

# Designing Dynamic Content

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# My Background

- ▶ Senior Game Designer @ Red 5 Studios
- ▶ Designing and crafting the dynamic world of Firefall
- ▶ Credited Products:
  - ▶ Guild Wars: Factions
  - ▶ Guild Wars: Nightfall
  - ▶ Guild Wars: Eye of the North
  - ▶ Guild Wars 2
  - ▶ Microsoft SQL Server 2005

# Why Dynamic Content?

- ▶ Content is evolving
- ▶ Massive multiplayer games present new challenges
- ▶ New opportunities for creating fun
- ▶ Get off the content treadmill

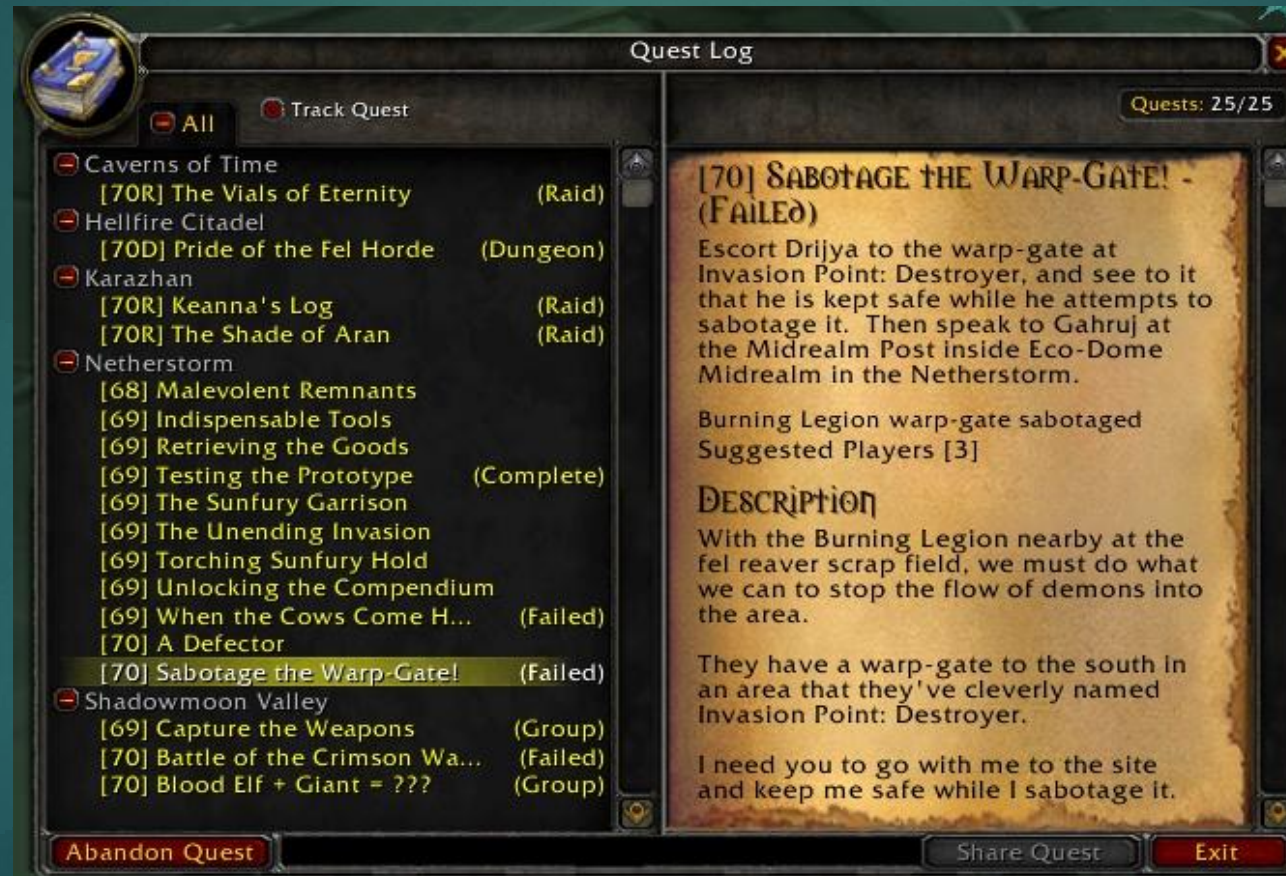
# The Evolution of Content

- ▶ Original Everquest
  - ▶ Did not have guided quests
  - ▶ Level up by grinding mobs
- ▶ World of Warcraft
  - ▶ Introduced the questing system
  - ▶ Conditioned players to load up on quests to level up





# WoW: Quest Log



# The Evolution of Content

- ▶ Warhammer Online
  - ▶ Public Quests
  - ▶ Staged progression
- ▶ Rift
  - ▶ Portal Events
  - ▶ World Invasion has consequence
  - ▶ Auto-grouping

# Rift: World Portals





# The Evolution of Content

- ▶ Guild Wars 2
  - ▶ Dynamic Events
  - ▶ Branching Events
  - ▶ Meta Events
  - ▶ Group friendly rewards and xp sharing
- ▶ Firefall
  - ▶ On-demand content
  - ▶ Parametric encounters
  - ▶ Player tailored guidance

# GW2: Dynamic Events



# The Evolution of Content

- ▶ Non-MMO Examples
  - ▶ Red Faction: Guerrilla
  - ▶ Grand Theft Auto 4
  - ▶ Red Dead Redemption
  - ▶ Just Cause
  - ▶ Animal Crossing

# Red Faction: World Map





# What makes content dynamic?

- ▶ Players perceive it as changing each play session
- ▶ Gameplay has multiple variations and parameters
- ▶ Many options:
  - ▶ Start Time
  - ▶ Time Duration
  - ▶ Location
  - ▶ Triggered by game events
  - ▶ Player triggered
  - ▶ Interacts with other content
