Gaming Motive

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In these writings I will be focusing on the question that plagues us (or maybe just me) whenever we see a new game being released, patch to a new game, or a headline in the news: Why? I explain motive because it is the key to understanding reason.

Diablo 3 removes Auction House permanently. One of the primary reasons Blizzard introduced the real-money auction house in the first place was to slow the rate at which consumers bought in-game gold from third party gold selling sites. While this strategy may have partially done so, it allowed Blizzard to tax our transactions, making them a lot (yes, a lot) of money. To buy an item for real-money, you got taxed, and if you put your real-money into your Battle.net account balance, to turn your Battle.net money back into real-money you get taxed an additional time. In the end, Blizzard was taking their share of the booty, approximately 30% of all real-money transactions. Even better was the fact that if you did decide to put your money into your Battle.net account balance, it was no longer considered yours; for, if something happened to your account, Blizzard could not be legally responsible (even if it was thousands of dollars – especially if it was thousands of dollars). Taking a step back from the specifics, if Blizzard is so committed to game quality and excellence, then why did they release a game that was a sequel to a once fastest-selling game of all time (Diablo 2) with a Pay-to-win mechanic? The only logical speculation was that the game was not finished yet. While showing the community they are trying to decrease third party gold farming, they were realistically just in it for the coin. Besides, that didn’t actually decrease the third party gold farming, these sites would ironically put their gold on the real-money auction house or they would simply undercut the real-money auction house. With the release of Diablo 2 in 2000, and Diablo 3’s in 2012, there were 12 years of expenses used without making a dime; it was time to make some money from their hard work, even if the game was sub-par and pay-to-win. Even more disturbing is that when you look closely, Diablo 3 is truly a Diablo 2 sequel in the fact that not much changed. The majority of the monsters remained the same, the acts, the bosses, the sounds, the quality of items, the followers, literally some of the items are the same, but on the upside, the graphics look nice.

It’s important to explain that the removal of both the real-money auction house and the gold auction house was a necessary repercussion for the health of Diablo 3. This health necessity is due to one simple economy mechanic: inflation. I did call the real-money auction house cut a tax, and it is; however, on the gold auction house, a cut is an important thing. We call this auction house cut a gold sink, and even with it, it didn’t change the influx of legendary items that crowded the auction houses, even if you continued to remove gold from the market. They even limited your auctions on the auction house to 10, but even with that and the gold sinks, the amount of quality items and gold acquired from playing the game persevered and unmanageable inflation was inevitable.

Final Note: Ebay doesn’t have problems with inflation because people are not seeing a substantial increase in items obtained each day (An increase in items on Ebay only helps its economy). Opposed to Diablo where when you increase your strength, you have the ability to get more items. To keep the Diablo 3 Auction House they could have designed a point system where at each difficulty you get a certain amount of points at the end of a monster slaying run, and the amount of points dictates the quality of your items, not the quantity.

World of Warcraft “prunes abilities”

Brian Holinka recently talked about PvP changes at the World of Warcraft 2014 Regional Qualifiers and admitted that with the removal of some complicated mechanics and abilities, it will “increase player base” and make it easier to pick up a class. Their apparently “long-standing” philosophy, actually just recently in effect, is that World of Warcraft should be “easy to learn, hard to master”. This has not been true for WoW since its launch. One could argue, when I jumped into the World, I knew what to do, I had two buttons to press, I could understand my class’s mechanics, and I immediately saw the quest giver. That is not the topic in discussion, let me rephrase the quote: “easy to learn to be competitive in PvP, hard to master to be competitive in PvP”. This is what they are saying when they make the classes, as a whole, easier to learn, removing complicated abilities and generally lowering the skill cap to be a skilled player in WoW PvP. Changes like this are killing the game; simplified talent trees, a small spellbook and easy to understand combat mechanics were not what made the game popular in World of Warcraft: Burning Crusader and Wrath of the Lich King. These games had, I don’t prefer to use the word complicated, but in-depth talent trees, difficult to pick up combat knowledge and tricks, and a massive spellbook with seemingly limitless choices of spells. Blizzard Entertainment is slowly pushing away its founding members from World of Warcraft at an attempt to “increase player base”. This not only shows their short-sightedness in this new industry coming of age, but it shows as a whole that the gaming player base is becoming increasingly attention and focus deficit.

