Postmortem: Gastronaut Studios' *Small Arms*

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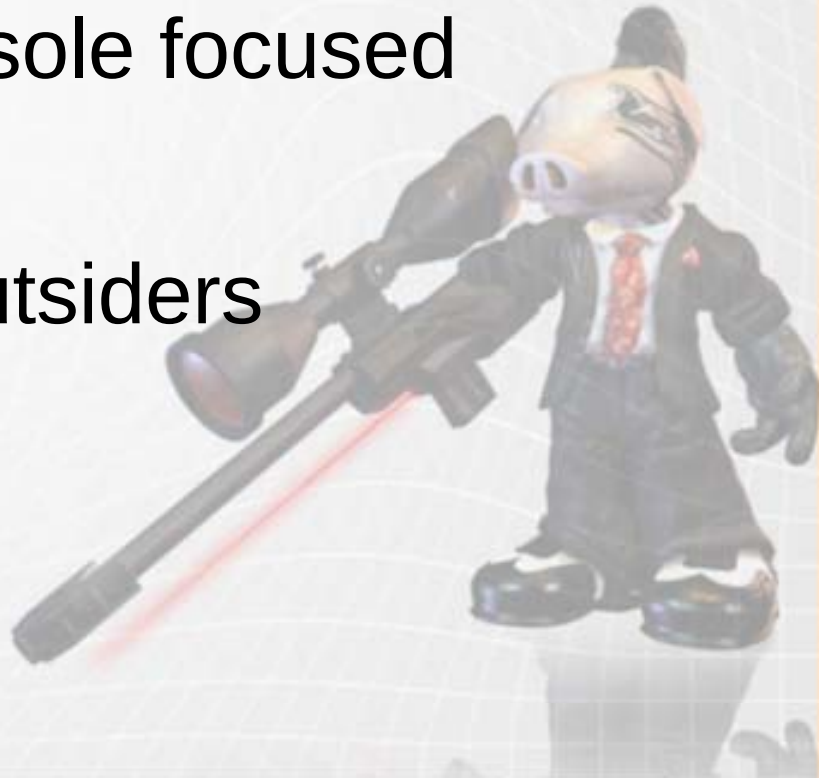
Gastronaut Overview

- Team assembled after ‘Fuzzee Fever’ -- Jake’s Original XBLA game.
- Downloadable console focused
- “Sociable Games”
- Band of industry outsiders



Small Arms Overview

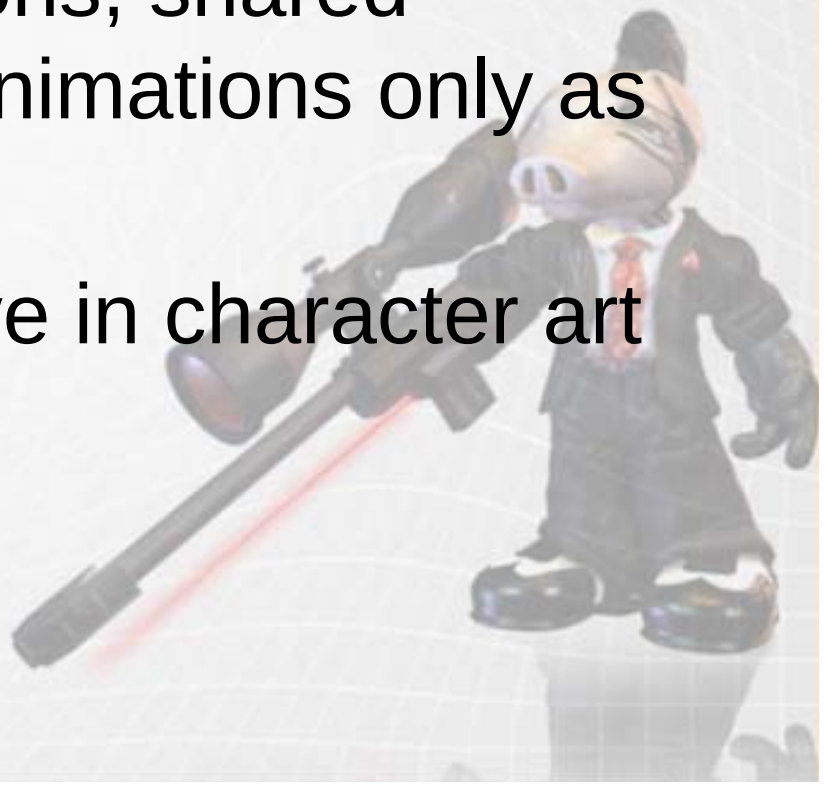
“’Small Arms’ is an intense but simple multiplayer brawling game with the action and precision of an arcade shooter. Players can jump from platform to platform shooting each other to pieces with 360° aim...“

- 2 programmers, 2 artists
- External audio team
- Microsoft XBLA Team
- Approx. 1 year in development
- 12 unique characters, 8 fighting arenas
- Online/Offline multiplayer focus

What went right!

