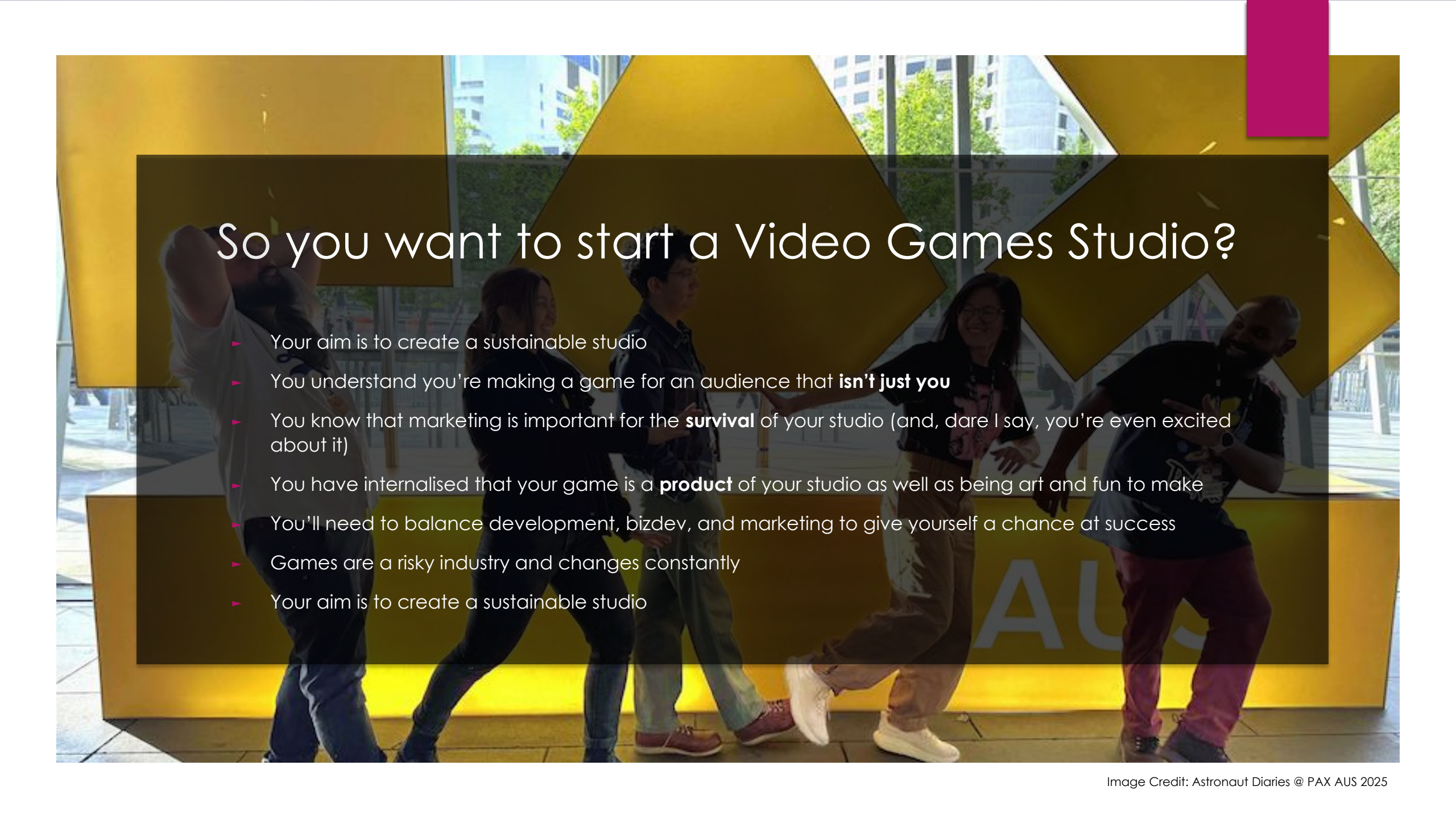




Grant Application Introductory Workshop Series

Workshop 2: Ideation and Prototyping

Navi Brouwer - Regional Content Manager - NZ CODE



So you want to start a Video Games Studio?

- ▶ Your aim is to create a sustainable studio
- ▶ You understand you're making a game for an audience that **isn't just you**
- ▶ You know that marketing is important for the **survival** of your studio (and, dare I say, you're even excited about it)
- ▶ You have internalised that your game is a **product** of your studio as well as being art and fun to make
- ▶ You'll need to balance development, bizdev, and marketing to give yourself a chance at success
- ▶ Games are a risky industry and changes constantly
- ▶ Your aim is to create a sustainable studio

It's time to get rolling



Two Paths of Game Creation

Early Stage Ideation

- ▶ Not sure what to make yet
- ▶ Some early ideation
- ▶ Possibly some documentation
- ▶ Maybe some prototyping
- ▶ USPs still being established and proven

Already have chosen a game

- ▶ Have picked a genre and know about your gameplay
- ▶ Have already started developing the game
- ▶ May already be sharing the game in social channels and doing playtesting

Ideation is for Everyone

- ▶ The start of a game creation process
- ▶ Feature ideation
- ▶ Game 2
- ▶ Taking a break from Game 1
- ▶ Revising Game 1



