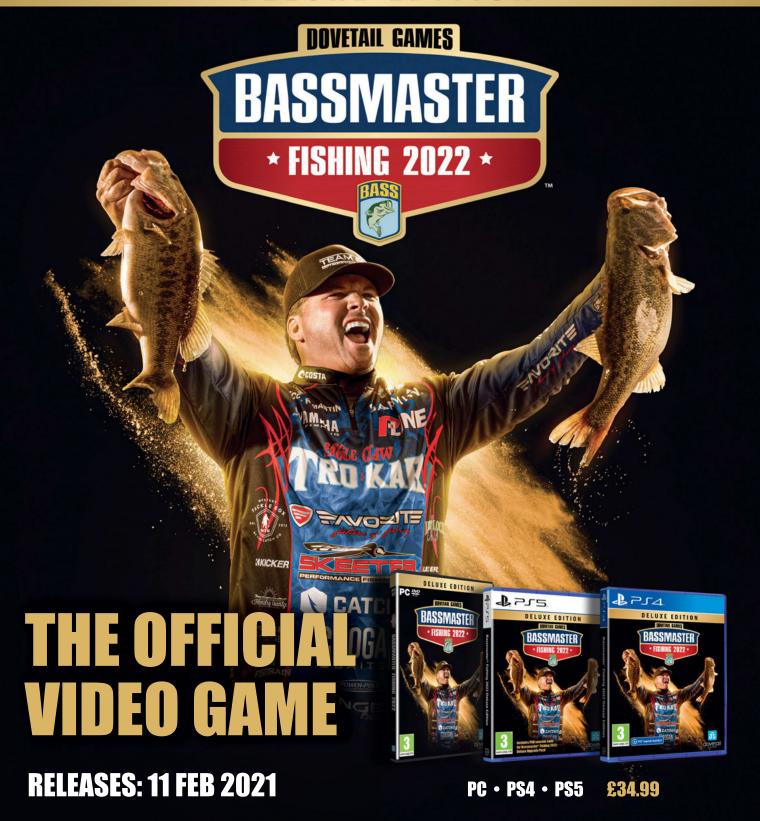
- 1. Raising Awareness now that you've decided, it's important to start building momentum. This can be at the senior level or studio-wide. Talking about the business case for Diversity and Inclusion specific to your business, explaining how it will benefit the business, each team and each individual, and creating a campaign around it are some of the ways one can do this.
- 2. Identify what you want to achieve with your D&I journey what is the biggest benefit you want to gain from it? Is it diverse talent? Greater market share? It is important to ensure that this D&I ambition is aligned with your business mission and vision.
- 3. Gap Analysis Once you know where you want to get to, find out where you are. If you want greater market share, find out whether you have enough people who understand the market you want to reach. If you want to design for a specific group, find out if you have enough people who understand that group.
- 4. Strategy Planning Now that you know where you want to go and where you are now, you can start the planning process. What do you need to do to get to where you want to get?
- Strategy Implementation This is where the fun begins.
 Strategy implementation takes years, is tweaked and adjusted based on how it is being received, updated for new information and research, and extended as needed.

HOW IS THE GAMES INDUSTRY DOING WITH D&I COMPARED TO OTHER SECTORS?

It has a long way to go. That said, it has made great strides towards becoming more inclusive. There are shining stars out there who do incredibly well. I focus on progress rather than where people are on the journey. Stagnation is the enemy of D&I; as long as we're moving towards greater inclusion and diversity, we're doing well. But, as I say, there is much work to be done.

Rina Goldenberg Lynch is the Founder and CEO of Voice At The Table, a leading D&I consultancy company which has worked with SEGA, Creative Assembly, Jagex, Double Eleven and Sports Interactive, as well as many other businesses outside of games.

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n October 10th it will be a decade since the Crowd Imperium Games founder, Chris Roberts, announced Star Citizen at GDC, since which time CIG has continued to amass an ever deepening warchest of crowdfunding credits, currently standing at £318m (\$422m). By most estimations that makes Star Citizen the most successful game to have never been released. Coming from the creator of the most expensively-produced games of the 1990s, that perhaps is no surprise, but what continues to baffle detractors is how without any release date in sight, CIG continues to gather financial support, a significant amount of which comes from the sale of in-game ships that are either unrealised or unfinished.

The appeal for its 3.4 million backers is that *Star* Citizen exists – albeit in alpha form – outside of many of the norms of modern game development. It is the most extreme example of an early access title, which has allowed CIG to stick to its own trajectory, even if a course correction has often been necessary and a final destination seems forever distant.

However, the news last November that CIG's main development studio in Cheshire would be moving to Manchester's Enterprise City, site of the Old Granada Studios, with a view to expanding operations to 1000 staff within five years, seemed to suggest that while we may never know where Star Citizen will end up or what state it will be in when it gets there, we can at least put an ETA to when that that might be: Five years from now, if our maths is correct, is the year 2027.

"I think by that time we'll be operating a very large MMORPG," says Carl Jones, COO of Cloud Imperium Games. "So there'll be a lot more publishing resources, a lot more games masters, more player support. That may require us to open facilities in other locations. At the moment we don't have any major Asia Pacific presence and that's probably something that will have to come in the long run, because if your game explodes over there, then you

really need to start building up teams to service that."

Jones suggests that while the potential to expand the new Manchester studio beyond its planned 1000-person capacity exists, the world is practically CIG's oyster. It might be Europe or the US that CIG heads to next. The point is that CIG will increasingly resemble an online game publisher, "we'll still have huge development resources, because by that time we'll be developing the sequel and sequels for Squadron 42."

Squadron 42 (bottom) shares the same universe as Star Citizen (top), but will be a cinematic single-player





"Hopefully we can progress Squadron 42 through to completion faster. We want to get that game finished, but it will be finished when it's ready."



Woah there! Let's wind that back a bit. Sequels for *Squadron 42*? as in, more than one?

Squadron 42 is the cinematic sidekick to Star Citizen, a single-player space adventure more in the vein of the old Wing Commander games that Chris Roberts came to prominence with. Starring the motion-captured likenesses of Mark Hamill, Gillian Anderson and Gary Oldman, the game was announced in the wake of Star Citizen's crowdfunding success for an initial 2014 release. Not only has it not been released, it's been put back so many times that CIG have understandably fallen on the "done when it's done" mantra. However, with Chris Roberts in the process of re-establishing himself in the UK after many years in LA, perhaps we can pin an ETA on that game as well, seeing as he's looking to hang around the north west for up to two years.

"I guess we'll see how long he needs to be over. But yeah, it could be one or two years more" says Jones. "He's spending more time over here with the *Squadron 42* team and with our other developers, but it'll be this year when he moves over for longer periods of time. Hopefully that means we can progress *Squadron 42* through to completion faster. We want to get that game finished, but it will be finished when it's ready."

TACTICAL OPERATIONS

Jones has said in the past that his job is to manage all the things that Chris Roberts doesn't want to, which means the long-standing COO is not the go-to guy for development updates. His priority is to get the office moving again, as well as moving office. This might have been easier seven years ago when CIG numbered barely more than a 100 staff, but in the time since the company has expanded massively. Right now there are studios and offices not only in the UK and US (Austin and LA), but also in Germany. There are more than 400 based in the UK and 750 worldwide, and space is getting tight.

"During the pandemic we increased to a point beyond which we have capacity for in our offices, which is why we're looking at new offices in most of our locations. Obviously CIG isn't just developing *Star Citizen*, we're getting it out there to the public, we're publishing it ourselves, and there's a huge amount of people needed to deal with all that."

There are a number of reasons why Manchester is the focus for current and future growth. One is that CIG is already well established in the area, close to Manchester Airport. Another is that Califorian-born Chris Roberts grew up

and went to school there. More importantly, it's cheap. Thanks to the UK government's Video Games Tax Relief for Corporation Tax, CIG can plan for a larger expansion than would be viable elsewhere.

"The availability of resources is great in the UK," adds Jones. "It's always been a great place for game developers. Aside from about 20 years ago, with the great brain drain, I think we've come back to massive strength in this country and we're able to hire very, very





experienced people. Obviously it's a little tougher now to bring people over from Europe, but we're planning to expand in Frankfurt as well. We're doubling our size in Frankfurt. So yeah, all studios are growing. The whole company is growing."

CIG will be moving into it's Enterprise City offices in the spring, after what will have been a close to threeyear search for new premises. It's been a long process of elimination, one that started close to the Wilmslow studio and steadily moved outwards and upwards into Greater and

then central Manchester. "Our goal was to get more space - that was the simple target," says Jones. "But then Chris [Roberts] wanted us to have world-class studios for our world-class developers and so we really started looking at what we could get and what we could provide. In Wilmslow there was only one location that had sufficient size, but it just didn't have the facilities that we were looking for." And so the search moved steadily north, and the attractions of Manchester, even in lockdown, became apparent: "Games development is a young trade. Being in a quiet leafy suburb like Wilmslow appeals to a certain group of people. But, if you're young and getting into the industry, you want to be able to go out and have fun and have a lot of amenities on the doorstep."

With performance capture facilities close by and other media infrastructure links dominating the area (including The Factory concert venue), the deal

"We've quite recently brought most of our Squadron 42 team back into our office in Winslow. The capacity is limited so we couldn't bring everybody back, but it's transformed the vibe and the morale of the team."



Star Citizen backers are able to access the game in alpha form.

to occupy Enterprise City was eagerly signed last summer. "It's going to be an extraordinary site," says Jones, looking ahead to the move later this year. "It's just a beautiful location and it's going to have a great vibe and a great buzz for our young staff. Also being in the centre of Manchester means that coming to the office is a little easier for a wider catchment area. So we're hoping that it also helps our recruitment in the longer term; to hit those headcount numbers that we're looking for."

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

There are those that might question the wisdom of relocating to an expensive new facility in the midst of a pandemic. After all, there are many organisations that, over the course of the last two years, have expanded far beyond the point at which they can offer everyone a desk to work at, yet they are willing to take a waitand-see approach and allow staff to work from home in the meantime. "I think the games industry is a little

Local Heroes?

Manchester and the North West has long had a healthy development scene, but how integrated is CIG within the local game dev community and how does it plan to support it going forward?

"Back in the 90s the whole North West was an exciting place for video games," remembers Carl Jones. "Still, Manchester itself doesn't seem to be attracting companies like ourselves all that much. There's a large number of small developers and we do what we can to be involved in that, but we're more involved at the national level and with Manchester in terms of supporting the city. which I think is really important. Manchester now is a model 21st century city. And we're incredibly proud to be part of that, and we're doing what we can to support that. As a result, hopefully, we bring more people, more companies, and more games to the city."



"It's going to be an extraordinary site. It's just a beautiful location and it's going to have a great vibe and a great buzz for our young staff."

In the 'verse

We couldn't let Carl Jones go without asking him about "the metaverse" and to what degree Star Citizen might realise the potential advocates of the concept have for it. Predictably, he sees Star Citizen in terms of its immersiveness, and the game offering players the opportunity to create meaningful social stories. However, he made a point that what really differentiates Star Citizen from other games - whether they're considered metaverses or not – is its fidelity:

"I don't think anyone else has got the ability to build scale and detail like we can. Obviously we've got a lot of work to do to create fun within that, but we've got tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of players, enjoying the game as it is today. Maybe one day we'll have something that people refer to as a metaverse – we'll certainly have the technology to build it - but that's not our business focus. Our focus right now is delivering Star Citizen and Squadron 42 to the community that supported us."

different" says Jones, "and I think, development in the games industry is different from a lot of other activities. It's very creative and it's very collaborative, and while we found it very easy to move everybody into remote work, after this long period of doing it we're starting to realise that it's not the ideal way for games to be created."

Citing innumerable game delays over the last two years, Jones feels that studios have struggled to maintain quality during successive lockdowns and the wider period of the pandemic.

"More and more studios are talking about bringing people back to collaborate. We've quite recently brought most of our Squadron 42 team back into our office in Wilmslow. The capacity is limited so we couldn't bring everybody back, but it's transformed the vibe and the morale of the team."

Jones gives an example where bug-fixing is made much easier by the teams being in close proximity. Where during lockdown a request might linger in a JIRA task for up to two weeks, now it might be dealt with on the spot after calling an on-team engineer over to check it out. "Since we've been in lockdown, everyone is in twice as many Teams meetings as they used to be, so a lot more time has been taken up in meetings, which means finding a slot to talk to a person a week in advance. Whereas when you're in the office it's so much easier to have that discussion. When we brought the



Squadron 42 team back into the office, the progress that they started making was noticeably better."

CIG has moved to support more flexible hours and Jones says that staff will still be able to work from home when appropriate, and, of course, where it is mandated. However, he insists that being in the office is an essential part of CIG's work culture, especially when it comes to establishing and maintaining morale and loyalty between staff. Without the opportunity to bond, Jones believes that staff are more likely to move on. "We've been able to hire very successfully, but that shows you that people are leaving their other jobs. If you're going into an office eight hours a day, working with the same people, you feel loyalty to those people. Regardless of whether the company has your loyalty, your friends have your loyalty. And I think as people are seeing each other less and less, team



bonding is being degraded. That's making it much easier for people to start thinking about changing jobs and moving on, which I think wouldn't happen if they were enjoying their time with their friends. That's what we want to encourage, that camaraderie and team

spirit that I think has been seriously broken by remote work and having to rely on tools like Zoom or Teams."

As well as doing everything he can to attract talent to CIG over the coming months and years, Jones is aware of the need for increased diversity, as well as being mindful of the fact that loyalty within closed ranks can, if left unchecked, be a breeding ground for toxicity. In the wake of the issues that continue to blight Blizzard, does he feel that CIG is an inclusive, open and healthy place to work?



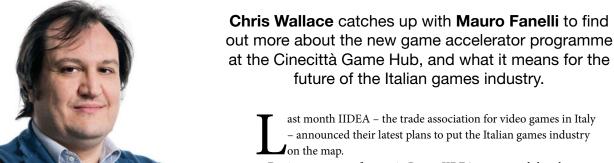
"Well, I certainly hope so," he says. "Before the Activision Blizzard issues were even raised, we'd started our employee resource groups and, we'd started programmes for increasing diversity. Our staff can tell us if there are problems and how we can deal with them. We run frequent town halls, even while we've been in the pandemic. Anyone can ask any question of the senior management, and we listen. We're dedicated to doing what we can to improve it - and that's all the way up to board level, where we've agreed that this is a real focus for the company and we should do what we can to provide a good example."

"It's not something you solve overnight," he adds. "When I started out it was an accepted norm that boys love video games, boys make video games. That's thankfully something that was cast off when games became popular amongst more diverse audiences. The rise of casual and mobile gaming meant, thankfully, that the traditionally white male-dominated developer was becoming a thing of the past. Our audience got more diverse. I really hope CIG is an inclusive and welcoming company, because we're doing everything we can to make sure it is."

An artist's impression of how the CIG office might look in the future. Maybe.







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24 | MCV/DEVELOP January 2022

During a press conference in Rome, IIDEA announced that they

were launching a video game accelerator programme at the Cinecittà Game Hub. The primary goal of this programme is to offer up to 10 startups €60,000 in pre-seed funding (with funds provided by the Lazio Regional Government and the Ministry of Culture) and - perhaps more importantly - hands-on mentoring from industry experts.

The 10 qualifying startups will develop an advanced prototype, which will then be pitched to publishers, gaming platforms and investors - gaining them access to the international market.

The ultimate aim of the accelerator is to prepare startups with the skills required to achieve success in the international market, and, they hope, finally bring attention (and much needed support) to the Italian games industry.

The accelerator began this month, and will continue for the next 12 weeks. We spoke with Mauro Fanelli - co-founder, creative director & CEO of the independent development studio MixedBag and former vice president of IIDEA - about the accelerator, and what he hopes it



might mean for the country's industry as a whole.

"The Italian games industry is a bit behind the curve, compared to the UK," notes Fanelli. "We are probably 10 years behind as an industry. "We have some very big developers, like Ubisoft Milan, that have been around for more than 20-30 years. But the smaller developers started around 5-10 years ago. I actually started my own studio about eight years ago.

"Initiatives like this serve two purposes to me. The first one is that we give money to the startups. It's public money, so it's basically a grant. Nothing will be recouped on that, it's not equity investment, it's basically free money from the government. So they get money, they get mentoring... and that's probably more important than the money in this case. Because the teams that we're incubating are really small, really new in the business, so they absolutely need some direction.

"The other thing I think is very important with this initiative, is that we're sending a message to the Italian gaming industry, because it's the first time that something like this has been done. And what we've seen is that we had this kind of waterfall effect on other initiatives. Since we announced it, two other Italian incubators announced that they'll open this year. So this is a very, very positive effect."

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Perhaps the most encouraging thing to come from the accelerator is the Government support. As we've seen in the UK, Government funds and tax relief can certainly provide a huge boost to the industry. Having passionate and talented game creators is one thing, but they'll struggle to make an impact without sufficient support.

"We've lobbied the government for a long, long time. You know, we always talk with the government, but we started talking with them about the tax credit around five years ago. We are always in touch, and we've been lobbying them for forever to get support for the industry. It took a lot of time for us to actually get recognition."

And I'm sure you've already guessed one of the reasons why the Italian government is starting to invest in the games industry. The period since March 2020 has, of course, been a hugely transformational time in so many ways – with the sudden boom in gaming revenues being one of the few bright spots.

