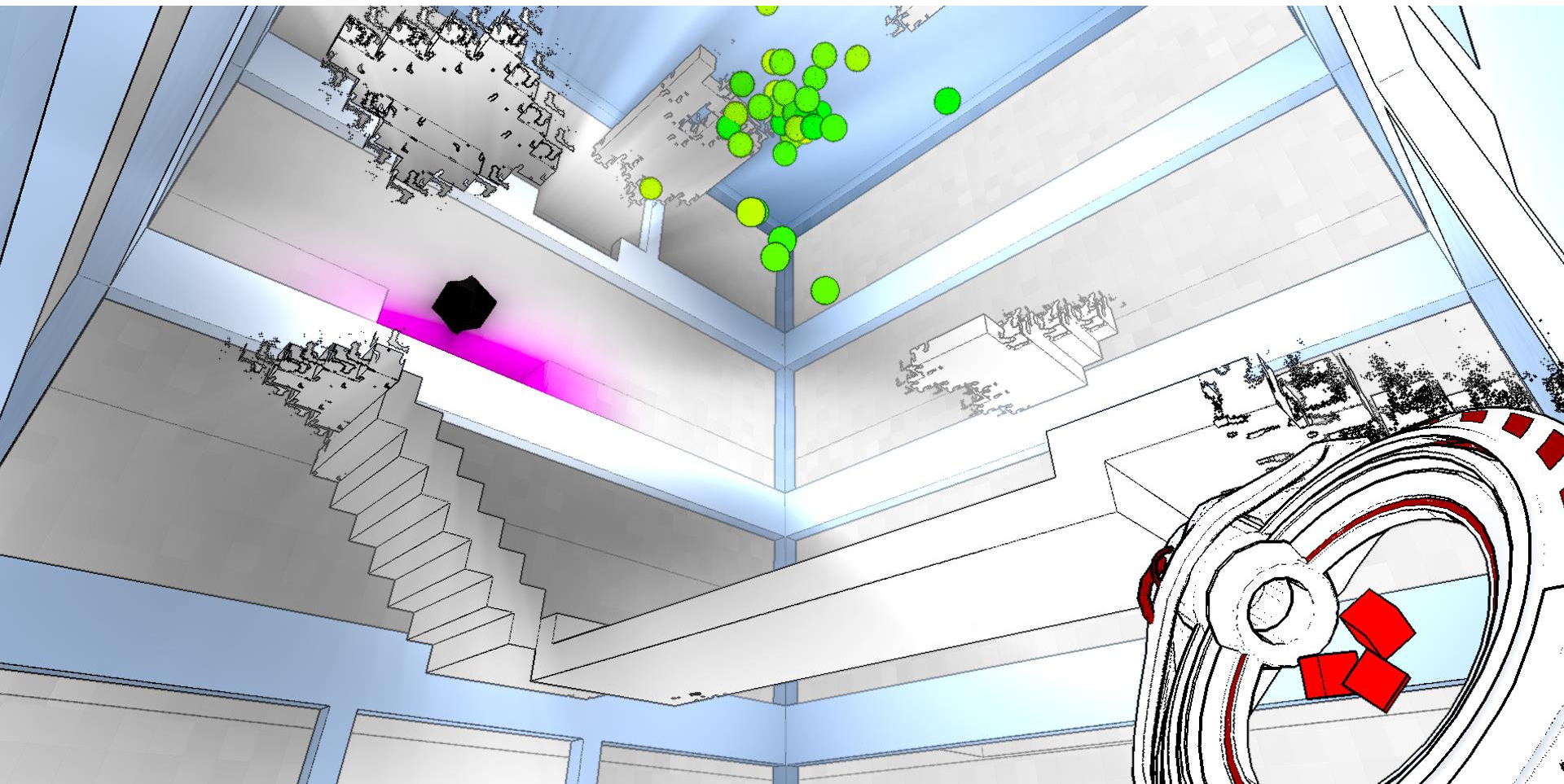


# Antichamber

An Overnight Success,  
Seven Years In The Making

**Alexander Bruce**

Creator, Antichamber



# Why am I here?

- IGF 2012 Technical Excellence Winner
- Backed by IndieFund
- Released 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2013
- 750K+ sales lifetime
- ~\$5M gross revenue

# How did this happen?

Experience?

