

The following is a lightly-edited version of a document created by CSM and provided to CCP in early November in response to a request from CCP Ripley (EVE Senior Producer). The CSM is making it public in order to make the community aware of our concerns and in the hopes it will stimulate a fruitful discussion.

EVE Online Development Strategy (CSM Edition)

In a recent Skype meeting, CSM offered to produce a document that expressed CSM views on the future of EVE development.

The CSM believes that the best long-term growth strategy for EVE is not simply a matter of increasing new subscriptions but rather gaining and retaining subscribers in the long term. A balanced strategy will encourage players to support EVE's growth throughout their personal and social networks, convince those trying the game to pick up a subscription, and foster the personal relationships (both with other players and with CCP) which will keep them subscribed for years.

The CSM believes that the player-driven sandbox nature of EVE lends itself to a steadily growing base with less churn/turnover. The competitive advantage of EVE is the enduring community of players CCP has earned over the past decade, whose ambitions, successes, setbacks, betrayals, and battles provide infinitely more content and headlines than giant-panda-themed dungeon bosses. CCP's challenge is to maintain this advantage by keeping existing subscribers engaged while steadily attracting new players.

From a development standpoint, it is appropriate to segment demographics not by physical age but by character age. The needs and interests of a 21-year old new player are far more likely to be similar to that of a 50-year old new player than a 21-year old veteran. When viewed this way, one can broadly segment the community into four groups, each of which is attracted by different mixes of new features/content (Shiny) and improvement of existing features/content (Iteration).

Potentials -- people who have never or only briefly subscribed. (90% Shiny, 10% Iteration)

Newbies -- players with less than a year in the game. (70% Shiny, 30% Iteration)

Veterans -- players with more than a year in the game. (10% Shiny, 90% Iteration)

Bittervets -- unsubscribed veterans. (50% Shiny, 50% Iteration)

The goal is to tempt Potentials and Bittervets to subscribe, and to prevent Newbies and Veterans from unsubscribing. A significant challenge is that these goals conflict with each other. You can't please all the people all the time, especially considering the limited development resources available. If CCP focuses entirely on Iteration and pleasing the Veterans, there's an opportunity cost of attracting Potentials. Conversely, if all focus is on new "Jesus" features, there's a very real and demonstrated risk of alienating or even hollowing out your stable subscriber-base.

Given what CSM knows of the EVE player experience, we believe that the core subscriber-base is EVE/CCP's most valuable asset and that reducing attrition of Veterans must be a key priority. At the same time, attracting new Potentials *and converting them to Veterans* is the key to growth. The trick is finding a way to have your cake and eat it too. In this document, we submit a strategy to do just that.

The Strategy: Iterating on Iteration

Over the past 12-18 months, CCP has done an admirable pivot in terms of addressing Veteran retention. The massively increased amount of effort devoted to ship (re)balancing, the rework of legacy systems like Crimewatch, and the multi-expansion iteration on Factional Warfare are just a few examples. All of these things directly addressed Veteran retention, and have eliminated some of the "technical debt" that has built up over the years. This has, in turn, paid off some of the "social debt" CCP has incurred in terms of customer goodwill. The CSM would like to reiterate our position that a return to the era of Jesus features would likely undo recent gains CCP has made in player confidence and enthusiasm.

To solve the root issues with subscriber retention and growth, the fact that many problem areas remain unaddressed must be acknowledged and dealt with. These include an unfinished and stagnating sovereignty system, an inefficient and unengaging resource extraction and production system, and an aging POS mechanic acting as a barrier to full enjoyment of EVE's best content such as wormholes and hindering the full potential of the player driven economy.

