



War Commander – Teardown

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Teardown Objectives

- Perform detailed game analysis between War Commander (WC) and Edgeworld (EW)
- Survey superior and inferior features of WC in order to identify potential enhancements to improve EW's monetization performance, and to assess technical positioning of competing developer
- Compare and contrast titles across multiple dimensions:
 - UI/UE
 - Gameplay
 - Acquisition Tactics
 - Retention Tactics
 - Monetization Tactics
- WC was identified as a suitable proxy due to similar target audiences, free to play model, MMORTS category, and foundation within the social-gaming space



War Commander - Overview

- War Commander (WC) is a browser-based core title developed by Kixeye
- Genre: MMORTS set in present day/near-future military theme
- Platforms: Facebook.com & Kixeye.com, via direct link to Facebook.com account
- User Volume – 500K, per Facebook estimate
- Listed within Top-30 list of top-grossing Facebook games
- Additional user statistics (Facebook 2012 press release)
 - Daily active users play 38 minute sessions on average
 - Players log more than two sessions a day, spending an average of 1 hour and 30 minutes
 - Speed-ups account for 85% of revenue across all of KIXEYE's games, including War Commander



UI/UE – Base View



- **Functional/Visual Notes**
 - UI Overview: View angle of player base utilizes similar top-down view, with animations for both resource buildings and unit production buildings
 - Environmental: View includes environment animations such as flying birds, trees, and ruined buildings to enhance atmosphere/visual effect. Additionally, there are animations of small drones transporting resources from harvesting buildings to storage units.
 - Residual Effects: Enemy soldiers and machinery that are killed/destroyed during base defenses remain in the map, long after the battle has ended. Blood and gore graphics are included, complete with carrion coming in and picking at remains after battle.
- **Takeaways**
 - WC's environmental and residual features create a superior UI against EW's 'static' base view. While this is strictly a visual feature, it effectively eliminates the notion of being 'boxed in' by delivering appealing visuals.
 - EW's current state design requires player to open up mission screen and 'remember' what to do. This may have a negative impact upon new player retention rates. Contrast this with WC's always open Mission list.
 - WC's minimized building queue makes it a bit challenging to keep track of current progress and estimated time to completion of building/research events. Contrast this with EW's UI, which clearly displays time to completion.



UI/UE – Base View (In-Browser via Facebook)



- Functional/Visual Notes
 - Similar to full-screen view, with additional functionality to zoom in/out of base view
 - Ability to view Facebook friends who are also playing WC, view their respective base, and to invite friends to play the game (A)
- Takeaways
 - EW's FB experience offers reduced sizing of UI in Facebook view. However, players can revert to full-screen mode, so this deficiency may have no impact.
 - EW lacks the ability to tie in Facebook social functionality via friend finding and ability to view their layout
 - Next steps may be to assess the proportion of active EW users logging in via Facebook to determine risk of these UI gaps, and compare relative customer churn rate vs. browser users.

UI/UE – Base View (In-Browser via Kixeye.com)



- Functional/Visual Notes
 - Ability to play directly from Kixeye.com, which runs through Facebook platform. Functionality offers player to 'port' current progress on Facebook into Kixeye.com site.
- Takeaways
 - Overall UI between Kixeye.com and Kabam.com are equivalent in functionality and ease of use
 - Ability to port progress between Facebook.com and Kixeye.com underscores close reliance upon Facebook as a platform



UI/UE – World Map



- Functional/Visual Notes

- Each server (called 'sectors') comprised of a grid of 499x499 hexagonal tiles
- Player can view location and rank of enemies, both human (red) and CPU (yellow)
- Deployment of player's troops (blue) accompanied by real-time troop avatar movement, allowing both the player and enemies to visualize troop movements and deployment positions across the map
- Resource deposits available for occupation throughout the map
- Player can quick-reference these different types of locations (resources, enemy players) using the 'Recon Satellite' toolbar.
- Some uninhabitable tiles are signified by mountainous terrain
- Player is allowed to move bases to a new sector every 7 days (or earlier through real-currency payments)

