



GDC
CLASSIC GAME POSTMORTEM

STAR
WARS

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GALAXIES



THE EARLY DAYS



- We were working on Privateer Online; it got cancelled.
- Raph learned about it while in Australia.
- The team went on the market, and Verant gave us an Austin studio.

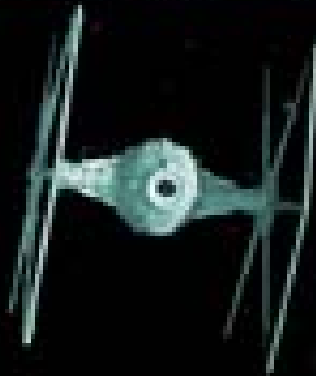
Tensions with San Diego

- There was an existing team working on *Star Wars Online*.
- We didn't expect to be asked to take it on.
- We started to work on a space addition for it...
- But their version was supposed to share an engine with *EverQuest II*, which was not far along; and was an action game, in the days before *Planetside* showed that was possible.

STAR WARS ONLINE



SELECT YOUR SHIP



An attack craft built by Sienar Fleet Systems for the Empire, the TIE fighter enjoys exceptional maneuverability and very high speed. However, it has little armor and no shields, and not much firepower.

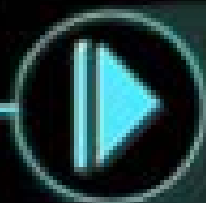


TIE FIGHTER



PILOT NAME

LOGIC



Tensions with San Diego

- When the leadership of the game was given to Austin, all the San Diego engineers on the project quit.
- We ended up doing development across both cities, with a substantial art team in San Diego.
- Lots of culture challenges.

Sandbox vs themepark

- The mandate from SOE was to differentiate from *EverQuest*, in order to avoid cannibalizing that game's subscribers.
- Our background from *Ultima Online* was in making online sandbox worlds, very different from *EQ*.
- In these pre-*World of Warcraft* days, the template for MMOs was not yet set.



MAKING THE GAME



The Jedi dilemma

- The pillars of Jedi in the *Star Wars* universe:
 - Everyone wants to be a Jedi.
 - Jedi are rare during the original trilogy.
 - Jedi are super powerful.
- Could we...
 - Make them NPC only? No.
 - Change the time period so they weren't rare? No.
 - Make them less powerful? Sure... but common *and* not special doesn't sound much like *Star Wars* anymore.
- We toyed with permadeath...
- But settle on a system where players have to sample a random set of the many features of the game – every player's set was different.



PC capability in 2003

- The game shipped on 3 CD's – a total capacity of 2.1GB.
 - We installed 2GB.
- It required a 56Kbps modem.
 - Downloading 1 GB on one of those took over 18 hours.
 - If nobody picked up the phone or hung up, that is.
 - A cable connection today is 6500x faster.

