

GDC[®]

9 Takeaways from Duelyst: From Tabletop to Digital Game

Eric Lang & Keith Lee
Lead Designers, Counterplay Games



Who are we?

Eric Lang

Lead Game Designer



15+ years tabletop experience & 2016 Diana Jones Award Winner

Shipped 13+ games including CCG, LCG, tabletop, and tactics games:

Blood Rage, Rising Sun, Marvel Dice Masters, Quarriors, XCOM board games

Warhammer 40,000: Conquest, World of Warcraft TCG

Game of Thrones, Star Wars, LOTR, Call of Cthulhu card games

Keith Lee

CEO & Creative Director



Lead Producer for Diablo III at Blizzard Entertainment

Lead Game Programmer for Ratchet & Clank series at Insomniac Games

The background is a stylized, painterly landscape. In the center, a tall, grey, rectangular tower stands on a small platform. The tower has a slightly jagged top and a few small windows. The landscape is composed of various shades of blue, green, and yellow, with a winding path or river in the foreground. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. Several rectangular objects, similar to the tower, are floating in the air around the central tower. The overall style is reminiscent of a video game or a digital artwork.

What is Duelyst?



Collectible Tactics Game

Online 1v1 turn based battles on 9x5 board

Assemble your deck from 500+ cards across 6 factions

250,000 matches played daily on PC/Mac/Web

Inspirations: Final Fantasy Tactics, Fire Emblem



PLAYER 1

9 / 9

PLAYER 2

6 / 6 HAND

9 / 9

25

25

1

1

REPLACE

DECK 15 / 40

2

4

6

3

1

4

END TURN

MENU

FRIENDS (0)

LYONAR

SONGHAI

VETRUVIAN

ABYSSIAN

MAGMAR

VANAR

NEUTRAL

Search



6



STORM ARATHA
MINION

6 5

Flying

X1

6



STORMMETAL GOLEM
GOLEM

8 8

X3

7



ASTRAL CRUSADER
MINION

7 6

Whenever you replace this card, it costs 1 less and gains +1/+1.

X2

7



DARK NEMESIS
MINION

4 10

At the start of your turn, deal 4 damage to the enemy General and this minion gains +4 Attack.

X2

7



DRAGONBONE GOLEM
GOLEM

10 10

X3

7



E'XUN
MINION

5 5

Forcefield
Whenever this minion attacks or is attacked, draw a card.

X3

7



GRAILMASTER
MINION

6 6

Whenever you summon a minion, this minion gains a random keyword ability.

X1

7



PADDO
MINION

12 6

Airdrop
Opening Gambit: Push ALL nearby minions and Generals to random spaces on the battlefield.

X3

V
28 Units - 11 Spells - 0 Artifacts

M
27 Units - 9 Spells - 3 Artifacts

S
26 Units - 13 Spells - 0 Artifacts

L
30 Units - 9 Spells - 0 Artifacts

V
24 Units - 11 Spells - 4 Artifacts

A
23 Units - 15 Spells - 1 Artifacts

NEW DECK



DISMISS NEW

BACK



A stylized, painterly landscape with a central tower and a river. The scene is dominated by a central, tall, grey, rectangular tower with a flat top, standing on a small platform. The tower is reflected in a body of water that flows from the foreground towards the background. The landscape is characterized by rolling hills and valleys, rendered in shades of red, orange, and brown, suggesting a dry or autumnal environment. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, with soft, wispy clouds. The overall style is reminiscent of a digital painting or a low-poly 3D render with a soft, atmospheric lighting.

How did Duelyst get started?



