Uniquely Ruthless

The Espionage Metagame of EVE Online

GDC 10

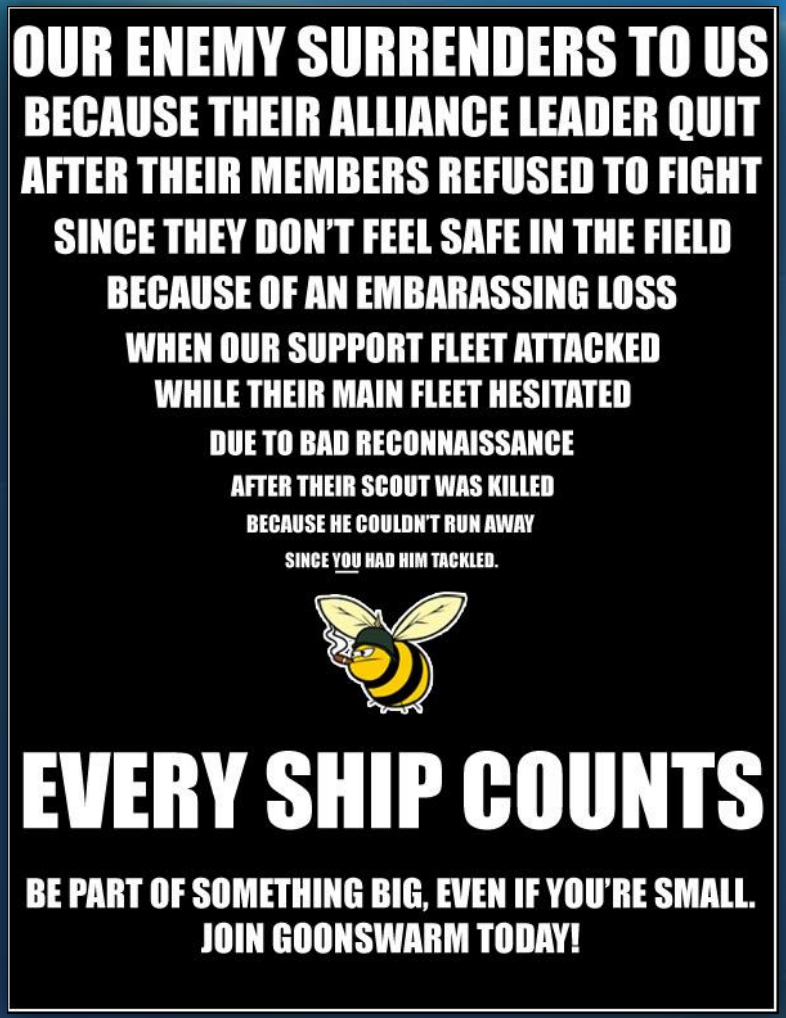
The Mittani

A Brief Introduction

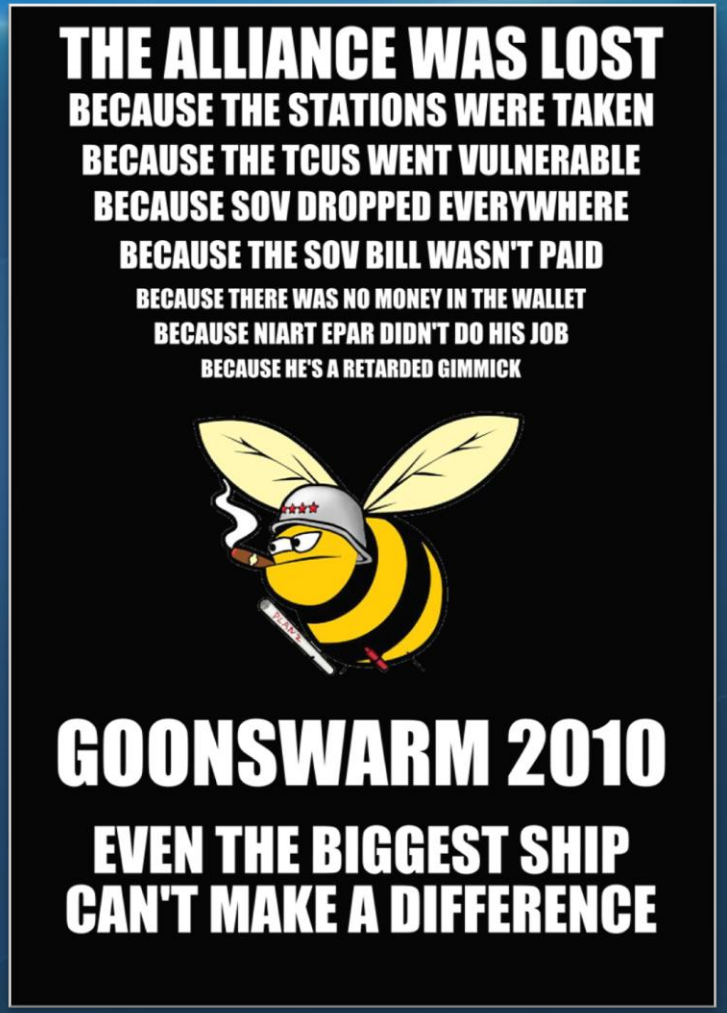
- What is a Metagame?

- Purpose of Talk:
  - Description of the hidden aspects of EVE gameplay
  - Analyze EVE's metagame for application in other environments
  - Convince attending devs to create more games with vibrant espionage gameplay

