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Competitive Gaming: Design and Community Building

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Competitive Gaming

Design and Community Building

Interactive Qualifying Project

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Abstract

This project attempts to characterize the qualities that make a competitive game successful. By researching the relevant literature and conducting original interviews with designers, players, and other people associated with the gaming scene, we identified three important development principles:

1. Competitive games should be designed for casual play and balanced for competitive play. Nearly every successful competitive game has far more casual players than it does competitive players. Players should want to play your game regardless of any fame or prize support they could gain from playing it competitively.

2. Understanding who your players are and what they want, both in terms of game content and what they want to gain mentally or emotionally from playing the game, can greatly assist in the design of competitive games. When a player gets to use a strategy they enjoy at a high level of play, the game becomes far more enjoyable.

3. A competitive game is defined by its community. When the community is open, accepting, friendly, and helpful, it reflects well on the game and leads to thriving casual and competitive communities. Communities are also vital to the evolution of their players' skills. Without a supportive and helpful community, players in that community will have a much harder time being successful than if they were a member of a more supportive and caring community.

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Introduction and Background

Examples

When writing about competitive games, we refer to a broad range of titles including RTS (Real-Time Strategy) games such as *StarCraft/StarCraft II*; other MMO games such as *League of Legends (LoL)* and *Defense of the Ancients (Dota/Dota II)*; card games such as *Magic: The Gathering* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!*; fighting games such as *Super Smash Brothers (Melee, Brawl, etc.)*, *Street Fighter*, *Virtua Fighter*, and rhythm games such as *DanceDanceRevolution (DDR)*, *beatmania*, and *Taiko no Tatsujin*.

Statistics

Did you know that South Korea has an entire TV channel completely dedicated to games such as *StarCraft II* and *LoL*? [33] Or that the *Apex* tournament for *Super Smash Brothers* had over a million viewers for their stream in three days? [14] The 2013 *LoL* Season 3 World Championship broadcast over *Twitch* live stream was watched by 32 million people where 8.5 million of them were watching at the same time. [9] Since the world population is approximately 7.1 billion, [7] with nearly 3 billion people online, [1] this means approximately 1 in 100 internet users were watching this video game live stream. *LoL* is sponsored by major corporations including *American Express*, *Coca-Cola*, *Samsung*, and *Nissan*. [2] Clearly, competitive gaming has become a popular worldwide phenomenon.

Figure 1 A *YouTube* video of a screen capture of a *League of Legends* game. IGN, “The Best LoL Match Ever Played,” Online video clip, *YouTube*, 2 December 2012.

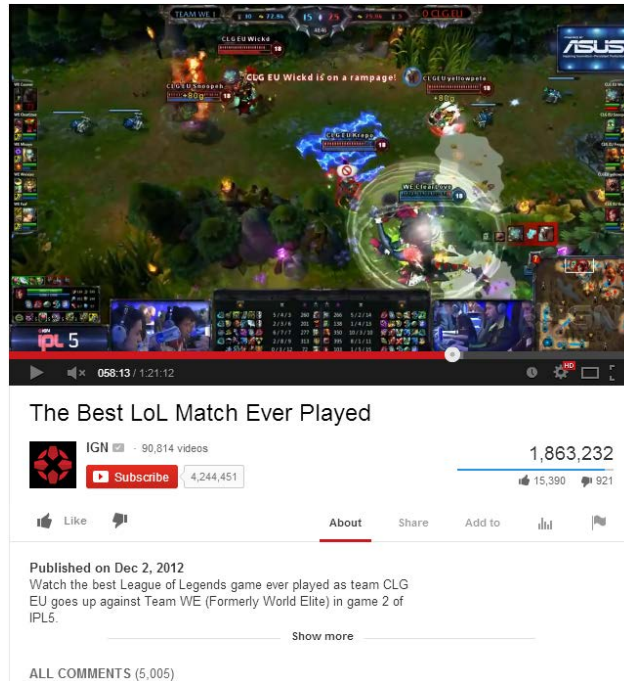
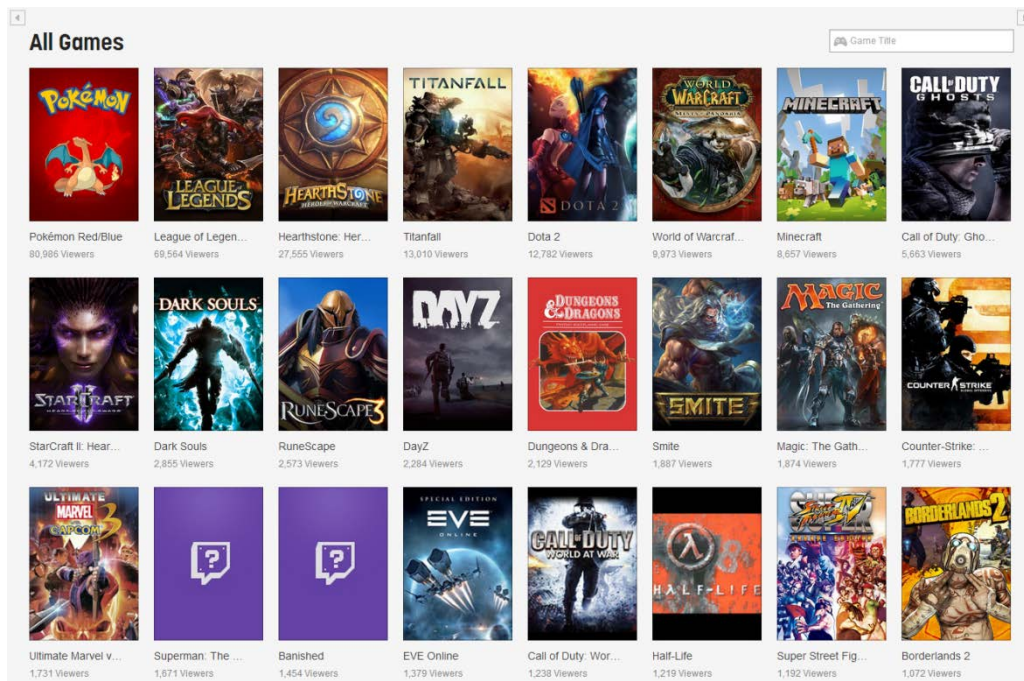


Figure 2 A list of popular games streamed on *Twitch*. “All Games,” *Twitch*, 19 February 2014. <<http://www.twitch.tv/directory>>.



Introducing the Interviewed People

Introduction:

The following are the professional players, designers, commentators, etc. interviewed for this project.

Bruce Hsiang (also known as GammerBee):

- Fighting game player (plays *Street Fighter Series*)
- Known as a top Taiwanese player [22]

Daniel Maniago (also known as Clockw0rk):

- Fighting game player (plays *MARVEL VS. CAPCOM, Street Fighter Series*, etc.) [22]
- Community Manager of *Playstation All-Stars Battle Royal Developer* [5]
- Writer for *BradyGames* and *G4TV* [22]

David Sirlin:

- Game Designer
 - *Puzzle Strike*
 - *Fantasy Strike*
 - *Yomi*
 - *Flash Duel*
 - *Kongai Virtual Card Game*
 - *SEGA Genesis Collection*
 - *Capcom Classics Collection*
 - *Capcom Classics Collection 2*
 - *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed*
 - *Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo*
 - *Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo HD Remix*
- Author of *Playing to Win: Becoming the Champion*

Holon

- Japanese *StarCraft II* player
- Writes a blog on *StarCraft II*

Kevin Landon (also known as Dieminion)

- Fighting game player (plays *Street Fighter Series*, *MARVEL vs. CAPCOM*, *Persona 4 Arena*, etc.) [22]
- Known as one of the top Guile player in *Street Fighter* [22]

kurOa

- Japanese *StarCraft II* player
- Currently writing a Japanese *StarCraft II* wiki for Japanese players

nazomen

- Japanese *StarCraft II* player
- Writes a blog on *StarCraft II* and has a Japanese *StarCraft I* homepage

Nick Ranish (also known as Axslav):

- Former *StarCraft II* player for *Infinity Seven*
- Former *StarCraft II* caster
- Former *StarCraft II* producer for *Major League Gaming*

Paulo Vitor Damo da Rosa

- *Magic: The Gathering* Hall of Fame member as of 2012
- Professional *Magic: The Gathering* player

Reid Duke:

- Professional *Magic: The Gathering* player

Rich Hagon:

- *Magic: The Gathering* European stream team member
- Commentator for *Magic: The Gathering* events and Inside R&D videos
 - Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz9OiX052RQ>

Zac Hill:

- Former *Magic: The Gathering* Pro Tour player.
- Former developer for Wizards of the Coast.
- Former Policy analyst for the Mayor of Memphis and the Menteri Besar Selangor

- Luce Scholar at the Centre for Independent Journalism in Kuala Lumpur, Mylasia
- Blogger for the *Huffington Post*
- Director of Research and Development for The Future Project, a New York based education nonprofit organization
- Affiliate of MIT GameLab

Zvi Mowshowitz:

- *Magic: The Gathering* Hall of Fame member as of 2007
- Former Development Intern at Wizards of the Coast
- CEO of MetaMed, a medical research analysis firm

Qualities of Competitive Games

Introduction

One of the most important things to understand about designing games for competitive play is not to design a game with only competitive players in mind. A game must be enjoyable and interesting to a majority of players before players begin to take it seriously. Nevertheless, games should be designed and balanced as if every player will take it as seriously as possible. As of August 2013, there were 570 professional *League of Legends* [32] players worldwide. Now, compared to the 32 million active players monthly, [9] it is apparent that the vast majority of players do not play at the highest level. From those 32 million players, the game gets over 1 billion hours of play per month worldwide. Compared to the amount of time a development team could test and balance a game, there is much more opportunity for the game's balance to be completely torn apart. Why do we care about this as designers? According to David Sirlin:

The reason is, because when you spend, if you think of all the effort that goes into making your game, and we call that, you know, a hundred percent of your effort, that one little balance [expletive] up like which is like one percent of all of that, or less, can ruin the entire thing. Like the experience of playing your game is like a [expletive] up broken thing. ... So like, that's why you need to care about this. [T2]

Game Depth

Game Depth: **"A measure of how long before players have learned everything they can about a game."** [15]

For a game to be played at a competitive level, the game must be deep. A common misconception about competitive games is their complexity. Game depth comes from the interactions between entities and mechanics in the game. A game need not be extraordinarily complex in order to be deep. Game mechanics and entities should not be complex, in fact they should be as simple and straightforward as possible, without sacrificing the essence of the gameplay. This allows the players to play the game in a skilled way without having to worry about needless complexity. Game depth should come from the subtle

interactions between game entities and mechanics.

“Even if most of your players don’t play as competitively as the way that you test, making sure the pieces are there will lead to dynamic interactions and implicit synergies that are present, even if people don’t maximize the whole way. Right, because you are building tools to do tasks.” [T10]

Zac went on to describe the following: when a player tries to embrace a strategy, the opposing player should be able to find the tool, game mechanic or entity, they need in order to combat their opponent’s strategy.

Skill

Skilled play: Optimizing the interactions between game entities and mechanics in ones favor, and if direct interaction between players is possible, ensuring that one’s opponent is able to optimize these interactions as little as possible.

One of the most important aspects of a competitive game is that the outcome depends on the skill of the players. This does not mean that luck/randomness cannot be a part of competitive gaming, as luck is present in many competitive games. However, the luck/randomness factor of a game designed for competitive play should be low to non-existent. (See “Randomness in Competitive Games” below.)

As a general rule, the more skilled players should win more often than the less skilled players. As mentioned above, game depth comes from the interactions of game mechanics. However, due to the concept of metagaming, this skill may not be entirely based in the mechanics of the game itself. Through skilled metagaming, a player may be able to provide for themselves an advantage through factors outside of optimizing their play. (See “Defining Metagame and Balancing a Game” below.)

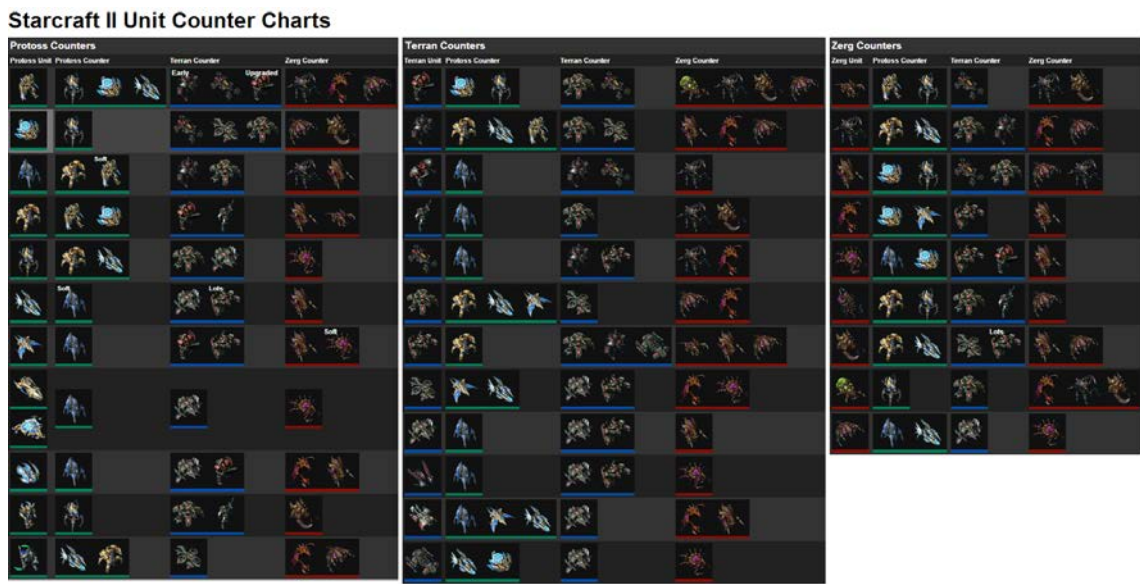
Evolving

Through either expansions of the game itself or an ever-changing set of viable strategies the game should evolve/change. A stagnant game is an uninteresting game. If a player can embrace a strategy unopposed and continuously achieve success (a dominant strategy), the game design has failed. Even if the game is

itself limited in size, the strategies to play that game should be ever evolving. Additionally, once a game's set of strategies has been fully explored, it should prove to be non-hierarchical. This means that even if the competitive potential of every strategy of a game has to offer has been dissected as far as it can possibly be, it should prove to not have any subset of inherently dominant strategies. There should be a set of strategies, forming a cyclical graph, where each viable strategy is a node in the graph, and each of these nodes should have some advantage or disadvantage over the other strategies, nodes, in the graph.

Below, you will see a diagram showing each unit in *StarCraft 2* and each unit that can destroy it. Here, you see that there are no units that can go unopposed by any of the 3 races a player may choose from. This means that any player is capable of beating any other player, and that a player cannot embrace a strategy of say nothing but units that fly, because a play can always build a unit that kills flying units.

Figure 3 *StarCraft II* Unit Counter Charts, “StarCraft II Unit Counter Charts,” Vaughn Royko, 3 March 2014, < <http://vaughnroyko.com/sciicounters/>>.



“A game that doesn’t change is no fun. And more than that though, a game where you just go through the same motions all the time, even if the cards change, is no fun. You can’t feel like you’ve done this before, or you’re dead...” [T11]

Lenticular Design

Lenticular design: The ability for a game entity or mechanic to be viewed differently between players of different skill levels. [15]

Through lenticular design, players are capable of optimization and therefore skilled play. Lenticular design is absolutely essential for competitive games. It is through the fight for optimization that a game becomes competitive. Allowing for optimization is possibly the most important thing a game can provide its players the opportunity to do.

Example of lenticular design:

- Another simpler example comes from trading card games. Let us say that I have a card that makes both players discard all of the cards in their hands. While a newer player may see this card and decide it is useless in that it does nothing to help you win the game, a more skilled player may view this card in the context of: “If I use this when my opponent has a full hand and this is my remaining card, I essentially deprive them of all the cards they had been saving or waiting to use. It may not win me the game, but it sure makes it harder for opponent to win”. Additionally, this card exhibits lenticular designed in that a newer player might use the card when they have cards in their hand, while a skilled player would rarely throw away cards in mass that they could use.

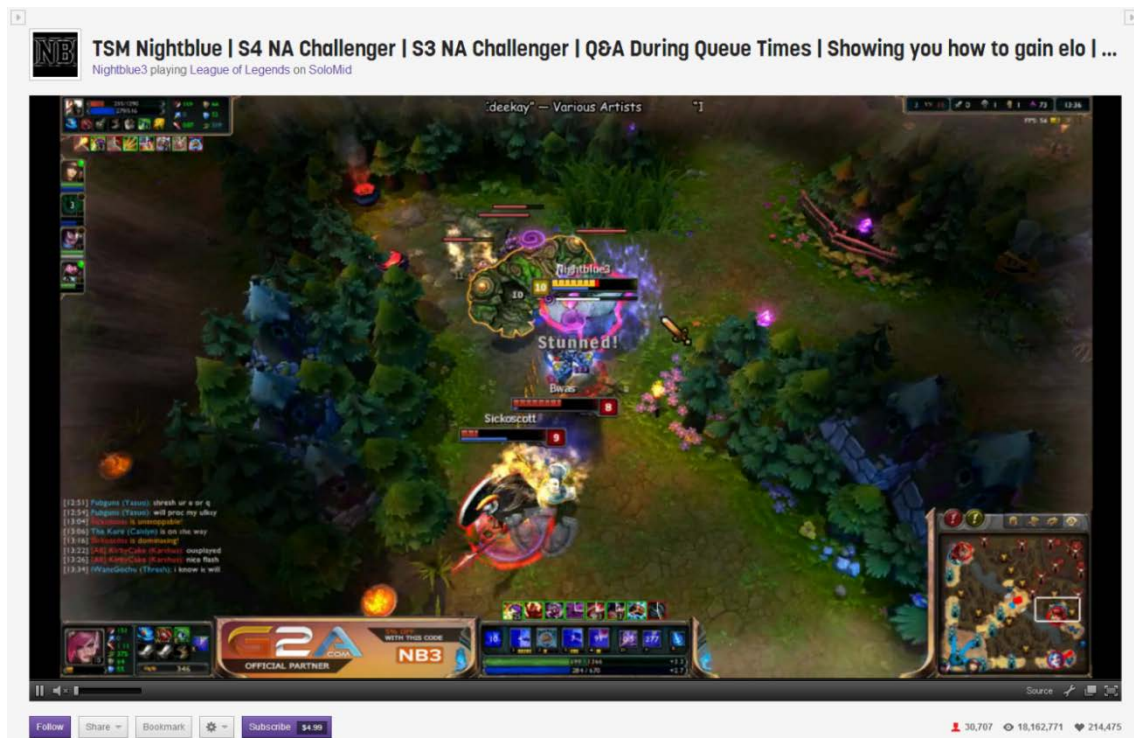
Fun

The most important quality your game should have is fun. Players should want to sit down and play your game, not for prize money, but out of pure enjoyment. When a game isn't fun, even if people show up to play in tournaments for money, the game cannot possibly profit. The future of any game is dependent on the public, and if the public doesn't want to play your game, consider the game dead.

“...Interesting things didn't happen. And without a fun game you're dead. ...” [T11]

“...nobody wants to play *Epic*. It is a mathematical exercise designed to differentiate good players from bad players, and that's not exciting.” [T11]

Figure 4 A *Twitch* live stream of *StarCraft II*, “Nightblue3,” *Twitch*, 19 February 2014, < <http://www.twitch.tv/nightblue3>>.



Conclusion

What all competitive games boil down to, regardless of genre, are the following elements. Competitive games are deep; players should have to spend a large amount of time to develop a complete understanding of your game. Competitive games are skill testing; a beginning player should almost, if not always, lose to more skilled players. Competitive games are constantly evolving; whether through the release of new content or through evolutions in strategy or play styles, the games change over time. Competitive games are, or at least should be, fun; if players are not enjoying themselves while playing your game, the design has failed, and additionally, your game will probably not be successful as a competitive game.

Defining Metagame and Balancing a Game

Introduction

This following section will discuss the formal and non-formal definitions of the term metagame. It will discuss what metagaming is. Additionally, it will discuss what to do when a game is discovered to be imbalanced and how players react in these situations

So what is a metagame? Well there are numerous possible definitions for metagame. The following are the definitions that will be used throughout the rest of this paper:

Metagame:

- The formal definition: Factors outside of gameplay itself taking place that affects the player or game environment during gameplay. These factors range from knowledge of popular strategies to mind games players use in order to condition each other to the environment of the room the game is taking place in.
- The colloquially used and accepted one, typically used by players of competitive games: The types of strategies one expects to see when playing the game.
 - Example: If a person goes to a *Magic: the Gathering* tournament, they may say that the metagame for that tournament is going to be: 30% of people using strategy A, 30% of people using strategy B, and 40% of people using strategy C.

Metagaming

The metagame model, according to Dr. Richard Garfield [Salen & Zimmerman]:

Metagaming refers to the relationship of a game to elements outside of the game. (Richard) Garfield's model of the metagame includes four categories:

What a player brings to a game:

- **Game Resources: "Necessary game components"**

- **Strategic Preparation or Training:** “includes studying an opponent’s playing style or memorizing levels”
- **Peripheral Game Resources:** “optional elements like game guides, cheats, and knowledge of play patterns. These resources are often shared among a game community...”
- **Player Reputation:** “Are you known to bluff, open up the board early, or take advantage of weaker players?”
 - **What a player takes from a game:**
 - **Winning Stakes**
 - “... the experience of the game itself. A player’s experience might serve to validate or contradict their beliefs about an opponent or about the game as a whole, thereby influencing future games.”
 - **What happens between games:**
 - “Players commonly reflect on strategy, training, or planning for the next game.”
 - **What happens during a game other than the game itself:**
 - “Among the ways that the metagame occurs during play are social factors such as competition and camaraderie, or the physical environment of play such as good lighting or noisy atmosphere. Trash talking, playing “head games”, and exploiting player reputations all affect the metagame as well.” [21]

(The following section uses the colloquial definition of metagame)

Allowing for metagame decisions is generally healthy for a competitive game. It forces the best players to constantly have to learn and evolve their game-plan, for if they do not, they will be at a great disadvantage. This is due to the ever evolving state of a metagame. After each major event, what players view as the metagame may change; and if a player happens to miss out on something or not account for the current metagame, they will be disadvantaged.

However, there is an interesting trap created by metagaming that should be understood by designers. The best example I can find comes from the movie *The Princess Bride*. There is a scene where one of the villains engages in a battle of wits with the main character. During their battle, the villain must decide

between 2 cups of wine, each possibly containing a deadly poison. The villain then goes on a tangent, using his intellect to try to metagame his opponent and try to predict exactly where the poison is. The villain, after explaining numerous reasons why it could not be in both of the cups, eventually picks a cup, and then dies. The problem with metagaming is that eventually, you begin to speculate as to how others will metagame against you, and you begin to base your metagame decisions on what you believe the metagame decisions will be which may be extraordinarily inaccurate. [13]

Figure 5 A Twitch live stream of *Magic: The Gathering*, “HAUMPH,” Twitch, 19 February 2014, < <http://www.twitch.tv/haumph>>.



When a metagame breaks down...

(The following section uses the colloquial definition of metagame)

One of the most important facts any designer of a game meant for competitive play should understand is that, the majority of players will not play your game at a competitive level.

If you look at games like competitive *League of Legends*, you look at competitive *StarCraft*, if you look at competitive *CS (Counter Strike)*

even, other shooter games: you get a lot more out of people that want to go pro, or want to watch pro's, or like the idea of being pro, than you do people actually trying to do it. [T10]

Figure 6 A list of *YouTube* videos regarding *The Smash Brothers Documentary Series* “The Smash Brothers Documentary Series,” *YouTube*, 3 March 2014.

<<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLoUHkRwnRH-KTCH3tJ9WvsWWPEgUu-y6d>>

East Point Pictures Subscribe 9,052

The Smash Brothers Documentary Series

9 Part Documentary Series on Competitive Melee 9 videos • 4 hours • 226,401 views

Play all Like Share 396 likes, 1 dislikes

- 1** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 1 - Show Me Your Moves**
by EastPointPictures 398,753 views
This series has since been remastered with better audio. Watch the remastered version here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSf2mgkRm7Q&list=PLoUHkRwnRH-KTCH3tJ9WvsWWPEgUu-y6d>
- 2** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 2 - No Johns**
by EastPointPictures 163,410 views
KOPIMI - FREE TO COPY / FREE TO SHAR...
- 3** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 3 - Don't Get Hit**
by EastPointPictures 144,066 views
KOPIMI - FREE TO COPY / FREE TO SHAR...
- 4** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 4 - The King of Smash**
by EastPointPictures 142,374 views
KOPIMI - FREE TO COPY / FREE TO SHAR...
- 5** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 5 - Revolution**
by EastPointPictures 146,674 views
KOPIMI - FREE TO COPY / FREE TO SHAR...
- 6** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 6 - Paper Cuts**
by EastPointPictures 109,913 views
KOPIMI - FREE TO COPY / FREE TO SHAR...
- 7** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 7 - The Robot**
by EastPointPictures 123,415 views
KOPIMI - FREE TO COPY / FREE TO SHAR...
- 8** **The Smash Brothers: Episode 8 - The Natural**
by EastPointPictures 122,514 views
KOPIMI - FREE TO COPY / FREE TO SHAR...

Nevertheless, your game absolutely *needs* to be balanced for competitive play. Even if 99% of your player base will never discover the deepest most complex interactions your game is capable of, they are extraordinarily important. All it takes is for a single skilled or inquiring player to explore an unexplored set of

interactions that the game allows for to completely break the game and invalidate any competitive play.

By their very nature, competitive players will do *anything* within the rules, and some outside of the rules, in order to win. The goal of the competitive player is to win, by any means necessary. They will continue to play as the same character, or use the same weapon, or use the same deck of cards as long as they are winning. And, as soon as that strategy is no longer working for them the vast majority of the time, that player will switch over to the most optimal / most viable strategy in order to continue winning.

So what happens when a player “breaks” a game/metagame? Simply explained, it means that that player has found either an unintended or previously undiscovered interaction between game mechanics that has provided them with a strategy significantly more powerful than any existing one. The player who does this, at least for the first time when publicly implementing this strategy, will be at a huge advantage over the rest of the field of players. After that, the cat is out of the bag. This is when the community kicks into action and if need be, the designers of the game.

So how do players react to a major metagame shift? How do designer / developers react to such a shift? What happens if this shift is unintended and creates an unpleasant tournament environment?

After speaking to some players / ex-designers regarding their reaction to a recently “broken” metagame, they had the following to say (in this case, I am referring to metagame in the sense of a viable strategy that was not present previously, that is now well known and dominating the tournament environment):

Zac Hill:

- Player Perspective: **“As a player, my thoughts are basically, how does this affect my existing decks? Because if the existing deck I wanted to play the week before the Pro Tour slaughters that deck that is just great for me. If it destroys everything we care about, were thinking it’s obviously so good we need to beat that deck. Usually, I hate being on the beat that deck plan, because not everyone is on**

the same wavelength you are. Because it is a really good way to just lose a tournament is to be like “I’m just going to beat the best deck”. I like really like playing the best deck with a really good sideboard plan against, the mirror and against everything else. I am a firm believer in doing that. I think like my choice as a player would be: play that deck, see if it is actually as good as everyone thinks it is... And then I would say “Okay, how can I do this, what is the edge in the mirror, what improvements can I make to this that doesn't sacrifice anything?” and probably sleeve that list up in the Pro Tour.”
[T10]

- **Designer Perspective: “As a game developer, my first thought is “Did something go wrong and is this sustainable?”. So the first thing I do is try to build a bunch of decks that beat it. And if you can hate it out relatively easily, you don't have to really worry about it. When you do get worried is when you have to have a bunch of narrow cards that aren't good in another context”** [T10]

Reid Duke:

Player Perspective: “As a player, my job is to do the best I can with the rules that I'm given. It's not my job to scrutinize the rules or to think about the consequences of whatever deck I choose to play. I would simply pick the deck that gave me the best chance of winning.” [T8]

So now that the metagame has broken down, and your game has become dominated by a specific strategy, and possibly a strategy meant to disrupt / beat that strategy, what is your job as a designer / developer? Your job is to pinpoint exactly what went wrong and fix it, as soon as possible. Players do not want to play a game that is dominated by a specific strategy: players want diversity.

However, there is no need to haphazardly go around editing and rebalancing your game at the first sign of distress. First, allow your game’s metagame the time to account for the new imbalance. In fact, the entire concept of the ever evolving metagame comes from minor imbalances. If the metagame is able to bounce back and remain balanced, given this newly discovered strategy, then there is no problem. The problem arises only when the newly discovered

imbalance is truly game-breaking. There is no absolute metric by which to measure this, it takes careful study and accuracy to tell not only what exactly is so game breaking about this newly discovered interaction, but also what the proper path to take is in order to correct this imbalance.

Balancing Your Game

Balancing a game for competitive game is extremely difficult. When balancing a game you must consider all of the possible interactions between game entities that exist, and the more entities your game is comprised of, the more difficult balance becomes. There is no set way or method to balancing a game. Balance comes from constantly testing and re-evaluating the power or viability of a game entity and ensuring that it balanced relative to the other game entities.

Well the only way to do it is just have the players keep playing it and they complain and complain and I have to judge like which complaints are valid and which are not and eventually know, complaints are like about minor things instead of like hugely broken things. That's, sort of do that long enough and it works out. [T2]

What many games do is they set an average for the power level of a game entity or mechanic. Then, game entities and mechanics are shifted from this average in either slight or very extreme ways. The goal of this is to create a situation in which new dynamic strategies are capable of being formed that are not strictly better or worse than existing ones. Allowing for a multitude of strategies to be viable competitively creates for the most interesting competitive game environments.

