Gothic Remake: What is the current state of development?
An interview with Reinhard Pollice

Source: TechRadar

Original: Gothic Remake: Wie ist der aktuelle Entwicklungsstand? Ein Interview mit Reinhard Pollice

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In an interview about Gothic Remake, Producer Reinhard Pollice has given new insights into the development status.

William: Hello Reinhard, what is the general state of development of the Gothic remake? Are you guys on schedule?

Reinhard: We are in the middle of production and therefore perfectly on schedule. World design and the related graphics are taking up a lot of time at the moment. But we haven't finished any feature 100% yet. But every day it becomes more and more the Gothic we all want.

The heart of what we're focusing on is the AI. Gothic, in my opinion, has always been a pioneer of living game world and simulation. Of course, we want to bring that back into focus in the remake. We want to go far beyond what the original title offered and offer an even more vivid world simulation.

William: It sounds like you are quite satisfied with the current state of development.

Reinhard: Absolutely! There is something happening every day and we have a great progress. Of course there are features where you ask yourself: Why isn't this further along in development? But that's a question of priorities and right now the priority is the graphical representation of the world.

We have already completed most of the Old Camp. We also already released a small sneak peek screenshot of it at Christmas. In parallel, the graphical work on the other two camps has also taken place. The goal is to make the Kohrinis mining colony look like you remember it, but more vivid.

William: How many people are currently working on the remake? My current knowledge is that there are around 40 people working on it.

Reinhard: Exactly! Our internal team consists of 45 people and we also have some partners who are working with us and implementing certain parts. Talented employees are of course still welcome in all areas, but we don't want to become much bigger than we are now.

The number of employees at Piranha Bytes for the first Gothic part was comparable, though. Nevertheless, the demands on video games have increased and evolved. For example, photorealism has its corresponding requirements in terms of manpower.

William: What are the biggest challenges the team is currently facing?

Reinhard: We always have smaller teams - of about 6-7 people - working on a particular feature. This has the advantage that we can identify problems early on. Even if it's a remake, it's not necessarily less challenging than developing a game from scratch.

Sure, you have certain templates you can fall back on. But you also don't have the freedom to say, "Well, we'll just leave out the Scavenger!"

Apart from that, of course, our internal demands are very high. This applies above all to the fidelity of animations, especially the locomotion system: that means how you handle the controllable character, how you perceive him, how reactive he is to inputs and how realistic the transitions between animations are.

To do this, we use the motion magic approach. That means we don't record individual clips of a movement via motion capture, but we do a 20-30 minute animation session and tell the model, "Move as naturally as you can." Then we take the individual sequences and divide them into the defined categories. Then there's an algorithm that decides which animation transition fits best, and that allows us to create much more natural animation sets. This is very challenging, as it involves a lot of iteration work and has been keeping us busy for a year now.

The AI is another point. We've been rebuilding it over the last year and a half so that it acts bug-free and has the appropriate settings for our designers

On the Combat System:
William: What are the progression mechanics for the combat system? To what extent will you follow the original? As you know, you have discarded the concept of the playable teaser.

Reinhard: We've taken most of that from the original. Of course, we will expand it in some places. For example, this will involve additional possibilities of learning points or master teachers.

We have also adjusted the progression of the magic system. Here we tied the spells to the respective gods (Innos, Adanos and Beliar) and highlighted them more clearly.

The Playable Teaser was meant to get a ball rolling. We took the community feedback very seriously, and through that we found out what the community really cared about in Gothic.

We got over 30,000 responses and we're very grateful to the community for that. Because based on that data,

we were able to see what Gothic players want. There were also interesting regional differences. One example is that the community from Eastern Europe mainly paid attention to small details like eating an apple. Is the food also brought to the mouth and does the hero also bite into the apple. This may sound trivial, but for us this information was very important, as this level of realism is expected and it allows us to prioritize accordingly.

Finally, regarding the Playable Teaser, we did take some graphics from it, but the rest is a complete reboot.

William: Where are you at with the combat system? You just mentioned that the spells are tied to the gods. What does that mean?

Reinhard: I'll start with the gods. They are not always consistent in the Gothic series. We want to straighten that out. For the progression of the magic system it means that every spell is based on a deity and that should be reflected in the world. Where do you find/learn the spell.

As for the Combat system, we are in the process of implementing the final spells into the game. Only then will the fine tuning take place. That means what effects and animations will be shown. However, we have decided on a mechanic that deviates somewhat from the original. There will be a channeling system for some spells, which means you can hold spells on an enemy. This of course costs more mana and gives new possibilities for mana management.

The ranged combat itself will be comparatively unspectacular. It's more about tactical use. So aiming and firing at a distant enemy.

William: Can you imagine it like in Gothic 3? You have a crosshair, aim and fire.

Reinhard: Exactly!

As for the melee system, I can tell you that we're going to stick to the basic principles of the original. It's not so much about clicking in the right timing, it's more about combining punching directions.

William: Are there any new weapons/spells that we don't know from the original?

Reinhard: Unfortunately I can't tell you anything conclusive about that yet. But we're generally looking at expanding the game at the appropriate point and adding to it where it makes sense.

Skillsystem & Worldbuilding

William: Can you say something about the skill system? In the original game you got learning points for each level, which you could spend on skills.

Reinhard: That's exactly how it will be! It will be very close to the original. We thought the system was well thought out and we think it makes sense in today's context.

William: Can we expect a reworking of the talents? Cue pickpocketing or lock picking.

Reinhard: Yes! On lock picking, I can tell you that while we have a similar system here, the presentation won't look as spartan as it did in the original title.

