

Dreams of Creating Video Games

In this issue, we introduce four second-year students at a high school in Osaka prefecture who are taking a course of study specializing in digital game development under the electronic engineering program at their school. In addition to regular classes at the school, this course teaches the essential knowledge for developing digital games through seminars provided in collaboration with the electronic engineering department of a university with which the high school is organizationally affiliated and with a software development company.



Hiroshi
I began playing video games when I was in kindergarten. I like to play action games. My other hobbies include listening to music and drawing.



Atsushi
Influenced by my older brother, I, too, began playing video games when I was in kindergarten. I particularly like action RPGs (role playing games). My other hobbies include sports. I belong to the rugby club.

Here the four students, Hiroshi, Atsushi, Isami, and Kita, devoted digital game players since they were little, talk about what it is like taking their first steps into the real world of digital game development.

Q: What are your favorite classes at school?

Hiroshi: English and electronic information. I especially like the electronic information class, in which we are learning how to do programming.

Atsushi: I like electronic information and practical training in electronics. In the latter we do things like send Morse code and build circuit boards. I am looking forward to the class we'll soon have in which we build a computer.

Kita: Electronic information and Japanese. Right now we are studying haiku, which is great because I like haiku.

Games Require Study of All Kinds of Things

Q: You also receive various special seminars, including one by a game developer from the software maker Konami Corporation.* Did your image of game development change after that experience?

Hiroshi: I felt I got a step closer to what I want to do. Before the seminar, all I could think about was programming, but now I understand that there are other essentials for making video games, such as setting and plot, and the special gimmicks and tricks included, and that the music and qualities

that give the game a sense of reality are also very important.

I also learned that the methods for developing games are quite different from what I had thought. Before, I had the image of developers working alone, but what they actually do is to construct a team and divide up the tasks among the team members to create a single video game. That seems really interesting to me. I am even more eager to become a video game developer than before.

Atsushi: When playing video games, having fun is all there is to it, and I learned that in game development it can't just be all fun. Video game development offers a whole new kind of fascination. When everyone brings in ideas, works together, and creates a single piece of work—that process is in itself absorbing.

Isami: I've never really liked to study, so I enrolled in this school thinking being involved with video games would be fun, but then video games became nothing but study! What I had always enjoyed became something not fun. Then, after taking this seminar, I realized that what I am studying right now is linked to creating fun video games.

Kita: Originally I just wanted to make programs, but after the lecture I soon became interested in game planning. The process of coming up with a title, deciding its content, and narrowing down the ideas through discussion with members of a team is really appealing to me.

Q: You made game development plans in groups for the seminar. How did that go?

Hiroshi: It was fun to get together with everyone and come up with the idea. There's still a long way to go in actually making the game: the program has to be written, the music decided on, and we have to work out how to make it seem realistic. I also felt that teamwork was as important as



Lecture by Mr. Namba, the game developer from Konami. The seminar strengthened the students' commitment to game development.

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* In this two-day seminar students learned about the process of digital game development and what the job is actually like. The instructors gave comments on game development plans the students, divided up before the seminar into teams of six or seven, had worked out in advance. The students then further refined their plans and gave presentations about them on the second day.

technical skills. We have to be thoughtful of other team members.

Atsushi: At first I was unable to understand what my teammates were saying. I couldn't understand at all why they wanted to do such and such, and how they came to think that way. Their explanations—and I guess it was true of mine, too—were not well articulated. You need to talk coherently when explaining your ideas, so others can understand you, and also listen carefully to others when they are talking. I felt the need to communicate with others more often.

Isami: It was exciting to see our own ideas take shape. The seminar gave us a taste of that experience.



The group of which Isami and Kita were members came up with a game in which cyborgs wearing roller skates play dodgeball while skating on a car racing circuit. It is titled "Cyberball Circuit."

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Q: We have heard that the special seminar at Takarazuka University of Art and Design was for improving sketching and imaginative skills. What was the seminar like?

Hiroshi: We were given a blank A4-size sheet of paper, and told to sketch the same A4-size paper on it. I was stumped at first, but I drew the paper tilted a little bit, and with its shadow.

Atsushi: I sketched the paper placed vertically. The paper began to wrinkle from my sweat as I was holding it, so I drew that in detail, too.

Isami: I sketched the paper after I folded it in half and made it stand up.

Kita: I sketched one paper folded in four and another lying down. One classmate sketched the sketch of his paper, which I thought was a great idea.

We Need More Knowledge

Q: What would you like to do in the future?

Hiroshi: I want to study video game development in university, too, and work for a video

game software company where I can make games in teams. I want to be involved in the integrated planning of games, providing good music, for example, so that players can even enjoy just listening to the music alone. And then it would be nice if I could go independent and develop a game by myself. I am attracted to the idea of working in teams to develop a single game, but I also want to take up the challenge of making a single game all by myself.

Atsushi: I will probably study video games in university, too. But I also would like to pursue a sport. And then I would like to make a game that I would want to play, even if it didn't sell.

Isami: It would be ideal to have a job relating to video games, but even if that doesn't work out, I still want to continue making games as a hobby. I don't have any specific ideas about what kind of games I want to make yet, but I want to do everything myself; planning, programming, the whole thing. In order to do that, I need much more knowledge and more advanced skills.

Kita: It is quite a challenge to make games solo, so I want to do it as part of a team. I'm willing to do anything, whether it is planning or programming; I just want to be involved in making video games.



Students solder wires on a home-made circuit board.

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In a special lesson at the university. The process of digitizing human movement through motion capture is demonstrated.

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Isami

I started playing video games before I knew it with the influence from my grandfather, who lived in the neighborhood. I love not only digital games, but anything with the word "game" in it, like board games and card games. I also like reading books.



Kita

Influenced by my father, I began playing video games around the time I was a kindergartener. I like playing "interactive fiction."** My other hobbies include *shogi*. I belong to the *shogi* club.

** "Interactive fiction" are games where text appears on the screen for the player to read as if reading a book, with images appearing on the background. Players resolve the situations that arise as the story unfolds. Here and there the game presents options for the characters, which the player must decide, and depending on the option chosen, the storyline changes.

The names of four students are nicknames.