

# Forging Hardspace: Shipbreaker

## Processes for creating Original IP

Rory McGuire - Chief Creative Officer  
Elliot Hudson - Associate Creative Director  
**Blackbird Interactive**

# Who are these people!?

Rory McGuire - Chief Creative Officer  
Elliot Hudson - Associate Creative Director  
**Blackbird Interactive**

# BLACKBIRD INTERACTIVE



# BLACKBIRD INTERACTIVE



# HARDSPACE SHIPBREAKER

HARDSPACE  
**SHIPBREAKER**

**GDC**  
SUMMER

**GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE**  
AUGUST 4-6, 2020 | #GDC20



# WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

- Blackbird Goals
- Shipbreaker Development
- Takeaways

# STUDIO STRATEGY

*What are we trying to accomplish?*





# 2016 - Blackbird Game Jam

*The Birth of an Idea*

- Just shipped *Deserts of Kharak*
- Wanted to decompress / “blood-let” creatively
- Five teams of 7-8, everyone involved!



# 2016 - Hello, Collector

*Game Jam*





# 2016 - Hello, Collector

*Game Jam*

- Let's make a game!



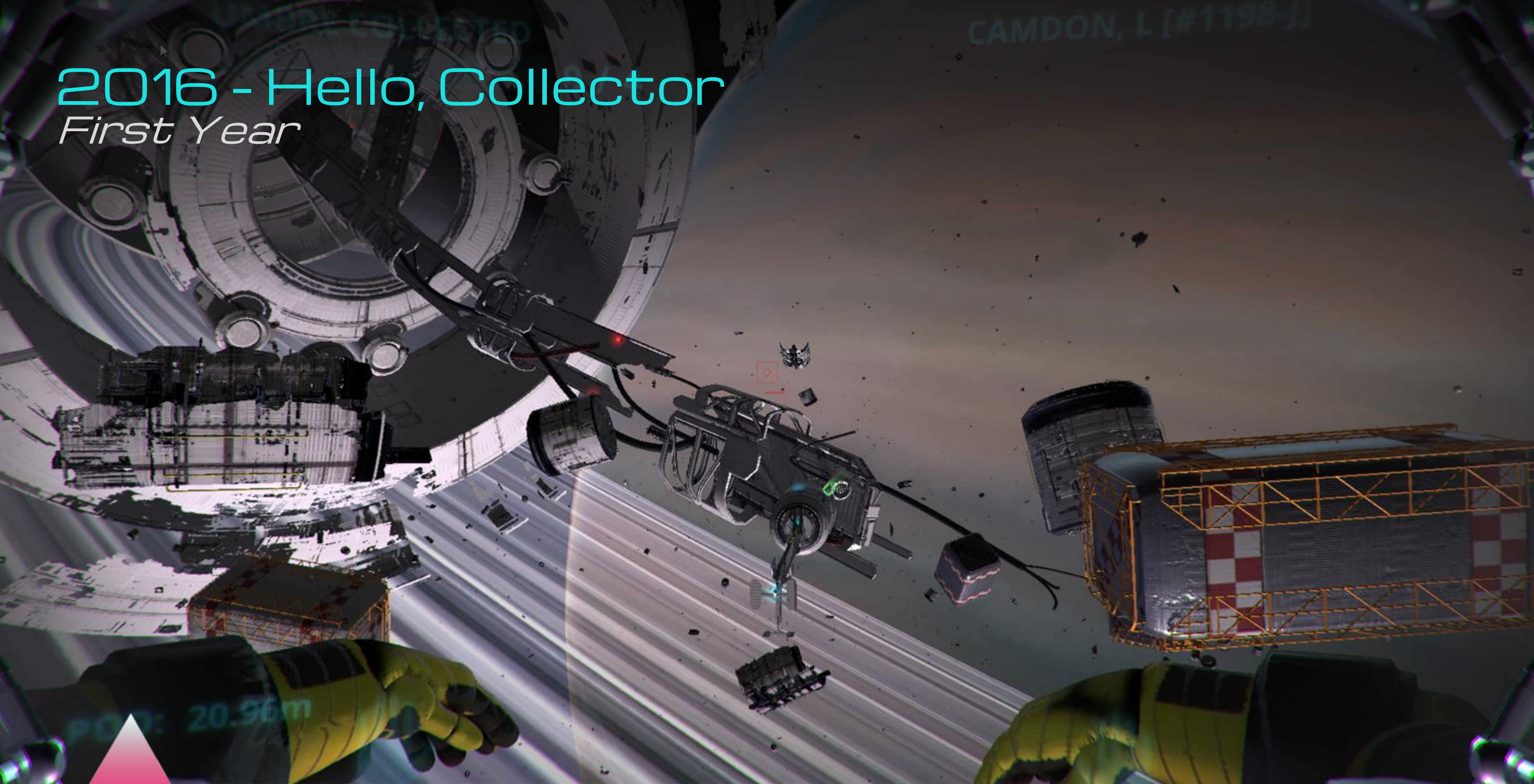
# GOALS

- Not worrying about being profitable
- Making an original game is hard enough
- Make something unique here



# 2016 - Hello, Collector

*First Year*





# 2016 - Hello, Collector

*Game Direction*

## Tone



# 2016 - Hello, Collector

*A Solid Core*

## Mechanics

- Grapple
- Grab / Hold
- Push Off
- Pick-up / Carry / Throw / Stash
- Surface Properties
  - Grappalable
  - Grabbable
  - Electrified
- Power / Electricity
- Debris / Energy Fields



# LEARNINGS

*Gates and Milestones*





# LEARNINGS

*Following the breadcrumbs*





# 2016 - Hello, Collector

## *Confidence Check*

**Visceral** zero-G traversal mechanics

**Utilize** toolset to explore / survive

**Hazardous** deep-space wrecks



Pre-Alpha Gameplay



# 2017 - Falling Skies

*First Pivot*

- Pivots CAN be healthy!
- Goodbye Collector
- Hello Falling Skies



# 2017 - Falling Skies

*Fruit Ninja in Space*

- Slice up warships falling toward Earth
- Exciting & Action-oriented
- Existing breadcrumb: zero-g traversal
- New breadcrumb: **Cutting**



# 2017 - Falling Skies

*An Inflection Point*

- Team wasn't happy
- An OVER-Pivot
- Too "action-arcade"
- Lost breadcrumbs: relatable, thematically unique



