Orchestrating Hexagroove's Junior Talent

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Creative Director - Ichigoichie

Who am I?
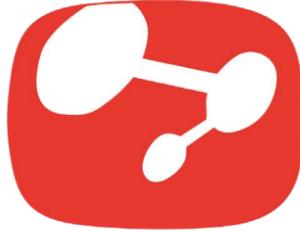
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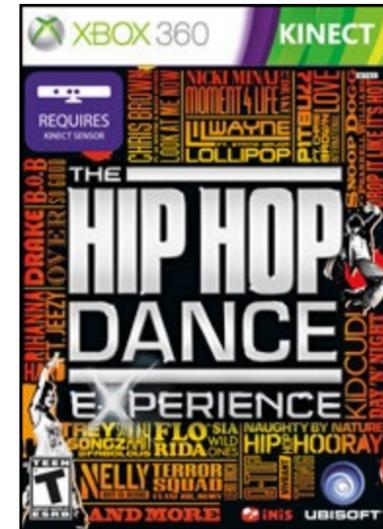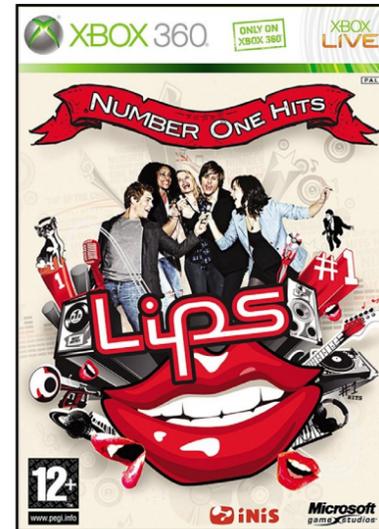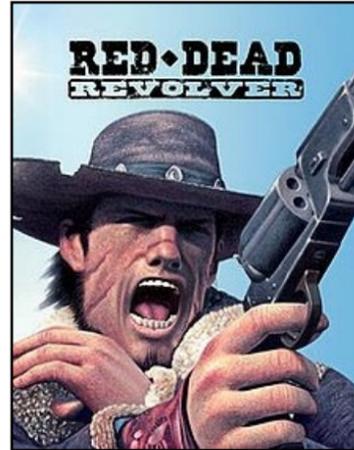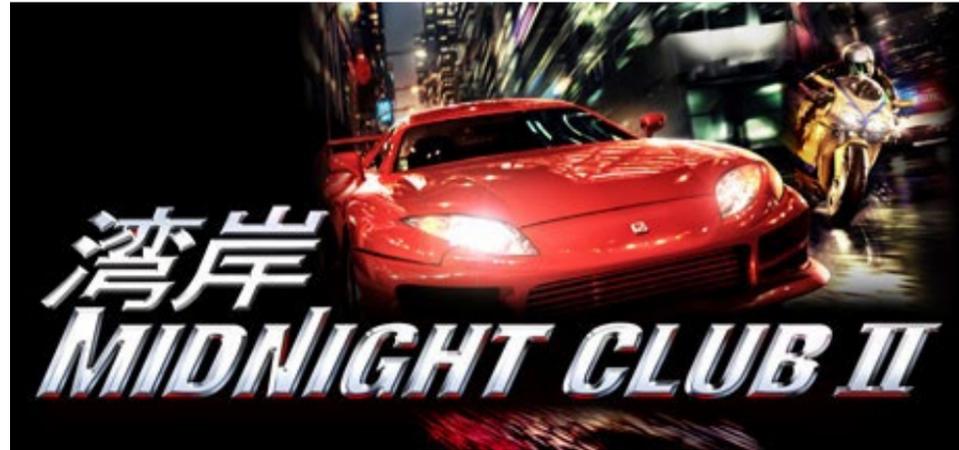
Ichigoichie AB

- Founded 2018

- Primary business: music/strategy games

- Secondary: musical analysis, ML, audio middleware

- 2 owners, 4 contract developers

- First title Hexagroove: Tactical DJ, 2019

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Why should you care?

- How to collaborate with junior devs
- Managing a wide range of experience
- Managing strong personalities
- New perspective on what a "dev team" is

About the games

Real-time strategy/DJ simulator
Released Switch / Xbox One / PC 2019

Multilinear time-based puzzle/strategy
Planned release TBA 2022

About the Hexagroove team

- Median age 21.8

- 9 student interns

    - 10 weeks - 5 months

    - Art, programming

- Junior artist and VFX

About the Backbeat team

- Median age 28
- 5 student interns
  - 10 weeks - 7 months
  - Art, programming
- VFX artist and composer

What are junior developers?

