



MARCH 18-22, 2024
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Level and Quest Design Collaboration from Skyrim to Starfield

#GDC2024



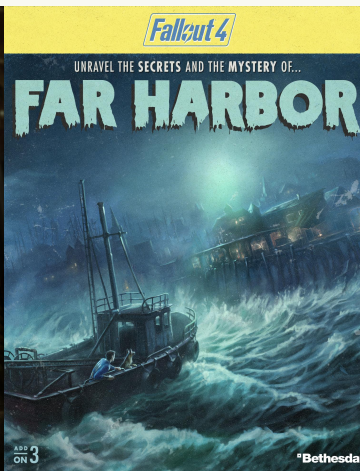
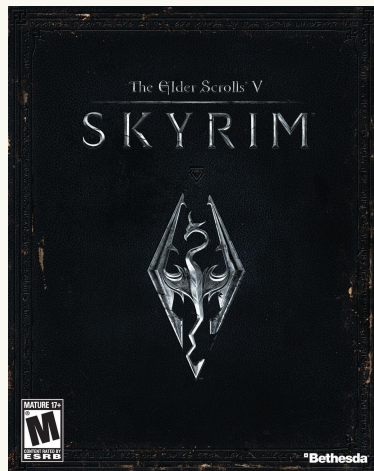
Will Shen





Daryl Brigner

Soft
Rains



Quest and Level Design basics

Quest Design

- Dialogue
- Text
- Voiceover
- Quest Scripting
- AI Behavior
- Systems Design*



Level Design

- Locations
- Kit Logic
- AI Behavior
- Combat Encounters
- Environmental Storytelling
- Gameplay Scripting



Collaboration

Level Design

Location

Combat NPCs

Layout Decisions

Quest Design

Narrative

Non-Combat NPCs

Story Decisions

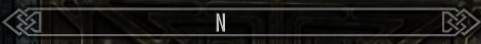


A typical example



The Elder Scrolls V

SKYRIM



STARTED: THE HOUSE OF HORRORS

 Talk
Vigilant Tyranus

"The House of Horrors"



Quest Design: Dialogue, AI behavior, objectives

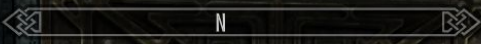


Level Design: Layout and haunted objects



Art adds unique assets, animation, and lighting

A closer look



STARTED: THE HOUSE OF HORRORS

 Talk
Vigilant Tyranus

We came up with the faction together



"Haunted House" was vague



VFX had idea for stacked chairs



World Art made the trap part of the altar

**We are writing and designing
the game together**

**This is a typical example of
how we made Skyrim**

But we also tried other ways

Level Design experimented with their own quests

An atypical example



"Lost to the Ages": A Level Design written quest



Katria

Sure.

No thanks.

Well, if you want to reach the summit, you're going to need some help. You... want a hand?

Katria is added



Unique location element



Katria calls out unique location elements



Completed: Reach the summit of Arkngthamz
Solve the Tonal Lock

Katria: Get it wrong, and... well. You've seen what happened when I tried it.

Katria's story linked to location's story



Here's the result:

1 - Arkngthamz
This one, 'Arkngthamz', was on the inscription, too. Apparently the main Aetherium research center. Seems like the place to start.

2 -

Mentioned as a 'Bthar-zel' (called city?). Not Bthardamz, though. Looks like a smaller site, north or northwest of there, on the river.

3 -

The primary source of Aetherium. Extracted from some deeper mines?

4 -

A storage site for raw Aetherium, just outside a major city. Apparently, it had to be kept outside because the Aetherium was 'harmonically volatile'.

Katria's Journal

Many Level Designers learn Quest tools

**Shared language deepens
collaboration going forward**



Fallout 4



"The Last Voyage of the U.S.S. Constitution"



Ironsides

Enough pleasantries. The Constitution has systems that need repairs to carry out its mission.

Captain "Ironsides" needs help



Scavengers Attack

**Collaboration brought new
elements to the content**



Repair Checks



Unlocked Shortcut




MANDY STILES

E) TALK

"Scavengers" quest path



A ship needs cannons!



✓ Completed: Fire up auxiliary power


The ship launches







Now on a skyscraper



Ironsides

What a glorious success. True, the mission is not quite complete. But one cannot deny our progress.