This does not mean CCP should not think about adding new features and game play into EVE; far from it. Rather, it means CCP should adopt an approach to expansion-planning which addresses both veteran retention and new player conversion in a holistic way. This can be done by framing releases within the following mutually-reinforcing pillars:

- **New Feature/Radical Iteration (Potentials, Veterans, Bittervets):** Even if EVE were the perfect game, it would not stay that way for long. Innovation will always be important to keep EVE growing and competitive. This pillar addresses the need to attract new players and relight the fire of old ones. When deciding what feature to develop, seek out potential synergies with existing areas/features in need of new life. Radical reimagining of existing or practically unused features can transcend "iterations" and fill this role (ie: Bounty Hunting).
- **Continued Iteration (Veterans, Bittervets):** A new feature should never consume so much of a release that iterations on old features go unaddressed or recently released features are left uncompleted. Iterations on existing features and finishing touches on recently released features build player confidence in the game, improve the polish/maturity of the EVE product, and keep veterans engaged and positive about EVE's development.
- **Quality of Life (Newbies, Veterans):** Commonly known as "Little Things," there are numerous aspects of EVE which are resource-light wins but reduce frustration and *needless* complexity from the EVE experience, to the appreciation of vets and those you hope will become vets.
- **UI (Newbies, Veterans):** How players perceive and interact with the players and universe around them is fundamental. Modernizing and streamlining EVE's UI on a steady, ongoing basis will keep EVE accessible to new generations of users and improve the game experience overall.
- **Aggressive Rebalancing (Newbies, Veterans):** Player conflict and competition are the life-blood of EVE. The same people fighting over the same stuff with the same ships over and over again leads to stagnation and disinterest. A very resource efficient way to combat this is a constant rebalancing of ships and modules. The approach spearheaded

by CCP Fozzie and CCP Ytterbium should continue independent of expansion themes, though they may intersect.

In order to meet these goals, CCP should be willing to adopt 12 month/two expansion time frames for ambitious, Apocrypha-scale projects. The first expansion should lay the foundation for something Big and the second would deliver the payoff. Both should include iterations, quality of life/UI improvements, and rebalancing. New features should be planned within the context of the larger EVE vision and existing risk/reward dynamics. By continuing internal efforts to streamline processes and modularize code, future adjustments to features, mechanics, balancing, and risk/reward will be less resource-intensive.

Examples for Consideration

The following examples, in alphabetical order, are included to provide concrete illustrations of a pillar-based approach in practice. These examples center on themes and concepts widely considered by existing subscribers as significantly broken and would likely need to be spread out over two expansions/12 months. Each area is a significant problem taking money out of CCP's pocket through lost or missed subscriptions. They are not wish-lists, but rather illustrations of how new features and iteration can be weaved into powerful, themed expansions with broad demographic appeal.

An Important Note on Rebalancing: As stated above, *the pace and process of ship and module rebalancing should continue*. Balancing in the following examples focuses on non-ship opportunities.

Critical Issue: 0.0 and Sovereignty

Issues Addressed: Need for more lucrative incentives to live/work in dangerous space; Need for 0.0 space to support ground-up alliance income; Need for large-scale conflict drivers; Need for small-scale objectives; Need for players to express themselves and create emotional attachment; Need to reduce burnout of alliance leadership and fleet commanders (EVE's most critical content creators); Need for a sovereignty system that is inherently fun to compete over, rather than an obligation to be endured.

- **Rich Sovereignty (New Feature):** This is a massive reimagining of something already in the game that can effectively be called a new feature and will hit many pillars at once. Sovereignty should contribute to a group of players feeling like they have a "home on top of gold" with vast economic value they need to actively unlock, that outsiders want to take, and that they will fight to protect it because it means more than just money. The mechanics of establishing, maintaining, developing, and conquering sovereignty should contribute to this experience and support a variety of players and groups in its ecosystem. The CSM supports the Farms and Fields concept as a starting point for this discussion.
- **Diversifying 0.0 (Iteration):** Currently every system in null security space is basically the same as the next one. The belt count and PVE value may differ slightly but the PVE activity remains the same and upgrades are applied equally in all places. Consideration should be given to adding more "flavor" to 0.0 space, either by making certain types of PVE more favorable in one place (or certain upgrades more effective), world shaping by adding more landmarks and environmental effects, or by empowering players to "terraform" their own systems above and beyond what current mechanics allow. This would contribute to players' sense of ownership, identity, and connection as well as acts

as a way to interest new players in exploring EVE's vast reaches and eventually making their own mark on it.

