

Interview with RetroDev Games

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When you're working for a large game company, the games you work on are often advertised through a variety of means. Game magazine print ads, radio ads, fantastically complicated and expensive flash based websites complete with mini games, and many other options are all at your disposal. People tend to hear about your game far in advance, and reviews are quickly forthcoming once it has been released. You may not get all that much credit for the work you put into it personally, but the product as a whole is made visible on the radar for the gaming public to take note.

As an independent game design group, however, your choices are fairly limited. Funds may be limited, or completely non-existent particularly if one is hoping to promote a game that they're offering free of charge. How then does one go about getting their game out to the public? Well for one, interviews on related websites are a rather good way to start.

As I've mentioned in a previous review, the RetroDev group is responsible for one of my worst lunch break addictions. It's a very straightforward, cute and agonizingly addictive little title known as Link Em Bamboo. Don't let the simplicity and overwhelming 'cute' factor fool you, this game can actually be quite difficult.

(Read the original xxgamers review of the game here: [LinkEm Bamboo Review](#))

After playing this game on and off for the past few months I decided I wanted to know about the group that created it. The credits offer a simple list of names and titles, and the website itself is rather sparse on in depth information. Then I thought, what better way to both get more information about the group and promote their work than through an interview?

And thus, without further ado, the first xxgamers interview with the folks over at RetroDev :

Who makes up the Retrodev team? Where are you located?

There are a few core people who nearly always contribute, namely myself (Code/ Design), Andy, Neal (Art), Ciaran (Audio) and Teresa (Level design). Above that, the team consists of 'whoever we know that wants to be involved!'. This can include girlfriends, boyfriends, family (My brother is a regular designer), the dog, and anyone we meet on the internet that wants to be involved. The more people listed in the credits the better. We normally do internet forums with everyone throwing ideas around.

As you can probably tell, that makes the 'Where are we located' bit a little hard to answer! The games mainly come together in my flat in the arse-end of Scotland.

I should probably clarify that we're not a company. We're just a group of people who make games in our spare time. RetroDev is a name we put on our games, symbolising the retro-ness of our development process, but it's not a company name.

Does each person have a specific position (artist, developer, etc), or does it vary based on what game you're currently working on?

Everyone's got their speciality, so they do that. But that's not a rule that's set in stone, it's just natural. If someone wanted to try their hand at something else, there's absolutely nothing stopping them from doing so. Lots of people threw in graphics for Dave's Day Out, because it was quirky and different. And they were 16*16 sprites, so it wasn't rocket science either!

What would you say some of your influences are, with regards to game design and direction?

Mainly we gain influence from games we have loved in the past, and make new games based on the same concept. We don't deliberately set out to make a game 'Look' retro, as long as the feel is there and it's fun to play. I realise that 'Dave's Day Out' seems at odds with this concept, but we found the only way we could recreate the feel of 'Jet Set Willy' was to recreate the graphical style of it.

We try and make games that are as accessible as possible. A lot of the people who test our games don't typically play games in their spare time, so compliments from them are especially important.

What would you classify as the core spirit or philosophy behind the games developed through Retrodev?

Straight from the website!

The philosophy eh? Well, this is a tricky one, because most of the time even we don't know what we're doing, or why we're doing it, but there is a common theme linking all RetroDev games. We're trying to recreate the spirit of the golden age of gaming, and not just the look. It's a Retro development process, not necessarily retro games. Our games are made by small teams of close friends, normally in a bedroom or a loft in our spare time. It's grunge game development, with our projects being a mixture of remakes, games inspired by classics, or entirely new concepts.

-Describe in brief the process behind the creation of the games you produce. (how you brainstorm ideas, assign responsibility, etc)

One of us will be lying in the bath, or sitting up a tree. There'll be a sudden flash of inspiration, and we're normally coding within the next few days!

What has been your favorite game to work on thus far? Why?

We haven't really done that many, but they've all been fun. Puzznic was a very different experience, since it was a proper remake, and not a new game.

All the games we have done so far have just been fun little projects, all helping practice up for something we can really get our teeth into.

How long does it typically take for RetroDev to move a game from concept to completion?

Couple of months maybe. We work pretty fast. It's hard to keep motivated on such small games for any real length of time.

What are your opinions on the current state of the gaming industry as a whole? Do you feel that it is thriving, losing touch with its roots, becoming more about the graphics than the overall design, etc?

I think a lot of people are a bit frustrated that 99% of games these days are factory-produced licences, created without joy purely to make money. The industry could survive quite happily doing just this, yet time and time again, a quirky, original will come along and blow everyone away.

With regards to losing touch, I think that peoples expectations of games have gone completely off the wall. A lot of emphasis is placed on cutscenes and plot. Sure, I understand it's part of the product, and I'm not saying plots have no place in games, but it seems now to have become one of the main criteria by which ALL games are judged. I got particularly annoyed reading a review of the DS 'Kirby' game, where the reviewer talked about how thin the plot was. And in another review for the same game, one of the 'Cons' at the end was 'It's in 2D'.

What would you say the downsides are of working in an indie gamedevelopment environment vs a larger game studio structure? The benefits?

The benefits are that you can do whatever you like, at your own pace. But obviously, we're not getting paid for it, so it's important to keep the motivation up in order to see projects through to their conclusion.

Do you have any advice for someone looking to get into game design?

Quite simply, design games. Just do it. There's an absolute wealth of info on the net, something we didn't have when we were younger. There are forums crying out for people looking for coders / artists / designers. If you're prepared to put the work in, there's absolutely nothing stopping you from

designing games.

A lot of people say that you need experience to get a job in games, but then you need a job in games to get experience. It's a vicious circle. But it's not true at all, you don't need a job in games to make them. That's like saying you need a job at a laundrette in order to use a washing machine!

What sort of projects do you have planned for the future?

We've just started our first truly meaty project. It's going to take a little longer than the others, obviously, and it'll be a great test for all of us. It's a pretty outlandish concept, and it's still a bit early to say anything about it (it doesn't even have a name yet). Everything we've done before has been building up to this, our first stab at a game which people might want to actually dedicate some time to playing. If we can pull it off, and we end up becoming a household name, then we will at least have proven that there is still a place in the world for the bedroom coder!

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