

Sporadic-Play Game Update

The Latest Developments in Games for Busy People

Bryan Cash

Jeremy Gibson

GDC Online

Game Developers Conference® Online
October 5-8, 2010 | Austin, TX

Visit www.GDCOnline.com for more information

Introduction Who We Are

 **Bryan Cash**
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2008 Independent Games Festival
Gleemie Award Winner



Introduction

Sporadic Play (in brief)

“Sporadic play” describes game mechanics which intentionally limit how often the player interacts with a persistent game world

and now for...

A Quick Clarification

and now for...

A Quick Clarification

Overview of Sporadic Play

Advances in the Genre

**Successful Mechanics and
Design Patterns**

and now for...

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Designing for Sporadic Play

Making Games That Understand Players and Their Time

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Introduction

What is Sporadic Play?

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“Sporadic play” describes game mechanics which intentionally limit how often the player interacts with a persistent game world

- ⌄ Limiting Interactions
- ⌄ Persistent World























What is Sporadic Play?

An Example from Skyrates



Examples of Sporadic Play Social Games

Top 25 Facebook Games for October 2010

Rank		Game	Monthly Actives	Developer	MAU Change	(Last Month)
1		FarmVille	61,966,187	Zynga	868	61,965,319
2		Texas HoldEm Poker	35,489,264	Zynga	2,712,131	32,777,133
3		FrontierVille	31,595,451	Zynga	1,292,791	30,302,660
4		Café World	21,962,050	Zynga	-689,561	22,651,611
5		Mafia Wars	21,160,220	Zynga	-8,222,265	29,382,485
6		Treasure Isle	15,541,022	Zynga	-496,278	16,037,300
7		MindJolt Games	13,832,911	MindJolt	-227,858	14,060,769
8		Pet Society	13,075,744	Playfish	-457,947	13,533,691
9		Happy Aquarium	12,793,661	CrowdStar	1,084,048	11,709,613
10		PetVille	12,500,470	Zynga	-1,889,136	14,389,606
11		Bejeweled Blitz	12,336,393	PopCap Games	-200,611	12,537,004
12		City of Wonder	10,422,545	Playdom	N/A	N/A
13		Restaurant City	10,089,261	Playfish	-552,670	10,641,931
14		Happy Pets	9,287,887	CrowdStar	1,259,499	8,028,388
15		Millionaire City	8,686,359	Digital Chocolate	N/A	N/A
16		Zoo World	8,397,509	RockYou	-2,406,532	10,804,041
17		Games	7,679,136	GSN	1,305,171	6,373,965
18		YoVille	7,661,696	Zynga	131,084	7,530,612
19		Nightclub City	7,659,795	Booyah	-108,038	7,767,833
20		FishVille	7,443,035	Zynga	-599,583	8,042,618
21		Birthday Cards	7,080,752	RockYou	-2,408,432	9,489,184
22		Happy Island	6,709,614	CrowdStar	-610,962	7,320,576
23		Family Feud	6,562,768	iWin & Backstage	-53,868	6,616,636
24		Kingdoms of Camelot	6,452,626	Kabam	N/A	N/A
25		Hotel City	5,769,319	Playfish	-1,142,869	6,912,188

InsideSocialGames.com

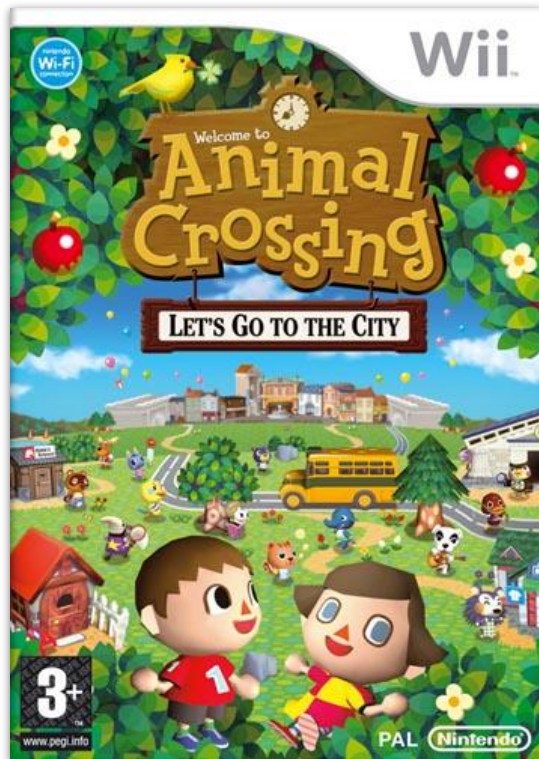
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Top 25 Facebook Games for October 2010

