GDC

Expanding the Dreamiverse: Making Dreams an experience for everyone

Joe Florey & Alexandra Perry

Introductions

Alexandra - Media Molecule Producer

Joe – PlayStation User Researcher

What is Dreams?

Design Expectations vs User Test Reality

Teaching Dreams

Making Creation a Game

Making Dreams Accessible

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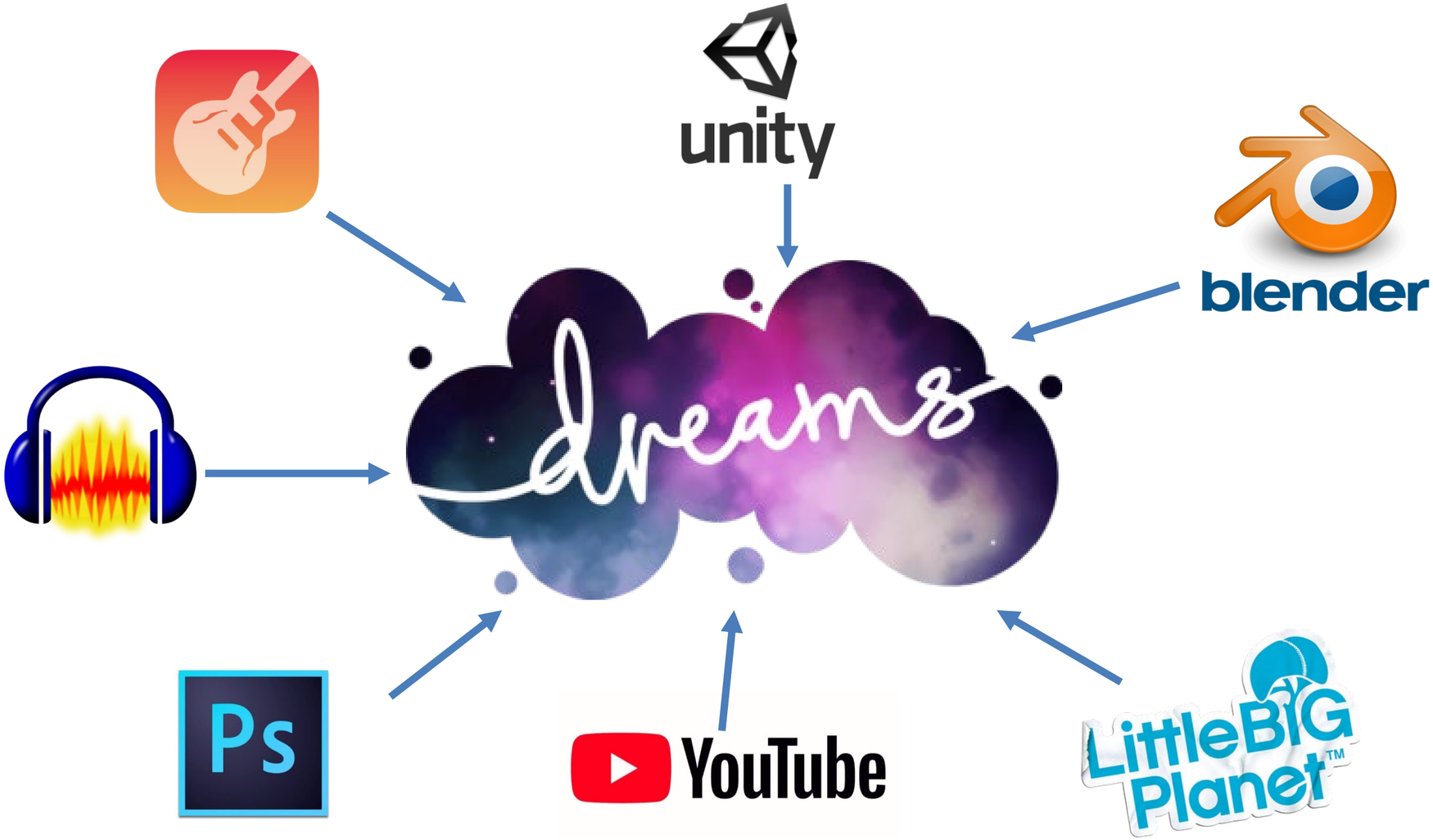
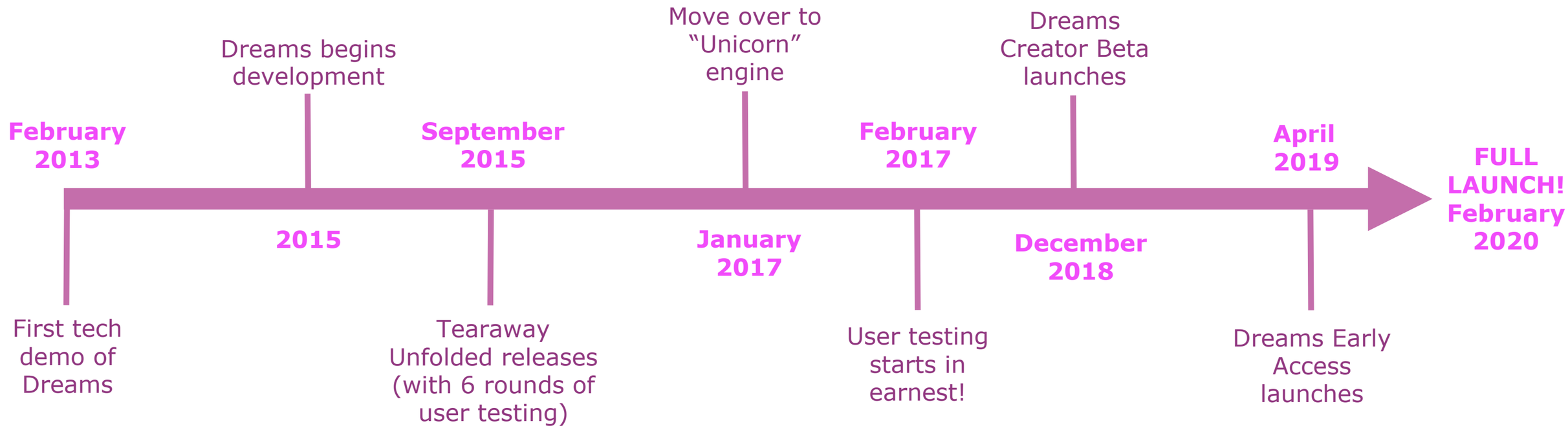
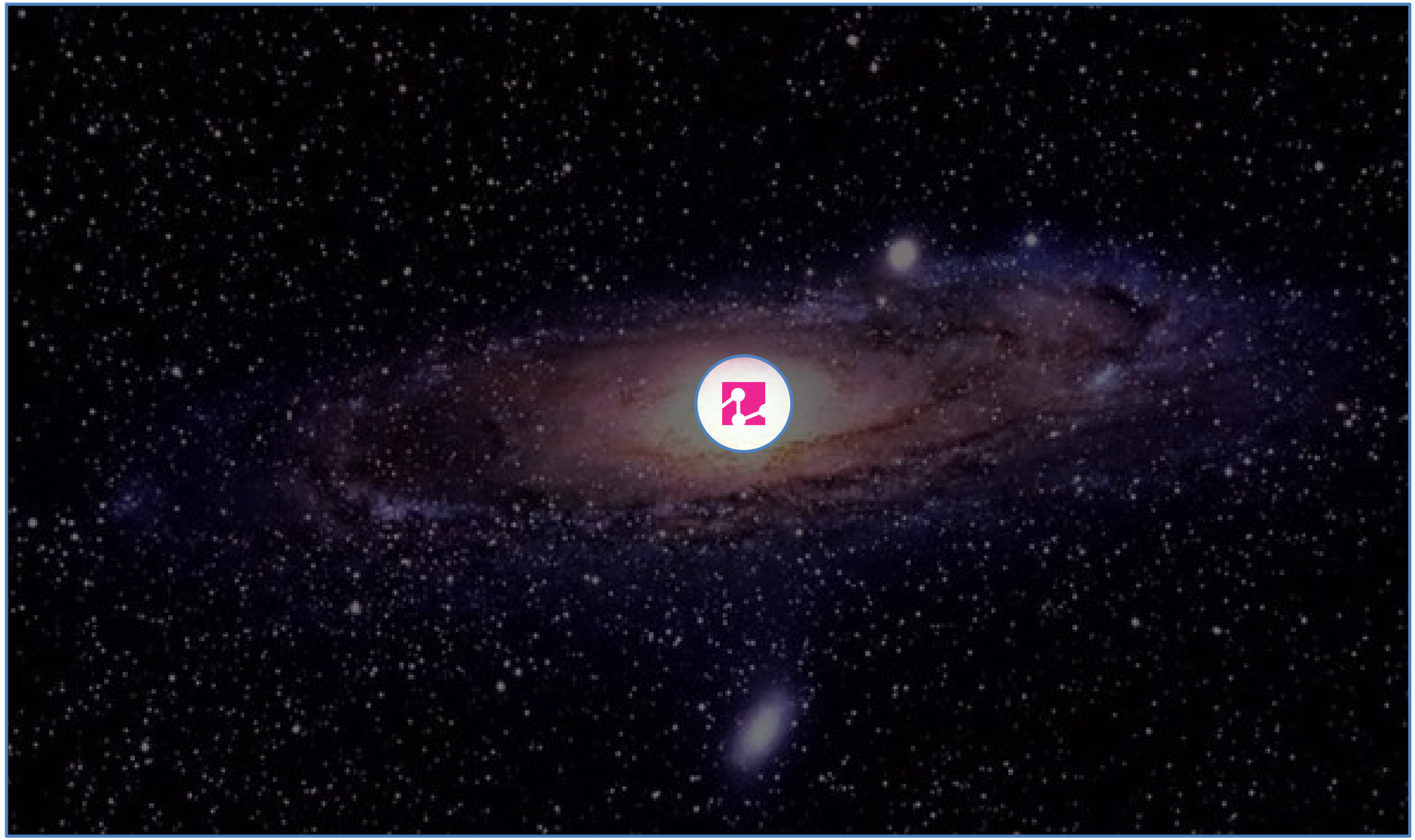
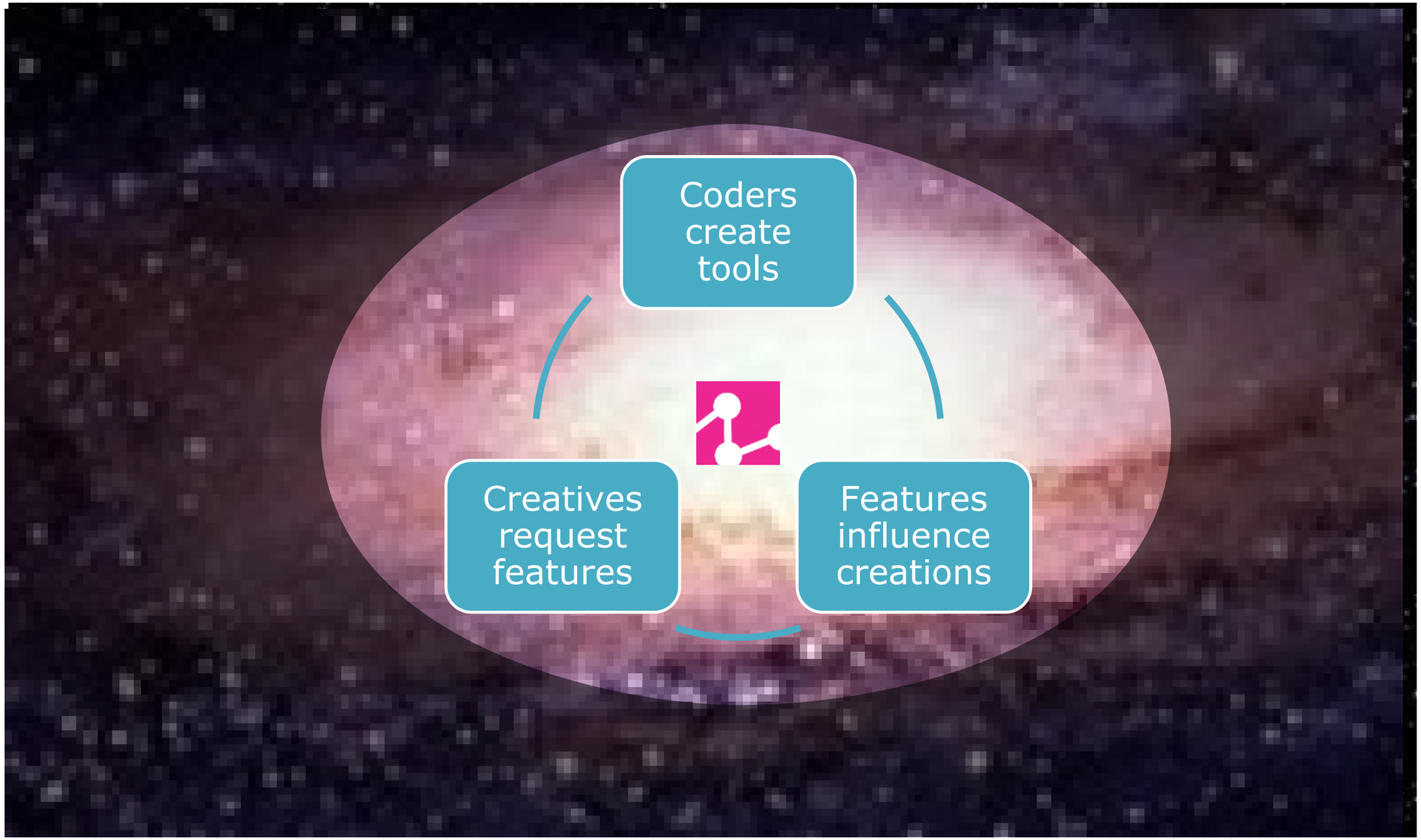

