



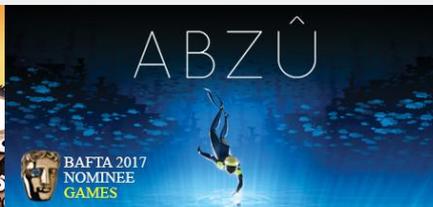
Kingdoms and Castles Post Mortem

Peter Angstadt (@petey123567)



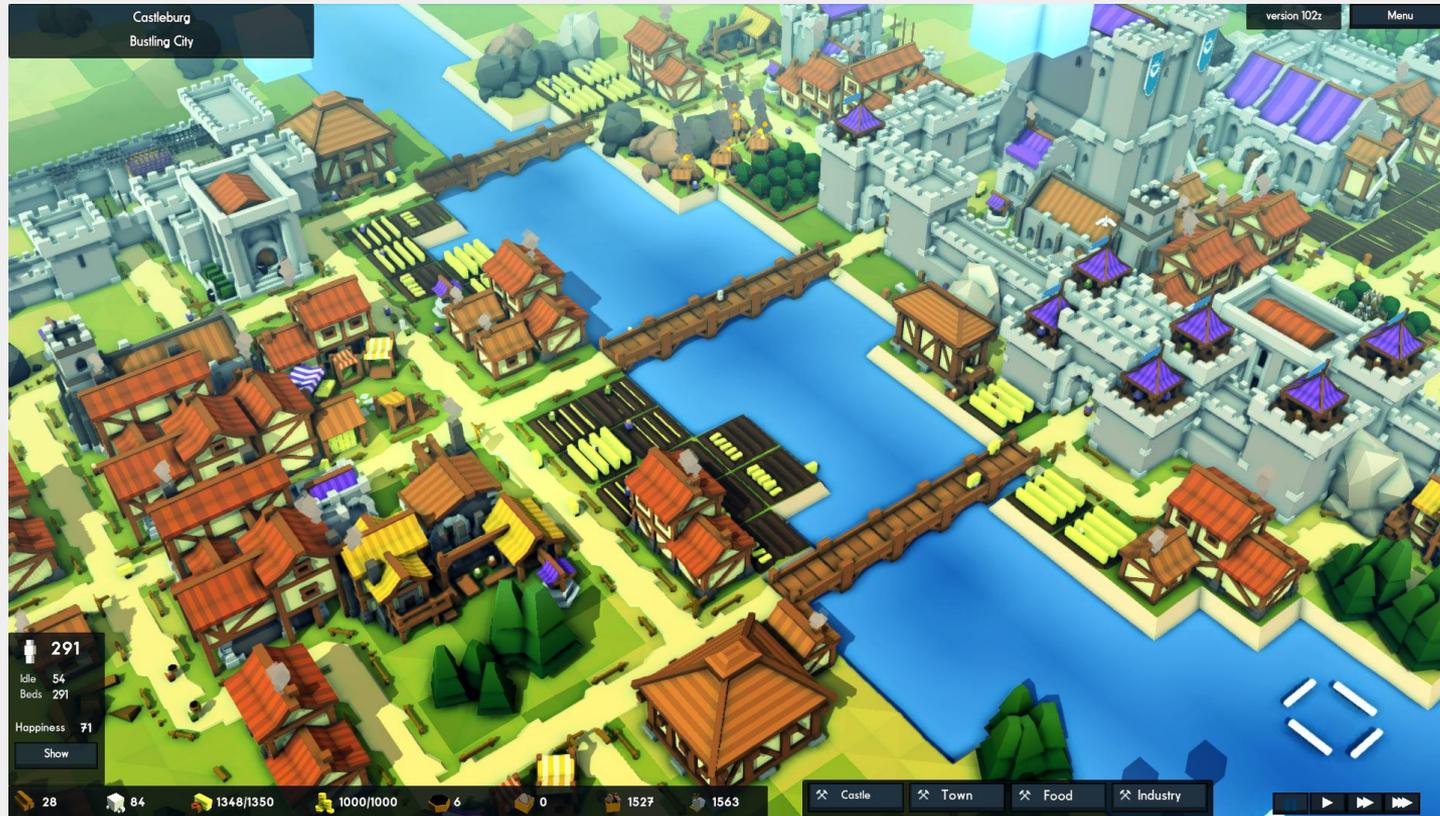
Who am I?

- Co-Founder at  **LION SHIELD**
- Programmer and designer (mostly)
- 10+ years making games:



What is Kingdoms and Castles?

Build and manage a medieval city!



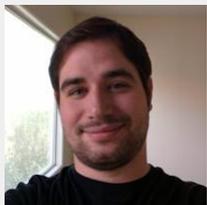
Development Overview

Two main developers:



Programming, Design, Art

Peter Angstadt



Programming, Design

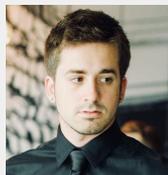
Michael Peddicord

Three contractors:



Music

Jason Taylor



SFX

Steve Green



SFX

Chad Freeman

Development Overview

Development time: ~1.5 “wall clock” years*

Built on: Unity with these plugins

- I2Loc
- Colorful FX
- SSAO Pro
- TMPPro
- DOTween

How did it go?



650,000+ copies sold to date.

Everyone stayed happy, healthy, and friends.



Market Fit Testing



Market Fit Testing

Goal: Find out...

1. Are people interested in the game at all?
2. How big is the market?
3. How much time should we take?

See also:

- Ryan Clark's *"What Makes an Indie Hit?: How to Choose the Right Design"* article on gamasutra
- *"What is "Marketing First" Game Development?"* on Ooblet's Patreon blog

Travel Back in Time

Market testing, why?

Rewind 5 years to my first indie game:



First Indie Game - Cannon Brawl

- 2D action strategy, RTS/artillery hybrid
- 2 people, 3 years development time



Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

Cannon Brawl



Developer: Publisher: Turtle Sandbox

Genre:

Release date: Sep 19, 2014 Price: \$14.99

Score rank: 80% **Userscore: 91%** Old userscore: 90%

Owners: 50,000 .. 100,000

Kingdoms and Castles



Developer: Lion Shield, LLC Publisher: Lion Shield, LLC

Genre: Indie, Simulation, Strategy

Release date: Jul 20, 2017 Price: \$9.99

Score rank: 61% **Userscore: 84%** Old userscore: 84%

Owners: 500,000 .. 1,000,000

Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

Youtube Devlog Videos - Every video has between 300-800 views

Never grows



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 12 - Flamethrower and...

