Save Abuse and UX

Dawnflower Labyrinth

A fairly disorganized collection of user-research and musings

from early in Dawnflower Labyrinth's development

Collected Data

The following poll was sourced from Fogu's Story of Seasons forum.[1]

Do You Use Save Scumming? (April 22nd, 2015)

Yes, for many/multiple aspects.	34%	[44]
Eh, depends on my mood; I don't aim to do it or avoid it.	30%	[38]
Yes, but just for mining.	22%	[28]
No, not at all.	11%	[14]
Yes, but just for festivals.	3%	[4]

Total Votes: 128

Below, are user quotes from the same post containing the poll.

"I was save scumming for the fishing festival and getting sick of my bad RNG luck. Still keeping on trying…

… so far I am giving it a shot, at least for festivals, but usually I get bored pretty fast and just play without it." -Melody Muse

"So far I've just done it while mining…

… if I had to wait months and months just hoping to get a couple gold ores? Nope, not patient enough, I guess." -Sertith

"If I need a material I can only get by fishing right now (glittering stone, for example) and I go say, a week without even finding one, I'll save scum for it…

… I do save scum pretty much all of my festivals now. This is because when I entered my first fishing festival, I lost 30 times in a row" - Judgment

"I also save spam the fashion festivals because they are SOOO annoying and hard to win" -SelfSmarted

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1   http://fogu.com/hmforum/viewtopic.php?f=30&t=166615&start=30

"… if I'm short on a particular ore and I need to build something, then I'll save scum.

As for festivals I didn't bother my first year cause I knew I'd lose pretty much all of them, but now I'm in Year 2 and I might, especially given the complete RNG behind whether you win or lose."
-WeekenderGirl

"I do save before festivals, but I usually win now anyway, sooo it's not really necessary. I only cared when it was the fashion festival anyway since that's just luck…" -Tink

"I did it once at the mine because I needed one gold. Had to save scum 3 times until I got it."
-dr4g0nh34d

"I always save scum for mining, and I do it sometimes for festivals. It's hard for me to accept losing to the RNG if I put effort into actually winning the festival." -Panda Parfait

"I'm barely getting any rainy days between Spring and Fall year 1. Wished they program it to bring in more rainy days. I have a rather dried year 1." - dr4g0nh34d

*"I **despise** games that are overly reliant on the RNG to determine outcomes, especially when there is a vast disparity between a good and bad result. I view that as a massive design flaw that needs to be addressed and NOT by simply making save scumming more difficult. Players should have a certain degree of control over the outcome of a random event, and skill should be made a factor in the result…"* -Lirishae

"At first I would try and reset to not have it rain as in the previous game raining only counted as watering once a day. But stopped when I realized it was futile." -Tink

"When it comes to certain festivals, definitely *glares at the fashion festival menacingly* Amusingly when I went to do it for the mine, I got the metal I needed right away, so I didn't actually have to XD I thought that was rather entertaining." -Merriberry

"I did it twice. Once to get enough gold ore to upgrade my tools, and then again for platinum. I actually got lucky with platinum because while I was still collecting it, Rose County unlocked so I stopped scumming. They only have one or just a few each time, with a long gap between appearances, but it was only a matter of time before I got enough." -Azog

"The RNGs are just evil in this game! It took me hours of save scamming to finally get recipe set 12! Other than that though the only other time I save scum is when I'm mining and looking for a rare material, like orichalcum." -Katgirl

"I pretty much save scumming all the time when mining. Also during festivals that I think I can win. And any other times to make it more convenient. Because I don't have enough patience to wait for 3587356789 years to get enough gold or platinum or whatever to build something…" -Kenzo

"I save scummed at Year 1's Cooking Festival because I wanted Recipe Set #12 (going for Rae's reverse proposal eventually). Took me about 15-20 resets, but I got it in the end." -Ratiasu_0380

"I try to compete fairly in most festivals aside for the fishing festival. I believe that it is rigged" -Ladysasuke

"I can most definitely see why people would, what with the insanity that is the random generator in this game." -Yurusumaji

"Yep. If I didn't savescum I'd probably be old and grey before I ever got to upgrade my hammer. I think I had to reload about 20 times before I got even my first piece of gold.
I do it for conquest and festival wins too. Conquest RNG is nuts, and with that whole business about having to raise every single crop/animal product's brand individually... losing a festival means losing a lot of time." -a giant turnip

"I usually only save-scum for conquests or festivals wins. The reason for it is in case i don't win, but I normally do, so i just don't bother with it, even if i haven't gotten recipe set 12." -Dragonest

"I do sometimes before the festivals to make sure I win, but most of the time I win.
I will sometimes at the mine too when I get all stone and no ore or gems." -Pixelpixy

"Yes for different things, when I've a bad day with the RNG especially with the mine, but it also depends on my mood sometimes i don't have the energy to save scum…

Like with festivals i know i won't win! With the pet & cow festival my cat & cow had 0.5/1 heart there's no way i'm going to waste my time save scuming to win with such stats in a case like that. It can be quite stressful & tiring if it takes very long yo get what you want while save scumming too." -Angely

"I did at first, mostly for mining so I could get the proper materials for upgrading my tools and house." -Melly

"I save scum ONLY to get orichalcum to get the two-story house, and other ores. Other than that I try not to use it - it's too tedious. In the amount that it'll take to save scum I could've been able to play another day lol" -Samurott

Below are additional quotes from others that are applicable to games in general

"In RPGs I have no rules. I never encountered one that felt fair and balanced for non-savescummers, so the only option seems to be to save often and cheat all the way…

Guess I would prefer if more games had real permadeath, or real strict checkpoints, and were not balanced for people that just hit autosave/autoload frequently enough." -Livrem (Reddit)

"It depends greatly on the game. I think it's incredibly important for the game designer to wholly factor the save system they use when they design the game. Most do, but often they don't. It incetivises people to save the game before important moments, negating the challenge." -Maxevans60 (Reddit)

"The Harvest Moon team has been aware of this for some time, though. As early as Back to Nature, one of the sins you could confess to the local priest was 'I reset the game to win at a festival.'