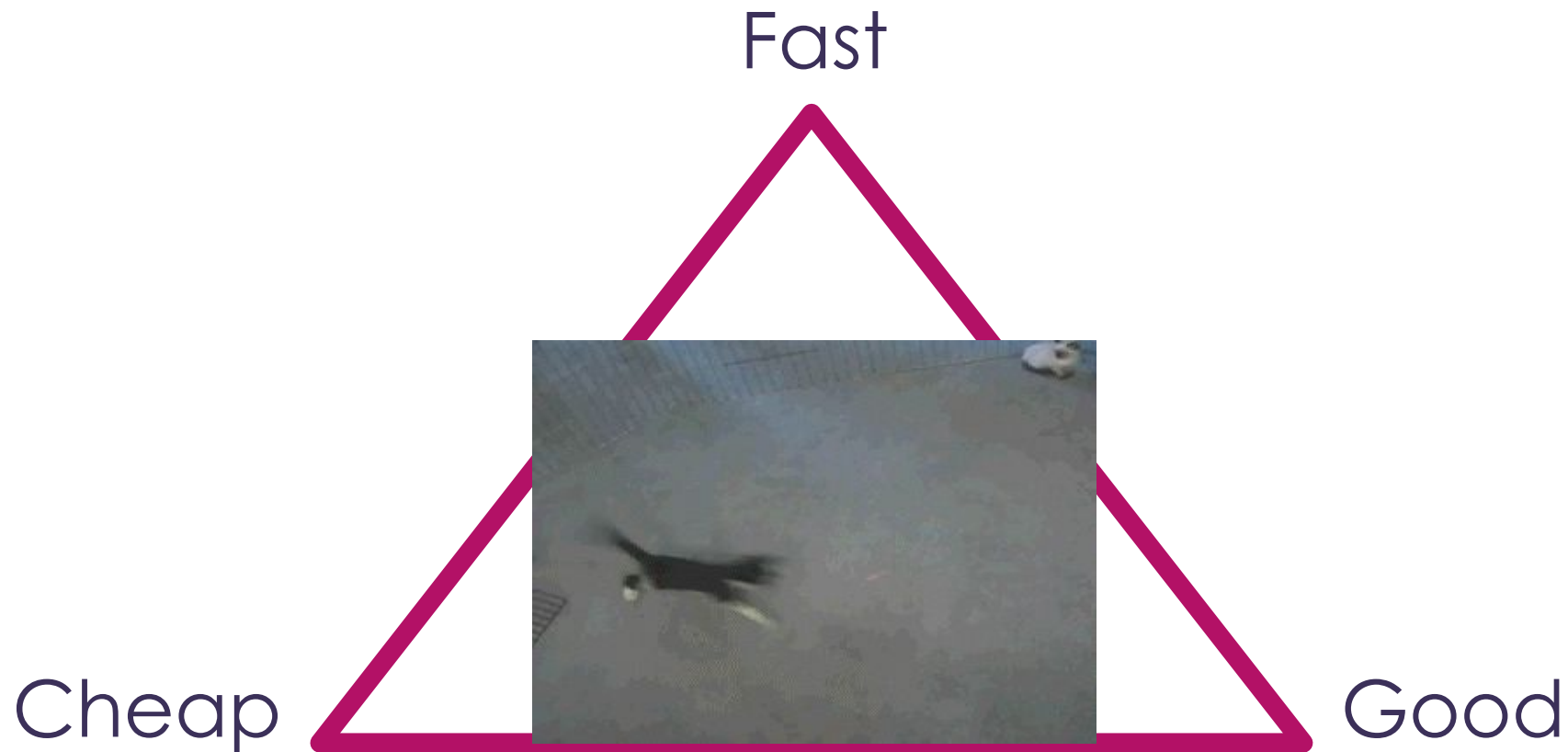
What's the Goal?

- ▶ What is the criteria you are setting for your game (product)?
 - How much \$\$ do you need to keep the lights on?
 - How long until you want to ship?
 - What can you make?
 - What can you market?
- ▶ What about studio IP?

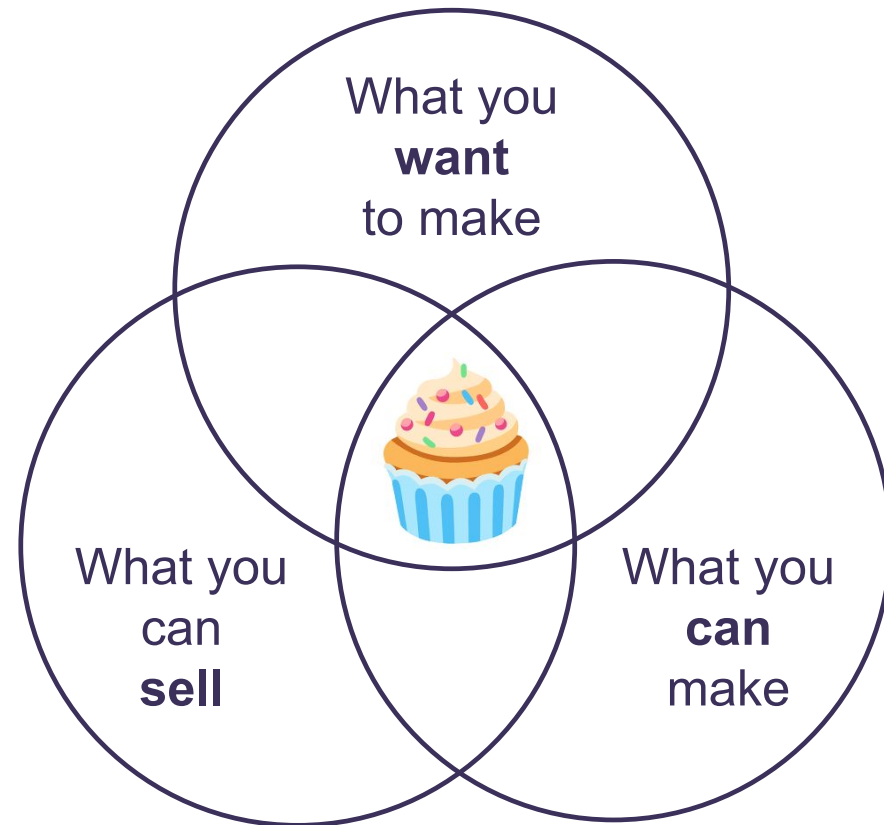
 Dog broke through!

