

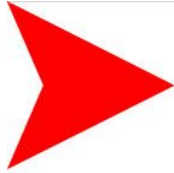
# **Retention Microtalks**

Free-to-Play Summit

Game Developers Conference

March 17, 2014

- Cell phones
- Survey
- Hold Q&A until end
- 6 minute limit!



Speaker	Genre
Steve Meretzky, GSN Games	Social Casino
John Welch, Making Fun	Card Battlers
Raph Koster	Invest & Express
Teut Weidemann, Ubisoft Blue Byte	Shooters
Tamir Nadav, Disney Interactive	Word
Mike Sellers	Role-Playing
Kenny Shea Dinkin, Making Fun	Hidden Object Games

**Daily  
Login  
Bonus**







Click those nice ripe tomatoes to harvest them!



## Annual Crime Spree

Complete Annual Crime Spree on Elite by 2013-08-10 7:00 PM and

**EARN THE  
DEAFENING SILENCE**



5675

2926

OKAY

MENU

Cassette  
Rattles

Bear  
Raspberries

Cancel

07:51



3,368,691

PAY TABLE CASH OUT 15 5,000 75,000 SPIN AUTO SPIN

ROYAL FLUSH	5M	25M	50M	250M	500M
STRAIGHT FLUSH	500,000	2.5M	5M	25M	50M
4 OF A KIND	250,000	1.25M	2.5M	12.5M	25M
FULL HOUSE	90,000	450,000	900,000	4.5M	9M
FLUSH	60,000	300,000	600,000	3M	6M
STRAIGHT	40,000	200,000	400,000	2M	4M
3 OF A KIND	30,000	150,000	300,000	1.5M	3M
2 PAIR	20,000	100,000	200,000	1M	2M
JACKS OR BETTER	10,000	50,000	100,000	500,000	1M

### JACKS OR BETTER



WIN  
100,000

BET  
100,000

BALANCE  
3,371,191



SPEED >>>

< BET

BET >

DEAL

Power Up

0 73 0 67 1 21 8 2 1 18 0 74

Spynx  
66 players  
212 cards  
19 Bingos Left

Eloise: blue gems  
Cherylee:   
Centayne: heyyy peoples =]  
Ria:   
Pam:   
Denvar:   
March:   
Jimson:   
Denvar: 74  
Denvar:   
Ria:   
Anita: it's hard to get the orange Gem

Type To Chat  
smiley send

B I N G O

7 24 41 54 73  
10 28 42 47 70  
5 23 52 52 68  
2 16 44 49 66  
14 20 35 55 61

BINGO!

8 16 31 46 61  
2 17 32 47 62  
3 18 33 48 63  
4 19 34 49 64  
5 20 35 50 65  
6 21 36 51 66  
7 22 37 52 67  
8 23 38 53 68  
9 24 39 54 69  
10 25 40 55 70  
11 26 41 56 71  
12 27 42 57 72  
13 28 43 58 73  
14 29 44 59 74  
15 30 45 60 75

Welcome, Lucas Level 19 \$602,609 GET CHIPS Send Chips Leaderboards Gifts

Check Raise

Folded \$397,443 \$52,076 \$17,623 \$59,817

Check Lucas \$235,485 \$188,869 \$514,000

\$61.8K \$12K

J J 3

\$12,000 TO CALL

Danny Lee: Nice hand

Fold Call Raise

Check/Fold Call Any





**SHOW ME  
THE  
TOKENS!**



## MY DAILY BONUS

10,000  
TOKENS

2,500  
TOKENS

2,500  
TOKENS

500  
TOKENS

3X  
TOKENS

500  
TOKENS

1,000  
TOKENS

DAY 3  
TOKENS

DAY 4  
TOKENS

DAY 5  
TOKENS

3,000  
TOKENS

200  
TOKENS

200  
TOKENS

1,000  
TOKENS

2X  
TOKENS

YOU WON 1,500 TOKENS!

FREE TOKENS



FRIEND BONUS  
MAX 25

\$25,000

+

RETURN BONUS  
MAX 25

\$1,000

+

DAILY SPIN

\$0

MORE FRIENDS = MORE CHIPS YOU GET 1,000 CHIPS FOR EACH FRIEND!

EVERY DAY IN A ROW THAT YOU COME BACK, YOU GET 1,000 CHIPS!

YOU GET A SPIN OF THE WHEEL EVERY DAY YOU COME VISIT!



Daily Game Prize 11,000  
A new game every day!

Facebook Friend Bonus 25,000



More friends, MORE BONUS! (Max 25K)

Return Bonus 1,000  
BIGGER BONUS every day! (Max 25K)

TOTAL 37,000

COLLECT CHIPS

Come back tomorrow for more FREE CHIPS

Tap a pumpkin & win a prize!





- FB wall posts
- Gifts from friends
- Emails



## Steven's Prize Collections

DREAM  
VACATIONS

AUTOMOBILES

WATERCRAFT

LUXURY  
HOMES

RETURN TO GAME

## POT-O-GOLD CHALLENGE

Time to find some lucky charms! Find your Pot o' Gold today by collecting all of the Horseshoes.



MAR  
7

MAR  
8

MAR  
9

MAR  
6

MAR 8

QUEST ENDS IN  
06:05:48

WIN UP TO  
4,000

WIN UP TO  
7,000

WIN UP TO  
18,000

COMPLETION  
BONUS  
200

FOLLOW THE RAINBOW TO FIND 12 POTS O' GOLD BY PLAYING SLOTS.

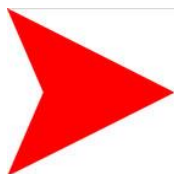
KEEP PLAYING



# Takeaways

- Chips, chips, chips
- Social Casino still not that sophisticated

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# Retention in Card Battle Games

F2P Summit Micro-talks

# about

- SEGA Dreamcast Network (1998-1999)
- Shockwave.com (1999-2004)
- PlayFirst (2004-2009)
- Making Fun (2009-present)
  - card battle games
    - BloodRealm (web & mobile)
    - Dominion (HTML-5 web/mobile; app coming)
  - other mid-core
    - Mage & Minions (mobile RPG)
  - casual
    - Hidden Express (web & tablet HOG)

What is special about (battle) card games?

# endless supply of content

- natural containers for stats
- easy to create a steady stream of diverse content
  - rare / unique
  - prestige value
  - clearly communicates value for gameplay
  - 2D: beautiful, diverse, relatively cheap
- inflation can keep players wanting that next better thing

# *Dominion*: relies on gameplay alone

- thriving community based only on a ton of great gameplay
- despite no retention features, no marketing
- imagine if we had what follows...

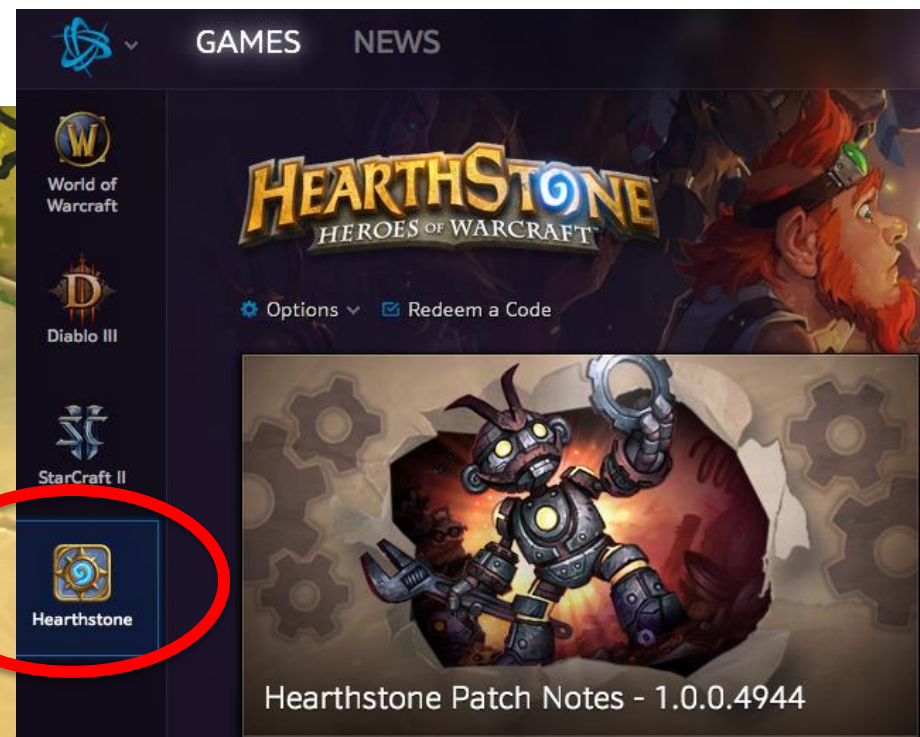
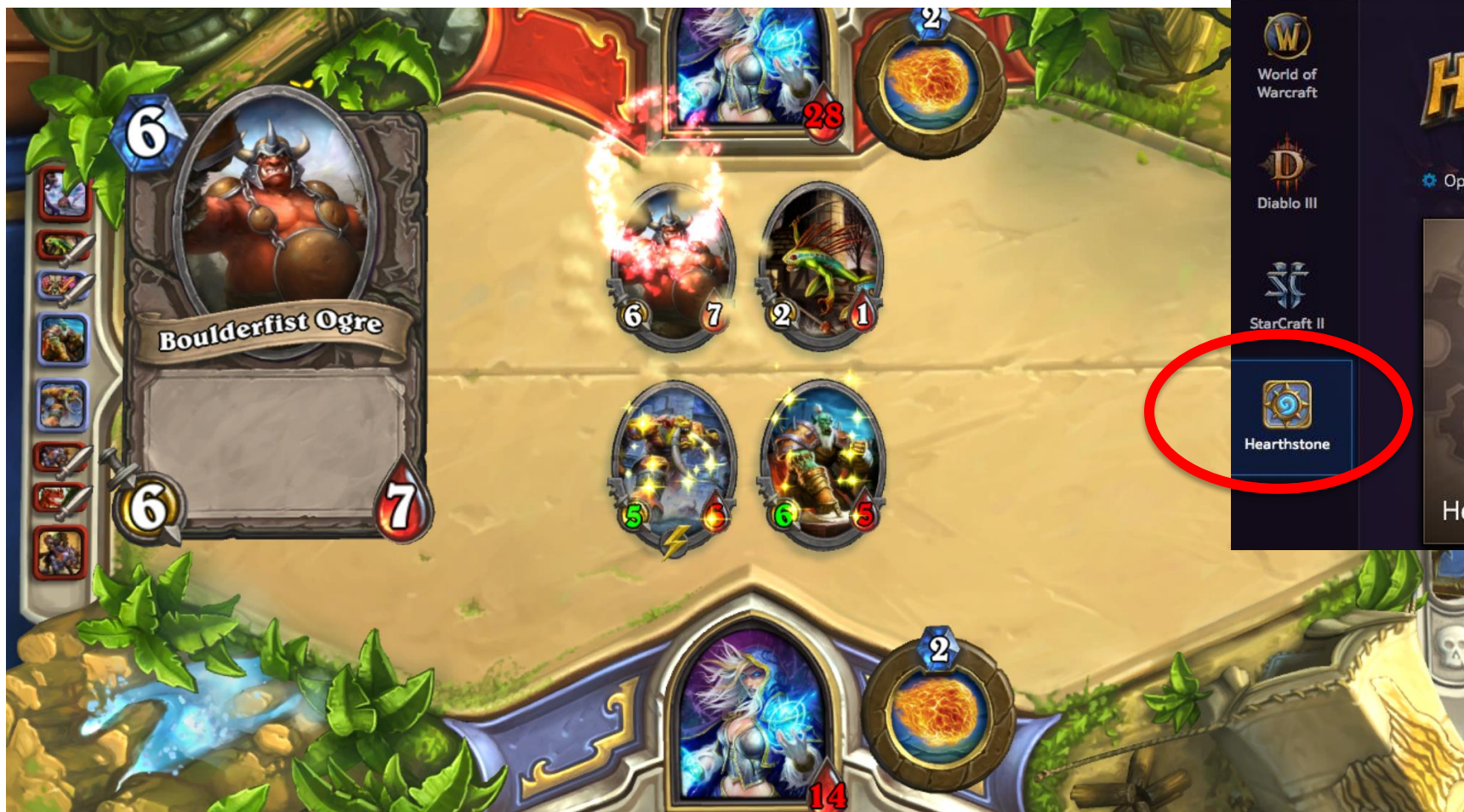
gameplay





