

# CRACK

An analysis of what makes good games good

*F. Jonas*

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# Social Aspect

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*Good against remotes is one thing. Good against the living, that's something else.*

Single player games can be fun and time consuming, there is no doubt about that. But the best times I've ever had when gaming are when I am playing either with, or against, other people.

You can draw a straight line from Pong to Tecmo Bowl to Goldeneye to World of Warcraft; a large part of the success of these games is the fact they allow for gamer interactions.

Putting a game on a mobile device that is a single player experience seems ludicrous. People use these devices to communicate with their friends; why would anyone design a game that eliminates that aspect from the device entirely? These things are hooked up to satellites, cell towers, can link wirelessly via bluetooth - they are designed to be integrated into a communication network.

Zynga, and it's cadre of facebook games, capitalize on this evolving aspect of our technology and its integration into our social world. Personally, I'm not a huge fan of their style of games; but I have played them, and it can't be denied that they are an incredibly successful gaming company. As of September 2011, Zynga's games on Facebook have over 266 million monthly active users; the company itself is valued on the low end at *15 billion dollars*.

The one thing I dislike about the Zynga approach is being forced into feeling like a pusher - in order to progress in these games, you have to constantly increase the number of participants in your little slice of their game. Eventually you hit a brick wall and either have to start befriending complete strangers, or become the Farmville version of an Amway salesman.

Nonetheless, the benefit of being able to include likeminded gamers in your endeavors is almost too great to ignore.

There are two general ways of making this happen; cooperative gameplay, or player versus player. It should be noted it is possible to include both; i.e. team style pvp that you get with games like Modern Warfare.

# Progression

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*You must learn the ways of the Force, if you're to come with me to Alderaan.*

Games are a complete waste of time. But you don't want to acknowledge this as a developer – players want to see how they are progressing; they want feedback that their valuable time is not actually being wasted. Even a game as simple as Chess tracks progress via a rating system. Win a game, and your rating goes up, lose a game, and it goes down.

This is especially notable in the world of MMO's. Character progression in these environments is incredibly important to the individual player; whether it is achieved via 'leveling,' or otherwise (some MMORPG's utilize a skill based system which is fairly different from standard D&D type character levels).

It is also tied in visually. If I walk up to a player, I can tell right way that they may be level 50 by just reading it on my interface. In most cases, though, I wouldn't have to bother. A high level player is going to have cool looking armor, or a cool looking sword, or a cool looking horse; or any combination of those and other assorted visual cues. Players not only want their progress tracked, they want to be able to show off their achievements.

This is also reinforcing to new players. If the game itself is fun, then when I see that uber looking warrior walking through the capital city of the realm, *I want to be that guy*. I've made a subconscious commitment to spend countless hours playing the game until I am a badass looking mother fucker.

While a game primarily played on a mobile device should be something that a gamer can spend just a few minutes playing and walk away, that doesn't mean that the time they spent shouldn't be measured in some fashion.

# Instant Gratification

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*Look, I ain't in this for your revolution, and I'm not in it for you, princess. I expect to be well paid.*

A huge part of what makes games enjoyable for a lot of people is the use of instant gratification. RPG's in particular make great use of this via loot and experience systems. Kill a monster, and you get instant experience points, and then you get treasure off the corpse. This mechanic starts to form a behavior that is somewhat equivalent to a gambling addiction in some gamers – they will kill monsters over and over just to see what they get; because that one in a thousand chance of something really cool dropping is akin to hitting the jackpot on a slot machine.

Simply put, reward players often as they go along. It doesn't have to be anything game changing, it can be something almost meaningless, but with the rare opportunity for the player to acquire something that is a great benefit to their advancement.

## Gender

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Whatever game we employ, I feel it is incredibly important to provide gamers with the choice of gender. We want something that is as universal as possible, and I can tell you from my personal experiences that women will not be as likely to play a game where they cannot play a female avatar. For men, the reverse is not necessarily true (though in some cases it is; but not to the extent with which it is for women).

For any game where an avatar is being displayed, it is imperative to include both genders to make the game appealing to as many gamers as possible.