Design and Scope

- Attainable by small team
- ‘Safety First’ software approach
- Re-usable animations, shared skeleton, custom animations only as needed
- Able to over achieve in character art

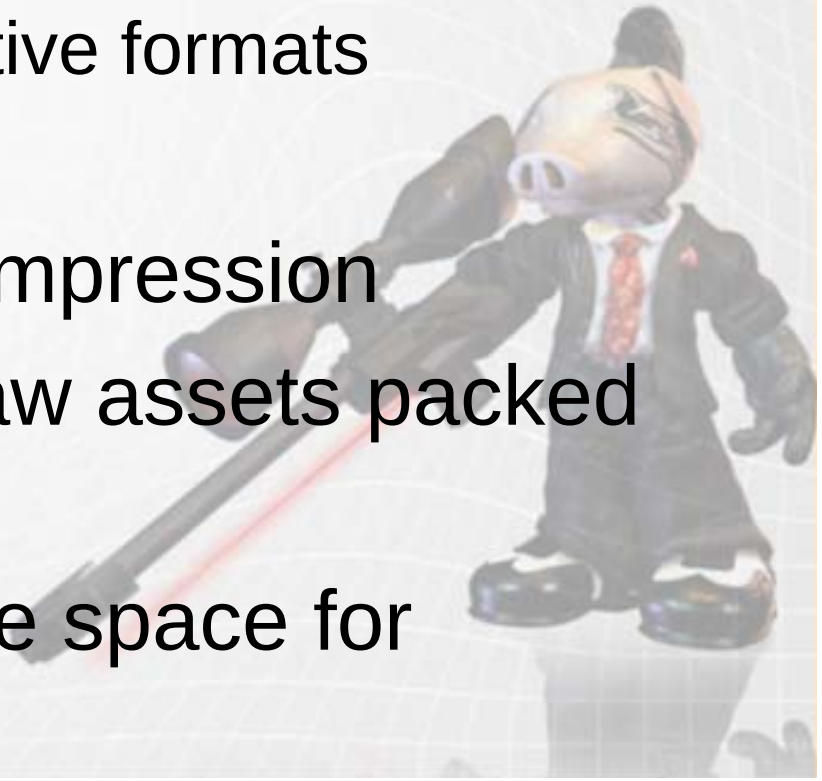


Custom Engine

- Highly portable engine.
- Designed from scratch for downloadable games
- 100% C++ but inspired by Java
- Threads aren't that scary. Used heavily

