CSM meeting minutes – December 2010 summit

Incarna game play and vision

Present: CCP Zulu, CCP Hammer, CCP Flying Scotsman

The CSM called for this meeting to get a clearer picture of CCP's vision and timetable for Incarna, the introduction of full-body avatars into EVE. CCP stated that they wanted to make it absolutely clear that Incarna will be rolled out in several steps over time. During this deployment, the flying in space functionality of EVE will not be neglected, and many enhancements will come out in addition to full body avatar features.

The CSM provided strong feedback, and expressed significant concerns, to CCP about the Incarna features and development plans that were disclosed to them – and about items CCP was not yet prepared to discuss. This information, however, is sealed under NDA. Note: During the editing of these minutes, several CSM members protested against the removal of key discussion points from the write-ups for Incarna sessions.

The CSM strongly emphasized that Incarna should add to the EVE experience and become an integral part of EVE in its own right – EVE's current gameplay should not be moved into Incarna and given a new user interface.

CSM delivered a strong message to CCP to start messaging players regarding what they should expect from Incarna, as CCP has said little other than 'Incarna will enhance EVE and make it a full blown Sci-Fi simulation'. Fulfilling the definition of 'sci-fi simulation' is pretty challenging as each person has its own idea of what that is, so a clearer picture is needed from CCP of what to expect from Incarna.

Incarna new player experience and captain's quarters

Present: CCP Chiliad, CCP Andy, CCP Zulu

CCP asked for this meeting to introduce to the CSM their plans for the new player experience and the captain's quarters planned for Incarna and get their initial reactions to the vision. This cannot be elaborated on further due to disclosure reasons, but the CSM provided invaluable insights and comments to the team working on this which will be incorporated into the feature set.

CSM's stance is that when it comes to managing your ships, no functionality in avatar mode should take longer than they presently do when docked in a station, and that any attempt to move EVE gameplay into Incarna is not the right way to go.

As in October, the CSM expressed strong concern that CCP was not yet ready to show the CSM a live demo of Incarna.

Account Security

Present: CCP Sreegs

Sreegs illustrated some solutions that CCP is using to enhance account security and reduce the number of potential attacks.

Due to its nature, and CCP's desire to carefully explain the changes to the players, the contents The content of this meeting will be released as a devblog in the near future. However, CCP wanted to state clearly that it is going to be making a lot of security changes, but most of them will be non-obvious from an end-user perspective, unless those changes are specifically pointed out. Any and all changes implemented that affect users will be published in advance.

Thursday Pre-Meeting - Arnargeddon

Present: CCP Zulu (Arnar)

Arnar requested an extra meeting with the CSM to clarify certain issues raised during the Wednesday meetings, in particular regarding Incarna. Most of these discussions must remain under NDA at this time, but the CSM received more detailed information about the development work that has been completed so far; however, the council remains concerned about expectation management issues related to the initial Incarna release.

After substantial discussion, the CSM and Arnar agreed that publication of a long-range Incarna road-map should be a key part of Incarna messaging.

As the meeting closed, Arnar informed the CSM that in the Incarna development expansion cycle (starting in January 2011), Team Best Friends Forever (a large team which is currently working on Incursion) will be dedicated to a project of implementing a collection of small fixes and iterations to existing issues in the game. Their current backlog has been drawn from CSM crowdsourcing lists, forum threads, and internal backlogs.

Arnar commented that this was done because "it makes too much fucking sense", that items would hopefully be deployed to Tranquility as soon as they were ready, and that he would like to talk publicly about the items on the list shortly after the final deployment of Incursion.

The CSM observed that proper messaging about this project would address player concerns that CCP was reducing EVE in-space game development in favor of Incarna.

Arnar noted that of all the EVE game-play teams, half are working on Incarna and half on in-space features. He further commented that he hoped that this project demonstrated his commitment (as EVE Senior Producer) to iterating and improving existing content, in ways both large and small.

Game balance requests

Present: CCP Hammer, CCP Grayscale

The meeting started out with the CSM stating that there might not be a full consensus in the CSM regarding this topic. It is certainly sometimes a question of perception whether an item or a ship needs to be brought into line with other items or ships or not. Often players need to make a choice and compromises – not everything should be useful in all circumstances.

