

CD Project Red co-founder Marcin Iwinski attributes the success of Polish video games to eastern European sensibility. "We bring something new to the table, a breath of fresh air, creativity."

Poland's video-game industry is one of the biggest in Europe, according to Daniel Sadowski, co-founder of the Nitreal Games studio and an instructor at the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology. "There are around 500 independent video game studios in Poland, compared to maybe around a dozen in Germany. Every year around 100 Polish games hit the global market," he said.

The studios of "11 bit", based in the Polish capital, Warsaw, has the hallmarks of an IT start-up.

Around 40 video game developers sit in the open-plan office, located in a 1970s building by a noisy expressway in an industrial part of town. They are all men, most of them bearded, and under 30. Dressed in faded T-shirts and jeans, they are busy coding, drawing and testing ideas next to walls covered in project sketches, cartoons, and calendars with game release dates.

Their most recent project, This War of Mine, was the first role-playing video game to show war from the perspective of civilians trying to survive in a besieged city, as opposed to elite soldiers. The game, which came out late last year, won dozens of prizes and topped a weekly sales chart compiled by the digital video games distribution platform Steam.

"We're hearing that our game has opened the eyes of many people in Russia," said Miechowski. "Because of the propaganda, they don't realise that there are civilians in these war zones who have to survive under extreme conditions. Our game was a kind of catharsis for them." Poland borders Ukraine, in whose east Russian-backed rebels have been engaged in conflict with Ukrainian government forces for more than a year.

At one point in May, the various versions of The Witcher took up three of the 10 slots on the Steam chart, while another Polish game - Dying Light by the Techland studio in the western city of Wroclaw - came in at number five.

"The success is a result of our national character, among other things: for us nothing's impossible. This determination to make something that no one else has made yet is crucial in video games," said Miechowski.

"We learnt how to make video games step by step, and how to reach players with a universal message," added Iwinski. "With The Witcher 3, we made one of the best games in the world and now we're aiming for the top. The sky's the limit."