unity
blender
dreams
Ps
YouTube
LittleBIG Planet™


February 2013
First tech demo of Dreams
2015
Dreams begins development
September 2015
Tearaway Unfolded releases (with 6 rounds of user testing)
January 2017
Move over to "Unicorn" engine
February 2017
User testing starts in earnest!
December 2018
Dreams Creator Beta launches
April 2019
Dreams Early Access launches
FULL LAUNCH! February 2020




Coders create tools
Features influence creations
Creatives request features

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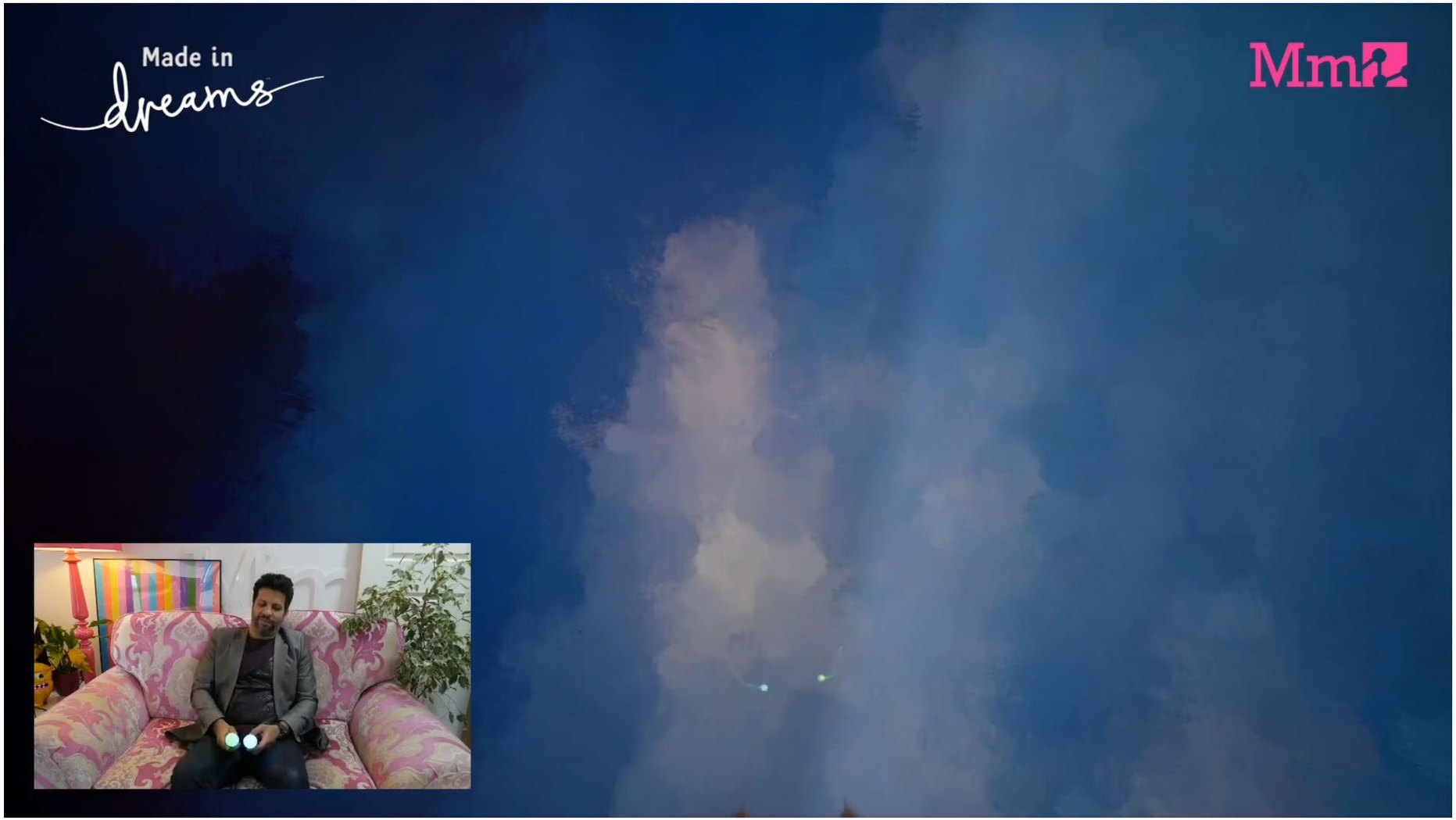
A minimalist approach to UI

Performative motion controls



What is Dreams?

Design Expectations vs **User Test Reality**

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Early testing

Challenges with Testing

Tool
Powerful
Unconstrained
Professional

Game
Simple
Playful
Fun

A Simple intuitive UI?

UI Example: Scoping between groups

Media Molecule needs you to find the differences between this picture and this picture.
They're the same picture.

Performative motion controls?

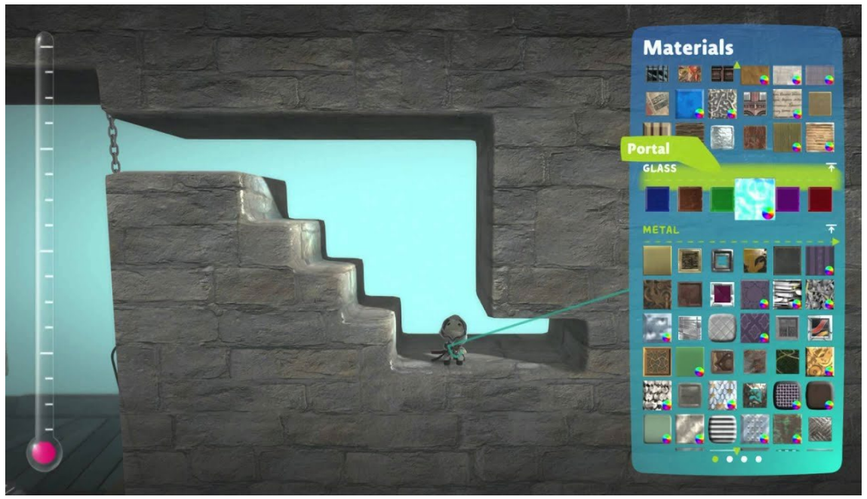
EXPECTATION **REALITY**

Performative motion controls?

“Motion controls are always gimmicky and terrible”

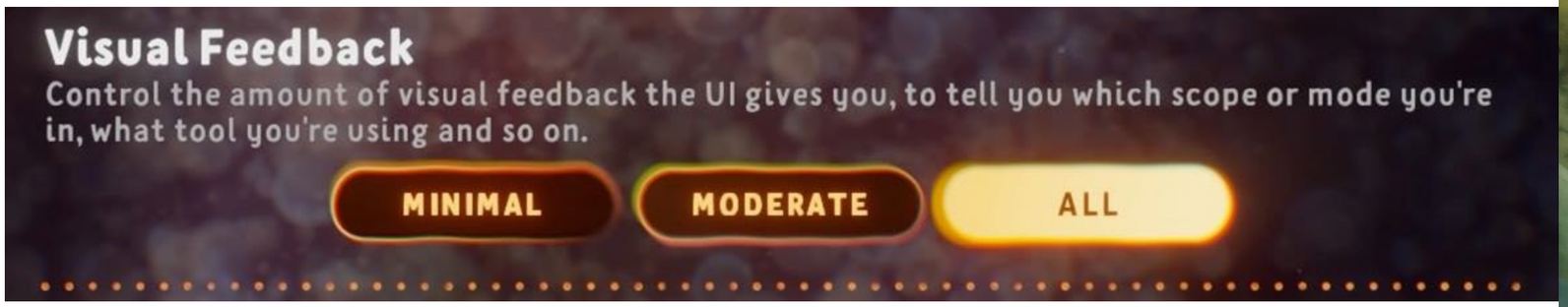
I don’t like the motion controls
Why was it you didn’t like them?
They’re just annoying and fiddly
What makes them feel fiddly?
I can’t get the pieces where I want them
What’s happening when you try to put pieces where you want?
When I moved the camera the thing I was holding moved as well

“Easy” creation experiences



Balancing needs of the studio and new users

Balancing needs of the studio and new users



Dealing with the motion controls

- Fundamental changes were made to how the camera worked
- Future on-boarding designed to highlight ways to make the motion controls easier/more precise
- Move away from getting players to make neat/blocky things early on – it wasn’t what Dreams is best at anyway.
- Motion controls are completely new to most players, so regardless of on-boarding will always take some time for them to become comfortable

Design Expectations vs User Test Reality: Takeaways

Developers

- Get researchers and external people involved early, you have to face reality at some point
- Compromising for new players' experience is important, but it doesn't need to come at the expense or power users - be flexible

Research

- Dig! Don't settle for the shallow responses or questionnaire feedback alone for complex or nuanced questions