# 2017 - Falling Skies

## *Branching Paths*

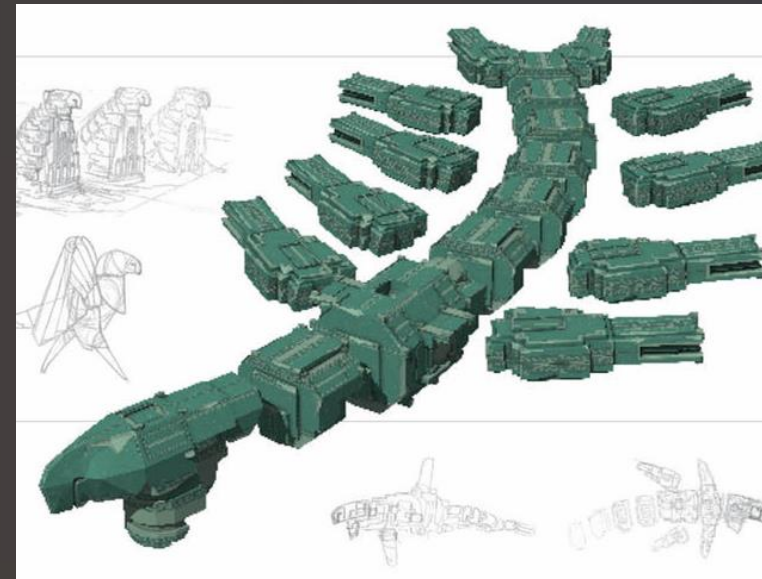
Falling Skies



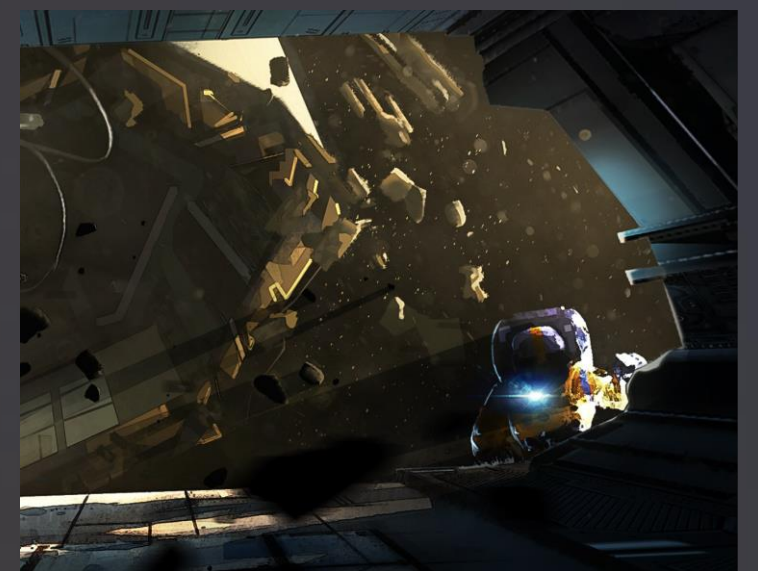
Saboteur



Knight Errant



Shipbreaker



# 2017 - Falling Skies

## *Branching Paths*

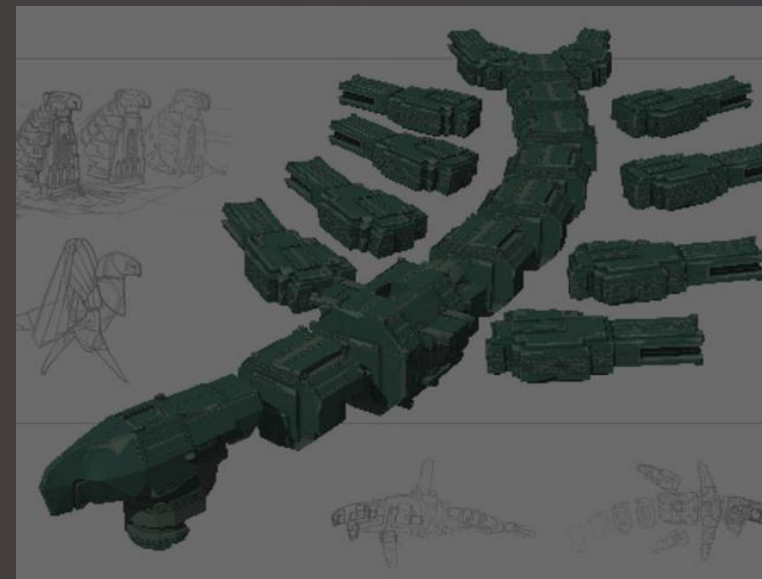
Falling Skies



Saboteur



Knight Errant



Shipbreaker





# 2017 - Shipbreaker (Handcrafted)

*Second Pivot - A Whole Loaf*

## FANTASY & TONE

- WORKING CLASS HERO
- REALISM WITH HUMOUR / CHARACTER
- FARGO MEETS BRAZIL



**TEAMWORK BUILDS SHIPS**

LYNX MANUFACTURING LIMITED  EMERGENCY FLEET CORPORATION



# 2017 - Shipbreaker (Handcrafted)

*Blue Collar Fantasy*

## PILLARS

- BLUE COLLAR FANTASY
- TACTICAL SHIP DISASSEMBLY
- VEHICLE FANTASY FROM THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

# LEARNINGS

## *Defining Pillars*

- Authentic vs. strategic
- Be specific - not single word pillars
- Repeat them often
- But do refine them



# LEARNINGS

## *Defining Pillars*

- Collaborative with the team
- Team was in on pillars because they shaped them
- Individual members can carry pillars into their work



# LEARNINGS

## Defining Pillars

### GENRE

- FIRST PERSON
- REVERSE-BUILDER
- SANDBOX - OPEN-ENDED
- IMMERSIVE SIM
- ACTION-ADVENTURE
- REDUNDANT? SPACE SALVAGER
  - SPACE DEMOLITION
  - LARGE-SCALE DEMOLITION
  - SPACE SALVAGING

