

What Did Raiding on PTS Tell Us?

Yesterday, we went in to test how the new changes affected vCR. This trial is one best optimized in terms of damage to handle the new changes, as the boss timer for ports operates on a 15-22 second timer based on rng (roughly). Likewise, the trial presents some pretty strong dots that tick on players for 1 second at a time (like hoarfrost and orb dots) as well as the notorious Baneful mechanic which dramatically reduces healing done to multiple players at a time.

The group that was put together consisted of 12 people who had successfully completed the trifecta (Gryphon Heart) on live, but still had a fine mix of very high end players, as well as simply above average players. The skill in the group was well beyond the average group overall, but by no means the sweatiest it could be.

We opted for the safest possible strats, opting to hold Rele and Gale in the center which undoubtedly affected damage and fight times compared to some of the “top scores” you might consider.

The night started with about an hour and a half of wiping. First portal had to get acquainted with Vigor not being a sufficient enough heal as a Stam spec, so portal deaths were a massive hinderance for around the first 30-45 minutes. After portal became more comfortable, there was a clear reprogession from all ends of the upstairs team, as healers had to find ways to compensate for the new changes, and we as the upstairs team quickly learned that any 1 mistake would very likely result in a situation that was unrecoverable.

Unfortunately, there were really silly mistakes from players being made, such as bar swapping, not stacking properly, not focusing adds like creepers down quick enough, and even a slight reprog the first few pulls on my end, as I quickly realized I would not be able to kill orbs quite as quickly as I was able to in the past, increasing the necessity to prioritize them over keeping dots up on the bosses while orb busting. I was testing out the Sorc with the same skills run on live (mainly Crystal Weapon) but it was tough, and Sea Unicorns had much more success with Frags once I switched to Portal.

Eventually, the roster broke up a little bit, and filled with even more talent, and we quickly cleared. I switched to portal for that run, and found that, on a DK at least, I could pretty much do the exact same rotation in portal as I did on live with practically the same amount of success.

So what does this tell us? First of all, the most important idea to look at in my opinion, is dissipating the myth that easier rotations means better damage and more mechanical awareness. This is the main reasoning given by zos regarding the dot changes. It's an idea that sounds good on paper, but as proven in my own thoughts and proven now in a tested reality, a concept that does not hold. Even worse, it is confusing newer players into believing that this

change will indeed help them, causing backlash towards endgamers who disagree with the notion. This pins us as “doom and gloom toxic elitists who just want to gatekeep,” a very vibrant myth that I’ll discuss shortly. Secondly, damage is notably lower, feeling more comparable to the damage groups were doing about 2 years ago when I got my first GH. The total fight time was about 9 minutes and 11 seconds, far slower than an above average group like this would likely perform on live. Keep in mind, if any trial were to benefit the most from the damage changes, it should be this one, yet I estimate about a 15-20% damage decrease this pts cycle. Finally, the healing situation proved a little surprising, as Baneful was expected to hold the most challenges, but seemed to actually be the easiest part for the healers to handle. It was the damage that ticked second by second, requiring sustained healing, that posed the most challenges. Keep in mind, the group was well coordinated enough to keep the healers from getting Baneful as well.

So diving into this, I think the most important thing to understand is that we have overreacted a little regarding how heavily damage was nerfed. Yet again, this patch proves to be another situation where endgamers will be just fine, except for players who would like to shoot for records, as such a goal is now impossible. But, anyone who has completed X content will still be able to do so, with maybe the only exception being Swashbuckler and with Planesbreaker now having a very tight speed requirement. Yet, in a patch where endgamers will be able to adapt with little reprog, why all the uproar? After avidly streaming, uploading videos, starting ample discussions via Twitter/forums, and based on the discussions that we as a group had after the run as well, there are 2 main reasons. First of all, these combat changes make combat feel boring. Not easier, just boring. Second, it puts newer players at an all time disadvantage in many ways.

It’s no secret that endgame has been dying. The controversial hybridization changes had taken away much of the ambiguity and creativity that could be called upon in trifecta and scorepushing scenarios depending on comps, and has now given us a set of 8 skills that we are guaranteed to use (based on class) with a couple of flex options rarely changing, as well as maybe 3 sets to choose from to push out top damage. This is opposed to maybe slightly less choices than even our current options when discussing a mag or Stam comp individually, but simply the ability to run a mag or a Stam comp with similar success, presented far more diversity regarding achieving buffs and maximized damage, with each comp having its own distinct challenges to overcome in content as well. Now, to point one, combat has been dulled down into mindless nonsense in the name of “closing the skill gap” in which it does THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF to point 2. Not only are endgamers leaving simply because the game isn’t fun anymore, but content has now become more exclusive than I’ve seen in a long time, based on the damage changes alone. That doesn’t even take into consideration how impossible some content will be to 99% of the player base when factoring in the healing changes as well.

My top priority is point number 2. Again, endgamers will be fine with these changes, but new players will not be. Quite frankly, my success in this line of content creation depends on the success of the endgame community, and the success of the endgame community depends on getting as many new players as possible to get involved as so many experienced players leave.

And these changes going through, whether you agree with them or not unfortunately, will destroy endgame. It's already dissipating at unforeseen levels. For example, one of the largest discords that sells skins/gear carries literally disbanded over night, at the mere principle that these changes suggest regarding the direction zos would like to take the game.