- Artists and programmers from other industries
- Game development students

Advantages

- Benefits
  - Enthusiasm, fresh set of eyes
  - Relevance to current market
- Parameters
  - Clear goals and expectations, fixed time
  - More or less unified background experience

Caution points

- Asset and code iteration
  - Lack of scalability, scrutiny
  - Understanding of design motivations
- Interpretation of instructions
- Pairing junior developers together
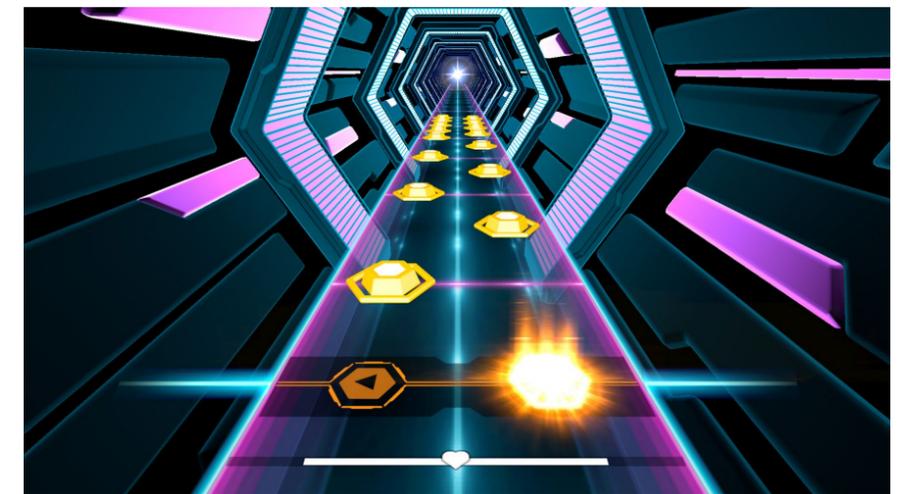
Techniques for management

- Manager Tools Podcast, Auzenne/Horstman
- The Effective Executive, Drucker
- 12 Elements of Great Managers, Harter
- The Five Dysfunctions of the Team, Lencioni
- Leading Teams, Hackman
- Management systems at larger devs

Management techniques: 1 on 1

- Don't talk, listen!
- Not a performance eval!
- Build trust between directs and managers
- Answer questions and increase information flow
- Handle feelings/concerns
- Bonus: manager feedback

Management techniques: evaluations

- Encourage introspection
- Look for differences in expectations
- Help build a roadmap for improvement
- Bonus: manager feedback

Management techniques: career coaching

- Can be worked in to the 1 on 1
- What stimulates the developer?
- What does she want to pursue?
- Paired with micro feedback about behaviors
- Portfolio and professional presence review

Part one recap

- Junior devs benefits and challenges
- Support infrastructure and overhead cost
- Management focused on bilateral communication

Remote artists and part-time people

- Remote is great, right?
  - Insurance, environment cost, bigger talent pool
- Unseen costs
  - Timezones and erosion of personal time
  - Pointing at things on screen
  - Diminished emotional connection

Theoretical example: external conflict

- What are your responsibilities as a manager?
  - Holistic wellness & work-life balance
  - Productivity declines
  - Increased tension in team communication

Remote management techniques

- Gratitude and compassion imagery
  - Set aside 2-3 minutes before the call to focus
  - How has the person contributed?
  - Under what circumstances are they working?

Remote management techniques

- Communication channel splitting & virtual hats
  - Facebook vs. Slack vs. Email
- Filtering noise
  - Ask the developer to turn off late notifications
  - If this doesn't work, buffer & sort your asks

Remote management techniques

- Progressive pipeline optimization
  - Reducing software layers people have to touch
- What is each person best at?
  - Titles are largely meaningless
  - What contribution to maximize from each member?

Communication tailoring for effect

- Which platform?
- What kind of hook?
- How much info to send?
- Analyze their communication up to this point
- Look at their social media, product messaging, etc.
- Change your language to match the above

Talking to non-game developers

"If you can't explain it simply you don't understand it well enough".