Pete Angstadt
720 views • 4 years ago



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 11 - The Armory

Pete Angstadt
416 views • 4 years ago



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 10 - Who needs 9

Pete Angstadt
409 views • 5 years ago



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 8 - Nightmare Mode

Pete Angstadt
607 views • 5 years ago



Cannon Brawl Alpha - Update 7 - New Map

Pete Angstadt
383 views • 5 years ago

Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

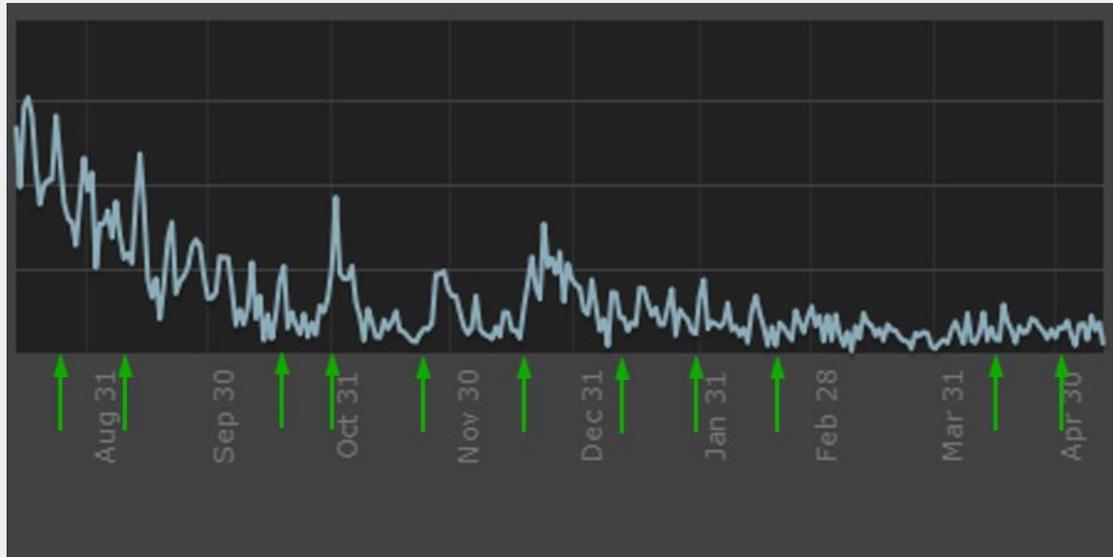
Steam Greenlight Run - would have liked more yes's



Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

Early Access Launch - makes it into the steam top 20

Updating seems to make no difference



Help Grow the Audience...?



+

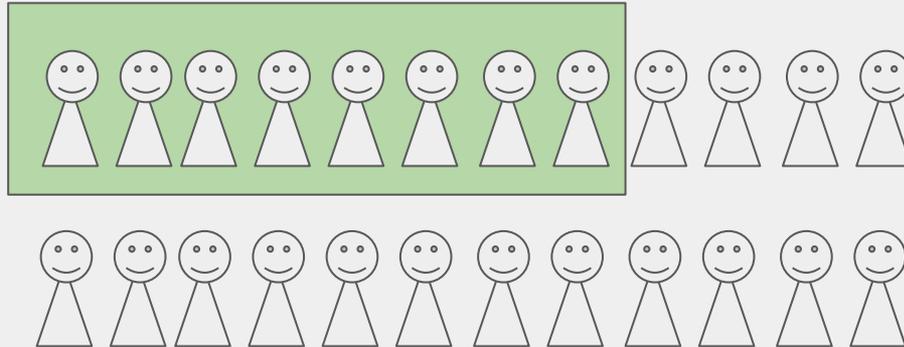
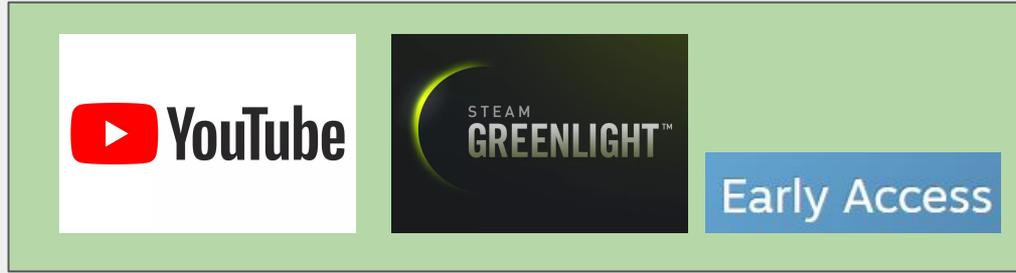


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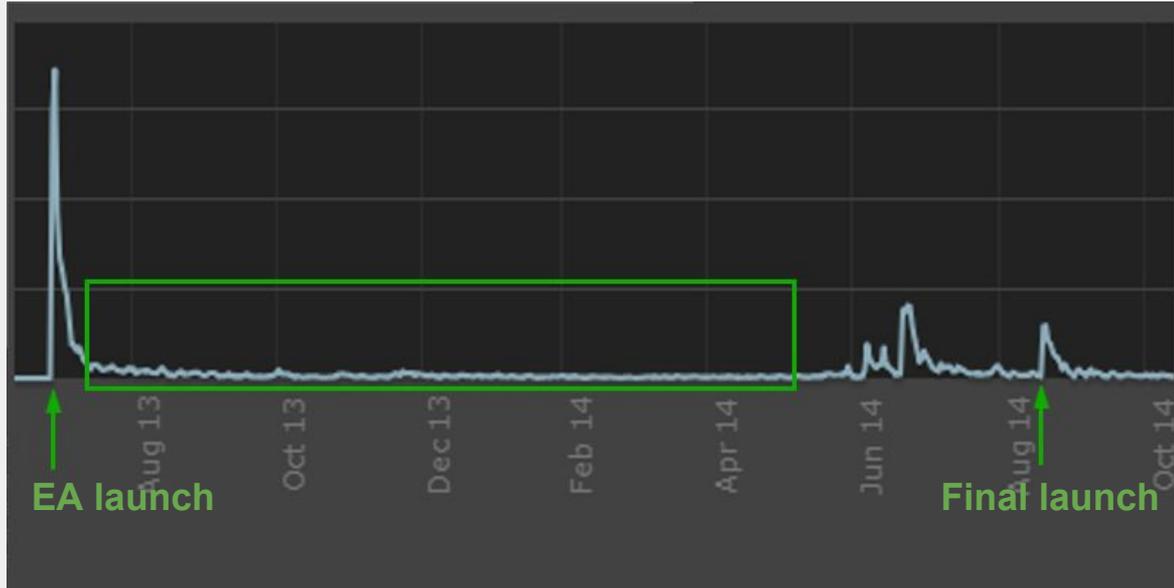
?