The CSM started out by addressing the issue of Hybrid weapon systems and how they were out of line with most the two other turrets. The point was made clear with the question from CSM; 'when did you last see a Hybrid turret used in PvP?' Almost immediately the answer came from another CSM member, 'Megathrons with blasters are used'. The question was directed to CCP, specifically "are the Hybrid weapons working as CCP intended them to work when they were designed in relation to the other turret systems?" CCP's response was that Blasters are supposed to be the highest damage dealing turrets in close range and as far as CCP can see they are still that.

CSM pointed out that in reality players never get the chance to apply this damage to someone who much needs it as Blasterboats are usually dead before their reach their target. An example was given, comparing a Gankageddon and a Blasterthron, where the Armageddon is capable of applying damage much sooner than the Megathron is – the Blasters require a player to be very close. Getting close to a target means that the player has to be able to provide a damage buffer while getting into range and have sufficient cap to both get into range and then turn on the guns and apply the damage. In summary, with all the changes made in the past the Blasters have become out of line with the rest of the turrets.

CCP then asked in return whether the issue was perhaps more that you can't efficiently get into range to use Blasters, rather than the Blasters themselves – a knockoff effect of the speednerf. This question prompted the reaction from both CSM and CCP that going into specifics like percentage numbers or minute number theory would not serve any purpose and it would be better to try and identify what needed to be addressed rather than how to address it.

A second point mentioned with Hybrid system is their alpha strike and the lack of damage. It was stated that more often than not, the alpha strike was more important than sustained DPS (damage per second), even at close range.

A third point was made regarding the fitting requirements for Hybrid weapons, which often seemed to be harsher than for other turrets, resulting in Hybrid specific ships often fitting Projectile turrets instead.

The CSM re-iterated that the Hybrid turrets were now mentioned most often by players as something that needed to be looked at in terms of balancing, now that tech II ammo and Rockets have received attention.

CSM also criticized CCP's habit of making large changes to systems, and then not revisiting those changes for fine-tuning or verification of whether the changes delivered the intended effects. This is something that needs to change, and players need to be informed when these reviews are done (even if the result is no change). On the other hand, CCP is never going to get everything perfectly equal and no one expects them to – but there will always be the tendency towards the flavor of the month or something that is viewed as being 'best' at certain times, which leads to a sort of stagnation because nothing else gets used. In this light the CSM feels that more frequent rebalancing will at least achieve a more dynamic and fun environment, even if it does not necessarily make everything 'fair'. The CSM also pointed out that the ships and modules that are never used reinforce the perception of inaction on CCP's part; there is nothing visible being done to encourage the usage of those ships and modules.

CCP's response was that it ranked rebalancing overpowered ships and items as a higher priority than balancing unused items – fixing problems with things that are being used rather to fixing problems with those that are not. The CSM responded that when something is not being used, that is a symptom of a problem. That was acknowledged by CCP but did not change the priority, for example the Dramiel is causing problems while the Destroyers are reducing the variety of gameplay for players, as unfortunate that uselessness is.

The CSM and CCP spoke, as a result of above discussion, about the possibility of creating a framework for the CSM to provide initial research on what should be attended to in terms of balancing, so that CCP could take the next step to see what (if anything) needed to be done in that area. That idea was well received, and will be evaluated and evolved further by both parties.

CSM wanted a confirmation that the roleplay characteristics of each race should generally, though not without exceptions, be reflected in their ships' designs; e.g. Minmatar ships favoring speed and alpha strikes while Amarr are more slow moving, harder to kill types. CCP confirmed that this is their guiding principle when introducing new and/or balancing existing ships and modules. A follow up question by the CSM was whether players should expect all weapons system to be equal or whether there are to be flavors of style present. The response was that CCP does not expect a fleet composition to be perfectly equally split between race specific ships and also it is not necessarily an indication of a broken game if fleets tend to be largely homogenous in composition as it is now.

The talk drifted towards super capital ships, specifically the Super Carrier, where the question was raised whether they are as they are supposed to be or is there work to be done on them? Furthermore, where those changes designed to make Dreadnaughts obsolete?

