

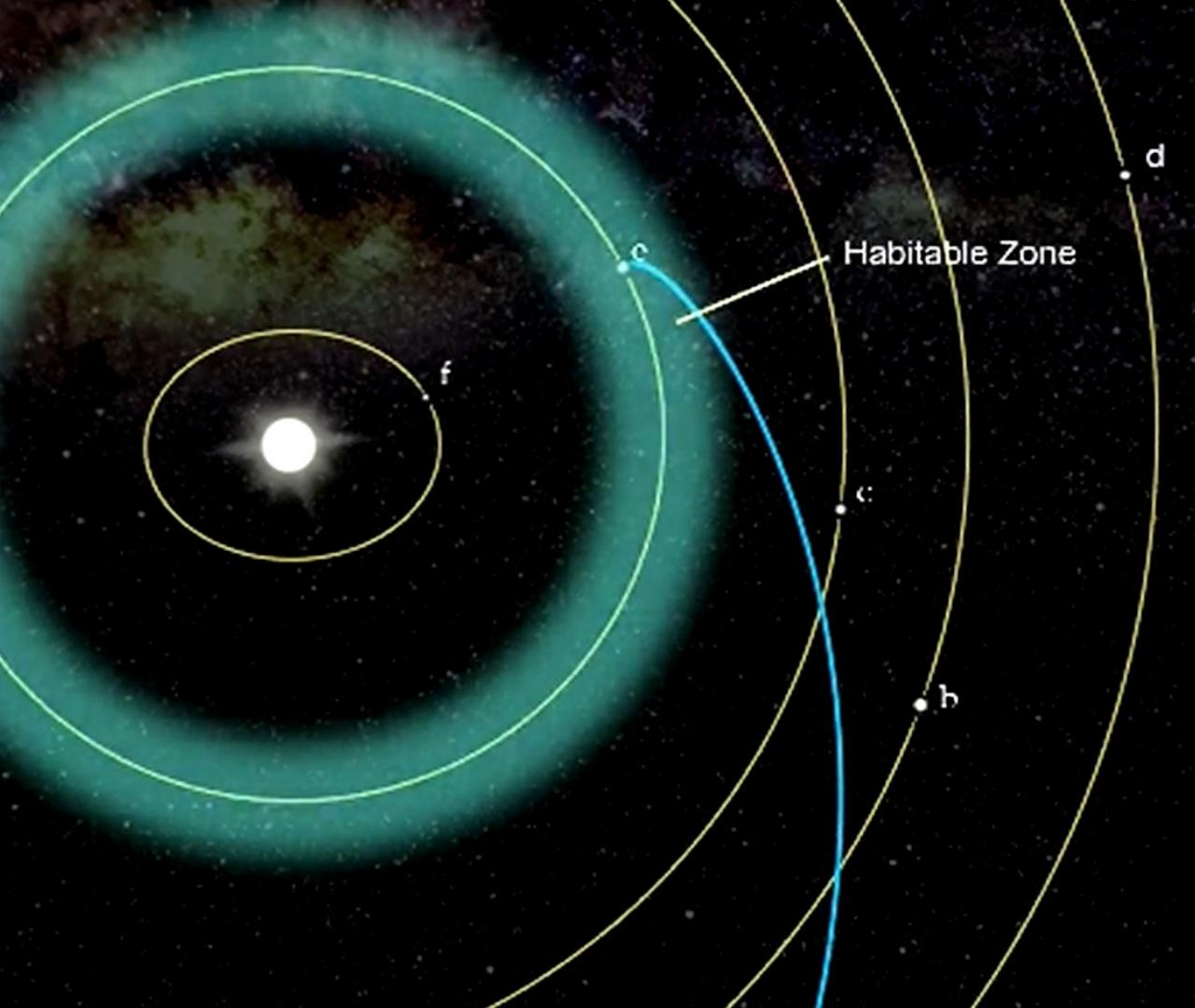
Innovating by Breaking the Rules

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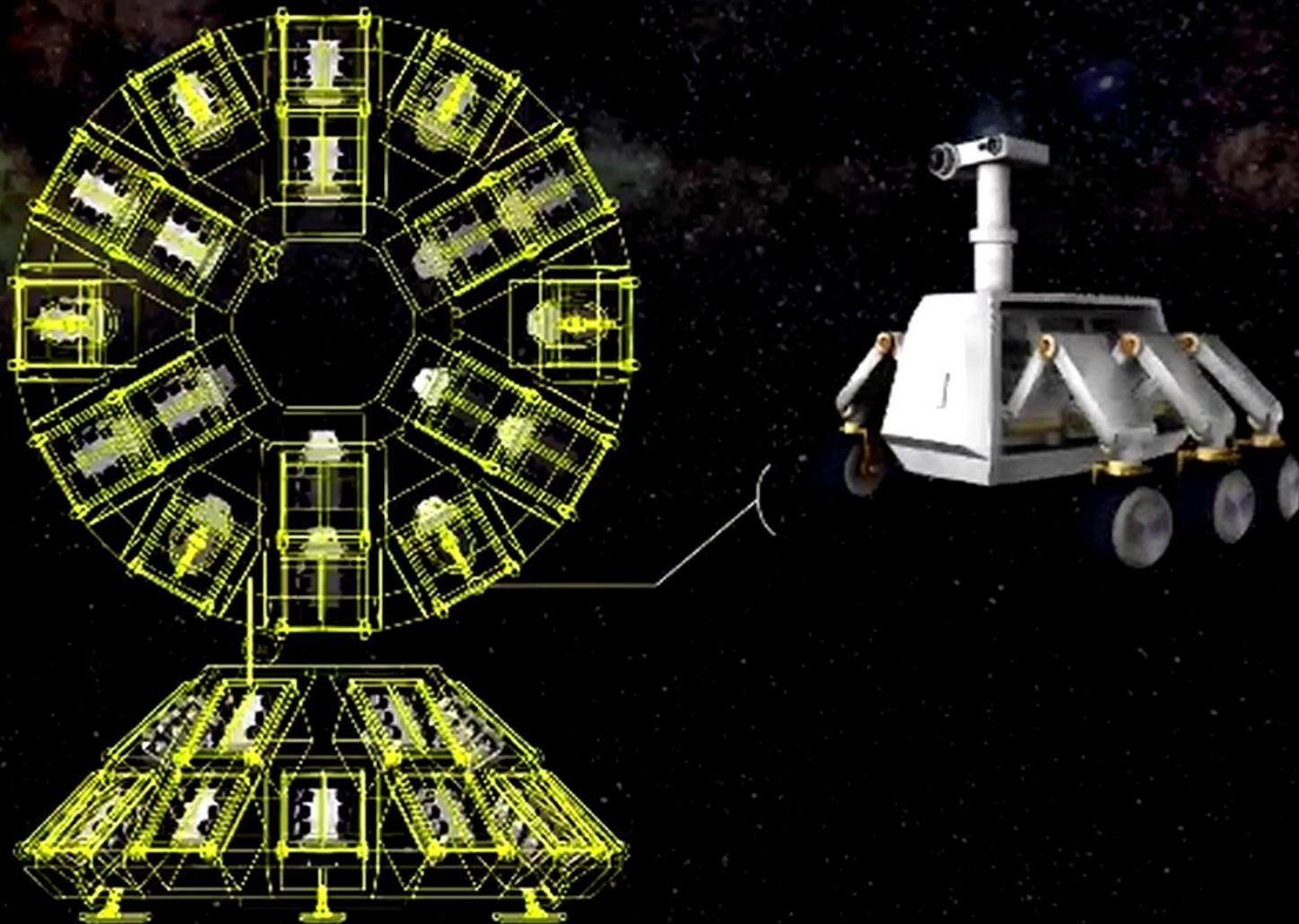
A landscape of a rocky, reddish-brown planet. In the foreground, there are several small, yellowish-green plants growing in a dry, cracked soil. In the middle ground, there are rolling hills and mountains. On the left side of one of the hills, there is a small green dome-shaped building, possibly an observatory or a research station. The sky is a clear blue with a few small white stars visible. A large, bright sun is positioned in the upper right corner of the sky, casting a warm glow over the entire scene.