- Takeaways

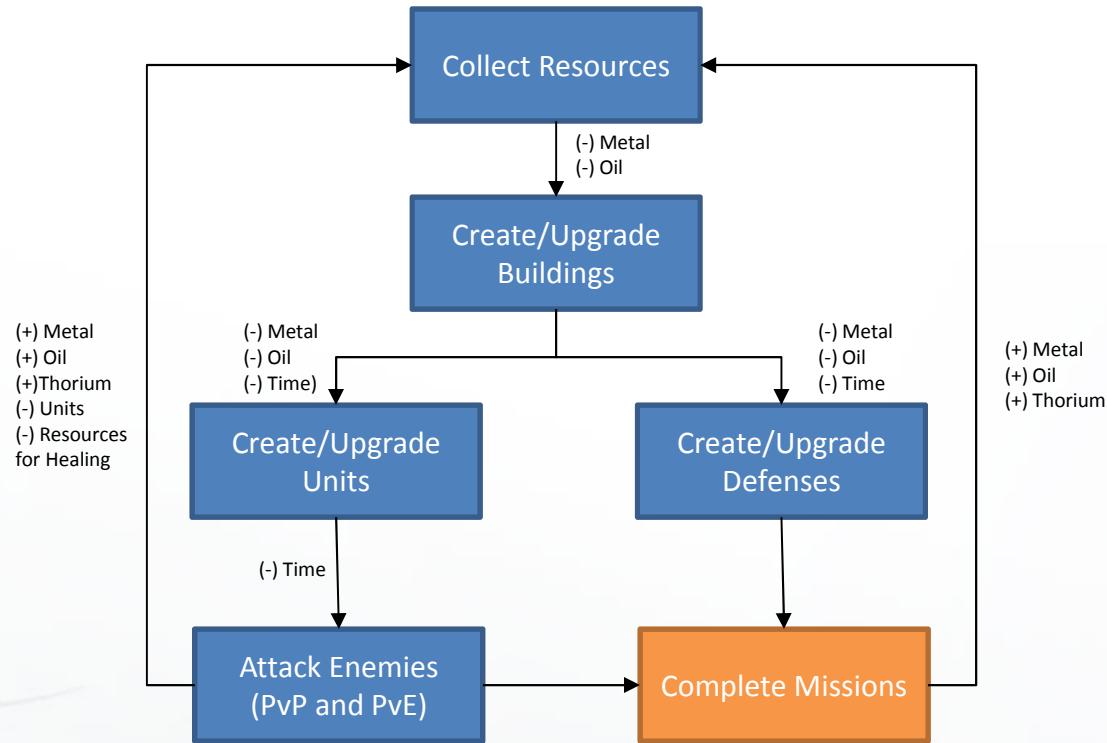
- EW world map is inferior compared to GC, due to less dynamic displays and RTS elements. Signals of incoming attack allow for instant strategic changes for players, resulting in a much more 'live' experience.



Gameplay



Core Gameplay Loop – War Commander



- WC employs a basic core gameplay loop similar to that of EW, featuring similar time barriers to collect resources, create/upgrade buildings and units, and to attack
- However, WC differs by offering specific gameplay features that enhance the experience in several of these game loop components
- Primary monetization features designed to increase both Resource collection and build/upgrade speed
- WC does not offer any base expansion like EW (Aurora-1 and Caldera-2), but resource deposits can be treated as base extensions, requiring defenses to be set-up to defend these resources
- Does not provide a framework for players to enter alliances with one another



Gameplay Comparison – Combat

- **RTS Gameplay** – WC’s combat gameplay offers the ability to select an individual and/or group of units and direct their movements and targets. Player can flank or push down the middle and/or exploit/protect troop specializations, offering significantly improved tactical feel and superior gameplay.
 - In EW, troops are deployed in clusters, and auto-target turrets before moving onto buildings. Often times these units split off on their own, targeting their closest threat.
- **Attack Capacity** – The number of troops that can be used in a given attack is directly proportional to the level of the Storage building. However, as troops are lost, capacity opens and allows for the player to re-deploy additional reinforcements.
 - This is identical in functionality to EW’s Warp Gate capacity; need to level up this building to deploy more troops in a given attack
- **World Map Tactics** - In order to attack another base (both PvE or PvP), the player must deploy their troops on the world map to an adjacent tile. This requirement adds tactical complexity to the game, as enemies can visually identify troop movements and potential build-up of forces, occupy potential attack routes with troops, etc. Additionally, defensive-minded players can relocate their base up against mountainous regions, eliminating potential attack angles.
 - While similar to EW Base features - where attacks can only be initiated against bases neighboring your alliance’s controlled region - players are required to cover defenses against all angles of attack and any different number of troop compositions





Gameplay Comparison – Combat (cont.)