# Hearthstone: gameplay + Battle.net

gameplay





# staples

- daily login bonus
- limited-time events

# BloodRealm

## SAVAGE LANDS FROM BEYOND

Magical creatures from beyond the Realm are wreaking havoc and destruction. Destroy them before they destroy you!

[VIEW REWARDS](#)

EVENT: DEC 12TH - DEC 28TH

5D 12H 52M 42S

NEED HELP?  
Find exclusive cards in the event box that will help you defeat your enemies!

LIMITED TIME ONLY!

[GET IT NOW!](#)

gameplay

**SAVAGE LANDS WILD MAGIC**

**Magic Box**

ENDS IN: 1D, 14H, 52M, 32S

\* Magic Box includes 100 cards

- \* Cards include 3-star, 4-star, 5-star, and an EXCLUSIVE 6-star
- \* Some Cards include abilities that help you defeat the Epic Boss
- \* Each time you draw a card, the number of cards in the box decreases
- \* The more cards you draw, the better chances of receiving the 6-star EXCLUSIVE card

[Tap for Card Details](#)

100/100 CARDS LEFT

200

[ONE CARD](#)

1,000

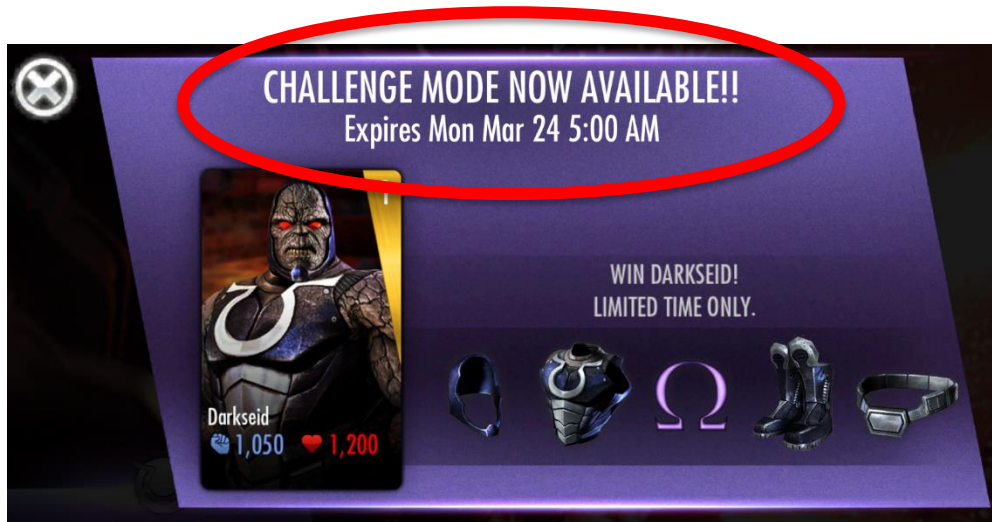
[SIX CARDS](#)





# *Injustice: Gods Among Us*

(also helps drive monetization)



gameplay



# *Knight & Dragons*



gameplay



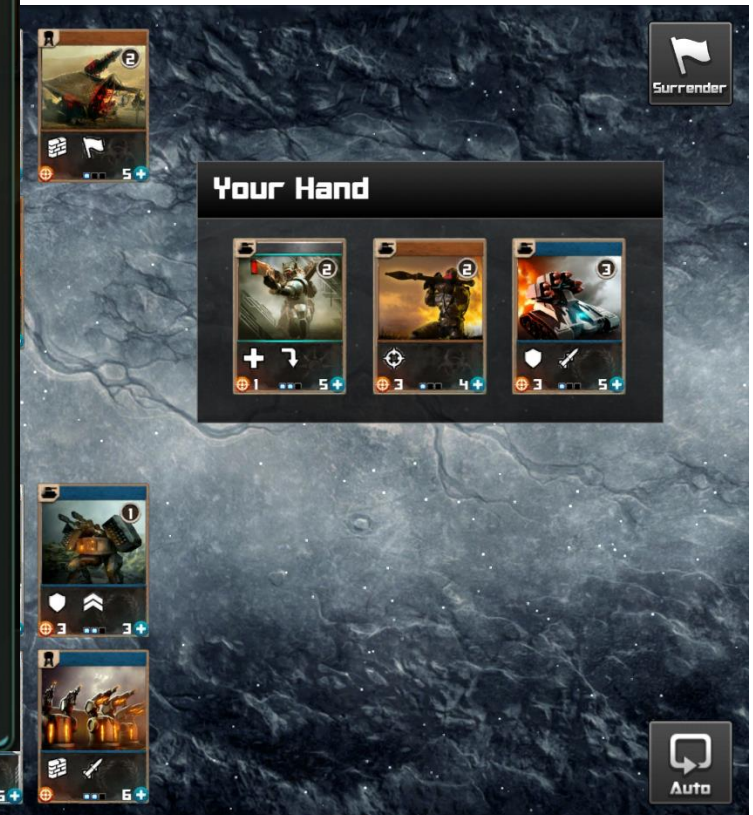




# Tyrant



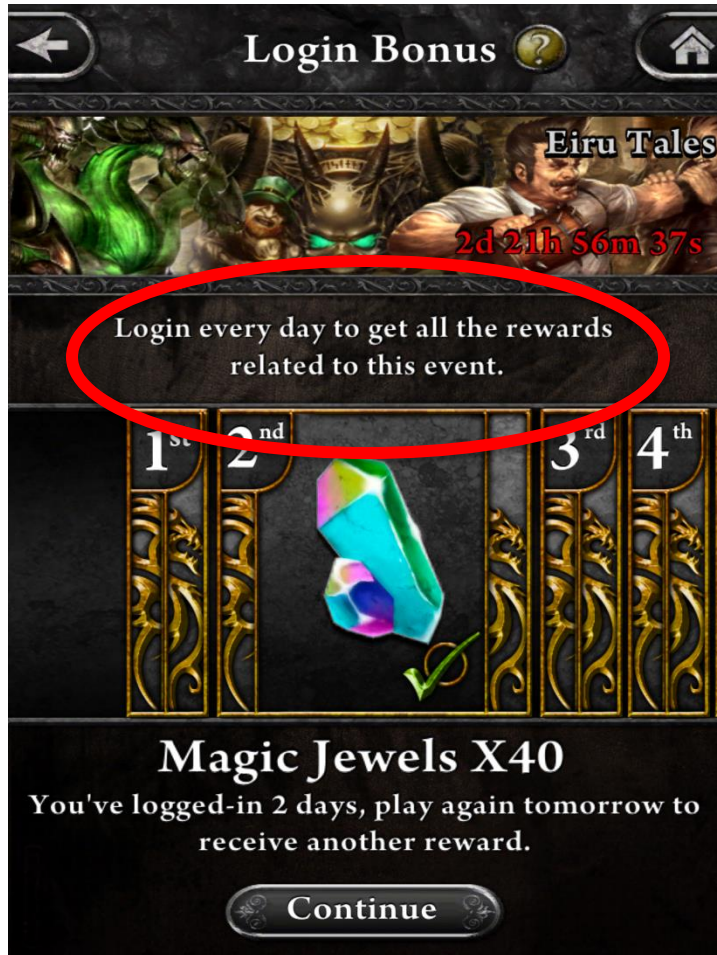
gameplay





# Hellfire

daily login bonus during limited-time event



limited-time purchase opportunity



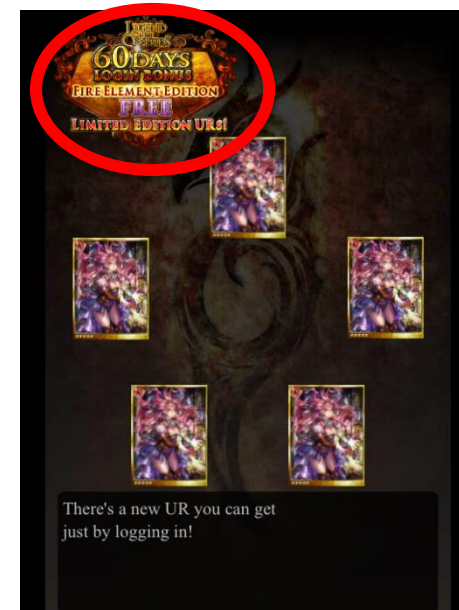
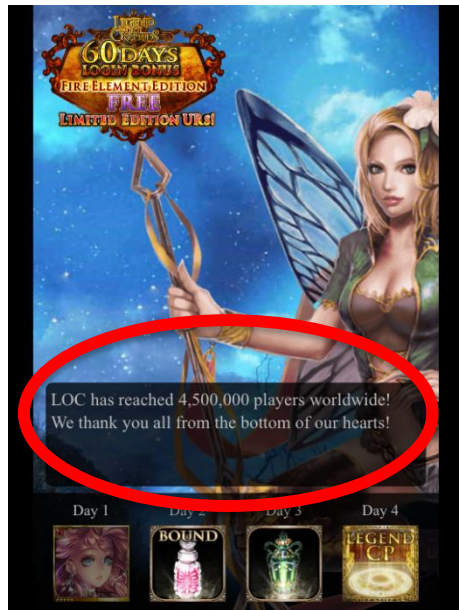
gameplay





# Legend of the Cryptids

- People stick a rusty fork in their eye day after day after day after day.
- Prizes for tutorial completion, 3-day event 'only' for today's installs, 60-day daily login bonus: get all 5 prizes to evolve into UR.



