

CSM meeting report.

During the CSM's recent visit to Iceland, the delegates had 6 major meetings with CCP staff. The general purpose of the visit was to give CSM more background information on CCP processes, and develop better ways for CCP to use CSM input to improve EVE. However, in addition to this, many other topics of general interest to the EVE community were discussed in detail, planning was begun for the December Summit, and the CSM was invited to observe some Sprint Demos. The CSM was very pleased with the depth and quality of the discussions held during the meeting, as well as the marked change in "atmosphere" during the visit, which made our interactions with CCP both pleasant and extremely productive.

In these meetings, there was much back-and-forth discussion, with CSM (and CCP) questions resulting in clarification of (or elaboration on) the material presented. Where appropriate, for the purposes of both brevity and clarity, many of these discussions have been folded into the main narrative.

Direct quotes by individuals are quoted, and paraphrased summaries are prefaced by the name of the speaker (or CSM / CCP as appropriate).

Meeting 1 - The CCP Kickoff, a.k.a. "The Hilmarathon"

CCP attendance: Hilmar (CCP Hellmar), Arnar (CCP Zulu) and Eyjólfur (CCP Dr.EyjoG).

The meeting began with a presentation by Hilmar of the CCP 2010 kick off video, depicting the 'Deliver' theme and slides connected to that message, accompanied by many clarifying comments, both unsolicited and in response to CSM questions.

Hilmar spoke about the past expansions and the past kickoffs and the experience accumulated from them. In 2004, CCP just had to say NO to new features, and focus on delivering the improvements they had accumulated in-house. When a similar thing happened the year after, CCP started committing to two expansions per year. Over the last two years, however, CCP has been over-developing, putting too many features into each expansion, resulting in a state of "*Too many features, not enough polish*".

Each kickoff has a theme, a tone that sets the spirit for the coming year. This year's theme is "*Deliver*," building on last year's "*Excellence*". As the company is becoming larger the need for this approach has been increasingly obvious. During the kickoffs, a presentation is given to all employees about the status of the current projects in production. Currently only EVE has public releases while the two other projects are in development and being tested internally.

Typically, the message of a kickoff takes time to diffuse and take hold in the company; last year's "Excellence" theme did not really start to influence company direction until Q2-2010, although Hilmar expects "Deliver" to have a more immediate effect.

In the 2010 kickoff the focus was Carbon, CCP's new internal development platform, and how it benefits all of CCP's products, since improvements and innovations developed for one game can be "corified" or "carbonated" and used in the others. As EVE is the only CCP game that has been released, most of the effort has involved carbonating EVE code for use in Dust 514 and World of Darkness. However, these projects are now starting to contribute improvements to Carbon that will soon benefit EVE.

For example network IO improvements developed by the Core team for Carbon, could very well improve the performance of large fleet fights in EVE.

In addition, the refactoring of EVE code during corification results in many subtle improvements in EVE itself. The recent trend towards shorter downtimes is a direct result of this effort, and CCP expects further, perhaps dramatic, reductions in downtime in the future. CSM inquired why CCP was not communicating things like this in devblogs, as they have been doing regarding the War on Lag. Arnar responded that every team has a backlog story to produce a devblog, but that often there is nothing to report as software development is sometimes boring.

Carbon has also improved the development environment. As most software engineers at the company are using the same technology, it is easier to shift manpower between different projects. Also, the technical challenges of Carbon have attracted a number of extremely talented people to join the company.

A discussion ensued about the Tyrannis expansion. Hilmar bluntly stated that "*Tyrannis was a benchmark release for what not to do*".

Hilmar: All performance and usage indicators along with the feedback on the forums indicated that CCP was not doing what it should be doing with Tyrannis. The implementation of Agile by CCP has had an interesting effect - "*It is like having your mother in-law visiting and she is always pointing out where you are failing and what you have to do better*". Agile is good at pointing out flaws, and there were red-flags about Planetary Interaction early in the process when their backlog collapsed to MUST features only, but despite this, CCP plunged forward, with predictable results.

Regarding the "*Commit to Excellence*" thread in the Assembly Hall, Hilmar commented that "*We love when people call bullshit on us*". This thread was featured in Hilmar's kickoff presentation and has been broadly discussed within the company.

Hilmar: This is necessary so that EVE can continue to grow and be alive. It is necessary for CCP. Of course, there are people within CCP who take it very personally when players start to point out mistakes in the game or in dev communications. Not all employees are accustomed to the verbal fencing that goes on the EVE Online forums, and how should they react, when the majority has only been with CCP for one to two years. Yet energetically calling CCP out when it makes mistakes is not malicious. Those

people want EVE to succeed and continue to do so, otherwise they wouldn't care. That is why CCP, often painfully, tries and learns from its mistakes and also is trying to develop methods to evaluate player reactions in a more timely way - "*Making mistakes is good as long as one has the ability to learn from them*".

Despite marketing efforts such as using Steam and reactivation campaigns, Tyrannis did not generate the expected subscriber growth. In fact, the apparent perceived downward trend in the subscriber numbers prompted a question from the CSM about what CCP was doing to halt it.

Hilmar: CCP is focused on fleet fight lag, re-organization within the company, simplification of processes, and limitations of the scale of the projects so that they can be safely and successfully delivered. Furthermore, the recent subscriber trends, although showing the number of subscribers decreasing minutely or about 0.9% in the last two months, is not yet a concern (but CCP is still deploying counter-measures and treating it as it was a concern) because historically periodic fluctuations in the numbers do happen. For an accurate picture of the historic fluctuations [the Quarterly Economic Newsletter for EVE Online](#) (page 8) is an excellent source!