… Practically the only way to get rare mining items – without blatantly cheating." -TVTropes

Initial Interpretation of Research

1. Most frequently, players mention reloading saves to win festivals, followed by mining.

2. Lost festivals are reloaded when players feel like they can *currently* win first place.

3. The difference between first place at a festival and second is *everything*.

4. Players strongly dislike how random the results in the game seem to be, and mention RNG.

5. Players will look for a particular resource from mining or fishing and reload until they get one.

6. Players are less likely to reload saves when there are multiple ways they can attempt to achieve their desired result or item.

7. Some festivals are known to be particularly random in their results, leading to more save abuse.

8. Players do not reload saves when they know or at least think that it won't change the result, such as with the weather or a festival they know they haven't prepared enough to win.

9. Existing games in the *Bokujou* series may be balanced around players reloading saves compared to playing "fairly."

10. Players reload saves to progress through tangible gameplay system gates/unlocks, such as finding a particular resource to upgrade their tool or house to the next level.

11. Players are pleasantly surprised when they are "lucky" and get the item they need without reloading saves.

Suggested design, pending further research

- Remove RNG from festivals. There are strict quantifiable elements to contest success that players either meet or do not. There is no variation in the success rating of different entrants (although their names and appearances might be different). As such, a concrete ranking acts more accurately reflects player progress in the areas that the contest measures.

- Adjust prizing mechanics. In the newest *Bokujou* game, prizes for higher level festivals are awarded in sequential order, possibly rewarding the lowest tier "random" prizes when the higher tier rewards run out. As players can already choose which difficulty of contest to enter, this is less of an issue when the difficulties have different prizes.

- Further adjusting prizing mechanics, there is no reward for second or third place. In reducing the difference between results, a separate progression of reward items can be given to second or even third-placing contestants. Preventing contradictory game design, players that place first should be given the option of the second or third place prizes instead if they so choose. This hopefully results in an item the player doesn't have if they place second (an acceptable result) and the ambition to try harder next time, rather than not being rewarded for their effort at all. Even with sequential item rewards, players that place highest still have their choice of 3 different items, which hopefully sates players who would otherwise reset for a different result.

- Random resources from mining (and possibly forest exploration) are essential to established gameplay patterns and conventions. Games with noteworthy grinds due to heavy random game elements have fan-imagined "desire sensors," where the game knows what resources are wanted/needed and refuses to produce them. The following are suggestions based on how I know different games handle RNG, player expectations and the fabled "desire sensor."

  - Actually create a desire sensor. Player behavior can be tracked and item/progression upgrade paths are linear-ish. Determine what upgrades a player is currently seeking, based on current progression and potential indicators like visiting merchants that provide upgrades and or lingering/viewing certain upgrade options. This is a fairly sophisticated system and I'm uncertain it's actually been implemented successfully if at all before.

    - Add "desire" to needed items for progression or upgrades that the player checks the status of (lingers on), possibly an integer value for the quantity of items remaining that are required.

    - Add "desire" to necessary items required to upgrade the tool or tools the player has used most recently- possible issue if gathering that resource requires using a different tool. Can possibly count this over a period of the last ingame week (day by day so it maintains a rolling count)

    - Increase the chance of obtaining the items by some amount if they have desire. This is possibly based on how much desire they have, but this results in droughts towards the end of progression requirements. Instead, reduce the value by 1 for each item gained towards progress and use its presence as a state-based check for a different system.

    This proposed drop chance system that works in tandem with the "desire sensor" system should be similar to bad-luck prevention present in other games. Successive attempts (possibly time limited) to obtain an item unsuccessfully will increase the drop rate value of that item by some amount up to another arbitrary amount. As soon as the player obtains that item, (possibly) reduce the value of desire for the item by 1 (complicated if they sell it afterwards) and reset the drop rate to its base value. Rather

than making items have directly percentage-based drop chances, have whole number values that are added for each item in a drop table and then chosen based on ratio. This prevents the need to decrease the chance of one or more other items' values when you increase the desired item in order to maintain 100%. The meaning of 100% shifts instead.

Additionally, remove RNG from festival results entirely. Have strictly evaluated values that result in different placement reflecting player success in the areas the festival measures. Remove the massive difference between first place and everything else by providing different rewards to lower placing contest entrants. Players that place higher can choose to receive a lower place's reward instead as a replacement. Rewards are a linear progression, so that players are not encouraged to reset even if they win to get a different reward. The lowest tier rewards shouldn't be items to collect like recipes but resources like fertilizer or high quality fodder to assist players in doing better next time. But, first, second, and third places will reward items that players actually want.

Poll Responses for Persona Creation

Responses to the poll/post from Fogu could contribute to the development of personas for user-centric design. While the research data represents a very limited segment of the player population, the poll responses and more subjective analysis of Fogu's userbase suggests the creation of a persona with some of the following attributes/motivations.

Plays these games to experience different NPC social events

Replays a game multiple times to see different events/endings

Has set goals in mind to accomplish and prioritize when playing

Dislikes random game systems that slow their experience down