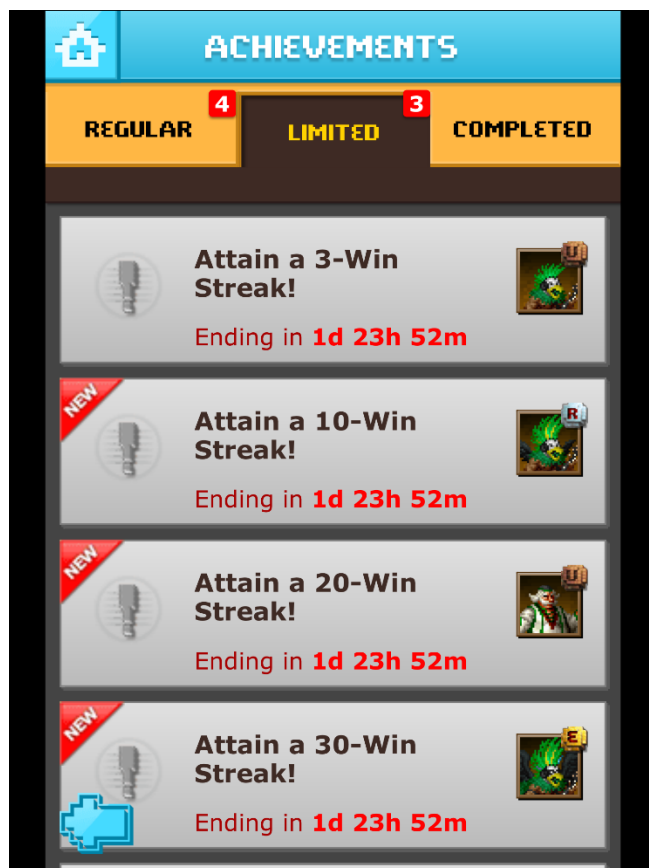
# clever

- limited-time rewards for
  - achievements
  - tutorial completion



# Defender of Texel

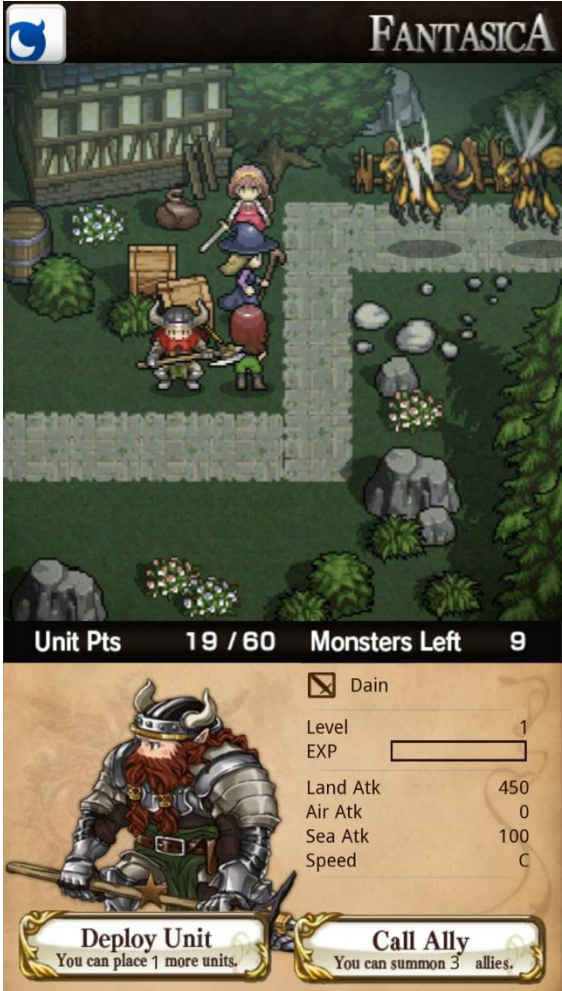
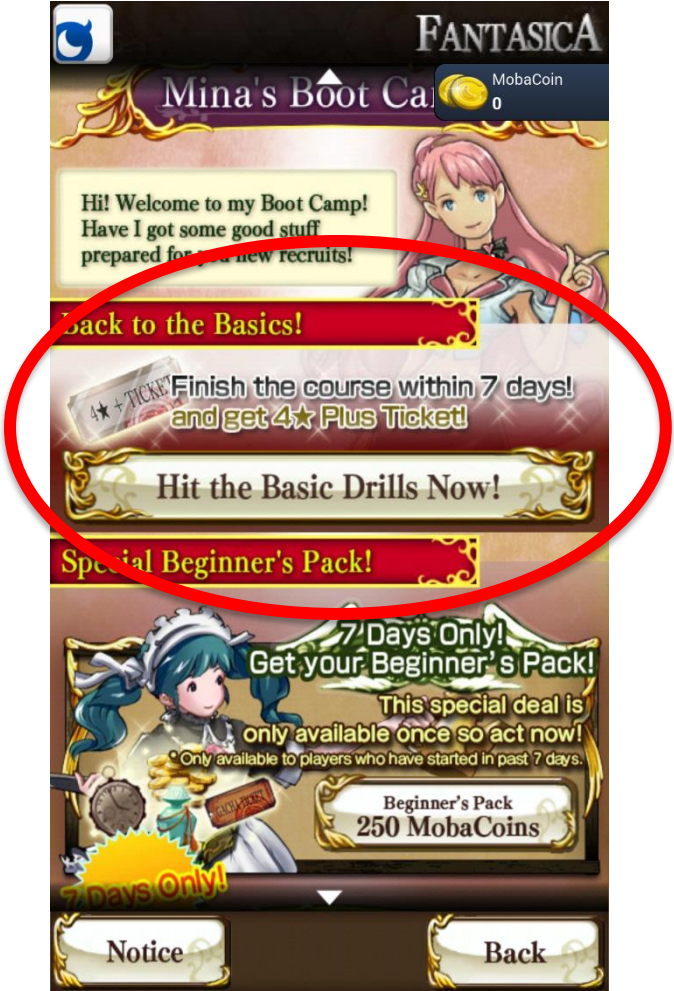
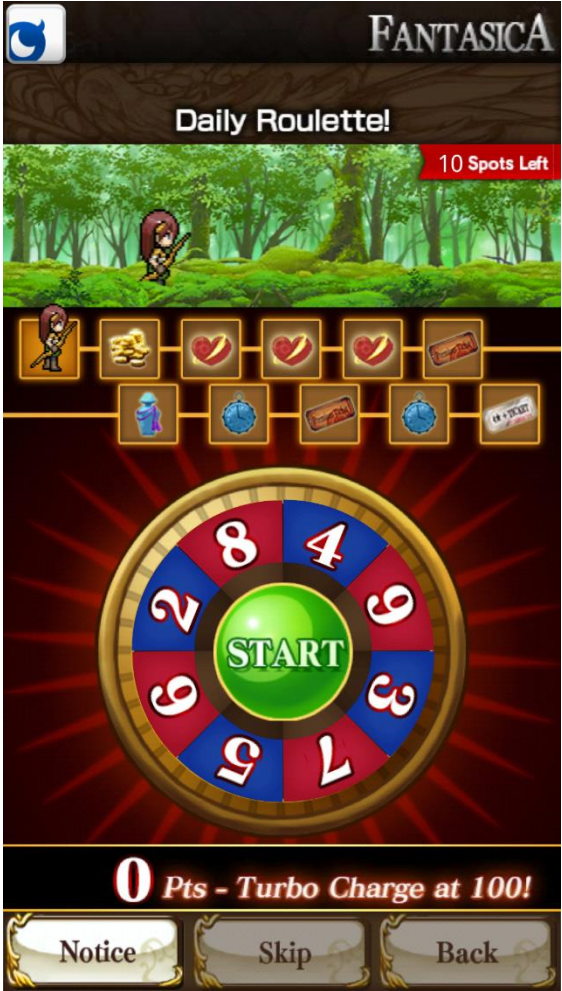
gameplay