With respect to the recent problems with the Tyrannis 1.1 release, a discussion was held about possible ways to prevent a similar event in the future. CCP is still investigating this and preparing recommendations.

The Kickoff continued with presentations on Dust 514.

CSM: Does CCP plan to create player councils similar to CSM for the new games?

CCP: We don't know yet, and it will most likely not be included in the beginning at least, as such a structure requires an established and functioning community.

CSM: What about the disparity in time-horizons between console and MMO players?

CCP: The goal of Dust is to have a meaningful connection to EVE, although the details have not been worked out exactly. Although the current trend for most console games suggests that they don't foster long-term players in the same sense as MMOs do, the aim is to have that possibility open with the persistence built into Dust and the relation of Dust and EVE.

While Dust and EVE interaction has not fully defined, the fundamental vision is that it should be very similar to the relationship marines have with fleet pilots; the relationship doesn't have to be huge to be meaningful, ultimately Dust players will interact with the EVE community in a similar manner.

The CSM then initiated a discussion of micro-transactions in EVE.

CCP explained that it has to watch the industry and continue to evolve the business model, lest they be out-competed. CCP is very careful not to disrupt the real-world economics of EVE, and started with PLEX as an option for players to play EVE without using real-life money and to deliver a blow to the RMT black market.

PLEX is one of the currencies currently in EVE -- a medium to pay for services/goods. The EVE economy has been mismanaged in the past according to Hilmar and as it stands now there is too much money in the system, thus all future changes to it have to be done in a careful and considerate manner.

CCP viewed introducing PLEX for remaps as a way to test the effects of micro-transactions and honestly did not think they would be controversial.

The CSM maintains that micro-transactions appear to be simply a source of additional income for CCP; it is difficult to see the value for the average player. It is very important in the CSM's opinion to NOT allow any advantage in game to be bought for real life money no matter how small or insignificant that advantage might seem.

The CSM also pointed out that adding extra functionality to PLEX would make it a worse tool, as currently it has a very clear role that will be muddled and made unclear with these changes. Furthermore, CCP will be reducing the value of ISK as not everything will be purchasable by ISK, resulting in likely PLEX inflation.

If CCP wants to introduce paid remaps, CSM believes it should not be done in a way which makes it difficult to unmake the baby. Adding an option to use PLEX to buy the remapping service at some later date might be very good, but it should start with having the option to get a remap for ISK.

CSM is also concerned that if non-vanity items are available via micro-transactions, big alliances that are funded through PLEX or other methods of RMT will be far more likely to win engagements (and the alliance with the biggest sugar daddy will come out on top). Throwing real life money at a problem (as opposed to thought or in-game planning) is not the EVE way.

The CSM pointed out that neural remaps are clearly not a vanity option in any sense of the word. It has a clear in-game value.

CSM continued by pointing out that PLEX for remaps is the first step along a path that leads to PLEX for skill points, and while CCP has stated they have no plans to do this, the players will assume that it is only a matter of time.

CCP stated that they had believed that PLEX for remaps would largely be used to correct mistakes a player has made in his training plan. CSM responded that even if so, the cost would have to scale in order to prevent abuse; for example, one PLEX for the first remap, two PLEXes for a second remap, etc. CSM again emphasized that neural remap is not a vanity item – it gives a true advantage in game, an advantage you would

only have if you were rich (in real-life or in-game). A change like this will cost good-will from the players and CCP should try to minimize drawing from that account, which they have already done with the diversion of some developer effort from EVE towards Carbon (although admittedly, this effort is starting to produce dividends for EVE players).

Eyjólfur: Is the CSM happy with PLEX as they currently are?

CSM: Most of us are happy with PLEX, and think it is a good addition to EVE. Having a transparent way to acquire ISK for RL money without actually creating ISK out of thin air seems to be good for the economy.

It was mentioned that if the ISK economy has been mismanaged and there is a need for more ISK sinks, it sounds counter-intuitive to not use ISK micro-transactions like remaps as a sink - it might actually be so popular that it would need to be restricted. Other examples of micro-transaction ISK sinks, such as custom paintjobs for ships, were mentioned.

Summary: CSM strongly emphasized that if CCP introduces micro-transactions, they should be for vanity items only. However, CSM's preference is that no micro-transactions be connected to EVE.

If CCP proceeds with their plans regarding neural remapping, which no CSM5 member is in favor of, CSM urges that an escalating cost should be imposed as a middle ground in order to prevent mini-maxing of character attributes and the abuse it will receive from wealthy players (both real-life and ISK).

The CSM ended the meeting by expressing their appreciation to Hilmar for the time he devoted to the meeting and preparing for it, and for his support of the CSM concept, and encouraged him to continue communicating with the CSM in a fearless manner.

Meeting 2 - Agile Development, with a side order of Planetary Interaction

CCP attendance: Pétur (CCP Xhagen) and Eyjólfur (CCP Dr.EyjoG).

The CSM watched a video of [Alli's presentation on Global Agile Game Development at GDC Europe 2010](#).

While most of the CSM was already familiar with the basics of Agile and SCRUM, part of Alli's presentation (slides 50-51) touched on what happened during the development of Planetary Interaction for Tyrannis, and the lessons CCP has learned from the experience.

The PI team was newly formed when it was assigned the task of producing the headline feature for Tyrannis, and as a consequence of their inexperience as a team (as opposed to as individuals), they underestimated the difficulty of the task, and thus the

feature ended up having only MUST user stories. In particular, emergent tasks -- unplanned, unforeseen tasks that only become apparent after development work is underway -- grew to dominate the workload for the team. The graph on page 51 of Alli's presentation shows this emergent work (in blue, including bug fixing) crowding out progress on planned tasks in each subsequent sprint. In the end, the team only managed to deliver 45% of what they had planned.

