

July 16th (Thu) "Approaching the Release of Devil's Third"

Hello everyone, this is Tomonobu Itagaki from Valhalla Game Studios.

Thanks to the support of gamers around the world, we are finally reaching the release of "Devil's Third."

Thank you all so much for that support.

I'm sure there's a lot of conversation going on already about the promotional video that we released, so in this column I'd like to let you all know about some topics we couldn't fit into the video, things that only the developers know, and so on. So let's get started.

To jump right into it, let me sum this game up in one word: unprecedented.

Devil's Third is a completely new style of third person shooting that also combines our know-how of creating fighting games with our experience building sword-fighting action games.

I'll tell it like it is.

Devil's Third features a "solo-play" story mode that goes far beyond any action game I have created, in terms of both volume, quality and technology. Not only that, it also features an "online multiplayer" mode with revolutionary ideas that is larger and more immersive than any multiplayer mode found in current first or third player games. When I say revolutionary, I'm speaking of the gameplay. I'd like to go more in depth about these gameplay ideas in this column.

In other words, Devil's Third is two games worth of product.

Why would we at Valhalla Game Studio do that?

We've always been in the business of challenging ourselves in the leading genres of the time. Once we set our sights on the next battlefield, "shooters," we took a close look at the genre, dissecting and analyzing it, picking out its strengths and weaknesses, further improving areas that were already good and reforming areas that needed work. Then we threw our collective strength into development and entered the field. This has always been our policy, and is exactly the same as what we did with fighting and action games.

But that's not the only reason we ended up creating two (maybe more) games worth of content. We also had to fix a major fault found in current shooters.

This was something that bothered me the most; the shooter demographic seemed to be split into two camps. On one side, you had a group of people that would only play the "campaign mode," (solo-play mode in Devil's Third), and on the other side, a group that would only play online multiplayer. For what it's worth, I used to be in the "campaign mode" group (laugh), because whenever I'd play online I'd just get killed constantly in what seemed to me as "random deaths." I probably don't have to explain, but the "random deaths" are when you don't know how or why you died. You don't even know what you need to do to protect yourself. This is biggest reason why beginners can lose their desire to play.

Players who are really interested in multiplayer will often skip the single player campaign to jump right into online matches because they are competitive and don't want to waste any time practicing, competing, unlocking skills, etc. And if the developer's going to throw in a half-done single player campaign just to say the game has one, these players would probably rather you spend your time

making more multiplayer maps instead.

Likewise, people focused more on the single player mode are left unsatisfied, wishing they had a campaign mode with more substance. This is a pretty fundamental problem, and I realized that a lot of shooter developers are probably struggling with the decision of which area to focus their resources on.

At Valhalla, we decided to take the approach that no one else has:

“Well then, why don’t we just make two games worth?”

That’s the principle that we followed through development, though we stopped using the word “campaign.” To a military buff like myself who associates the word “campaign” with a strategic military plan, the single player was nothing like my personal image of the word.

So under the simple name of “solo-play mode” we created an action game on a far grander scale than any of my previous works for all our fans of single player games. I think our fans will be more than satisfied with the game even if they only touch the single player side.

Now for the online multiplayer. The multiplayer mode in Devil’s Third does contain a lot of critical strategic elements, and early on in production I actually wanted to name the multiplayer mode itself the “campaign mode,” though I eventually yielded to a pretty stubborn director (laugh) who insisted that “even if the name fits, it’s going to confuse a lot of players!” So we went with “multiplayer mode.”

I still remember the debate we had.

(Director) Ehara: “Are you sure? Only military buffs are going to understand this naming.”

Itagaki: “Think so? There’s no strategic layer to the single-player ‘campaign’ modes of these other games though.”

Ehara: “That’s true, but players are just going to get confused, so let’s be clear with ‘multiplayer mode.’”

Itagaki: “If feel that strongly about it then alright, but I guess you’re telling me it’s a necessary evil? Like crouching punches in fighting games. Just go with it.”

Ehara: “Yes yes, that’s exactly what I’m talking about (laugh)”

Itagaki: “Okay, I won’t fight you on it. Let’s go with the simple name to avoid confusion.”

Now then, we’ve kinda run off track, but for the players who are focused on the online multiplayer, we’ve prepared real innovation for them. By making the concrete evolution of online multiplayer our number one priority, we were able to implement completely new elements to gameplay. I’m happy to hear that some details of the innovations found in Devil’s Third multiplayer are already starting to be known to gamers around the world. We’ll also be releasing further details on the official site here. As I’ve said already, we’ve implemented a ton of new strategic elements. Oh, and there’s something I almost forgot to mention. We’ve really reduced the amount of “random deaths!” Like the fighting games I’ve made in the past, Devil’s Third is full of entertainment that can be enjoyed by players of any level. Games that only skilled players can play are boring. I want a game that can get anyone excited from the moment they first get their hands on it, games that both really hardcore players and casual players alike can enjoy. I believe we’ve achieved that with Devil’s Third online multiplayer.

“Another carbon copy of the same game is boring! What’s the point in even making one!?”

With that spirit in mind, we’ve finally completed Devil’s Third.

Honestly though, the development strategies that I’ve talked about here usually aren’t possible. Just

think about it. These days, where else can a studio get the opportunity to develop one game for seven years?

I understand it as a miracle, given to us by the gamers that have continued to believe in and support us, by Nintendo who lead us so well, and by the help of countless people throughout the gaming industry. It's thanks to that miracle that Devil's Third is now finally complete and ready for release.

P.S.:

The main character Ivan is 43 years old – I gave him that age, simply because I was 43 myself at the time. I'll be 48 this year though. In other words, it's been five years since I wrote Ivan's setting.

I'd like to deeply thank everyone once again for making Devil's Third's release possible.

Tomonobu Itagaki