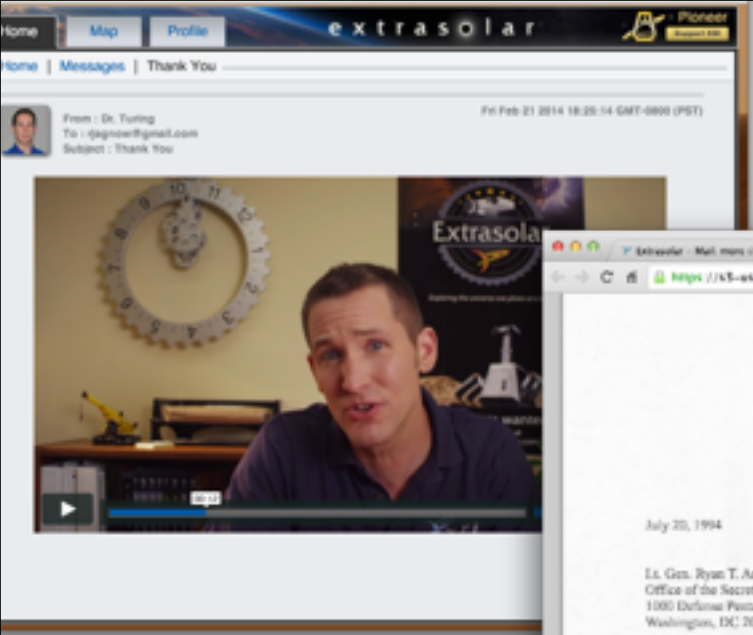
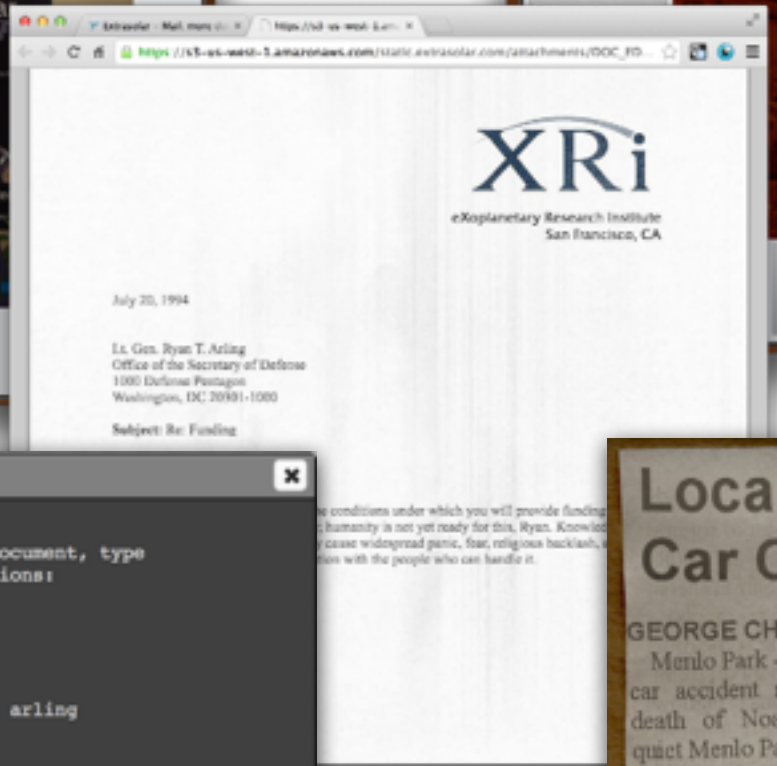
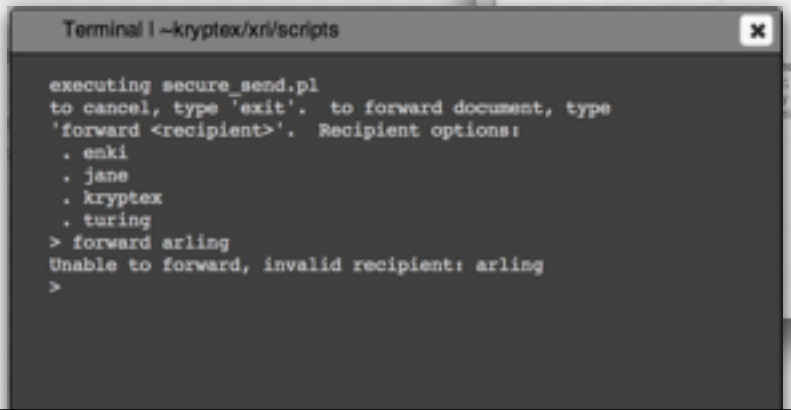
Extrasolar Postmortem: Game Design at 0.0003 fps