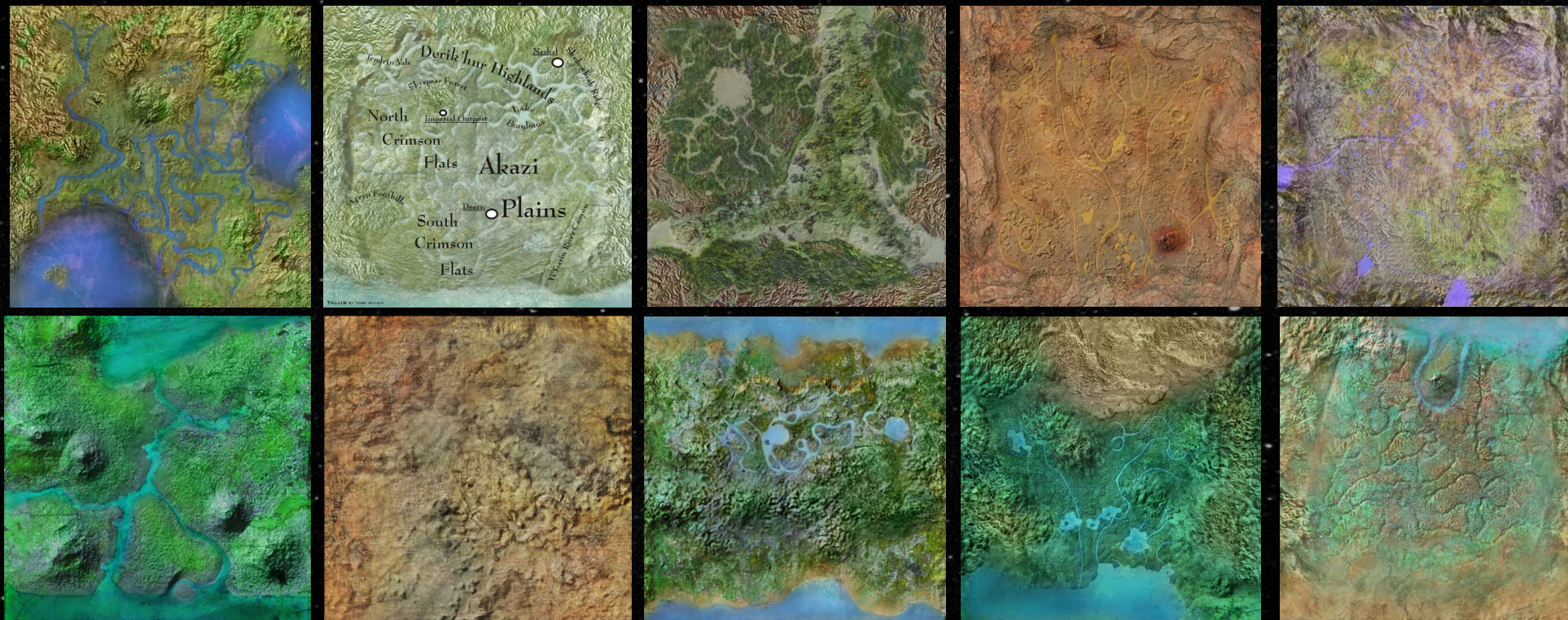


Ultima Online:
16 sq km



Everquest:
116 sq km

SWG's planets represented over 2.5GB of data

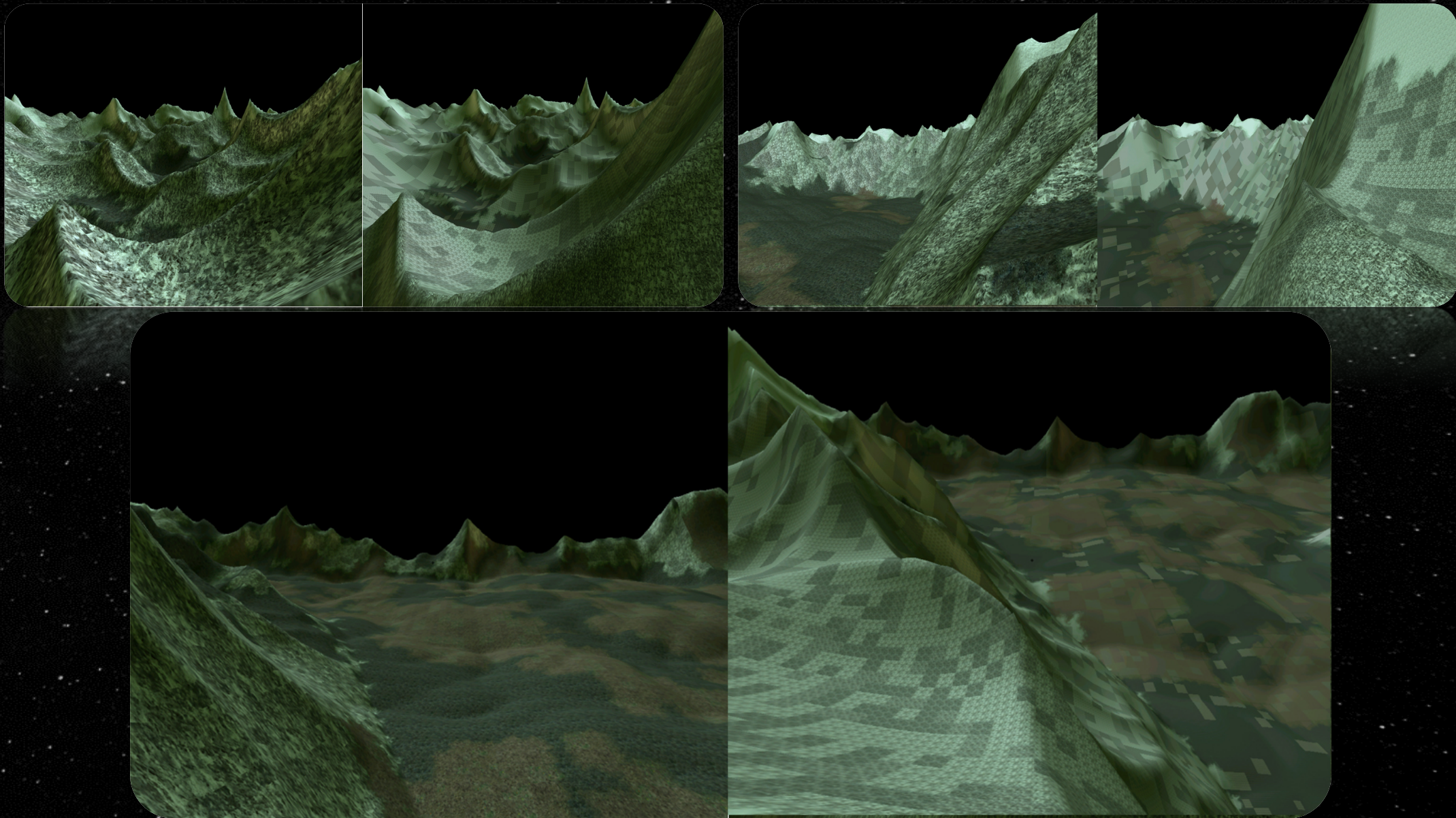


Maps to scale

rk

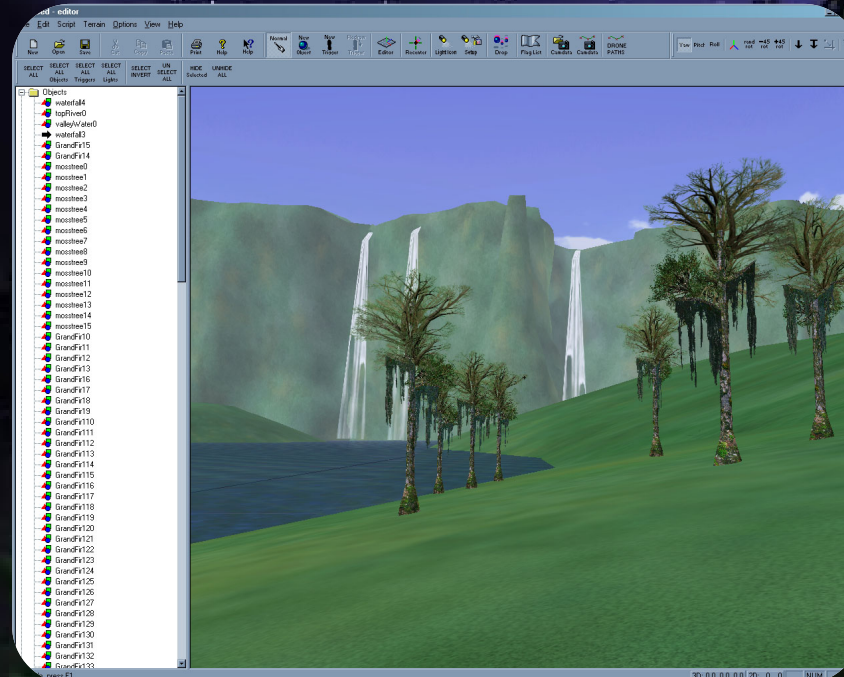


Fractal terrain





Runtime procedural terrain tools



- A custom tool created procedural rules in layers, like Photoshop.
- Each planet shrank to around 30K on disk.
- We couldn't afford the RAM on the server to hold the planets, so we had to generate them as players walked around.
 - This led to huge issues with collision, and messed up combat!
- Rules could be added on the fly, which allowed runtime placement of buildings.

From this...



...to this, in four months





Approval process

- Everything had to go through approvals processes.
- Lucky to have Haden Blackman as the LucasArts producer.
- Getting reference material from the as-yet-unreleased prequel movies was a big deal.

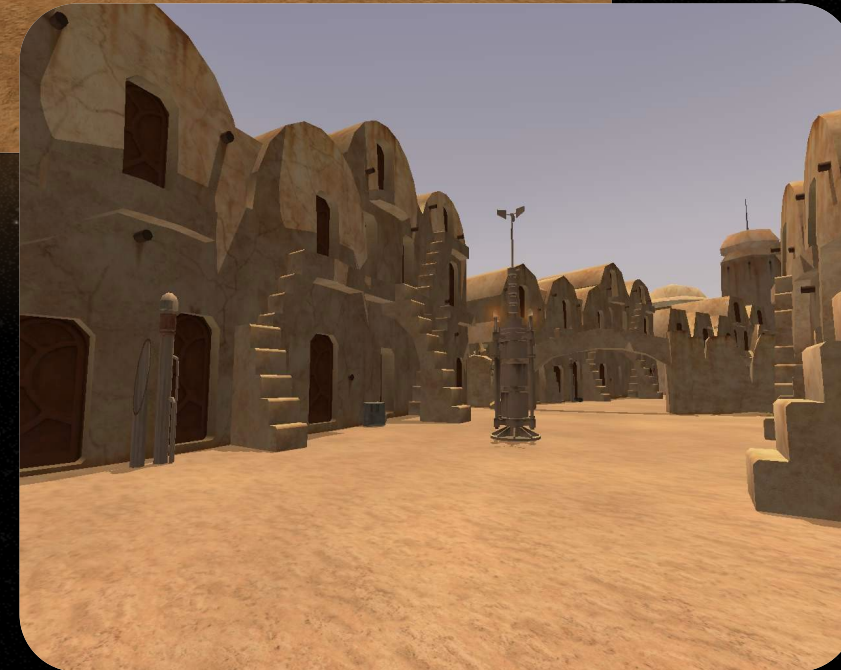
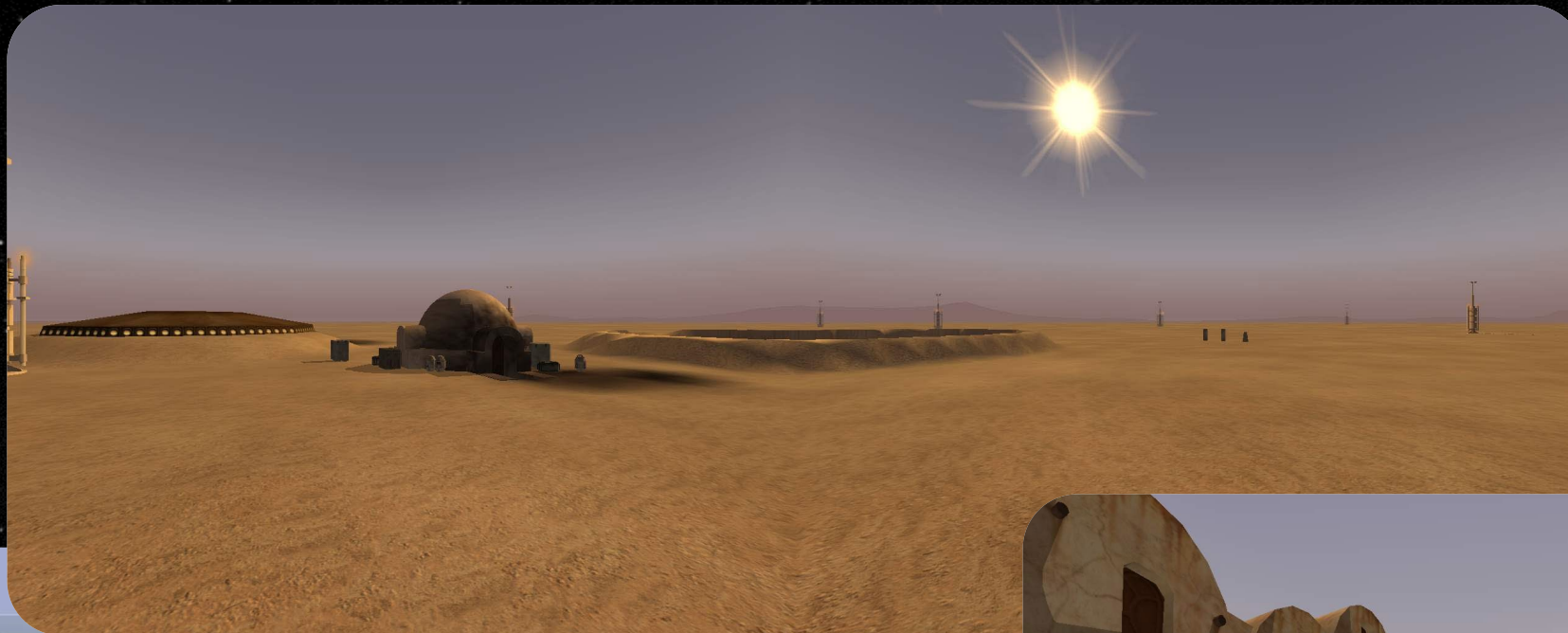
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Remember the purple lightsaber?



Recreating SW scenes



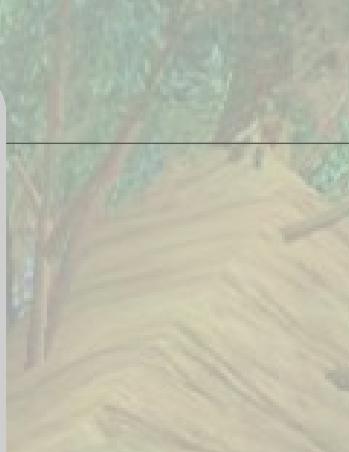
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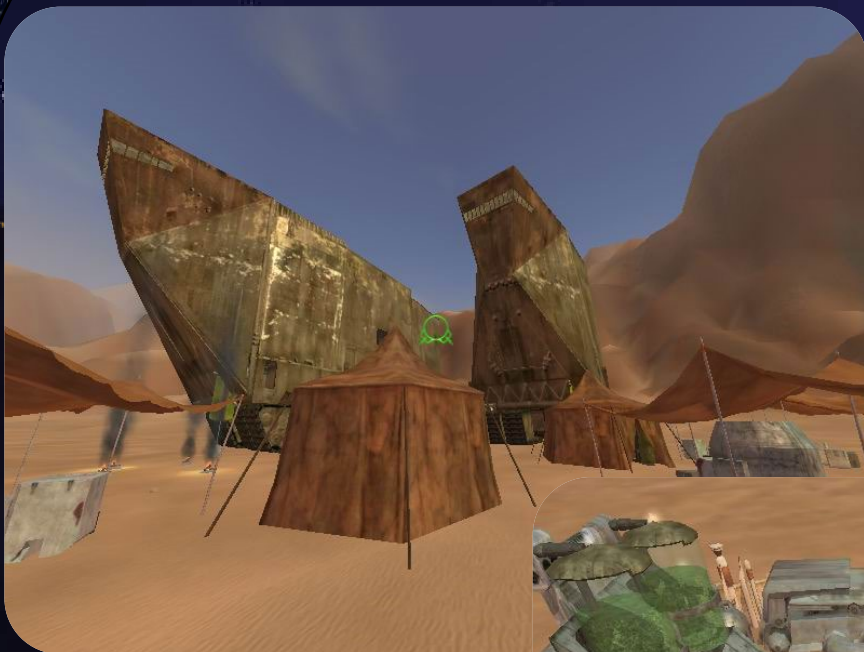
Character customization



