Game Modes Design Document

EverWing

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Word Count: 4352

Creation Date: 19th September 2018

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0.0   Preface

This design document proposes two new game modes suitable for the following criteria:

- Addition of these modes should richly enable group play through Facebook Messenger.
- Opportunities for monetisation should be presented, either through ads or IAP.
- Directly integration with Messenger's features
- Documentation should include:
    - An explanation of the new game mode and its suitability for the goal
    - UX flows/game loop for the new mode
    - How the new mode uses the capabilities of Messenger
    - A detailed description of the design process

1.0   *Tag Battles* Update

1.1   Introduction

As seen in an interview, Blackstorm Labs hopes to tap into the real-time co-operative experience with EverWing –

> *"The example would be people sitting around at a table, all trying to play a game at the same time"*

> *~ Fu, (Lynley, 2016).*

Where EverWing's game mode *Boss Raids* embodies the MMO-guild-forming experience, it doesn't quite capture what Fu had set out to achieve – the co-ordination and teamwork that is often necessary in typical dungeon raids is somewhat lacking. There isn't a real need to communicate with each other in the same way that raid parties do in MMOs, as players are alone when battling against the boss as opposed to sharing an instance of gameplay. This is the biggest inspiration for *Tag Battles*: to create an experience that not only allows players to play together, but to encourage them to feel the *need* to form a cohesive team to take advantage of the new mechanics that this new game mode has to offer.

Tag Battles also takes inspiration from *Dragonball FighterZ*, a 2.5D fighting game in which each player chooses 3 characters from a roster of 24. Only one character is controlled at a time but may be switched with other characters in their team. For a winner to be declared, all 3 characters in the opposing team must be defeated.
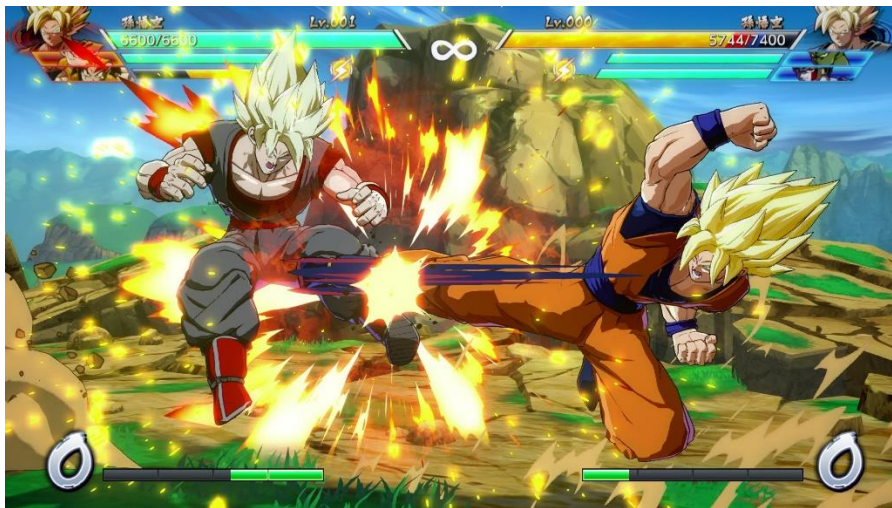

Figure 1: Dragonball FighterZ. Notice the multiple health bars at the top.

Characters can be switched if they are available.

1.2   What is *Tag Battles*?

Tag Battles plays out in the same way that the base game does: players aim to survive and collect coins (or in this case, tag tokens) as they progress through a series of waves, defeating bosses that stand in their way. The final goal is to ultimately achieve the highest score.

However, this new game mode presents a twist: what you do in this battle, you do with your friends – in the literal sense. Players can team up with up to three friends to experience *EverWing* together – using Facebook Messenger for voice chat. Play by *tagging* each other in and out of battle, taking turns to lead the others through the level, and provide *power-ups* that are applied to *all members of the team* to improve their combat capabilities.