Dr. Rob Jagnow
Founder, Lazy 8 Studios

INDEPENDENT GAMES SUMMIT
GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE 2014
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
MARCH 17-21, 2014
EXPO DATES: MARCH 19-21


Home
Map
Profile
extrasolar
Pioneer
Home | Messages | Thank You
From : Dr. Turing
To : rjagnow@gmail.com
Subject : Thank You
Fri Feb 21 2014 18:20:14 GMT-0800 (PST)
Extrasola


XRi
eXoplanetary Research Institute
San Francisco, CA
July 20, 1994
Lt. Gen. Ryan T. Arling
Office of the Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000
Subject: Re: Funding


Terminal | ~kryptex/xri/scripts
executing secure_send.pl
to cancel, type 'exit'. to forward document, type
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> forward arling
Unable to forward, invalid recipient: arling
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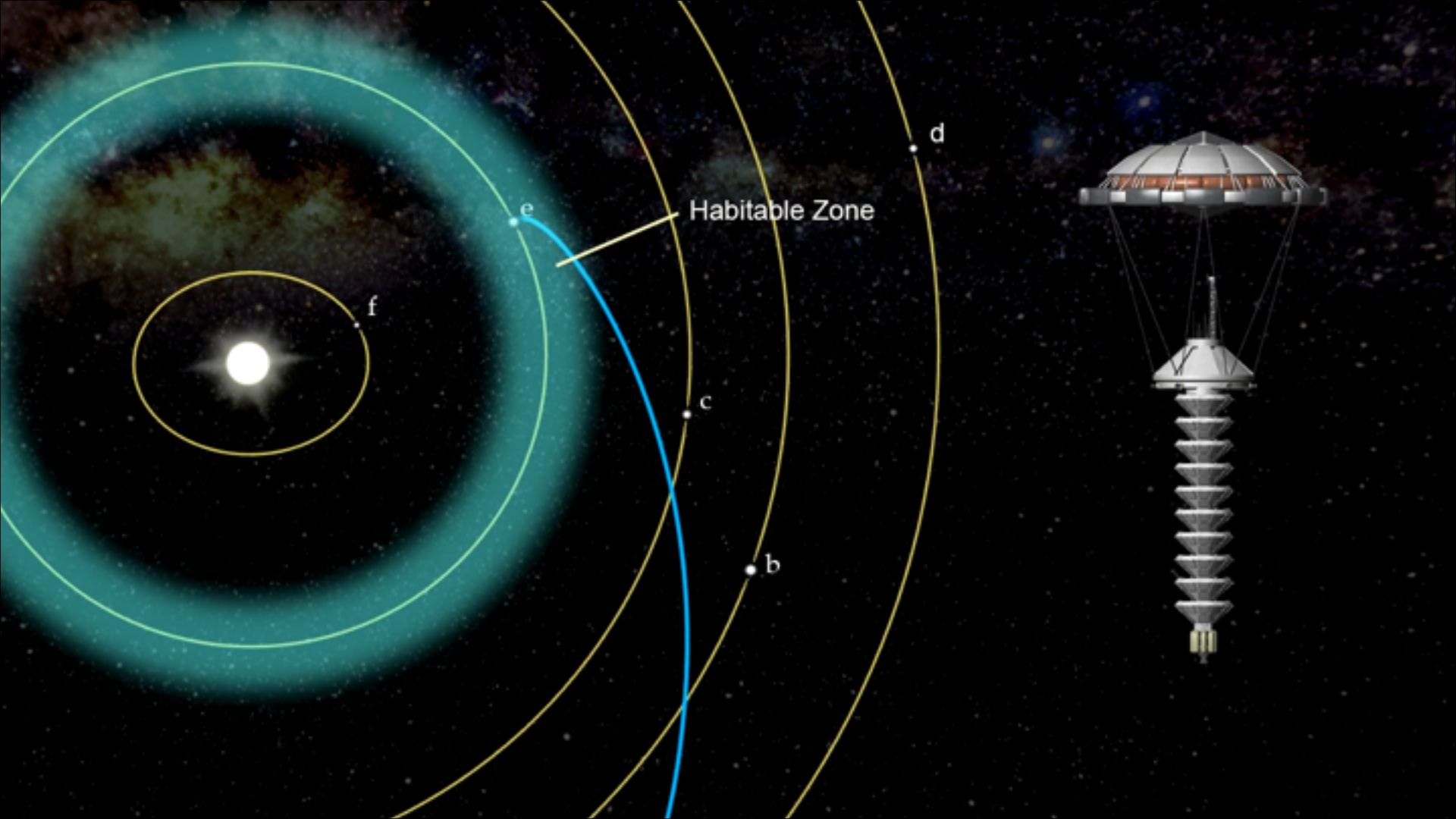
Local Resident Dies in Car Crash
GEORGE CHRISTIAN
Menlo Park -- A devastating car accident resulted in the death of Noam Jemison, a quiet Menlo Park resident, late last night.
Dr. Jemison was driving home from his job in San
The other driver did not stop after the accident; police are still looking for the suspect. Nearby residents of Woodside Drive heard the crash around 1:30am and called emergency services.
The highways of the Bay