Conclusion

In order to keep a competitive game from being dominated by a specific strategy, it is vital that you constantly keep track of what is doing well and why it is succeeding. If a strategy is dominating the competitive scene for an extended period of time unopposed, the game may require some re-balancing or new elements to be introduced that fix this problem.

Randomness in Competitive Games

Introduction

The following section will attempt to answer the following questions: How much randomness should be in competitive games? Should there be zero randomness, similarly to traditional competitive games such as chess, or should there be a slight randomness in the game that allows less skilled players to possibly win? What are the types of luck/randomness and how do they effect gameplay?

A much debated point in the design of competitive games is the randomness factor. Traditionally, skill intensive games, such as *Chess* and *Go* have absolutely no luck factor. The only factors involved when two players go head-to-head when playing these games is their skill itself. This creates an interesting situation in which the better player should consistently beat their less skilled opponent. So if the game we are designing is meant to be played competitively, shouldn't it be free of luck? Should the game not reward the better player with victory?

The upside of a game that is entirely luck free, is that the player(s) will always feel that they deserve the outcome of the game; be it positive or negative. However, there is one flaw with this type of design. If a player is unskilled, they will lose continuously until one of two things happen:

1. They will eventually become skilled by learning from and constantly losing to more experienced and skilled players.
2. They will get fed up with constantly losing and will quit the game entirely.

The complete lack of luck in a game can be very detrimental to the player base. Players that are constantly losing will not play your game for long; there are plenty of things for them to do other than sinking their time, energy, and money into your game. Some designers have the philosophy that:

“...you want tons of randomness so that people who suck like win sometimes and feel like they have a chance and then it will increase the player pool, so the more randomness you have like a more players you can

get and bigger scene you can get.” [T2]

Therefore, if your game will include randomness of any kind, a balance must be struck. Do you add in additional randomness to your game to increase the player pool, and remove some of the skill of the game, or do you keep the luck close to zero but risk inhibiting your player base? This is an essential question to ask yourself when designing your game.

“...randomness that prevents you from even playing the game would be the worst kind ever and no you do not want that kind in competitive games.”

[T2]

Types of Luck:

- Pre-Action Luck: Random events that happen before the player performs an action
- Post-Action Luck: Luck introduced after the player has made a decision and executed an action.

Pre-Action Luck is preferable for competitive games, while post-action luck not. The reason for this comes back to optimal play. For a player to play optimally, they must be able to account for all possible factors before making their decision. Maximizing ones play is one of the cornerstones of competitive play. What happens if we take this away? Here is an example:

Let us say for example that player A is going to make an in-game decision. After careful consideration, they decide between 2 possible choices. He decided to pick option 1. After they decide this, a 6-sided die is rolled. Then, based on the outcome of the die roll, the player will end up in 1 of 6 unique game states. This makes optimal play extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible. Although a player could try to account for all possible states after the die roll, this is not practical given that each possible value of the die roll produces a unique game state.

This is not optimal for competitive games. If a player cannot trust their choice to be optimal at a given game state, then luck is having a greater impact on the game than the skills of the players involved, and that is *not* a characteristic that

competitive game should ever have. As mentioned earlier, skill is what defines competitive games and separates them from unskilled games.

Now, this is not to completely disregard post-action randomness in competitive games. A player's ability to calculate the approximately correct action given numerous possibilities is a skill that is often tested by games, competitive and non-competitive, but it may lead to dissatisfying gameplay if a player's action is never properly executed due to factors they cannot control.

Now, let us compare it to the same situation, but with pre-action luck rather than post-action luck. Let us say, once again, that player A is going to make an in-game decision. Before he decides what action to take, a 6 sided die is rolled, which puts the game into one of 6 unique game states. Now that it is player A's time to make a choice, he is only faced with one game state to evaluate, rather than the 6 produced by post-action luck. In this case, it is extremely possible for the player to understand the impact of their decisions and make a choice with confidence. Player A does not have to fear the outcome of a die roll, something that no player has any control over, they only need to worry about their own decision making as well as the decision making of other players.

Put in extremely simple terms: If you are playing a game and every time you try to move your character forward, there was a 20% chance to move backwards, regardless of your input, this section of the game is obviously unskilled, as there is no way to play optimally, you can only hope to move forward. However, if you were placed on a multi-directional treadmill, and you know that the treadmill may move you forwards, backwards, or sideways if no action is taken, you can obviously reason what the correct decision to be once you have begun to move. The use of pre-action luck rather than post-action luck also helps eliminate needless complexity, which is quite helpful for players when many decision need to be made.

Conclusion

Each game is different, and understanding how randomness can affect your players experience is vital. Make sure to allow for players to optimize their gameplay decisions and for their choices to produce the intended outcome.

Understanding Your Audience

Introduction

One of the most important things to understand when developing a game is your audience. Who will be playing your game? What do your players want to do when playing the game? Why are they playing the game to begin with? Are they out for glory or just looking to have a good time sitting in their living room with friends? Understanding this can greatly help inform your design. Meeting the expectations of your audience is extremely congruent to any games success, not only competitive games.

A perfect example of this comes from *Magic: the Gathering*. At some point during the long history of *Magic: the Gathering*, the designers came up with names and personalities used to describe their players. They found that being able to describe who they were developing for informed their decision making.

These psychological profiles represent; "What is the emotional reason I play? What do I get out of the game emotionally?" -Mark Rosewater

Here are the examples used for describing the players of *Magic: the Gathering*:

Timmy: "Timmy is what we in R&D call the "power gamer." Timmy likes to win big. He doesn't want to eke out a last minute victory. Timmy wants to smash his opponents. He likes his cards to be impressive ..."

Johnny: "Johnny is the creative gamer to whom *Magic* is a form of self-expression. Johnny likes to win, but he wants to win with style. It's very important to Johnny that he wins on his own terms. As such, it's important to Johnny that he's using his own deck. Playing *Magic* is an opportunity for Johnny to show off his creativity."

Spike: "Spike is the competitive player. Spike plays to win. Spike enjoys winning. To accomplish this, Spike will play whatever the best deck is. Spike will copy decks off the Internet. Spike will borrow other players' decks. To Spike, the thrill of *Magic* is the adrenalin rush of competition. Spike enjoys the stimulation of outplaying the opponent and the glory of

victory.” [16]

Now, let us apply this to a different genre of game. For this next example, I will use fighting games. Let us say that you are designing / developing a fighting game and you realize that your players fit into 2 groups.

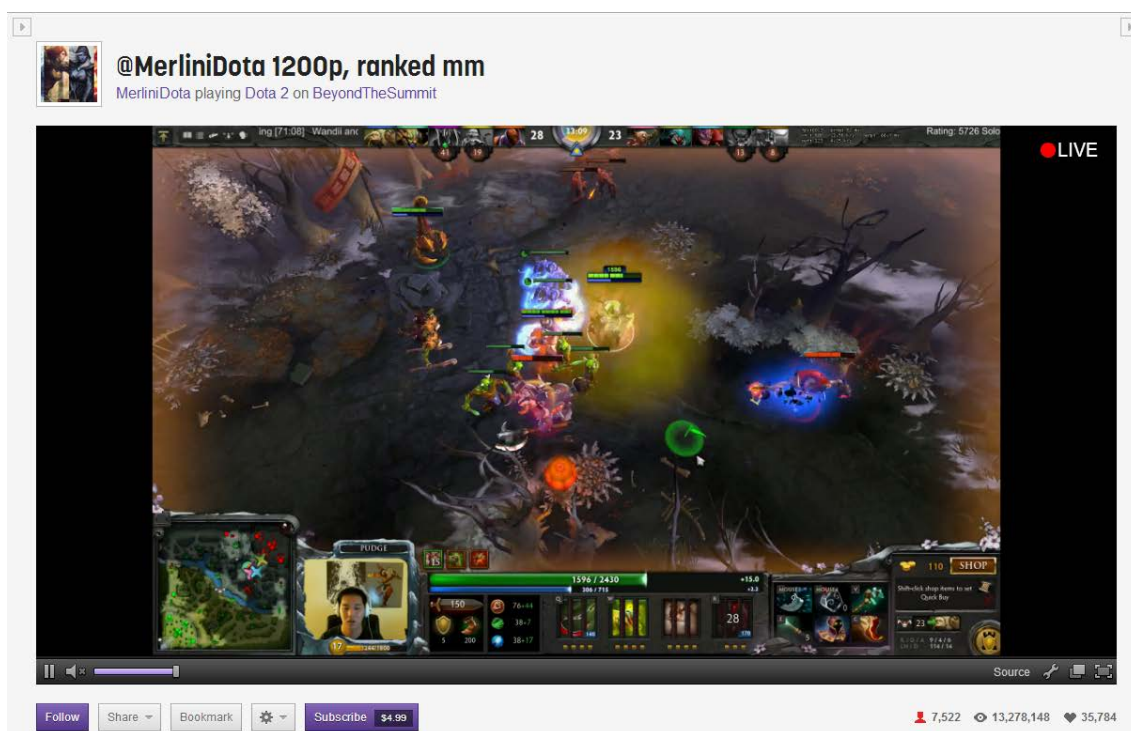
Category 1) The players that want to use the most flashy and damaging combos possible, even if they are not the most efficient moves. These players want to show off their ability to combo their opponent. They want to prove their superiority this way.

Category 2) The players that will repeatedly use the most efficient moves. These players have no problem winning in the least dramatic or fantastic way, they will repeatedly just jab and block their way to victory, even if each game plays out the same way. For these players, victory is the only concern, not appearance.

Now that we understand our players, what do we do? What opportunities do we afford our player, knowing these are the tactics they will try to embrace?

Here is where the competitive gamer comes into play. The competitive gamer can and will do *anything* that the games mechanics allow in order to win. In fact, some players will embrace any tactic in order to win, even if it is dishonest. Dishonesty in this case is not cheating. It is not directly violating any rules that the game itself has decreed. An example of dishonesty in this case would be manipulating a player into believing something was true about the game state that was untrue and then taking advantage of their misbelief. As long as it is legal within the regulations of the play environment, any tactic is viable and should be accounted for. This will be touched on in another section, but this concept is important to keep in mind.

Figure 7 A *Twitch* live stream of *Dota 2*, “MerliniDota,” *Twitch*, 19 February 2014, < <http://www.twitch.tv/merlinidota> >.



A competitive player will embrace any tactic to win. This means that they will always embrace the one that provides the greatest probability for victory, otherwise, they are not out to win and are not truly a competitive player. Commonly, the tactics embraced by the players in category 2 of our example game will have an inherent advantage, they are not trying to do anything other than win, even if it comes from a straightforward tactic, possibly seen by players in category 1 as “boring”. For our example, although a competitive player may fit into category 1, the player that wants to win in the flashiest most fantastic way possible, may be forced to embrace the tactics of category 2 in order to achieve victory at all. If that is the case, the developers of the game have failed to understand and support the tactics embraced by their players.

As a designer / developer, you must afford opportunities for action to your players that are not only what they desire to do, but these actions must be viable in a competitive setting. Players should be able to embrace the tactics they want to embrace, without fear of these tactics being obsolete once they begin to understand / play the game at a higher level. Your design should not allow for

your players skills to be invalidated as they progress / evolve their skills. This means that the tactics your players embrace should be competitively viable, and at the same time, balanced to compete with the other tactics that players will use.

Conclusion

Respecting your players is integral to a games success. Understanding what they want and giving it to them will make your players even more likely to continue to play your game. Knowing who your players are and why they play games, specifically your game, can greatly assist in your games success.

Building Your Community

Introduction

Community building? Why is it important? As the business end of things go, it is fairly obvious; you want players to be invested in your brand / product so that they continue to spend their time and money on it. But why is community building essential to games and even more so for competitive games? First, we must look to our players.

The first major reason why community is incredibly important to competitive gaming is that it is used to help players grow their skills. When players begin to play a game, they come with all sorts of different skills, backgrounds, and expectations. Your job as the game designer is to meet the expectations of your experienced / enfranchised players, given their previous experiences. But at the same time, you must help your newer or less experienced players to be able to play the game well. But how is the latter done?

One of the hardest things for a player to do in competitive gaming is to gain a thorough understanding of the game's concepts. To some players, this will come naturally through experience and practice. However, most players are not inherently skilled or knowledgeable enough to begin to play a game at a high level all on their own. So how do players become skilled enough to compete?

Most players are taught the necessary skills by friends, and in more recent history, by other players online. Players can go to any number of online forums to ask questions or get advice from other players. Players use these forums to prepare for upcoming tournaments, find other players to practice with, speculate about the metagame, and numerous other things. For many players, these forums are the only way to discuss their views on the game and have others discuss their thoughts. These forums are a place of debate as well as a place of information sharing. Through these online venues, a newer player will develop into and work their way up the skill ladder. Much like raising a child, the environment in which they develop affects who they will grow to be.

I think that one of the reasons *Magic* is successful is it's reached what I call the good equilibrium. Where if you don't cooperate and produce value, and help make sure everyone has a good time and a good experience, and really value the community, and creating value, then you won't be welcome. The teams won't want you. Nobody will want to test with you, nobody will give you their stuff, and you will suffer. [T11]

When trying to help your game enter the world of competitive gaming, make absolutely sure there is a place for your players to meet. With the advent of the internet and modern technology, players are able to get on the internet, anytime anywhere, and talk about the games they are playing with others from around the world. Competitive players are especially connected to the online communities, as it is where they will ask other high-level players for advice. Competitive players will use internet forums, such as Reddit, as a place to prepare for major tournaments and base their metagame decisions.

Another important part of building your online community is to involve the high-level players. Once the game is released and tournaments are held, take the players that did well and involve them in your community. Have them write articles about their tournament experience, how they prepared for the event, what they feel is relevant to the metagame, etc. In competitive gaming, celebrities are extremely relevant and well respected. Players dream of one day becoming as skilled as those players or even getting to play against them some day. While it is less so with traditional sports, such as football or baseball, a competitive gamer constantly feels like they are only one major win away from achieving this.

Where you cannot imagine you are Dwight Howard, unless you've got a really active imagination, you can imagine that you won a PTQ (Pro Tour Qualifier), that you know Christian Calcano (a famous player, known for attending an extremely large amount of *Magic* events), and that he might be able to get you on a north east team testing for the Pro Tour in Valencia. That is a path that is, in reality, not really open for most people, but because you can join those dots, and go 1+1+1 is 17, people feel that they can potentially do that...

And so there is this dangling carrot, that maybe the next time is your time, and that's huge... [T9]

The second major reason for the importance of community in competitive games is the social aspect of games. Even if your players are not going to engage of the competitive side of the game, which most will not, your players still want to talk about your game. Players want to talk about things they love with other people who love the same thing just as much as they do. Many competitive gamers travel and practice together in teams. The following is a quote from my interview with Rich Hagon, *Magic: the Gathering* commentator, after I had described being a member of the world of competitive *Magic* (although this applies to almost any competitive game) as a lifestyle.

And I say to people, I say, "Look, don't think of *Magic* as a game, the best comparison I can give you, is it's as if you've decided to become a season ticket holder at a European soccer team." Right, a Manchester United season ticket holder. So what you're buying for that is, sure, you've got a bunch of matches that you're going to physically go and see, but way beyond that:

On Sunday, you ring up your mates and plan who's going to be driving the car to the next away trip on Wednesday night for the cup match. And on Monday, you go on the club website and you check out what is happening with all the players. And on Tuesday, well that is the day before the match; so you're gearing up, "I've got everything I need". Wednesday: You go to the match, you buy your pie, you buy your program, you chat with your mates, you watch the game, you talk all the way home about the game, and the it's "Who is driving on Saturday to the match".

Right, and every single day, you're invested in your team, and *Magic* is your team. And so, you know, once you get down to the *Magic*, it's like "So, it's *FNM* every Friday, except on weekends when it's the *European Grand Prix* when I am going to be going to 4 of those a year, then I am going to try to go to all 3 of the *World Magic Cup Qualifiers*, on the weekends that that's not happening I'm going to watch the *Star City*

Coverage, I am going to watch the European coverage, then I am going to switch over to the North American GP coverage, you know where we've got double weekend. So it's like ok, I've got round 8 of Vienna open on one side and I've got round 4 of whatever the other one is on another screen. Um, it is absolutely, as you say, it is a lifestyle commitment, like, you know if you want to follow the *Boston Red Socks*, you've got 162 games worth of chat to have with your friends.
[T9]

Competitive gamers will completely immerse themselves in a deep and interesting game, spending all of their free time playing, watching, and discussing a game, all the while with a giant smile on their face. Supporting your community with things like team based play, multiplayer ways to play the game, incentives for team play etc., can all help not only support the players, but also help to grow the brand that is your game.

Another major element of competitive gaming in recent history has been live streaming events while professional players or commentators narrate the event. Interested players will often find themselves with more online content every day than they could possibly consume. Ranging from professional players using streaming services such as *Twitch.tv* to professional *StarCraft 2*, *League of Legends*, *Call of Duty*, *Magic: The Gathering*, etc. events being streamed live every weekend. In fact, in Korea, there are multiple television stations dedicated to broadcasting games such as *League of Legends* or *StarCraft / StarCraft 2*.

A great way to help your players not only become more informed regarding the competitive environment of the games, but players can also use it to immerse themselves further in the culture of the games they love, is to have a constant stream of consistent and interesting online content.

I got an email from a guy that said "I've watched 50 of the 50 ½ hours of world's week last year." I just said "What happened to the other ½ hour? What went wrong?" And that's amazing. When you think that TV is more and more geared towards the idea of: we will try and put this ratings winning comedy on for a half an hour before our big set piece

new drama, which is 45 minutes only. And we are inviting you in for 50 hours in a week. And you're saying "Yes". I mean this is wonderful. [T9]

Additionally, viewers get to see the players they like evolve and succeed. Professional gamers are exactly the same as professional sports players. To some people, *StarCraft 2* player Jang Min Chu (MC) is just as famous as Derek Jeter or Michael Jordan is to others; and players / spectators care about the players just as much about their team and professional players as the spectators of traditional sports do.

Figure 8 A *YouTube* video capturing a *Street Fighter* match. foolished, "Street Fighter - Justin vs. Daigo," Online video clip, *YouTube*, YouTube, 28 December 2005, 2 March 3, 2014



So you've decide that you want there to be streaming for your major events. So what is the job of your stream crew? What should they be talking about while the game is being played? Well, according to *Magic: the Gathering* commentator Rich Hagon:

"...It's my job to convey my love of the game to people and to explain why what they are seeing matters." [T9]

Whether that means the order of actions your player took while playing *StarCraft*, versus the read a player may have made to guess what card their opponent had in *Magic*, or how a player is spacing their opponent advantageously in a fighting game: the job of the commentator is to not only understand what is going on and explain it, but to explain why and how, whenever possible, the actions the player took as well as the impact of those decisions.

Conclusion

When developing your community, the goal is to get your player base to the “good equilibrium” that Zvi mentioned as fast as possible. It is there that you will see players developing their skills at a high rate. If your game is a competitively successful one, with many major events going on, understand that it may become a lifestyle for your players. Your players may be spending hours every day thinking and talking about your game; and supporting them in this can only benefit the future of your game.

The Player's Perspective

What exactly do the players of competitive games think about the games they play? Since they play the games on a regular basis, we decided to interview a few of them directly.

Q. How would you describe your job/hobby to a non-gamer?

Although we have been talking about what competitive games are, we haven't actually showed what an actual player says about his/her job/hobby. Here are a few quotes from actual competitive game players describing their job/hobby:

"...I would say my hobby is playing competitive games, specifically those called Real Time Strategy (RTS) games, which removes the turn-based aspects from tactical games such as *Shogi*, *Chess*, and *Go* and is a so-called war game." [T5]

"As a player my job was to be as good as possible at *StarCraft 2*, provide an entertaining stream for viewers to watch me practice, and provide coaching to players who wanted to improve and understand more about *StarCraft 2*." [T7]

So there you go. The *StarCraft II* players (and probably many other RTS game players) like to describe the games they play as *Chess* or *Go* at real-time. This seems like a nice explanation especially when you want to tell people that the games they play aren't just something that anyone can do but needs skill, just as professional chess players have their own strategies when playing. Nick points out how the player's job is not only to be good at competitive games but at the same time entertain the spectators and fans of the game and even help other players get better at the game. Competitive games are not simply there for you to enjoy yourself, there is a whole community for each game existing on the internet with fans from all over the globe.

Of course, people do not put this much effort into competitive games unless they really like to play games:

“It's more of a hobby / lifestyle for me personally. Really, I'd just describe it as something I use as a creative outlet. Something that gets my adrenaline going.” [T1]

Video games are clearly a major part of these players' lives and are not simply things that exist to kill time.

“For people that don't know what video games are I'd just ask them where have they been for the past 25 years.” [T4]

Q. Why are competitive games this popular worldwide?

Why do the players think competitive games are this popular worldwide? A former *StarCraft II* player/caster/producer describes it as the following:

“Competition as a form of social interaction is something people love in all walks of life. It's only natural with the growing popularity of gaming that competitive gaming becomes more popular as well.” [T7]

Thus from what he says, competitive games are popular because people just like competition in general. This does make sense as many people like to watch and play competitive sports games such as the Super Bowl, which is very popular, especially in the US. Non-gamers may think games could not be considered as sports but just games but as the term eSports (electronic sports) suggests, these competitive games could be considered as something analogous to competitive sports like football or basketball. Other similarities between sports and eSports include the fact how they both have professionals that actually make money from doing it and are sponsored by famous companies.

Going back to topic, a fighting game player Daniel says the following regarding why competitive games are popular:

“I think competitive games are popular because players feel far cleverer when defeating live opponents rather than pre-scripted AI.” [T1]

Daniel is assuming that people think live opponents are cleverer than AI. This is true at the current level of AI in most games unless they are as simple as something like *Chess* or *Othello* in the sense that the AI can defeat a human player quite consistently.[8] The AI does not perform as well in competitive games which Daniel enjoys to play. However it suggests that as time passes and AIs get cleverer, competitive games would get less interesting to those who feel clever defeating live opponents. I personally think as a student gamer that playing against live opponents is more interesting than playing against AI as well mostly because the AI would usually go with its own strategy all of the time whereas when you play with many other players online throughout the world, people have all kinds of different strategies when playing. Just beating one type of strategy (e.g. the AI) will get boring very fast unless the AI is capable of learning new strategies and countering the player.

Competitive games are not only popular amongst the players. A Japanese *StarCraft II* player says the following:

“...games such as *Starcraft1,2* are not only interesting to play as eSports, but could also be fun watching them.” [T6]

Q. What are the main qualities that make a competitive game?

Since one of the points of this paper is to figure out what the main aspects of competitive games are, why not try asking the players that question?

A Japanese *StarCraft II* player, kurOa, says having an opponent, a balanced game, and the foundation for industrial development of the game is important factors of a competitive game. [T6] Another Japanese *StarCraft II* player, Holon, also mentions having a well-balanced game is necessary but also says that increasing you skill and the amount of knowledge about that game should lead to winning. [T3]

Many of the competitive gamers seem to agree that competitive games must have a well-balanced system, and this probably is to increase the chance of skillful players to be in the top rather than just players that happened to win by luck. In competitive sports like basketball, the games are balanced, no such rule

favors one team over another--it is all based on the skills of the players on each team. Naturally the winning condition also is a big factor for competitive games.

“There exists a win condition,’ ‘The win condition is clear,’ ‘The opportunity to win is fair.’” [T6]

These are the three aspects that nazomen thinks are vital for a game to be competitive; they are all regarding the winning condition of games. All competitive gamers want to be highly ranked in that game and really focus on winning--they aren't just playing games to kill time or have fun without thinking about who wins or loses. They analyze the ways of winning and train to actually get better at the game like a professional sport player. This is why it is so important for the players that the game has a clear winning condition with everyone having fair opportunities.

Q. What about the prize money when playing competitive games?

As many of these competitive game players are called professionals, they would probably be making some amount of money from playing. Some of you non-gamers, the fact that making money just from playing video games may be a completely surprising thing and some of you may or may not be very jealous of the professional players. What do the players actually think about the prize support of competitive games?

A professional fighting game player comments on the money that players get from playing:

I think fighting gamers, for now, have to sacrifice living a lifestyle of luxury to do what they love to do, because the current prize support is not high enough to make this a career. Right now, only the top 3 consistent placers of major tournaments can make a basic living (phone bill, rent, electricity etc.). [T4]

kurOa goes into detail about how much money a Japanese RTS gamer earns:

“For Japanese tournaments the total prize money per year will be at most 200,000 yen. A college graduate could earn 200,000 yen per month these days. Even a part timer could earn 100,000 yen. For those who plan to play as a competitive gamer this could be very small.” [T5]

Assuming the yen/dollar exchange rate is 100 yen/dollar, 200,000 yen is roughly equivalent to 2,000 dollars per year. Considering this is how much they make at most for playing games all year, you may understand how money is probably not the major factor that drives competitive gamers to play competitive games as a professional. Of course, this is for people in Japan and since the game scene in Japan is a lot smaller they probably earn a lot less than let's say professional StarCraft players in the United States. Regardless of that, you would still need to be a very dedicated player who could continuously be in the top rankings as Kevin said, and this is just to make a basic living so people who just want to make money would probably be better off choosing some other job unless they really enjoy playing games.

“But mostly what is professional gaming about, it's about: you want people to say ‘You are going to give me money to play that? I wanted to play that anyway!’” [T11]

Q. How would you describe the term “metagame”?

In previous sections we've talked about the importance of the “metagame” in competitive games—what do the players define it as? Here is one description from Nick:

Metagame refers to anything that affects the game outside of the interactions inside the game itself. An example would be how knowledge of your opponent's favored strategies could shape your own decisions before the game even starts or without even seeing what your opponent is doing. [T7]

Another description by Daniel:

To me, "metagame" is the game beyond the game, if that makes any sense. This is huge in fighting games specifically, as it takes into account the human element brought into the game. In a fighting game, the game says when you get hit by this move, you get knocked down, then get up 3 seconds later. The metagame says you are at a huge disadvantage when you are knocked down, and you have a few defensive options versus your opponents multitude of offensive options, and your response is guided by your anticipation, reactions, and knowledge of both game and opponent (among other things of course). [T1]

From these descriptions it seems like the term metagame is referring more towards the strategies and knowledge used for the game more than the gameplay itself. Later on we will be talking more about defining what a metagame is and how it is important to competitive gaming in more detail.

Hopefully these set of interviews shows the players' perspective towards competitive games and could be taken into account when designing a successful competitive game. The gamers are the main audience of games after all.

Competitive Game Spectators

As you have read before, millions of people spectate competitive games through live streams like *Twitch*, so clearly there is something to competitive games that are not only compelling to the players but also to the community and the people who like to just spectate rather than play the game.

Before going into the details about spectators, what exactly are the types of things that spectators look at?

Social Media in Competitive Games

Live stream

Spectators may watch gameplay of competitive games live through streaming services such as *Twitch* or even *YouTube* has broadcasting features as well. These live casts might be casted by the player himself or maybe by some companies when it is streaming for tournaments.

Videos

Many people are not able to make it to the live stream to see the action live, and this is when video sites like *YouTube* are useful when they want to watch replays of previous matches.

Wikis

Although spectators might never even consider playing the game that they're watching, they might look at the wiki for knowledge regarding the game, which could range from basics about the game to high level techniques and maybe even player information/statistics.

Bulletin Boards/Forums

Similar to wikis, bulletin boards could also be used by spectators when they want to talk with other fans of the game about either the game itself or about specific tournaments or players or anything else.

Of course, all of the media above are heavily used by other people like the players themselves in a slightly different way such as in order to get better at the game.

Some examples of wikis and forums are listed in the Resources section.

Figure 9 A *YouTube* video of the *KAC* tournament finals for *beatmania* Mouse Salvatore, “KAC2013 IIDX 21 SPADA 決勝ラウンド 灼熱 Beach Side Bunny (A) (DOLCE),” Online video clip, *YouTube*, YouTube, 22 December 2013, 3 March 2014.



The Importance of Spectators

So how important are the spectators in the competitive gaming scene? In Glifford Cheung and Jeff Huang’s paper “*StarCraft* from the Stands: Understanding the Game Spectator” they talk about how much the spectators are actually part of the game too:

...a spectator can be just as immersed in the reality of the game as players who have a direct hand in the final outcome of the game...It should be noted that in-game tension is over stakes that, Huizinga reminds us, do not necessarily have any outside meaning; they are

“unimportant and a matter of indifference” (qtd. in Huizinga 49). These spectators have adopted the values of the game-world, a position squarely inside the magic circle. [4]

When it comes to live streams like *Twitch*, the competitive players do not only show the spectators their gameplay, but some of them actually interact with the spectators through the stream since services like *Twitch* have a chat feature that allows the spectators to directly comment on the gameplay of the caster.

In the paper they also talk about sports and video games have similarities and how commentating on a sport affects the spectators:

Some sports have similarities to video games in that they have competitive players as well as spectators....We found that spectators watched *StarCraft* for many of the same reasons....[Jennings Bryant, Dan Brown, Paul W. Comisky, and Dolf Zillmann] found that subjects watching a tennis match found the experience more enjoyable, exciting, involving, and interesting when the commentary depicted the players as enemies, rather than friends or neutral parties. The projected animosity between the players because of the commentators created suspense throughout the game...[Paul Comisky, Jennings Bryant, and Dolf Zillmann] showed that even commentators that simply report what was occurring on the screen make watching the game more entertaining and enjoyable for subjects. [4]

Since both competitive sports and competitive games attract spectators in similar ways, having a commentator in sports games will probably have a similar effect in the gaming world as well. Especially in tournaments of competitive games they have commentators comment on what each player does to the spectators even if it was obvious by just watching the gameplay, and this probably is having a good effect towards the spectators as Glifford and Jeff state in their quote above.

