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San Francisco, CA

THE ART OF CLOSING

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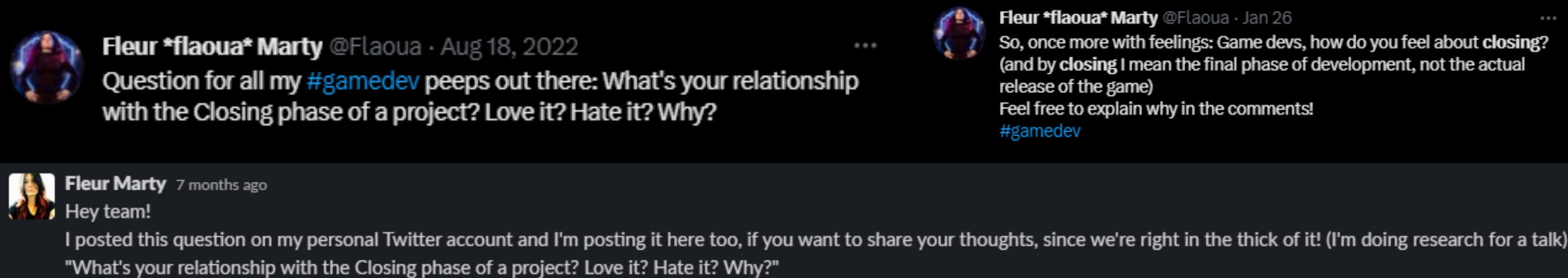
#GDC23

Every game that ships is a miracle

The Ugly Duckling of Game Dev phases: **Closing**

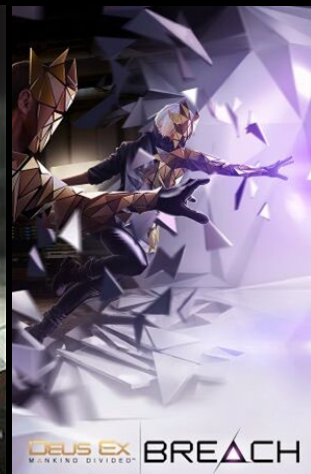
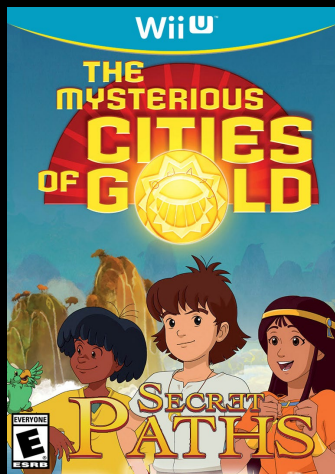
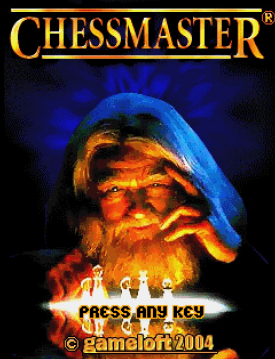
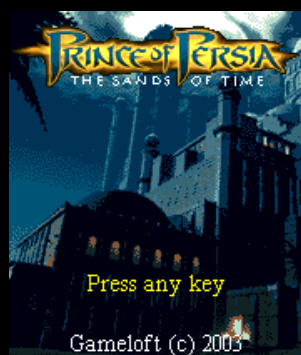
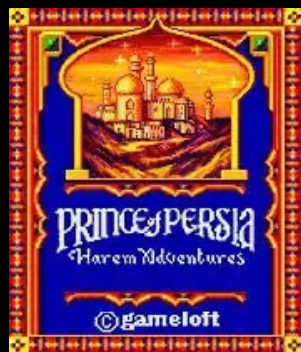
- Nobody likes to talk about it
- Nobody outside of the industry even thinks about it
- A majority of game developers really don't like it

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



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

The screenshot shows the UnrealGameSync web interface for the game Gotham Knights. At the top, there's a header with the game logo and a navigation bar. Below the header, a section titled "Day 1 Patch: Build Delivery September 26th, Submission October 3rd - Release October 21st" is highlighted with a red box. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column, titled "LATEST STABLE BUILD INFO", contains text about finding the latest stable PC build and a "WEEKLY UPDATES - 16/05/2022" section. The right column, titled "Milestone Dates", lists key dates for the game's development, including "DEBUG & STABILIZATION - May 2nd - September 26th" and "SUBMISSION DATES".

UnrealGameSync

GOTHAM KNIGHTS

Opened [dropdown] | Settings...

Last synced to [dropdown] at changelist 780248. | [Sync Now](#) - To... ▾

Using editor changelist 779834.

[Unreal Editor](#) | [Game Standalone](#) | [SDK Info](#) | [Perforce](#) | [Visual Studio](#) | [Windows Explorer](#) | [More...](#) ▾

✓ Sync took 6m 26s, completed at 7:44am.

Day 1 Patch: Build Delivery September 26th, Submission October 3rd - Release October 21st

Type	Change	Time	Author	Description	CIS	Status
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WELCOME TO GOTHAM KNIGHTS

LATEST STABLE BUILD INFO

Looking for a stable build to play the game?
You can always find the latest stable PC build, validated by DevQA, in this folder: [link]

WEEKLY UPDATES - 16/05/2022

Hello Fellow Knights!

We are officially in our Debug phase!

Some of you still have Polish/Optim tasks assigned, and if you got the greenlight from your lead and producer, you can keep working on them.

Even if you still have Polish/Optim tasks, **you should be tackling your JIRAs BY PRIORITY.**
Meaning that you should work on your P0s (regardless of them being tasks or bugs), then your P1s, then your P2s etc.

Our 1st Pre-Submission build will officially get submitted to 1st parties today, Monday May 16th 🥳
This is an important moment for us, as it kicks off the submission process for our game.
Big thanks to everyone who helped deliver this pre-submission build!

Our 2nd Pre-Submission build is due for June 13th

You can find the entire Freeze & Branching strategy for all submissions [on this page](#).

Other important topics:
[You can find the updated road to ship calendar on this page](#) and the updated vacation zones calendar [on this page](#)

DIRECTORS Q&A SESSIONS

If you have missed or just want to rewatch past Directors Q&A Sessions, all recordings can be found [on this page](#).
Don't forget to send your questions, either through your leads or using the anonymous form: <https://forms.gle/Bg64bL7c2NpeaxDc7>

Have a great week!
The Production Team

Milestone Dates

DEBUG & STABILIZATION - May 2nd - September 26th

SUBMISSION DATES:

- 1st pre-submission build delivery: May 9th **DONE!**
- 2nd pre-submission build delivery: June 13th
- 1st Submission build delivery: July 18th
- 2nd Submission build delivery: August 22nd
- Day1 Patch build delivery: September 26th

Completed

- 1st Pre-Submission build delivery: May 16th **DONE!**
- 2nd Pre-Submission build delivery: June 13th **DONE!**
- 1st Submission build delivery: July 18th **DONE!**
- 2nd Submission build delivery: August 22nd **DONE!**
- Day1 Patch build delivery: September 26th **DONE!**

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



**KEEP
CALM
AND
ALWAYS BE
CLOSING**

QUESTIONS?

Come find me at Overlook 2013!

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