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TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRODUCTION OF COMPUTER GAMES IN UKRAINE

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Анотація
У статті досліджуються тенденції розвитку виробництва комп'ютерних ігор в Україні.
Ключові слова: комп'ютер, студія з виробництва ігор, зроблено в Україні, комп'ютерна гра, шутер.

Abstract
The article examines the trends in the development of computer games production in Ukraine.
Keywords: computer, game development studio, made in Ukraine, computer game, shooter.

Introduction

Humans have been playing games for a long time. At first, these games were simple ritual games, but over time, they got more complicated and later reflected certain real-life or fictional situations. Every person has their favorite game because this type of entertainment helps to relax, relieve the nervous system, etc. Everyone has their own preferences: some people like to play with a ball, others prefer board games, solving Rubik's Cube, and so on. With the development of technology, another type of entertainment has appeared - computer games. Each year, different companies from all over the world spend a huge amount of resources to develop their products that can interest a potential customer, but how successful are the projects developed in Ukraine?

The main topic of the article is to explore the trends in the development of computer games production in Ukraine.

Research results

The Ukrainian gaming industry started its journey in 1993 with the foundation of Meridian'93 studio in Luhansk, the first video game development studio in Ukraine. They also created the first commercial title - Admiral Sea Battles, in 1996. It was a turn-based 2-D strategy game whose gameplay focused on sea battles. The game was conditionally divided into 3 stages: the first stage was to defeat enemy attacks, the second stage was to take away the looted gold from pirates, and the third stage was to expand your presence on the game map. However, the game received mediocre reviews from critics: 4.9/10 from GameSpot[1] and 6.2/10 from MobyGames[2]. The studio continued to release its games until 2012[3], but it did not achieve much popularity.

In 1995, the well-known GSC Game World studio was established. In 1998, in the words of the company's founder Sergiy Grygorovych, GSC tried to get a contract to develop Warcraft 3 (a popular massively multiplayer online role-playing game by Blizzard Entertainment), but was rejected, and they started developing their own project - Cossacks: European Wars. This is a real-time historical strategy based on the events of the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. The player manages troops and villages to support them with the aim of destroying the enemy or completing a mission. It should be noted that initially the game was supposed to present the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia, but after a positive assessment from critics, the developers decided to add 12 more nations and release the game worldwide. The game was released in 2001 and received high reviews from critics and players alike: 7.1/10 from GameSpot[1] and 74/100 from Metacritic[4], and made GSC Game World known worldwide.

During the 2000s, several quite ambitious projects were released by different studios. The most notable of them are:
- Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars by GSC Game World.
- Collapse - shooter by Kyiv-based Creoteam studio.

- The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes game series by Kyiv-based Frogwares (a series of adventure games in the quest genre that told a story from the works of Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, and received positive reviews from critics[1, 4]).

- Shooters from Kyiv-based Action Forms studio - Cryostasis: Sleep of Reason and Vivisector: Beast Within.

- Soldiers: Heroes of World War II and its sequel Faces of War from Cherkasy-based studio Best Way.

However, GSC Game World really shook up the gaming industry with the release of S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl in 2007 - the debut game in the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. series. It was developed in the first-person shooter style with horror elements, and the developing process lasted 6 years. The game is based on the exclusion zone caused by the Chornobyl accident. The protagonist is one of the stalkers, who has lost his memory and is trying to find out what happened to him. Overall, the game became a cult game and once again demonstrated the abilities of Ukrainian developers, which is confirmed by numerous positive reviews from players and critics (82/100 on Metacritic[4]). Next year, GSC released the sequel to the franchise - S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky, the project received nearly the same positive response from the public[4], and in 2010, the world saw the third title - S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripyat, that remains the freshest game in the series because the company would later face with difficulties and be forced to pause its activity. However, in 2013 GSC Game World will resume its work and start developing Cossacks 3, and a bit later, in 2018, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2: Heart of Chornobyl will be announced.

The beginning of the new decade began with the debut game of the Ukrainian-Maltese company 4A Games, which was established by the natives of GSC Game World, who, although not without scandals, still created their own studio a year before the release of S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow of Chernobyl. Metro 2033, the name of this title, was created in the survival horror style. The story is based on the novel of the same name by Russian writer Dmitry Glukhovsky. The game takes place in Moscow 20 years after the nuclear war, and the protagonist goes to complete tasks to save the surviving citizens hiding in the Moscow metro. It should be noted that the game was created using advanced technologies, as players note, the graphics were at a great level[6], so it is not surprising that this project turned out to be successful and received excellent reviews from the community (81/100 from Metacritic[4]).

From 2012 to 2023, only 3 Ukrainian studios achieved truly global success in the area of computer games: GSC Game World, Frogwares, and 4A Games. During this period, companies released the next titles:
- Cossacks 3.
- Continuation of the Sherlock Holmes series of games.
- Continuation of the Metro series.

It is also important to note The Sinking City by Frogwares, because it is a new game series for this studio, based on the horror stories by Howard Lovecraft (the project received 71/100 from Metacritic[4] and was quite positively received by the community).

Importantly, all the mentioned titles were produced in Ukraine, but there are also subsidiaries of global giants in Ukraine, such as: Ubisoft, Gameloft, Wargaming, Crytek, and many others. And our developers have contributed to the development of such global hits as: Crysis, Assassin's Creed, World of Warplanes, World of Tanks, Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six, and many other computer and mobile games. By the way, as of 2018, about 84% of game development companies in Ukraine create mobile games for iOS and Android[5].

Due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the studios faced serious problems. Most companies were forced to relocate abroad because of the threat to their employees' lives and they have suffered significant financial losses. The release of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2, which was announced in 2018, is delayed because of the war, but as announced by GSC Game World, this game should be a breakthrough in the gaming industry, its release is scheduled for 2023.

Conclusion

In the process of research, we can note that the Ukrainian game development industry has gone through a long way from the first 2D strategy game Admiral Sea Battles to the revolutionary S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2 or Metro Exodus. Ukrainian developers have a passion for creating something new and creative. Despite difficult circumstances, such as the economic crisis, coronavirus, or even war, they are directly involved in the development of world-famous titles, working in both domestic and global game studios.

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