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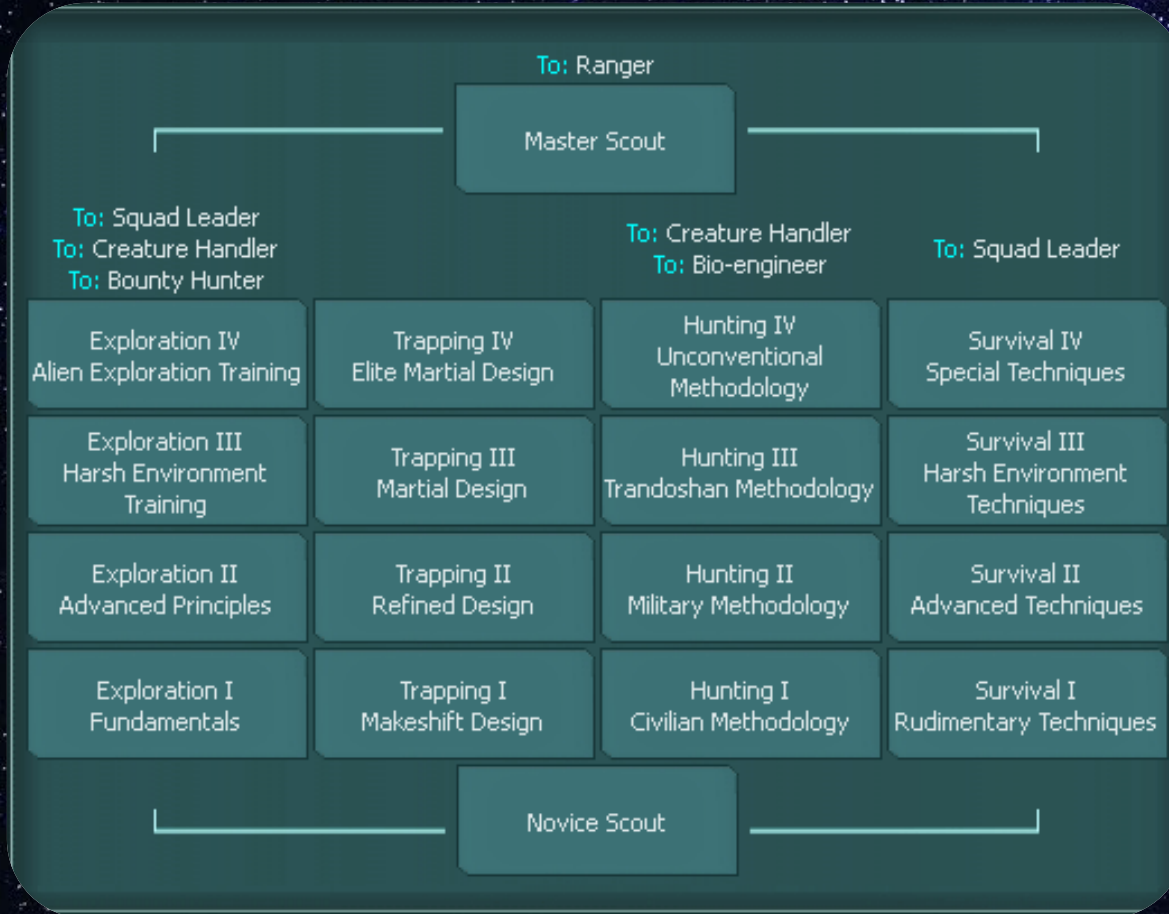


GDC



Thanks to the proc gen terrain we could drop entire hand-built set pieces as dynamic encounters.

Throwing away the level-based RPG



- Crafting would be on equal footing with combat... and so would dancing and hairdressing.
- We designed 612 separate skills, arranged into trees, with intricate interdependencies.
- Players had to learn skills from one another.
- They had to watch musicians and dancers to deal with their PTSD from combat.
 - This got much derision.



A player-driven economy

- Players could harvest materials while offline.
- And materials would *move* and *change*.
 - This led to unique stats on every object.
 - Database bloat!!
- Everything was crafted by players.
- There was no loot.
- Everything broke eventually too.
- To prevent various forms of cheating, we decided to only allow one character per server.



Resource system

Energy

Energy	Renewable	Non Site-Restricted	Solar (3)
		Site-Restricted	Wind (2)
			Geothermal

-Inorganic

Inorganic	Chemical	Fiberplast (11)		
		Lubricating Oil (2)		
		Inert Petrochemical	Polymer (2)	
			Known (3)	
		Liquid Petrochem	Unknown	
	Water (10)			
	Mineral	Radioactive	Known	Polymetric (1)
			Unknown	
		Solid Petrochem	Known (2)	
			Unknown (1)	
		Metal	Ferrous	Unknown (1)
			Steel (7)	
			Iron (13)	
			Unknown (1)	
		Non-Ferrous	Aluminum (5)	
			Copper (4)	
		Igneous	Extrusive (1)	
			Intrusive (2)	
			Unknown	
		Low-Grade Ore	Carbonate (1)	
			Siliclastic (1)	
			Unknown	
		Gemstone	Amorphous (2)	
			Crystalline (2)	
			Unknown	
	Gas	Inert	Known (4)	
			Unknown	
		Reactive	Known	Sig
			Unknown (1)	

Organic

Organic	Flora Resource	Flora Food	Cereal	Corn	Domesticated (10)
					Wild (10)
				Oats	Domesticated (10)
					Wild (9)
				Rice	Domesticated (10)
				Wild (9)	
				Domesticated (10)	
				Wild (10)	
			Seeds	Fruit	Berries (10)
					Flowers (10)
				Fruits (10)	
		Vegetables		Beans (10)	
				Fungi (10)	
			Greens (10)		
			Tubers (10)		
	Flora Structural	Wood	Hard	Deciduous (9)	
			Soft	Conifer (10)	
			Evergreen (10)		
		Creature Resources	Creature Food	Meat	Avian (8)
					Carnivore (10)
	Domesticated (3)				
	Egg (10)				
	Herbivore (10)				
	Insect (8)				
	Reptilian (5)				
	Seafood			Crustacean (10)	
				Fish (8)	
				Mollusk (8)	
				Wild (7)	
				Domesticated (3)	
				Wild (9)	
	Creature Structural			Bone	Avian (9)
			Hide	Bristley (7)	
				Leathery (10)	
				Scaley (8)	
Wooly (9)					
Horn					

-Space

Space	Asteroidal Chemical
	Asteroidal Gas
	Asteroidal Gemstone
	Asteroidal Mineral



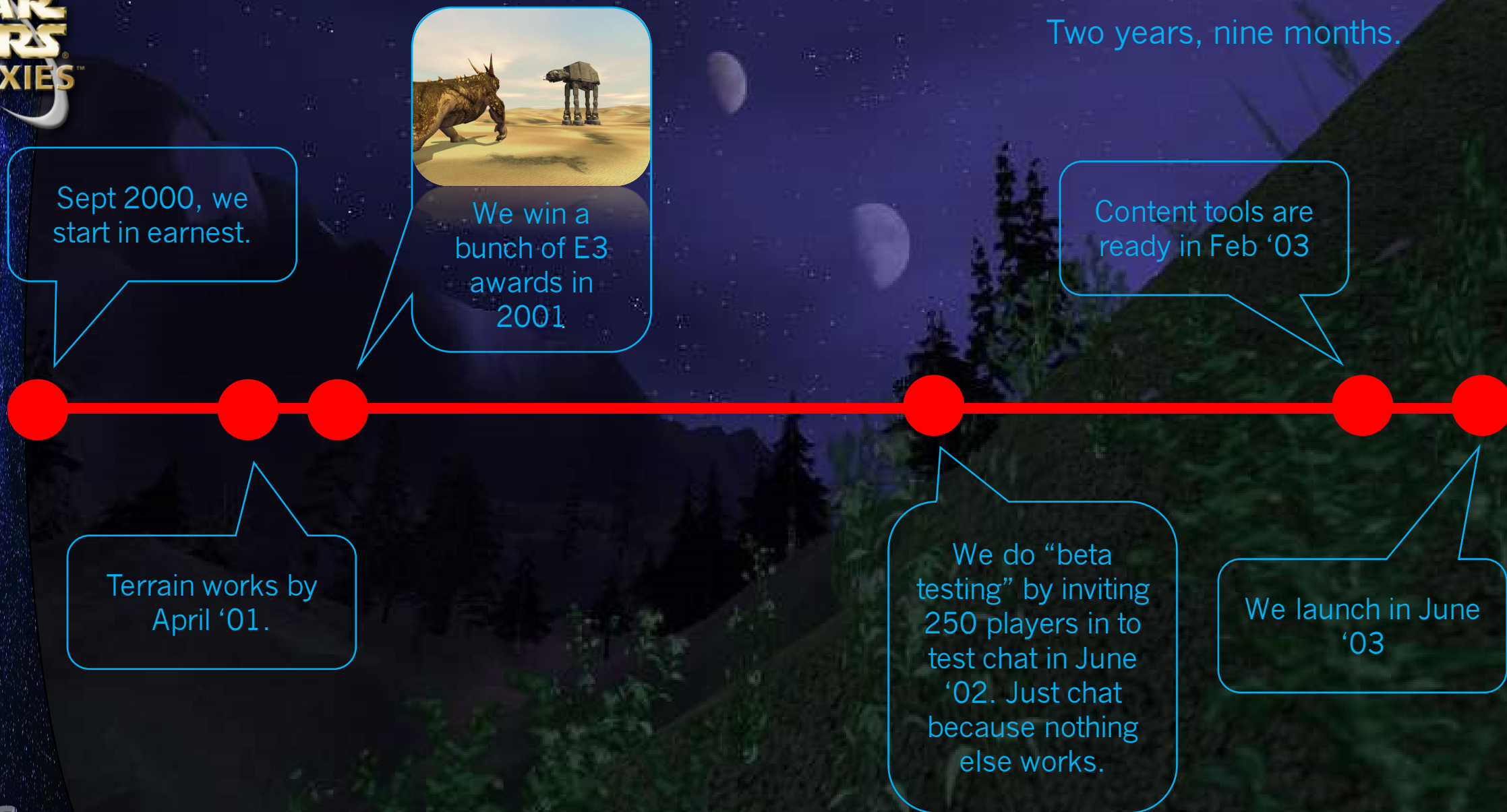
READY TO LAUNCH?

HELL NO



Our timeline is *HOPELESS*

Two years, nine months.





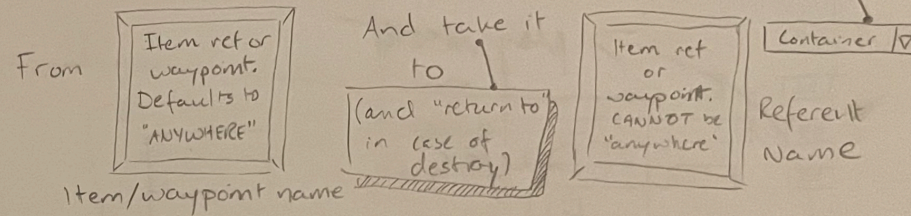
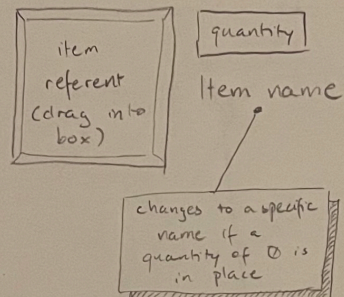
We have no...

- No real quests in the game. Jabba's Palace is the only real quest chain.
- No quest system, either.
 - We end up relying on randomly generated mission terminals, which gets extremely repetitive.
- We ran out of time to implement all the things to track to become a Jedi.
 - We settled for "try a random subset of the 612 skills."

Player-granted missions were cut for time...