Ideas?

Quality?

Steam?

**Luck?**

Awards?

Timing?

Press?

Connections?

# Where did I start?

- 2009 – Final year of university
- Living in Melbourne, Australia
- First independent game
- Working from a bedroom

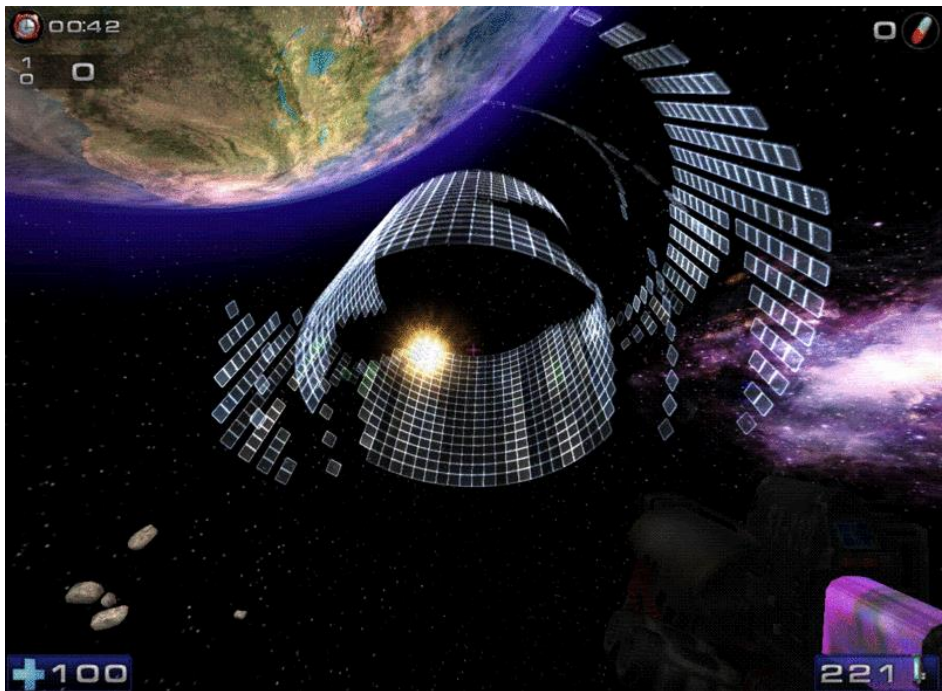
# What makes me different?

# 2005 – University

- “Not the best at X”
- Very good at being different
- Stand out in university to get into industry
- Stand out in industry and get hired overseas