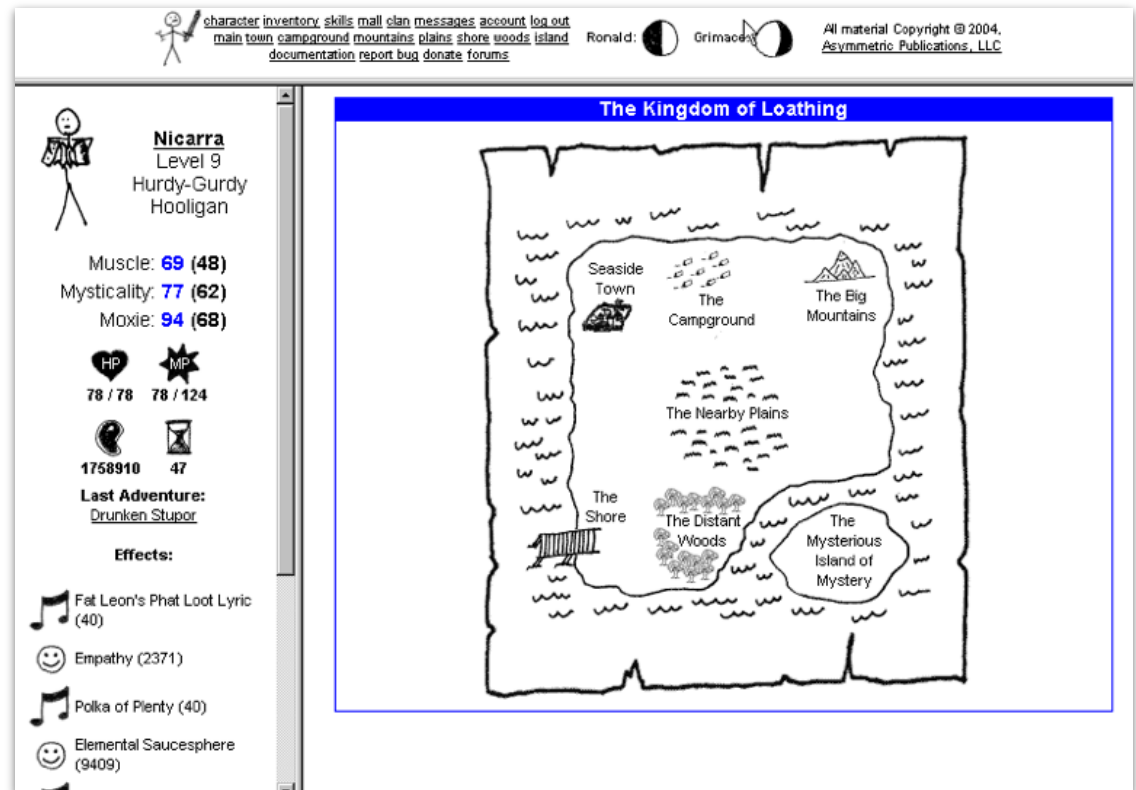
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80% Of the top Facebook games use sporadic play mechanics

Examples of Sporadic Play Console and PC Games



Animal Crossing



Kingdom of Loathing

Examples of Sporadic Play Bulletin Board Games

```

----- Docking Log
No current ship docking log on file
For finding this neglected port

  Items      Status   Trading % of
-----
Fuel Ore     Buying    2730    100
Organics     Selling   2950    100
Equipment    Buying    1400    100

```

You have 1,000,290 credits and 150 empty cargo holds.

We are selling up to 2950. You have 0 in your holds.
How many holds of Organics do you want to buy [150]?
Agreed, 150 units.

We'll sell them for 3,944 credits.
Your offer [3,944] ?

You are a shrewd trader, they're all yours.

You have 996,346 credits and 0 empty cargo holds.
Shutdown Autopilot and stay here? (Y/N) [N] _



Trade Wars (1984)

Examples of Sporadic Play Fantasy Sports



The screenshot shows a mobile app interface for a fantasy sports league. At the top, the status bar indicates 'AT&T', signal strength, Wi-Fi, and the time '6:58 PM'. Below this is a green navigation bar with '◀ WK 6', 'WK 7', and 'WK 8 ▶'. The main content area is a table with columns 'Slot', 'STARTERS', and 'Pts'. The table lists players for various positions: QB (B. Favre, NYJ), RB (E. Graham, TB), RB (D. Rhodes, IND), WR (R. Moss, NE), WR (P. Burrell, NYG), WR (I. Bruce, SF), TE (D. Keller, NYJ), D/ST (NYJ), and K (J. Reed, PIT). A 'Total' row shows a score of 0. Below the starters table is a 'BENCH' section with one player listed: 'BE M. Jones-Drew, JAC' followed by 'BYE'. At the bottom is a navigation bar with icons for back, forward, add (+), book, and a tab icon with the number 5.

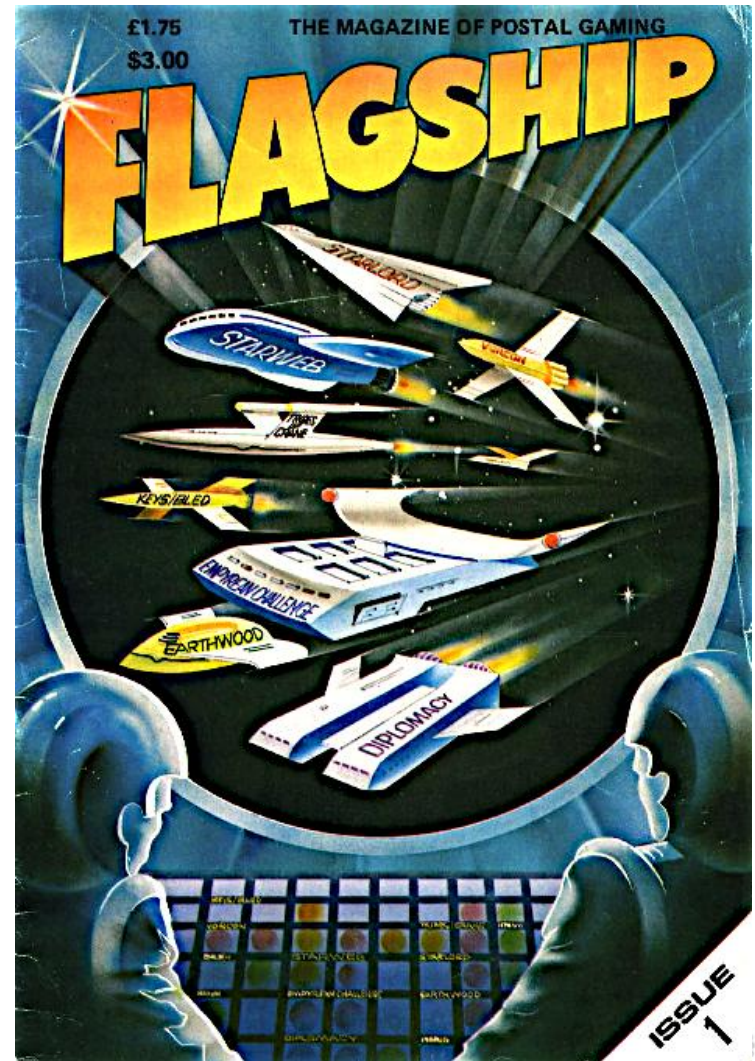
Slot	STARTERS	Pts
QB	B. Favre, NYJ	3 (13-16 F)
RB	E. Graham, TB	Sea, Sun 8:15
RB	D. Rhodes, IND	23 (14-34 F)
WR	R. Moss, NE	Den, Mon 8:30
WR	P. Burrell, NYG	8 (29-17 F)
WR	I. Bruce, SF	4 (17-29 F)
TE	D. Keller, NYJ	0 (13-16 F)
D/ST	NYJ	3 (13-16 F)
K	J. Reed, PIT	8 (38-10 F)
-	Total	0
Slot	BENCH	Pts
BE	M. Jones-Drew, JAC	BYE