As the game designers know that competitive games are popular among the spectators as well, they keep in mind making the game interesting for the spectators when designing,

“The original *StarCraft* game had a number of community-developed tools that allowed the observer to monitor each player’s resources and APM (actions per minute, a metric often used to judge a player’s skill). *StarCraft 2* built many of these metrics into the game’s spectator interface.” [4]

The authors concluded in their paper that in order to design a game that will be entertaining to the spectator as well, the designer would need to be careful of how much information to show to the spectators:

“...we found that spectators enjoy situations that start with information asymmetry—that the suspense is in the revelation.” [4]

This does make sense in the way that a spectator would not want to know all about the stats and strategies for each player or else they might just know the outcome of the game and that would be too spoiled for them. As you could see, competitive gaming is not just a big thing for the gamers but also for the spectators who not necessarily play the game themselves. Thus, when designing a competitive game, it is important to listen to what other game designers recommend, as well as what the gamers and spectators hope for in the game.

Demonstration of How a Game is Played Competitively

Up until this point, we have mostly been talking about adversarial games, meaning that one player wins and the other loses (such as in *StarCraft* or in *Street Fighter*). However, how could a non-adversarial game be played competitively? In this section we would be explaining how a Japanese rhythm game *Taiko no Tatsujin* could be played competitively.

The objective of this game is quite simple, you have a Taiko drum in front of you and notes flow from right to left on the screen. Every time the note overlaps with the circle to the left of the screen you want to hit the drum, and the more well you time it the more points you get. The middle of the drum corresponds to red notes and the edges of the drum correspond to blue notes. This game is very popular in Japan that they have sold it on PS2, PSP, DS, 3DS, Wii, and WiiU consoles and they even have a machine in the arcade centers located all over the country. Players range from small children to adults (the majority of the players are casual players, not competitive players).

Figure 10 The *Taiko no Tatsujin* game screen, “遊び方,” 太鼓の達人, Bandai Namco Games, 18 February 2014, 3 March 2014, < <http://taiko.namco-ch.net/taiko/howto/>>



The Different Types of Players

Before even talking about the competitive players, let me describe the different types of categories of players that exist:

- 1) Serious/Competitive Players
- 2) Casual Players

3) Performers

The main objective for the serious players is to get as good as they can at the game, not only for rhythm games but for any type of competitive game. For example in *Taiko no Tatsujin* there are four difficulties, Easy, Normal, Hard, and Demon, and so the serious players usually play in the Demon level. Whenever they get a good score, they will upload the score to the mobile website to compete with other players around the nation.

Some well-known serious players are:

りんね(Linne), るーぼー(Luubou), and いわごん(Iwagon).

By looking at some of their videos, it is noticeable that they try their best possible in order to achieve the highest score they could. Regarding *Taiko no Tatsujin* this may include the optimal way to hit the drums, the orientation in which you use your arms, the types of sticks you use, and more.

A casual player does not necessarily mean bad at the game and a competitive player does not mean a person who is good at the game. Here we are distinguishing the players by their play style.

From what we have seen from observing casual players of this game, they only play the game once in a while, maybe when they walk buy an arcade center and notice that the game is there. Or maybe they have one of the console games and play it once in a while with their friends or family. They do not go out of their way to practice a song for hours straight and train to get better at the game.

The third type of players, performers, is those who play the game in a way to entertain the viewers. They usually play in a way that is not quite a normal way people do to be unique and interesting. Once they do something interesting most of the time they like to upload videos of themselves onto sites like *YouTube* to show it off.

An example of a performer in *Taiko no Tatsujin* is Shun; he is known for making huge movements with his body (almost like dancing) to show off to the audience why playing the game quite well. Although there is no need to do this in order to play the game, he does this in order to entertain the people gathering around

him and the people on the other side of the camera looking at his videos on the internet.

Figure 11 A *YouTube* video capturing a TV show airing about the *Taiko no Tatsujin* national tournament. YEYEEYE55, “太鼓の達人 13 日本一決定戦,” Online video clip, *YouTube*, YouTube, 12 March 2010, 3 March 2014.



To Become the Master of Rhythm Games

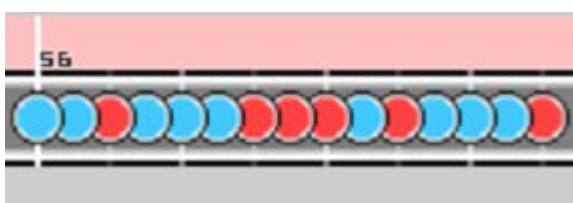
The Taiko no Tatsujin diagrams used in this section were originally from the 太鼓の達人 譜面とか Wiki[23], edited by Stefan Alexander.

Now that you've seen the different types of players in this rhythm game, let me show you some details on how this game is played by a competitive player.

A competitive player has to know everything about the game system and every small technic that an average player may not even know about to get the highest score possible in the game.

For example, some of the top difficulty songs may be a bit too difficult to just be able to master from playing. When that's the case a competitive player will go to

the *Taiko no Tatsujin* wiki and acquire the music information of that song. This is an example of the metagame in *Taiko no Tatsujin* since looking through the wiki in order to know more about the game is not part of the gameplay. Here is a fragment of the song “Kamikaze Remix” that may be a bit challenging for some players:



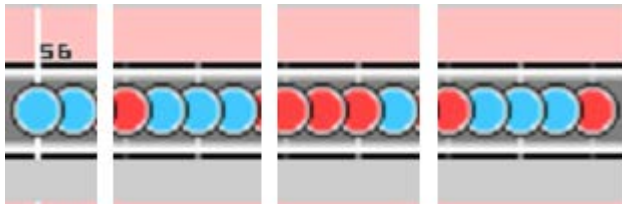
This image shows a measure of the music with the notes to be hit in that measure. This stream of 15 circles will be flowing from right to left and the player needs to hit all of them in order at the right timing. The blue and red circles you see here are the notes (blue corresponds to the drum edge, red corresponds to the center of the drum). In order to be able to hit all of the notes in this sequence, it is recommended to hit it by alternating between you're left and right arms since you might not be able to hit multiple continuously with one hand. However just by looking at this you wouldn't necessarily know which notes to hit with your left arm and which to hit with your right (unless you played enough of this game that you could just glance at it and know). To make the above sequence a lot more manageable, there exists several different strategies:

- The first strategy is to just examine the sequence and find out if there actually does exist a pattern.



Here after labeling each note with R for right arm and L for left arm, a player might notice that when he starts from his right arm, all of the red notes that come after starts from his right arm and all of the blue notes will start with his left arm. This is a pattern that could be memorized.

-Another strategy is to actually divide the long sequence into shorter manageable sequences like this.



Now, each segment is less than or equal to five notes and may be easier.

Now you may question how a player would manage these shorter segments, would he need to actually memorize every possible combination of red and blue notes in order to get better at this game? The answer is no, what a player does when the notes get very complicated is count in his head the number of consecutive red/blue notes and act on whether or not that number is even or odd.

That was a taste of competitively playing a rhythm game. Taiko players do a lot more other things, especially those who play in the arcades. The arcade Taiko games are connected to the internet and thus you can compare your own scores with anyone in the nation which makes the game really competitive. They also have a rating system that shows roughly in what level you are compared to the other players. For the latest version in 2013, the highest rating is 十段 (Level 10), which according to the official twitter account, is only the top 0.26% of players. [17]

There is also a difference between a 赤十段 (Red Level 10) and a 金十段 (Gold Level 10). Looking at the graph from the official twitter account [18], there seems to be approximately seven Gold Level 10 for every thirty Level 10 player. So as a whole, there are only about $0.26 * 0.23 = 0.06\%$ of the players who are Gold Level 10. Being in one of these levels is something players could brag about even though they make no money off of it (rather, they keep losing money the more they play it at the arcade centers), so the competitive players get more into it. People actually bring their own drumsticks (one of us has lived in Japan and made his own drumsticks from scratch) to the arcade centers just to use them for the game. Some of them cover the drum with a piece of cloth in order to decrease the amount of friction between the stick and the drum to get more points. Many of the competitive players even figure out ways to hit the drum as fast as they could such as using actual drumming techniques such as the

drumroll. You may think that's funny because it is a game not an actual musical instrument, but the players are very serious about this. Just like other games like *LoL* and *StarCraft*, national tournaments are held once in a while too.

Figure 12 Drumsticks just for *Taiko no Tatsujin* sold on Amazon, “Qwants 太鼓の達人 アーケード用 マイバチ タタコン 黒色 マットブラック AC専用 朴木 ホオノキ,” Amazon.co.jp, 3 March 2014, <http://www.amazon.co.jp/gp/switch-language/product/B00D8LKRQK/ref=dp_change_lang?ie=UTF8&language=en_JP>



Qwants 太鼓の達人 アーケード用 マイバチ タタコン 黒色 マットブラック AC専用 朴木 ホオノキ
by Qwants
★★★★★ (1 customer review)
List Price: ¥4,980
Price: ¥1,750
You Save: ¥3,230 (65%)
Only 3 left in stock. Click [here](#) for details of availability.
Ships from and sold by 古倉組 音楽堂. For Returns, please check the seller link. CVS is available from this seller.
[4 new](#) from ¥1,750

Click for larger image and other views

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In conclusion, this example shows that a competitive game does not need to be adversarial; many rhythm games including *Taiko no Tatsujin* and more could also be considered as competitive games, especially since most rhythm games have a ranking system that encourages players to play competitively.

Conclusion

Competitive games should be designed for casual play and balanced for competitive play. Nearly every successful competitive game has far more casual players than it does competitive players. Players should want to play your game regardless of any fame or prize support they could gain from playing it competitively.

Understanding who your players are and what they want, both in terms of game content and what they want to gain mentally or emotionally from playing the game, can greatly assist in the design of competitive games. When a player gets to use a strategy they enjoy at a high level of play, the game becomes far more enjoyable.

A game is defined by its community. When the community is open, accepting, friendly, and helpful, it reflects well on the game and leads to thriving casual and competitive communities. Communities are also vital to the evolution of their players' skills. Without a supportive and helpful community, players in that community will have a much harder time being competitive successful than if they were a member of a more supportive and caring community.

The future of competitive gaming is unknown, but is quite possible in the foreseeable future for games to become major spectator sports, such as Football or Baseball.

Interview Transcripts

The following interviews are transcribed in their original form, including all expletives.

T1. Interview with Daniel Maniago

Q. How would you describe your job to someone who has no idea what competitive gaming is?

I wouldn't call playing fighting games competitively my job. It's more of a hobby / lifestyle for me personally. Really, I'd just describe it as something I use as a creative outlet. Something that gets my adrenaline going.

Q. Why do you think competitive games are so popular?

I think competitive games are popular because players feel far more clever when defeating live opponents rather than pre-scripted AI. If we're talking about fighting games specifically, I'd say fighting games aren't nearly as popular as other genres of games.

Q. Is there a reason why you decided to take the career as a professional gamer?

Again, I wouldn't necessarily say my career is fighting games, nor would I say I'm a professional at them. I just enjoy playing them competitively, and always have.

Q. How did you become a professional gamer? Have you had some sort of training?

My older brothers got me into Street Fighter, and it sort of blossomed from there. I started playing against my brothers and friends, then graduated to going to the arcade to play against people who were no less passionate than I about fighting games.

Q. Why do you prefer these games over other games?

Defeating a live opponent in a game with such complex mechanics is one of the most rewarding gaming experiences you can have in my opinion.

Q. What other games do you enjoy playing?

I'd say my favorite genre after fighting games has always been RPGs, though I don't play games nearly as much as I used to.

Q. If you had to describe the term "metagame" how would you describe it?

To me, "metagame" is the game beyond the game, if that makes any sense. This is huge in fighting games specifically, as it takes into account the human element brought into the game. In a fighting game, the game says when you get hit by this move, you get knocked down, then get up 3 seconds later. The metagame says you are at a huge disadvantage when you are knocked down, and you have a few defensive options versus your opponents multitude of offensive options, and your response is guided by your anticipation, reactions, and knowledge of both game and opponent (among other things of course).

Q. If a metagame shifts such as unskilled players are able to dominate, how should the designers/developers of the game as well as the community respond?

It depends on what the developers are trying to achieve really. I personally have never experienced this scenario.

Q. How do you feel about the current prize support? Is it enough to support your lifestyle? If they were able to increase prize support, would the competitive scene rise in popularity?

Prize support in fighting games is relatively low I think. I don't really know how increased prize support would affect the community, since it seems the devil would be in the details regarding said prize support.

Q. You are on a team—describe you team dynamic and how often you practice.

Game wise, I'd say the team dynamic is non-existent just by nature of the games being 1v1. As a team in the community, I think we all bring something unique to BROKENTIER and it's always a blast to hang out, practice, and collaborate together when we're all in the same place (which is rare).

Q. Do you ever write articles on competitive games or about player successes/failures?

I used to write regularly on shoryuken.com forums back in the day, but I hardly do these days. Not really sure why. Maybe it's because I don't vibe with any of the outlets that I might output some work. Or I could just be super lazy. Maybe these days I just feel I've already said my piece and would rather focus on playing. I crawled on fighting game forums for a really long time, so I think I might just be over writing about it. Not sure really.

Q. How active would you say you are in the community? Do you feel like you have a responsibility in the community?

I feel I'm fairly active in the community, but could definitely do more. I personally don't feel I have a responsibility to the community, though that doesn't stop me from contributing in ways that I feel are positive/interesting/whatever.

Q. Do you feel that the community is disconnected from the competitive players?

I'm not really sure. But maybe that's because I come from a time where we just called it "the scene". We would have to define what a community really is before delving into that question I think!

Q. Are there any must-read articles/formative literature that successful players should read before involving themselves in competitive play?

I think old Seth "S-kill" Killian articles make for a good read in regards to getting a strong mindset for success in fighting games. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is supposed to be good too, through I've never read it in its entirety.

Q. Before joining the competitive scene, how devoted were you to competitive play? Were you just playing casually or were you already planning to become a competitive player?

I don't know. I can't pinpoint a specific era or moment when I officially joined the competitive scene. I always played fighting games against people.

Q. If you had to define three qualities that every competitive games had to have, what would they be?

I'm not really sure. Off the top of my head: A focus on playability over balance, a focus on emergent gameplay, and accessibility!

T2. Interview with David Sirlin

David Sirlin: Did you happen to read the my four part series I wrote for Game Developer's Conference on game balance there's like a handout that goes with it....It's really relevant to what you are saying because when I gave that lecture the very, very first thing out of my mouth was like "Here is why you should care about the rest of this lecture. The reason is, because when you spend if you think of all the effort that goes into making your game, and we call that, you know, a hundred percent of your effort, that one little balance fuck up like which is like one percent of all of that, or less, can ruin the entire thing. Like the experience of playing you game is like a fucked up broken thing. If that one little, like all that other effort is garbage now? So like, that's why you need to care about this."

Maxwell Perlman: ...I was playing I think it was Hearthstone earlier, the new DCG in Blizzard, and I found it to be pretty enjoyable, but even if I was playing like the control role, versus the opponent, they could still top deck something and kill me because I can't interact on their turn. So that like is a I think a major thing from what I've seen from like community boards and stuff. It's like, stuff like that is not conducive too.

David Sirlin: Uh, well, I don't know, I will make a few comments on that. So first like I'm morally opposed to Hearthstone or refuse to play it even one time in about every amount of chance I get because it has uneven play fields it has the concept of like, "you have more stuff than I do, so your deck is more powerful. " And that's like fundamentally opposed to what competition is about. It actually personally offended me that it like a competitive game would have a mode where it's not about even play field. But then they have the other mode which is fair, which that you know, that there's no reason to complain about that. But they're linked business-wise like the prices of the other mode are what they are because of the uneven playing field mode so it's like dirty pool to me and I don't want anything to do with it. But I have a different comment to you about the more to the substance of your point. You said that you can't interact in the opponent's turn? You know um, that's frustrating to you. Ok I'm not like trying to say there is a right or wrong or that I know the answer to this or something. But that's, I'm struggling with that exact same thing right now. In my game Codex which is a customizable but not collectable card game. I don't know if you read it, I've only

written a little bit about it but I've been developing it for about ten years it's ridiculous it's pretty far along out. It's like Magic if you had completely different assumptions about everything like every bit. Like you just totally disagree with everything they're doing, but you're like, "Hey, that's a really fun game." That's how you made a backwards version of it. That's what it's like. But, I'm writing about the same thing, I try to make it asynchronous because if it's asynchronous then you can end up playing it way more. Like, you can play it at times in your life where you only have a few minutes, you could play, you could start ten games at once against ten different people and, you know, whenever they get around to playing you can play. So it kind of transforms like how much you could potentially play the game. And that's so alluring that like it could be played that much more than I thought, well, Codex my game might it doesn't really let itself to that but maybe I'll try it. Maybe I'll like if I modify it a little bit would it be like, would it be so horrible that we will just say, "No, fuck this." And we try it and it's like, it's actually pretty good, but it has the same thing you just said. You know like, the concept of asynchronous is like "I take my turn without you interacting." And so, yeah that

Maxwell Perlman: You get some weird non-interaction which you would have like

David Sirlin: Yeah, right. Yeah and that's a negative. So I don't know what to say, like I agree with you that that's a negative but there's other concerns, so I don't know what the right answer is. I don't wait, Hearthstone seems like it's designed completely to be asynchronous so I don't know why it isn't. You know? Like you can't actually play it asynchronously?

Maxwell Perlman: No. Which would make sense, because the whole design is that you can do anything in any order on your turn and your opponent cannot interact.

David Sirlin: Yeah it's like they went over it backwards to make it asynchronous but didn't actually implement the asynchronous part.

Maxwell Perlman: They have a very small amount of things that can interact on the opponent's turn but you set them up on your turn, they're like a trap that they walk into.

David Sirlin: Yeah, I know, I understand.

Maxwell Perlman: So you still don't need to be there. You could totally play it asynchronously.

David Sirlin: Right, right, and I'm saying like normally they would just never have designed it that way so it really seems like that was a constraint of their own, of like, hey let's put these traps in so that there could be some interaction even though its asynchronous. Cause like if I had to the same kind of thing in my game it's like, well okay you can't act on their turn but you can do something and your turn that will affect their turn right? But anyway that's like a tangent to your built topic.

Maxwell Perlman: On of them (questions) is on randomness in game design and that's a big thing that how much, I mean there's no real way to like give it a quantity but how much randomness do you think is acceptable, before the game loses its skill intensive nature?

David Sirlin: Yeah that's a, that's like an intense question. People like disagree on that a lot and I know it's not arrogant but I just I think a lot of people just don't get it or something like the trade-offs like there's no one answer to that, right? I can't tell you the exact level of randomness is X or something. So some people will say you know 0 is the right amount right? Has anyone said that?

Maxwell Perlman: Yeah people have said that, that it should be entirely skill.

David Sirlin: Yeah, so, okay. That's reasonable, so like you know, chess has 0, that's fine. StarCraft has extremely low randomness like super-close to zero. So that, I think that shows that being close to zero is okay. You know, it's been done and seems to work. That you have the opposite end of the spectrum where, okay Richard Garfield...you know like creator of Magic right? Yeah so he would say the other end like you want tons of randomness so that people who suck like win sometimes and feel like they have a chance and then it will increase the player pool, so the more randomness you have like a more players you can get and bigger scene you can get, is the kind of argument he makes. And I think that

yeah there's some truth to that, but you kind of like drill in a little bit about like well what kind of randomness are you talking about and like here's an example type of randomness: I'm playing Magic and I don't draw any Lands and I lose. That's like the worst kind in the world. Right? Cause you didn't even get to play. So I yeah I think part of answering this is like looking at the different types of randomness. So like that, I don't know what you call that but like randomness that prevents you from even playing the game would be the worst kind ever and no you do not want that kind in competitive games. Even if you bought into his argument like there could be things during gameplay where you're both doing moves and stuff that have random effects as opposed to just being completely locked out of playing. Also another way to...you got a drill down about what are you even talking about, input randomness versus output randomness? Like if you have a deck of cards and you draw some cards and that's random like what your choices are at this point, but maybe when you play the cards there's no randomness. Or there, you could have a game where you play a card then it says roll a die to figure out if you hit or something. But usually, like, there's not, usually that the randomness was in your input to your decision then you make a decision and it happens. The way around is output randomness like do you know Summoner Wars? The card game? Whatever, in that game you it's kind of it's like a miniature's game that's really with cards, you move cards around the board, and when the cards attack, you roll a dice. And I hate dice and I don't know, I was super against it for a long time but I started to realize that there is some value to output randomness, that's where you make your decision, "I'm going to attack", and then the randomness happens after the decision, rather than before. So, I think a lot of competitive players super hate that, but what it does is it creates risk managements. It's like, well I could do this, but it might go wrong, so how sure am I? Like, should I do a higher percentage thing with less benefit to prevent the worst case from happening? You know so risk management is a legitimate skill and could be tested in competitive games. So I think it's kind of more about just knowing what you're doing with this randomness and having right kinds, you know, weighting the kinds and knowing what you're going for as opposed to a certain level. But I guess it will put a cap on like, ... like poker is just so far on the random end, that's it's just really frustrating that like the number of hands of poker you have to play to determine a winner is like uncomfortably many. So it's a little iffy, right? So in my card game Yomi, I think it's a really, really good competitive card game, and it is, it's a, I mean of course

it's random it's a card game but it's less random than poker. Like if player A was a lot better than player B and they played three out of five games, there's a really high chance that the better player won that. Like super high. Whereas I mean in poker that would be like ridiculous like, to play that short of time and have huge confidence that that person is better you just can't even do that. So I mean, I'm just trying to give you a ranger like, poker seems a little too much to me, but poker is huge so what do I know? And then having no randomness is legitimate but, I do admit that no randomness does, it might make the player base smaller, you know? ...

Yeah so another thing that the part that, the thing about randomness that I like as a designer I try to shoot for, is to test the improvisation skill. Of, not like randomness like, oh you just happen to lose to a die roll, but like, here there's a whole bunch of things in the world that could happen, and now we'll give, we'll randomly give you a situation and now you've got to figure out the best thing to do. So you couldn't have memorized the best thing to do because there's too many possible situations.

Maxwell Perlman: That's like in Puzzle Strike.

David Sirlin: Yeah Puzzle Strike's bank cause that way in, do you know Guilty Gear? The fighting game? Do you know Faust? Character Faust, he's got a bag over his head. Ok well, it's okay I'll just tell you. I think Faust is like really special in fighting games. Like, it's, he's like a miracle they pulled off or something. Fighting games are not that random really. Like Street Fighter II has some randomness in how much damage you do but whatever I mean, it's not like; when you do moves the moves are not random. Like, the meat of the game is not really random. Even though there's some variables like dizziness and how much damage they're random. But, Faust has actual randomness in his moves. Like, he has a move called Item Toss, where he throws an item and there's a whole bunch of possible items that could come out, and it's random and they're you know they're weighted and like, some of them are rare and some of them are common. And they do completely different things. And so if you didn't really know anything about this, you might say, well, randomness is bad and that's not a skill, like it's ruining the skill of the game. So I don't like that and I don't want that character to exist. But then actually, playing the game, like I said it's like it's kind of a miracle in that, it manages to have, he manages to have randomness

and yet, it's very skill testing actually. Because it's all about can you take advantage of the situation that just happens to arise. And you can't really practice it. Like, Guilty Gear is a game you want to practice in training mode forever, like all these hard combos and shit, but with Faust, it's sort of, you kind of can't. It's just like you just got to go with whatever happens. And that's interesting that they were able to pull it off. So they used a random, it's exactly what I like, that they used a randomness to test how adaptable are you. You know, to these changing situations. So if, you know, if a competitive game could work that into it then, that's a good use of randomness.

Maxwell Perlman: So in your book you talk about, players do, they will and they should, at a competitive level, do anything they can to win. They will, any unintended interaction, they will use it to their advantage, or they should. Correct?

David Sirlin: Yeah, if you're trying to win tournaments and get better and better.

Maxwell Perlman: Right, so when you, let's say. for the games you balance, how long do you actually take, and how, you can't really describe the process because it's different for everyone but, for actually going through and making sure that there, you've explored all of the areas that you think, that you could think of at the time are in fact safe. And not abusable.

David Sirlin: Well the only way to do it is just have the players keep playing it and they complain and complain and I have to judge like which complaints are valid and which are not and eventually know, complaints are like about minor things instead of like hugely broken things. That's, sort of do that long enough and, it works out.

Maxwell Perlman: Alright, so for like games like Puzzle Strike, how long would you say that you play tested that?

David Sirlin: Oh, I don't even remember exactly but maybe less than a year for the first release and then, there was like another year of changes so ... do you know much about Puzzle Strike? I don't know like

Maxwell Perlman: Yeah my friend group, my group of friends and I play Puzzle Strike, so.

David Sirlin: So like in, I mean there is a first edition which was on the wood chips and then the second edition was like the same exact game but on regular, like cardboard stuff. And on that version Valerie was kind of too good, cause of her chips she could trash to take another turn, and it took like strangely long for that like I would think if that's too good, it would just be too good right away, but for some reason it took like months for that to be too good. And I think it was because it really seemed like, ok, when you do the, when you use that move, you got a big effect out of it, and depending on when you used it, you could get a bigger effect. Right? You know, sometimes an extra turn is worth more than other times. And the trick there was that later in the game, the amount like taking extra turns had a huge benefit, and so for months people were like, well you get a bigger benefit if you do it later so that's how you should use the move. But then eventually everyone figured out like, oh, if you do it early, you get a smaller, the extra benefit is smaller, but it compounds. It's like snowballs, even the right then it's not big, if you, by the time you got to later you're way ahead than you would've been and then everybody did it like first turn always. And, it's too good. Alright so then, then I released the something called an upgrade pack, which we balance the characters but didn't change any of the puzzle chips. And then, so working on the expansion, and what was so frustrating was that every time we say like, hey how about a character that does this or how about a chip that does that, all the testers are like well, that's a cool idea but we can't do that because that, you would just like only buy purples with that. You would just like do nothing but combine, if you made that character. And that happened so many times I'm like, what is wrong with this game. Like why can't we make anything? Like any idea come up with either no, you can't do that cause you'll just buy combines like something that's fundamentally fucked up here. So, I, it was like, a derail it was like I thought we were making an expansion but really it's like the foundation of everything isn't right. And so that's what is a big controversial thing in our development and everyone is yelling and arguing and things like I don't know what I'm doing and so on and...we made the change eventually it was really hard to figure out but, let's make the change when we do combine it costs a dollar it's not free. And that had a huge effect on the whole system and fixed everything. So expansion was made with that in mind and then the base design

was redesigned with that in mind and both shipped at the same time. So that, it's like, maybe less than a year, to get it out, and then all this fucked up stuff happened it had to be fixed and so on for the course of another year.

Maxwell Perlman: Would you say that's kind of normal?

David Sirlin: Well, I kind of want to say no in board games because no one else seems to be doing this. Like, I mean, look on boardgamegeek and how many games are suitable for competitive play. Almost zero, like, they're just, they're not even trying that. Like, you and I are from this video game world where it's like of course it's got to hold up and be good and high level play and so on but board games is like play it a couple of times and move on and they don't get to the high level they don't know things are broken, so they don't value it as much. So not, like, you know, okay, games like Magic you know, they get it. But I don't know how to say what's normal you know, because I feel like we're just way outside the normal. Making competitive games. You could ask in video games though, more common. So I worked on Street Fighter HD Remix and that's a whole topic too.

Maxwell Perlman: When players start playing your game, you don't know the level at that which they approach the game. That's a pretty basic thing, players could be coming from

David Sirlin: Yeah, they could be terrible or great or who know what.

Maxwell Perlman: Yeah, so how do you predict like you know the possible strategies in the game that you're designing or the possible routes they might take. How do you show over time that a strategy is although enjoy it like a new player doesn't know good or bad. He's the scrub, he doesn't know anything. How do you get them to the not scrub level other than having them just continuously lose? Or be told outright?

David Sirlin: You were saying like just, like how to help the new player know what, how to get good? Like, not in development, I mean, like we're done developing it but, yeah right. I mean I don't think I'm particularly good at that, as a developer. Okay, a good tutorial, right? That's one thing, you could do, to

...Well, I'm not sure which...okay, one thing that is like I don't know how to play the game and they need to know how it works and what's legal and what's impossible and that's, now you need a tutorial or something. But that doesn't necessarily tell you anything about how to be good right? So maybe you're asking more about how to be good rather than how to even learn the rules?

Maxwell Perlman: Yeah that's what I meant. How to become, go from an unskilled new player not all the way to like a professional but capable of playing and having above like a fifty percent win rate.

David Sirlin: Uh huh. Um, well, most of my background is fighting games and fighting games do a really bad job of that, like, maybe the worst of any genre I think, so I mentioned Guilty Gear like...I'm really good at that game, and I was thinking, you know I thought to myself a few times that like, how if I wanted , when I wanted to learn how to play, a character better, okay, I know what to do, like, it has okay, I...I need to know all of their moves, I need to play them a little bit on my own, and then I need to like look up some frame data, because some moves have special properties that I might not have noticed, and I can learn all that, I can see recoveries and stuff, and then then I want to read a forum, certain forum, not just any forum, a certain forum about Guilty Gear and a certain section on it, and see how those player, like what combos are they doing that they think are easy or they think are hard or what basic strategies. And, like, who the hell would know to do any of these things? Like, you know? It's totally unreasonable to expect, there's so many things I, like, a new player how do they even know where the frame data exists or what it is or how to read it even if it was handed to them? So the answer in fighting games is that you just kind of can't, there's like no good way. Maybe the best I can think of is Virtua Fighter uh, what is it 4? I forget which one or 6 evo? No, Virtua Fighter 3 Evolution, or 4 Evolution... I don't know, there's a certain version of it like PlayStation 2 that has the best tutorial ever in the world of fighting games. And it's like, it's like a textbook basically, it's like, okay here's how rising kicks work, so do like, do it five times. Great, now you know that, rising kicks have super high priority, you can only beat them with a move that does 25 or more damage. Your character's move that does 25 or more damage is this move. So now do that, 5 times against this rising guy and you realize like, oh jeez it's actually a little tricky, you got to kind of avoid the kick and do the right second and you really do learn like

oh, that's how you punish that. And they go through like everything ever. It's so comprehensive. That, you feel like you have reached basic confidence. And that particular version got super high review, it didn't have high sales, but it had really high reviews and I think it was because everyone who reviewed it, like reviewers don't often know a lot about fighting games, but like any idiot could walk into that and go from not knowing anything to feeling like they at least understand the system, but they couldn't do that in Guilty Gear or Street Fighter or other fighting games. So, again like, a good tutorial but beyond that like, a good community? I mean, I don't know this one is a hard one to answer.