Informs Size of Potential Audience



Market Fit Testing - Cannon Brawl

Modest sales, but the market wasn't as large as we hoped



Market Fit Testing - Kingdoms and Castles

Market test early and continuously:

- **Should we make the game at all?**
 - **1mo** (and onward) - post gifs on twitter
 - **3mos** - Steam Greenlight Concept

- **How much time should we invest?**
 - **8mos** - Crowdfunding + Steam Greenlight
 - **18mos** - Steam Launch



Note about timeline: this project was part time for much of its pre-launch life (about 10 hrs/week), time estimates are compressed to read as if we did full-time (35 hours a week).

1 Month In - Should We This At All?

Step 1 - Post on twitter, test the waters

Success Criteria: getting something retweeted 25+ times



1 Month In - Testing with Twitter

After a few tries, got there with this gif (25 retweets / 40 likes):



Another success (129 retweets / 417 likes):



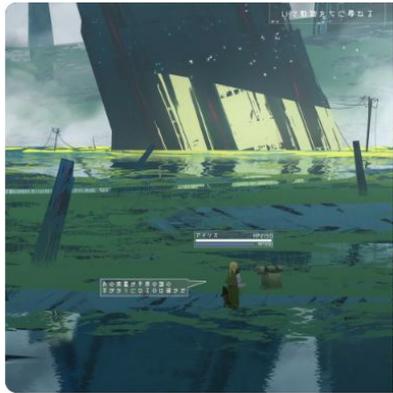
Other People Testing on Twitter

More examples from other folks.

These resonate, worth taking to the next step!

 **あすてろid** @asteroid_jil · Aug 25
ずっと雨が降らないずっと雨上がりの平原で、冒険しながら
き明かすゲームです。

[Translate Tweet](#)



44 6.0K 23K

 **Michał Mrosczak** @ultek85 · Apr 20
Last try with day-night cycle 🖤

#voxels #voxelart #magicavoxel #indiedev #screenshotsaturday #animation #render #bfs



GIF

20 112 657

 **Staggart Creations** @_staggart_ · 2 Nov 2017

Making a playable art showcase demo, which kind of turned into the premise of an exploration game #unity3d #gamedev #assetstore



0:02 55.1K views

97 1.1K 5.0K

3 Months In - Testing with Steam Greenlight

Step 2 - Made a Steam Greenlight Ideas page

Success Criteria: Get into the top 100 ideas, generate 50+ comments

Kingdoms and Castles [Concept]

Description Discussions 7 Announcements 3 Comments 197

Oh dear sire, rats have eaten 28 food!
My lord, 10 people killed and I decided to stay to serve you.
Sire, the peasants grow unhappy, and food is low, although...



Population: 170 Min: 0/1
Supplies: 6/6

Genre: Strategy, Simulation
Platforms: PC, Mac, Linux
Languages: English
Players: Single-player

Posted Aug 29, 2016 @ 8:02pm
Updated Dec 4, 2016 @ 3:49pm

Favorite Follow Share Add to Collection



3 Months In - Testing with Steam Greenlight

Made it into the top 100 ideas and results went beyond expectations:



Public User Comments (197) Private Developer Comments (0)

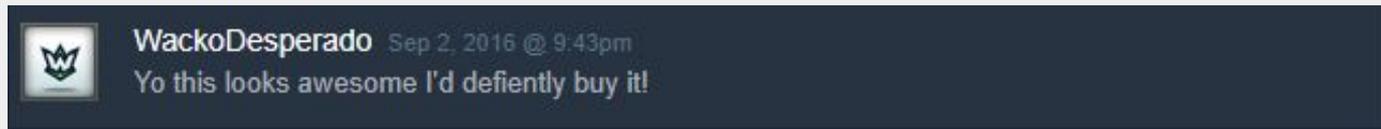
197 Comments ✓ Subscribe to thread (?) < 1 ... 14 15 16 17 18 ... 20 >

The screenshot shows the header of a Steam Greenlight comment thread. It features two tabs: 'Public User Comments (197)' and 'Private Developer Comments (0)'. Below the tabs, there is a comment count '197 Comments' which is circled in yellow, a 'Subscribe to thread (?)' button with a checkmark, and a pagination bar showing page numbers from 1 to 20.



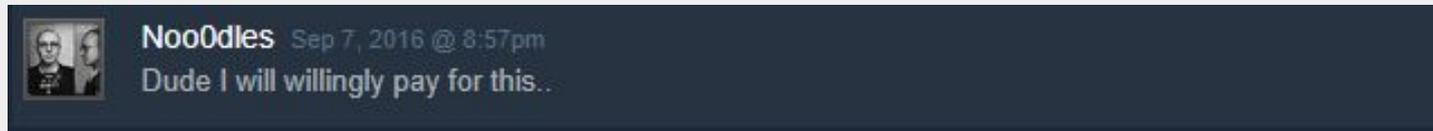
 **Fergus** Sep 2, 2016 @ 8:06am
This looks awesome. I hope I can play this sometime soon. Looks to be my kind of game tbh

A comment from user Fergus, dated Sep 2, 2016 at 8:06am. The comment text is: "This looks awesome. I hope I can play this sometime soon. Looks to be my kind of game tbh".