SOLODRAKBANSOLODRAKBANSO [LODRA]



BEFORE



AFTER

Overview

- History of Espionage in Multiplayer Games
- Pros and Cons of an Espionage Metagame
- Three Key Attributes of an Espionage Metagame
- Four Types of Espionage Gameplay

The Birth of Espionage in MMOs

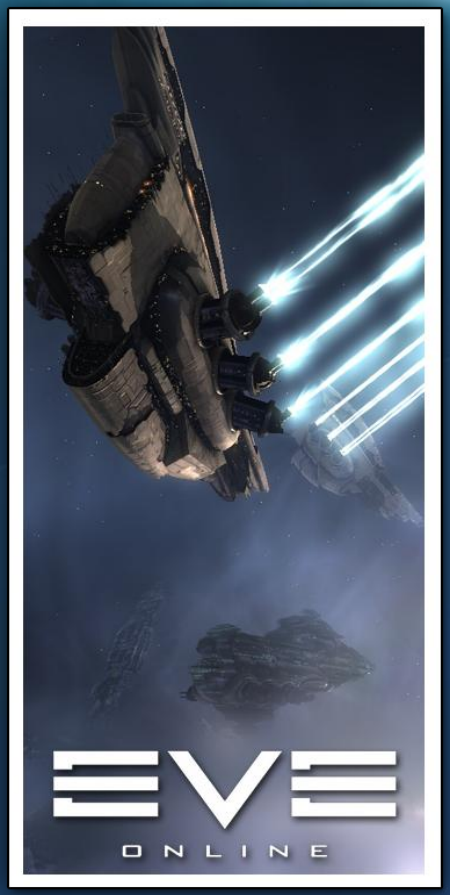
- The Dark Ages:
  - Lootable PK MUDs - DartMUD
  - Camera Code/Breeze Code on MUSHs
- Early PvP MMOs:

Ultima Online

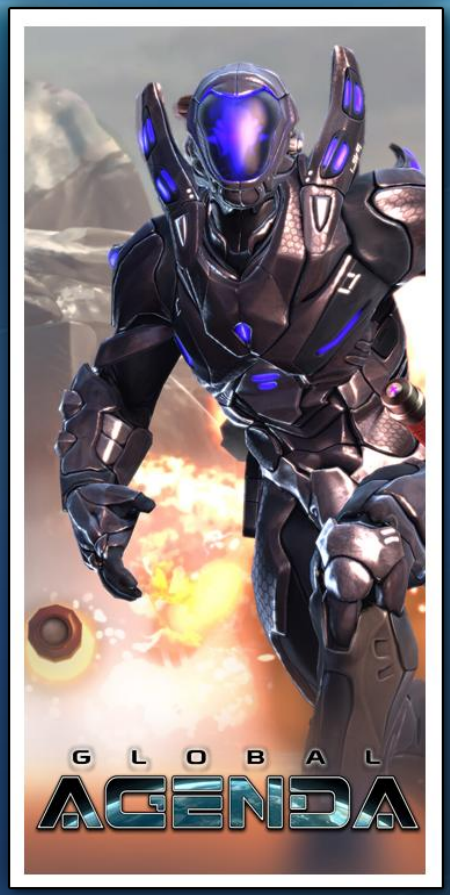
Everquest

Shadowbane

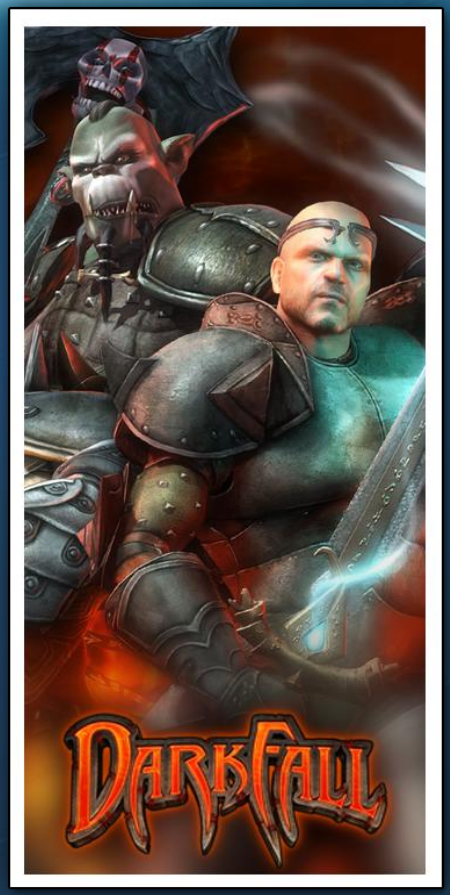
Modern MMOs Featuring Espionage



EVE Online



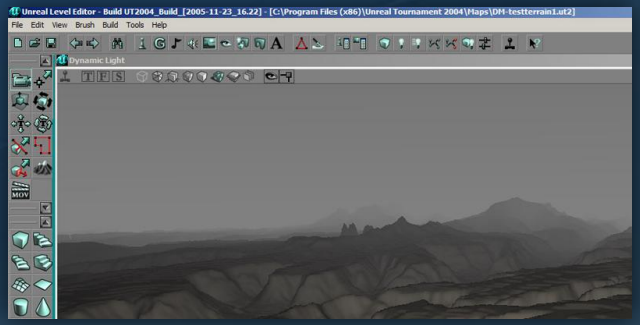
Global Agenda



Darkfall

Benefits of an Espionage Metagame

- Free Media Coverage, a dramatic Recruiting Tool
- Players can use cunning as an in-game skill
- Espionage is the ultimate in UGC



Hazards of an Espionage Metagame

- Impact of espionage is completely unpredictable, outside of Dev control
- Offends sense of ‘fair play’
- Customers dislike losing or being cheated

Three Key Attributes of an Espionage Metagame

- Player-Created Factions
- Significant Consequences and Risk of Loss
- Supportive Mechanics & Dev Environment

Factions Across Modern MMOs

FIXED FACTIONS:

PLAYER-CREATED FACTIONS:

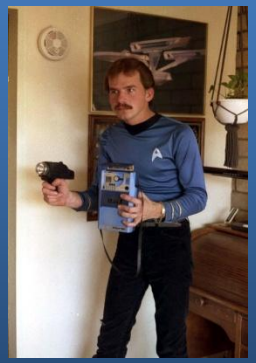
Fixed Factions Examples

Alliance VS Horde

Order VS Destruction

Rebels VS Empire

Federation VS Klingons



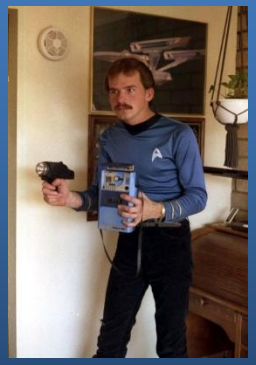
Key 1: Player-Created Factions

- Espionage requires a personal commitment which is meaningless without player engagement in a conflict
- Most MMOs force players into fixed factions, limiting the level of player engagement

GoonSwarm VS Band of Brothers

Federation VS Klingons

(roleplayers)



(roleplayers)

Involvement in the Factions

- The more personal the struggle, the more intense the espionage gameplay becomes

“The final days of The Great War”

Key 2: Consequences and Risk of Loss

- Espionage cannot exist in an arena where nothing is risked

"Guys guys MY DKP~!!!"

$4000 down the drain

- Convertible Currency and RMT

Key 3: Supportive Mechanics & Dev Environment

- Must provide opportunity for espionage gameplay in the client itself
- Must have ‘clean’ dev environment with rigorous policing against corruption
- Laissez-Faire attitude towards fates of players

Two Additional Factors

- Shardless Environments
  - Not a requirement for espionage
  - Increases the risk of loss and player engagement
  - “Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide”
- Avoid Playerbase Segregation
  - MMOs with most vibrant espionage lack a level-based system: EVE, UO,Darkfall
  - Levelling reduces the relevant population for player factions.
  - New players can contribute immediately in non-level-based games, helping factions grow.

Four Types of Espionage Gameplay

Intelligence Gathering

Sabotage

Counterintelligence

Fraud

Intelligence Gathering

- Agents gather information to remove or create an element of surprise

Success Versus Failure

Intelligence Gathering

- Allows ‘Pure Meta’ gameplay, entirely separate from game client

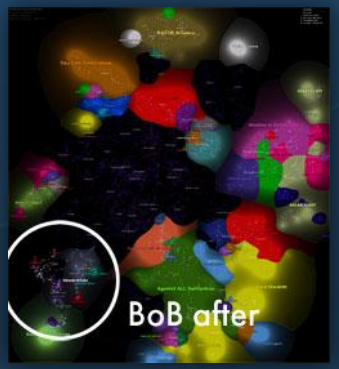
- Vibrant external metagame has several benefits:
  - Reduces game load
  - Increases player involvement

Intelligence Gathering

- Classic Divide: Human vs Signals Intelligence
- Player agents vs forum hackers
- Competitive Espionage in the Alliance Tournament

Sabotage

- Dramatic, Slash-and-Burn Events
- Almost inevitably exposes an agent
- Attracts the most media coverage



