

There are only two items this week. There could have been more but unfortunately someone from the gaming industry expressed an opinion in an interview opinion that I think needed a better and proper answer than the bunch of bitter comments about it I've seen posted on the web this week. It took me more time than I thought to voice my own feelings about the issue but I think that the matter in itself deserves to be discussed because it concerns the whole gaming industry, publishers, developers and gamers alike.

So this was a week during which:

Bioware announced the general demo for Dragon Age 2 and Josh Olin (Treyarch community manager) expressed his views about what is the true danger to the gaming industry.

{slide=Demo For Dragon Age 2 on February 22nd}

Bioware announced that the demo for **Dragon Age 2** will available February 22nd. This demo will include the prologue of the story and feature 3 playable classes (in fact the only 3 classes available which would be warrior, rogue and mage as in the previous game). Originality of this demo, upon completion players will be rewarded with a weapon that they will be able to use in the full game once it is released (the offer only applies if you finish the demo before May 31st, 2011).

In the demo, players will venture through the game's prologue, choosing from three different character classes. They'll also learn more about Hawke and hone their skills and abilities that will make them the ultimate hero. After finishing the prologue, players will enter a key new location in the world of Dragon Age, Kirkwall, befriending Isabela, a romantic interest in the game who is also a deadly smuggler. Upon completion of the demo, players will unlock a special weapon, Hayder's Razor, an ancient dwarven blade which increases health, mana, and combat abilities, in the full release of Dragon Age II.

I suppose the "Isabela" mentioned is the one from **Dragon Age**. That promises to be fun...

More details are available on the official [demo page](#) .

Release of **Dragon Age 2** is still planned for March 8th (North America) and 11th (Europe)



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{slide=Gamers are the big problem for innovation in the gaming industry}

Treyarch (**Call Of Duty - Black Ops**) community manager Josh Olin revealed during an [inter view](#) with the site NowGamer about the **Black Ops - First Strike** DLC pack for **Call Of Duty - Black Ops** what his views are on the biggest threat that games developers are confronted to today.

Personally, as a community manager who lives in the media or social media world every day, I think the social culture of video games is moving in a more negative direction as technology and social media continues to grow. Rather than growing with it, the trend seems to be devolving. More and more gamers seem to forget what this industry is all about.

It's a creative industry – the most creative form of entertainment in existence. Too many developers who try new things are getting burned by “pundits” and angry entitled fans who look to be contrarian, sometimes simply for the sake of being contrarian. The only thing this attitude aims to achieve is stunt that creativity and innovation even further, which is something that no rational gamer looking to be entertained would want to do.

Well, as surprising as it may seem, I think he's right for a part. However, he got the wrong example and the wrong target. True, innovation in games has been shy if not stagnant during the last years. Are gamers responsible for that? When it comes to licenses like **Thief**, **Deus Ex**,

Unreal Tournament

or, mind you,

Call Of Duty

, gamers are probably partly responsible and they are right. Innovation in such licenses should always be approached carefully unless you want to ruin the franchise. Let me make a movie parallel : a James Bond movie is a James Bond movie no matter what. A Star Wars movie is a

Star Wars movie no matter what. There are changes, more effects, more explosions, more action, sometimes more emotions but basically the franchise remains the same from movie to movie and they're always big successes. Why? Because people know what to expect. When they go see a new James Bond, they may not know the story but they already know what they'll find within it and they're happy to anticipate.

Games are no different. Gamers expect something from a license they already know. They expect a certain story quality and a certain gameplay level. Sure you can introduce innovations as long as those don't disturb too much the previous areas. However, most gamers welcome big innovations when it comes to a new Intellectual Property. Gamers don't expect anything from a brand new game no one heard about and in most cases they welcome the surprise (if it is correctly integrated and doesn't turn the title into a gigantic bug feast). Unfortunately even in new IPs during the last decade, innovations have been scarce (except in the independent games developers sector). Are gamers responsible for that? How could they be? A new title they never heard about, I don't see how they could put pressure on developers. They expect nothing, they want nothing (except fun) they just wait. Sure they place their judgment after the game release but should I remember to Mr Olin that any customer willing to invest \$50 to \$60 in a commercial product is by all means entitled to give their opinion on the said product, even when their opinion is bad? But if developers do their job right including their innovations in a new IP, why should gamers complain? And the fun part about a new IP is that developers have no fanbase to please so they should feel free to try a lot of different approaches.