Started in 1960

**29.9 Million Players
in 2007**

Examples of Sporadic Play Play-by-Mail Games

- ⌚ Diplomacy (1960)
- John Boardman
- ⌚ Peaked in 1980s



THE MAGAZINE OF POSTAL GAMING

Examples of Sporadic Play Correspondence Chess

<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td><td>A</td><td>B</td><td>C</td><td>D</td><td>E</td><td>F</td><td>G</td><td>H</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>8</td><td>18</td><td>28</td><td>38</td><td>48</td><td>58</td><td>68</td><td>78</td><td>88</td><td>8</td></tr> <tr> <td>7</td><td>17</td><td>27</td><td>37</td><td>47</td><td>57</td><td>67</td><td>77</td><td>87</td><td>7</td></tr> <tr> <td>6</td><td>16</td><td>26</td><td>36</td><td>46</td><td>56</td><td>66</td><td>76</td><td>86</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr> <td>5</td><td>15</td><td>25</td><td>35</td><td>45</td><td>55</td><td>65</td><td>75</td><td>85</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr> <td>4</td><td>14</td><td>24</td><td>34</td><td>44</td><td>54</td><td>64</td><td>74</td><td>84</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr> <td>3</td><td>13</td><td>23</td><td>33</td><td>43</td><td>53</td><td>63</td><td>73</td><td>83</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr> <td>2</td><td>12</td><td>22</td><td>32</td><td>42</td><td>52</td><td>62</td><td>72</td><td>82</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr> <td>1</td><td>11</td><td>21</td><td>31</td><td>41</td><td>51</td><td>61</td><td>71</td><td>81</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>A</td><td>B</td><td>C</td><td>D</td><td>E</td><td>F</td><td>G</td><td>H</td><td></td></tr> </table>																	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H		8	18	28	38	48	58	68	78	88	8	7	17	27	37	47	57	67	77	87	7	6	16	26	36	46	56	66	76	86	6	5	15	25	35	45	55	65	75	85	5	4	14	24	34	44	54	64	74	84	4	3	13	23	33	43	53	63	73	83	3	2	12	22	32	42	52	62	72	82	2	1	11	21	31	41	51	61	71	81	1		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H		<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Partie</td><td>Nr</td><td>Ihr Zug</td><td>Nr</td><td>Mein Zug</td></tr> <tr> <td>Partie</td><td>No</td><td>Votre coup</td><td>No</td><td>Mon coup</td></tr> <tr> <td>Game</td><td>No</td><td>Your move</td><td>No</td><td>My move</td></tr> <tr> <td>Partida</td><td>No</td><td>Su jugada</td><td>No</td><td>Mi jugada</td></tr> <tr> <td>Партия</td><td>No</td><td>Ваш ход</td><td>No</td><td>Мой ход</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </table>		Partie	Nr	Ihr Zug	Nr	Mein Zug	Partie	No	Votre coup	No	Mon coup	Game	No	Your move	No	My move	Partida	No	Su jugada	No	Mi jugada	Партия	No	Ваш ход	No	Мой ход																															<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Turnier</td><td>Nr</td></tr> <tr> <td>Tournoi</td><td>No</td></tr> <tr> <td>Tournament</td><td>No</td></tr> <tr> <td>Torneo</td><td>No</td></tr> <tr> <td>Турнир</td><td>No</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </table>		Turnier	Nr	Tournoi	No	Tournament	No	Torneo	No	Турнир	No												
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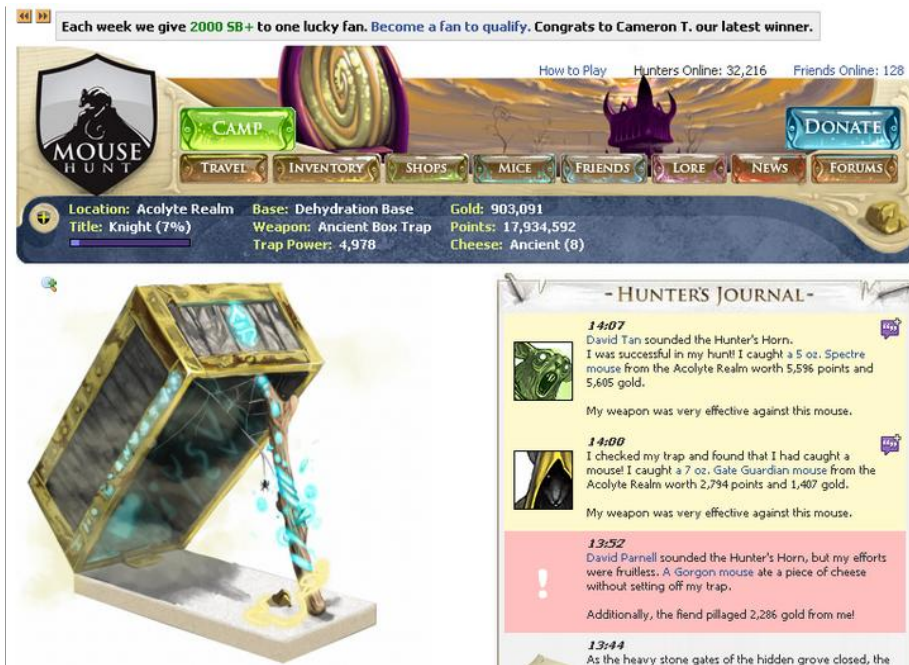
Dates back to the Middle Ages

