




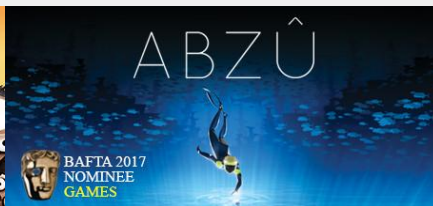
# Kingdoms and Castles Post Mortem

Peter Angstadt ( @petey123567 )



# Who am I?

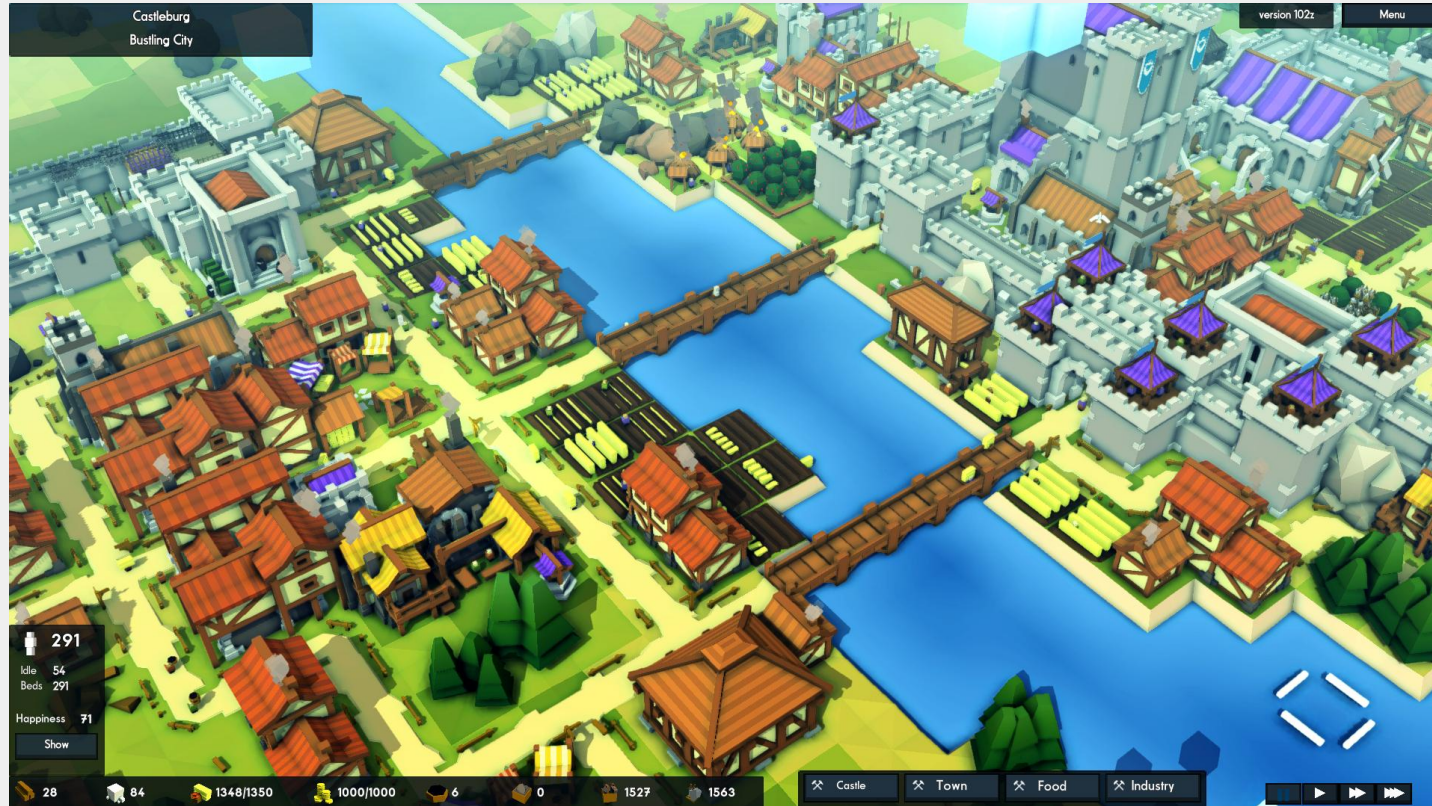
- Co-Founder at  **LION SHIELD**
- Programmer and designer (mostly)
- 10+ years making games:





# What is Kingdoms and Castles?

Build and manage a medieval city!



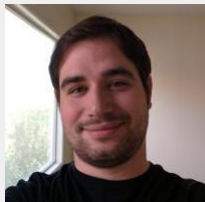
# Development Overview

Two main developers:



**Programming, Design, Art**

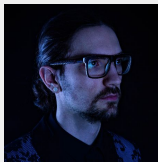
Peter Angstadt



**Programming, Design**

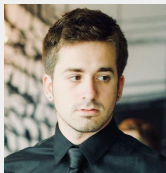
Michael Peddicord

Three contractors:



**Music**

Jason Taylor



**SFX**

Steve Green



**SFX**

Chad Freeman

# Development Overview

**Development time:** ~1.5 “wall clock” years\*

**Built on:** Unity with these plugins

- I2Loc
- Colorful FX
- SSAO Pro
- TMPPPro
- DOTween

# How did it go?



650,000+ copies sold to date.

**Everyone stayed happy, healthy, and friends.**





# Market Fit Testing



# Market Fit Testing

**Goal:** Find out...

1. Are people interested in the game at all?
2. How big is the market?
3. How much time should we take?

## See also:

- Ryan Clark's *"What Makes an Indie Hit?: How to Choose the Right Design"* article on gamasutra
- *"What is 'Marketing First' Game Development?"* on Ooblet's Patreon blog



# Travel Back in Time

Market testing, why?

Rewind 5 years to my first indie game:



# First Indie Game - Cannon Brawl

- 2D action strategy, RTS/artillery hybrid
- 2 people, 3 years development time



# Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

## Cannon Brawl



Developer: Publisher: Turtle Sandbox

Genre:

Release date: Sep 19, 2014 Price: \$14.99

Score rank: 80% **Userscore: 91%** Old userscore: 90%

Owners: 50,000 .. 100,000

## Kingdoms and Castles



Developer: Lion Shield, LLC Publisher: Lion Shield, LLC

Genre: Indie, Simulation, Strategy

Release date: Jul 20, 2017 Price: \$9.99

Score rank: 61% **Userscore: 84%** Old userscore: 84%

Owners: 500,000 .. 1,000,000

# Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

Youtube Devlog Videos - Every video has between 300-800 views

Never grows



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 12 - Flamethrower and...