MISSION ENTRY

- ☐ Deliver
- ☐ Escort
- ☒ Destroy



COMPLETION

If you complete this task ☒ before this date

☐ within this time (from acceptance)

I will pay you credits.

If you do not complete the mission, you forfeit credits

☒ and may be hunted for a bounty.

FILTERS

I will only accept Master Profession on this mission,

who have a % success ratio on this mission type,

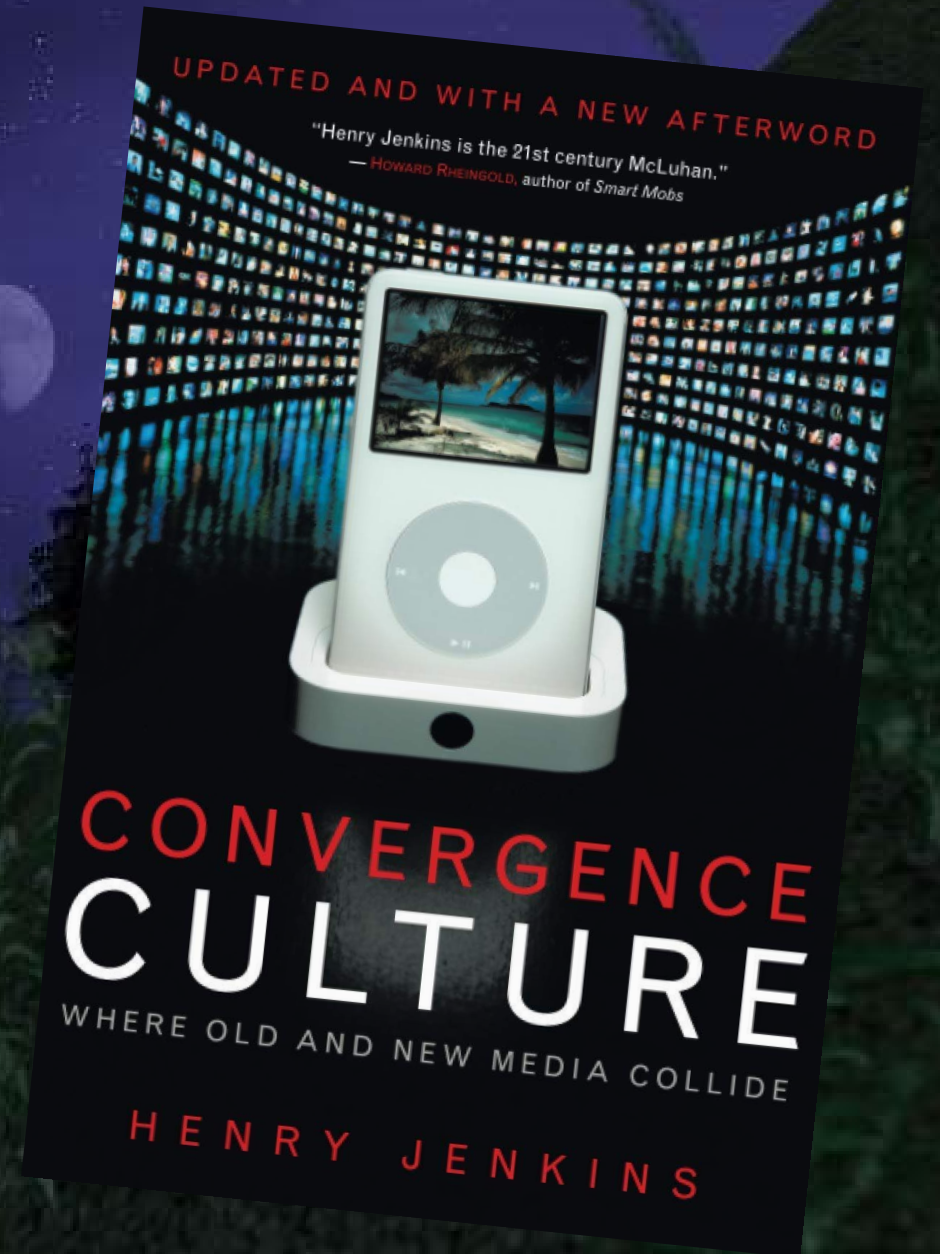
and who are

- ☐ on my friends list
- ☐ in my guild
- ☒ are sympathizers of the faction
- ☐ are declared faction



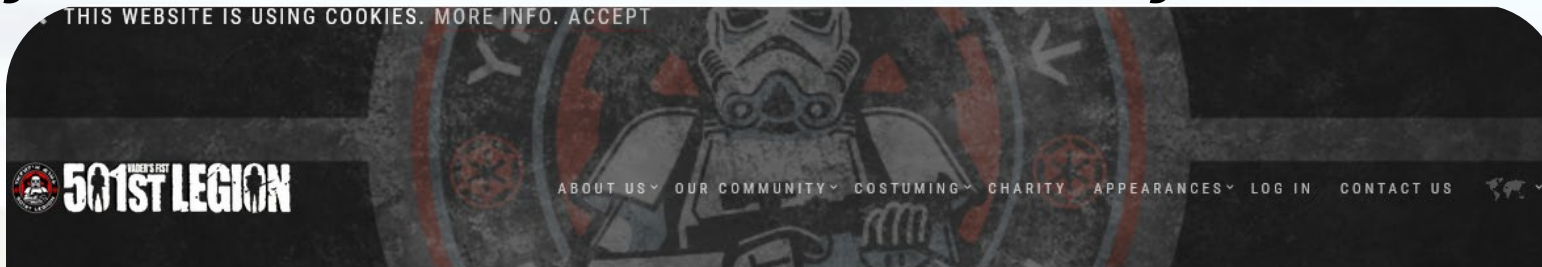
- Posted up design documents from very early on – and actually adjusted the design based on the feedback.
- Players elected representatives from each of the professions to serve as a direct contact to the team.
- Ended up being an MIT case study in how to build a community.
- There was a 1:1 match between our forum activity and our day one sales.

Building the SWG community



The 501st Legion threaten to picket

- Over playing Stormtroopers...
- They're clones, but we can't tell them yet!



REQUEST AN APPEARANCE

TROOPER OF THE MONTH

Where we recognize Troopers who
surpass expectations



STAR WARS GALAXIES™

WINNING STRATEGIES & TIPS FOR C&C: RENEGADE, MEDAL OF HONOR, AND MORE!

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

EXCLUSIVE 12-PAGE PREVIEW!

Star Wars Galaxies

The full story on the
biggest online game ever

REVIEWED AND RATED

Jedi Knight II & Freedom Force

Two early Game of the Year
contenders

Unreal Tournament 2003

Amazing new screens and vital info
from Epic's multiplayer extravaganza

Host a LAN Party! We Show You How in Six Easy Steps



FEATURE



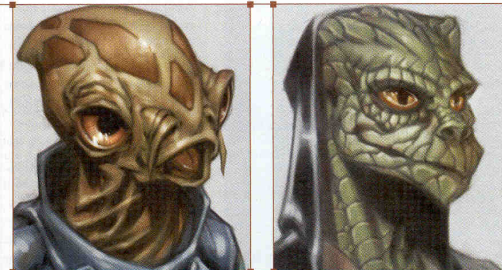
Attack of the Clones doesn't nearly describe the unique vision for this galactic game By Thierry Nguyen

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

PLAYING WITH STAR WARS TOYS USED TO BE THE ONLY WAY TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE. NOT ANYMORE.

"Let's just make EverQuest in space." ■ ■ ■ That was the first thing the developers of *Star Wars Galaxies* made sure not to have as a design goal. So don't expect to camp at an Ewok spawn point and yell incessantly for SOWs and buffs. *Star Wars Galaxies* isn't just going to be a Monty Haul-style fight-and-loot game with a chat window stapled on top like, say, EQ, *Dark Age of Camelot*, *Asheron's Call*, *Anarchy Online*. It's going to offer a giant, virtual society. With *Star Wars* trappings. ■ ■ ■ Think of something you'd like to do, and odds are you can probably do it. Do you want to run a seedy tavern in Mos Eisley? Do you want to zip around the landscapes of Naboo in

pursuit of a bounty? Do you want to take a group of friends out rancor hunting, and then maybe relax at Jabba's Palace afterwards? ■ ■ ■ The developers at Sony Online Entertainment in Austin let me in their doors to see everything there is to see about SWG (with the exception of death). I was able to get info on the new planet, character generation, the interface, the static hit point system, and the process of becoming a Jedi. But here's how I'd sum it up: This game is going to be absolutely huge.



- We are so short on time and game content that we bus out ~60 people from QA and put them up in extended stay hotels. Then we have them pile in and just start placing objects on the map.
- We are supposed to launch in May. We ask for an extra year. We are given a month and a half.
- We fly out our most dedicated testers to ask them to help quell anger among the public.
- Then the game doesn't even work on the first day.



- GameSpy: the “green banana” award for unripe game
- CGW:

COASTER OF THE YEAR
STAR WARS
GALAXIES:
AN EMPIRE DIVIDED

Like all MMORPGs, *Star Wars Galaxies* can be addictive once you get started. It's the Stockholm Syndrome effect—learning to love your captor. Once you find a few trades you enjoy, the skill system is good, and there are numerous dangling carrots to keep you building one skill or another. A large-scale story has been promised for the coming months, but for now, the biggest problem facing the game is that the world, outside of the popular cities, seems rather empty. It's enjoyable, but it's just a complex version of the same old treadmill, albeit now you can get on the cooking treadmill when you get bored with fighting.

VERDICT ★★★★★
Might get a whole lot better.

