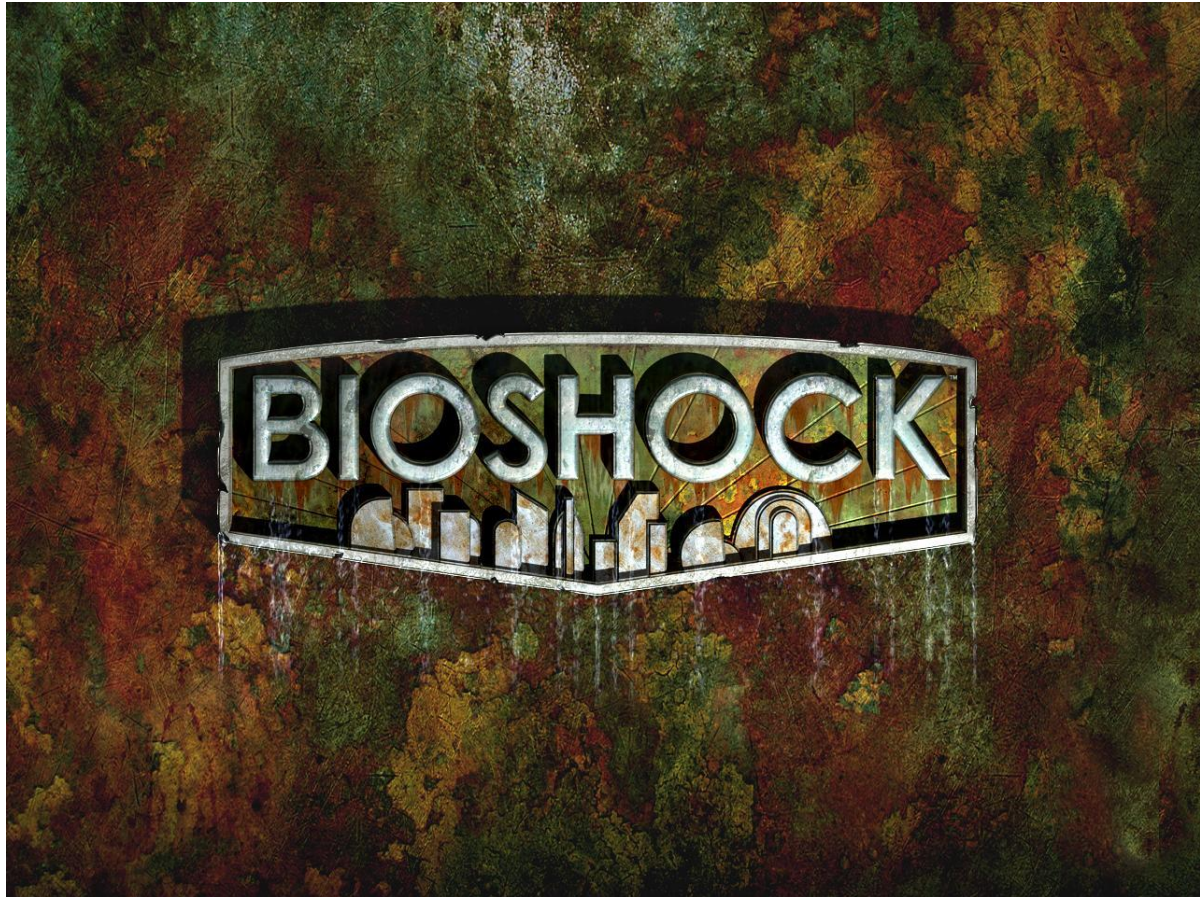




Christopher Kline  
Technical Director  
Irrational Games / 2K Boston

# **KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON: *MAKING BIOSHOCK***

# BioShock should have failed





# BioShock should have failed

- Series of big mistakes and corrections
- **Success through failure**



# Genesis

- Early 2002
- Small company, small successes
- Gaming market changing



# Company in crisis

- Console transition disaster
  - Creative leader running technological process
  - Design too ambitious
  - Poor decisions made early
- Reboot!



