

GARDENS OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS

BROWSE GAMES FORUM 2010

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INTRODUCTION

- SO, I'M ABOUT TO START A **KEYNOTE** AT A **BROWSER GAMES** CONFERENCE IN THE **WORST** POSSIBLE WAY...
- ...BY ADMITTING I'M **NOT** A BROWSER GAMES **EXPERT**
- THIS IS BECAUSE THEY HADN'T **INVENTED** BROWSERS WHEN I BEGAN
 - NOR, INDEED, THE **INTERNET**...
- **MY** AREA OF EXPERTISE IS **MMOS**
 - FORTUNATELY, THIS MAY ACTUALLY BE **HELPFUL**

BUT FIRST...

- THIS IS *THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS* BY HIERONYMUS BOSCH (1500 +/- 10 YEARS)



• GARDEN OF EDEN

EARTH

HELL

STARTING WITH...

- THIS REALLY **ANNOYS** ME...



NEW IDEA?

- HUMAN BEINGS, JUST LIKE **OTHER** MAMMALS, ARE RESPONSIVE TO **OPERANT** CONDITIONING
 - BASED ON **VARIABLE REWARD** SCHEDULES
- IF **DOING** SOMETHING **GIVES** THEM SOMETHING THEY **LIKE**, THEY'LL DO IT **AGAIN**
 - EXCEPT NOT IF THE RESULTS ARE TOO **FREQUENT**, TOO **INFREQUENT**, OR TOO **PREDICTABLE**
- THIS WAS USED VERY EFFECTIVELY UP BY MASS-MARKET BROWSER GAMES ON **FACEBOOK**
 - *FARMVILLE, FRONTIERVILLE, <RANDOM WORD>VILLE, ...*

OLD IDEA...

- IT'S LED TO A KIND OF **INDUSTRIALISED** ONLINE GAME DESIGN PROCESS
 - ALL **METRICS-BASED**, A/B TESTING
- OPERANT CONDITIONING IS NOT ACTUALLY A **NEW** IDEA IN ONLINE GAME DESIGN, THOUGH
- DESIGNERS KNEW ABOUT IT **YEARS** AGO
 - DESIGNERS TEND TO KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT A LOT
- HOWEVER, THEY CHOSE **NOT TO EXPLOIT** IT
 - BECAUSE IT MEANS EXPLOITING **PLAYERS**
 - BECAUSE THEY KNEW IT **WOULDN'T LAST**

REFLECTION

- OOH LOOK, A MIRROR!



DIFFERENCES

- HUMAN BEINGS, **UNLIKE** OTHER MAMMALS, ARE ABLE TO **REFLECT** ON THEIR ACTIONS
- WHEN THEY REALISE THAT SOMETHING THEY **THOUGHT** WAS A REWARD IS **NO SUCH THING**, OPERANT CONDITIONING **FAILS**
- HUMAN BEINGS CAN ALSO **LEARN**
- THEY CAN **SPOT** WHEN SOMETHING **NEW** IS SOMETHING **OLD** IN NEW CLOTHES
- IF THEY WENT **OFF** THE OLD THING, THEY'LL GO OFF THE NEW THING AS **SOON** AS THEY NOTICE

CONSEQUENCES

- THIS HAS **HAPPENED** WITH FACEBOOK GAMES
 - THERE MAY BE MILLIONS OF FACEBOOK USERS, BUT “MILLIONS” IS STILL FINITE
- PLAYERS WHO HAVE FIGURED THAT “REWARDS” ARE WORTHLESS ARE **GROWING** IN NUMBER
- THE SUPPLY OF **NEW** PLAYERS IS **SHRINKING**
- **DAU** FOR *FARMVILLE* ETC. IS DROPPING SHARPLY
- PLAYERS HAVEN'T **STOPPED** PLAYING, THEY JUST WANT GAMES WITH MORE **GAME** TO THEM

EDUCATION

- *FARMVILLE* ETC. HAVE INADVERTENTLY **BEGUN** THE **EDUCATION** OF **LEGIONS** OF NON-GAMERS
 - WHO ARE NOW LOOKING TO **CONTINUE** THAT EDUCATION
- LARGE DEVELOPERS HAVE ACCEPTED THEY'RE GOING TO **HAVE** TO MAKE GAMES WITH ACTUAL **GAMEPLAY**
- AT GDC ONLINE LAST MONTH THERE WAS A SCRAMBLE TO HIRE **ANYONE** WITH **DESIGN** OR **MANAGEMENT** EXPERIENCE
 - BOOTHS STAFFED BY THREE RECRUITERS FULL TIME...