But what happens when a player is defeated in battle? No, it doesn't end there. With only one team member down, they can persevere through the level and soon enough, an opportunity to *revive* their teammates will arise.

As the team progresses far enough through the game, they may be in for a surprise, as a *more interesting* enemy unit may pose a serious threat, and sometimes with an equally nasty *bounty* on their head. Players can then discuss their options and cast their votes in – do they continue with their original path, or do they proceed with the challenge.

When the whole team is wiped out, receive their score – posted on the leaderboards under their Facebook group name. They can compare their performance with other players worldwide, which hopefully should inspire them to try for a higher score.

Key Features:

Below are some of the key features of this new game mode

- Co-operative tag team battles
- Competitive team vs team rivalry
- All new *Augmented Bosses* and *Bounty Boards*
- An all exclusive Guardian
- New ways to play the game and most importantly, new ways to grow stronger
- New possibilities for advertisements and IAPs
- Interesting ways of using *Messenger*.

Starting a Tag Battle

Up to four players can share the same level instance. When selecting *Tag Battles*, the Messenger UI opens and displays all the player's Facebook groups (in a similar way to using the "Invite Player" function). If the player's selected group contains up to four members in total, play is approved. Players may then select their Guardians as well as turning on *Messenger* voice chat if they so please. Play may begin once each member has selected a unique Guardian and all players have readied up.
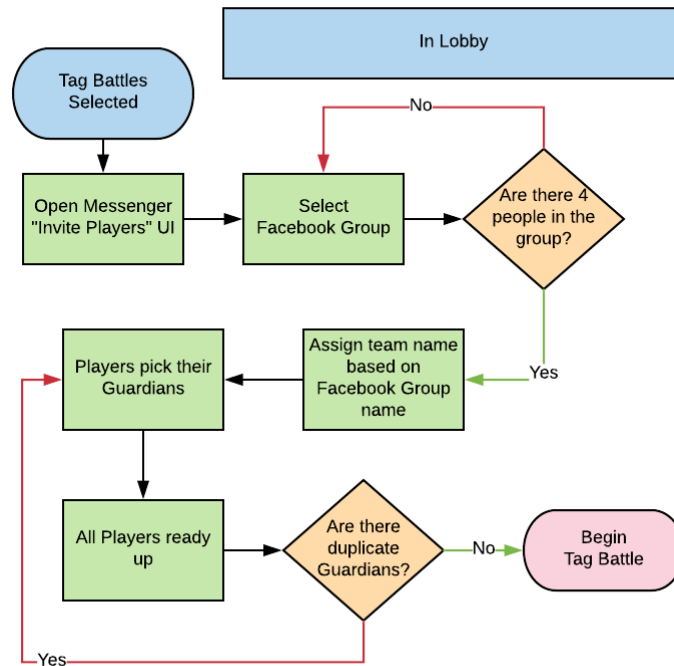
Figure 2: Tag Battles lobby initiation

Playing Tag Battles

One player always remains active in the level, whilst the others can request to tag themselves into battle. The active player can then choose a player from the requesting pool to switch roles with if they so desire. The selected player becomes the new active player, whilst the formerly-active player is given a cooldown timer before they can be brought back into play.

Power-ups cannot be acquired through traditional methods. Rather than dropping from monsters on-death, each player is assigned a random power-up over the course of the run – primarily dependant on time elapsed since the last tag. When a player is tagged in, their power-up is applied to every member of the group. Power-ups that are being held by players at that moment are then re-rolled for the next possible tag. Power-ups are re-rolled into any of the default options that are seen the single-player campaign, such as: damage+, magnet, and double shot.