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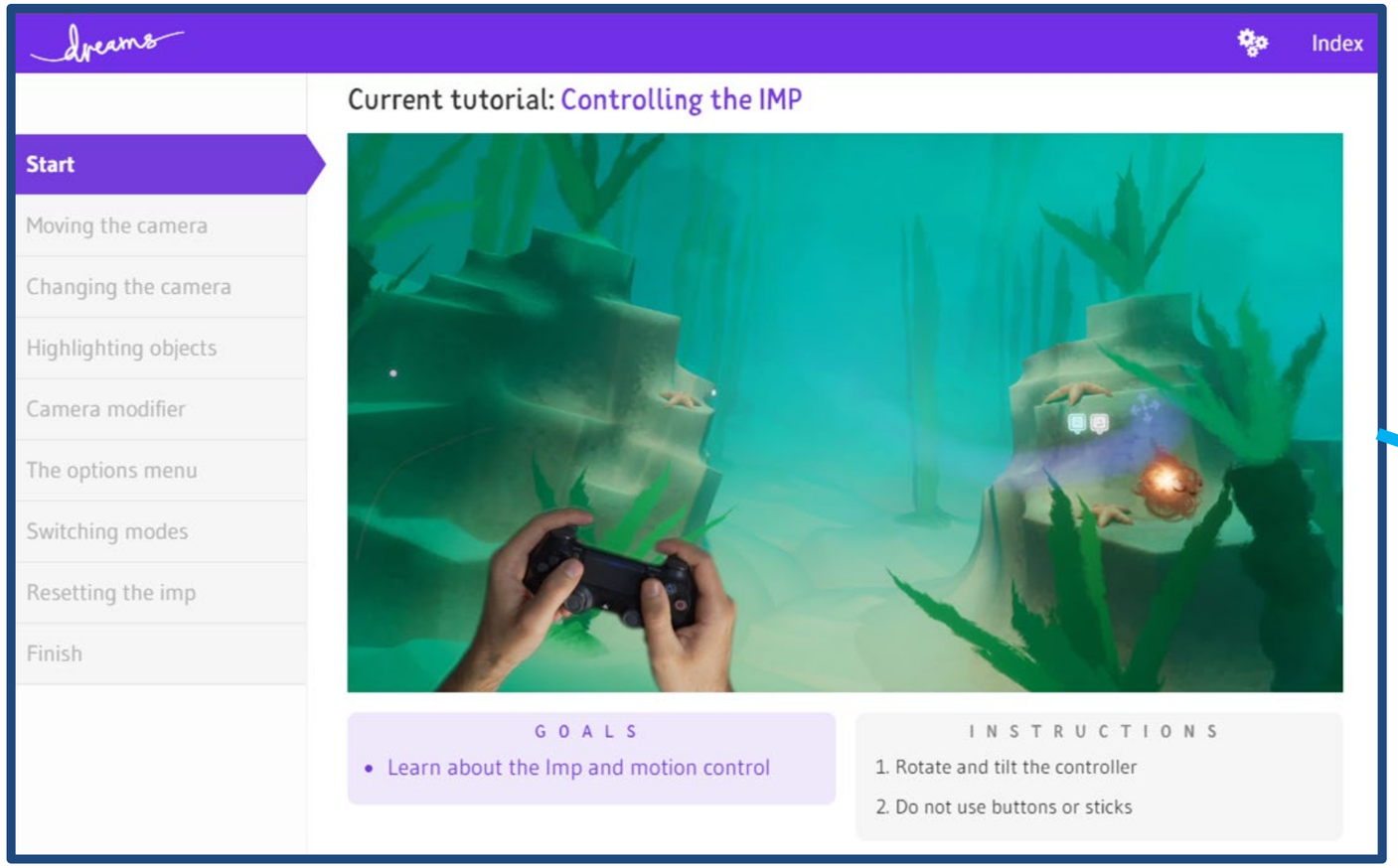
How to teach Dreams?

Technical challenge



Failing quickly

Expectations

Reality

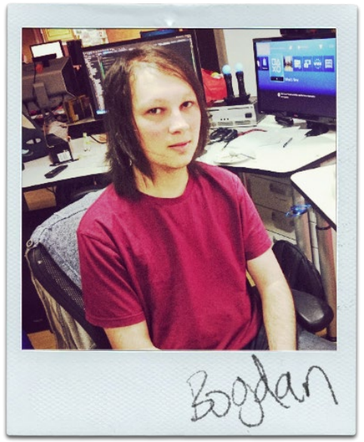
The initial results

- Players struggled to split their attention between a laptop screen and the game
- Complex pieces and levels were very easy to break or get lost in

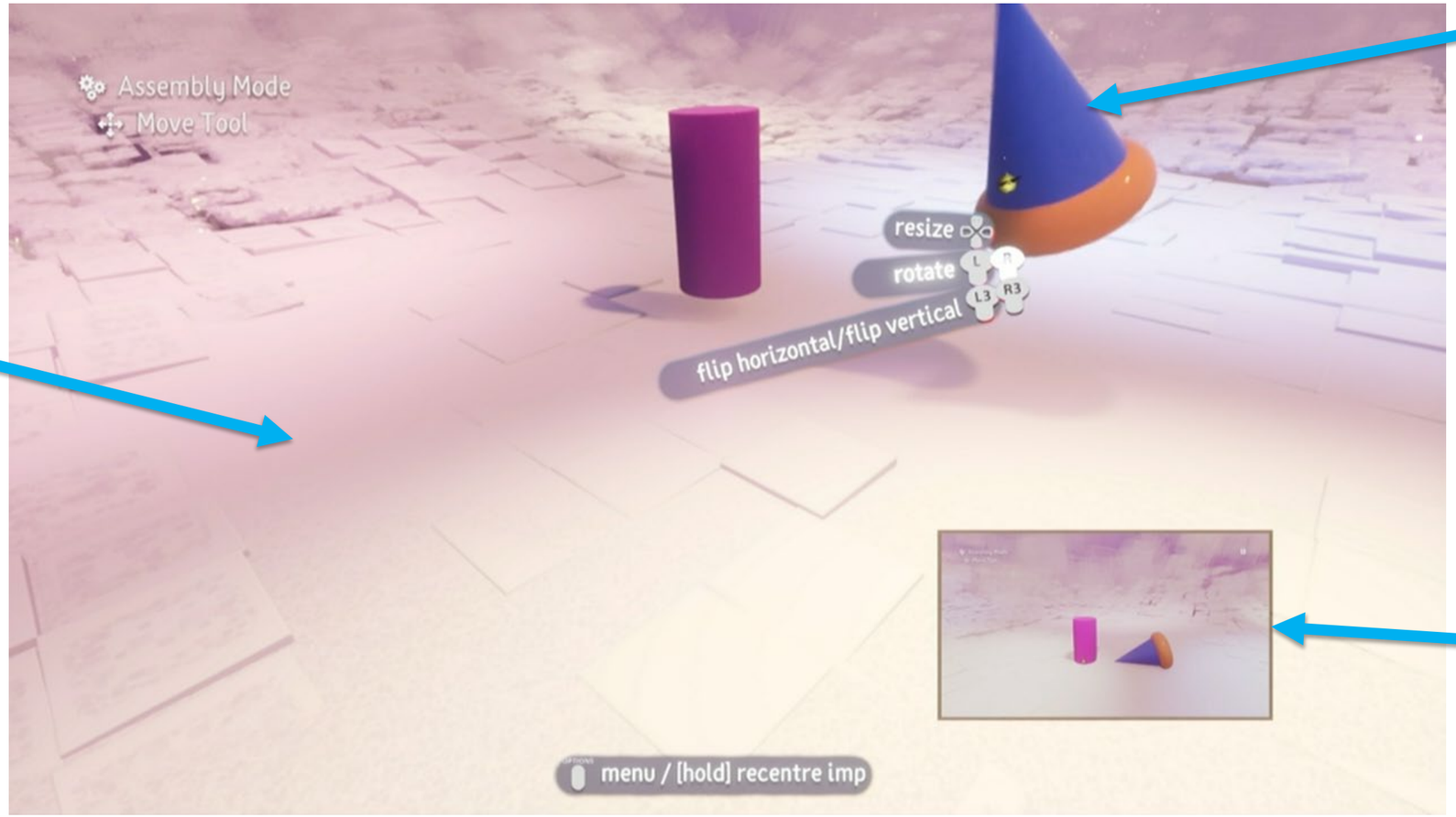
BUT

- ✔ Starting with a pre-built scene gave players a clear starting point
- ✔ Breaking tutorials down into short steps meant players weren't totally overwhelmed

Getting a team together



Tutorials V2

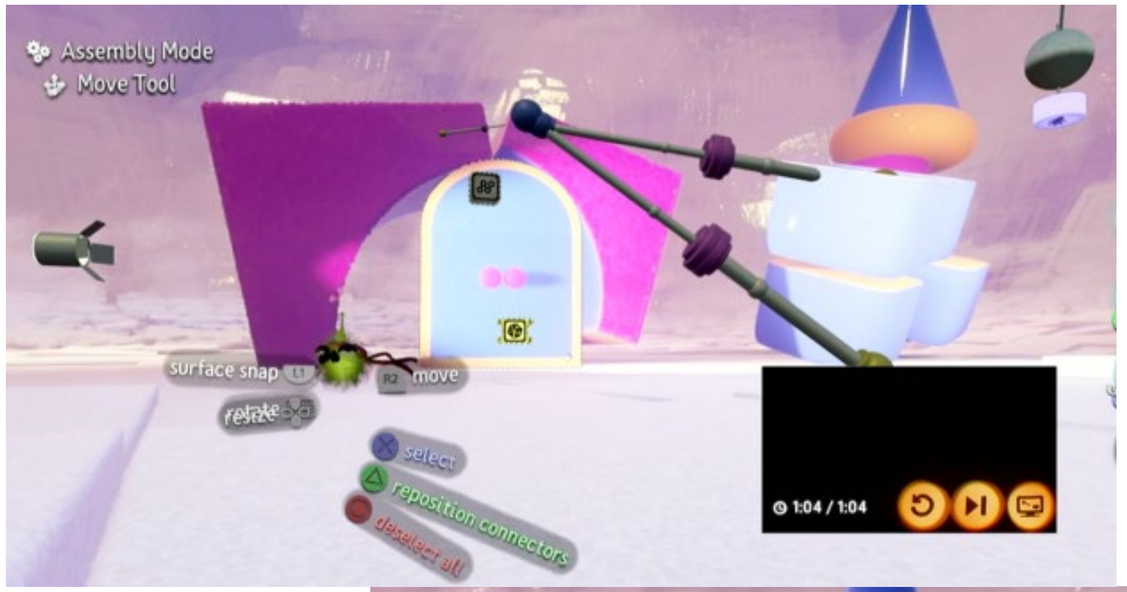


Simple pieces

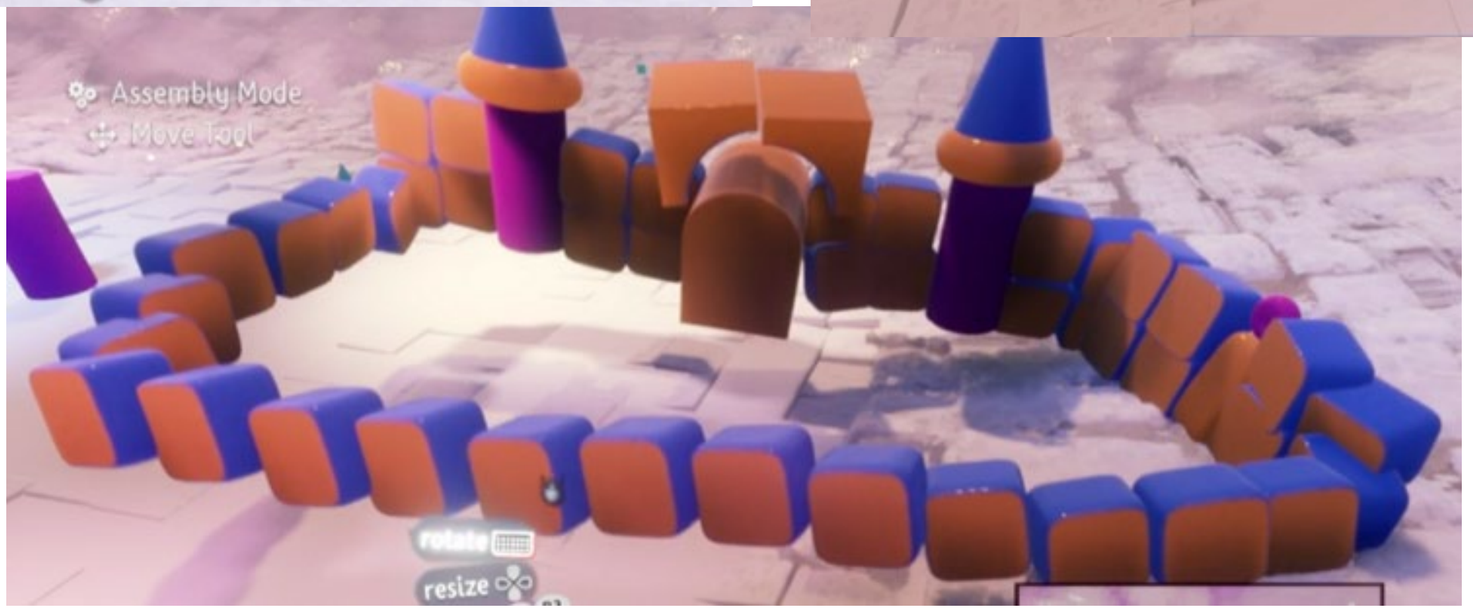
"Frozen" floor

Video player in game

Start Dreaming - Teaching the basic controls


Assembly Mode
Move Tool
surface snap
move
select
reposition connectors
deselect all
1:04 / 1:04

