



Plague Inc.
EVOLVED

Evolving Plague Inc: Taking a Top Mobile Game to Steam



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSat_gLDXPc



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Founder of Ndemmic Creations

Developer of Plague Inc.

I will explore how and why our mobile game succeeded on Steam



- Steam: Opportunities and Challenges
- Designing around these challenges
- Did it work?
- Observations from the Journey
- My recommendations



App Store



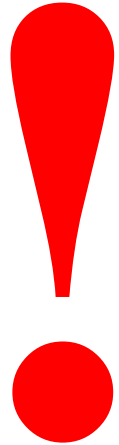
Google play



Disclaimer: Listen at your own risk



- Focus on issues linked to going from mobile to steam
- Will use Steam and PC interchangeably
- This is the games industry: everyone has opinions and theories but nobody really knows anything for sure



Plague Inc. has proved quite infectious on mobile...



- **Platforms:** iOS, Android
- **Released:** May 2012 (Oct 2012 for Android)
- **Price:** \$0.99 (*free limited version on Google Play*)
- **IAP:** Expansion packs (e.g. zombie virus / Planet of the Apes virus)
- **Players:** 45 million
- **Games played per day:** ~900k
- **#3 best selling** iPhone game of 2014 in the US
- **#1 best selling** iPhone game of 2014 in China

...And I wanted to bring Plague Inc. to PC



Reasons why I wanted to bring Plague Inc. to PC...

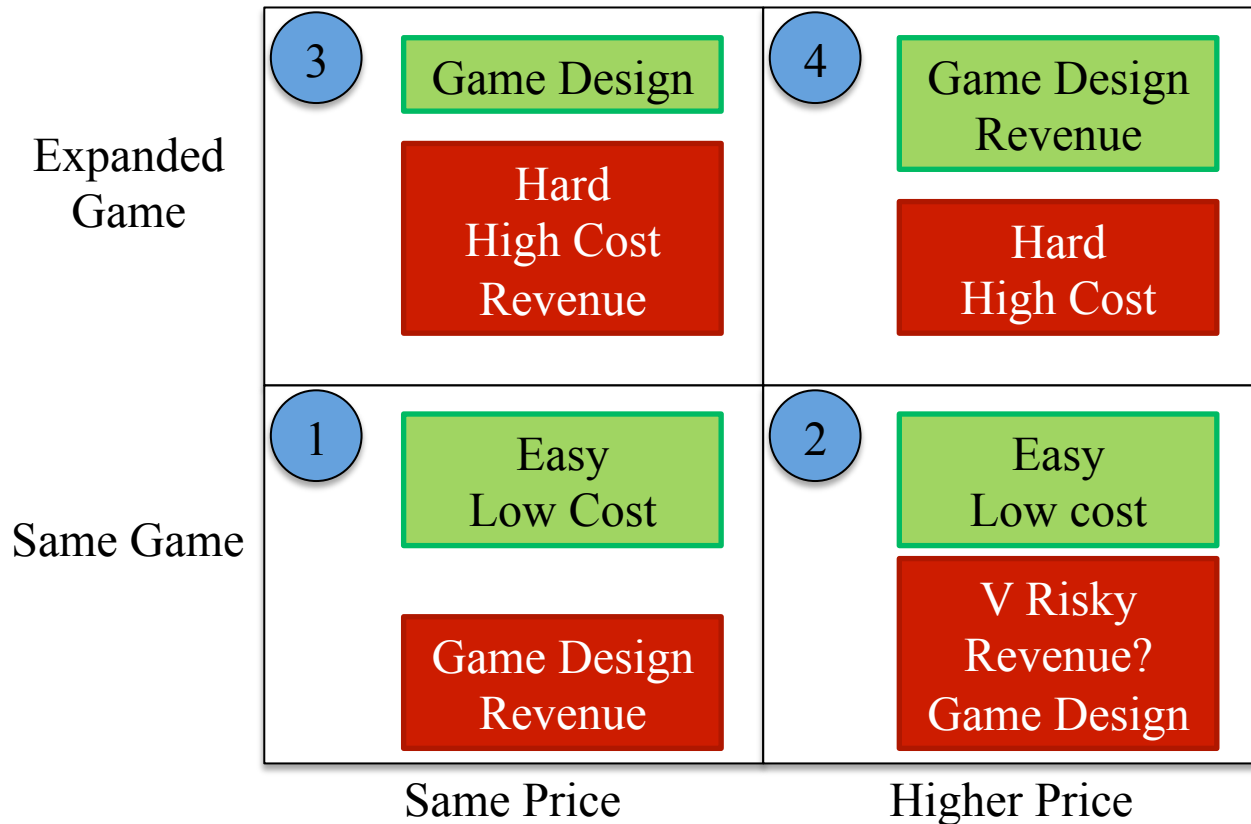
Unofficial

- It would be fun
- I'm a PC gamer
- Opportunity to add new stuff to the game
- Share it with more people

Official

- Make more money from the game
- Strengthen/expand the Plague Inc. brand
- Extend overall game life (more people playing it)
- Diversify company revenues
- Foundation for future games

There were several ways to take Plague Inc. from mobile to steam



Plague Inc. on PC would be expanded and have a higher price



The plan for Plague Inc.:

- High Quality
- Improved from original
- Adapted to platform
- Priced at \$15-\$20



But making Plague Inc. on PC successful wouldn't be easy



- Do everything a normal game must do
 - Make a good game
 - Capture player imagination
 - Market it well
 - Get Lucky
- Defeat the Mobile Stigma



Games coming from mobile must meet a higher standard



THE MOBILE STIGMA:



The average Steam Players' belief that **all** games which originate from mobile are sent by the devil

PC gamers don't like mobile games (and rightly so)



- Mobile games are not proper games
- Overpriced compared to mobile
- Pay to win monetisation
- Not designed for PC
- No point buying it on multiple platforms