How did we get there?

PIXAR

extrasolar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Home | Map | Profile

extrasolar

Associate
Support XRI

Messages

See All

kryptex81	he knew...	6 days ago
Jane Van Susteren	Re: Flower Structure	6 days ago
kryptex81	hidden message	6 days ago
SR-K Rover	Audio Detection: Anomaly, nort...	10 days ago
Dr. Turing	Landmarks	11 days ago
kryptex81	enki. listen in.	11 days ago
kryptex81	Re: the interstellar message	12 days ago
Dr. Turing	Re: The Interstellar Message	12 days ago

Tasks (2)

See All

Active

- **Audio source, northern coast**
- **Explore other parts of the island**
- Tag 3 different colors of bioluminescent species
- Photograph and tag bristletongue variation
- Find serpentweed, spindlepus, and aircomber

Completed

- Tag starspore in open and closed state
- Tag gordy tree in various life stages

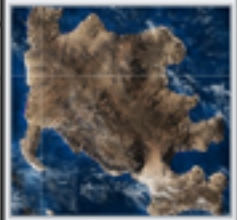
Current Planet Status

Sunset
Sunrise in 6h 56m

Waning Crescent
Rises in 5h 33m

First Quarter
Sets in 4h 07m

Rover Location



Newest Photos (3)

See All

one hour ago

2 hours ago

3 hours ago

5 days ago

5 days ago

Discoveries (3)

Bristlebrush

With a new, open-ended design space, how do you focus ideas?

What are your *core design values*?

- Help make fast, consistent design decisions
- The whole team should understand
- May evolve over time