A response was given, with a warning that it would be very controversial. Before the Super Carrier changes went live there was a rather large commotion regarding proposed changes to the initial design that had been advertised – there is little need to revisit that in detail. What is becoming clear however is that the changes might have been popular at the time, but are now a source of rather widespread discussion about whether or not the Super Carriers are overpowered. Certainly the changes (nerfs) proposed before the Super Carrier upgrade went live might not have been the optimal ones, and certainly the subject could have been revisited before the current trend of usage has become so strong – there is a shared responsibility when things are put into perspective. Maybe CCP should have stood firm against the players and forced the changes through? Perhaps players should have taken a step back and evaluated the whole thing on a larger timescale? The CSM did grant this point but did remind CCP that a history lesson would hardly solve anything.

The current situation with Super Carriers is that they are just not dying, they do large quantities of damage to other Capital ships and sub Capital ships – in fact they can be wielded in any situation with very good effects. In addition, they are obsoleting a whole class of ships, the Dreadnaughts. There were some examples given of how easy it is to move Super Carriers due to their jump range – allowing extreme force projection by relatively small number of pilot flying Super Carriers. It was decided to postpone this discussion to the 0.0 discussion.

CCP Greyscale floated a trial balloon for some conceptual balance changes, which have not been allocated time or manpower. More details will be provided on the Features and Ideas forum section if the topic is granted development resources.

Finally the CSM asked how much of an effort rebalancing a ship actually is. The answer is not a simple one. Actually changing a number on a ship takes about three minutes. However, the process of allocating time to work on changing the number, reaching a number that designers (as part of peer review) agree makes sense, making sure that it meshes with other numbers, the testing of that change with other changes, the mandatory route each change or feature has to go through in terms of QA and other overhead procedures that have been (for a very good reasons) developed and are practiced within CCP makes time estimations almost impossible. So the simple answer is that changes like that should not be expected more frequently than every six months or so in relation to expansions. Also, tied into that are steps of getting data from Research and Statistics to see the situation in relation to statistical data.

The CSM strongly encouraged CCP to put the issue of Hybrid Systems next on their list to balance.

Game Design talks to the CSM

The EVE development team approached the CSM for this session not as the CSM but as veteran users of EVE. The exercise consisted of splitting the CSM up into two groups, one group was to think about EVE from the newbies' point of view and the other group from veterans' point of view. The groups were to

think of EVE as a speedboat and then to name each thing that was slowing the boat down; an anchor if you like. With two outside facilitators to steer the conversations and two game designers as silent note takers, this was a very good and helpful exercise for all involved.

Post Dominion 0.0

Present: CCP Zulu, CCP Greyscale, CCP Dr.EyjoG (final hour)

This discussion of nullsec issues was extremely fluid and broad-ranging, and individual CSM members sometimes had differing opinions on specific issues. Similarly, the opinions of the CCP participants were their own, as opposed to official CCP positions, and in the interests of having a frank exchange of views, it was agreed that nothing discussed should be taken as an agreement to undertake a particular action, unless explicitly agreed upon.

For clarity, some elements of this discussion have been slightly re-ordered to group related issues and concerns.

CSM opened the discussion emphasizing that nullsec needs iteration, a position that CCP shares.

Attention was drawn to the issue of supercapital proliferation (over 2000 currently deployed in the game, with a single alliance able to field over 180). While supercapital deaths are increasing, they are being greatly outnumbered by births.

Currently, supercapitals – and supercarriers in particular – can be used to quickly project large amounts of force over great distances. An environment where hot-dropping a supercapital blob is the solution to any problem is not desirable.

However, at the same time, simply nerfing supercarriers will not solve the problem. Supercapitals present a unique problem – once a pod-pilot is installed in one, because the ship cannot be docked in a station, it is difficult to change ships. Thus a supercapital pilot is much more committed to his or her role than the pilot of other ships, and nerfing the ships so that they do not have significant utility imposes a great cost on those pilots.

Furthermore, simply nerfing them may just result in supercapital blobs growing even larger in compensation, and in their deployment only in situations where the risk of loss is very low. A consequence of this is that the victims of supercapital attacks will feel very put-upon.

The CSM suggested that one reason for the reduction in nullsec PVP kill rates (as mentioned in a previous meeting) is that supercapital blobs are an "I win" button.