Upon death, if other players are still alive in the team, the formerly-active player has a period of 5 seconds to choose the next player to tag in before one is chosen automatically.
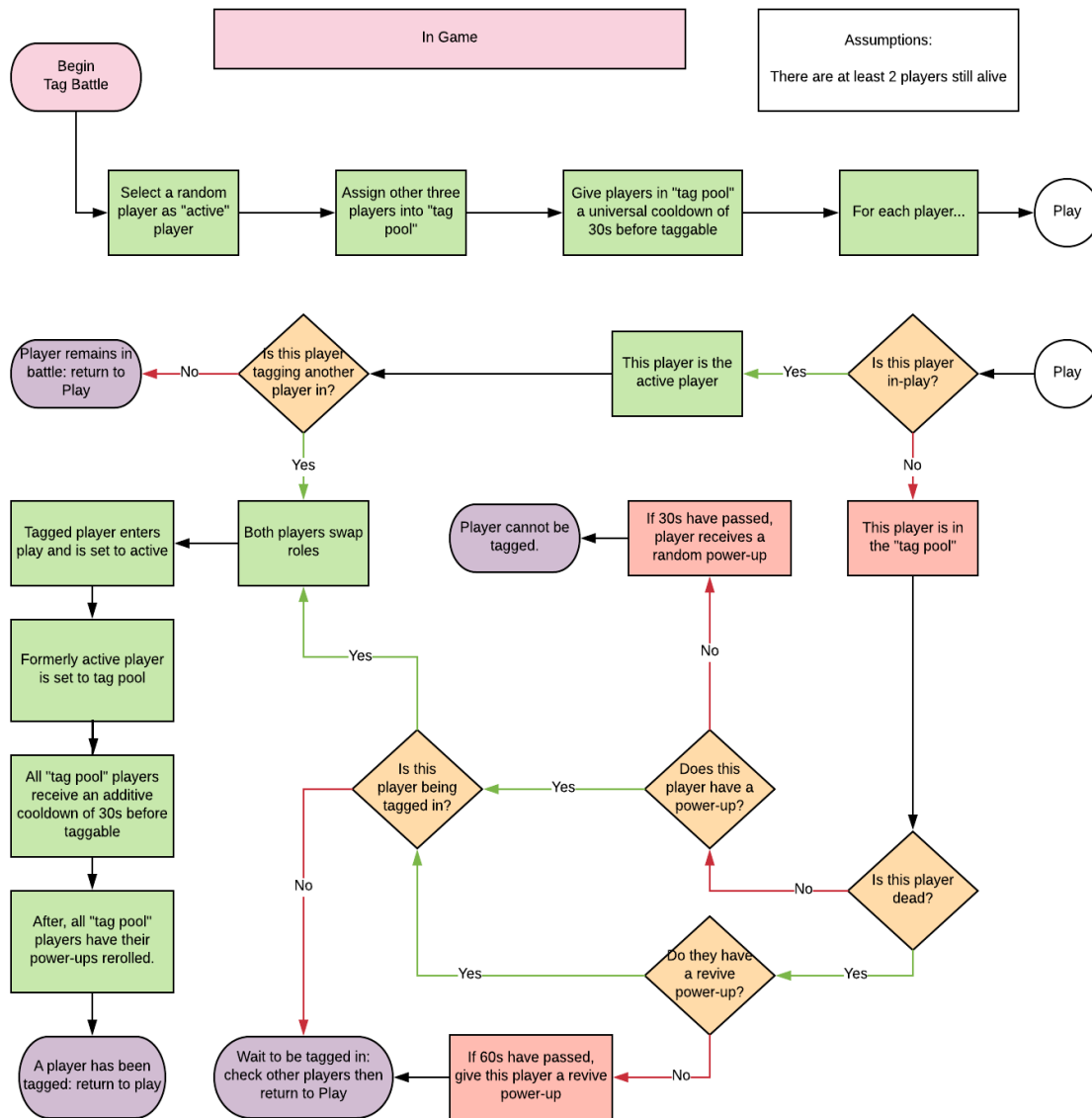
Figure 3: Tagging players and power-up distribution

In addition, *Tag Battles* introduces a unique power-up, specific to this game mode – the revive power-up. Players who have been defeated in battle will have a duration of permanent death before they are given this opportunity to be revived. If the current active player chooses to tag in a player who has this power-up available, then that player will be revived and tagged in like normal.