"Mobile games are crap – don't put them on steam"

"Rip off – you can get this for less on mobile"

"This game forces you to spend money to win"

"Don't buy it on steam, its not as good as on mobile"

"I already have it on mobile – why should I buy it again"

Without proper planning, the mobile stigma could be lethal

- Unhappy players
- Damage brand / reputation
- Damage original game
- Wasted time, effort and money
- Barrier to entry for future projects on PC



We had to plan from the beginning how to beat the mobile stigma



Visible differentiation:

- Big Tent Pole Features
- Improved graphics
- Redesigned UI
- Numerous smaller enhancements
- Low effort quick wins

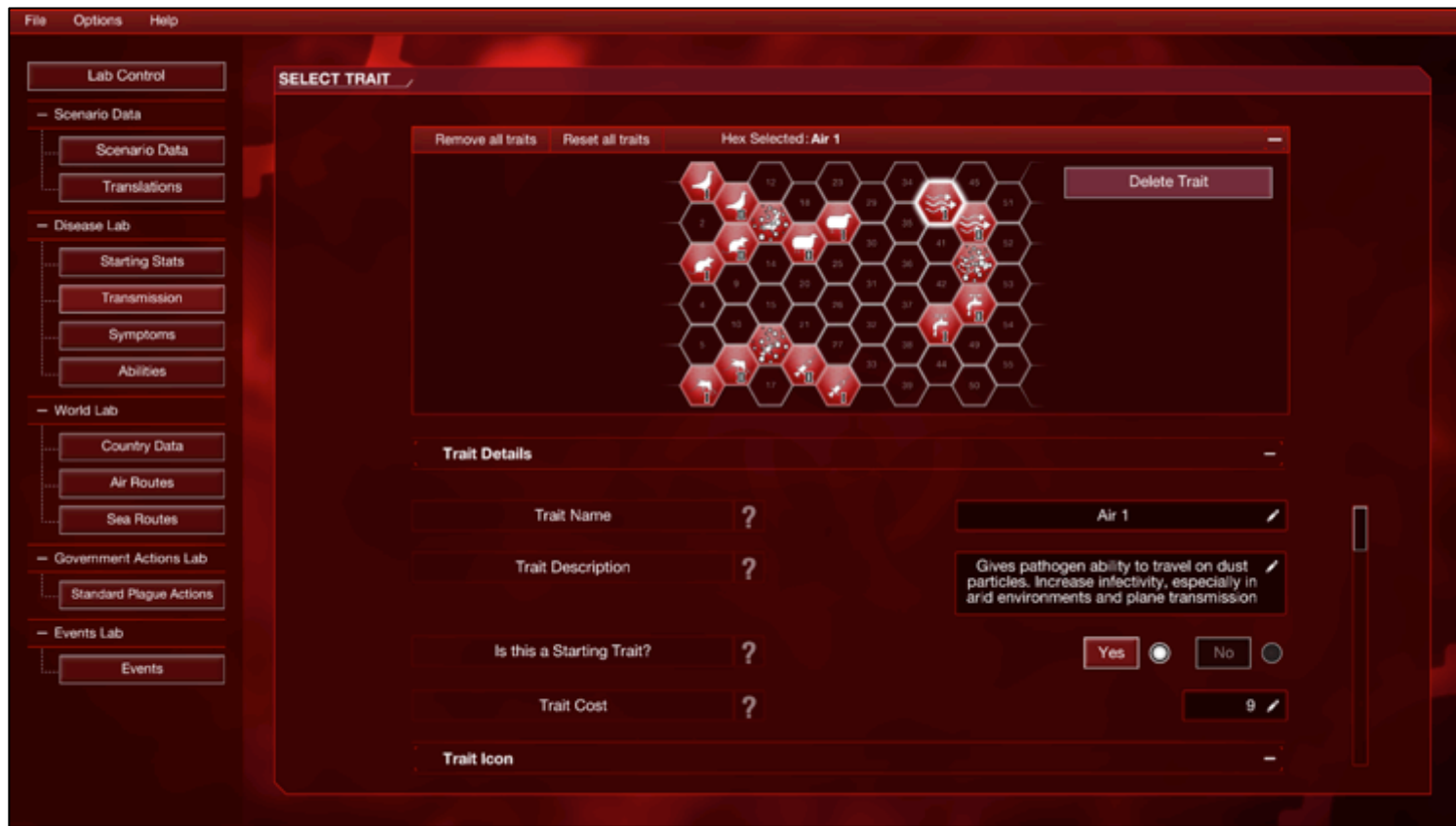
Clear communication:

- Messaging
- Branding
 - game name
 - game icon/logo
- Pricing/monetisation

Custom Scenarios and Multiplayer are the big tent pole features



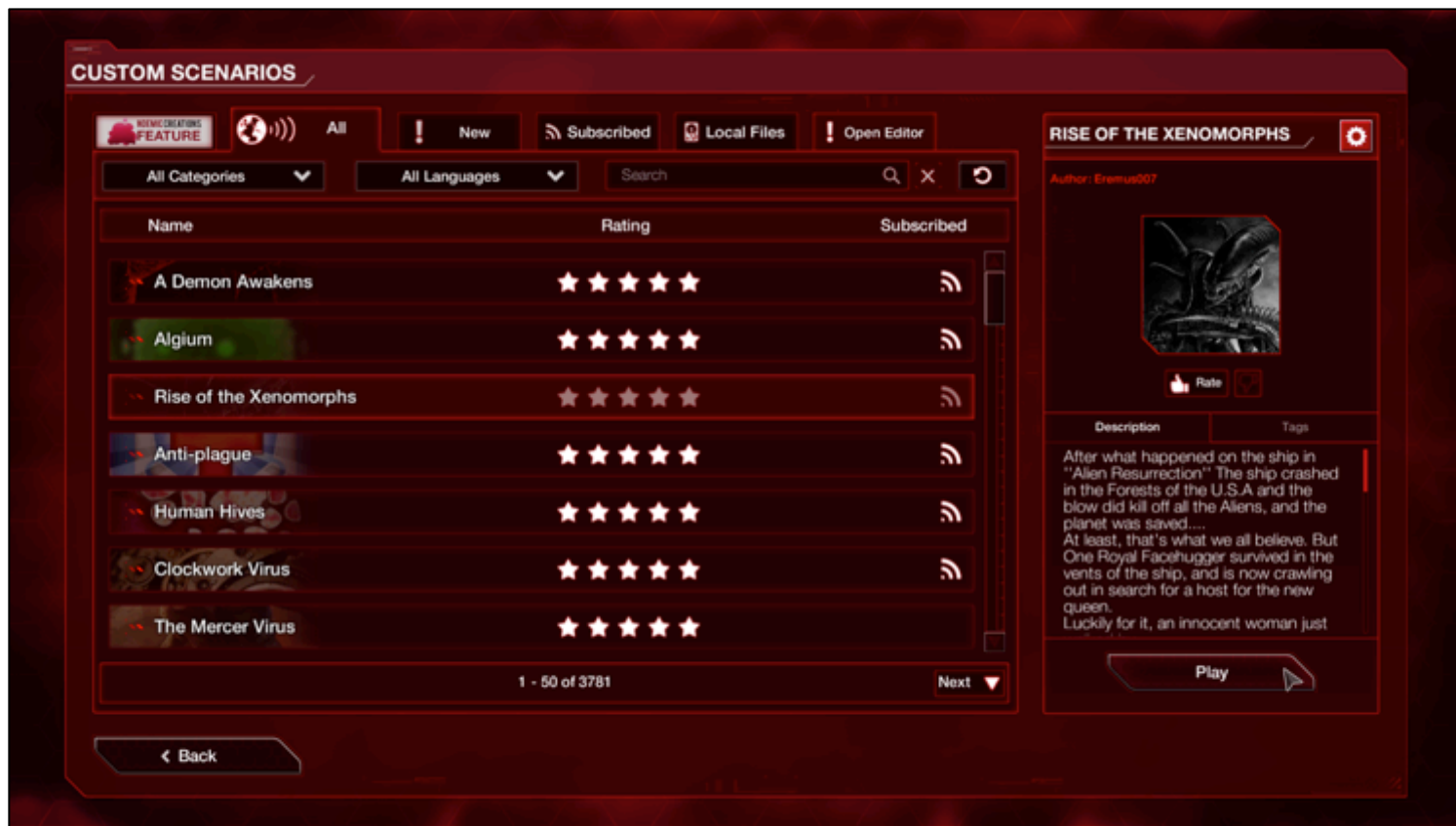
Players can customize disease layouts



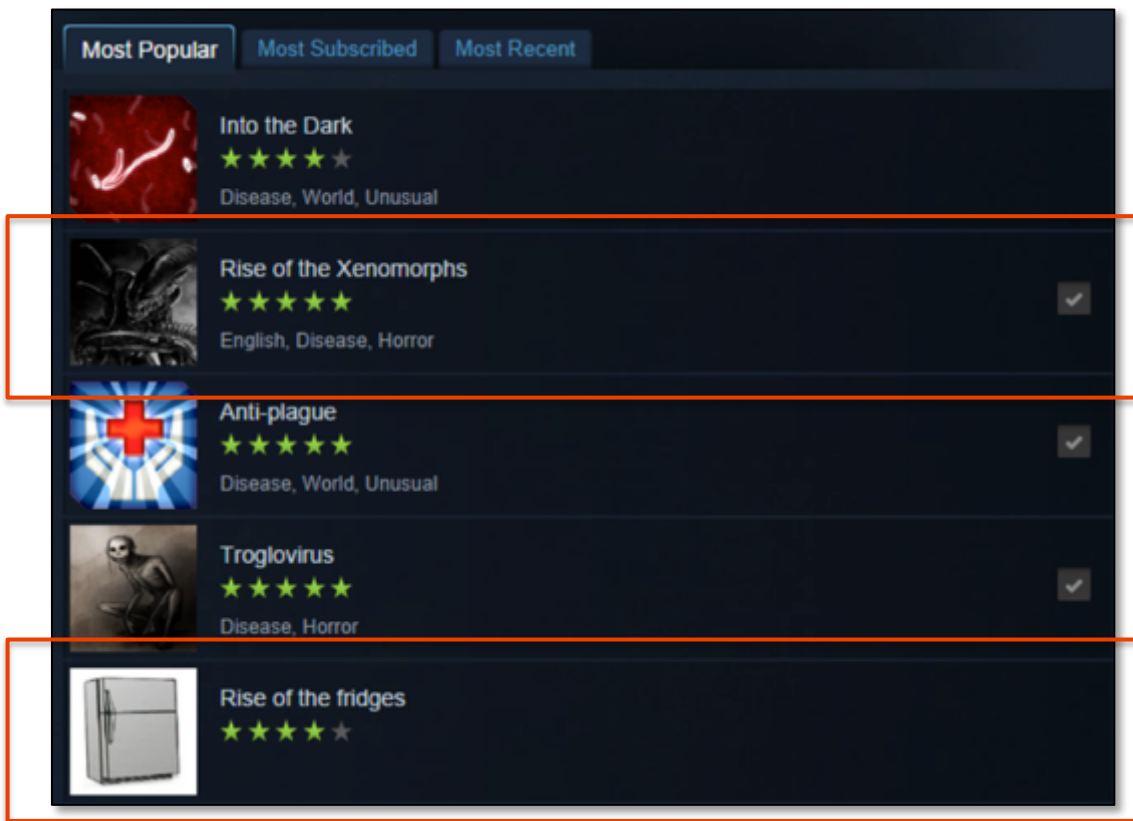
Manipulate variables and create events



And then publish them online for others to enjoy



There are custom scenarios for everyone...