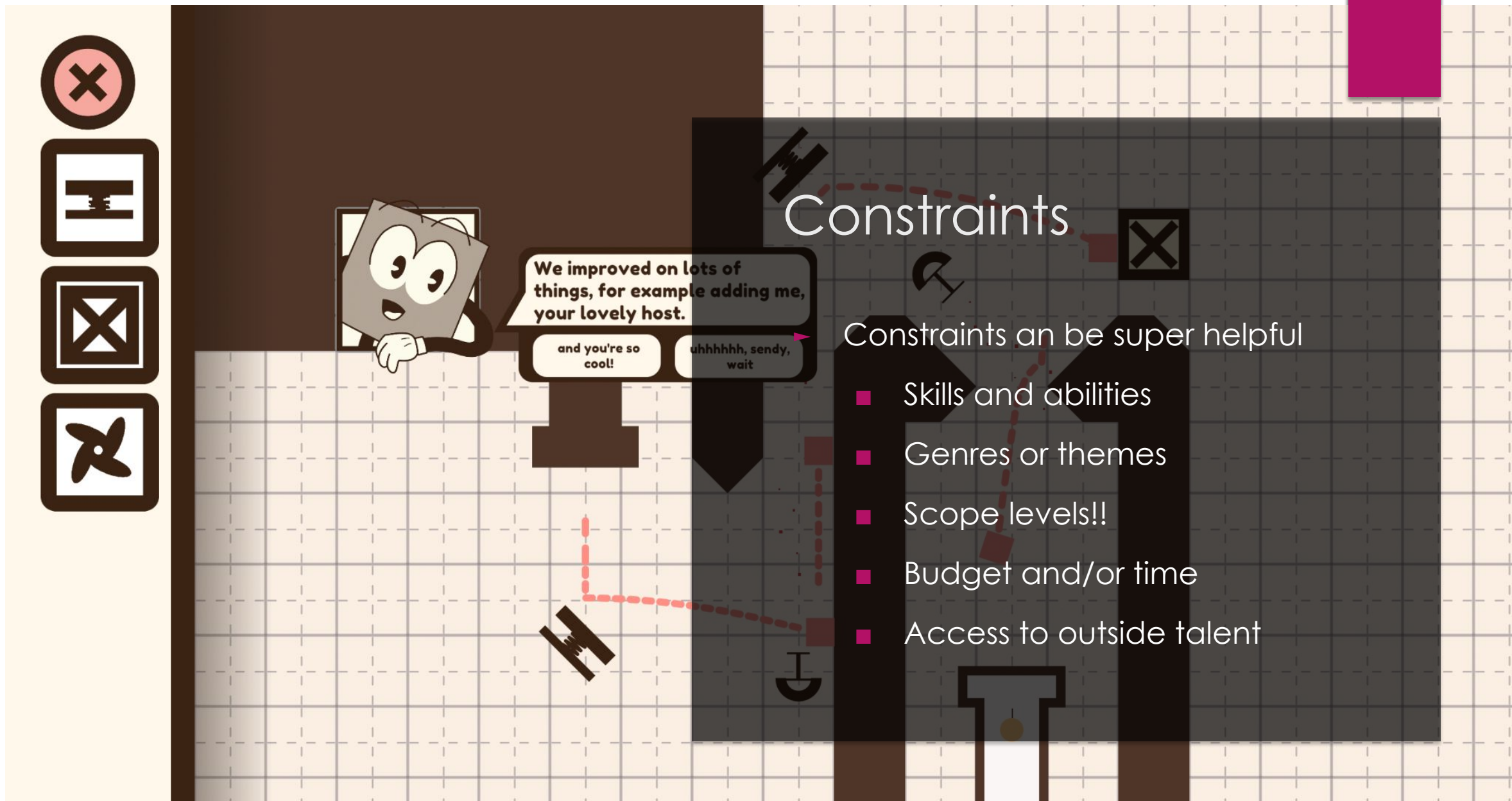
READY

The Iron Triangle (The Triangle of Reality)



The +2 Venn Diagram of Cleverness





Where to get Inspiration?

Places like:

- ▶ Life Inspiration
- ▶ Other Interactives
- ▶ Limitations first
- ▶ Find the fun & Re-Theme
- ▶ What's the problem?
- ▶ 1-Sentence pitches

List from Indie Game Clinic YouTube Video

S.C.A.M.P.E.R.

- ▶ S. ubstitute
- ▶ C. ombine
- ▶ A. dapt
- ▶ M. agnify
- ▶ P. urpose
- ▶ E. liminate
- ▶ R. e-arrange