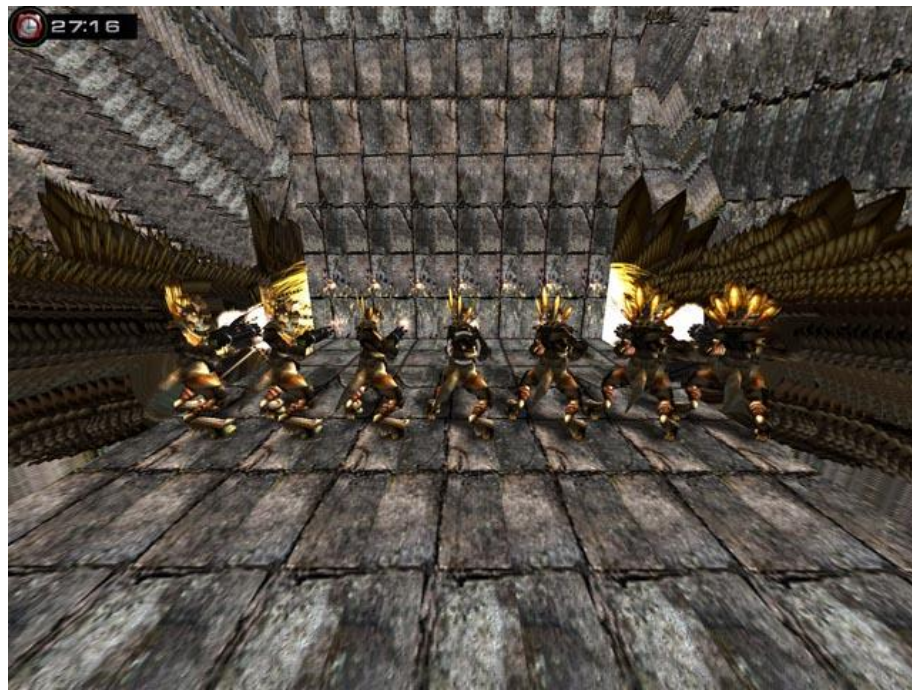


# 2006 – Dynamic Geometry





# 2007 – Recursive Space

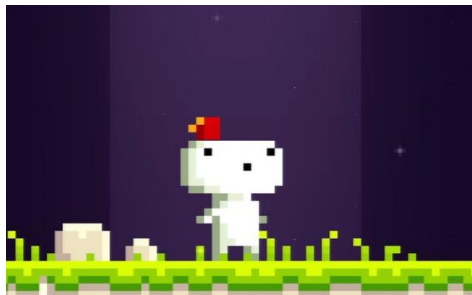


**2007 – Hired to work with UE3**

# 2008 – Industry

- Unreal Engine 3 game was cancelled
- Moved onto an Infrastructure team
- Went through months of crunch