"It's a bad thing to say, but COVID definitely accelerated everything. Digital entertainment got a huge boost from COVID. It definitely put us on the map as an industry, because before video games were

not a priority. It took years, but everything really accelerated in the last 16 months.

"It's definitely a big change. We've seen from talking to the government, it's different than before, and it's definitely a lasting change. This first measure we have right now, it's really important to us, but it's a small amount of money compared to other industries.

"You know, getting four million Euros to support that prototyping side of the industry, it's not a lot of money for now. Also for the tax credits, it's five million euros – just to give you an idea on cinema tax credits in Italy, it's 465 million euros this year, and will be probably almost double that for the next year. So the amount of money is a lot bigger for cinema and TV production. For games, it's very, very small, but it's the beginning of something.

"So what we are doing right now is asking the government to raise the ceiling, asking for more money to support the industry because I think they were surprised. The government was actually not sure that there was enough demand from the industry, but for the first level fund, they actually exhausted the whole allocation in less than two hours. They had to close down everything because they received too many applications for the fund, and it probably will be the same for tax credits when they open it.

"It's positive for us, because if we have a lot of people applying to get support from the government, they get a clear signal that there is a lot of demand from the industry. So what we're doing right now is asking them to actually raise the money that we put into the industry, because it's definitely needed."

CATCHING UP

A large part of what Fanelli is pushing for is the introduction of support schemes that are already in place elsewhere in the world, in order to allow them to compete internationally.

"In the UK, you have a lot of measures. It's the same in France and Germany. Every country has their own kind of measures. Not having them in Italy... The problem is that it's difficult for you, as an industry, to compete internationally if you don't get help. But I think we've had very good feedback from the government. I think they'll keep investing in Italy."

So, assuming this accelerator is a huge success, prompting similar programmes and further growth in the industry. Let's assume that the future of the Italian games industry is as rosy as we'd love it to be. What kind of games would come out of this culture? What makes a game distinctly Italian?

"Yeah, that's an interesting question," says Fanelli.

"I was thinking about this. Because, you know, with Japanese, UK or American games, you can see specific characteristics sometimes. You can really see, 'okay, this is probably a game that's been produced in say, Japan.' You have distinctive traits.

"For now, I think that in Italy, we don't really have distinctive traits – for now. But I see some patterns, actually. There is a lot of creativity in Italy, you know, we grow up, usually in beautiful cities, beautiful countryside, we are exposed in a passive way to a lot of arts and design. You're in this kind of setting, full of arts and creativity everywhere. And at the same time, you have a lot of design – the car industry and the fashion industry is huge.

"We've seen that there is a lot of creativity, and usually it's not really well supported. In games you can be very creative, but you need to actually need investment and the right mindset to really make a product. Turning art into a product, it's bizarre. We are still in the process of pinpointing what an Italian game is, from an art or design point of view.

"At the same time, we can see that we have some game genres that are popular in Italy. We have racing games, the *Moto GP* games, made by Milestone, and we have *Assetto Corsa*, which

is made in Italy (by Kunos Simulazioni). So you know, everything that's racing, we have a lot of good expertise on that. At the same time, we have horror games. I think horror and racing games right now are probably the two most popular genres that are being made in Italy."

TIMES ARE A-CHANGIN'

With the right support, there's certainly potential for growth here. With the right support, the Italian games industry could be a major contender a few years down the road. After all, while it might be behind countries like the UK and elsewhere, the Italian industry had already come a long way over Fanelli's 20-plus-year career – from his earliest days as a journalist right up to today.

Fanelli founded *Alternative-Reality.co*, one of Italy's first gaming websites, in 1997. Following that, he founded the indie development studio MixedBag in 2013, has been the developer representative for At the same time, we can see that we have some game genreIIDEA for the last four years and won outstanding individual contribution to the Italian Games Sector in 2021 at the IVGAs.



"I've been around for over 20 years in different roles," notes Fanelli. "Because when I started, I was actually a journalist. So I have a bit of a double perspective about what the industry was back then.

"Two decades ago, there was not really an industry in Italy. Ubisoft Milan was around making Gameboy games, and later Wii and WiiU games, but it wasn't much of an industry back then. Right now, I'm seeing that we are building an industry, which has been really accelerating in the past four years. I think in 10 years, it will be a lot bigger than now."

It's that long history and experience that makes Fanelli so passionate about helping the industry grow, and why he seems so excited to help guide the 10 chosen studios from the accelerator. Now that games are in the spotlight, and attracting government attention, he seems keen to ensure that the future leaders of the Italian industry are able to learn the lessons of those who came before them.

"I think this is a very, very good opportunity for the industry. You know, it's the first round, so I'm also a bit scared, because it's the first time that I'm actually mentoring someone in an official way. I always tried to mentor smaller teams if someone asked me for help, I always try to be helpful, but this is the first time that I'm doing this kind of work. So I'm a bit scared!

"But at the same time, I really think it's a very, very good opportunity. I really hope that the startups that we will be mentoring will try to get as much as possible from the programme. It is super intensive, actually, because we only have three months. So I really hope that they will try to get as much as possible from the programme.

"Two decades ago, there was not really an industry in Italy. Ubisoft Milan was around making Gameboy games, and later Wii and WiiU games, but it wasn't much of an industry back then. Right now, I'm seeing that we are building an industry, which has been really accelerating in the past four years. I think in 10 years, it will be a lot bigger than now."

"But I know [the studios] are not just there for the money. The grant is quite generous for the industry, it's very big compared to other initiatives like it. It's probably one of the highest grants that there is around. But at the same time, I really want to stress that the mentoring part probably is more valuable – because the video games business is difficult. When I started, I didn't know anything about that, so it was really tough for me. I had to learn a lot of stuff and I made a lot of mistakes back then. So I really hope to help them avoid those same mistakes."





TikTok has the potential to bring huge new audiences to your games

- So why doesn't the industry understand it better? **Chris Wallace**talks to the TikTok experts to find out the best tips for surviving on this
latest frontier

TIKTOK, it turns out, is more than just an app designed to remind millenials that we're no longer the young generation, and that the world has left us behind.

At least that's the impression I've been left with over the last few months, as lockdown boredom drove me into the dark depths of TikTok's terrifying algorithm, never to return. I don't want to come back, there's cat videos and less industry discourse here. It's a better place.

I, like many others, was somewhat cynical about TikTok before I installed it. I'd seen the lip syncing videos, the vlogs, the dancing teenagers... TikTok was not an app for me, and certainly not an app for gaming content. Or so I thought.

Despite its reputation, TikTok is actually remarkably hard to pin down to one particular genre. There are often common themes to videos that make it big on the app, but the topics and types of video vary more often than some might think.

I casually browsed my 'For You' page, the main area where users discover new content on the app, while writing this article. In just a short sample, I stumbled upon a parody sketch of working conditions in the games industry, political discussions, comedy *Skyrim* content and... yes, okay, a dancing video. But since the video in question was a senior gentleman dancing to an anime soundtrack, I'm still calling it a win.



MJ Widomska, YRS TRULY

This misconception of TikTok, that it's an app for tedious dancing children, is one that belies the opportunities available – as well as the demographics of its user base, as MJ Widomska, founder and director at YRS TRULY, explains.

"This may come as a shock for many, but TikTok is no longer a platform for lip syncing teens," says Widomska. "Its user base has expanded greatly in 2020 (quarantine boredom surely helped) and is still very much on the rise. While you may, at least initially, see younger users when you download TikTok, that's just because they're more likely to create content instead of just consuming it. In reality, the demographics of TikTok's user base are not that far off from other platforms you may be more familiar with."

NICHE COMMUNITIES

As discussed, it's not that TikTok doesn't have lip syncing teens – it very much does. But it's a much broader platform than it's often given credit for, with the potential for building communities around increasingly niche interests.

"In reality, I would say the TikTok audience does skew a bit younger, but it's a massive platform with users in all age groups that just keeps growing at the moment," notes Thomas Reisenegger, founder of Future Friends Games. "Contentwise, TikTok is also very varied and really good at creating small content niches, from Microsoft Excel tips and hacks to fan-made musicals, cute indie games and skincare tips."

And those content niches, of varying sizes, are where the real opportunities for TikTok marketing lie. Far from being scared away that your game won't appeal to the lip syncing demographic, we should instead be focusing on how TikTok can create communities around *anything*. I once stumbled upon a TikTok discourse between people who collect human bones. If that can get millions of views, your game certainly can too. And best of all, you don't need an existing audience in order to hit it big on the app.

"TikTok's discoverability is fantastic," says Widomska, "you can genuinely get tens, hundreds, even millions of views with no followers. Whenever you post a video, the vast majority of people seeing it aren't your followers anyway – TikTok tests the water by showing it to a few people to see how they react. If they watch it several times in a row or engage with it in any way, it sends a signal to the algorithm to keep pushing

it to other users. With consistency and a little luck, your TikTok account can become your strongest awareness driver."

"At the moment it's the platform where organic growth without a big pre-existing following is possible for the very first time," adds Reisenegger. "We have had a few instances where a first post got upwards of a million views and resulted in thousands of followers. That's pretty much unthinkable on most social media like Twitter and Facebook today.

"The only platform where similar organic reach is possible right now for games is Reddit, I think, but posting content is way more difficult due to strict rules, mods and the fact you can only post semi-regularly. Opposed to YouTube and Instagram, TikTok also doesn't push users too hard to post on a regular schedule - so you can take longer or shorter posting breaks and still grow your channel."

That growth potential on TikTok is, partially, thanks to the terrifying power of the TikTok algorithm. The reason people are often so surprised at the variety of content on TikTok is thanks to this. In almost no time at all, TikTok's algorithm worked out what content I wanted to see and delivered it straight to me, with an almost

"At the moment it's the platform where organic growth without a big pre-existing following is possible for the very first time."

unsettling accuracy. Unlike on other social media sites, like Reddit, you don't need to meet the users where they are. TikTok will deliver you to them, all being well.

"At the moment the algorithm is extremely good at finding people that would like your content but are not your followers yet," says Reisenegger, "so that's great for especially smaller companies and newcomers on the app.

"On the flip side, I believe the follower count matters a bit less than on other socials – though it can still give you a headstart. Basically, if you have



Thomas Reisenegger, founder of Future Friends Games



Rosa Carbo-Mascarell lead game designer at Loveshark

a post that people like and interact with, TikTok will push it to your followers and to a lot of new viewers. But if your post doesn't get the traction, it's buried pretty quickly - even towards your own followers and only the top followers will get it, if

SHOW SOME PERSONALITY

"[The algorithm is] very useful, but it does indeed have downsides," adds Widomska. "It's great at finding highly relevant audiences and putting your content in front of people who are most likely to engage with it, which also makes it perfect for building communities.

"Though, as most brands and creators will eventually find out, success on TikTok can be fleeting. The algorithm is in a ruthless pursuit of the newest, hottest thing, so if it deems your content less relevant than it used to be, you could lose views as quickly as you gained them. It's not the end of the world though – it's more like moving to a 'phase two' of TikTok success, where your videos will pop up in front of people already familiar with you."

The concern with TikTok is less about what your content is, and more about how you communicate it. TikTok videos are often personality-driven, with the creator front and centre of the experience. While this isn't an absolute rule to the app, it's nonetheless something worth keeping in mind.

"TikTok is a huge platform and there's certainly space for both," says Widsomska. "For indie games, personal stories seem to work really well: starting your videos with something like "I'm making my dream game" brings stronger engagement and more views. TikTok users also seem to be interested in how games are made, so any prototypes, concept art or demos are usually well received. On the other hand, this strategy won't work for more mainstream games: so, stream highlights/gameplay clips/'top 10' lists can still do well on TikTok, as long as they're formatted for 9:16 instead of 16:9. But, a personal touch goes a long way, so you'll find that even these videos start with a quick selfie cam introduction from the creator compiling them."

"I tend to do educational TikToks and those are the ones that tend to do best," says Rosa Carbo-Mascarell, lead game designer at Loveshark. "There is a large audience of people out there who are interested in how games are made but don't

know where to look. So a TikTok from a real game designer showing them how games are made is fascinating to that audience. It also feels personal. This isn't some company carefully calculating how to best market and sell a game. It's a game designer in her home or at her desk, showing the practical and messy behind the scenes."

It's often tempting to assume that high production values will wow your potential audience, but standing out in such a way could be actively detrimental to your campaigns. With that said however, there's certainly a market for more gameplay-oriented videos too.

"Some of my TikToks have been viewed over 400k times and I never have to worry about abusive behaviour."

"I would say, what we traditionally call high production value, is not the most popular content on TikTok," says Reisenegger. "It's about being authentic and making TikToks that look like TikToks. That means understanding how good clips are passed, certain tonal nuances, using the right font within the app etc. It can be a lot of work to make a video look authentic, find the right angle and really make a video pop in the first five seconds (which is super important on TikTok) but the time doesn't go into the traditional "polish" but more into the ideas."

An interesting point, and one worth noting, is the culture of TikTok compared to other social media platforms. I'm certainly not claiming that abuse and harassment don't exist on TikTok - but it is nonetheless a more welcoming space for women than some of the other platforms out there. Which, for an app that values authenticity and direct interaction with the user behind the videos, is certainly attractive.

"On Twitter I'm always worrying that if a tweet ends up doing too well, it'll end up in front of the wrong people and I'll have to go private," says Carbo-Mascarell. "Especially as a visible woman online. I've never had that issue with TikTok. Some of my TikToks have been viewed over 400k times and I never have to worry about abusive behaviour."

MEME COMPLICATIONS

When making a TikTok, you'll doubtless be tempted to play into the app's unique meme culture. But this can be rife with problems, particularly when it comes to audio. It's common practice to play other people's audio over TikToks, a practice that can potentially fall foul of copyright law if you aren't careful. How careful do users need to be when marketing their games?

"That is an extremely tricky question but we are still working on finding an answer for it," says Reisenegger. "We often work with tiny teams that just want to break out of their bubble and currently the worst case is that a sound gets taken down retrospectively, making the post a bit useless in your backlog. As of now, that is a small risk to take but things might change in the future or might be different for bigger games. We also worked on multiple accounts that only used their in-game music which is a totally viable strategy and eliminates the whole music licence risk."

That all assumes you're producing your own TikToks, however. If you're working together with a TikTok influencer, things can get more complicated. Now, dealing with influencers is often a different skill set to dealing with press (who are all handsome and sophisticated, of course). This is potentially even more the case with TikTok – as, although the demographics are broader than stereotypes suggest, TikTok influencers often tend to be younger and less experienced than on other platforms.

"We've been working with TikTok influencers for over two years now, and there's certainly been a massive shift in that time," says Widsomska. "TikTok creators are still often very young and inexperienced, they may struggle with accurately quoting for their work, some of them may be scared to sign a contract. But, in the past year, we found that TikTokers are thankfully getting a bit more savvy.

"Still, the nature of the platform means that you can quite literally find overnight success, so there's a constant influx of new popular creators,

most of them completely new to working with brands. It's vital to ensure you're compensating them for their work fairly, as some creators may quote far below what their content and influence are actually worth. TikTok is certainly worth exploring in your content creator marketing strategy, but be prepared – your experience working with TikTok creators may not be as smooth as working with YouTubers or streamers of comparable size (who all have agents, too)."

"A lot of TikTok influencers right now in the gaming world are former or current YouTubers or streamers and a lot of native TikTokers also seem to branch out onto other platforms, adds Reisenegger. "Overall we treat them quite similar to other influencers I think. In terms of younger users, we do adapt content a bit - use easier to read language and tone, don't reference an in-joke from a 90s TV show, etc.

"We also see a lot of content doing well that gives a look behind the curtain of how games are made. Here we try to really make them easy to digest and not require too much prior game dev knowledge. For example, on Twitter, we would maybe make a post of what is special about a hitbox in a video game that is being made, whereas on TikTok we would probably first explain what a hitbox is in general and how it works in the game."

However you decide to approach TikTok, it's obvious that the enormous potential of the app will continue into 2022. And while many might be behind the game, your gaming rivals are bound to catch up sooner or later.

"TikTok is easy to understand but hard to master, and while I think many brands in the gaming industry are beginning to experiment with it, few have mastered it," says Widomska. "TikTok still seems to be more popular among indies than the bigger players, who are probably all busy right now strategizing how to best approach it in 2022. Its potential still remains largely untapped, but as interest in TikTok is growing, I expect we'll see more brands take the plunge very soon."

"The nature of the platform means that you can quite literally find overnight success, so there's a constant influx of new popular creators."

POSITIVE **PLAY**

How EA is making the games industry a more welcoming place to work

Chris Bruzzo, chief experience officer at EA, tells us about what the publisher is doing to create a more diverse, welcoming industry, and the work it's doing to reduce harassment inside and outside of games.



Chris Bruzzo, chief experience officer at EA

EA has increased its investments in organisations working to advance equality this year. What prompted this increase, and do you think the games industry is doing enough in this area?

Video games can be a powerful tool for change – they open us up to new ways of thinking and can connect us when we are apart. Time spent in virtual worlds and in gaming communities can carry great meaning in our lives. As the creators of these worlds and the guardians of these communities, we have a responsibility to reflect the diversity of those we serve through our games and be a positive driver for change.