Extrasolar



Habitable Zone









“How do rovers
kill each other?”

WTF?!



Violence 8-bit Multiplayer First-person
Avatar Social Linear Score
Death Puzzles MMO
Third-person Story Points Fun
Extra Lives Competition Goal Monetization
Win Platformer RPG Mobile Health
Lose Single-player

Score

Violence Multiplayer First-person

Linear MMO

Puzzles Social Achievements

Death Fun

Avatar Monetize

Points

SHMUP

Extra Lives Third-person

Goal Story

Competition Mobile

RPG Platformer

Win Single-player

Lose

8-bit

Multiplayer

First-person

Linear

MMO

Social

Achievements

Fun

Monetize

SHMUP

Extra Lives

Third-person

Story

Mobile

Platformer

Single-player





Breaking the rules

Free verse broke the rules of poetry.

Stream of consciousness broke the rules
of literature.

Surrealism broke the rules of painting.

Jazz broke the rules of music.



Who will break the rules of game development?

Where is the
Innovation
Happening?

Innovation in Monetization

Microtransactions

Free-to-play

Pay-per-play

Embedded ads

Subscription

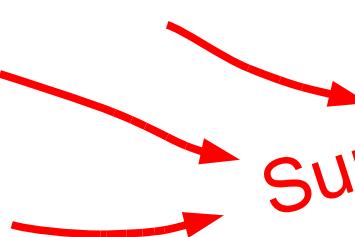
Product Placement

Public Shaming

Peer Pressure

Social Guilt

Super effective!



Innovation in Promotion

“[Our company] promotes iPhone/iPad applications
and puts them into Top 25 in 3 days.”

Click-bot farms

Pay-per-install

Click exchange

No quality necessary!

Innovation in Gameplay?

Clone what works.

Pay \$\$\$ to out-promote competitors.

Simple and effective!

Indie Catch-22:
Innovate and get cloned.
Fail to innovate and get ignored.

What's an Indie to do?



There's Good News!

The Big Players have shown no interest in innovation.

Lots of room for small teams to make waves.

Solution 1: Innovate in Form

Aesthetic
Story
Audio
Characters

Protected by copyright & hard to emulate.

Solution 2: Go Nuts

“Don't worry about people stealing your ideas. If your ideas are any good, you'll have to ram them down people's throats.”

- Computing pioneer Howard Aiken

What's your highest design principle?

Monetization:

- You're limiting your design space.
- You're competing in a saturated space.
- Clones win with advertising.
Got \$1M to spare?
- Unsatisfying design process.



What's your highest design principle?

Creating a great player experience:

- Leaves more room for innovation.
- Passionate team = better product.
- Market is driven by first-movers.
- Monetization still matters, but should not be #1.



Disclaimer: Extrasolar may suck.

The inspiration behind Extrasolar

Bring high-quality imagery to the Web.

What could we do with a GPU in the cloud?

Rover-based planetary exploration.



We're Breaking the Rules of Social Games

... but it's for good reasons.
Don't apply the rules blindly.
Consider why the rules exist.
Should they apply to your game?



Rule #1: Make it super social.



Why the rule exists: Social = viral.

Why we're breaking the rule:

- What's special is the feeling that YOU are a critical participant in a major conspiracy.
- Adding social broke that illusion.

Rule #2: Maximize time-wasting potential

Why the rule exists:

- Business model: pay or wait.

Why we're breaking the rule:

- We want a game for busy people.
- Borrowing rules from the movie industry.
- Every line of dialog should advance the story.