# Fantastica

gameplay



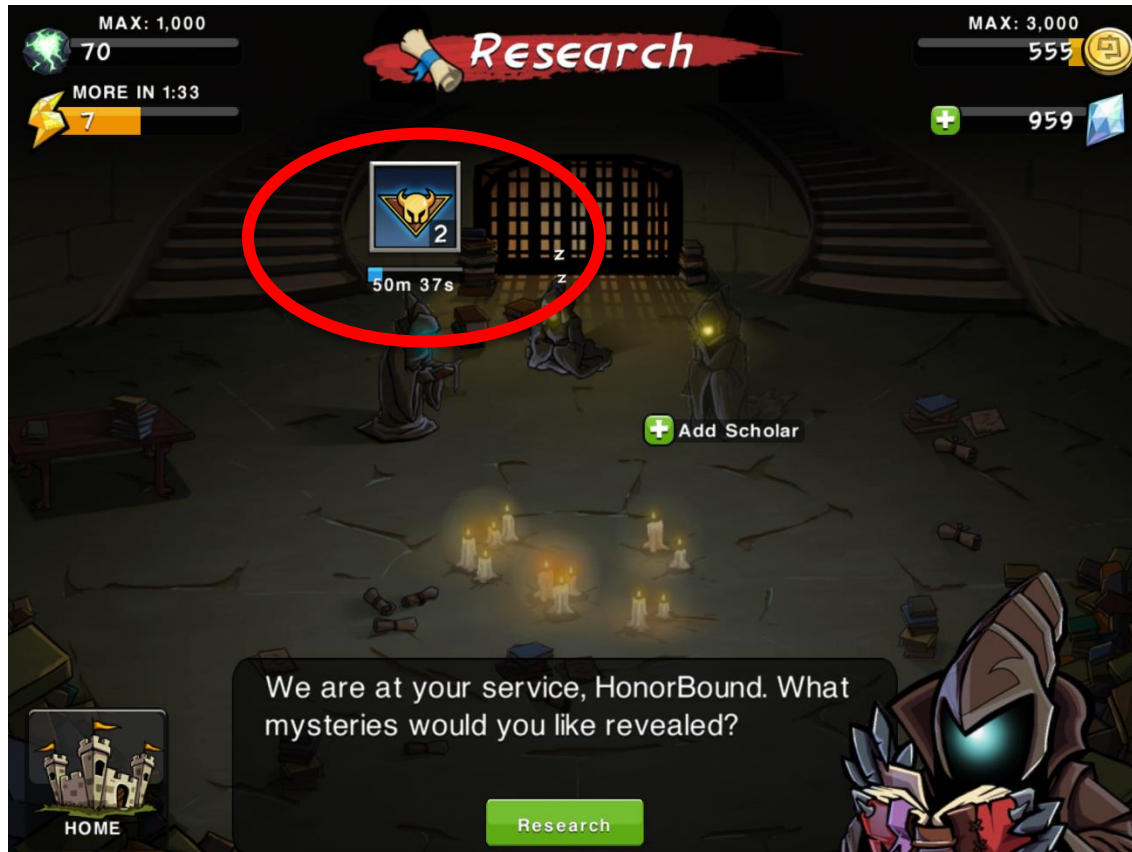
# timers

- to gate
  - economy
  - power in gameplay



# Honorbound

research unlocks larger <container>



gameplay





# Lil Alchemist



need to research to perform the combo...

each one takes time to research

(and factorial many are available!)



# summary

standard

- great gameplay isn't a requirement for success today 😞
- limited time events chasing rare/exclusive cards
- stuff exclusive to limited-time events (packs, etc.)
- daily login bonus, ideally with chance, related to event

clever

- timers gate expanding economy, improving power

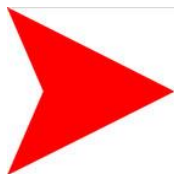
Wow!!!

- test ridiculous extremes? (*Legend of the Cryptids*)
- time pressure makes tutorial an event (*Fantastica*)

# conclusion

- great gameplay alone can work (*Hearthstone, Dominion*)
- most top card games are way less fun and way better at using urgency in meta-structural devices to retain / build audience
- time is the key ingredient
- things we will try: event-ifying tutorial, extra-long daily login

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Build (and express!)

# The obvious

- You can string players along with quests.
- People want to check off boxes.
- That said, if you run out of quests or they derail, you lose them.



## Less obvious: richness

- Quests in typical building social games are driven by fixed recipes.
- “You need 5 of item id #97246.”
  - Expensive to implement
  - Not reusable usually
  - Items are one-offs you then throw away

# In contrast...



# Some approaches

- The sim method: abstract qualities underlying objects
  - Recipes tied to qualities not item ids
  - CA or other sim approaches underlying game logic
- The utility method: no dead-end items
  - Never create an item type solely for a quest
- The self-directed method
  - Provide game objectives based off of scalar metrics instead (“population of N”) and let players solve how to get there.

# Expressing

- In MMOs we spoke of “the elder game.”
  - “The game you play when you run out of game.”
- Quests work against self-expression
  - Force you to build what the dev wants, not what you want
  - Builds all look the same
  - Prevent the player constructing a narrative
- Quests and emergence can co-exist but not if you handhold on everything.



# Showcasing

- Everyone does this poorly.
- At a minimum, celebrate great builds on your site/page.
- Or build in sharing!
  - Huge community value



# Enabling story

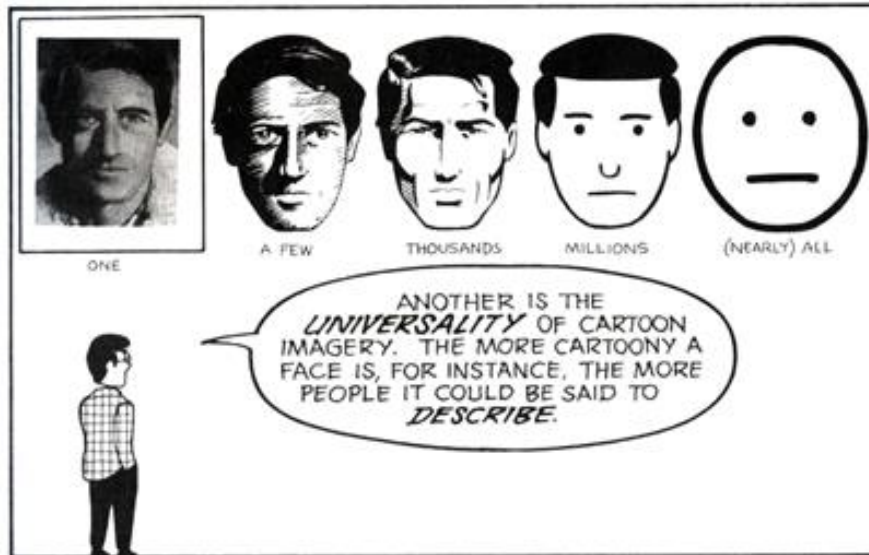


“Alice and Kev” – homeless in  
The Sims 3



# Encouraging player stories

- Leave threads incomplete
  - Players will do better with a thread to pull on
  - What do you provide in your initial map?
  - Anything mysterious in your characters?



- Use abstraction
  - SimLish enables stuff that dialogue does not
- Watch out for overdetermined quests!



# Break the grid

- No good reason to stick to pure tile engines.









# Lego style assets

- An old lesson! Enable players to build things you didn't supply the art for.



*Ultima Online Piano.*

# Asset interactions

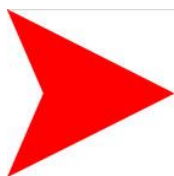
- Autonomous actors
  - Lead to serendipity! Pets, simple behavior patterns, etc.
- Radial effects
  - If you have a solid system behind the game, you can have richness emerge through interactions
  - E.g. fountain near plants = better harvest
  - Don't document... a wiki for your game is the best sign of a committed audience!
- Aim for emergence!

# Trading

- Trading reduces ARPU, alas, though it increases retention.
- Rares and limited editions make for a powerful engine.
- We shouldn't forget that the F2P model was built on rares and trading originally!



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# Shoot Retention!



**Teut Weidemann**

Online Games & Monetization  
Consultant

Senior Online Games Supervisor  
Ubisoft Blue Byte



# Shoot Login Bonus!

- Do not reward login
- Reward play instead!

World of Tanks rewards 1<sup>st</sup> victory for each tank with 2x/3x/5x XP



# Multi-Progression Systems



- i.e. 4 Classes
- = 4 x Leveling ~ 4x Lifetime



# Multi-Progression Systems



- Multiple weapons to level
- Even more add-ons to unlock

# M\*Progressions gives you



## Short Term

Unlocks:

- Weapons
- Mods
- Items

## Mid Term

- Next Level
- Unlock Class
- Achievements

## Long Term

- High Tier
- Max Level
- Collections



*"Just one more level!"*

# Now Add Premium Accounts!

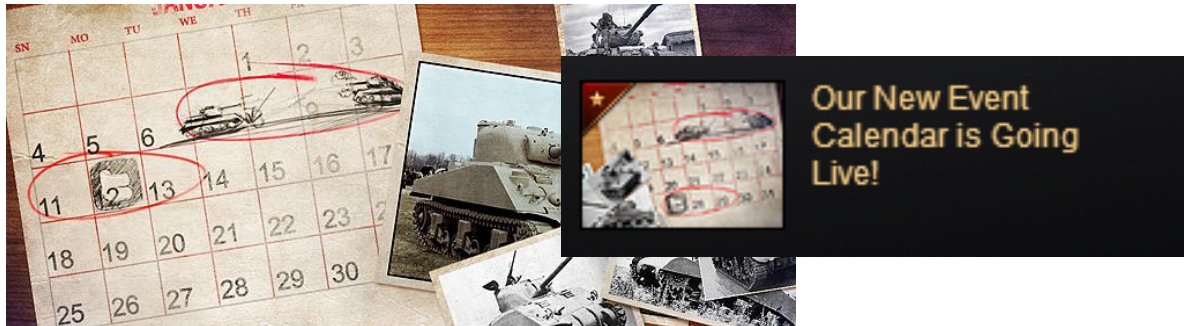
- Grants 50% XP & Credit Bonus
- Ultimate Retention:
  - Users play intensively before Premium runs out!
  - Gift 1-3 premium days as teasers!





# Game Specific Events!

- Weekday specials interacting with game loop
  - Double XP
  - Easier Weapon unlocks with 'Double Weapon XP'
  - Exclusive rare Weapon & Item access on that day
- Announce these events (calendar)
  - So players start to plan their RL around them



# Game Specific Events!

In other words some game content is only available

- at specific days, weeks or months
- or during special Events

*And why not special content during full moon? At night?*

## WEAPONS

A gold-colored semi-automatic handgun with a black slide and magazine. It has a compact design with a short barrel and a textured grip.

### F2000 WAR

#### ORIGINAL

DAMAGE	40 [0]
RATE OF FIRE	842 [+42]
ACCURACY	83 [-1]
CONTROL	21 [0]
TIME	0.95s [+0.1]

A gold-colored submachine gun with a black magazine and a long barrel. It has a distinctive C-shaped grip and a compact body.

### P90 WAR

#### LONG RANGE

DAMAGE	37 [+3]
RATE OF FIRE	800 [0]
ACCURACY	68 [-2]
CONTROL	23 [-7]
TIME	0.55s [0]

# Collectibles & Rares

- Now add Collectibles & Rares
- Yes this means stuff is only available once per year
- Or once per lifetime
- Creates awesome retention!





# Social Retention

Now add

- Leaderboards (resetting weekly, monthly, yearly)
- Tournaments

With those Rares & Collectibles as prizes!