CSM: What is being done so this doesn't happen again?

CCP: All teams are now aware of the problem, and are adjusting their planning to give themselves more slack. MuSCoW is great for planning, but no battle plan survives contact with the enemy, which highlights the need to plan for iteration in subsequent expansions -- as is being done with Planetary Interaction in Incursion.

CSM: What is the difference between working with a fixed release date compared to not having a fixed release date? Wouldn't it have been easier to simply delay the release of Tyrannis?

Eyjólfur: It is difficult to move dates around; there would be conflicts with holidays and vacation dates, plus it would mean breaking the commitment to new expansions twice a year. Furthermore there are other teams and other projects that are dependent on release dates being held, so the domino effect would have been impossible to contain. The options CCP has with Agile mean that it is possible to make features as good as possible within the timeframe, and then plan and/or commit to iterations.

CSM: After PI, has there been a change so that teams have more freedom to work on features they like?

CCP: Yes, but that does not mean that they can do what they want. The teams can make suggestions about what they want to work on to their Senior Producer, and the Senior Producer makes suggestions about what direction to take, and coupled with the broad vision that comes from the Creative Director a list of possible things to do emerges, and from that list it is possible for the teams to choose.

Meeting 3 - EVE Marketing

CCP attendance: Rick (CCP Zinfandel) and Eyjólfur (CCP Dr.EyjoG).

Rick outlined several of the marketing strategies for the coming months. A part of that message is that the CSM has influence and that CCP is taking its comments and acting on them, i.e. the CSM is being mentioned whenever appropriate, such as in devblogs. Other CSM influence on CCP activities (CSM items being implemented, the War on Lag team, etc.) will get more public discussion.

One thing Rick pointed out from his own experience (when he was working out of Atlanta) is that if you are not on-site (in Iceland) you feel like you have less influence,

but a part of this is perception. It takes some time for one's presence to seep into all departments, but it will get there. CSM members that have been through more than one CSM stated that every CSM has made progress although sometime it doesn't seem like progress.

Rick discussed the upcoming Commissioned Officer Edition (COE) retail box that is coming out, and how it has to be differentiated from the original box. The COE will be aimed at new players, including a CD-key that is only usable to create new accounts (not adding to existing ones), an item that enhances the performance of new characters during their first 30 days (a bonus to all attributes, more damage and a faster rate of fire for missiles; things that will help the new players along in the harsh world of EVE).

Rick freely admitted that retail is not CCP's strongest side and MMO's in general have had difficulty with box sets. One way to get around the demand from retailers that something new and shiny is in each box is to put out one limited edition and then change it around for the second version and also that having a box sometimes helps to keep the game more visual.

Regarding the Cerebral Accelerator implant in the COE, it checks the character's creation date to see if it is younger than 30 days and doesn't work for older players. The Cerebral Accelerator can be owned by older players and it can be sold through the contract system. Furthermore, the Accelerator is destroyed if a character is podded.

A CSM raised concerns about whether the 'shock' of no longer having the bonuses given by the implant would affect the players in a strange way when they are faced with 'reality'.

CSM: Is the cost of publishing a box really worth it?

Rick: People will convert (to long-term players) at a lower rate but that chunk of money still makes it worthwhile. Furthermore the box set will reach customers that CCP would otherwise not have reached.

Rick claimed that a planned Incarna box would contain a faction swimsuit it. However, the CSM thinks he may have been making a joke. A discussion will take place on the CSM internal forum regarding possible bonus contents of that box.

One effect of the new character creator is that it means a larger client size, but that will not be a problem for the COE box.

When asked about the marketing strategy for Incarna, specifically related to how it seems to be being rolled out in stages (character creator in Incursion, followed by the Summer2011 expansion) the response was that it is not yet time to discuss that. There was however a unanimous expression of concern from the CSM due to the fact that they hadn't seen any gameplay from Incarna, and were thus not able to form an educated opinion about the feature.

CSM: Will it only cater to new players, or will it take older players into account? Will it be necessary for people to go into the stations, or be purely optional? Why would anyone want to participate in Incarna? Also, if all this time has been spent on development and there is nothing to show for it yet, it does not bode well for the future.

Rick: The initial Incarna message that will be released with the new character creator is that EVE will have the best avatars any MMO game has to offer. Even though you are only flying through space and only seeing your portrait when you log on, it will still add a tangible value to the game experience.

The reason for adding Incarna is to expand the SF experience CCP started creating 7 years ago with EVE. It has taken years, but CCP is finally getting there. Furthermore, by adding Incarna CCP is opening up possible gameplay for subscribers that would otherwise not have subscribed to EVE, thus making EVE more populated and thus better for everyone. Having the choice of being either in space, in a station, or both is a richer environment than only being able to be in space.

CSM: Will it be possible to get retention numbers and further statistics regarding subscribers?

CCP: Sadly this is one of the things that CCP holds rather close to its chest as it is potentially very helpful for its competitors to utilize. However, releasing the numbers deemed safe will be looked into further.

A part of CCP's message in the coming months will be to mention how EVE is constantly being maintained and advanced. One metric for that is the number of players simultaneously fighting or the pilots supported at the same time in Jita. Another is the CSM and the messages coming from that direction, that message is very positive.

CSM: In our communication we are trying to be positive, but always be critical. Different CSM members will have different focuses but it is clear who the CSM represents. Additionally it is fully acknowledged that mindlessly bashing CCP will never be productive. But in terms of messaging, it is very difficult for the CSM when there is as yet little to show for their effort. However, they will make sure that the player base is fully informed, even though CCP does not like the messages. It is a fact that forums are full of thoughtful discussion which can be useful, even though not all of it is positive. The players also have expectations of the CSM even though they may not be fair at all times, so the CSM is kept on their toes as well.