Pete Angstadt  
720 views • 4 years ago



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 11 - The Armory

Pete Angstadt  
416 views • 4 years ago



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 10 - Who needs 9

Pete Angstadt  
409 views • 5 years ago



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 8 - Nightmare Mode

Pete Angstadt  
607 views • 5 years ago



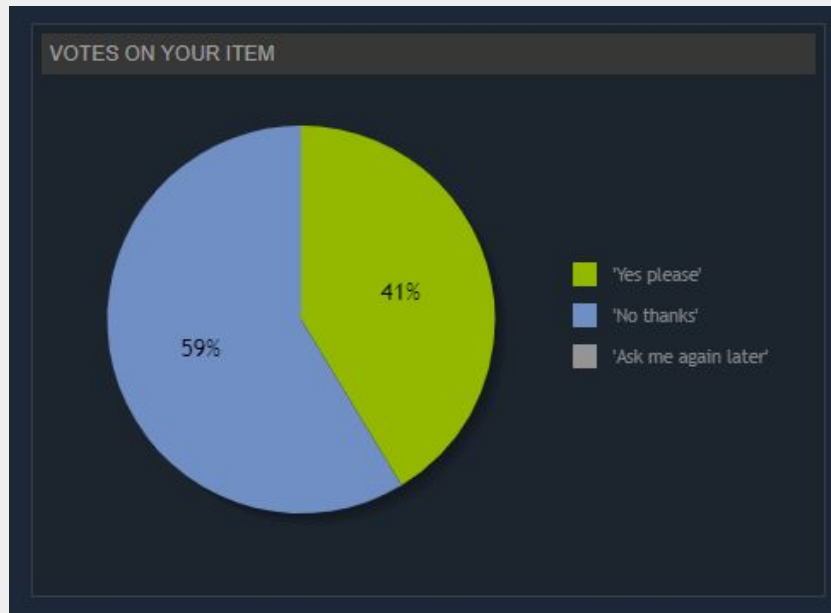
Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 7 - New Map

Pete Angstadt  
383 views • 5 years ago



# Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

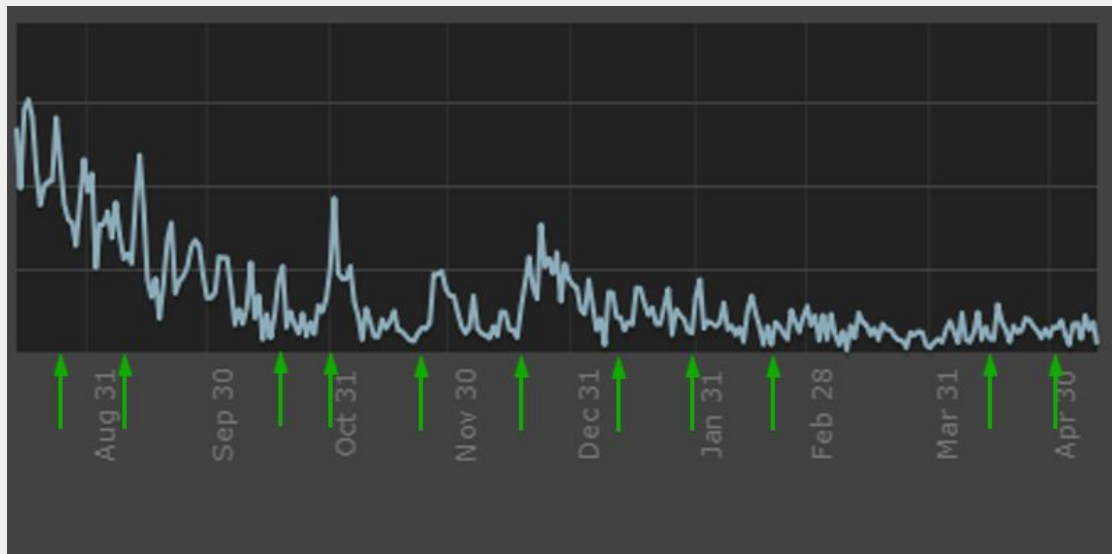
Steam Greenlight Run - would have liked more yes's



# Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

**Early Access Launch** - makes it into the steam top 20

Updating seems to make no difference



# Help Grow the Audience...?



+

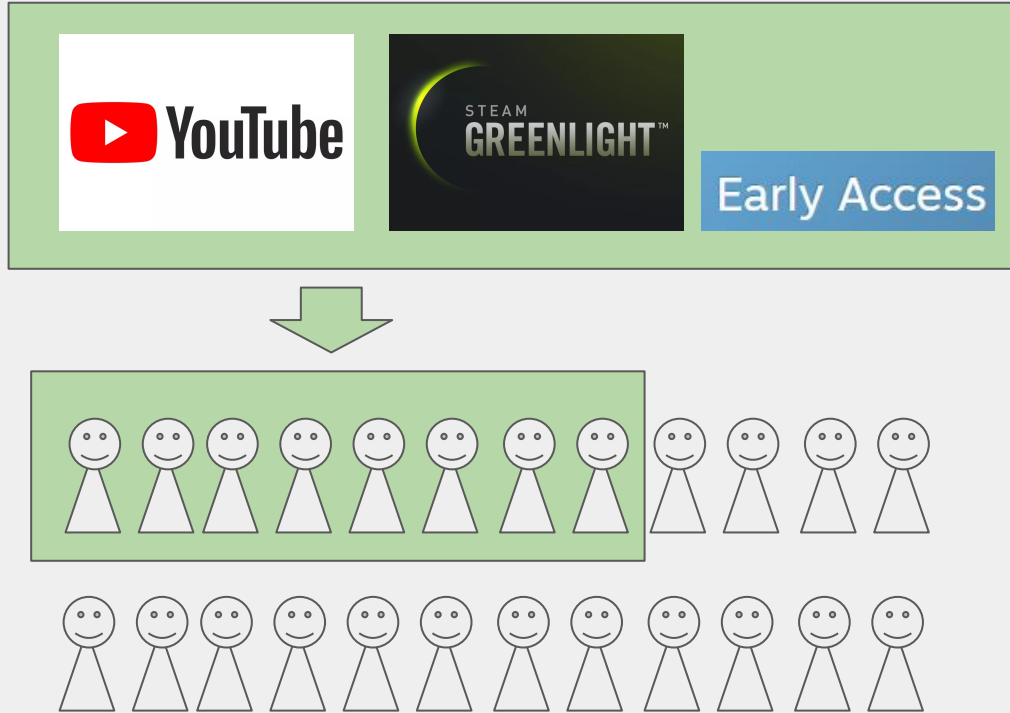


=



?