Maxwell Perlman: It's so hard to pinpoint exactly what you can do once you shipped a game, to help your players because yeah, you can give them the all in comprehensive 8-hour tutorial or however long the one in that game is, but some player will just say, ah, I don't care, oh wait now I suck.

David Sirlin: Yeah, that's right, some players don't want that. So, I don't know. I mean, another mysterious thing is you'd think, well one thing would be to have a community that was pretty supportive. So like a new person comes in says, I don't know anything, and then people are like, we're so friendly and why don't you read this beginner guide and like really helpful. But, like League of Legends or whatever has like the worst community ever like they're so hateful. And that doesn't seem to matter, like, so, I don't even know. You know?

Yeah I mean like I said I'm not a great one on this because I've, I mean, my games are not succeeding against this dimension of...So Puzzle Strike has a strategy guide, we tried really hard, we tried super hard on that strategy guide, and it's really good. It's specifically, it's like that Virtua Fighter thing. It's like written for someone who doesn't know anything to teach some like way more about the system than you would imagine there is. And you would understand that if you read that guide, but just like you said like not everyone wants that, so now what? It's like it, even though you try super hard, I just don't know how to crack the nut entirely. It seems like the answer has to be something about the community doing it themselves. Somehow. Having them want to help each other and want to be nice to new people.

Maxwell Perlman: How would you define the term 'metagame'?

David Sirlin: There's a certain distinction that matters a lot, comes up a lot, and it's the distinction between what happens, well, maybe I'm answering the wrong question, but what happens before you start actually playing and after you actually start playing. So like if we play Magic the part where we put the cards on the table, like I would call that gameplay, and that part where we like build our decks is not gameplay or maybe pregame, you could call it metagame, yeah and in fact it has to do a lot with metagame, right. Like how you build your deck is like extremely about the metagame, whereas "gameplay" is not about the metagame anymore, you're in the game itself. And there's like a weird disconnect between like card games like Magic and almost any other asymmetric type of game like in a fighting game, if I give you a matchup chart of all the different characters versus each other, you know numbers like five-five and seven-three what that means, yeah so if the matchup chart had like tons of seven-three and some eight-two and some nine-one, you'd be like what the fuck is going on in this game? Like, all these matchups are horrible? This is a terrible competitive game. Like you sit down on a table, to play the person, and you're at an eight-two disadvantage? Like this is obviously a terrible game. That's what a fighting game player would say. But somehow in Magic it's okay, because of the metagame. So, my claim is that, actually, it isn't okay. And that entire community is like thinking of competition in the wrong way. And they are holding metagame up as like a great thing, when all it does is destroy actual gameplay. So I mentioned the 10-year card game I worked on and, that's one of the missions. Is to minimize the metagame, and Magic players would be like, oh but the metagame's the most fun part! But the more power you're able to get in deck building before you sit down to the table, the more unbalanced matchups you're making. And so, that's why like, I'm aiming for like the smoothest metagame possible, not like the most jagged crazy one possible, so that you're like your deck building choices ahead of the time, they could be fun and interesting, cause they're like what style you want to play, but, the more there are about beating everyone in unfair matchups, it's like, it's not a great competitive game anymore. I know I'm answering your question, what is a metagame, it's uh, the collective beliefs of players of what beats what, that's kind of outside the game itself?

Maxwell Perlman: That's kind of similar to what others said. They described it as, how you would like, if you had to divide the strategies you see at a competitive level, what by percent on what strategy. So if I expect 30% of

players to play this deck, and 20% to play this deck, that's the metagame that I think would be there, but that's not necessarily true.

David Sirlin: Yeah, right, and so character choice in something like Street Fighter or Puzzle Strike like could import like okay, even, no matter how balanced the game is, it's not perfect, it's not like, every match is five-five right, so even in a very well balanced game, like Puzzle Strike Third Edition is pretty well balanced now, but still, there's advantages here and there. And so the metagame choice would be like, well if I expect people to play these six characters more than the rest, then, whichever characters have good matchups versus those six matter. Like if I had good matchups versus those six, but bad matchups versus characters that no one would play, then that's okay. Then that's a good metagame choice. That's exactly what you're saying. I just applied it to percentage character choice instead of percentage strategy.

Maxwell Perlman: What do you think about prize support for professional or competitive gaming? So what I have found is that players should make enough to support the hobby and travel or if that's necessary to travel, but it'd be very rare for them to actually make a full-time living off of just gameplay. Is that what you think or, how do you, I don't know.

David Sirlin: Like, there's so good they deserve to make a living? You know, well what if they're like super good at Yomi? Like my game. Am I supposed to pay them like a fulltime salary? But Yomi doesn't make enough money to do that. So it's like entirely a business question. And actually doesn't have anything to do with how good they are. Right, it just has to do with how much money there is in the system. So, like, if you took the best Yomi player in the world right now, maybe they "should" win a hundred dollars or something, and then if Yomi had like a billion players, and like, you know a tons of money, maybe they should pay them like hundreds of thousands of dollars. So, it's just, it's all about business and it's a marketing decision too, cause like, I, so back to the same example but, I could decide as a marketing expense to hold on a thousand dollar prize tournament, expecting to lose all that money, but, it's like advertising basically. It's like; oh look how important this competitive game is. So it's just so business-y and like so little to do with the player's skill or something that I don't know how to answer from the player's perspective.

Maxwell Perlman: I was talking to some other game designers about like when a new player begins the game they see a strategy or a character or whatever from one perspective, but then the professional or high level player sees it from another perspective. How much would you say that comes from, like that something being optimized? Like, an example in Magic, if my card kills everything, the lower level player might just use it to kill one thing, but the higher level player knows, I can wait on it and wait on it until I can get the most value. Or, I have my character's jab frame six. So I want to maximize the number of frames after my opponent has done a move, that I can overlap those frames to hit them, possibly. How much would you say it is that part of like viewing it from different angles?

David Sirlin: Yeah, that's all about it, optimizing. Like, in a terrible game Street Fighter versus Tekken, so Rolento is like what could you do, he could roll around and jump, throw knives; he could do all these things, that's what he is about. No, that's not what he's about. He's about stand jab. Rolento is a stand jab because the frame stats are too good, he could lock you down, super hard to get out, and so the high level player is like, I'm going to pick that stand jab guy, but the low level player doesn't even know that's a thing, like, so that's an example of like a totally failure of design cause I mean the designers don't want that. They want Rolento to be in this very mobile agile guy or something and they're surely really upset that it turned into such a degenerate thing. But that's a lot of what this, I mean that's not the only kind of thing but that's pretty common, it's like, the expert sees it cause they know the degenerate thing. They know the thing that they optimized such that like a lot of the other strategies are parts of the character or whatever, just aren't as good as this one thing. Another slant is like so that, I mean, that's an example where it's like a problem. It's like a fuckup by developers. But we could have one that's not a fuckup where it's actually just difficult to do. It's not broken or anything but. So Akira in Virtua Fighter, the design behind him which is a little questionable but maybe, I don't know, maybe it's alright, they on purpose, made it so that if you just kind of mash around and just do whatever, that you get the worst most ineffective things. And then, the things he could do that are powerful are tuned they're trying to tune it to be like at the top end of power. Like, he's like a scary powerful awesome character. But all those things are difficult on purpose. So they're trying to make him like, "the

master's" character. And they're rubbing it in by making, you know, even worse than normal to beginners. So there's an example where the beginner would be like, what the fuck is this guy he can't do anything, you know, but the experts will be like, a whole other level.

So you kind of, I think in general you don't want that. I mean, it's, you really don't, so I have all these games with characters in them, and I'm trying to have the mechanics express their personality. Like Setsuki is like a fast character so it should feel like you're doing a lot. And they really should. Like, if you're new and you pick Setsuki, you should feel like you're doing a lot. Like it's kind of a failure of expressing her personality if you don't feel that way as a beginner and it's also a failure if you don't feel that way as an expert. It's even more a failure if you don't feel that way as an expert. Cause like, eventually people you know, they get better and better and better, at like the end of the road if the character feels completely wrong or doesn't do what they're supposed to do, then that's like bad. And that's happened, that's happened like more than once on my characters. Jaina, it seems to have happened in multiple games, where her, she's supposed to be aggressive, and somehow like optimal play, it is like don't do anything. And then, like it's, so there's late game thing where eventually you're late game is better. So basically you just want to stall to get that. So in both Puzzle Strike and Yomi I did like chain turns to make it so that her late game is like intentionally bad and give her moves that like, it's so careful how they don't benefit at all from doing later and sometimes they're like they're even like intentionally better early like, they give you more aces early whereas later you've already had aces so you kind of wasted it if you did it later. You might as well do it early and get the benefit plus the aces. That sort of thing. So yeah, you know it's good when your character functions how you expect.

Maxwell Perlman: When you're designing a game, you're designing how every character interacts with every other character. How much ability to negate or make up for what an opposing character or player or strategy is doing should each strategy have? Should every strategy have a way to negate or counteract every other strategy? Because if that's too much it kind of just becomes rock paper scissors. But if it's not enough you could fall prey to whatever they're doing and not have enough interaction with them?

David Sirlin: I don't, I disagree with it being rock paper scissors, I mean, you might not want to have every, you might not want to be extreme as everything could counter everything, just because it's logistically too much. As opposed to if you did it, it will be shallow. I mean if you replace the word strategy with character then like, yes it needs to; every character needs to be able to handle every other character. But you said strategy not character. I told you the articles in the site, ... a concept in there is I called it, "Viable options during gameplay as opposed to fairness of starting options", so like a character is a starting option, you start the game with a character and you're stuck with a character. So therefore, characters have to be fair against each other. If they're not then well we've covered that, it's like you sit down and play at a disadvantage, that's crap. But, that's different than stuff that's going on during the game like, during the game, things can be better than other things. You know, like if you started the game locked in with a certain weapon set, then your weapon set sucks compared to someone else that's bad, but if you started the game with no weapons, ran around the map and picked up weapons, some of the weapons were better than others, that's like, okay? That's, because like, because we both know the good weapons are over there and like so there's some fighting to like who's going to get it and what if we fight for who's going to get it and I get it? So now I have an advantage? Yeah, that's right I have an advantage I played better than you I'm supposed to have an advantage. Like that's not an actual problem. So, or in StarCraft like if some unit beats another unit you don't go, this unit like it could beat another unit what the hell? Like, no, units are supposed to beat other units. But Zerg isn't supposed to beat Terran, where Zerg is like a starting option locked in, you see the difference, right? So that's, I mean that's what I'm thinking of when you're like does every strategy have to beat every other strategy I mean, well not necessarily because like, does the all Mutalisk strategy like, have to, you know versus the all Zergling strategy or something? Like okay one of those is allowed to win. And you shouldn't have done it, you should've scouted and... Yeah, it's hard to answer, I mean, yeah things need to counter each other but not always perfectly. Yeah so that's a nice thing about StarCraft is that it's not so binary. It's not like, like I mean imagine if you took the whole possibility space of StarCraft and then you combed out like 99% of it. So the only thing left is like, you can press a button that's like, "build all Mutalisks". Or, another button that's like, "build all Zerglings" and like nothing in between. And so it's like, all card counters, but real StarCraft is not all card counters. There's all this in between,

that's interesting and like I can go sort of this way and you could go like sort of that way and then harass me enough that it slows me down, but there's enough gray area that you get some more gameplay so it's good to have gray area. It's more skill ceiling, like more ways to show your skill to get ahead, the more "play" you have. As opposed to pure hard counters.

Maxwell Perlman: Now I'm trying to think of like, if a game had nothing but pure hard counters but both players had options to all of the hard counters. Is that skill intensive or is that

David Sirlin: I mean that's okay but there's just not much game like, the number of decisions of the game might be really small. You know? So I think that's why we like this gray area cause it allows for a lot of back and forth and like a large number of important relevant decisions to happen in a game. Whereas a game with all hard counter is just like I went this way you went that way and one of us is fucked and what are you supposed to do now? It kind of reminds me of some fighting games, I call it limited slippery slope. Slippery slope is you know, I'm winning and that causes me to win more. Like in StarCraft, you have a battle and my unit's beat yours so now I won that, but you don't have as many units so I'm actually even more powerful now. Whereas in basketball I scored a point, it doesn't disable your players, so I'm not actually powerful. So slippery slope is a huge factor in competitive games, it's kind of bad actually but a real good example on it is in fighting games where you're knocked down or in the corner or something, so that's, it's slippery slope because I hit you, and it's not like basketball where it's just like external score of your health, cause it changes the game state to have you being knocked down and not have as many options, and now I could do a mix upon you or something, so like I am more powerful after I hit you. So there's slippery slope. But it's limited, I can't knock you down further, I can't, there's not like multiple levels of knock down, like you could only just knock down once and then that's the limit of how fucked you could be. I think that works really well. Because having some slippery slope means that correct decisions are given advantage but it can't snowball into just like a guaranteed win or something. So the reason I brought it up is because that's more play and more gray area you know. Like if I had, if I could knock you down deeper and deeper into a hole that disables all your moves, then it's just getting closer to the hard counters where there aren't any decisions anymore.

Maxwell Perlman: There is such thing as too little interactions between players. Is there such thing as too much? Can I interact with you too much and that it's no longer worth playing?

David Sirlin: Yeah I feel highly qualified to answer that. Cause I've lived through this. So my first answer was, no you can't have too much that's the point, that's what we're trying to do. So Puzzle Strike is like an answer to Dominion not having enough interaction. Dominion is another card game that's like, too much Solitaire, like not enough interacting with the opponent, and I was like, I kind of like the mechanics sort of, but you should be interacting as much as possible. So Puzzle Strike is about that. And then some players were like, it's so cutthroat, I'm like well, it's because you're interacting that's why you say that. Like, the way to make it not cutthroat is to play a mostly Solitaire game. But there's this whole section of players that see that as a negative. At least in the board game world they seem to be the majority, which is a huge shock to me. But that is, okay you could say if that's true that just means they're not really competitive players, and so if you restricted to your question to competitive games, maybe we don't care about their preference. And may steer back to maximum interaction is good, right? You could say that. So then another lesson I had was developing my card game Codex the one that's been years and years and years, and I wanted it to be a really competitive game and how much interaction was like really important to me and like it's strange that it's not, it's actually pretty kind of low interaction sort of because it's more asynchronous now. Even though there's tons of choices on your turn that you know, matter about what they're doing but, not every little you know every step of a turn you're not interacting. But in an earlier version, it was the maximum possible interaction you can like ever have in any card game. And the theory there was like in Magic, so counter spells are a way to interact. You know that they could play a thing and you're like I can interact and stop you from doing it. And I thought that that was strategically maybe one of the better parts of Magic, because there's more interaction. And so, if I wanted to make a new game, and like, shouldn't that be more highlighted? If that was a good part of Magic, could it be woven throughout the game and not just like something that Blue does sometimes. So in one experiment which lasted a while, it was like what if it gave everyone counter spells always? Everyone could just counter spell and they're not even cards, they're, it's like a, I don't know if you

know my other game Chess 2 which I just released yesterday, but Chess 2 has this bidding system where you could try to take a piece and then they could duel you and you double blind bid some stones and if the defender wins that then actually both pieces are destroyed, whereas if the attacker wins then just like normal chess you could win the piece. But the point is there's this resource of stones and you can like trick the other person you could like duel them and then bid nothing, but they're like, oh this is so important I better bid stones and they just like throw away the resources, so that later on, when you duel on a more important thing you'll have more stones/ That's the idea behind that, so it was the same thing in my game Codex. Same kind of system, where when anyone did anything, you could potentially counter spell them with this stone bidding thing. And it's tons of interaction so any fucking thing you could counter it, it's just should you because you have a very limited amount of these things so, I mean you could actually do all the time, but you could potentially you're always thinking about oh I could do it, oh he might do it here so how does it affect my moves. And it was just excruciating to play, cause like you know Llanowar Elf, right? So like the equivalent to that in my game or something. It would be like alright, turn one, right off the bat, Llanowar Elf, alright and then, you get to start with more than, you start with four mana in my game, and then you're like hold on a second, well let me think about that, let me think about Llanowar Elf, and then, it's like oh geez should I let that go cause it's going to snowball the mana, I don't know...alright I'll let it go. And you're starting like, your brain is just melting when they barely did anything you know, half a percent in the game and you're already...and so it's just so exhausting to get even through a turn much less a game. And I play tested this with a guy and after two games we just like neither of us even said anything. We were just like sitting there just like wine to go asleep, and I said hey you want to play again but without the bidding thing? And he was like yeah! He was so excited that I said that. And that's when we were like alright, I guess this isn't working I mean, theory it's like super deep, but the game's for humans and it's like not eating the amuse of humans. So, yeah, I think there's too much. I think there's, there's a point where it's just like, analysis paralysis stress. And it's like not fun enough anymore.

Maxwell Perlman: Having infinite options is too many options.

David Sirlin: Yeah I mean I don't see that, that much though. Like, this thing I was play testing has like off the charts interaction compared to any normal game. But yeah there's too much, I think like Puzzle Strike's a totally normal amount, it's like a lot but, I don't know.

Maxwell Perlman: I mean, I think it has a fairly decent amount but it's not like off the charts and it's not so minimal that it's not interactive at all.

David Sirlin: Yeah it's kind of reasonable in the middle ground in my opinion even though people say oh it's so interactive, cause you play your combos and stuff and people don't usually interact with that but they could if you did an attack they could play a Blue, it's like sort of interactive some of it, and then any time you do a Crash to send gems, then they could interact. So, yeah it's reasonable. I mean even with the one that does have a -1 combine, you eventual see like oh, there's certain puzzle chips that are really, really good against the people that only get Purple. You know I told you how I really changed the game around, but the problem, so there's like a kind of misconception people think that the problem was that it was all mono-purple all the time, and so that's why it needed a change. But that's not actually true, it's more like there's like a paper rock scissors of three different kinds of strategies you could do, and one of the three was just purples, so that means like if you know that they're going to do that there's another thing you could do to beat it. But I didn't like that paper rock scissors thing like, sorry I'm fine that there is a paper rock scissors thing, but I don't like that one of the main legs of it is like, not buying other bank chips. Yeah it's like, I mean like in StarCraft if there was like a paper rock scissors between Air units or Ground units or not doing anything. Like wait what, not doing anything? That shouldn't be one of the three. Yeah so in the -1 combine it's like none of those three are literally just buy purples that's actually just inferior to like getting a lot of money or whatever. But when you're new that's what you try first, until someone could beat it.

Another level of sucky thing is that I complained that its paper rock scissors where one of the choices is mono purple, but even if you said that was okay, there's still that problem of like, okay, he's doing mono purple, how do I beat it. And like the amount of knowledge to execute the strategy to beat it is like a little bit high. So, too many people's early impression is like oh you can't beat it, it sucks. It's like no you can, but oh you got to kind of know a lot. So I didn't like

that and changed it. People super hate it that a new version came out, it's so bizarre, I don't know, if you're familiar with all that. Like in the video game world, you release new versions of things and fix them it's like totally normal, new Street Fighters come out, new patch of StarCraft came out, whatever, it's like expected. You would be like crazy if they didn't do that. Can you imagine if there is some balance problem in StarCraft and they're like, oh we're just not going to do anything about it ever. But then in the board game world it's like, what a new version I got to buy it again, like fuck that, you don't know what you're doing if you had to make a new version that just shows you don't know how to make games. Which is like, wow could you imagine if you told Blizzard that? Your new patch shows you don't know how to make RTS games. It's like no actually the patch shows that we care about our RTS games. So there's a weird culture difference between board games and video games when it comes to patching and changing things.

T3. Interview with Holon

(Original in Japanese, translated to English by Stefan Alexander)

Q. If you were to explain your job/hobby to a person who knows nothing about games, how will you explain it?

I would say it is something like a professional Shogi or Chess player, with the income of something close to that of the people in the BJ League in Japan, meaning that the income itself is not enough in order to live off of. (Most BJ League players have a second job and work while playing basketball).

Q. Why do you think StarCraft 2 is this popular?

I think it is because many people believed that Blizzard will make a high quality game which would be carefully balanced even years after being sold, as well as giving support to tournaments and other game events, and that the game will be successful. I believed so.

Q. Is there a reason why you chose to be a competitive gamer?

When watching the video of CounterStrike1.6 in the WCG2003 Japan preliminary contest, I thought I wanted to be standing in that stage. I also like games.

Q. How did you become a professional? Training?

I believed that you are considered a professional once you are either in a team that calls themselves a professional, or obtain some sort of prize support from sponsors yourself. Hence, I tried to join those types of teams and obtain prizes from sponsors.

Q. Why did you choose RTS out of all the different types of game genres?

I am not particularly stuck with the genre. Before playing SC2 I played CS1.6 for about 6 years and I've also played the HoN and the Arena of WoW. When SC2 got sold, I thought SC2 will be the most popular among the e-Sports games so I chose to play SC2.

Q. Are there any other games that you play?

I am currently playing *FF14*, *WoT*, and *Hearthstone*.

Q. How would you explain the term "metagame?"

I would describe it as the fight of different strategies.

Q. If the game shifted in the way that people without much skills were able to rank high (for example new strategies or glitches were found), how should the developers react/what should they do?

If that game is wants to keep being a competitive game, they should fix it so that players with skill are able to win. However, I consider the power of finding glitches as a skill as well. The developers should investigate whether or not using that glitch itself can make you a top player.

Q. What do you think about the current prize support (in the US or Japan)? Are people satisfied? If they were to increase the amount of support do you think the game scene will become more active?

I think the more you increase the prize support the more active the community will become. I am not certain of it, though. Also, the more active the community becomes, there will be more people who will aim for the prize money. As a result, there will be more competition for the prize money and thus I would think it is impossible for everyone to be satisfied.

Q. It seems like you are in a team, how often do you practice?

Recently I just left the team. The last time I participated in a competition I was practicing for about 3-4 hours per day. During the time I was practicing the most I was practicing for about 6-8 hours per day.

Q. Have you written about games/players?

Yes. I have a blog.

Q. Do you consider yourself as an active member of the community? Do you feel responsible?

I consider myself as being quite active. Whenever something happened I actively gave opinions. Since I give my opinions I feel responsibility.

Q. Do you feel a distance between the community and professional players?

I do sometimes. I feel the distance is especially large when talking about game balance and tactics but I think this is just natural.

Q. Are there any articles or books that people should read if they want to play competitively?

Not in particular. If I must choose than probably studying languages would be profitable. Also, it will be good if you investigate how top players approach the game.

Q. Have you been aiming for the top since the beginning when you started playing RTS games? Or did you not care much at that time?

I started playing CS1.6 in order to participate in the offline tournaments so I was aiming for the top from the beginning.

Q. StarCraft 2 is a competitive game. What do you say would be the three aspects for a game to be competitive?

(1) The game balance should be as fair as possible. (2) Increasing your game skills should result in winning. (3) Deepening your knowledge of the game should result in winning. These three aspects are needed.

T4. Interview with Kevin Landon

Q. How would you describe your job to someone who has no idea what competitive gaming is?

Good question. For people who know what gaming is I'd just say something like, "Think of something like playing Mario Kart for money. For people that don't know what video games are I'd just ask them where have they been for the past 25 years.

Q. Why do you think competitive games are popular?

I think competitive video games are popular because it's the next step in the video gaming culture. Video games have been around for...Roughly 30 years now for this generation it's been a part of the majority of people's lives. I think these people want to make something of what they loved to do for so many years.

Q. Is there a reason why you decided to take the career as a professional gamer?

Gaming was always a huge deal for me. Personally I took it completely seriously in 2009 when an incident with my younger brother took his life. After I just stopped everything I was doing at the time (work, school etc.) and just started playing games.

Q. How did you become a professional gamer? Did you train?

I guess I moved into the realm of professionalism around 2010 after I consistently did well in major tournaments and started to gain recognition from the people around the world who saw me play through live streams. I did train a lot when I first started playing. I would play with people I've known for years that played fighting games competitively for years. These guys were well known as top players for the games they've played in the past.

Q. Why do you prefer these games over other games?

I prefer fighting games over other games because when I was young I mainly played fighting games in the arcades growing up. Fighting games in the arcades were the only competitive games to play anywhere else other than your home and I used to leave my home a lot early on weekends to go to the arcade and play. I think it's safe to say that I became addicted to playing fighting games.

Q. What other games do you enjoy playing?

I enjoy any game that has a competitive element or involves more than one person to play. I do enjoy other types of games also but I've always had more of a love for competitive games.

Q. How would you describe the term "metagame"?

The term "metagame" is simply what the majority of players are using in a time period to win in a particular game.

Q. If a metagame shifts such as unskilled players are able to dominate, how should the designers/developers of the game respond?

I think there are different levels of skilled players that separates them from unskilled players. I'll go into some detail. People who are known as "top players" are the players that are able to make consistent high placing in tournaments. But not every top player is necessarily skilled. Unskilled players are generally players that can't win or have not grasped basic knowledge and applied it to their game yet. To a top player, an unskilled player is someone that either wins using an overpowered character or tactics that wouldn't get them good results in a high level competitive field. So to answer the question I'll say that designers should try and make a balance in the diversity of the game. That way the better player will almost always win.

Q. How do you feel about the current prize support? Is it enough to support your lifestyle? If they were able to increase prize support, would the competitive scene arise in popularity?

I've won a lot of money playing fighting games competitively. I think fighting gamers, for now, have to sacrifice living a lifestyle of luxury to do what they love to do, because the current prize support is not high enough to make this a career. Right now, only the top 3 consistent placers of major tournaments can make a basic living (phone bill, rent, electricity etc.). If the prizes for fighting games increase, their popularity would surely rise and more people would be able to make a living, but it would also be more difficult to win after a while. Only the most dedicated players would stay consistent enough to make a living.

Q. Do you ever write articles on competitive games or about other players?

No, but I would love to become involved in that type of thing.

Q. How active would you say you are in the community? Do you feel like you have a responsibility in the community?

I'm not too active in the community recently, but I understand that many of my supporters/fans want me to make more appearances and see my gameplay more. I'd consider my style "artistic" and rare in comparison to most so I understand why people want to see it often. I feel like I have responsibility in the community because I've been a consistent top placer in the past 4/5 years worldwide. Top players have a responsibility to help the community grow, whether it be through the game, exposure to the world, mentoring new players etc. There are many ways to contribute to the community.

Q. Do you feel that the community is disconnected from the competitive players?

I don't feel that the community is disconnected to competitive players. At one point almost everyone in the community has been a competitive player.

T5. Interview with kurOa

(Original in Japanese, translated to English by Stefan Alexander)

Q. If you were to explain your job/hobby to a person who knows nothing about games, how will you explain it?

I guess this will be when talking about games as a hobby?

If I were to explain it, I would say my hobby is playing competitive games, specifically those called Real Time Strategy (RTS) games, which removes the turn-based aspects from tactical games such as Shogi, Chess, and Go and is a so-called war game. When explaining the content of the game I would say it has aspects of war spanning from combat to tactics and military logistics, and the goal of the game is to gain control over the opponent player.

Q. Games such as StarCraft, LOL, and Dota2 are very popular amongst many people - why do you think they are this popular?

All of those games have a different genre and are made by different companies so the reasons may differ and I do feel it to be a bit unusual to group them together, but if I were to answer the question, it is probably because of the brand strength of blizzard and sc1 for sc2, the marketing power of Riot for LoL, and the brand strength of Dota1 for Dota2. In the first place, the people aren't gathering around these games because the game is innovative or anything, come to think of it.

All of them strongly reflect their prequels. Hence the aspects other than just the game design was excellent. Please investigate about each company's marketing power.

Q. I read online that you are playing on Team oGaming. Is there a reason why you decided to become a professional gamer?

I stopped playing for oG as the owner changed. I think I wasn't good enough to be called a professional gamer.

The actual details on how I got into the team started from the owner making a strong approach towards me. I did not really have much interest in the team itself so I kept ignoring his offer. However, as he kept on asking me to be in the team I eventually accepted his offer and got into the team. Now that the owner changed, I do not have any reason to remain on the team so I left.

Q. I see. When you were on the team, were you doing any practicing? What kind of schedule did you have?

I remained practicing alone as before.

First of all, there was a lot of time difference between me and the other teammates so it was hard for me to meet them. Also in sc2 just by playing the ladder will be relatively good for practicing so you do not necessarily need a team to practice. Of course when it comes to the Korean professional level, just playing the ladder would not be enough.

Q. I see, so the Korean professional level is very high. In order to be in that level, would you just need to keep practicing? Would you practice with the Korean players?

The Korean professional level is very high without doubt.

In order to meet that level...of course I would say a lot of practice is needed regardless of nationality. In the old days you could just practice in the Korean server, but recently the Korean professionals start to practice within their communities.

Therefore they stopped using the ladder. So only using the ladder will not be enough to get to their level.

If you wanted to meet their level, the only way to do that is probably joining their community.