HELL

- HELL AS A **CONSEQUENCE** OF CREATION



OVER!

- ESTABLISHED DESIGNERS WERE **RIGHT**: OPERANT CONDITIONING **IS** WITHOUT A FUTURE
 - THEY MERELY **NEGLECTED** TO ACCOUNT FOR THE FACT THAT IN THE TWO YEARS WHILE THEIR PROPHECIES WERE **BECOMING** TRUE, IT WAS POSSIBLE TO GET VERY, **VERY** RICH INDEED...
 - **I** MADE THE SAME MISTAKE WITH ONLINE **POKER**...
- WHAT STARTED AS **HEAVEN** FOR PLAYERS ULTIMATELY BECAME A GRINDING **HELL**
- NO NEED FOR **YOU** TO WORRY, THOUGH?

THE PRESENT

- PEOPLE HAVING FUN SUPPORTED BY OTHERS



SAVE THE WHALES!

- LET'S TALK **FREMIUM**, OR **FRP**
 - OR MICROTRANSACTIONS OR WHATEVER YOU PREFER
- HOW THIS **WORKS**:
 - MOST PEOPLE PLAY FOR **FREE**
 - SOME WILL SPEND A **LITTLE**, BUT BARELY ENOUGH TO COVER WHAT THEY COST TO SERVICE
 - A FEW **WHALES** WILL PAY **STUPID** AMOUNTS OF MONEY AND SUBSIDISE THE **REST**
- NON-SPENDERS MAKE THE PLACE LOOK **BUSY** AND GIVE THE HIGH-SPENDERS **CONTEXT**

- THIS MODEL IS USED IN **REAL LIFE**
- LAS VEGAS SURVIVES ON **HIGH ROLLERS**,
NOT EVERYDAY TOURIST GAMBLERS
 - AN OIL-RICH ARAB WHO LOSES **\$20M** AT ROULETTE
IS WORTH THE SAME AS **200,000** PEOPLE WHO
LOSE **\$100** EACH
- **UNFORTUNATELY** FOR LAS VEGAS,
PURPOSE-BUILT RESORTS IN THE FAR EAST ARE
LURING THEIR WHALES AWAY
- FINDING AND **KEEPING** WHALES IS **HARD**

OFF TO CHINA!



SUSTAINABILITY

- THE **CONSENSUS** IS THAT F2P IS VERY **PROFITABLE**
 - *LOTRO* **DOUBLED** ITS REVENUE WHEN IT SWITCHED FROM SUBSCRIPTION TO F2P
- YOU **CAN** MAKE A **LOT** OF MONEY THIS WAY
 - INDEED, SOME OF YOU MAY BE **DOING** SO!
- THE QUESTION I'D LIKE TO ASK IS THE **SAME** AS FOR OPERANT CONDITIONING:
- IS IT **SUSTAINABLE** IN THE LONG TERM?

A PROBLEM

- PLAYERS' EDUCATION DOESN'T **END** WITH GIVING THEM GAMEPLAY
- SOONER OR LATER, THEY'LL DEVELOP THE NOTION OF **FAIRNESS**
 - IT **INVARIABLY** FOLLOWS FROM A GROWING UNDERSTANDING OF GAMEPLAY AND COMPETITION
- IF A GAME **ISN'T** FAIR, THAT WILL PUT PLAYERS OFF JUST AS **SURELY** AS FALSE REWARDS DO
 - SHARKSKIN SUITS AT THE OLYMPICS

LIMITS

- THIS IS TRUE **EVEN** FOR GAMES WHICH APPARENTLY **CONDONE** UNFAIRNESS
 - BUYING **EXPENSIVE** GOLF CLUBS MAY HELP YOU LOWER YOUR HANDICAP TO BELOW THAT OF A BETTER PLAYER – BUT THIS IS **FINE!**
- HOWEVER, THERE ARE **ALWAYS** LIMITS
 - BUYING A LOWER HANDICAP WITHOUT PLAYING THE GOLF IS **NOT** FINE!
- F2P GAMES ARE **TRAINING** PLAYERS WHO DON'T SENSE UNFAIRNESS TO **SENSE** IT

FAIRNESS

- THAT ONE GUY CAN'T GET TO THE TOP..



