

# Post mortem – *SINE MORA™*

## The Failed Struggle to Reboot a Genre

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# Origin of the Project

- Spirit of the team
- Realities of the team
  - Team size
  - Project type serving the team goals
  - Production process - straightforward, modular
- Realizing Who You Are is key

# Genre analysis

- Heritage - shoot'em up games defined our industry
- Position today
  - Danmaku dominated niche with low sales
  - Third of releases coming from a single company
  - Very few studios make STGs
- Blind alley / dead end - needs SFIV-like saviour

# Our selected methods of innovation

- Go back and start an alternative timeline
- Add new core gameplay element
  - Not a bullet hell, not a euroshooter
- Not enough, per se
  - Story integration
  - Fabulous art

# Core gameplay design

- Inspiration from the doujin scene: Carax '95
- Technology driven design
  - Current televisions at home - HD / Widescreen
  - Surround sound, 3D stereoscopic rendering
- Conversion of the basic idea and our legacy reflex
  - Realizing we're not doing an arcade game

# Production planning - Up the ante!

- Add production values
  - Co-development with Grasshopper Manufacture
- Work together with big names, legendary talent
  - Goichi Suda
  - Akira Yamaoka
  - Mahiro Maeda

# Co-development: An extra layer

- Workload distribution between the parties
  - Focus on studio strength
  - Maximize task separation
  - Plan ahead, you hold two fates
- High compatibility is essential for co-production
  - Immediately leave non-productive areas

# Art production process detailed

- Consensus on the style
- Gray box level, basic level and gameplay design
- Object (enemy) list, key areas selected
- Concept art
- 3D modelling
- Lighting and post processing

# Art production process detailed

- Narrative / story driven level design
- Level design driven concept art
- Concept art driven project plan
  - Very well separated tasks
  - Based on a single level segment, you can make extremely accurate calculations, project plan

# Super effective... in theory



# Super effective... in theory

- Schedule correction effects on production
  - Makes top management nervous, requires balls
  - Morale boost for the team, to a certain degree
  - Requires outstanding communication with the partner
  - Do it very, very carefully
- Make sure you have your playground in the budget

# Deus Ex Machina

- A publisher with extra requests
  - Plus five languages
  - Catastrophic early UI decisions made this a nightmare
- A partner with different development background
  - Different tools, no experience with Fmod
  - Inventive but non-elegant methods and solutions

# Product launch

- Fantastic critical reception
  - Metascore 83 after 61 reviews
- Initial sales under expectations
  - Great conversion rate, but only 10k units in the first month
- Slowly gaining ground, now at 20k
  - P&L was calculated with 4 platforms

# What went wrong?!

- Failure theories
  - Timing and position
  - It was too casual for the hardcore players
  - It was too hardcore for the casual players
  - Fresh, new IP
- Cannot accept the truth: it is niche
  - Sales numbers of other shoot'em ups are encouraging

# Critics vs. aficionados

- The hardcore decided to ignore the game
  - Random power-up distribution
  - Power-ups leaving the screen
  - Environment-collision inconsistency
  - General readability
- Creator contra consumer
  - Do not enter the snake pit

# Lessons learned

- Never turn your back on the Family
- Must try harder to gain mainstream attention
- East-West collaboration is essential
- Genre releases require multiplatform strategy

# Genre future

- From Prof. Jim Whitehead's lecture at UC Santa Cruz
  - Push limits of storytelling, plot to motivate players
  - Multiplayer / Social shoot'em up
  - Improved choreography, in our case cinematic qualities
- Genre renaissance?
  - Forget Kickstarter, we need an SFIV: Gradius, R-Type

**Thank you very much**  
**for your attention**