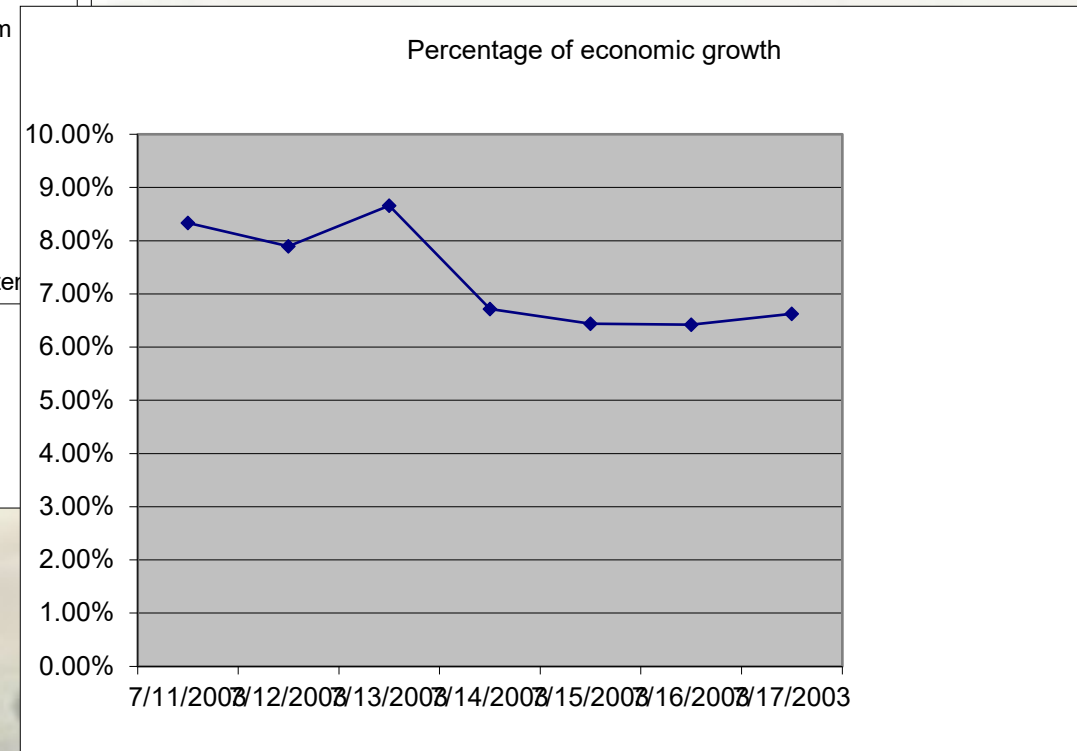
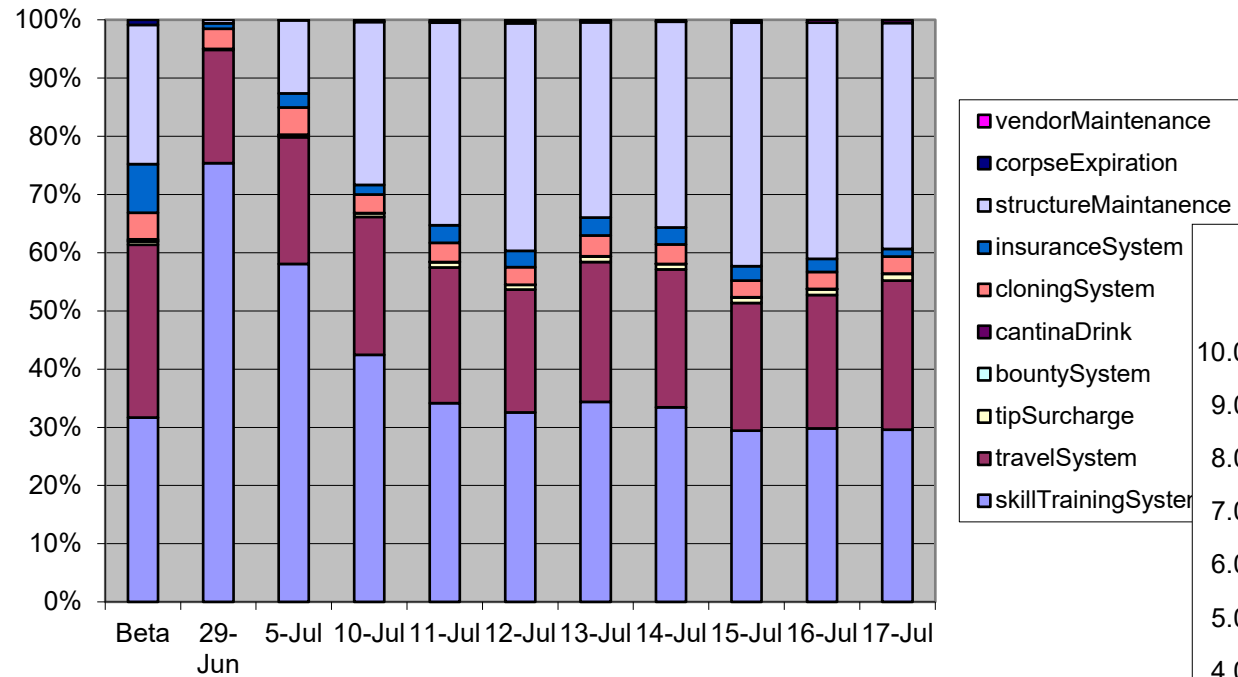


LIFE IN A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY



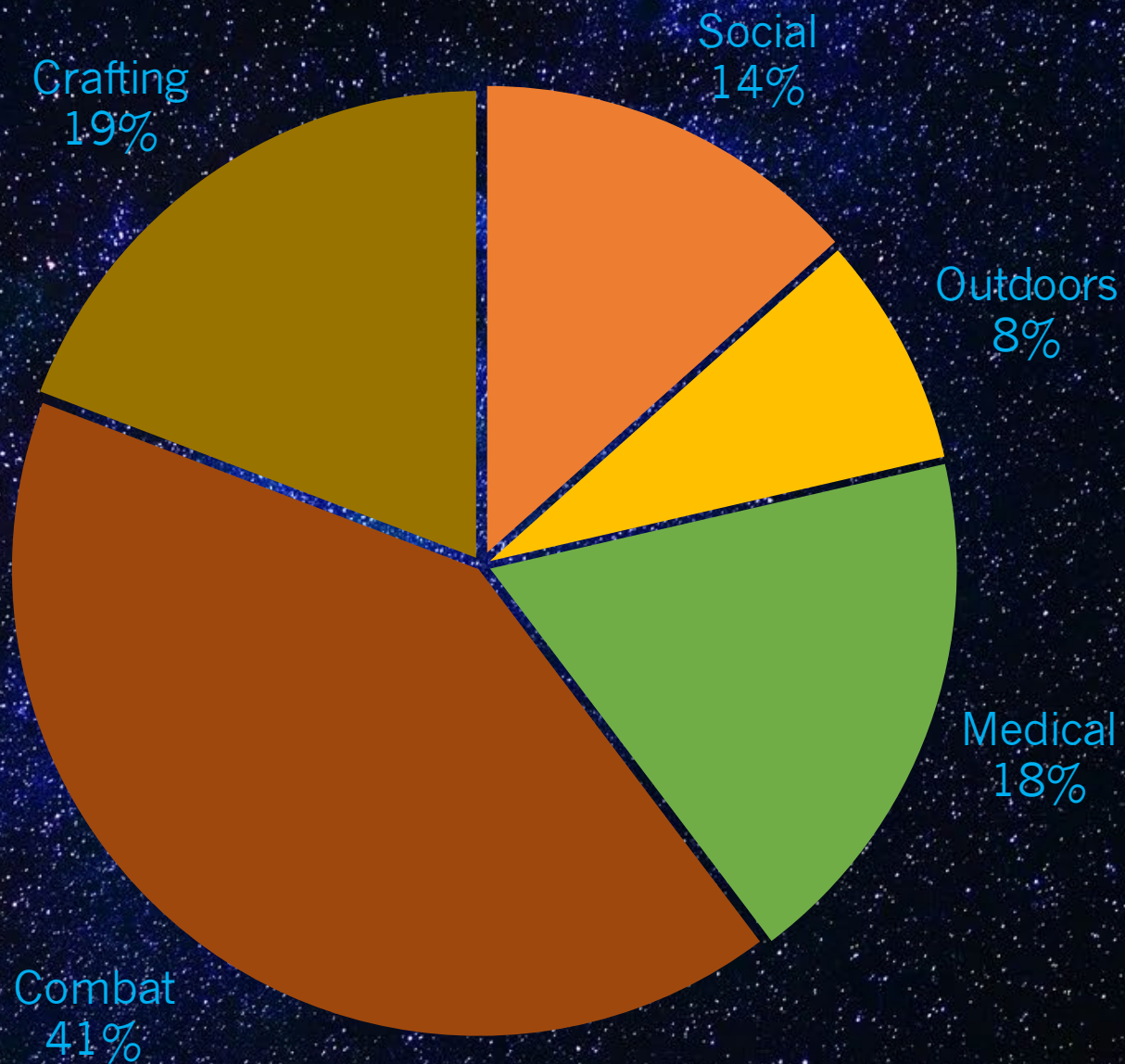
Early analytics systems

- We had really robust analytics for the day.

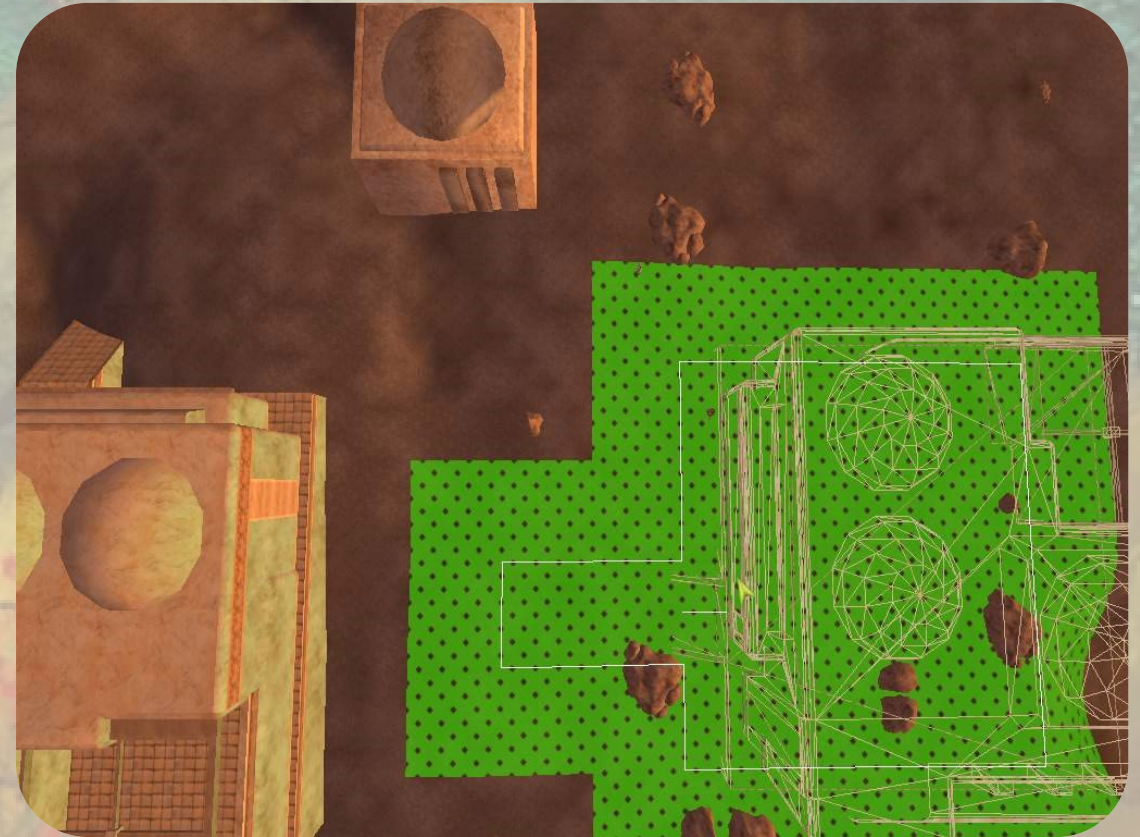




Crafting and social were surprisingly popular



- Houses could be placed anywhere outside of cities.
 - Players used this to block off dungeon entrances... oops.
- 25% of players owned a house.
- An average of 12000 houses on every server.