Rule #3: Have 2 currencies



Why it exists: Allows players of 2 types:

- Time-rich, cash-poor.
- Time-poor, cash-rich.

Why we're breaking the rule:

- Adding grind breaks the fiction.
- 1 currency with limited purchasable items.

Rule #4: Instant gratification

Why it exists:

- Satisfies animal desire for a dopamine kick.

Why we're breaking it:

- Appeal to the player's sense of wonder, not addiction.
- Increase suspense.



Rule #5: Cartoony characters with huge heads

Why the rule exists: It's approachable.

Why we're breaking it:

- I'm so over it.
- It's condescending to your audience.



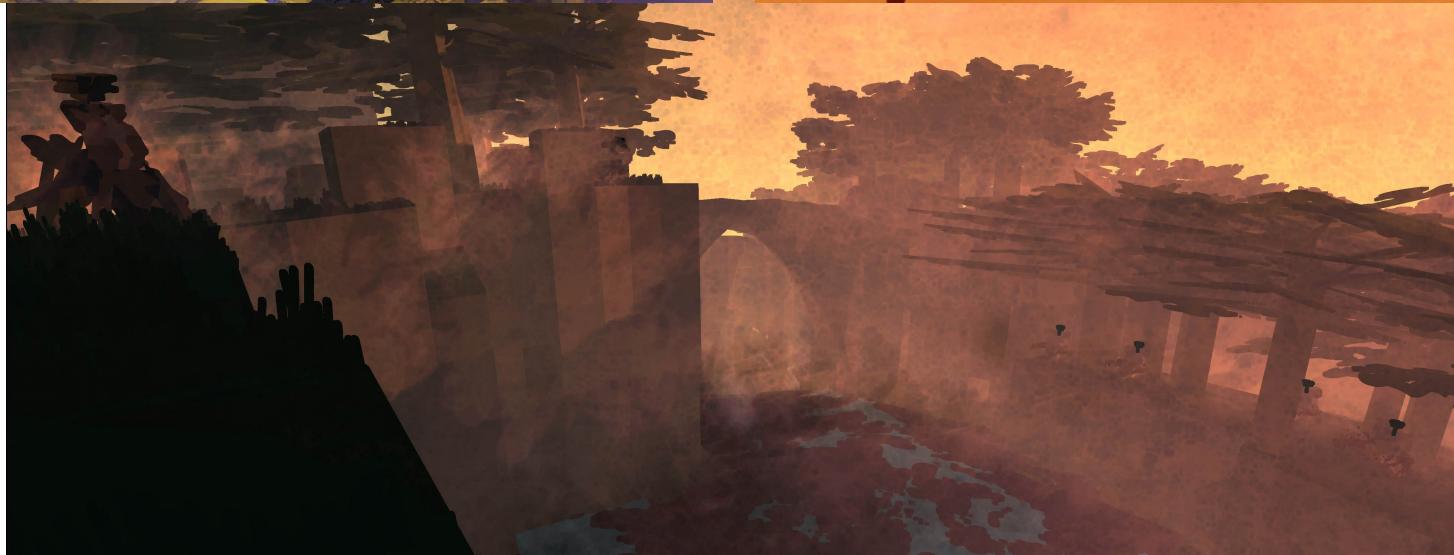
Ravenwood Fair



Bastion



Journey



Love

“But Extrasolar isn't a social game...
It's an Alternate Reality Game.”



Things we like about ARGs

Blurs fantasy and reality.

Real-time.

Transmedia storytelling.

...But ARGs also have a lot of flaws.

Breaking the rules of ARG design.

Extrasolar is single-player.

Start from the beginning at any time.

Play at your own pace.

Other Assumptions We're Violating

Assumption: You play as an avatar.

In Extrasolar, you play as yourself.

Assumption: Clear delineation of game universe.

In Extrasolar, the line is blurred.

Other Assumptions We're Violating

Assumption: Target emotion should be “fun”.

