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Kraków

A game set in Krakow wins prestigious Polish video game industry awards

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We know the winners of the most prestigious Polish video game industry awards — the 2021 Digital Dragons Awards. Three of the awards went to *The Medium*, a game developed by the Kraków-based Bloober Team and set in a post-apocalyptic Kraków. The competition jury also recognised *Here Be Dragons* by Red Zero Games, *Papetura* by Petums and *It Takes Two*, proudly presented by Hazelight Studios. The official award gala took place on 16 May at the ICE Kraków Congress Centre.

The names of the winners were announced during the Digital Dragons – the largest conference for video game industry representatives in Central and Eastern Europe, which has been held for a number of years at the ICE Kraków Congress Centre. The mission of the Digital Dragons is to promote the Polish video game industry. The conference is also an excellent opportunity to take part in expert presentations and meetings aimed at exchanging knowledge and experience and offering numerous occasions to meet developers, publishers and investors.

In 2019, the total revenue from the entire video game market amounted to \$150 billion. To put that in context, the film industry brought in only \$42 billion, with popular music trailing behind at \$20 billion. It is estimated that 3 billion people worldwide enjoy video games, and this number has been growing by 6% every year, including in Poland. Here, games are developed by nearly 500 game studios. Forty-six video game companies are listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange.

Kraków ranks third among Polish gaming cities, hosting nearly 16 per cent of the companies in the industry; it trails Warsaw, with about 30 per cent of the grand total, and closely follows Katowice, which boasts about 19 per cent. The video games industry has been supported for many years by the Kraków Technology Park, the City of Kraków and Małopolska Voivodeship. This year's 10th edition of Digital Dragons was attended by nearly 2,000 participants, including representatives of CD Projekt Red, Techland, People Can Fly, 11 bit studios, Huuuge Games, Flying Wild Hog and many international brands – Third Kind Games, Valve, Activision and Infinity Ward.

The 2022 edition of the Digital Dragons also offered a perfect opportunity to present the latest study **on Polish gamers - the 2022 Polish Gamers Research** – as well as to present **awards for the best Polish games of 2021**.

The 2021 Digital Dragons Awards winners were as follows:

- Best Polish Game: *The Medium* (Bloober Team)
- Best Mobile Game: *Here Be Dragons* (Red Zero Games)
- Best Polish Game Design: *The Medium* (Bloober Team)
- Best Polish Game Art: *Papetura* (Petums)
- Best Polish Original Soundtrack: *The Medium* (Akira Yamaoka & Arkadiusz Reikowski)
- Best Foreign Game: *It Takes Two* (Hazelight Studios)
- Best Indie Game of the Decade: *Ghostrunner* (One More Level)
- Special Recognition Award: Mateusz Witczak

The 10th Anniversary Special Recognition Award went to Mateusz Witczak, and the award for the Best Indie Game of the Decade went to *Ghostrunner* by One More Level.

The event was organised by the Kraków Technology Park, with support from the City of Krakow. The official Digital Dragons Awards gala was attended by Robert Piaskowski, the Mayor's Plenipotentiary for Culture, who presented the award for the Best Polish Soundtrack to Arkadiusz Reikowski and Akira Yamaoka for their music featured in *The Medium*.

Recognised with three awards in various categories, *The Medium*, whose plot starts in one of Kraków's town houses, takes the player on a journey to two parallel worlds – the real one and the spiritual one, full of horrors and nightmares. The jury appreciated the dystopian surrealism and excellent graphic design, inspired by the works of Zdzisław Beksiński. The competition jury also recognised the distinctive soundtrack. The accolades, including the Best Polish Game title, crown several years of hard work by the Krakow-based Bloober Team.

The winners were selected by a jury featuring representatives from the largest gaming websites, **Paweł Węgrzyn** from the Department of Games Technology of the Jagiellonian University, gamemusic.pl editor-in-chief and co-founder of the Game Music Festival, **Mateusz Borkowski** and **Ola Olszar**, author of the blog *6 kolorów gier*, which is devoted to the topics of diversity and LGBTQIA+ in video games. This year, the competition jury also included a representative from the Film Music Festival, which showcases and promotes game music as part of its mission.

'When it comes to gaming, Kraków continues to be a major point of interest among other Polish cities. This is demonstrated by the 10-year-long run of the Digital Dragons, an event brand created here in Kraków at the initiative of the gaming industry [and] organised by the Kraków Technology Park. The victory of *The Medium* proves the potential of local assets – the talent in numerous fields, the narrative potential of our city, as well as the charisma and persistence of the heads of Bloober Team, who created this game from the bottom up. The city of Lem, the kings and the fascinating dystopian social realism offers numerous topics worth taking up and presenting using the means of expression of video games. The local universities, young ambitious graduates, and a thriving start-up ecosystem constitute the creative base of Kraków's gaming industry, as well as the foundation of the success of local games. The latter fact is reflected in the Startup Genome ranking. Over the course of the last 20 years, Kraków has become a leading technology hub in Central and Eastern Europe. The accolades for *The Medium* are proof of the leadership and ambition of the video games sector – which are worthy of note and development – generate employment and bring about economic and skill development, and it places Kraków among the creative metropolises of tomorrow,' claims Robert Piaskowski. The Plenipotentiary for Culture and Artistic Director of the Film Music Festival also announced the strategic partnership between Digital Dragons and the FMF during the award gala. As part of this collaboration, the award-winning music will be presented during the next year's festival.

Make sure to read the debate concerning the potential of the video game market in Kraków and Małopolska, carried out as part of the **Krakow Culture Lab**. The debate was moderated by Łukasz Cioch, with a foreword by Robert Piaskowski. The guests include Joanna Kucharska, an expert in video games and new media, a game developer and professor; Radosław Ratusznik, co-creator of *Ghostrunner*, the winner of the 2020 Digital Dragon for the Best Polish Video Game; Katarzyna



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Wysocka, Head of the Department of Entrepreneurship and Innovation of Kraków City Hall; and Krzysztof Krzysztofiak, Head of the Technology Park Department at the Kraków Technology Park and organiser of the Digital Dragons trade show.