The CSM pointed out that there is not a great deal of communication about the EVE's future and it is CSM's belief that marketing can be more involved there. Rick responded positively to this suggestion.

The CSM also inquired about several other aspects of EVE marketing, such as newsletter response and online advertising, the answers to which were provided under

NDA. Several suggestions that Rick found useful were made regarding these activities.

Meeting 4 - Lagnarök

CCP attendance: Brian (CCP Veritas), Team Gridlock (CCP Atlas, CCP GingerDude, CCP Warlock, CCP Masterplan), and many other CCP staff -- the CSM was blobbed.

Note: As Team Gridlock intends to release detailed devblogs on topics discussed during this meeting, this report is less detailed than the other meeting reports, and focuses on process-related issues. However, this segment is still one of the longest in this report, because Team Gridlock arrived at the meeting fully armed with multiple blue graphs and ready to engage. The CSM greatly appreciated the detailed and frank nature of the discussion.

During this session, the CSM asked many questions about technical issues; for brevity, the questions are not listed but the answers have been folded into the presentation narrative.

CCP Veritas made a presentation to the CSM on progress in the War on Lag. He began with a timeline of recent events:

24 June – Previous CSM Lag meeting.

30 June – CCP GingerDude describes tight service locks, calls for a priority shift and formation of a team devoted to continuing improvement of fleet fights. Widespread internal agreement ensues.

12 July – CSM Meeting notes published, internal CCP mailing lists erupt. Shortly after, the Eve Online forums react in a slightly calmer manner. Initial goals for the lag-fixing group are sent out for review.

19 July – Thin client hardware comes online.

27 July – Massively.com weighs in on the backlash; Internal CCP mailing lists erupt again.

29 July – Tight service locking goes live.

9 August – CSM delivers the list of prioritized matters for Winter-2010.

11 August – Formal proposal for the Fleet Fight Lag Fixing Force (FFLFF) is presented to CCP Management.

16 August – CCP Management approves team formation, on the condition that a better name than "Fluffers" is found; Team Gridlock is born.

The current short-term goals of Team Gridlock are:

- * Fix issues involved with jumping into a loaded system.
- * Fix / Mitigate module cycling issues.
- * Diagnose Jita to see how server performance degrades under load.
- * Basic performance investigation and fixing.

Long-term goals are:

- * Have predictable, graceful degradation under load (i.e. when a node gets overloaded the subsequent behavior is predictable and known to the user)
- * Increase the performance envelope, both in terms of hardware and software
- * Transition to a multi-core architecture (currently EVE is designed to run one solar system on one core. Changing this fundamental design is far from trivial)

Short-term progress to date:

Tight Service Locks

Lock contention was causing long session-change delays. After the change these locks are now held for a far shorter amount of time. Deployed on Tranquility on 29 July 2010

Jumping Optimization

Jumping takes a lot of server CPU. Improvements to the process of ripping a player from space and stitching him back into the game have resulted in a 33% speed improvement in the worst-case. Deployed to Tranquility on 20 September 2010

Client grid loading is a work-in-progress, but one very subtle error case has been detected and a fix will be deployed soon. A jump duration monitor has been installed to gather live stats, which is generating useful information and will help evaluate the effects of future changes.

Load Balancing

Since high-sec load is very predictable, overall efficiency improvements, even small ones, mean that more high-sec systems can be handled by a single node. This means more nodes can be allocated to nullsec, so the average number of nullsec systems per node can be reduced, which in turn reduces the potential for lag.

Module Cycling

Dogma (the effects system that handles things like guns firing, etc.) is now much better behaved under load, but can still get overloaded. Module lag under extreme conditions cannot be avoided with the current architecture, but performance can and will be improved.

A client-side fix for the “stuck” entering a system issue is on TQ, awaiting a safe time to enable. Team Gridlock fixes are deployed disabled, then they can be enabled on a node-by-node basis for battle-testing before being enabled cluster-wide.

Jita

Jita is very useful for testing under high-load, non-combat situations. Team Gridlock is developing special profiling tools that can run on highly-loaded systems without themselves significantly affecting the behavior of the node (the “Observer Effect”).

General Performance

General performance has been increased by deploying lots of small fixes with proportionally big impact, and Team Gridlock are fairly confident on that the trend of increasing CPU cost per user has now been reversed.

The team has a long laundry-list of potential optimizations they are evaluating, whose combined effect should be significant, and thus permit even more aggressive load balancing.

Dynamic allocation of nodes (as opposed to the current static reallocation during downtime) is being worked on by the Core Cluster Team, but it is not an easy task.

Client Lag

At the present time, Team Gridlock is mostly working on server-side lag issues. Carbonation of the UI (begun in Tyrannis 1.1) will permit client improvements, and the composition of Team Gridlock may evolve over time to include UI-focused team members; it is simply a matter of getting the most bang for the buck.

How Team Gridlock Operates

The two main things that have enabled Team Gridlock to make significant progress have been support technologies that have been developed specifically for diagnostic purposes and mass tests on Singularity.

Thin clients, database lock diagnostics, and better network statistics were mentioned by CCP Veritas as having had great impact on analysis, identifying problems and confirming/disconfirming hypotheses. The ability to generate realistic server load with the thin clients has been very valuable and allowed CCP to focus mass testing much

better and into areas where they were really needed.

Mass testing has changed a lot and the attendance is way up (with the assistance of the CSM). One test actually had too many people, which caused the node to become so overloaded that even the lag diagnostic software became lagged out. However, this is a problem the team will willingly endure, and the new profiling tools coming online should permit mass-tests to dance right on the edge of the cliff and still return useful data.

