

Assassin's Greed

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Montag, 15 März 2010
Last Updated Montag, 15 März 2010

I know i’m late to the party with commentary on the game’s draconian protection, but nevertheless I need to let of some steam. And I’m not talking about valve’s download platform that introduced the idea of an always-online copy protection. My gripes aren’t even with the protection itself, but rather with the concept of the protection and its PR strategy.

At first I want to remind people that we are talking about Ubisoft here. And a follow up to assassin’s creed. Both of which need further explanations. Ubisoft may not be “the devil” per se, but they are trying their best to give other companies like Activision a good run for their money to the throne of eternal hellfire.

Look for example at the seemingly harmless game series Petz that Ubisoft has released for the DS, where they split one game into several games to maximize their profits: When playing Petz Nursery, a kid can play for roughly 45 minutes with the game, before it needs one of two or three other games to transfer its pet over to continue playing! Or sell it online. A pet they just learned to love and adore. What a way to market a game to kids, Ubi.

Now onto Assassin’s Creed: A great looking game with a control-scheme so streamlined for accessibility (or whatever they call dumbed down controls these days in PR lingo) that it looked like a great Prince-of-Persia-like game, but felt like its braindead brother gameplay wise. I really wanted to like it, but the game made it very difficult to be loved. Like my ex-girlfriend. As you can see, I’m not really one of the prime candidates to rush out and buy the next instalment to the series. Yet, the last game made a lot of promises – that it sadly didn’t fulfil – that I’m inclined to at least show some mild interest in its offerings quality-wise. Which brings us to the current debate about the ‘merits’ of its protection:

Ubisoft willingly reduces the customer base for AC2 to those with always-on broadband internet, which leaves out a lot of people already, just as Valve did in the past. And they argue that this draconian measure is to fight piracy. In my humble opinion this is only half the truth. Because with a system that binds a game to an account, the game itself loses all its value, because it cannot be sold without also selling the account, which gives Ubisoft control over the second hand market. I haven't looked into the EULA, but I bet that something will be in there, that forbids the re-selling of the game or the selling of the account the game is registered to. And since the game has to connect to be playable, they will know, when a game changes ownership. And if it's not in the EULA now, it will be in the future.

Another reason why an always-online protection is problematic, is the inevitability of reverse-engineering. Somebody will break the code. Which means it makes the copy-protection a hassle for the people who actually bought it (for example when the servers are down like in the past weeks) and it opens the systems running the game up to attacks and exploits. With online multiplayer games this is a problem people have to live with, because they need the connection anyways, but why would anybody want to run a service that needs full access to the internet and the system, when it is absolutely not needed for gameplay reasons? That's like having to unlock the front door every time you want to play table tennis in the backyard. You can only hope that you will notice when somebody sneaks in while you play…

…which is why I will not buy the game – or any others with that kind of protection – out of pure principle.