At Electronic Arts, we are committed to inclusion and equality and consider these two principles an important part of the wellbeing of our communities. That's why we support organisations in the UK and around the world who share those values.

In the UK specifically, we're really proud to be one of the five founding members of the #RaiseTheGame pledge and this year we are sponsoring the LGBTQ+ Gayming awards for a second time. We also have a long-standing partnership with SpecialEffect, the UK-based non-profit that specialises in helping physically disabled people play video games.

As an industry, there's no denying we have a lot of work to do to live up to the responsibility that our communities trust us with. We've made good progress but it's an ongoing



effort and we'll continue to hold both ourselves and our peers to the high standards our players deserve.

You have also strengthened your inclusive recruiting strategies – What measures have you taken to make EA's workforce more diverse, and why is this so valuable?

Inclusive recruitment strategies are crucial. In the last 18 months the video games community has grown substantially: we serve more people than we ever have before and as we've grown, our audiences have become more diverse. If we want to reflect our players in the worlds we create for them, then we have to have that same diversity reflected in the makeup of our people.

Inclusive recruiting has long been embedded in the way we do business but it continues to be a priority. In this past year, over 300 managers received our global 'Hiring for Results' training, in addition to nearly 1,500 participants. We have inclusive recruitment strategies developed specifically for each business unit and review every job description for requirements that may have unintentional bias in their language. Last year we saw an increase of 11 per cent more diverse applications than the year prior thanks to these efforts.

We also focus on fostering an inclusive culture once people join EA and we're very proud to see those efforts recognised for making an impact. Earlier this year The Human Rights Campaign gave EA a perfect score for its LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and Anita B, a non-profit dedicated to the recruitment and advancement of women in technology, awarded Electronic Arts the Top Companies for Technical Women award in 2020.

The industry is currently grappling with high-profile stories of abuse and misconduct. As such a large company, how do you ensure bad actors are weeded out and workers have their voices heard?

We are deeply committed to having a respectful workplace that allows all of our employees to thrive. We know that diversity strengthens our teams, and believe that our



Electronic Arts

Left: EA has partnered with a number of organisations looking to make the industry a better place, such as Girls Who Code

workforce needs to reflect the full range of identities and experiences we see in our players. We have watched the stories unfold around us and each cycle has prompted us to look ever more closely at the cultures we are creating and the process we have in place to support our people.

We have to create environments where the behaviours that facilitate those situations are not tolerated in any way. At EA we ensure there are clear and secure processes in place that enable our employees to report abuse of any kind. We have procedures that facilitate alternative paths to escalate issues, avoiding the need to route through line managers if needs be.

We have robust staff welfare policies in place, including our 'Raise a Concern' initiative which enables employees to side step the normal reporting structure if they feel the need. In recent years we have created and grown our People Relations team who also bring expertise and impartiality to the investigation of complaints.

Recent events prompted us to speak about this issue at every level of the company. We took steps to clearly articulate our position to every employee in addition to issuing a public statement encouraging anyone to come forward. Talking about these issues makes a big difference and we hope it will help embolden everyone to speak out and ensure there's no hiding place for those offending. We take every allegation seriously at EA, we investigate thoroughly and are deeply committed to ensuring there are safe spaces for employees and those outside our company who interact with our employees, to come forward.

What can you tell us about your work with groups like Girls Who Code, and your virtual intern program?

Put simply, we look for programmes and partnerships that help us make our industry a better place. Making sure we're investing in the next generation of female tech talent has long been one way we do this - for example through our partnership with Girls Who Code.

This year we hosted our seventh summer intern programme, introducing more than 600 girls to coding this year alone. We also signed the organisation's #HireMe pledge to promote meaningful career opportunities to the Girls Who Code alumni network. I'm very proud to say 11 have decided to join us as interns already, with one taking on a full time role as a Software Engineer. Here's to many more joining our ranks in the future!

But I also think it's important that efforts to bring more women into our industry don't stop at skills and recruitment. Employers need to make careers rewarding and meaningful for their employees, no matter who they are. At Electronic Arts we have gender pay equity globally but there are still too many businesses that fall behind.

What advice do you have for developers and publishers seeking to reduce toxicity in their games' communities?

Online communities mirror what we find offline. They can be incredible places of friendship and support but sadly there are bad actors as well. We're being purposeful about standing behind our commitment that play should be fair, safe and fun for everybody and we take action against those who look to disrupt that in our game or adjacent communities. Video game communities should be respectful and welcoming to everyone. As an industry, we have a responsibility to set boundaries and make it clear what is and isn't acceptable.

Last year we launched the Positive Play Charter to make it clear what our expectations are of our community. Defining what we see as 'fair' is only half the job but it allows us to hold players accountable - anyone publishing games should be clear about what they will and will not accept. Holding players to account makes a real-world impact.

Recent data from Apex Legends shows that when players receive feedback about their behaviour, many of them change it. 85 per cent of Apex Legends players who received an email from us after exhibiting behaviour that violated our Positive Play Charter, didn't go on to repeat the behaviour.

This kind of work is extremely important to us and we will continue to progress this to reduce both in-game toxicity and to make all our games more accessible.



MCV/DEV/ELOP VONEN INGAMES AWARDS 2022

4th March Altitude - Skyloft <u>Millbank Tower L</u>ondon



This event is an invitation-only basis.
To register your interest please contact:
alex.boucher@biz-media.co.uk

www.womeningamesawards.com



A positive future for the workplace in 2022 and beyond

As we arrive to face an uncertain new year, one thing that can be relied upon, according to Amiqus' Liz Prince, is a continued interest in remote working.

THE last two years have undoubtedly been tough for everyone. But if we are able to take any positives from the pandemic, one is surely the renewed focus on a good work/ life balance.

Across the board, people have taken a long hard look at what they want from their professional life – when they want to work, how they want to work and where they want to work.

In the games industry, as in many other sectors, we are facing an ongoing skills shortage in development, compounded to some extent by Brexit as well as the resulting increased difficulty in hiring talent from overseas.

SO, WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR INDIVIDUALS SEEKING NEW CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN 2022 – AND THE STUDIOS LOOKING TO HIRE THEM...?

Experienced games professionals who are considering new options in the New Year are in a strong position to ask for the working location and patterns they want, and the companies who will attract them will be the ones who have embraced the opportunities to rethink how they hire, how they work and how they engage with employees.

The games industry adapted well when the work-from-home directives were first introduced. And, at the time of writing, we are once again seeing these measures being put back in place.



It has been a tumultuous time for people in both their personal and professional lives, but what this period has given us is the opportunity to work more flexibly, avoid 'dead' commuting time, and enjoy more time for ourselves and our families.

AND EMPLOYEES DON'T WANT TO GIVE THAT UP NOW.

We conducted a survey late last year of over 400 games industry professionals, which revealed that 82 per cent said that their productivity had increased or remained the same while working remotely. And, in a clear message to potential future employers, of those who stated that they didn't have their

ideal working conditions, 79 per cent said that they are looking or considering a career move to achieve those goals.

For some studios and other companies, full remote working for their staff may present some challenges. But, from our experience and the outcomes of our survey, it's clear that these are challenges that are worth working on to rethink our workplaces and working models from the ground up, to help to retain and attract the best and most diverse team for your studio.

The past two years have been tough for all, and there are still challenges ahead. But there is also an opportunity for us to change workplaces and working conditions for the better, for good. And that is a big positive for us to take away from this.





Back in June my predecessor promised that DEVELOP/JOBS would become a biannual feature in the magazine, one that sought to profile the brightest and best studios in the UK and beyond. I'm happy to deliver on the first half of that pledge for 2022, with 12 studios featured over the course of the following 30 pages

It's been almost two years since COVID-19 was designated a "public health emergency of international concern and in that time we've had to get used to many changes. Perhaps the most impactful has been the imperative to work from home. However, after a summer that saw the majority of the adult UK population double-jabbed, it seemed that we might soon be filing back to our cubicles for good. Then Delta made way for Omicron and the order to work from home rang out once again.

Could this be part of the "new normal" that Take-Two's Strauss Zelnick alluded to in the last issue? A new coronavirus variant every year, one that we have no idea whether it will be more virulent or fatal than the last, forcing us on occasion back into our homes to work? If so, remote working is going to become ever more permanent. That being the case, we have to see it as an opportunity to broaden our horizons, and seek out roles that we'd not have considered in the before-times because they were too distant. That two-hour commute may not become a thing of the past, but that two-hour commute five days a week surely must.

As I write this I have been MCV/DEVELOP's editor for just a few weeks. In that time I've been to the offices of my employer once. This suits me fine. I live in the wilds of Cheshire, while the office is in central London. Had I been expected to travel south every day of the week, I'm not sure I'd have lasted the month. Hell, I probably wouldn't even have been interviewed. But this is the way of the world, at least for now. There are precious few benefits of this pandemic that we should at least make the most of this one. I did by accepting the role that allowed these words to coalesce on this page – and I'm very glad I did. I hope you will be similarly enthused as you peruse the following pages.

Richie Shoemaker, editor of MCV/DEVELOP

NOW HIRING...

04 Codemasters 16 Rocksteady Studios

06 Creative Assembly 18 Splash Damage

08 Criterion 22 Sports Interactive

10 DPS Games 24 Stainless Games

12 Lucid Games 26 Sumo Group

14 nDreams 28 Warp Digital





Location(s): Birmingham City Centre and Southam (Codemasters HQ)

Team size: 120 people in the Birmingham studio plus 35 in the wider Southam HQ who are dedicated to Formula 1

Key projects and hiring areas: Formula 1 is technical, agile, fast-moving and challenging; and so is our team!



Recruitment contact
Carl Morris
Recruiter
carl.morris@ea.com

The Codemasters Formula 1 studio is the awardwinning team behind the official video game series. In its 13th iteration, F1 is one of the highest-scoring sports franchises of all time.

THE Formula 1 team is busy working away on the official BAFTA award-winning F1° series, the majority of the team having relocated to their new home at Alpha Tower in the heart of Birmingham city centre, just a stone's throw from the Mailbox and New Street Station. It's a truly inspiring place to work!

The passionate team is dedicated to bringing players closer to real-world action than ever before. This means a constant energy and motivation permeates the day to day activity with exceptional opportunities to learn new skills and keep challenging what's possible with boundary-pushing ideas. Since the first release with *F1 2010*, each iteration innovates to bring players new and exciting experiences, letting them live their dream of lining up alongside their heroes from the worlds of F1 and F2. According to Metacritic, the *F1* franchise is one of the highest-scoring sports titles and, for the team, it's a true honour to develop the game.

The studio recognises the need for a diverse and inclusive workforce and embraces opportunities to make this happen. The leadership team has created a welcoming culture where its people thrive, share ideas and come together to produce the best results for its players. There has never been a better time to join the F1 team and help shape the future of the official Formula 1 video game.



Matthew Skingle Principal Game Designer, Codemasters



TEAM CAMARADERIE is what enticed me to return home to Codemasters last year. The company is built around a talented breadth of different disciplines, skill sets, and backgrounds. The leadership has allowed us all to grow and build as one, resulting in a team that is welcoming, passionate, and driven to get the best out of the game and one another.

Working with the F1 licence on an annual release is challenging and rewarding. We have been working on the series for over ten years and have always supported one another, and are continuously striving to ensure everyone gets what they need to achieve the tremendous results we have earned with the series.

While there is a passion for F1, and sports in general, we are all gamers at heart and participate in various activities from board games, charity events, and games challenges across all genres. There is something for everyone here.

Anthony SimpsonPrincipal Programmer, Codemasters



I JOINED Codemasters six years ago on an internship as part of my master's degree and I haven't looked back. I've grown a lot during this time expanding my skills as a developer and working with some truly talented people.

Codemasters has allowed me to tailor my career trajectory and enabled me to move from gameplay into systems which has given me the opportunity to work on some cutting-edge technical challenges at the beating heart of the F1 titles.

It has been an exciting time to be involved with F1. The sport has gone from strength to strength over the last few years and we've been delivering excellent annual titles that match the real-world excitement.

Codemasters has a rich history of making iconic video games, particularly racing and it has been an honour to become a part of that legacy.

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at Codemasters

F1 is based on our proprietary engine, which we are constantly improving and building its feature set in order to stay ahead of the competition. With the expansion of the franchise it's an exciting time to join the team, with lots of new opportunities to continue to grow and shape the future of Formula 1 titles. Come help us push the boundaries on new gameplay modes, rendering technology, player focused UX experiences, game designs and much more.

Software Engineer - UI

Formula 1 - Birmingham or Southam studio Deeply embedded into the user experience both on and off-track, for us UI performance is integral to gameplay, so you will be fully involved in shaping player dynamics right at the heart of our game. We have multiple vacancies and will consider all levels of experience.

Gameplay Software Engineer

Formula 1 - Birmingham or Southam studio
This role will give you the chance to bring new
ideas and encompass gameplay features that will
develop and grow within this franchise for years
to come. We have multiple vacancies and will
consider all levels of experience.

Associate Producer

Formula 1 - Birmingham studio
This is an internal role embedded with the
development team, organising and driving the
deliverables of cross discipline teams.

Character & Livery Artists

Formula 1 - Birmingham or Southam studio Bringing the world of F1 to life with all its diverse cast of characters, and pushing forward our customisation options to allow our players to personalise their experience.

Dialogue Designer

Formula 1 - Birmingham or Southam studio We are looking for a Dialogue Designer to join our fantastic Audio and Game Design teams within Formula 1, who can design and produce scripts to a AAA quality standard.

Software Engineer - Online Game Services

Formula 1 - Birmingham studio
We are looking for an Online Gameplay Services
engineer to help bring the vision of the game's
ongoing evolution to life.



"At Codemasters and Electronic Arts we are committed to inclusive recruitment as well as ensuring a welcoming culture in our studio where all our people can thrive. We know that a more diverse workforce will further strengthen our incredible team, reflecting the player communities and sport we serve."

Meg Daintith, Talent Acquisition Manager





Location(s): West Sussex, UK and Sofia,

Bulgaria

Team size: 850

Key projects and hiring areas: New multiplayer Sci-Fi FPS IP, *Total War* franchise



Recruitment contact Emma Smith Head of Talent jobs@creative-assembly.com Creative Assembly is a craft-led studio with a people-first approach, recognised as one of the best places to work in the industry for five consecutive years.

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY (CA) is a 34-year-old studio with a long history of awardwinning games, spanning history, fantasy and sci-fi.

A thriving developer, CA is full of ambition, pushing boundaries within *Total War* and its new multiplayer sci-fi shooter IP which is currently in development.

Taking pride in its approach to authenticity, CA makes deep and detailed experiences that last. For the team, this means having the space, freedom and support to master their craft. CA has a collaborative, supportive, and creative culture.

CA wins awards for both its culture and people-centric approach with extensive initiatives for:

Health and wellbeing: including enhanced holiday allowance, maternity and paternity breaks, flexibility with core hours, no-notice holidays and 'Focus Fridays' which provide time for focusing on training. More flexible ways of working are in development, aimed at giving everyone the balance and space they need.

Diversity and inclusion: with engaged and evolving employee-led Network and Resource Groups.

Global games education: with its award-winning programme the Legacy Project, which supports 1000s of students each year. Everyone at CA can become an Ambassador for the industry, to mentor and guide others who are passionate about making games.



Tatiana Labkovitch Product Director Live Services

I WAS ORIGINALLY attracted to Creative Assembly due to the passion, determination and drive of the Leadership teams in championing focused strategic direction – which is something I feel strongly about.

I've been here almost a year now and feel lucky to be working with a team who actively engages with their ambitions and who consistently achieve the things they set out to do.

With the games industry being so dynamic and innovative, the possibilities really are endless. I love the range of problems that my team have to solve and the interesting challenges we face when looking at essential features for a game to be live, and how we approach those challenges together.

It's important to be able to step outside of your comfort zone, learn from those around you and trust in each other to support you when you need them to – and I'm grateful to have that dynamic at CA.

I enjoy every day here, going to work and being surrounded by remarkably creative people. **Liam Price**Lead Sound Designer
Total War



AS A VETERAN of the audio industry, I've worked in many film post-production studios and had taken a 10-year break from game audio.

I'd always dreamed of returning and looked for a studio that aligned with my values. Creative Assembly ticked those boxes; the work ethic, the people initiatives, and the security the studio clearly has.

In early 2021 I relocated from Australia and since then, I've been impressed by the development managers who actively plan tasks and schedules to avoid overtime and burnout. For the stage of my career I'm at, it is fantastic to see a career path where I can grow and develop my management skills.

I may be biased but the game audio we are releasing soon is the best yet; it comes from a passionate team who enjoy the technical and creative challenge that CA provides. It's a team with a variety of experience, sharing ideas and sound design suggestions to achieve the best outcomes. Our audio team is the best team I have worked with, and I am glad I made the giant leap to come here.

"Creative Assembly ticked those boxes; the work ethic, the people initiatives, and the security the studio clearly has."









Location(s): Guildford
Team size: 150
Key projects and hiring areas:
Need for Speed



Recruitment contact Lewis Brown Lead Recruiter Ibrown@ea.com InsideGamesEA At Criterion we see striving constantly to work in a better, healthier way as fundamental to making AAA games that entertain our players with great experiences, and that are profitable for our company

WE'RE A TALENTED team of people who live and breathe games; from table top to video games. The team is currently working on *Need for Speed* and we have a proud history working on *Battlefield, Star Wars Battlefront* and *Burnout* to name but a few.