Elevator to Ironsides

Learn each other's language

Transitioning to Leadership

Fallout 4

FAR HARBOR




Far Harbor Goals

- Multiple Endings
- Non-Combat Gameplay
- High Level Equipment
- Experimentation





Three factions, more outcomes



Examining the wires you see several that are disconnected and missing.

Do Nothing

Repair the wires (6 Copper)

Rewire it (5 Intelligence)

Kick it!

More stat challenges

Building blocks of computer programs.

CODE BLOCK

BUILD WITH

Code

0/1

SIMULATION



[Q] TAG FOR SEARCH [ESC] EXIT

New puzzle gameplay

February 15th, 2077

Grandpa Pat was yelling in his sleep tonight. He's done it before, but this time it was so loud it woke me up. I saw Mom head over to make sure he's okay. Glad she remembered her coat, it looks like it's freezing out there. I heard her talking to dad the other day about Grandpa moving in with us soon. I don't think I want him to.

[E] TAKE [TAB] EXIT

Draw a picture of your family.



[E] TAKE [TAB] EXIT

Draw a map of home sweet home.



[E] TAKE [TAB] EXIT

Artist explores narrative



Santiago

Do you not see it? The glory of the thing? The artistry?

60



Level Designer large quest and location

Plans met setbacks

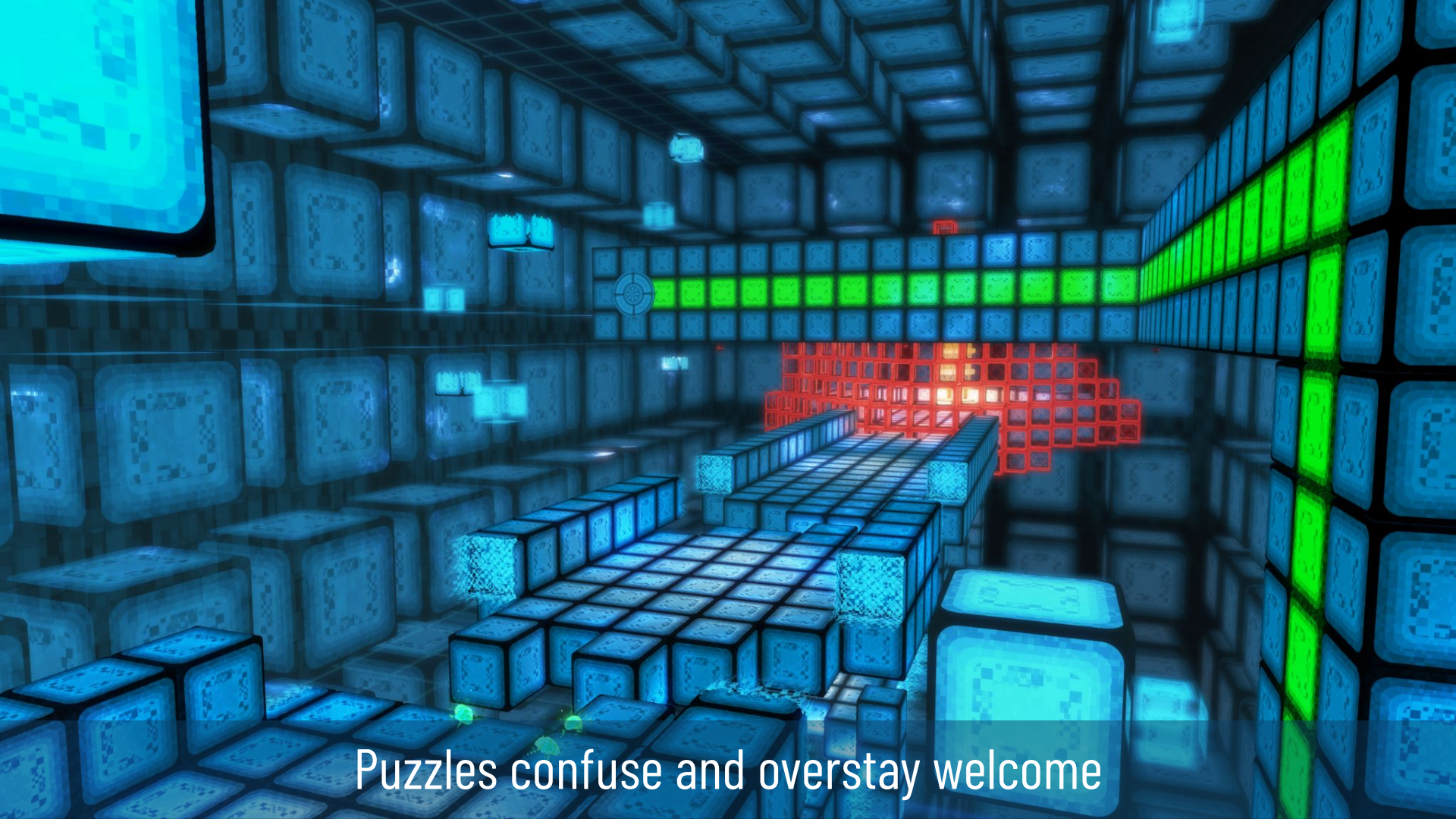
Solving project-wide problems



Support for battles



Experienced Level Designer help



Puzzles confuse and overstay welcome



Optional final puzzles

Welcome to ROBCO Industries (TM) Termlink
ICE-Breaker Program Loaded...

Long-Term Memory Storage

[Memory 0V-9AX0 - ACQUIRED]

[Memory 0J-2NN8 - ACQUIRED]

[Memory 0H-3X0P - ACQUIRED]

[Memory 0Z-7A4K]

[Memory 0Y-8K7D]

>

Unclear only 3 were required



A large location and large quest was too much



Focused Level Designer on just the quest

Results

- We led a project!
- Criticism mostly positive
- Puzzles a sore spot
- Level Designer quests
needed production buy in
- Team morale high