- **Sidelining Structure Grinds (Quality of Life):** The grind-structure-get-reinforcement-timer-grind-more-structure mechanic currently dominates sovereignty and is one of the most counterproductive mechanics in EVE from the perspective of player retention. Currently required to take objectives, it's also done in the hopes of "forcing" a fight. However even if a fight is achieved, the winning side must still structure grind afterward, either with guns or repair modules. Grinding structures is universally considered one of the most tedious, un-fun activities in EVE and contributes to player/leadership burn out. While a certain amount of structure grinding may be unavoidable, the challenge to CCP should be to find ways to frame sovereignty and conflict that focus on dynamic, engaging player vs. player activity, not boring player vs. structure activity players feel like they have to go through to get to the fun part.
- **Standings and the Map (UI):** Great strides have been made with standings, such as adding a diplomat role and simplifying standings levels. However, tools to share standings information and updates with ones allies would be welcome social and organizational management tools. Additionally, combining the UI for personal and organization standings was a step backward and should be addressed. As for the in-game map, it does a lot of things well. However encouraging player interaction is not one of them. Support for sharable annotation, both visual and textual, will allow players to better organize, track, and share their experience, knowledge, objectives, and schemes. This facilitates cooperation and will enable players to engage an ever changing universe on their own terms. It is worth noting that the CREST API could empower players to design their own tools to accomplish this.
- **Incomes and Security Levels (Balance):** A vibrant, dynamic, and accessible sovereignty system affords CCP an opportunity to finally address the risk/reward imbalance between 0.0 and empire that is the source of much resentment amongst the veteran population and confusion among new players. Since Dominion and a subsequent nerf to anomalies, nullsec has seen non-Technetium rewards go down while risk has remained level. On the other hand, features like Incursions, removal of drone alloys, and to an extent Faction Warfare have vastly raised the rewards in Empire while changes to suicide ganking and wardecs have greatly lowered the risk of living in and operating out of there. Either by reducing empire-based income or by using it as a baseline with which to scale up lowsec/wormhole/nullsec income potential, CCP should plan out a vision for the relationship between sections of space and close the book on this long standing issue.

Critical Issue: Mining and Industry

Issues Addressed: Need for industrial incentives to live/work in dangerous space; Need for 0.0 space to support ground-up alliance income; Need for more exciting group content; Need for enhanced 0.0 industrial capacity; Need for more service contracts to enable efficient player interaction; Need for unique and hazardous environments to support new and exciting forms of PVP.

- **Group PVE for Miners aka "Ring Mining" (New Feature):** Building upon the success of Incursions, this mining feature should be group oriented and dangerous, requiring close coordination with other players. Borrowing from the wormhole/Apocrypha concept, it should take place in conditions that create a new and challenging environment that

limits visibility, movement, and situational awareness. Ideally this will be accessible to young players and desired by veterans by prioritizing player skills, such as timing and spatial positioning, ahead of skill points. This mechanic should be applied to advanced versions of existing asteroids as well as moon minerals, providing fantastic incentives to successful mining teams. These rewards should come at great risk, including dangerous and disruptive environmental effects as well as the ever-present risk of ambush by other players and fleets taking advantage of new stealth PVP tactics enabled by the environment. This feature should be *extremely* rare in high sec (with no CONCORD protection if possible), while more common and lucrative in null sec. This allows new players to try the feature while respecting the risk/reward balance veterans are concerned with.

