

Only two items remain between us and a Gold Master. We had an MP test tonight using the demo and it all went very smoothly. There were a couple of minor bugs, but at this point I am confident in the stability of this release and very loath to change anything. I cannot count the number of times that an innocent change made at the end of a dev cycle had unintended results.

We started working on this soon after we released the last patch for MadMinute at the end of 2006. So that's a little over 3 years of a development cycle. This past year we really stepped it up and we're ready to be done.

I wrote an article a while back about what the day is like developing an Indie title, not much has changed. I put in 48 hours a week at my day job and work 9pm-? on this title. It takes a lot of dedication to finish something like this, from yourself as well as those people around you. One really nice thing we did for this game was to share the profits with the team. Since it's not just me making the sacrifice, it's only fair that the other guys that make the same sacrifice also get some profits. So anyone that stuck it out, will get a little cut of the pie. It's only fair. Besides, our families deserve a little reward too as they only got to see our backs for the past 3+ years.

Back in 2006 we started working using a whole new graphics engine to see how feasible it would be to put models in the game. So we got the new engine, grabbed some test models and started from the ground up. That graphics engine didn't work out, they had a crazy license process, but the code base I was laying was much more flexible than my previous work, so it wasn't too big a deal to switch back to our traditional sprites. We also started out with the idea of doing Waterloo. We worked towards that goal for a long time because we didn't want to compete with a possible Gettysburg expansion for TC2M. When that didn't pan out we decided that we wanted to do GB and we hadn't gotten too far into Waterloo, so we switched. Most of the team had either worked on or modded TC2M, so we had some unfinished business with the American Civil War :) I still have an old build of that first Waterloo version. There's barely any AI coded, few commands, but the men still look and move in a way that makes me want to go back.

Our goal was to learn from our previous work. We were not reinventing what had already proven to be a very popular game. We wanted the same thing, but we wanted it much better. That started with the maps. We didn't want them looking like putting greens. I'm not a graphics programmer, so I had to dig down into the graphics engine and figure out how to get this working correctly. I learned a little about shaders, got the map splats to where we wanted, and

we were off. The maps on SOWGB are awesome. We're all really proud of the work here. Each is created with the greatest detail of one of the most well known battlefields in the world. We had to be perfect! We posted lots of screenshots and they got picked apart on our forums. We've had some great guys on our forums cheering us along and they all love this battle. So we put the pictures out there and took their shots and made sure that we had done everything that we could to be perfect.

So we spent a couple years in catch up, trying to get to where we felt the genre should go. Creating the commands that would allow units to act historically. This was one of the big departures from previous games, as firm control had been impossible before. Then we took on the biggest task which was multi-player. I personally have added multi-player to a handful of games, but I've never done anything of this scope. I talked to friends in the industry to make sure that I had the best possible design. I made sure that all the code that I was creating would fall in line with the approach. To get it running didn't take that long, to get it good, did.

We've been testing 3 nights a week for a very long time. Every Tues., Thurs., and Sunday evening at 9pm we get on a voice app and start up the game. It started with just a few of us, as the bugs were obvious and there were many. As the game got more solid the team grew. We had 7 players on there for an hour scenario the other night and it was a blast. I think that I can tell the it's good when it gets very quiet. The talking stops and we step into the shoes of the famous personalities from Gettysburg. Guys yell at each other for not supporting their flanks. They call for help. If they want to send something private, they have to send a courier. We are sure that people are going to really love it. We didn't leave out the people that like single player. We got the battle covered. All the major engagements and many minor ones. I had to completely change my way of thinking to create the backbone of the new scenarios. I had always been a fan of randomness and designed my code that way, but I got schooled. If you are going to do one of the most famous battles in American History, you have to do it exact. So when the documents say that Lee started his attack at a certain time, he better start his attack at that exact time. If someone historically held their position, then they've got to hold in our scenarios. I see the passion that people have for this battle and we know that we have done it justice.

For MadMinute fans, you will find a lot that seems familiar. We have listened for years to the comments about those games and made sure that we didn't make the same mistakes in ours. We created what you liked better than before, and we reinvented what you didn't like. We made sure to stay true to where we thought the genre should go and we're sure you'll agree.

I've been asked a few times about who designs the game. Whose idea this was? Who came up

with that? We have a Lead Designer and he specs up any major new features. He has last say in all the content of the game. He settles the disputes, makes the final calls, and makes sure that everything that has to get done, does get done. This takes the major burden of managing the product off of me so that I can focus on the source code. He's in everything. But if I have to answer the question, I'd have to answer that we all do. The people on the forums, ourselves, stuff we read, previous experiences, games we play, all feed into the ideas used in the game. So all of them are the designers. Then the concept gets on a list. If it's complicated it gets spec'd out. So the Lead Designer is the designer. I look at it and try to see this thing as code. I modify it to fit into the "design" or architecture of the program. I may have something to add, something to take away. Go back with questions, ideas. So I'm the designer. Then it gets in the game and the test team plays it, tries to break it. They have feedback because they are the first ones to actually use it while playing. They submit their ideas and questions. So they are the designers. Then it gets in the release build and the rest of the team sees it, they comment, it spurs things in their head. They add to, take away, we work together. So the rest of the team are the designers. The point being that on this Indie team, everyone designs in some way. Some much more than others, but if an idea is good, we get it in. It's design by committee to a point, with the Lead Designer having the final say. The rest of the team is going to read that and completely disagree with me :)

Here's some of what we did right:

1. Got a team of very dedicated people and worked very hard to maintain a professional attitude throughout the project.
2. Got a test team on board early. They find the bugs before the players and make us look good :)
3. Learned from our mistakes.
4. Shared the profits.
5. Allowed the room for people to step up and fill in the roles where there was a need and a desire.
6. Listened on the forums.
7. Didn't ship until we were ready, but made sure to set deadlines for ourselves.

Here's some of what we can do better:

1. Some jobs were too big for one person and should have been split up.
2. Assumed too much that people were on the same page. We didn't spend enough time explaining our goals and expectations to the entire team.
3. Should have allowed more wiggle room in distribution of the profits so that there could be more reward for those that really stepped up.
4. Should have at least tried continuing with models after we switched engines.
5. Allowed too many distractions to disrupt our progress.
6. Some areas needed more direction and some areas needed less.
7. Didn't distribute work as efficiently as we can, some people are burning it at both ends while others are eager to figure out what they can do to help.

It is a very great feeling to know that this is finally coming to an end. It's been a ton of hard work, long hours, but we have a great team and that makes all the difference. Look for us very soon. Hopefully this weekend, but if not 3/31 at the latest.

Norb Timpko

Producer - fancy title that means I'm the hard ass that makes sure we stay on target and meet our dates.

Lead Programmer - I'm only the lead of myself :) Which means I write the tens of thousands of lines of source code it takes to drive this thing and turn all these crazy ideas into something the computer can understand.