CONTRADICTION

- THERE IS A FUNDAMENTAL **CONTRADICTION** BETWEEN F2P AND FAIRNESS
 - IF YOU **CAN** BUY AN ADVANTAGE, SOME PEOPLE WILL GO RIGHT AHEAD AND **BUY** THAT ADVANTAGE
 - THE PEOPLE WHO CAN'T AFFORD IT WILL **RESENT** IT AND LOOK FOR A MORE LEVEL PLAYING FIELD
- YES, I **KNOW** YOU CAN THINK OF EXCEPTIONS, BUT THAT'S ALL THEY ARE – **EXCEPTIONS**
- NOTE: IT'S THE **NON-PAYERS** WHO OBJECT
 - THE PAYERS **WANT** UNFAIRNESS – IN THEIR FAVOUR

PREDICTION

- IF YOUR F2P MODEL INVOLVES **ONLY** THINGS WITH **NO** GAMEPLAY BENEFIT, YOU'RE OK
 - NOVELTY PETS, COLOURED ARMOUR, NAMING YOUR HORSE, ...
- IF IT INVOLVES SELLING ITEMS GIVING BEYOND A **COSMETIC** ADVANTAGE, IT'S **DOOMED**
- HOWEVER, YOU CAN STILL MAKE A **ROOMFUL** OF MONEY **BEFORE** THIS HAPPENS!
 - I'M JUST WARNING THAT THIS IS A **GOLDEN AGE** THAT **WILL** COME TO AN END