## Bartle Test

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The Bartle Test is something you should read up on if you don't know about it. It is a psych questionnaire that evaluates what the gamer's preferences are when gaming, and divides them into 4 categories: Killer, Socializer, Explorer, and Achiever. I feel this is important to look at, because you would want to include aspects of gameplay that scratch all these itches in order to make the game as universally appealing as possible.

Alternatively, you could simply choose one area to focus on and do the best job possible making something appealing to a single category.

# Real World Integration

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I am fascinated by the idea that somehow a game developed for a mobile device could be somehow integrated into the real world. Geocaches are the best example of how people utilize technology to participate in something that makes them get off the couch and do something out in the world.

People carry their mobile devices with them everywhere; to the store, on vacation, to work. Could that fact be exploited by somehow giving people something to do via the game that causes them to take certain actions or visit certain places in reality?

Just off the top of my head, and going with your notion for a 'Marathon' type game – what if a pedometer were somehow integrated into the game – so that as you walked or otherwise moved around the real world, this translated into moving your character forward in the game?

# Concepts

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## **Character Transformation:**

This one is a bit complex and may require more development than we would have available. It's tough for me to say, since I'm not a programmer; but I could see this being something that would require a lot more work than we may want to invest.

I'm thinking of a sidescrolling RPG/platformer type game – nothing terribly new, with the exception of a mechanic:

A player can transform their character; and when they do so, it would change how they see the map or level. A good example of how this has been previously used is from one of the Zelda games – you could change Link into a wolf; and when you did, the environment changed into how a wolf sees things (dark areas brightened, you could 'see' scent trails).

So, you could do this in a variety of ways. You could play on religious themes by allowing a player to switch between being an archangel and a demon. Making the switch might make changes on the map; so that perhaps an environmental barrier would become passable by switching archetypes – but in doing so, this might make some NPC's change how they view player (i.e., a previously passive NPC would decide to become aggressive or vice versa).

And, it doesn't have to be good/evil based. Going off what we talked about and drawing from universal characters, you could have the player be able to switch from ... Zeus to Odin. From 'Death' to 'Mother Nature'.

Nor does it have to be based on duality; in fact, allowing for 3 choices would be much more dynamic and interesting – for example, being able to switch between 'Death,' 'Nature,' and 'Father Time.'

## **Assassination:**

Most mobile devices not only know where you are via GPS, they have Bluetooth that allows wireless connection between devices.

This concept might be tough to get off the ground as it would require a good sized player base to be successful, but it's outside the box. I'm not even sure how to properly describe it or if the technology even exists to make it work properly.

I guess this would basically be a pvp game with real world integration. If your phone could somehow detect other devices in the nearby area and alert you to the presence of other players, that would be the starting point. The idea or goal of the game would be to 'tag' other people who are playing the game before they 'tag' you using some kind of interface to send out the 'hit.'

This could be fleshed out a lot more; allowing people to take on certain personas via the game; i.e. ninja, mob hitman, government agent, and so forth. Successful 'tags' or 'hits' could rank the player up, be tracked statistically, and perhaps even offer certain advantages (like lower detection radius to other players, chance to 'dodge' incoming tags, counterattacks, and so forth).

You could also allow for some variance in the role a player chooses to take – or even force a role on them. For example, a player could designate themselves as a 'target' rather than an assassin. They would earn rank based on how long they go without being tagged; or, you could offer mission based real world goals – go from point A to point B in the real world without being tagged.

## **Monster Pets**

Maybe this is a ripoff. Who cares. Good artists create – great artists steal.

I'm sure you remember the craze back in the day where people carried around those stupid keychains that had virtual pets on them. They had to be fed, played with, and so forth.

Toss in a monster rancher style mechanic. The game reads an mp3 of your choice off the device and uses that information to generate different variables for the pet, especially what it looks like.

You could train it somehow, feed it, play with it, whatever, and then fight other players with it ala pokemon style.

I know I'm probably not selling this idea very well, but I think you get what I'm talking about. It's low hanging fruit, but think of it like making pancakes – pancakes is a very simple recipe, but it has to be done precisely or they aren't very good. If well executed and visually appealing, a game like this could do very well. Like I said about Angry Birds – the concept was nothing new. I've easily played a couple of dozen physics based 'catapult' style games before I ever even heard of angry birds. A lot of the success of that game is due to the presentation, story, and polish.