Assembly Mode
Move Tool


Assembly Mode
Move Tool
rotate
resize

Information overload - The steps taught in Start Dreaming

1. Moving the camera and imp
2. Grabbing and moving objects
3. Undo + Redo
4. Delete tool
5. Rotating with the touchpad
6. Rotating with L2
7. “Grab-Cam”
8. Searching for elements
9. Clone tool
10. “Shift” actions and strafing
11. Flipping objects
12. Resizing
13. Selecting objects
14. Grouping objects
15. Navigating groups
16. Shortcuts for groups

Tutorials lacked clearly defined goals

- Moving the camera
- Changing the camera
- Highlighting objects
- Camera modifier
- The options menu
- Switching modes
- Resetting the imp

A success story

“Platforming 1”

The results

✔ The built in PiP player made it easier for players to focus on the steps

✔ “Frozen” levels limited players ability to mess everything up!

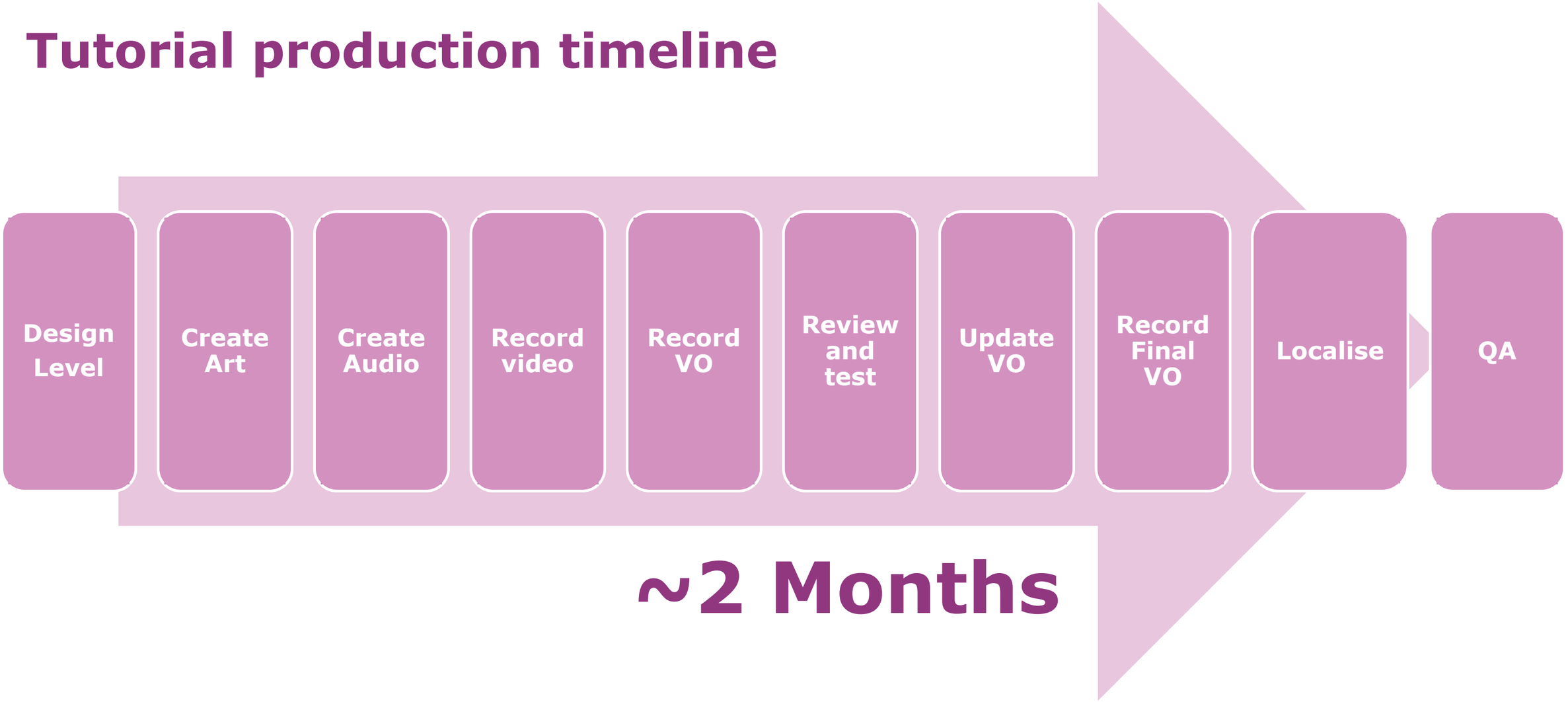
✔ *Some* tutorials are working well - “Platforming 1”

BUT

❖ The goal of some tutorials was vague and inconsistent

❖ The basic controls were still overwhelming to learn

Tutorial production timeline



Get Connie across the first gap in Play Mode
0:44 / 1:26
1 / 7

Use the Clone Tool to build a bridge
0:25 / 2:38
1 / 4

Open Sound Mode
0:29 / 1:14
1 / 8

Connect multiple gadgets with cloning
0:12 / 1:54
3 / 7

Making individual steps clearer

Information de-overloaded

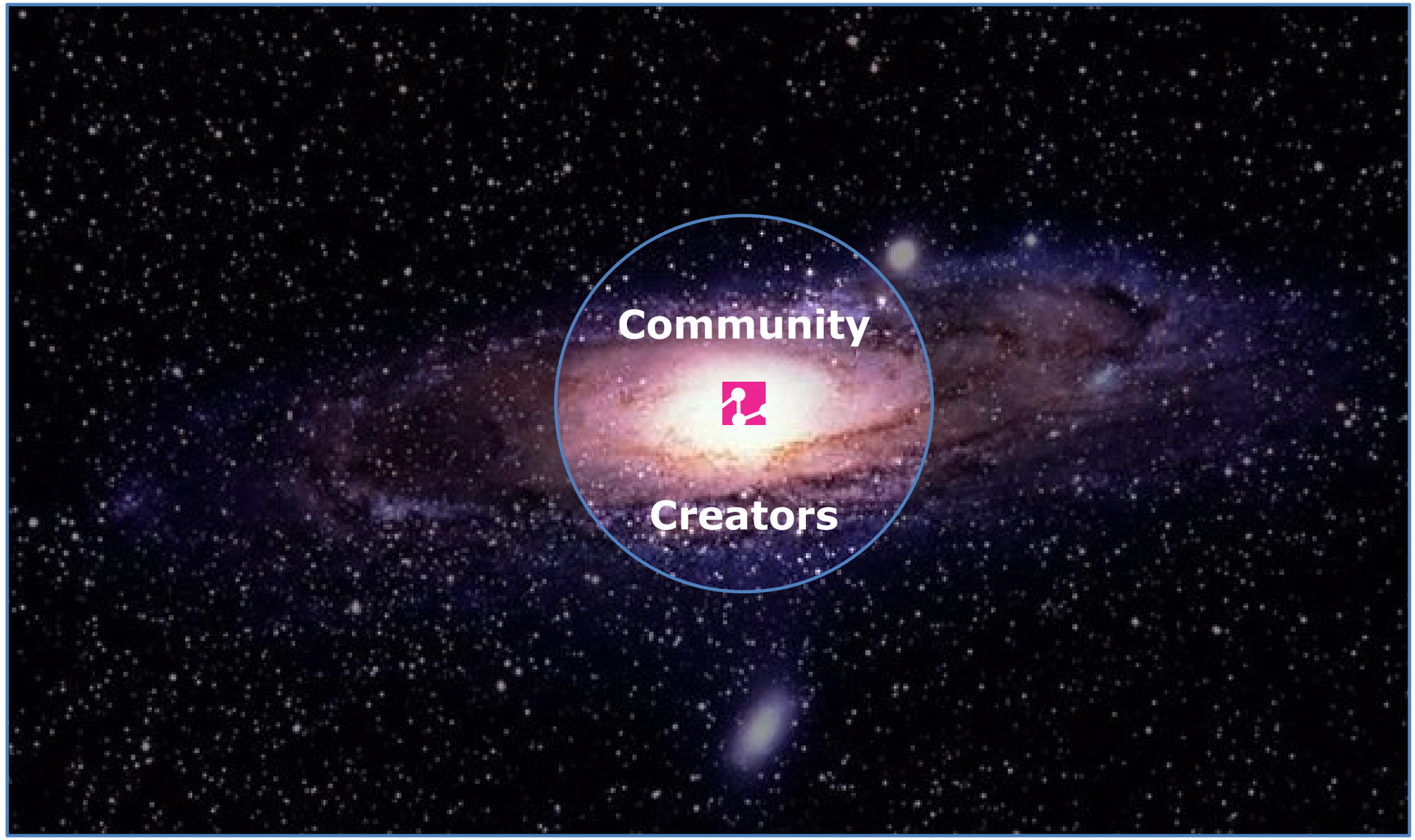
Start Dreaming 1
- Basic camera movement
- Using the motion controls
- Grabbing and moving objects
- Undo + Redo
- Delete tool
- “Grab-Cam”
- Searching for elements

Start Dreaming 2
- Reinforce moving objects
- Rotate
- Resize

Start Dreaming 3
- Clone tool
- Multi-cloning

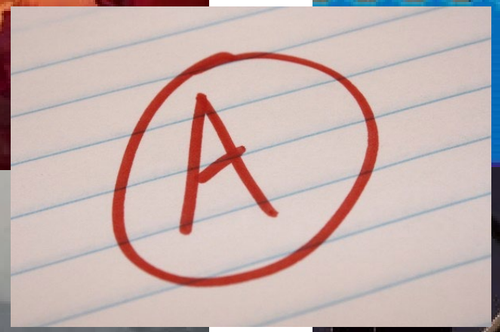
Start Dreaming 4
- Selecting objects
- Grouping
- Scoping

Creator Early access launch!