Talking to non-game developers

- Empathizing with the artist's medium
  - What is she familiar with?
  - What is the process used to create?
- "Bucket of musical legos"

Part two recap

- Empathize especially with remote developers
- Tailor communication
  - Time
  - Purpose
  - Personality
- Learn and speak the language

Bonus: Hexagroove anecdote

- Production start 2019/02

- Master submission Gamescom August 2019

- 6-8 week milestones, 2 week sprints

- Demoitis triggered at GDC
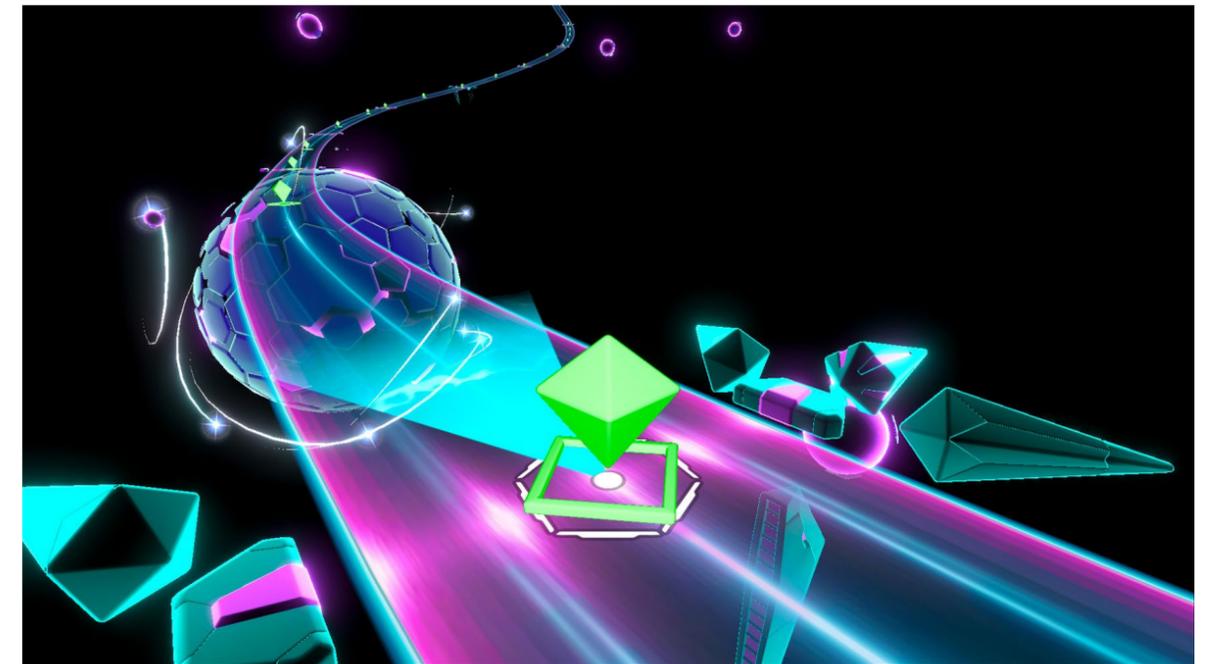
Hexagroove challenges