House decorating



Political system and player cities

- Players could set laws for their cities.
- There were an average of 125 player cities per server. (!)





- You could find a creature as a baby.
- It learned its name from you saying it over and over again.
- You could teach it tricks and watch it grow up.
- Having a ton of powerful pets became too dominant in combat.



PvP, TEF, and factions

- Common wisdom was that free for all PvP had destroyed UO. The EQ philosophy was basically safe play.
- We developed a “temporary enemy flagging system” that let you join a side but “covertly” so you could opt in with a time limit.
- < 1% of characters were engaged in full time PvP.
- But 26% (!) used the “covert” system to opt in some of the time.

rv/rk



Bases and faction warfare



Search "Fett's Vette" on
YouTube. You won't regret it.

Dancing... and bands on tour





- A sizable Machinima community cropped up. Music videos. Soap operas.
- There was even a beauty pageant.
- Bear in mind, YouTube didn't exist yet.



- The player economy had to bootstrap up from zero, because there was no real loot.
- But players did it, basically “inventing” the weapons and equipment they would use in the game.



Player driven economy

- An average of 30% of all players on a server were running a shop!
- 15000 vendors per server!
- On some servers, **50%**. This was shocking at the time.





THE DEATH STAR APPROACHES

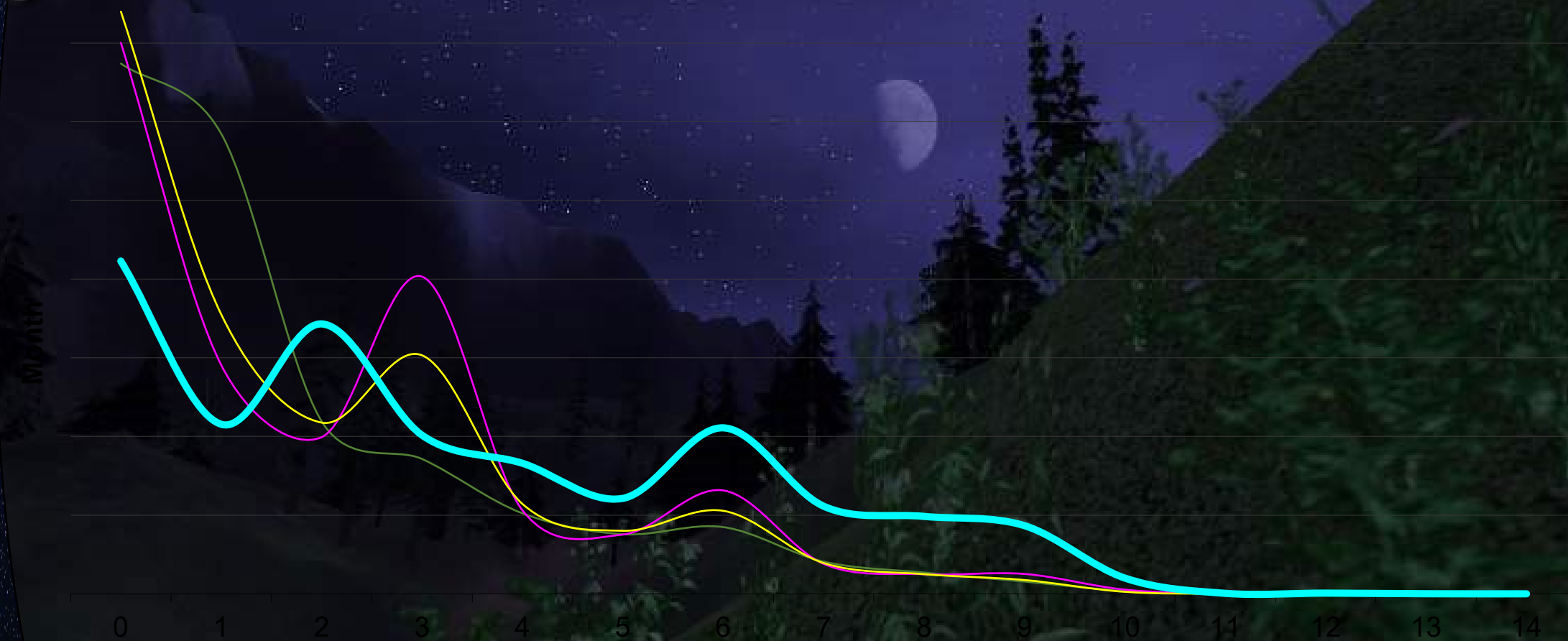
Failing to fulfill the fantasy



- Our vision doc had promised exciting combat, the feeling of *Star Wars*, epic storylines...
- We had delivered a sandbox, by the skin of our teeth.

It didn't hold

Percentage quitting by month of sub life





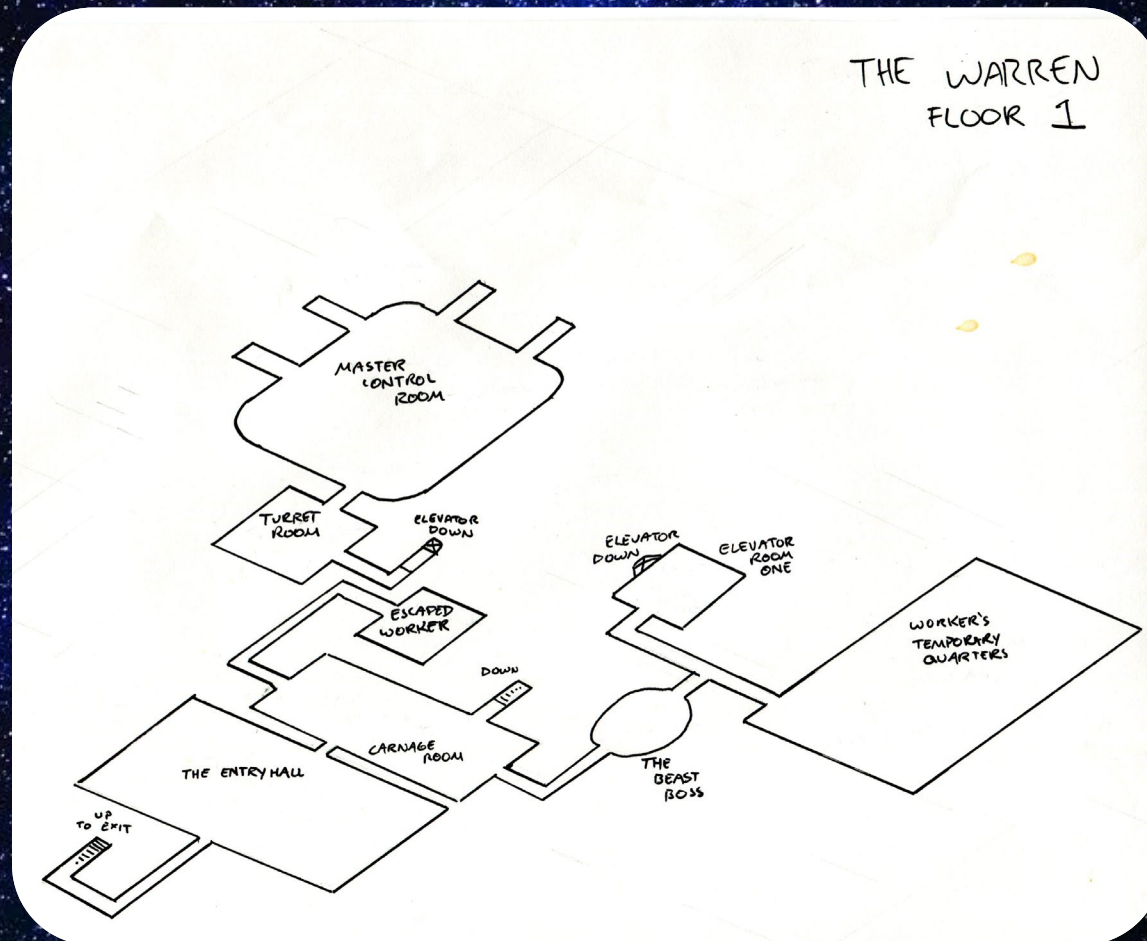
The price of launching too early

- Content is king.
- Exit surveys said:
 - Game got repetitive
 - Not enough to do
 - Too buggy
 - Not enough storyline
- But almost 80% said they would return if that were fixed...



We desperately try to add content...

- But it is too little, too late...
- And our tools for doing it are terrible.