## Recap:

Retention means players coming back for more fun

Retention mechanics only help optimizing it

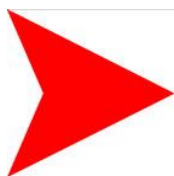
There is short, medium & long term retention

Service your players. It is more than a game\*

## THE MAGIC BEANSTALK OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY



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# Retention in Word Games

Tamir Nadav

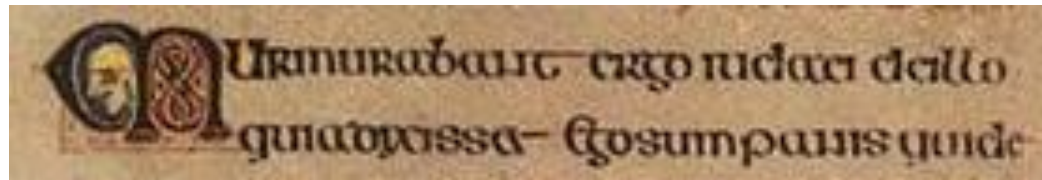
# Unique Challenges

- Vocabulary is paramount
- Players enjoy feeling “Smart”
- Longer deliberation between actions

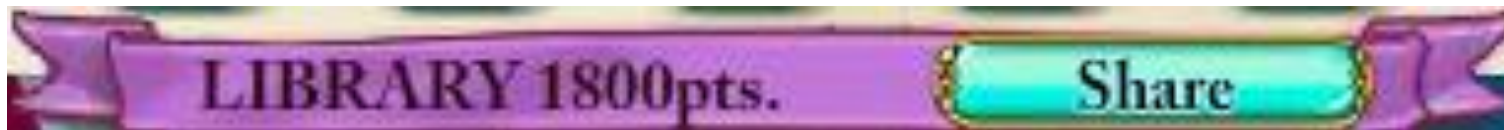
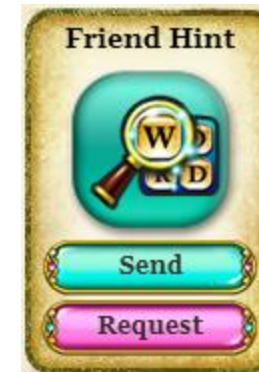


# Voluminous Prospectus of Terminology

- Word games MUST be localized!



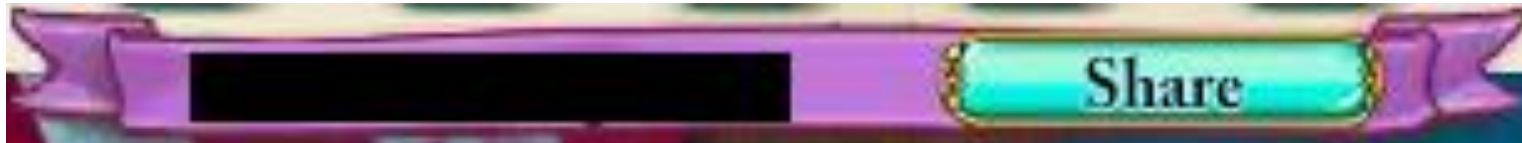
- Collaboration encourages retention
- Players **want** to show off





# Words can be Dangerous

- Not ALL words should be shared, however.



# Feeling S-M-R-T

- Remind players how smart they are



<i>Your Statistics (Standard Levels)</i>	
<i>Total Tiles Cleared:</i>	16,048
<i>Total Words Spelled:</i>	3,143
<i>Highest Total Word Score:</i>	9,900
<i>Average Word Length:</i>	3.94
<i>6-7 Letter Words Spelled:</i>	188
<i>8+ Letter Words Spelled:</i>	7

*... or at least help them FEEL smart.*

# Turns Take Time

- Vibrancy, Color, Character



- Encourage Play with Hints





# Theme and Purpose

- If players CARE about the world...



... they will do anything to fix it!

(even spend money!)

# Some Fun Stats

- Over **11 BILLION** words spelled

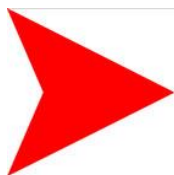
- Longest Words:

**UNDOMESTICATED**

**PALEONTOLOGIST**



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# F2P Role-Playing Games Retention

**Mike Sellers**

# RPGs: Quick Definitions

- Single character/avatar focus
- Increasing achievement and expertise
- Player builds character's skills, abilities, and gear
- Not a slot machine: player skill matters
- Either/both PvE, PvP
- Not quite Hearthstone to maybe MOBAs

# Examples

- Realm of the Mad God
- Kings Road
- Solstice
- Path of Exile
- Marvel Heroes





# F2P Platforms

- Facebook, web
  - Crowded
  - Mature (slow growth)
  - Expensive to get installs (and poor viral channels)
  - But: opening up again as other games leave?
- New(er) markets: tablet, phone
  - Gatekeepers: Apple, Google
  - Requires smoother, simpler UI/UX

# Tried and True Methods

- Character improvement: leveling up, adding skills
- Quest lines and map completion
- The lure of better gear
- The lure of better character types
- Guild involvement continues to be huge












# Crafting and Evolution

- Borrowed from Card Battlers
- Upgrade <item>, combine with another, evolve, repeat
  - Twist: Evolve at any time – but this limits the item
- Similar to other collection mechanics
- Huge time (money) investment for player
- Path and benefits must be clear to retain players



# ROTMG: Pets!

- Hatch your pet from an egg
- Feed pets *anything* (especially purchased food)
- Evolve pets to have awesome abilities
- Results: Huge retention, monetization driver

Type	Eggs	Common & Uncommon	Rare & Legendary	Divine
Aquatic	 	 	 	 
Automaton	 	 	 	 

# KingsRoad: Item Sets

- Multiple armor/weapon sets
  - Look awesome
  - Confer special abilities
  - Very rare
- “Best item” treadmill
- Player desires for set completion
- Recently added “Enchanting” to items: upgrade & evolve
  - But: no “early evolution”



# KingsRoad: Other Retention

- Daily and limited-time Bounties
- Co-op, especially high-end dungeons
- Improving long-term story



# Diablo III Shout-out

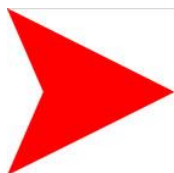
- Not F2P, but still the source for a lot of F2P
- Changes to link monster level to character level
- “Key factor is item quality” - Mosqueira
- Two interlocking retention loops: Level/skill + Item quality
  - Players play on hardest settings: fair game, more fun



# Open Issues

- RPGs becoming stale?
  - Go shorter/simpler: MOBAs
  - Go longer/deeper: MMOs?
  - Go episodic/linear: Walking Dead
- Need retention/monetization beyond upgrade/evolve
- Need better social retention methods
- Engagement remains shallow in crowded market

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# Retention & Narrative in FTP HOGs



**Kenny Shea Dinkin**  
CCO  
Making Fun  
Kenny@makingfun.com

# Who is this Guy?

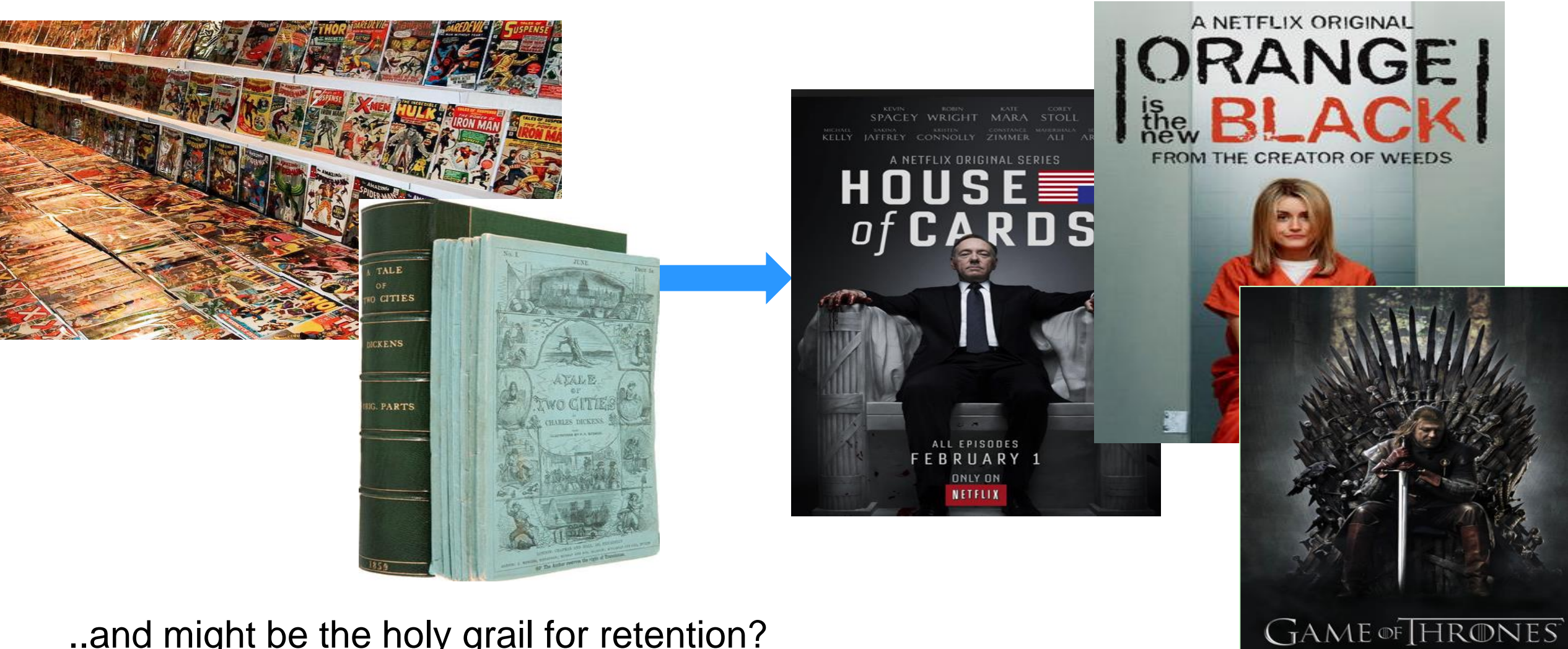
- ⦿ Kenny Shea Dinkin, CCO, Making Fun
- ⦿ Formely, VP & Executive Producer, Studio Head, San Francisco Studio, Disney Interactive Media Group | Disney Social Games/Playdom
- ⦿ Before that, Chief Creative Officer, PlayFirst (7 years)
- ⦿ Before that Creative Director , The Learning Company/Broderbund (9 years)





# NARRATIVE AND RETENTION in FTP HOGS

Compelling Character-Driven Serialized Narrative = Crack



..and might be the holy grail for retention?

