

Press Reset PDF (Limited Copy)

Jason Schreier



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Press Reset Summary

Behind the scenes of video game studio struggles and resilience.

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In **Press Reset**, Jason Schreier delves into the often tumultuous world of the video game industry, focusing on the intense emotional and professional struggles individuals face as game studios rise and fall. The book is structured around a series of compelling case studies that highlight significant studios and the creation of iconic games, intertwining the personal narratives of the developers behind them.

The narrative begins by establishing the precarious nature of game development, where success can quickly turn into downfall. Schreier provides a backdrop of the industry's rapid growth over the past decade, marked by a surge in demand for innovative games alongside an equally significant risk of studio closures. Through detailed firsthand accounts, readers encounter the passionate teams behind groundbreaking titles, including **Bioshock Infinite**, which was marred by internal strife and mismanagement. Schreier's exploration exposes the harsh realities of the development process, where creative visions often clash with corporate interests, leading to emotional turmoil for developers.

The book also addresses the factors contributing to studio closures, such as hostile takeovers and shifting market demands. Schreier uncovers the stories of those who find themselves out of work when studios shut down, shedding light on the broader implications of job security in an industry built on

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creativity and innovation. The tales of resilience amidst these challenges illustrate the personal sacrifices made by developers, fostering a deeper understanding of the human cost behind the games many players take for granted.

As Schreier navigates through the highs and lows of various studios, he raises important questions about the future of video game development. The balance between creativity and commercial viability becomes a central theme, prompting readers to reflect on the sustainability of an industry that thrives on both passion and risk. In **Press Reset**, Schreier not only chronicles the rise and fall of notable studios but also offers a poignant commentary on the struggle for stability in an ever-changing landscape, making it a crucial read for anyone interested in the intricate dynamics of the gaming world.

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About the author

In "Press Reset," Jason Schreier examines the often-overlooked realities of video game development, particularly focusing on the human cost associated with the industry's frequent studio closures. The chapters intertwine personal narratives with broader industry analysis, shedding light on the trajectories of various studios and the individuals who shaped them.

The book opens with a discussion of the chaotic nature of game development, marked by passion, creativity, and the inevitable pressure that accompanies deadlines. Schreier introduces a cast of characters—developers, artists, and executives—each representing the diverse voices and experiences within the industry. As he recounts their stories, he emphasizes the emotional and financial toll that studio shutdowns impose on employees, many of whom face the harsh reality of job loss in an unpredictable market.

Schreier delves into specific case studies of renowned studios that have succumbed to the pressures of the gaming landscape. He explores how external factors, such as changing consumer preferences and the rise of microtransactions, influence the viability of a studio. Notable examples include the narrative of Telltale Games, once lauded for its innovative storytelling, whose sudden shutdown left its employees in disbelief and turmoil. Schreier brings to life the passionate work of these creators, illustrating how their dreams and dedication can be abruptly overshadowed

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by corporate decisions.

Throughout the chapters, Schreier underscores the need for systemic change in the gaming industry, advocating for better working conditions and sustainable practices. His reporting pulls back the curtain on the often glamorized world of game development, revealing the vulnerabilities faced by those who create beloved titles. By blending personal stories with critical insights, Schreier's narrative encourages readers to appreciate not just the games we play, but also the lives of those who bring them to life, fostering empathy for the challenges inherent in this multifaceted industry.

In conclusion, "Press Reset" serves as an essential exploration of the gaming world, highlighting both the triumphs and tribulations of its creators. In doing so, Schreier not only documents the evolution of the industry but also calls for a recognition of the human experiences that lie at its core, making a compelling case for a more humane approach to game development.

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Chapter 1 Summary: The Journeyman

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In late 2005, renowned video game designer Warren Spector, celebrated for his groundbreaking work on *Deus Ex*, approaches Disney executives with innovative video game ideas. Initially enthusiastic about his vision, Spector's excitement wanes as he senses the executives' disinterest, leading them to focus on a separate project centered around Mickey Mouse. This pivotal moment directs the conversation toward Spector's potential involvement in conceptualizing a new game featuring Disney's iconic character.