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The other driver did not stop after the accident; police are still looking for the suspect. Nearby residents of Woodside Drive heard the crash around 1:30am and called emergency services.
The highways of the Bay Area have claimed many lives. Police advise using extreme caution when driving, especially at night.
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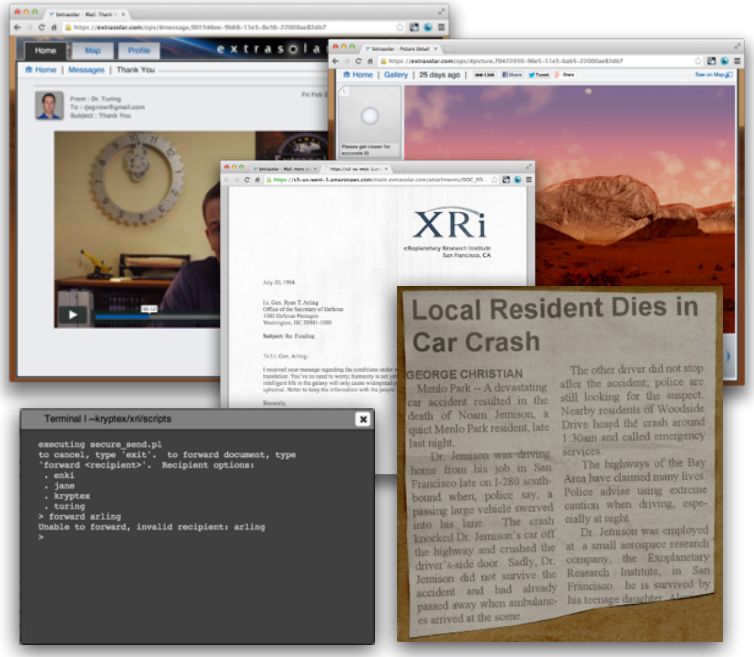
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Our core design values

#1: The fiction is paramount

#2: Make it accessible

#3: Respect the player's time

So… is this an ARG?

Common ARG channels we avoid

- Community-driven puzzle solving
- Real-world media or events
- Physical locations
- Interactions with live actors
- SMS messages
- Phone calls

Accessible storytelling channels

- Websites
- Email
- PDF files
- Web videos
- Online voicemail
- Digital images

Our core design values led to unconventional design decisions

We're all looking for the magic formula

$$\frac{\text{FREE-TO-PLAY} + \text{SEO} + \text{PAID USER ACQUISITION} + \sum_{i=0}^{\infty} \text{ABUSIVE\_SOCIAL\_MECHANIC} + \text{WHALES} * \text{ADDICTIVE\_MECHANIC}}{\text{SUCCESS?}}$$

Write your own formula

STRONG, CONSISTENT FICTION
+ IMMERSIVE STORY
+ BEAUTIFUL IMAGERY
+ ACCESSIBILITY

SUCCESS?

Unconventional Design Decision #1: Immediately reject the player

- We lose up to 24% at this step
+ Emotional experience
+ Helps establish expectations
+ High retention for those who get through

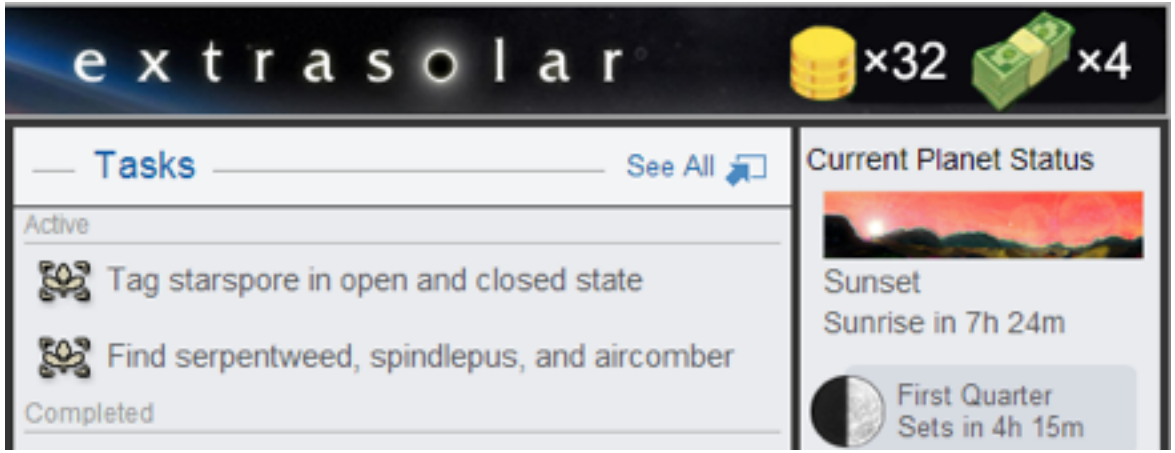
Unconventional Design Decision #2: Ridiculously Generous Demo

- All of season 1: free
- Median completion time: 27 days
- Players can optionally pay to upgrade
- Extrasolar is so weird, how else could we build an audience?

