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THE ART OF CLOSING

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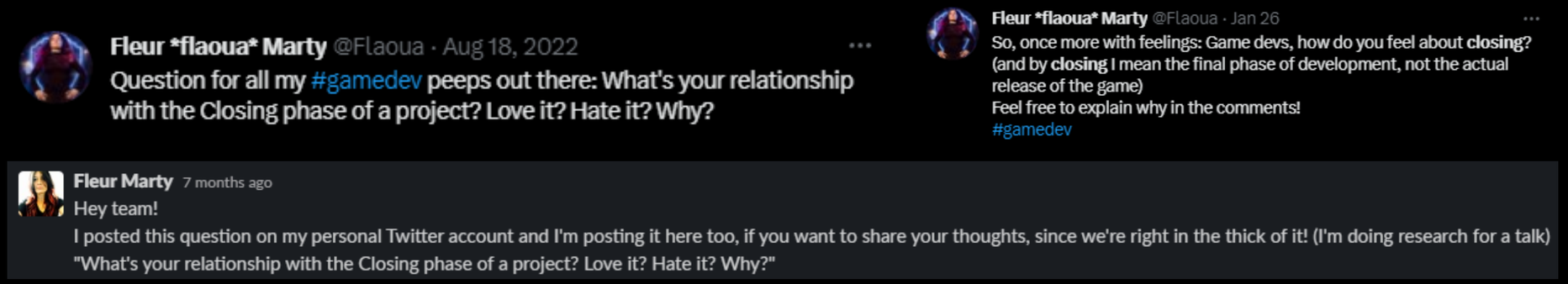
#GDC23

Every game that ships is a miracle

The Ugly Duckling of Game Dev phases: Closing

- Nobody likes to talk about it
- Nobody outside of the industry even thinks about it
- A majority of game developers really don’t like it

A little dive into how devs feel about closing



Combined results:

- About 10% of respondents absolutely hate it
- 70% have some form of mixed feelings about it
  - Less than half of those on the positive side
- 20% absolutely love it

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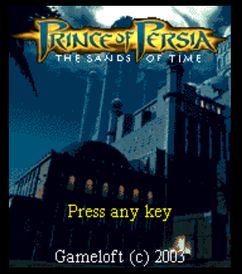
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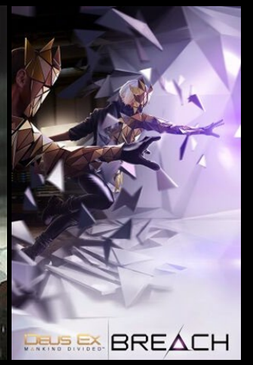
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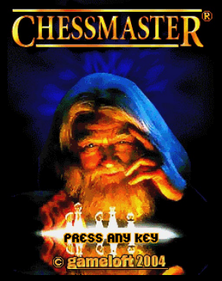
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Closing is HARD. Like, really friggin’ hard.

But I LOVE it.

What is closing?

The final months of development, right before ship, when the team is putting the final touches to the game.

Theoretical ideal: Optimization, debugging & final balancing

Actual reality:

- Finishing features
- Final polish pass on content
- Addressing last rounds of player feedback
- Outputting Marketing assets
- Optimization
- Balancing
- Debugging

Why is closing so special?

- More than just debug - “crystallization” moment
- Moment of absolute clarity
- Realm of Producers

Why is closing so special?

- Requires a completely different set of mental muscles than other phases of development
- Major factor in the success of the game's release
- Can make or break teams' mental and physical health

Ideal outcome

Releasing a great, highly polished, bug free game, while preserving the team’s physical and mental health.

Unpacking the survey results

Main dislike drivers

- Chaos
- Crunch
- Last minute feature creep
- Lack of creativity
- Poor communication
- Poor prioritization

Main like drivers

- Focus
- Manageable workload
- Good scoping calls
- Sense of achievement
- Good communication
- Clear prioritization

Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

- Communicating
- Building alignment
- Engaging the team
- Keeping things under control

Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

Communicating

- Focus points / priorities
  - In context
- Upcoming milestones / deadlines
  - Early & Often
- Precise progress & remaining work
  - Highlights & Trends

Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

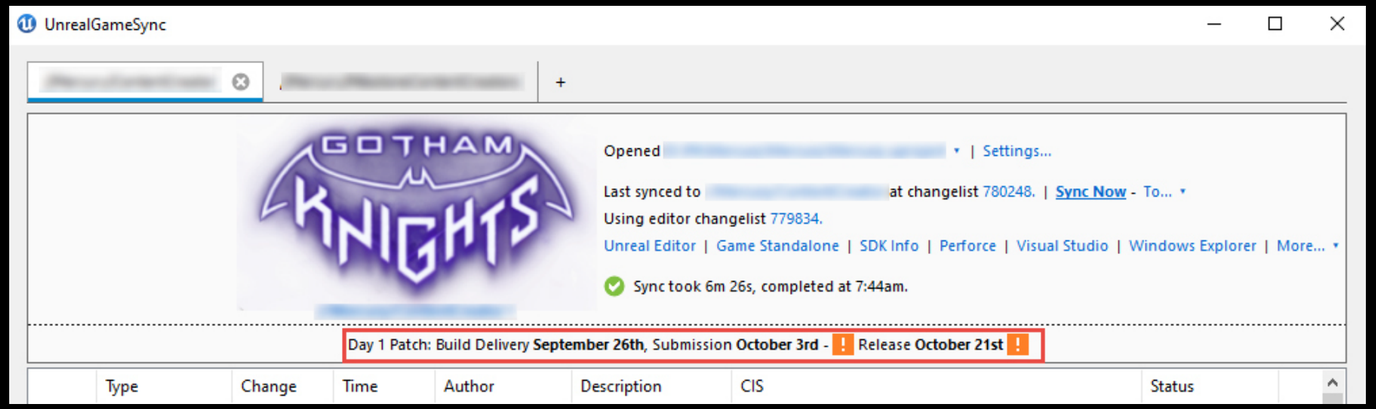
Communicating

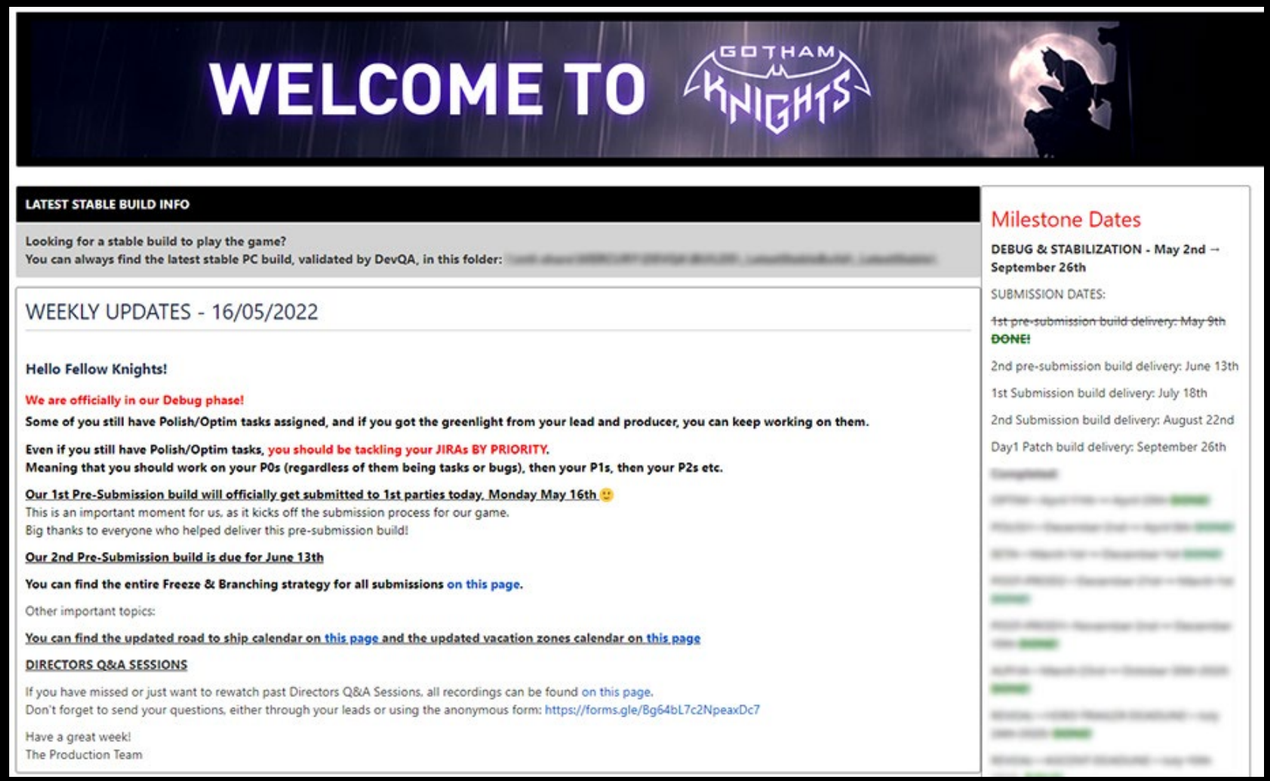
- Cuts
  - In context
- Closing specific processes

Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

Communicating

- Be mindful of the HOW
  - Nobody reads emails
  - Opportunistic Channels





Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

Building Alignment

- Reminder of game pillars
- Establishing a clear, shared definition of what goes in the game at this stage
- Having a clear established process for defining “what is done”
- Moral contract between Directors & Producers

Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

Engaging the Team

- Involving individual contributors in the final scoping
- Trusting the team to know where its efforts will yield the maximum results
  - 80/20 rule
- Protecting play time
- Celebrating the wins!
- Leveraging the marketing campaign

Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

Keeping things under control

- Polish vs Debug
- Ramp down strategy
- Building extreme awareness of dependencies

Bringing devs to the “like” side of the Closing Force

Keeping things under control

- Controlling OT and making it meaningful
- Do not panic
- Tolerance zero for toxic behaviors

The Nitty-Gritty

Critical processes for a good closing

- Documentation
- Communication pipeline between QA & Dev Team
- Reliable “flare” process for urgent issues

The Nitty-Gritty

Critical processes for a good closing

- Submit approval pipeline
- Waive pipeline
- Risk assessment
  - Know your game…

    … and your team!

Conclusion

Tips to be a good closer

- Practice the closing muscle
- Keep your head cold
- Know what to let go of and when
- QA is your best ally
- Identify and avoid single points of failure
- You don’t have to do it alone
- Put your oxygen mask on before helping others

QUESTIONS?

Come find me at Overlook 2013!

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