

Scope control on Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag

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Hello world

- Who am I?
- What is Assassin's Creed 4:Black Flag?
- What is Scope Control?
- So, how did it go?

Who am I?

- Lead AI/Gameplay Programmer
- Worked on most AC's
- I like ice hockey

Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag

- 6th installment in the AC series
- 2 years development
- 1000 people world wide in 9 different sites
- 6 target platforms

Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag

- Based off the Ac3 technology
- MTL Gameplay team:
 - 25 programmers
 - 8 animators
 - 9 testers
 - 4 technical level designers

Scope control

- Dynamic equilibrium between the ambition of creating an amazing experience and the reality of delivering it
- Scope can be measured by
 - The content offered to the player
 - The amount of work to get there

Pushing the envelope

- Okay is not good enough
- You'll never run out of things to do
- Maximize the bang for the buck
- You need to quantify both
- Added value is a very subjective thing

So, how did it go?

- Scope control throughout the life cycle
 - Pre-production
 - Production
 - Shipping mode
 - Post-release

The FSO process

- Feature Sign-Off
- Documents a given feature
 - Game designers write it
 - Programmers implement it
 - Level designers integrate it
 - UI, sounds, FX, Quality Control

Wait, this isn't very Agile

- Waterfall vs Agile
- Agile is great for iteration, but it's not very predictable
- Waterfall helps with dependencies
 - Production
 - The game's design

Pre-production

- Establish the complete list of features
- For each of these features, quantify
 - Added-value
 - Estimated amount of work required

The art of estimates

- Having good estimates is crucial
 - Work-week is a good unit
 - Fibonacci sequence (1,2,3,5,8,13,21,...)
- Plan for the unknowns
- Add some buffer time
- Re-evaluate as you learn

Estimating added value

- Same process, different participants
- No actual units, pick a reference point

The original scope

- The total of estimates for each features
- The number of resources
- The alpha date
- You're ready to start cutting!

The art of cutting

- Cutting is shipping
- Cutting early hurts less
- Cutting is hard
- What's at the bottom of the pile?

Production

- The schedule
 - Return on investment
 - Dependencies
- Following the plan
 - More cutting

Other teams' scope

- Fun factor takes a long time
- Who's they?
- The longest 2 minutes of your day

The other tasks

- Metrics from the player's point of view
- AC is an annual, open world, story-driven, action-adventure game
 - The legacy needs to be worked on too
- Time buckets, secret agents

Shipping mode

- The crunch
- You can't turn the volume to 11
- Change the level of granularity
- Will not fix
 - Fair warning

Why all the “Will not fix?”

- Why not keep them, in case?
- Team morale
- Telling it like it is

Post-release

- DLC, patches
- Scope control is key for stability

Thank you

- Any questions?