

Enormous Fabricated Ability: Boosting in the *Battlefront II* Player Community

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

“Boosting” refers to collusive strategies used by players of digital games to attain in-game rewards (e.g. X6223 2010, Meades 2015). A variety of boosting methods have emerged since the late 2000s, such as “trophy boosting,” “level boosting” (also called “power leveling;” Ducheneaut and Moore 2005, 95), and “league boosting” (Boost Royal n.d.), each describing an inter-player collaboration process that undermines a game’s competitive ethos while adhering to its structure of persistent rewards: gaining trophies, upgrading to a higher level, or advancing to a more expert league. While boosting occurs within the communities of an untold number of games, notably *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) and *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009), this discourse analysis specifically examines *Star Wars: Battlefront II* (DICE 2017), where boosting is part of an economy of methods that players use in ostensibly competitive team matches to pursue rewards apart from victory.

Forum discussions between *Battlefront II* players support the argument that player communities will refine methods for achieving any available symbolic reward (Cruz et al. 2017). They also demonstrate two distinct goals in agonic play: victory and ability. Victory means winning a match. Ability means easy dominance over parts of the world. Boosting demonstrates a contradiction between the two, where players pursue ability at the expense of victory. Boosting is thus an irony, what might be called a ludo-ludo or *ludo-ludic dissonance*, as boosting is both a counterplay to design intentions and an accelerated pursuit of goals designed into the game.

Sources for this study are forum posts, YouTube comments, and videos from the English-speaking *Battlefront II* community, including threads from “Playstation Trophies,” related fora referring to “boost” or “boosting,” and comments to the YouTube videos of *Battlefront* players Taveq, OLDJABBAJABBA, and a cluster of related players including AnarchYxNinja and Numpteez. As *Battlefront II* has a multilingual playerbase, this study’s monolingual English scope is a limitation.

In the *Battlefront II* community, playing in a way efficiently conducive to victory is called “playing the objective.” Three playstyles deviate from playing the objective.

1. Boosting: a player collaborates with a group to achieve an in-game reward in an accelerated manner. For example, in the video “Star Wars Battlefront II -

Choose Your Path Trophy Guide / Boosting Method,” shadowslaya89 (2017) demonstrated a method devised by IMATT-SNIPER1 (2017) in which a group of eight players collaborate to help two of the group achieve a rare trophy called “Choose Your Path.” The method required players to repeatedly re-join the game at a certain server location until they were all, by chance, assigned to the same match, which they then played in a completely non-competitive way according to a specific recipe. While groups of boosters normally exchange boosting services or volunteer their help, some forum members offer boosting for hire (e.g. DarthMalys 2020).

2. *Killstreak maximization* can be observed where YouTubers record videos of long “killstreaks” (e.g. OLDJABBAJABBA 2019) requiring prolonged matches instead of swift victories. A player seeking a maximal killstreak sometimes plays as though with a handicap, purposely allowing opponents to make progress at some times during the match. Playing the game in this performative way caters to online spectators, who may also emulate the playstyles of those upon whom they spectate. Killstreak maximization can be combined with boosting, recruiting teammates and possibly opponents to assist the performer in attaining many “kills.” Although YouTubers have no obligation to declare whether boosting techniques have been used, boosting is considered less legitimate than non-boosted play.¹
3. *Celebrity-bullying*: some players seek to record momentary triumphs over celebrated YouTubers by engaging in “stream-sniping” (Ditmarsch 2013, 19), watching a livestream, attempting to locate the streamer’s match, and attempting to locate and defeat the streamer within the match. Such celebrity-bullying has a parasitic relationship with the logics of boosting and killstreak maximization. Instead of emulating or admiring celebrated players, stream-snipers cause them chagrin, thus acquiring momentary notoriety.

These play styles emerge specifically from *Battlefront II*’s super-agonic ethos, whose design includes several malfeasant patterns such as incentivize boosting by turning ability-development into a grinding task (see Zagal et al. 2013). Thus, anti-victory counterplay in *Battlefront II* contrasts with other games where playing away from victory has served to dilute “toxic meritocracy” (Paul 2018) by generating forms of interaction that liven losing matches (Horrigan 2022).

Rather, boosting negatively affects *Battlefront II*’s player culture by inflating impressions of dominance from players who are willing to boost, some of whom demonstrate their superlative boosted abilities through public performances distributed on YouTube or Twitch, promoting cruelly optimistic expectations of possible gameplay experience (see Berlant 2011). This form of ability-inflation may be compared with a wider discussion examining masculinity, mediatization, and steroid use, where super-dominant, expensive, and inaccessible images serve as inspiration for naïve audiences (see Gibbs 2023).

ENDNOTES

¹ Commenting on a killstreak video by Taveq (2020), user Fabiiian says “Oldjabba had 314 on Starkiller base, 2nd phase overtime.” Taveq replies “yes with two friends buffing him (basically impossible to kill) and two friendly heroes contesting for 30mins. I could probably get a 10k ks [kills] like that so who cares not really impressive.” Taveq’s comment concurs with OLDJABBAJABBA’s own self-analysis: “obviously couldnt do this legit” (OLDJABBAJABBA 2019).

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