The evolution of game as a live service/monetization

The current state

The current state of gaming monetization is terrible with most games pushing micro transactions around every corner, in today's market with heavily anti-consumer pricing only focused on profit rather than making a good and finished product. And most companies just give out empty promises for the future without ever delivering on those promises and this has left pretty much all the community frustrated as seen with recent games such as Callisto protocol which was promised to be the new standard for the survival horror genre, and to improve upon previous generation of games such as dead space which is one of the most iconic horror survival games of all time, but upon release Callisto protocol, the game launched which a massive number of issues rendering the game complete unplayable on pc and many people had their purchase refunded,(Kotaku 2022) but even after the issues were sum what solved the overall game was received to be very lackluster only receiving mostly negative reviews on steam and massive outrage on social media such as twitter(steam 2022), as the game didn’t seem to be an improvement on what we had over 10 years ago, and is just one example of the many disappointments in today's gaming climate but how did we even get here?

The start

In the early 2000s games were vastly different to how games are made today most games were produced finished and then the developers moved on to the next project, but later closer to 2010 games started adding extra paid content after release such as map packs for call of duty and halo or story expansions for other games, but the beginning of bad monetization is none other than the horse armor DLC which was added to oblivion in 2008 which when released was met with massive backlash with it costing £2.50 for a simple piece of armor, but even with all this outrage the DLC actually ending up selling massively and was a huge success, this would become the catalyst for a lot of future monetization to come. Also, one of the biggest impacts of gaming monetization was with call of duty advanced warfare which released in 2014, this brought many changes for the franchise with it being set far into the future and introducing probably one of the worst micro transactions to date loot boxes, these were added to call of duty's multiplayer where players could pay money to buy supply drops which would contain cosmetics for your character, but also contain different versions of weapons which were better than there basic counterpart, players could earn these supply drops by just playing the game but were earned very slowly which would push players to spend money to get them instead, I personal believe that this was one of the biggest changes that changed how monetization was handled in future games.

The Shift

The next big shift for monetization was in 2017 which is when Fortnite battle royal was released in early access for everybody and took the world by storm as the game was completely free to play and the way they made their money instead was by having a in game item shop which had paid cosmetics people could purchase instead, this model became highly successful as Fortnite was one of the biggest games of 2017 and years after as in early 2018 the game quickly surpassed over 40 million players and kept growing for months after, I personally believe this is because their business model was both fair and profitable at the same time all the games money was made from cosmetics so it didn’t affect people who were not very interested in that sort of thing, but also even if you were a completely a free to play player you could still earn the in game currency (vbucks) by just playing over the time which helped make it feel even if u didn’t pay u were still earning your way towards something.

There achieved this by something called the battle pass which had both a free and paid version which players would get though by just playing the game, most of the rewards were cosmetics but some did give up some of the in game currency which if u paid for the battle pass and then finished it you would have earned all that in game currency back that you spent to get it, this was extremely smart as this made it so that a lot of players would spend a lot of hours on the game so that they could finish the battle pass in time for the next one, which was one of the many reasons the game had such massive growth and players after launch, even until this day Fortnite remains one of the most popular games of all time and has made well over 40 billion dollars over the last half a decade(Businessofapps) which is pretty much unheard of in the gaming world. But this type of gaming model came at quite a big cost for the rest of the industry.

The aftermath

The aftermath of Fortnite's success saw pretty much every company shifting their business models with something similar and releasing their own versions of battle royals, such as call of duty releasing blackout for black ops 4 then later Warzone for call of duty modern warfare Apex legends and many other games, but all these attempts were not as good as what Fortnite achieved as these other attempts were more of just a cash grab than anything else as even though these alternatives were quite popular when they launched people quite quickly released that the devs cared more about pushing new cosmetics at extremely unfair prices, one of the prime examples of this was in apex legends with their heirloom cosmetics, which were priced at in my opinion extremely unfair prices up to £100+ and when there were original released were only able to be obtained via lootboxs which were in the game so players could end up spending outrageous amounts of money before getting it and some other people would end up getting it on their very first box. not making enough of an effort to fix the issues that were present in the game, which only got worse as time went on and made the community feel neglected.

Similar things played warzone which launched in March of 2020 which was also massively popular among fans of the call of duty fans but unfortunately ended up running into similar issues to apex legends with it seeming the devs were more focused on pushing out cosmetics to keep their profits up and ignoring the issues that were plaguing them especially with a rise in hackers and cheaters which made the game suffer heavily even to this day.

Today

In today's gaming world pretty much, every single company has shifted towards this new way of gaming monetization it can been in pretty much anything from free to play games of course or even paid games such as grand theft auto which is a fully priced game but still comes with microtransactions in the online mode which can give people an advantage over others if they pay, even other games such as destiny which were once a fully priced triple A game have actually shifted their to free to play/ live service format and changed their business model as well. And has changed games for better and for worse, with this way of monetization this allows more people to access games and to play together but overall, the quality of the games that have been releasing in the past few years has gone down dramatically with far more issues on release with false promises to fix them later down the line and other bad practices such as releasing a game and then adding DLC later on that should have just been a part of the base a good example of this is Callisto Protocall which realized in a poor state but even after looking past all the problems it has at the end of the game the game ends on a cliffhanger and the actually ending will be released later as paid content, which left a bad taste in a lot of people's mouths considering how poorly the game launched.

Overall, I think these changes have changed how games are developed and monetized for mostly the worse as I personally feel that in today's landscape there isn't as much passion put into game creation as there used to be and any changes that are made seem to be geared to towards how much more money they can make from their consumers, although I do have hope for the future in game development as many studios have released the damage this has had on the market and have begun shifting the way their go about creating games and making sure to actually release finished products and to not lead consumers on with false promises.

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