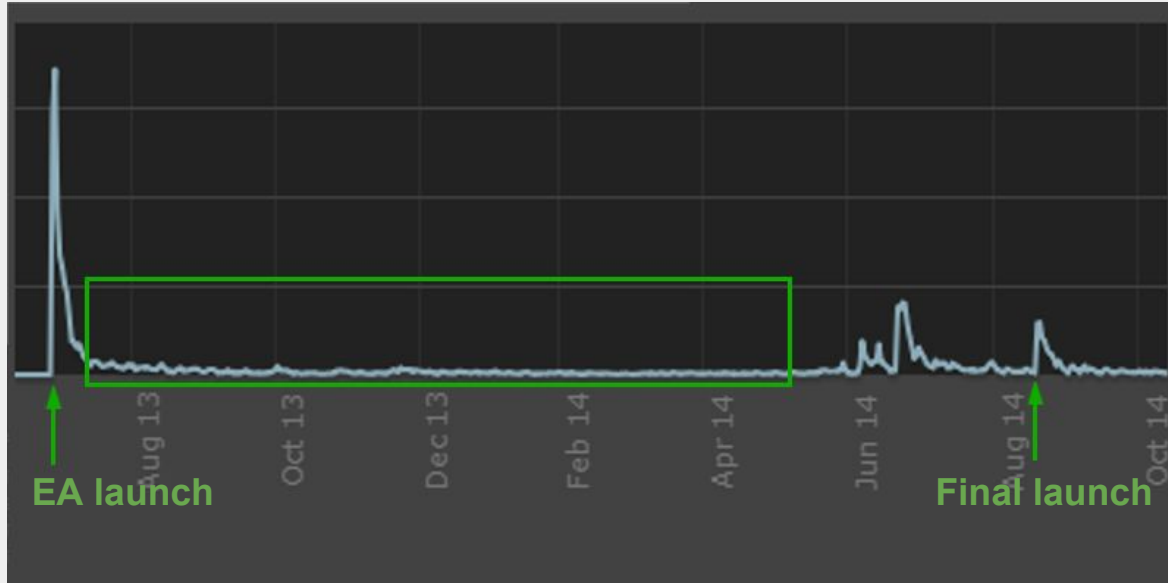
# Informs Size of Potential Audience





# Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

Modest sales, but the market wasn't as large as we hoped



# Market Fit Testing - Kingdoms and Castles

Market test early and continuously:

- **Should we make the game at all?**
  - **1mo** (and onward) - post gifs on twitter
  - **3mos** - Steam Greenlight Concept
  
- **How much time should we invest?**
  - **8mos** - Crowdfunding + Steam Greenlight
  - **18mos** - Steam Launch



**Note about timeline:** this project was part time for much of its pre-launch life (about 10 hrs/week), time estimates are compressed to read as if we did full-time (35 hours a week).

# 1 Month In - Should We This At All?

Step 1 - Post on twitter, test the waters

Success Criteria: getting something retweeted 25+ times



# 1 Month In - Testing with Twitter

After a few tries, got there with this gif (**25 retweets** / 40 likes):



Another success (**129 retweets** / 417 likes):





# Other People Testing on Twitter

More examples from other folks.

These resonate, worth taking to the next step!



# 3 Months In - Testing with Steam Greenlight

**Step 2** - Made a Steam Greenlight Ideas page

**Success Criteria:** Get into the top 100 ideas, generate 50+ comments



# 3 Months In - Testing with Steam Greenlight

Made it into the top 100 ideas and results went beyond expectations:



The screenshot shows the Steam Greenlight interface for a game idea. At the top, there are two tabs: "Public User Comments (197)" and "Private Developer Comments (0)". Below the tabs, there is a comment count "197 Comments" which is circled in yellow, a "Subscribe to thread (?)" button, and a pagination bar showing "1 ... 14 15 16 17 18 ... 20". Below the comment bar, there are three comments from users: Fergus, WackoDesperado, and NooOdes.

Public User Comments (197) Private Developer Comments (0)

197 Comments ✓ Subscribe to thread (?) < 1 ... 14 15 16 17 18 ... 20 >

 **Fergus** Sep 2, 2016 @ 8:06am  
This looks awesome. I hope I can play this sometime soon. Looks to be my kind of game tbh

 **WackoDesperado** Sep 2, 2016 @ 9:43pm  
Yo this looks awesome I'd defiently buy it!

 **NooOdes** Sep 7, 2016 @ 8:57pm  
Dude I will willingly pay for this..

Should we commit to making this game? Yes.

# Early Art Style Feedback

Also learned we were drawing too many comparisons to Stone Hearth:



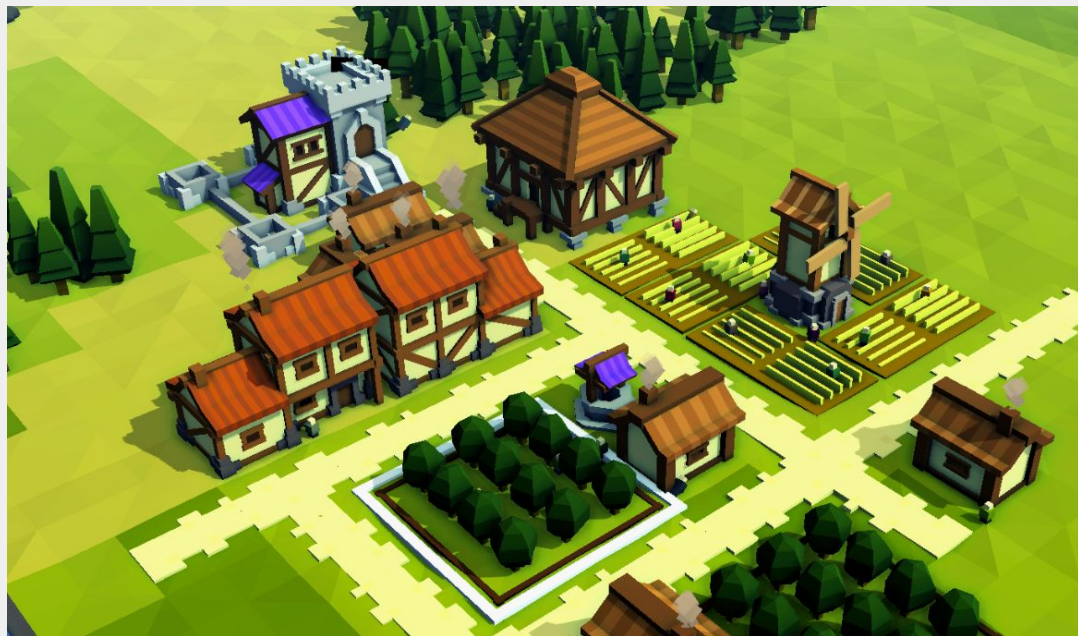
Tuxu ==JeepC== Sep 2, 2016 @ 2:32pm  
So, how is this better then stonhearth?





# Art Style Rework

Re-did all the assets in low-poly style to better differentiate:

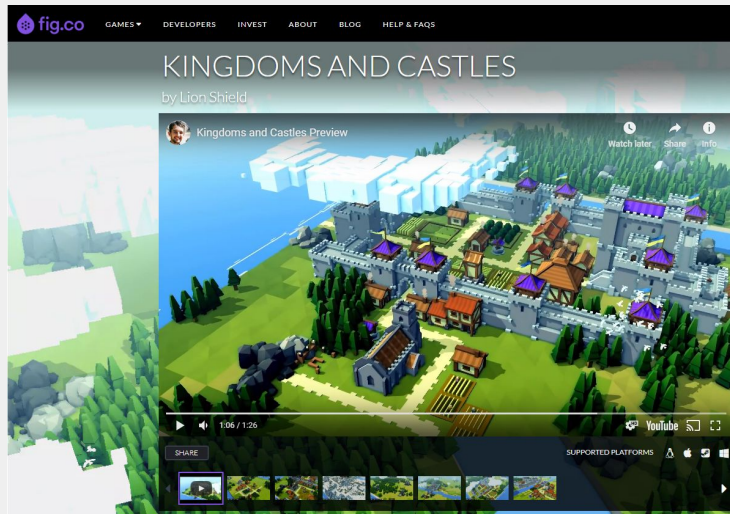


# Crowdfunding/Steam Greenlight

**Step 3:** Commit 6 months of dev time to prepare a:

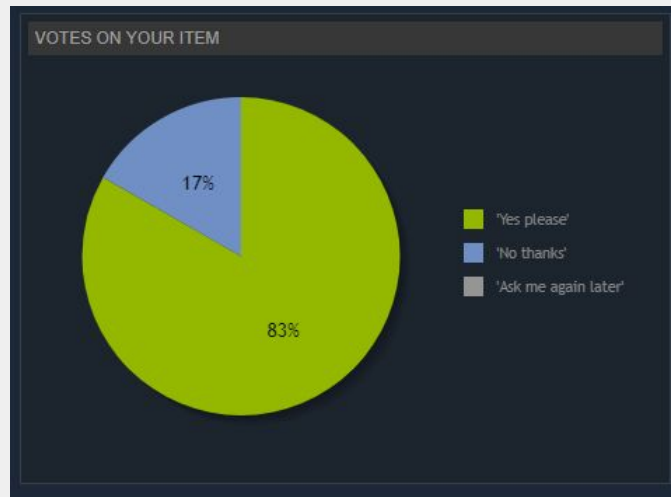
- Crowdfunding campaign on Fig
- Real Steam Greenlight run

**Scope Criteria:** Being Greenlit and level of success of crowdfunding









# 8 Months In - Crowdfunding/Steam Greenlight

Now we know how to scope and how much time to invest.



# 18 Months In - Steam Launch

Launch Time - it goes great! Gets into the top 5, but unable to unseat PUBG

New and Trending		
Top Sellers		
Upcoming		
Specials		
	<b>Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator</b> Dating Sim, Simulation, Romance, Indie	\$14.99
	<b>Dark and Light</b> Early Access, Massively Multiplayer, Sandbox, RPG	<del>\$29.99</del> -17% \$24.89
	<b>PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS</b> Early Access, Survival, Shooter, Multiplayer	\$29.99
	<b>DOOM</b> FPS, Action, Gore, Demons	<del>\$29.99</del> -50% \$14.99
	<b>Kingdoms and Castles</b> Strategy, Simulation, Indie, City Builder	\$9.99
	<b>Total War: WARHAMMER II</b> Strategy, Action, Fantasy, RTS	\$59.99

Do we continue expanding after launch? Yep!





# Clear Player Fantasy





# Player Fantasy

**“Ability of the player to imagine what the game is like without actually having played it.”**

Can be anything, but must be **clear**

**See also:** Alex Hutchison’s “Designing Games to Sell” GDC 2012 talk

# Player Fantasy - Examples

**Assassin's Creed** - "Be a cool assassin ancient times"



# Player Fantasy - Examples

Rocket League - “Play soccer with rocket powered cars”



# Player Fantasy - Examples

**Papers Please** - “Be a border control agent in a dystopian country”





# Player Fantasy - Examples

## Cannon Brawl - “???”

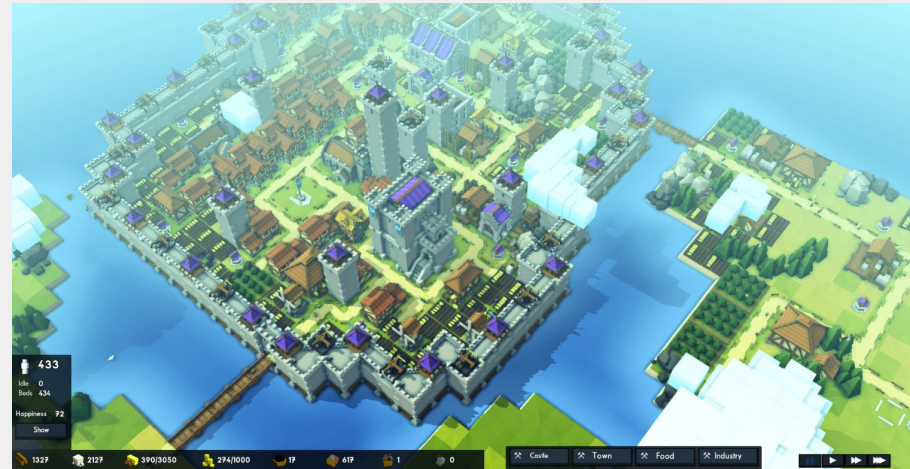




# Player Fantasy - Kingdoms and Castles

Player fantasy is super clear - **“Build and manage a medieval city.”**

Aim to communicate it through every avenue possible: title, trailer and screenshots