- Environment modeling
- Shader setup
- Crowd representation
  - Illusion of life?
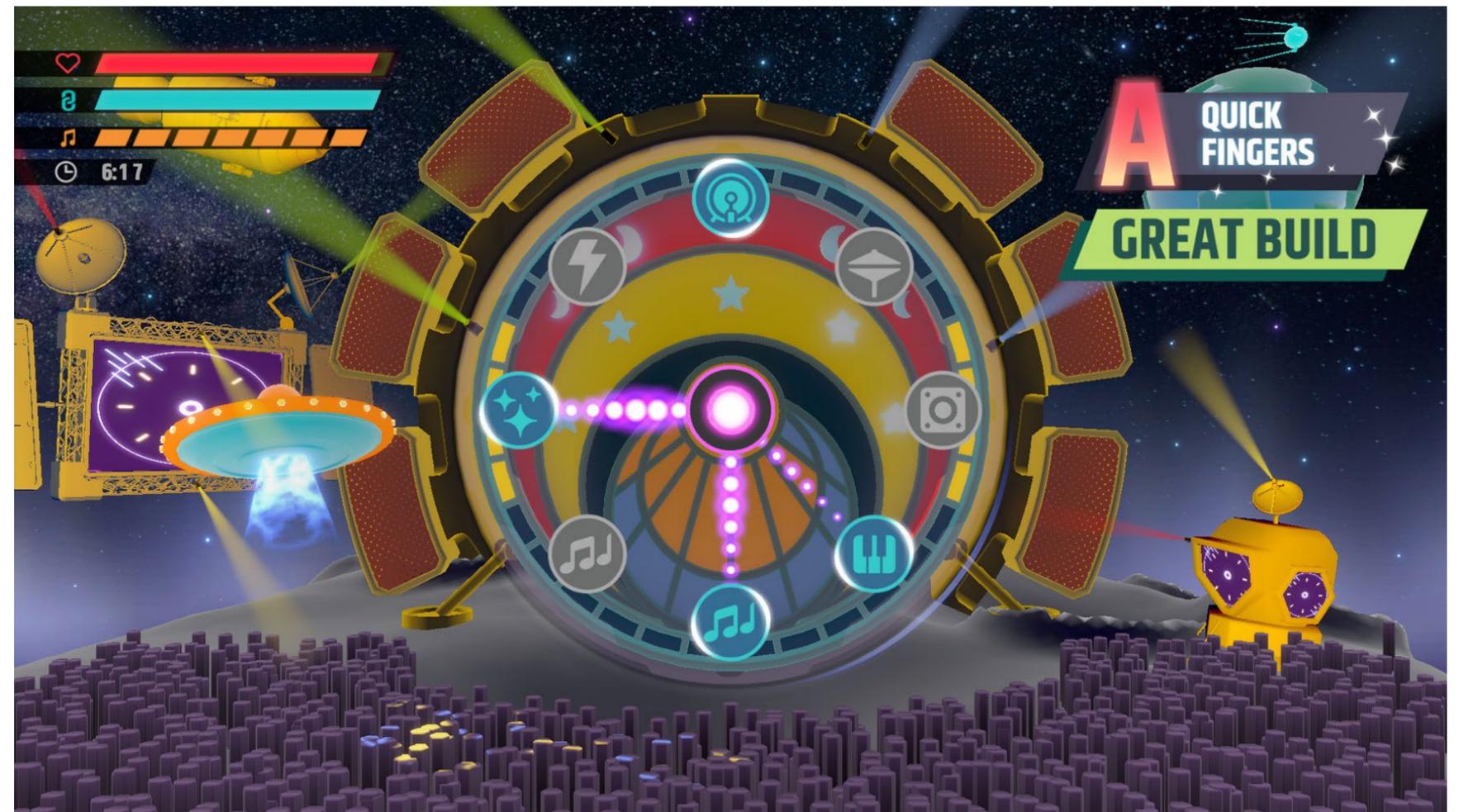
Summary

- Junior devs are good, but need focused work
- Have the seniors build systems for the juniors
- Make your communication effective and heartfelt
- Double down on your strengths
- Search for creative solutions
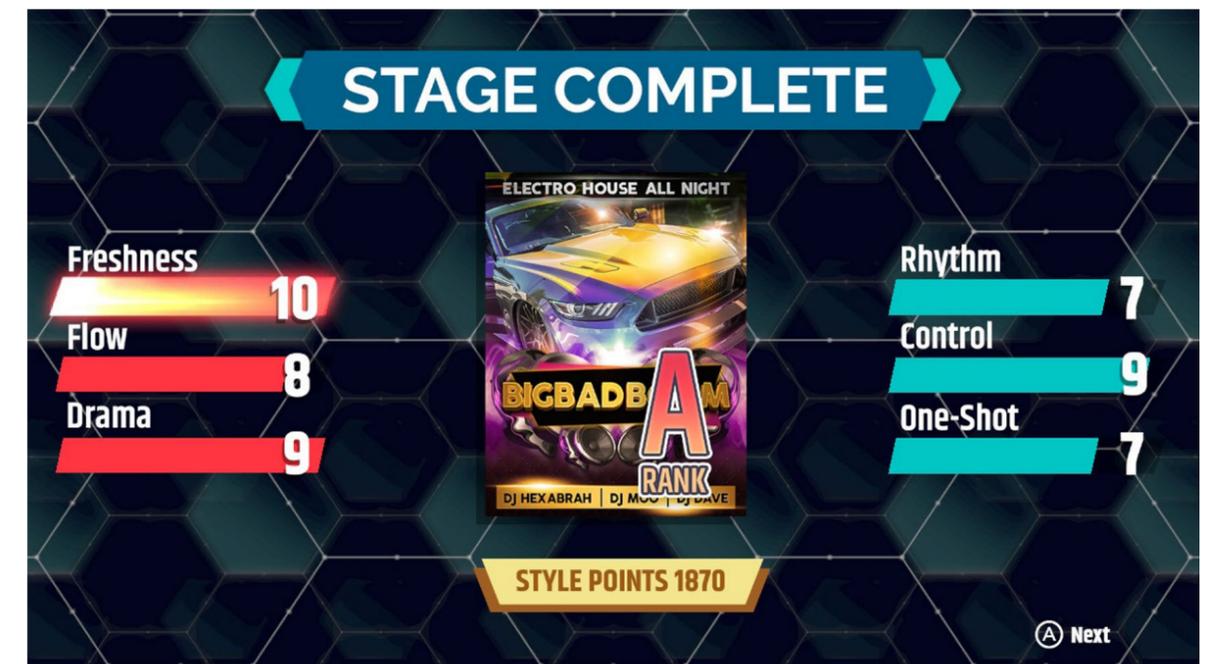
Thanks for a team effort!