Multiplayer is in development and is eagerly awaited



Major tent-pole features are key to differentiate from the mobile version



- Major, development intensive additions to the core game (make sure pick right ones)
- Hard for players to ignore/overlook
- Significantly increase the depth/life of the game
- Appeal to the more hard core / involved Steam players
- Provides marketing headlines / great talking points
- Supports higher price point
- Bonus: Discourages piracy

A key reason to rebuild the game was to improve the graphics



Take advantage of:

- PC hardware
- More generous budget



The original 2D world map was replaced...



...With a 3D map and more complex disease animation



The evolution screen got significantly cooler...



The screenshot displays the "Symptoms" tab of the NDEMIC CREATIONS evolution screen. The interface features a grid of hexagonal icons representing various symptoms, arranged in a cluster. The icons include a virus particle, lungs, a brain, a heart, a flower, a target, and a DNA helix. The background is a dark, textured grid with a faint world map. On the right side, a detailed description of the selected symptom, "Immune Suppression", is shown. At the bottom, there are four sliders for "DNA", "infectivity", "severity", and "lethality".

Disease **Transmission** **Symptoms** **Abilities** **X**

Immune Suppression

Pathogens attach to lymphocytes, suppressing immune system and allowing significantly greater freedom of mutation. Can be lethal

Devolve

DNA 4 **infectivity** **severity** **lethality**

...With responsive 3D models of your disease



GDC-2015

OVERVIEW TRANSMISSION **SYMPTOMS** ABILITIES



IMMUNE SUPPRESSION

INFORMATION

// Pathogens attach to lymphocytes, suppressing immune system and allowing significantly greater freedom of mutation. Can be lethal

COST

// 20 DNA Points

EVOLVE

DNA 8 **INFECTIVITY** **SEVERITY** **LETHALITY**



And the world screen used the extra space...



...To add extra narrative and information sources



Graphical improvements are impossible to ignore



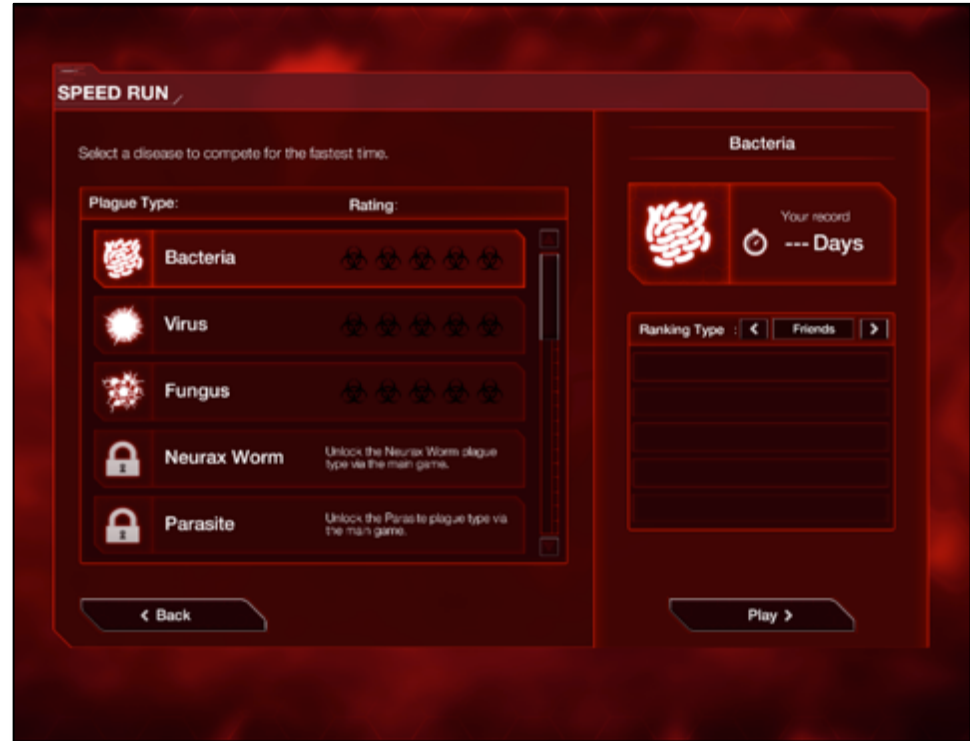
- Player constantly reminded they are playing an improved version.
- Feels shiny and new
- Great for marketing materials
- Makes harder to say identical to mobile

All the UI was redesigned from scratch to suit PC



Think about:

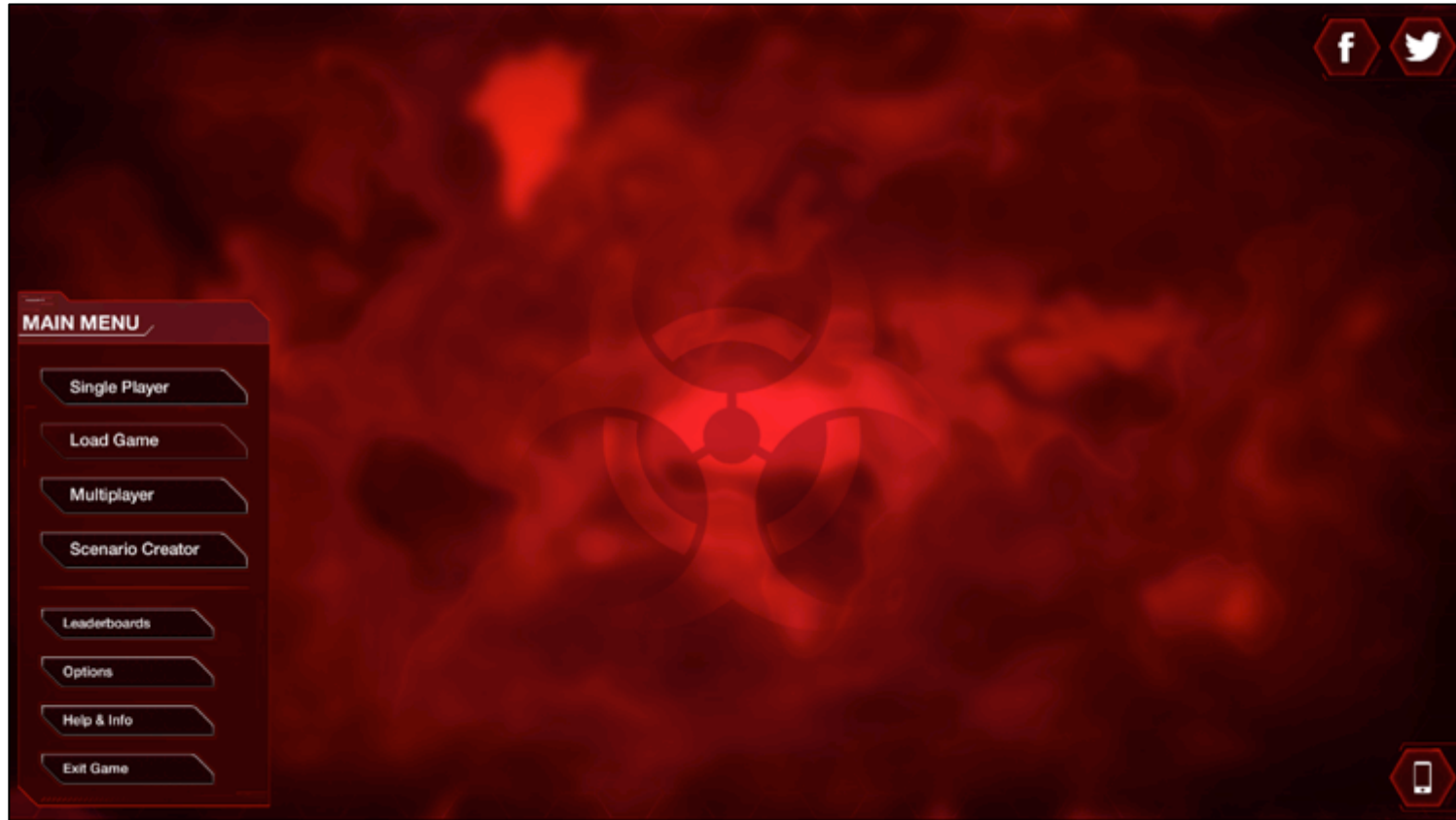
- Distance between options
- Greater precision
- Double click to select
- Fewer space constraints



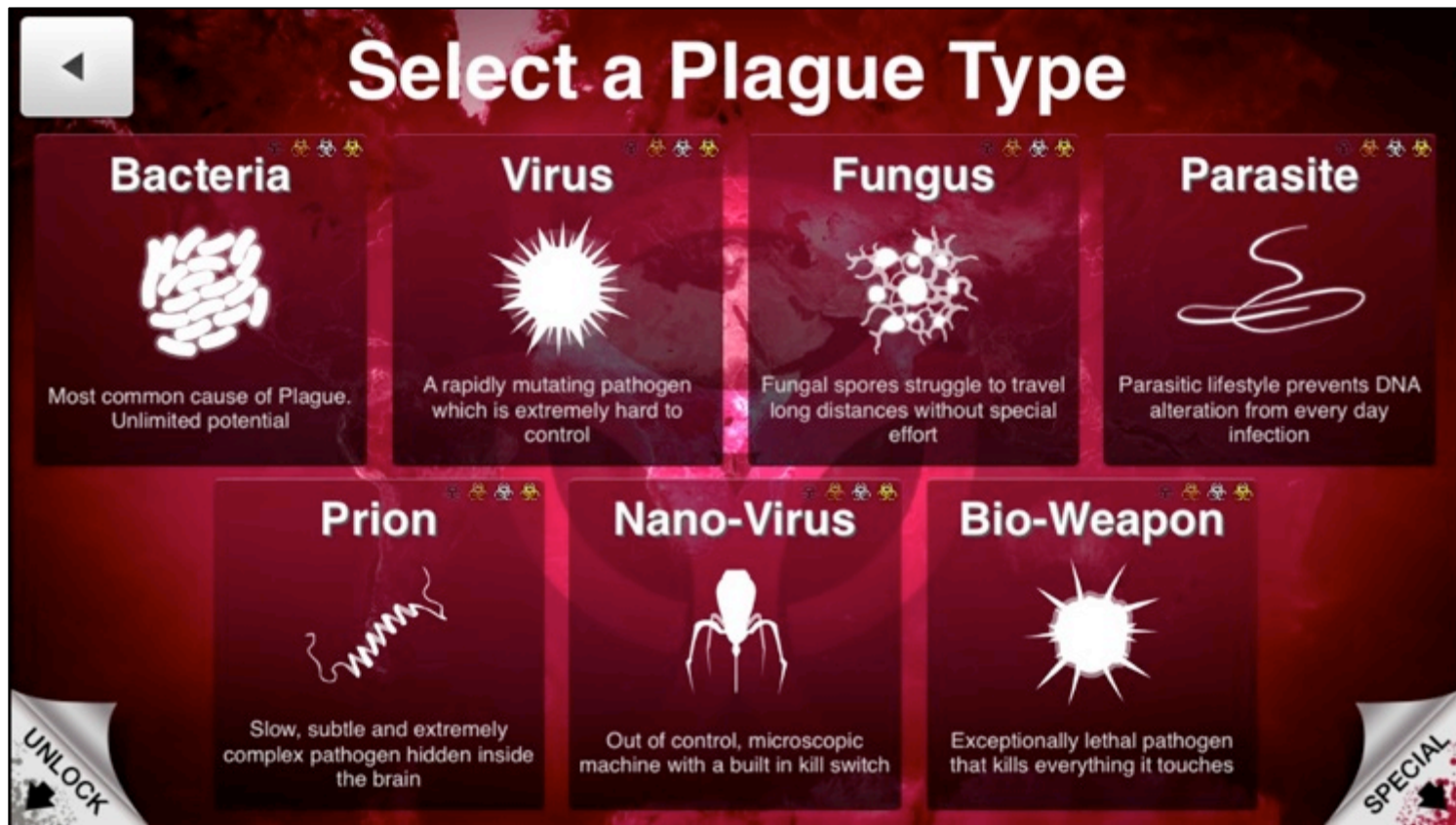
The main menu could be streamlined...