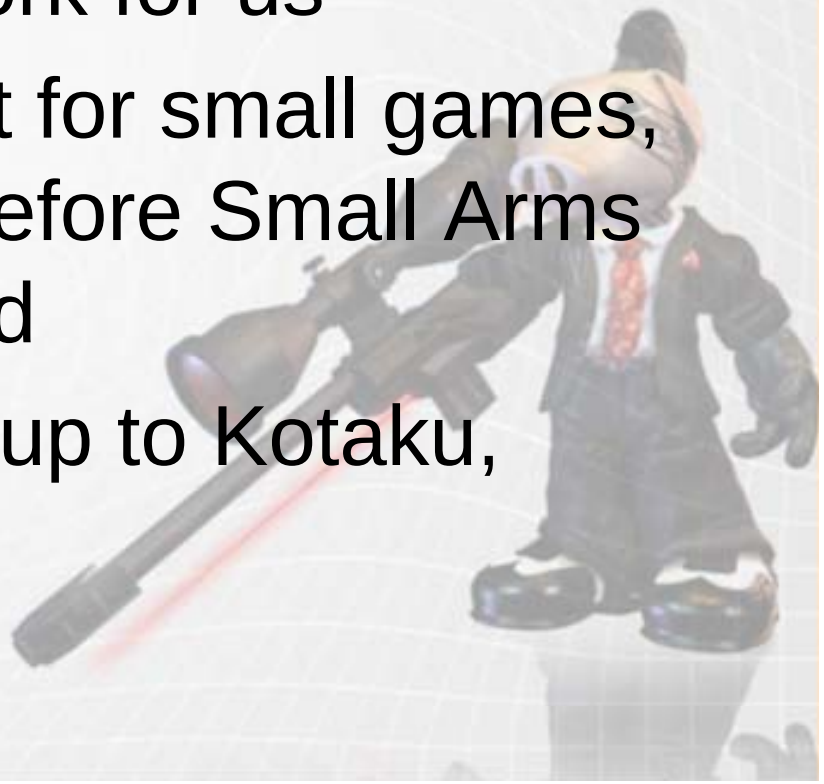
Data Processing Tool

- Heavy data processing at build time.
  - -Export all data to raw formats(less plugin work)
  - - Process data to native formats
  - - Compress like hell
- Load times VS. Compression
- Well over 1gig of raw assets packed into the 50m game
- Don’t forget to leave space for Localization



Grassroots Press

- No blog or fansite is to small
- Give the exclusive to the little guy
- They did the leg work for us
- E3 – Largely a bust for small games, Delayed reaction before Small Arms footage was noticed
- Eventually made it up to Kotaku, Joystiq, 1up etc…



Outsourced Audio

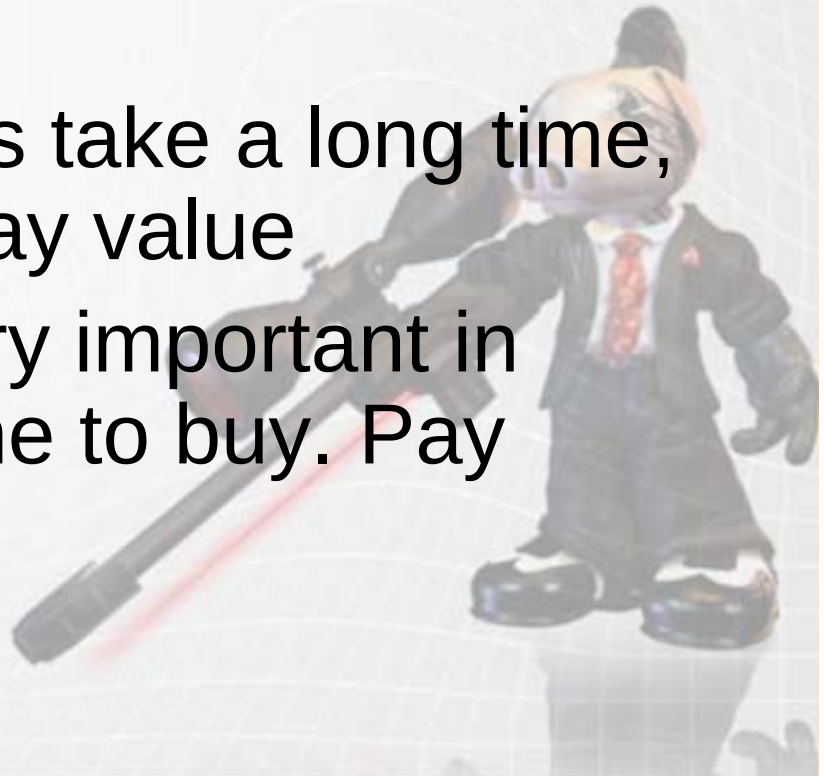
- Contractor VS. Audio firm
- Daunting for a small team --
- But, well worth the cost
- Worked as external team
- Weekly sync meeting
- XACT is awesome