You'll find us playing, creating, breathing, and talking games. In fact, gaming is so important to us that we regularly set aside time to play games together either online or in person! Learning from the widest range of experiences makes our own games better.

We believe that healthy, engaged teams make great games, so we place enormous value on collaboration, fresh ideas, and unique perspectives. We'd love to hear yours! Crunch doesn't help make a better game. We don't do it. For the past three years we are very proud to have been recognised by gamesindustry.biz as one of the best places to work in the UK.

We are a team of creative collaborators and we believe that the most effective collaborators communicate face-to-face, but we have also learned in the last year how to be effective working remotely. We are now on a journey of learning how we have the best of both worlds.



Caroline Trujillo Senior Development Director Criterion Studio Need for Speed – Guildford



I JOINED Criterion during the pandemic, remotely. The majority of the studio was working on *Battlefield* when I joined, while I started on *Need for Speed*. It's always challenging to join in these unusual times.

Criterion attracted me with their promise to create a safe environment, where people come first, where talent is nurtured and appreciated, and where improving "the way things are done" is a goal.

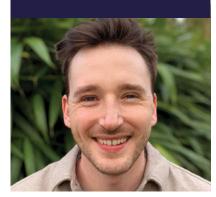
Seven months later, I am not disappointed with Criterion.

I am not naturally an optimist, maybe it's my 28 years in the industry that has created rough-edges in my expectations.

I have previously worked in some challenging environments, some "toxic". So I know what I have here at Criterion, I am happy to be a part of this group of compassionate leaders, managers, and service staff.

Criterion works every day to adjust to the changing needs of development, to meet the challenges brought by Covid, and to be of service to an enormously talented group of game developers.

Chris Thwaites Technical Animator EA Criterion, Guildford



I'M A Technical Animator at EA Criterion (Guildford) and just wrapped up on *Battlefield 2042* and now gearing up to start work on the new *Need For Speed* in 2022.

I'm originally from Cape Town, South Africa and joined EA Criterion in August 2020. As a long-time *Need For Speed* fan, it's been a dream come true really!

I think the thing I've enjoyed most is not being limited in my role. When I started, we were working on tools and tech around our Animation and Cinematics pipelines. On *Battlefield*, I was given the opportunity to work on shaders for characters, vehicles, weapons and water. Now returning to *NFS*, I'll be involved in animation, content pipelines and tools, there's just been so much opportunity to learn and try new things!

As a studio, I think I've been most impressed by Criterion's focus on supporting us during the pandemic. From mental health services, regular calls with our managers, our TA team outings, making games is hard at the best of times and it feels like a lot of effort goes into keeping us supported and feeling like we're part of a community, even though we're all working from home.

I've also loved being involved in our LGBTQ+ ERG and promoting inclusivity at our diverse studio!

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at Criterion

For more than fifteen years we've entertained millions of players around the world with our award-winning games. Our talented people have expressed their passion for world-class game feel, AAA audiovisual quality and technical innovation in the Burnout and Need for Speed series as well as in Battlefield 1, Star Wars X-Wing VR, Starfighter Assault and Arcade for Star Wars Battlefront II and Firestorm for Battlefield V.

With exciting plans for the next Need for Speed title, we have these amazing opportunities for talented developers who can help us build an innovative Need for Speed experience.

Technical Artist

Guildford

We are looking for a Technical Artist to join our creative team working on the Need For Speed franchise to help solve challenges the teams face. You will be working on improving workflows and pipelines, creating new tools and researching new approaches.

Handling Designer

Guildford

As a Handling Designer you will work with the Lead Designer, Physics/Handling Engineers, the world team, the vehicle art team, and the vehicle audio and VFX teams. A Handling Designer takes part in a structured, iterative design process and has a hands-on role in creating the user experience for both a large and varied range of vehicles.

C++ Software Engineer - Gameplay

Guildford

We are looking for talented C++ developers to join our gameplay team. Someone who can contribute to the design process and help turn the output into reality in the fast-paced world of Need For Speed.

VFX Artist

Guildford

We're looking for a VFX Artist who can combine their technical knowledge of cutting-edge VFX with a creative eye for drama and composition. We need your passion to fill the game with spectacular effects while keeping the framerate silky smooth.

C++ Software Engineer - UI

Guild ford

We're looking for an engineer to join our experienced User Interface Team. Our UI/UX team oversees the presentation and framing of the game, building all the menus and in-game feedback systems, and connecting the game's features together into a consistent and exciting experience for our players.











DPS Games



Location(s): Guildford, Sydney

Team size: +100 Key projects and hiring areas:

New AAA F2P IP



Recruitment contact
Liza Mowat
Lead Recruiter
L_mowat@wargaming.net
Find me on LinkedIn!

DPS Games is one to watch. It isn't easy creating a brandnew AAA IP, but with top industry veterans at the helm, this new studio from Wargaming is making waves in Guildford.

DPS GAMES is a fresh new studio from the mighty *World of Tanks* creator Wargaming. However, we've been reliably told that its upcoming unannounced product is trying to do anything but blend in. Celebrating its first anniversary last September, the studio cut cakes in their offices in Guildford as well as Sydney. There's certainly reason to celebrate over at DPS Games. With the project being fully funded, the team have made huge progress over the past year – with production now being well underway.

Currently hiring for over a dozen roles, the studio is expanding. Not only in terms of staff, but office space. The company is shortly due to complete the fit-out of their new second floor office in the centre of Guildford. Currently the space seats 150 staff, has panoramic views, as well as a subsidised deli with free coffee and snacks. The new space will offer over twice the footprint plus additional state-of-the-art interior design. Note for artists: this includes adjustable lighting!

With the legacy of their parent company behind them, we asked the Product Director, Sean Decker, if it'd be reasonable to expect their new product to be along the same vein.

Sean replied with a glint in his eye:

"...Not quite!"





Sean Decker Director

NEW IP IS DIFFICULT – perhaps the most difficult thing to do in the gaming industry. Surrounded by giant franchises that release successful products year-after-year, how do we create a new one that cuts through? And even harder - how do you create one that can last a decade, a whole generation?"

There's no secret sauce. No single special ingredient. However, you do consistently need a couple of things: courage to make bold and imaginative steps and bounce back if it doesn't go right, and respect; and that means respect for the people you work with and the audience you're creating for. Listening and remaining open to feedback isn't always as easy as it seems. No matter what else you throw into the pot, without those two, your potion has no magic.

We've created a studio unlike any other I've experienced. And if it isn't magic, it's something very special.

Our upcoming product is still top secret – but I can say this. We're looking for people that are hungry to create deep, rewarding experiences with nuance. We're looking for people who want to leave their mark, who want to help us shape tomorrow.

Cristian BobescuTools Engineer



I'M A TOOLS ENGINEER at DPS

Games, working on a AAA game. I streamline and improve the development process, customising the Unreal editor or creating pipeline tools to fit the needs of our game and our developers.

We are a small team but that means we are tight. I enjoy working with them and I like that, even with the current environment, we are constantly in touch.

It's refreshing. A lot of the people here are young and are striving to build something great. They are not afraid to experiment and to create something new, something they can be proud of. The feeling is that we are all aiming to create a legacy. It is a fairly new studio, but it does have big dreams and the people to achieve them.

The fact is that they are not afraid to let you know you are an important asset to the team. The culture here is built around appreciation and I feel that that is a great thing to build on.

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at DPS Games

DPS Games is currently looking for new talent to work on its upcoming project.

Don't see something that fits? Check out the website at **dpsgames.net**

Development Director

(Guildford)

Build and facilitate a world class development team. Aligning groups towards shared purposes, goals and priorities.

Lead Combat Designer

(Guildford)

Responsible for the balance and experience of combat on the project, ensuring combat delivers a fun and satisfying experience for the player.

Senior Publishing Manager

(Guildford)

Looking for an experienced Publishing Manager with a minimum of 1 shipped AAA product.

Senior Gameplay & Graphics Programmer

(Guildford)

Working on core systems of a free-to-play Unreal Engine 4 based PC game.

Senior VFX Artist

(Guildford)

Design, create and implement stunning VFX to enhance the dramatic performance of vehicles and characters and breathe life into our world.

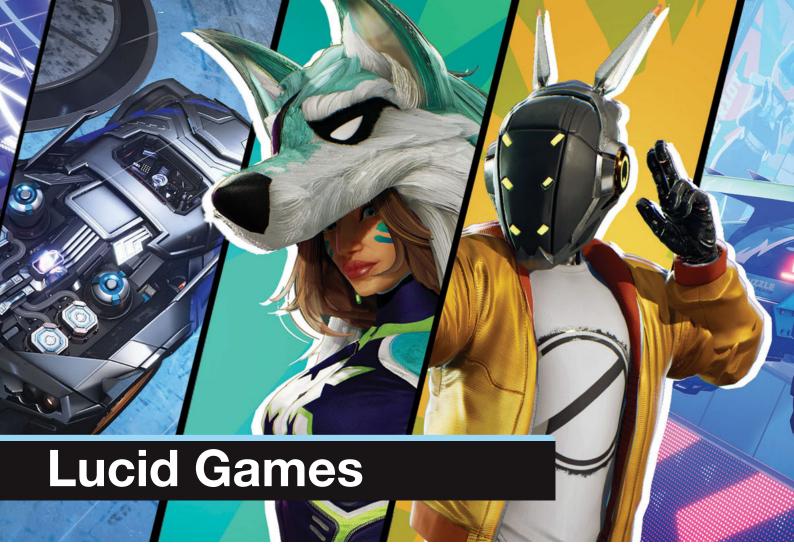
UI Artist

(Guildford)

Develop the User Experience and Aesthetic design of the game menus, user interfaces and in game HUD.

"We are all aiming to create a legacy"







Location(s): Liverpool and Remote

Team size: 165

Key projects: Destruction Allstars, Apex Legends, EA Sports PGA Tour and more to be announced...



Recruitment contact Hollie Lapworth Head of Talent Hollie.Lapworth@lucidgames.co.uk 07946 845284 Lucid Games is an independent AAA studio, developing cutting edge games. Located in one of the world's most iconic cities, its studios are in the heart of Liverpool's creative quarter

LUCID GAMES is the developer of Playstation 5 exclusive *Destruction AllStars*, Vehicle Combat Game *Switchblade*, and also works alongside the worlds biggest developers and publishers on some of gaming's biggest franchises. Lucid is always pushing boundaries of what's possible. In the past year it has launched *Destruction Allstars*, worked on *Apex Legends*, *Need for Speed Hot Pursuit Remastered*, *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* and *EA Sports PGA Tour*... and that's just the ones it can tell you about.

Lucid has been established for over a decade now and has grown from 10 people to over 165 employees and looking for more! The team at Lucid from the top down are all hands-on, including the founding members who to this day, still have a passion for developing great games in a great environment.

With different size projects from AAA titles to co-development teams, the studio benefits from having a relaxed informal culture, whilst working on huge titles, giving their team the best of both worlds.



Hayley Brant UI Director

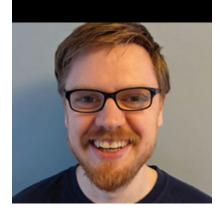
I'VE BEEN at Lucid for four months now but I feel like I've been part of the team for much longer! This is mainly down to the fact that everyone has been so welcoming. At the end of my first week was the company summer party, where I was able to meet lots of my new colleagues in person. I didn't feel daunted at all because everyone was just very approachable and down to earth. It has made it really easy to settle in. We are also really well looked after, including regular deliveries of baked goods.

Aside from that, there is so much talent here at Lucid. People here really love what they do, everyone is constantly striving to learn, whilst making the best possible experiences for players. The best thing about being a part of the UI team here is how broad the skillset is. There is always something to learn from someone else and we are also given the time to train and figure out new ways of doing things.

Now is a really great time to be working at Lucid as there are some really exciting things in the works!

"There is so much talent here at Lucid.
People here really love what they do."

Nathan Dobby Senior Programmer



I JOINED Lucid as a gameplay programmer in January 2016 and in the six(ish) years I've been here I've worked on several different titles, progressed to a Senior Programmer and seen Lucid grow from a staff of around 35 to nearly 170 employees today.

Although the company has changed a lot in that time, the wonderful thing about Lucid is what hasn't changed here: how much the company cares about its employees.

Having worked in the games industry for around 10 years before joining Lucid, I was used to having to chase down salary reviews and promotions, but Lucid has actively supported my career progression; there are clear paths for advancement and it's normal to see staff being promoted and compensated for their contributions.

Lucid has also been very flexible with changes to my working situation; I recently became a parent, and it's been very straightforward for me to work around all the necessary appointments and interruptions.

What else? There are lots of interesting projects at any given time, regular training days and fun company events and social activities. But everything good at Lucid is underpinned by just one thing; putting the wellbeing of employees first.

It's a very nice, secure feeling to know you're being cared for by your employer, I recommend it!

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at Lucid Games

Principal Character Artist

Liverpool or Remote

Lucid Games is looking for highly talented 3D Character Artists in order to create interesting, diverse human characters and to help establish benchmarks & workflows for in-game character models.

UI Programmer

Liverpool or Remote

Lucid games is looking for enthusiastic and talented programmers with a love of UI to join their team. You will be working directly with their UI Programmers and Artists to implement UI systems and features.

Technical Artist

Liverpool or Remote

The Tech Art team is growing at Lucid and they are looking for passionate Artists, they have an extremely talented team where people can grow and find their strengths. The candidate will be working with the art and programming teams to develop and maintain asset pipelines for an exciting new IP

Level Designer

Liverpool or Remote

Lucid Games is looking for people to join their Level Design team and assist them in developing a brand new title. You will be working with a multi discipline team in order to create a deep exciting game world.

Senior Technical Animator

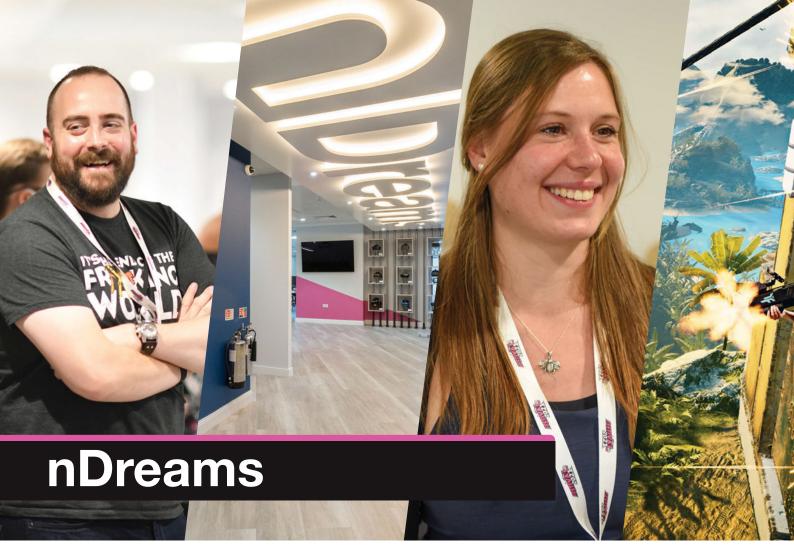
Liverpool or remote

As a Technical Animator the candidate will collaborate with the animation, art, design and programming teams at Lucid. They will be tasked with finding progressive techniques and processes to animation solutions and issues with models, characters and vehicle movement.

As well as being able to work with some of the most talented people in the UK game industry, Lucid Games also offer:

- Remote and flexible working
- Private Healthcare
- Pension (up to 10%)
- Profit bonus & company shares
- Enhanced Parental leave and many more...

www.lucidgames.co.uk/careers



Location(s): Farnborough, Flexi-remote,

Fully Remote **Team size:** 110+

Key projects and hiring areas: Working on multiple unannounced projects across a variety of headsets, based on both new and existing IP.



Recruitment contact
Suzie Cook
Internal Recruiter
enquiries@ndreams.com
+44 (0)1252 546082
@suziecookVR

A developer and publisher working at the cutting edge of virtual reality, across multiple trailblazing titles and genres.

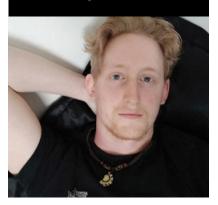
nDreams pivoted to VR development in 2013. Since then, it has built award winning experiences for a range of headsets, helping to drive the growth of home-based VR with innovative and memorable experiences across a spectrum of different genres. *Phantom: Covert Ops*, its #1 bestselling stealth-action game, reimagined movement mechanics, receiving the Best of E3 award and defining what a premium, long form VR game could be. Its recent PlayStation VR exclusive, *Fracked*, delivered a trailblazing, high-paced action shooter that was applauded by critics and players for the execution of its locomotion and cover system, providing "a bite-sized chunk of VR perfection" (Eurogamer). Not to mention, flexing its muscles with well-known IP, including with Ubisoft on the creation of *Far Cry VR*.

Having expanded to a second fully remote studio, nDreams is going from strength-to-strength to match the demand for VR experiences. With a growing team, and multiple high-end projects in the works, nDreams launched a third-party publishing initiative, bringing exciting VR projects from smaller external teams to market.

nDreams strives to deliver best-in-class game development coupled with work/life balance. The studio engages in external outreach with Into Games, through the nDreams Academy, to help bridge the gap between education and employment, as well as internally ensuring individuals are on a personal development plan with training opportunities for career progression. It is the perfect place to innovate, and learn, together.



