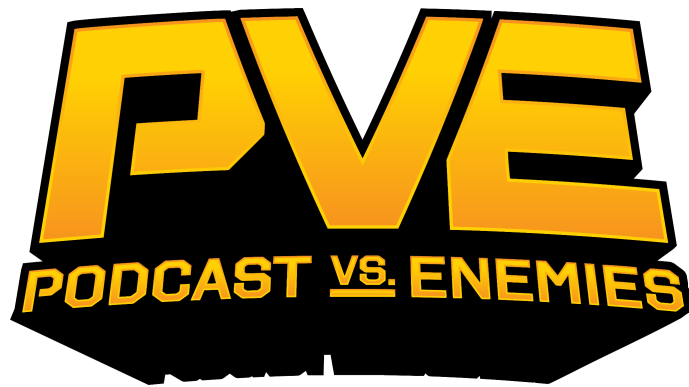




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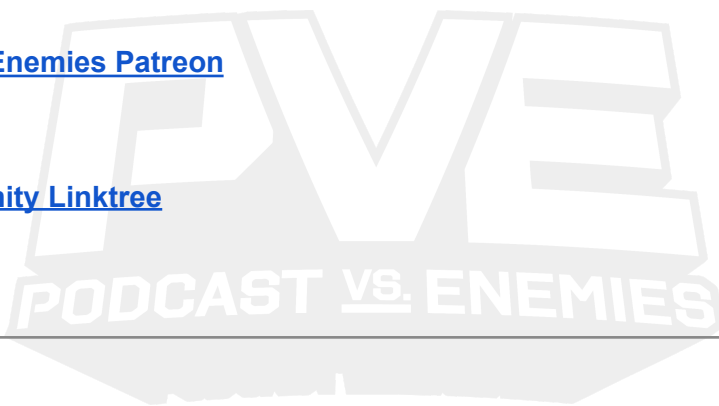
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Podcast Versus Enemies - Episode 63 Transcript

Podcast Intro: 0:00-5:53

DEVELOPER INTRODUCTIONS

5:54 What do you do at Bungie, Chris?

I do team leadership and also weapons content stuff.

6:30 What exotics and weapons have you been working on for Lightfall?

I actually didn't work on any exotics weapons for Lightfall; I've been working on Season 21 stuff. I did the raid weapons (Root of Nightmares) and a bit of stuff on the raid exotic (Conditional Finality) and one of the exotics from S21; all of the reticle stuff as well.

6:51 What kind of highlights have you been working on the past couple of seasons leading up to Lightfall?

Season 19 was a lot of fun getting to do the Tex Mechanica set and all of the Foundry weapons. Otherwise all of the reticle work has been a ton of fun to work on.

7:23 Rodney Intro: “How did you get started in games and what have you been up to at Bungie?”

Started in games in 2001 while I was in college, started out doing freelance tabletop game design for a bunch of RPG companies. I got hired by one of those companies to run an RPG product line and worked on board games, tabletop games, card games. After about 15 years in tabletop games I decided I needed to broaden my horizons and applied for a position at Bungie.

I’ve been at Bungie for eight years now, I started out as an Activity Designer for D2, I did a lot of design for the open world stuff on the EDZ (adventures, quests)... then on Engineering team for a couple of years then moved over to Sandbox design and have been a Sandbox designer for the last five-ish years.

In that time I was Feature Lead of the Armor team and now I am the Sandbox Design Lead for the Rewards area which is a fancy way of saying that I’m Chris’ boss. I oversee the Weapons and Armor teams, the Rewards UI team, and I am responsible for making sure that we put out the best sandbox rewards content that we can and that encompasses everything from mechanics, art to UI, etc.

The funny thing is when I came to Bungie one of my biggest fears was am I gonna be able to do this? One of the first things I learned was while the specific implementation of game design is different, a lot of the underlying philosophies is the same... a lot of what changes is the speed and tools at your disposal.

10:55 “There have been a lot of changes to Rewards broadly speaking... how have those changes been landing for you?”

If I didn’t have an All-Star team that I work with everyday it would be a lot more difficult. A lot of the pain points and details fall away and I get to focus on bigger picture stuff. At the same time, I feel compelled to get my hands dirty... Chris and I are similar in this regard in that we actually like making things that players will put their hands on.