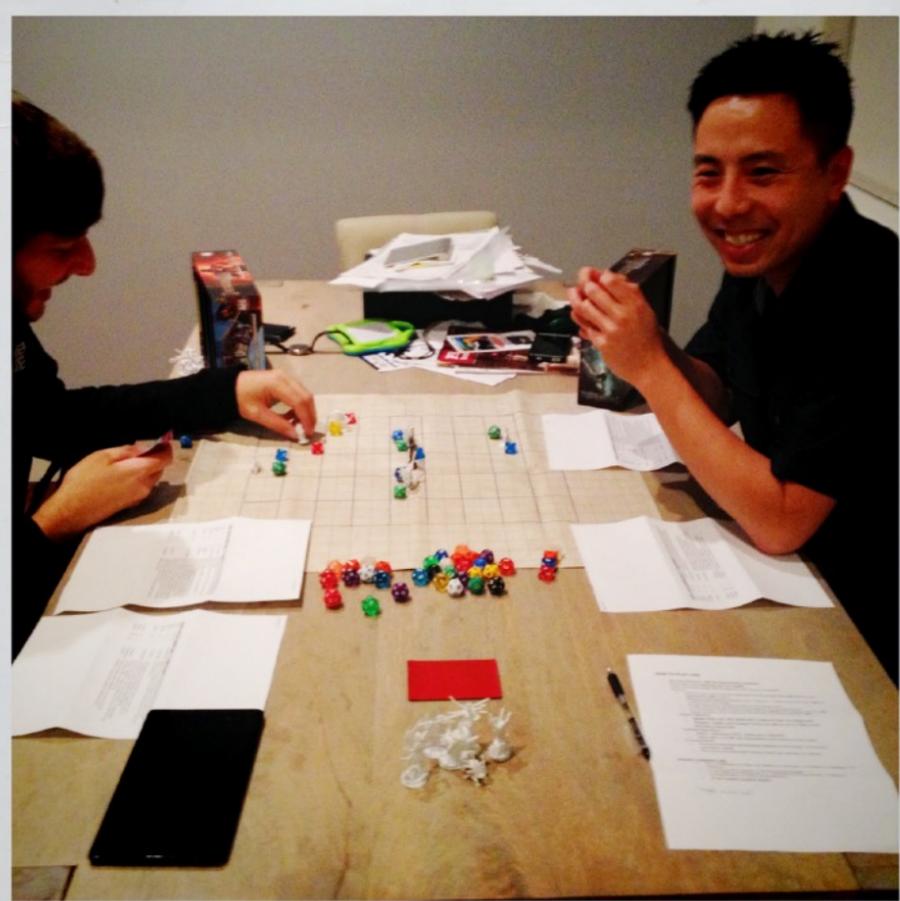
MANUFACTURED BY PORTER LANE RECORDS, TOKYO JAPAN 00047



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MANUFACTURED BY PORTER LANE RECORDS, TOKYO JAPAN 00047

Prototyping Board State:

Chessex vinyl mat

Bag of polyhedral dice

Card sleeve protectors

Pathfinder miniatures - unique heroes

Bag of generic fantasy miniatures





What are the strengths of digital?

Strengths

- Highly interactive social experience
- Ability to read secondary expressions

- Find players anywhere, anytime
- Hides massive number crunching

Tabletop

Digital

- Difficult to schedule and plan
- Big time commitment

- Lacks deeper person-to-person interaction
- Easily distracted / impatient

Weaknesses

A stylized, painterly landscape with a central tower and a river. The scene is dominated by a central, tall, grey, rectangular tower with a flat top, standing on a small platform. The tower is reflected in a body of water below it. The landscape is rendered in a soft, painterly style with a palette of muted greens, blues, and greys. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Does tabletop == digital persona?