### GAME PILLARS

- BLUE COLLAR FANTASY
- TOTAL SHIP DISASSEMBLY
- 1000 WAYS TO DIE
- DAVID VS. GOLIATH

### SCALE

SMALL FISH  
BIG POND

LARGE  
FRAGMENTED  
WITH A SMALL  
CHARACTER

- LARGE SHIPS
- LARGE PLANET  
PORT

STARSHIP  
SALVAGER  
- IMMERSIVE SALVAGE SIMULATOR

### AESTHETIC

- INDUSTRIAL SCI-FI

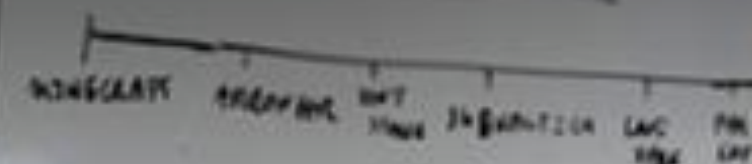
### SEED

- START SMALL & GROW

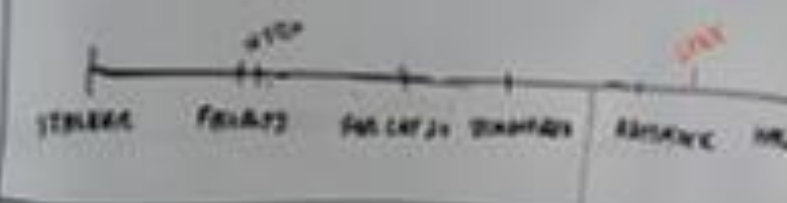
- SAROBON SIMULATOR (NOT THE CONTRACT)
- RED FACTION
- BURNOUT - CRASH HOPE
- SMALL SHIP W/ BIG PROBLEM