 **WackoDesperado** Sep 2, 2016 @ 9:43pm
Yo this looks awesome I'd defiently buy it!

A comment from user WackoDesperado, dated Sep 2, 2016 at 9:43pm. The comment text is: "Yo this looks awesome I'd defiently buy it!".



 **Noo0dles** Sep 7, 2016 @ 8:57pm
Dude I will willingly pay for this..

A comment from user Noo0dles, dated Sep 7, 2016 at 8:57pm. The comment text is: "Dude I will willingly pay for this..".

Should we commit to making this game? Yes.

Early Art Style Feedback

Also learned we were drawing too many comparisons to Stone Hearth:

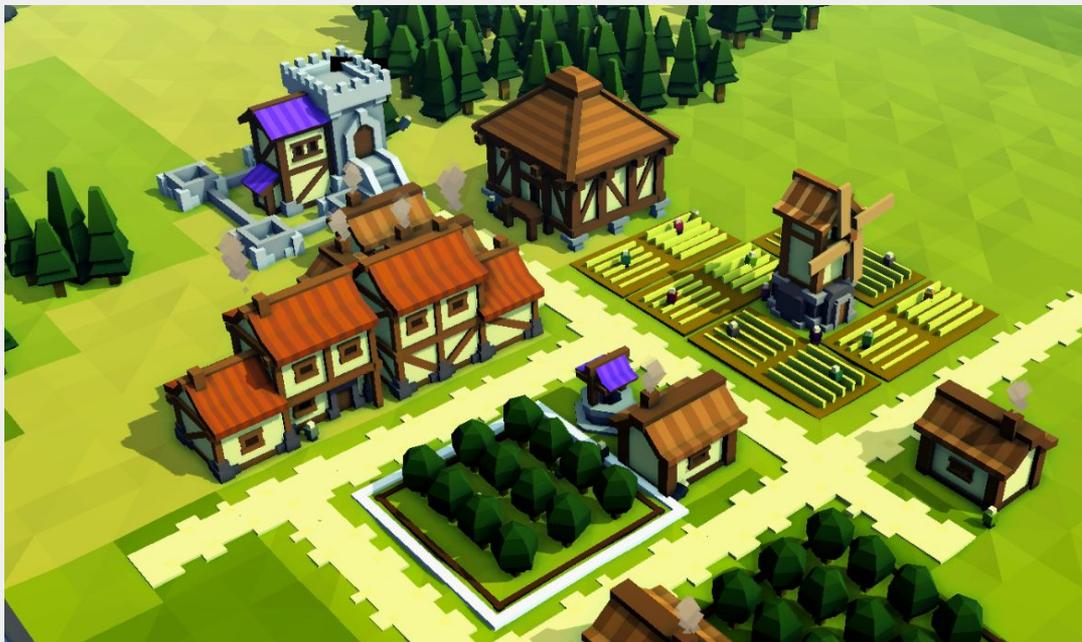


Tuxu ==JeepC== Sep 2, 2016 @ 2:32pm
So, how is this better then stonhearth?



Art Style Rework

Re-did all the assets in low-poly style to better differentiate:



Crowdfunding/Steam Greenlight

Step 3: Commit 6 months of dev time to prepare a:

- Crowdfunding campaign on Fig
- Real Steam Greenlight run

Scope Criteria: Being Greenlit and level of success of crowdfunding



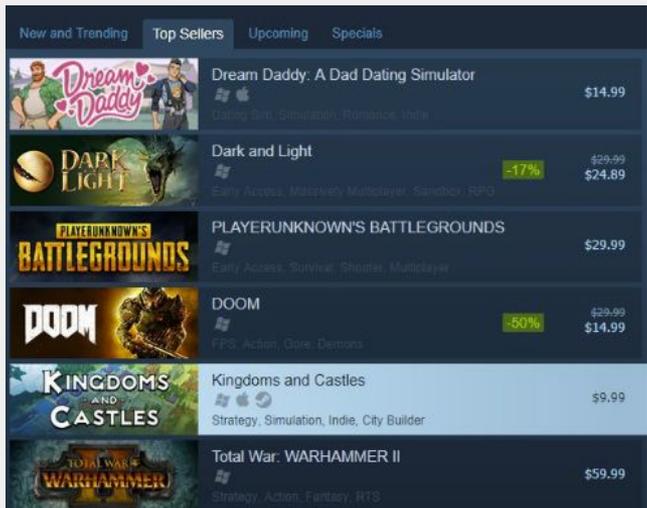
8 Months In - Crowdfunding/Steam Greenlight

Now we know how to scope and how much time to invest.



18 Months In - Steam Launch

Launch Time - it goes great! Gets into the top 5, but unable to unseat PUBG



The screenshot shows the Steam Top Sellers page with the following games listed:

Game Title	Price	Discount
Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator	\$14.99	
Dark and Light	\$24.89	-17% (from \$29.99)
PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS	\$29.99	
DOOM	\$14.99	-50% (from \$29.99)
Kingdoms and Castles	\$9.99	
Total War: WARHAMMER II	\$59.99	

Do we continue expanding after launch? Yep!



Clear Player Fantasy



Player Fantasy

“Ability of the player to imagine what the game is like without actually having played it.”

Can be anything, but must be **clear**

See also: Alex Hutchison’s “Designing Games to Sell” GDC 2012 talk

Player Fantasy - Examples

Assassin's Creed - "Be a cool assassin ancient times"



Player Fantasy - Examples

Rocket League - “Play soccer with rocket powered cars”



Player Fantasy - Examples

Papers Please - “Be a border control agent in a dystopian country”



Player Fantasy - Examples

Cannon Brawl - “???”



Player Fantasy - Kingdoms and Castles

Player fantasy is super clear - “Build and manage a medieval city.”

Aim to communicate it through every avenue possible: title, trailer and screenshots





Inventing Design & Existing Metaphors



Inventing Design Takes Time

Cannon Brawl invents and communicates lots of new design to the player.



Inventing Design - An Example

The Shield Tower: Hard to figure out how it works without being taught.