Unconventional Design Decision #3: Force the players to wait

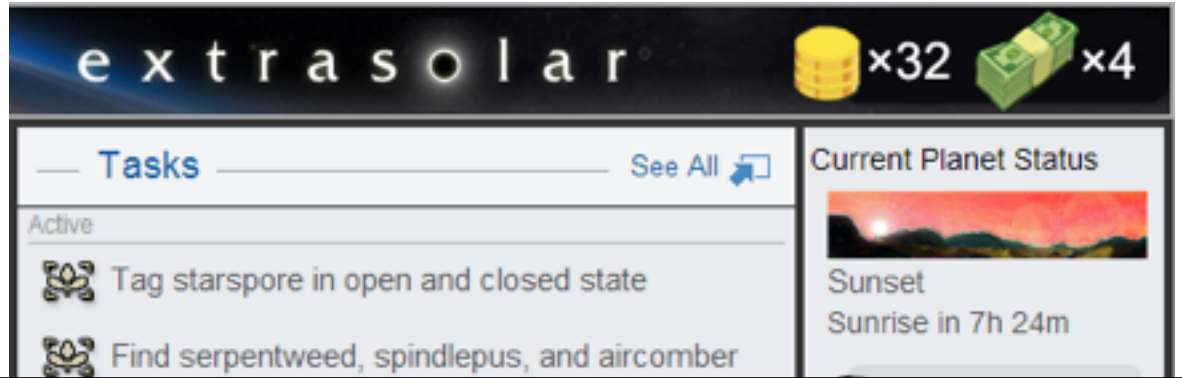
- Waiting is frustrating at first…
- …but becomes part of your daily routine
- No filler. Respectful of the player's time.
- Grind makes the experience worse

Unconventional Design Decision #4: Monetization



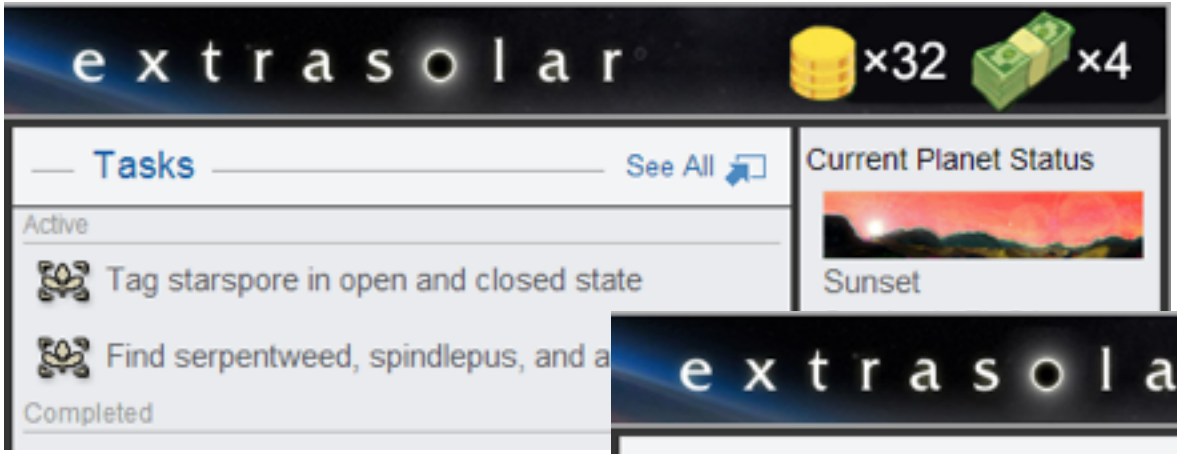
Monetization “best practices”