Markus Hoell Principal Programmer Farnborough, UK



I BEGAN my nDreams career as a Graphics Engineer, and the excitement for my job and the studio has been there since day one. My current role as Principal Programmer is very interesting as it overlaps with both our code and art teams. The position has many layers. Parts of my responsibilities involve researching new approaches and technology, planning implementations, performance optimisations, general improvements with regards to our graphics, as well as risk management and guidance for our art direction. Computer graphics and VR are both rapidly evolving together, with new hardware and algorithms to be explored continuously. It is incredible to be part of this.

nDreams makes world leading games, however, the studio is so much more than that. Everyone is incredibly friendly, open, helpful and communicative, as well as respectful to each other. Working for nDreams feels like working with friends, who are all passionate about video games and VR. We want to push the boundaries of VR experiences, while having an absolute blast together doing so.

Kat ParkerBrand Manager
Publishing Team



MY ROLE sits within the publishing team, working on both nDreams first party games and third-party titles from external developers. I've just finished working on the campaign for the PlayStation VR title *Fracked*, and I'm now leading on *Little Cities* for Quest.

Having recently side-stepped into the VR sector within gaming, it's a really unique experience to work within a vibrant and growing area of the industry which is evolving at such a rapid pace. It's inspiring to work within a studio which aims to push the limits of VR, as well as being able to be extremely innovative with what we do.

What impresses me the most is the huge effort that nDreams put into the personal development of their own staff, which is something I've not experienced to this level before. They invest in their talent to help them grow and succeed whether that be in project management to actual qualifications. It feels really empowering to be part of a culture that wants to better their talent from within.

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at nDreams

Infrastructure Engineer

Farnborough, UK or Hybrid
We are actively searching for an Infrastructure
Engineer to be a key contributor, responsible for
the technical delivery of a targeted product or
key subsystem within a larger one.

Senior Gameplay Designer

Farnborough, UK or Hybrid
We are looking for a Senior Gameplay Designer,
preferably with an interest in Al design. You'll
collaborate closely with our development
teams to develop world class VR games and
experiences.

Art Director

Farnborough, UK or Hybrid
Work alongside the Game Director to deliver an
artistic vision for our industry-leading VR games.
Being able to communicate a well-conceived
vision and give clear direction is essential.

Senior Level Designer

Farnborough, UK or Hybrid
Able to deliver exceptional levels for our games that support the Game Director's vision. From early concept and white box all the way through to the final product.

Technical Artist

Orbital - Remote

Help guide the art team with technical insight and work collaboratively across the project to ensure the best possible ideas are optimal, professionally presented and realised in-game.

Gameplay Programmer

Orbital - Remote

This is an opportunity to be at the heart of a new team right from the start. You'll be prototyping immersive mechanics that form the heart of our upcoming project.

Senior Artist

Orbital - Remote

We're looking for an artist who is an expert in art creation and level implementation. You should have significant knowledge in games art and will become the go-to person for certain areas of development.

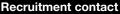




Location(s): Kentish Town, London

Team size: 250 Key projects and hiring areas: Suicide Squad: Kill The Justice League. Engine

Programmers



Bex Holland Senior Recruiter bex.holland@rocksteadyltd.com https://twitter.com/rocksteadygames https://rocksteadyltd.com/ https://warnermediacareers.com/rocksteady-jobs Best known for creating the award-winning Arkham series, Rocksteady is continuing their adventures in the DC Universe and are now working on the upcoming Suicide Squad: Kill The Justice League.

ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS was founded in 2004 by Creative Director Sefton Hill and Studio Director Jamie Walker as a small start-up. The team's first release, Urban Chaos: Riot Response, was a commercial success but it wasn't until the launch of Batman: Arkham Asylum in 2009 that the studio really made a name for themselves. To this day, the Arkham series remains the best-selling superhero video game series of all time.

Rocksteady is currently working on the new 4-player action-adventure third-person shooter, Suicide Squad: Kill The Justice League.

The team of over 250 works across many disciplines, they all remain focused on only one game project at a time. Rocksteady are continually looking to expand their diverse team. Their Central London office is open to those that wish to work full-time in the big city, but they also support full remote working, or a combination of the two.

The team holds regular lunches; yoga sessions remotely and in the office, as well as fun days throughout the year, including live arts and crafts workshops supplied by the studio support team. Rocksteady are also active in celebrating cultural events, and regularly host round table discussions with speakers on issues including the representation of people from marginalised groups in video games.



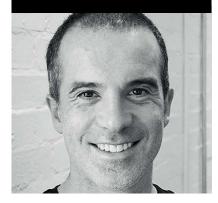
Helen Kaur Lead UI Artist

I LEAD the UI/UX team here at Rocksteady, having joined the team as a Senior UI Artist a little over four years ago. Before that I worked in the games industry in Finland, and I'm originally from Singapore, so I've had an interesting journey thus far!

Working at Rocksteady has had a huge impact on my skills and career as they really value creative freedom and thinking. I have been able to explore ideas and take on full ownership of features. I've been able to help bring features from the design phase to completion, from wireframes to implementation, and work with incredibly talented people both within and outside our team to make this happen. Our UI team has a collaborative spirit and we all have the same goal – to make the best experience for the player. Having been part of a minority all of my life, being treated equally and feeling accepted is important to me. I'm glad I've found a studio where I feel at home and I'm able to be myself, and make friends along the way!

"I'm glad I've found a studio where I feel at home and I'm able to be myself, and make friends along the way!"

Jamie Walker Studio Director



THERE IS a special culture here at Rocksteady and we listen carefully to our team to continually improve.

The positives we hear from our wonderful team break down into five components. Firstly, the welcoming and inclusive culture we have. I meet with every new joiner and they mention how welcoming and supportive everyone is. The second is treating people well, from how we treat people as professionals to how we handle Covid remote and hybrid working.

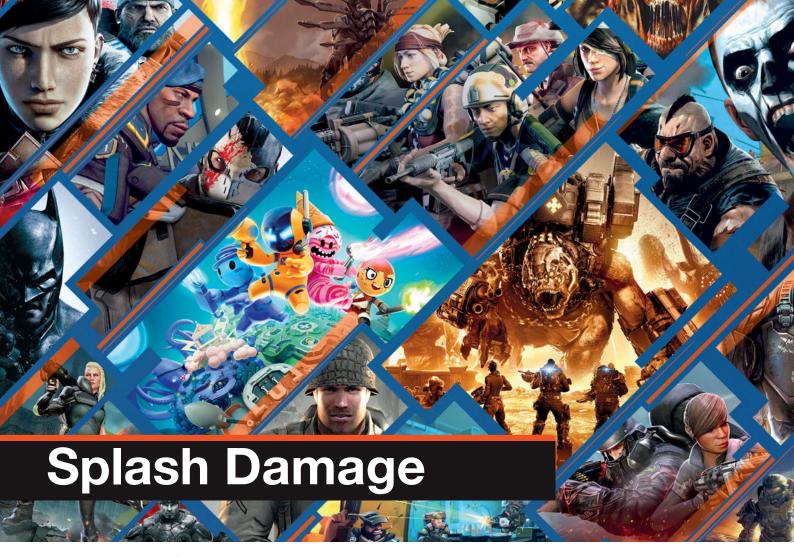
When we help when people are struggling with issues, they are often surprised. It's not something we share or shout about, but for me, treating people well is one of the best things we do here. The third is the quality that comes from people's effort and skill. The fourth is the feeling of a team, which is all about working together and making great games.

I love the diverse social fabric that thrives here: our hobby and interest clubs, the focus on good food (and coffee) and exercise, the friendships made, the relationships that have sprung, and the babies born! Lastly, everyone mentions the breakfast we cook each month which brings people together with quality food, a chance to connect, to chat about their passions, to laugh and energise, and it's this type of energy that helps nurture the culture here at Rocksteady.

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at Rocksteady Studios







Location(s): Bromley, Greater London

Team size: 400

Key projects and hiring areas:

Splash are working on a number of unannounced titles and looking for leaders to shape those projects and the studio.



Recruitment Contact Alex Fong Lead Recruiter alex.fong@ splashdamage.com

splashdamage.com/

Splash Damage is dedicated to crafting team-based games that forge lifelong friendships.

SPLASH DAMAGE has been a pillar of the UK game development scene for 20 years. The studio has worked on some of the world's biggest IP from *Wolfenstein* and *Batman*, to *Halo* and *Gears of War*, while building its own unique worlds in games like *Brink* and *Dirty Bomb*.

Following their acquisition by Tencent, Splash is entering a new era of ownership, with the biggest slate of games in the studio's history in development, including a number of own IP titles across multiple genres.

This year the studio was once again named as one of the UK's 100 Best Companies to Work For, placing in London's Top 75 Best large Companies, and earning a World-Class accreditation.

The studio is regularly celebrated for its commitment to diversity, with ongoing partnerships, events, and industry-leading initiatives.

Splash Damage recently announced a brand new sci-fi IP and are looking for people to help shape the future of the project and the studio.



Neil Alphonso Studio Creative Director

I'M STUDIO Creative Director here at Splash Damage, which means I support the creative leadership teams for all our projects. I've always been more focused on the games that we've developed internally over the years, so I spend a good bit of my time helping teams shift away from "Work for Hire" or "Co-Dev" practises that aren't as relevant to us anymore.

I'm part of the studio management team, who are mostly comprised of people that I've been making games at Splash Damage with for more than a decade. We help support our teams to make great games, as well as tackling the inevitable blockers that occur that get in the way of that. A thing that has kept me going for more than 13 years here is that I've always had a new challenge to take on and peers that will support me when I do.

A thing that I value highly about Splash Damage is our ambition, but even more importantly that it's accompanied by humility and a willingness to learn. That's essential to embracing constructive criticism and raising the quality bar.

Cinzia MusioDiversity and Inclusion Advisor



I'VE ALWAYS loved that Splash Damage feels like a community; regardless of what you're interested in, you'll always find someone that loves it too and you'll get to chat about it!

One of my favourite memories at Splash Damage was the drag bingo we did during pride this past year, so many people showed up, and we even had children around with their parents! Our benefits around mental health have been a great addition to the studio, it's been really good in the past couple of years to know that I could easily rely on accessing support when things could be very challenging, and the work that was done to normalise talking about mental health was really heart-warming to see.

The culture of feedback we have at the studio is also one I find great, knowing that everyone at the studio wants to improve and learn from each other. I find it important that, no matter how senior or junior you are, people will always be happy to hear and listen to what you have to say.

"Splash Damage feels like a community; regardless of what you're interested in, you'll always find someone that loves it too"

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at Splash Damage

Development Director

London

Development Managers are the execution pioneers here at Splash Damage, responsible for building and delivering game experiences that continually delight our fans on a daily basis.

Executive Producer

London

We are looking for a high impact, passionate person to lead a large team of developers to deliver our next AAA title via roadmap planning, team building and organisations, client management and alignment all while balancing internal and external needs to ensure an on time, on budget, high-quality game.

Senior Designer

London

As Splash Damage's Senior Game Designer, you will be responsible for the game design of numerous critical features of a game, or the complete design of a companion product, driving end to end implementation across the team.

Lead Online Programmer

London

Online Services Leads are responsible for the output of an Online Services team who design, implement and support client-side game features that interface with back end and platform level services.

Lead Lighting Artist

London

We're looking for a talented Lead Lighting Artist with a strong understanding of lighting and composition to build upon the work of the other artists, while enhancing and supporting their work.

Lead Technical Designer

London

Technical Designers are hands-on members of our teams who focus on bringing designs to life: building prototypes, identifying and solving technical pitfalls, and ensuring crisp, clean cross-discipline communication.



Looking forward. Together.



Your skills are in demand right now – is it time to reconsider your options for now or in the future?

If you're an experienced Games Professional, get in touch for a Career 1-2-1 with one of our team.



Game changing. Together.

Call **01925 839700** or check out **amigus.com**







Location(s): Here East, Stratford, London (and almost everywhere else in the world)

Team size: 230

Key projects and hiring areas: Football Manager and other (secret) things



Recruitment contact Laura Hetherington Senior Recruiter laura.hetherington@ sigames.com +44 7818 184547 www.linkedin.com/ in/laura-hetherington-a7a49929/ Sports Interactive (SI) is an ambitious development studio creating immersive sports management simulations. Since 1994, we've captivated a global pool of players with our iconic, award-winning game, Football Manager.

HERE AT SI we like our talent tenacious, so you can expect to surround yourself with other ambitious individuals bringing their A-game to many disciplines. We know collaboration is the key to continuous improvement and encourage our people to fiercely realise their potential.

Above all, we're a team; a team with a down-to-earth dynamic that works and plays together. We have fun doing what we do; one of the many reasons we're one of the best places to work in the UK games business. While we live to create extraordinary games, we know that's not all you've got going on. You can trust that we always keep things in perspective, fostering an environment where work can be more than just a job.

Our culture gives team members the responsibility to optimise their workloads, with in-office, hybrid and global remote working options. We provide a top-class benefits package for full-time team members, including gym membership, private health and dental care, and more. We boast one of the lowest staff turnover rates in the industry.

We're proud to be an equal opportunities employer and encourage applications irrespective of sex, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief. Our studio has disabled access and facilities.



Marc Duffy
Director of Development
Hybrid onsite/offsite



WHENEVER I tell people in the business that I work on *Football Manager*, they often respond with something like "Isn't it boring to work on the same game every year?" The answer is a very emphatic "no."

First of all – as the millions of people who play it will tell you – FM is not the same game every year. More importantly, every year that I've been on the team (22 and counting) we've made significant advances, some of which we've revealed and many that we've kept 'under the hood.'

Take the last 12 months. During that time we released *FM22* across multiple platforms simultaneously (something we've never done before) while also starting work on our women's football project, formally assessing new third party dev tools and launching a new talent id programme that we call the 'Developer Academy'.

I'm particularly excited about that last one, as I believe we have a great track record of finding and developing talent and the Developer Academy gives us a formal structure that allows us to build on that. As a part of this process, we've also just appointed our first Developer Advocate.

Maybe the most important point I can make is that, despite having worked at SI for years, I still look forward to work every day.

Tina Keech Head of Women's Research Offsite



NOWADAYS, it's common to see organisations banging on about how inclusive and diverse they are, to the point where it sometimes makes you think 'Really?'.

When I first interviewed for the role to lead women's football research for *Football Manager*, I suspected that SI might just be another one of those organisations; a company that just wanted to indulge in a little 'virtue signalling' by jumping onto the women's football bandwagon.

Turns out I couldn't have been more wrong. Six months into this project I can confirm that the studio and the leadership team have shown they truly believe in equality and inclusivity. The decision to add women's football to *FM* sends out a very positive message to the world and everything I've been involved with so far suggests that the team is serious about getting this right.

On a personal note, I have been given every bit of support I've needed in terms of finance and resources to get the job done – or, at least, to get it started (this is a huge project that's going to take years to complete). Best of all, I have been given exactly the right combination of guidance and autonomy to allow me to make significant progress in a relatively short time.

My initial 'Really?' has become a very firm 'Really!'

Now Hiring!

For the full list, go to www.sigames.com/careers

All roles below are onsite or offsite

Senior Server Engineer

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/senior-server-engineer

Tools Programmer

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/tools-programmer

DevOps Engineer

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/devopsengineer

Technical Artist

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/technical-artist-ftc

Software Engineer (C#/C++)

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/software-engineer-cc

Software Engineer (Console)

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/software-engineer-console

Gameplay Software Engineer (Console)

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/gameplay-software-engineer-console

Senior Software Engineer (Match AI)

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/senior-software-engineer-match-ai

FM Gameplay AI Software Engineer

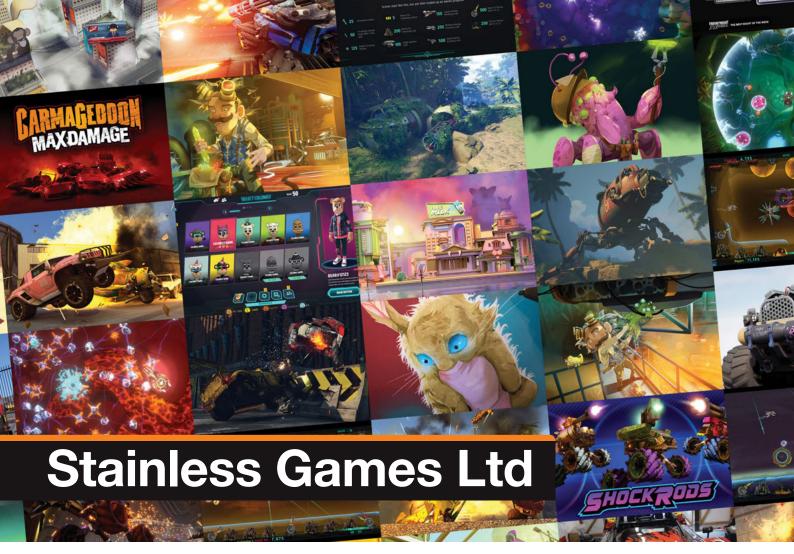
https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/football-manager-gameplay-ai-software-engineer

Senior Software Engineer (C++, FM Mobile)

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/senior-software-engineer-c-fm-mobile

Software Engineer (Engine/Tools)

https://www.sigames.com/vacancy/software-engineer-enginetools





Location(s): Newport, Isle of Wight **Team size:** 70 (including at least 10 different nationalities)

Key projects and hiring areas: Experienced C++/Lead/Senior Programmers, Producers, VFX Artists, Lead QA.