We target emotions like fear, surprise, and anxiety because they're hard to achieve.

Other art forms don't always aim for fun. Why should games?

Other game tropes: Death, competition, score, winning, losing.

How do you know which
rules to break?

Rule-Breaking Process

Iterative Design

Original design: Highly social, focus on exploration/sharing, very little story.

Current design: Strong focus on story.
Exploration a tool for advancing plot.

Get a playable prototype ASAP

Throw out the Bad Ideas.

Common design pitfalls

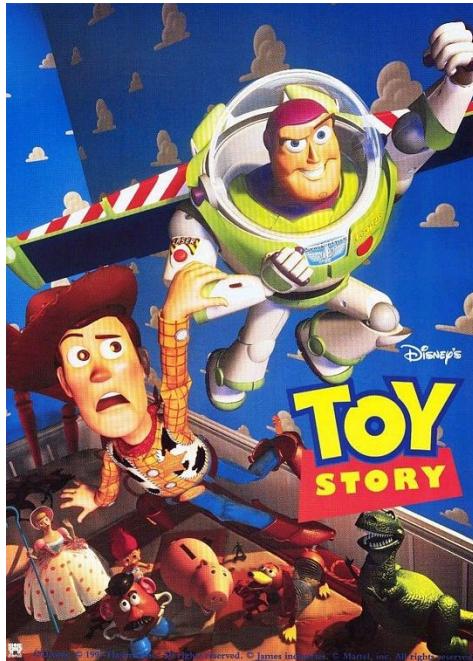
Don't spend all your time making the engine while ignoring gameplay.

Don't get entrenched on your first idea.

Don't forget to test on noobs.

Learn from more
mature industries

Lessons from Pixar: #1



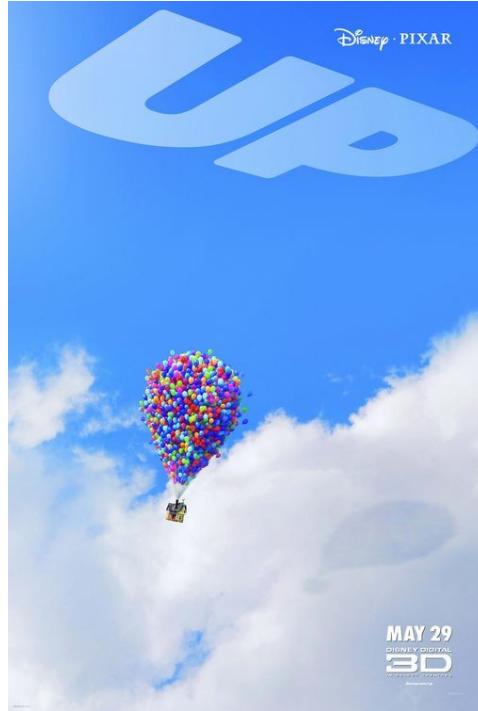
A great experience takes more than great tech.

Lessons from Pixar: #2



What attracts audience ≠ What keeps audience.

Lessons from Pixar: #3



Immersion means more than time invested.

Immersion

Some claim that immersion = spending lots of time in a game.

Our claim: immersion = emotional connection to an experience that engages your mind.

Go Forth &
Innovate!

How?



Exercise 1: Leave the phone at home

How many brilliant ideas in the shower?
vs. sitting in front of the computer?
Innovation comes during unstructured time.
Portable devices turn unstructured time into
content-consumption time.

Exercise 2:

To unconstrain thinking, think with constraints



More buttons = more better



One button



Canabalt



Faraway

Time moves forward



Retro/Grade

Braid



Space is contiguous



Where is My Heart?



Portal

~~Key emotion should be "fun"~~



Dear Esther

Amnesia: The Dark Descent



~~There must be a screen.~~



Johan Sebastian Joust

What are *your* constraints?

Work around your shortcomings.

How can you best use your strengths?

What are your unique talents?