SCALE REFERENCE - ONE PERSON IN THE ULTIMATISIM  
EVERYWHERE

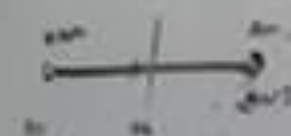
### OUTDOOR / SURVIVAL



### IMMERSIVE SIM



### PROTOTYPING

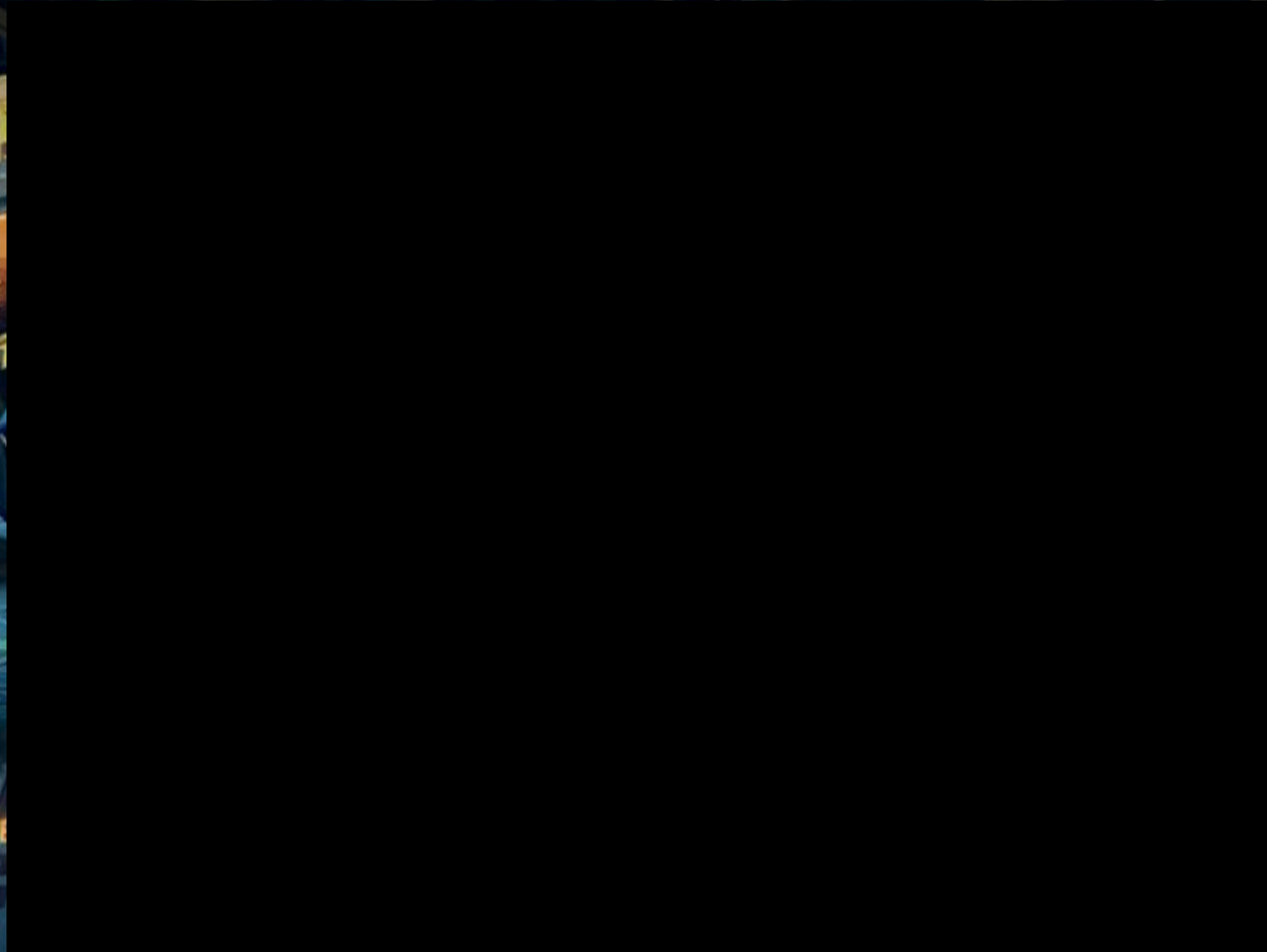


[wikipedia.org/wiki/MDA\\_framework](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/MDA_framework)





# 2018 - Shipbreaker (Handcrafted)

## *Vertical Slice*



# 2018 - Shipbreaker (Handcrafted)

## *Content Problem*

PRODUCT DETAILS	
Pre VS	Post VS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identity Crisis</li><li>• Linear</li><li>• 5-10hr Gameplay</li><li>• Small # of Ships</li><li>• Limited Replayability</li><li>• Hollywood biz model</li><li>• DLC tricky</li><li>• No Early Access</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet and exceed Audience Expectation</li><li>• Non-linear</li><li>• 15-30hrs of Gameplay</li><li>• 50+ "modular" Ships (Systemic &gt; Scripted)</li><li>• Replayability Galore</li><li>• Slow Climb Biz model</li><li>• DLC Easy</li><li>• Early Access</li></ul>
	



# 2018 - Shipbreaker (Procedural)

*The Final Breadcrumb*

## Systemic Game Design

What does it look like in Lynx?

- Modular, procedural ships
- Fuel, electricity, cryo, atmosphere, radiation
- Equipment decay and maintenance