One thing Team Gridlock mentioned specifically was that new players were active in coming onto the test server for mass tests – but due to them being relatively new their feedback is not as valuable as the feedback from the older players. The veterans have the experience frame to know when something is acting out, how things should work and when they are a bit ‘wonky’.

This raised the question: how can CCP incentivize the vets (the new players are apparently satisfied with the 2.000.000 skill points that are awarded on Singularity for participating in mass tests)?

CSM pointed out that if the framework for test feedback was improved, such as having thread for each mass test (not always the same one), asking specific questions (it might however taint the answers as then the thought process has been directed), and having the Singularity build automatically start the logserver program and make it easy to send in the resulting logs. Another idea was to move mass test feedback to a web survey – possibly post a link in the chat after every test scenario during the mass test, while the information is very fresh in the players’ minds. Other general framework matters were discussed such as spicing up the messages about the mass tests and better reports from CCP about the mass tests.

It was also suggested that CCP take note of players that are giving good feedback, and contact them directly for specific feedback.

CSM: How feasible is it to test on Tranquility?

CCP: While anything is possible, some things are very difficult. Running tests on Tranquility would mean that the test code would have to be on Tranquility, and while that is theoretically possible it is also very dangerous. It is possible to run two different builds there but running two versions of the same code could cause TEOTWAWKI (The End Of The World As We Know It). However, Team Gridlock will keep this suggestion in mind should the opportunity to do this without destroying the Universe present itself.

Rapid Testing Pipeline

Team Gridlock has improved the speed at which problems are fixed, tested and deployed. For example, this is how the module repeat optimization went through the hoops (this is however not an example of a full client patch testing pipeline).

8 August – Problem identified.

13 August – Fix checked in to source control.

19 August – Fix tested via Mass Test.

24 August – Deployed to TQ in disabled state.

30 August – Enabled on TQ.

Many issues can occur during this process. Deployment can get delayed due to other hotfixes, it might be necessary to dance around patches, bugs can be found anywhere along the path (fixes are immediately disabled if there's reasonable suspicion of errors). Client changes have to wait for a full patch that has a very rigorous testing pipeline, so they cannot be deployed through this method.

The reason for the six-day delay between being deployed on Tranquility and then being enabled was because it had to be made sure that the change was safe in its disabled state before it was enabled. This is an important but subtle point.

Devblogs

Team Gridlock and associates has produced a number of devblogs during its short history:

[Need for Moar Speed](#)

[The Long Lag](#)

[Fixing Lag: And I, For One, Welcome Our New Automation Overlords](#)

[Fixing Lag: Character Nodes](#)

[Fixing Lag: Module Lag – Why Not All Bugfixes Are A Good Idea](#)

[Fixing Lag: Picking Up Low Hanging Fruit](#)

[Fixing Lag: Well, This One Doesn't Really...](#)

[Fixing Lag: Fostering Meaningful Human Interaction, Through Testing And Communication](#)

The CSM feels that the dev blogs have a huge pay off in good will, and strongly encouraged the team to produce more, as soon as possible.

Dominion Lag

A bug (aka “The BUG”) introduced in Dominion that caused increased CPU usage per user, and thus a lot of lag, was actually quickly identified and fixed. However, the continued reports of lag were very perplexing, and CCP has spent considerable time in trying to identify what changed in Dominion that can offer an explanation.

Multiple factors have now been identified that contributed to lag in addition to the BUG.

First of all, player behavior changed after the release of Dominion. With this change, the behavior, location and composition of fleet fights also changed.

The removal of Titan doomsday device was a contributing factor, as now people are less afraid of traveling in large blobs. Also, missiles are used more than before; this is significant as they are more expensive (in terms of CPU) than guns. It did not help matters that the new Fighter Bombers use missiles (this has now been changed, as per the [recent dev blog that details how they will now be using ‘fake’ missiles](#)).

To top it off, the Drake became one of the most popular ships in null sec, with great flocks of them spamming missiles everywhere they went. The only consolation is that they are going down in flames in much greater quantities.

Q & A

CSM: why did it take so long to recognize there was a serious problem server performance?

CCP: It was a matter of reprioritization within the company and other problems had a higher priority at that time. Dominion was a tipping point, where long-standing issues reached a critical mass. CCP reprioritized after the CSM meeting in June.

A member of the CSM expressed great satisfaction that CSM whining is now taken more seriously by CCP. ☺

CSM: Are the lessons learned by teams are reported to the other teams?

CCP: Yes. The reporting process is actually quite diverse. It includes code reviews by peers, team reviews of work, wiki’s to distribute information, and a name and shame program.

CSM noted that it is receiving messages from people that are happy with CCP’s effort on the War on Lag, and players are generally aware that progress is being made. CSM suggested that perhaps CCP or Team Gridlock could do dev blogs on, for example, the life-cycle of a fix, a drill-down into a specific problem, or the unexpected consequences of an infestation of Drakes in 0.0.

CCP: Explaining exactly how lag can be induced might have to be approached with

caution (!), but the commitment to continue with publishing dev blogs is there so the flow of information will not stop.

CSM pointed out that tech- and graph-porn would always be well received by EVE players.

CSM again expressed its approval of the progress made so far, and re-emphasized that needs to be clearly communicated to the players. Everyone just needs to be careful on the detail as it affects the player expectations.

The CSM also suggested that Team Gridlock should blog about its failures, and what it has learned from them, in order to both manage expectations and give the players a better understanding of the difficulty and subtlety of their task.