Hypothesis for Digital

- 1) Shorter play sessions < 10 minutes
- 2) Per match variety is top priority (not 'samey')
[tabletop has more variety due to unique social interactions]
- 3) Playing with anonymous players

Data: Player Behavior

Average playtime: ~86 minutes daily

Average Games: 6 matches daily

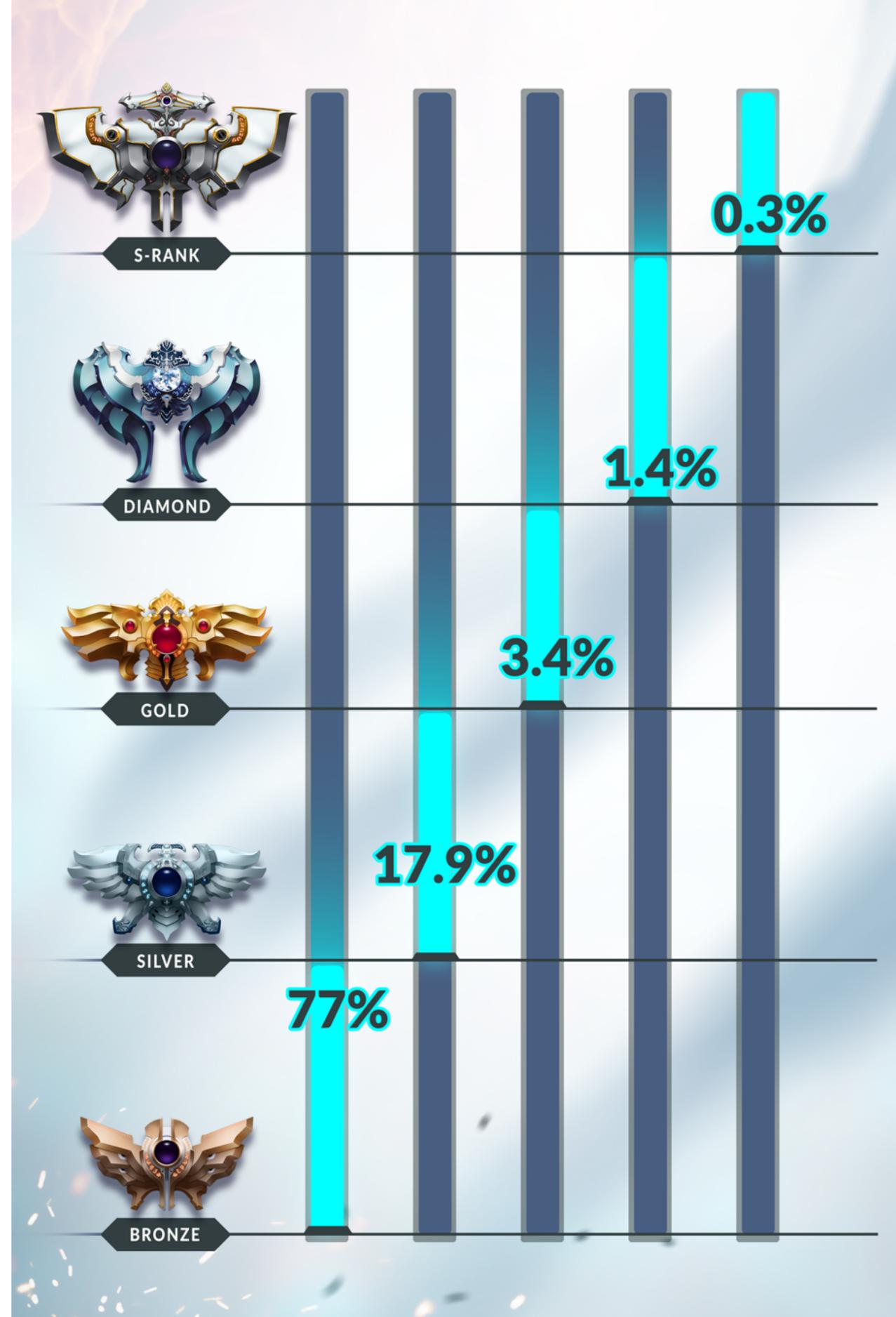
= Each match < 15 minutes

Key Design Pillars

- 1) Enforce match time upper bound to 10 minutes
- 2) Offer wide variety of deck archetypes
- 3) Build player confidence + skill level

Intended Ranked Player Distribution

NOT Gaussian Normal Distribution
Instead, skewed towards time served



A stylized illustration of a futuristic landscape. In the center, a tall, white, rectangular tower stands on a platform. The sky is a vibrant blue with soft, white clouds. Several rectangular objects, some white and some blue, are floating in the air. The ground is a mix of red and blue tones, with a winding path or river. The overall style is clean and modern, with a focus on geometric shapes and a cool color palette.