# 2020 - Shipbreaker (Procedural)

*The Pillars Now*

## PILLARS (2017)

- Blue Collar Fantasy
- Tactical Ship Disassembly
- Vehicle Fantasy from the human perspective

## PILLARS (2018 - Now)

- Blue Collar Fantasy
- Total Ship Disassembly
- Systems as Content



# LEARNINGS

## *Team Size*

- Keeping team below 10
- Not moving people off of the team
- Never pausing the team or spinning it down

# LEARNINGS

*How much is too much?*

- Timebox it
- Then examine it
- If we're making progress we're ok





# LEARNINGS

*Ask for help*

- Brian and Hayley Martel
- Shane Neville
- Jamie Cheng
- Tyler Sigman
- Derek Johnson



# LEARNINGS

*Finding a partner*

- Not everyone needs a partner, but if you do...
- Find someone who loves your game for what it is
- And believes in what that will be



# LEARNINGS

## *Finding a partner*

- Not everyone needs a partner, but if you do...
- Find someone who loves your game for what it is
- And believes in what that will be

# FOCUS

HOME INTERACTIVE



HARDSPACE  
**SHIPBREAKER**

**EARLY ACCESS  
LAUNCH TRAILER**



# Contact!

**Rory McGuire**

Chief Creative Officer

@rorymcguire



rory@blackbirdinteractive.com



**Elliot Hudson**

Assoc. Creative Director

@elliot\_k\_hudson

elliot@blackbirdinteractive.com