As far as how it’s been with the changes coming in, we’ve been working on them for a long time. I started working on the buildcrafting revamps for Lightfall in the summer of 2021. Through months of design work and playtesting and redesign and playtesting and re-re-re-re-design and playtesting... everything went through a lot of iterations... When Lightfall launched, there was this moment of holding your breath where you think “Are people going to like this thing?”...

Initial reactions are one thing: On day one I’m going to hear a lot of complaints about this thing but by day seven everyone’s gonna have adapted to it... The newness factor: This is different and therefore it is bad... and then people develop some mastery over it; here are the ins and outs of the new thing; you start seeing the conversation get a lot more nuanced and textured... Once we got over the initial shock of the new stuff coming out, the conversation got a lot more... nuanced and very detailed-oriented.

Saint shares his experience playtesting the new buildcrafting system when he was a tester at Bungie, specifically the feeling of shock at having to relearn a familiar but different system.

Rodney: We saw (a similar response) from our playtesters when we would introduce a big new change... there was always a bit of concern from the designers that after multiple playtests would eventually start to change... a lot of what it really comes down to is when you change the rules that you have mastered, it can be difficult to accept it for what it is... We have nullified your mastery (“an extreme description of what happens”) VERSUS: you have mastered this thing, I’m asking you to spend some more time to remaster it. It’s completely understandable reaction that even seasoned veteran game designers experience when we playtest for the first time.

Feeling largely positive about (buildcrafting revamp)... there were some features that even before they came out I knew they were going to succeed: the loadout system and the mod manager system.

“Anything can be improved; there’s still plenty of space for things to be improved there”... “Perpetual tinkerer”

We've seen an uptick in people transitioning from being a new player to being someone who uses mods to make builds... I feel like we've landed in a good place and can iterate on it from here... What's been encouraging to me has been seeing conversations not just from the high-level streamers all the way down to my friends who didn't care about buildcrafting now saying "hey, I've put together this build, can you help me find the right blah-blah-blah to go with it?"

Chris "One of the really nice things of working on a live game is that you can always fiddle with it" -cites previous work on Halo enemy AI- only getting one shot at it whereas fairly frequently we can ship a simplified version of thing and layer onto it after it ships... lets us get into a good place much more efficiently.

20:08-21:26 Rodney talks about his Star Wars miniatures (Armada minis)

DISCUSSION OF S21 WEAPON AND ARMOR CHANGES ARTICLES

WEAPON ARTICLE (CHRIS)

22:00 How long have these reticle changes been in the pipeline?

Started on these reticle changes back in S19... when we shipped the fixed pellet spreads stuff, we looked at what we can do with reticles and what we were blocked on. We shipped those and then realized that we needed to be able to scale reticles more cleanly based on field of view so that the shotgun reticle size could match the pellet spread... in the past a lot of this info has been hard coded (like glaive energy meter)... we got the ability to put anything we want into a reticle through something we call channels (like charge state, sword melee, exotic perk counters).

23:50 Are these reticle changes intended to offset some of the UI bloat? Will the weapon buff/debuff UI still show weapon elements (like Memento Mori)?

Anytime a weapon's perk status is critical to using the weapon, we want that information in the reticle. It can't only be in the reticle because currently that only exists in hip-fire and we would rather have multiple locations to show that data anyway... we aware of how crowded that buff area gets, and there are some pretty big tweaks coming to that system in several seasons down the line.

25:05 Any specific changes coming to UI that you can talk about?

Way too early to drop specifics but we are working on it.

25:52 Sniper rifles have been in a rough spot for PvE, do these new changes close out the gap to make sniper rifles a more appetizing choice?

It's pretty easy to overdo damage on snipers, dialing it up one step at a time. Rapid-fire buff should make them quite decent.

27:25 What other (non-damage) buffs could you apply to snipers to buff them up a bit?

The major buffs we like to do are damage, ease of use or uptime. We could do another recoil reduction. More likely we'd bump up the damage given the range of these weapons to make them still hard to use.

28:22 These buffs also affect Exotic Snipers (except for Izanagi's Burden), how are the heavy snipers performing in your eyes?

Whisper and DARCI aren't being used a whole lot, Whisper is pretty close to where we want it to be (should be above lfrs now). Looking at a larger change to Whisper in a few seasons. DARCI is much weaker than where we want it to be but we're waiting to see how the damage buff and reserves buff affect it before we touch it again.

Regarding the popular community suggestion “just make DARCI special”: Weapons team doesn’t want it to compete with Cloudstrike, another rapid-fire, Arc sniper rifle.