Note: Repetitively smashing the faces of noobs does not make you a professional, it makes you a marginally improved noob.

Blizzard releases Hearthstone and soon to release Heroes of the Storm

I cannot help but question Blizzard Entertainment’s future goals with the development of these two games. The MOBA (Multiplayer online battle arena) scene has become a massive and iconic realm of the gaming industry. This means that there is lots of fame to be had, and money to be made. Why *wouldn’t* Blizzard want to be a part of that? When Blizzard Entertainment was first named Silicon and Synapse, as any other gaming company start up, the only way to emerge into the gaming scene was to make something clean-coded, fun, and simply great. Silicon and Synapse was named Software Developer of the Year by VideoGames magazine. After another 20 years of Warcraft, Starcraft, Diablo, precise and perfectly created games, they now have a reputation to upkeep. No longer can a company like Blizzard Entertainment screw around with creativity and make a game simply because it’s a great idea. They have families to feed and they have consumers relying on their ability to spit out games that are good enough, quickly enough. While Blizzard did release a different trading card game based off of WoW, have since cancelled the continuing production of these cards. Having a knock-off trading card game where you don’t have to opportunity to play online and you actually have to read a physical card is not widespread enough to attract the number of customers Blizzard needs to remain successful. The answer is Hearthstone, a dubbed simple game that is online for all to see and play. This is deeply disappointing because as I’m sure many people enjoy the game, it’s not tradition. Not only are the genre’s basically completely new to Blizzard, they are free-to-play games, and from what I’ve heard about Hearthstone, arguably pay-to-win. Instead of releasing earth-shattering, record-breaking ingenuity we are seeing content rereleased as free-to-play games. This may be a difficult carrot for some to grasp, however, Hearthstone and Heroes of the Storm are literally just Blizzard characters and mechanics in a different form. I want and expect Blizzard to release new games, that I need to pay for, that rock my world. A perfect example of this is Titan. A project Blizzard had been working on for seven years before cancelling. What I have read about Titan is that it had some complicated features and it was huge. It was supposed to be an MMO and they had already dumped over 50 million dollars into the project, but because they thought it wasn’t up to snuff, they cancelled the project. I can’t tell whether this decision makes me want to laugh or cry hysterically because Blizzard has the nerve to tell us they think that the game would not have been fun enough. Is that not for the players to decide? It’s becoming increasingly clear that Blizzard is in it for the long haul, soaking as much money out of us as they possibly can, even if that means continually rereleasing content that’s pay to win.

Notes: Critiques are judgers paparazzi are followers, as I am neither; I am not saying I could do better, I simply give due diligence to the strategy.

Why in the hell is Runescape fun?

When I think of sound logic in gaming development, I think of Jagex Games Studio’s creation Runescape. For the duration of this post I will be referring to the 2007 version of Runescape even though all the strategies are continued to Runescape 3 and continued from Runescape 1. Runescape is the pinnacle of the MMO feat, gaming logic and how to keep someone entertained. This is the ironic part, because of Runescape’s first century models and walking on squares, it would seem the zenith of boring. Runescape is also the American rendition of repetition and grinding, which is typically seen as an Asian form of entertainment. When chopping an oak tree or cooking an inventory of lobsters, the player can basically assume a vegetative state, while not forgetting the many anti-afk features Runescape implements that are not only anti-afk, but fun minigames with attractive awards and froufrou. In all honesty, what is better than having max efficiency while doing relatively nothing? Runescape has engaging quests, not-engaging-I-can-watch-a-movie farming, the ability to collect wealth through gold or glory through slaying difficult monsters in dungeons, and when the vegetation state is making you sleepy, you can participate in one of the most high-risk, high-reward environments in all of gaming: the wilderness. While trekking through the flat grasses and squares of the Runescape’s wilderness, a player can fight you and take all of your loot. This is one of the most addicting features of a game that, unfortunately, has since been abandoned probably due to hate mail of ragequitters (TM). The other most unique and perfect feature of the game is the open market. When the only way to acquire an item you need is to either grind it out yourself or to buy it from another player, you will often go to extreme lengths to find a seller or a buyer. This journey is unique, often inconvenient, and enjoyable. This open market has also been abandoned in every game that I know of typically due to an Auction House sort of feature. The open market was not something that they created, it was something that they didn’t create. Without an Auction House, players could decide if they wanted to trade and they decided where to do it. Simplified trading is yet another never relenting half-assery by game companies that realize our generation’s inattentiveness. Keeping the open market was one of the main reasons that made Runescape so engaging and fun, even without a high budget and updated graphics. The list is insurmountable, but one mechanic to touch on is the skills. When I fish up lobster, not only am I collecting a number of lobster, but I am collecting a number of experience, and eventually a number of gold, or some health healed in the wilderness where I can win epic battles. This is efficiency, as with one stroke of the mouse, I am multi-tasking.