Takeaway No.1

#1 Focus on real-time interactivity

Show opponent's mouse movements & interactions in real-time

[Make it feel as though you're playing human component]

Summary: **Always keep player engaged when inactive**



RYVIRATH

25

2

1

0 / 2

connected



SIBON

25

34 / 40 DECK 5 / 6 HAND

3 / 3

2

1

ENEMY TURN

BATTLELOG

DECK 33 / 40

3

2

4

3

5

ENEMY TURN

MENU FRIENDS (11)

Activate Windows
Go to Settings to activate Windows.

#1 Focus on real-time interactivity

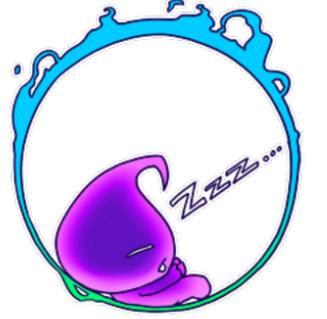
Offer restricted level of player-to-player interaction:

Emotes + Expressive Language

Buddy List w/ chat

Replay Sharing

Watch interesting division matches + spectate



#1 Focus on real-time interactivity

Very short matchmaking queue times (< 20 seconds) [roving eye in War3]

Avoided pushing out multiple game modes at launch

Started w/ Ranked Ladder + Draft Mode (The Gauntlet)

No Casual Mode

Only now adding Rainbow Mode

A stylized, painterly landscape with a central tower and floating rectangular objects in a blue sky. The scene is dominated by a central, tall, grey, rectangular tower with a flat top, standing on a small platform. The tower is surrounded by a vast, flat, reddish-brown landscape with a grid-like pattern of lines. In the foreground, there are dark, jagged, rocky outcrops. The sky is a deep blue with soft, white clouds. Several rectangular, glowing objects are floating in the sky, some appearing to be falling or rising. The overall style is reminiscent of a video game or a digital artwork.

Takeaway No.2

#2 You're only as good as your matchmaking systems

Multi-metric w/ weighted parameters, reduced to normalized range for Rating Score

- 1) Rank radius
- 2) Time served
- 3) Win count
- 4) Queue wait time
- 5) Never same opponent back-to-back
- 6) Cohort-based