30:08 Tyranny of Heaven is getting reworked. Is Last Wish the next reprised raid?

ToH change doesn’t necessarily guarantee that Last Wish is getting reprised. Craftable raid weapons will stick to the 7x7 perk pools for now and reprised raid weapons will retain their unique rolls (like Rampage + Kill Clip).

New rocket launcher perk is called Bipod and will drop on several weapons next season (“maybe a raid one”).

The hosts share their favorite Commemoration rolls (except Impetus).

Reprising raid weapons is a great opportunity to look at where we missed the mark when we originally shipped them.

33:51 How similar is Sweet Business’ explosive round to the Explosive Payload perk?

Sweet Business’s explosive round is additional damage (not split like EP) and deals a higher percentage of that damage and in a larger radius.

34:38 Where do you see Legend of Acrius fitting into the close-range PvE meta?

It’s exceptionally strong in boss fights and against Champions which is why this change is getting shipped in S21, (Shotgun Champion mod in S21 artifact confirmed?) still kind of a niche pick.

We are reworking swords in a future release that will shake up the close-range meta but for now Legend of Acrius should be quite strong.

Legend of Acrius should work with the reworked No Backup Plans.

36:25 Salvation’s Grip rework: How long has this been in the pipeline?

We’ve been wanting to touch Salvation’s for a while. Difficult to come up with a change that felt in line with its exotic fantasy and worked in the heavy slot and that we had time to do. Same designer that worked on Verglas Curve ended up taking a crack at Salvation’s so it’s no coincidence that the two share a similarity.

37:25 Any hints where we might see the reworked Reconstruction perk?

It’s rolling out across more endgame weapons next season. Definitely pickup a rocket launcher with Reconstruction and Bipod next season.

38:03 Court expresses his excitement for the Graviton Lance rework

Merc did the rework for Graviton Lance!

ARMOR ARTICLE (RODNEY)

39:14 What were the considered changes to Eternal Warrior and how did the shipped change come about?

We’ve been trying to make a concerted effort to unify our damage bonuses and relieve the pressure people were feeling about having to stack up all of these damage sources. In the process of doing that, we saw how Path of the Burning Steps played out that concept and wondered if we could make an Arc version of that. Now you can play a little minigame to get to that highest damage buff. Helped to solve two issues (Path being too strong and Eternal Warrior being too weak) at once.

41:54 Chromatic Fire is getting an awesome rework, is a similar change getting added to other,

non-Warlock exotics?

Not unique to Warlocks, team is looking to add those kinds of mechanics to other options. Chromatic Fire is something we want to be judicious with as it has a lot of design work and test work and has lots of latency in its exotic effect. If functionality is based on subclass, the Armor team wants to make sure that those functions are easy to understand no matter what subclass you're on. Elemental effects are intuitive.

Do we want to create an armor that is applicable across multiple subclasses or do we want to build a more elaborate exotic around one subclass?

45:19 Any chance we see a Mask of the Quiet One buff?

It's on the list. Usage data, specifically usage in general population, usage in activities, usage in successful completions. Outliers filter their way to the top of the list. While everything is on the list, things high on the priority or unpleasant to play against/with are the first things that get looked at. Easy fixes also influence what armor pieces get touched.

What's a priority? What do we have time for? What's our idea for this armor?

We don't want to mess with the fantasy of any piece

49:00 What are scorch numbers on Khepri's Horn?

Should be comparable to Caliban's Hand (60 stacks), scorch is applied once (either when the wave is going out or coming back).

50:11 How do you determine/theorycraft the new meta for exotic armor?

We have multiple playtest sessions where we buildcraft/theorycraft. When we're reworking/nerfing something, we target the original playstyle and see how close we can replicate it with a change, scaling the level of buildcrafting with every tweak.

Heart of Inmost Light change wasn't going to obliterate usage, we just wanted to make it not an automatic choice. Goal is similar for Starfire in the neutral game space (don't want it to be as strong for damage phases).

54:24 How do you create a new piece of exotic armor and how long is that process?

6 to 9 months for total process, art starts a lot earlier in the design process. We come up with a communication layer early on to convey information to players. Few months of paper design where ideas are bounced off other teams. Afterwards, technical design begins. Technical work is done by the paper designers (unique to Bungie). In-engine work is followed by 3-4 months of playtesting, 2-3 months of bug fixing.