Jedi and the Holocrons

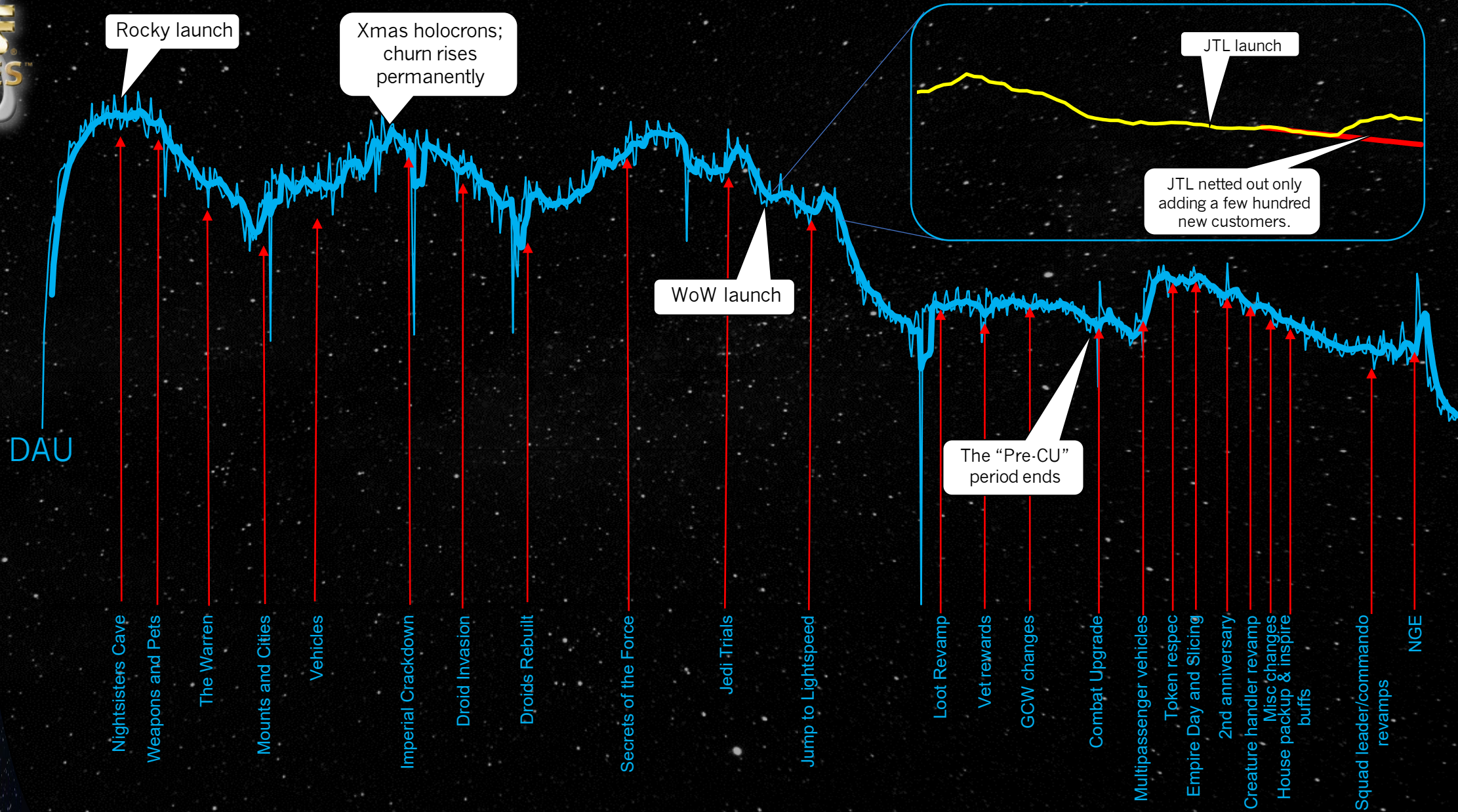
- Marketing says “we need Jedi by Christmas.”
- The decision is made to drop hints.
- But a few hints gave away the whole system.
- From then on, Jedi were common.
- Worse, players all played to reach Jedi, rather than the way they enjoyed.
- Churn rate went up *more*.



Jump to Lightspeed

- Full action space combat.
- Multiuser ships you could walk around in
 - Or be the gunner while someone else piloted

Jump to Lightspeed runs up against WoW



Trying to stop the bleeding

- Combat upgrade!
 - Didn't really make a dent.
- Then the decision is made to try to do a drastic, action combat revamp.
- It will be called "the New Game Experience."

THE NGE



The most infamous patch ever

The New York Times

For Online Star Wars Game, It's Revenge of the Fans



"We really just needed to make the game a lot more accessible to a much broader player base," said Nancy MacIntyre, the game's senior director at LucasArts. "There was lots of reading, much too much, in the game. There was a lot of wandering around learning about different abilities. We really needed to give people the experience of being Han Solo or Luke Skywalker rather than being Uncle Owen, the moisture farmer. We wanted more instant gratification: kill, get treasure, repeat. We needed to give people more of an opportunity to be a part of what they have seen in the movies rather than something they had created themselves."

Action RPG combat put in place.

Skill trees removed in favor of classes.

No more mixing of professions. Peaceful professions were now helpless in combat.

Jedi as a starter class.

Pets frozen forever, players holding funerals for them.

STAR WARS GALAXIES™

Wait... people liked the game after all?

washingtonpost.com

.game Sadness in 'Star Wars' World

By Mike Musgrove
Thursday, February 2, 2006; Page D01

There was a great disturbance in the Force this past holiday season, when gamemaker Sony Online Entertainment Inc. tried to kick sales of its online "Star Wars" game into hyperspace with a makeover that infuriated some of the game's longtime fans.

One player wrote in an e-mail to me this week: "The game for me probably will be a lost love. Sort of like seeing your spouse with Alzheimer's. Outwardly, everything appears the same as it always has, but you know that beneath the surface, things will never be the same."

Yoda once mentioned that anger leads to hate and hate leads to suffering. What does quiet resignation lead to?

"...a lost love. Sort of like seeing your spouse with Alzheimer's."

"Let us pause to mourn the collapse of Western civilization."

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
MONITOR®

Dumbing down virtual 'Star Wars' may backfire

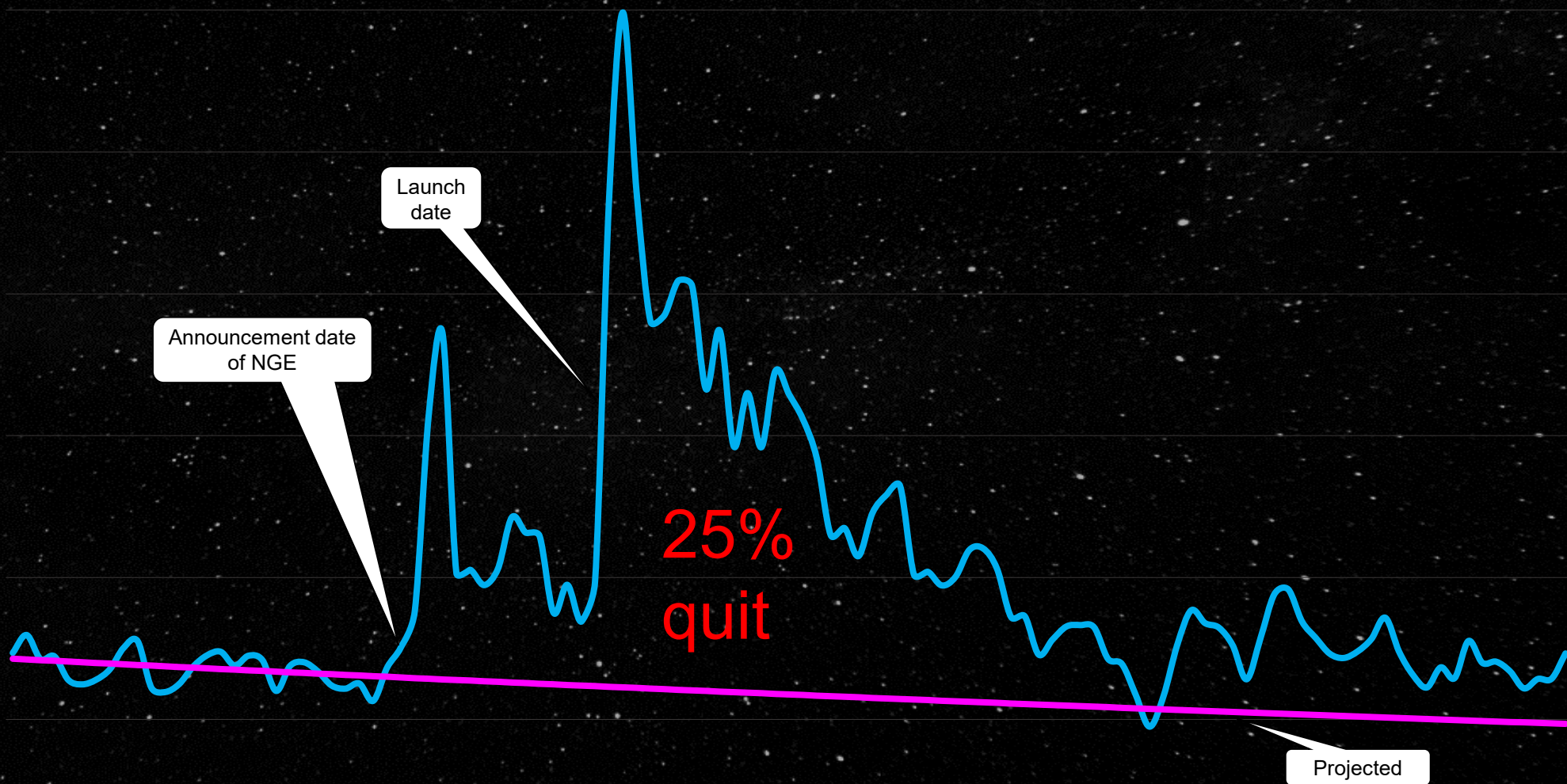
December 15, 2005

By Jeremy Dauber, csmonitor.com

Let us first pause, for just a moment, to mourn the collapse of Western civilization suggested in MacIntyre's words, which are, it seems to me, as close to a direct definition of philistinism as anything I have ever read. Let us not be led into the temptation of experimentation, of growth, or - heaven forfend - of learning; we must at all costs avoid personal identification with characters who deviate from the mainstream, who might provide an opportunity to demonstrate greater individuality. And - for goodness' sake - let's have as little reading as we possibly can. Instead, let's revert to a process that would have done the Visigoths proud: kill, get treasure, repeat.

The NGE impact

Actual cancellations versus projected cancellations without NGE, first month



- Players complained in droves.
- A refund for the latest expansion was issued.
- Previews in magazines attempted to put a brave face on it, but...



They knew for months that professions would be eliminated (posts on their boards say they've been working on this for over a year) but still advertised loot that would help those same professions and got us to buy a useless expansion for \$30. Adding insult to injury, the creature handler necklace never even appeared in the game. Isn't that fraud? Last I checked, SOE isn't answering any posts about players wanting their money back. I know I do.

Kelly Kirchner

EMPIRE STRIKES OUT

Sony Online Entertainment ripped me off, along with the rest of *Star Wars Galaxies* fans. In November, it sold us the *Trials of Obi-Wan* expansion. New planet, Mustafar! New loot to enhance our professions! Personally, as a creature handler, I was interested in a creature handler necklace that would allow me to tame more powerful pets. Then, the day after the expansion's release, SOE and LucasArts announced that soon, my profession, along with many others, will no longer exist.