Introduction

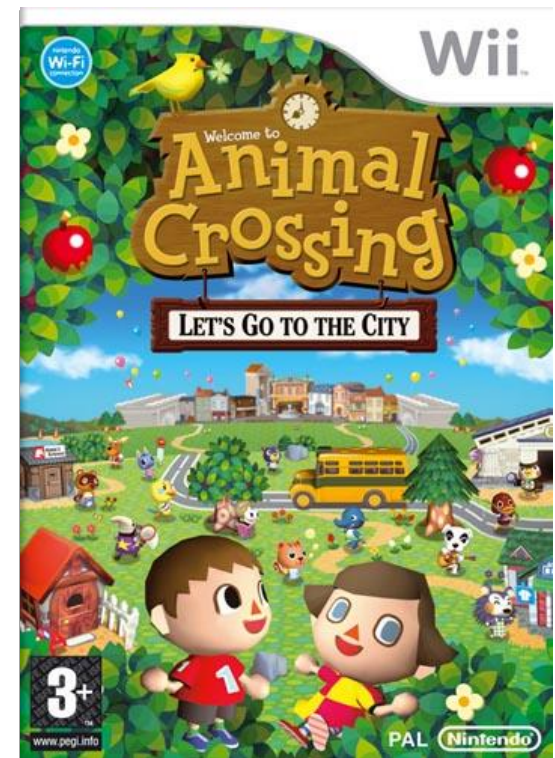
What isn't Sporadic Play?

Sporadic Play is not Casual Games

There's a lot of overlap...



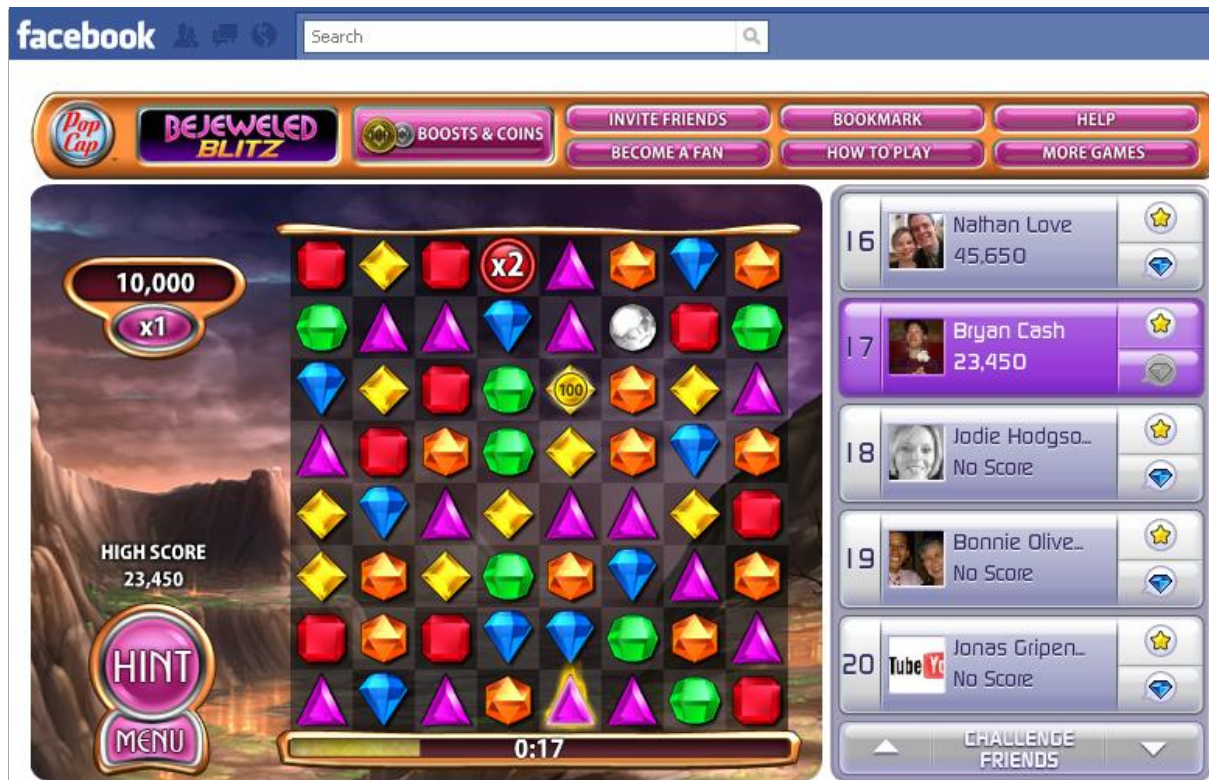
Mouse Hunt



Animal Crossing

Sporadic Play is not Casual Games

...but not everything overlaps.