Recruitment contact
Tracy Curtis
HR Manager
jobs@stainlessgames.com

Independent games developer Stainless Games has been creating acclaimed multi-million selling titles since 1994. Based on the picturesque Isle of Wight, it's best known for CCGs and driving games.

STAINLESS released the chart-topping classic driving game *Carmageddon* 24 years ago, and is also known for developing five hit *Magic: The Gathering* CCG titles on PC, consoles and mobile.

They understand pandemic life has helped many of us rethink our priorities, so if you love making games and are looking for a change of lifestyle then look no further!

Stainless offers flexible working around core hours in a relaxed environment. Still believing the ability to interact with colleagues face-to-face is an invaluable part of making great games, they're now adopting a hybrid working arrangement. They'll continue to nurture a collaborative team dynamic in the studio, while giving employees the option to work from home for part of the week. Other flexible arrangements can be considered.

As one of the sunniest places in the UK, the Isle of Wight has become a very attractive lifestyle destination. It boasts spectacular walking and cycle trails, and you're never more than 25 minutes' drive from a beach, so it's ideal for outdoor living and family life.

The team pride themselves on inclusivity, so it really doesn't matter who you are or where you're from, provided you have a passion and talent for game development.



Rodrigo do Ó Barbosa Programmer



HI ALL! I'm so glad I get a chance to talk to you about Stainless Games. The journey that led me from Portugal to the Isle of Wight was bumpy, as I was struggling to find a job in the gaming industry, and the prospect of a boring coding job was looming. So when Stainless called me to be part of their family, I gratefully accepted, but was unaware of how lucky I'd been.

This team is composed of some of the funniest and friendliest people I know, and when you're not having fun with your work, you are with your co-workers. If a great environment wasn't enough, I've grown more than I ever thought possible from a technical standpoint. I've worked on character movement, customization, tools, and game engine, with experienced and talented colleagues who helped develop my knowledge with every task.

Coding practises, 3D mathematics, and cool hacks are among the many skills I've sharpened while maintaining an excellent work and life balance. Now I finally know how lucky I was to have landed at Stainless!

Kat BridgesAssistant Producer



I'M ONE of the Assistant Producers at Stainless, having progressed here from QA Tester, to QA Lead, and then into Production. Working in Production can be challenging sometimes, but I'm lucky enough to see how all the departments work, and get involved in the creative design as well as keeping the project running smoothly.

Each day I help manage the team, lead meetings, organise tasks, and communicate with the publishers. I've had the pleasure of working on a variety of games here, each different from the last, which keeps it fresh and interesting, and lets me be consistently surprised by the things our team is capable of.

We pride ourselves on having a fun and relaxed work environment, with frequent social events or games nights, so it's easy to get to know people from all departments. The company offers a variety of benefits to help staff thrive, both in and out of work.

With new games on the horizon, there's no better time to join us.

"This team is composed of some of the funniest and friendliest people I know"

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at Stainless Games

Please check out all opportunities for programming, art, QA and production roles at **www.stainlessgames.com/careers**

Experienced (Gameplay) Programmers

Isle of Wight

We're after passionate programmers with strong C++ skills, and ideally experience in UE4 or Unity. Candidates with shipped title(s) and/or strong mentoring abilities would be an added bonus

Producer/Senior Producer

Isle of Wight

Have you shipped high quality games over a full development cycle as producer or senior producer. Can you manage a variety of teams? Do you love herding cats...? Apply now!

VFX Artist

Isle of Wight

We need a skilled VFX artist that can use the latest technology to take our games to the next level. Experience in different styles, genres and platforms would be ideal

Employee Benefits

At Stainless, benefits include:

- Assistance with working visa, application processes and fees
- Relocation assistance
- · Private medical cover
- Annual 22 days holiday + UK bank holidays
- + a 2-week Christmas shutdown
- Discretionary annual bonus
- Mental Health First Aiders in the workplace
- On-site lounge and games room
- State of the art virus killing ventilation system
- Based in a bustling town centre

And much more...including social events as and when restrictions allow!







Location(s): UK, Europe, North America and India

Team size: Our studios range in size from 10 – 300+ people!

Key projects and hiring areas: Over 40+ projects, with open roles across all studios & disciplines!



Recruitment contact
Kieran Holland
Talent Acquisition
Manager
kholland@sumo-digital.com
@SumoKieran

Sumo Group's award-winning businesses create ground-breaking games in studios around the world. Achieving wonder together developing their own and partner IP for console, mobile and PC.

THE SUCCESS of the people at Sumo Group is the success of the company. The Group prioritises taking care of its people with a focus on supporting them, nurturing their talent and providing a healthy, friendly, enriching, creative and safe environment in which to work. Sumo Group's five operating businesses, Sumo Digital, Atomhawk, Pipeworks, Secret Mode and Auroch Digital employ over 1,200 people across 15 studios in the UK, Europe, Canada, India, and the United States. Built on the pillars of Family, Security, Trust and Collaboration, those behaviours and attributes guide decisions and interactions and underpin everything the group does. Whilst they've grown and evolved substantially those values have remained at the core of the business.

Sumo Group has over 160 roles available across all disciplines of game development spanning numerous genres and platforms. With roles based in studio, fully remote or hybrid, in design, programming and publishing, for consoles, mobiles or PC, and in racing, narrative or action adventure – there really is something to suit every way of working.



Will Lake Associate Art Manager Atomhawk



WORKING for Atomhawk is all about variety. In my time at the company I can easily say that no project is alike, and that is really appealing to me. Whether it's the subject matter, the client ask or the worlds you explore for a project, they all offer a very unique perspective on visual creation. It's this variety as well that weaves together greatly with the team at the studio – a group of interesting artists with varied backstories, interests, and art styles.

Jemima CrowMarketing & Comms Director Auroch Digital



AUROCH DIGITAL specialises in making strategy and management games such as *Mars Horizon* and the upcoming Brewmaster. It's a fast-growing team that strives for transparency at every level and for everyone to contribute ideas to their many projects. The team is very nerdy, epitomised by founder Tomas Rawlings's decades-long love for Steve Jackson games and painting miniatures – which he encourages everyone to try no matter their skill.

Adriana Rutowicz Marketing Manager Pixel Ant



l'VE DECIDED to join PixelAnt Games simply because I believed in their promise – a culture-first game development studio built on a firm set of values, putting their team's wellbeing over profit. And this promise has been well kept. What I came to appreciate most over time is the leadership's commitment to creating a workplace that's healthy, respectful, and free from crunch. We're a relatively young studio - we have celebrated our first anniversary recently – but I can already say that it's working well and that the right mindset and the right people really do make all the difference.

Paige Dolan
Commercial Coordinator
Secret Mode



I WAS completely won over in the interview stage by Secret Mode, the ethos of the company is one of inclusivity, diversity, challenging perspectives and ultimately fun, and I was overjoyed to see that beliefs permeate everything we do. We've gone from a team of five to a team of 13 rapidly, we have a huge variety in backgrounds, interests and experience in the team but are united by one main thing, a love for games. It's this passion, shared at all levels of the organisation, that makes it an absolute joy to start work each day.

Dal Hundal

Associate Technical Director Sumo Leamington



WHEN I first spoke to Sumo Digital, things just felt right straight away - as they say "when you know, you know." A year on since I joined I'm glad to say that instinct was right - I feel so lucky to have landed at a studio where I'm given the room to learn and grow, alongside some of the best people in the industry. Sumo gives me the opportunity to work on some fantastic projects that bring fresh challenges, in an environment that respects life outside of work - I've got my cake and I've eaten it!

Mark Sample Design Director Sumo Sheffield



18 MONTHS AGO I joined Sumo Digital Sheffield – It's been the best move I've made in my whole career. The amazing opportunities, high calibre games, welcoming teams, and superb culture throughout all our studios are just a few of the highlights that come to mind since I started here. As a dev director I get to work with so many fantastic and talented people both internally and externally. Whilst there are occasional challenges, there is never a dull moment and I'm always learning and making new friends along the way. That's why I'm here and I love it!





Location: London and Remote **Team size:** 21

Key projects and hiring areas: *Dune, Metal:Hellsinger*, Secret Porting Project



Recruitment contact
Piers Duplock
Senior Producer
piers@warpdigital.com
Twitter - @Piers_D

From the Sea of Thieves to Dune's Arrakis – London's Warp Digital is stepping up to AAA co-development

LONDON-BASED WARP DIGITAL has existed for five years, although the core team dates back fifteen years, having split off from Curve Digital.

The studio built its reputation porting some of the most beloved indie titles around – including *Return of the Obra Dinn*, *Close to the Sun* and *For the King*. Curve Digital has also worked with the likes of Devolver Digital and Team17 and many more along the way.

Things are changing over at Warp, though. The studio has been transitioning into triple-A co-development. With Warp already working with NaturalMotion and Rare – and has its fingerprints on the enormously popular *Sea of Thieves*.

And now it's also partnering with Funcom to bring the world of Frank Herbert's *Dune* to life, having already worked on popular multiplayer survival title *Conan Exiles* with the company.

The studio believes in striving to be the best that it can be by cultivating a teamoriented working environment, a culture based on fixing problems rather than assigning blame, and open and honest communication.

Co-development provides exciting opportunities to work on big-name titles. Warp aims to create titles that live up to their clients IP and vision, and which Warp can be proud to add to its portfolio. If that sounds good to you, then many positions are currently open.



Joe Peatfield Technical Artist Dune



I HAD previously worked at Warp back in 2018 on a short contract basis doing art for porting. My time at the London office was great, with friendly staff and a great supportive work environment. I was saddened that my time there was so brief but I left with good memories.

So when an opening came up almost six months ago to join on a permanent basis for co-development as a technical artist I leapt at the opportunity and could not be happier to be back. Everyone here has a different background, from veterans of the industry to new rising stars. We all work together, everyone here is knowledgeable, friendly and helpful which keeps us all individually growing and projects moving forwards.

Right now I am working on an ambitious title in Unreal Engine and it's been great testing my skills and being on the front line of what is possible. I now work remotely and although I miss the physical office (with its delicious coffee machine) I found that none of that Warp feeling is lost, still great support, communication and people. Working here is a true joy.

Freya JonesJunior Software Engineer
Metal:Hellsinger



EARLIER THIS YEAR I started working at Warp Digital. This is my first year within the games industry and initially was apprehensive about working remotely. However, from day one, I felt like I was part of the team, everyone was so welcoming and approachable which made discussing any issues or questions I had very easy.

Despite only working at Warp for a short period of time, I have had the chance to work on two diverse projects, and with the help of my teams, I have gained so much experience and knowledge in Unity and developing on the next generation consoles.

No matter the role or seniority of anyone, they are helpful, have a can-do attitude and always make time for others to help resolve any issues. I feel lucky to be working with such a variety of talented people and I am really excited for my future with this company with all it has to offer, from the potential projects to the career growth as well as the personal development opportunities.

"From day one, I felt like I was part of the team, everyone was so welcoming and approachable."

Now Hiring!

Just some of the many roles open at Warp Digital

Lead Programmer

London or Remote

This is a key leadership role for our co-development projects, working with the producer in order to help guide and mentor the team, while also maintaining technical standards.

Designer

London or Remote
Join the world of Dune and work on
several key areas of the game, you will be
tasked with designing systems and stories
to bring that large-scale, next-gen feel.

Unreal Gameplay Programmer

London or Remote

Be part of the core gameplay team, creating and implementing features that directly impact gameplay while working with designers and artists to make those features as polished as possible.

Unreal Console Programmer London

Be a key player in a small team that ports and supports both small indie titles and AAA scale Unreal projects on current and next-gen console platforms.

Unity Console Programmer

London

Be a key player in a small team that ports and supports both small indie titles and AAA scale Unity projects on current and next-gen console platforms.

We offer:

- Fair working hours and a crunch-free environment
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What can we expect from the games industry job market in 2022?

OPM's **Kim Parker Adcock** looks into the future and the issues that will face recruiters in the months ahead

2020 was one of the strongest performing years we've seen in video games, and 2021 continued to show growth in game sales and jobs being made available. Can this upwards trend continue? We certainly hope so, and if it does this is what we expect to see on the recruitment side of things.



as well and sometimes even better remotely. To truly remain competitive in the games industry jobs market, studios have to offer remote-working, or at least a hybrid version of this. You will miss out on top talent if you only offer in-house working, and that is a truth that most studios have come to terms with.

SKILL-SHORTAGES AND WAGE GROWTH

The incessant demand for experienced game industry professionals has always been there. Whether it be developers, creatives, marketers, or any area of the industry really, it's the experience in games that is sought after and for some roles there just aren't many candidates that have it. The industry's recent success has generally led to expansion for studios, unfortunately the demand isn't meeting the supply when it comes to experienced game developers. The difficult roles to fill have become even trickier, and an often-overlooked result of skill shortages is that it can lead to wage growth. A basic economic response to a skill-shortage is for companies to increase pay to attract the best talent and we have seen many examples of this in practice over the last year or two.

REMOTE WORKING

Remote working has had a huge impact and will continue to mould hiring strategies. A few studios are planning to go back to the studio full-time in the new year and are already seeing a backlash from their current employees. It's a double-edged sword, some people want to feel a part of a team again and miss the social aspects of working in-house, and of course many feel safer at home and are operating just

COVID-19'S CONTINUING IMPACT

The only thing that really delayed or held studios back from hiring in 2022 was lockdowns and the uncertainty surrounding them; particularly when looking for staff from another country. New Covid variants and ever-changing covid rules bring instability and uncertainty, as is to be expected. However, job growth seems inevitable in any case, and we expect this could be considerably stronger if society in general can remain stable.

REMEMBER BREXIT?

Thus far, we haven't noticed a remarkable change in hiring needs because of Brexit. The timing of the global pandemic has skewed the stats, so no one can accurately estimate the impact of Brexit so far for the games industry. The demand for more staff coupled with more barriers when trying to hire staff from abroad could mean companies are more likely to bring in less experienced people and train them on the job. Could it finally be time the games industry considers apprenticeships as a viable option? We don't work with any studios that have an apprenticeship scheme in place, but this is something we're keeping a close eye on, as it could be a viable path for both studios and job seekers.





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VISION

- 40x brighter highlights, 50x more dynamic range
- Billion of colors instead of millions
- Master once, deliver anywhere

ATMOS

- One mix for every playback environment
- Immense dynamic range
- Minimal workflow changes



More information

GAMES.DOLBY.COM

the mod.io article

At what point when developing a game should you think about supporting mods and other forms of user generated content? **Scott Reismanis**, founder and CEO of mod.io, doesn't have the answer, but he can connect you with those that do – the people that make the magic happen. Regrettably, **Richie Shoemaker** can only connect words





hree of the four biggest titles on Steam right now, were, in their earliest incarnations, mods – fan-made games built atop the foundations of another. Riot's most popular games are directly derived from two of them. To suggest that mods are an afterthought or inconsequential to game industry success is a delusion. For it is mods, with their constant updates, lively communities and customisations, that were very much the original live service games. It's not beyond the bounds of possibility that we might one day view mods collectively as the prototypical – and perhaps utopian – gaming metaverse, able to transpose and combine IPs across boundaries that publishers are averse to cross. Where else but in a mod can you pitch *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* ships against one another, or find the iconic weapons from *Aliens* fully realised in *Doom*? Crudely given form 20 years ago, these are the dreams of metaverse evangelists today.

Also crudely realised 20 years ago was mod DB, one of the first websites devoted to collecting, curating and archiving mods for popular and not-so-popular games. From unofficial patches that fixed games that their developers had moved on from, to character skins and full-blown total conversions that might render an underlying game unrecognisable, keeping up with developments in user generated content (UGC) was a challenge that a young Scott Reismanis sought to overcome.

"It was so hard navigating through Planet Half-Life and all the dominant gaming sites and modding communities were fragmented all over the place" he remembers. "So I decided I had to remedy that, selfishly, by creating a community where people could collaborate and share what they're doing. And that's really why mod DB was born, just to be a database of mods. Inevitably, as these things have a way of doing, the community took over and it's been on a life of its own and just grew and grew and grew."

After later setting up the digital indie storefront Desura and indie DB, Reismanis returned to mod curation by establishing mod.io in 2017. This was during a time when mods were starting to become more mainstream on console, having long been the preserve of the PC gaming fraternity. Together with the growing demand for



Space Engineers (above) is one of the biggest games that mod.io supports

crossplay and cross-platform play, with players wanting to progress regardless of the platform, Reismanis saw an opportunity to champion greater integration and accessibility for user generated content - to have a mod work seamlessly regardless of whether it's on PC or console, and with as few issues as possible when combined with other mods.