Of course, many of these variables are placeholders, and would need to be playtested before determining their values. For example, allowing players to gain team boosts through tagging could potentially mean too many or too few power-ups, dependant on the length of the tag cooldown.

1.3   Tag Tokens

As players team up together to tackle the new *Tag Battles* game mode, users will notice that monsters do not drop coins, but instead drop something new: *Tag Tokens* – this is a new currency that will be introduced alongside the new update.

Tag Tokens aims to make farming for items a lot easier. What does that mean? These tokens can buy:

- Existing dragons – Sidekicks will be featured in the store, with new ones rotated in every week
- Exclusive characters – *Unity* will be introduced with the *Tag Battles* update
- Dragon feed – an item that gives double exp gain to dragons, and possibly even permanent stat boosts
- Coin boosters – an item that gives double coins for an hour
- And much more: the possibilities are endless!

Figure 4: Mock-up of a Tag Token

UX Goals:

The aim for this new feature is to cover some of the issues that users had reported back. The biggest problem was the over-reliance on advertisements and IAPs to gain new eggs – a integral part of player growth. Not only can players purchase new dragons using this new currency, but they can also be selective of what kind of dragon they want as well – as the store will be selling **dragons** and not **eggs**.

This also became a problem for players who sought to improve their score: it was often necessary to watch these advertisements to hatch eggs in hopes of getting stronger sidekicks; but even then, it was a chore to have to level them up, and even more arduous to evolve them. This is what dragon feed is for – it doesn't need to stop at exp boosters: they could include zodiac modifiers to change their signs or permanent stat amplifiers

Overall, *Tag Tokens* should give players new opportunities to farm their way into growing stronger: this feature that is severely lacking in the current state of the game.

Potential Problems:

Adding another resource for players to manage can become mentally and physically straining for them in the long-term. Players may not always have the time or the right people to play with, especially those with busy lives. A quick play function would certainly remedy the situation, but therein still lies the issue of having to communicate with strangers for a game mode that requires a lot of coordination.

1.4   Augmented Bosses and the Bounty Board

Augmented Bosses

Typically, in the single player campaign, when players reach the end of the stage, they are faced with a boss-level monster that they are tasked to defeat. In *Tag Battles*, things can get a little different.

If the team advances far enough into the campaign – beyond 3 boss encounters – they have a chance of receiving a warning notice at the end of the stage. This notice presents the team with two options to choose from – proceed as they normally would or face an *Augmented Boss*. Each member of the party would then cast their vote in to decide the path that the team takes.

Augmented Bosses should be entirely unique from what has been seen in *EverWing* thus far: as such these encounters are incredibly rare. They would look completely different from existing bosses and have an attack pattern designed to push the limits of what players expect: the ultimate challenge, fitting for a team with 1 life each. An example of this would be from Enter the Gungeon, where the *Lich* uses walls of bullets to create a *safe zone* around the player – this area moves around the level so the user is forced to follow along with it to ensure they don't get hit.

Figure 5: Enter the Gungeon – the bullets move clockwise

If the player defeats the *Augmented Boss*, they will receive a large sum of tag tokens and, by the game's rules, a proportionate increase to their current score – giving players an incentive to rise to the challenge, and to possibly increase their chances of beating their team's and others' high-score.

During some events, special items may be redeemed in the *Events* section if the boss has been slain as part of a *Bounty*. The difficulty of such a boss should not be vastly different from an *Augmented* one but should only be accessible in the later stages of the game, making bosses around this point challenges in and of itself anyway, alongside some of the prerequisites to activate them.

The *Bounty Board* will be a feature that is accessible in the *Events* section of the game. The event entails that high-value threats to the kingdom need to be taken care of. New bounties show up every month, where players are given the opportunity to encounter a hyper-rare *Augmented Boss*, known as *Nemesis*, in *Tag Battles*. "*Nemesis Discovered"* will show on the screen, alongside the reward for completion.