William: On the subject of world-building, I'd be interested to know how much the penal colony offers something new? In the original title there were definitely areas (e.g. The Bandit Camp) that had recognizable ideas and potential, but for various reasons could not be implemented. Were you able to exploit such potentials this time?

Reinhard: Whether we have exhausted the potentials, someone else must judge then, but it was our approach and goal to take up such potentials and to link them with quests.

About the world itself: We imported the original world as a reference, but in the remake the spacing will be a bit bigger. The original world is quite small, but very convoluted. That was certainly a conscious decision at the time, and it has its advantages. However, we sometimes lacked the space for more details. Of course, the world will not be twice as big as the original, because then the feeling would no longer be there. We want it to feel as similar as possible, but the colony will be about 10-15% larger and have more detail.

William: That means there are also new things to discover for Gothic connoisseurs?

Reinhard: Absolutely!

William: How do you pick up the puzzle passages from the Orc Graveyard or the Sleeper Temple? What revisions can we expect here?

Reinhard: We have already revised them. Some of the puzzles are relatively clunky from today's perspective, so we've come up with new interactions and ways of embedding the world.

William: The original title was notable for various ways of interacting with the environment. For example, turning a spit with a scavenger. That was cool for immersion at the time, but had no real use otherwise. How did you rework those things?

Reinhard: We reworked some of those items. But that doesn't always have to have an active use, it can also trigger an action in the immediate environment. But there are also aspects that we have adopted without much revision, simply because they make sense and contribute to the feel of the game. But we've also added additional features that didn't exist before.

William: Games usually feature Easter Eggs and Gothic had the band "In Extremo" at the beginning of the second chapter on the gallows square of the Old Camp. Can we expect an appearance of the band in the remake?

Reinhard: Unfortunately I can't tell you anything about that.

William: You announced at Gamescom 2022 that Kai Rosenkranz will be responsible for the remake's distinctive soundtrack. Are you also in contact with other people involved, I'm thinking of Mike Hoge for example, from the original or are they working in an advisory capacity for the remake?

Reinhard: I can't say anything about the person you mentioned, but we have other people on the team who were on the original title or worked on it afterwards.

William: So the signs are good that the spirit of the original will be captured as well as possible?

Reinhard: I hope so! It's one of our biggest goals, and we try to poll that regularly as well. We do regular asset drops, and through that we get the feedback we need from the community.

William: There's one question in particular that the German community keeps asking: Will we get the old voice actors back?

Reinhard: The goal is, of course, to work with the original voice actors as much as possible. Unfortunately, that won't be 100% feasible, because some of those voice actors have already passed away. But we also want to have the style as close to the original as possible, and we'll have to see how feasible that is.

For example, listen to the nameless hero over Gothic 1, 2 and 3.

William: Yeah, you're right about that. You can tell there's been a definite evolution there.

Reinhard: Exactly! And that is one of the key questions we have to solve in this context. Is it possible to fix this? We're still facing that challenge.

Changes for the guild system and armor

William: Since you just brought up the nameless hero: In Gothic you can choose between three paths/camps. Once you've played all three paths, you'll notice that the Old Camp has gotten more time in development and is more polished. This is especially true for the possibility of guilds. The Swamp Camp, on the other hand, only offers the Templar path. Will there be any innovations here?

Reinhard: Basically, the guild system will remain as in the original. But there are places that have not been handled well and, for example, have plot holes or hint at things that are not there after all. I can't give you any details at this point, but here we want to adjust the questlines and see where there were illogical places. We'll pick up on those and/or explain them better.

William: I would stay with the guilds for a minute and talk to you about the appropriate armor. You've already presented some armor that people can look at. Two questions about that: can you decide for yourself which variation of each armor you want to put on? Is there also the possibility to improve your armor through crafting and blacksmithing?

Reinhard: As far as crafting to armor is concerned, we're not sure yet. But in terms of armor variations, I can tell you that we're currently experimenting with that a lot and considering whether we'll allow combinations. We definitely want no two NPCs to look the same. For the armor, that means that it has different levels of wear or a shoulder plate is set differently. Whether we implement that for the player himself is something we're still thinking about. It has to add appropriate value, and we're sounding that out.

Accessibility and AI

William: Will the Gothic remake only be something for connoisseurs or will it also appeal to newcomers?

Reinhard: The primary goal is that we want to convince the fan community that the remake adds so much value that they say, "It's totally worth playing the remake.

If there are RPG players who have never had anything to do with Gothic before and find a way into that world through the remake, then that's a bonus. Of course, we have in mind that we need to make the game more accessible than the original. Controls and UI are two big points in that regard. But we're also not going to simply adopt modern UIs, which are sometimes cluttered with unnecessary on-screen displays and can detract from immersion.

I hope that explains your question.

William: Currently, the topic of AI - especially Chat GPT - is being discussed everywhere. What is your opinion about this technology and how do you evaluate it for your development work?

Reinhard: Deep learning is basically an exciting thing for now. At the moment it can be used in very selective areas. We use deep learning systems to speed up our process for creating faces of NPCs.

Usually you draw a face and realize, "It doesn't fit yet." And start again. That takes time, and it takes several hours to a full day of work. With Deep learning, the experimentation phase is much faster, and we have time for other things. Of course, this also benefits the final result.

Otherwise, it will probably be a while before this technology can be used completely in everyday work. I see this as an extremely exciting development, although you also have to see the problems associated with it. Take AI that generates text-based images, for example. Was the artist whose artwork was used as a reference and ultimately copied even rewarded appropriately for it? Personally, I care a lot about that, and I don't think it's an all-you-can-eat buffet for free.

William: Reinhard, thank you very much for your time and your answers.

Reinhard: You are welcome!