Q. What do you think about the prize support of these kinds of games? I do not know about how much people earn but is everyone satisfied? If they increased the amount of prize support would you think the game scene will get more active?

Are you talking about the prize support in the Japanese community? It changes a lot by nation. For Japanese tournaments the total prize money per year will be at most 200,000 yen. A college graduate could earn 200,000 yen per month these days. Even a part timer could earn 100,000 yen. For those who plan to play as a competitive gamer, this could be very small.

Of course if there were more prize support I would think more people will be interested. However there aren't many RTS players in Japan in the first place. A variety of people of the Japanese community tried many ways to expand the population. It is not clear if increasing prize support or doing anything else would be better for the game scene at the current state.

Q. If you were to explain the term "metagame", how would you explain it?

Metagame huh...to tell you the truth I actually do not understand it well either, but I guess I would explain it as the current trends in that game (which is my understanding of the term).

Q. If the game shifted in the way that people without much skills were able to rank high (for example new strategies or glitches were found), how should the developers react/what should they do?

If something like that happens there would be a patch fix. In sc2 that kind of thing hasn't really occurred but if it were to occur then it should be fixed by patches!

Q. Have you written any kind of article regarding games or the players?

There isn't much content in it yet but I have started creating this wiki.

<http://wiki.livedoor.jp/kuroasc2/>

Q. Do you consider yourself as an active member of the community? Do you feel responsible? When saying community it could be either the Japanese or foreign community.

I think I am quite an active member in Japan and since I have been in the community for quite a long time I do feel responsible. I do hope I could do something to increase the number of new young players to the community, I am not sure if I am successful though.

Q. Do you feel a distance between the community and professional players?

I think the top players and the Japanese community are relatively close. This may be because there are many people who do streaming and so the people in the community have a chance to interact with the top players.

Q. Are there any articles or books that people should read if they want to play competitively?

Not in Japan. Perhaps reading *The Art of War*? LOL.

Q. Have you been aiming for the top since the beginning when you started playing RTS games? Or did you not care much at that time?

I was playing casually. I was avoiding teams that had 1v1. After a while a Japanese player taught me how to play 1v1 and as he trained me I got better at 1v1.

Q. StarCraft 2 is a competitive game. What do you say would be the three aspects for a game to be competitive?

Opponent player, game balance, and the foundation for industrial development, I guess.

Q. Do you play games other than RTS?

I play *LoL* - not much other than that.

T6. Interview with nazomen

(Original in Japanese, translated to English by Stefan Alexander)

Q. If you were to explain your job/hobby to a person who knows nothing about games, how will you explain it?

How I would describe StarCraft2 right? I would explain it as something like "Playing Go or Shogi at real time." I also use the expression, "You stand in the position of a commander, gather money to construct buildings, make an army and defeat the enemy." However most of the time people do not understand from my explanations so I show videos to them a lot of times. If I cannot do that I would not explain much into detail.

Q. Why do you think RTS games are this popular?

They are not popular in Japan but are considered as a major genre in foreign countries. Several reasons could be listed but as aspects that are avoided in Japan are:

1. Playing games on the PC
2. Human players fight against each other seriously

I think that foreign countries have less resistance towards these making them popular. In addition, games such as Starcraft1,2 are not only interesting to play as E-sports, but could also be fun watching them. Regarding watching the games there is a paper like this as well:

http://jeffhuang.com/Final_StarcraftSpectator_CHI11.pdf

Q. Is there a reason why you chose to be a competitive gamer?

I actually was not aware that I became a professional gamer lol Since there was no income it was mostly the team just calling themselves a professional team (I think only large teams who have sponsors get income). Regarding SC2 I think the difference between pro and amateur players are whether or not you are in a

“pro-gaming team.” There is a big difference in income between teams though. The reason why I joined the team is because I got invited by the team’s manager. It seemed like they were just looking for a Japanese manager that manages the Japanese players so I joined as a manager rather than a player. I even thought I was joining as a player until the moment I actually joined lol From there I became a player/manager.

Q. You said you were on a team, how was your schedule? How often did you practice?

We basically did not do much practicing as a team. We did do a clan game 1, 2 times and an something like an overall interleague game 2, 3 times but that was it. It is hard to actually play with people from different countries both from time difference and because of servers. SC2 is also a game where you could easily practice on your own.

Q. What do you think about the current prize support (in the US or Japan)? Are people satisfied? If they were to increase the amount of support do you think the game scene will become more active?

Regarding Japan the amount of prize money players get is almost nothing. The scene is too small that even getting a small amount of money makes the players satisfied. I think there is a possibility that increasing prize support may make the game scene more active, but there probably does not exist that kind of sponsor in the first place. Even if there was a person who wanted to support the Japanese game scene, at the moment there is no way to make the scene more active, and even if it were it wouldn’t really be that much. So it would basically be like a chicken or the egg problem.

Q. How would you explain the term “metagame?”

A metagame in StarCraft is the game between top players, as in the top-class professional players.

Q. If the game shifted in the way that people without much skills were able to rank high (for example new strategies or glitches were found), how should the developers react/what should they do?

In StarCraft they were observe whether or not the professionals could fight against the new strategies. After the observations if they decide it is not possible to win with skill they will patch the game. After testing out the new edits with the patch, if everything goes well the patch will be put into effect. If it is just some sort of glitch then it will be immediately fixed. However the decision of what is a bug and what is part of the game depends on the game balance and how interesting it will make the game. SC2 was patched a lot of times but the bugs were left a lot of times in SC1.

Q. Have you written about games/players?

It is mostly about game content, but I do have a blog for SC2.

<http://ynoheya.blog34.fc2.com>

If it is SC1 I have a homepage <http://starcraft.web.fc2.com> and videos uploaded to nicovideo.

Q. Do you consider yourself as an active member of the community? Do you feel responsible?

I think I am very active. These few months I've been too busy that I couldn't do much but in the past I've done most things such as a player, a manager for a competition, a commentator, and a broadcaster. I have also been a clan leader and have done practice matches for novice players. Better or worse, I believe I am in the position that lets me affect the other Japanese SC players so there will be some responsibility there.

Q. Do you feel a distance between the community and professional players?

In Japan I think the distance is very close. It is because most of the people who do streaming advertise to community sites. In foreign countries teams such as

TeamLiquid has a similar format. It is like the gamers are creating the community.

Q. Are there any articles or books that people should read if they want to play competitively?

I do not think there are much articles. But if I were to recommend something it will probably be something that has tips on how to be a top competitive person in general. Not specifically for games but to prepare yourself mentally and learn some guidelines on how to act. Details regarding SC2 will not be in books but from the internet.

Q. Have you been aiming for the top since the beginning when you started playing RTS games? Or did you not care much at that time?

I think I was basically playing in order to get better at the game. I did want to win most of the time but my situation was a bit unique (I was playing in the situation where there was a very small Japanese population playing SC1 for a year).

Q. Are there any other games that you were/are playing?

Not for PC games. For consumer games I am currently playing "Atelier Rorona: The Alchemist Of Arland." However I do not have much time so I only play it once or twice per week.

Q. StarCraft 2 is a competitive game. What do you say would be the three aspects for a game to be competitive?

"There exists a win condition," "the win condition is clear," "the opportunity to win is fair."

T7. Interview with Nick Ranish

Q. How would you describe your job to someone who has no idea what competitive gaming is?

I'm currently unemployed, do you mean my previous job as a producer? or before that as a caster? or before that as a player?

As a player my job was to be as good as possible at *StarCraft 2*, provide an entertaining stream for viewers to watch me practice, and provide coaching to players who wanted to improve and understand more about *StarCraft 2*.

As a caster my job was to provide commentary during a professional match to explain to the audience what was the most exciting thing going on on-screen, what important strategic and tactical decisions players were making, and provide the story-line for the match as it fit into the tournament being played as well as the player's lives and careers.

As a producer my job was to come up with *StarCraft* content to run on the MLG SC2 stream, and ensure that the broadcast was both technically and creatively ready to go.

Q. Why do you think competitive games are so popular?

Competition as a form of social interaction is something people love in all walks of life. It's only natural with the growing popularity of gaming that competitive gaming becomes more popular as well.

Q. Is there a reason why you decided to take the career of a professional gamer?

I have always loved playing strategy games and by the time I graduated university there was enough interest in competitive gaming that I could work full time in the field.

Q. How did you become a professional gamer? Have you had some sort of training?

I've always had a passion for strategy. Growing up I played chess and loved to read books on military strategy. When I first started playing real-time strategy games I discovered I had both talent and passion for them.

Q. Why do you prefer these games over other games?

While there are other good strategy games besides *StarCraft 2* out there, a competitive game is only as good as the competition and the best and most dedicated players all play *StarCraft 2*.

Q. What other games do you enjoy playing?

I enjoy *Hearthstone*, *Infinite Crisis*, and some single player games like *Mass Effect*.

Q. If you had to describe the term "metagame," how would you describe it?

Metagame refers to anything that affects the game outside of the interactions inside the game itself. An example would be how knowledge of your opponent's favored strategies could shape your own decisions before the game even starts or without even seeing what your opponent is doing.

Q. If a metagame shifts such as unskilled players are able to dominate, how should the designers/developers of the game as well as the community respond?

If there is a strategy that requires very little skill to use and defeats all other strategies then the game needs to be changed to remove that strategy as an option. That being said, if a game had a flaw as major as that there would never be a competitive scene. The fact that Blizzard makes sure no such flaws are in its games is one of the reasons that their real-time strategy games such as *StarCraft 2* have been the only strategy games played at the top competitive level.

Q. How do you feel about the current prize support? Is it enough to support your lifestyle? If they were able to increase prize support, would the competitive scene arise in popularity?

As a producer and commentator of course I'm not winning prizes myself. That being said of course larger prizes would attract more and better players and legitimize the field in more people's eyes which could only help the scene. Typically though the popularity of the scene combined with the skills of people marketing events is what drives the prizes not the other way around.

Q. You are on a team — describe your team dynamic and how often you practice.

I haven't been a player on a team for almost two years now, but back when I was I practiced pretty much all day every day. If you want to be the best at something not only do you have to have talent and practice as much as other competitors but most importantly you have to practice smarter. You have to be constantly 100% mentally engaged with your practice and constantly pushing your boundaries.

Q. Do you ever write articles on competitive games or about player successes/failures?

I have not written any articles beyond some strategy guides for Warcraft 3 about 10 years ago.

Q. How active would you say you are in the community? Do you feel like you have a responsibility in the community?

I'm very active in keeping up with what's going on in the community. I do feel a responsibility to always be honest and genuine with the community.

Q. Do you feel that the community is disconnected from the competitive players?

While it's not super easy for somebody in the community to get instant access to a professional player, there's much, much more interaction between players and the community than in any of the conventional sports.

Q. Are there any must-read articles/formative literature that successful players should read before involving themselves in competitive play?

There are no must reads but books like *Outliers*, *Blink*, and *The Classic Book on Military Strategy* by Liddell Hart are all useful. The most important thing to learn in strategy though is that memorizing what was the best decision in one instance is much less useful than trying to understand the thought process that led to that decision.

Q. Before joining the competitive scene, how devoted were you to competitive play? Were you just playing casually or were you already planning to become a competitive player?

I had been playing strategy games competitively ever since I first found out about them.

Q. If you had to define three qualities that every competitive games had to have, what would they be?

Every competitive game needs to have gameplay that rewards skill, gameplay that is fun (so people want to play and excel in it), and high entertainment value for viewers (to grow the scene and attract the best players).

T8. Interview with Reid Duke

Maxwell Perlman: How did your Magic career begin? What inspired you to play magic and what made you want to play at a professional level?

Reid Duke: I started playing Magic when I was five years old, with my older brother Ian. I loved the game, and played consistently ever since that time. When I got to be in college, I made the decision that I either needed to severely tone down the amount that I was playing and focus on other aspects of my life, or else I needed to put everything I had into the game, and make it something that I could be great at and take pride in (and potentially make some money as well).

Maxwell Perlman: How do you describe your career as a professional magic player to someone who has no idea what competitive gaming is?

Reid Duke: Playing Magic professionally much like any other competitive endeavor—sports or whatever else. Prize money and big wins *are* something that you work towards, but most of my living comes from sponsorships and from writing about what I do. I travel a lot on the weekends to compete, but my day-to-day life feels a lot more like a normal job.

Maxwell Perlman: How would you describe the team dynamic as a member of Team SCG? Do you feel that you gain a large advantage being on a team?

Reid Duke: Team SCG works because of the tremendous level of mutual respect that we all feel for one another. Each player has proven their talent, but also brings something different to the table: there are the old pros with decades of experience, the players who specialize in one aspect of the game (drafting, deck building, etc.) and the people like myself, who earn their spot because we're currently active and in-touch with the pro community. While there are also some pitfalls of having a large team, all things considered it does give us a tremendous advantage over other players.

Maxwell Perlman: What are your feelings regarding the current prize support for professional players? Do you feel that you can/do make enough money to

support the travel as well as playing? If the prize support were to increase, how do you feel it would impact the competitive scene?

Reid Duke: Prize support for professional players alone would not be enough to sustain the lifestyle. Thankfully, while prizes tend to grow very slowly over the years, the amount of money that can potentially be made from sponsorships and writing is exploding as MTG becomes more popular and as tournament coverage gets more viewers. That said, prizes can definitely help, and I count myself fortunate to have spiked a handful of big wins at times when my finances were not so stable. The problem is mostly that the prizes reward lucky runs a lot more than they reward consistent results. To go 11-5 at every Pro Tour probably means you're one of the best players in the world, but you would only early about \$6000 a year, which is less than making a single top eight and getting last place in the other three tournaments. To make the lifestyle of a professional more stable and sustainable, there would have to be more prize money at the middle levels.

Maxwell Perlman: I use the term “lifestyle” to describe what it is like to engulf yourself in a professional game? Would you agree/disagree with this statement?

Reid Duke: Yes, “lifestyle” is a good word for it, although you should realize that there is still some amount of flexibility in how a professional player can live their life. Some people are able to hold other jobs and have families while playing, but others choose to focus entirely on MTG.

Maxwell Perlman: How would you describe the term “metagame”? (Zvi and I defined the term differently, and Zac agreed with both definitions)

Reid Duke: The term “game” refers to the exact rules and constraints of whatever activity you're engaged in. “Metagame” means what the players are actually doing. In the case of Magic, it's easy to know the rules and what cards are legal, but it's difficult to predict exactly what decks your opponents will show up with, how they'll play them, how they'll sideboard, etc. Metagame refers to the latter.

Maxwell Perlman: Say that for the next major event you are going to attend, the week before the event, someone finds a tier 0 super degenerate deck that wins very easily? How would you as a player react? How do you feel Wizards should react?

Reid Duke: As a player, my job is to do the best I can with the rules that I'm given. It's not my job to scrutinize the rules or to think about the consequences of whatever deck I choose to play. I would simply pick the deck that gave me the best chance of winning. From a big picture perspective, I support Wizard's right to do whatever they believe is best for the health of the game. They can ban any card, or make any rule they want, so long as they give sufficient notice to the players preparing for tournaments, and planning their schedules far in advance.

Maxwell Perlman: You are well known in the community for your article writing. Why do you write your articles? Do you enjoy informing others, do you do it to support yourself financially, do you feel some sort of duty/responsibility to the community?

Reid Duke: If not for financial compensation, I would devote myself entirely to playing, and write very infrequently, if at all. That said, I do enjoy writing, and there are a huge number of good things that come along with it, both for me personally and for the community as a whole. As I've devoted my life to Magic, it is satisfying to share the thoughts and ideas that I've worked so hard to develop.

Maxwell Perlman: What are your views on the MTG community? Do you feel there is a disconnect between professional players and kitchen table players, or do you feel connected to those players? Would you agree with Mark Rosewaters statement of "Magic is many games to many people", however these games all fall under the umbrella of "Magic"?

Reid Duke: MTG is the best game in the world because it can mean so many things to so many different people. Take me for example, I picked up the game when I was five years old because, at that age, anything having to do with Knights and Dragons and all that fun stuff was very exciting for me! Today, I stay with the game because of limitless strategic questions and problems to be

answered as a player. Personally, I feel connected to every magic player—the pros, the amateurs, the collectors, and the people who play for the flavor alike.

Maxwell Perlman: How do you feel about WotC’s openness and connection to its audience? For example: MaRo has a blog, and a podcast, and every week the designers/developers write articles to inform the readers of what is going on inside of the mind of R&D.

Reid Duke: Wizards is terrific at taking community feedback and adjusting accordingly. My complaint is that they actually do it *too much*. Without getting into specifics, there have been a number of times over the past few years when I felt that organized play decisions were made based simply on which people in the community were the most outspoken. I would prefer WotC to listen to everyone, but make the final decisions for themselves.

Maxwell Perlman: If you had to define 3 qualities that any competitive game, capable of being played at a professional level, should have, what would they be?

Reid Duke: No two games should play out the same way. There should be enough depth that you can think about and discuss the game while not playing.

T9. Interview with Rich Hagon

Terminology:

- 75: A Magic deck, and sideboard, consist of 75 cards.
- Inside R&D: An example:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaBa6o7st8w&list=PL3rP64NRtmbjkWGTFWQJknWG80BzyFekp&index=1>
- Eggs:
<http://www.starcitygames.com/magic/strategy/25221-Winning-Pro-Tour-R-eturn-To-RavnicaWith-Eggs.html>
- Nightveil Specter:
<http://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Card/Details.aspx?multiverseid=366242>
- Draft: See Booster Draft:
<http://www.wizards.com/magic/tcg/resources.aspx?x=mtg/tcg/resources/formats-sanctioned>
- GP: A Grand Prix:
<http://www.wizards.com/Magic/Magazine/Article.aspx?x=grandprix/welcome>
- Pro Tour Dragons Maze:
<http://www.wizards.com/magic/tcg/events.aspx?x=mtg/event/protour/dragonsmaze13>
- Platinum refers to a level of professional player:
<https://www.wizards.com/magic/magazine/article.aspx?x=protour/playersclub/guidelines>
- Eternal Championship:
<http://www.wizards.com/magic/magazine/article.aspx?x=mtg/daily/eventcoverage/eternal13/legacy>
- Top 25: A piece of the ranking system that keeps track of the top 25 MTG played every week:
<http://www.wizards.com/Magic/Magazine/Article.aspx?x=mtg/daily/top25/20131128>
- FNM: Friday Night Magic, most local game shops host events every Friday night, called FNM events
- To sleeve: To put a card into a protective sleeve, probably to go into a deck

- Xenagos:
<http://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Card/Details.aspx?multiverseid=373502>
- Mono-Blue and Mono-Red are deck types/names
- The mirror: in competitive gaming, when a player faces off against an opponent who is using the same character, deck, etc. it is called a Mirror Match.
- Dagen vs Dezani:
<http://www.wizards.com/magic/magazine/article.aspx?x=mtg/daily/eventcoverage/ptths13/finals>
- Path to Exile:
<http://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Card/Details.aspx?multiverseid=370408>
- Lightning Helix:
<http://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Card/Details.aspx?multiverseid=370528>
- Modern Masters:
<http://www.wizards.com/magic/tcg/productarticle.aspx?x=mtg/tcg/modernmasters/productinfo>

Maxwell Perlman: How would you describe your job to someone who has no idea what competitive gaming is?

Rich Hagon: So one of the things I often say to people, especially if they are American, is I say that my job is a cross between Chris Berman and Mike Tirico, in that I am a studio host for a sports show and I am surrounded former players, and experts and guests that come on the show and they talk about things. They will talk about what they expect to see in the forthcoming games, and what the significance is, and who is likely to win and why. And then with my other hat, I am at the game calling the play by play. So my job sort of straddles those two worlds within broadcasting: a studio host and also a match commentator; for what amounts to a sport.

Maxwell Perlman: So you are obviously well known in the Magic Community: you do so many videos for the GP's and you said Born of the Gods (all of the Inside R&D), you sometimes do the deck techs with people, so how would you

describe like if you had to say my role in the MTG community, what would you say it is?

Rich Hagon: I love the game and I love drama, and it's my job to convey my love of the game to people and to explain why what they are seeing matters. So whether that is because someone has got this incredible new deck that is sort of demonstrating their mental superiority, like so maybe Stanislav Cifka winning Pro Tour Return to Ravnica, like maybe that's quite an interesting tournament in the sense of a lot of people were quite bored by the deck, because the deck itself, Eggs, is just sitting there doing its thing; it's not terribly interactive. I found that an incredibly exciting Pro Tour, because from around round 5 onwards, here was this guy who went "In my hand I have this 75, and I'm going to beat all of you with it, and there is nothing you can do about it.". And for 2 days, we were waiting to see whether that was true or not, and ultimately it was.

And I think that's incredibly exciting, sometimes it's like that, sometimes it's about almost treating cards as personalities, so there is an element of, I love it when a card that is abundantly terrible suddenly does something incredible, so I sort of think like Nightveil Specter, Nightveil Specter would be just fine right now. It's a perfectly valid draft card, from a year ago. And now it's the best card in standard.

Maxwell Perlman: which is amazing, because it's pretty bad.

Rich Hagon: It's pretty bad, so I love it when the less obvious cards come to the fore in some way. I think that's great. So there is an element of that to it. And the thing that, I'm unusual in this way, because almost everyone is involved in the Magic coverage scene, I would think, is Magic first, performer second., and I' the other way around. I've been a performer all my life, a creator all my life, and so to me the thing that excites me most about Magic is the people.

So right now, we're at an incredible time for Magic, because yes, you've still got your hall of famers, floating about, your Jon and your Kai and your Brian Kibler and your Luis and your Paolo, but you also got right now, I can point to 4 people with fantastic storylines right now.

Jeremy Dezani, who has obviously won the last Pro Tour.

Owen Turtenwald, who just failed to make 3 GP wins in a row.

Sam Black, who spend years and years trying to make other people good and not caring if he was good himself, and finally found the switch inside him to go “I don't care about coming in 15th or someone else winning with my deck, I don't care about making the top 8, I want to win with my deck , on my own terms and stand there with a trophy.” And you knows he is 4 top 8s in the last 5 tournaments, and then 11th last week.

And then the final one is Ari Lax, who he lost his last round at Pro Tour Dragons Maze, against Luis Scott-Vargas, where the winner would be platinum this year, and the loser would not. That's immense, so hour of Magic, potentially, would have seen him leave the game forever, because he loses, he goes “I'm not platinum, ”I can't afford to go to everything, I can't bear another 15 month slog, it's a long season, I'm done”, but instead, he went “I can't believe I lost in the last round , playing for platinum.” I don't ever want to play for platinum in the last round again”, he went away, improved, he won the Eternal Championship , he's just won this weekend, he is into the Top 25 this week for the first time, there you go, that's a world exclusive, no one knows that yet, yeah but that's not a shock.

Yeah and I love seeing the storylines, you know I've known Owen (referring to Owen Turtenwald) since he was 17 at his first Pro Tour in 2007, he is such a different human being at 23 than he was at 17, and I just love the human drama of it, because ultimately, and I think this is where it ties into sport more generally, Magic is incredibly pure.

For all of it has incredibly complex rules, and thousands and thousands of cards, ultimately it's you against me, and somebody wins and somebody loses, and it's largely because of what is going on in our heads. Yes, if you're better than me, you will still lose sometimes and that's part of the appeal, but basically speaking, you can see, played out week after week, people winning because they are better than the other guy, and that's really, really compelling.

Maxwell Perlman: Also there are players like Shahar Shenhar, who are younger than the game, yet they are the world's top player, which is crazy.

Rich Hagon: And I think what is interesting about Magic is there is now this, sort of at the other end of the age scale, there are an awful lot of players who are in their mid to late 30s, who are now coming back to the game, having gone away in the early 2000s, and spent a decade running their hedge funds, setting up their own multi-million dollar business, whatever it is, and they are like "Oh Magic, still around, awesome". And they are back and they are just as good as they ever were. Say you look at Huey Jensen (William Jensen) or Jon Finkel again, obviously. So yeah I think Magic is in a great place, in that although sure, its core is still you know 14 to 28, that's really expanding at the top end. And they say you really never give up Magic, you just stop paying for a while.

Maxwell Perlman: Wizards is like the most public company when it comes to what they are doing. Their head designer has a blog, he has a podcast, there are many articles published every day on multiple websites, it is a very public game. How do you think that contributes to the community thriving?

Rich Hagon: I think one of the big things, and I'm certainly not going to try to put a number on it, but I think one of the huge things for Magic is that, everyone feels like it is "their" game. Magic belongs "to you". And when you build a deck for FNM, that part of Magic is yours and yours alone. And ironically, even if that deck is 75 cards for 75 what Sam Black played last GP, you still feel that it belongs to you. It's my "Mono Blue Devotion" (a deck name). And that is very different to a lot of sports, like a tennis racket, or a cricket bat, or a baseball bat or glove. They are just objects. But for Magic, when you sleeve up a Xenagos, there is something. "He is on my team", and I don't mean that in a flavor way, I mean the ability to go +1 and do this thing belongs to me.

So I think one of the huge successes for Magic is that everyone feels that it belongs to them. And certainly, if you like the outreach that Wizards does, is certainly about telling people about their own game. Like when we do these Inside R&D videos, it is literally, "We cannot invite, physically, 12 million of you into this office building, but we can invite 12 million of you into the conversation that you want to have with the people who made the latest set." And also, one of

the big things, is that Magic is a game of conversation, it is a game of conversation at the table, and it is also a conversation as soon as you have finished. Because you go see your friends and it's like "How did you do" "Aw man I did"

Maxwell Perlman: It is a social thing

Rich Hagon: It is a social thing, and you talk all the time. And I think fundamentally what coverage is about is putting you in a conversation that you couldn't otherwise be in. So I think the match that we are watching, it is like you are at your local FNM, standing beside the table, and on your left is Brian David-Marshall, and on your right is me. And the three of us are just standing there with our trade binders, and our decks from round 3, and our rucksack, watching two people we all know, waiting for the round to finish, and watching that. And in a sense, coverage is almost recreating that round by round. "Hey let's see what else is going on" "Oh look it's Jeremy Dizani against (Warikof from Germany), alright what are they up to" "Ooh mono-blue against mono-red, let's have a look". And although sometimes we are a bit more formal in tone, fundamentally, that is what's going on. We're inviting you into a conversation with us, at a match, and when we are away from the match, like when we do the Inside R&D or when we have players come to the desk, you know if Conley Woods comes in to talk about his deck tech on mono-black or something, when mono-black wasn't a thing, everyone is like "Hey, is Conley, I want to ask him so many questions", and it's our job to ask the questions that everyone at home can't.

I'll be interested to hear what BDM (Brian David-Marshall) has to say about this. But certainly I feel that it is my job to be the voice of the people who are standing beside me as I do the deck tech, or the interview at the news desk, or I do the score updates in the back rounds of Swiss. I know that there are people hammering the door down saying "How is Jan Van der Vegt doing, did he win round 14. So when I am up at the big board going "Ok here is where we stand after 13 rounds, 11 and 2, 3 players at 10 and 3." I know how much that matters to people at home, and I think that is something that, yes Wizards is very good at. Wizards is very aware of that everyone cares. It is not a game that you just pick up and put down as a sort of casual, you know, hour killer. It matters. Magic

matters to people and therefore Wizards treats that caring with respect, and this sounds a bit wishy-washy, but almost with love. You know, I mean we love that people care so much about Magic. I am, it's humbling, because the European side, I run the stream for the European video, so I direct it and produce it. So I sit there at the desk, generating the content, and make it all happen, and it's you know, there are hundreds of thousands of people who at some point in the weekend go "Yep, I am not going to go and watch college football, I'm not going to do my work, I'm not going to see my girlfriend; I am going to sit and look at round 7 of GP Vienna. That's AMAZING. Right, I mean that's wonderful.

Maxwell Perlman: It's a lifestyle for a lot of people. It's like they have their own communities.

Rich Hagon: I think lifestyle is a very interesting word as well, because one of the things I explain to people once they get an idea of what the game is, so once they are past the idea of "ok so you are playing against people, and they start at 20 and getting to 0, and you cast spells; once they are past that: One of the beauties of Magic is that, yes, you can enjoy it as a game off the shelf, \$20, grandparents buy a "Jace vs Chandra" deck for their two grandchildren, and you can have a couple of rainy afternoons spent very happily with that. But as it moves up the chain, almost everyone I'm involved with, is, as you say, it's a lifestyle choice. And I say to people, I say "Look, don't think of Magic as a game, the best comparison I can give you, is it's as if you've decided to become a season ticket holder at a European soccer team". Right, a Manchester United season ticket holder. So what you're buying for that is, sure, you've got a bunch of matches that you're going to physically go and see, but way beyond that:

On Sunday, you ring up your mates and plan who's going to be driving the car to the next away trip on Wednesday night for the cup match. And on Monday, you go on the club website and you check out what is happening with all the players. And on Tuesday, well that is the day before the match; so you're gearing up, "I've got everything I need". Wednesday: You go to the match, you buy your pie, you buy your program, you chat with your mates, you watch the game, you talk all the way home about the game, and the it's "Who is driving on Saturday to the match".

Right, and every single day, you're invested in your team, and Magic is your team. And so, you know, once you get down to the Magic, it's like "So, it's FNM every Friday, except on weekends when it's the European Grand Prix when I am going to be going to 4 of those a year, then I am going to try to go to all 3 of the World Magic Cup Qualifiers, on the weekends that that's not happening I'm going to watch the Star City Coverage, I am going to watch the European coverage, then I am going to switch over to the North American GP coverage, you know where we've got double weekend. So it's like ok, I've got round 8 of Vienna open on one side and I've got round 4 of whatever the other one is on another screen. Um, it is absolutely, as you say, it is a lifestyle commitment, like, you know if you want to follow the Boston Red Socks, you've got 162 games worth of chat to have with your friends. And then, when you get to the playoffs, it's like can we possibly do it. So yeah, I think that lifestyle is a very big word.