Collaboration when work gets hard

Fallout 76



The easy stuff



Basic Level Design still fast



Started with Fallout 4 assets



World Art iteration still fast



Map 3-4x larger than Fallout 4

The hard stuff



Multiplayer makes all scripting harder



"Haunted" cabins

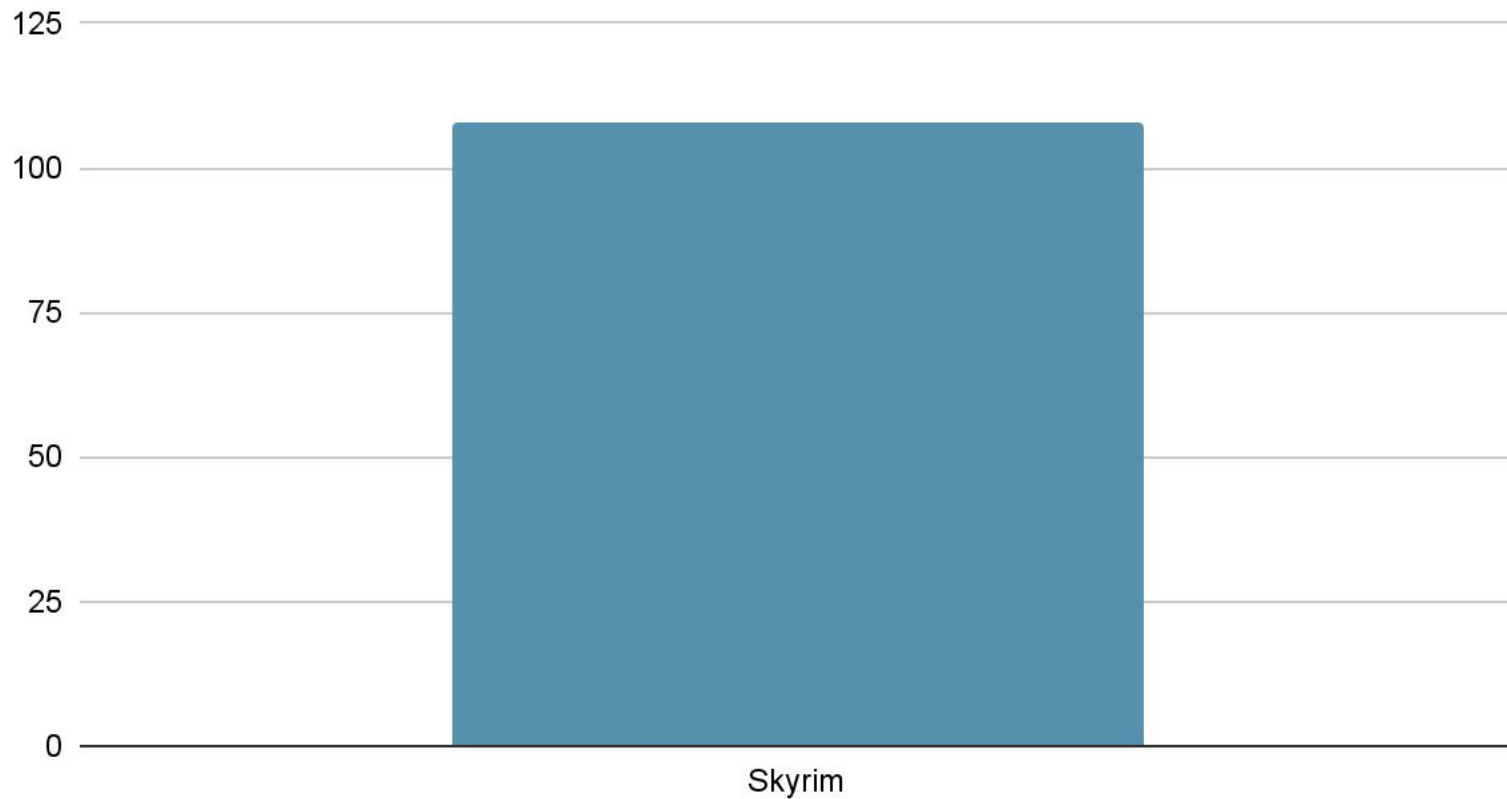


Terminal controlled "haunted" elements

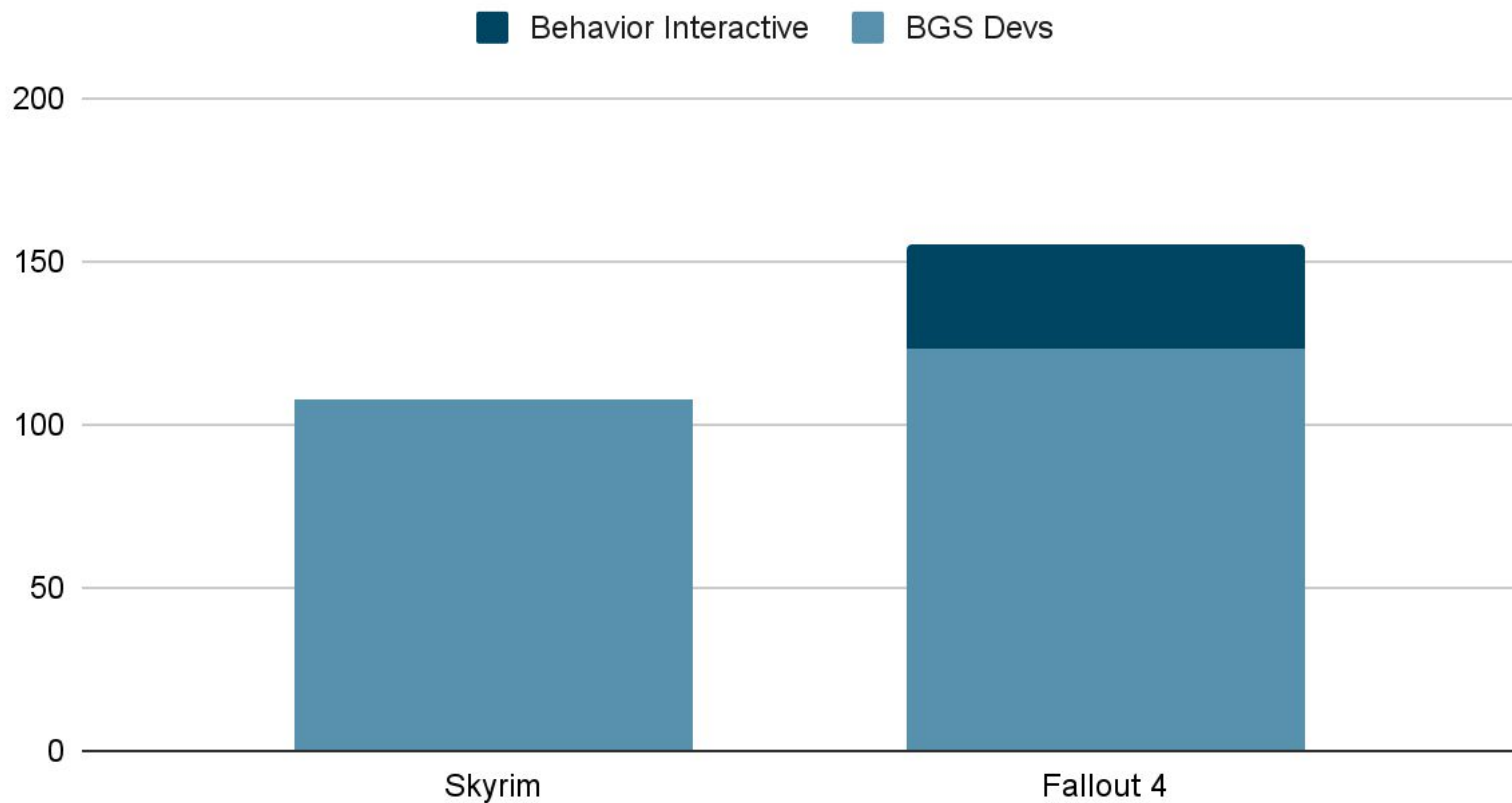
Multiplayer limited unique gameplay experiences