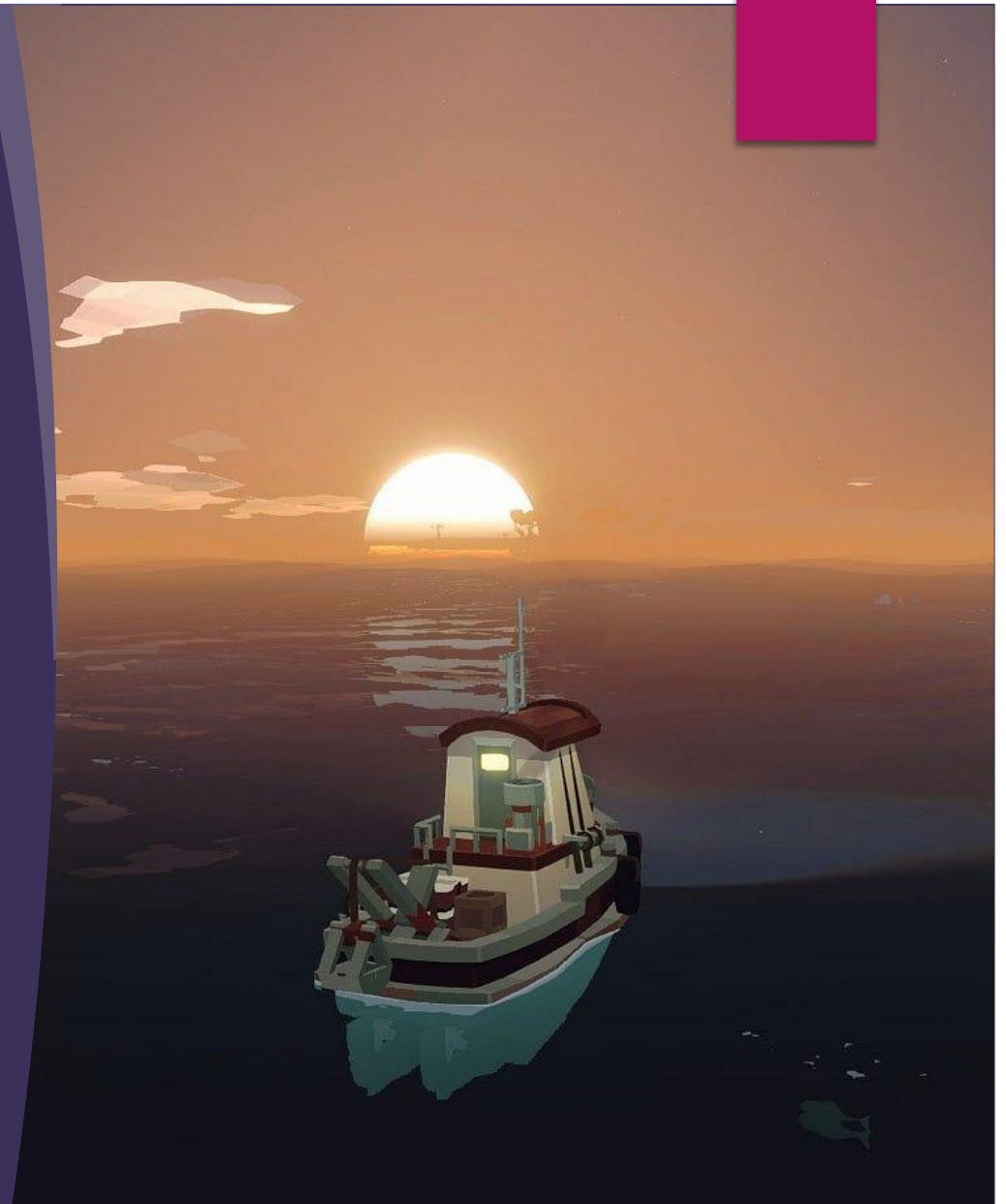
There are many ways
to ideate

This is just one way to
do the thing



Start by going **wide**

- ▶ Start with 20 ideas
- ▶ Give yourself a time limit
- ▶ Write down the silly stuff (banish it from your brain)
- ▶ Individually and as a group
- ▶ Can be parts or features that aren't fully formed
- ▶ Can be themes
- ▶ Don't get too attached



Then **narrow** it down with **research**

Internal Research

- As a team...
- Remove the easy "nopes!"
 - Remove or flag any ideas that are out of scope or skill ability
 - Combine similar ideas
 - Flag partial ideas (themes, etc)
 - **Early market research**

Reduce to 5

- If you're a team...
- Vote: each person can have 3-5 votes - Ideas with the most votes wins
 - Can decide as a team
- If you're solo dev...
- pick the most interesting few and utilise market research

Prototype

- What to build...
- Plan what you need to understand before starting to make stuff
 - The USP (unique selling point)
 - The biggest unknowns
 - Quick and dirty - plan for this to be remade (asset packs, etc)

Market Research

- Pick the ones you like.
- Roll up your sleeves:
- Have other games made this? When? How'd it go?
 - Who's the audience? Evidence they are keen for this?
 - Be brutally honest
- Why this now?

Pick 1

- Decide the one...
- Compare with your constraints and goals
 - Look at market research
- And remember...
- The direction can change mid-dev
 - Reevaluate the market often
 - Scope will change

Main Objective

☐ Protect the Homestead 17:43

STORMGATE

Protect the Homestead!

Prototyping

Make a thing quickly

Define what you're trying to prove!

Focused on one mechanic (maybe two)

Dirty first draft of your USPs and/or unknowns

Ways to prototype

- Paper Prototypes

- Game Jams

- Jumping in engine (simple and ugly)

- ▶ Always tests your prototypes early!

MENU



Nomad

1,050 / 1,050

Barracks

1,200 / 1,200

Fortified - Mechanical - Structure

COMMAND

TRAIN (T)

BUILD (Y)

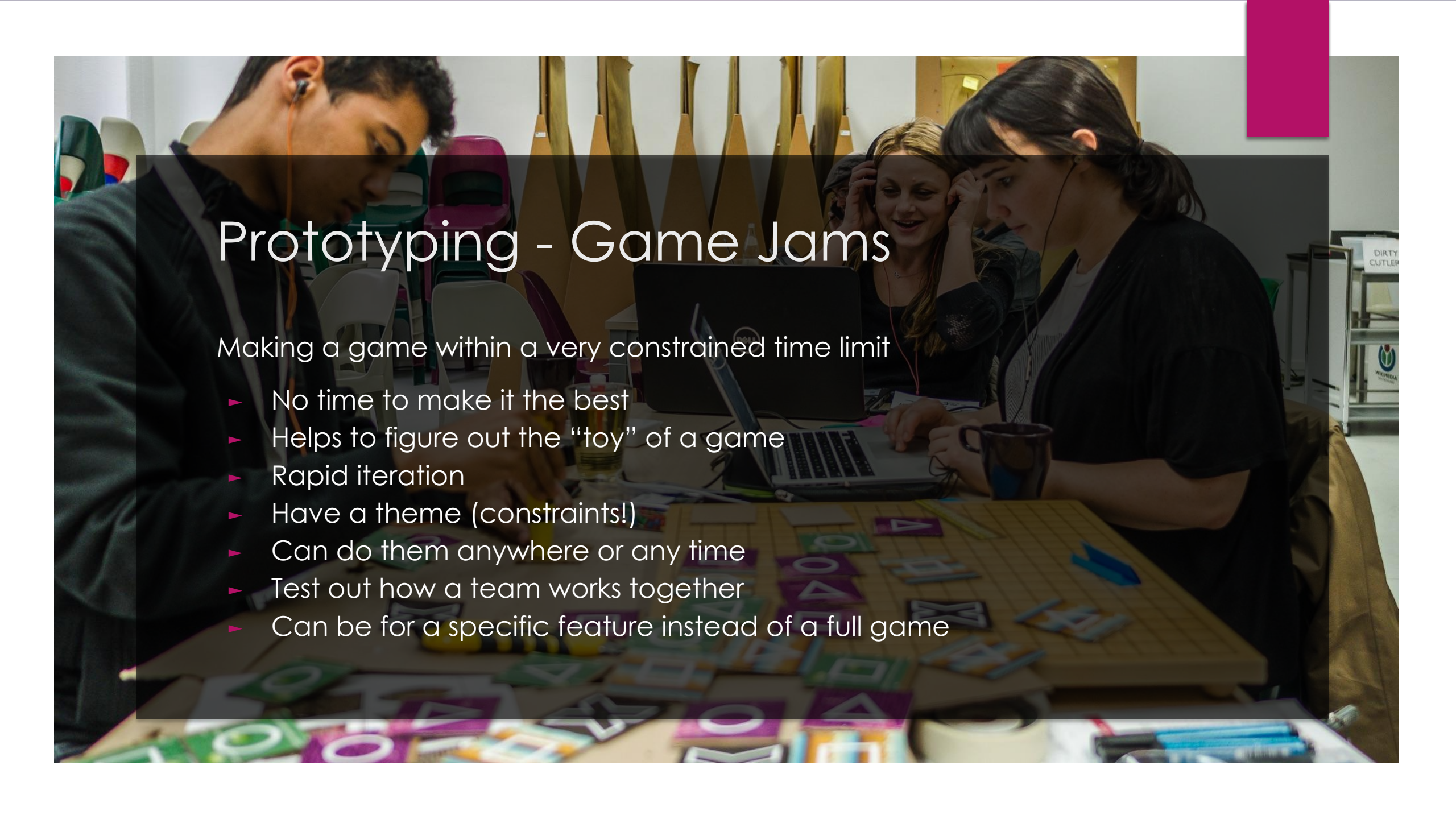
UPGRADE (U)

