

'Destiny' video game creators seek to atone for missteps

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This photo provided by Bungie/Activision Publishing shows a third-person view of players competing in a "Control" match on the new "Thieves Den" map in the multiplayer video game "Destiny." The game's second expansion, "House of Wolves," will be released May 19, 2015. (Bungie/Activision Publishing via AP)

The creators of "Destiny" are ready to unleash the wolves.

When the latest expansion to the hugely ambitious but frequently maligned video game "Destiny" is released next month, it won't merely feature a new social area, multiplayer mode and maps. "House of

"Wolves" will also aim to right several wrongs as developer Bungie, publisher Activision and the sci-fi shooter's Guardian protagonists look to the future.

Despite its popularity, many players have become frustrated with the game's lack of content and unpredictable nature. "Destiny" randomly rewards players with new gear, guns and parts, similar to a role-playing title. Following the game's much-anticipated release last year, the designers have sought to tweak as much as possible without alienating fans.

Just how much have they changed?

"The short answer is everything," said multiplayer design lead Lars Bakken. "We put out the game we thought 'Destiny' would be, and then it took on a life of its own once it was in the wild. We probably touched every system in the game. We've already done so many enhancements to 'Destiny.' I can't even keep them straight in my head at this point."

Unlike similar sci-fi shooters, such as "Gears of War" and "Killzone," most of the gorgeously detailed worlds found in "Destiny" are persistent realms that can only be accessed online by players, who portray one of the gun-toting, super-powered Guardians that must defend the last city on Earth from oblivion. Simply put, it's "World of Warcraft" meets "Halo."

Critically, "Destiny" was met with mixed reviews when the shared-world shooter went online in September. The New York Times' Chris Suellentrop said it was "monotonous and poorly paced," while Lou Kesten of The Associated Press dubbed it "unimaginative." "Destiny" has a 76 out of 100 rating on the review aggregator site Metacritic.com.

The so-so word of mouth didn't stop virtual sharpshooters from digging

into "Destiny." It was the third best-selling retail game in the U.S. last year, behind "Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare" and "Madden NFL 15," according to industry tracker NPD Group. Activision said during a February earnings call that 16 million players have registered for the game.

Bungie should know a thing or two about sci-fi shooters. They created the original trilogy of "Halo" games. However, even they weren't prepared for how complicated "Destiny" had become or just how much time players would invest in it. Bungie was also caught off guard by data-miners, players who managed to unearth details embedded within the code.

The developers now regularly toss in phony bits to throw off the sleuths, but not before the data-miners were able to discover that the three-versus-three multiplayer mode called "Trials of Osiris," arguably the most substantial part of the "House of Wolves" expansion coming May 19, was originally slated to be a big part of the game from the outset.

"When we were getting close to launch, we knew we weren't going to have something that was compelling," said Bakken. "I had a conversation with some of the other leads, and we came to the conclusion that it just wasn't ready yet. The data was still there, but what 'Trials of Osiris' has become is very different than what it would have been."

Other updates coming to "Destiny" in "House of Wolves" include daily rewards for players who participate in "Crucible" multiplayer matches and free access to the new maps from "The Dark Below," the game's previous expansion, regardless whether players purchase "The Dark Below" or "House of Wolves" for \$19.99, or \$34.99 for a bundle of both.

"They're going to be available for everybody as soon as 'House of

Wolves' comes out," said Bakken. "That's our way of not only enriching the game and continually making the experience that people bought into last September better, but it also helps us to not continually fracture the matchmaking population going forward."

For the visionaries at Bungie, "House of Wolves" could very well redefine their "Destiny."

More information: www.destinythegame.com

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