Level Design stopped learning Quest tools

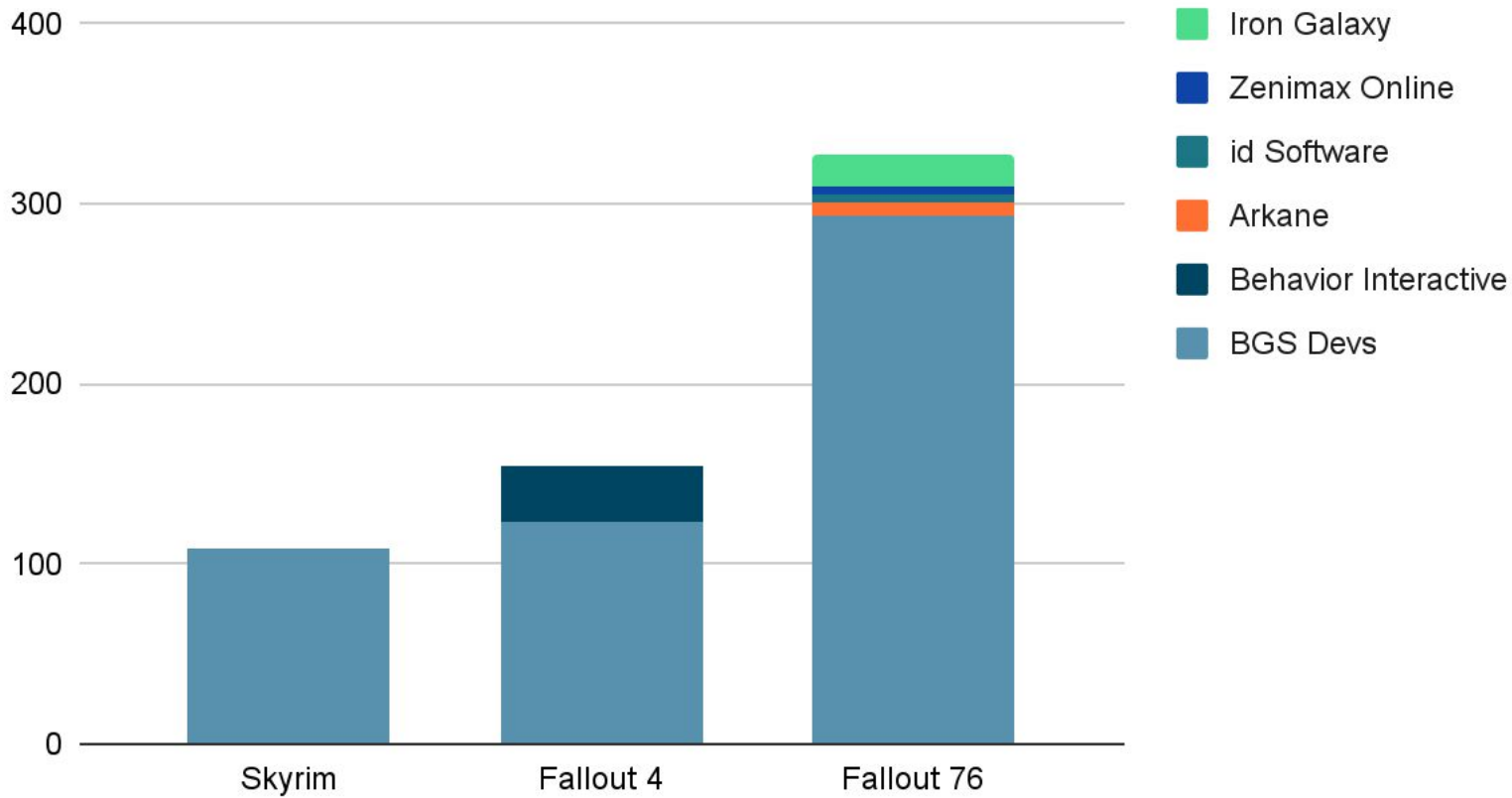
Source: MobyGames Credits



Source: MobyGames Credits



Source: MobyGames Credits



Fallout 76 has a rocky launch

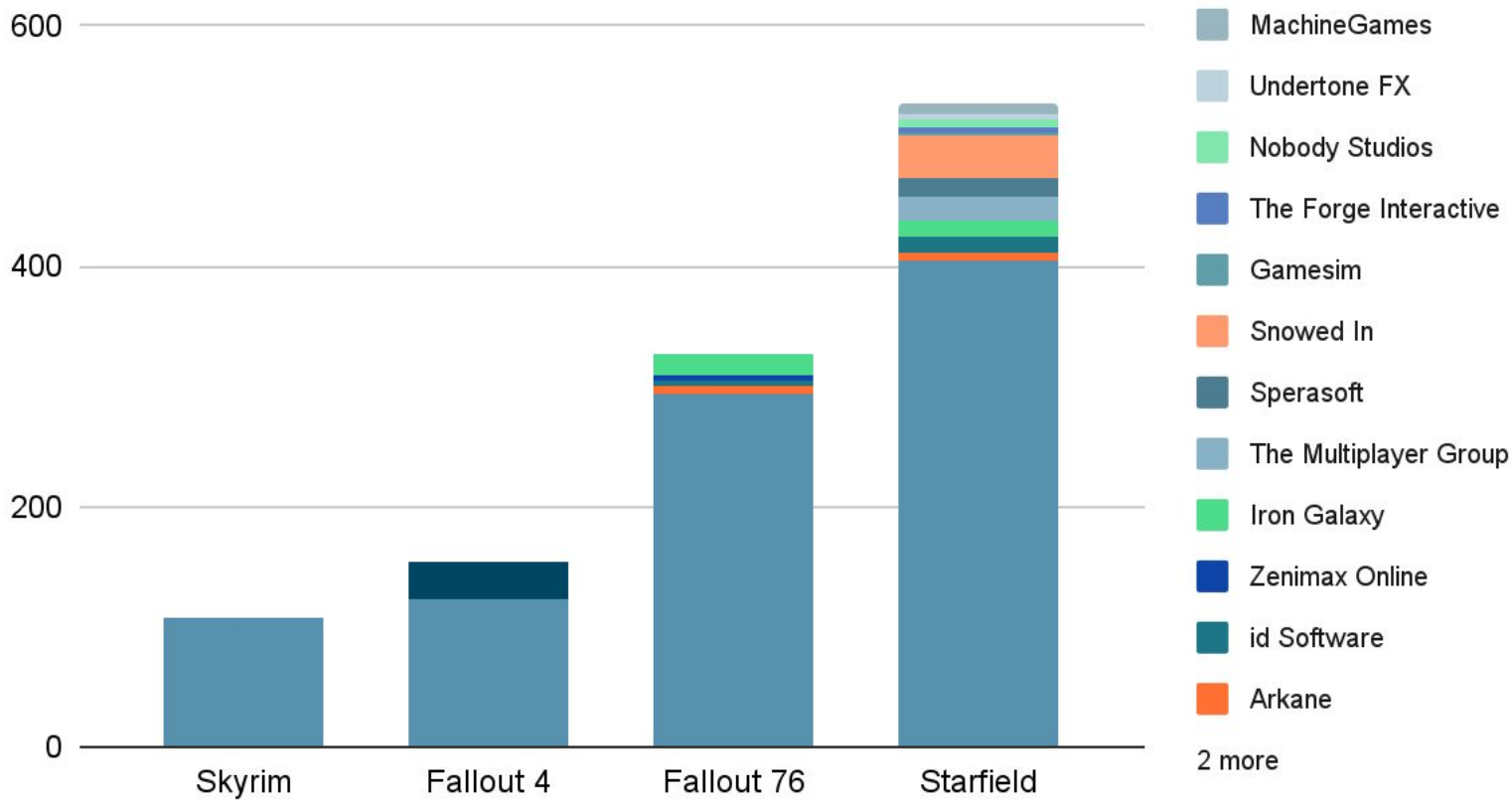
Wastelanders update revives the game

Grappling with scale

The image is a promotional title card for the video game Starfield. It features a dark, atmospheric scene of a planet's surface. In the foreground, a large, complex, and heavily armored lander is positioned on the left, angled towards the right. The lander has multiple red thrusters and is labeled "FRONTIER" and "044". In the background, a vast, desolate landscape stretches out under a sky filled with swirling clouds and a large, dark planet. A bright, streaking comet or meteor is visible in the upper left. On the right side, there are several tall, thin, and jagged rock formations. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and browns, with a bright light source creating a hazy glow on the horizon.

STARFIELD™

Source: MobyGames Credits





Approvals

Scheduling

Feedback

Department over project



OBS Studio

Documentation is now critical



Carmen Vega 11:30 AM
Way ahead of you! Give me a sec...



Thoughts on this?



Zoe Maxwell ●
Senior Director, Marketing
she/her/hers

📅 In a meeting • Google Calendar

🕒 11:23 PM local time

🔍 Message

🗨️ Huddle ▾



Zoe Maxwell 👍 11:33 AM
Works for me! We should get @Lisa's eyes on it.

B I 🔗 | ☰ ☷ | ≡ | </> ↻

***Not a real
Slack
profile!**

You are your title

Can Level and Quest collaboration continue?

STARMAP

Masada III

Masada System

SURVEY 13%

TYPE	ROCK
GRAVITY	1.12 G
TEMPERATURE	COLD
ATMOSPHERE	STD O2
MAGNETOSPHERE	UNKNOWN
FAUNA	ABUNDANT
FLORA	ABUNDANT
WATER	SAFE

RESOURCES (0/8)

H ₂ O	Ni	Fe	Al	H ₂ O ₂	Co	Pt	Yb
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TRAITS: UNKNOWN



