

Creating Major Titles Built on the Strong Brand Established by “Rise of the Ronin”

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Released globally in March 2024, “Rise of the Ronin” is a major title that served as a challenge for KOEI TECMO. Two individuals who worked on the game as producer and development producer shared insights gained from its development and discussed how they plan to apply these lessons to create future AAA titles*1.

*1 AAA title (Triple-A title): A game that is a major hit, has a huge budget, and is meticulously crafted.



“Rise of the Ronin”: KOEI TECMO’s endeavor to create a major open-world title

Hayashi “Rise of the Ronin” is an open-world action RPG set in late 19th-century Japan, during the Bakumatsu period (the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate). It was gratifying to see positive reactions from international players unfamiliar with Japanese history, as they expressed excitement for the game. The project also involved the scale and development timeline of a AAA title aimed at achieving global success, while venturing into the now-mainstream open-world genre*2.

Yasuda Our successful dive into the new open-world genre, along with completing a large-scale project with

a longer development timeline and three times the usual staff, is a significant achievement. Looking at customer reactions, it’s clear that “Rise of the Ronin” is resonating with a new audience, different from our traditional KOEI TECMO fans, highlighting the success of the game.

Hayashi The open-world genre was an essential challenge for us in delivering our games more globally. Achieving this with such a large-scale project is a valuable asset. We have always believed that we should be at the forefront of the gaming industry, and through this challenge, I feel we have made significant technological strides and have come closer to competing on the same stage as our global rivals.

*2 Open-world: A game where the background and world are vast, allowing for relatively free movement and exploration.

Team unity as the key to the project, with smooth communication supporting large-scale development

Yasuda “Rise of the Ronin” was a project involving an unprecedented number of stakeholders. In addition to coordinating within the Company, there were negotiations with external parties, including those overseas, which led to many challenges. I found team management to be the most difficult aspect.

Hayashi When many people are involved in development, if the vision and gameplay aren’t clearly shared and understood, the direction can become inconsistent, potentially diminishing the game’s appeal. Although there was some trial and error along the way, I believe

we were able to guide the project to success by staying true to the final vision. This will be valuable know-how for future large-scale projects.

Yasuda The development process involved numerous directors and sub-leaders. We broke down the stages, organized teams, and brought together staff from various roles to create modules*³ for each stage. While each team had its own leader, I believe the key to the project's completion was maintaining effective communication and alignment across all teams throughout.

Hayashi Even with the long development period, it was crucial to maintain the same vision and avoid losing direction.

*3 Module: In programming, a module refers to a component with a specific function. Development is divided into separate tasks, with each module developed individually, and the modules are then combined to complete the program.

Tackling large-scale titles, leveraging past experiences for new value, and driving growth to achieving our vision

Hayashi When considering the significance and importance of creating AAA titles for KOEI TECMO, it becomes clear that reaching our vision of becoming "The World's No. 1 Digital Entertainment Company" requires us to engage a broader audience. To achieve this, AAA titles are essential. I believe that creating such titles unique to KOEI TECMO is a necessary challenge on the path to realizing our vision.

Yasuda In recent years, the scale of development has been gradually increasing, and with it, development costs have also risen. However, the retail price of games has remained relatively unchanged. As a result, it will be essential to consistently release AAA titles with high sales potential to sustain the business. Also, as creators, the most rewarding thing is for more people to enjoy our games, so I want to focus on producing large-scale titles that can be played not only in Japan but worldwide.

Hayashi Going forward, we want to expand KOEI TECMO's lineup of AAA titles. However, with longer development periods, we need to establish a system that allows us to develop and release multiple titles concurrently. In April 2024, I took on the role of leader as we established a new AAA Games Studio. We will be progressing alongside Mr. Yasuda's Team NINJA, where he oversees the brand, through healthy competition and collaboration.

Yasuda A large-scale title is not just about size; it requires various creative efforts to make games that can be enjoyed by many and leave a lasting impact on players.