Spector, born in 1955, has always been captivated by interactive storytelling, which began with his love for tabletop role-playing games. He pursued this passion into graduate school in Texas, eventually working at Steve Jackson Games and later at Origin Systems. Here, he honed his production skills while contributing to beloved classics like *Ultima VI* and *Wing Commander*. His collaboration with Paul Neurath notably led to the development of influential titles, such as *Ultima Underworld* and *System Shock*, which further solidified his reputation in the gaming industry.

Seeking creative freedom, Spector left Electronic Arts (EA) due to its corporate constraints and founded his own studio, Junction Point. The early

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days of Junction Point were fraught with challenges, including financial difficulties that resulted in the cancellation of several projects. However, Spector's fortunes shifted when he secured an opportunity to develop a game featuring Disney characters, particularly focusing on Mickey Mouse and his forgotten brother, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit.

This project, dubbed **Epic Mickey**, aimed to blend Spector's immersive gameplay style with Disney's rich narrative heritage. Spector was tasked with reimagining Mickey in a way that would resonate with both newcomers and lifelong Disney fans, creating a unique storytelling experience within the game.

As the development of **Epic Mickey** progressed, Spector and his team confronted the instability of Disney's corporate strategy. The company's leadership was increasingly moving away from traditional console games, pivoting instead toward mobile and social gaming. Despite **Epic Mickey** achieving success, ongoing shifts in Disney's direction led to mounting tensions between Spector and the executives.

Following the release of **Epic Mickey 2**, which suffered from rushed development and disappointing sales, Disney ultimately decided to shut down Junction Point. The dissolution of the studio hit Spector hard, leaving him to grapple with the emotional fallout of the layoffs and reflect on his career journey.

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Spector's narrative highlights the ups and downs of the video game industry, illustrating both the creative successes and the harsh realities faced by developers. His impressive contributions to gaming history serve as a testament to the precarious balance between artistic innovation and commercial demands. As Spector transitioned into teaching and introspection, his story encapsulates the complexities of navigating both personal vision and industry pressures.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Project Icarus

Chapter 2 Summary: Project Icarus

Introduction to Narrative in Video Games

In the early days of video gaming, from the 1990s to the early 2000s, critics largely dismissed the medium's capacity for deep storytelling. However, this perception shifted dramatically with the release of *BioShock* in 2007, which demonstrated that video games could blend thought-provoking philosophical themes with interactive gameplay, elevating the art form to new heights.

Development of BioShock

BioShock, developed by Irrational Games—a studio co-founded by influential figures Ken Levine, Jonathan Chey, and Robert Fermier—emerged in a landscape rife with financial hurdles. The team's earlier work on titles like *Thief* and *System Shock* informed their creative ambitions, but securing the funding necessary for their vision proved challenging. The eventual partnership with publisher 2K Games brought the necessary financial backing but also imposed expectations for mass-market appeal. This added pressure translated into demanding work

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schedules marked by crunch periods, where developers worked extensive overtime.

Creation and Impact of BioShock

Upon its release in August 2007, *BioShock* was met with widespread critical acclaim and commercial success, selling over 2.2 million copies. The game's innovative storytelling, delivered through audio diaries and rich environmental storytelling, allowed players to immerse themselves in the intricate dystopian world of Rapture. This success not only confirmed video games as a valid narrative medium but also sparked simultaneous interest and pressure for sequels.

Work Environment and Challenges

The work environment at Irrational Games was fraught with intensity, largely due to Levine's demanding leadership style, which resulted in high employee turnover and burnout. Although there was a temporary division that focused on developing *BioShock 2*, the team eventually regrouped to explore new territory with the conceptualization of *BioShock Infinite*, a game set in the breathtaking floating city of Columbia.