The concept of capital ship roles was reviewed. Dreadnaughts are supposed to be mobile DPS, Carriers do repping and logistics, and Titans deliver DPS and bridge fleets. What then is an appropriate unique role for supercarriers?

A high-level conceptual discussion of rebalancing and addressing the rebalancing of supercapitals then ensued. CCP emphasized that fixing this and other aspects of nullsec is not a matter of "if" but of "when".

There was general consensus about avoiding mechanics that involved ongoing costs, as that has never proved to be effective in the past.

It was proposed that supercarriers become, in effect, tier-III carriers, as opposed to tier-LX (60!) as they are now; they should be better than regular carriers, but not 20x better. In addition to a HP reduction, this might include removing things that make them jack-of-all-trades ships (such as restricting them to fighter-bombers only). While it was clear that the exact changes will require much thought and planning (in particular, to ensure there is a role for dreadnaughts), the CSM was broadly supportive of the concept.

There was also discussion of allowing all supercapitals to dock at a POS, allowing a supercapital pilot to switch to a new ship. However, it was noted that most supercapital pilots have heads full of expensive implants, and therefore such an option may not be as useful at it might appear at first glance, since it would often also require a clone jump.

Greyscale reiterated that his opinions on what supercapitals's should be is only his own and can't be taken as CCP policy; CSM responded that they had high hopes for the man who brutally murdered learning skills.

The next major topic was force projection. With respect to nullsec sov warfare, CCP has always wanted smaller goals that can be achieved with smaller fleet subsets; that was the original idea behind wings and squads. But the problem was and is that these multiple objectives do not exist, and the result is blobbing.

The CSM agreed that force projection of capships is an issue; they can deploy across the entire universe faster than normal ships can move using gates. Also, unlike a carrier blob, a supercap blob excels at all roles; contrast this with Black Ops ships, which have limited range and fuel issues, and thus must operate in a local region.

CCP agreed that the current situation was "ridiculous," and furthermore that once a battle starts, it's not that interesting – the interesting stuff is all in the preparation for combat... "and you can't scout a cyno. It's bing, boom, and you're dead."

The CSM added that Titan bridges suffer from a similar issue.

But how to deal with this problem? Greyscale suggestion that he would "love to have jump-drive spoolup; you have to lock the cyno up and the lock time is proportional to the distance." A suggestion

from the CSM was for different cyno generator sizes. So you'd need a battleship or carrier cyno to drop a supercap.

It was agreed that there were many possibilities that should be investigated by the game design staff.

The discussion then shifted from the tactical use of cynos to strategic uses; the CSM referenced player discussion of changes to make capital deployment more strategic and less tactical, and asked Greyscale how, in his personal opinion, the problem could be addressed.

Greyscale: The harder we can make logistics, the better for the game viewed as an abstract system. It would be much better for the game if we got rid of freighters, but we have to balance what is good for the game at a higher systemic level with making the player's lives a living hell. Forcing people to do convoys with lots of industrials would, from a higher level systemic view, be awesome. But for the individual players, it would "suck balls."

"[CCP has] gone [too far] in the direction of making players lives easy – we've got jump freighters and jump bridges and all this [stuff] – and I think there is an agreement here [at CCP] that we want to pull back from that. We would like to pull back as far as we can get away with. But how far can we go?" The underlying point is the need to get a balance between avoiding frustration and getting desirable macro-scale outcomes.

Much of the CSM agreed that alliance logistics is too easy, but there are some edge cases (in particular, items that have both high volumes and quantities) that could be significantly hurt by making logistics more challenging.

Another consequence of harder logistics might be more local manufacturing in nullsec, as opposed to the current situation where many items end up being bought in Jita.

It was suggested that CCP, as part of any changes to logistics, take the opportunity to eliminate mindless pain, and add gameplay value.

Greyscale would like to see more opportunities for conflict in the logistics, making it easier for other players to trap you if you're being sloppy.

He then popped the question: "How much can we nerf things?"

The CSM asked whether the introduction of easy logistics caused nullsec population increase; if not a lot of people moved out when it became easy, not a lot will move back when it becomes hard. No immediate numbers were available.