- **Resource Gathering** – Similar to EW, resources can be gathered on base, as well as attacking other bases (PvP and PvE) by targeting resource buildings
- **Resource Bonus and Re-Roll** – Upon victory against PvE opponent, player will receive a loot drop bonus in addition to the actual amount of resources looted during the attack. Alternatively, the player can spend thorium (rare in-game resource) to ‘re-roll’ for the opportunity to earn a different and potentially better (or worse) bonus. Each subsequent roll costs more thorium to re-roll. It appears that each roll costs the player double the amount of thorium each time.
 - Traditional PvP results in a resource drop that is proportional with the resources held by the defender
 - In EW, player is limited to the resources that are available on-hand at the given base, without additional opportunity to ‘spend’ resources to upgrade the resource drop.
- **Unit Healing** – Unlike EW, units are not actually lost after battle. Troops that are killed during attacks are taken out of the attack, but the player can heal these troops back to strength.
 - In order to complete healing, player must expend resources and time. The res/time costs are tied to the strength and volume of units requiring healing.
 - Player can only heal one platoon at a time
 - This functionality may help encourage the frequency of PvP attacks and investment into advanced units, as there is only a resource expenditure required to re-gain lost units back





Gameplay Comparison – Defense

- **RTS Gameplay** – Similar to attack mechanics, individual units can be selected and deployed in a specific manner. During attacks, player has the ability to maneuver units in a tactical manner, and to exploit/protect unit mismatches. This also lends itself to other buildings such as Mine Factory (see below) and bunkers (fortify with troops to increase damage).
 - Defensive gameplay in EW is more static, with an approach centered around turret functionality
- **Mine Factory** – This building adds an additional defensive scheme and monetization loop into the game not seen in EW.
 - Construction Loop comprised of initial placement of mines (base level = six mines), equipping these slots with a mine (res and time). Once mine is used, player must expend additional res/time to re-build the mine.
 - Upgrade loop comprised of research (res/time), and assignment to mine slots (additional res/time). Furthermore, if the player levels up their mine type while having existing mines, they must be ‘used’ before they can be upgraded.
 - Building upgrade loop allows for additional mines to be placed, at an expense of res/time expenditure
- **Barricades** – Represents another defensive scheme/monetization feature that is not available in EW
 - Serve as defensive ‘walls’ that the player can construct to slow an enemy attack. These are built and upgraded using time/resources, and are not dependent upon finding a special item (as is the case in EW monuments).





Gameplay Comparison – Defense (cont.)

- **Defense Set-up** – Defense turrets in WC are comprised of two components; turret platform and the turret itself. Player must first build a platform, which can then house one type of turret, each of which are more effective against specific units. This requires an additional resource commitment step (to build the platform, then turret). Additionally, the player is allowed to change the turret, at the expense of resources and time. This allows for flexibility in adjusting defenses on the fly.
 - **Upgrade Loop** – Loop in this mechanic is basic, comprised of resource/time expenditure to research improved turret levels
 - **Upgrade Tree** – Turret upgrades are non-linear; player is able to upgrade their turrets to the maximum level researched of that type. For example, if a player has level 1 Machine Gun turrets, but has researched up to level 4, they can upgrade up to level 4 immediately in a single upgrade step. Resource expenditure to upgrade is consistent with the level increase. Time requirement does scale up as well, but unclear whether it is to the same degree.
 - **Monetization Loop** – Given WC's upgrade tree, it demonstrates a willingness to forfeit time barrier in this particular scheme, as players can quickly make a leap without needing to wait for building construction in each level. This might be offset by the need to upgrade the turret in two parts (i.e., base and turret). Overall effect may encourage hard currency spend to research turret levels and level up defenses.
 - In EW, turrets are constructed as a standalone building, and require the player to move the entire turret to change defensive schemes. Furthermore, player must cascade up through each turret level.