# Story in games: inelegant

- Young art form, still figuring things out
- Awkward: linear model in an emergent dynamic system
- Creators have tended to be technologists, not story tellers
- Constant disruptions by leaps in technology, new platforms and new business models

# Story in FTP = extra awkward

- GaaS → Game must last forever
  - Hard to tell a story forever. Expensive.
- Must be grindable and ripe for (much) repeat play, without being unbearable.
  - How do you (entertainingly) tell the same story over and over again?

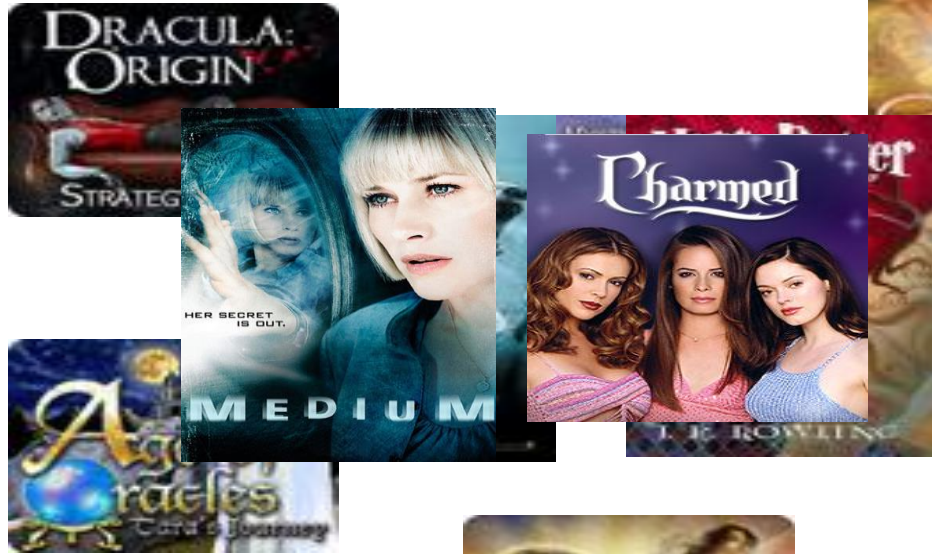
# 1. PTP HOGs

- If storytelling is linear and games are not, adventure games are the natural place to tell a story in games
- PTP HOGs organically grew out of adventure games
- Naturally narrative spaces
- More and more story as time went by
- Ravenhearst and Dream Chronicles series began to use inventory driven structures and embedded puzzles

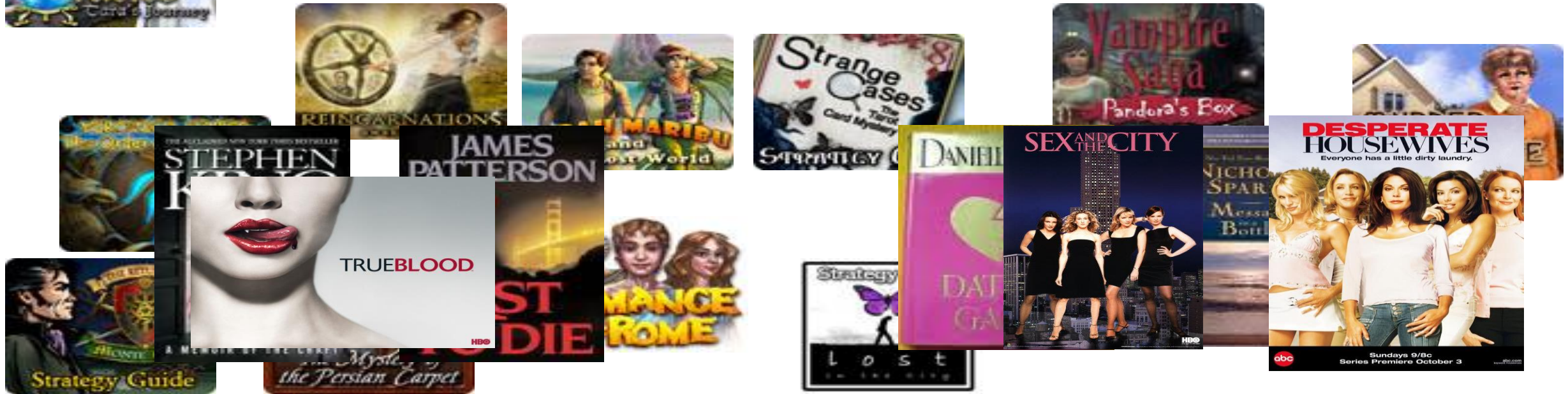


# 2009 casual hits...

## FANTASY



## CRIME/MYSTERY



## HORROR/THRILLER

## ROMANCE



# Social 2009

Narrative Free Zone?

**Mafia Wars** by zynga

Cash (Go to Bank) **\$210,445**  
More in 51:00

Health **79/100**  
(Hospital)

Energy **22/27**  
More in 1:58

Stamina **4/5**  
More in 3:26

Experience **241/305**

Profile My Mafia (7)

Home Jobs Fight Properties Inventory Godfather

Your Mafia of 75 fought against NightMareChild with a Sawed-off Shotgun, a Revolver, a Machine Pistol, 3 9mm Semi-Automatics, a Grenade, a Butterfly Knife, 16 Colt Pistols, a .22 Pistol, 2 Brass Knuckles, a Baseball Bat, a Croc, a Gas Mask, and a Motorcycle.

NightMareChild'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.

**Attack Again!**

Remember: You can fight with up to **501** mafia members, and each can use one weapon, one armor, and one vehicle!

**Fight** (Take on other Mafias) **Hitlist** (Be a hired gun) **Racketeering** (Extort money from other Mafias)

Only your top 501 Mafia members can help in a fight. After that they do not provide a bonus. This is also true for Hired Guns.

User	Mafia size
Ragmeister, Level 8 Mogul	6
ymm, Level 8 Mogul	2
69 ERZ, Level 8 Marlac	8









## 2. FTP HOGs

- HOGs stumped social game makers at first
- How do we make them last forever
- How do we create grind
- But it turns out HOGs are a natural setting for massive replay
- Short-term memory vs. long-term memory allows players for natural massive replay
- Fits beautifully with energy based monetization
- But what about linear story?



# Endless Narrative Spaces





Energy driven monetization.

Compartmentalized narrative and characters.

Decorative space for a meta game, upgrades, resources.

Disconnected narrative works in “chapterized” format.



Chapterized format allows for massive grind/replay.



PLAY

MY TEAMMATES

+ INVITE FRIENDS

EARN CASH



MESSAGES



# CRIMINAL CASE TEAM

Loading game... (Cross-checking Alibis)

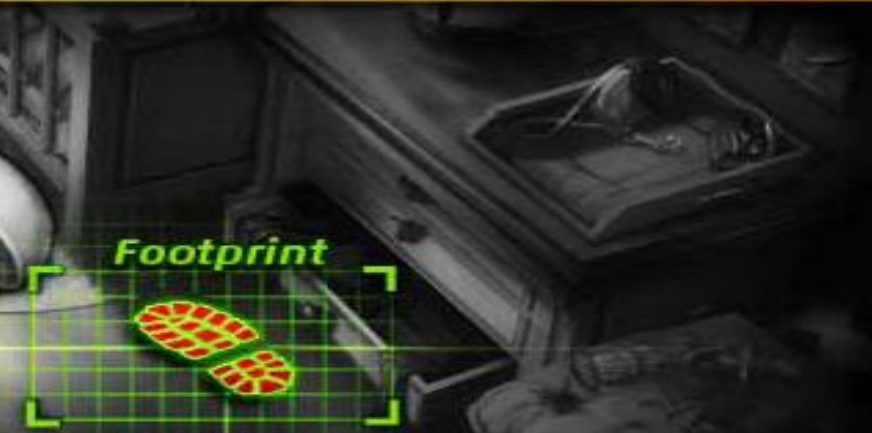
• CROSS •

• CRIME SCENE •

• DO NOT CROSS



Knife



Footprint



## Criminal Case

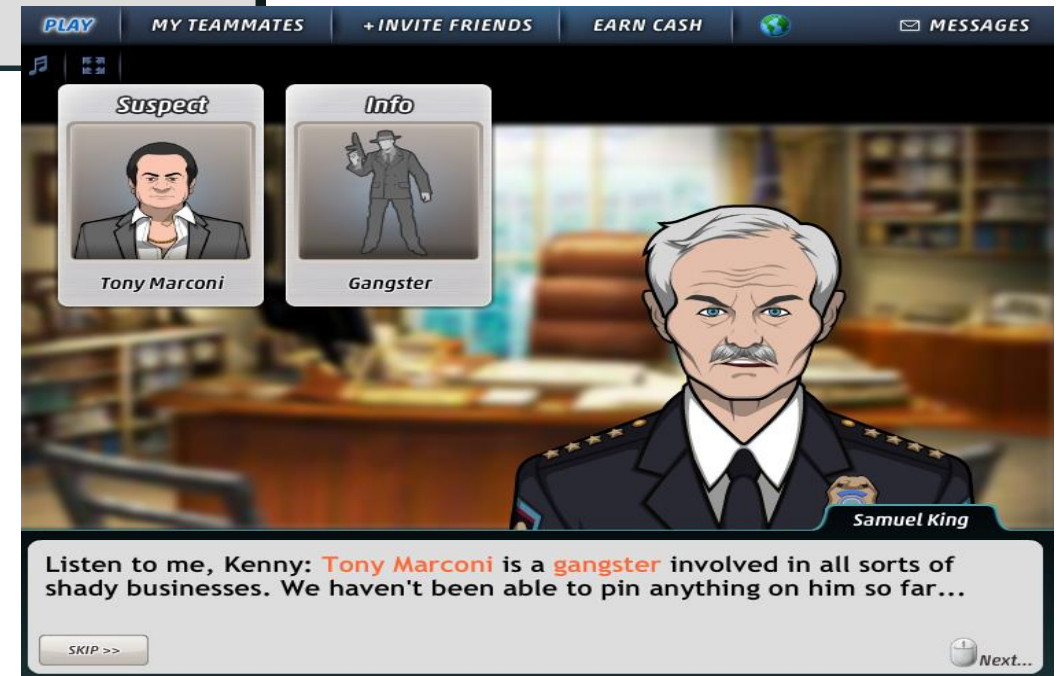


Narrative spaces:  
creepy “adult” locales

grizzly crime scenes as



Forensics meta game where you are a detective and solve a murder – interview suspects, perform autopsies/forensics etc.