Development Challenges of BioShock Infinite

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With aspirations to innovate gameplay while enriching the narrative, the development of **BioShock Infinite** was marked by numerous changes and reboots. This iterative approach—though often essential for creative breakthroughs—was frustrating for the designers, who found themselves frequently discarding ideas they had invested significant time and energy into under Levine's direction.

BioShock Infinite Release

BioShock Infinite launched on March 26, 2013, receiving critical acclaim and selling 3.7 million copies. However, as the studio expanded, maintaining the close-knit culture that had characterized its earlier successes became increasingly difficult, leading to a decline in team morale.

Irrational Games Closure

In an unexpected turn of events, Levine announced the closure of Irrational Games in early 2014, shifting focus to a smaller studio tailored for more intimate development processes. This abrupt closure shocked many employees, resulting in significant layoffs and an industry-wide scramble for new opportunities among former staff.

Conclusion

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The narrative surrounding Irrational Games and Ken Levine encapsulates the intricate pressures inherent within the game development industry, particularly the volatile dynamics surrounding projects that depend on the vision of a dominant creative figure. Levine's exit and the closure of Irrational serve as a poignant reminder of the unpredictable nature of game development, especially for studios that are defined by strong auteur influences.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Rafting Upstream

Chapter 3 Summary: Rafting Upstream

Gwen Frey's Early Career

Gwen Frey's journey in the video game industry began with her studies at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where she discovered her passion for game development. After graduating, she landed her first job at Slipgate Ironworks, but the excitement was short-lived—just six months into her role, the studio faced a devastating shutdown, leaving Frey suddenly jobless and isolated in California.

Camaraderie and New Opportunities

Faced with this upheaval, Frey found comfort in her former colleagues, bonding over shared experiences in the industry. She quickly pivoted to a new role at Secret Identity as a technical artist on the game *Marvel Heroes*. Although she appreciated the job, her desire for more creative fulfillment spurred her to seek further opportunities.

Joining Irrational Games

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The turning point came at E3 2011, where Frey was captivated by the ambitious project BioShock Infinite. Her determination paid off when she secured a position at Irrational Games in Quincy, Massachusetts. At Irrational, Frey thrived while managing NPCs and developing unique AI behaviors, deeply immersing herself in the game's expansive vision amidst tight deadlines.

Irrational's Closure

Frey's trajectory faced another significant disruption in 2014 when Irrational Games shut down, forcing her to reevaluate her career. Attending a job fair, she felt disheartened by the lack of opportunities, grappling with the feeling of being in a relentless cycle of game development without owning her creative contributions.

Forrest Dowling's Journey

Simultaneously, Forrest Dowling experienced the fallout of Irrational's closure. Sharing a meal with friends, they exchanged ideas about personal projects, sparking a discussion about the potential for independent game development. Dowling felt a sense of optimism, as the rise of digital platforms had made indie development increasingly viable.

The Formation of The Molasses Flood

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Building on this inspiration, Dowling and partners, including Frey, founded The Molasses Flood with the mission to create thoughtfully designed yet commercially achievable games. Their inaugural project, The Flame in the Flood, was funded through Kickstarter, showcasing their ambition but revealing the harsh realities of financial limitations.

Challenging Times

As they labored on The Flame in the Flood, the team encountered grueling hours, modest pay, and uncertainty. Following the game's initial release, disappointing sales threatened their studio's survival. However, a fortuitous partnership with Double Fine provided critical financial support, ensuring their continued operation.

Evolving as a Studio

With new stability, The Molasses Flood set out to develop their next game, Drake Hollow. Yet, tensions arose with Google regarding the creative direction of the project, ultimately leading to the dissolution of their partnership.

New Beginnings

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In the face of these challenges, the studio regrouped, signing a marketing deal with Microsoft that enabled them to launch Drake Hollow, achieving moderate success. Meanwhile, Frey pursued her own passion project, Kine, carving out her identity as a solo developer in the gaming landscape.