So no, i seriously don't think that gamers are responsible for the lack of innovation in new IPs. However we have to remember that most big publishers are in the stock market and consequently they have shareholders to please. Those shareholders are pleased when their shares go up. What's the best way for publishers to ensure that the shares go up? Well, delivering products that they already know will please a large part of gamers out there hence assuring that money will flow. Big publishing companies are not about great innovations these days they're all about not unnecessarily risking money and being conservative. And creating a brand new IP with a lot of innovation is taking a gigantic risk.

In Hollywood, there are two type of movies; the blockbusters, sure to bring back a huge load of bucks with no innovations whatsoever and the indie productions that sometimes reveal to be more interesting than blockbusters and try to be innovative but that in many cases barely bring enough money to cover the costs of making the movie in the first place. The gaming industry is no different. You have the blockbusters on one side (**Call Of Duty** being one example) and the indie productions on the other with recently (as a successful example)

Amnesia: Dark Descent

by Frictionnal Games. Fortunately Frictionnal made enough money with Amnesia to allow them to make a living and to work on further projects which is really the best case scenario for an Indie developer. Independent developers as they have no outside financial influence or pressure from a publisher are completely free to attempt new things even if they appear risky. On the downside, they have no financial backup, work triple shifts, have no insurance of success whatsoever and cannot benefit from the big marketing support that comes with a giant publisher. But in the gaming industry today ruled by big companies that are only running for profit that may be the cost of being innovative, that or trying relentlessly to convince a big

publisher to back up your amazingly brilliant and innovative but financially highly risky game... good luck with that.

So my advice to Treyarch if they really want innovation in games would be: develop a new IP on your own funds, don't expect any big publisher to fall for it, even less to back it up, and take the risk to displease everyone. But if you do it right you might end up with a big seller, at least enough of a big seller to allow you to develop your next innovative IP. One thing is sure, staying in the **Call Of Duty** business following the will of Activision won't help you.

Anyway, I agree with Josh Olin on the fact that some things in the current video game industry need to be discussed. Developers and gamers should sit down around a table (so to speak) and have a real brainstorming about the future of video games. For too long there has been a trend from some publishers and developers to ignore the true wishes of gamers and the other way around as well. It's not reading forums dedicated to specific games that will help the matter as most people on such forums have complaints (their game run bad or not at all and such...).

On the other hand most people who find a game excellent rarely take the time to make a post just saying how much fun they had to encourage developers to keep up the good work so in the end, developers receive more bad than good feedback which may skew their perception of gamers' opinion in general and push some to post on their blog like Epic Games CliffyB two weeks ago that "PC gamers are grumpy". For this skewed perception gamers are certainly responsible. Publicly stating how good a game is should feel as natural as complaining about it unless gamers in general want to be perceived as a bunch of whiners.

Then there are those publishers/developers that obviously feel no need to communicate with gamers unless it is for announcing the closing release of their next game, and even in this case the communication is often one way only. With such companies gamers may legitimately feel entitled to think that they are not more than money bags allowed to buy games and shut up about it. Example of a company that goes every way possible to stay away from gamers... The list is long so I won't choose a specific (at least I'm trying hard to not choose a specific even if I have a specific name in mind). It would be so good for gamers to post suggestions or the like on a publisher board and to hear some kind of response from the other side. Too often the answer is just... silence. Hell, in some cases it would be good to just have a board to post to... (and I'm talking about a real board, not some Facebook nonsense).

We certainly do have a bad communication problem in the gaming industry and there are parts of responsibility on every side. Now there's the matter of how are we going to fix it? The discussion remains open...

The Foxhole Week (2011-5)

Written by Starfox

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See you next week.

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