http://www.omniinteractiveaudio.com/

What went wrong! ☹

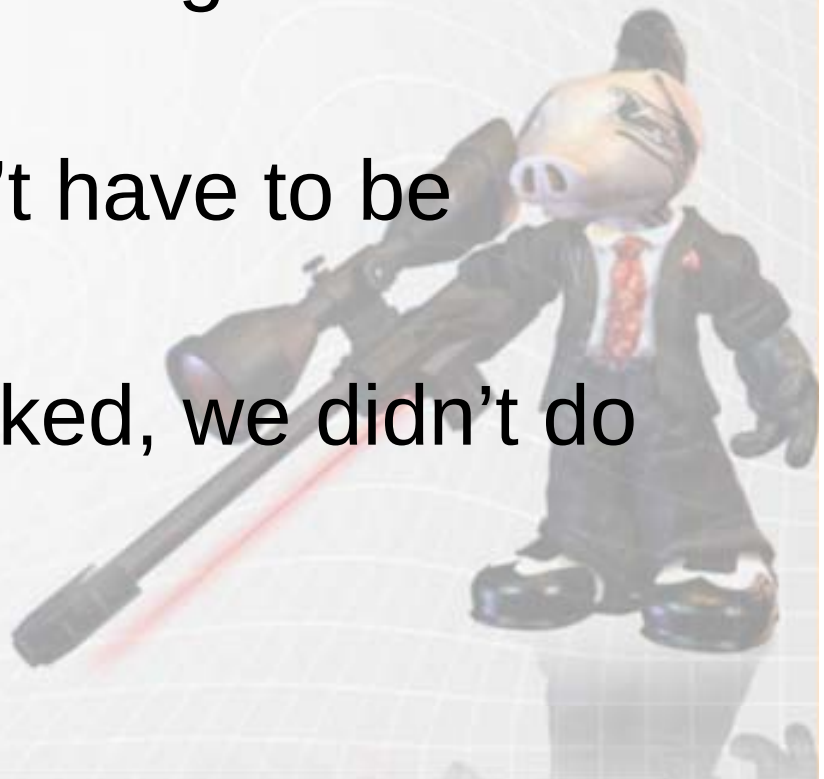
Un-focused single player

- Intended as a Multiplayer focused title
- Overly ambitious plans for story and bosses
- Unique boss battles take a long time, add little or no replay value
- Single Player is very important in convincing someone to buy. Pay more attention to it!



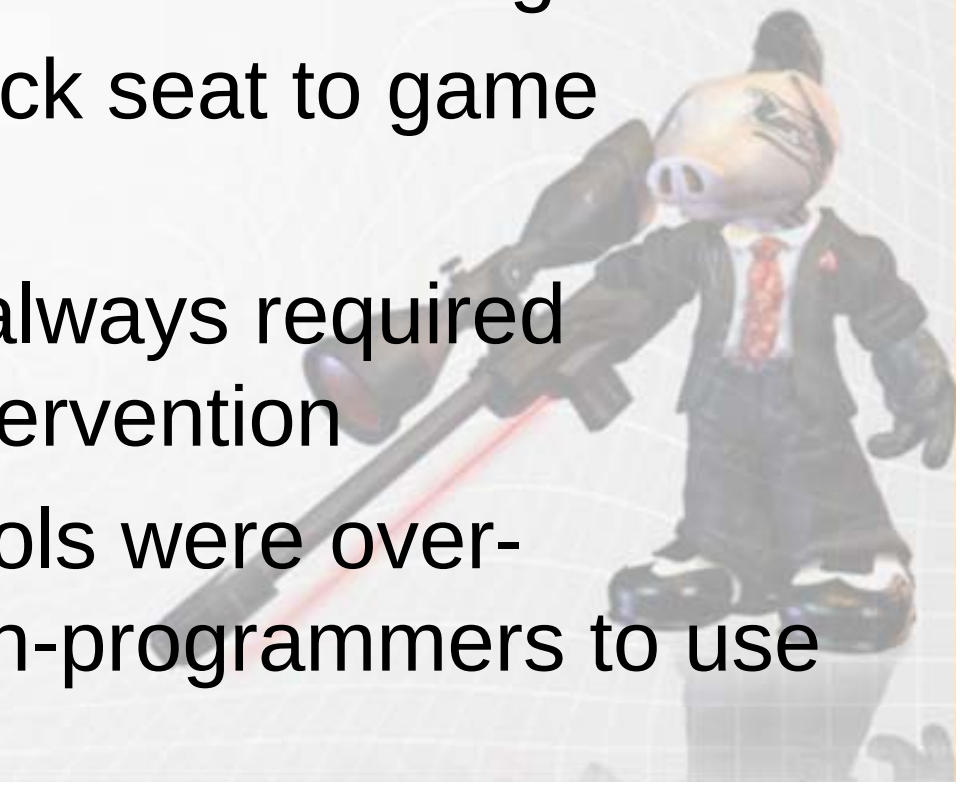
Not enough user testing

- Too little external input on gameplay
- Controls difficult for beginners, turned off people to the game in some cases
- User testing doesn’t have to be behind a mirror
- “Party Testing” worked, we didn’t do it for Small Arms



Art Pipeline

- Poor organization, hard to find the newest item
- Broke version control with large files
- Tools took a back seat to game features
- Art integration always required programmer intervention
- Level design tools were over-powered for non-programmers to use efficiently

