Get Jamming!

Aspiring developers create a video game in a weekend

From March 25th to March 27th, Train2Game, in association with the University of Bedfordshire, is holding its first ever Game Jam with all the proceeds going to the Prince's Trust. Train2Game Game Development student Lee Davis was one of over 100 participants in the event and the Train2Game blog caught up with him on the Saturday afternoon – halfway through the event – to see how he was getting on. You can read the transcript below, or listen to it at www.audioboo.fm/train2game.

All proceeds from the Train2Game Game Jam will go to The Prince's Trust.

T2G: We're about half way through the Train2Game Game Jam now and you've just had a meeting with all of the heads of the teams, what important things did you have to put into the students minds at this point?

SHARP: The key thing is just to remind them about their passage of time, so just to remind them that we are half way through, that they have to reserve some time for some activities towards the end; i.e. optimising the game, tidying it up, making it look good then obviously the submission. It's very easy for them to forget about all that and just add and add and add which just leads to more problems. So, the right thing to do right now is just remind them that half the time's gone, they need to break the remaining time up into particular portions to make sure everything gets taken care of.

T2G: How has the first half of the Game Jam gone?

SHARP: It's gone pretty well in comparison to other events so we'd see certain kinds of problems that are fairly familiar. We get teams where the design is a little weak and that leads to problems when they start to produce it; we've had all those usual problems in a minor way. We've had no huge real issues, we've had no team collapses, we've had no real show stopping kind of problems. So, at the moment it looks like every team has got something which is moving towards being a playable level, which is good at this point.

T2G: Can you tell us what the theme of the event is and what made you decide upon it?

SHARP: The theme for this event was *Sherlock Holmes.* I considered a few other things before selecting that theme, but what I really wanted was a theme that had a very strong visual style already so that the teams weren't forced into a process of 'We don't know what this looks like.' Well, most people know what Victorian London looks like, there's plenty of reference material so from that point of view the theme – the Sherlock Holmes theme – meant we had less problems in terms of art style. There's a strong set of characters that have all got very well defined attributes, and that made it very easy to see and understand what the game might or might not include. But it was really just to make sure that the team had a lot to go on, that the theme had a lot of strong material that the team could rely on and to leave a little less to the imagination.

T2G: And have the students come up with a variety of the interesting themes around this topic?

SHARP: Yeah, we've got two or three of the games that where they did the design they decided to focus on a certain character in a certain story and that meant two or three of the games kind of look and feel similar. But we've got a couple that do look really – I guess outlandish – so we've got a pretty good spread of ideas I think.

T2G: Come the end of the event, what benefits will the Train2Game students have gained?

SHARP: There's several things to have learned, one is that is much harder than they imagine it is to the real role that teamwork plays and being able to coordinate the activities of other people to the same goal. Hopefully they've understood that the technology is not the driver; they need to come up with an interesting game idea and the technology is something that comes along after that and not before that. And then a little bit of personal realisation – some of them probably thought they were a little better than they are, some of them probably thought they're a little worse than they are – but what it does is give them a good way of judging their own abilities and progress in terms of the course and in terms of other students, and I think that helps them understand where they actually are overall in their learning curve.

T2G: Thanks Dave

Dave Sharp, Head of Placements and Incubators at Train2Game, added "Train2Game's Game Jam is for all those with a passion for gaming, a test of skill, creativity and imagination. A small group acting as a team exemplifies where games development is heading and the Game Jam model brings that together beautifully. I'm expecting to see some new and crazy ideas flow out of this event and prove that the participants are up to the challenge!"

About Train2Game

Created in 2008, Train2Game is the only online blended learning college that offers people the chance to qualify as a Games Designer, Games Developer, Games Artist & Animator or Games QA Tester with a TIGA Diploma and was created to meet the specific industry skills shortages as recognised by TIGA.