**The Art of the Flame War**

An Exploration of Gaming Culture and Etiquette

In an online video game, much of your experience (good or bad) is dictated by the players you share the match with. Even a game you lose can be satisfying if you fought the good fight. By the same token, a victory can be turned sour by some jerks. Here’s who to watch out for.

THE BAD

First of all, and most numerous, are the forces of evil. These vary greatly in competence and demeanor, but all impact your game experience negatively. Some are simply so pro that there’s no way you could possibly beat them, and they won’t hesitate to let you know. These elites constantly trash talk and ridicule one’s pitiful attempts to overthrow them. Killing them a couple times tends to shut them up, but sometimes they will instead evolve into a “Flamer,” a malevolent being whose only mission is to spread rage and spite through the webbed cosmos. “U MAD BRO? MAD CUZ BAD!!!!” the Flamer will quip, riding loftily upon his caps lock flagship. Frustrating as they are, one must never respond to or goad a Flamer, because, no matter how right or reasonable you are, he will only become more strident in his howling accusations of anger and incompetence.

There are others who can wreck your experience through action rather than all chat. Chief among them is the Baddie. He is a paragon of failure, but refuses to acknowledge his shortcomings. He will bog down your team and give away points at every turn. Sometimes he will border on idiocy, wandering haphazardly into situations that even the simplest glimmer of logic would tell him to avoid. This breed of player may come equipped with a healthy penchant for lashing out at his teammates, complaining about the game being rigged against him, or claiming that other players are hacking. In any case, try to ignore him and compensate by working especially hard with your other teammates, for attempts to help him will surely end with your good intentions being punched squarely in the jaw by a wounded ego.

Far less common is the stealthy Troll. This ghastly teammate will intentionally sabotage his team by taking sorely needed resources from other players, sacrificing himself to the enemy, or even outright attacking his teammates. You may not notice him until it is too late to stop him, as he avoids the chat box altogether. He will retain his silence even when questioned and sworn at by his teammates, but one can imagine his wide, infuriating, troll-like grin as he sits at his desk pecking away at his keyboard in malicious glee. Jerk.

THE GOOD

However, if you are extremely lucky, you may receive some respite from this frustrating parade of fools and trolls. It is possible, albeit unlikely, to have a player in your game who enhances your experience. Impossible, you say? So said I, but that was before I met Mr. Polite. I only spotted him once, walking calmly away through the grainy woods, his legendary furry back the only thing visible, until, suddenly, he turned and typed something nice in all chat. I almost fainted. Had that been a compliment? I triple checked before responding with a curt “ty bro,” unsure if he was merely setting up a trap for me to stumble into later. As the game progressed, however, I began to realize that he was a genuinely nice person. He was a gracious winner and graceful loser, worked well with his team, and joked around with everybody. He somehow had the ability to convince everyone that it really was just a game, and that there was no need to get bent out of shape. It was a magical experience.

THE NOT REALLY BAD BUT NOT THAT GOOD, EITHER

The more common reality, however, is that there is no Mr. Polite. If you’re lucky, though, you may run into someone who is neutral. They type seldom if at all in chat, saying only what is necessary for their teammates not to get mad at them. They leave everyone to their own game. I place myself in this category. I just want to play. I ignore everything except the game, flamer and baddie alike, in pursuit of personal betterment. And a massive kill streak.

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Here at the conclusion of our little tour, things look grim. The best player you can hope for is someone who doesn’t speak. The elusive Mr. Polite may appear to you once in a lifetime, but nowhere near often enough to teach other gamers the lesson of respect he embodies. There is a secret, though, to online games: Skype. Grab a friend, jump online, and magically you will be above all the petty squabbles streaming by in the chat box as you and your friend snicker and trash talk to each other in amiable glee. The jibes will roll off your backs like water off a duck. In short, I hold two important bits of advice for you: It is dangerous to go alone into the great fearsome yonder that is the internet. And, more importantly, if you get mad in a game, don’t stick around to whine and flame. Rage quit. It’s for the good of the webbed cosmos.