Exercise 3: Be Inspired







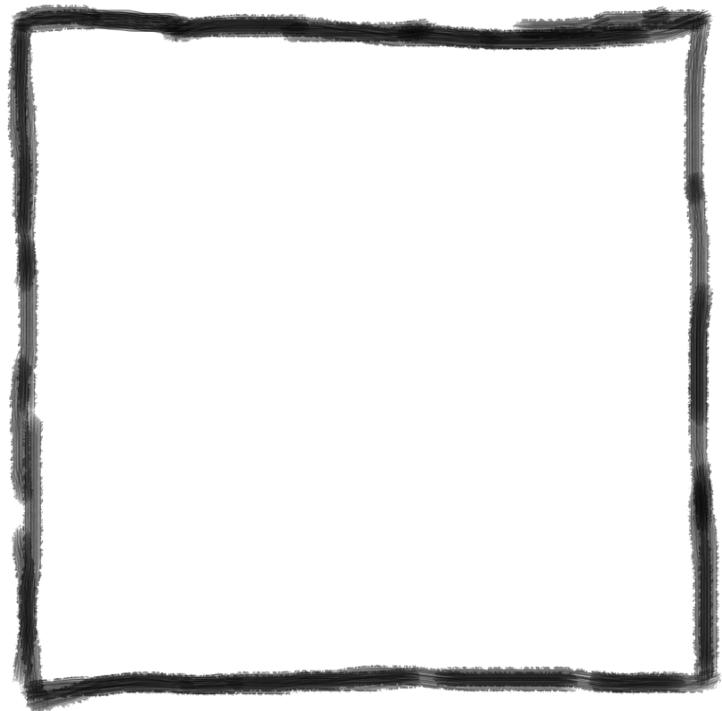


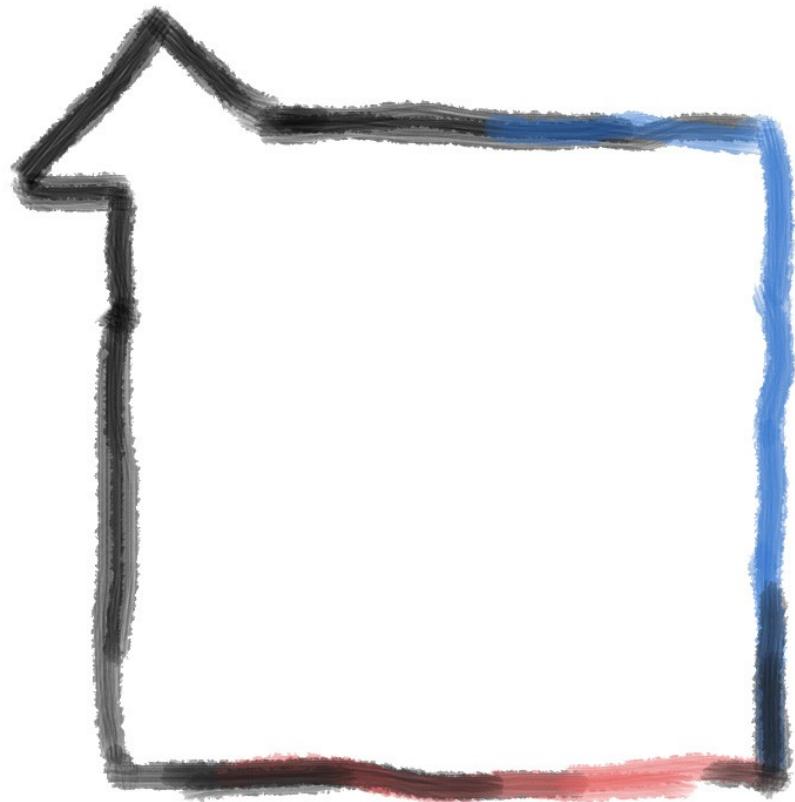












Game Over

Slides at lazy8studios.com