Hayashi For large-scale titles, it's not just about technical skill but also ideas, innovation, and understanding customer expectations. It's essential to strike a balance between offering something players have never encountered before and delivering what they are eager to play. In essence, it's crucial to focus on surpassing customer expectations and discovering new forms of entertainment that players have yet to experience.

Yasuda The landscape of game development is constantly shifting, with both innovation and customer expectations evolving. To stay ahead, we need to share internal knowledge and insights, monitor global game trends, and build an organization that can adapt and respond quickly to these changes.

Hayashi In game development, the experience we have gained can be likened to individual points that, when connected, form a continuous line. By accumulating and linking this knowledge, we are able to create even better titles. KOEI TECMO's strength lies in the ability to apply insights from one project or team to the development of others.

Continuous delivery of titles with KOEI TECMO's unique style is crucial to the development of AAA titles

Hayashi It's not enough to simply gather 100 talented developers to create a hit title. While individual abilities are important, what matters most is whether the team is united, with shared values and a common vision. As a company that has been making games for so long, KOEI TECMO's ability to harness this strength is one of our greatest advantages.

Yasuda KOEI TECMO has multiple brands, yet there remains a distinct "KOEI TECMO feel" in our games, which is an irreplaceable strength. On the other hand, as the number of developers grows and production periods lengthen, individual involvement can become diluted. Personally, I strive to ensure that each team member remains focused on how they approach the fun and innovation in the game, and how we manage that process. Even as collaborations and partnerships with other companies increase, it's important to maintain balance and focus on the core elements while embracing new challenges.

Hayashi Simply selling a game based on scale in terms of its playtime or the size of its world will become increasingly difficult. Future AAA titles will need to offer





unique appeal and value. It will be essential to embrace a flexible mindset and focus on what makes each game stand out.

Creating unique works that blend Japan's history and tradition is the key to global success

Yasuda Taking on AAA titles means competing with powerful global rivals. To succeed, it's important that the company's and the studio's unique strengths and identity are clearly articulated to and understood by all employees. Without this awareness, our distinctive advantages and characteristics could diminish. Additionally, we need to accelerate development and progressively build titles. Our focus on historical themes, Asian influences, and traditional Japanese elements is a unique advantage, and adapting these to current trends is vital. Embracing our Japanese roots will positively contribute to the appeal of our games.

Hayashi The history and culture of Japan and Asia have

become widely accepted themes globally. Their appeal is not niche, but I feel we have yet to reach every corner of the world. To achieve our goal of becoming "The World's No. 1 Digital Entertainment Company," targeting large markets like North America and Europe is essential. However, we must carefully consider how to leverage our strengths to deliver to these markets effectively. Around 15 years ago, we made the mistake of overly focusing on the Western market, which led to results that did not align with customer expectations. We want to avoid repeating that experience and be more mindful of our unique strengths moving forward.

Aiming to create widely accepted titles as a globally recognized gaming company

Yasuda I have never been instructed by KOEI TECMO to create an AAA title, nor have I explicitly aimed to develop one. However, given our growth, taking on large-scale AAA titles is inevitable. At the same time, the games I want to create naturally evolve into AAA titles. Moving forward, I will continue applying the knowledge gained from "Rise of the Ronin" to develop titles that deeply engage a broader global audience. Ultimately, I strive to produce results that align with our vision of becoming "The World's No. 1 Digital Entertainment Company," achieving social recognition and attaining number one status globally.

Hayashi Games cannot progress past the title screen without the input of players. That's why our value lies in getting as many people as possible to play our games. We want to continue creating works that are widely accepted, as this will drive the Company's growth. What defines a AAA title? It's something that excites, sparks curiosity, and has the potential to be a hit.

Titles that meet the latent needs of customers have a certain aura or atmosphere about them. These are the kinds of titles that define AAA games, and

continuing to create such titles is essential for our sustained growth. I am confident that this will lead us to our vision of becoming "The World's No. 1 Digital Entertainment Company."