2:39

Prototyping - Paper Prototypes

Using paper to “play” your game. Literally drawing/writing the different parts of your game to see how it could work

- ▶ Great for figuring out systems and UI
- ▶ Helps to find the flow of the game, and how to get from one stage of the game to the next
- ▶ Can be a big time saver and cheap
- ▶ Allows people without programming skills to try out a game



Prototyping - Game Jams

Making a game within a very constrained time limit

- ▶ No time to make it the best
- ▶ Helps to figure out the “toy” of a game
- ▶ Rapid iteration
- ▶ Have a theme (constraints!)
- ▶ Can do them anywhere or any time
- ▶ Test out how a team works together
- ▶ Can be for a specific feature instead of a full game

Prototyping - In Engine (Simple & Fast)

Making a prototype the easiest and fastest way possible

- ▶ Focusing on the feature or system itself - usually the USP
- ▶ Identifying biggest unknowns
- ▶ Scoping to the easiest way to tell if a feature works
 - ▶ all about speed to answers
- ▶ Make it basic (or even ugly)
- ▶ Use existing assets and details only where needed - fastest path
- ▶ Throw away code
- ▶ Test, test, and test some more

“This is going to be the best game ever”



What is Market Research

We'll get into the details of this in workshop 2, but for now, it is...

- ▶ Doing research to understand the following things that may impact if your game will sell enough copies to sustain your studio.

This can take the form of....

- ▶ Genre Analysis
 - What genre norms are people expecting
- ▶ Audience Research
 - What they like which will impact your game design
 - Where to find them so you can connect with them / show them your game
- ▶ Competitive Analysis
 - Who else has made a game like yours and how did it go/what can you learn

Market Research

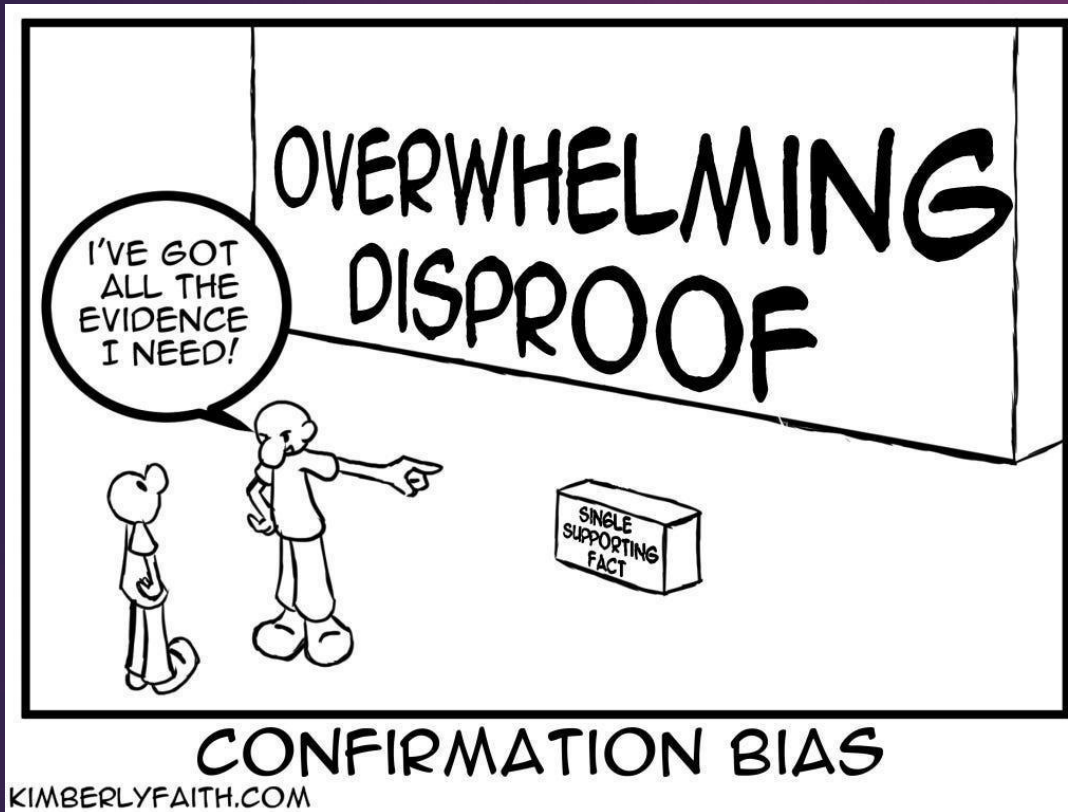
- ▶ It's not a swear word
- ▶ It's not actually scary, but you might not like what you find
- ▶ Games are expensive
- ▶ Marketing is kind of important
- ▶ You can/should be excited to share your game with people in a way that they enjoy!
- ▶ Market Research helps you understand risk

It does...