SCAN



DESTINATION

MASADA III
BURIED TEMPLE

LAND



MISSIONS



SHOW ME



SET LANDING TARGET

MOUSE1

CLEAR ROUTE

HOLD TO EXIT

TAB

The Buried Temple



Needed a final dungeon



And a big space battle



Senior Level Designer implemented the quest



I wrote dialogue and reviewed the content



A separate Level Designer on layout



MISSION UPDATED
REVELATION

ENTER THE ANOMALY



Dimension-hopping mechanic



A final fight

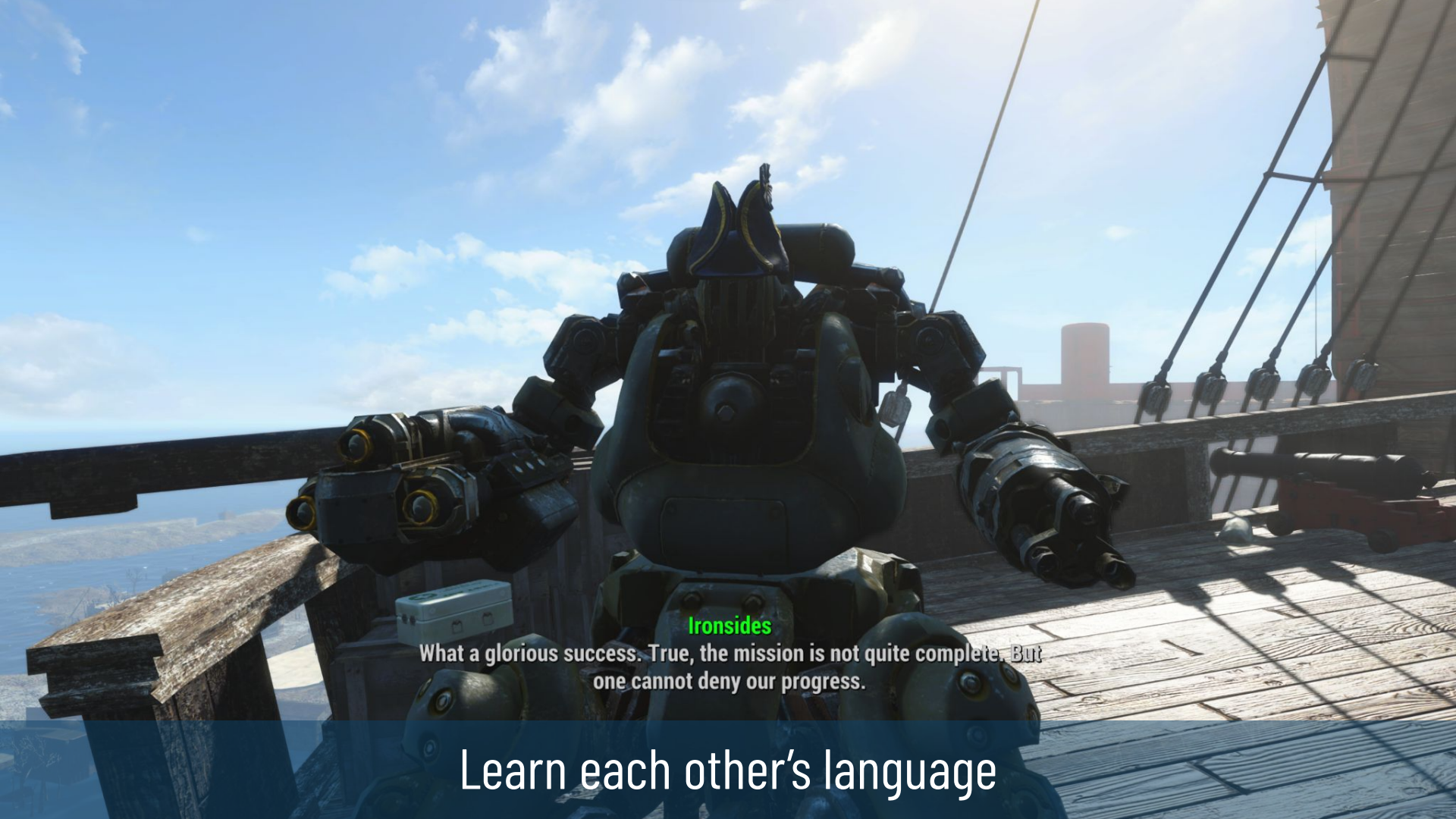
A classic collaboration of old and new

Necessity and urgency broke silos

Conclusions and Takeaways



Write and design the game together



Ironsides

What a glorious success. True, the mission is not quite complete. But one cannot deny our progress.

Learn each other's language

A dramatic, dark scene from the video game Fallout 4. In the foreground, a man in a blue shirt and a dog are on the deck of a boat, looking out at a massive, dark, and heavily damaged industrial structure (the Far Harbor) that looms over the turbulent, greenish-blue water. The sky is dark and stormy. The title 'Fallout 4' is in its iconic font at the top, and 'FAR HARBOR' is written in large, white, dripping letters across the middle.

Fallout 4

FAR HARBOR

Give your team clear goals



When work gets hard, people retreat into specialties



Large teams silo and need project-centered goals



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Special Thanks to our Design Collaborators

Dee Langlois

Steve Cornett

Kurt Kuhlmann

Nadia Haschart

Samuel Fronteau

All other Designers, Artists, Programmers, Producers,
QA, Family, and Friends

For Ferret Baudoin

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Questions?

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