The CSM was somewhat divided on how aggressive CCP should be with any nerfing. However, one CSM suggested, with respect to the nerfing of jump bridges, "get rid of them."

Greyscale: "Anyone disagree with that?"

CSM response varied between "Nope," "Nah" and a simple "No".

Greyscale: "Sweet!" – meaning that option will then not be discarded when the topic of jump bridges will be on CCP's table.

It is suggested that killing JB's and adding a cyno spool-up might be the core of a solution to the force projection problem. And spool-up plus a minor range nerf could handle the issue of Titan JB hotdrops as well.

There is concern that logistics into deep nullsec will be much more difficult than shallow nullsec.

Greyscale: Awesome, more things to fight over. and more importantly, more differentiation between different areas of space..

CSM: Will changes to logistics and force projection cause people to castle-up in their home space? Will it have a cooling effect on Sov warfare?

Greyscale feels that reduction in mobility will decrease need for big coalitions, because huge coalition blobs won't be able to move as fast; result should be smaller local wars.

It is noted that the cost of supporting coalition allies will increase, which will increase friction; coalitions may fragment so reds are easier to find. This may make it easier for small alliances to set up shop, with less supercapital curb stomping.

Greyscale warns, however, that during the transition period "everything will go to shit."

The CSM responded with a knowing smile.

There is discussion of changes to jump clone cooldown, but no consensus that this needs attention.

The CSM notes that if changes are made to make logistics more difficult, entry points into nullsec will become even bigger choke-points than at present. This issue was discussed in June, with the CSM suggesting more entry points. Greyscale believes they would go the route of more "back door" entries in out of the way places in lowsec., if more gates were added. Discussion turned to a brainstorming document of nullsec concerns that CSM produced in preparation for this meeting. While many of the items had already been discussed by this point, some additional ones were pointed out and CCP was asked to comment on them.

CSM has some concerns about current upgrade system because it homogenizes things, which means less reason for conflict. However, it was pointed out that rich regions like Delve never got conquered; they fell when BOB and the Goons disbanded due to internal conflicts. CCP responds that it is not that someone holds it, but that everyone else wants it that drives the conflict.

What is CCP's vision about small alliances? CCP wants them to be able to be independent if they want, and feels reducing the ability of large alliances to hold a lot of space will make this more viable – it make the curb-stomping harder. Another issue is that at present large alliances start feeling secure, get bored, and say "we have nothing better to do, let's go crush these guys."

There was a short discussion of the consequences of regional disparities, and also the individual risk/reward vs. Alliance risk/reward of nullsec – for example, many of the goodies like moons are alliance resources.

Also discussed were the negative consequences of system upgrades – homogenized regions, but they also permit systems to support more people. CCP would like systems to sustain 20-30 people (more than today) without upgrades.

Greyscale floated a trial balloon – tweak upgrades so that good truesec systems have a small number of really good sites (which can support only a few people but make them rich), and ones with bad truesec have a lot of just decent sites (more people can farm, but not as much goodies).

This elicited a strong negative reaction from one CSM.

Another CSM suggested that overgrazing of resources would reduce truesec, and under-utilization would increase it. So players would have to move. The issue of static moon resources is raised – should moons be mined out?

Greyscale expresses concerns about dynamic resource reallocation – he would prefer people pick good space and defend it, as opposed to being hunter-gatherers, or even locusts. This is clearly an issue that needs more thought.

Another possibility is providing opportunities for roaming around and finding stuff – as opposed to mindless belt-ratting. The question is, how can this be implemented?

The CSM next raised the issue that currently there are no objectives in sov warfare for smaller gangs – there needs to be a way for a roaming gang to be able to force a response or impose a cost on opponents.

Greyscale indicated this was discussed internally 2 days ago, and gave the example of raiding moon-mining arrays – either you will get the goodies, or you will get a fight (and the hauler will get popped), but you probably won't get both. This is seen as an issue.

CSM concerns: Any disruption must involve activity (AFK cloaking is lame). Problems with static objectives include hitpoints, timezoning, and min-maxing (if I want to steal your moon-go, I'll do it at 4AM when you are not around).