Gameplay Comparison – Wave Defense

WC offers Wave Defense features that allow the player to test their defenses. Wave Defense manifests itself in one of two ways: Go-Go Bar (persistent) and Live Events (periodic). These features provide an interesting contrast to the EW Defense and Invasion Simulators (D/I).

- **Go-Go Bar:** Player is able to activate a wave of CPU controlled units to test their defenses, under the premise that enemy troops are looking to enjoy themselves at your Go-Go Bar. The building also provides defending troops with a percentage damage bonus, with the boost dependent upon the building's level.
 - **Troop Composition** - Player can select the number and type of troop to test their defenses against, and can set the direction of the incoming attack. Alternatively, player can elect to deploy a randomized composition of enemy troops. In EW, troop compositions in D/I Sims are hard coded into the game.
 - **Constraints** - Available unit type is parallel to the units unlocked by the player. Total number of troops available to send on a wave (capacity) is a function of Go-Go Bar building level. This is similar to the EW Defense Sim, where levels are unlocked based on building level.
 - **Cost** – Initiating WC wave defense has real costs. Post-wave, player must heal buildings and troops using resources and time. In contrast, EW simulations do not cause real damage to the player's turret/base.
 - **No Unique Monetization Loop** - To date, there is no distinct loop in place to this feature; there are no item/XP rewards for successful defense. Only potential loop is residual from standard gameplay unit/building loop (upgrading units for combat-related purposes). Thus, EW Simulators provide a superior monetization loop with prizes and XP to encourage active usage of this feature.





Gameplay Comparison – Wave Defense (cont.)

- **Live Events (called Special Events)** – WC features a ‘wave defense’ feature that allows player to test their defenses against increasingly difficult number and types of CPU troops. Furthermore, successful completion leads to prizes, often in the form of an unlockable unit/troop.
 - These wave defense mechanisms are event driven – beginner player event is called ‘Operation Badger Run’. In this example, player can unlock the Honey Badger tank troop upon successful completion where the player must fend off 15 different waves to earn the prize of the Honey Badger schematic.
 - Many of the Special Events are driven off of this wave defense mechanic. More on this in the *Gameplay Comparison - Special Events* section.





Gameplay Comparison – Research & Economy

- **Instant Complete** – WC allows for players to bypass the last five minutes of progress for all unit creation, construction, and research with an instant upgrade. Furthermore, this enables quick upgrades to level 3-4, which facilitates new player retention and ramp-up.
 - EW does not offer this functionality. While this may not have a large difference upon the actual gameplay, there may be some perceived benefit to being able to finish these steps early.
- **Unit Upgrade Loop** – In addition to overall unit upgrades, player can equip individual soldiers with different upgrades. Similar to unit unlocks, the tech must first be researched (at time/res expense), then equipped to individual units at an additional res expense. Varying levels of technologies can also be found/purchased for different levels of strength/rarity.
- **Overdrive** – Player can select to place Power Plant (res harvest) into overdrive. Produces 50% more output than baseline for 4 hours. After time expires, plant will shut down and require repairs at a resource expense.
 - Similar to in-game purchases in EW (e.g., nanos) to temporarily improve economic output, but can instead be initiated at any time.



Gameplay Comparison – Research & Economy (cont.).



- **Resource Deposits** – In addition to harvesting deposits themselves, players can access the World Map to find resource deposits scattered across the map. These allow the player to extract additional amounts of that resource type to fund building and unit creation/research.
 - Depending on the size of resource deposits, there are a set number of defensive buildings that occupy that tile. Players cannot add to these buildings, but can rearrange them to their liking. However, players can add one platoon of up to 1500 units to help defend the deposit.
 - Resource deposits add an extra layer of gameplay and defense upgrade loop that is not seen in EW. These represent WC's closest analog to EW's base extensions.
- **Resource Rarity** – WC utilizes a particular resource type that can only be harvested from resource deposits around the map. This resource is required for upgrades at higher levels of the game. While these deposits have finite supply, they auto-spawn around the map.
 - Defense mechanic is similar to resource deposits as described above, with pre-set defensive buildings that are parallel to size of the deposit, coupled with the ability to assign one platoon of units
 - This may result in some game imbalances, as stronger players with more resources and stronger troops are able to occupy these tiles at a higher rate. While the inability to add defenses (outside of a single platoon) helps balance the gameplay to a degree, players at lower levels may abandon the game once reaching a certain point in the game and unable to progress if they are unable to overcome a stronger player's troops.
 - Per WC Wiki, Kixeye has firmly stated that thorium will never be offered for purchase with hard currency