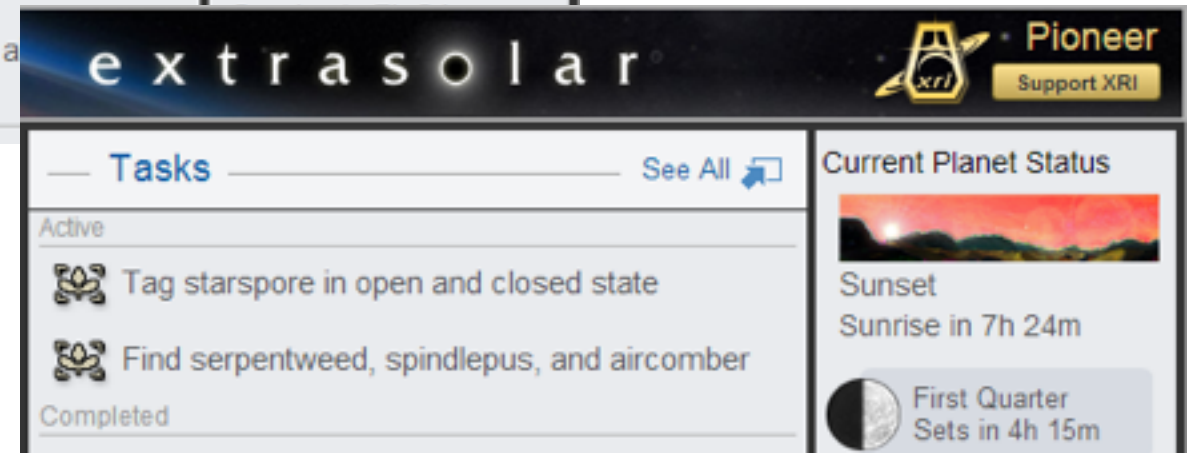
- Microtransaction
- dual currency
- grind economy



Unconventional Design Decision #4: Monetization

- Constant microtransactions hurt fiction
- Paying up front is not an option
- Episodic content
- $9.50 per episode or $25 for all 3
- 15% of players pay, ARPU is $2-3.


extrasolar
×32
×4
Tasks
See All
Active
Tag starspore in open and closed state
Find serpentweed, spindlepus, and a
Completed
Current Planet Status
Sunset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Sunset
Sunrise in 7h 24m
First Quarter
Sets in 4h 15m

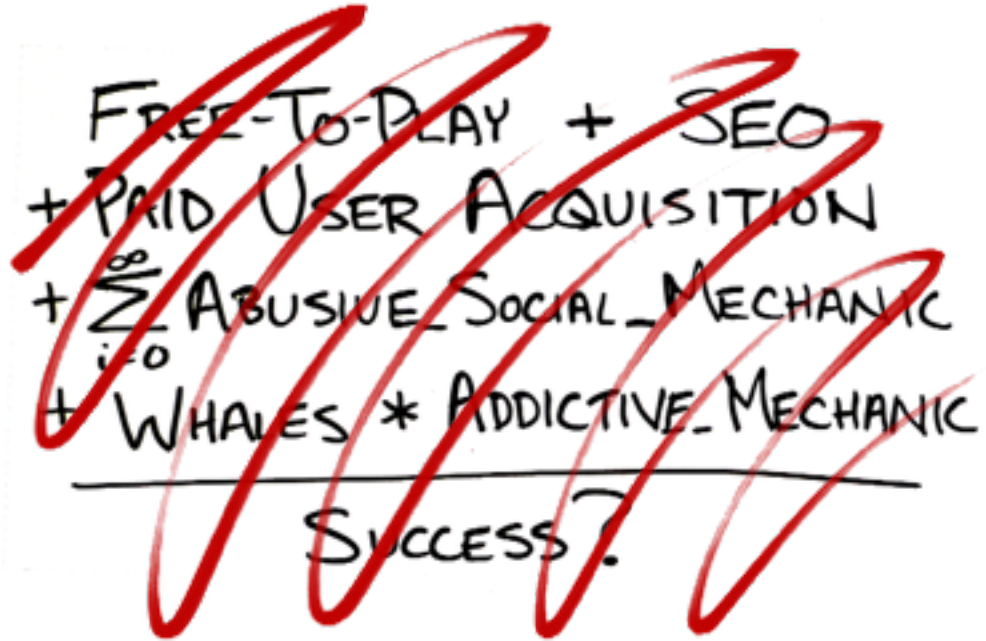
Unconventional designs come from unconventional contributors

How do you make a big game with a small team?