The CSM feels that avoiding a fight should cost you, and notes that when controlling large amounts of space, it's hard to respond to stuff happening on the periphery. There needs to be incentives to take the fight vs. "let them knock it over and we'll go fix it afterwards",

The CSM noted that the current sov system concentrates fights in one system. CCP wants to move to a more continuous system vs. specific flashpoint targets, but there is no agreement yet on how to do it.

Greyscale: "Shooting structures suck, it is a terrible mechanic."

Greyscale floated the idea of jump interdiction bubbles – not for a grid, but for multiple light-years! They would prevent jumping through the bubble, maybe sucking the capship to a certain point. The CSM is intrigued (but a bit divided); mechanics should be very costly, and it should not be possible to use it to "castle up".

Phage Wars is suggested by CSM as an example of a continuous sov mechanic that might be an interesting starting point.

On the subject of treaties, CCP wants to implement them. Treaties would be about 1 scrum team for one release, and CCP hopes to get it done by Q3. However, there is always the issue of competing priorities – for example, cap fleet force projection vs. treaties, which is more important?

There are going to be some changes to sov mechanics as a result of the DUST/EVE link; what those changes are going to be have still not been planned out. However there will be iterations on the current 0.0 situation during the next year. In general, iterating on existing gameplay has higher priority than previously, and sov is high on that list.

There was some discussion of sov- and treaty-related taxation issues.

The possibility of removing the "no assembled ships in freighters" restriction (currently, this can be done using a courier contract as a work-around) is being discussed internally at CCP, but this discussion is in the very early stages.

With respect to the issue of aggression timers and logoffski, Greyscale deployed his catch-phrase – it "sucks balls". The problem of legitimate disconnects remains, but if you are in a fight and lose your connection, then that ought to be tough luck.

It was mentioned that CCP has hired an effects artist (a specialist), who starts in a month. So old effects will be iterated - cyno effects and trails will be high on the list.

As a result of this discussion, Greyscale committed to investigating the possibilities and consequences of the following changes ifas and when time was allocated to do sostuff: No drones on supercarriers, jump-bridges die the true death, supercarriers become tier-III carriers, storage of supercapitals, and cyno spoolup.

Finally, concluding the discussion, Greyscale noted that there was a non-zero possibility that some of the proposed changes might come in the next 6 months, possibly even 3. But this is not a hard promise, planning has to be done.

CCP agreed that CSM will get a report post-release planning on the status of intended nullsec changes for summer 2010 (with the usual caveat that no battle plan survives contact with the enemy).

Nullsec Economics discussion (CCP Dr.EyjoG)

Dr.Dr. Eyjo noted that it is hard to compare income of average nullsec and average hisec resident.

There was a discussion of ISK faucets and sinks. Dr. Eyjo wants more sinks, and noted that if you increase income in nullsec (for example) you need to either have more sinks or trim income in other areas.

Turning to relative prosperity, there are concerns that many of the real advantages of nullsec accrue to alliances (moon-goo) rather than individuals. As a general design goal, CCP wants there to be economic incentives that encourage more people towards lowsec and nullsec, where they can generate income, build things, and have them blown up – thus, increased economic turnover. But again, there needs to be a faucet/sink balance; one possibility is moving towards item rewards – things that can be traded for ISK – rather than ISK itself.

The CSM agreed that taking another look at loot balancing, and moving from ISK to item rewards is a good idea.

A suggestion is made to perform more frequent (possibly semi-automated) balancing of mission rewards, similar to what was done with insurance, and a similar suggestion is made regarding the LP store. CCP believes that this is complicated and hard to do, but it is something that is being looked at. However, CCP agrees that LP store needs a look; they want to make it a bigger ISK sink.

Multiple CSM councils have had a theme of getting more people into nullsec, and there has been a modest increase in nullsec population (especially when WH residents are added in). CCP views the goal as not necessarily getting more people into nullsec, but making it the bottom of the landscape, so people will naturally want to roll in that direction from high-sec. It is pointed out that low-sec is distinct, and there should be ways to roll off the high-sec hill to there as well; CCP agrees that this is a separate issue – there is no one endgame to EVE.

Indeed, CCP considers the "endgame" to be "the stuff you do when you get bored with the newbie stuff".

Dr. Eyjo will continue to work with the game design staff to implement changes to the eve economy to address the issues raised in this and other CSM meetings.