This, unbelievably, is one of the more polite e-mails we've gotten regarding the big *Star Wars Galaxies* switchover—and we've been buried in 'em since the news broke. For the record, Sony Online Entertainment and LucasArts did offer a refund to anyone with a *Galaxies* account in good standing who purchased the *Trials of Obi-Wan* before November 3. On the other hand, once you get past the part that puts years of your character's progress down the tube, the *Galaxies-to-be* is actually worth a second look (see story on page 26).

November 3. On the other hand, once you get past the part that puts years of your character's progress down the tube, the *Galaxies-to-be* is actually worth a second look (see story on page 26).



The only game to win it TWICE

COASTERS OF THE YEAR

The best of the worst

But SWG achieves the heretofore unachievable, crapping all over itself so spectacularly that it lands on the list a sloppy second time. On the face of it, redesigning the game to actually include things gamers might want this time around—like a modicum of enjoyability—sounded great. But SWG is all about sounding great and not being great: The new game is not only broken and buggy, it also infuriated what fans it did have by negating most everything those poor souls had achieved over the last two years. And it still isn't fun. No more do-overs for you, SOE.

Yes, the same magazine.

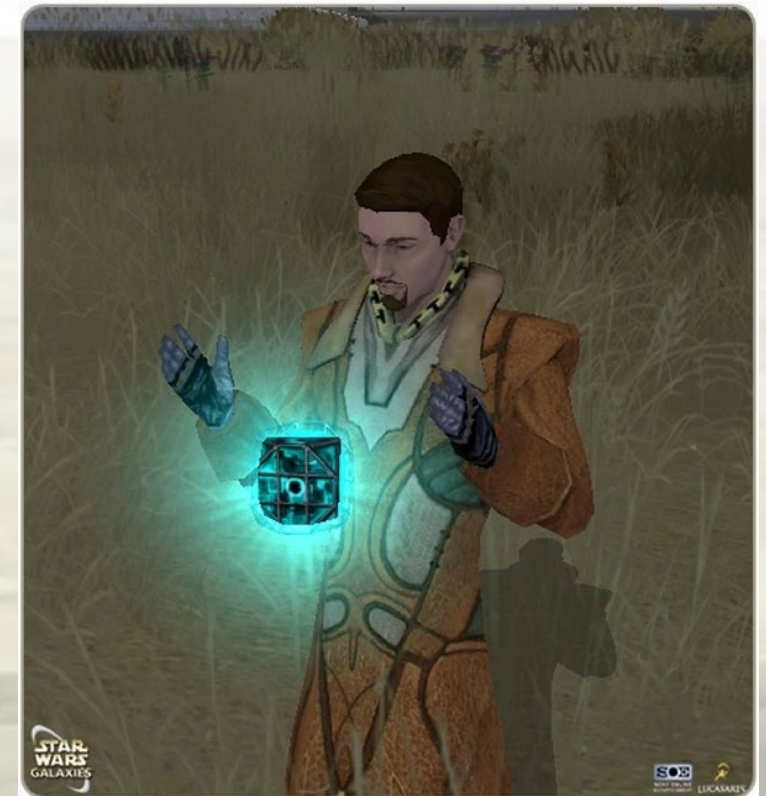


A NEW ERA



For the next six years, the live team did an incredible job of marrying the new NGE gameplay with many of the older features, bringing back much of the “world” that had been lost.

- There was a paid event staff that ran events in the game on a regular basis.
- They could create events all across the servers, advertise them, and run them in real time.
- Eventually these tools were given directly to players.
- More than *3 million* quests were created by players in one month when the Chronicle Master system was released.



December 15th, 2011.

Adam'M Ortega
Elder Jedi
TRON

Svare Kilone
bounces around
with excitement!

With a gesture to himself, Simot summons his inner strength.

Reenna Flair gives
CythShari a hug.

may the force
be with you a

Anna Flair
Durosso a

et comme ECPS

Selling water for
one penny a glass

[illegible]

02-FF STA
 from Europe-Chimaera
 3EA

```
t: lol still displaying those pup messages
n: Now he's gone..
t: I hope the last countdown is a farewell, thanks for
  ut i doubt it
g: guess he jumps from server to server
t: find a safe place to rest our restfull heads
```

X Chat

06:54:37 Reenna Flair gives Duross a hug.
06:54:37 Meriine El'sadai: non pas tous
06:54:37 'Dee' Mouch' gives Twefong Strabolgi a hug.
06:54:38 Oxmon: [Shyriiwook] Selling nothing for one Mill <ggg>
06:54:39 CythShari: squeeze reenna
06:54:40 -Cooper Tefr: et comme ECPS s'etait dissous je les ai rejoint

Chat

AFTERLIFE



Force Ghost: Why Star Wars Galaxies Refuses to Die

A long time ago in a Galaxies far, far away.

2018-07-17 16:13 • James Crosby • 2 comments

Star Wars Galaxies: how modders are keeping the dream of a Star Wars MMO alive

By Daryl Baxter October 30, 2018

A new hope for the 2003 MMORPG

Star Wars Galaxies Is Dead, But These People Are Keeping It Alive



Heather Alexandra
9/13/16 4:00PM

230

34



Fans kept it alive



rk



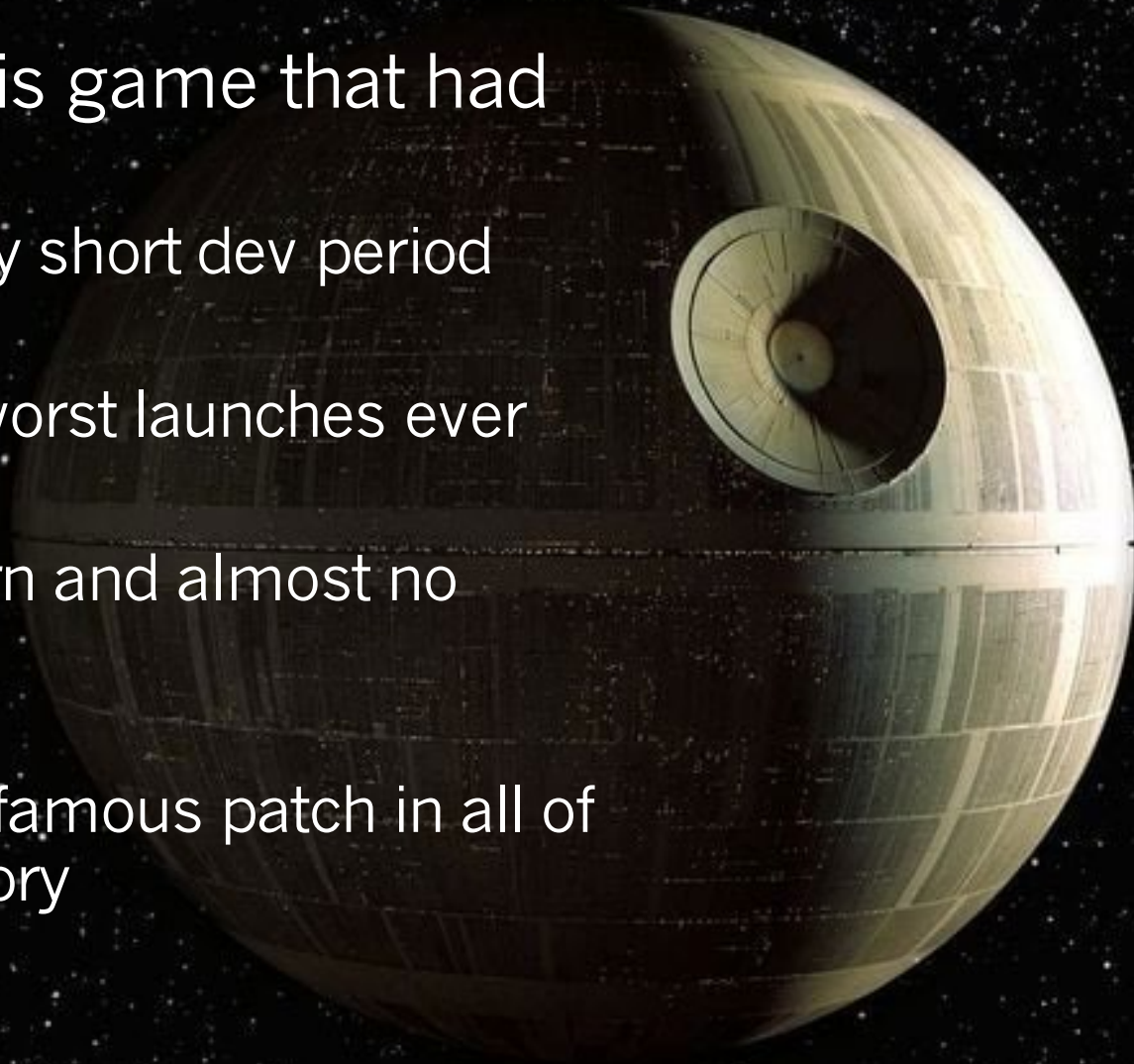
Fan servers

Bespin, entirely built by players.

GDC

Today, across a dozen fan run servers, there are still thousands of active users.

- Somehow, this game that had
 - A ridiculously short dev period
 - One of the worst launches ever
 - Terrible churn and almost no content
 - The most infamous patch in all of gaming history



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...is now a classic.

Galaxies was the Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru simulator we never knew we wanted.

VARIETY

Ranking the All-Time Best 'Star Wars' Video Games



10. "Star Wars Galaxies" (2003)

KILL SCREEN

12.17.15

**REMEMBERING THE
BEAUTIFULLY BORING MMO
STAR WARS GALAXIES**

GDC

KOTAKU AU | See Games Differently

Star Wars Galaxies Left a Black Hole



PC Gamer @pcgamer

Remembering Star Wars: Galaxies, the fallen MMO that should have been revolutionary: trib.al/ivtT25y

**Star Wars Galaxies was an MMO
that almost changed the world**

By Chris Thursten May 04, 2021

The rise and fall of an MMO with limitless potential.



- Today, the crafting system is widely regarded as one of the best ever made.
- The idea that many players might like to live peaceful lives in an online game doesn't seem weird anymore.
- Asynchronous harvesting became the basis of Facebook gaming.
- Entire genres are built atop house decorating.
- Real-time event systems are still rare.
- ...And of course, people don't laugh at the idea of putting dancing in a game anymore.



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Goodbye to a World

"Thank you, I'll say goodbye soon.
Though it's the end of the world,
Don't blame yourself.
And if its true,
I will surround you
and give life to a world
That's our own."

" I kept referencing this whole world-destruction notion, which is totally born out of me playing online roleplaying games that then got shut down, and then you couldn't play them anymore —which was really really significant to me because I was very much into these games.