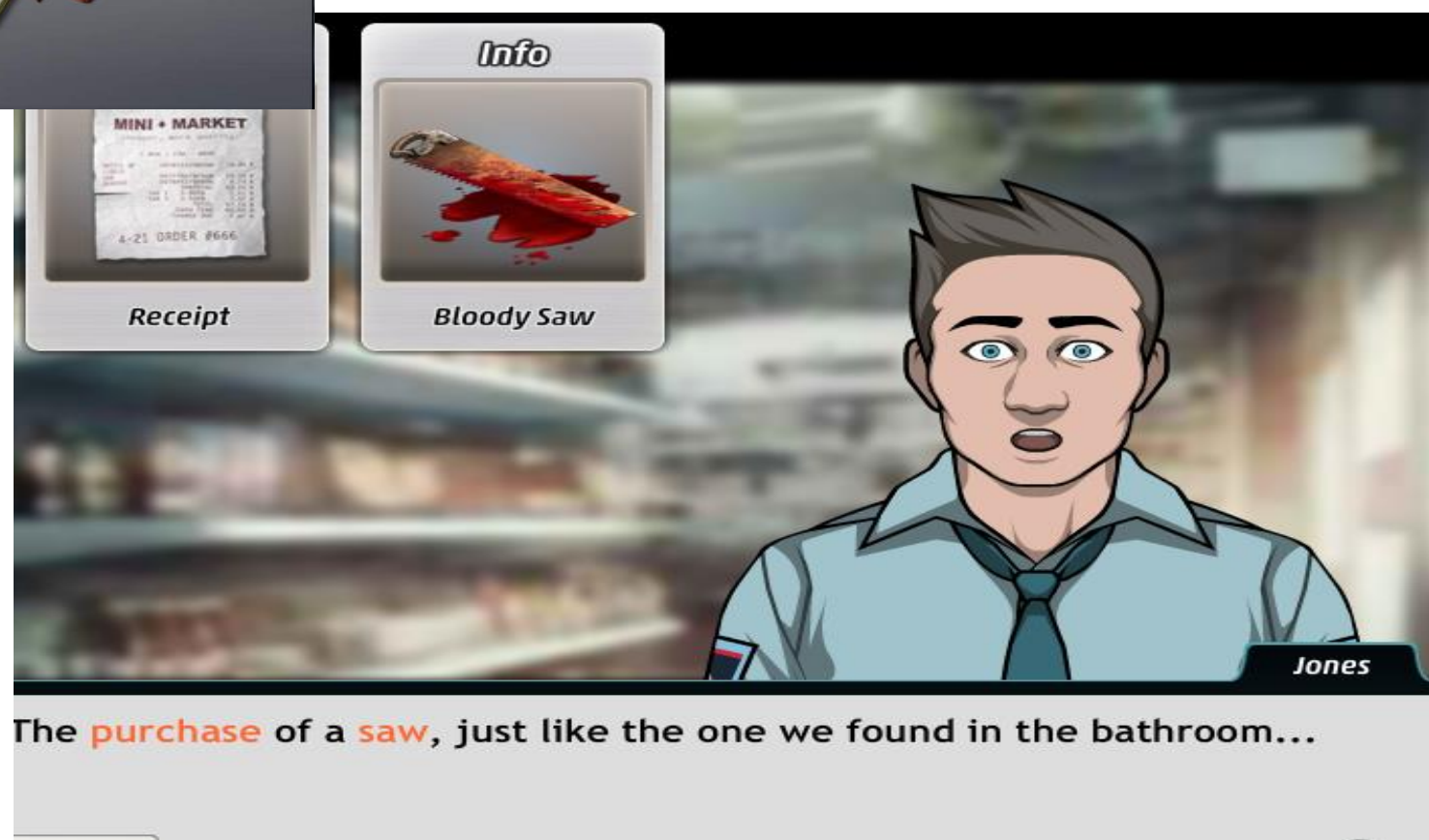




Mini  
games



Embedded clue  
scenes





Expend (or buy) energy to play more. Play more to earn more stars.



Spend those stars to interview suspects, examine clues and resolve a murder mystery – to unlock...more content.

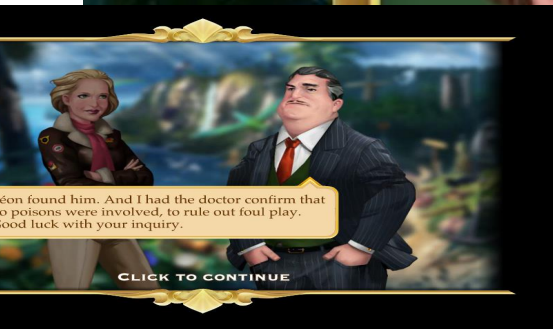
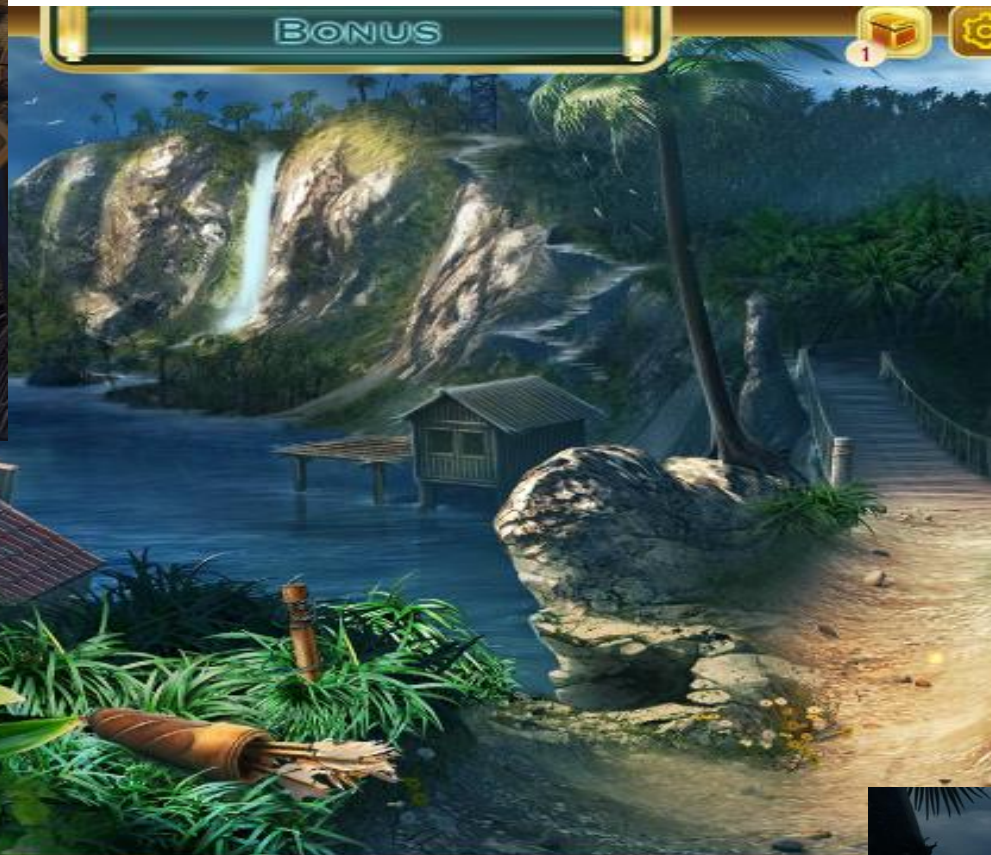
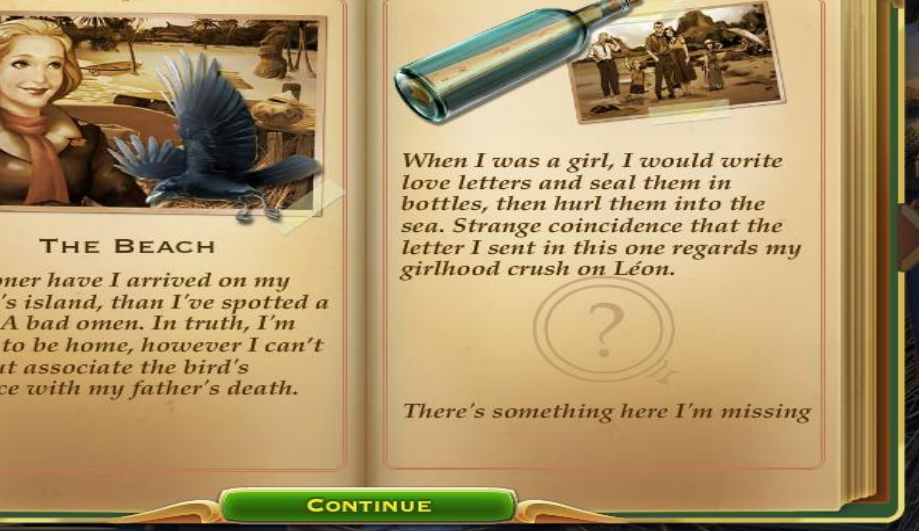




- Family saga
- Aviatrix in the 1930s
- Mysterious Murder mystery narrated via panel cut scenes
- Evocative narrative spaces







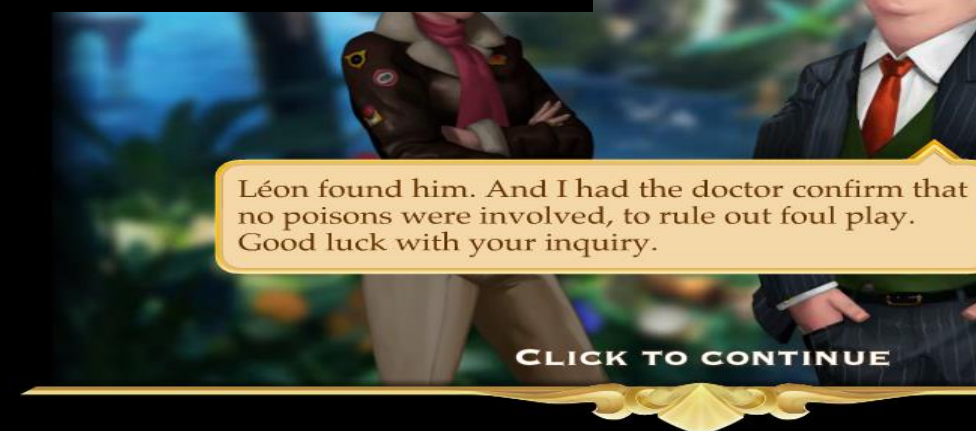
Embedded clues to solve a mystery  
Diary/journal format to collect clues.  
Each chapter a cliffhanger –







Coherent narrative pulls players to purchase more energy to play more to unlock more story.