Thank you to all our junior devs, student interns, schools, and our accelerator Baltic Explorers as well!

Follow via ichigoichie.org!
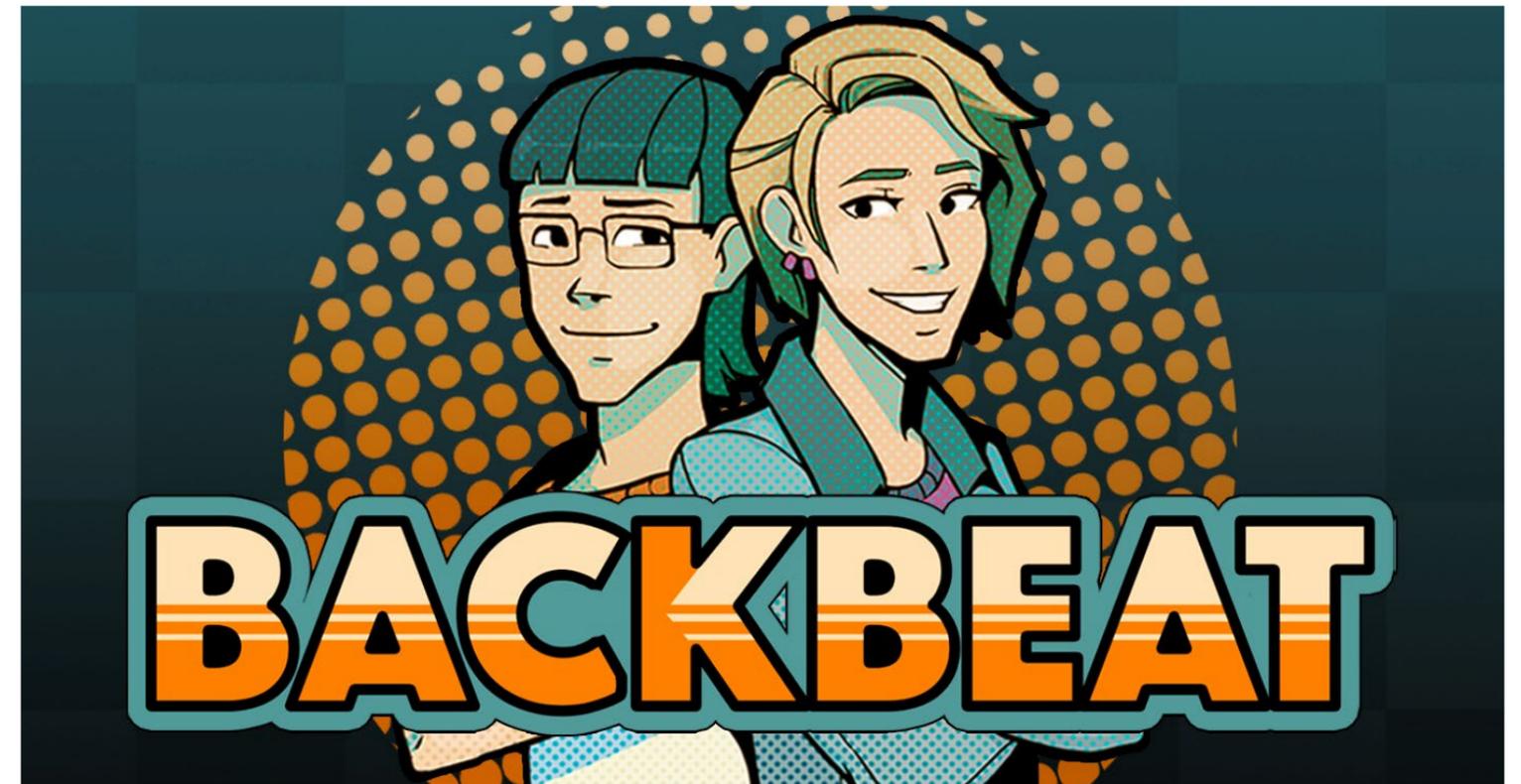
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