Reflections on Industry Instability

Through their journeys, both Frey and Dowling gained insight into the volatile nature of the gaming industry, balancing creative aspirations with financial realities. They held onto the value of their experiences while nurturing friendships and collaborations within the dynamic indie game development community, demonstrating resilience amidst uncertainty.

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Chapter 4: The Case of the Missing Studio

Chapter 4 Summary: The Case of the Missing Studio

Industry Turmoil and Response

The chapter opens against the backdrop of significant upheaval in the gaming industry, marked by the closures of well-known studios such as Junction Point and Irrational Games. In this climate, there was a collective effort to support affected employees. However, on October 17, 2013, 2K Marin, a development branch of 2K Games best known for its work on *BioShock 2*, unexpectedly shut down without any prior notice. The sudden closure bewildered its employees, who found themselves split into two distinct groups: some retained for a new studio initiative, while many others were laid off without adequate support or explanation.

The Language of Closure

As news of the layoffs broke, 2K's public relations team attempted to frame the situation as a "realignment of resources." This euphemistic attempt at reframing the layoffs frustrated those let go, as they felt their studio did not receive the proper acknowledgment it warranted. This lack of public recognition limited the sympathy typically extended to employees during

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studio closures.

2K Marin's Story and Evolution

Founded to develop *BioShock 2*, 2K Marin faced considerable pressures as they followed the groundbreaking success of the original *BioShock*. The development journey was fraught with challenges, requiring team expansions and fostering a learning environment where collaboration and leadership were paramount. Building on these lessons, the team ambitiously initiated a new project called Richmond, which intended to explore cooperative multiplayer gameplay.

Transition Issues with XCOM

However, the focus soon shifted to a reboot of the *XCOM* franchise, which brought about significant development challenges. Internal conflicts arose as the team at 2K Marin struggled to merge with an Australian development team, leading to a frustrating dilution of their cultural identity. The management's decision to integrate the two teams ultimately undermined morale, resulting in chaotic project direction and a burgeoning sense of identity crisis among developers.

The Demise of 2K Marin

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As *XCOM* went through an extensive series of redesigns, the morale and productivity of the 2K Marin team declined. They increasingly felt trapped in a project that diverged from their original vision. The situation reached a tipping point following the mediocre launch of *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified*, a game that strayed far from the studio's core strengths,

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Chapter 5 Summary: Workaholics

Chapter 5 Summary: Workaholics

In this chapter, the narrative centers around Zach Mumbach's unexpected journey into the world of video game development, illustrating the complexities and challenges of the industry.

Zach Mumbach's Journey into Game Development

Zach Mumbach, who grew up immersed in the realm of video games, found his path to the industry while modding classic titles like *Duke Nukem 3D*. After graduating from high school in 2000, he secured a Quality Assurance (QA) position at Electronic Arts (EA), marking the beginning of his professional gaming career.

The QA Experience

What initially appeared to be a dream job quickly revealed itself to be a grueling process. QA work involved monotonous tasks aimed at identifying bugs, but Mumbach excelled in this role. His commitment and enthusiasm paved the way for a promotion to lead tester, and eventually he transitioned into the role of producer for projects including *The Simpsons Game*.

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The Rise of Visceral Games

As EA Redwood Shores transformed into Visceral Games, the studio gained recognition for producing the critically acclaimed *Dead Space* series. Mumbach played an integral part as an associate producer on *Dead Space 2*, which not only advanced the studio's reputation but also solidified its status in the gaming landscape.

Shift in Industry Trends

However, the video game industry was undergoing significant changes. Mumbach and his team faced mounting pressure from EA to prioritize profits and appeal to broader audiences. This shift became particularly evident during the development of *Dead Space 3*, where demands for cooperative gameplay highlighted EA's focus on financially lucrative multiplayer experiences.

Visceral's Closure

Despite Visceral Games' creative successes, the financial performance of some titles led to its abrupt closure in 2017. This decision was emblematic of a wider trend within the industry that favored profit maximization and cost-cutting over fostering creative projects.

