



# GAMING ACADEMY

## **Abstract**

*Courtesy of Mrs. Bassima El Masri*

The upbeat Lebanese youth suffered a blow to its joie de vivre after the Beirut port explosion of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Something was needed to reignite the passion and to restore some hope. The Gaming Academy filled a gap by bringing gamers, trainers, developers, and novices virtually together over a week. Creativity, connection, a sense of community, intellectual growth, and the promise of an ongoing journey were on the menu.

Breathing new life into Lebanon's Gaming Community



## The Story of the Gaming Academy

In the aftermath of the Beirut Blast, one could tell, simply by looking around the very streets we used to roam ever so frequently, that something was off. Every corner of the country used to brim with life and energy, and whenever you'd ask a random teenager or young adult about their aspirations for the future, you would expect joy and excitement to be pouring out of every word comprising their answer. You'd be thrilled to hear about their dreams to become, for instance, a computer engineer, a painter, or a singer. Alas, in the wake of the tragedy of the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, very little remains of that lively momentum, as we are finding it increasingly difficult to recover the vigor which used to flood our cities, day and night. Countless stories of young talents losing hope and abandoning their once diligent and inspiring pursuits have become somewhat of a norm in our daily conversations. While we at Khaddit Beirut are no less heart-broken than the generations which both preceded us and are set to come after us, we have taken it upon ourselves to, no matter what, stay strong in the face of adversity, and keep everyone around us hopeful for a better future. We started searching for something, anything that could put us on the right track to stimulate our community to stand up and face the uncertainty of the future together. After much effort, we landed on one simple, yet very fun activity which binds people together through thick and thin—gaming and particularly, game development. And thus, we embarked on the journey of a lifetime, fueled by our desire to liberate our youth from the grip of their sorrows: The Gaming Academy.

The Gaming Academy perfectly embodied what we do best at Khaddit Beirut. We aimed to incentivize our community to take action and change the world around us by focusing on our mutual development and by providing each other with guidance, love, and motivation. To fulfill our mission, we strove to bring out the full potential of the 500 gaming enthusiasts who had signed up through our series of workshops led by eminent experts in their respective fields. All solicited educators have partaken in the projects of entertainment giants such as Epic Games, Blizzard, Ubisoft, Unity and Unreal. Through this venue, we aspired to revitalize the drive of the younger Lebanese generation, both locally and abroad, in excelling at what they love. The versatility of the mentoring talent on board was crucial to our mission, as we endeavored to teach our participants about the design fundamentals of most, if not all common gaming genres out there. Following most workshops, the assigned educator prompted participants with an assignment which tackles the key points brought forth throughout the presentation. This served to simultaneously encourage our participants to take the time to thoroughly revisit the content of the workshop through our recorded lectures and provide them with the opportunity to get feedback on their work. This feedback



from educators, in turn, was a means of self-assessment as the participant would be able to tangibly assess their progression throughout the academy.

The reception of the workshop phase was very positive, as we soon realized that the Gaming Academy significantly exceeded set expectations. Interviews with participants shed light on how much they loved the workshops. They were pleased with how these workshops were led, with their respective educators displaying the passion, openness and thoughtfulness needed to explain key concepts while grasping their attention. There was always something to keep them interested, to keep them hooked on the content of the workshops. Indeed, many have stated that the fun exercises scattered throughout the sessions quickly became the parts they were looking the most forward to. The educators themselves were delighted with how dedicated and hard-working participants have been; always prompting them with intriguing questions and willing to enrich the conversation by, for example, bringing up their favorite games. They were simply taken away by the sheer number of contestants who had resolved themselves to go above and beyond in the Academy, whether it be through their excellent assignment submissions or their tireless contribution to the workshops. On that topic, one of the aspects of the venue which had resonated the most with participants and educators alike is the utilization of Discord as the main hub of the event. To quote lead organizer Ashraf Abi Said, “the platform was tremendous in fostering a learning environment which promotes professionalism, respect and amicability while consistently giving off a vibe of comfort, security and support.” It transcended its status as a virtual chatroom and became more of a warm home for our participants. Discord was developed to be a haven through which people could meet like-minded souls with whom, and despite different backgrounds and upbringings, they couldn’t wait to become friends with. This diversity of perspectives at play was pivotal in broadening the viewpoints of everyone involved in terms of game design – which made potentially controversial educator quotes such as “killing your [ideas] babies” by professional storyteller Jenna Yow a hit in driving forward participants’ interest and motivation.

At the end of it, we have built teams with strong bases in game development, comprising individuals well-versed in the ins and outs of game designing, coding, storytelling, and art creation. Alas, it is unfortunate that only 5 teams can possibly make it to the second portion of the Gaming Academy consisting of a dedicated mentoring program, given the lack of resources to cover everyone. And yet, we are so thrilled with the outcome of our venue as all participants have gained and demonstrated the technical, decision-making, and resource-management skills required to create a game within a realistic deadline. We can proudly affirm that the Gaming Academy has succeeded in opening the horizons for more game development in the future. This, in



turn, is vital in putting the spotlight on Lebanon's youth and the limitless talent it harbors which we have pledged to always safeguard, cultivate, and fight for.