# Inventing Design & Existing Metaphors





# Inventing Design Takes Time

**Cannon Brawl** invents and communicates lots of new design to the player.



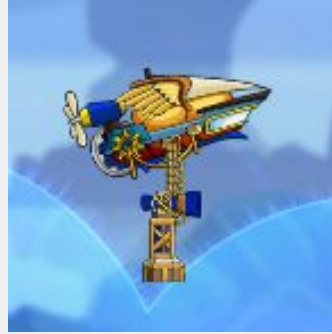
# Inventing Design - An Example

**The Shield Tower:** Hard to figure out how it works without being taught.

Long process of playtesting,  
reworking, repeat...



# Too Many New/Repurposed Metaphors



Required 25+ major revisions on the tutorial levels (and hundreds of minor revisions).



# Use Existing Metaphors

Kingdoms and Castles is built on existing metaphors (farms, houses, roads):



# When to Invent?

Can make sense if it's core to the experience.



And/or if you have time!



## Simple Art Style





# Simplify and Cheat

Super simple low-poly 3D style

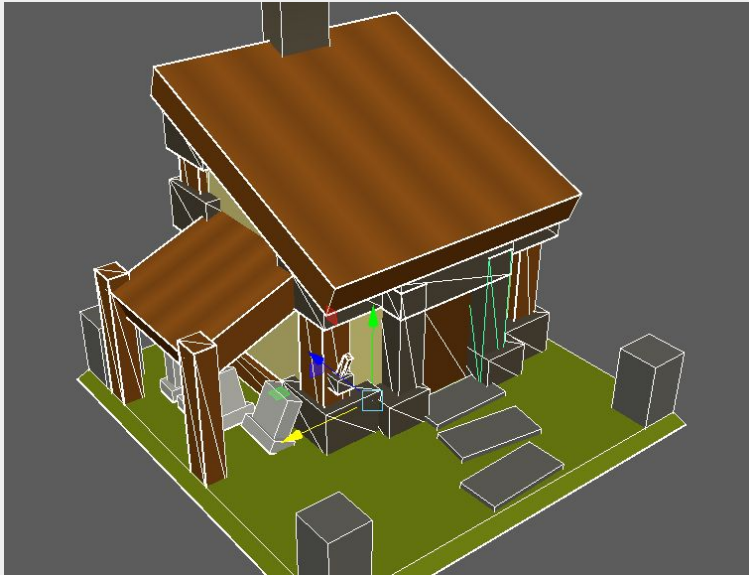
Very fast and easy to make and revise stuff.



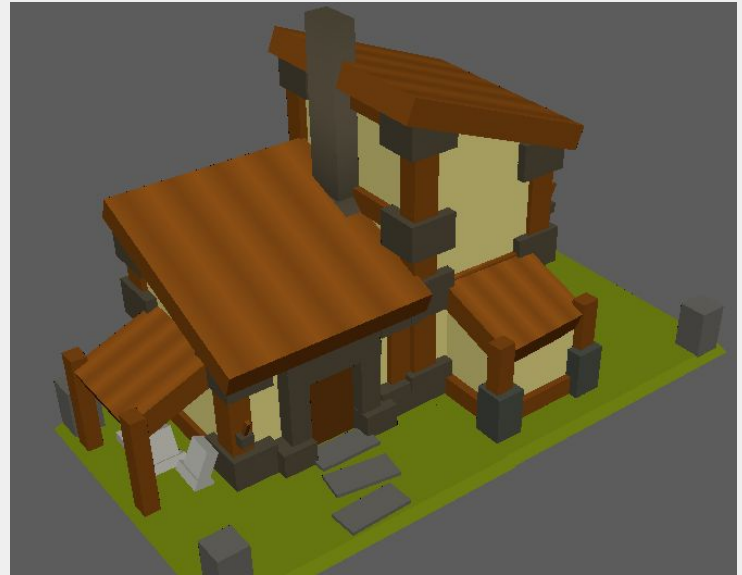
# Simple Primitives

Buildings made of simple primitives.

To make new buildings just kitbash old ones together.