"One of the beautiful things about the previous and the newest generation of consoles" says Reismanis, "is that each of them have got their own really incredible UGC-type games and experiences, whether it's Super Mario Maker on the Switch, or Dreams and other

"Mod.io is very much focused on official partnerships with gaming studios, and helping them build a stronger bond with their creators and players." games on PlayStation, or Minecraft and Microsoft Flight Simulator on the Xbox. And once I started to see those games emerging on those platforms, and that there were so few developers that had actually been able to accomplish modding in a cross-platform manner, I thought that was a really awesome and unique selling point to be able to build a solution around."

The key, it seemed, was to bring people together, not just the UGC creators and the players, but also the publishers of the games that the vast majority of mods require to be able to work. No mean feat, when you consider that the relationship between mod developers and IP holders has rarely been a collaborative one. On that point, Reismanis believes that the fact that so many studios have kept modding at arms length for so long has been detrimental for games and their fans. "It's been very hard to measure the impact of modding on gaming. Because they are generally free, there's really no clear way to point at a mod and say that it drove up game sales. Of course, there's heaps of examples and evidence of that, but that's really where mod.io aims to step in."

"Mod.io is very much focused on official partnerships with gaming studios, and helping them build a stronger bond with their creators and players. Community is so

In the wake of Valve rolling out paid mods in 2015 and then quickly pulling them back in again a week later, you defended the idea. Does the existence of mod.io suggest your view hasn't changed?

Scott Reismanis: I definitely think that there's a place for paid mods, it just really depends how it's done. There's definitely a happy medium where players get access to more content and creators can really hone their craft and be rewarded. It's just a matter of finding that balance. And again, that's really where we are being careful with how we expose this space, because we really want to find that balance, where it's a win-win-win for all parties, and it's seen as a very strong positive and not as a threat.

But is that something that's built into mod.io?

SR: At the moment, no. It's a feature that's not available. But our entire platform is designed so that studios are in control of their creative community, and they can choose how they want to use it and enable it. Once it is available, it will be at a studio's discretion as to if and how they use it. We'll certainly work with them to explain best practises, what we think works and looking at what's great for their creators and players. So it will be coming and it's something that we're very focused on and putting a lot of thought behind, but it's not quite here yet.

How geared is mod.io towards supporting fan ownership of content in the form of NFTs?

SR: It's not really an area that we're observing. Just like with paid modding, we're listening to the feedback of the games we're working with and we're prioritising what's most important to them. The NFT part of it, once it stabilises and once the initial hype has worn off, it'll be interesting to see how many gamers are actually engaging with it, because it almost seems to be predominantly speculators, not necessarily players. And we're very focused on the normal game that wants to release on Steam and ship through Playstation and reach an audience that way. If NFTs are a really strong way for them to accomplish that and succeed then absolutely will be a direction that we will look to enable.

important to studios these days. They know that it's no longer about just shipping a title and then moving on to the next one. It's about working with the players to create an engaging live service-type title." For Reismanis, nothing creates community better than mods. "Mods are a really awesome way of pulling fans together, no matter what platform or device they're on, and unifying them around something they love, which is finding and exploring new content for games, whether it's on Xbox Games Pass, or on Steam, Epic Game Store or wherever."

Reismanis cites the success of Roblox as the platform that really took the concept of UGC to heart and allowed creators to "go pro." With mod.io Reismanis wants to provide studios with the tools they need to make it a no brainer to embrace mods to the same degree. "That comes down to metrics and dashboards and tools that show them how many of their players are engaging with content and what types of content are trending in their ecosystem. So that they can identify and help elevate their top creators

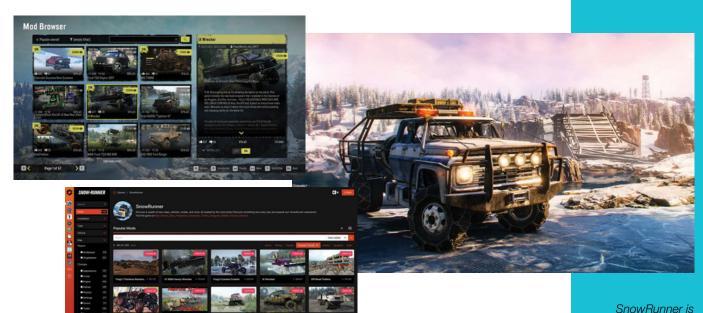
and content, make it official in their game and really just learn. Because the creativity of many is always going to outweigh the expertise of one. Mod.io is about enabling that."

That's all very well of course, but holding up Roblox as a trailblazer in the realm of UGC is also problematic when you consider how much player-created content exists in the Roblox ecosystem that willfully crosses those IP boundaries that publishers are usually so keen to protect. Reismanis responds by saying that it's not for mod.io to curate what UGC can and can't be available: "Each studio is able to set up their own policies for what creation they permit, what creation they encourage, and then we can help them implement that policy and start growing their creative community. It's just about having a platform that can help moderate and manage content and can let it run when it's permitted."

It's telling that Reismanis wants to nurture relationships between publishers and UGC creators similar to the way that influencers are managed, in the sense that mod creators are often first and foremost fans. "For the majority, the reason why they mod is because they absolutely love the game. They actually see themselves as more creative types than a consumer type. They mod just because they just want to learn game development, and because they derive enjoyment from seeing people play and experience what they've

"Modding is very much a multiplier of success. It's not necessarily something that will create success on its own, because you've got to have that passionate community that really wants to extend the game and personalise it."





created. I think it's a real shame that most UGC creation is on the edges of games, and there's really no real way for studios to really engage with their community, except on a case by case basis, which means most of them put it in the 'too hard' basket. That's why it's all about accessibility for us."

Currently mod.io supports more than 80 games, including the likes of Mordhau, Space Engineers and SnowRunners. The fact that UGC for each one is accessible hassle-free regardless of platform is impressive, but next to the volume of titles supported by Steam's Workshop, suggests perhaps that many more companies are hesitant of the service than have embraced it.

"Modding is definitely growing year by year. It's a really interesting thing, though, because modding is very much a multiplier of success. It's not necessarily something that will create success on its own, because you've got to have that passionate community that really wants to extend the game and personalise it in different ways. It's never going to be something that fits every game because modding is really challenging to support. It lives completely outside of the realm of what a game developer is normally expected to do."

Reismanis admits that when you invite and support fans to mod a game, you are relinquishing some control over it, which means having strong support and moderation systems in place to manage what UGC is put out. "One of the biggest barriers that studios face is that it's just so hard to ship a game. 'How do we do modding, where do

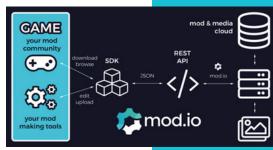
we start?' And so we're building Unity and Unreal plugins that just drop in and work, and can work on PC and cross-platform. We can take responsibility and really assist with moderation and community, as we've got a lot of expertise and experience doing that over a multi decade period.

"Ultimately, it all ties into our belief that modding makes amazing communities and leads to really emergent, incredible gameplay when enabled." The challenge for Reismanis and the wider mod.io team is to get that belief across, and of course provide the metrics and stories to back it up. "Making that more and more known to more of the

industry is a really exciting challenge for us and we're not going to really stop until we see modding as a bigger driver of success for more games, and something that studios start thinking about very early on in their development lifecycle, rather than seeing it as a value added at the end. So, it's a bit of a shift, but it's one that I would say is certainly accelerating."

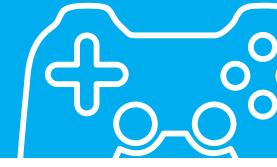
apparently the most popular game on mod.io. Take from that what you will

mod.io wants to make mods just as accessible to publishers as they have been for players





Access All Areas



Welcome to the first of hopefully many articles that will highlight the stumbles, sidesteps and giant leaps forward in accessibility, written by experts in the field. (Except for this introductory piece by **Richie Shoemaker**, that is)



20 YEARS AGO I commissioned an article in *PC Zone* magazine called Game & Able. It was intended as an oblique look at how well-served disabled gamers were by the industry at the time. I'll be honest and say that my motivation for the

article was mostly down to the fact that I'd not seen any on the subject before and it made a change from the usual six-page "exclusive" on whatever the next big thing was at the time. I had no intention to start a campaign, simply to profile an underrepresented group of gamers that I took to be every bit as passionate and invested in their hobby as everyone else.

What I didn't expect to gain from the resulting article was an understanding of how capable these gamers were. There was the story of Barry Young, who, despite living with spinal muscular atrophy, was able to enjoy and compete in *Team Fortress Classic* and *Half-Life* thanks to his programmable Sidewinder Pro. Then there were the efforts of polio sufferer John LeDell, who had set up a community site for golf fans to play together online; among whom was Paul Willey, who despite having multiple sclerosis was considered the best *Links* player in the world at the time.

On the hardware side of things there was the Joybox out of Sweden and the Tracker 2000 from Canada, that between them allowed those with a range of severe physical disabilities to enjoy interactive entertainment in

"Now we all know that developing features and functionality with disabled gamers in mind isn't just the right thing to do, it can be profitable too." innovative ways. Also mentioned were titles like *Grizzly Gulch* and *Shades of Doom*, specifically designed for the visually impaired. All this was far from the mainstream, of course, but the existence of games, devices, and



thriving online communities (including game review sites such as DeafGamers), was, for me, eye opening.

Unfortunately, the innovation, selflessness, and passion in and around the disabled gamer community was far from reflected by the industry at large. It's fair to say that the comments in the article from the ELSPA (now Ukie) representative have not aged well. In response to criticism that games lacked accessibility features for the visually impaired came the line that "altering the lighting or colour scheme may be detrimental to the effect [publishers] are trying to achieve." With regards to accessibility features generally, it was said that they would need to generate a "commercially favourable outcome" to be justified. Oh dear.

That was then and things have thankfully come a long way since. 20 years ago there was barely a recognition that disabled gamers existed, let alone could be catered for. Now we all know that developing features and functionality with disabled gamers in mind isn't just the right thing to do, it can be profitable too.

There's still a long way to go. Indeed, it may be that ensuring accessibility for all may be one of those goals that is forever out of reach, simply because it's the nature of games to innovate. But that shouldn't stop progress, which is why I hope that in the months ahead this page will be taken over by someone more qualified than me to hold the industry to account; to celebrate its success, and to highlight its failures, and to shine a light so that the ignorance and lack of engagement of 20 years ago remains forever locked in the pages of a forgotten magazine.

A Swift Spotlight: Electric Noir

Positioned at the intersection of film, TV and video games, BAFTA-nominated studio Electric Noir has hit the ground running in their four years of operation. Offering up to the industry their first instalment of critically acclaimed, interactive mobile game Dead Man's Phone, the studio is showing no signs of deceleration, with the blueprints of studio expansion and the development of a truly immersive platform for narrative content on the brink of fruition.

ardvark Swift went "in conversation with" Electric Noir's CEO and Co-Founder Nihal Tharoor, to reflect on how the industry outsiders became pioneers of interactive immersion, as well as bringing into consideration the future landscape of the mobile medium and Electric Noir's place within it.

Co-founders Nihal Tharoor and Benedict Tatham first conceptualised the bare bones of what would become Dead Men's Phone around half a decade ago, spawning out of their time as a creative partnership in advertising. "One day an email forward came around about a soap opera depicted through a WhatsApp conversation" reflects Nihal. "Immediately, that struck us as a really interesting concept; we never considered something like a messaging app as being a vehicle for narrative fiction. We had a eureka moment where suddenly like a bolt of lightning, we imagined a story where you took the role of a detective, searching the phone of a murder victim for clues."

This became the catalyst for the pair to set up shop in an industry foreign to them, with their unwavering vision being the driving force in their project. "It was certainly a huge challenge, particularly in the first few years where it was just a team of three. It was just me, Ben and our CTO Sam with very little resources". Nihal continues, "I think we were really ambitious with the level of interactivity that we wanted, a fully fleshed phone simulation where the user can explore multiple apps and features. We luckily always had guite a clear vision of what we wanted to create, and we've never really pivoted that much on what we wanted

Since then, Electric Noir have released their flagship title Dead Man's Phone, a nuanced crime drama exploring

"The hope is to create a platform for interactive storytelling; we believe the interface of the phone really is the most accessible and scalable format."

the hidden issues of racism within the UK, immersing the user in the perspective of a detective combing the phone of murder victim Jermain Jacobs. "It's a story we were really passionate about telling" Nihal highlights. "We began writing long before the Black Lives Matter surge in 2020, and includes some really challenging scenes that the actors brought an immense amount of integrity to."

The studio is now intent on evolving the season into a platform for a plethora of interactive stories, and have begun to expand their capacity, both technically and through studio hires to realise this. "We've brought in an established creative team now, including three senior creatives authoring their own seasons." Nihal continues "we have ambitions to have hundreds and eventually thousands of hours of content on this platform, so we're really focused on future facing development as much as possible. The hope is to create a platform for interactive storytelling; we believe the interface of the phone really is the most accessible and scalable format. We're trying to pioneer the medium, and while we're not the only ones doing it, we really think this will be the first mass market, interactive storytelling medium that's adopted by gamers and nongamers alike".

Electric Noir are already making huge strides to achieve this, Nihal believes the cornerstone to reaching the heights they'd like is the studio values they cultivate. "We're a young studio. We're always iterating and optimising our processes

and trying to learn from other people and on different methodologies. We're looking for exceptional minds unified by one concept, which we call generosity of spirit that we define as a sustained approach towards kindness, playfulness and curiosity. We think these values are some of the most important values in building a really healthy and enduring creative culture."

You can listen to Aardvark Swift's full conversation with Electric Noir's Nihal Tharoor through the Aardvark Swift Podcast, available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, third-party apps, and the aswift.com website.



Nihal Tharoor, CEO and Co-Founder Electric Noir



The Art of... Carrier Command 2

Geometa's game director **Dan Walters** takes **Richie Shoemaker** through the thoroughly modern sequel to the 1980s classic that's old school MicroProse through and through



HOW DID THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP CARRIER COMMAND 2 COME ABOUT?

We were interviewed by Laura Kate Dale in person for Kotaku AU a few years back about our game Stormworks, it's one of very few interviews we had done. A few things happened because of that interview; a bunch of Stormworks players used some details in the article to figure out our office address, and sent us pizza one day when we did a big update, it was a really nice gesture. Initially it was a bit concerning because our studio location wasn't published, and we thought maybe we should be more careful, but we got over it and ate the pizza.

Weeks later, I got an email from David [Lagettie], the CEO of MicroProse, who had discovered us through that article. We got talking, and immediately I was on board with the mission to bring my childhood games publisher MicroProse back. David has a huge enthusiasm for games and genuine excitement and energy, has passion for quality, and puts games first. He spoke to me for a long time about game design and a bunch of niche games that I wouldn't expect many people to know of.

And this is a person who has dedicated their life to games and simulations. It was the first time I had met someone who had in common this specific side of me.

Stormworks was doing well and we were expecting to make

more of our original IP next, but we just got excited about the original *Carrier Command*, and what we could do with it.

HOW FAMILIAR WERE YOU WITH THE ORIGINAL GAME?

I first heard about *Carrier Command*, when *Carrier Command Gaea Mission* came out. Pre-release, I remember a few people explaining to me that it was a sequel to an old but legendary game. They must have all read the same article because they would have been toddlers when the original released in 1988. Neverthe-less, it got me interested and I thought the whole concept of the game was awesome. It wasn't until later in life when I became a game developer that I became more familiar with the original and played it.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE VISUAL DESIGN OF CARRIER COMMAND 2 - WHAT WERE YOU AIMING TO ACHIEVE?

When we were concepting CC2, I was really excited about The Last Night and how the artwork for that game took an old "retro" style and brought pixel art into the modern era. It looks a thousand times better than pixel art games looked in the 1980s and 1990s, but at the same time, is exactly as I remember them in my head. We wanted to do the same thing for early 3D games, and mix low fidelity with rich lighting. We wanted to do something that hadn't been done before in video games. I had played Alien Isolation (which is a masterpiece) and loved how it took the player back to the 1980s and was so true to the Syd Mead concept art.





And we wanted to build upon the gameplay, and give the game that moodiness that is constantly reminding you how alone and in peril you are, and that every decision matters.

THE NATURE OF THE SEA IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE GAME, BEING BOTH ALIEN AND FAMILIAR, ALMOST LIKE A VAST OIL SLICK - WAS THAT INTENDED?

Yes, it is intentional. The sea is completely over the top, the ocean swell must be 30-40m. Adopting the narrative of another planet frees you of a lot of constraints, so you can do crazy things like tuning the colour of the water to achieve the right mood, or adding colossal waves to deter the player and add an extra dynamic to the strategy board.

HOW MUCH DID THE ORIGINAL GAME (OR ITS MORE RECENT REMAKE) INFORM THE VISUAL DESIGN?

We are aware of the remake, we have played it, and some of the visual effects are really nice. But there was a conscious decision to ignore it and focus on developing a sequel for the original 1988 game. It was one of the first 3D games and there were not many triangles to spare, and they were very carefully spent describing the information the player needed to play. Gameplay was before graphics, and much of the screen was carefully considered UI for the various tasks. We took that concept but went diegetic, and from this point, we looked at a lot of different places to build the rest of the visuals.

"The problem with trying to build a new visual that has not been done before in entirety, is that you are having to imagine what it could be like, with no solid reference material to clearly specify it."

STORMWORKS IS CLEARLY EMBEDDED IN THE DNA OF CC2, BUT TO WHAT EXTENT? WHAT TOOLS OR TECHNIQUES DO THE GAMES SHARE?

