BECOMING A VIDEO GAME ARTIST: FROM PORTFOLIO DESIGN TO LANDING THE JOB

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John Pearl is a design director and principal artist at Gunfire Games. Over the past 17 years, he has worked in different positions including for example, character art director or technical art director, which enabled him to work with a number of different styles and genres of games while in these positions. He is one of the founders of Gunfire Games and the author of the *Darksiders Franchise* including the recent *Darksiders II: Deathinitive Edition*. Not being a researcher involved in truly academic research, the author´s ambition was to write a bo k that would be "a testament of the community within the games industry of people who want to see others succeed." The video games industry is a growing industry. With more people getting into gaming there is a greater demand for talented artists to construct video games. John Pearl knows this well because he is a concept artist with long experience.

The title of this book suggests a comprehensive overview of the general concepts and skills an individual needs to acquire to get into game development and land a job. The game industry has continued to grow over the years. Nevertheless, competition in getting a job in video games still remains fierce. *Becoming a Video Game Artist* endeavours to guide readers through all the stages, from making a portfolio to being successful in a job interview. The book is filled with detailed descriptions of the types of jobs, their responsibilities, the required skill sets and characteristics of professionals as well as interviews with working professionals about their career advice and experience. During the last 17 years, the author has worked in different positions within the game industry and his close work with artists in other disciplines such as concept art, user interface, visual effects and animation as well as having reviewed hundreds of portfolios for various art positions has resulted in writing this detailed and comprehensive book.

The book consists of eighteen chapters and an introduction written by the author himself. It explores the different jobs related to the video games industry and their responsibilities. Furthermore, each chapter contains questions raised to various industry professionals in the form of interviews to enhance the readers' understanding. The book is not intended to teach future professionals how to draw or construct their ideas, nor is it meant to teach them to design and it certainly does not have any ambition to improve their artistic abilities. What the chapters will present to them is to begin the experience of a career in video games industry by teaching them how to make their portfolio stand out from others, what to expect once given a job in the industry and what it takes to become a concept artist or designer working on professional games for studios.

The chapters may notionally be divided into thematically oriented sections focusing on different aspects of getting a career in video games. Leaving aside the Introduction, which is the author's personal contextualization of the issue, the second chapter entitled 'General Concepts and Skills' looks at some general skills and personal traits that are of-

ten required to get any art-related game development position. The chapter deals with the universal skills for any development position and that are vital for any game artist, such as creativity, attitude to solving problems, team collaboration, excellent communication skills, a readiness to 'prototype' something, to implement new character types or animation techniques for the game, or the ability to be organized and to work under tight deadlines.

The next seven chapters, from chapter three to chapter nine, focus on key skills and the core competencies of different artists which are listed in job postings. John Pearl explores the key professional skills required to be an animator, a character artist, a concept artist, an environment artist, a technical artist, a user interface artist and a visual effects artist. Each of the chapters includes relevant information related to the job and an explanation of the fundamental elements of the games on one hand, and one or two interviews with various former game artists on the other. The interviews provide first-hand accounts while also reinforcing the topics. Moreover, visual examples are provided throughout the chapters to reinforce the learning objectives of the book. At the end of each chapter, the author refers to upcoming chapters that deal specifically with preparing a portfolio for different artists to allow them to demonstrate their skills and competencies as described in the previous seven chapters of the book.

The following section of the book, including chapters ten to seventeen, deals with crafting a portfolio for different art jobs. Chapter ten explores 'some of the general concepts and theories behind building a strong portfolio' (p. 99). It primarily focuses on principles to keep in mind when assembling a portfolio and covers universal ideas that are applicable to any of the art disciplines. If there is any weakness in the book, it may be the treatment of the general concepts and theories. The background behind building a strong portfolio is clearly described, also accompanied by an interview, can easily be understood and is generally adequate. On the other hand, however, general theories are not dealt with as well as the question of the practical implementation of key skills, responsibilities and competencies into the art portfolio.

In chapters eleven to seventeen, the author immerses 'more into the specifics of tailoring a portfolio to a particular career path' (p. 99). The chapters are practical, providing information on key items related to specific art jobs and giving advice and recommendations by experienced professionals in the form of interviews on how to craft a good portfolio. Animation in games, character art, concept art, environment art, technical art, user interface art and visual effects art are highly competitive fields and the aim of the book it to help a reader's portfolio 'stick out from other portfolios' (p. 132).

The last chapter of the book represents the final section and is focused on the preparation that should be taken into consideration before applying to a company, namely writing a cover letter and looking at the interviewing process. This may be perhaps the least exciting part of the book to read because, as the author himself remarks, cover letters are often a formality and 'may never make it to the portfolio reviewers or even to the hiring managers' (p. 197). These views are, however, refuted by the professionals' answers in the interviews included in the chapter.

The comprehensive scope of the book covers all important aspects of a career in the video games industry. Rather than being a theoretical book on video games, the work may be considered a 'roadmap' in guiding those who seek a job in the field of video games. The different art related jobs and their responsibilities are explored utilizing an understandable and enjoyable approach. The book is well written. The layout of the chapters and visual examples make it clear and attractive. To sum up, the book should be considered a good choice if one wants to learn about the challenges of art-related jobs before getting one's foot in the door of a video game company.