This post will discuss the ways that various games have approached the theme of virtual currency, with a specific focus on how to make in-game currency feel more valuable to players. This analysis will explore how these titles are able to create imbalances in their systems, which present barriers for people who may not want to pay for in-game currency. We'll also share some thoughts on how developers can give players the ability to speed up progress without compromising fairness. Please note that this blog post does not encourage or endorse player's participation in unethical patterns of behavior related to game design tactics. The goal is only provide an overview of the dynamics involved when using these tactics and potential ethical implications related thereto. Almost every game has some form of virtual currency that can be acquired or purchased, either directly or indirectly. Many games even rely on the sale of various currencies as a core revenue stream for developers. Yet whether it's World of Warcraft's gold, Battlefield's Battlepacks, Star Citizen's UEC, Call of Duty Points, etc., there are always players who are unwilling or unable to spend money on these systems. As a result, they are incentivized to play in ways that will maximize the amount of currency they can receive for free and minimize their investment in it. This process often makes them feel like their effort is not valued by the game itself and may even directly contradict the goals and interests of developers. To make matters worse, many games are designed in ways that actively discourage players from experiencing the full extent of their systems. The introduction of RPG elements, such as experience points or character levels, is a prime example. Players who seek to maximize their playtime by spending less money are often attracted to free-to-play games in the first place due to their ability to progress through regular play over time. However, these systems can also create situations that can intentionally or unintentionally convince players that it's useless or unsafe to spend time on certain activities. This is generally accomplished through the use of barriers and imbalances which devalue these types of play and present them as either less efficient (grind) or less feasible (gated progression). These dynamics create a conflict between game designers and the players who seek to develop their characters in ways that maximize progression without sacrificing time or enjoyment. As a result, many game designers have begun to think of virtual currency not only as a potential revenue stream, but also as an important tool for creating engagement by encouraging players to invest time on activities that will make them feel more attached to the content they've been presented with. Moreover, it aims to offer carrots that can benefit players at various levels of investment while also balancing against them when necessary. In order to explore these concepts further, we will discuss 4 different games that illustrate some of the major approaches virtual currencies can take in their design. Please note that this post does not encourage or endorse player's participation in unethical patterns of behavior related to game design tactics. The goal is only provide an overview of the dynamics involved when using these tactics and potential ethical implications related thereto.

There are numerous ways that virtual currency systems can be balanced against one another, but we will focus on some of the most common problems and how they can be solved easily. As we discuss each example, we will also provide some educational examples and links to additional resources.

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