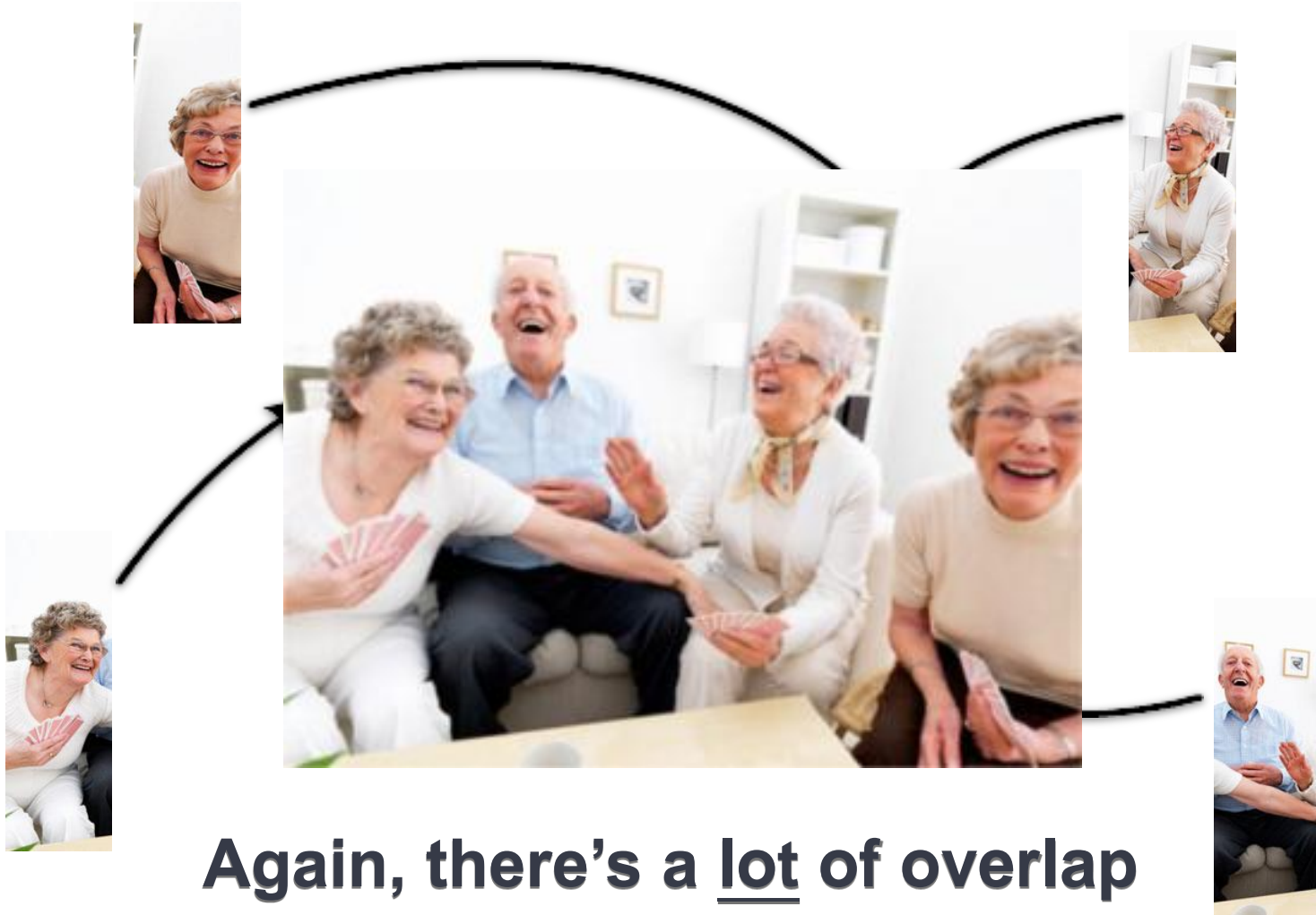


Bejeweled Blitz

Sporadic Play is not (necessarily) Casual Games

- ⊕ Casual gameplay is defined as **low depth** of gameplay with **instantly obvious mechanics**.
- ⊕ The persistent nature of sporadic gameplay allows for **deeper gameplay** and **layered mechanics**.

Sporadic Play is not Asynchronous Multiplayer



Sporadic Play is not (necessarily) Asynchronous Multiplayer

- ⌚ Asynchronous Multiplayer focuses on the **relationship of the players to each other.**
- ⌚ Sporadic Play focuses on the **relationship between the player and the game.**

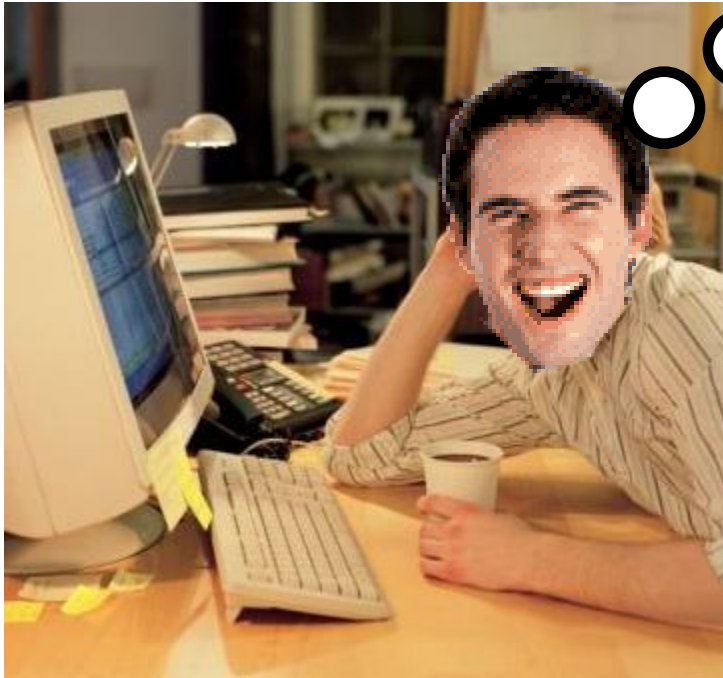
What is Sporadic Play good for?

What is Sporadic Play good for?

Increasing Internalization
while
Managing Obsession

What is Sporadic Play good for? Increasing Internalization

“Back of your mind” gaming



What is Sporadic Play good for? Increasing Internalization

You've experienced this in your life



What is Sporadic Play good for? Increasing Internalization

When Sporadic Play is done right
**the end of every play
session is a cliff hanger.**

What is Sporadic Play good for? Managing Obsession

Cake is AWESOME!...



What is Sporadic Play good for? Managing Obsession

But too much cake...



is too much awesome.

What is Sporadic Play good for?

Managing Obsession



What is Sporadic Play good for? Managing Obsession

**Sporadic Play prevents
oversaturation...**

**and leaves the players
wanting more**

What is Sporadic Play good for? **Benefits we're not talking about**

because we talked them at GDC

Benefits to Development

New Revenue Models

What is Sporadic Play good for?