Maxwell Perlman: Do you think that if other companies were as open and as active with their player base that their games would thrive as much as Wizards' has? Because I think Magic reported 25% growth every year for like 2 years or 3 years. Which is kind of crazy that the player base is expanding so rapidly. Do you think that the openness has to do with that?

Rich Hagon: I don't know, I think one of the things to be careful with on those numbers, but yes that is absolutely true, so there is nothing incorrect about the numbers. But, you know this is, let's go with the Boston Red Socks again. They will sell out 81 home games every year, so that's, you know whatever it is twenty-some thousand 81 times. When we went to Las Vegas; we created a world record for the number of people simultaneously sitting down to play a game, and that was 4,900....4,500. So in that sense, we are still small, we are huge within certain versions, you know within certain worlds, but once you get out into the world of "How many people watch the NFL on a Sunday?" "How many people watch Magic on a Sunday?" You know, it's less. Right, so in that sense we still have a lot of room to grow.

Now, I can see a time, and it's probably, it's never further away than you imagine, it is probably not further away than we imagine, where there can be dedicated amalgamated TV channels for Magic, where you have 4 hours of the Scandinavian stream, followed by 4 hours of Jan Van der Vegt and Simon

Goertzen, followed by 4 2-hour blocks of North American content, followed by “Hey it’s Asia morning, and you’ve got Shuhei Nakamura streaming.” And you know, a 24-hour streaming channel for Magic is entirely, it’s virtually viable now. And certainly as the game continues to grow, it becomes all the more viable. But the openness thing, um I really don’t know if that in itself is a thing. I mean obviously Wizards spends a lot of time trying to make sure organized play is worth going to, is fun, that it has its rewards: whether or not you win. I think that’s very important. I think it’s very easy to get caught up, and I mean even we do it: “Someone is about to win 40,00 US Dollars or 50,00 US Dollars” or “He is about to go platinum pro, which is worth probably 100 grand.”

I think the real success of the organized play thing, is that most people go to a Grand Prix, for example, knowing they are not going to win, knowing they are not going to make day 2, and not caring; and that’s really big. Because they are all really competitive, and they want to make day 2, and they want to win, but they know they are not going to, and they go anyway, because there is so much else going on. I think, you know, in a way, they are like mini conventions, and I think that’s a really big deal. I mean, I think one of the other things is that, also, you always feel, that because Magic is constantly being re-invented, you always feel that maybe the next time will be your time.

Right, so, like right now, everyone can pick up and play mono-blue devotion in standard. Um, at the Pro Tour, only two teams arrived at mono-blue devotion in standard. Now there is only 6/7 weeks between now and then. So anyone who is now playing mono-blue devotion, and doing well with it, you can see, physically, in your hands, the correct answer. And that’s a profound thing for Magic; because if you watch Roger Federer playing tennis, or Novak Djokovic, you can watch their forehand, but you can pick it up, you can’t hold it, you can’t have it (picks up a card off his deck, there is a Xenagos, sitting on my desk. right, I don’t have a tennis racket sitting on my desk. And even if I did, the tennis racket I have here, doesn’t function the way Novak Djokovic’s does. But that Xenagos right there does exactly what Makihito Mihara’s Xenagos does. If I make, it. If I’m good enough to make it.

And I think, so I think the idea of that constant regeneration is massive for magic. Because even if you are the world’s worst Theros drafter, you can say “When

Born of the Gods comes out, I'm going to pick all the cheap white heroic cards, and by the time I open Theros, I'm going to get my Blue/White heroic deck, that I can never get at the moment". And there it is. And so there is this dangling carrot, that maybe the next time is your time, and that's huge.

Maxwell Perlman: It's kind of interesting, you mentioned live TV channels, and in Korea, for certain e-sports like StarCraft: that's a thing. They have a 24 hour channel devoted to nothing but StarCraft. And where not there yet, but plenty of games could get to that point within the next couple of years.

Rich Hagon: Yeah, for sure, and I think one of the big things is in terms of content, it's there already. Right, I mean we...if you give me a few days, I could point you to 24 hours' worth of Magic coverage. Pretty easily right. In terms of all of the different streamers. There are, and I don't just mean people just with an internet connection shoving themselves on Twitch, but I mean you know Mike Jacob, Jan Van der Vegt would be two I instantly think of, um Paul Cheon and that's before you get to "Oh, David Ochoa is on tonight, LSV's (Luis Scott-Vargas) on tonight" right. The content is already there, the thing that isn't quite there is, and this is going to be an interesting hump for Magic to negotiate at some point, one of the fascinating things about e-sports, StarCraft and so on and all of this League of Legends and so on, is because of their demographic and the sheer size of it, the amount of money that is available in terms of sponsorship is huge, utterly huge. And Magic has always been a culture of, not paying for content. So, just as an example, this past weekend, there was no video coverage of Grand Prix Toronto. Wizards received a lot of negative feedback for that, which I completely understand, because everyone that wanted to spend 18-20 hours last weekend watching Toronto couldn't. Wizard's received relatively little positive feedback for showing 18-20 hours of Grand Prix Vienna. Because it wouldn't occur to people that it might not be there, because it's always there. It's another European Grand Prix, so it's there. So the fact is that Wizard's supplied 18-20 hours of live video content for free this past weekend. And Star City supplied 18-20 hours a weekend, for free. And that is where the stopping block is coming from regarding a TV station. Because you need the sponsorship if you're going to actually be on air the whole time or most of the time. But even without that, I think I can certainly see a place, 2 years, 3 years, 5 years, certainly within 5 years, where something, like

www.magicthegathering.com/, whether that specifically or not, is running I don't know, 4 hour loops of content daily, so that there is like a 4 hour schedule of little bits of this stream, here are some highlights from the last GP, this is some new original content leading towards next weekend, here is what's going on, a little R&D conversation about the next set. Blah blah blah blah blah. Where you have, just this local entertainment network for Magic. It's certainly out there. And the numbers are such that it could be done. I imagine it will be.

I fully expect, just consider this as a little thought experiment for you. Imagine a world where Magic is similar to the NFL, where you took 32 of the best players in the world, and you hook them up to a league and you said "Okay, so here is what we are going to do. We are going to have 8 divisions with 4 of you each, and over the next 16 weeks, were going to stream the matches that you play, but hey, just like the NFL, you have networks. So on Wednesday, which is the big night for these matches, you have 12 games going on: early games, late games, just like the NFL. And that goes up on www.magicthegathering.com/ let's say. But not imagine that the other 4 matches, well you have Tuesday night Magic, where 3 of the matches go on, and they are hosted on ChannelFireball.com, with their commentators. Right so if you want to tune into those specific matches, you have to go to CBS or you have to go to FOX or NBC. And the you get Thursday night Magic, which is just one match, but it's the one match that everyone wants to see, because they get to cherry pick, and you know that's on Star City. So you know there worlds in which I can certainly see that kind of thing coming. Where you have essentially, an e-league for Magic, with the best players in the world going at it over a period of months.

You know, I mean, Wizards was at the forefront of putting together organized play and covering it, and there is no reason why we shouldn't learn from watching what have done off the back of Wizards. You know, we look at, we are not blind. Wizards looks at League of Legends, Wizards looks at StarCraft, and so on and says "What are they doing? How does it work for them? What is their business model? Why are they able to spend so much money?" Cuz I mean, let's make no bones about it, the cost of what Riot are doing for some of their League of Legends events would blow most people's minds. I mean, even things like their stands at conventions, like if you go to PAX and you go to the Riot, they are spending millions of dollars on making an event space look good. Millions of

dollars. And magic isn't there yet. Magic doesn't have that kind of production value budget. That said, it's pretty eye washing(?) what Magic does spend on, you know, production if you like. But, yeah I can certainly see a time, pretty soon, where there is enough interest day-in-day-out. Because that's the thing, Magic people are so passionate that they do just want Magic all the time. By and large, they don't want a 2 hour highlight show, so they can go and do others things. They would much rather have 12 hours of Magic. Which is simultaneously great and a bit of a curse, because is hard to make sure you are giving them compelling content for 12 hours. But that's what we've signed up for, so that's what we try and do.

Maxwell Perlman: Yeah, I'm on the boat where when Worlds weekend comes around, I'm just sitting on my couch for 3 days. That's all I want to watch. That's the only thing I want to do.

Rich Hagon: Well that, that's what we want. I got an email from a guy that said "I've watched 50 of the 50 ½ hours of world's week last year." I just said "What happened to the other ½ hour? What went wrong?". And that's amazing. When you think that TV is more and more geared towards the idea of; we will try and put this ratings winning comedy on for a half an hour before our big set piece new drama. Which is 45 minutes only. And we are inviting you in for 50 hours in a week. And you're saying "Yes". I mean this is wonderful. It's great.

Maxwell Perlman: So, you talk a lot about Team Star City Games and ChannelFireball, how do you think those teams impact not only the competitive scene, but the social aspects. Because people know Brian Kibler, people know Jon Finkel. People know all those teams and all their members, and everything about them.

Rich Hagon: Yeah, I think that there's a couple of interesting things there. First of all, to have a team is huge. So forget all the external stuff. In terms of the tournament, to be on a team, massive. It's a huge deal. It's a gigantic edge, it's one of the reasons why the best player's win more often, as often as they do. Now, don't get me wrong, if you locked all 400 Pro Tour competitors in a box for the last 3 weeks before a Pro Tour, and they couldn't talk to anyone, and they were just left alone in their padded cell with all the cards, I am not suggesting for

a minute that many of the members of Team ChannelFireball wouldn't arrive at great decks, I'm sure they would. But it's the speed at which they understand the format, the speed at which they can start getting on to sideboard choices. So many players, they come to a Pro tour, they think they've got the best deck, they never test the mirror. Well (Channel) Fireball and Star City and Team Revolution and all these guys. They have their decks pretty much 3 days before, and they are all about the mirror and what do we do to sideboard against this deck. The edges are immense. So teams are a massive deal.

One of the slightly strange this, though, is teams, for a while, weren't important. Roundabout I want to say sort of the mid 2000's, 2004/5 maybe, through to about 2009 when ChannelFireball came back, came out of the woodwork; you could argue that you had a perfectly reasonable chance if you were just working with a friend. It helped if your friend was Gabriel Nassif and you were Paul Rietzl, but it was nonetheless doable. But, the old version of teams, which almost it doesn't exactly predate the internet, but functionally it does, is that there everyone came to the Pro Tour and was terrified, you were in the dark completely, about what is the French deck, what is the German deck, what is the Dutch deck, and most important of all, what is the Japanese Deck. And the Pro Tour was this huge unveiling of what those deck were; and that is less true now and part of the reason for that is the way that Magic is designed is that there are far more playable cards, that are decent, that are at a close power level, that there really are a ton of different decks you can play, and can play successfully. Which is great, but what it does mean is that, I mean it's been a long time since we've said "Really, someone broke the format" in standard. Now, Cifka, with Eggs, is the closest is the closest we've had to that in a good while. Alex Hayne, with miracles, you know clearly deserved to win because he had this deck that basically no one else had got; but again, that came from a team.

The interesting thing though is I think because the players themselves are very pragmatic about teams, it's actually a lot harder to tell who is where than it used to be. Because essentially, you just went, "Raphael Levy, he is French, so he is playing the French deck". Simple. But the idea that, so Team Revolution, from the Pro Tour, were most of the French players, but also had Melissa DeTora. You're like "What's she doing on that team there? How did that work?" And it turns out that a couple of French people they had worked with in their previous

testing group, and then so they got invited onto Team Revolution when the French got together. So keeping up with the intricacies, of if you like the transfer market, is actually quite tricky. Owen Turtenwald: what team is he on? Well he writes for ChannelFireball, all his photos have him in a ChannelFireball shirt that I can think of but his on Team Star City (Games). And then you get Conley (Woods) who writes for TCG Player and Channel Fireball, he is ChannelFireball, sure. Huey Jensen, he's Star City; Tom Martel Channel Fireball, oh but not now, now he's Star City. And this constant back and forth, and then you got to the World Championship where because they need to split themselves up, you ended up with ChannelFireball's Shahar Shenhar working with Star City's Tom Martel as a team that was neither Star City nor Channel Fireball, but both together: just as a pair. So in that sense I think Magic has in a way a little bit of a problem. In that it is really, really hard to keep track of the teams. And it's something that actually we have done quite a lot of talking about in recent times, because it is starting to become a lot more important again. When Dagen and Dezani both make the final and Star City has Sam Black and Paul Rietzl in the top 8 and Channel Fireball doesn't have anyone anywhere near, that is clearly a thing. The mono-red that (Channel) Fireball came up with was not the correct answer this time. It's clear that they, the Revolution team, did have the answer, and obviously Sam had it as well. But that doesn't take away from it, they got there. They found the right answer. So teams are something that we're looking at , because as you say, people are sort of very interested in that. And I think one of the reasons they are most interested is unlike the NBA, where you cannot imagine you are Dwight Howard (unless you've got a really active imagination), you can imagine that you won a PTQ (pro tour qualifier), that you know Christian Calcano, and that he might be able to get you on a North East team testing for the pro tour in Valencia. That is a path that is , in reality, not really open, for most people, but because you can join those dots, and go 1+1+1 is 17, people feel that they can potentially do that. So I think that, I mean the Holy Grail is not to win a Pro Tour, but to test with ChannelFireball for a Pro Tour. I mean that is what I would want to qualify for. I'd be like "Hey if I qualify, they'd let me on ChannelFireball and I could make like lots of content for the Pro Tour and stuff. I'd just spend a week hanging out with these great Magic players. That would be awesome." So yea, teams are an interesting thing, and I would be really interested to see how they develop.

I was watching some piece, we just had a show this weekend, in the UK called “How Video Games Changed the World”, which is actually very, very interesting; because it talks about organized play and there is some stuff about StarCraft in there. And I watched this little StarCraft clip, and to me, there were just 10 people I didn’t know or recognize, all just standing in a row holding t-shirts. I am sure there are some people who watch Magic in the exact same way. And it’s like, “How do really make the team thing stand out from the other bunch of blokes in black t-shirts?” It’s a tricky one, and it’s something I’m really interested in; and I don’t have the answers to this; I’m just interested to see moving forward, what they do and whether teams become much more casual and floating and 3 people split off there and go and join the other lot and whether there’s I don’t know if you know Lauren Lee , used to work at ChannelFireball. The last couple of Pro Tours, she has like a team breakdown, and it’s really interesting just seeing, because once you get past just Star City, ChannelFireball, and Revolution ... it turns out that there were 20 teams at the last Pro Tour.

Maxwell Perlman: So, in that regard, what do you think of players like Shouta Yasooka, who are known for testing alone and playing alone, but then he comes out of nowhere with Eternal Command and like almost breaks modern.

Rich Hagon: He is one of my favorite players of all time. I absolutely love him, he is a complete monster. And the other one who is the same for me is Makihito Mihara, the 2006 world champion, with Dragonstorm. To me they are both utter beasts. I love the idea of sort of sitting in the dark corner, I am sure they have neither corners nor darkness, but just the idea of the dark corner where they are like “Then I will simply play 3 AEther Vial and that will be it”. That, again, is incredibly exciting. I love that, I don’t really know how they do it, I think it’s incredible that they do. I guess in some ways it points to the fact that there are teams where, you know if you are working with yourself, you only interact with yourself, you only have to blame yourself, there are a lot of politics that go on in big teams and people who do not get on as well with other team members. I mean, you put 15 competitive super smart guys in a room, anyone who tells you all 15 like everyone equally, that’s obviously a lie. That can’t be true. A dorm room alone is enough to make that difference. And I think one of the great successes of (Channel) Fireball was that they were able to just put people who really liked each other in a room together. That was a huge deal.

Maxwell Perlman: I forget, which team was it that practiced for Pro Tour Theros at the castle, was that SCG (Star City Games)? (Referring to two people) They were just in the kitchen making food, and then one says “Let’s try blue devotion” and it’s the best thing ever (best deck in standard at the time).

Rich Hagon: And the thing is, that is where the sort of professionalism comes in. Because, if you and I work as a team, we have Skype, so we could arrange to meet as we did today at 9 o’clock. But you and I will never meet in the kitchen, whilst preparing food, having just done 100 hours of testing. For one of us to say “Hey why don’t we just do mono blue devotion!” That will never happen for us. And what they do is they put themselves in a position where that is allowed to happen. Now it doesn’t always. You know (Channel) Fireball had the collar and cunning sparkmage (referring to the two cards Basilisk Collar and Cunning Sparkmage, which have a very synergistic interaction that players did not discover immediately) That came out of a trip to a Subway (sandwich shop). That is awesome, and that is why they do that, because it is a kind of groupthink thing and I’ve been very lucky, I’ve been able to go visit with (Channel) Fireball for a couple of Pro Tours, you know a couple of days out and just hang out with them. You have to look quite carefully to see what is actually happening. Because it doesn’t look like most people imagine it should. Like it should be a row of tables with everyone with notepads and laptops sitting in silence playing Magic and then handing result slips in to the number cruncher at the end of the table and blackboards with analysis. And instead it’s pizza and socks and Gameboys and Conley (Woods) looking through 10,000 commons (a rarity of magic card) in the corner, and Josh Utter-Leyton listening to music, and Brian Kibler off in his own room looking at his sideboard. But it is the fact that this constant swirl of excellence arrives you at the winning list, and that is very hard to replicate when you are a PTQ winner from Belgium or Venezuela or whatever.

Maxwell Perlman: So I know you and BDM were very huge at the last worlds (tournament) about the team unified standard and the country teams, I am not exactly sure what they called it where it was team USA is against team Germany and ... do you think formats like that and Cube and Commander are helping build Magic...

Rich Hagon: I don't particularly think unified standard is, because that is actually really complicated and so on. But I mean the fact that my local game store, they will do a draft on Monday while there is a commander league going on, they draft 3-4 times a week, but they also have a modern tournament every couple of weeks, they have a legacy tournament every couple of weeks, every FNM you've got 2 lots of standard going. Obviously, one of the beauties of Magic is that we can look up a card and every card has multiple homes. And I think one of the simplest examples I can give is like...so like for no obvious reason that I can put a finger on, so just about my favorite card in Theros (a recent magic set) is this guy (holds up a card) Minotaur Skullcleaver. Now, he is clearly terrible, he is a 2/2 for 3, with haste, and when he attacks he is a 4/2. But I just love minotaurs. I would love there to be a minotaur tribal deck that was really good. Like sometimes you can get all the minotaurs in draft and you can win a draft that way. I would just love to play Red/Black Minotaurs in standard. Now, I imagine that I am never going to be allowed to do that successfully. I'm guessing. But who knows.

Maxwell Perlman: We don't know what is in Born of the Gods (the set to be released after Theros).

Rich Hagon: Right, so there are two more sets, and maybe I get Minotaur Lords (in Magic, a lord is a card that makes all creatures of a certain type, say minotaur for example, stronger) and you know 3/1's for 1 with Minotaur as the creature type.

Rich Hagon: Right, but that is what I want. And the thing is, they give me Minotaur Skullcleaver and I am really excited about Minotaur Skullcleaver. And most players will open their booster pack and have never ever been excited about a Minotaur Skullcleaver. But exactly the same way, while I'm doing that, there are other people who are "Oooh, Blood-Toll Harpy, enters the battlefield, each player loses 1 life, I've got my everyone loses life every turn deck, this fits in perfectly". So the fact that they sort of intersect all these different points within the game, is actually what makes magic awesome. Because Magic is not one game, Magic is many games.

Maxwell Perlman: I think it is Mark Rosewater that says “Magic is many games to many people”. To me, I love, let’s say I love legacy, but you love standard. We can talk forever about the differences and what we love about each, but then we also have that connection where it’s the same game.

Rich Hagon: Yeah, and I love that fact that, because I quite like the speed of churn within standard. I love the fact that, because I am a chameleon in that obviously I don’t play a lot because there is just no time, and I am constantly moving from format to format. So I am about to do a 3rd week of standard in Dallas, my next thing is Prague Modern (a format of magic). And then it’s like “Ooh, here’s Born of the Gods, okay, let’s look at that.” And then it’s limited again (another magic format). I love the fact that I might use Path to Exile for 2 years in standard, and then it’s gone. It’s out of my sight now. But then suddenly, once a year around comes a legacy GP, or a modern GP or whatever it is, and “Oh look, it my old friend this, or people are playing the old Lightning Helix, I remember that. I actually loved playing Modern Masters last year because all these amazing cards that I had loved and played with back again, it was wonderful. So I think the “many games to many people” is obviously a vast thing for the game.

T10. Interview with Zac Hill

Terminology/Relevant Names/Info:

- The Dojo: http://wiki.mtgsalvation.com/article/The_Dojo

Maxwell Perlman: When you were still playing Magic at a competitive level, how would you explain your job title to someone who had never heard of competitive gaming? Playing/commentating, specifically those, people understand design a little more, but they don't understand play or commentary for games.

Zac Hill: Like right now, when I do commentary, I say "I do commentary for professional gaming, sort of like when you see Steve Kerr talking about basketball; it's like that for games. Or Charles Barkley or whoever." So I relate it to someone they know; and usually that gives them enough context to have a conversation. When I was a professional Magic player, I always did something else. But I usually said "I play games professionally. I actually play a game called Magic." And you know, people, I think I started like really having tons of success on the Pro Tour around like 2003, when like poker was getting really big, so I think the emergence of poker really helped people understand competitive Magic. "Oh yeah game, of course people do that."

Maxwell Perlman: How has the tournament scene changed since you've started playing versus today?

Zac Hill: Yeah, so I still play now every once in a while, I'll play in like a Grand Prix every 6 months or something and am still able to do pretty well, which feels nice. The big difference is that when I was playing on the Pro Tour, we had a huge team: with Frank Karsten, me, (French name I cannot understand), Jan (last name I cannot understand). Tons of top 8 competitors. Christoph (last name I cannot understand). We had a team of like 8/9 solid players, and at the time it just seemed huge. And now, that's a tiny team, it's not even a team. I worked at Pro Tour Gatecrash with team Star City (Games), you know I've dabbled, I know the ChannelFireball guys really well. All those teams are like 20 people, you know and they are really regimented, you know and if it were up to me, I would probably more dramatically. And so it's segmented enough that each person has their different roles, and you can have entire metagames within the context of

your team. We just used to not be able to do that. So constructed decks are way better, draft pick orders are far more thoroughly understood. It's just harder now, frankly, than it used to be. I mean a lot harder.

Maxwell Perlman: I heard someone said "The difference between tournaments now and tournaments 5 years ago, is 1000 people"

Zac Hill: Yeah, that's a really good way of putting it. And I think the Pro Tours, which are actually smaller than they were when I was playing; the field is just way more prepared. You know, it used to be; you just had people showing up with decks that weren't really decks.

Maxwell Perlman: Like 40 creatures and 20 forests. (This would be an example of a deck a child or inexperienced player may have made, not prepared to fight against the metagame, and most definitely not finely tuned).

Zac Hill: Yeah, or just a deck that came out of like the GP season last year, and was like okay. That used to happen all the time. Another big difference is drafts. So I remember doing like 10 drafts for Pro Tour Kobe, and feeling like insanely prepared. Now it's like 50, 60 70, 70 is excessive, but I know plenty of people who do like 55 or 60 drafts before the Pro Tour. And I mean you just used to not be able to do that. That's a whole different ballgame.

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Zac Hill: There's probably 1 competitive Magic player for every hundred Magic players. ... If you look at games like competitive League of Legends, you look at competitive StarCraft, if you look at competitive CS (Counter Strike) even, other shooter games: you get a lot more out of people that want to go pro, or want to watch pro's, or like the idea of being pro, than you do people actually trying to do it.

Maxwell Perlman: How would you define the term metagame? Because, I defined it differently than Zvi did.

Zac Hill: So there is what the metagame actually means and then there is the colloquial term of it; and I think the colloquial is accepted enough that you can just use it. Sort of just literally, that's how it works. Metagame from a game design perspective means: the game outside the game. That's like you're thinking about what people are going to bring to the table, what strategies they are going to use, and how you react to that. Before you play the unit of analysis of the individual game of Magic or the individual Magic tournament. The way people use it is just "What's the metagame?", and they mean the tournament environment, which is technically incorrect, because the metagame should be from the perspective of the individual agent or the collective series of decisions the agents are making before they play the unit of analysis of the game. But when everyone just says "the metagame" they mean like "30% mono blue devotion, 30% mono black devotion, and some esper control". So I think both of those usages like are coherent, and I would expect those to be what you were talking about.

Maxwell Perlman: As a player, and as a developer: this is kind of a developer brain versus player brain; let's say that you are going to the next GP for example. Someone like the week before completely tears the metagame in half and there is this new Tier 0, broken, ridiculous combo deck that just wins. As a game developer versus a game player, what would you do?

Zac Hill: As a game developer, my first thought is "Did something go wrong and is this sustainable?" So the first thing I do is try to build a bunch of decks that beat it. And if you can hate it out relatively easily, you don't have to really worry about it. When you do get worried is when you have to have a bunch of narrow cards that aren't good in another context; because this creates this kind of sinusoidal function of like who is playing what. Some degree of that is good, to shake up the metagame, but when it feels like rock-paper-scissors it's not actually good. It's like, okay, you know this one card destroys you but it's terrible against everything else. That is when you get to things like Dredge (a very degenerate and powerful Magic deck that can be very easily beaten if the opponent is prepared, but it is otherwise virtually unstoppable) and people feel like they don't get to play Magic. That is when a constructed environment becomes too much about the metagame rather than the game. But some amount of that is really healthy, because you don't want people just playing the

same things over and over, even if they are really fun, because you have to sell cards.

So that is the thing you always have to remember when you are a game designer, your job, first and foremost, make money for your game design company: unless you're Jonathan Blow, and in which case you can do everything and I idolize you.

As a player, my thoughts are basically, how does this affect my existing decks. Because if the existing deck I wanted to play the week before the Pro Tour slaughters that deck that is just great for me. If it destroys everything we care about, were thinking it's obviously so good we need to beat that deck. Usually, I hate being on the beat that deck plan, because not everyone is on the same wavelength you are. Because it is a really good way to just lose a tournament is to be like "I'm just going to beat the best deck". I like really like playing the best deck with a really good sideboard plan against, the mirror and against everything else. I am a firm believer in doing that.

I think like my choice as a player would be: play that deck, see if it is actually as good as everyone thinks it is, because a lot of the time, if it's on like the Star City Circuit, it's because everyone is just playing crappier decks and you can actually convince yourself that a deck is better than it. And then I would say "Okay, how can I do this, what is the edge in the mirror, what improvements can I make to this that doesn't sacrifice anything" and probably sleeve that list up in the Pro Tour. This is basically what we did for elves in Berlin, and we a got deck in the top 8 of that tournament, and I think we had the best version of that deck.

Maxwell Perlman: We were comparing Caw Blade versus today.

Zac Hill: Yeah, yeah.

Maxwell Perlman: Which is, Caw Blade was the meta. It was what you played, or you tried to beat Caw Blade, and you couldn't, so you played Caw Blade.

So you were a member of (Wizards of the Coast) R&D and you did commentary, and you played, obviously: How much can you actually tell me of what R&D is

thinking of when they're preparing these sets for tournament play?

Zac Hill: I can say a lot. We playtest for tournaments way more than other game design companies do. And we do that because our tournaments generate so many of our (something I couldn't understand) that it percolates down. It also just is good for your system design. Even if most of your players don't play as competitively as the way that you test, making sure the pieces are there will lead to dynamic interactions and implicit synergies that are present, even if people don't maximize the whole way. Right, because you are building tools to do tasks. If you don't build the tools to accomplish those tasks, and you just put a bunch of things out there, without thinking of the system of how they interact with each other, you just have far more externalities that percolate out that player behavior can't interact with. Right, so if I'm designing for an optimized tournament environment, I am also making sure that there is a Tormod's Crypt to beat the Dredge deck (Tormod's Crypt is a card that is extremely powerful against Dredge, a deck known for being extremely powerful and degenerate), so that even a casual player that has no idea what Caw Blade is, but maybe makes some graveyard deck that's like a bad version of dredge, the tools are still there to deal with that and there is a really fun way of discovering that.

Wizards, basically, we have a bunch of Pro Tour developers, we come and we build Pro Tour decks, we build decks for block. We build decks with the set before and then the set after to figure out, okay are we putting all the power in a single set, because if that's happening then it's legal for 2 years and that's bad. So you want a deck's cards to come from a diversity of sets across the environment. And then there is limited, and limited is a whole other thing, we just draft *ad nauseum* and keep a ton of data about what is getting played and why, and what's winning and why. We try to make sure the same players aren't just drafting the same thing all the time, because that isn't set data, that's player data. I mean I can talk about this for a half an hour but I'm trying to give you the unit of analysis you're looking for.

Maxwell Perlman: Wizards is a super in touch company. MaRo has a blog, he has a podcast, and there are articles every single day on Daily MTG about everything. How much of that would you attribute to its tournament success (by

this I meant the success of the tournament / competitive scene) and how popular these GP's and PTQ's are becoming?

Zac Hill: Yeah, I think that a lot of the magic tournament scene stoked early websites like The Dojo, and early starcitygames.com, and MindRipper, and New Wave, and a lot of those sort of sites that got people in the habit of consuming Magic content on the daily. I think that informed the design of magicthegathering.com, which also produced weekly content, and then I think magicthegathering.com influenced Star City's sort of stage 2. And so I think it's kind of a cycle. I do think that competitive gaming heavily influenced the landscape of Daily MTG and the relationship we have with our customers. That said, I also think that an element of Magic's outreach, is because is a BMW. Its customers spend like \$400/year, or whatever the number is, and you want to have good customer service. You want to feel like you're talking to human beings. You want to feel like you're talking to other gamers. I think Magic is a zero-sum 1-on-1 competitive game, which is the way most Magic is played, also lends itself to kind of people that want to get a competitive edge.