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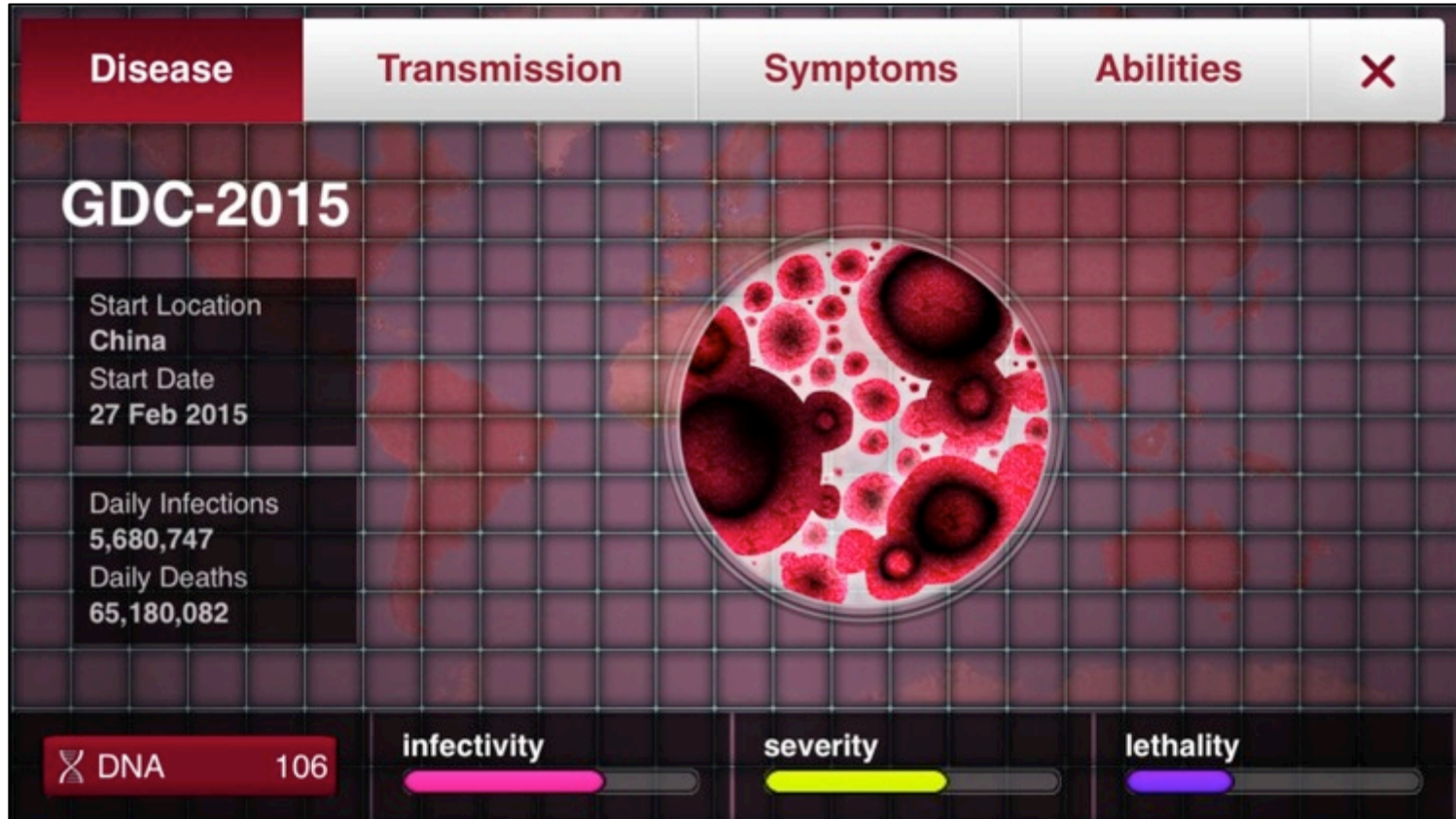
...And selecting your disease became much more elegant