Increasing Internalization

and

Managing Obsession

are both elements of

**Understanding your audience
and their time.**

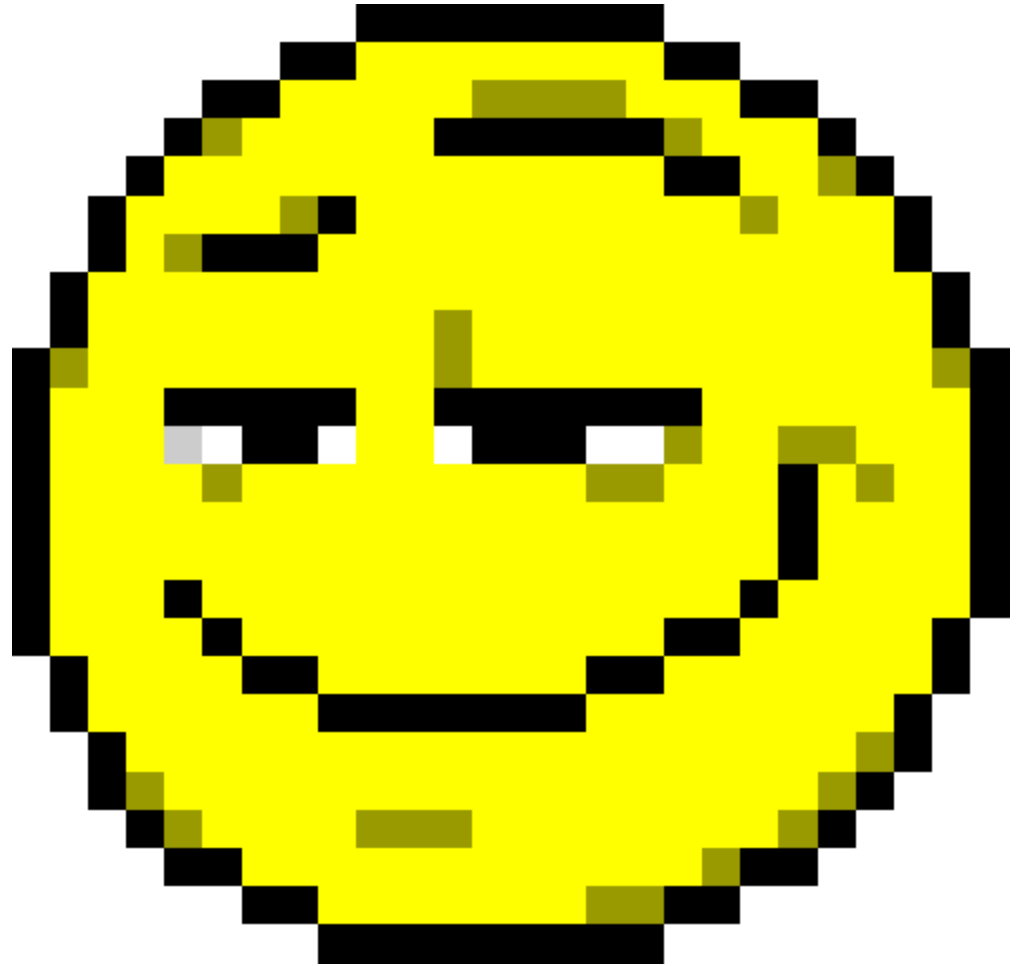
Understanding Your Audience

Who is Your Audience?



Who is Your Audience?

**Okay...big
whoop.**



Everybody already knows that.

Who is Your Audience

Two Main Questions

- ③ How **often** do they play?
- ③ What is the **duration** of each play session?

Who is Your Audience? How Often Do They Interact?



Where do they play from?
When are they playing?

Who is Your Audience? How Long Do They Interact?



They've both been playing 3 weeks

Who is Your Audience? Consider Each Play Session



World of Warcraft



Who is Your Audience?

Session Flow







Who is Your Audience? Prolonging Suspense



Who is Your Audience?

Interaction Matrix

	Rare Interaction	Frequent Interaction
Short Duration		
Long Duration		

Who is Your Audience?

Player Commitment - Daily



Social City



Crazy Planets

Who is Your Audience? How Long Do They Interact?



Legends of Zork

Who is Your Audience? How Long Do They Interact?



Critter Island

Who is Your Audience?

Player Commitment



Who is Your Audience?



**It's not just about
how they play your game**

Who is Your Audience?



It's about what they're doing
when they're not playing.

Who is Your Audience?

Designing for Sporadic Play is

**Designing for the Negative
Space of Player Time**

Who is Your Audience? Negative Space in Art

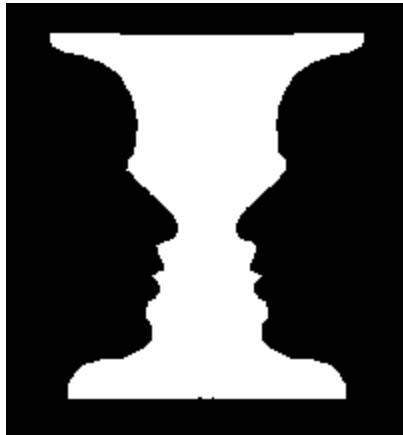


Who is Your Audience? Negative Space in Art



Who is Your Audience?

Negative Space in Games



What your players do
when they're not playing
affects what they do when they are.

Sporadic Mechanics

Sporadic Mechanics Appointment Management

Monday, March-8	Tuesday, March-9	Wednesday, March-10	Thursday, March-11	Friday, March-12	Saturday, March-13
Registration Mandatory session Lecture (optional) Special function Meeting					
		IT: Loralyn McWilliam	Prerogative RT E-Max 228	Funding S309 micratalk N134	Brenda Train N133 aca download N134
	Tony Reed @GC	M: Schuler Orientation @IGDA	IT: Luanndata		Felix Buehler @S: S1334
	M: Laura Becan @req		Edery S303 100 Uozz N122	Side keynote NHall D	Charlie P S303
	Sac: Overview N134	*Ed: Gue panel N132			
	IT: Baqart/Juul		M: Laura + Clinton @IGDA		IT: expa rcon
		DFAIT lunch (12-2) @W: uarkroom3	IGDA luncheon @Jillianz	IGDA AGM @N133	
	Steven Silvester @req		Lucie Ghiz @W: uark3		
	IT: BDB @req		Smithsonian N133 Tigerstart S303 Q&A panel N125 Camuz S309	ngmaca unlearn N134	*Rest panel N134
	Dave Sharp @GC	Emiliano de Castro @GC: Pixogram #165			
	Per Strumbeck @req	Sac: Funding N134 Sac: Madole N122	Ari Burek @req	IT: Chris M PR 101 N125 Artqamar N131 Future panel S306 Ben ualmar N134	Scott Stalaka
	Chu Qing @Pickwick: 855th	Ed: Kellee keynote N132	Hiraku Ozeki @req		Ryan Sharpe @req
		Canada Party (4.5-8.5) @Jillianz	Salvatore S306	EEDARstart N130 D-challenge N134	Zoraida Butera @Nobby
		IT: Parkike/Matayama	Ox (5-7) @ Rao		