Long process of playtesting,
reworking, repeat...



Too Many New/Repurposed Metaphors



Required 25+ major revisions on the tutorial levels (and hundreds of minor revisions).

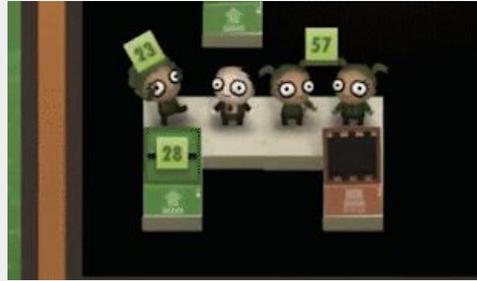
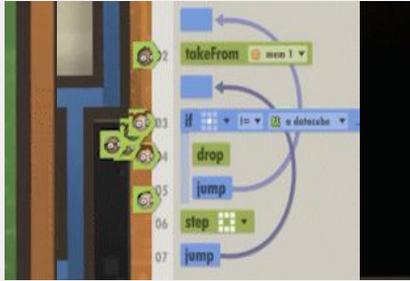
Use Existing Metaphors

Kingdoms and Castles is built on existing metaphors (farms, houses, roads):



When to Invent?

Can make sense if it's core to the experience.



And/or if you have time!



Simple Art Style



Simplify and Cheat

Super simple low-poly 3D style

Very fast and easy to make and revise stuff.



Simple Primitives

Buildings made of simple primitives.

To make new buildings just kitbash old ones together.

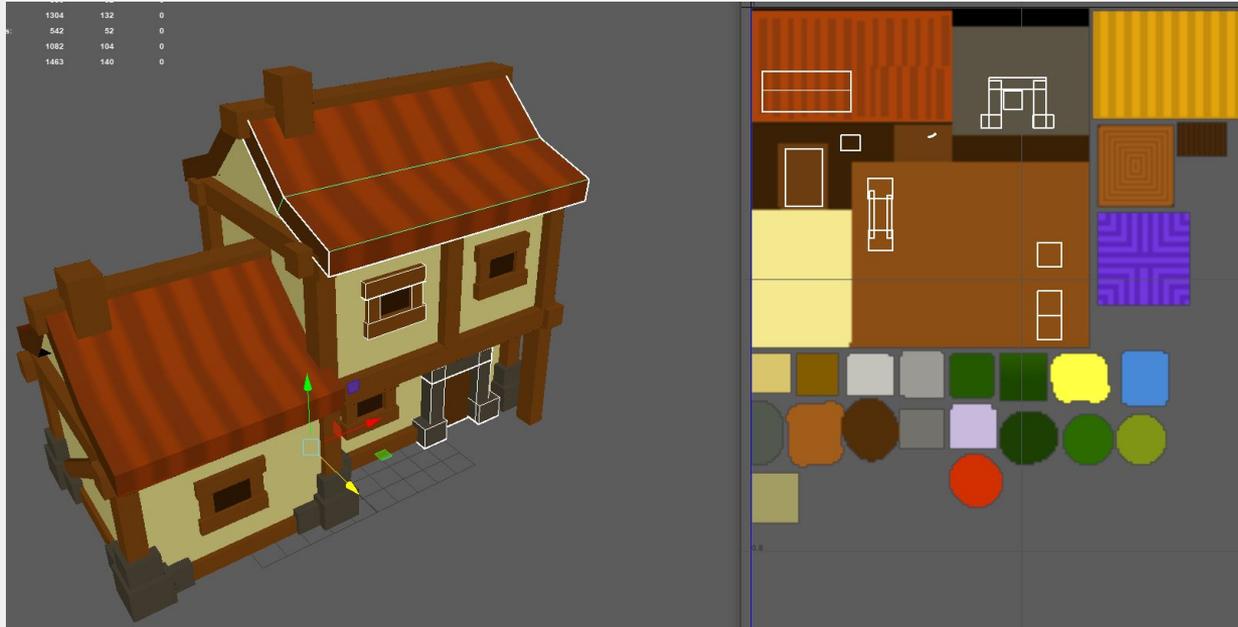


+5 min



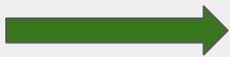
UV Cheating

- Same texture used for every model (just blobs of color)
- Drag UVs from different parts of the model on the desired color blob