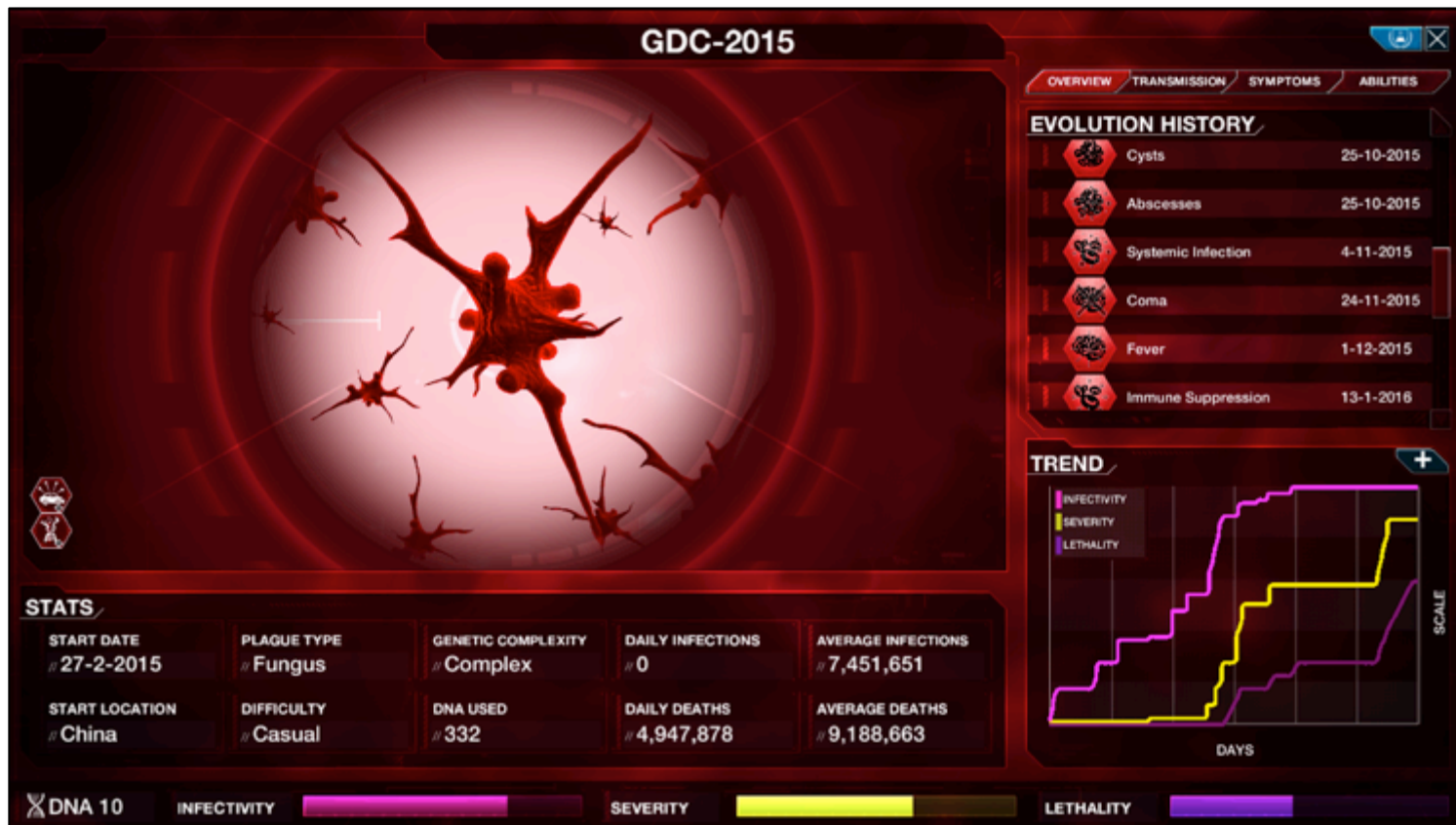
...And selecting your disease became much more elegant



The disease screen was expanded significantly



The disease screen was expanded significantly



Redesigned UI makes it 'feel' like a PC game

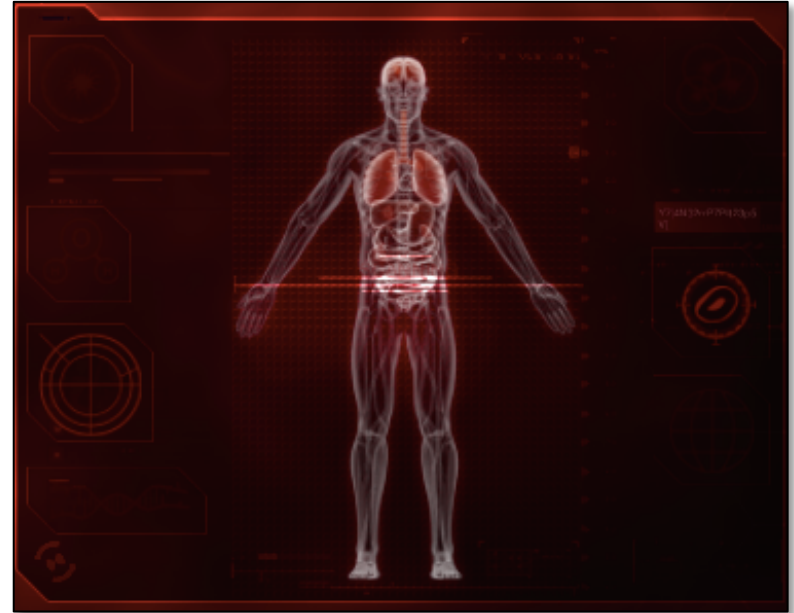


- Prevents too much / too little space
- No remnants of mobile
- Ensures optimal/natural playing experience
- Players appreciate that it was designed from scratch
- Makes it feel premium
- Improve on original mobile

We also made huge numbers of other enhancements:



- Numerous smaller additions throughout the game
- Heavily influenced by player feedback
- Medium/high impact, low effort



Body Scanner

We also made huge numbers of other enhancements:



More Save Slots

We also made huge numbers of other enhancements:



Longer Disease Names

We also made huge numbers of other enhancements:



City-Cams

We also made huge numbers of other enhancements



End Game replays

We also made huge numbers of other enhancements



Animated Zombie Hordes

These enhancements combine to significantly impact player experience



- Cumulatively – provide general feeling of improvement and polish
- Appreciated by existing fans
- Potential to bundle into marketing bullet
- Includes elements that wouldn't work on mobile
- Supports the broader price argument

There are lots of simple, generic quick wins that can help out too



Having well thought out hotkeys shows that you care:

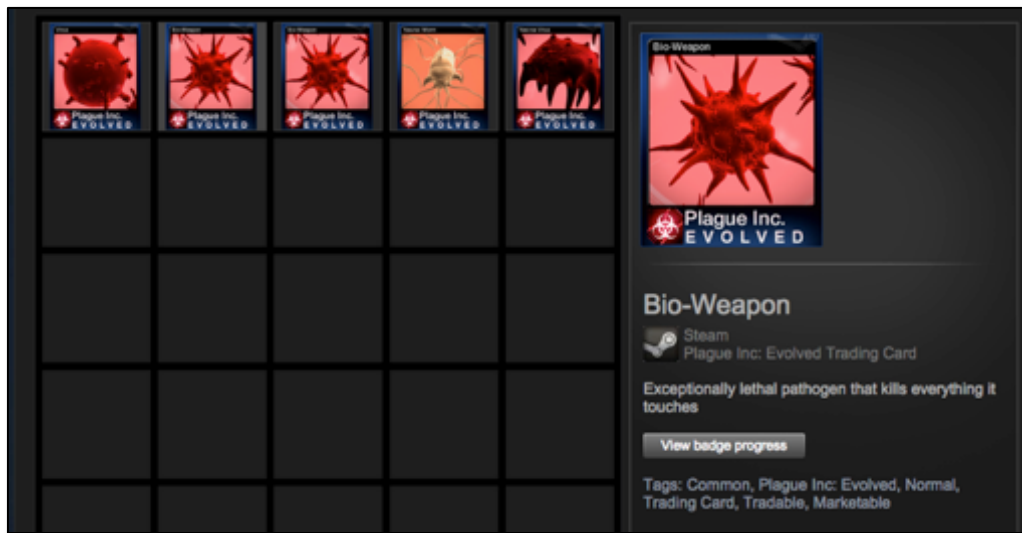
- Improves player experience
- Defends against an easy criticism
- Bonus: Makes testing your game easier!



Other examples include using core Steam/PC functionality



- Steam Achievements
- Trading Cards
- Cloud Save
- Video settings



To counter the Mobile Stigma, Players must understand the changes



~~Visible differentiation:~~

- ~~Big Tent Pole Features~~ ✓
- ~~Improved graphics~~ ✓
- ~~Redesigned UI~~ ✓
- ~~Numerous smaller enhancements~~ ✓
- ~~Low effort quick wins~~ ✓

Clear communication:

- Messaging
- Branding
 - game name
 - game icon/logo
- Pricing/monetisation

All these changes allow a compelling story to be told



- Polish the story
- Tell it again and again
 - Store page, press, trailer, customer support etc
- Make it easy for fans to educate others
- First few weeks of launch vital for customer support



The game name is a very important communication tool



- Same game, but better
- Maintain brand / theme
- Keep distinct identity between mobile and PC



The game logo subtly supports the branding difference



Same brand – but not quite identical

Communicating pricing logic and monetisation is vital



- Accept that players will compare price against mobile
- Clearly explain why it costs more (player relevant terms)
- Justify the price mathematically
- Educate players
- Repeat, repeat, repeat

6) How much does Plague Inc: Evolved cost?

Plague Inc: Evolved costs \$14.99 on PC and Mac. This includes:

- Every paid expansion pack that Plague Inc. has received over the last two years.
- Loads of new content updates that we have planned for the future.
- Significant, **all-new features for PC and Mac** (including multiplayer and scenario creator).

7) Why does Plague Inc: Evolved cost more than Plague Inc. on mobile?

Plague Inc: Evolved costs \$14.99 whereas Plague Inc. on mobile costs \$0.99 + an extra \$6.99 for expansion packs (Neurax, Necroa and Scenarios).

Plague Inc: Evolved costs more because you get a lot more! It includes :

- Every paid expansion pack that Plague Inc. has received over the last two years.
- Loads of new content updates that we have planned for the future.
- Significant, **all-new features for PC and Mac** (including multiplayer and scenario creator).

Be very careful about aggressive monetisation / DLC strategy



- Players will be watching for any signs of “mobile behavior”
- Don't take any risks
 - Have softened game progression rather than let people pay



Plague Inc: Evolved has vastly exceeded my expectations



- Overwhelmingly positive reviews (95% positive - top 2% of all steam games)
- Year 1 aggregate PC sales (all channels): 500,000 units
- Top 20 pirated game of the year*



Making a high quality, PC focused game beat the Mobile Stigma



- Our approach worked
- It came from mobile but it is still a proper game
- It can cost more than mobile and still be a fair price
- Even the trolls accept it (mostly)*



**Thanks to help from players*

There are definite differences between Steam and Mobile



- Way fewer player numbers
- Much closer connection to players / community
- Social links not as relevant
- Analytics underused?
- Steam platform very friendly for games

Only go from mobile to Steam if you can beat the mobile stigma



Expanded Game	<div>3</div> <div></div>	<div>4</div> <div></div>
Same Game	<div>1</div> <div></div>	<div>2</div> <div></div>
	Same Price	Higher Price

Danger Signs when bringing a game from mobile to Steam



- Price higher for same game
- Difficult to logically explain why the game costs more in player relevant terms
 - “It took a lot of effort to port it onto PC” “We rebuilt the game to support higher resolutions”
- There are no PC specific features
- Steam functionality is not being used
- No good hotkey set up
- Difficult to communicate benefits to player
- Selling consumable currency
- Selling multiple DLC at launch



Going from Mobile to Steam isn't all bad!



- Existing game to build on (tech, design, bugs)
- Existing fan base / brand awareness
- Cross sell potential
- Forced to design for more restrictive platform from the start

TBD what I will do with next game

My recommendation

- Understand why you want to go to PC
- Identify how the mobile stigma threatens you
- Design your approach to neutralise the mobile stigma
- Have fun 😊





NDEMIC
CREATIONS

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