

T.E.C. 3001 Post-Mortem

Intro

After a few months of learning XNA Game Studio, we started working on Dark Redeemer - our first game. Development took a long time and after two years we realized that we took more than we could handle. Then we spotted a local mobile application contest so we decided to send Dark Redeemer on vacation. We set down and started thinking of an idea for mobile game. Along came idea for running game - T.E.C. 3001. After few months of development we decided to port it to XBOX. Later on, game was in beta stage and we applied for Indie Games Summer Uprising event. T.E.C. 3001 was released on 25th of August and there are some things that went right and wrong.

What went right

Game design. The choice of virtual world and running robot turned out good. Our starting position was simple: "take snail mail, replace it with robot and put it in a virtual world". We looked at it as inspiration to simplify gameplay. As a result we now have few simple controls which can be combined and give nice results. After that it was all about level design. We put so much effort in level design and it paid off. Many levels can be completed in different ways, so the game is not linear. We tried to make each level unique and to stand out from other levels. Combination of simple controls and level design gives great sense of depth in gameplay. From the moment it was published, game became unique on XBOX Live Indie Service.

Graphics and Audio. One thing that makes our game stand out on XBOX Live Indie Games is graphics. Almost every person who tries the game, relates to Tron. We used graphics engine and shaders which we developed for our first game mentioned earlier. We gave the game retro-futuristic look which people liked very much. Neon lights and glowing trees are everybody's favorite elements in game. When we saw reaction to the basic graphics in beta test, we added extra touch to the graphics with changing the color theme - in game and from menu. Also, music came out very well. It fits with our virtual environment perfectly. We aimed for music to be electronic. At the end music turned out as combination of techno-electro-break-punk - similar to our personal taste.

Communication with gamers. From the moment we decided to go for XBOX development of T.E.C. 3001, we wanted to spread the word about our new project. We started new threads on many forms to hear the voice of real gamers. We wanted real critics from gamers who will say what they really mean about it. There were many constructive criticism which influenced final product. For example, ranks at the end of the levels are suggested by players from many public gamer forums. Also, running animation was changed three times according to player responses. All this communication went really well and we recommend that every developer do the same. We wanted new approach - to hear what people like in game at a time when it is still in development.





HEAD



Apply for IGSU. One day we ran onto Indie Games Summer Uprising news on LinkedIn network. Day before, we were thinking to send mail for Arcade games. But we decided to go with small steps into game industry and IGSU was perfect way to go. After day of thinking we filled a form and applied for IGSU. We were surprised by competition because there were over 70 games applied. We had maximum votes even though there were a lot of other good games. Also we made contact with great developers from the finals and we learned so much about organization from Kris and Dave (organizers of the IGSU event).

Testing with friends. Last month of the T.E.C. 3001 development our friends helped us with testing the game. There were over 15 people who at least tried the game. Many of them are active, good gamers who provided us good feedback about the game. Result of that was very polished title. Game would be incomplete if we had not organized this testing.

Speed and difficulty curve. This is the tricky one because we had good and bad things with both of those. We planned the game to be all about speed so we put so much effort to give great sense of speed to the gamers. Great speed attracts specific type of gamers. We decided that T.E.C. 3001 is going to be hard, challenging game. Good thing is that we achieved the difficulty level that we planned. Both of this things earned us respect with hardcore gamers.

What went wrong

Deadlines. Because of our participation in IGSU event, we had a deadline which we didn't expect at the beginning. Even though the game was almost finished, level design and testing for XBOX Live Indie Games put us in dangerous situation to break the IGSU deadline. Also, we did marketing by ourselves so it took us from development of the game. There were many things we had to do in finishing stage before release date, like testing of gameplay, testing for evil checklist, marketing, level design, promotion materials (boxart, trailers), etc. If there wasn't any deadline, we would design many more levels than we have now. This period of the development was the hardest and made us cut off some of the game parts but it gave us a lot of experience.

Evil checklist. This is our first published title and that checklist was very evil to us. For those who don't know there is a checklist of problems that needs to be cleared in game before it gets on marketplace. We failed first peer review because we didn't had experience with this before. This, along with deadline caused us headache. If we had more experience with this we would have more time and more levels in game.

No multiplayer and mods. Many people complained about not having multiplayer or some other mods of the game. We had an idea for multiplayer and mods but because this is our first finished game, we decided to go without them and to keep the game small. These things would take us 6-8 months more

with development and that would be too much for this title. We wanted to get small and polished game so we can publish it fast. If we had multiplayer and other modes, game would sell better and it would be completed title.

Non-popular title. We didn't want to make copy of popular titles (minecraft clone, zombie avatar killers etc.) and that affected the sale numbers. That is bad thing because we are not rich now :). Will we make that kind of titles? No. We will keep trying to make something original even if it does not get us the money.

Speed and difficulty curve. No, this is not error. As we said earlier, we had good and bad things about these two. Great speed gave us great development problems with collision and visibility of incoming obstacles. A lot of time was spent for this to work but again some problems remained in final version. Difficulty drove away many people because they found the game annoying. If we had not extreme difficulty and speed approach to the game it would be interesting to wider audience.

At the end, this was great experience for us. We feel we made a nice and decent game which sits besides avatar and zombie games on marketplace. We learned some stuff about publishing game to marketplace. Now we have the basic insight of the game development industry. We are proud with taking place among other finalists in IGSU and publishing our first title and we are proud with our robot who saved humanity :) For those who are interested, here is sales data:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AascbsUFKBqUQdERiYIFtV1pLemZXS1RBUk9Sdnd6aWc&hl=en_US#gid=0

We want to thank XNA Community, friends and IGSU organizers.

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