Sporadic Mechanics

Appointment Management



Farmville



Ghost Trappers

Sporadic Mechanics Tap on the Shoulder



Skyrates

Sporadic Mechanics

Tap on the Shoulder



"Pardon me, sir...I'm afraid you were just '**ganked**' in Mafia Wars. Most inconvenient, sir."

Sporadic Mechanics Caretaker / Delegation



Neptune's Pride

Sporadic Mechanics

What do these have in common?

⌘ Appointment Management

⌘ Tap on the Shoulder

⌘ Caretaker Delegation



Persistent World

Persistent World Time Passes



Persistent World Accumulation of Time

Home Market **Gym** Store Fight Work Leaderboard Invite

< Market

Money: \$998.00 Experience: 110 Energy: 1,080.00 cal Rank: #17,003
Level: 1 Fame: 1 Weight: 66.00 kg

BODYBUILDERZ


You may want to look for a new trainer at the MARKET.

My Benefits:

Biceps: Level 1	Triceps: Level 1	Forearms: Level 1
Pecs: Level 2	Abdominals: Level 1	Deltoids: Level 1
Trapezius: Level 1	Lats: Level 1	Lower Back: Level 1
Hamstrings: Level 1	Quadriceps: Level 1	Calf: Level 1


New Notifications (Expand | Hide)

Bench Press




Consumes: 400 cal
Trains: Pecs
Trained!

Biceps Curls



Consumes: 280 cal
Trains: Biceps
Train

Triceps Extension



Consumes: 300 cal
Trains: Triceps
Train

Mafia Wars by Zynga

How to Play | Support | Help

Top Friends

Cash: [Go to Bank] Health: 79/100 Energy: 22/27 1st Stamina: 4/5 Experience: 241/305
More in 10:00 (hospital) More in 1:00 More in 1:00

Home Jobs Fight Properties Inventory Cellfather Profile My Mafia (75)

Your Mafia of 75 fought against nightloneChild with a Sawn-off Shotgun, a Revolver, a Machine Pistol, 3 Semi-Automatics, a Grenade, a Butterfly Knife, 16 Colt Pistols, a .22 Pistol, 2 Brass Knuckles, a Baseball Bat, a Crowbar, a Gas Mask, and a Motorcycle.

nightloneChild's Mafia of 17 fought with a Propane Bomb, a Car Bomb, 13 Machine Pistols, a Colt Pistol, a Grenade, and 3 Bullet Proof Vests.

You **WON** the fight, taking 13 damage and dealing 21 damage to your enemy. You gained \$65,000 and 3 experience points.

1st Attack Again!

Remember: You can fight with up to 50 mafia members, and each can use one weapon, one armor, and one vehicle.

Fight (Take on other Mafias) **Hitlist** (See a hitlist post) **Racketeering** (Steal money from other Mafias)

Only your top 50 Mafia members can help in a fight. After that they do not provide a bonus. This is also true for Heed Guns.

User	Mafia size	Action
Bagmaster, Level 8 Mogul	6	1st Attack
ymh, Level 8 Mogul	2	1st Attack
69 ERZ, Level 8 Marac	8	1st Attack

Mafia Wars

Bodybuilderz WARs

Persistent World Initiate... Wait... Get Reward



Neptune's Pride



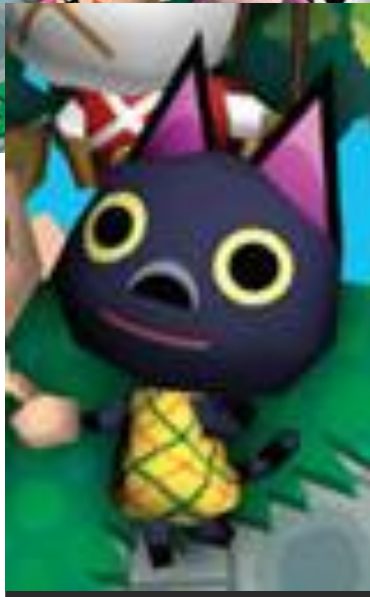
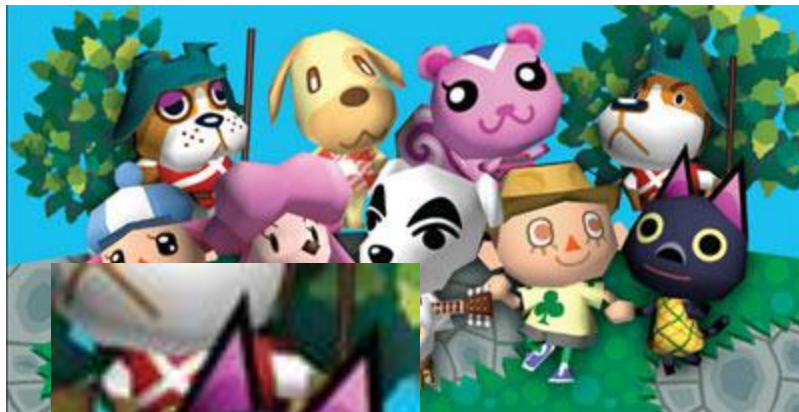
City of Wonder

Persistent World Consider the Longterm



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Persistent World Consider...Animal Crossing



