The Legend of Vraz

'The Legend of Vraz' by Zatun Games won for Best PC game at the FICCI Best Animated Frames (BAF) Awards held in March this year. The 2D game was released for the PC platform this January and has already attracted Indian as well as global audiences. With a strong passion to create a totally in - house game, Zatun Games has come a long way to see their dream come true.

Set up in the medieval period, the game appeals to all generations of gamers. It is a story of Prince Vraz of Thor who is in love with princess Avi of Kund. In order to win her hand he needs to fulfill the five tasks set by her father, which include earning 100,000 coins or equal amount of gold for the wedding, to find the brightest and the biggest red rose, a diamond studded heart, a traditional horse and a traditional sword, by entering into four exotic worlds in fourteen levels.

The style and design of the game is influenced by the Indian miniature paintings from the Ajanta and Ellora caves to the temples of Hampi and Konark. "All Indian games released earlier had a strong mythology context and that is something which we wanted to steer clear off. Our game had to have a strong local flavor with a global taste. I had always been fascinated by miniature paintings ever since I was young and while visiting the temple of Nathdwara, I came across detailed miniature paintings and I realized it would be a great idea if we can somehow take this art form forward. That's how the game style and game idea was born," says Abhinav Chokhavatia, CEO and founder of Zatun Games.

Chokhavatia is a graduate from Vancouver Film School and has earlier worked for Ubisoft, Montreal on titles like Far cry: Instincts for XBOX 360, Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones for PS2, Splinter Cell: Double Agent for PS2, Rainbow Six: Lockdown for XBOX and Rainbow Six: Vegas for XBOX 360.
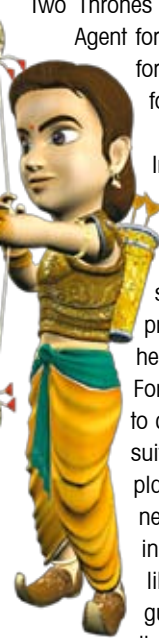
In an attempt to create something different from the characters in the real miniature paintings, a new character design was made with new body proportions like big arms, a big head along with a small body. For the Prince itself the team had to create four to five 3D models to suit his character and the game play. The other characters also needed much thought, keeping in mind their roles in the game, like the Sadhu, who plays the guiding force of Vraz throughout the game. These characters were the first ones to be drawn and remained unchanged over the game development phase.

The design of Mani, the tribal warlord, had to be remodeled. "The role of the Mani earlier in the game was that of a thief. He had to steal diamonds from the prince as soon as the prince came near him or when the Prince was near the exit. The first concepts were created keeping this idea in mind. As the gameplay evolved and the game kept getting more complex, the role of Mani changed to a tribal war lord. The new concepts reflected this role in a better way," says Chokhavatia.

Langur baby, the princess's pet was designed keeping in mind his cute and mischievous character and leg armor and more shoulder was given to the soldier to make him look mean and aggressive. As for the levels in the game, they needed to be thoroughly researched to bring in the intricate details. For example for level three references were taken from the palaces of Udaipur, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer and for level 4, the Ajanta and Ellora caves and temples of Hampi and Konark were studied.

Abhinav Chokhavatia

When asked why they chose to make the game in 2D, Chokhavatia answered, "We created one sample where the background, assets and the characters were in 2D. In another sample the characters were in 3D but the background and the assets were in 2D. And in the final sample the characters, assets and the background were in 3D. Out of these 3 samples, the one with 3D characters and 2D backgrounds seemed most appealing. So we went ahead and created a few more samples with rough levels and assets and the end result made us finalize this style."

The music of the game was composed by music directors Steven D'souza and Jimmy Trakar from Glory studio, Ahmedabad, who themselves had never played a game before. Therefore the sessions started with them playing the game and then later came the long music sessions in their music studio where each sound, background music and effect was composed accordingly to suit every level of the game. Western instruments like the guitar and saxophone were used to enhance its game play while Indian instruments like sitar and tabla were also used to retain the local flavor.

Zatun games is now planning to release the game on XBLIG (XBOX Live Indie Games) later this year and are also working on their next game. "This game has been a huge learning experience and it feels great that it has been such widely accepted. We have learnt a lot and we plan to take this knowledge onto our future games," says Chokhavatia.

The BAF award has helped to increase the importance given to the gaming industry in India. "The gaming culture is not present in India. There are very few dedicated schools/institutes which teach industry relevant content. There are very few studios developing games as compared to a huge number of outsourcing studios. Even if a game is developed, it requires a huge marketing effort and a very strong distribution network to make sure the game reaches the audiences," he concluded, when asked about the present scenario of the Indian gaming industry. **ar**

– Anita Thomas