There is no use button for exotic armor. Armor design has to ride on top of weapons, abilities, etc. As more ability-based armor comes out, that design space narrows. Experimenting with having more armor override an ability. Also looking at any "needs" that should address a problem (cites Path of the Burning Steps reacting to Stasis). Look at subclasses that need help. Neutral game exotics are the hardest to design as they encompass a lot of design space (ex. Chromatic Fire could've been five different exotics). All of these questions occur before and during the paper design phase.

Playtesting starts from Day 1 of the "first pass" after feedback/reviews come in from other teams. Dev starts testing at their desk in local environments. Once in a stable state, armor goes out to larger playtesting groups. Next few months is a process of refinement through playtesting, ensuring that armor hits the original goals as it develops.

1:02:50 Is it fair to say that the paper design phase is where the team commits to an exotic armor for release?

Once the artists begin work on an armor piece, that armor piece is getting shipped. Mechanical adjustments do happen along the way but it takes up a lot of dev time. Once other teams are

committed, you want to follow through on the armor piece.

1:05:13 What is Bungie's philosophy for damage stacking post-Lightfall?

More sources for damage stacking shut down opportunities for buildcrafting. We want the game to be interesting to play. That being said, there are some broad guidelines for armor:

If the damage bonus is tied to a specific damage type, the bonus will use the buffs used by the surge mods

If the bonus affects all the weapons equipped, use the damage buff used by Empowering rift

Prioritize more ways to use a damage buff rather than have multiple damage buffs stack on top of one another

Stacking damage buffs will apply to extremely specific cases

Artifact will be the place for stackable damage sources as those are temporary and exciting

Stacking damage buffs from Path of the Burning Steps/Eternal Warrior free up mod spaces on your legs. Want to alleviate the pressure to stack everything for optimal damage. Very easy for things to get out of hand with multiplicative stacking vs additive stacking and very hard to implement in game.

HOST & COMMUNITY Q&A

1:14:30 Does the armor team have enough resources to commit to seasonal balance patches?

Can't announce anything specific at this time. Designers get eyes bigger than their stomachs. We think it's worth doing!

1:16:04 What are your thoughts on combining overlapping exotic armor?

The challenge with combining exotics is one exotic no longer fulfills its fantasy in the process. We don't want to deprive players of a fantasy that they fell in love with

1:18:18 Weapons and armor are two halves of a greater whole. Chris, what's it like to work together with the armor team?

Our teams are largely in the same production schedule. You'll see more collaborations between weapons and armor in the future. Chris frequently hops in on the Friday raid sessions with the armor team.

1:20:42 Buildcrafting has evolved so much over the course of the game and many older systems were designed to be temporary. When did you realize that you need to convert the mod systems into a more permanent, streamlined system and what was that process like?

Removing armor energy type was the first big shift that led to a lot of mods getting combined/ removed. Usage data also indicated what was crucial to the older system (Taking Charge became the foundation of the new system). Orbs become more important than elemental wells which in turn got subclass synergy. Making the system more approachable was our guiding light.

Buildcrafting 2.0 grew out of a simple starting point and covered a massive amount of the game. Many teams had input on the changes.

Weapons didn't get adjusted in a massive way. Moving orb generation off of weapons well before buildcrafting 2.0 gave weapons room to shine. Orb generation was a great collaboration between weapons and armor team

1:27:55 When making a new exotic weapon, is a catalyst designed alongside the weapon? Are new raid weapons getting catalysts?

If the catalyst is shipping with an exotic or we know the weapon will ship later as a pre-order, then a catalyst is designed at the same time. Otherwise the catalyst is designed at a later point. Newer raids don't have an acquisition path for a catalyst so those exotics haven't had a catalyst designed yet.

1:29:15 Are Nightfall weapons hitting their mark in regards to acquisition sources and strength?

In general we feel like we've hit the mark fairly well.

Chris asks the hosts to list any weapons that feel too weak or too strong for their source

1:32:12 How do you feel about the ability to enhance RoN Adept weapons? Could this system expand to other Adepts in the future? Will players be able to enhance multiple perks per column?

We're happy with this initial run and its reception. Future raid adepts may have a different system. Long term, we intend for EVERY non-craftable weapon to have the ability to enhance its columns 3 and 4 perks. Aspects of enhancing may be unique to certain groups of weapons. We intend to enhance multiple perks in a column but we have no timeline for offering multiple perks on crafted weapons.

–End of Interview–

Transcription by Impetus