Note: Two common motivations of gamers are to collect numbers (Skills, Achievements, Collectibles, Gold) and to win (PvP – Win players, PvE – Win computers, Gold – Win wealth).

Why Wildstar will never make us whole

I played Wildstar for weeks and enjoyed the hell out of the game, the ingenious design and its hilarious but epic style of its own. The problem doesn’t lie in the style or the different looks of the world and the models, but the strategy. The raids, the arenas, the dungeons, the “adventures” (a.k.a. scenarios), the battlegrounds, the quests, the professions and all the little leveling strategies and tricks throughout the game draw a striking similarity to the strategies in World of Warcraft (WoW), or any other successful MMORPG for that matter. The cold hard true is, everything in Wildstar reminds the WoW players of WoW. Which, by the way, was the exact philosophy of the Wildstar developers. Take an extremely successful MMORPG, that a number of the Wildstar developers had worked on, and modify it slightly. When you do this, you will have something that is similar enough that a traditional MMO player will feel comfortable, but also different enough to attract new members. As genius as this is, it’s still too similar to force people to make the conversion from Warcraft to Wildstar. Even so, if Wildstar is similar, wouldn’t people enjoy it? This question took me awhile to figure out. One day I woke up and I wondered why Wildstar felt empty. The answer is that there are no other Wildstar games. A percentage of World of Warcraft players were once either Warcraft, Warcraft II, or Warcraft III players, and both Warcraft II and Warcraft III had expansions. There were 10 years of Warcraft lore and nostalgia before World of Warcraft was created, keeping as true as possible to the characters, places and themes as possible for Warcraft’s entirety. This is the reason that after a montage of monster-slaying, gun-wielding mayhem and excitement, Wildstar feels empty when completing all of the content in a matter of weeks.

Convenience in gaming

There was once a time in games where if you failed or died, you have to do the whole game over again. Many games did not adopt that hardcore of a strategy, but almost every game had a severe consequence at death. Even up until Mario 64, if you died on a level, you had to do the entire level over again. In others, you may have a limited number of lived until you have to start the entire game over. One style that emerged was Real-time strategy (RTS). In an RTS game like Command and Conquer, Starcraft or Rome Total War, you have many units and/or buildings, and while losing your entire army is entirely frustrating and inconvenient, you have the opportunity to build it again. After that, massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) hit the scene hard and fast. In Runescape, if you died, you lost all the pillaged loot in your inventory and all the gear you may have been wearing. This is a, at the right moment, catastrophic consequence and loss upon death. Then we have World of Warcraft where if you die, you simply run back to the location you died at. And the last point to be made, and the epitome of convenient, is a first person shooter (FPS) like Call of Duty where when you die, you normally wait a few seconds. The convenience varies by style, but I would argue it also depends on timeline. Where the world once had blogs, is now filled with Tweets. A world once of newspaper is now Reddit, almost instantaneous notification and instant gratification of knowledge. Slowly but inevitably we, as I include myself in this, consider even a run back to our corpse inconvenient. The strategy for developers is that if they make various nuisances, then it will give you more incentive to not die in the first place, for example. This strategy is proven to work, but with the world growing more impatient in general, simply the fact that you could die and lose everything that you worked so hard for is a variable urges some players to avoid that game at all. I just said that we worked so hard for, and in some cases it does seem like hard work, but in reality a walk back to a corpse is a trivial holding down of a keyboard button for a matter of seconds.

