# Gamer Types

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## Introduction

- We talk about hardcore, we talk about casual, we talk about broad appeal, or family friendly, but who are the people who play our games?
- When first thinking about what to talk about, I immediately went to what games inspire me. As some of you know, I'm a huge Treasure fan. Treasure is a Japanese developer of some memorable titles which for some reason or another only resonate within smaller sectors of the gaming community. Now without going into a rant about why these titles were or were not successful in the main populace, the analyzation of their game quality lead me to think, "What do these games lack? What do they do well? Do they have what it takes to become popular titles." This then lead to an analyzation of player needs and desires.
- Who is the player that buy millions of copies of Halo, or the millions of copies of GTA IV, or the hundreds of thousands who buy Virtua Fighter? Who are the players who buy Family Game Night or Wii Fit?
- Obviously different gamers have different interests. Whether it be thematic, stylistic, or genre type. It is nearly impossible to extrapolate what players will think is cool, or what players will think is a hit, but can we ensure that each of our games has particular activities and goals for every type of player?

## Setup

- There have been studies and research done to define gamer types, but in this talk I will propose three types that, I believe, encompass all states of being within players: Casual, Gamer, and Hardcore. And in defining these types we will explore how different games satisfy these different player archetypes.
- Each type essentially determines a players' level of knowledge and understanding of the underlying game system. Or one can define it as the player's level of engagement in a particular game. Casual players tend to understand little to just the basics of the rules of a game. While Gamers spend hours refining their skills and learn the game from their own observation and understanding. Hardcore are people whole analyze, deconstruct, and destroy game systems from the inside out.
- Let's use Puzzle Fighter as an example. Most casual players understand the basics of most "match 3" puzzle games. Puzzle Fighter is similar but one needs a catalyst block to be able to remove colored gems from the board. With just this basic knowledge anyone can get into the game and start playing. They may or may not realize winning involves the other player losing. The gameplay is not just restricted to your side of the screen. A Casual players' levels of understanding never moves beyond this.
- Gamers realize putting more gems together create bigger blocks. And destruction of bigger blocks drops more crash gems on their opponent. They may also start to

recognize building patterns that create chain combos.  This is a key component to winning.

- Hardcore comprehends not only all the things mentioned previously, but also recognizes each character chosen by the player and their opponent affects their play style.  Depending on whom your opponent is, one can begin to lay out their gem patterns for maximum efficiency even when their opponent attacks.  Their attack may be used in retaliation.  Hardcore develops the mental recognition and reaction to place gem in there desire and correct location more often than not.  These players are exceptional and typically play flawlessly.

# Theory

- What I propose it that all "good games" have healthy levels of enagement (Casual, Gamer, Hardcore) for all players.  A quick side note... a good game does not mean a million seller nor does it imply popularity.  A "good game" in this context implies a level of quality and timeless substance.  A good game must ensure, regardless of the time invested in the game, the player feels satisfied.  A player's time is precious, and this currency should be valued.  The return on this investment must be gratifying.

# Engagement Wheel

- I've defined three levels of engagement: Casual, Gamer, and Hardcore.  Throughout your time spent with a game you may be at any one of these levels of engagement.  One week you may be a Gamer, and then in the following week you are Hardcore.  What determines where you fall on this scale is your level of interest and willingness and capability to improve.  Levels of engagement are not static archetypes one falls in eternally, but they are moments in time or snapshots of your current state of being.
- Typically when we first start out playing any game we are all Casual players.  We try and grasp the general concept of the game.  If it is easy to understand we may become Gamers.  We spend a few hours a night playing it.  But if we crave to know more...or that light of understanding flicks on, we become hooked.  We become Hardcore.  We spend every moment we can, researching, testing, and executing new ideas and newly found information.
- Long ago, I became interested in the card game of Yugioh.  Those darn cartoons made me think the game would be awesome.  I bought a starter pack out of interest, and like any new player proceed to badger my friends into getting a starting pack as well, just so I could play with someone.  I had read the rules.  I had a loose understanding of how things played out.  Of course there were some missteps in the beginning. (Drawing too many cards after a turn, etc)  However I quickly became a Gamer.  I started buying more cards.  Analyzing the different card in each pack trying to create the ultimate strategy.  Then I started to border on Hardcore.  I started looking online for card errata.  I scoured for site with deck builds and strategies.  I was driven to learn what were the killer card combinations and efficient deck designs.  However I was never truly Hardcore. I never really created any unique strategies, nor did I understand the system to build the most efficient decks.  I always focused on my own creations.  But I had run full circle

on the level of engagement.  I would say I'm a casual player now.  Maybe a gamer, even though I haven't played in years.