Nemesis units won't be particularly more difficult as compared to *Augmented Bosses*, but they will each have their own unique requirements to guarantee an encounter: the players won't be told what these conditions are, but vague hints will be displayed on the *Bounty Board* or even on *EverWing*'s Facebook page. With the example below, *no deals with the dead* and *2000 tokens for goods trades* means that all players need to be alive at the end of stage 8, and they must have a score of 2000 points.

The Flying Dutchman
Last found: Tag Battles Stage 8
2000 tokens for goods trades
No deals with the dead
Reward: some eggs   *Tasty!*

Figure 6: Example of Bounty Board description.

These requirements can be framed thematically as well. For example, players could receive an item, such as a crown that their Guardians wear, that they must keep with them until stage 8, but will be dropped upon player death. With the implication of *item* and *death*, players will soon be able to connect the dots that the *item* had some significance and that *death* caused this to disappear. These implications can make it easier for players to understand the hints that are given to them: the item was necessary to satisfy *no deals with the dead*.

If the players emerge victorious, the team will receive their standard token award, alongside a bounty confirmation. If they haven't already, users may claim their bounties on the *Events* page, ensuring that they can only claim their prize once if players are to face the boss again thereafter. These prizes can vary with each month. A few examples are: new Guardians, a chest of dragon eggs, or a pile of gems. Developers may even be bold and reward the player with enough gems so that they are just short of being able to purchase something good, giving users more incentive to invest in IAPs.

UX Goals:

At its core, these features should aspire to promote comradery and cooperation in the same way that *Boss Raids* does. By allowing players to make small teams of 4, the experience suddenly becomes a lot more personal, in a way that users can talk about their previous misadventures from playing together as a small group.

Underneath the layers, *Augmented Bosses* and *Bounties* should provide an intermediate challenge for those who seek it. By keeping these bosses unique, it can keep these types of users on their toes, as they are being forced to quickly adapt to new, unfamiliar attack patterns.

Players can have fun trying to figure out the meaning behind hints that are imposed on the *Bounty Board*. The intent it to leave the hints vague and mysterious, making the community more reluctant to work together to figure out the conditions to encounter the *Nemesis* – like when the *Binding of Isaac* community solved the real-life Easter Egg (Smith, 2015).

Potential Problems:

It is not easy to come up with ideas for new boss units, and to make them stand out from each other when they are expected to have different move-sets and sprites. *Moba* type games often see new units come into play every month, so it certainly isn't impossible. A dedicated team may be necessary, solely to design these new bosses. Otherwise, it may be difficult to keep up with the community, especially with the inclusion of *Nemesis* units as well.

Another problem comes with balancing. *EverWing* somewhat curbs this problem by having a set order to which bosses will appear. With the case of *Augmented Bosses*, there will be the case of playtesting each unit and considering where they may place on this difficulty scale, and then fixing their encounter to specific stages, in the same way that they do in the single-player campaign. With the problem of ordering aside, there remains the case of how much stronger they should be compared to their default counterparts for that stage. Making them too difficult can cause frustrations and deter players from taking the challenge. Conversely, making them too easy defeats their purpose: to challenge players.

1.5   New Guardian: Unity Joins the Frey

The newest edition to the Guardians: Unity, the Guardian of Harmony. While many of the characters in the roster each fill their own niche, Unity fills the niche of having excellent supportive abilities in *Tag Battles* as well as being a versatile unit overall. Below is a quick summary of her traits.

Name	Unity, the Guardian of Harmony
Bio	A carefree spirit that brings happiness in her steps. Her enigmatic aura is infectious, making her friends more powerful.
Unlock at	Lv. 5
Availability	Buy with 50,000 Tag Tokens Clear the 10th Stage of *Tag Battles*
Abilities	Cuts tag cooldowns for everyone by half Damage buffs apply to dragons too

UX Goals:

Her fluffy, outgoing aura empowers both Guardians and Sidekicks alike. With this powerful ability, not only can she fill a meta-gaming role for teams who wish to pursue a personal record in *Tag Battles*, she should also see use in both the single-player campaign and in *Boss Raids*, as she can rely on her dragons to deal extra damage.