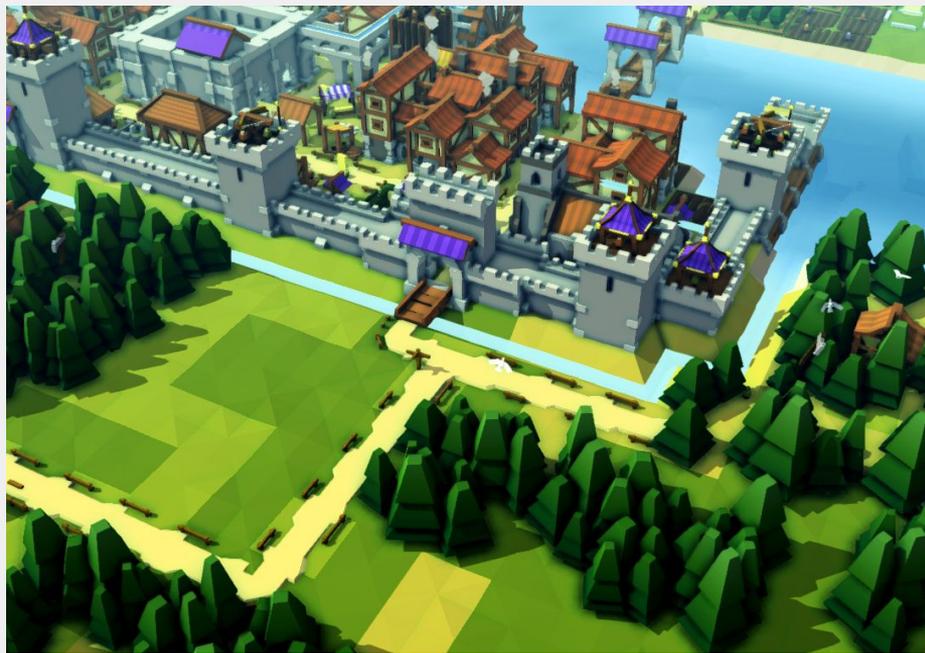
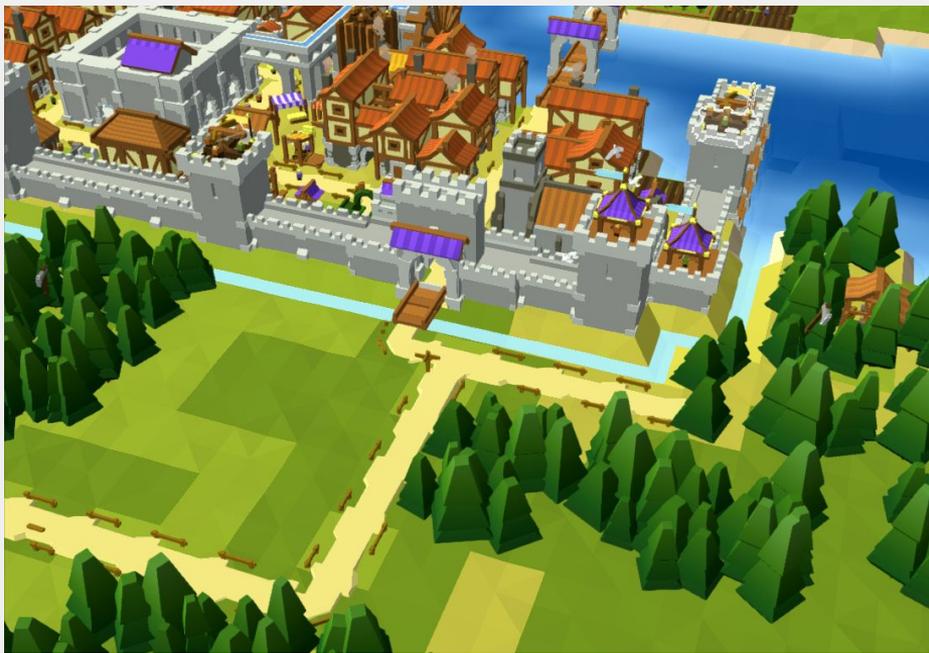


Carried by Post Effects

Raw textured lighting



Shadows, SSAO, color correction, fog



Bonus of Simplicity

Easier to forgive clipping other weirdness because the peasants are simple pegs.



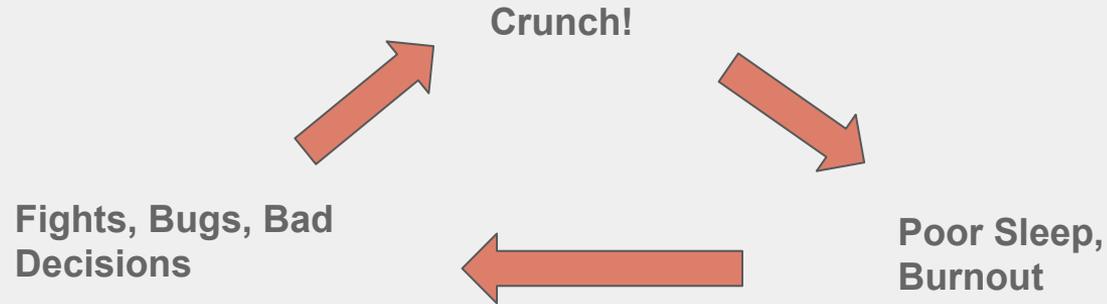


Studio Culture



Studio Culture - No Crunch

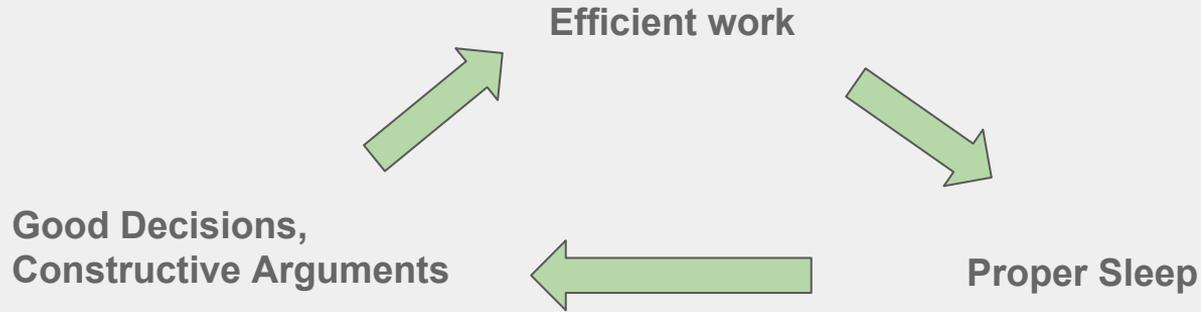
Don't get caught in the vicious cycle:



See also: [Why We Sleep](#), by Matthew Walker PhD

Sleep is the Most Important Resource

Instead stay well rested, healthy, and spiral upward:



Crunch Hurts Strategic Decision Making

Decisions in game development:

- **Tactical Decision:** “let’s improve our skill tree by adding these three skills”
- **Strategic Decision:** “does our game even need a skill tree at all?”

A Thought Experiment

Crunching already and we see a similar game.

It's menu/ui art looks real good! (Northgard)



ours looks...



“Let’s redo our UI! We’ll put in more hours to make this game better!”

Tactical Decision Pitfalls

We're operating mostly tactically.

Only looking at a small part of what this decision means.



Tactical Decision Pitfalls

Heated disagreement!

All new UI takes longer
at higher quality bar!

**Put off reworking core
design problems!**



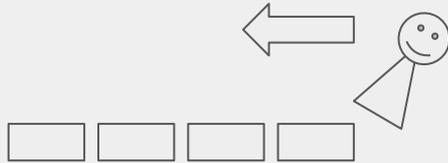
Crunch -> Poor Sleep -> Wasted Work

The final result: **Realize there's three months left and the game isn't compelling.**



Crunch -> Poor Sleep -> Wasted Work

Trudge back up the decision tree and take a different path.