#2 You're only as good as your matchmaking systems

Competitive play

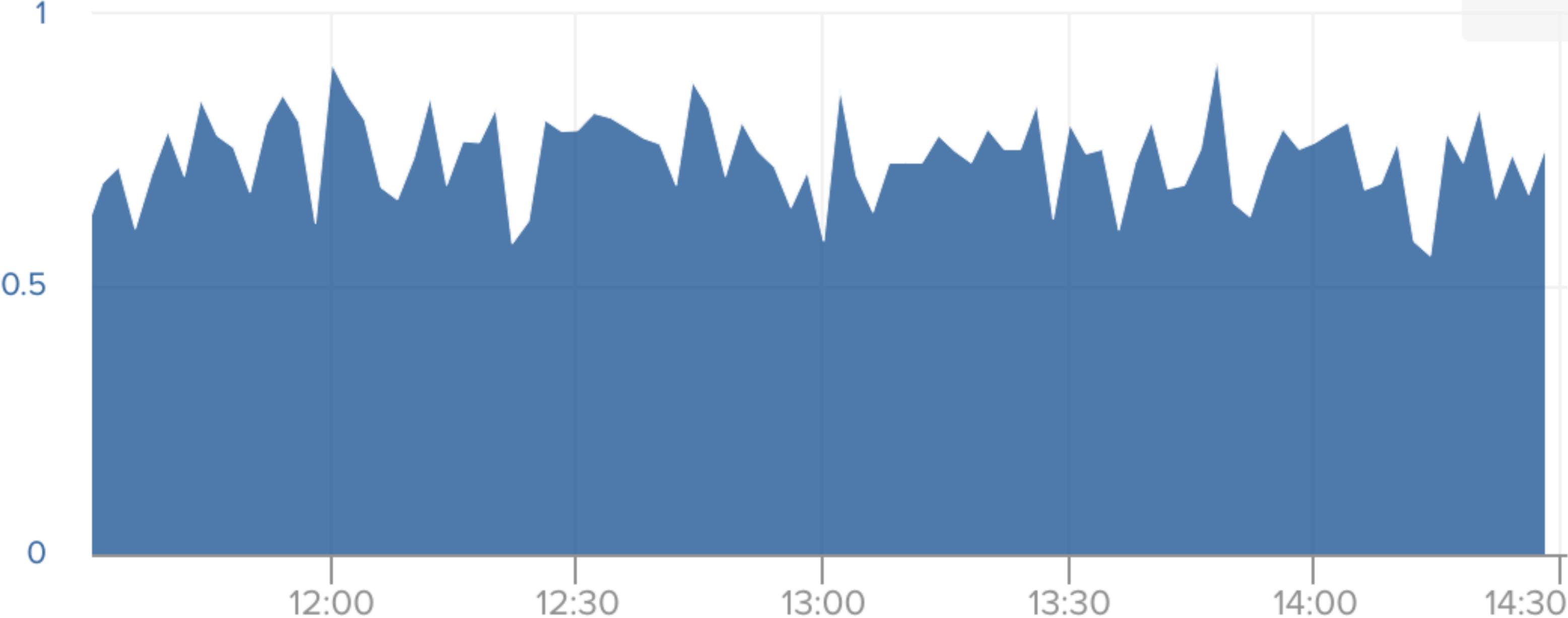
1.0 perfect, 0.75 great, 0.5 good, 0.0 poor (same player twice in a row)

Casual matchmaking is HARD

Peter Drucker: "What gets measured, gets improved."

Build a system w/ granularity across ranked divisions

B matchmaking quality



The background is a stylized, painterly landscape. In the center, a tall, grey, rectangular tower stands on a small platform. The sky is a vibrant blue with soft, white clouds. Several rectangular, glowing objects float in the sky, some appearing to be falling or rising. The ground is a mix of red and blue tones, with a winding path or river in the foreground. The overall style is reminiscent of a digital painting or a concept art piece.

Takeaway No.3

#3 Extracting fun from losses

How can the player still have fun after losing a match?

[With tabletop, you can still end session having had social fun/capital]

Play Quests vs Win Quests

Beware players conceding to game the system, must consider penalties

Faction Progression System

Get Orbs after losing X games

// DAILY QUESTS



First Win of the Day (+20 Gold): ACTIVE

<p>Win 1 Practice Game</p>  <p>Win 1 practice game.</p> <p>0 / 1</p> <p>STARTER</p>	<p>Vanar Challenger</p>  <p>Play 4 online games with a Vanar Deck.</p> <p>0 / 4</p> <p>REPLACE</p>	<p>Welcome Back!</p>  <p>Play 3 Games.</p> <p>0 / 3</p>
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You can replace each quest once per day.
New Quests added in: 1 Hour 49 Minutes 52 Seconds

#3 Extracting fun from losses

Within a match itself, game design pacing built around milestones

Achieving combos

Learning Moments

A stylized, painterly landscape with a central tower and floating rectangular objects. The scene is dominated by a central, tall, grey, rectangular tower with a flat top, standing on a small platform. The tower is surrounded by a vast, flat, reddish-brown landscape with a grid-like pattern of lines. In the foreground, there are dark, jagged, rocky outcrops. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, with soft, billowing clouds. Several rectangular, glowing objects are floating in the air, some appearing to be falling or rising. The overall style is reminiscent of a digital painting or a stylized video game environment.