Making her a strong and appealing Guardian in the roster encourages players to play *Tag Battles* more often so that they can collect the tokens to unlock her. She can become an attractive goal for new players to work towards, or a versatile unit for veterans. This initial hook should get players to try out the new game mode, increasing the number of returning players that find this new feature engaging.

Potential Problems:

There needs to be a lot of balancing done before anything can be finalised.

- Is the token amount too high?
- How much damage should dragons receive from damage buffs?
- Does her versatility make her too strong?

Testing needs to be done in single-player mode and *Boss Raids* to determine her strength against other Guardians. Testing with *Tag Battles* needs to be done to see if she synergises with other characters as intended – to make her a strong supporting character rather than a damage dealer.
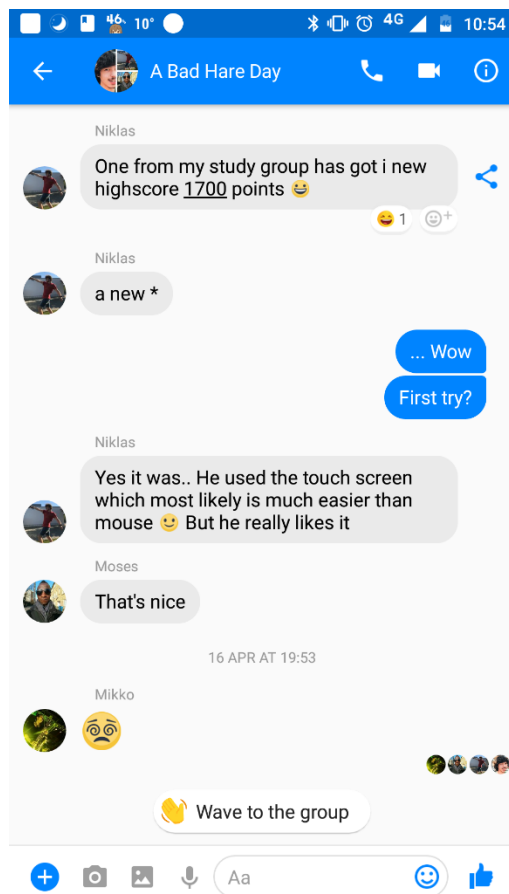
2.0   Facebook Integration

Figure 7: Facebook Group chat window

As hinted towards in multiple areas thus far, the *Tag Battles* update will include various forms of *Facebook Messenger* integration. This section should serve to summarise these points, and to discuss why these methods have been chosen.

Using Facebook Groups to form parties will be an easy way for users to take advantage of the features that *Messenger* provides. Many multiplayer games would otherwise use a lobby system wherein a *host* has to invite their friends into the party: using Facebook Groups can complete this process for the player by simply clicking "Invite Group". Players may also take advantage of the *voice chat* function in place of other common communication platforms such as *TeamSpeak* and *Discord*. This would make the experience more seamless and immersive, as players can join chat rooms without having to switch aps or using another device. Players can open the *Messenger* overlay instead and hit the *call* button on the top right.

By tying the team name with the Facebook Group, they can avoid the hassle of coming up with a new name for the leaderboards, again making the process more continuous as players can instantly jump into the game. As alluded to at the beginning, this team name is later used in conjunction with their personal record to be displayed on the global leaderboards.

Although players may certainly choose to, socialising currently isn't a necessity in any of the current game modes, nor is it encouraged. What *Tag Battles* hopes to do is to bridge that gap, not by forcing players, but rather by showing them that they can gain an advantage using proper teamwork. Players may even be able to improve on their personal records, as communication will be key to overcoming some of the unique challenges in the game: as a team, players should strategize on who to tag in and out of battle and they should be coordinating their efforts to take down bosses that they are faced with.