Could have been avoided.

Evaluating strategically



~~“Let’s redo our UI! We’ll put in more hours to make this game better!”~~

“No redo, our UI is serviceable. Players will get more value if our mid game decisions are more interesting/we fix this dominant strategy/etc...”

A Strategic/Tactical Crunch Scenario

Travel a more efficient path down the decision tree from the beginning:



See Through the Myth



Conscious/subconscious attitude: **“we must suffer for art” = we must crunch**

Games Without Crunch



and more!

(from Jan Willem Nijsen's twitter thread)

Lots of successful games are made without crunch!



Marketing



Marketing

Mostly not distinct from making the game itself.

No press hounding. No trade shows. No paid influencer coverage.

Maximize appeal and find time effective places to show it.

See also: *“What is “Marketing First” Game Development?”* from the Ooblet Patreon Blog

Marketing - Help from Fig



Able to convert some of their mailing list subscribers

Ran facebook video ads

Helped with press releases around the campaign and final launch

Marketing - Youtube

Biggest Impact: organically popular on Youtube

Viewers must be able to act:

- Newsletter sign up
- Wishlist on Steam
- Buy (become a 'late backer')



NEW Halloween Update! GIANT Wolf Army vs Knights! (Kingdoms and Castles Update Gameplay)

BaronVonGames • 82K views • 2 months ago

Welcome back to Kingdoms and Castles Halloween update gameplay! Today we will be checking out the new items in the game such ...



Cemeteries update - Kingdoms and Castles #54

wolf grim • 274 views • 2 months ago

►Subscribe for more great content ►Twitter : <https://twitter.com/wolfgrim1> ►Instagram : <https://instagram.com> ...



Kingdoms and Castles - Ep. 1 - Keep Building and Food Production! - Kingdoms and Castles Gameplay

Blitz • 998K views • 1 year ago

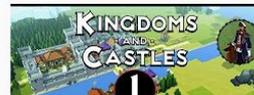
Welcome to Kingdoms and Castles part 1! Kingdoms and Castles is a medieval city building game where you construct castles to ...



BUILDING THE GREATEST KINGDOM | Kingdoms And Castles #1

jacksepticeye • 1.3M views • 1 year ago

Join me for a relaxing adventure. Building my very own empire in Kingdoms and Castles! Banished ... CC



Dragons AND Vikings?! | Kingdoms and Castles Gameplay #1

Aurathas • 2K views • 2 months ago

Dragons AND Vikings?! | Let's Play Kingdoms and Castles Gameplay #1: Our budding new kingdom, managing to surmount the ...

Marketing - Youtube Wins

Why did it catch on with youtube?

- Game is clear from a thumbnail
- People want to try themselves (“I would have built my tavern over there”)
- Easy to make into a series of videos
- Matched well with the genre specific fan community



See also: “Slime Rancher: A Preemptive Postmortem” from Nick Popovich, GDC 2017



Community



Community - Discord

Discord from day 1, slowly grew. Now at **1000 active** members.

Link to it everywhere!

Hi Everyone,

We've got a Halloween themed update for you with a bunch of new game mechanics! If you have any questions, ideas, bug reports, come chat with us on discord:

<https://discord.gg/kingdomsandcastles>, or email us at contact@lionshieldstudios.com. Here's what's new:

A medieval city building game for PC, Mac, Linux. By @petey123567 and @mjpeddicord Chat with us on discord: discord.gg/kingdomsandcas...

 kingdomsandcastles.com

 Joined December 2015

Tweet to

Message

Community - Discord

Allows you to really dig into feedback.



DarkChronos 10/20/2018

damn, how big of a graveyard do i need for a city with over 5000 population

I have hundreds of people die every year

these graves fill up in minutes

i'd have to wipe out 20% of the map just for graves at this rate. Can we not have gravekeepers just bury dead people on top of each other

Can we just* have gravekeepers just bury dead people on top of each other? So I'll just need a 3x3 sward grave with the 16 graves in each sward



Pete 10/20/2018

[@DarkChronos](#) graves deteriorate here as well, but I am curious how many cemetery tiles it'll take to get a city of 5000 going

we can tune it so it's reasonable



DarkChronos 10/20/2018

[@Pete](#) I can test this. gimme 30 minutes

also, do witch huts spawn on old maps



Pete 10/20/2018

right now they don't but it sounds like folks want that, so I can add it...



DarkChronos 10/20/2018

please do 😊

Community - Discord

Get lots of details with bug reports!



Pete Last Monday at 7:48 PM

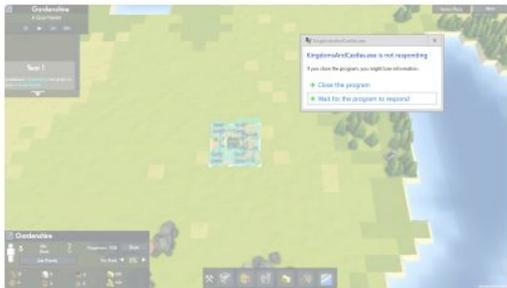
hrm, well that didn't help haha

can you try navigating here: C:/Users/<your name here perhaps>/AppData/Local/Temp/LionShield/Kingdoms and Castles/ and tell me what's in that folder?
or try %AppData%/Local/Temp/LionShield/Kingdoms and Castles/



TooMuchDog Last Monday at 7:50 PM

yep, I will try that right now. Meanwhile, here's what I am currently seeing on my K and C window, if it helps haha



Pete Last Monday at 7:53 PM

very curious!