- Core team: 4 programmers, 1 artist
- Development cycle: 3.5 years
- Cost so far: ~$600k
  - Part-time team: $400k

Take advantage of constraints

Lessons Learned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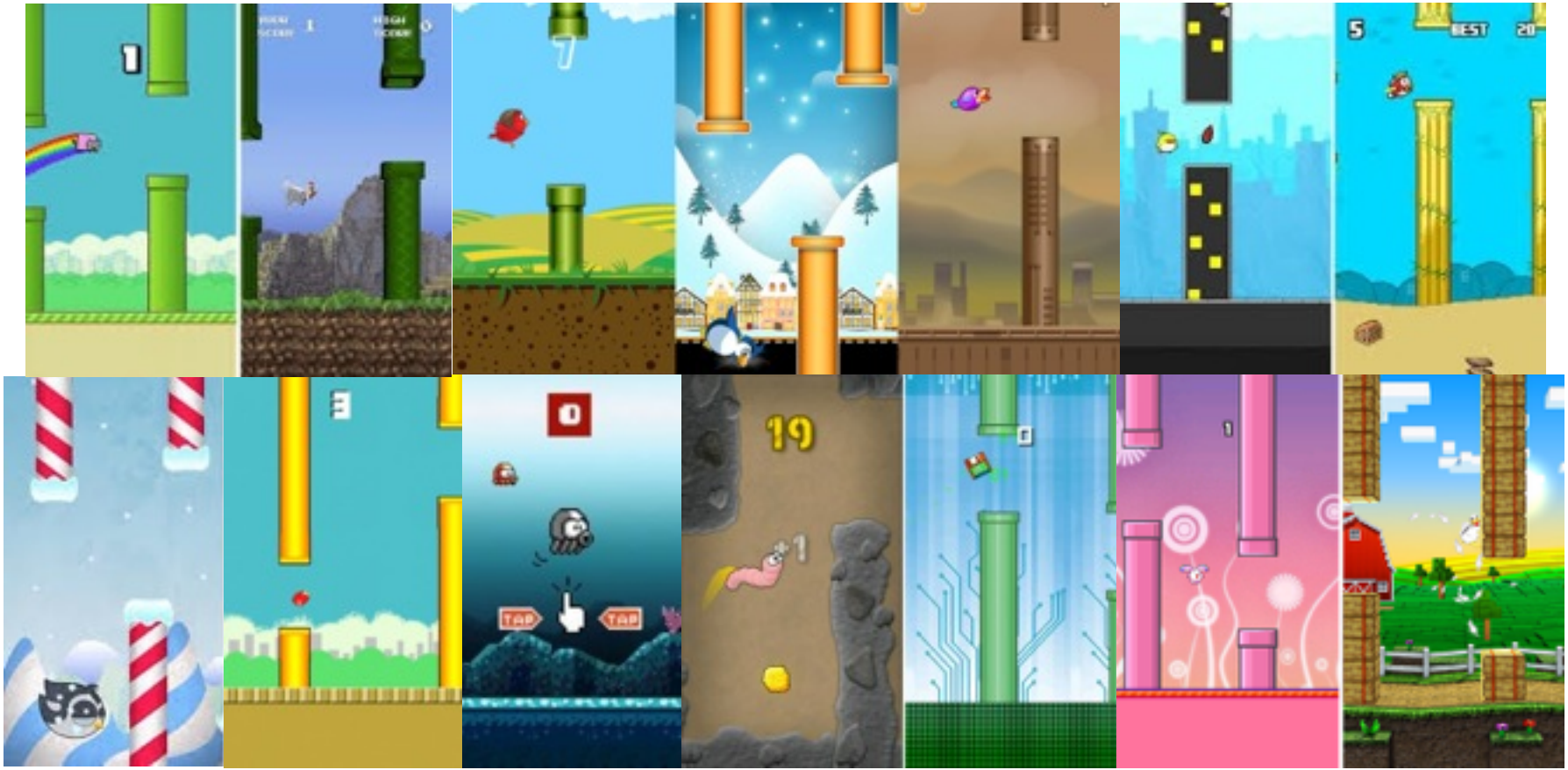
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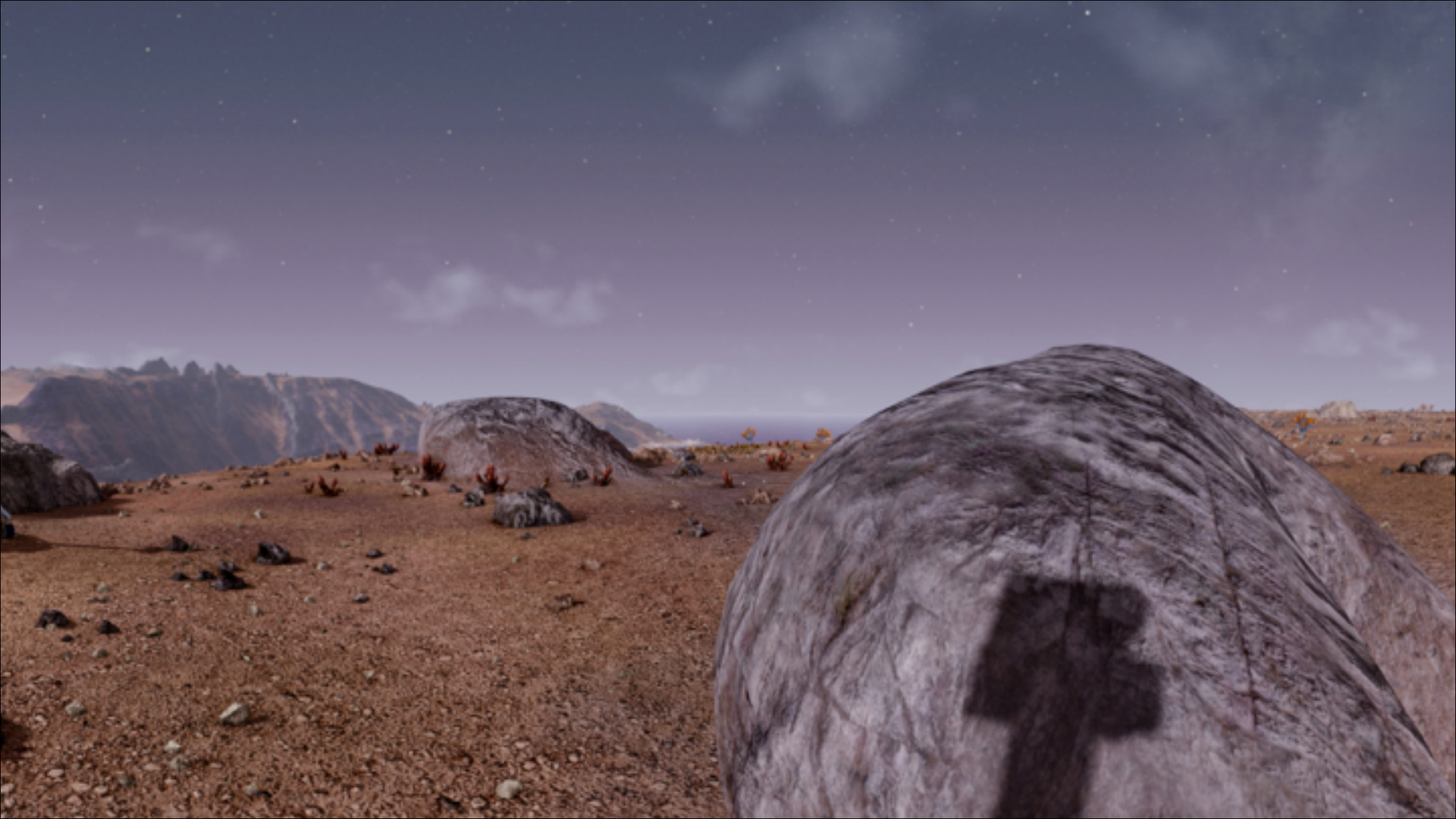
Thank you!

More at extrasolar.com

or visit us at the IGF booth