



Plague Inc is an old best selling game that was released in 2012 by Ndemic Creations; it was the #1 paid app for both iPhone and iPad in the U.S. for two weeks after launch. This game became wildly popular again this year with the spread of the pandemic. In this episode of The Longest Rainy Sunday, we'll be talking about how this game evokes the public awareness on public health, and how people could learn from playing this game.

Sources:

“Plague Inc.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, blogs.cdc.gov/publichealthmatters/2013/04/plague-inc/.

“Plague Inc: Evolved (PC).” *Plague Inc: Evolved (PC) - Ndemic Creations*, www.ndemiccreations.com/en/25-plague-inc-evolved.

Wendy:

Hi everyone and welcome to this episode of The longest Rainy Sunday. This is episode 8. My name is Wendy and I’m the producer for this episode.

Ryan:

I’m Ryan and I will be the assistant producer.

Roy:

I’m Roy and I will be the line editor...

Wendy:

In this episode of The longest Rainy Sunday, we’ll be talking about an old best selling game Plague Inc. Released in 2012 by Ndemic Creations, It was the #1 paid app for both iPhone and iPad in the U.S. for two weeks after launch. This game became wildly popular again this year with the spread of the pandemic. For those of you who, like myself, that don’t have much experience with the Plague, we’re gonna start off with a brief overview about what the Plague is as a game. This real-time strategy simulation video game enables the player to create and evolve a pathogen to infect the human population with a deadly plague.

Ryan:

Yeah, the first time I have played this game was a long time ago, when I was in 7th or 8th grade so around 2015. Now that I think of it, I probably played when Plague Inc. Evolved came out. Plague Inc. Evolved is the same game but a remake version that came out in 2015. Anyways that was the first time I played this kind of real time strategy simulation game and, even though I had no idea what those complicated biology terms meant, found the game to be very interesting.

Roy:

Right, I probably played the remake version too. It was a long time ago but I still remember it being one of the most unique games I have played. They really designed it in a way that everything seemed legit. You could choose different types of pathogens to start with and the game would be different based on what you choose. And it's all based on the specific choices you make throughout the game.

Ryan:

So the whole point of this game is to make your own pathogen and kill off the entire world, which is interesting because the game was redownloaded by many players across the world to play in this where a pandemic is spreading across the world, a situation very similar to the one in the game.

Roy:

Yeah, the current pandemic brought me back to playing the game a few months ago. I noticed that, when I start the game they give you a tutorial level where it is very easy to wipe out the whole population. In the

introduction they explain that this is the easiest level which simulates in the assumption that people have 0 sanitary awareness.

Ryan:

Yep, so when you start a new game, you get to select a difficulty with easy, medium, hard, and very hard. This is obvious but each difficulty has certain sets of conditions that affect the difficulty of the stage, for example: for the easiest stage no washes hands and sick people are given hugs haha. Which makes this stage easy to beat. By the way you need to clear previous difficulties with different pathogen types to unlock other pathogens to use and next difficulties.

Roy:

I think the world we live in is probably in between the medium level and the hard level. First off the medium level is assuming that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the population wash their hands and sick people are sometimes ignored, which is true for many people in our real world. The hard level assumes that doctors work almost everyday and patients get quarantined, which may reflect some more economically developed countries in the world.

Ryan:

And so the pre-set conditions as well as the random events that happen during the game serve as obstacles to the players actually contain a lot of important information about hygiene and how to better stay safe during a pandemic. In this case we can see this game as an educational game that helps raise people's awareness about health and what to do during a pandemic.

Wendy:

That's an interesting part to consider. I remembered when I first started the game, I chose a country that has many ports and airports, like Saudi Arabia. Because I think besides hygiene, the circulation of the airports and ports will definitely spread the disease more lethally as well. Also, for me, I think what makes this game engaging is the fact that instead of trying to stop disease, players are actually spreading the disease, which is kind of the opposite of humanity. While I played, I feel I was playing a game about death, it is truly a really dark game. By infecting and killing people, players will earn the DNA points, and using the DNA points, players can upgrade the pathogen with the goal to wipe out the entire human population.

Roy:

Right, I feel like if the game was designed as an organization trying to contain a pandemic it wouldn't be as fun. I feel like this is almost a role-playing game, where you are playing as a virus, or a laboratory developing a virus in order to wipe out the human race. We get to play as the "antagonist" which makes it more unique and engaging. Ironically though, when I played this game again during the pandemic, I had opposite feelings. At first the game felt really surreal, but as I played it during the quarantine it felt more related to my life.

Wendy:

The coughing and the hospital sound in the background really make the game realistic. Especially playing the game during this global pandemic, I got a little nervous by listening to the coughing sound, and have a feeling that I should drink more water. So this game did teach us lessons, it promotes people to be more aware of public health. Players will learn

about the different types of diseases, how those diseases spread, and how those diseases affect humans.

Ryan:

I feel like the role playing part is really something that got me hooked on the game, I'm sure everyone likes to imagine different situations when they play role playing games. Back to the topic though, the mechanic of this game is pretty much just the definition of probing. Which, for those who have listened to the KIDS episode that was created by us would know that it is a concept bought up by Steven Johnson as an important aspect of games where players learn about certain mechanisms through trial and error , in this game how the pathogen works to infect all people in the world or in reverse how people can contain the spread of diseases.

Wendy:

Telescoping is also the key element of this game. With the goal of wiping out the entire population, players needed to achieve smaller goals or steps such as making the disease more contagious, deadly, or immune to certain cures in order to complete it. This allows players to practice having clear goals in mind in order to achieve tasks. During our long rainy afternoons in the pandemic stuck home sitting in front of the computer screen, people might be inclined to, like many other players in the world, to play this game where you try to cause a pandemic to wipe out the human race. Plague Inc. is a game that provides deep thinking about the public health and reflections of the current society, it allows players to actually learn how to stay safe in a pandemic. That's it for this week's episode on Plague Inc.. Thank you for listening and please looking forward to the next episode!