And beyond that, this is based again on a skill gap that is not closed, even if you were to buff the overall damage by 100%, it would not solve the problem, because this change relies on the success of faulty logic. Easier rotations does not mean better damage, nor does it mean more mechanical awareness. In fact, this group of Gryphon Hearts quite literally wiped for an hour and a half before we got the clear, still failing the most basic mechanics of the trial in some instances. If these changes didn't make it easier for experienced endgamers, how are you to expect a new player to do any better? Mechanical execution does not rely on "seeing and reacting" it relies on "knowing and anticipating." There is not a single change to combat that you could imply, that would allow players to be more successful in executing mechanics. This comes with reps and reps and reps, and if that is the underlying issue, the only solution is to nerf content. Mechanical execution relies on doing the trial enough to be able to understand how to handle every eventuality of rng (for example what to do in ice/fire or how to handle 2 fires on the same side in exe, cone + fire, or the timing to killing creepers) and then being able to anticipate these mechanics before they happen with a plan in mind that has been practiced. The top players "stare at their bar" because they are SO repped in content, that they hardly have to look at the trial to know what's coming next and how to handle it.

So not only do the changes not help new players or their accessibility to content/clears/achievements, but the overall damage nerf in fact severely hurts them. Newer players have no reason outside of desire to get involved in endgame, and if they don't feel it's worth it to try, they'll be perfectly happy continuing on whatever adventure Tamriel presents. Nobody new will join endgame to replace the hundreds of players fleeing the game mass exodus style. And this dissipation is preventable, but the only realistic way that I see to do so, is to completely revert the changes made to DoTs on the PTS.

As this is my main point of contention I'll only briefly iterate the two claims made earlier. In terms of the damage loss, again for most endgamers, it won't be that bad. World records won't be possible, and I don't think Swash will be possible, but everything else will be attainable, just much more difficult. For example, I was still able to solo portals, but it was much closer than on live. The players the most hurt are those on console. A relatively average fight time for Xalvakka is around 7-8 minutes for teams with XS on console. This now won't be achievable for these players without massive reprog. Godslayer will again be a very difficult speed run to achieve, PB might be possible for a handful of teams, and swash will be impossible. Period. Beyond this, all the console prog teams that barely have the damage to clear whatever regular Vet or Hard Mode that they're progressing will now fail consistently. In terms of healing, if you wish for healing output to be weaker, make the skills tick less, but not once every 2 seconds. You can't time out heals to hit when necessary at this pace against content that ticks against players once every second. The orb dot gave healers with Planesbreaker a lot of trouble at the start, and still

wasn't even consistently handled well when we did clear. Imagine a dot that actually ticks hard like Falg or Bahsei. This was a silly change and should be reverted.

So what is the solution to all of this? For all of the reasons mentioned, these dot timer changes and heals ticking once every 2 seconds must be completely reverted. If endgame is to continue, a new direction and approach must be taken entirely.

Before tackling the lack of diversity in endgame, solve the issue with player accessibility to clearing content. To do this, you need to incentivize a different type of endgame. It's been proven over and over that, if the room for creativity is present, endgame players enjoy pushing score. Incentivizing score pushing through the leaderboards would make the most sense for this. Start giving rewards greater than that of even Tales of Tribute for teams with top scores for content in each patch. Present a temporary title for players to wear throughout the next patch for achieving the top score in a trial and offer a "former" if you wish as well, much like emperor. When endgame at the highest level becomes properly incentivized to not be based on achievements that other players feel are unattainable, begin to address that gap by continuing to offer high damage dealing options that are easy to use (but not quite meta), keep overall damage output high, and consider potentially nerfing content just a little bit. Nothing crazy, but enough to make Trifectas accessible to 25-40% of the the player base. Player's will need to put in work, but not their life. The best way to keep content engaging to endgamers and possible for newbies is to abolish the tough speed runs and make more fights like the Twins in Dreadsail. This is one of the best designed fights/trials I've seen maybe ever. It punishes weak damage, it punishes high damage, and only the absolute crackheads can potentially skip the high damage punishments this fight presents. It's perfect. Adjust the speed runs to be possible for slower and safer strats, still requiring simply good, as opposed to insane, damage and push to make score pushing the new endgame

Likewise, the biggest gap in the game is not a skill gap, it's a knowledge gap. Console is not only the greatest proof of this claim, but it can also be the living testing grounds. It's no secret that PC achieves even just Vet clears at a higher rate than console, and that rate exponentially increases when discussing both Hard Mode clears and trifectas. The difference between the two platforms is pretty clear... add ons. Add ons like CMX, weave delays, combat metronome, the real action duration, srrendar, buff tracking add ons, and many more, contribute to a near infinite source of information about the fights, trials, and player performance that console doesn't have access to. The best way to address player accessibility would be to try implementing these things on console, see how dramatically endgame would shift, and reap the rewards. It's worth noting too, that adding base game tutorials explaining these features and their importance would help players on all servers. The lack of information in the base game is simply unacceptable.

AND THEN GIVE US OUR META DIVERSITY BACK. Find a way to allow the meta to involve crazy creative thoughts with varying comps/builds/and strats that have pros and cons compared to other types, allow players to rediscover skills/sets/set ups that uniquely work in a niche way in some fights. Make combat fun and creative again. This is how you keep endgamers interested in the game, and make even ALL THE ACHIEVEMENTS accessible to lower level players as well.

Allow the skill gap to exist in a high capacity, but make it only matter in the most high end endgame.