3.0   Monetisation

Monetisation in multiplayer games are often one of the trickiest things to do. We can see that even *Payday 2*, a PvE co-operative game about heisting, came under fire when introducing skins that provide additional stat boosts to guns (Klepek, 2015). Players could buy both *drills* and *safes* to unlock these items, and although *safes* did drop through gameplay, they were often incredibly rare. Each safe required a matching drill to open as well, so it wasn't always guaranteed that a user's spare drill could come in handy later in the game.

Figure 8: Payday 2's gun safe, reminiscent of loot crates as seen in CS;GO

No matter how small it may be, a stat boost is still an advantage for one player over another, and the same problem could easily happen in *EverWing*. This issue is especially prominent as features such as leaderboards exist to compare players implicitly: placement matters in game modes such as *Boss Raids*, where higher-seed players obtain better rewards.

However, it is certainly far from impossible to do. Many mobile games that are free-to-play provide interesting ways to introduce monetisation into their games. This update should aim to do the same.

3.1   Tag Token Boosters

Tag Token boosters can be purchased with gems; it is an item that is used only on the user and, when consumed, boosts the player's token acquisition rate by double for an hour. As the token store will be designed to be the hotspot for competitive players, it seems like an obvious choice to give them an option to increase their income. Due to some of the issues that users had reported in the previous document, where players often couldn't watch anymore advertisements to subvert the expenditure of

coins and trophies for eggs, using IAPs as the other form of monetisation for boosters will certainly help to ease this problem.

There may be potential back-lash from the player base that using IAPs to get token boosters gives paid users an advantage. Thus, a free 30-minute token booster should be available to all players to claim, that refreshes each day.

3.2   Advertisements to Double Income

In the single-player campaign, when a game is lost, players are offered the choice to watch an ad to double their coin income. This feature can be implemented into *Tag Battles* as well – instead doubling the user's earned tokens.

This should be the safest way to implement monetisation into this update, as it takes advantage of already established systems. It makes it easier to make subtle changes to the current monetisation system in the single-player campaign for them to be compatible with *Tag Battles*, whilst reducing the possibility of player backlash to a minimum.

3.3   Introducing Cosmetics

Many competitive games include cosmetics that make aesthetical changes to a character's attire or even appearance and personality. *EverWing* could take one such approach, using *Unity* as the first character subject to this feature. It would provide a safe way of including IAPs where the prices can vary depending on the quality of the skin, letting users of differing economic backgrounds to invest if they are so inclined.

There is one potential problem – some users may choose to invest in skins to show to their friends. However, there does not exist a game mode that allows players to see other player's characters, except for *Tag Battles*. This problem can be subverted by having a showcase system, where players can place their favourite Guardians on display for others to see. A similar feature exists in the game *Food Fantasy*, where players can view other people's profiles, where they may be showcasing some of their characters. In *Food Fantasy,* some of the strongest characters are tied to events, and thus can no longer be acquired. This gives players the opportunity for players to brag about some of the rare units or skins that they have acquired that are otherwise no longer available.

Figure 9: Food Fantasy - characters being displayed for others to see

However, this goes beyond the scope of monetisation within the constraints of *Tag Battles*: it may be more suited to discuss this feature in an update of its own.

3.4 Performance Enhancers

Potentially the riskiest option for monetisation, players could have the choice of selecting performance enhancers during the initiation phase in *Tag Battles*. They could range from enhancers that increase the player's initial stats, free revives that can be used on death, or even a third Sidekick. These enhancers could use tokens or gems to purchase, depending on magnitude of effect that the enhancer has on player performance. For example, a free revive could be purchased with tokens, whereas a third Sidekick may require gems.

There is always a risk of introducing *Pay-to-Win* options in a *free-to-play* game. It has certainly worked in other games with little to no problem – the obvious example being *gacha* games, a wildly accepted genre of games where players can spend money to acquire better units. It is necessary to balance the equilibrium of powerful token-enhancers and gem-enhancers to ensure that players are satisfied with both options that are available to them – tipping the scales in favour of gem-enhancers over the other could spell disaster for the future of the game.

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