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Mumbach's Transition and Personal Reflection

In the aftermath of Visceral's demise, Mumbach struggled to redefine his identity after years entrenched in the gaming sector. He shifted to a non-gaming career, taking the opportunity to reflect on his workaholic tendencies and the stark contrast between executive compensation and developer wages. Ultimately, Mumbach sought out a more rewarding path, joining a smaller team focused on independent game development, hoping for a better work-life balance.

Summary Insights

Mumbach's journey serves as a revealing commentary on the intense pressures faced within the video game industry. It explores themes of work-life balance, corporate demands, and the quest for personal fulfillment. His story encapsulates the tension between creativity and profit in an industry that increasingly prioritizes financial gain over innovative game design.

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Chapter 6 Summary: Bloody Socks

Chapter 6: Bloody Socks – Summary

This chapter delves into the fascinating yet turbulent world of 38 Studios, founded by former MLB All-Star Curt Schilling, who sought to transition from baseball to video gaming. Schilling envisioned crafting an exceptional MMORPG to rival popular titles like *World of Warcraft*, leveraging his passion for gaming developed during his sports career.

Attraction to 38 Studios

Thom Ang, a seasoned video game artist, initially hesitated to leave sunny California for the cold winters of Massachusetts. His skepticism melted away upon experiencing the studio's opulent perks—modern equipment, free meals, generous health benefits, and extravagant travel opportunities. He accepted the role of art director in June 2008, drawn by the studio's vibrant culture and the ambitious project, *Copernicus*, despite it languishing in development.

The MMORPG Landscape

The narrative unfolds against a rich historical backdrop of multiplayer online

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games, tracing back to the inception of MUD by Richard Bartle in 1978. The popularity of MMORPGs like *Ultima Online* and *EverQuest* set the stage for Schilling's ambition to create a standout game in this genre.

Strategic Moves and Challenges

38 Studios' grand vision faced stark financial realities. Despite the glamorous atmosphere, the company had to rely heavily on Schilling's personal investments to sustain operations. In an effort to diversify and stabilize, 38 Studios acquired Big Huge Games, aiming to develop a single-player experience that could bolster interest in their ongoing MMORPG.

Partnering with Rhode Island's Economic Development Corporation, 38 Studios received a \$75 million loan guarantee, contingent upon job creation and relocation. This strategy aimed to provide financial security but raised concerns about the feasibility of Schilling's promises.

Operational Strain and Game Launch

As the new Providence office buzzed with activity, the company's financial health deteriorated. Cash reserves dwindled rapidly, leading to hiring freezes and mounting pressure on staff to meet Schilling's lofty expectations. On February 7, 2012, they released *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*, which,

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despite positive critical reception, failed to achieve the expected financial success, exacerbating existing challenges.

Unraveling of 38 Studios

By May 2012, it became evident to employees that the studio was in dire straits when paychecks were missed. The default on the state loan incited political turmoil, compounding financial woes and negatively impacting employee morale. In a swift collapse of communication and crisis management, layoffs followed, leaving many without pay or healthcare.

The Aftermath of Closure

As 38 Studios shut its doors, the fallout left many former employees scrambling for jobs in Rhode Island. The local gaming community rallied to support those affected, albeit the experience was marred by frustration and disillusionment regarding Schilling's management.

Reflections on a Dream Dashed

Though 38 Studios cultivated a rich corporate image, behind the façade lay a story of dysfunction, waste, and unfulfilled potential. The chaotic rise and fall of the studio served as a stark reminder of the precarious nature of success in the video game industry, ultimately evoking mixed emotions

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about lost opportunities and the promises of creative ambition turned sour.

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Chapter 7 Summary: Big Huge Problems

Chapter 7 Summary: Big Huge Problems

Introduction

On May 15, 2012, the excitement within Big Huge Games was palpable as they celebrated the launch of Diablo III with a designated "Diablo research day." However, the atmosphere quickly soured due to growing financial concerns regarding their parent company, 38 Studios.