- **Breaking Mineral Compression, Revisiting Station Upgrades (Iteration):** By having a greater flow of minerals in 0.0, successfully extracted by skilled risk-taking miners, you create incentives for miners in null. To ensure they have a niche, mineral compression must go away, giving miners a demand to fill. To help null sec producers take advantage of this, revisit station upgrades to make them cheaper, more flexible, and more useful.
- **Delivery Contracts (Quality of Life):** The service-contract program would fit here, since a proper “delivery of goods” mechanic would unlock tremendous economic potential within the EVE player base while also reducing frustration and tedium. It would also empower industrial corps by allowing vets/leaders to more efficiently organize their production and logistics while facilitating the contribution of new players to the process.
- **CREST for Industry (UI):** Updating and streamlining the in-game production UI with a focus on a more intuitive, less click-heavy interface which addresses the needs of career manufacturers is extremely important. Many Quality of Life improvements in this and other areas could be had by fully unlocking the power of the CREST API. The ability to move tracking contributions to a mining op and the resulting payments from manual spreadsheets to CREST-based third party tools would be a powerful improvement to the EVE experience. Producers of all scales would certainly appreciate being able to initiate builds and deliver items via a web app. These apps will lower the barrier of new industrialists from becoming industrial leaders and prevent current industry veterans from succumbing to administrative burnout.
- **Revisiting Asteroids (Balancing):** Create new asteroids which either yield massive amounts of low-end minerals (i.e. Tritanium), or significant amounts of low-end minerals along with high-end minerals, for use with the new Group Mining mechanic. The yields of conventional asteroids should be reexamined. This will help address high sec/null sec risk vs. reward veterans are concerned with and, when taken with station upgrades, enable a 0.0 industrial environment which will draw in new players.

Critical Issue: POSes

Issues Addressed: Need for incentives to live/work in dangerous space; Need for players to express themselves and create emotional attachment; Need for smaller-scale objectives to provoke and facilitate conflict; Need for proper security that allows new players to live in and explore the most dangerous areas of space; Need for modern management, permissions, and construction UI for player structures; Need for more tools for economic competition; Need to rebalance moon mineral use to decentralize strategic income and promote conflict.

- **Modular Starbases (New Feature):** Currently, POSes touch huge numbers of players over every conceivable demographic and leave them disappointed or worse, making this

one of the most consistently requested and broadly supported updates to EVE. As one of EVE's unique selling points is the player-driven nature of the world, allowing players to own a tiny little part of space is hugely important. Modular Starbases can empower players and organizations to address PVP, industrial, and residency needs in a personal, scalable way. This feature will help unlock player economic power, develop infrastructure, express identity, and create new PVP and social opportunities for players of all ages.

- **Empire POCO and Structure Bounties (Iteration):** Starbase fuel is harvested from planets, so it makes sense to iterate on planets in an expansion related to them. Adding player owned customs offices (POCOs) to Empire would drive interesting player interaction and content with renewed importance given the new Starbases. Allowing players to place bounties on these Starbases and the customs offices that facilitate their supply is a natural iteration of the upcoming bounty system which will enhance this interaction.
- **Small Scale Objectives (Quality of Life):** Not a feature in itself, but the Starbases feature should be implemented in a way that accommodates achievable PVP objectives for small groups of players to drive small-scale, short-term conflict and enhance strategic conflict. Objectives that do not involve large structure grinds and reinforcement timers would add welcome variety and would help revitalize stagnant areas of the game, particularly nullsec.
- **T2 Production (Balance):** POSes have always had a role in T2 production. Whether the new Starbases continue that legacy or not, this expansion would be a perfect time to address issues with T2 production, specifically the concentration of moon mineral requirements in T2 ship and item construction. Rather than replace a Technetium bottleneck with a new bottleneck, care should be taken to balance mineral requirements to avoid built-in bottlenecks while maintaining high-end moons as valuable sources of income. EVE's widely touted player-driven market will be empowered to determine which moons have the highest relative value, while providing more PVP conflict drivers.
- **Starbase and Planetary UI (UI):** New Starbases should have a brand new, modern, usable, and friendly UI. A fresh pass at the Planetary Interaction UI may also be in order.

This collaborative document is a heavily condensed version of internal discussions and consensus building. The CSM is happy to expand on it or any specific concepts contained within it at CCP's discretion. We would like to thank CCP Ripley and the rest of the CCP staff for this unique opportunity to contribute to the discussion of EVE's future planning in such a high level way.

Sincerely,
The Members of the Seventh Council of Stellar Management