- Was becoming unsatisfied with local industry

# 2008 – Independent Development



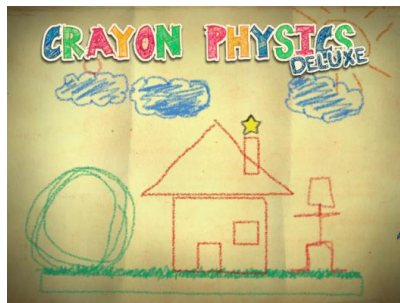
Fez



Braid



World of Goo



Crayon Physics



The Unfinished Swan



Narbacular Drop

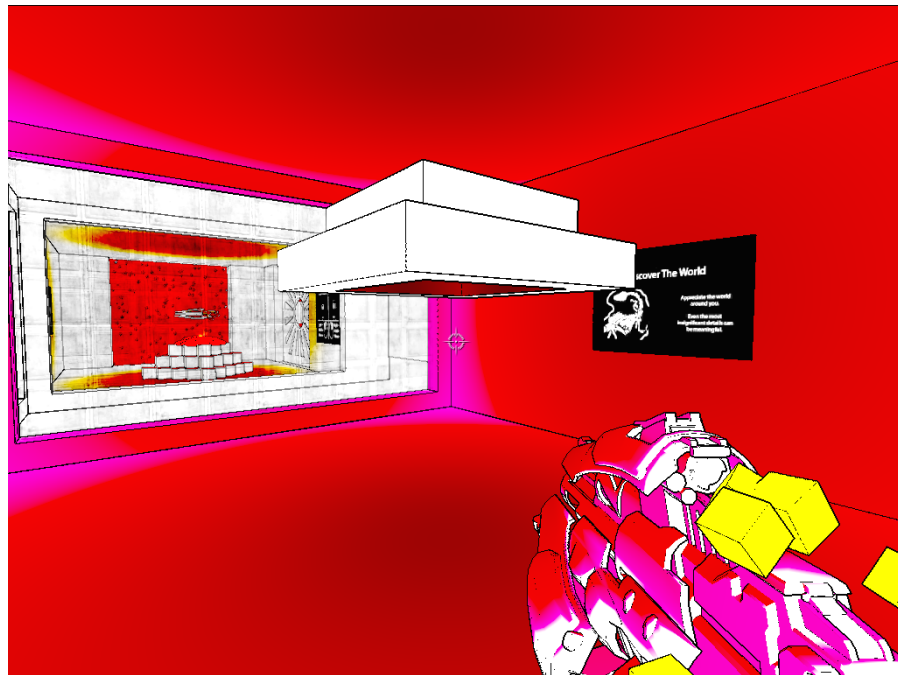
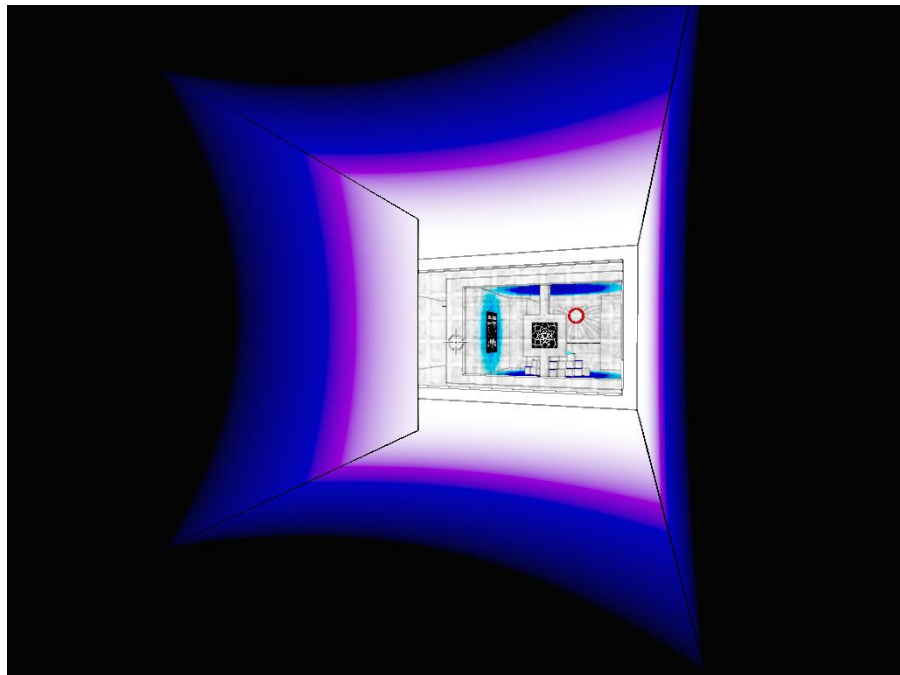
# What makes me different?