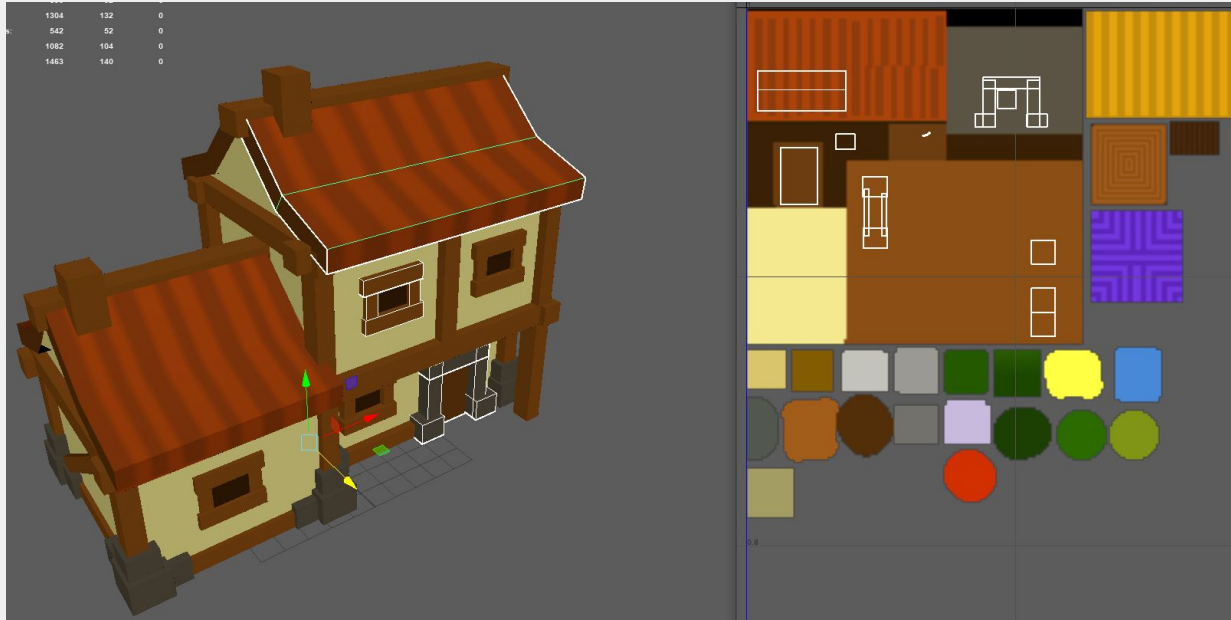
+5 min





# UV Cheating

- Same texture used for every model (just blobs of color)
- Drag UVs from different parts of the model on the desired color blob



# Carried by Post Effects

Raw textured lighting



Shadows, SSAO, color correction, fog



# Bonus of Simplicity

Easier to forgive clipping other weirdness because the peasants are simple pegs.





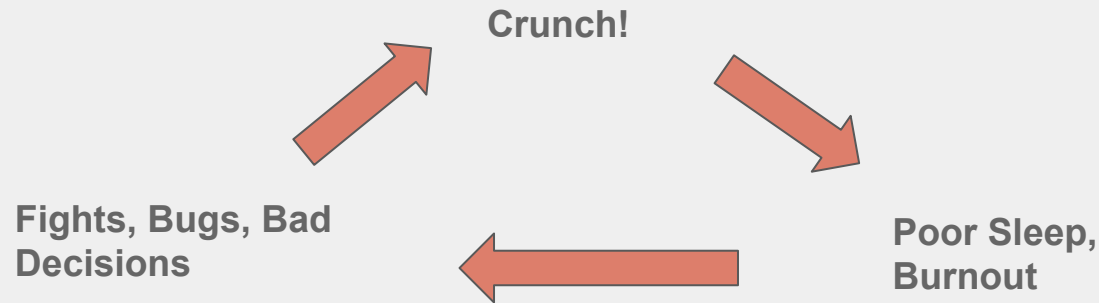


# Studio Culture



# Studio Culture - No Crunch

Don't get caught in the vicious cycle:

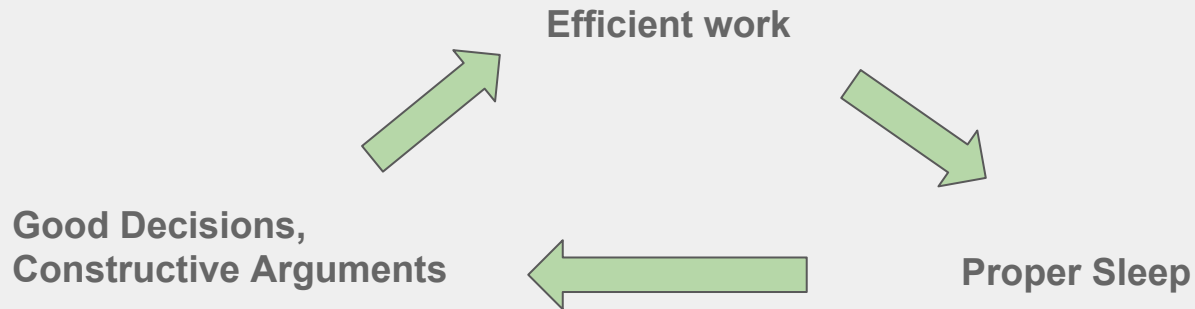


**See also:** Why We Sleep, by Matthew Walker PhD



# Sleep is the Most Important Resource

Instead stay well rested, healthy, and spiral upward:



# Crunch Hurts Strategic Decision Making

Decisions in game development:

- **Tactical Decision:** “let’s improve our skill tree by adding these three skills”
- **Strategic Decision:** “does our game even need a skill tree at all?”

# A Thought Experiment

**Crunching already** and we see a similar game.

It's menu/ui art looks real good! (Northgard)



ours looks...



**“Let’s redo our UI! We’ll put in more hours to make this game better!”**

# Tactical Decision Pitfalls

We're operating mostly tactically.

Only looking at a small part of what this decision means.





# Tactical Decision Pitfalls

Heated disagreement!

All new UI takes longer  
at higher quality bar!

**Put off reworking core  
design problems!**



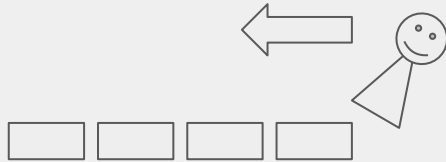
# Crunch -> Poor Sleep -> Wasted Work

The final result: **Realize there's three months left and the game isn't compelling.**



# Crunch -> Poor Sleep -> Wasted Work

Trudge back up the decision tree and take a different path.



**Could have been avoided.**

# Evaluating strategically



~~“Let’s redo our UI! We’ll put in more hours to make this game better!”~~

“No redo, our UI is serviceable. Players will get more value if our mid game decisions are more interesting/we fix this dominant strategy/etc...”



