

No Man's Sky Beta Testing

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No Man's Sky is a computer game by the British independent studio Hello Games that lies at the junction of survival and action-adventure genres. The project release for PC and PlayStation 4 took place in 2016. Despite high expectations, the publication of the game on leading gaming platforms revealed numerous global shortcomings, failing to meet the expectations of most fans. The official game release played a role in a quasi-beta test, which helped developers to identify major bugs, glitches, inefficient gameplay mechanisms, and to improve the game before its Xbox One release in 2018.

The announcement of the product at the 2014 E3 convention caused hysteria among gamers and attracted the intensified attention of the community. However, the first step that led to the global failure of No Man's Sky after its release was the decision of its authors not to use beta testing and not to allow users to have an early access to the game. After the game announcement and the drama to which it led, one of the developers, Sean Murray, officially stated that the company would not allow gamers to enter the project until it was finalized (Splechta, 2014). This statement demonstrated the high level of the authors' ambitions and their belief in success. At the same time, it significantly restricted their ability to make the game as good as possible by the time of its release.

Beta testing is a common practice in the gaming industry. It has a double significance. First, beta testing is an additional marketing tool that makes the game more recognizable in the community. Secondly, it can detect program errors, the disadvantages of gaming mechanics, and the weaknesses of the gaming process in general in order to subsequently fix these blunders before an official release (Schramm, 2007). Hello Games did not need to increase the level of the game's recognition. However, as demonstrated by further developments, beta testing could have

helped the company avoid numerous mistakes due to which the release of the game became a failure.

Hello Games positioned No Man's Sky as an extremely ambitious project, an entirely new world in computer games. However, the authors failed to implement most of the elements that fans anticipated. The published project contained a number of pressing issues and caused numerous complaints from gamers. First of all, users were outraged by the unbalanced gameplay. They had to spend most of the game dealing with the interface of the menus and inventory slots, while the direct travel and interactions with the environment took a much smaller percentage of the overall time (Perry, 2016). Meanwhile, the gameplay trailers focused on the menu tables only for a minimum amount of time. Such a mismatch of promises and reality was the first expectation that No Man's Sky did not justify.

Another problem that the users were actively discussing was the monotony. From the beginning, the developers positioned No Man's Sky as a game with a procedurally-generated environment. Games of this type usually utilize a limited set of digital patterns which the program mixes in a random manner. However, in the case of No Man's Sky, which focuses on the research of new, undiscovered worlds, the excessive monotony of flora and fauna, distinguished only by insignificant details depending on the planet, was disastrous. Gamers could not enjoy the visual component of the new worlds, since after only a few hours of playing, it was becoming all the same, and only the individual elements, such as coloration and shapes, changed. For a game that focuses on discovering the unknown, such a situation is unacceptable.

Finally, another global problem gamers faced was system crashes. A crash is a situation in which the game stops working and turns off in the absence of the corresponding commands by the user. According to numerous gamers, they have been facing multiple crashes of the game

during such processes as the warp flights between the star systems, travels between planets, and in some cases, the moments when the player did not give any commands (Perry, 2016). Thus, the weaknesses of the game included not only gameplay elements and the game mechanics, but even such a critical aspect as technological support for internal processes. If the game had a proper beta testing, it would have been possible to predict and fix these elements.

Customers have been regularly reporting these problems and claims to the company. As a result, the developers have got an opportunity to fix their product. The technical aspects became the subject of the first corrections. The company released its first patch for the game in August 2016. It focused on improving such technical features as AMD Phenom Support, Mouse Jitter, Shader Caching, Alt-Tab combination problems, and overall performance (Callaham, 2016). This time, the developers took into account their previous mistakes and conducted beta testing for the new patch. In the subsequent period, they implemented the patch into the game, and the technical aspects of the project improved significantly. In such a way, the official launch of the game had a role that is usually designated for beta testing: it allowed developers to identify critical issues and eliminate them.

After fixing the technical problems of the project, Hello Games spent the next few years improving gameplay and game mechanics. At that point, No Man's Sky did not have an official release for Xbox One, and the developers had a chance to rehabilitate themselves on part of the gaming community. They globally updated the game, partially or entirely addressing most of the claims. The significant improvement was the introduction of a full-fledged multiplayer (King, 2018). The original version lacked this feature, which was one of the biggest disappointments for fans. Secondly, the developers have substantially diversified the textures, making the game more visually harmonious. Some issues remained unchanged, such as an overloaded menu interface

and a monotonous combat system. However, generally, the game has improved. The updated version of No Man's Sky has become much closer to the game that the fans were expecting to see from the beginning.

Summarizing the above, the ambitious decision of developers to launch No Man's Sky without prior beta testing has almost destroyed the project. The original 2016 version with the numerous technical and gameplay disadvantages was not the game that fans expected. Because of this, the official release of the game turned into an unofficial beta testing conducted by the entire community. Based on their claims, complaints, and suggestions, Hello Games made crucial adjustments to the game, introduced by several global patches. As a result, in 2018, the company released an updated version of the project that fans perceived with much greater enthusiasm. The analyzed experience vividly demonstrates the importance of beta testing and early access to the success of computer games—especially if these projects are as global and ambitious as No Man's Sky.

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