# Where to start?



# Where to start?

- “Let’s just re-make System Shock 2”



# Sci-Fi Demo

10/28/02





# Mistake #1

- “Let’s just re-make System Shock 2”
  - More space stations and killer robots?
  - Haven’t we done this before?
  - Can’t we do better?



# Why Play BioShock?

- Needed 200% more "WTF?!"

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  - Mind-blowing narrative and mystery



# Why Play BioShock?

- Needed 200% more “WTF?!”
  - Mind-blowing narrative and mystery
  - New and *different* AI experience





# A Living World

- Life exists *around* you but *without* you
  - Why?
  - How?
    - 3 interdependent classes of AI
    - Player is the “wild card”



# We did it for the money

- BioShock development stops for 2 years (2002 – 2004)
- Shipped 3 titles:
  - SWAT 4
  - Tribes:Vengeance
  - Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich



# Selling BioShock





## Mistake #2

- “Let’s just re-make System Shock 2”

## Mistake #2

- “Let’s just re-make System Shock 2”
- ***“Let’s just make a commercial flop!”***





# Selling BioShock

- Publishers are very risk averse
- Make the tail wag the dog





# Selling BioShock

- System Shock 2 game style now looked sexy
- Stock market mentality
- Landed a publisher

# OMG!

- What game are we making?
  - 7 months to figure it out
  - 14 months to ship it



# ?



# Pre-production Plan

- The “Vertical Slice”





# Pre-production: Code

- Tech team: 2K Australia
  - World-class console engine
- Game team: 2K Boston
  - Core gameplay systems
- Big tech risks/focus:
  - AI, Animation, Lighting



# Pre-production: Design

- Shock 2 was near-perfect design
  - A few fixable flaws...

# Pre-production: Art

- Focus on AI models
- “Form follows function”





**Evolved for melee combat**



**Evolved for ranged grenade combat**





## Evolved suck Adam out of dead bodies

The original design of the Little Sisters



# Pre-production Results

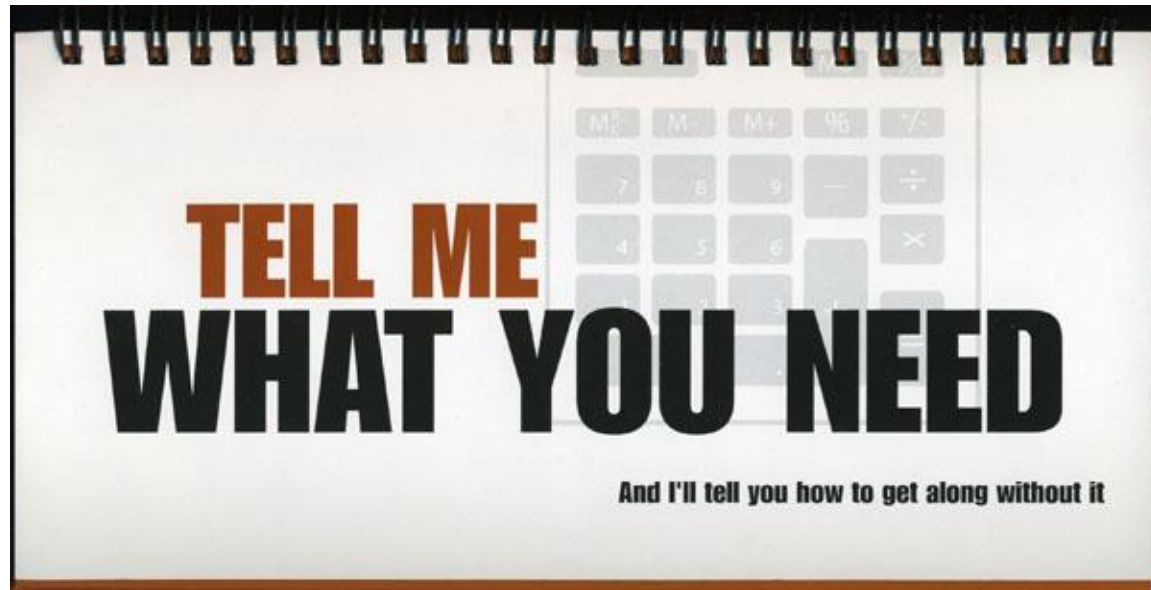
- Behold! "The Vertical Slice"





# Mistake #3

- “The Vertical Slice”





# Mistake #4

- *“Life exists around you but without you”*
  - Player-agnostic emergence sucks



# Mistake #5

- *“Form follows function”*
  - Missing the point
- What is the “star” of *your* game?