Carrier Command 2 has an entirely original engine developed specifically for this game. There are many common effects and appearances that originate from being created by the same studio, but internally, most of the techniques are different. We started developing Stormworks seven years ago and are still updating it with major new features – but this takes its toll on any code base in any software company. Code does age, and re-writing takes much longer than writing it the first time did. When you work on Stormworks, then CC2, you feel like you are getting 4x more work done, because everything is simpler, better considered, and easier. It's the effect of having many more years of experience and confidence.

HOW DID THE VISUALS EVOLVE DURING DEVELOPMENT? WHAT CHANGES, IF ANY, WERE FORCED UPON YOU DURING THAT TIME?

The problem with trying to build a new visual that has not been done before in entirety, is that you are having to imagine what it could be like, with no solid reference material to clearly specify it. You simply cannot know how it is going to turn out. You have to press forward with some faith, and trust your process. So, we were thinking more about the process, than the result. For example, a big part of the visual of CC2 is the lighting and fog colours at different times of day. We drove this by a live-reloaded texture so the artist can sit there, editing a texture, and immediately seeing how that

affects the mood of the game.

I don't think any changes were really forced. I think the only thing would be that we initially wanted more verticality to the islands, but the procedural process we developed didn't really allow this.



Right: The narrative of Carrier Command 2 is based on the Gaea Universe, and particularly, Beyond the Son, by PD Gibson. In the not-so-distant future, more destruction of the climate and environment has led to more extreme politics and fierce fighting over less abundant resources.





Below: The 3D pixel art takes the focus away from detail and realism, and towards design, silhouette, and form. It is a very different process to modern game art asset creation.

Below: The diegetic UI is designed to replace the various UI screens and views of the original game. These UI screens become physical screens, buttons become physical dials. In a game with so many player controlled functions, arranging these screens in a physical arrangement is easier for humans to navigate and associate location with function.



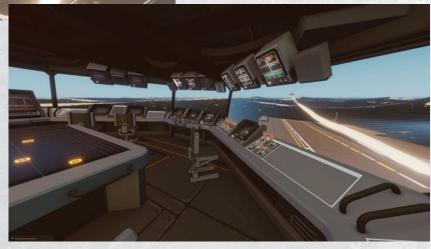
Right: In pursuit of consistency, the HUD overlays are also rendered with limited resolution to match the pixel art appearance of the game. In many ways this is restrictive, but pushes the designer to get the most of every pixel rendered. Should any element be rendered a single pixel out of place, it would be glaringly obvious.





Left: The atmosphere and dynamic environment is core to Carrier Command 2. Wind, rain, ocean currents, visibility, are all richly and dynamically simulated. The visual effect reinforces the gameplay implications that these systems have.

Right: Carrier Command 2 was a natural adaptation to VR. The "bridge commander" style gameplay is a restrained window into the world from a game design point of view, but also matches the restrained physical interface that comes with VR.



Left: The literalism of the diegetic UI is carried over to the carrier and vehicle controller. The game is always experienced from a first person viewpoint, to underline the simulator aspect. Operating the remote cameras gives a limited view of the battlefield, as the player uses multiple information sources to build their image of the game board.

Right: The landscapes are procedurally generated, built from triangular low-poly tiles, then heavily processed in code to build the geological stories of the various biomes that occur in the world.



When We Made... Murder by Numbers

Chris Wallace gets behind the scenes of Murder by Numbers: a detective/Picross hybrid title that puts good times and LGTBQ+ representation front and centre.



efore there was Fall Guys, there was Murder by Numbers. The visual novel/Picross hybrid game is the sort of title that was once synonymous with the Mediatonic name – following the tradition of their leftfield, fan-favourite titles such as Hatoful Boyfriend.

A lot has changed at the company since *Murder* by *Numbers* first released in March 2020 – A month in which nothing else of note occured, I'm sure. Just a few months before *Fall Guys*' Beans charmed the world (including Mediatonic's new owners Epic Games), *Murder by Numbers* delivered an exceptional blend of 90's nostalgia, a heartwarming story rife with LGBTQ+ representation and a talking robot, all packed together in a Picross game.

It's definitely a novel and eye-catching idea – Combining the best of *Phoenix Wright*'s camp melodrama with relaxing and satisfying Picross puzzles, two concepts that blend together far better than you'd ever have expected.

The game's narrative follows the adventures of actress-turned-detective Honor Mizrahi and her robot companion SCOUT as they tackle a series

of murder mysteries, all to a remarkably nostalgic backdrop of the 1990s. As we've discussed in previous issues of MCV/DEVELOP, combining a puzzle game with a strong narrative, especially such a high-concept one, is a tall order. So we're intrigued to know how Ed Fear, lead creative at Mediatonic, first pitched the idea to the studio.

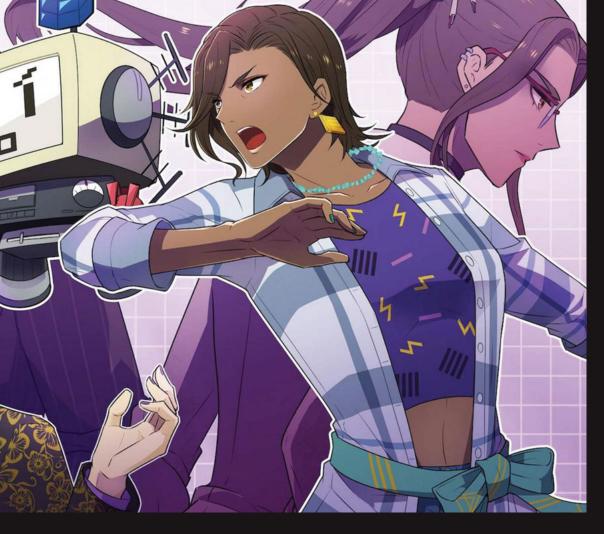
"I'd had the idea in my back pocket for about 10 years," says Fear. "When I applied [at Mediatonic], I was asked to provide some game concepts, and a Picross/detective game was one of them. No one ever said anything about it. So I just assumed that no one was interested.

"And then, years later, I was working on some stuff that got cancelled and I suddenly didn't have anything to do. So my boss asked me to prototype the idea, so I spent six weeks building the game. I mean, a horrific version of the game with everything cobbled together from Google Images and my terrible programming. But I submitted it and immediately went on holiday.

"The next day, at the departure gate at the airport, I got an email saying that they're approving it right



Ed Fear, lead creative at Mediatonic



away. The leadership team really liked the prototype, and we started figuring out a way of putting a team together."

GET THE GANG TOGETHER

And put a team together they certainly did. Of the numerous hands involved in the project, one that is particularly of note is Hato Moa (director of Hatoful Boyfriend), who stepped in to handle the character design, much to Fear's delight.

"It was huge when she came on board to do the characters. Obviously, we'd had success working with her before on Hatoful Boyfriend, so getting her buy-in was a huge moment for us. And that kind of thing kept happening as development went on. It suddenly grew into like, 'wow, this is really happening,' rather than just this... thing we're doing in the corner."

The big-name talent didn't stop there however, with the legendary Masakazu Sugimori (of Phoenix Wright, Viewtiful Joe and Ghost Trick fame) stepping in to handle the game's soundtrack. Which, for a game inspired by Phoenix Wright, is a tremendous bragging right.

"The original idea for the game came about when I was playing Picross DS, which is around the same time I was

playing the Phoenix Wright games. I didn't quite realise how much fans would draw that line with it.

"I mean, Phoenix Wright is a terrifying thing to live up to, right? Especially the original trilogy, they're just really amazing, wonderful games. The structure of *Pheonix* Wright was always a part of Murder by Numbers, and then it just gradually became more that way over time.

Below: The game's Picross elements blend surprisingly well with its visual novel aspects





Above: The LGTBQ+ representation is a large part of what makes the game so beloved "So obviously, when we got Sugimori-san on board, it was a real 'oh shit' moment. It was great, but also like okay, we're definitely going to get compared to *Phoenix Wright* now!"

Sugimori's involvement inadvertently resulted in my favourite aspect of *Murder by Numbers*: its opening theme song. When I first played the game just before its launch last year, I was wholly unprepared for its opening cinematic: an animated theme tune to the game, evoking the Saturday morning cartoons of my childhood. It's a damning indictment of the limitations of print media that I can't share it here, and I wholeheartedly encourage you to seek it out – it's beautiful.

And, it turns out, it nearly didn't exist at all.

"To be honest with you, I only had the idea of doing it with about six months to go," Fear reveals. "There were a number of origins to the theme song. The main one being, as the game got further along, I started thinking more and more about like... how am I going to pitch this game to people? Because I used to be a journalist, and I know that if you can't deliver the elevator pitch, it probably means that your concept is a bit too woolly or whatever.

"I'd tried describing it like 'oh, it's a detective Picross game that is set in the 90s, where there's an actress and a floating robot...' and just oh god, it wasn't working. I couldn't get the tone of the game across.

"At the same time, Sugimori-san mentioned to me that he really wanted to write a vocal theme for the game, and I couldn't work out how I could make that work. The game deliberately ends on a really positive note, so an emotional song at the end isn't going to work. And what would we display over this four minute song? The credits are only like a minute long, so that's three minutes I'd have to fill.

"So I was uhhming and aahing, but I was thinking that I'd probably have to tell him no. But then I suddenly realised I could solve both of my problems. If we made the opening movie like the start of a TV show, and we did the vocals as the theme tune to that TV show, then we could have

something that was short but got across the tone and the setting of the game.

"All of these things coalesce together, and when that happens, it becomes a really difficult thing to push back on. Because suddenly we're solving all these problems, we've already got all these people... If I'd gone to them with one thing, say I'd only solved the pitch problem, It might have been a harder sell. But the fact that so many things had dovetailed together really just made like: 'well, we kind of have to do this now!'"

Fear concedes that the opening animation and theme song might have been an expense Mediatonic hadn't considered, but he (rightfully) has no regrets.

"The reaction to it has been so overwhelmingly positive that I actually think the intro movie was the best thing I contributed to the project. That was the best decision I made. I think."

Development on the game was, as Fear tells it, quite smooth – with little, if any pushback from the leadership team at Mediatonic. While he recalls challenges of juggling Murder by Numbers alongside other projects, Fear describes the game's development as "pretty clear sailing."

A WARM HUG

Which seems appropriate, given Fear's motivation for making the game in the first place. There weren't any 'design pillars' in the traditional sense, but Fear had a number of goals he was working towards regardless.

"There were a number of principles that I tried to go by," he says. "For example, I didn't want there to be a fail state. I didn't want to make it so that you could get it severely wrong and have to replay things. One of my guiding stars was that I wanted to make a relaxing game – a game that I'd want to play when I was feeling low, and it would be comforting and reassuring. The idea of doing anything that punished the player was a complete no-no.

"Beyond that, we always knew we were essentially combining two different audiences, and we'd have to balance the game between the two. It couldn't become too much of an adventure game with pixel hunting and combining every item, because that would be irritating to Picross players.

"But then at the same time, you had to think about the adventure game players. There were times where we considered having more involved adventure game aspects, but I was very keen on boiling the idea down to its absolute core essence.

"And just doing that rather than getting distracted about putting in other things that we could do, because I felt that that would have thought that given our resources and our time, that was our best route of action."

One of the most well-received aspects of the game is how it portrays diverse groups, putting LGTBQ+ characters front and centre of the narrative, with the gang even making a visit to a drag club as part of their adventures.

"This was the first opportunity I'd had working in the industry where I would get to set what was going to happen in a lot of ways," says Fear. A lot of games I've worked on in the past have been with publishers. And I felt, in a lot of instances, unable to pitch a gay character for certain reasons. I just didn't want to upset the boat in a lot of ways.

"I suddenly realised that this was my chance to do what I want, and so I immediately knew that I would have a prominent gay character in it. That was always a big thing. I think some of the other stuff happened by accident, like the idea of setting a case in the drag club. But just in terms of the tone, it's a very camp game.

"I remember once speaking to my boss, and I was like, 'I think I'm really gonna make this quite, quite gay. Like, quite camp.' And he just turned to me and asked, 'what do you think you've been doing for the last year?!' It was just... oh yeah. You're right!.

"So yeah, it really was a mix. It was some degree of wanting to do something, some degree of chance... And then there was the team we had, which was very LGBTQ+, and had a lot of women on it too. We just kept on egging each other on, without recognising it. It is definitely a product of its team as well."

LGBTQ+ IN GAMES

While LGTBQ+ representation in games is slowly improving, it's still refreshing to run into a title, released by a major British studio, that takes the effort to put diversity at the core of the game's experience.

"I definitely think [LGBTQ+ representation] is getting better," says Fear. "The indie scene is doing a really great job in that. The AAA scene is.... not doing a great job. Yeah, there are exceptions, The Last of Us Part II and stuff like that, But the thing with indies, and this is very much what I experienced with this project, is that you get to set your parameters. But when you're working with a publisher, it's an entirely different thing. There's so many more people in the decision making process that can have, even well meaning, trepidation towards that.

"I wouldn't say that things are better until AAA is also generally better, because that's where you're dealing with 'oh, are we going to be able to sell this game in China?' Or 'are we going to be able to sell it in Russia?' Whereas, with indie you can just follow what you want to do. There's a lot of work that still needs to be done.

"There are a lot of good people really trying, and I think we'll get there, but it's definitely a work in progress."

While there's work to be done, there's no doubt that Fear and the rest of the Murder by Numbers team more than achieved their ambitions with the game - to create a comforting experience in times of need. Good thing too, considering when it was released.

"The thing that's meant the most to me, and something we never could have foreseen during development, was that we came out about two weeks before the pandemic hit. We started getting messages from people saying that Murder by Numbers made them feel calm, and helped them to get through this really weird time.

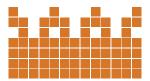
"That to me was like, the most amazing feedback I could ever get, that it helped people. Because I wanted something that was comforting. I wanted an experience that felt a bit like, and this sounds really lame to say, but it's a bit like a hug in game form. So to hear that it was doing that, in circumstances that we never could have predicted, was just wonderful."

Releasing at the outbreak of the pandemic puts the game in an interesting place. It released at the perfect time to provide comfort when it was most needed. But now Mediatonic, and the world at large, has changed drastically since March 2020. In a post Fall Guys, post Epic Games world, does Fear still feel able to pitch niche new ideas like Murder by Numbers?

"So obviously, things have changed a lot. In many ways, the pandemic, Fall Guys, being acquired by Epic... But Mediatonic has always been a company that is made up of people who are driven by people who have those kinds of ideas. That's not changed at all. So I'm pretty confident that you will see new weird things out of Mediatonic in the future. If I didn't have that confidence, I wouldn't still be here."

Below: The game's camp, comic tone will be familiar to any Phoenix Wright fans





The Final Boss

Every month an industry leader wraps up MCV/DEVELOP with their unique insight



Mike Gamble, head of strategy, Talenthouse Media Foundry

"With all eyes being on the games industry with respect to the Metaverse etc, I think one of the biggest challenges is retaining our souls."

How would you characterise the thread that runs through your career?

I think the common theme is that most of my career has been straddling the line between business and technology, almost as a translator between the two camps, helping each area understand the other a little better.

Would you say Talenthouse Media Foundry is a culmination in terms of bringing together your skills and experience - how so?

Yes definitely! It's allowing me to draw on every facet of my career to date without the need to be partisan regarding technology or company. This allows me to be able to keep the needs of Indie devs at the core of every decision.

Why is what you're doing now needed more than ever?

The ubiquity and cheap – or indeed, free – nature of professional development tools means that it has never been easier to start creating a game. However, that just moves the bottleneck further along the process. Distribution, marketing, QA/localisation, funding, self-publishing or finding a publisher all remain significant challenges, not to mention discoverability and scaling teams. Media Foundry gathering those skills and resources under one roof will help solve those challenges for devs.

What has been the biggest change you've experienced in the industry during your time?

I think the obvious change is graphical fidelity, from 8 bit pixel art to ray-traced 3D images. But in lots of ways it's how the industry has gone full circle from being 'indie' dev/publisher led, through monolithic publisher and 1st party dominated, and then back to being 'Indie' driven.

What was the greatest [or most ludicrous, funniest, worst...] single moment of your career to date?

Ahhhh tricky, perhaps the most frightening was demoing *G Police* (Psygnosis title) to Bill Gates in the early days of DirectX and wittering on about the traffic (in game) whilst casually committing mass slaughter.

With the greatest respect to your current role, what is/was your dream iob?

Owning/running an equestrian show jumping business.

What are the biggest challenges today in the games industry?

With all eyes being the games industry with respect to the Metaverse etc, I think one of the biggest challenges is retaining our souls. Not selling out to corporate machines, basically.

Who continues to impress you in the industry?

Really tricky, but I think it's the teams forging new ways of working and engaging: Sloclap with Kepler Interactive, Thunderful, Robot Teddy all seem to be holding the torch for Indies.

Can the games industry possibly change as much over the next five years as it has over the last five?

No question about it, blockchain/crypto becoming regulated and mainstream will have a huge effect. The dreaded Metaverse (can we please call it Web 3.0?) will be a black hole that pulls the industry towards it for good or ill. The great thing about the industry is that it is constantly evolving and will take all the changes in its stride.



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