Persistent World Parallel Universes



Farm Town

Designing for Multiple Players

Multiple Players Asynchronous Play

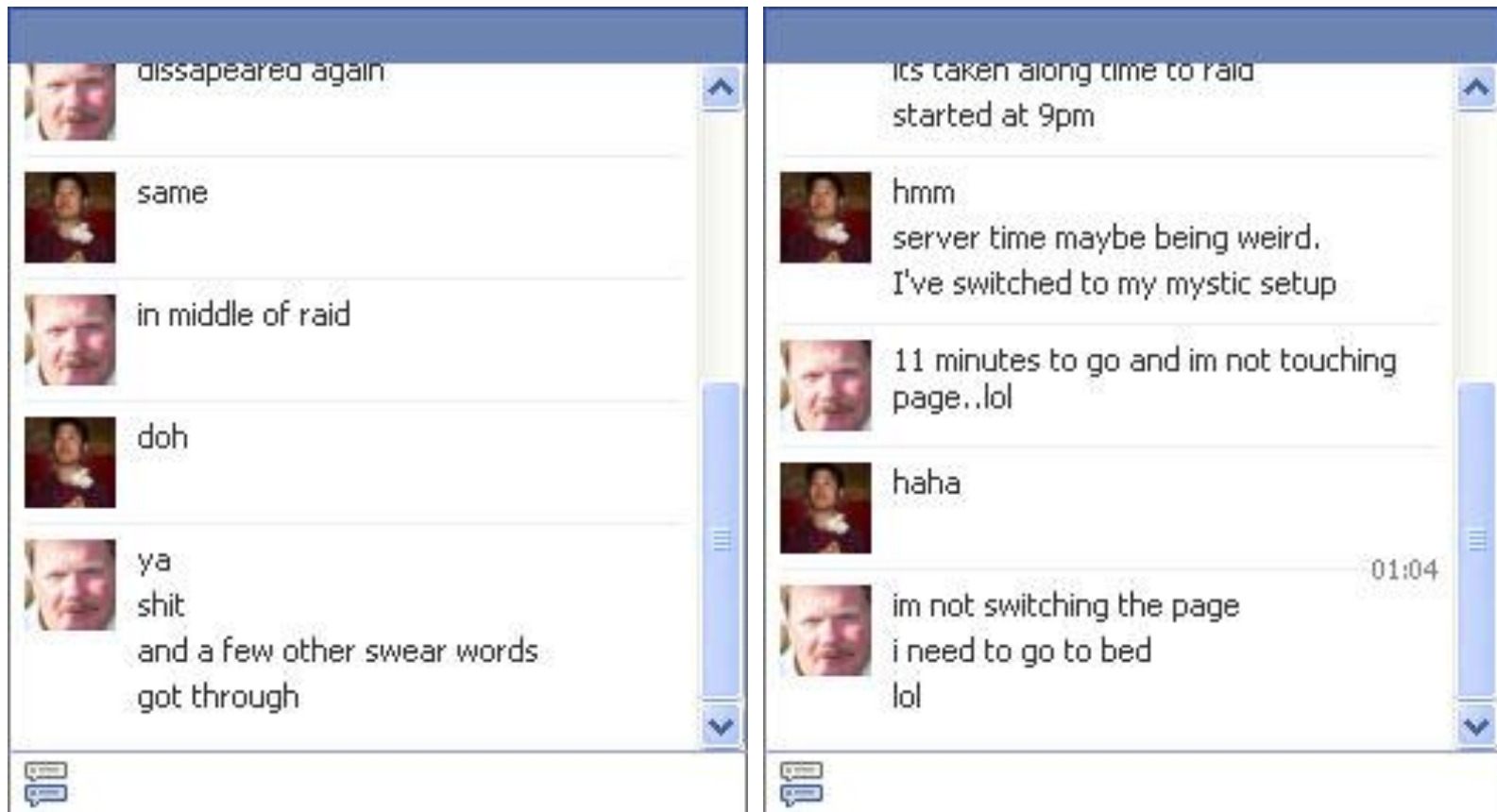
```
You have 996,346 credits and 0 empty cargo holds.  
Shutdown Autopilot and stay here? (Y/N) [N]
```

Trade Wars



Miniconomy

Multiple Players Synchronous Play



Multiple Players Coordinated Play



Mouse Hunt

Multiple Players Coordinated Play in Skyrates



Multiple Players Player Versus Player

FEDEX ST. JUDE CLASSIC

PREV. SCORE	LEADERS	HOLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
SCORE	PAR	PAR																			
2	MAGGERT	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
5	PERNICE	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
2	COOK	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
5	HERRON	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
2	SENDEN	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
2	PRICE, N.	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
4	VILLEGAS	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	COX	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	DELSING	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	PALMER	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18

Multiple Players Balancing Attentive with Sporadic



Multiple Players Balancing Attentive with Sporadic



Add Slides

Multiple Players Player with Player



You punks work for
me now.



Yes ma'am.



Traditional Games

Traditional Games

Multi-Platform Interaction



Toy Soldiers



**Match Defense:
Toy Soldiers**

Traditional Games Bonuses for “Negative Space”



Rested XP in World of Warcraft

Traditional Games Consider the Audience



- ⌚ A companion game for the **same audience**?
- ⌚ A different game for a **new audience**?

Looking to the Future

Looking to the Future

Facebook Policies in the Past

- ③ You can only ask user to post about the same thing **once per play session**.
- ③ This means, if you want to generate **lots of posts**, encourage **multiple play sessions**.
- ③ Rumors of nefarious deeds.

Looking to the Future

Facebook Policies as of Sept. 21st



Jeffrey Ashbrook and 14 other friends changed their profile pictures.



Yesterday at 8:25am

- ⊕ Users are **notified only once**, when their friends join a game.
- ⊕ If they don't join, **you never hear from that game again.**

Looking to the Future

Facebook Policies as of Sept. 21st

- ⌚ This means that you either have to pay Facebook a lot of \$\$ for ads
- ⌚ Or you need to **understand and respect that player's time** enough to where they make their own wall post inviting friends to join.

Any Questions?

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