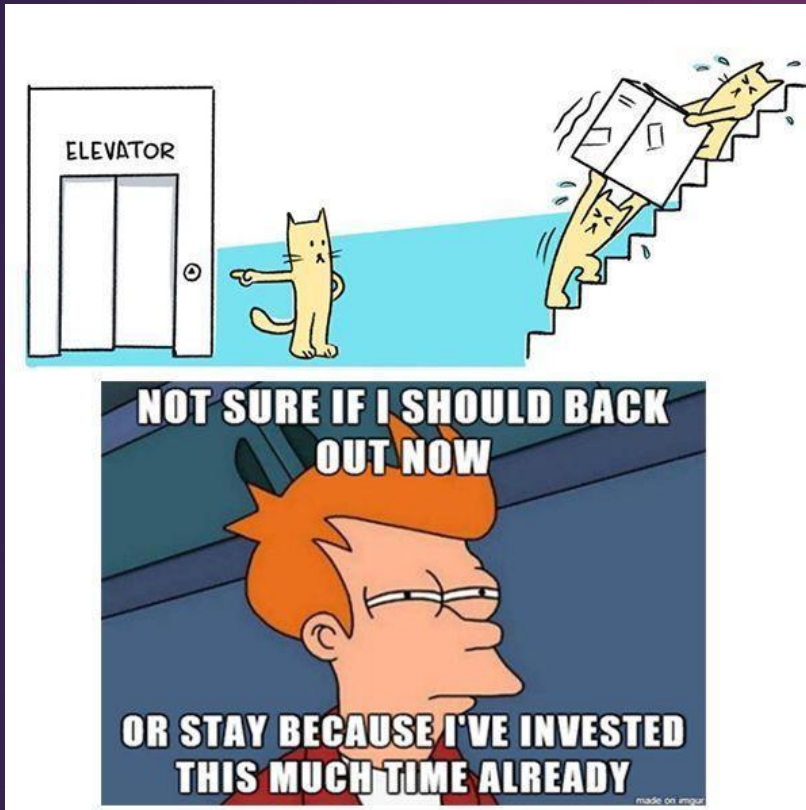
- ▶ Take time
- ▶ Require planning
- ▶ Have a learning curve
- ▶ Mean you need to talk to your audience
- ▶ Require research
- ▶ Change over time
- ▶ Seem to be more and more important to publishers

But it is possible to do yourself

Confirmation Bias



Sunk Cost Fallacy



Hope is not lost!

Iterate on the mechanics

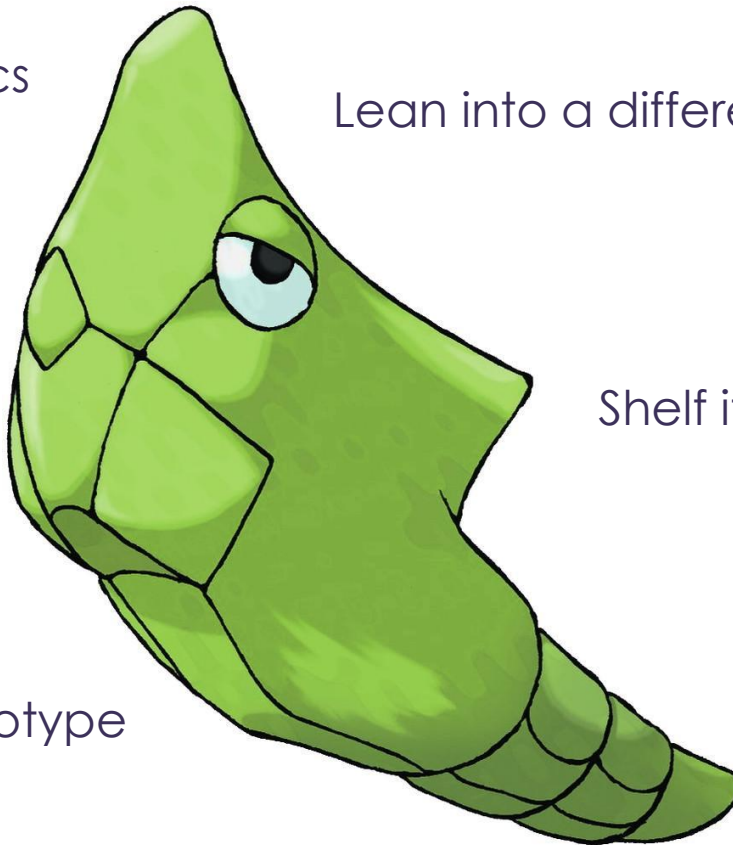
Lean into a different theme

Fix what others failed to

Shelf it for now, come back later

Choose another exciting prototype

Be aware of your risks



10 Questions to ask yourself

1. Why am I making this game?
2. Can I make this game?
3. What makes my game different and distinctive?
4. Am I taking on a Goliath?
5. Who is going to get excited?
6. How am I going to get them excited?
7. Do I need money and where am I getting it from?
8. What are my goals?
9. How am I going to spread the word?
10. What's the plan, Stan?

Tim's workshop sheets are linked in the workbook.



Other things to consider



Art

Art Direction

- ▶ Don't try to pack in full art to early prototypes unless you really need to
- ▶ Do make notes/lists if inspo and vibes
- ▶ Don't exclude your artist from prototyping
- ▶ Do pick the most impactful areas to include art experimentation (especially if they are USP related)

Asset Packs

- ▶ Great for early stages!
- ▶ Very quick to add and get an idea of how the game will feel
- ▶ Not just for art, can be for animations and other things as well
- ▶ Keep the list of credits, juuust in case
- ▶ Make sure to check the Ts&Cs

A note on AI

AI is in a really
weird space
right now.

A note on AI

BBC

Trending Now

Latest News

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Disney and Universal sue AI firm Midjourney over images

12 June 2023

Tom Espiner Business reporter, London and Lily Jamali North America technology correspondent, San Francisco

Share Save



Darth Vader is one of the characters the two studios allege Midjourney uses to generate images.

Disney and Universal are suing artificial intelligence (AI) firm Midjourney over its image generator, which the Hollywood giants allege is a "bottomless pit of plagiarism".

The two studios claim Midjourney's tool makes "innumerable" copies of characters including Darth Vader from Star Wars, Frozen's Elsa, and the Minions from Despicable Me.