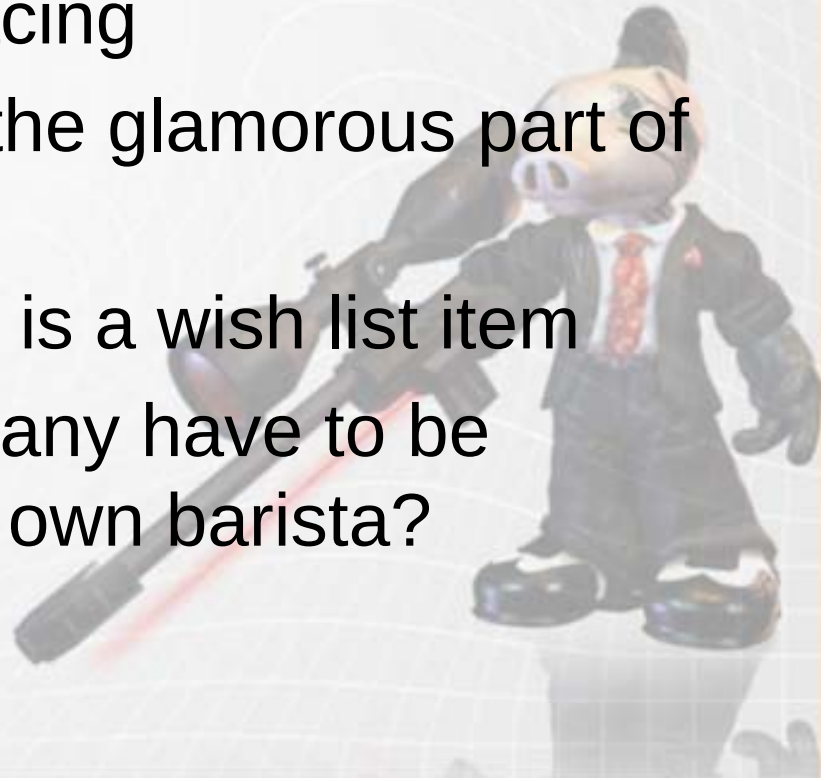


E3 Crunch

- Our first and thankfully last
- Wasted audio pass (no-one heard)
- Bad for the code
- Bad for the staff
- Bad for the dogs

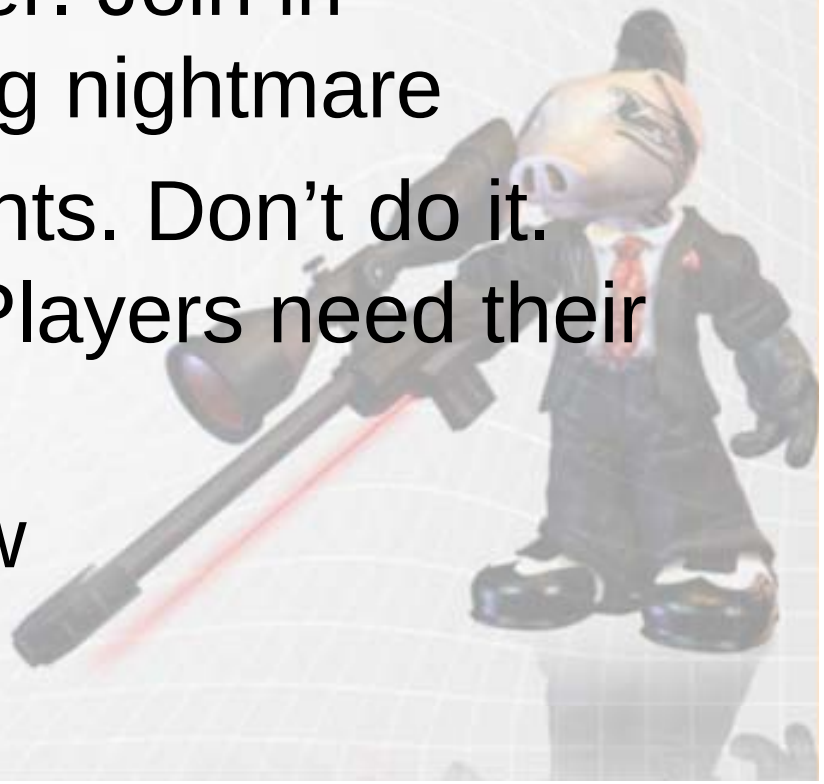
Missing Staff

- An internal producer would have been useful
- We spent lots of valuable coding time organizing and interfacing
- Filling out forms isn’t the glamorous part of game dev
- In house tester or two is a wish list item
- How big does a company have to be before it can have it’s own barista?



Shipped Bugs

- Pressure to ship before holidays
- Don’t pressure testers
- Complex multiplayer. Join in progress is a testing nightmare
- Broken achievements. Don’t do it. You’ll get threats. Players need their Gamerscore
- Patch out soon/now



Q & A

- Feel free to ask anything we want to answer