# A Strategic/Tactical Crunch Scenario

Travel a more efficient path down the decision tree from the beginning:

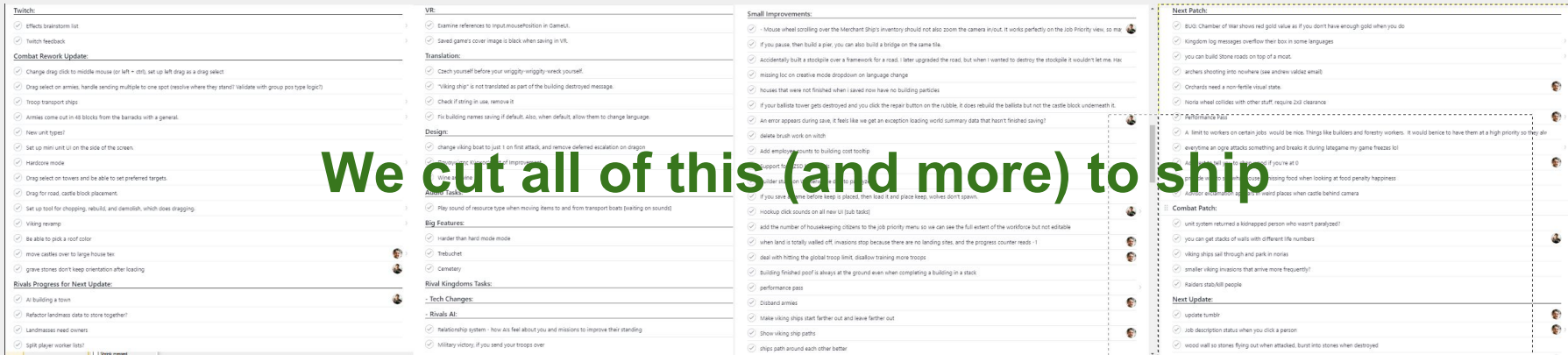


# Strategic/Tactical Examples

“Limited time, we must crunch to get everything done!” <- tactical decision.

“Cut early and all the time.” <- Strategic decision

We cut all of this (and more) to ship



# See Through the Myth



Conscious/subconscious attitude: **“we must suffer for art” = we must crunch**

# Games Without Crunch



and more!

(from Jan Willem Nijsen's twitter thread)

Lots of successful games are made without crunch!



# Marketing





# Marketing

Mostly not distinct from making the game itself.

No press hounding. No trade shows. No paid influencer coverage.

Maximize appeal and find time effective places to show it.

**See also:** *“What is “Marketing First” Game Development?”* from the Ooblet Patreon Blog

# Marketing - Help from Fig



Able to convert some of their mailing list subscribers

Ran facebook video ads

Helped with press releases around the campaign and final launch

# Marketing - Youtube

**Biggest Impact:** organically popular on Youtube

Viewers must be able to act:

- Newsletter sign up
- Wishlist on Steam
- Buy (become a 'late backer')



NEW Halloween Update! GIANT Wolf Army vs Knights! (Kingdoms and Castles Update Gameplay)

BaronVonGames • 82K views • 2 months ago

Welcome back to Kingdoms and Castles Halloween update gameplay! Today we will be checking out the new items in the game such...



Cemeteries update - Kingdoms and Castles #54

wolf grim • 274 views • 2 months ago

► Subscribe for more great content ► Twitter : <https://twitter.com/wolfgrim1> ► Instagram : <https://instagram.com...>



Kingdoms and Castles - Ep. 1 - Keep Building and Food Production! - Kingdoms and Castles Gameplay

Blitz • 998K views • 1 year ago

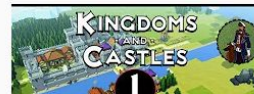
Welcome to Kingdoms and Castles part 1! Kingdoms and Castles is a medieval city building game where you construct castles to...



BUILDING THE GREATEST KINGDOM | Kingdoms And Castles #1

jacksepticeye • 1.3M views • 1 year ago

Join me for a relaxing adventure. Building my very own empire in Kingdoms and Castles! Banished ... CC



Dragons AND Vikings?! | Kingdoms and Castles Gameplay #1

Aurathas • 2K views • 2 months ago

Dragons AND Vikings?! | Let's Play Kingdoms and Castles Gameplay #1: Our budding new kingdom, managing to surmount the ...

# Marketing - Youtube Wins

Why did it catch on with youtube?

- Game is clear from a thumbnail
- People want to try themselves (“I would have built my tavern over there”)
- Easy to make into a series of videos
- Matched well with the genre specific fan community



Kingdoms And Castles S2E13: Beautification Project

MangledPork Gaming • 3K views • 2 weeks ago

The kingdom enjoys a period of safety and prosperity, and so Bentham decides to celebrate the success of Winterfell with the ...

**See also:** “Slime Rancher: A Preemptive Postmortem” from Nick Popovich, GDC 2017



# Community





# Community - Discord

Discord from day 1, slowly grew. Now at **1000 active** members.

Link to it everywhere!

Hi Everyone,

We've got a Halloween themed update for you with a bunch of new game mechanics! If you have questions, ideas, bug reports, come chat with us on discord:

<https://discord.gg/kingdomsandcastles>, or email us at [contact@lionshieldstudios.com](mailto:contact@lionshieldstudios.com). Here's what's new:

A medieval city building game for PC, Mac, Linux. By @petey123567 and @mjpeddicord Chat with us on discord: [discord.gg/kingdomsandcastles](https://discord.gg/kingdomsandcastles)

 [kingdomsandcastles.com](https://kingdomsandcastles.com)

 Joined December 2015

Tweet to

Message

# Community - Discord

Allows you to really dig into feedback.



**DarkChronos** 10/20/2018

damn, how big of a graveyard do i need for a city with over 5000 population  
I have hundreds of people die every year  
these graves fill up in minutes  
i'd have to wipe out 20% of the map just for graves at this rate. Can we not have gravekeepers just bury dead people on top of each other  
Can we just\* have gravekeepers just bury dead people on top of each other? So I'll just need a 3x3 squard grave with the 16 graves in each squa



**Pete** 10/20/2018

@DarkChronos graves deteriorate here as well, but I am curious how many cemetery tiles it'll take to get a city of 5000 going  
we can tune it so it's reasonable



**DarkChronos** 10/20/2018

@Pete | can test this. gimme 30 minutes

also, do witch huts spawn on old maps



**Pete** 10/20/2018

right now they don't but it sounds like folks want that, so I can add it...



**DarkChronos** 10/20/2018

please do 😊

# Community - Discord

Get lots of details with bug reports!



**Pete** Last Monday at 7:48 PM

hrm, well that didn't help haha

can you try navigating here: C:/Users/<your name here perhaps>/AppData/Local/Temp/LionShield/Kingdoms and Castles/ and tell me what's in that folder?  
or try %AppData%/Local/Temp/LionShield/Kingdoms and Castles/



**TooMuchDog** Last Monday at 7:50 PM

yep, I will try that right now. Meanwhile, here's what I am currently seeing on my K and C window, if it helps haha



**Pete** Last Monday at 7:53 PM

very curious!