It is part of the entertainment industry's ongoing love-hate relationship with AI. Many studios want to make use of the technology but are concerned that their creations could be stolen.

Midjourney's image generator makes images from typed requests or prompts.

Chris Kerr, Senior Editor, News, GameDeveloper.com

November 4, 2025

4 Min Read



IMAGE VIA SQUARE ENIX / UNREAL

The Content Overseas Distribution Association (CODA)—a Japanese anti-piracy organization that [represents numerous media and video game companies](#), including Square Enix, Cygames, Bandai Namco, and FromSoftware owner Kadokawa Corporation—has submitted a written request to OpenAI to demand the U.S. company stop using its members' content to train models such as Sora 2.

CODA was formed in 2002 at the behest of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Agency for Cultural Affairs to "promote the overseas development of Japanese content and take anti-piracy measures."

Latest News

Business

The Persona 5 series has sold over 15 million copies by Diego Argüello

Nov 4, 2025

3 Min Read

Business

Subnautica owner Krafton outlines plans to transform into

3.8 CODE will not fund:

(h) projects where there are possible legal and/or commercial issues due to the use of generative AI in the finished product.

Audio!

- ▶ Add sound effects (and music) early!
- ▶ Free sound effects are fine for prototypes
- ▶ It will change how your game feels
- ▶ Plan to bring in an Audio person in early
- ▶ ... No, earlier than that



Toys Vs Games

Toys are...

- ▶ A mechanic that brings joy or challenge
- ▶ Limited scope or depth
- ▶ Full extent is done within a short time and/or a single play session (not enough time for sustainability)
- ▶ Still really neat and are a jumping off point for a full game

Games are...

- ▶ A fun mechanic that works in concert with other mechanics / features / narrative to bring depth
- ▶ The original mechanic is built upon or evolves to bring in new waves of interest and challenge
- ▶ Often there can be a meta,
- ▶ ... No earlier than that

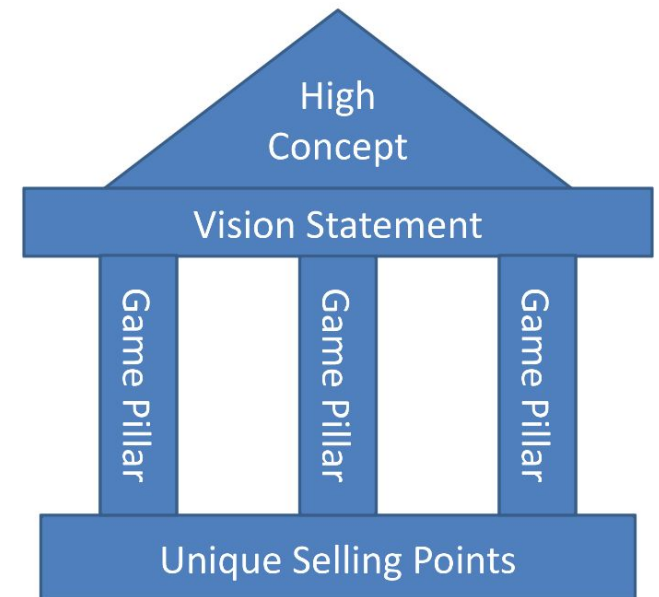
Game Vision

High Concept

- ▶ Short sentence to explain the idea driving the game
- ▶ X meets Y with Unique Twist
- ▶ Or (better) explain without referencing a game

Vision Statement

- ▶ A short paragraph (couple of sentences)
- ▶ Clearly defines game and gets people hyped about it
- ▶ Explains how it stands out



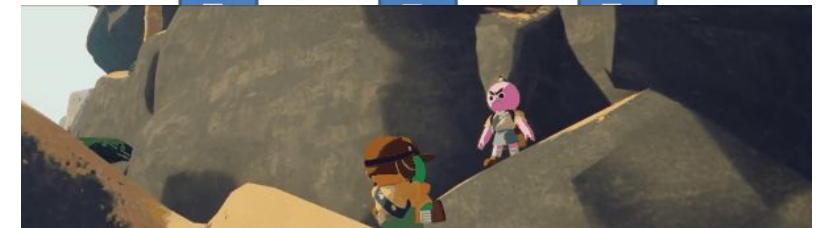
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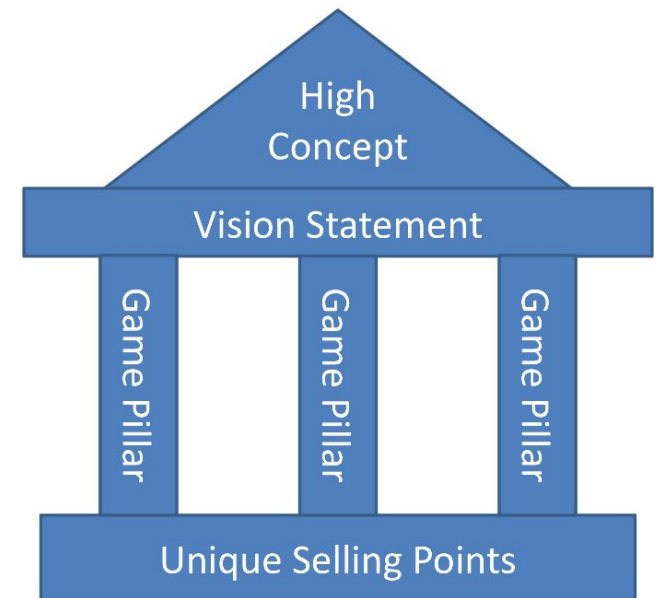
Game Vision

Game Pillars

- ▶ 3-4 Short statements
- ▶ Define the core focuses of the game's design and development - experiences, objectives, elements
- ▶ All new features measured against these pillars

Unique Selling Point(s) - USP

- ▶ List of items that make your game stand out from others like it



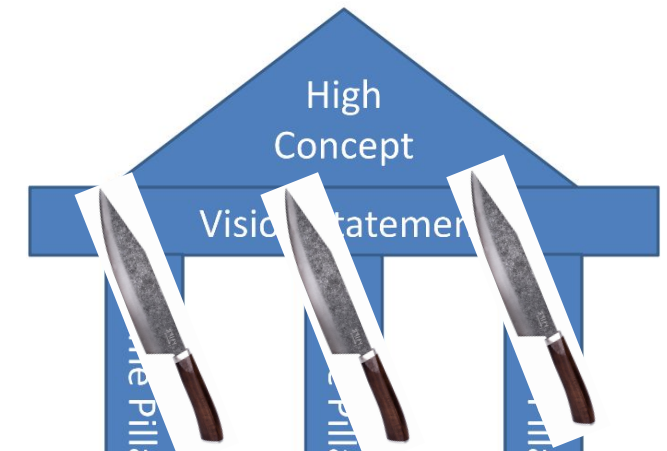
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Add cover Add comment

Game Name GDD

✦✦ *Insert the Vision Statement of the game*

Overview

General Info

Title of the game

Look and Mood

Pictures with brief description that make clear the visual look and general mood of the game.