Read Me
Exit

HEALTH
COINS x 0
LIVES x 3
LEVEL 1 - ?
MOVE
FIRE
JUMP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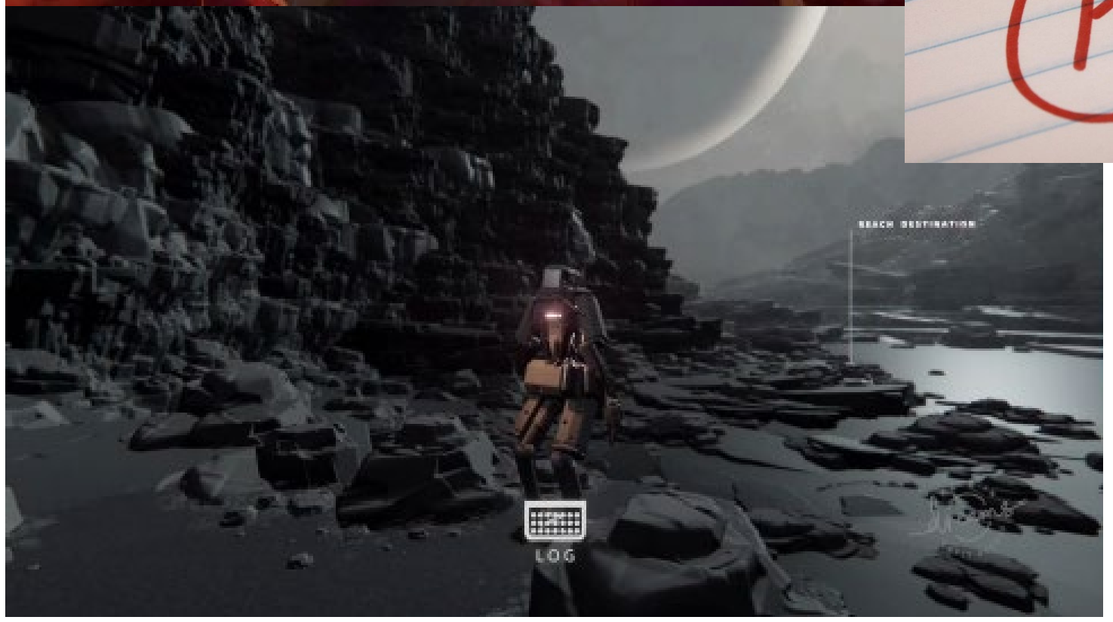
LOG

Takeaways

Development

- The sooner tutorials are developed the better
- Know when to change strategy, even if it means more work

Teaching creative tools

- Break down larger concepts into digestible steps
- Have a tangible goal for players to aim for
- Don’t overload players’ attention or memory

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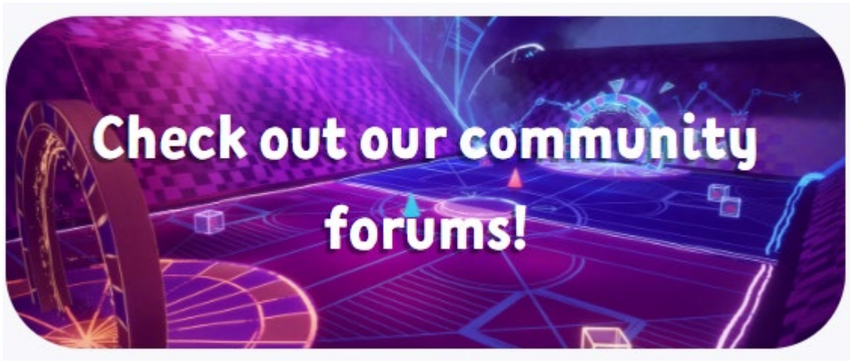
Still a long way to go…

Getting to the root of the issues

- Lots of feedback from multiple channels to process:



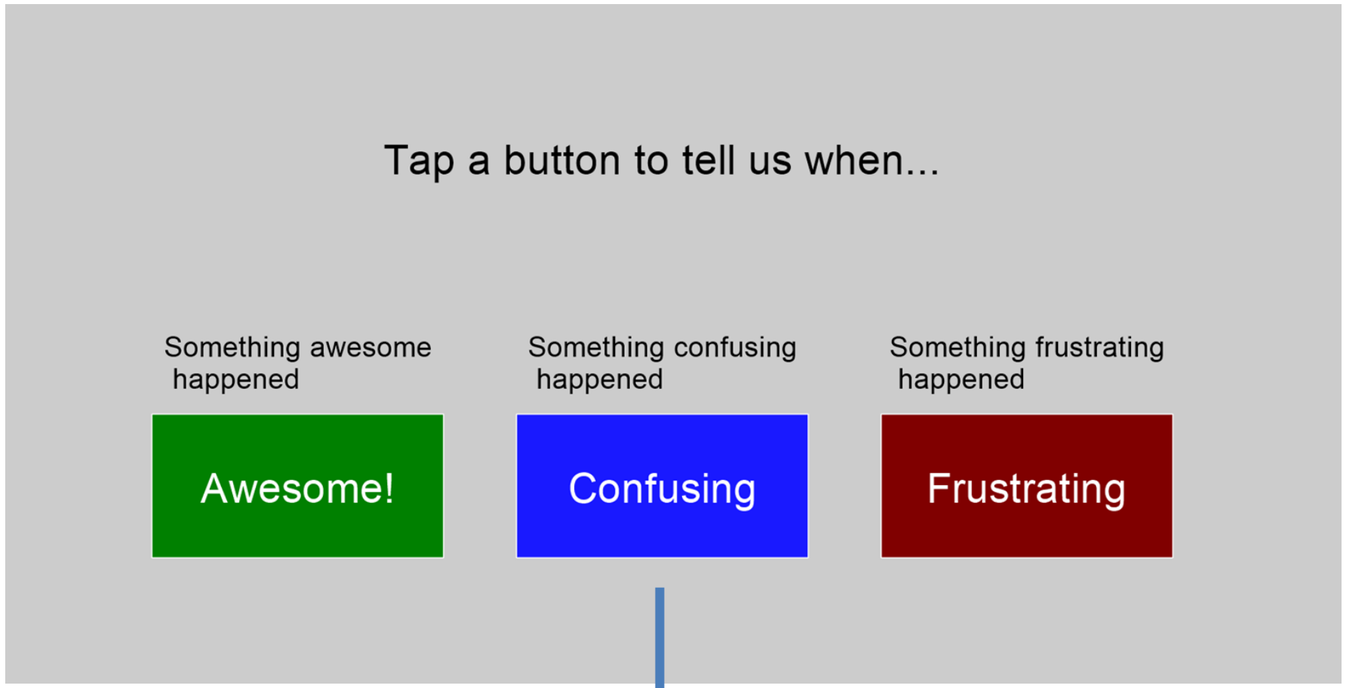
Game Analytics

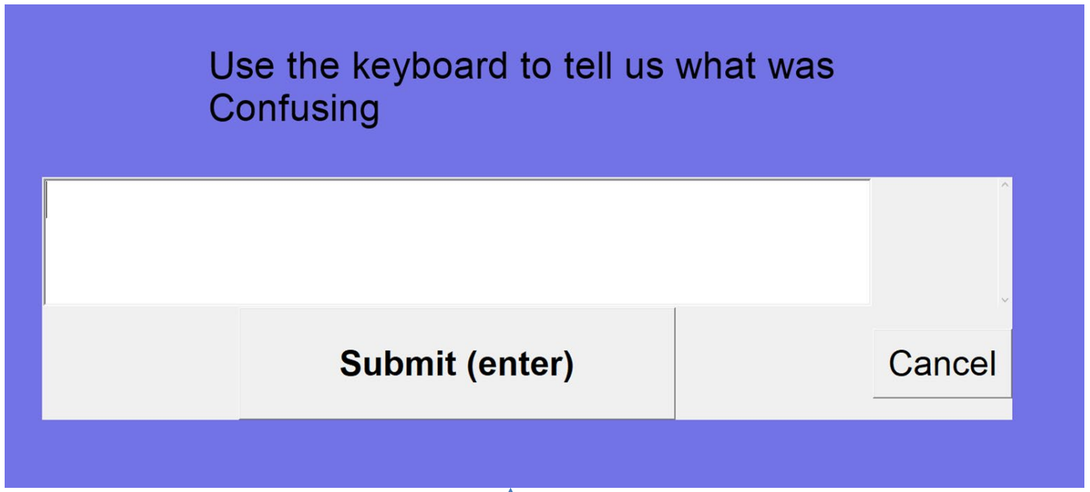
“Hands off” Testing

Quick discoveries…

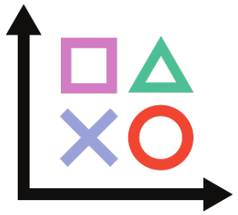
- Creation is mentally draining
- The Standard “playtest” processes didn’t work for Dreams

Keeping track of players





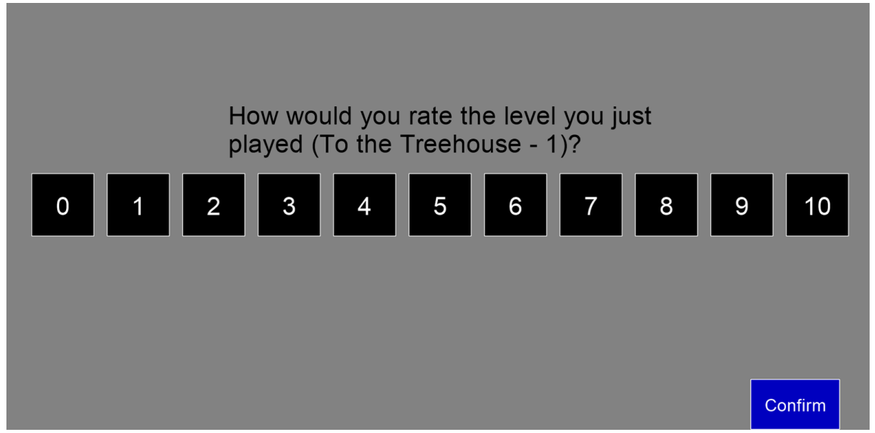
Player comments posted as telemetry events



Player Identifier		Player's Comment	In game location
q5b8602a1c3-Gben	Awesome!	The prebuilt levels are so inspiring. Ancient temple is beautiful	Homespace or main menu
qf5b9fd1417-Gben	Frustrating	I got locked into a tool and it was not clear on how to get out of it.	tutorial: Coat, Style and Effects, step: 3
q5b8602a1c3-Gben	Frustrating	After creating a sculpture, I cloned and grouped it so I could select the clones as if they were a single sculpture. It appears though that I can't edit the grouped-together sculpture as a whole.	tutorial: Sculpting, step: 4
q50d3e1a443-Gben	Awesome!	The Last Upgrade was really awesome. Defintely add more levels.	playing: The Last Upgraded
q5b8602a1c3-Gben	Awesome!	Discovered there is actually a grid snap tool	editing from scratch

Integrating with Telemetry - Getting ratings

Player finishes a level and telemetry posts a “level exit” event



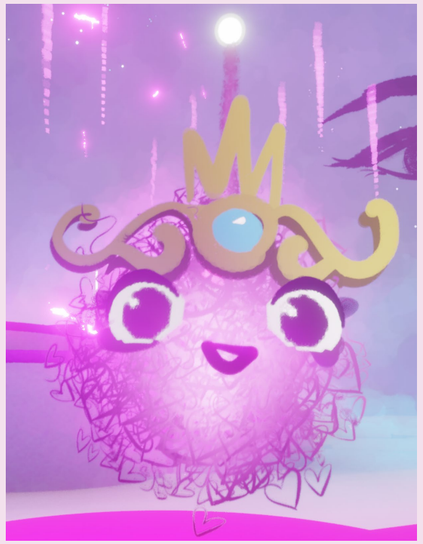
App listens for that event and prompts players with a question whenever they finish a level

A “rating” event is posted back to the server which can be seen live and analysed later

Testing revealed different kinds of Players and Creators

Types of creator

Hardcore Creators

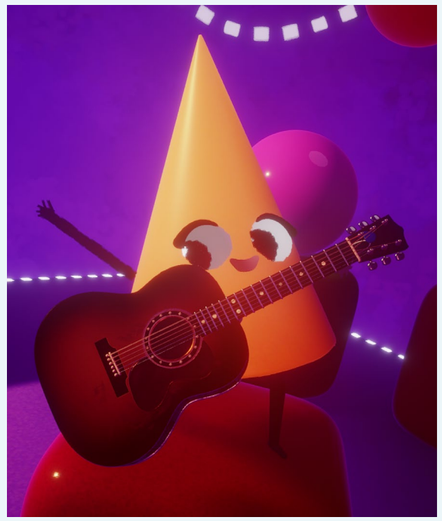


ROBLOX

unity

MINECRAFT
(Creative mode)