Initial Excitement and Reality Check

While employees initially buzzed with excitement about playing Diablo III, the joyous mood shifted to unease as rumors of financial instability emerged. As the days passed without paychecks, the team's anticipation morphed into anxiety, confirming their deepest fears about their financial future.

Day of Reckoning

Despite repeated assurances from 38 Studios executives that the situation would be remedied, employees went over a week without receiving their salaries. Eventually, on May 24, the situation deteriorated drastically as 38

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Studios declared bankruptcy, leading to the abrupt layoff of the entire workforce at Big Huge Games.

Ian Frazier's Career Journey

This chapter highlights Ian Frazier's trajectory in the gaming world, detailing his struggles to break into the industry before joining Iron Lore Entertainment. From there, he gained invaluable experience that eventually led him to contribute to Big Huge Games' ambitious project, *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*.

Development Struggles

As Big Huge Games transitioned from making strategy games to developing an RPG titled *Crucible*, they faced significant hurdles, including subpar initial gameplay and the financial difficulties of their publisher, THQ, which put their project at risk.

Acquisition by 38 Studios

As threats of closure loomed over Big Huge Games, the studio sought new ownership. They were eventually acquired by 38 Studios, which promised a better development environment. However, this integration led to mounting tensions as interference from 38 Studios executives complicated

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development processes.

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning's Development

Under the ownership of 38 Studios, the developers dedicated themselves to crafting Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning. Although they faced ongoing challenges, including communication breakdowns and management disputes, the game's innovative combat mechanics garnered critical acclaim, reigniting hopes for a sequel.

Hopes for a Sequel

Even with the success of the original game, the dreams of a sequel began to fade as 38 Studios grappled with financial turmoil. Concerns about the company's stability intensified when comments from Rhode Island's governor exacerbated the situation.

Awful Turn of Events

On the day Diablo III launched, the looming uncertainty came to a head when employees were informed of their layoffs, as the fallout from 38 Studios' financial collapse reached its zenith.

Post-Closure Environment

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After the closure, employees gathered their belongings from the office, confronting the abrupt end of their creative endeavors. Some former staff members received new job offers, forging connections as they sought new opportunities in the industry.

Aftermath

The talented team from Big Huge Games found new life at Epic Games, where they formed Impossible Studios to develop *Infinity Blade: Dungeons*. Unfortunately, corporate decisions led to the closure of that studio as well, prompting many to explore diverse career paths.

Conclusion

The chapter reflects on the resilience and talent that emerged from Big Huge Games, culminating in the eventual reestablishment of a new studio under the same name. This narrative brings the tumultuous journey full circle, highlighting the tenacity of the gaming community in the face of adversity.

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Chapter 8: Gungeon Keeper

Chapter 8 Summary: Gungeon Keeper

Introduction

In the summer of 2012, Dave Crooks and Brent Sodman met unexpectedly at an airport, where Crooks broke the news that their studio, Mythic Entertainment, was on the brink of closure. Despite a storied history of success with iconic games like *Dark Age of Camelot*, Mythic was struggling to adapt to shifting trends in the gaming industry.

The Studio's Transition

Founded in the 1990s, Mythic originally thrived on the popularity of MMORPGs. However, by 2012, this genre was experiencing a decline in player interest. Acquired by EA in 2006, Mythic was now facing an uncertain future, with executives worried about profitability. In an effort to turn things around, the studio attempted to pivot towards mobile gaming, seeking to recapture its earlier success by exploring new platforms.

Carrie Gouskos and Game Development

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Carrie Gouskos joined Mythic in 2006 and became a witness to the rise and decline of the MMORPG market. As Mythic underwent restructuring, Gouskos found herself stepping into a unique role as a game design instructor, where she first encountered Crooks. He had transitioned from community management to game design, bringing fresh ideas during a critical time for the studio.