One of the things that's fun about Magic, is your opponent does a thing to beat you, then you customize your deck, and then you beat him, that is exactly what internet content is very good at helping you do. I think a lot of the design conversations come largely from the individual perspectives of people like MaRo or like me when I wrote the development column, I just talking about this, but also because it gives us a vocabulary of interaction with the players to talk about the decisions we make in a way that makes you feel invested in the brand; and I think that is really powerful. It's also like a case where you give people enough information to have conversations about stuff without telling them really the whole, or even most of the story, so you don't lose out on you know trade secrets and things like that that are important.

So my perspective from when I was in Wizards, was that the content on the website, because you are getting just a window every single week, lags around 2 years behind reality in terms of how the thinking is. And I don't think that's intentional; don't think Wizard's is trying to manipulate players, I just think that it's like, you know, player's get a narrow window into the thought process of the company but that little goes a long way to establishing a rapport with your

players, and basically every game does this now. You know, whether it's via a forum community or some sort of interaction where you have mods, people from the company or whatever, that just have relationships with players to make them feel like all the time they are investing isn't just going down a hole. I think that's the big difference between the game industry, and specifically a game industry trying to design a community of players, versus other entertainment industries. Players are more high investment.

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Maxwell Perlman: When you were a player, and you were writing these articles all the time, why were you writing them?

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Zac Hill: ... It was important to me, as a professional player, for Memphis, where the Magic community was not large, to build my brand enough, to develop relationships with other players. ... Through my writing, I started to meet, you know this player, that player, I became friends with the St. Louis guys, it was easier to Q (qualify) for the Pro Tour with their team, then I became friends with Tim Aten, the Ohio guys, Cedric Phillips, that took my game up a little bit, then I befriended a lot of the Belgians and Dutch guys, and that took my game to a totally different level; and by that point, we were Top 8ing all kinds of Pro Tours and I got to know the really top tier players and improved myself. So I think the first step to that was establishing a community presence so I wasn't just some anonymous kid from the south, who was playing with basically no one. ... The money, the brand, the ability to improve my writing, and the ability to improve my game were probably the 4 reasons. ... If you're writing strategically about Magic, in front of an audience of 40,000 people, you don't want to look stupid; so you get a lot better at thinking analytically about gaming strategy and the environment and stuff.

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Zac Hill: I think the most important is a willingness to learn. You never know everything. The nature of a metagame means that if you were the best, you'd still

have to keep learning ... because you know it's like sharks are still nipping at you. And a willingness to learn also means an ability to divorce yourself from some sort of narrative you have about what being good at games means about you. You can't conflate your performance with your self-identity, because a) you're going to crash and burn and b) that externality is not going to allow you to focus as much as you need to do on what's actually happening right now; and you're going to stop learning, because you're going to confirmation bias yourself into oblivion. So I think the will to learn is one very important thing. ...

T11. Interview with Zvi Mowshowitz

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Maxwell Perlman: When you were playing Magic, which you don't do anymore, how would you have described your job to someone who has no idea what competitive gaming is?

Zvi Mowshowitz: Just to clarify, before I answer the question, I still do play, I occasionally do play Magic it's just not my job. So I would say your job as a Magic professional is you train, you do research, some mix of the two depending on how you want to think about it, between tournaments in order to figure out what decks or strategies you want to use, and to make yourself stronger and to better understand what your opponents are going to be doing, and what it and isn't possible and is good and bad. And then you fly around to tournaments, major events Pro Tours, Grand Prix, and so forth and you compete in them, and you try to do as well as possible, and you then supplement that by writing up what you've learned in articles, so that you can support yourself. And during all of this you have a team by your side, of other professionals, and you help each other through everything, and you share hotel rooms, and combine to collaborate on decks and figure out what everyone else is going to do and so forth.

Maxwell Perlman: So you were talking about teams, are you still part of a team now?

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yes, I am. I'm part of Team Star City (Games).

Maxwell Perlman: Oh okay, I wasn't sure if you still part of that team.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yes, so we are, I think, clearly the best team out there, at this point. We've been winning all the events and Top 8ing them all over the place. Yeah, we have a lot of the most dedicated players, a lot of the strongest players,

and we're more dedicated to innovation and keeping an open mind and working hard than our competitors, and we just have a lot of really, really amazing Magic minds right now.

Maxwell Perlman: So for Theros you guys were at the castle, I heard.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yes, I was so sorry to have to stay home for that.

Maxwell Perlman: You hear some of the craziest stories out of those teams. I forget who, but they were sitting in the kitchen making food, and they're like, "How about mono-blue devotion?"

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yes, and I hear that essentially, 5-15 after that they walked out with essentially the list.

Maxwell Perlman: The optimal, or semi-optimal list.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Right, I don't think it's a coincidence that the French list and the Star City list were very close, in that neither of the two of us had to change much since then. I think it's one of these cases where there's one underlying insight, which is "Let's do mono-blue devotion"; and once you have that insight, there really aren't that many cards to choose from. There are two double-blue cards that make any sense, there are 2 1-drops that make any sense, and a third one if you're crazy, which actually got into some of the decks.

Maxwell Perlman: And then there is a 3-drop.

Zvi Mowshowitz: You obviously want nightveil specter. And you obviously want Thassa and the bident.

Maxwell Perlman: And Master of Waves

Zvi Mowshowitz: And Master of Waves, and at that point, you don't have that many slots left in your deck. So you're arguing over 4 to 6, something like that, cards left and how many Nykthos' do you want in addition to your Mutavaults; and otherwise you're done. So it's very easy at that point. Some other decks

take a lot more refinement. So we played a Bant deck, in Portland, and that deck is entirely not obvious. If you were allowed to play more than 60 cards, you could shuffle up an 80 card version of that deck without feeling like there were cards that obviously didn't belong in it, very easily. You just wouldn't draw the good cards as often as you need to.

Maxwell Perlman: When you guys are all sitting around brewing for the next major thing, how would describe the experience of being on that team and doing all that for however long you prepare.

Zvi Mowshowitz: So it's a mix of exhilarating great times with great people and joking around, having fun, exploring and playing and seeing what happens, and learning, and it's some of the best experiences you'll ever have in anything but also with a lot of hard work and annoying drudgery. Because, well there are logistical annoyances, but other than that, being a professional gamer means being willing to set aside what's fun and what's exciting when you need to, and saying "Okay, these are the problems we have to solve, these are thing that are actually going to make a difference in terms of whether we win or lose, and so we're going to sit down and we're not going to stop until we find our answers." We're gonna look at this honestly, okay this deck that we love, that we want to be good, isn't very good, or this mirror matchup needs to be solved. So there have been many teams in the past, where the people who've succeeded are the ones that say "Okay, I'm not going to just going to rely on my actual talent, I'm not going to wait for my teammates to hand me a deck, I'm going to sit down and I'm going to solve the really hard problems that aren't fun to solve."

So for Venice, which I think is the best example of this, Justin Gary and I spent two weeks of our lives, on the internet, playing identical deck lists, or very close to identical deck lists, of Astral Slide against each other. And this was a MISERABLE experience. We were whining to each other the entire time. But at the end of it, we knew exactly what comes out, we knew exactly what comes in, we knew exactly how to play it, what cards mattered, what cards didn't, I won all of my (astral) slide mirrors, and it didn't feel close, at all. It felt like, "Oh, they don't know what to do, they just lose, because I know, and they don't. And I'm boarding right, and they're not." And the other players on our team didn't play Astral Slide because they weren't willing to spend those two weeks, and we

were. And they still would have had to spend 1 week to learn it, even if it's 2 weeks to solve it. And so we got really close and Osyp's (Lebedowicz) people found pacifism, we didn't pacifism, so I ended up 1 win short, and he won. Outcomes are totally based on how much you prepare. Every Pro Tour that I have lost, except 1, after the Pro Tour, I sit down and I say "What did I do wrong? What could I have done better, either in preparation, in terms of card selection, in terms of play, in terms of practicing different ways, in terms of scouting; you name it. And I always say, okay, this is something I could have done better, I should have known better, and I didn't, and it's my fault. It's entirely my fault."

Kuala Lumpur, the Lorwyn block draft, is the only tournament where I looked back at that tournament and I think "You know, I was doing better than Finkel consistently in our drafts, and he won the whole damn thing; and I don't know that the hell I did wrong". I went 3 and 3 and I was out, and I still don't know that the hell I did wrong. And in 50 Pro Tours, you're going to have one bad beat.

Maxwell Perlman: I mean 50, that's negligible.

Zvi Mowshowitz: The fact is that out of 50, I got 49 stories of how I screwed up. Starting with the first Pro Tour, which was taking the intentional draw in round 7 because you didn't realize 6 and 1 on day 2 wasn't good enough. Which is a very simple mistake to make, and I played really well, I don't think I made major play mistakes in my first Pro Tour, I was nervous as all hell, but I don't think it mattered much. I think I had a brilliant deck choice, in terms of exactly what I played, I mean who plays 3 Jackal Pups in their mono-red deck, and is clearly right by the way. Did you see that field, it was 40% red. But I took a draw in round 7, at 4 and 2, to make sure that I could make day 2, because everyone told me that X-3-1 was good enough, and then I had one match where too many (unknown word) came down on day 2, and I ended up 12th. The worst part was having teammates who kept egging me on and going "You can do it, you can do it, you can do it", but I could do math, and I knew I couldn't do it. I won all my rounds anyway, but it's like, I can't do this.

Unused content here.

Maxwell Perlman: You guys could all make a giant team, if you so desired.

Zvi Mowshowitz: It wouldn't be a good idea. We work together during the Pro Tour, so I had to stay home, because I had business to attend to, I'm a CEO now. But at the same time, during the weekend, I was free during the tournament itself. So, I'm sitting there watching coverage, because I would do that anyway, it's great, and I keep the list. (The list of what players are playing what deck, to help inform their teammates of who is playing what deck.) Because I'm better at it than some random guy, and often it won't get done if nobody steps up, so I'm keeping the scouting list of what everyone is playing, because I can relay it to the team members, and once people realize that we have me working on it, we reach out and (Team) ChannelFireball works with us, because why wouldn't we. We're all friends and you don't want too big a team. You want your team to be big enough that you can try out all of the things you need to try out and have good sounding boards and be able to get drafts started within your team so you get experience. What you don't want is a team of 30 people, which you would have if you combined Team ChannelFireball and (Team) Star City (Games). because now, you're 10% of the field (of players at the event) and adverse selection problems are frigging huge, and everyone knows what you are playing often before round 1, they play a card. If you mulligan (to swap out your original hand of X cards for a new hand of X-1 different cards), and then the game next to you starts, there is a good chance you know what your opponent is playing already. That's really bad. You can see like 3-4 matches, you've got a reasonable shot. "You want a mulligan?" "Hold on, let me see what land he plays ... Island, ok, I'm out."

Maxwell Perlman: So they way Rich Hagon explained it is that teams are just full of smart, skilled players, who happen to all be really close friends. And that, even if you guys weren't really close friends, you might team together. That the benefit of being on a team is so great versus practicing alone.

Zvi Mowshowitz: So when I joined my first team, it was called the Legion, we didn't meet together ever, we were just an online mailing list, and I never became friends with most of those people, I joined because one of them was friends with me and asked if I wanted to join. But my first real team was Mogg Squad, and when I joined Mogg Squad, I had been working for that Pro Tour with them, and I got to know Scott Johns and Alan Comer online that way but I

wasn't friends with the rest of them, I didn't even know them. But, by the time Mogg Squad broke up, I was some degree of friends with all of them. It's the same thing with Star City. I didn't know a lot of these players when I joined the team, I've been out for a while. But now I consider most of them my friends. And I expect that if I were to for some reason to end up on Channel (Fireball), that I'd end up friends with most people who aren't already my friends very quickly. It's very easy to be friends with other professional magic players. Some of the best players out there. Most of the best people out there. It's not just players.

Maxwell Perlman: You have so much in common.

Zvi Mowshowitz: I think there's that, but also I think that they're just good men. They're really good people. I think that one of the reasons Magic is successful is it's reached what I call the good equilibrium. Where if you don't cooperate and produce value, and help make sure everyone has a good time and a good experience, and really value the community, and creating value, then you won't be welcome. The teams won't want you. Nobody will want to test with you, nobody will give you their stuff, and you will suffer. Nick Eisel, a few years ago, was caught cheating and was suspended briefly and he tried to make it back, but he couldn't because he was radioactive. Because he had been an ass. And nobody wanted to touch him, it wasn't just the cheating. And similarly, we have these reactions when people become toxic and nobody will want to deal with them. And they may have Top 8-ed a Pro Tour once, but you never hear from them again because without a team, they've got nothing. And it's not like that out there way too often, where you don't have groups of people who have each other's back, who really wish each other well. And to have that happen not only in something where the stakes can be reasonably high and winning is really, really important, but also in a really competitive place, I don't think that's an accident. I think that competition is vital to good sportsmanship and good sportsmanship is vital to good men. So if you're not competing, if you don't have the idea that competition is good and striving to create and be the best, and to optimize everything that you see is good and right, then I don't think it's possible to get this kind of environment, these type of people in this kind of northern culture working in the ways that you want it to be.

Maxwell Perlman: I definitely agree, I am trying to, I don't have the time to go to tournaments as much as I would like, but I don't have a team to actually practice with so I go to a local store and college practice but it's not the same as I would imagine being, like you said you worked for 2 weeks play testing that one deck against that one deck over and over.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yes, that's the most extreme I've ever heard of anybody doing that. But that's block constructed, and in block constructed, you really know what's out there. You always ask after the block tournament "What's the one thing you missed? What are the two things you missed? What did you miss about their deck that you faced that you didn't expect to face to be in their deck and therefore what didn't you have, what were you missing?" Right, if you're any good. So in this case, we didn't know red would go big, we thought red would go small, whereas the red small deck's got killed and therefore we didn't have (inaudible). Because it didn't occur to us that we would need to deal with these problems on that level and we didn't find it, so we knew only an hour before the tournament, didn't realize how to adjust, made the one mistake that cost us, clearly what cost me. I mean there's other things that went wrong, but this would have been enough to put me on the top.

So, normally it's not 2 weeks. The conflicting story is (inaudible name) and Nikolai Herzog get to New York before the waters Pro Tour, before the rebel Pro Tour, and they spend 1 day there at my parents apartment, and I sit down at my dining room table I grew up at, and I teach them here is how waters works, here is how you play this deck against rebels, here is how you play this deck in the mirror, and actually that's it, there's only 2 matchups, and everything else is really easy, so don't worry about it. Basically. Because it was really like that, there was the promised land of forests, mountains, and swamps was the rest of the tournament.

I saw down, I played a cowardice deck at one point late in the tournament and I was thinking "What the hell is he doing?" But it's block, so you can figure it out. You just need 3 cards; you don't know what deck it is, you're like "Okay, what would I have out in that deck if I were building that deck? Okay, I know what he's doing." and that is exactly what he was doing. I tried it, and it wasn't good enough.

You'll often see that at a tournament. You'll have thought of something, but it wasn't good enough, and you'll see them playing exactly what you thought wasn't good enough, they just think it's good enough or they found one more card and they think it's good enough; but usually it's not. Occasionally they will have made it work and you'll go "Oh wow, I just missed that one card that means everything."

You've got to be willing to spend, now, the problem is they've condensed the schedule now, you get the set, and then you have a few weeks after that in which to draft the set enough to learn how to draft it properly, which is really hard (inaudible) from scratch, and figure out what constructed decks you want to play, and acquire all those cards, and get to the site and be ready. And because of that, you don't have 2 weeks to spend on that. And in some ways that's good, because it means you will never have to spend 2 weeks of your life doing that, I would prefer that nobody get to do that in some ways, but it also means there is an elegance gone, you can't just be exactly right. I've really missed that.

Maxwell Perlman: So the competitive scene has definitely changed a lot. (Skip to 24:35) So you've written the book *My Files*, and I was watch the interview about *My Files*, I actually haven't gotten a chance to read it, you describe a little bit at the beginning of the interview how Magic has changed your life, and how being in that professional scene and doing everything you did, can you kind of go into detail about what exactly it's done to your lifestyle, playing Magic, and how do you think it would be different had you not experienced everything you've experienced with Magic.

Zvi Mowshowitz: It's always a question. You never know what would have happened. But, Magic was the greatest school I've ever seen. I was in college, I just played Magic all the time, and I learned so much from that, and then occasionally I was forced to go to class and did not learn very much from that. I did stay in school, but maybe not. I don't know. (inaudible) has a point. So, I would say, first of all it taught me to stay disciplined, to really work at something, to be honest with yourself, to work, to improve, to evaluate, to be self-critical, to focus on what matters, not to get lost in results. It taught me the value of real competition, it showed me a community. And all of that's still chump change. It

taught me to be cool under fire, to really be able to handle pressure. Because once you've played a game for \$15,000 - \$20,000, very little phases you like it would have before. And you realize wait a minute, that didn't actually play any differently than normal, I was just playing Magic. And, I think, 2 years ago this guy challenged me to play for ante, to play for 2 Ice Age dual lands, 1 each, and I was such a nervous wreck. And now I'm playing in the semifinals of a Pro Tour and I know what I'm doing cold. If I lose, I lose because he outplayed me, or in this case stacked my deck, but I didn't know that for years so that's fine.

So, it teaches you how to think. You have to be able to think critically and really learn how to figure things out in a way that you can't other places. It also just brought me a community of people who I could talk to, I could work with, who respected me, who thought I was someone who mattered, who valued what I brought to the table. And I grew up with Magic, I was taught my life skills by other Magic players. With Magic, I got to see the world, I got a job, I got to learn how to write. If you read my files, you can see me learning how to write. I didn't understand it at first, but if you look at the beginning of the book, if you don't cringe, you don't know how to write; you do not understand what writing is, until you understand that, it starts out that I can't write at all, and by the end of the book, I'm decent. By the end of part 2, I'm good. But the amazing thing is that, at the time, I was being praised by everyone, Frank Kusumato: "You're great at this, you're a wonderful writer, please keep coming to me with material". And part of that was he was flattering me because I didn't get paid, but more than that, I generally was much better than most of the writing that was going on, because the standards were so low. And the standards are much higher now.

Maxwell Perlman: It was kind of the advent of the online community. The Dojo, they have a backup of all the stuff, and some of that writing, other than the fact that it's still used today, it's pretty mediocre writing wise, not content wise.

Zvi Mowshowitz: The writing is atrocious, let's not mince words, it's a few really good ones. You've still got your John Schulers and your other masters out there, who really knew what they were doing, but the vast majority of people back then who were writing were just whoever felt like writing, and they weren't edited, and they were just posted because they had interesting content, so it was just complete potluck. And my early stuff, I would think would get heavily edited and

sent back to me if I sent it to Cedrick today for editing at Star City. I wouldn't have it any other way. I would possibly try to get more editing, ever since Scott Johns stopped editing things, I can't get it anymore. It's really frustrating. A good writer knows that an editor is invaluable. A lot of great writers start running into a lot of trouble when they say "I'm George R.R Martin, and you are not going to tell me I have too many characters!"

Maxwell Perlman: So, I kind of describe any professional game, Magic, Street Fighter, StarCraft, whatever, it's a lifestyle right? Would you say that? Would you agree with that? And any thoughts on that?

Zvi Mowshowitz: It can be. I would say choosing to play that professionally as your focus is a lifestyle. Whether or not you have to do that in order to be successful, is an open question. Magic has definitely reached a stage where a lot of the most successful players are professionals but a lot of the more successful players also are professionals at something else, who occasionally will see there is a Pro Tour coming up and then take a vacation and go play Magic for a while. So you've got the Jon Finkel's of the world, the Kai Budde's, the Zvi Mowshowitz's, or they are doing something professionally related to Magic but not playing even; and on weekends, given they can, go to a Grand Prix, but they've learned over the years how to do this, how to play on that level. I don't know about a lot of other games. You can play multiple games professionally at once, a lot of the computer game professionals play more than one game for example. There's a big hullabaloo recently, because, League of Legends I believe, people said that you couldn't stream other games during their season, if you were a professional for them. And a lot of people were very mad about this because they are stopping them from building their personal brands and it's really bad. But they started versus a while ago, and until recently they had World of Warcraft and a lot of the best pros in those games were just Magic pros. So you had, I think, Ari Lax who occasionally would drop by a World of Warcraft tournament, and dominate. And from what I could tell, did very little work for World of Warcraft, compared to Magic; because being a collectible card game professional gamer, and knowing how to think about these things and understanding the dynamics, just transferred directly to a game that's just like Magic. He didn't need to learn the game, he already knew. I've had those situations before, I've tried other games to some extent, but it's never been that

great an opportunity. I didn't want to have to qualify for various things, I didn't have the time and so forth. I showed up to Battletech worlds once.

Maxwell Perlman: Which game?

Zvi Mowshowitz: Battletech

Maxwell Perlman: I don't know that game.

Zvi Mowshowitz: So that was, it's based on warhammer 40k. I think it was the 3rd, it was the 4th game by Richard Garfield, after Netrunner and Jihad, so then this was, it's a really interesting game because you get to play 2 cards a turn, it's got a lot of Magic-e elements, but it has sort of armor and then damage where if you put damage to that, it's permanent, and it has you can attack in groups, you can block in groups, but you have you have to be at least as fast as the other guy to block something, unless you're guarding it, but also, you can attack anything on the board. Can go after your lands, I can go after anything that isn't nailed down, including any creature that's slower than me. And I can go after your deck, and you win by milling (putting a card from the top of someone's deck into another zone, usually a graveyard. Players lose when their deck has no cards remaining.) And so there is always a question of "What are you focused on, what matters in this game?" And so it was one of these games where the better players did not lose. And I found it endlessly great to play and I would go to tournaments, across the river in New Jersey, and I would do well at that, and we would play every Saturday. We would hang out, and I would play in qualifiers; and then my friend (inaudible) Don Lim, as he is often called, came up with an idea for a mech-less deck. A deck with no creatures. And we worked on it, he had it in a pretty good spot when I got in there and started tinkering with it, but I made a few more changes to it. I played it at the world championships, and I lost in the quarterfinals to one of only a handful of people who could have possibly have beaten me, as far as I'm concerned. It was the reigning world champion, in the quarterfinals, with a deck that had zero dead cards in it and was hyper aggressive. It was like I'm playing Pros-Bloom for the first time and in a room full of dorky midrange decks, I run into sligh, and the guy knows exactly what I'm doing and plays perfectly. Because he actually had my deck, he says, I don't know if he had it right, what he said was "No one on the team was comfortable

with the math.” The way it worked was you used a card that redirected all their attacks to somewhere else, you go to choose where their attack with things, and you used this over and over and over again until you could Fireball them for 41 and hit their deck for enough to kill them. Basically (inaudible) over fire.

Maxwell Perlman: It’s like turbo-fog with fireball.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yeah, that card has one of the best quotes of all time, on a card. It’s “If brute force doesn’t solve your problem, you’re not using enough.” So he turned to his teammates at the end and like “You comfortable with the math? No, how about you? No, no, no alright I guess we’ll just play aggro” They played their wolf decks and he got to the semis, he didn’t win. And then, after that, we had a whole dinner together with the design team, we decided to ban one of my cards. It was fun, but you can’t let that happen again.

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Zvi Mowshowitz: Back then, bans weren’t immediate. Today, its ban today. Back then, it was banned every 2 weeks. Which led the wonderful story of how right before Grand Prix Vienna, they banned Memory Jar and errata’d Great Whale. So my opponents can play their Memory Jar deck, but I couldn’t play my Recur-Survival deck, after I bought a plane ticket to Vienna. That was fun.

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Zvi Mowshowitz: Just because you have a broken deck, does not mean you are going to be favored against every opponent.

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Maxwell Perlman: I don’t actually have a professional player’s definition. How would you define the word metagame?

Zvi Mowshowitz: Metagame is...

Maxwell Perlman: Because I know how I define it, but I'm not sure that's a widely accepted one.

Zvi Mowshowitz: I know what it is. I'm trying to figure out the words to just give a definition.

Maxwell Perlman: So the way I describe it is: the current state of the competitive scene, at a moment in time.

Zvi Mowshowitz: I don't think that's a good description, because it's too ambiguous. It could mean a lot of things that it doesn't mean. I know why you said that, and I don't think you're wrong in terms of, it has like 17 different interpretations. I think the metagame is the mixture of strategies being pursued by the players. How they matchup against each other, and interact with each other, and how you navigate that problem. The "competitive scene" is so broad. But, you can refer to metagaming anything. Metagaming is choosing what to do based on what you think other people are going to do, is a good definition.

Maxwell Perlman: Which is exactly what you did, that one time.

Zvi Mowshowitz: That's the ideal. The ideal way of metagaming is you figure out what everyone else is going to do, including what they do in reaction to what they expect other people to do, then, based on that, you figure out what you want to do.

Maxwell Perlman: Which is very convoluted thinking, not convoluted, complex.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Can be. Sometimes it pretty easy. You get a real good feel after a while. These days it's really well established kind of how the metagame will react to certain kinds of cards and kinds of strategies. You can know in advance what people are going to do if you understand what decks do what and how easy it is to find each one and what people are talking about. It's just that you don't have the entire picture, usually you don't have the whole picture.

Maxwell Perlman: So, you were an intern at WOTC (Wizards of the Coast) for a while, right? I'm not wrong in that?

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yes, 7 months at WOTC.

Maxwell Perlman: Let's say tomorrow, the standard metagame breaks in half. And someone finds this super busted tier 0 deck. It's not going to happen, but let's just say it does. How would you, as a player, react to that?

Zvi Mowshowitz: So, first of all, congratulations to the player who found that and the team that used it, that was really cool. You see it in action, you see it crush people, you revel in it, they shook things up, it's great. Then you ask what's the fallout - what's the interaction?

So the first question you ask is "Can you beat it?" Right. So, let's say Mono-Blue Devotion comes on to the scene, kicks everybody's ass. Dominates a tournament, like it dominated Dublin. Then you ask yourself, "Okay, can you beat it?" and the answer comes back "Of course". Of course you can beat it. I can play my decks full of Mistcutter Hydra's and Skylashers and other cards you really don't want to see when you are playing mono-blue, and I could beat you up. And then the question becomes "Okay, you can beat this deck, so what's the new equilibrium? How many players are gonna play this deck and how are other players gonna adapt their list and their choices, such that we now have another stable metagame." And if the deck's really good, you'll see a lot of it but it takes a lot.

The key problem comes when it can't be beat. So you can dominate mono-blue if you want to enough. This is not a choose your 60 cards and I'm still 55% against you situation. Compare that to caw-blade. This is an example of that happening. With caw-blade, the problem is this deck was everything to everyone and you just had so many powerful interactions and ways to get ahead and appealed to the best players that like to make a lot of choices. So between all those factors, there was nothing you could do. It was just gonna dominate, because you just couldn't beat it. You could literally design your deck choose your 60 cards and your 15 cards with nothing in mind but beating caw-blade, and I don't think you could break 60% (60% odds to win the matchup) once the deck

got refined. There is just nothing you could do. And if you could, you actually just wanted to go caw-blade with a twist. You just found the next level caw-blade, and so at that point, you react by not going to tournaments. You say “I could spend 2 weeks learning how to play caw-blade. Are we gonna do caw-on-caw violence here?” (makes caw sound). But you choose not to because you say “I have better things to do right now. I could catch up on my school work, or focus on my job, spend time with my family, read a good book, play some other games, draft.” You name it. There’s plenty of things to do in life, and Magic constructed is only one of them. So you do what people do at the end of caw-blade or the end of the affinity situation or when academy was running rampant, and you temporarily quit. And so when Wizards sees that, that’s when they panic. They say “Oh, these people have given up on beating the deck, they’re not interested anymore, and now they’re just not going to play until this rotates out or we ban something, or cards are printed that shake things up.” Now they have to do something. And if it gets that bad, you call for an emergency ban. Can’t wait, you need to kill Stoneforge Mystic, you need to kill Jace, the Mind Sculptor, you know, whatever. I think those are the easy cases where it destroys things, but you can fix it. The hard cases are where cards are not fun, or they’re fun to play, but they create interactions that aren’t fun that are subtle. And you can’t really do anything about it except print more cards, especially if they’re creatures.

So the contrast, I think, between True-Name Nemesis and Mental Misstep, in Legacy, is a very interesting one. Mental Misstep changed legacy for the much, much worse and it was obvious what was going on, which was now that you have access to Mental Misstep, you clearly have to play blue. Because now you just can’t get through in time to beat the blue decks. The blue decks can play this card which is fighting against each other, because Mental Misstep counters Mental Misstep and it counters Brainstorm, and it counters Portent and preordain, so it’s fine. Right, no matter what, it’s always fine. It’s a free action. If they’re black they have Duress, blah blah blah blah. It’s a free action. So the aggressive decks can no longer beat the blue decks, so the blue decks are just what everyone plays. And so everyone’s playing one color, this is horrendously bad. They are playing one color and these control decks we don’t like. It’s a spell that does something weird and esoteric, and costs 0. So it’s very easy to say, okay, we’re going to ban this.

Now compare it to True-Name Nemesis. It's a creature. It costs 3. It kills you very slowly, these games last a while. It's very hard to say, and also it's the card that people are buying your specific sealed product to extract, they paid hard earned money specifically to get that card, it's not like a common.

Maxwell Perlman: It's a supplemental product that you can't just pull out of a pack at random. It is a \$25 box.