► **More References**

Game Design Documents

- ▶ A document that explains choices and decisions
- ▶ Gets ideas out of your head - can you explain it?
- ▶ "The source of truth"
- ▶ Philosophy: Don't delete, mark in red and comment why
- ▶ Balance between too much and not enough documentation
- ▶ Tools: Words - Doc file, Visual - Miro, Both - Notion, etc

Consider commenting your code

- ▶ Just do it
- ▶ Also your design, art, production, etc
- ▶ It's also documentation
- ▶ Future you will thank you

I'll remember what this
code does



After all, I wrote
it myself



And it's unlikely anyone
else will work on it



So I don't need to leave
comments.



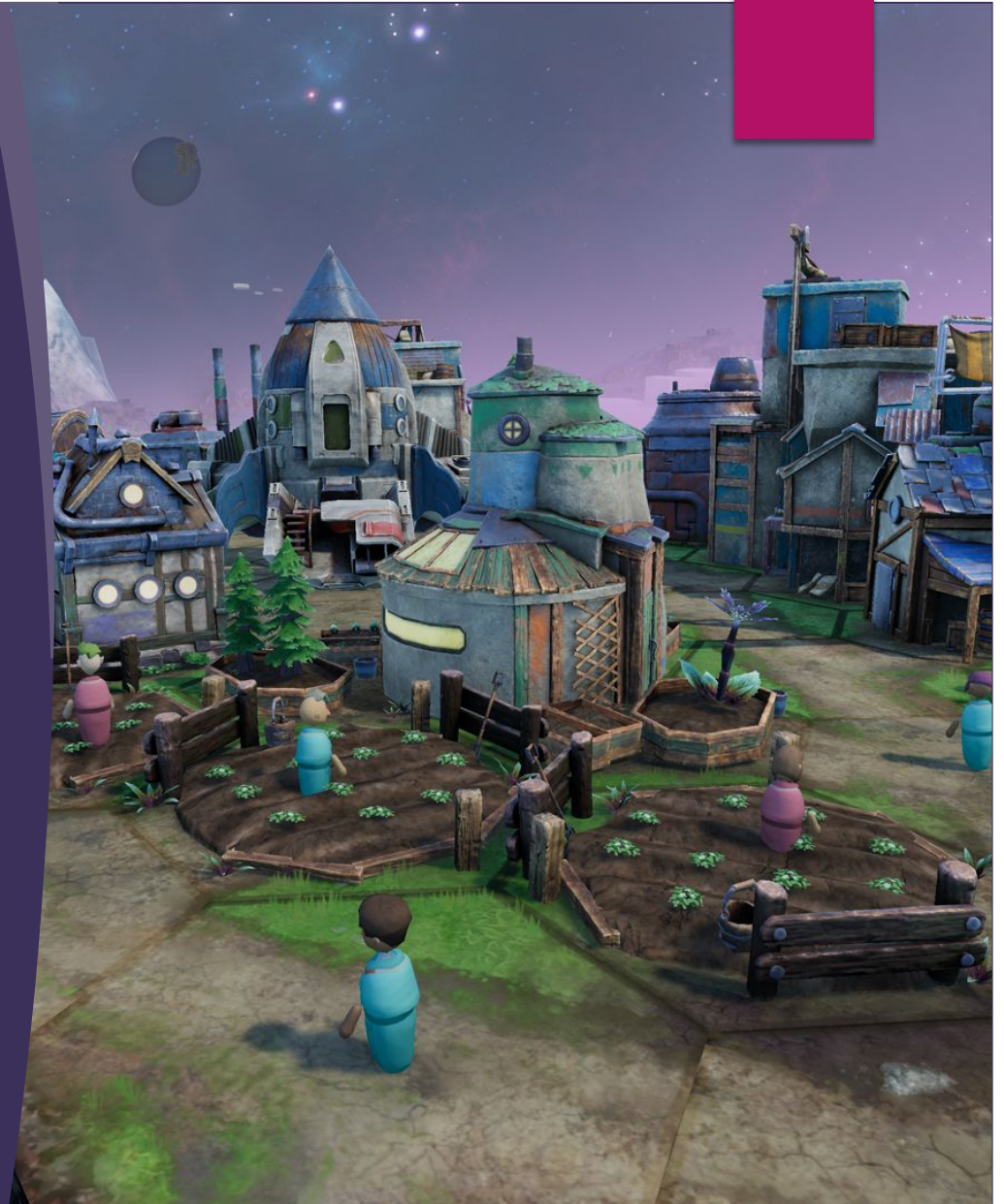
Testing and Iteration

- ▶ If you plan to have other people play your game, give it to others early
- ▶ Why is this a good idea?
- ▶ No one will steal your game - they have their own game ideas
- ▶ No one will make your game like you - you've done the research
- ▶ Learn from the tests -> Iterate = wash, rinse, repeat
- ▶ Be thoughtful about feedback given/observed
- ▶ Ask questions carefully (beware bias)
- ▶ Test often



In Summary

- ▶ Know your goals for making a game
- ▶ Remember, there are a variety of places to ideate a game
- ▶ Figure out how you want to prototype
- ▶ Do market research early (no sad dreams)
- ▶ Consider Art and Audio Early
- ▶ Find clarity through game vision, documentation, and **testing**



Any Questions?

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Thank you!