# 2008 – Make Something Unreal 3

- Run by Epic Games. \$1M in prize money
- Ran for 2 years. One round every 6 months
- I wasn't a "modder", but had an unusual game
- Wait until final round in 2009 to surprise people



# 2009 – Hazard: The Journey of Life



# **2009 – Sense of Wonder Night**

**“If I don’t do X, nothing will happen.”**

**“If I do X, something might happen.”**

# 2009 – SOWN Conversations



Mike Capps  
(Epic Games)

“I will put you onto Mark Rein, and we will find a solution to your problem.”

# 2009 – SOWN Conversations



Steve Swink  
(Shadow Physics)

"You should join the indie community. You should go to GDC and meet these people. You'd fit right in."

# 2009 – Early Success

- Festivals were a great way to get noticed
- Selected for Make Something Unreal
- Won an Australian competition
- Entered Independent Games Festival



# 2009 – Overconfident

- Wasn't nominated in the IGF
- Received an honourable mention for Nuovo
- Why didn't the game get into the IGF?

# What makes me different?

# 2009 – Being more critical

- Sense of Wonder Night was a new competition
- Epic didn't expect such an unconventional game
- IGF was used to showcasing exceptional games

# Remarkable

# 2010 – Just getting started

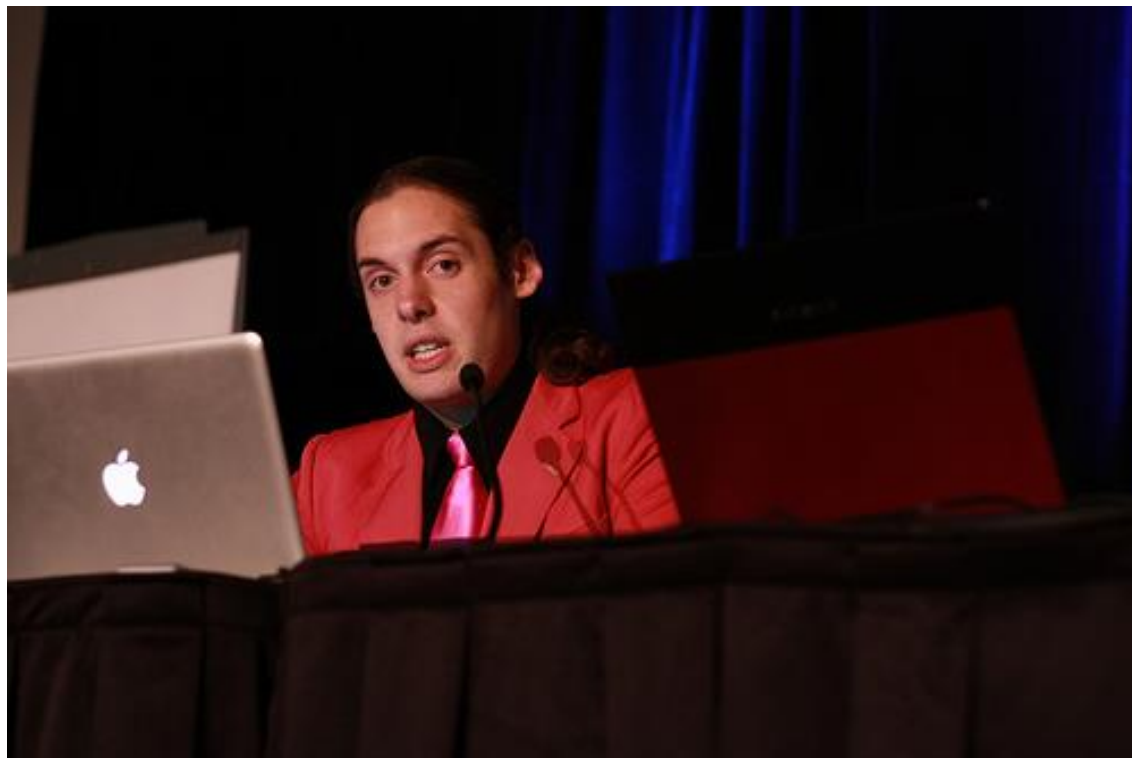
- Won Make Something Unreal
- Could use UDK for a commercial version
- Contacted by Valve to put game on Steam
- Went to the Game Developers Conference

# 2010 – GDC Networking

- Handed out business cards to a lot of people
- Not the first person to make a successful game
- Wanted to learn from other people's mistakes



# 2010 – GDC Nuovo Sessions



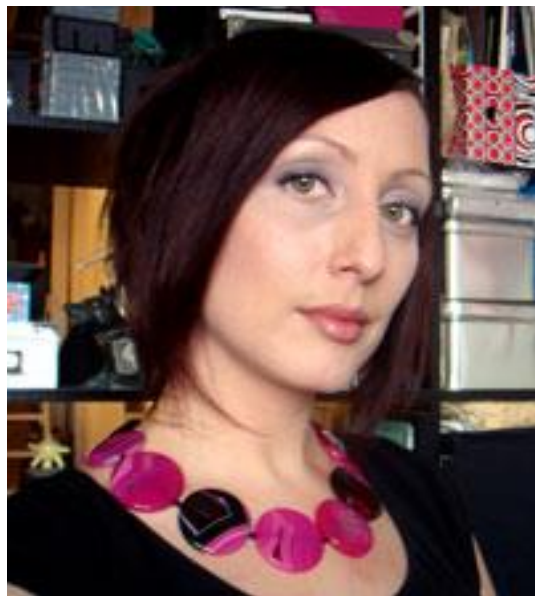
# 2010 – GDC Conversations



Heather Kelly  
(Kokoromi)

"You need to familiarize yourself with the phrase 'Fake it till you make it.'"

# 2010 – GDC Conversations



Mare Sheppard  
(N+)

"I encourage you to not get discouraged and keep in mind the jury changes every year."

**Real Networking**  
**=**  
**Genuine Relationships**

# 2010 – Aftermath of GDC

- Change in circumstances = Change in plans
- I knew more after GDC more than I did before
- Need another 3 months of development

# 2010 – IndieCade @ E3





# 2010 – E3 Playtesting Lessons

- People saw the game and wanted to try it
- Average playtime: 5 minutes
- Game wasn't holding people's interest

# 2010 – E3 Marketing Lessons

- Explaining your game is difficult. Need to be good at it if you want people to care.
- Need to explain in ways that someone who has never played before understands.