MOTIVATION

- DRINKING FROM THE SAME POOL

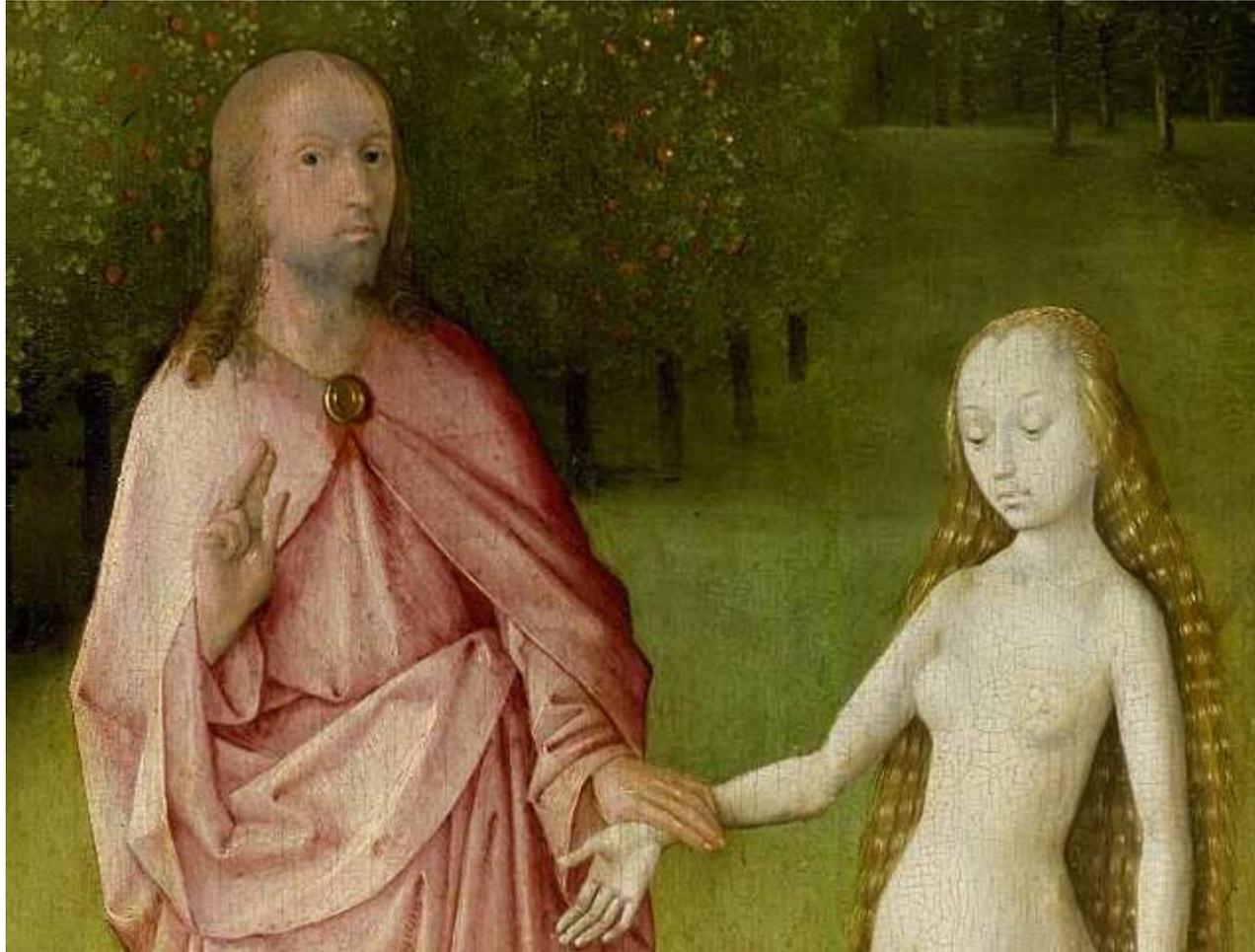


WHY?

- WHY ARE **YOU** MAKING BROWSER GAMES?
- IT'S NOT:
 - TO MAKE **MONEY**
 - BECAUSE YOU LIKE **PLAYING** GAMES
 - TO BRING **JOY** TO MILLIONS
 - BY **ACCIDENT**
 - BECAUSE YOU WANTED A NEW **CHALLENGE**
- YOU'RE DOING IT BECAUSE IT'S **FUN**
 - IF IT **WEREN'T** FUN, WHY WOULD YOU **BE** HERE?!

YOUR GIFT

- GOD PRESENTING EVE TO ADAM



THE FUTURE

- BROWSER GAMES HAVE **SMALLER** BUDGETS, **LOWER** PRODUCTION VALUES AND **SHORTER** DEVELOPMENT TIMES THAN AAA TITLES
- THAT **DOESN'T** MEAN YOU CAN'T **ENJOY** MAKING THEM, THOUGH!
- THIS IS ACTUALLY THE **KEY** TO THE BROWSER GAMES OF THE FUTURE
- IT'S **NOT** ALL ABOUT TWEAKING PERCENTAGES
 - THAT'S MERELY A **PHASE** WHILE WE EDUCATE PLAYERS AS TO WHAT GAMES **ARE**

THE POINT

- RIGHT NOW, BROWSER GAME PLAYERS ARE GETTING THE **EQUIVALENT** IN GAMES OF LEARN-TO-READ **PICTURE** BOOKS
- ONCE THEY'VE **MASTERED** THEM, THEY'LL WANT THE EQUIVALENT OF **NOVELS** AND **SHORT STORIES**
- IF **YOU** DON'T PUT ANY OF **YOURSELF** INTO **MAKING** YOUR GAMES, WHY WOULD YOUR **PLAYERS** PUT ANYTHING OF **THEMSELVES** INTO **PLAYING** THEM?

PROGRESS

- IT'S AS IF WE'VE STARTED IN PURGATORY AND ARE MOVING THROUGH A STRANGELY WRONG **UNEARTH** TO THE GARDEN OF EDEN



SUMMARY

- THE GAMES WE'RE MAKING TODAY **AREN'T** THE GAMES OF TOMORROW
- HOWEVER, THEY **WILL** ENABLE US TO **MAKE** THE GAMES OF TOMORROW
 - THE ONES YOU **WANT** TO MAKE
- THERE ARE **GREAT** OPPORTUNITIES RIGHT NOW, BUT THESE ARE **FLEETING**
- THE **GREATEST** OPPORTUNITIES LIE IN WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TODAY'S 70M *FARMVILLE* PLAYERS BECOME TOMORROW'S SOPHISTICATED **GAMERS**

EDEN

- BIRDS FOLLOWING THE ONES AT THE FRONT