Meeting 5 - Noah and Torfi - Incarnal Knowledge

CCP attendance: Noah (CCP Hammer), Torfi (CCP t0rfifranz), Eyjólfur (CCP Dr.EyjoG), Sophie (observing).

Torfi and Noah open by expressing their feeling that this meeting is basically an informal gathering. They have no particular agenda, and just want to discuss things like vision, goals, Incursion, future expansions, etc., and get CSM feedback.

Incarna Q and A

CCP's long-term goal is to transform EVE from a spaceship game to a complete SF simulator, containing both space ships and avatars. CCP wants to make EVE, the virtual world, better, more dynamic, more real and closer virtual reality. Incarna is part of that process.

CSM: There is a difference between giving players the ability to walk around in stations and forcing players to. Will players have to walk around in stations and what will be in those stations?

Noah: "That's the question we are asking ourselves every day" - it hasn't been decided yet. But by leaving the ship a player is putting himself into a vulnerable position.

Incarna is expected to become the underworld of EVE, with contraband, black markets and illegal activities, which gives you potential benefit within the game. CCP is also looking into gambling and will be demoing a test of this during the spring demos (on the last day of the CSM visit).

This description is very close to the last public demonstration, and the darker side appeals to many players - it's important that it has a function or value to regular players, not to just those who wish to participate in it.

CSM: if CCP is considering including contraband in Incarna, will it be moved from the current contract system into Incarna? If so, CCP will be forcing people to use Incarna, and it will put some pilot at a disadvantage because Incarna will not be available in all stations (for example, if players can only acquire boosters by exiting their ships).

CCP could not offer any concrete answer to these concerns as nothing has been decided in regards to the gameplay and availability of Incarna.

CSM: What will be the technical implementation of Incarna in terms of online availability – will all stations be accessible to players or only some? Can a player exit his pod in all stations? If not all stations are accessible, how will CCP choose which ones are?

Torfi: Currently the technological side of Incarna has not been fully investigated. It remains to be seen how many Incarna instances (i.e. station environments) can be run on the cluster. It appears to be a very scalable problem that can be resolved by buying more hardware to run Incarna instances, as the goal is to not limit the amount of Incarna stations. The implementation as it is now allows you to exit your ship in every station and go to your captain's quarters; it is just the large communal areas that might not be available on all stations.

The CSM restated their opinion that Incarna should not be forced on players, and it should not give you a flying in space advantage to use Incarna.

CSM: What can pilots do in the captain's quarters?

CCP: Nothing had been decided about the actual functionality and it was not possible to commit in any form or fashion to functionalities. CCP turned the question around and asked the CSM what they would be able to do in their quarters? Several things were mentioned; gambling, tactical management, view of the outside of the station (but stations in New Eden don't have windows!), access to station services, planetary interaction interface and customization of characters. Realistically this cannot be answered spontaneously so this will remain an open question for the time being.

CSM: Why are there restrictions on the amount of customization in character faces in Incarna?

CCP: It was a conscious decision on CCP's behalf to create themed faces for each bloodline instead of allowing players to create 'any' face. This was done to prevent all faces from becoming washed out and all looking alike. Furthermore it was a decided to not allow players to see their old avatar image when they were making a new one because of simplicity in building the system.

Incursion

CSM: Will warp gates that lead into the dungeons allow capital ships?

CCP: Yes, the gates can be configured to allow capital ships through. But if those sites will be included, they will be designed for capital ships.

CSM: Will it be necessary to probe out Incursion sites?

CCP: No, they will appear on everyone's overviews and on the main map.

CSM: Will super capital ships be able to use the warp gates?

CCP: No, most likely not.

When an infestation get stronger or isn't cleaned out several negative things will happen on a system wide scale. There will be a bounty tax applied to all bounties acquired in the system, the Sansha fleets will cyno-jam the system, and other annoying things will happen. The idea is to create a strong incentive to clean up the system. The infestation will however not be permanent to the system, it will move after one week restoring the system to normal. There will most likely be one Incursion per region at any given time.

CSM: What will be the rewards for cleaning out an Infestation?

CCP: The rewards are primarily ISK and LPs from Concord, points that players will be able to spend on the new Concord LP store. The super carrier blueprint copy will have a fixed chance drop rate. The trick about the rewards is that only the fleet that deals the most damage will receive bounty and LP rewards. Rewards for individual complexes will also change based on the number of pilots in the fleet running them, bringing the 'sweet spot' number of pilots will ensure maximum gain; too many or too few pilots and the rewards will be lowered. Also, Incursion rats will give sec status increases just like other NPCs do.

CSM: Will there be a how-to guide on Incursion?

CCP: Currently no official guide has been planned.

CSM: Based on the information we have, we think that primarily corporations and alliances will be able to organize infestation fighting.

CCP: That might look like the trend, but several tools will be created to make it easier for people to assemble random fleets such as chat channels, special markings in the fleet finder etc. The CSM still feels that it is unlikely that a group of strangers will do the high end Incursion dungeons.

CSM: There are a lot of potential exploits connected to joining a random fleet that unscrupulous players can use to grief people. Have you considered this?

CCP: If there is a particular mechanic that is of concern, let us know. CSM pointed out one in particular, the ability to reset someone's session timer by moving them around a

fleet. CCP agreed that this was indeed to be looked into.

CSM: What about supporting Sansha during infestations, allow players to align with Sansha so they will not be engaged by the NPCs – allowing them to more freely engage other players?

Torfi: While I like this idea personally, there will not be an option to support Sansha.

CSM: About Sansha rats, will they drop Sansha faction stuff like non-invading Sansha pirates?

CCP: (After checking) Sansha invaders will not drop Sansha faction loot.

Game Design Quality Assurance

CSM: How does CCP do quality assurance on their designs?

