

Resisting Patches and Errata: Motivations and Tactics

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Patches and errata are often understood as a sign of developer support; their lack can be easily interpreted as neglect and can potentially lead to player boycott. However, not all updates are welcomed by players. While some developer practices such as day-one patches are criticized on a more general game production basis, other patches are resisted for more particular and practical reasons. This paper analyzes specific cases of patch rejections and focuses primarily on the discourse behind the motivations and tactics of resistance.

Patches and errata have been so far studied from two different perspectives of technical communication (see Sherlock, 2014) and paratextuality framework (see Carter, 2015; Paul, 2010). Both approaches agree that patches, patch notes and errata are much more than just technical documentation; they often employ rhetorics and also serve as a paratextual record of iterative game design. Above all, we should not think of patches as mere correctives of errors and glitches but as rather strong instruments of control over the way a game is played; they help to establish and enforce preferred ways of play and retroactively frame certain play styles as aberrant. From this perspective inspired by Eco (1972) and Hall (1973), it is only understandable that some players fight for the lost freedom of play and reading by resisting the new restraints issued by developers. Still, it is important to look at empirical material to better understand the motivations, tactics and also ethics of players who decided to play “around” patches and errata. Given the variety of video games, I will focus mostly on mainstream PC and home console video games which by themselves offer rather rich source of material, especially regarding the differences between single-player and multiplayer scenarios.

One of the most reported case of patch boycott was the balance update for Call of Duty: Black Ops 2 (2012) which resulted in death threats aimed at the design director David Vonderhaar. Described by some journalists as small changes (Hernandez, 2013), the update among other changes introduced a nerf to popular sniper rifles and in effect also made the so-called quickscoping trick move less effective. At that time, some players interpreted the game design decision as ignorant of the player community. However, the nature of a competitive multiplayer shooter did not leave much ground for any actual

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An arguably more complicated situation took place after a nerf to a popular shield from *Borderlands 2* (2012). Signaled by the producer Randy Pitchford in advance on Twitter, the update was received without heated emotions, but some players still preferred the prepatch version of the shield. These players were looking for an effective tool for singleplayer farming and were disappointed by the need to look for a substitute. However, due to a hybrid nature of *Borderlands* franchise as both a single-player and a cooperative multiplayer game, the farmers in question were able to ignore the patch and not install it. For the time of their farming they only had to sacrifice their access to the multiplayer portion of the game. In their reasoning, the popular shield was only necessary when farming alone and the need to farm itself was influenced by very small drop chances of certain other powerful weapons. While a portion of the community lauded the nerf of the popular shield, others discussed and shared the ways to resist the patch.

The paper will address the issues of motivations, tactics and ethics of resistance against patches and errata using a discourse analysis of player discussions and journalistic articles related to the relevant cases of patch and errata resistance including Call of Duty: Black Ops 2, Borderlands 2, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive and other video games. Aforementioned preliminary findings show that patches can be challenged by players for very different reasons. Also, the actual resistance can take various forms: from complaints to bypassing the need to install a patch or to a social contract aimed at diminishing of the effects of an update.

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