Zvi Mowshowitz: It is literally a box that has this card and then it's like "Okay, who wants this commander deck? Cuz I don't. I'll take a dollar. Anyone want to play a dollar. 2 dollars? That would be awesome. " I don't actually know the prices, but

Maxwell Perlman: True-Name Nemesis plus Baleful Strix is the money.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Right. It's funny that Strix is already out. It's nice to have more of them. So what happens is, you've got this True-Name Nemesis, and a lot of people start playing 4 True-Name Nemesis, and the metagame clearly changes. What happens is you have this subtle interaction where, first of all everyone wants to play blue. Which means that everyone's back to playing blue. As if you didn't have enough reason to play blue already. And once you start playing double blue spells, then you want to play Force of Will, which means you need to play even more blue spells. So everyone is really playing blue. And then, to top that off, now, if you're playing a "fair" deck, you get killed by all these True-Name Nemesis', because it's good against "fair", it's amazing against "fair" decks. And so, once everyone is playing the card that are good against "fair" decks, now you have a situation where the metagame degenerates, and fair decks get denigrated, because just like the aggressive decks before, the fair decks can't really beat the unfair decks without playing their game and playing True-Name Nemesis. So what's left to you, you've got various decks playing True-Name Nemesis and various combo decks that ignore True-Name Nemesis. And this is the bad outcome, the problem being in that scenario, the card is perfectly beatable, you don't see that many in a Top 8, and it just came out, it's a creature, you just made it a marquee product, it's really hard to drop the hammer on this card. But you have to. They're gonna have to.

Maxwell Perlman: Given another 2 legacy opens, it will be gone. I think.

Zvi Mowshowitz: I'm not convinced. I see the history, and can we point to, aside from the start of an event or the start of a format where they banned Kird Ape and Juggernaut and so on, can we see a situation where a slow, a perfectly normal looking creature got the ban-hammer?

Maxwell Perlman: 'Tog? Maybe? But it's not Psychatog.

Zvi Mowshowitz: You can say Psychatog, but think about how, we had over a year of suffering at the of Psychatog, where Psychatog was doing these awful awful things to the metagame, just like I'm talking about here, before they were willing to pull the trigger on Psychatog, and that was a gold card. So, everyone was playing it anyway. Then, you've got Psychatog, you've got ... what else did the even ban?

Maxwell Perlman: Stoneforge Mystic in modern?

Zvi Mowshowitz: Sure, they banned Stoneforge Mystic, but Stoneforge Mystic isn't really a creature.

Maxwell Perlman: Okay, yeah. Bloodbraid Elf? Ah, not really a creature.

Zvi Mowshowitz: That took them 5 years and wasn't clearly even the right, it was probably the wrong card. Depending on the details. It's unclear. It certainly wasn't a bad idea to ban it versus not banning anything, it worked out, but. So the situation where things are getting worse and they have to get really bad. You don't want this meandering middle.

One of the weird thoughts about being at WOTC, was I tried to argue heavily not to print Damnation. Not only did I not win that argument, I made the problem so much worse, because I designer Urborg.

Maxwell Perlman: Knowing Damnation was a card.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Well, not at the time. It was once set earlier. There was a hole in the set: Urborg, Tomb of Yawgmoth. I said that “All lands in play are Swamps.” And they said cool, sure we’ll go with it. Sometimes a card just makes it as-is. Gets right on through (past development to printing). And then they put this Damnation card, and I just can’t convince them because they are looking for, “Okay, dominate the NFL. Show me you can’t be beat with your Damnation deck.” That wasn’t the argument I was making. I was making the argument that this card is going to make white obsolete. This card is going to make the metagame stupid, because you’re going to give the control decks tools they shouldn’t have and it’s not going to be fun. But that was too subtle. Right, you can’t carry the day on that versus this is a marquee card, this card is really exciting, people are going to think “Oh my god wow” and I’m thinking “Wow, this is going to screw up the color pie.” You just can’t win that argument in a world where the dual lands are good enough to play a bunch of colors anyway. The effect it actually had ... not that much ... it’s ugly. These things happen.

Maxwell Perlman: So as a developer, when you look at True-Name Nemesis, your developer brain versus your player brain, when you’re looking at True-Name Nemesis or some really degenerate thing: the player brain is “Can I beat it, yes or no? If no, just kind of stop?”

Zvi Mowshowitz: Well, the developer brain says “Is this fair? What should this cost? Is this fun? What will this do to the game? Who will play it? Who will play against it? Is this going to make things better or worse?” And I see True-Name Nemesis, and I think “Oh god, what the hell, no!” I don’t know the story, but I have to assume it’s one of these last minute changes.

Maxwell Perlman: Like (Umezawa’s) Jitte and stuff

Zvi Mowshowitz: Yeah, it’s like a Jitte, right. Where people come up with this card late, and then every player knows within an hour of it being opened and put into their sealed, every time a player knows after the first round with it in their sealed deck with it, the card is stupid busted. And a lot of players saw it, and 5 minutes later, 4 copies of it were proxied into their Legacy deck. Everybody just knew immediately. It was sort of like the people who were in charge of looking at

legacy didn't think about this. I give them too much credit to have thought about this, they must have just not thought about it.

Unused content here.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Legacy has a huge problem where people are poor, they are not made of money.

Unused content here.

Maxwell Perlman: When you were writing your articles, my files, and all that stuff, did you feel like you had any responsibility to the community or were you writing it because you wanted to write them. I mean obviously you enjoyed writing them, but what was your purpose because there is no benefit, like you weren't getting paid, like you said to write these original articles. Were you doing it for the sake of the community? Were you doing it because you just happen to enjoy the article writing?

Zvi Mowshowitz: I think that is a very narrow view of benefit. I'm an economist by training in many ways, but economists make the mistake of thinking that you're not getting anything out of it means you're not getting paid. Rather, not getting paid means you're not getting anything out of it, and I think that's just not true. What was I getting out of it? Well first of all, initially I was writing, I talked about the legion earlier, my original team, I wrote an email to my team and for whatever reason Frank Kusumato had been CC'd on the previous email that I was replying to. We didn't have a mailing list per-se. And Frank said "This is cool, can I post this?" and I said "Okay sure." And then it got really positive feedback, despite it having things like a list with 58 cards in it, because I was just typing it for the team. And so I started thinking "Well, what else would he post?" Because, well first of all, you get the joy of contributing to a community, the joy of getting feedback, if you post an idea on The Dojo, and it's good, people will tell you it's good, and if it's crappy, they'll tear it to shreds. Right, it's quite useful. And, you get credit, this was your idea, everyone knows it was your idea you can go out there and see people using your idea and go "Oh my god, I did that", and that's kind of cool. You get to name it; back then, it was a big deal. Nowadays,

everything is called mono-blue devotion, but ...

Maxwell Perlman: It could be Team SCG or Team Revolution devotion.

Zvi Mowshowitz: Well no. You would never be that lame.

Maxwell Perlman: Well you could call it something silly, if you liked.

Zvi Mowshowitz: It would be like, "What are you playing, what are you going to call this deck?" And a guy is like "I think we should call it Poseidon." No no no, that's not right. Call it the waves and we all do the wave at the tournament.

Maxwell Perlman: Every time someone wins with mono-blue devotion, they go like this (does the wave).

Zvi Mowshowitz: No, but you see the point right. Which is you designed the deck, you get to name the deck; and you get your place in Magic history that way. And you get to be known as the designer and now you get to make a name. And that's huge. You get to interact with the community, you get to make a name for yourself, and then over time you get to work with better and better people, people recognize you, it's easier to make friends, they help you because you helped them. What goes around comes around. And so it's very easy to justify and yes after a while we all had to make a living, you're gonna give away your secrets and you teach people how to play Magic better and beat you, yeah you better get paid for that, or it's not worth it. You can't pay the bills that way, but you don't want to take the narrow view. And these days the web is all about free, and people understand that there is plenty of stuff, the world has no shortage of stuff, you don't need to be constantly like "Where's my stuff? I can't do anything for you unless you give me stuff." There's more valuable things than stuff, for most people.

Maxwell Perlman: I'm on the MTG Salvation and Magic Reddit and every time I'll have an idea I'll just throw it up, and they are pretty cruel, but they are useful. They will tear the hell out of anything.

Zvi Mowshowitz: If I didn't need to keep things secret or worry about lawyers, or other similar problems, I would just throw everything up to the internet and see what they said. You can't run a business that way, but you can do Magic that way. And so that works until everyone is paying too much attention, you can't run your ideas on feature stuff once you get too famous.

Maxwell Perlman: You worked for Wizards and you know Wizards is a very public company. They have really good community outreach. MaRo has a blog, MaRo has a podcast, there's articles every single week from every designer/developer anybody. Would you say that is a major part of their success? Most companies, especially in the competitive gaming scene, they're not that in touch with their community.

Zvi Mowshowitz: I think absolutely yes. I think that, I can't be sure because as you know it's tough because you can't run a controlled experiment. So you don't know what would have happened to Magic had they not done that. Magic was not like any other game when they started doing that and so forth. But, when you do that, the community that you build, the communication, the trust that you engender is huge, but also it means that you get, by laying out what you're thinking, you get to tap the minds of the entire community in a way that they couldn't otherwise (do). It is a miracle that Wizards puts out the game that they do on the number of people they have. It is a miracle. These people are gods. It's ridiculous. I mean I was able to play with them, and I was able to beat them soundly most of the time that we played Magic, I was able to play their game and walk with them and contribute because I had been studying their materials for so long and talking to them for so long, that when I walked in, I wasn't just useless. In a normal industry, I would know nothing about that side of the game, and the first year I spent there I would be worse than useless. Because of them, I was able to help the game, right from the get-go. Not as much as the best, by any means, but I was a positive on day 1. Some would say I was left in the farm system for way too long, but I was a positive on day 1.

But also, from the beginning, they tell you what they think. You get their ideas, get their feedback, get their predictions, and a lot of these people are really good, you could plug a lot of these people into Wizards today and they would be fine, again from day 1. So, it's huge for them and also, I've learned this a lot from

MetaMed, explaining your reasoning is huge. Being forced to explain your reasoning is huge. So the fact that when MaRo does something, he knows he is going to write a column about it someday, he has to explain it, he has to put it into words. He has to have a rule a principle to go by, means that everything they do is consistent, everything they do is on principles. And then, when they break those rules, they ask themselves why and they update those principles. And they make sure updating those principles is a good idea and they know why they did it. And so on, and that's really important. Because it's very easy to get lost in needless complexity and arbitrariness if you don't have to check on that. And having to tell your public, your customers, why you are doing the thing you are doing is a great way to stop that from happening.

Maxwell Perlman: So one real last question. Let's say you are designing a game, you are the game designer. And you want it to be a competitive game, similar to Magic, not necessarily a card game, but has a Pro Tour, has a ranking system, has prize support, what would you say are, I don't know, an arbitrary number like 3, qualities that you or things you would do to make sure your game thrives in that way. Because, you've written articles, you've been a developer, you've played, you were so involved in the community, you know what's helping gaming and what is not.

Zvi Mowshowitz: My answer would be: first of all, people gotta want to play your game. You've got to make the game fun and interesting. If the players don't want to be playing your game, sure some of them will show up and take your money, but it will do you no good. So there's no point in that. Versus had a problem where they had collectors and they had pros, but nobody was just randomly "I like to play this game, it's fun" and I helped develop the alpha for that game, I was responsible for putting the cards face-down to for the resources and the face-up to form the plots, among other revisions, and I broke the sentinel thing 4 times in a row. The interesting thing about Versus is that it is an intellectual exercise that allows you to differentiate between players in important senses and has cool Marvel IP, which everyone loves, but it was never a fun game. Interesting things didn't happen. And without a fun game you're dead. And they never appreciated that fully, I don't think. They never shook things up. Magic is a really fun game. A uniquely fun game. And the successful game that people play professionally, in terms of computer games, they are all games that are wildly

successful before they have professional leagues. You don't get this narrow game that is interesting for a few experts and then pump it up by throwing a bunch of prize money at it. No. You have people playing chess, because chess is awesome. You have people playing Magic, because Magic is awesome. You try to throw a bunch of money at Epic, you get an epic fail, because nobody wants to play Epic. It is a mathematical exercise designed to differentiate good players from bad players, and that's not exciting. That's number 1.

Number 2: I think you need to make sure that your offer is exciting enough to be worthwhile, in terms of the prize support really matters, the structure really matters, you have to make sure people can play this game without giving up their other games. You need to make sure that they can come to the tournaments and compete for the big prizes, and win the big prizes, in a reasonable amount of time, with a reasonable amount of effort, and the prizes are big enough that it's worth going for. This Versus did correctly. World of Warcraft did this correctly enough by itself, it's just the game wasn't interesting.

Number 3 is that you've gotta have, if you consider part 1 not just being fun but "make the game popular with casual players" because it's fun for casual players and players of all skill levels want to play the game, and then number 3 is the game has to have the fresh and new and be skill testing via the fresh and new. It can't be static. A game that doesn't change is no fun. And more than that though, a game where you just go through the same motions all the time, even if the cards change, is no fun. You can't feel like you've done this before, or you're dead. But mostly what is professional gaming about, it's about: you want people to say "You are going to give me money to play that? I wanted to play that anyway!" ...

Japanese Interview Transcripts without Translation

T12. Interview with Holon

1) ゲームなどに詳しくないひとたちにあなたの職業・趣味を説明するとしたらどう説明しますか？

将棋やチェスのプロのようなもの、しかし収入は日本における BJ リーグのような、それだけで生活していけるほどはない。と説明します。(BJ リーグの選手は他に仕事をしながらバスケットをしている人が多いです。)

2) Starcraft2 などのゲームはなぜこんなにも人気だと思いますか？

多くの方が Blizzard ならば質が良いゲームを作る上に、公平なゲームバランスを作るための努力を発売後も長年に渡り続け、トーナメントやイベントのサポートを行い、更にそれが成功すると期待したからだと考えています。私はそう思っていました。

3) あなたがプロゲーマーになった理由などはありますか？

CounterStrike1.6 の WCG2003 日本予選の動画を見て、自分もこの舞台に立ちたいと思ったからです。またゲームが好きだったというのもあります。

4) どうやってプロになりましたか？特訓ですか？

プロを自称するチームへの所属、もしくは個人で獲得したスポンサーからの物質的、金銭的サポートを持ってしてプロであると自認していました。そのためそういったチームの加入を目指したり、スポンサーを獲得するための行動をしました。

5) 沢山のジャンルのなかでなぜ RTS でしょうか？

ジャンル自体に拘りはありません。SC2 をプレイする以前は CS1.6 を 6 年ほどプレイしていき、HoN や WoW の Arena もプレイしていました。SC2 が発売された時に SC2 が e-Sports と呼ばれるゲームの中で最も流行るだろうと考えたから SC2 を選びました。

6) 他にもプレイしているゲームはありますか？

今プレイしているゲームは FF14、WoT、HeathStone です。

7) 「メタゲーム」という単語がありますが、あなたはどのように説明しますか？

戦略の駆け引きと表現します。

8) もしもスキルのない人達がトップになれたとしたら(裏ワザなどで)開発者達はどうすべきですか？

そのゲームが competitive game でありたいならば、スキルのある人達が勝てるように修正すべきです。ただし、その裏ワザを見つけるのも一つのスキルであると考えます。その裏ワザ一つで本当にトップになれるのかどうか慎重に検討すべきだと思います。

9) 現在の賞金のサポートについてどう思いますか？(日本でもアメリカでも)皆さんは現状に満足しているのでしょうか？もしもっとサポートが増えるとしたらこういうゲームのシーンはもっと活発になるとおもいますか？

賞金が増えれば増えるほど活発になりやすいと思います。絶対になるかどうかはわかりません。そして、活発になればなるほど賞金を目指す人が増えます。そうすると賞金を奪い合う人数が増えるため、全員が賞金に満足することは来ないのではないのでしょうか。

10) チームに参加しているそうですがどれほどの頻度で練習していますか？

つい最近チームを脱退しました。最後に大会に参加した時は1日3~4時間練習していました。最も多い時期では1日6~8時間練習していました。

11) ゲームやゲーマーについての記事などは書いたことはありますか？

あります。blogを持っています。

12) あなたはコミュニティのなかでは自分はどれほどアクティブだと思いますか？わりと責任を感じてますか？

自分はアクティブな方だと思います。何か起こった時に積極的に意見を出していました。意見を出すからには責任を感じます。

13) コミュニティとプロゲーマー・上位プレイヤーの間に隔たりを感じますか？

感じる事もあります。特にゲームバランスや戦略については隔たりが大きいと感じますが、これは当然のことだと思います。

14) いわゆるプロや上位になる前に絶対に読んでおいたほうがいい書籍などはありますか？

特にありません。強いていうならば、語学を勉強すると有利です。また、自分と同じゲームプレイしている強い人がどのようにゲームに取り組んでいるのかを調べると良いでしょう。

15) あなたは最初からこういったゲームには本気でしたか？それとも最初のうちはわりと勝ち負け気にせずに遊んでましたか？

私はオフラインのトーナメントに参加するために CS1.6 を始めたので最初から上手くなることを目標にゲームをプレイしていました。

16) Starcraft 2 などはいわゆる「competitive game」、つまり競争的なゲームの一つだと思います。競争的なゲームであるために絶対に必要だと思うゲームの特徴を3つ挙げるとするのならなんですか？

1.ゲームバランスが出来るだけ公平であること。2.ゲームのスキルを伸ばすことが勝利へつながること。3.ゲームの知識を深めることが勝利へつながること。以上の3つです。

T13. Interview with kurOa

1) ゲームなどに詳しくないひとたちにあなたの職業・趣味を説明するとしたらどう説明しますか？

ゲームのことを趣味として語る時の話ですかね。

もし説明するとするならば私はネットでの対戦ゲームが趣味で、それは Real Time Strategy (RTS)と呼ばれるものであり、将棋、チェス、囲碁、などの戦略ゲームのターンをなくしたものであり、いわゆる戦争ゲームである。内容としては戦闘から戦術、兵站を含めた戦争の要素を取り入れ、対戦相手を制圧することを目的とするゲームと説明しますかね。

2) それでは Starcraft, LOL, Dota2 など沢山のプレイヤーに人気ですが、なぜこんなにも人気だと思いますか？

それぞれジャンルも制作会社も違うので理由は異なってきますし一括りにするのはなにか違和感を覚えますが、

あえて言うならば sc2 は blizzard のブランド力と sc1 のブランド力 LoL は Riot のマーケティング力、Dota2 は Dota1 のブランド力ですかね。そもそもそのゲーム自体が革新的で人が集まったものというのはいまありません。今こうしてみると、どれもこれも前作を踏襲、色濃く反映しています。その上でのゲーム以外の土俵が優秀だったということです。各社のマーケティング力などはネットなどで一回調べてください。

3) ネットで知ったのですが kurOa さんは Team oGaming でプレイをしていらっしゃるのですね。プロのゲーマーになった理由などはありますか？

oG での活動はオーナーの変更と共に停止しました。それ自分ではプロのゲーマーといえるほどのものではなかったかなと思っています。

実際にチームに入った経緯はそのオーナーの熱烈なアプローチがあったからですね。特にチームなどには興味がなかったのだからかなり適当にあしらってはいたのですが、どうしても君が欲しいのだという熱意に折れましたね。そしてそのまま意気投合してチームに所属しました。オーナーが変わった今ではチームに所属する意味を見出せなかったんで辞めたということです

4) そうなんですね。そのチームに所属していた頃は練習などやってたのでしょうか？
どういったスケジュールで練習してましたか？

練習は変わらず個人での練習でしたね。

そもそも他のチームメンバーとの時間差がありすぎてなかなか会いづらいのとやはり sc2 はラダーをまわしているだけである程度練習になってしまうということですね。もちろん、韓国のプロレベルになってくるとラダーでも難しいですが。

5) やはり韓国のプロはレベルが高いんですね。そのレベルに達するためにはひたすら練習しかないんですかね？韓国の人たちを相手に特訓とかするのでしょうか？

韓国のプロのレベルは間違いなく高いですね。

達するためですか…もちろん練習をひたすらするしかないというのはどこの国の方も同じだとは思いますが。昔であれば韓国サーバーで練習するのがよかったのですが、最近は韓国プロが自分たちのコミュニティだけで練習するようになってしまいました。つまりラダーを使わなくなったということです。なのでそれだけではまだ差が埋まりません。

もし韓国プロと同等に渡り合いたいなら自分もそのコミュニティの中に入っていきほかないでしょう。

6) こういったゲームの賞金などのサポートについてはどう思いますか？どれほど儲かるものなのかは知りませんが、皆さんはわりと満足しているのでしょうか？もしもっと賞金が増えたりしたらもっとゲームのシーンが活発になるのでしょうか？日本のコミュニティ内の話だとどうでしょう？

日本の大会での賞金の年総額は大体多くて20万。

新卒の月給が20万程度の時代です。

アルバイトでも10万くらいは軽く稼げます。

競技的にプレイしたいと考える人にとっては少ないといえますね。

もちろん賞金が増えれば野心家も増えるとは思いますが。しかしそもそも日本では RTS をプレイする人口自体が非常に少ないです。この土台を拡大するために日本のコミュニティでは様々な人たちが試行錯誤を果たしました。しかし今のところ賞金を拡大するのがいいのか何がいいのか全くわからないといった状況ですね。

7) 「メタゲーム」という単語がありますが、説明するとしたらどう説明しますか？

メタゲームですか…恥ずかしながら私もあまりちゃんとは理解していませんが、あえて言うならゲームにおけるそのときの風潮というものと理解しているのでそんなことを説明するかと思います。

8) もしもスキルがそれほどない人達でもトップにいけるようになったとしたら(例えば新たな戦い方や裏ワザがみつかったなど)開発者達はどう反応すればよいと思いますか？

そんなことがある場合はパッチで変更を加えますね。sc2においてそれまでのことはあまりありませんでしたがしかし似たような状況が起きた場合やはりパッチで変更ですね！

9) ゲームやプレイヤーについての何らかの記事などは書いたことはありますか？
まだコンテンツは充実していませんがこんな wiki を作り始めてますよ

<http://wiki.livedoor.jp/kuroasc2/>

10) あなたはコミュニティのなかでは自分はどれほどアクティブだと思いますか？わりと責任を感じてますか？ここで言うコミュニティとは日本、海外どちらでもよいです日本では割とアクティブなほうだと思いますし年長者でもあるのである程度責任というのかな？若い人がもっと増えるようなことができればなどは思ってますよ。実際にできてるかどうかは別として。

11) コミュニティとゲーマーの間に隔たりを感じますか？

トップ層と日本のコミュニティは割りと近い関係にあると思いますよ。配信をする人が多いのがありますしその中でコミュニティの人たちがトップ層のプレイヤーとかかわることは多いですね。

12) いわゆるプロや上位プレイヤーを目指す人が読むべき sc 2 の書籍などはありますか？

日本にはないですね・・・孫子とか読むとかですかね？笑

13) あなたは RTS ゲームなど遊び始めた頃からすでに上を目指していましたか？それとも最初のうちは勝ち負け気にせずに遊んでましたか？

上は目指さずに気にせず遊んでましたね。いわゆる1v1以外のチームだとかそういったところですね。

そのうち日本人プレイヤーで1v1を教えてくれる人が出てきてその人にしごかれながら1v1うまくなつてった感じはありますね。

14) StarCraft 2 はいわゆる「competitive game」、つまり競争的なゲームの一つだと思います。競争的なゲームであるために絶対に必要だと思うゲームの特徴を3つ挙げるとするのならなんですか？

対戦相手、ゲームバランス、産業化の土台
ですかね

15) RTS ゲームの他に好きで遊んでるゲームとかはありますか？
LoL ですねー他は特にはないです

T14. Interview with nazomen

1) ゲームなどに詳しくないひとたちにあなたの職業・趣味を説明するとしたらどう説明しますか？

StarCraft2 の説明ということですよ？ それでしたら「リアルタイムで動かす囲碁や将棋」と表現してます。他にも「自分が指揮官の立場になり、お金を集めて建物を建て、兵隊を作って敵を倒す」という表現も使っています。ですが基本的に口頭で説明してもほぼ理解してもらえないので動画を見せることが多いです。それが出来ない場合はあまり細かく説明はしませんね。

2) こういった RTS ゲームなどはなぜこんなに人気があると思いますか？

日本では人気がないですけど海外では一大ジャンルとして扱われるぐらいですよ。いくつか理由が挙げられますが日本では忌避されやすい部分として

1. PC でゲームをする

2. 人同士が本気で対戦する

これらへの抵抗が比較的小さいというのがあってと思います。ここに加えて

StarCraft1,2 などは E-sports としてプレイするだけでなく観戦も楽しめるというのは大きな要因だと思います。観戦に関するものとして

http://jeffhuang.com/Final_StarcraftSpectator_CHI11.pdf

こういった論文もありますね。

3) あなたがプロゲーマーになった理由やきっかけはありますか？

自分がプロになっていたという自覚はほとんどないですね w 給与も発生していなかったのでもほとんどチーム自体が自称という感じでした。(スポンサーのついてる大きなチーム以外では給与があるところはほぼないと思います)

SC2 の場合プロとアマの違いは「プロゲーミングチーム」に所属しているかどうかだと思っています。そのチームに大きな差があるので待遇にも差がある感じですが、自分が入った理由はチームのマネージャーに誘われたからです。

ただ日本人担当のマネージャーを探してみたいで選手としてではなくマネージャーとして入りました。入る瞬間まで自分も選手として入るものと勘違いしてましたけど w そこからは選手兼マネージャーという感じになりました。

4) チームに参加していると言いましたが、スケジュールとかはどうでしたか？どれほどの頻度で練習とかしてましたか？

基本的にチームとして何かをするというのはほとんどなかったですね。クラン戦を 1,2 回と全体での交流戦みたいなのを 2,3 回しましたけど。他の国の選手とは時差やサ

ーバーの関係で難しかったのと SC2 は一人で練習するのが楽なゲームでもあるので。

5) 現在の賞金のサポートについてどう思いますか？(日本でもアメリカでも)現状で皆さんは満足しているのでしょうか？もっとサポートがもらえたらゲームのシーンは更に活発になりますか？

日本の賞金に関しては完全にお小遣いレベルですね。完全にシーンとして小さすぎるので賞金があるだけで嬉しいとなっているのが日本の現状ですね。賞金が増えたら活発になる可能性はなくはないと思いますけど投資する人がまずいないと思います。日本の SC2 シーンが大きくなれば投資しようとする人がいたとしても現状では大きくなりようがなく、そして大きくなれば人が一気に増えることもないという状況です。なのでその辺りに関しては鶏が先か卵が先かという話になってしまいますね。

6) 「メタゲーム」という単語がありますが、あなたはどのように説明しますか？

StarCraft における「メタゲーム」とは上級者のゲーム、その中でも更に(トップ、もしくはトップクラスの)プロ同士のゲームを「メタゲーム」といいます。

7) もしも新たな裏ワザや戦い方が発覚してスキルがそれほどないひとたちがトップにいけるようになったとしたら、開発者達はどのように反応すればいいのでしょうか？

StarCraft においてはプロたちが新しい戦い方に対して対応できるかどうかをしばらく観察されます。その後プレイヤーのスキルでは対処できないと判断された場合はパッチによって修正されます。修正案を提示し、テストが行われ結果が良好であれば適用されます。

裏技やバグ技であれば基本的にすぐに修正されますね。ただ何が仕様で何がバグなのかはゲームバランスやゲーム自体が面白くなるかで変わるみたいですが。SC2 では修正されることが多く SC1 ではそのままにされていることが多かったですね。

8) こういったゲームやゲーマーについての記事などは書いたことはありますか？

主にゲームの内容に関してですけど SC2 ではブログをメインに書いてますね。

<http://ynoheya.blog34.fc2.com>

SC1 でしたら HP と <http://starcraft.web.fc2.com> ニコニコ動画に動画の up もしています。

9) あなたはコミュニティのなかでは自分はどれほどアクティブだと思いますか？わりと責任を感じてますか？

かなりアクティブなほうだと思います。ここ数ヶ月は忙しくてやれていることは少ないですがこれまで、プレイヤー、大会運営、実況解説、配信とやれることは一通りしてきていると思います。他にもクランリーダーにもなっていますし初心者への練習会などもしています。

よくもわるくも日本の SC プレイヤーへ影響を与えやすい形になっていると思っています。なのでそれに伴って色々と責任が生じていると思います。

10) コミュニティとゲーマーの間に隔たりを感じたりはしますか？

日本に限って言えばかなり近いと思います。配信をしているほとんどの人がコミュニティサイトで告知を出しながらという体をとっているのです。海外でも TeamLiquid などでは似たような形ですね。ゲーマーがコミュニティを作ってる感じです。

11) SC2 などのトップを目指したい人とかが読んでおくべき書籍とかはありますか？

書籍では特になくと思います。あえて言うなら一流の競技者などの教訓が書かれているようなものでしょうか。ゲームへの直接的なものではなく心構えや行動指針を参考にするために見る感じです。SC2 に関する直接的な知識に関しては書籍ではなくネットからですね。

12) nazomen さんは RTS ゲームとか始めた頃から既に上を目指していましたか？それとも最初のうちは勝ち負け気にせずに遊んでましたか？

基本的には上達しようとしてやっていたと思います。できる限り勝ちたいと思ってやってきましたけど環境がちょっと特殊でした。(SC1 の日本語版でプレイヤーが極端に少ない状況で 1 年続けてました。)

13) 他にプレイしていた(現在プレイしている)ゲームはありますか？

PC ゲームではないですね。コンシューマでしたら今やっているのは「新コロナのアトリエ」ですね。ただ時間があまりとれていないので週に 1,2 回といったペースですけど。

14) StarCraft はいわゆる「competitive game」つまり競争的なゲームの一つだと想いますが、競争的なゲームであるために絶対に必要だと思うゲームの特徴を 3 つ挙げるとするのならなんですか？

「勝利条件が存在する」「勝利条件が明確である」「勝利を目指すための機会が平等である」

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