Noah: There is a process in Game Design that has multiple checkpoints and after each release the metrics are evaluated to see whether a particular design was a success or not.

CSM: What lessons has been learned in the past about designs and their implementations?

CCP: CCP ranks different aspects of designs, either as a whole or individual parts, with votes and data (where applicable) and weighs them both before they are implemented and after they are deployed. The metrics used when evaluating the designs depends on the design and what aspect of the design is being looked at. Usage patterns, written feedback from players, internal feedback and in fact whatever can be applied is used to evaluate a design. The Research and Statistics department is currently responsible for producing and maintaining datasets called the 'EVE Dashboard' for internal usage. The CSM requested to get access to this data and that will be investigated – whether the access will be CSM only or if it will be distributed freely to all players via devblogs or perhaps just made available as a live feed.

CSM agreed to think about what kind of statistics would be useful to them, and present a list to CCP.

Incarna and Micro-transactions

CSM: Will there be micro-transactions in the initial Incarna release?

CCP: CCP is open to diversifying its business model, and exploring virtual goods is neither evil nor bad. However the idea of only the rich kids being the best does not sit well with CCP and that situation will be prevented through any means necessary. Regarding the Eurogamer interview with Torfi and micro-transactions, CCP really wants

to have the virtual goods, and they should not be game changing. However CCP agrees that neural remapping is game-changing, although their original idea was that it would simply be a way to fix a mistake in attribute allocation.

Someone with a large amount of money could remap over and over again, therefore getting an unfair advantage over players that cannot do so and this truly worries players. The CSM emphasizes that there is a big difference between 30 days playing time (a PLEX) and buying in-game upgrades, it's not player-player trading. CSM adds that most of the current EVE subscribers find micro-transactions irritating and feel that CCP is double-dipping into their pockets. Furthermore there is a very strong worry about whether CCP will stop implementing micro-transactions at vanity items.

The CSM emphasized that vanity items or services, such as changing portraits, a big pink hat for Incarna or other things are less worrying than, for example, name changes, extra slots on ships etc. It is not clear to anyone where CCP is heading with this and where it will stop.

Additionally, with the ideas circulating it is evident that the usage of PLEX will only complicate its purpose – it is now a clean and simple notion, spend real life money to get a PLEX that can be either sold for ISK or used to extend an account, and bought with ISK to extend an account. Throwing in another function will make things unnecessarily complicated. The CSM brought up the idea of vanity-PLEX, another item that could be bought for real life money but can only be used for vanity items, not subscriptions; this would also permit better tracking of micro-transaction usage, because everything wouldn't be thrown into the same PLEX pot. Also, the CSM expressed the concern that the option to buy vanity items for something else than ISK could inflate the ISK and therefore create an imbalance in the game with the possible results of pushing people more into RMT.

According to CCP there are already three currencies in EVE, Loyalty Points, ISK and PLEX. So EVE players already are dealing with multiple conversion rates, and other foreign exchange problems. Perhaps it is not such a huge step to add to those complex systems.

CSM: Has it occurred to CCP to simply raise the subscription cost instead of dabbling in micro-transactions?

CCP: CCP is not necessarily doing this to make more money, but to offer a greater and broader range of service to players.

The meeting was concluded with Torfi's message that Incarna will be about more than just walking around. Player-owned establishments, player-made establishments, black markets, the multiplayer and the sandbox will be the guiding values of all decisions made regarding Incarna. The things available in Incarna will be unique and EVE specific. However, the Summer 2011 expansion will be just the initial phase in the rollout of Incarna.

CSM: What about Incarna gameplay?

Torfi: It's definitely going to be more than walking around, maybe gambling.

CSM: Make the stuff unique to EVE, and make it EVE specific. It needs to be much more than "walking in stations".

Meeting 6 - The Last Temptation of Dr. Eyjó

CCP attendance: Pétur (CCP Xhagen) and Eyjólfur (CCP Dr.EyjoG).

Dr. Eyjó opened with the 'simple' question of how the CSM feels about micro-transactions, and how CSM would approach them.

CSM's immediate response was that CCP needed to be sensitive to the players' visceral response, as they are already paying a monthly subscription. The reaction may not be logical, and players will most likely not agree with micro-transaction. The CSM is furthermore worried that having to fork out even more money to evolve your character is both unfair and annoying. CSM further asks whether there are statistics or research on who prefers micro-transactions, and if EVE subscriber demographics match this profile

Dr. Eyjó: It is difficult to map the possible interest as there has not been done any studies on the interest of micro-transactions within the EVE's subscriber base – whether there are different preferences based on age, sex, interests etc.

CSM can understand the desire to explore the micro-transaction business model for future products, but for EVE they must be vanity items. The CSM cannot emphasize this enough. The appeal of EVE is that it is a cutthroat society and not the casual, friendly environment. So why would CCP try to attract the casual player? This could lead to EVE losing its current community.

Dr. Eyjó: when we decide which groups CCP wants to attract to the game, it is necessary to think about how those groups fit with the current community. That is clear to CCP.

CSM is worried about that if PLEX for Remaps is implemented, the inflation that might follow could make it difficult for many players to continue playing EVE, as there are many players that are paying ISK for game time. CSM also mentioned that as they already pay a lot for subscription they will inevitably get the feeling of CCP double dipping into their pockets.

A suggestion, albeit one not supported by all of CSM, was made regarding locking all items bought through micro-transactions to specific characters, thus keeping them out of the EVE economy, and unrelated to PLEX. Some CSM members believed that these items should at least be destroyable.

The CSM expressed concerns about the profitability of this venture for CCP.

Dr. Eyjó: CCP is not necessarily doing to this for profit, this is about testing the waters with a new business model.