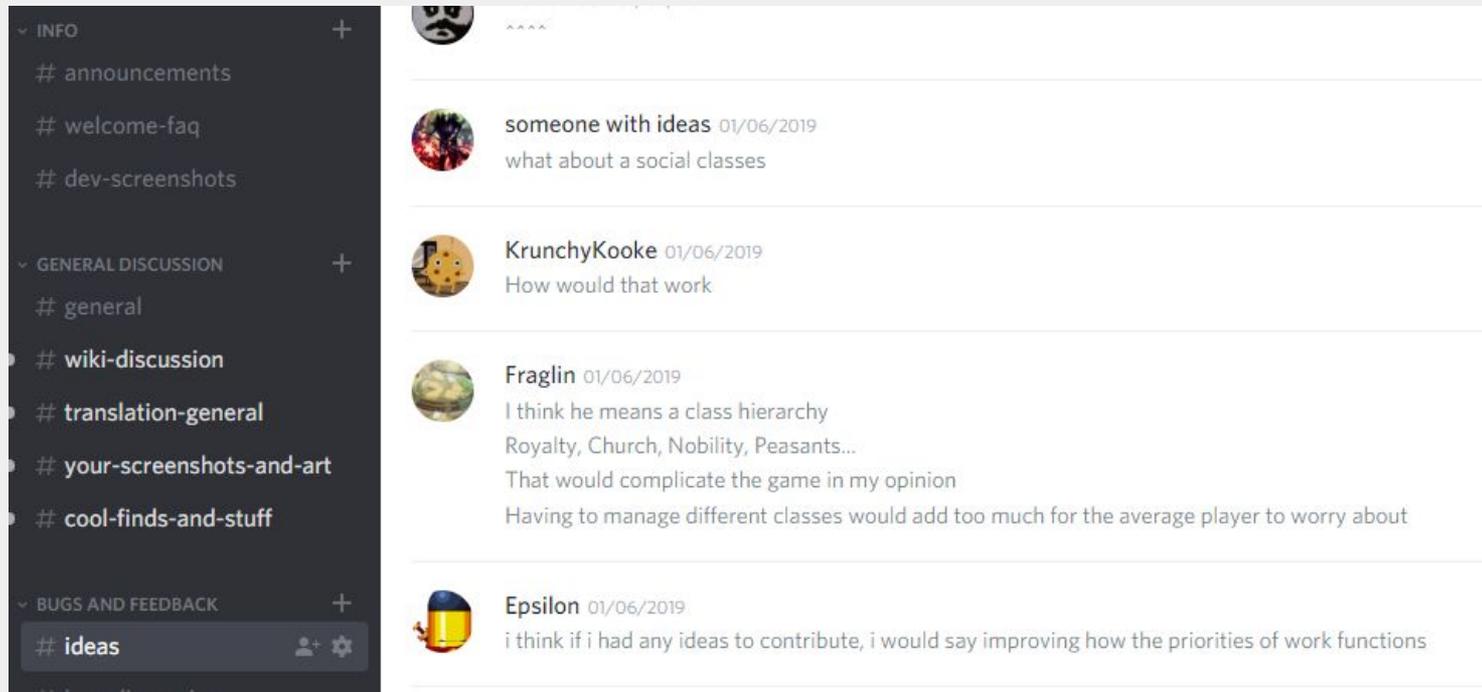
so you start up the game, do a standard game, search for 10 maps, then pick the 11th?

what are the map settings when you're searching?

(I'm so far unable to reproduce it)

Give Ideas Their Own Space

Made a hands off #ideas channel.



The image shows a screenshot of a Discord server interface. On the left is a dark sidebar with a list of channels. The channels are organized into sections: 'INFO' (with a plus sign), 'GENERAL DISCUSSION' (with a plus sign), and 'BUGS AND FEEDBACK' (with a plus sign). The '# ideas' channel is highlighted in the 'BUGS AND FEEDBACK' section. On the right is the main chat area, which displays a message history. The messages are from users with avatars: a person with a black beard, 'someone with ideas' (01/06/2019) asking 'what about a social classes', 'KrunchyKooke' (01/06/2019) asking 'How would that work', 'Fraglin' (01/06/2019) discussing 'class hierarchy' and 'Royalty, Church, Nobility, Peasants...', and 'Epsilon' (01/06/2019) suggesting 'improving how the priorities of work functions'.

INFO +

- # announcements
- # welcome-faq
- # dev-screenshots

GENERAL DISCUSSION +

- # general
- # wiki-discussion
- # translation-general
- # your-screenshots-and-art
- # cool-finds-and-stuff

BUGS AND FEEDBACK +

- # ideas

someone with ideas 01/06/2019
what about a social classes

KrunchyKooke 01/06/2019
How would that work

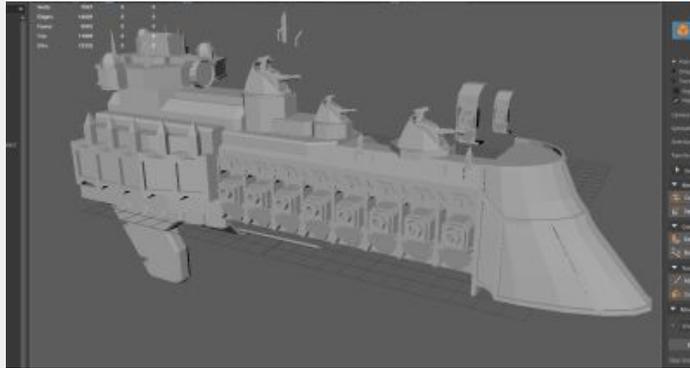
Fraglin 01/06/2019
I think he means a class hierarchy
Royalty, Church, Nobility, Peasants...
That would complicate the game in my opinion
Having to manage different classes would add too much for the average player to worry about

Epsilon 01/06/2019
i think if i had any ideas to contribute, i would say improving how the priorities of work functions

Shape the Space

Had a **#random** channel that required a lot of moderation.

Renamed it to **#cool-finds-and-stuff**. Not perfect, but now less weird stuff, more:



Disclaimer

Not a recipe for success: Value intent/strategy over specifics.

Can't count out luck: ex. Steam's algorithm changed late 2018 that hurt our daily sales. We launched in 2017. Would our launch have been affected if that algorithm change happened earlier?

Can't count out privilege: Very fortunate to have the opportunities and support network over the years that helped us get here.

Thanks!

Lion Shield - [@LionShieldGames](#)

Peter Angstadt - [@petey123567](#) (no 4)

contact@lionshieldstudios.com

Special Thanks to:

Steve Swink, Michael Peddicord, Sam Torno, Bryan Farmer, Jason Taylor, Steve Green, Saori Haigo