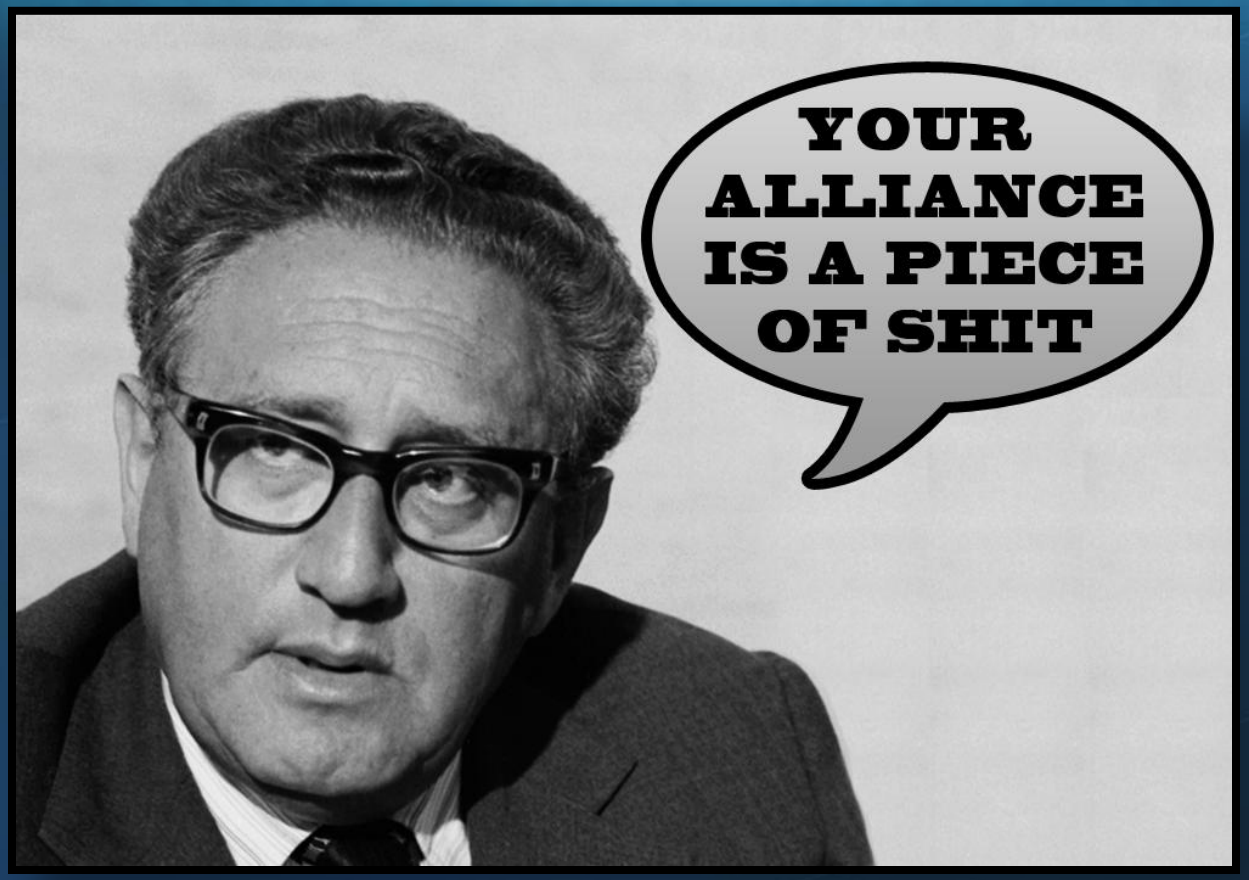
Theft

Stealing Corporation/Alliance Assets

Strategic Sabotage

Altering the Course of a War

Diplomatic Sabotage



Diplomatic Manipulations

Free Academion

Obliterating an Entire Alliance

~

~

Booya~

Counterintelligence

- Spy vs Spy

- Spyhunting vs Witch-Hunting
  - When at risk, Agents will always try to provoke a witch-hunt
  - Without technical knowledge, spyhunting is just torches and pitchforks

Counterintelligence

- Bleeding Edge of the Metagame
  - Most Secretive: techniques can be countered if exposed
  - Most Resource-Intensive: requires coders with forensics knowledge, massive time investment
  - Most frustrating: Never achieves 100% clarity

Counterintelligence

- Methods:
  - Collecting IP Addresses & Geolocation
  - Timestamps: Forums and Teamspeak
  - Signature Bugs

  - Honeypots

Fraud

- Not espionage, strictly speaking
  - Uses identical skillset
  - Nationalistic vs Narcissistic Agents

- Scamming:
  - Types of Scams
    - Item Trade Scams
    - Recruitment Scams
    - “I’m Quitting EVE, Send Me Isk”

Fraud

- Financial Shenanigans
  - Ponzi Schemes
  - “Legitimate” Banks gone bad

- Fraud in EVE, both in scams and finance, closely mirrors techniques used in the real world.

Conclusion

- Make more games featuring espionage
- Formula applies to many possible settings
- FFFF