# Levels of Engagement

- Time investment
    - One's time invested in a game generally defines one's level of engagement; however it is return on the investment that determines the quality of the game.  At each level of engagement, the player's experience can influence their desire to move to a new level of engagement.  These experiences can act as bridges and can ensure enjoyment regardless of how often the game is played.
- Casual
    - Clarity of Concept
        - When starting out in game for the first time, one is almost always considered a Casual player.  Even if it is for a short while.  At this level, it is most important to establish a clarity of the concept.
        - How easy is it for player to understand the game's objective?  And how easy is it to achieve the game's objective?  The first question should be easily answered.  For most players, this should be quickly grasped.  If the game is too hard to understand initially you run the risk of quickly losing your player completely.  However, the second question is harder for game designers to execute.  While most people like games that are easy for them to complete, they need to be challenged just enough they feel they were effectively participating in the outcome.  Finding this balance is challenging, as we all know.
- Gamer
    - Skill Improvement
        - Once engrossed in a game, Gamers attempt to improve their level of skill.  They play every day to get better at the actions within the game.  This is where the game design and control starts to get tested.  Essentially this is where players begin to take the game through its paces.  If it were a race car, this is where we push and test the handling on the race track.
        - At the Gamer level, players tend to learn the game by instinct and forced will.  They gain enough skill to become efficient in the game, but bolster their understanding of the game systems through personal experience.  They make their own judgements and assumptions on how the game works.  Their understanding and assessment of the game and its underlying system are purely anecdotal and empirical.  While this may lead to a truth and accurate understanding of the game is usually never goes beyond the discussion of the game amongst close friends and acquaintances.
- Hardcore
    - Knowledge Building

- At the Hardcore level, players seek to fully understand the game that is before them. They scour forums, read FAQS, buy strategy guides, participate in tournaments, debate, test, and strategize....ALL THE TIME. At this level, players actively seek knowledge of the game. They then apply that knowledge into creating new methods and occasionally break the game design. These players are the edge case, but are the ones that will be the most vocal about how great or horrible your game is.

## Examples

- Radiant Silvergun
  - Casual
    - The basic controls of Radiant Silvergun are easy to pick up. Press a button fire a weapon. Avoid bullets.
  - Gamer
    - There are 7 different weapons in the game. They have various purposes depending on the enemy arrangement and enemy types.
    - To get the highest scores players must chain together kills. Killing enemies of the same color increase the point total with each kill.
  - Hardcore
    - There are secret chain that require the player to kill enemies in a specific color order. Red, then Blue, then Yellow. It gives a higher point bonus than normal chains.
    - There are also secrets to be found and can be discovered only by a specific weapon is the appropriate levels.
- Quake
  - Casual
    - Point your weapon and shoot. You understand your purpose is to find the exit of each level. Push through and don't get killed.
  - Gamer
    - You start to learn more effective ways to move through levels. Players start to understand how to use their weapons effectively. Rocket jumps start to become a thing.
  - Hardcore
    - [Speed runs](). Quake speed runs are insane.
- Metroid
  - Casual
    - It's easy to comprehend this initial controls of Metroid. Run, Jump, Shoot…etc. The major focus of the game is not very clear at first. It seems as if you should just escape rooms.
  - Gamer
    - As a gamer you realize you are in a maze. There is back tracking and abilities you must find to help you reach once unreachable areas.
  - Hardcore

- Sequence breaks. You are expected to encounter abilities in a specific order, however using skilled movement and unexpected solutions you can collect your abilities out of order. This can be used to enable crazy speed runs.

# Action Plan / Application

- So, how do we use this knowledge to our benefit? By recognizing the "wheel of engagement" we can be sure to broaden our design focus to accept and acknowledge a wider audience. It is easy to focus on one level of engagement and completely forget the other two.
- On the Casual layer, can you easily describe the game concept and objective in a 2 sentences or less. Ideally can you state it in one?
- On the Gamer layer, how complex are your controls? Is there a steep learning curve to understand them? And do the controls and underlying game system offer up consistent and comprehendible outcomes?
- On the Hardcore layer, how easy is it to get specific information on the game rules and details? How discoverable is this information within your game? Do you have an online manual, or strategy guide? Consider a central internet presence for player to find information.

# Key take aways

- Make sure you have designed your game for all levels of engagement. If you skew to heavily in one area, you will find your game is more niche than desired.
- Keeping all levels of engagement in mind ensures you have a product that caters to a wider audience. This should be a goal for all designers.
- Keep your concepts simple, your controls tight and easy to use, and make it easy for player to find and share a deeper knowledge of the game.