Takeaway No.4

#4 Encourage Positive Behaviors

Player Gifting (great rewards to recipient w/ rate limiting)

Winners Tipping

Top 50 Tipping Leaderboard

[Helps to distribute Gold across the player ecosystem]



DUELIST™

TOP 50 GOLD TIPPERS OCT 2016

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1 nara10 | 26 islamhetlar |
| 2 f8d | 27 bamhorse |
| 3 paul30604 | 28 eldynamite |
| 4 williamblake | 29 sk1llz9 |
| 5 t2k5 | 30 envybaer |
| 6 pagogo | 31 mightyassassin7 |
| 7 iplayonlyabyssian | 32 jumjuml |
| 8 darklordsen | 33 southpaw |
| 9 kingsley | 34 zerotheabsolute |
| 10 retsudoyagyu | 35 thaliak |
| 11 peachesftw | 36 nowayitsj |
| 12 blankzero | 37 beardier |
| 13 althur | 38 flutin |
| 14 xbuster | 39 jogdhai |
| 15 haxishax | 40 omiknight52 |
| 16 antiitna | 41 huliganjetta |
| 17 proginoskes | 42 floss2xdaily |
| 18 dannyst | 43 rainesama |
| 19 chronos33 | 44 themagma |
| 20 lia | 45 sephytreebeard |
| 21 lovelylioness | 46 mechan1x |
| 22 nitroxilin | 47 r0lf |
| 23 equifinality | 48 ascetis |
| 24 mka | 49 isthore |
| 25 supremeegg | 50 mmf |

A stylized illustration of a futuristic landscape. In the center, a tall, grey, rectangular tower stands on a platform. The ground is a mix of red and blue, with a winding path or river. The sky is a mix of blue and white, with several rectangular objects floating in the air. The overall style is clean and modern.

Takeaway No.5

#5 Create Progression Vectors w/ 1 Goal

Achievements: Dinged at specific points to reinforce play patterns

eg. lose several matches in a row

eg. disenchant first card, achievement to give you enough spirit to craft new card

FTUE (First Time User Experience): Focus on the gameplay, not the meta-systems

Faction Progression: Avoided lump sum starter bundles and packs

[players don't yet know how to best value them + overwhelming]

#5 Create Progression Vectors w/ 1 Goal

Goal: Avoid hyper literal text

Lower card word count, 30 chars per line, hard max of 4 lines

Single abilities per card (especially early progression cards)

Discoverable Abilities (eg. Variax)

#5 Create Progression Vectors w/ 1 Goal

BAD: Kara Bloodborn Spell:

“Whenever you summon a minion from anywhere this turn, give it +1/+1.”

[Intent: Tell player bbs works with tokens, rather than just minions from hand.]

GOOD: Kara Bloodborn Spell:

“Any minion you summon this turn gains +1/+1.”

A stylized, painterly landscape with a central tower and floating rectangular objects. The scene is dominated by a central, tall, grey, rectangular tower with a flat top, standing on a small platform. The tower is surrounded by a vast, flat, reddish-brown landscape with a grid-like pattern of lines. In the foreground, there are dark, winding paths or rivers. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, with soft, billowing clouds. Several rectangular, glowing objects are scattered in the sky, some appearing to be falling or floating. The overall style is reminiscent of a video game or a digital artwork.

