

Thesis Project Portfolio

Approachable Code: Developing with Abstraction in Mind

(Technical Report)

Destiny 2: Carefall: Analyzing Bungie's Lack of Care for its Players in the Lightfall Expansion

(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis

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The technical project and STS research project I conducted are both centered around a common theme related to the idea of a healthy environment in the field of game development. Game development as a field is notoriously difficult to properly conduct, integrating fields of art, music, storytelling, and, most importantly, programming. However, a team's development capabilities largely depend on its size, and the dynamics and expectations of a team vary drastically due to this fact. My technical work focuses primarily on the dynamics and efficacy of smaller game development teams whereas my STS research analyzes the ethicality of a triple-A studio. Both of these, though, place focus primarily on the dynamics and decision-making process of game development teams as a whole.

In my technical project, I analyzed the efficacy of different strategies on the rates of recruitment and membership retention for a university game development club. An attempt was made to overhaul the club's approach to its programming practices in order to facilitate a coding environment conducive to easier collaboration through the implementation of more professional programming standards. These professional standards, in comparison to the club's somewhat erratic "everything goes" policy serve as an attempt to emphasize consistency and readability such that both newer and older members of the club's constantly cycling population would be capable of understanding and contributing to the codebase of the club's projects. In essence, the project relies on the assumption that the more people believe themselves capable of contributing, the more likely they are to continue contributing.

In my STS research project, I analyzed the events relating to game development company Bungie's release of the *Lightfall* expansion. I make the argument that, through the lens of care ethics, Bungie failed to demonstrate the adequate care for its consumers expected of a larger

triple-A company in their execution of releasing the *Lightfall* expansion. Specifically, I argue that Bungie made decisions that were significantly detrimental to its consumers, at times explicitly turning down instances which it knew its consumers would appreciate. Instead, as a result of multiple actions on Bungie's part that consistently rejected the notion of its responsibility to provide care, Bungie's consumers grew irritated and discontent with the company. This led to a major consumer backlash and massive damage, both internal and external, to the company.

Working on both these projects throughout the course of the year helped me gain a better insight into the inner workings and expectations of game development teams of all sizes. My technical project, focusing primarily on smaller teams, allowed me to understand the limitations and consequences of what might be considered game development's organized chaos. However, the aspiration and passion for the medium demonstrated by the team I worked with allowed me to understand the core of game development as a project being developed strictly for the enjoyment of its players. This helped translate to my analysis of Bungie as a company that had essentially abandoned this base concept. In turn, though, I was able to understand some of the more rigid requirements of team expansion demonstrated by Bungie which, while detrimental to consumers, was at least a decent means to encourage developmental focuses in smaller projects. In the future, I believe a balance between structural rigidness and free flowing ambition to be necessary if a game development team should desire to find success.