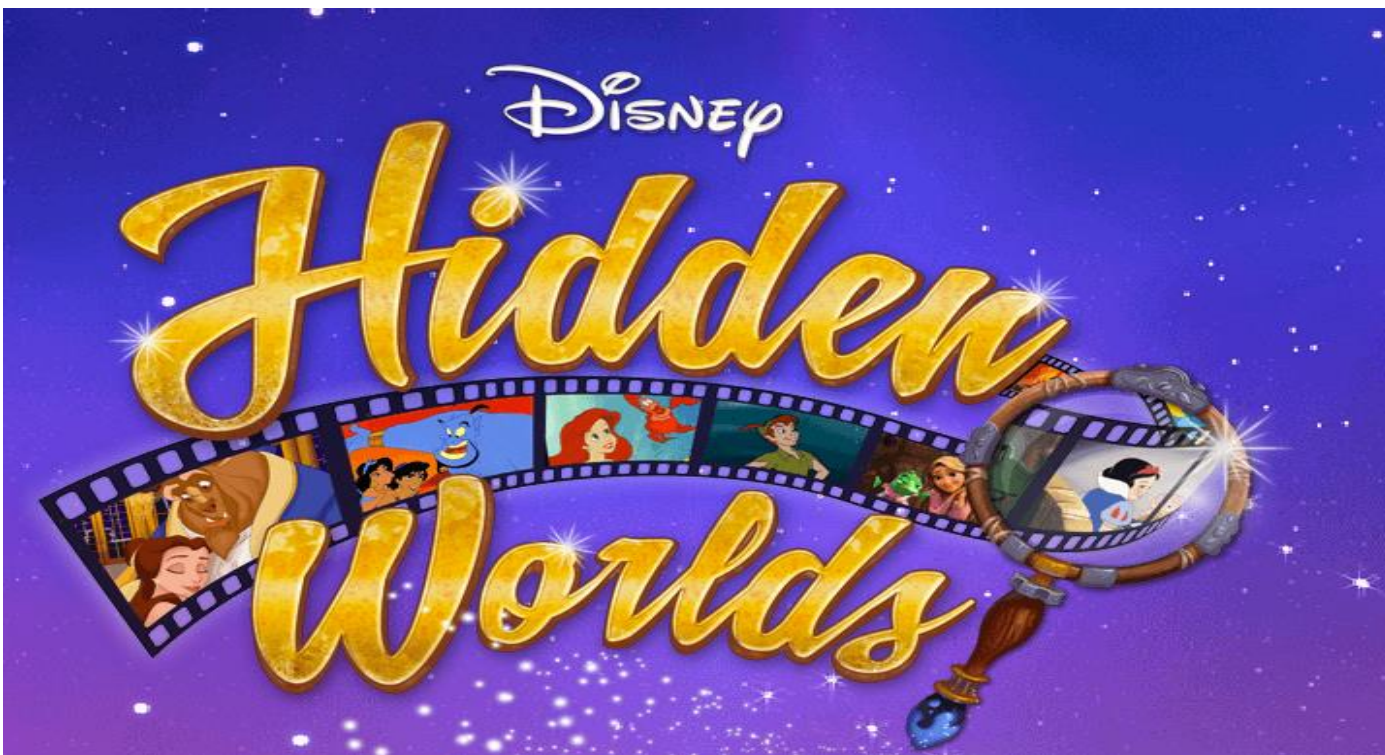




Decorative space meta game to chart progress and add monetization drivers to accelerate upgrades to unlock more content.







Meet Chrona and the Inklings...







- Meta Story surrounding multiple (beloved) branded micro stories.





- Embedded found objects are sometimes resources needed for crafting
- Crafting allows to monetize accelerators as well as energy





- Well-known, beloved brands used as long term retention draws/unlockable story worlds.
- Nostalgic/kid-oriented – grandma oriented

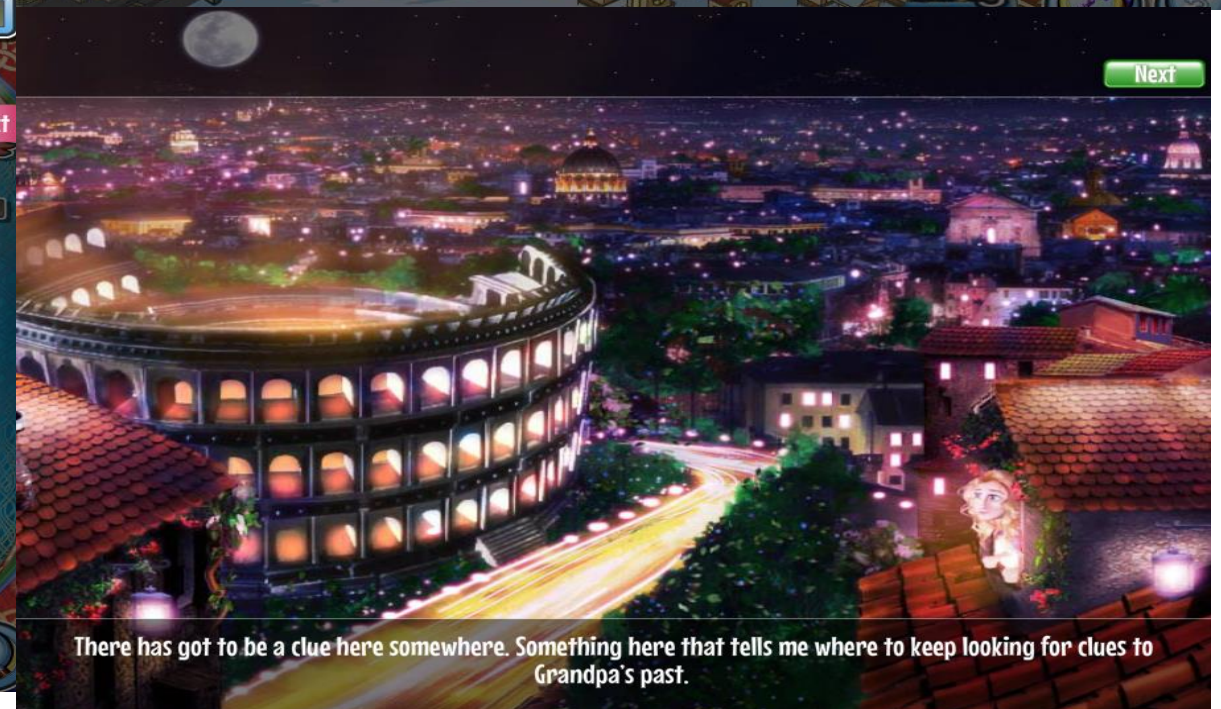
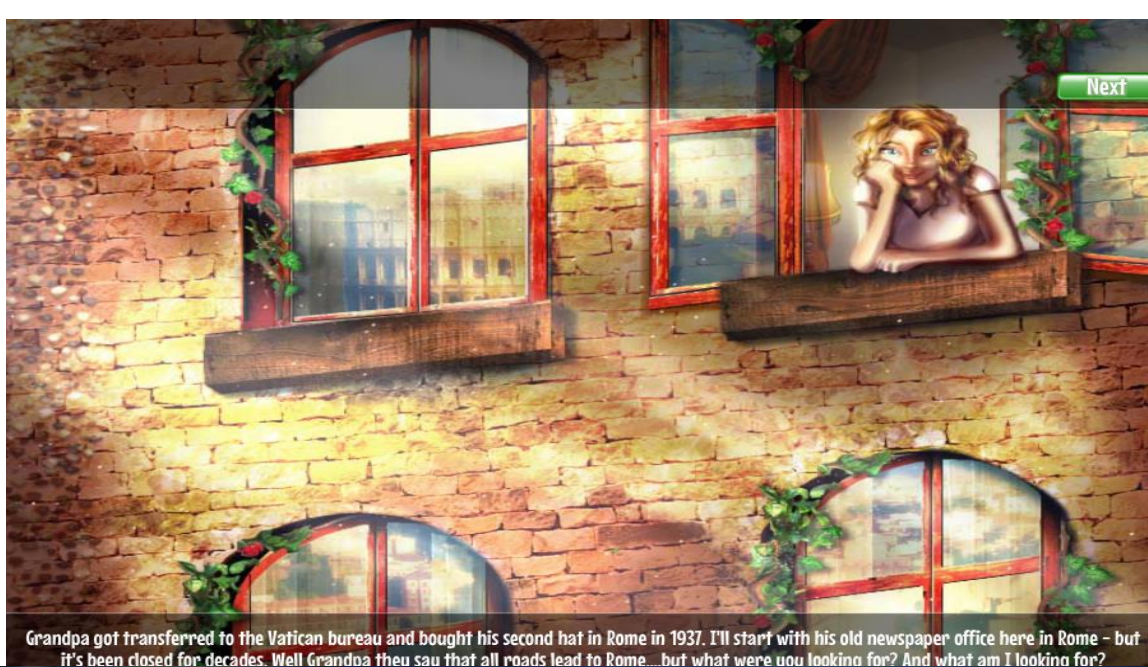






- Original vision: content as metagame – made more fun with added arcade element of grab the locomotive. Grab it before it runs off the tracks.
- Originally: no narrative, no story, no characters
- Beautiful Photographic HOGs
- Spend energy and power ups, to master cities and unlock more content.
- The meta-game?: Mastery stars unlock more cities/play. 38 cities so far. Content monetized at end of line to elder gamers/fans/addicts/"whales". Worked, but how to raise the KPI after one year?







# NARRATIVE & TIME LIMITED EVENTS

- Added narrative segments just two months ago as time limited events: (Juliet's Journeys)
- Paris, Rome, Istanbul
- Added a new currency: "Golden Miles" – earned through grind/mastery
- Journey play costs GMs, earned through grind, to unlock and play.
- Time-limited play
- Lifted Monetization ~18%
- Shored up retention and decreased churn





# Retention & Narrative in FTP HOGs



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**Q & A**