# What makes me different?

# 2010 – Fixing the first 10 minutes

- Watching people at E3 revealed a lot of issues
- I wanted to understand how other people think
- Continued testing on people at home

**The more you *choose* to fix,  
the more you have to fix.**

# 2010 – Competitions

- Not selected for PAX10
- 3 nominations in an Australian competition
- Didn't win in any category
- Not selected for IndieCade festival

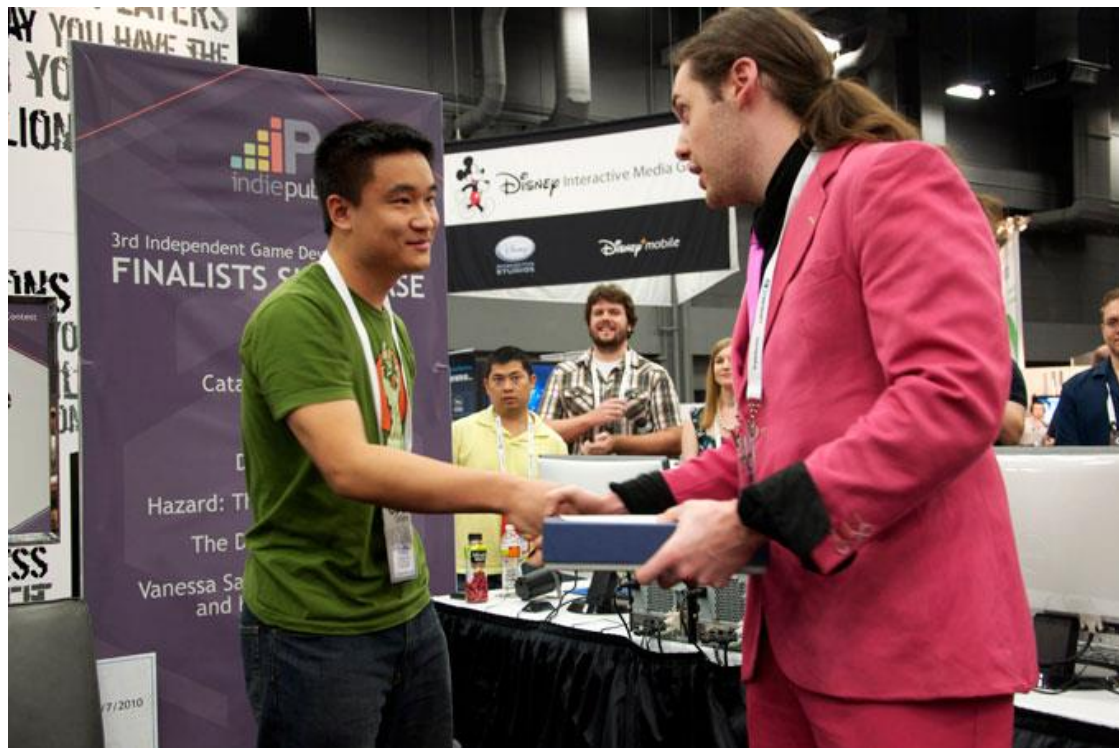
# 2010 – Downward Spiral

- Not getting enough done = longer hours
- Longer hours = less sleep
- Less sleep = becoming sick
- Being sick = getting less work done

# What makes me different?



# 2010 – GDC Online



# 2010 – Signs of Progress

- Early issues resolved. Later issues discovered
- Average playtime: 20 minutes
- Met Robin Arnott (Deep Sea, SoundSelf)
- Increasing interest from publishers

# 2010 – IndieCade Conversations



Ron Carmel  
(World of Goo)

“Don’t go with a publisher.  
If you can get this game  
greenlit on a console, I will  
fund you myself.”

# 2010 – IndieCade Conversations



Daniel Benmergui  
(Today I Die)

"You're doing really well,  
but you need to slow down,  
or you will just keep  
making yourself more sick."

# 2010 – Turning Point

- Nominated in IGF China
- Nominated in the IGF
- Nominated in Indie Game Challenge

# 2011 – DICE Summit



# 2011 – DICE Connections



Garnett Lee  
(ShackNews)



Alexander Sliwinski  
(Joystiq)



Adam Sessler  
(G4TV)



Ben Kuchera  
(Ars Technica)



Michael Thomsen  
(IGN)



Brian Crecente  
(Kotaku)

**“How are you going to appeal to the Call of Duty crowd?”**

**“My daughter loves Minecraft. Why would she play this?”**



# 2011 – DICE Conversations



Dino Patti  
(LIMBO)

“We were getting asked the same questions before Limbo was released. You’re doing fine. Keep doing what you’re doing.”