Specialist Creators



blender

MAX

Dabbling Creators

LittleBIGPlanet™

SUPER MARIO MAKER 2

MINECRAFT
(Classic)

Testing revealed different kinds of Players…

UGC Appreciators

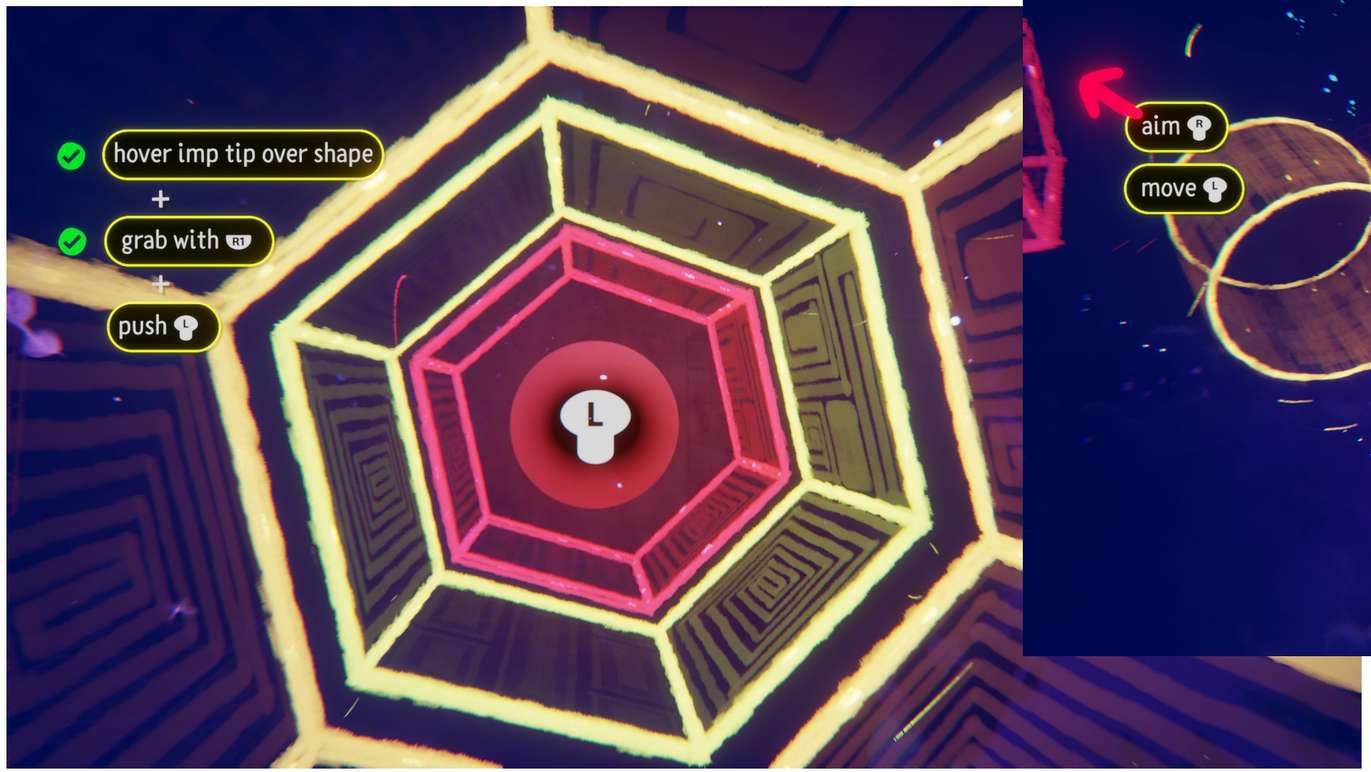
- Excited by a variety of unique content
- Enjoy games, videos, music, animations
- Willing to overlook “rough edges”

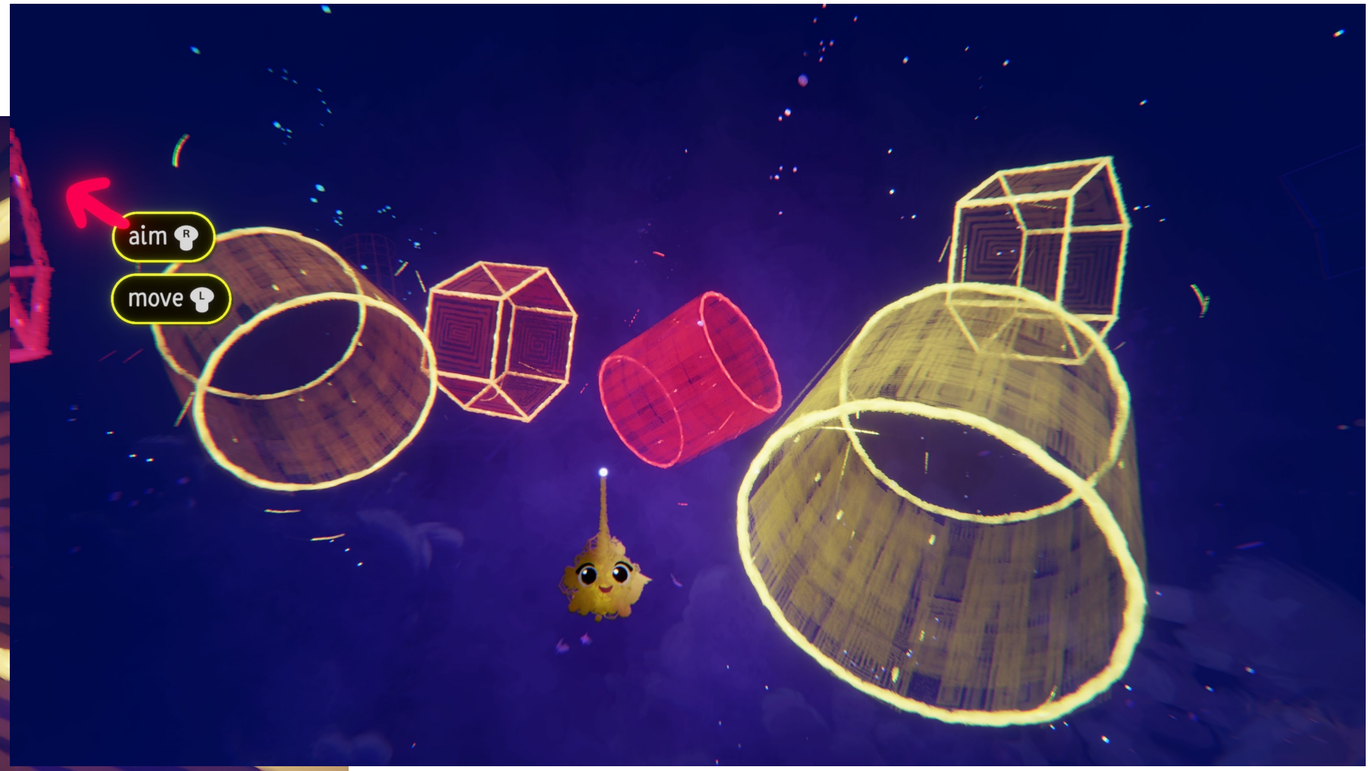
Traditional Gamers

- Only looking for “games”
- Expect high quality “complete” experiences
- Unforgiving of bugs or lack of polish

GDC GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE | July 19-23, 2021 | #GDC21