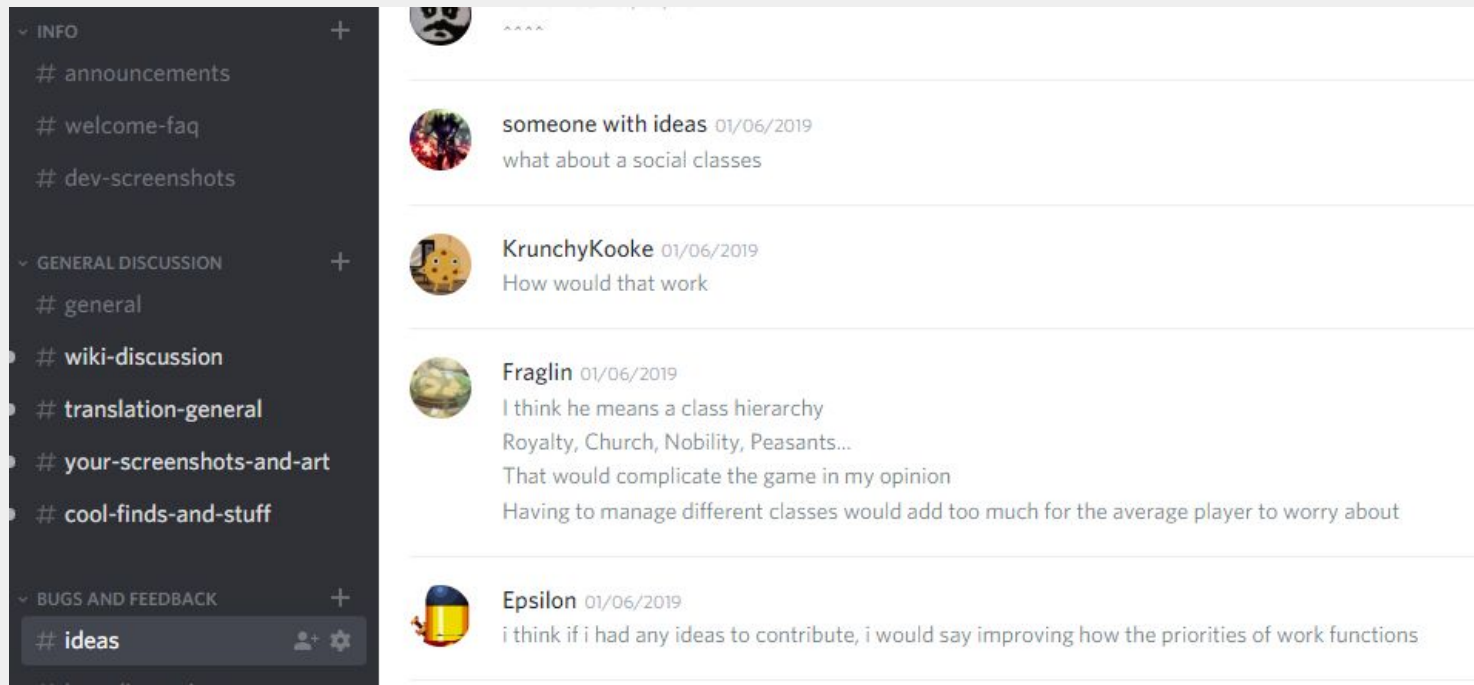
so you start up the game, do a standard game, search for 10 maps, then pick the 11th?

what are the map settings when you're searching?

(I'm so far unable to reproduce it)

# Give Ideas Their Own Space

Made a hands off #ideas channel.








The image shows a Discord server interface. On the left is a dark sidebar with channel categories and a list of channels. The main area on the right shows a chat log with four messages.

**Sidebar Channels:**

- INFO (+)
  - # announcements
  - # welcome-faq
  - # dev-screenshots
- GENERAL DISCUSSION (+)
  - # general
  - # wiki-discussion
  - # translation-general
  - # your-screenshots-and-art
  - # cool-finds-and-stuff
- BUGS AND FEEDBACK (+)
  - # ideas (selected)

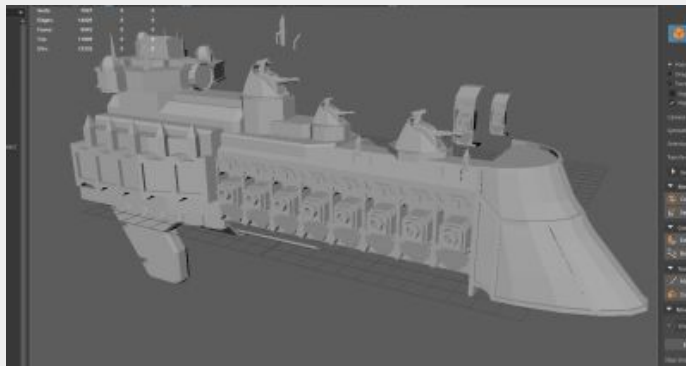
**Chat Log:**

-  [redacted] [redacted]
-  someone with ideas 01/06/2019  
what about a social classes
-  KrunchyKooke 01/06/2019  
How would that work
-  Fraglin 01/06/2019  
I think he means a class hierarchy  
Royalty, Church, Nobility, Peasants...  
That would complicate the game in my opinion  
Having to manage different classes would add too much for the average player to worry about
-  Epsilon 01/06/2019  
i think if i had any ideas to contribute, i would say improving how the priorities of work functions

# Shape the Space

Had a **#random** channel that required a lot of moderation.

Renamed it to **#cool-finds-and-stuff**. Not perfect, but now less weird stuff, more:





# Disclaimer

**Not a recipe for success:** Value intent/strategy over specifics.

**Can't count out luck:** ex. Steam's algorithm changed late 2018 that hurt our daily sales. We launched in 2017. Would our launch have been affected if that algorithm change happened earlier?

**Can't count out privilege:** Very fortunate to have the opportunities and support network over the years that helped us get here.

# Thanks!

Lion Shield - **@LionShieldGames**

Peter Angstadt - **@petey123567** (no 4)

**contact@lionshieldstudios.com**

**Special Thanks to:**

Steve Swink, Michael Peddicord, Sam Torno, Bryan Farmer, Jason Taylor, Steve Green, Saori Haigo