# Keep Calm and Carry On

- Does *your* team plan for pre-production failure?
  - You *will* fail sometime
  - Great teams learn and recover
- What did *we* learn?

# Wonder and Mystery

- “One Room That’s Right”



# Intentionality and Emotion

- People, not monsters
- Player-centric emergence





# Origin of the Little Sisters

- No morality without empathy















# Empathy





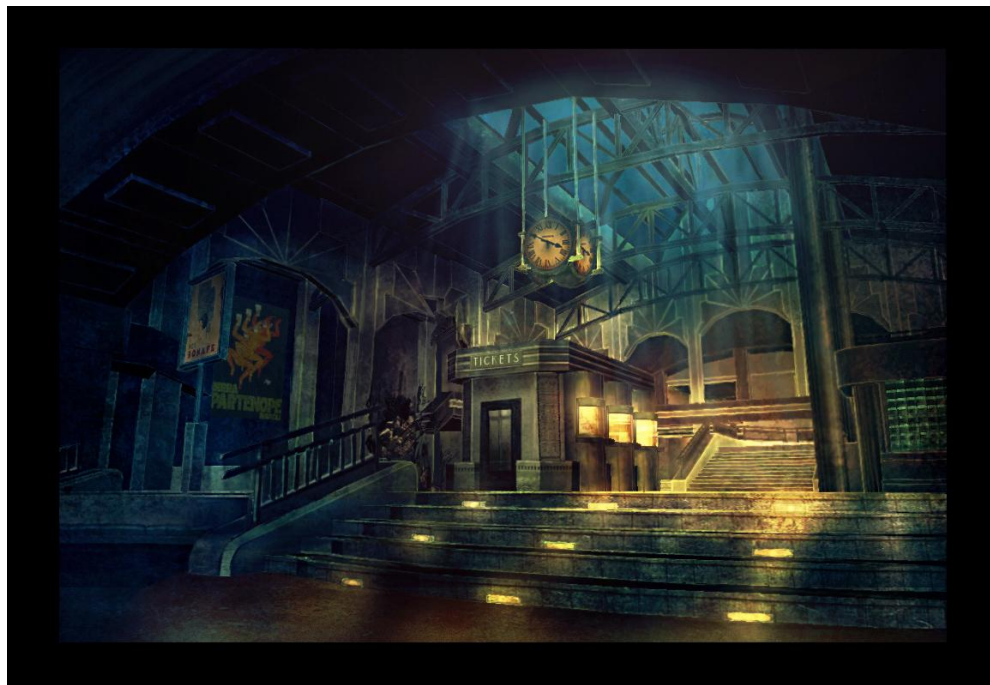
# Full Production

- Fix pre-production mistakes
  - But don't slow down
- Huge task list
  - But all departments working through it



# Full Production

- Clear skies, smooth sailing!





# Mistake #7

- *Thinking that schedules measure progress*
- We were building pieces of something
  - But what was it?



- Only one sure way to fix this kind of problem.



- Only one sure way to fix this kind of problem.
  - ...threat of public humiliation!