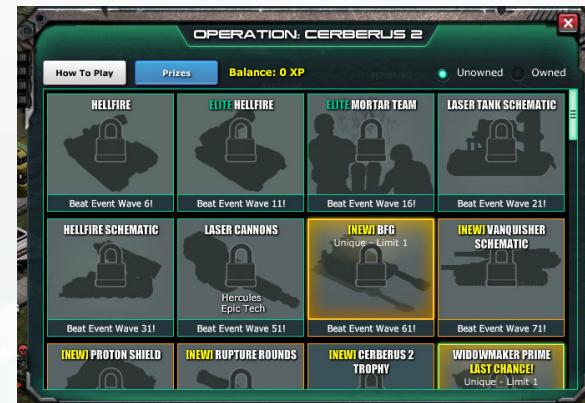
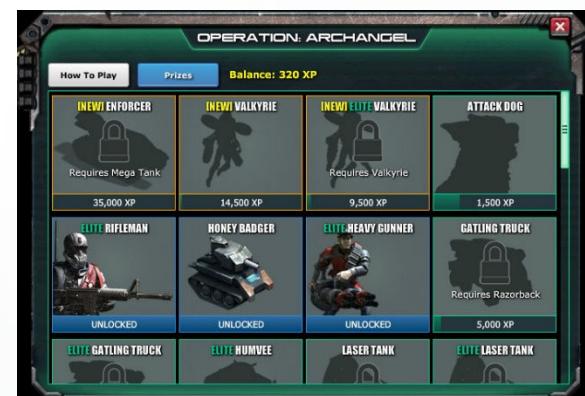




Gameplay Comparison – Special Events

Special Events are WC's equivalent of Live Ops events, intended to drive retention and monetization through users. These are timer-based challenges where the player has several days (e.g., 5 or 7 days) to progress as far as possible through the objective.

- **Special Event Types** – Special Events can be categorized into several types of gameplay. Additionally, each of these events are packaged with their own storyline to deliver an engaging experience for the player:
 - Defense – Player must defend against waves of CPU attackers
 - Attack – Player must defeat a set number of CPU controlled bases
 - Targeted Attack – Player must destroy a certain objective (e.g., building) within a time constraint on a PvE tile
 - Conquer – Player must look to conquer a number of resource deposits in both PvP and PvE.
 - Hybrid – Player must both attack CPU bases, as well as defend against CPU controlled attacks
- **Payouts & Special Event Shop** – Once the player successfully completes a challenge, they can earn Event Experience Points (eXP). These eXP can be redeemed in the Special Event Shop that consist of special units, buildings, and upgrades that are not available through normal gameplay. Alternatively, some events allow the player to unlock special units depending on how far through the wave they progress.
 - eXP do not carry over from event to event; the event shop is specific to the type of event that is running during that time period and can be used as an engaging way to introduce new troop types.





Acquisition & FTE

- **Acquisition** - Given heavy reliance upon Facebook as the primary game platform, there is high degree of Facebook functionality to drive user acquisition.
 - Upon each level-up, players can opt to share their progress on Facebook
 - Player can invite friends to their sector directly out of Facebook app
 - Banner Ads – Presumably, WC would utilize banner ads to appeal to players playing other titles on the FB platform
- **First Time Experience Pathway**
 - Illustrates combat gameplay well, and springs player right into action. Sets the tone for the game, which clearly revolves around combat and PvP engagement.
 - Lacks information around upgrade needs and economy (in-game tips), as well as information around Special Events and how they work
 - Walkthrough Mechanics:
 - Begins with PvE event where player's base is under attack by CPU
 - Build Defensive Turret platform and Machine Gun turret
 - Additional scripted attack takes place to demonstrate turret capabilities
 - Perform repairs on turret
 - Prompts player to attack enemy base (PvE)
 - Create platoon
 - World Map walkthrough
 - Scouting/Attack mechanic walkthrough
 - Unit repair