  - ▶ Rewards are varied



# Time

- ▶ Different times of day or night
- ▶ Holidays, In-game events, player specific days
- ▶ Duration can change

# Location

- ▶ Different enemies
- ▶ Different loot drops
- ▶ Varying difficulty
- ▶ Different mechanics
  - ▶ Mountain top versus plains
  - ▶ Water versus air
- ▶ Proximity to other content

# Game State

- ▶ Outpost condition
- ▶ NPC Reaction
- ▶ Player accomplishments
- ▶ World Events
- ▶ Leaderboard / Ladder status

# On Demand

- ▶ Player triggered
- ▶ Using consumables (varying stats)
- ▶ Interaction with game objects
- ▶ Interaction with NPCs
- ▶ Moving to a specific location

# GTA4: Cellphone Requests Content





# Implementing Dynamic Content

# Messaging

- ▶ Player awareness
  - ▶ Trained by static content to follow quest logs
  - ▶ Visualizing the changes
- ▶ How is content delivered?
  - ▶ HUD elements
  - ▶ Map Markers
  - ▶ Voice Over
  - ▶ In world elements

# Firefall: SIN Cards



# Game Flow

- ▶ Dynamic Content may not have a set time or place
  - ▶ How to direct players?
- ▶ There isn't a quest log to follow
  - ▶ How to find objectives?

# Leading the Player

- ▶ World Map
- ▶ Heart Tasks
- ▶ Scout NPCs
- ▶ Crier NPCs
- ▶ Environmental Effects
- ▶ Voice Announcement
- ▶ Content Director



# Guild Wars 2 World Map



# Guild Wars HUD Events



# Telling a Story

- ▶ May be harder to tell a story with public content
  - ▶ Focus on getting across general lore points
- ▶ Dynamic content can branch!
  - ▶ Opportunity for a local storyline to be ever-changing
  - ▶ Cause and effect
- ▶ Opportunity to react to player state
  - ▶ Player reputation could affect content

# Player Participation

- ▶ Which players should the content be delivered to?
- ▶ Which players should get credit?
- ▶ How much credit?
- ▶ How are rewards distributed?