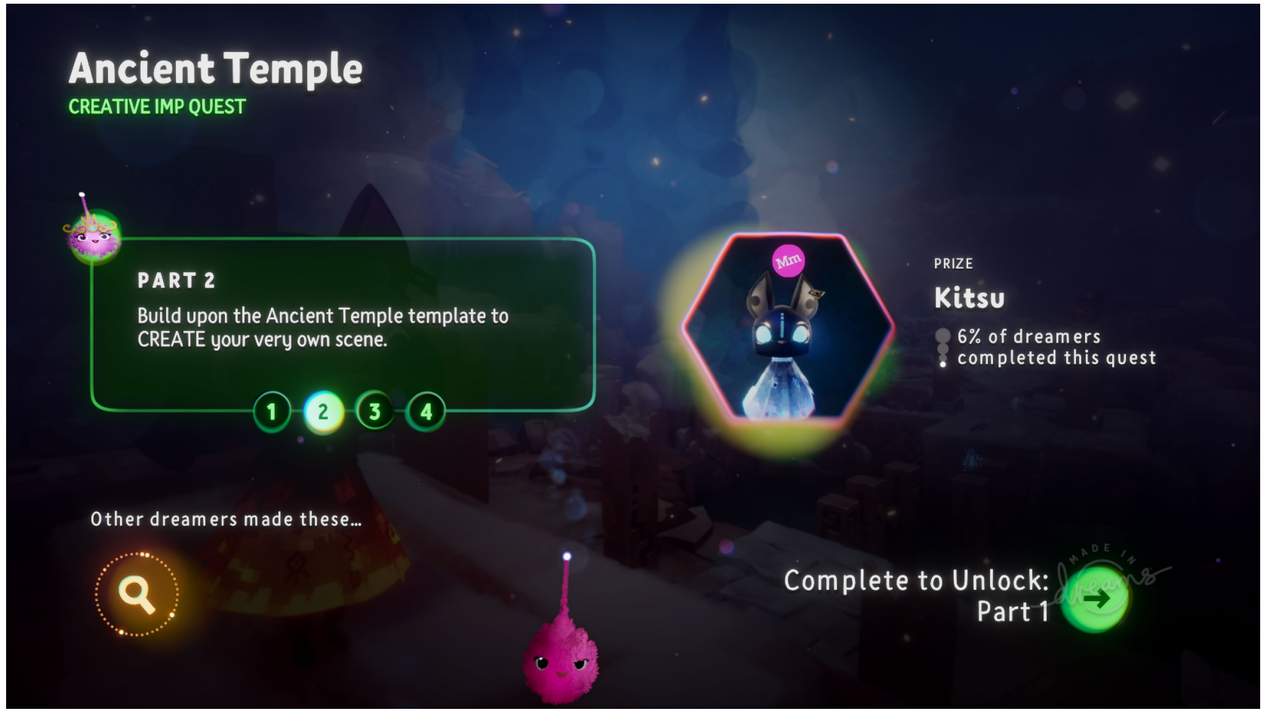
Gamified on-boarding - The basics

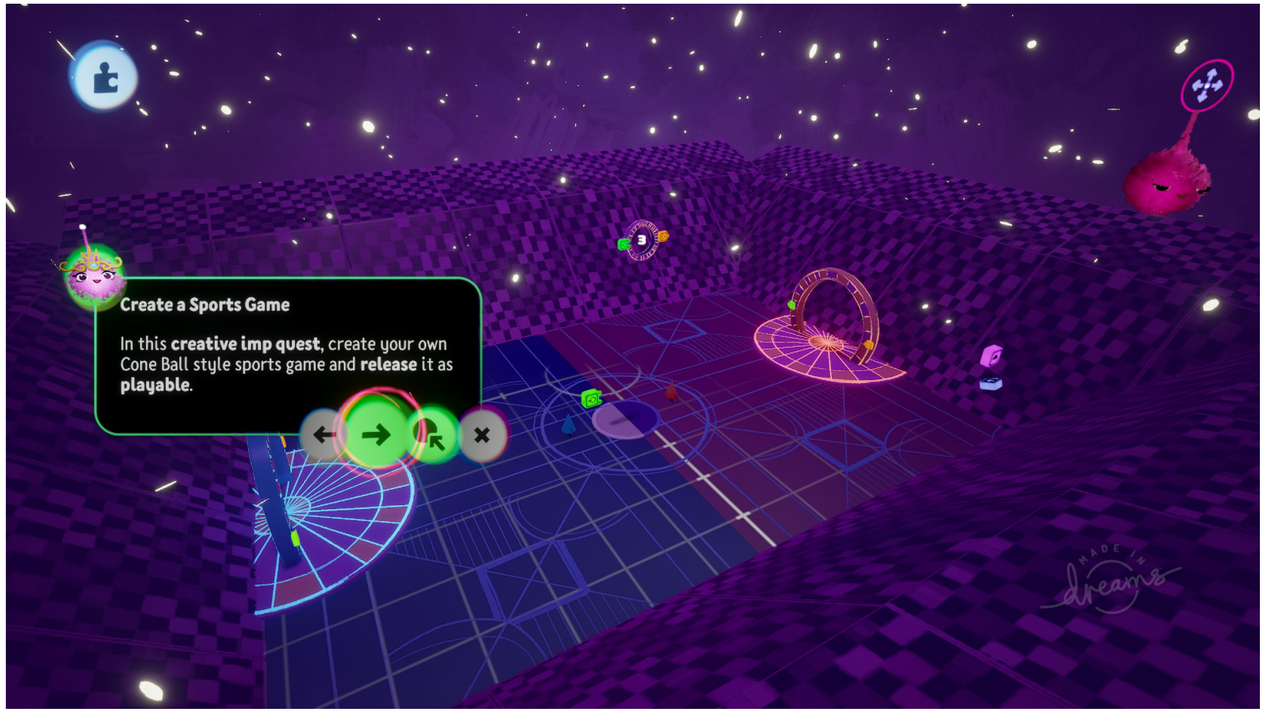




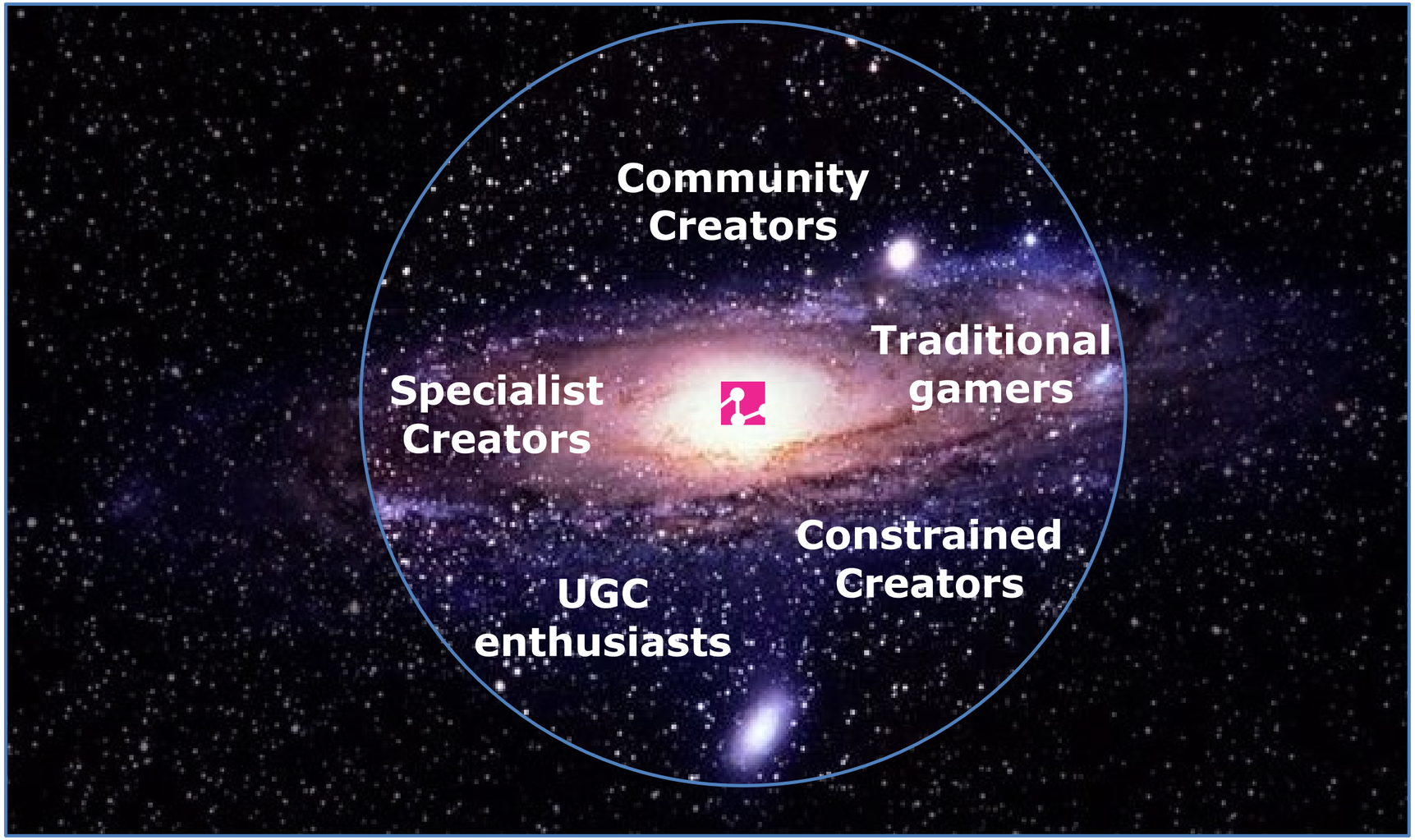
Story campaign

Creative imp quests





Real Launch…


Community Creators
Traditional gamers
Specialist Creators
Constrained Creators
UGC enthusiasts

Takeaways

Dev

- Leverage all the feedback you can during early access (Data, Forums, UR)
- Understand who your players are in depth
- Beware the blank canvas in creative games, it can easily overwhelm and put off players

Research

- Telemetry isn’t just for dashboards and graphs after a test, utilise it as a live feed to enhance your research
- Build your own tools (you don’t need to be a programming pro)

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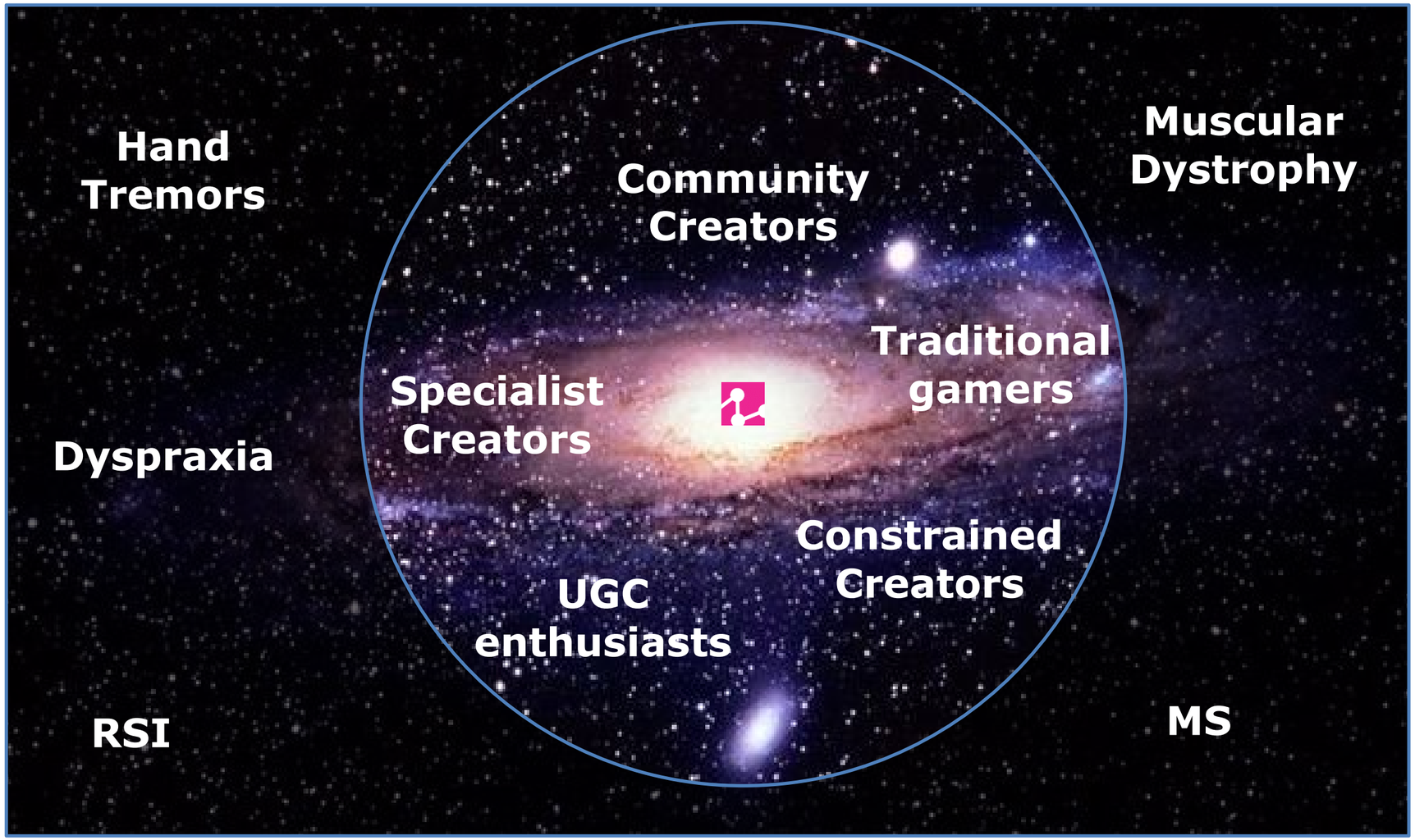

Motion controls excludes these people + more

Getting the community involved

Game accessibility guidelines

Accessibility evangelists

Access

Before te

- Rev
- Get
- Eng
- Che

During s

- Do
- Allo
- Tre

PlayStation.

The Usability of Accessibility

Mark Friend

Principal User Researcher & Accessibility Lead

@markusfriend

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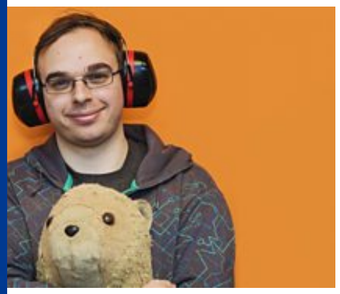
Accessibility Guidelines



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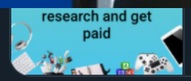
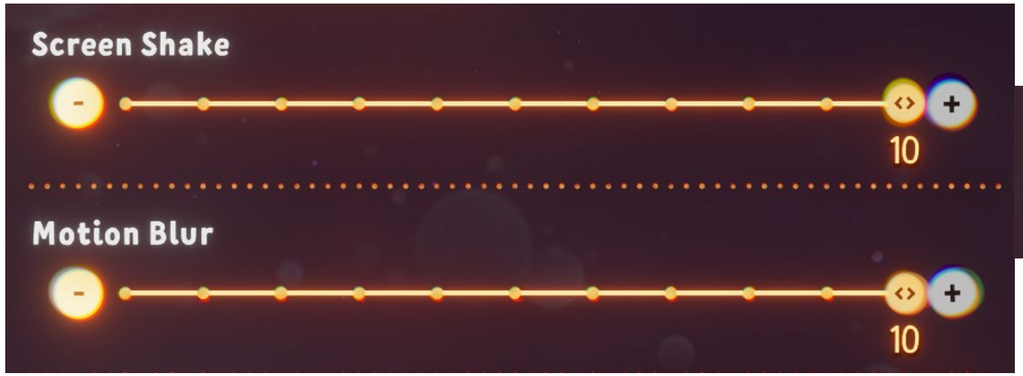
Research