This response prompted concern from the CSM that CCP's reputation would be put at risk for little to nothing.

CSM furthermore pointed out that the timing of this proposal was bad. If Incarna had already been deployed and that there were vanity items available for real money there, then this (PLEX for neural remaps) would perhaps not have been such a big deal; the idea of micro-transactions would have been introduced and wouldn't be alien to the players.

Dr. Eyjó: If this had been about vanity items only instead of remapping, what would have been the CSM's reaction?

The CSM believes that the reaction would have been much smaller, but still would have been there.

CSM wants CCP to realize that while they are perhaps jumping to conclusions, it is perfectly legitimate to worry about the future of EVE, as both the CSM and the players are very attached to it. Furthermore, the players aren't hearing anything that contradicts that CCP is taking up micro-transactions in EVE for everything, and so naturally they are very worried. And, on top of everything, the micro-transactions business model could compromise the long term goals of the game.

In CSM's opinion, the micro-transaction model can only work if subscription cost is very limited, but EVE is quite expensive and the CSM has not heard any good argument from CCP which favors micro-transactions for EVE. How will micro-transactions improve EVE at all? CCP has not provided a good answer to this question.

There is a general consensus that micro-transaction games are different from EVE in many aspects, and as such they are perhaps better suited to support micro-transactions than EVE is. CCP might be tempted to switch entirely to the micro-transaction model if it believes that it could be better than subscriptions, presenting the real danger of EVE becoming so radically different that the current players (CSM's constituency!) will migrate away from EVE.

Dr. Eyjó: The communication about micro-transactions to the players has been grossly mishandled. CCP is a company that is leading in entertainment creation and wants to be leading there in the future as well. Exploring the possibilities of micro-transaction is a part of that vision.

The CSM points out that CCP should be the company that proves that it is possible to

have only subscriptions. CCP responds that it needs to be tapping into everything, CCP needs to do new things to survive in the business.

CSM members also pointed out that there are other routes to go in this regard; rather than charging for vanity items, why do something like provide more data out-of-game (perhaps via an expanded API) for an additional fee, or make it possible for 3rd-party developers to create paid apps, with CCP sharing in some of the profits?

Dr. Eyjó and the CSM agreed that needs to be emphasized to upper management that a clear message must be communicated regarding the goals CCP has related to micro-transactions, in particular with regard to the neural remap situation.

CCP as a company has to take into account what it is doing and what to do so it will does not alienate the community.

CSM urges CCP to state that it is rethinking the strategy from the ground up, and it will engage the community in a discussion about the matter of remapping. It is suggested that if CCP is serious that PLEX for Remaps is an experiment and not being about making money, pick something that does not have a direct in-game impact. Then tell the community that the new 'vanity' item will be sold, and all money will go to charity; thus CCP clearly not doing this for the money, and is able to create an experiment. CCP should also keep in mind that the whole EVE experience is a service - why add or try to ruin that service with other services?

The CSM also brought up the topic of ship paint jobs as something that players would be willing to pay for with real money. While that might anger the artists and affect the whole look of EVE (both items of concern), no in game advantage would be created, and those ships could be destroyed.

Meeting 7 - Nathan gets Shanghaied

CCP attendance: Nathan (CCP Oveur) and Pétur (CCP Xhagen)

The CSM had a teleconference with Nathan, who was in Shanghai at the time. To the surprise of absolutely no-one, the discussion immediately turned to micro-transactions.

After hearing a summary of the CSM position, Nathan responded with points about corporate strategy regarding the three different games, making particular note of the convertibility of PLEX to ISK and game time.

The CSM agreed this was fine (it involves time and player trading), but disagreed about neural remaps; they do not provide an ISK sink, nor do they involve player to player transactions.

Nathan discussed PLEX for services, which the CSM thinks is acceptable so long as those services don't provide an in-game advantage.

CSM: Removing an artificial game design barrier by letting players pay extra money will create ill will. CCP should look for ways to provide services that won't create ill will and which players will embrace enthusiastically.

A CSM was concerned that the next logical step after PLEX for Remaps is PLEX for Skill Points; also noted was the PLEX price spike since this issue became public. This creates issues related to players who can afford the inflation and those who can't, and might affect actual subscriber status if people who can't pay with real cash also can't afford PLEX. It was suggested that ISK farmers are probably going to benefit most from PLEX for remaps, resulting in a loss of players that provide real interactions.

Nathan: If that happens, it can be removed.

CSM: Then why introduce it in the first place?

Nathan: We have a lot of experience putting features into EVE; this is more "exploring" than "experimentation."

Some discussions of economic subtleties took place. Nathan agreed that ISK for Remaps was a viable alternative, and might have less effect on PLEX prices. CSM suggested that CCP take this smaller step if they really want to proceed.

Mention was made of the SP reimbursement done during the June Summit TQ downtime; the players assumed that the SP reimbursement feature had been in place for a long time, thus fueling the PLEX for SP rumors.

Nathan: It was an impromptu thing, requiring a big push to implement.

CSM: Regarding some of the negative PR over the summer, was that really needed to prod CCP into action (for example, over lag)?

Nathan: Our view is that we got a good wakeup call thanks to the CSM, and that was useful and productive. So we don't think of it as bad PR, we think of it as a much needed message to redirect efforts in more productive ways.

A short discussion ensued about better ways for CSM to get more information from CCP, and provide more feedback to CCP at an earlier stage ("raising red flags"), so as to avoid preventable PR issues in the future.

With respect to what happened with Tyrannis 1.1, the post-mortem process is ongoing; there was a discussion of ways to improve player-testing of point releases.

The meeting ended on a cordial note.