# Location Independence

- ▶ The need for relative coordinates
- ▶ Game mechanics must adjust for terrain
- ▶ NPC behaviors must adapt to environment



# Parametric Encounters

- ▶ Content must have multiple parameters built into it
- ▶ Player Data
- ▶ Geographic coordinates
- ▶ Nearby props or NPCs
- ▶ Configuration of encounter creating consumable

# Content Triggers

- ▶ Access to other world events
- ▶ In-game time and date
- ▶ Results of other events
- ▶ NPC states
- ▶ City states
- ▶ Player stats and achievements

# Context Sensitive NPCs

- ▶ Hand scripting NPC behavior can be messy
  - ▶ But...more straight forward
- ▶ Behaviors designed to react to situations can be very power and emergent
  - ▶ But...requires more AI investment

# Scaling

- ▶ Scaling is very important for balancing public content
  - ▶ Can scale by difficulty or by enemy numbers
  - ▶ Enemy abilities and AI can scale as well
- ▶ Determining the scaling factor
  - ▶ Potential participating players
  - ▶ Number of players
  - ▶ Average power of players
- ▶ Rewards need to be scalable as well

# Event Chains

- ▶ Dynamic events and branch and chain into each other
- ▶ Opportunity for players performance to have consequence
- ▶ By following a chain, player is led to more content
- ▶ It's important to balance both success and failure chains
- ▶ Pace the duration of the chain so that it fits within a play session
- ▶ Make sure to design event chains so they are self-reseting

# GW2: Event Chain Development





# Dynamic Rewards

- ▶ Dynamic may not be guaranteed to happen
  - ▶ Rewards in these cases should not be specific
  - ▶ Let players collect tokens for their effort
    - ▶ Karma Vendors
    - ▶ Crafting Resource Collection
- ▶ Rewards can be parametric just like the event
  - ▶ Change rewards based on time, location...etc....
- ▶ Remove player conflict
  - ▶ Make loot and XP sharing automatic
  - ▶ Do not make players desire particular event outcomes

# Personalizing Content

- ▶ Dynamic means it's possible to tailor content to player needs
- ▶ Alter content based on:
  - ▶ Player boredom / excitement level
  - ▶ Player's actual geographic location
  - ▶ Player's in-game behavior
  - ▶ Player's friends
- ▶ GM Based Approach

# Dynamic Zones

- ▶ Entire zones and servers of a game can be dynamic
- ▶ Player choices and performance can alter world events
  - ▶ Guild Wars: Utopia
  - ▶ Meta-events
  - ▶ RvR rewards
- ▶ Provides long term goals for players
- ▶ Moving Warfronts
  - ▶ Chosen warfront
  - ▶ SIN information warfare
- ▶ Phasing

# Dynamic PVP

- ▶ PVP level that changes during a match
  - ▶ Based on players completing objectives
  - ▶ Could be based on timer
  - ▶ Battle of Kylo – trebuchet and walls
- ▶ Players gaining combat / stat advantages
  - ▶ Forest of Niflhel - slaying Svanir gives time a stat boost
- ▶ Session-based progression
  - ▶ League of Legends
- ▶ PVP Tutorial in the open world
  - ▶ Heart of the Mists

# GW2: Heart of the Mists



# Dynamic Content Give Us

- ▶ Advantages

- ▶ A chance to give players a living, changing play space
- ▶ An opportunity for a much more social game
- ▶ The ability to give consequence to player action and decision
- ▶ Gets us off the content treadmill by being much more replayable

- ▶ Drawbacks

- ▶ Does not replace an engaging scripted narrative
- ▶ May not be seen by players if it is not on-demand
- ▶ Is a content delivery system, does not replace good base mechanic



The background is a solid teal color. There are several abstract shapes: a large, semi-transparent teal circle on the left side, a smaller teal circle in the top right, a red rectangle in the top right corner, and a medium-sized teal circle on the right side.

# Thanks for Listening!

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