# 2011 – DICE Conversations



Jamie Cheng  
(Klei)

"Why is it called Hazard?  
The title didn't match the  
experience I had playing  
the game."

# 2011 – IGF Nuovo



# 2011 – Hard lessons from the IGF

- Expectations hurt
- No automatic explosion of interest
- Many IGF nominees get forgotten

# What makes me different?

# Survivorship Bias

# 2011 – Aftermath of GDC

- Change in circumstances = Change in plans
- Average playtime: 40 – 90 minutes
- Trying to negotiate console versions
- Another 6 months until release

# "You need to change the name"



Adam Saltsman  
(Canabalt)



Jason Rohrer  
(Passage)



Jonathan Blow  
(Braid)





**ANTI CHAMBER**

# 2011 – Announcing the change

- Nominated in the PAX10
- Announced immediately after notified
- Only Joystiq posted about it

# 2011 – Getting people to care

- Submitted footage to Indie Game: The Movie
- Nominated in IndieCade
- Won 2 awards at an Australian festival
- Sent game to many festivals around the world

**“That’s a big call for an indie”**

# What makes me different?

# Nothing!

# How do I not mess this up?

# 2011 – Letting go of consoles

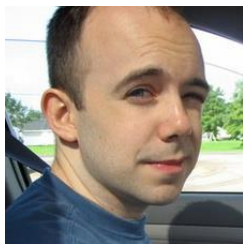
- Negotiations were taking a lot of time
- Didn't follow up with Microsoft
- Turned down a large potential offer from Sony
- Consoles required too much up front risk



# 2011 – PAX10



# 2011 – PAX Connections



Stephen Totilo  
(Kotaku)



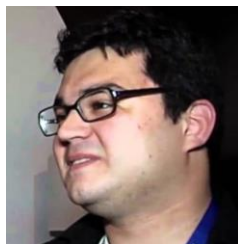
Griffin McElroy  
(Joystiq)



Ryan Davis  
(GiantBomb)



Blair Herter  
(G4TV)



Billy Shibley  
(Machinima)



Markus Persson  
(Minecraft)

# 2011 – Depression

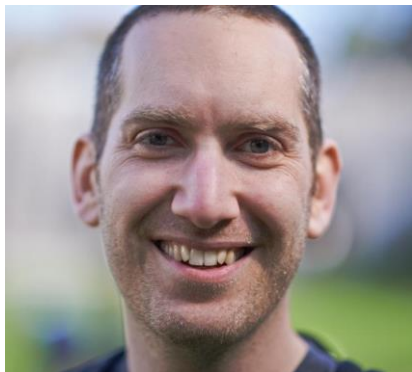
- More attention = Rising expectations
- Needed to deliver and not disappoint
- Game was still several months from done
- Running out of shows, running out of money

# 2011 – Second Chances

- Set IGF 2012 as deadline for completion
- Nominated for Technical Excellence at IGF
- Learned from my mistakes at IGF 2011

# 2012 – A new teaser

- Needed new footage for IGF / PAX East
- Got help from experts in the field



Kert Gartner  
(Independent)



Antoine Fortier-Auclair  
(Assassin's Creed)

# 2012 – Teaser release

- Sent to all press contacts I had met at events
- Call to action – Come talk / play at IGF or PAX
- Saturated the news on day of release
- Retweeted by Notch, Epic and many others

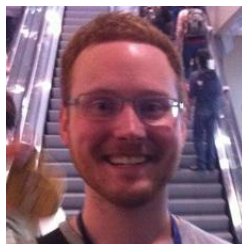
# 2012 – IGF Technical Excellence



# 2012 – GDC Connections



Ben Kuchera  
(Penny Arcade)



Jordan Devore  
(Destructoid)



John Walker  
(RPS)



Anthony Carboni  
(Revision 3)



Patrick Klepeck  
(GiantBomb)



Kyle Orland  
(Ars Technica)



Nathan Grayson  
(Gamespy)