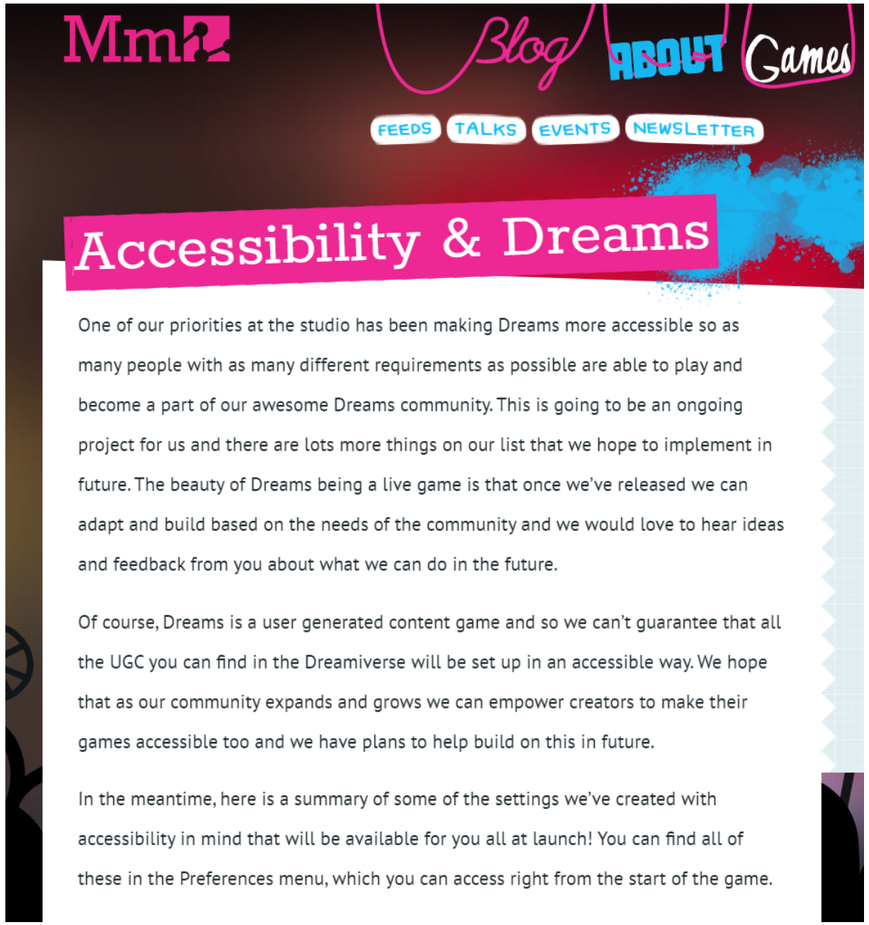
10:24 AM · Jul 11, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

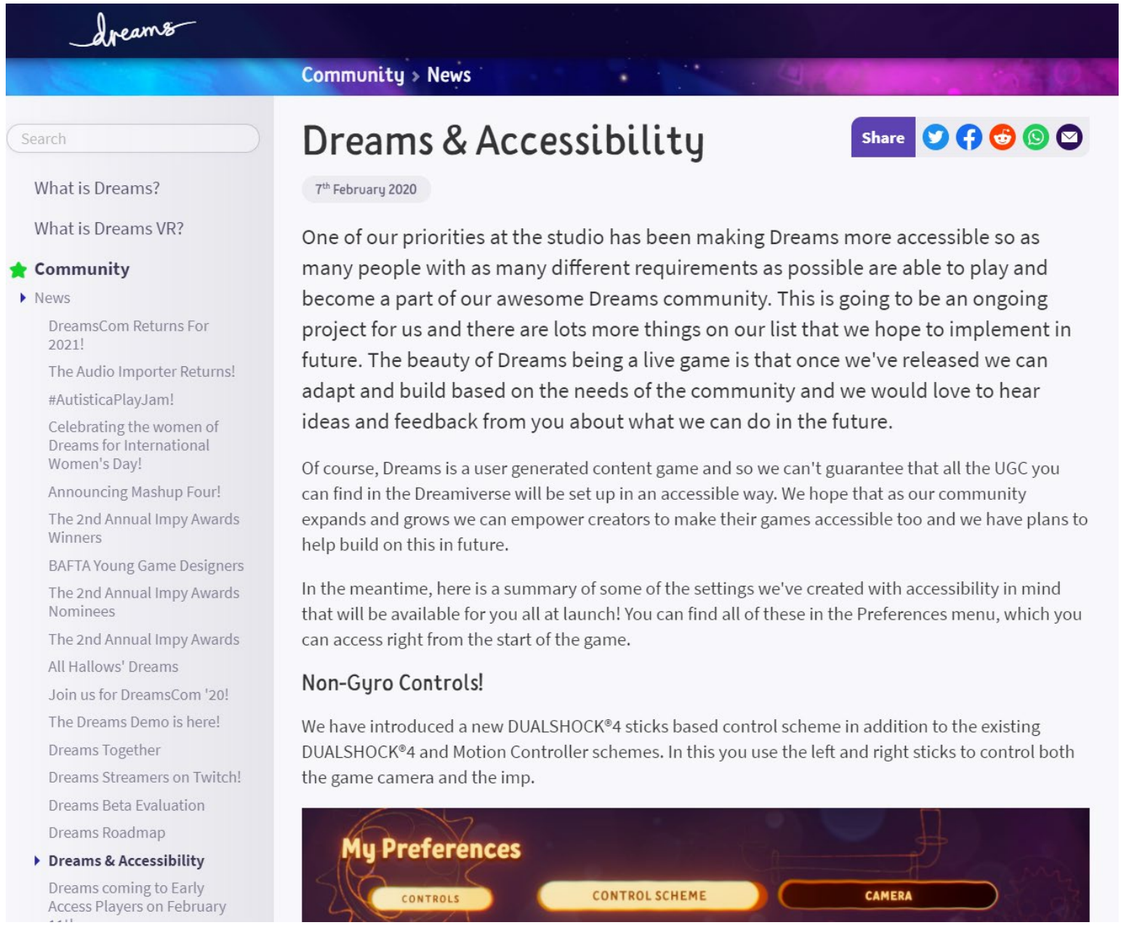
The results



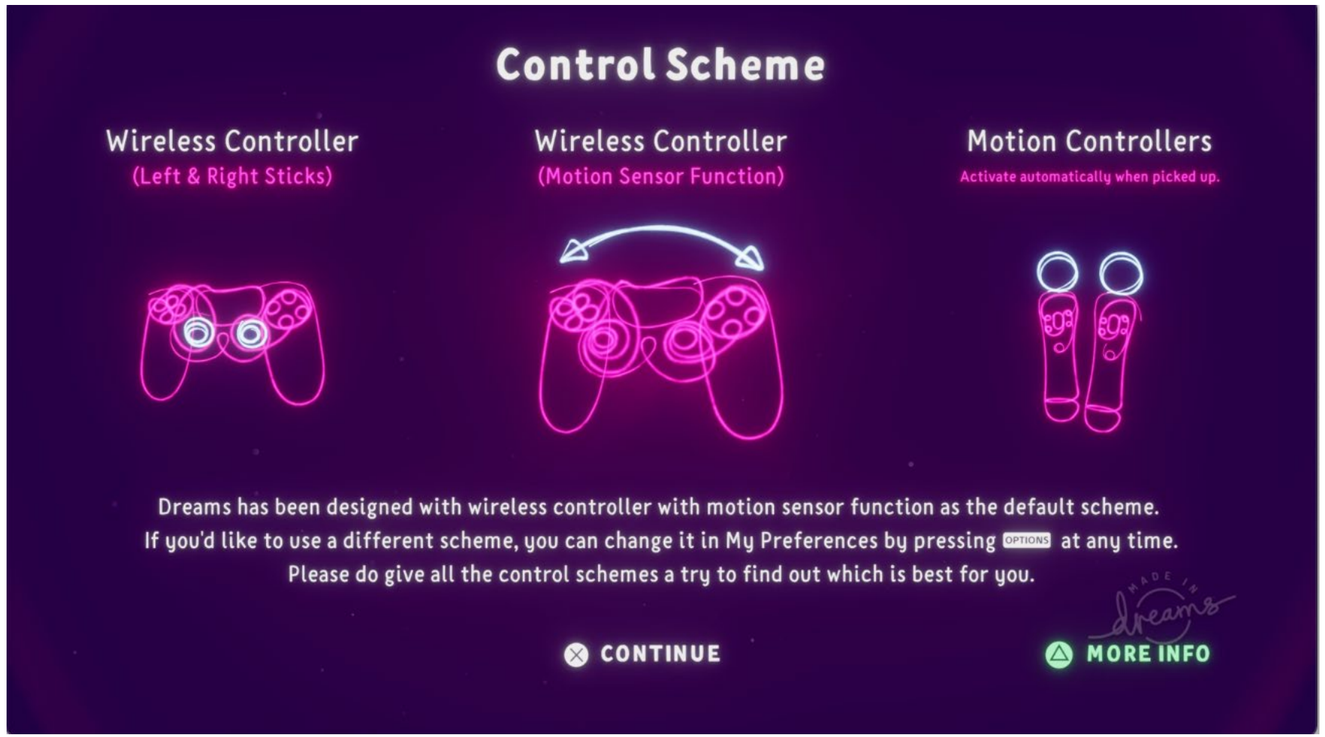
- Lack of full re-map limited accessibility
- It wasn’t always clear how or when the settings were useful to players!

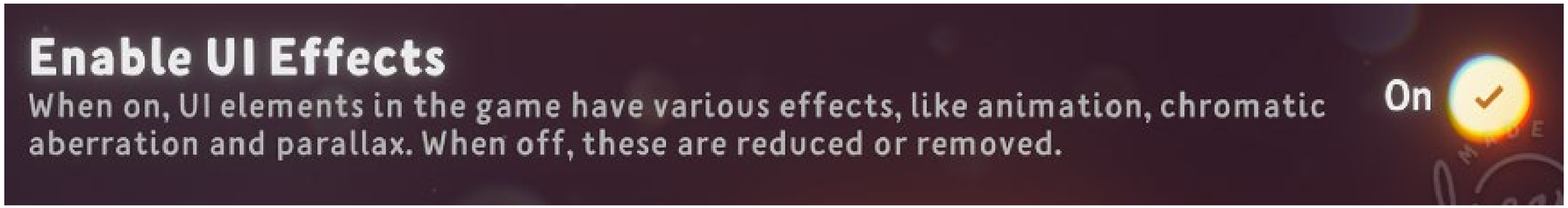
Additional considerations





Final fixes


Control Scheme
Wireless Controller
(Left & Right Sticks)
Wireless Controller
(Motion Sensor Function)
Motion Controllers
Activate automatically when picked up.
Dreams has been designed with wireless controller with motion sensor function as the default scheme.
If you'd like to use a different scheme, you can change it in My Preferences by pressing OPTIONS at any time.
Please do give all the control schemes a try to find out which is best for you.
CONTINUE
MORE INFO


Enable UI Effects
When on, UI elements in the game have various effects, like animation, chromatic aberration and parallax. When off, these are reduced or removed.
On

Takeaways

Dev

- Get experts and the accessibility community involved
- Have accessibility advocates across diverse teams

Research

- Accessibility trained researchers can catch potential issues throughout development
- Talk to people who have experience of accessibility testing
- Use testing to understand the effectiveness of accessibility features

Summary

- Test early and face the issues head on before it’s too late
- Getting tutorials right takes iteration
- Understand your players and give them what they want
- Make the accessibility a core part of the development process

Thanks to Panos, Luis and all the PlayStation research team!

And thanks to everyone at Mm, particularly Constantin who helped put the presentation together and Dave C and Jamie C who helped find us nice assets!

Questions?