# E3 2006

- Show compelling user experience
- *Feeling, not doing*



# E3 2006

- Team:
  - W00t! We actually have a game!
- Press:
  - BioShock is *TEH AWESOME*





# Mistake #8

- *Evaluating your game based on press reactions*



# Mistake #8

- *Evaluating your game based on press reactions*
  - BioShock still not very popular on gaming major web sites
  - Gamers are complicated





# Shooter 2.0

- Pseudo-Objectivist  
RPG/Shooter/Horror/Adventure?
- “Core fantasy” must be clear
  - Soldier, Rock star, Race car driver
- Complex games need clear marketing



# Microsoft X06 Event

- Action not mood
- Show why environment and RPG elements were important, useful, and exciting

# Microsoft X06 Event

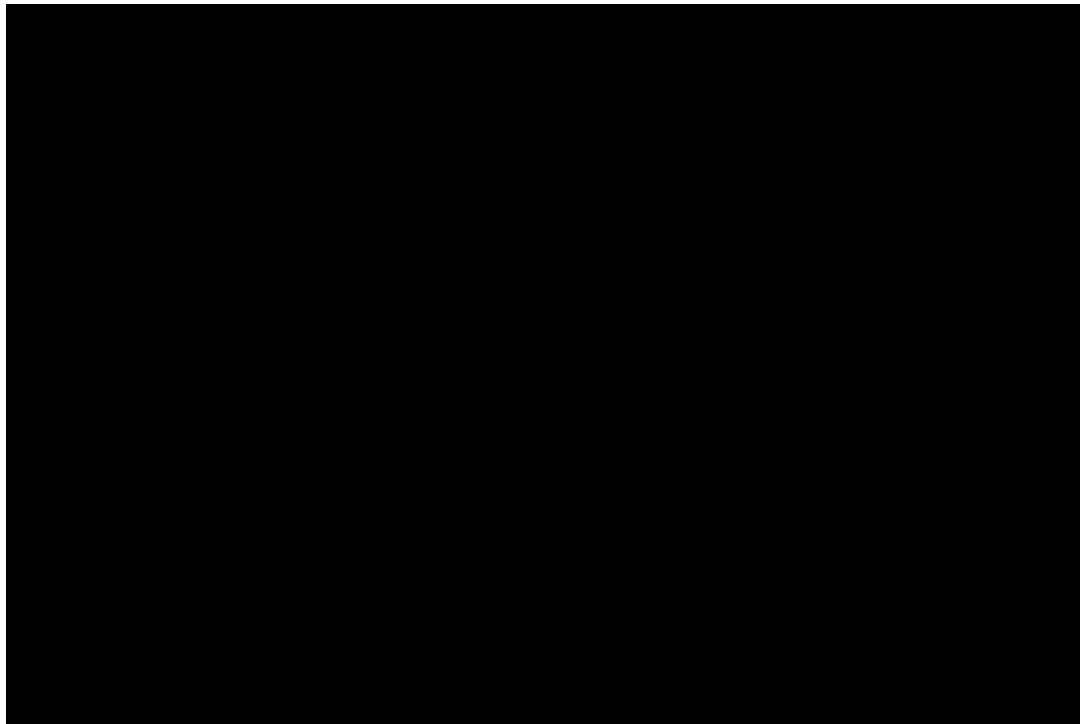
- X06 was big success internally and externally
- Saw what the game *could* become





# The Final Push

- All the big pieces falling into place





# Mistake #9

- *Waiting until very late to realize how important the small details were*



# Mistake #9

- *Waiting until very late to realize how important the small details were*
  - Do players understand the story?
  - The Harvest / Save mechanic
  - Money vs. Adam for player growth
  - How to encourage plasmid use?
  - Balancing the game
  - 30 FPS?
  - Umm, the script?
  - ...



# Mistake #10

- Trying to fit a 5 year story into a 30-minute lecture
  - Sorry folks!

# Final thoughts

- Success through failure







# Final thoughts

- Always remember that you might be totally screwing everything up
  - Listen to everyone
  - Doubt everything
  - Maintain intense honesty



Good teams that learn  
from failure make great  
games



2 K B O S T O N . . .

# BIO SHOCK TEAM

The background of the advertisement is a detailed, atmospheric scene from the video game BioShock. It depicts a flooded industrial interior, likely a Rapture city level. A large, imposing character in a diving suit, equipped with a flamethrower, stands in the water. In the background, a smaller figure can be seen. The environment is characterized by dark, metallic structures, pipes, and some green plants growing in the shadows. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, creating a sense of depth and immersion.

N O W   H I R I N G !

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