Jeffrey Matulef  
(Eurogamer)



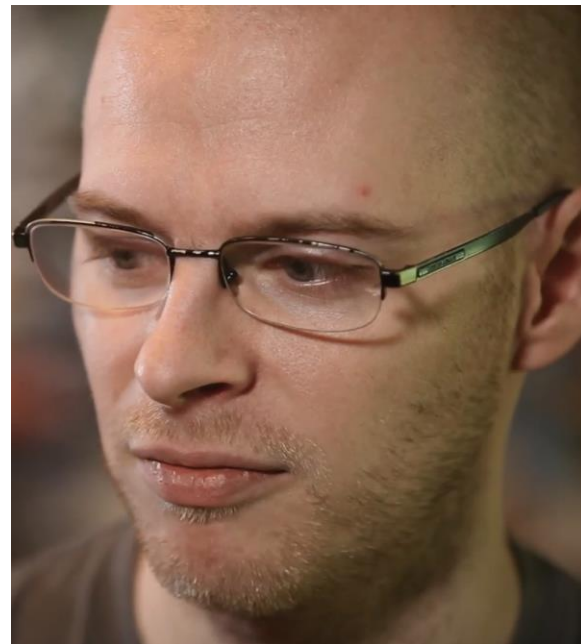
# 2012 – Aftermath of GDC

- “My game still isn’t done.”
- “I feel worse than I’ve ever felt.”
- “I don’t have anything to work towards now.”
- “They took away my goal.”

# 2012 – Breaking down

- Working alone and increasing pressure was taking a huge toll on my mental health
- Couldn't quit
- Couldn't release an unfinished game

# 2012 - Indie Game: The Movie



# 2012 – Snowball

- Trying desperately to finish the game
- Feeling jealous of other successful games
- Getting paranoid about failure
- PAX East and PAX Prime had to be my last shows

# 2012 – TotalBiscuit at PAX Prime

- Known for his WTF Is? series
- 1M+ Subscribers on YouTube
- “We are almost booked out of slots for PAX, so if you want your game looked at, contact X.”

**“The 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of November  
look pretty good.”**

# 2012 – Delay to 2013



"Wait until late January or early February. You'll make more revenue releasing at a good time than you will lose via the "delay"."

Nathan Vella  
(Sword and Sworcery)

# 2012 – Plan your launch



Ron Carmel  
(World of Goo)

“Delaying will also give you time to plan and execute a launch PR plan.”



# 2012 – Don't misstep now



Aaron Isaksen  
(Chip Chain)

"You've spent so many years on this, I think you want to give people some time to get ready for its final release."

# 2012 – This worked for us



Kellee Santiago  
(Journey)

“Journey was on a similar schedule, and I think we really benefitted from the added time to do a proper PR lead-up.”

# January 2013 – Release Plans

- Assets, trailer, pricing, release date, final builds
- Seeking critical feedback from developers and press I trusted on every single decision
- Carefully co-ordinating release coverage

# January 30<sup>th</sup> 2013 – Pre-release

- Released Antichamber Launch Trailer
- GiantBomb posted their quick look
- TotalBiscuit released WTF Is? video
- Twitter hype from Notch and other developers

# January 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 - Release day

- #1 on Steam in first hour
- ~25,000 sales in first 24 hours
- 40+ reviews over 8 and 9 from major websites
- Lots of high profile YouTube coverage
- Non-stop twitter discussion all week

# Takeaway: Success is Messy

- None of this happened quickly
- No single decision made the game successful
- 8 years of decision making, 7 years of work and 3 years of obsession for 1 day of release

# Takeaway: Luck vs Opportunity

- Some of the most significant events started off as completely insignificant details
- “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”

# Takeaway: Development Philosophy

- **What** people did is less useful than understanding **Why** they did it
- Brutal self-awareness
- Question your assumptions and course correct



# Takeaway: Nothing in isolation

- 80 - 90% of development, business and marketing was done myself
- Hundreds of other people were necessary for feedback and sanity checking along the way

# Making games is hard

**Alexander Bruce**  
Creator, Antichamber

**@demruth**

# **Antichamber**

Three Years of Hardcore Iteration

**Tomorrow: 11am – 12pm**

Room 2016, West Hall