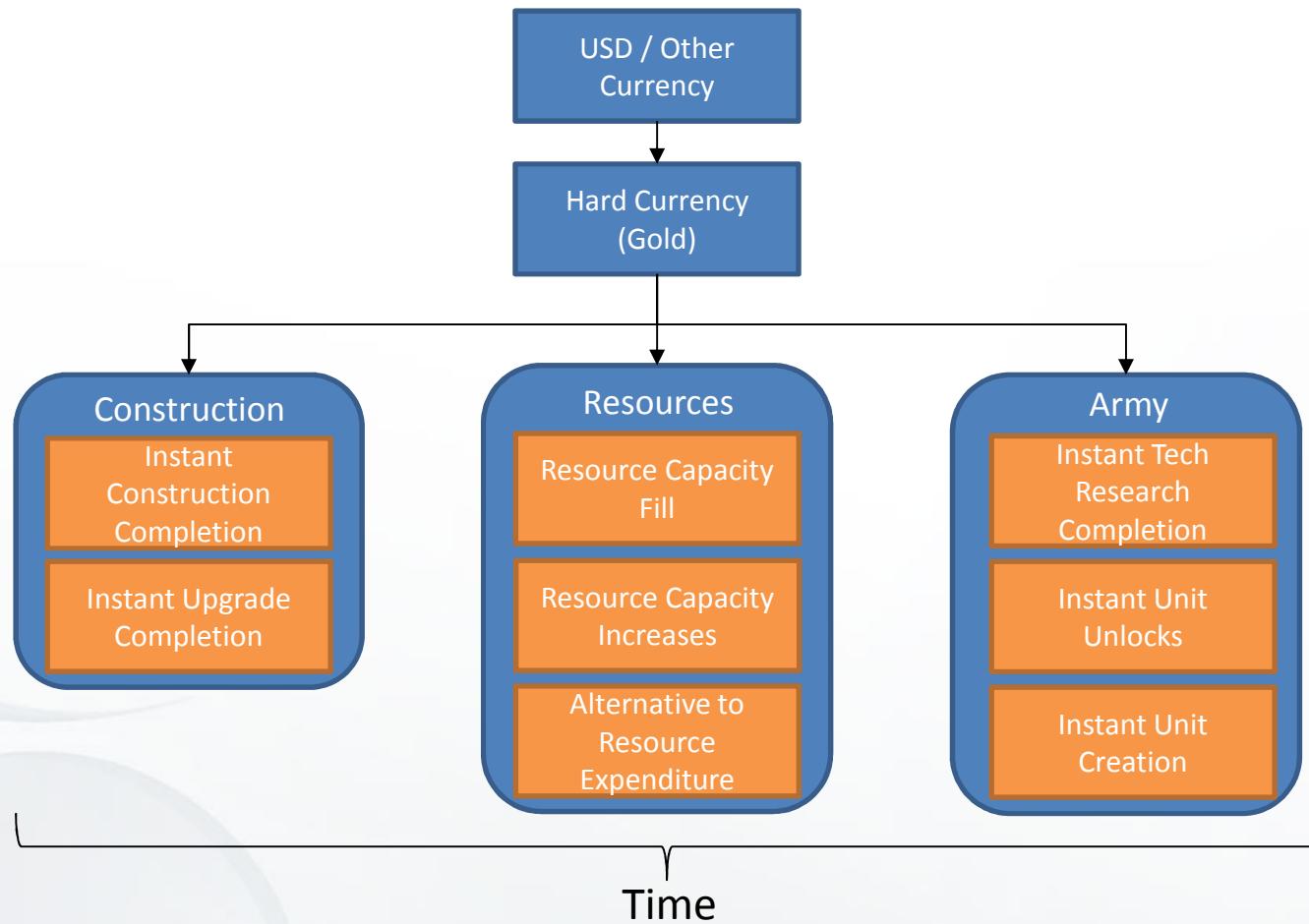
Retention

- Early Game Retention Methods:
 - **Quick Upgrade** - Instant 5-minute completion allows for rapid ascension to level 4 or 5 units
 - **Base Relocation** - Free sector relocation 1x/week
 - **New Player Protection** – Seven day base shield
 - **Daily Rewards** – Similar to EW Daily Login Bonus, logging in on a daily basis gifts the player with a unit or upgrade bonus. However, these rewards appear to be focused to beginners, as this feature disappeared after completing the 5-day cascade.
 - **Attack Cap** – Players can only attack players +/- 3 levels of their own rank, helping to ensure balanced gameplay and a chance for new players to establish their base. This serves as an ongoing retention method as well. Per WC wiki, the max possible level is currently Level 57.
- Other Player Retention Methods:
 - **Special Events** – Serves as the main retention mechanic, by offering various types of special events and challenges for players to complete
 - **Spoils of War** – Essentially a persistent Special Event, where players are awarded medals to redeem in the Gear Store (separate from Special Event shop) after winning 5 PvP battles. The timer resets each week, and the number of medals is correlated to the amount of infamy (in-game points) earned during battle. Defeating higher level players earns more infamy.
 - **Resource Capacity** – Player must login in to ‘collect’ resources to move to caches
- However, a key retention strategy appears to be missing:
 - **Clans/Alliances** – Currently no formalized clan/alliance system in place, but through a system established by players themselves. This detracts from the social experience of the game, which may have a negative impact upon WC’s retention rates.





Monetization



- WC employs a basic monetization mechanic, centered around time barrier removal. All activities within the game can be grouped into three monetization groups, all of which are intended to support the PvP/PvE focus of the game.
- There is a robust offering of time-based Special Events (live ops) that encourage player engagement and monetization to remove these barriers. However, WC lacks deep monetization features compared to EW; there is no traditional store to spend hard currency. Bundles of items and hard currency are not common in-game; only one offer was given in the span of 2 weeks during this teardown. Unknown whether these targeted offers are made to players who have or have not yet paid in-game.



