In 2015-2016 I heavily played PlanetSide 2, and while a fun game there where many problems with the game. Many of the issues where due to simple flaws in the design of the game, other where caused by major overlooks in the game design.

Flaws: point overcrowding, confusing squad/platoon layout, confusing menu making it hard to do anything, broken fast travel.

Points in PlanetSide turn into mad houses of lag and friendly fire. This is caused due to anywhere from forty-eight to almost hundred players fighting over one to four objectives, each meant for engagements smaller than 12 on 12. This is a side effect of the squad/platoon system, fast travel system, and scoring system.

First off, its due to the squad/platoon system, where it is common to see one or two platoons each with forty-eight players steam role over a point, or cluster of points, defended by half or quarter that many players. The goal, for these players is not to move the front, or reinforce sectors they take, but rather to bee line for a point of interest like a Power Plant or Bio Sphere. The issue is not that these players are employing bad strategy, the German Blitzkrieg proved that this kind of shock and awe fighting was wildly effective, the issue is the game doesn’t punish these players for failing to reinforce their supply lines, or to even defend the sectors they have captured. When the insensate forward march, that I jokingly call a wall of lag, is stopped by another faction, there are virtually no penalties for them having no supply lines.

In PlanetSide 1, a game I didn’t play, there was a vehicle called an ANT, these where used to transport materials from the warp gates to the fronts, these materials allowed player to respawn, and powered the force fields that defended the bases. If you lost your supply lines, you would find it nearly impossible to defend a siege. However, in PlanetSide 2 that’s not how it works. The ANT’s are still used to move materials around, but not for the bases. Where you can respawn is determined by a latus network, supposedly like that of a power grid. But this doesn’t solve anything, because there is a vehicle universally available that lets you spawn unlimited players, anyplace you want.

The Sunderer in PlanetSide 2 is honestly one of the biggest problems in the game. It allows player to spawn on it when it is deployed in a stationary mode, as well as resupply, heal, and change class; for free. It takes every feature of a stationary base, removes the ability to spawn other vehicles, and puts it on wheels. This means that even if you are cut off from the ‘power grid’ and can’t spawn in the base you are trying to defend, you can just spawn in one of the Sunderers that your team has ‘pulled’ for that engagement.

This leads into another problem with the game, that being the fast travel system. The maps in PlanetSide 2 are massive, 8 KM by 8 KM; it takes several minutes to fly from one side to the other, quite some time to drive from a warp gate to the front, and I’ve never tried walking more than a few hundred meters because the maps are that big. But the size of these maps is made completely null and void by its fast travel system.

Now I should say, that having a fast travel system in a video game is not an inherently bad thing, Borderlands 2 and Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel, did this fantastically. In Borderlands you play in a massive world, that moves through several point of focus as the player progress through the story. But you still must experience the world, there is no way around it. You spend time walking from place to place, and it never feels out of place. Borderlands is an amazing game for its story and characters, yes, but its made and balanced around combat. Yet traveling around its world is a normal and almost fun part of the game. Gearbox managed this in two ways I believe, the first is that you have rocket boosted cars, or Star Wars style hover bikes at every fast travel station, so if you know it’s a long walk you can take one of those, for free. The second way is that you can only fast travel from fast travel stations, so you still must walk or drive to a fast travel station if you need to get someplace. When you die, you are also fined a large percentage of your money, this means it always hurts the same to die, and killing yourself simple to fast travel is never worth it.

Day Break Games addressed the issue of fast travel in two ways, they gave you two hot keys, one that ‘redeploys you’ and one that ‘joins combat’ and both are ridiculous game ruining additions. Redeploying simple means, you get a 10 second count down, and if you don’t take damage for those ten seconds you are taken back to the spawn menu without it counting as a death. Join combat does the same thing, but then it auto reassigns you to a new sector, possible on a new continent, that sometimes has a battle taking place nearby.

In a game with an open world, giving player buttons on their keyboard design so that they don’t have to actually spend time traveling, and mobile spawn points so that they can fast travel anyplace, completely negates that open world. I think Daybreak tried to use the join combat feature to help distribute players better. However, what it turns into is people who don’t have a ‘clan’ or platoon to join getting assigned to a sector in the middle of no place, that has two allies and three enemies. This turns a game about waging a planet wide war, into a three on three hide and seek game with everyone running around as invisible snipers.

Further, more the re-deploy feature is abused by those who just zurg-rush in a straight line, once one front slows down, all of the players in those two or three platoons will just re-deploy to the other side of the map, or a separate continent completely and start all over again, leaving small squads and solo players to try and stop the now oncoming wave of enemies. This often results in the sectors they just captured being retaken.

The simplest way to fix the fast travel, is to make it so players must spawn at bases connected to the ‘power grid’ and can only fast travel from those bases. If they want to re-deploy, make it count as a death. (A change I believe Daybreak made just as I quit playing) Daybreak should also remove the join combat hotkey, make it a feature that you can access from the respawn menu. I also believe that there needs to be a stronger emphasis on sector control, and defense.

They way scoring works in PlanetSide 2 is that each continent has the three factions fighting on it. The first to 21 points wins the continent. Winning a continent will unlock a bonus for that faction. The continent then locks for some time usually about 8 hours, and another one unlocks. There are many ways to get points, you can generate them by building refineries and feeding them raw materials collected through the map. But they are also won for holding a certain percentage of sectors, and for hold points of interest like Power plants, Bio Spheres, or Tec plants. There are three of each of these points, each faction starts with one of each when a new continent unlocks, and each gives a different bonus too, such as passive heath recovery, or access to the faction main battle tank at vehicle spawning stations other than the warp gate. These points of interest supply powerful advantage as is, but when you add huge score swings to owning several at a time it almost negates every other way of generating points. An example was when I was playing if you controlled two Tec Plants your team got 3 points, if you owned 2 tech plants and two Bio spheres you got 7. Seven points is a third of what it takes to win the game. If you owned all three Tec plants, a nearly impossible task admittedly, you got 15 points, merely 6 points short of winning the continent, compiled with the fact that the other factions now don’t have the passive bonus from those points of interest, and it becomes a one sides slaughter fest.

I think with the passive bonuses granted by these points of interest make them important enough as is. I Don’t think that they should have bonus score assigned for holding multiple. Buffing the current passive bonus or increasing the ‘Continent capture’ bonus would be a better way of rewarding player holding those points of interest. This would eliminate the strategy of zurging through 5 sectors to capture a Tec plant. Which in turn would help eliminate point overcrowding and encourage players to spread out along the front and fight for sectors and hold those sectors.

A big part of the reason I stopped playing is because there is there was a very inconsistent player base for the game, many, many players left for the reason I stated above. Furthermore, almost every issue in PlanetSide 2 compounds on and with others. The game is a mess of poorly designed features, I used to compare it to a cake someone tried to make, except they didn’t know the langue the recipe was written in. They had all the right ingredients, they just added the wrong amounts and the wrong time. I really do believe that PlanetSide has the possibility of being an incredible game, even with the massive amount of room for player error; it simply needs to be designed better, to encourage players to ‘fight fair’. With this type of game, you cannot plan on players being smart enough, or coordinated enough to counter cheap strategies like zurg rushing a Tec plant. The game itself must punish the players and faction that uses game ruining strategies like this one; yet Daybreak does not seem to be interested in doing so.