Takeaway No.6

#6 Offer catch-up mechanics

Not everyone can catch up to hardcore players (skill/collection gap)

Originally, we had discrete X wins for Y gold

But this only favors better skilled, experienced players

‘Stronger get richer’

Our solution: Front-load the bulk of rewards (daily/weekly/monthly)

#6 Offer catch-up mechanics

Welcome Back Quest

5 Gold for very daily quest you complete; Stacks to 25

#6 Offer catch-up mechanics

Old: 10 Gold every 4 Ranked Plays (daily max of 50 Gold)

Issue: Players concede 20 games on ladder

New: 5 Gold per 2 Wins

First 14 wins per day, you get +10 bonus per completion

15 Gold per 2 Wins

#6 Offer catch-up mechanics

In-game matches:

Mana ramps up every turn

Stakes elevate from turn-to-turn

Strong board clears

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Takeaway No.7

#7 Continuous Content + Patch Updates

Built on Web for testing/deploys, then PC (100% in Javascript)

Consistency is Key: Update 55 patches in 1 year

Not tied to LCG model

Offer monthly content: cards, daily challenges, boss battles, expansions

DUELIST

7



WAR TALON
MINION

4 Frenzy, Provoke

9

War Talon is a blue and black armored warrior with a sword and a shield. It has a blue hexagonal icon with the number 7 in the top left corner. The card features a yellow circle with the number 4 and a red circle with the number 9. The text 'Frenzy, Provoke' is written below the yellow circle.

4



TETHERMANCER
MINION

1 Provoke
Dispel any minion that deals damage to this one.

6

Tethermancer is a purple and red figure with long, flowing red tentacles. It has a blue hexagonal icon with the number 4 in the top left corner. The card features a yellow circle with the number 1 and a red circle with the number 6. The text 'Provoke' is written below the yellow circle, and 'Dispel any minion that deals damage to this one.' is written below the red circle.

6



BONEREAPER
MINION

2 Provoke
At the end of your turn, deal 2 damage to all nearby enemy minions.

9

Bonereaper is a purple and black figure with a scythe. It has a blue hexagonal icon with the number 6 in the top left corner. The card features a yellow circle with the number 2 and a red circle with the number 9. The text 'Provoke' is written below the yellow circle, and 'At the end of your turn, deal 2 damage to all nearby enemy minions.' is written below the red circle.

5



HOLLOW GROVEKEEPER
MINION

3 Opening Gambit: Destroy ANY nearby minion with Provoke or Frenzy. If you do, this minion gains Provoke and Frenzy.

4

Hollow Grovekeeper is a red and black figure with a green and red mane. It has a blue hexagonal icon with the number 5 in the top left corner. The card features a yellow circle with the number 3 and a red circle with the number 4. The text 'Opening Gambit: Destroy ANY nearby minion with Provoke or Frenzy. If you do, this minion gains Provoke and Frenzy.' is written below the yellow circle.

A stylized, painterly illustration of a futuristic landscape. The scene is dominated by a central, tall, grey, rectangular tower that appears to be a structure or a monument. The tower is set on a platform and is surrounded by a vast, flat, reddish-brown landscape. In the foreground, there are rolling hills and a winding path. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, with soft, wispy clouds. Several rectangular, glowing objects are floating in the air, scattered around the central tower. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on geometric shapes and a limited color palette.

Takeaway No.8

#8 Create a social community atmosphere

Availability and access to developers

Discord (real-time) vs. Reddit (daily) vs. Forums (long form)

Customer Support (24 hour grading system)

Twitter (18K followers) > Facebook (35K likes)

< 1% of your FB posts will reach your liked audience

Integrating featured steamers directly in-game

Twitch Dev Talks

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Takeaway No.9

#9 You can't make everyone happy

True for any design, but we never tried to

Be very clear what we're NOT

Bolster strengths, don't focus on weaknesses

Change is lightning fast to developers, but an eternity for players

2 card draw vs. single card draw, community polarized

Consistency of play (boring) vs. RNG (variety spikes, smoothes skill curve)

Chess 0.0 <—> Duelyst 0.5 <—> Higher RNG CCGs 1.0

Strengths

- Highly interactive social experience
- Ability to read secondary expressions

- Find players anywhere, anytime
- Hides massive number crunching

Tabletop

Digital

- Difficult to schedule and plan
- Big time commitment

- Lacks deeper person-to-person interaction
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Weaknesses

Thank You

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