Teardown Takeaways

- Xixeye's focus upon delivering a core gameplay experience is evident, given strong offerings within a RTS title. However, WC's monetization and retention features appear to be somewhat deficient relative to EW, underscoring Xixeye's emphasis upon gameplay.
 - **UI/UE** – WC contains superior UI/UE, namely due to residual effects and superior environmental animation
 - **Gameplay** – WC delivers a more engaging gameplay experience by giving complete control to the player over individual unit movement patterns and attack targets
 - **Acquisition Tactics** – WC heavily relies upon Facebook activity as an acquisition approach. Xixeye does not offer its own standalone platform, as playing the game on Xixeye.com continues to link to FB data.
 - **Retention Tactics** – WC employs traditional retention mechanics, including robust Special Events that are heavily centered around gameplay. However, the game is missing several core features that would improve retention (i.e., alliances, base expansion), which are areas that EW holds a distinct advantage.
 - **Monetization Tactics** – Monetization is focused strictly around time barrier removal. The game is lacking sophisticated monetization approaches, due to simplicity of the game loop. WC offers an interesting Live Ops mechanic via their Event and Gear Stores, which encourage hard currency spend as players look to earn points to redeem for unlockable units and buildings that cannot be purchased directly. Item bundles are indeed offered, but appear to be utilized much more infrequently compared to EW (which occur on daily basis). Furthermore, WC lacks a traditional storefront to redeem hard currency outside of these one-off bundle offers.

Overall, WC delivers a superior gameplay experience relative to EW, but is behind the curve in monetizing these advantages to a certain extent. One strategic interpretation may suggest a conscious decision from Xixeye to keep the game combat/skill focused, rather than frequent offering of items that expedite leveling-up (i.e., items/boxes). It may demonstrate Xixeye's commitment to monetization driven off PvP gameplay as opposed to level-ups and empire building.

Thus, EW should look to couple improved core gameplay mechanics with our existing best-practice monetization strategies.