Dungeon Keeper and Mobile Gaming

Recognizing the boom in mobile gaming, Mythic set its sights on rebooting **Dungeon Keeper**, a classic franchise, for a modern audience. The development team introduced a mobile-friendly business model focused on microtransactions and timers. This decision triggered significant ethical debates within the team, with many, including Crooks, feeling that such monetization strategies were exploitative.

Development Challenges

As **Dungeon Keeper** progressed, rising tensions between creative designers and corporate leaders became evident. The pressure to include profitable microtransactions ignited frustration among developers who felt compromised in their creative vision. Released in 2014, the game faced widespread criticism from fans and media alike for prioritizing profit over the franchise's legacy.

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Mythic's Closure

Not long after the backlash, Mythic officially shut down. Employees received severance packages and assistance in job placement, but the emotional toll was heavy, leaving many feeling disheartened by the end of their storied studio.

The Birth of Dodge Roll Games

In the aftermath, Crooks, Sodman, and other former Mythic employees decided to embrace their newfound freedom by launching their indie studio, Dodge Roll Games. Inspired by their experiences and the success of other independent titles, they developed **Enter the Gungeon**, a roguelike game. Their networking efforts at E3 paid off when they secured a publishing deal with Devolver Digital.

Success and Post-Release Community

Enter the Gungeon was launched in April 2016 to critical acclaim and impressive sales figures. The Dodge Roll team prioritized fostering a strong community through continuous free content updates, cultivating a positive relationship with fans, a stark contrast to their experience at Mythic.

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The chapter concludes by reflecting on how the closure of Mythic paved the way for the creative and commercial success of Dodge Roll Games, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of developers in the rapidly evolving landscape of the video game industry.

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Alex Walk

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Chapter 9 Summary: Human Costs; Human Solutions

Chapter 9: Human Costs; Human Solutions

The chapter delves into the troubling treatment of employees in the video game industry, illustrating a pervasive culture of exploitation and inadequate support. A compelling narrative is woven through the experiences of Joe Faulstick, whose early career was marred by repeated layoffs and the pressures of relentless overtime, often referred to as "crunch." This not only hindered his professional development but also took a toll on his personal life.

Faulstick's journey reflects a disturbing cycle prevalent in the industry, characterized by grueling work hours and the looming anxiety of job insecurity. After leaving Irrational Games, he embarked on freelance work, eventually transitioning out of the gaming sector altogether in favor of the more stable software industry, seeking a better work-life balance.

The closure of Irrational Games serves as a pivotal moment in the chapter, highlighting the abrupt and harsh realities faced by many employees like Steve Ellmore. Despite sensing the impending demise of the company due to a lack of projects, many were unprepared for the fallout. Ellmore and his team, equipped with valuable programming skills, took a proactive approach

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by founding their own company, Disbelief. This venture focuses on technical outsourcing, providing a buffer against the erratic nature of traditional game studios and promoting financial stability.

Through the establishment of Disbelief, the chapter suggests a novel business model that could mitigate industry instability. By functioning as a tech outsourcing agency, companies can engage expert teams on a contract basis without the pressures associated with over-hiring and subsequent layoffs due to game performance.

Amid these challenges, the discussion around unionization emerges as a potential solution to protect workers' rights. Advocates argue that unionization could lead to improved working conditions and benefits, potentially preventing future crises similar to the closure of Telltale Games, where employees were left without severance and in financial distress.

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a significant shift in the industry towards remote work, prompting reflection on its viability as a long-term solution. This transition has allowed employees to retain their positions without the necessity of relocating, thereby addressing some of the inherent instability within the industry.

Innovative work models arise as a beacon of hope, with companies like Moon Studios thriving in a fully remote format. By leveraging global talent

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without the constraints of physical offices, such models demonstrate the possibility of change and inspire a reevaluation of traditional practices in the gaming sector.

In conclusion, the chapter serves as a clarion call for systemic change within the video game industry. It urges developers and stakeholders to prioritize the rights and well-being of workers, advocating for innovative business strategies and the potential for unionization. By embracing these changes, the industry could reshape itself into a more equitable and stable environment for all involved.

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