A solid counter argument would be to introduce the topic of fighting games. Where each round is a fight to the death, and after a certain amount of rounds one player wins. The respawn is also instant, but these games have been around for a fair amount of time and have always been successful. How can a game be so convenient, and still be successful? World of Warcraft and League of Legends are two games that have claimed that their philosophy is one of which the characters and the gameplay is easy to learn and hard to master. Fighting games, for as long as I can remember, have been just hard; hard to learn, hard to master. I would never challenge a friend to a Mortal Kombat fight without skimming the keys to press for all the combos prior. These combos are typically different for each character, and that’s just the character phase of the learning, not including learning what it takes to win. All in all, because of our societies’ tendencies, game developers are forced to change the overarching strategies included in great video games. Blizzard’s solution to this was introduced in Diablo, where you can choose to be a character that can die and still play the game, or a hardcore character whose journey ends once the heartbeat stops. Even the solution of having different game modes creates a sort of separation that I wouldn’t preference. In my opinion, to only solution is to create games in the traditional sense. If there are more players that receive a Fatality in Mortal Kombat, or a more competitive Player versus Player scene because you lose all of our loot when you die, then the people without the diligence to click more or press more buttons on the keyboard be damned.

What do you mean, eSports? LoL.

One might laugh out loud at the idea of electronic sports, however, when it comes to League of Legends, it’s anything but laughable. Even when I was very young, I was taught how to put my body through extreme torque and pain to supersede my peers and opponents in traditional athletic sports. As such, I had my fair share of comical reliefs when it came to Golf as a professional sport. When I started to mature, coming of the teenage years, I started to craft a particular fondness for bowling. My grandfather would help aid me in the constant unfolding of repetition, which in turn lead to consistency. Anything that came on T.V. that required precise mechanics, the perfection of slight hand movements, or the fluidity of a gazelle had me hooked. Professional pool, darts, and car racing were examples of things that you didn’t have to have less than 5 percent body fat to competitively compete in. Around this time I dived into the world of aggressive, sometimes even cutthroat, world of PvP in gaming. Shooting games like Call of Duty and World of Warcraft arena would make me blood boil. It took consistency, perfect mechanics, and endless practice to keep up with my equivalents. We’re talking an easy eight hours a day of dedicated repetition. At the peak of my basketball career, I would practice anywhere from 10 to 14 hours a week. With eSports, my eyes bled, my fingers cramped, and I would rub my wrist raw but I could still put in upwards of 84 hours a week. How can one ever dream of perfecting a sport such as Basketball, when for an average guy like myself, it would take six times longer than an electronic sport to achieve the same level of greatness. Even after years of over 70 hour weeks, I was nowhere near the best. For some people, this sort of sport was what they lived for. These quick fingered, scarily aware, and brilliant minded professional gamers would never have gotten the spotlight they deserved if this scene did not exist.

One thing that I did not entirely realize when I would weekly watch my favorite bowlers on television was that I enjoyed watching them because I too enjoyed bowling. Of all the football fans in the world, although many of them probably enjoy engaging in football, seldom do they actually play football. Gamers game and enjoying watching other gamers game; it is actually that simple. However, why do League of Legends players acquire more fame than other types of professional gamers? Now that we have seen a glimpse of the purpose in spectator’s eyes, the idea to drive home is that eSports is a spectator’s sport. Furthermore, while that may be obvious, the broadcast of eSports is done in its entirety for the fans. You can see different players’ style, their personality in game, and their personality out of game. League of Legends highlights the players’ stats, or lack thereof, as well as their out of game experiences. Other eSports scenes like World of Warcraft and Starcraft II will skip over less important matches, run into schedule delaying circumstances, and will often times not even show me the players’ faces while the game is on. While watching League of Legends, I will never miss a game and I always feel that the show is tailored to better my personalization with the players. Nor will the game ever be delayed, while it’s apparent that electronics can break, when they say that the show starts in three minutes, the guns are blazing because they mean it and are not messing around. Professional gamers and their dedication is an incredible thing to endure and experience, and I can do it right here from my computer. While I may not like every professional gamer in the world, I will have my fan favorites. They are all there because they are talented, and it’s a different talent than that of a basketball player. League of Legend’s broadcasters and the entire crew that put on the show for the fans to watch understand that they are shoutcasting gamers, as gamers, for gamers. This particular company is on a strict schedule, they never let the fans miss a game, and they make sure the fans are given the opportunity to dive into the bubble of the professional gamers themselves. I suspect that one day, because of the vastly increased opportunity over athletic sports, there will be a professional gamer who has perfected the craft. When he or she ascends, you can bet your bottom dollar that I will be here watching them devoutly.