

Minecraft is a Terrible Game

An essay by Blue-Maned_Hawk

([HTML version](#) | [Source](#))

[Edit, 2022-11-04: This essay was originally written and published shortly after the release of Minecraft version 1.17.]

Minecraft is one of the most popular games in the world, and has a reputation as a very good game. It's persisted through ten years of an ever-changing world and has sold millions of copies. These are properties that it does not deserve to possess. It is a game riddled with flaws. It is a game filled with inconsistencies. It is a game that is being maintained poorly. The only reason it continues to persist is through circumstances outside of the game itself. Fundamentally, Minecraft is a terrible game that, in a vacuum, could never have achieved the success that it has.

I could have this essay simply be a list of each and every problem that I can find with the game. I'm sure that that could work as a simple "list of things to fix with the game". I've elected not to do this, partially because it would, frankly, make for a boring and low-quality essay, and partially because many of the problems in the game can be reduced to a few core problems with the game: inconsistency, bloat, and poor choices.

Perhaps the single biggest problem with the game is that Mojang thinks that games are somehow unique pieces of software that aren't subject to the same basic laws as other software. This is a method of thinking that I've seen reflected in other places by other people, and I'm not sure why. With other software, many people can quickly recognize (or easily be taught) that the idea of "more stuff is always better" is a fallacious argument, yet when it comes to games, people seem to think that there's an exception. This is something that I do not understand at all.

Whatever the source of this flawed thinking may be, its effects can clearly be seen in the game, and the intermediate steps can be inferred. "Do we need to carefully think about our development choices before implementing them? No, this is a video game! Do we need to make sure that adding this new feature solved a real problem that the software has? No, this is a video game! Do we need to remove all the crap that's not useful anymore? No, this is a video game! Do we need to break backwards-compatibility so that we can redo all these systems that have gotten filled with gunk over time? No, this is a video game!", and so on.

There are numerous places that this can be seen. Take copper, for instance: a system of blocks and items added solely on the basis of "it's cool", without any regard as to whether they solved an actual problem with the game. It's not as though there weren't problems for it to solve, either: the iron ingot has an unmanageable number of recipes, many of which could certainly have been transferred over to the copper ingot to make things more even. It's not as though Mojang is unable to solve problems with the game, either: the lodestone and the shulker box were both clever methods for Minecraft to implement the powerful systems of waypoints and portable storage at a fair cost to the player. Copper was implemented as it is because Mojang had a need to satisfy Microsoft without enough time to think things through.

Further proof of this can be seen in the enchanting system of the game. Enchanting is a really, *really* tedious process, requiring many hours of boring grinding to achieve optimal results. This isn't just limited to experience farming, but also getting the correct librarians and, to a lesser extent, getting the materials for building and maintaining an enchanting setup. Obviously, getting optimal results should take time and effort, so I'd like to be clear that that's not what I'm

concerned about here. What I'm concerned about is that it's *boring*. Currently, the processes for getting enchanted books and experience are pudding farms, unfun processes that are the only practical way to do something. Something can surely be done about this.

Let's switch to talking about inconsistencies, because there are a lot of them. Take block variants, for instance: whether or not a block comes in stairs, chiseled, bricks, polished, slabbed, or other variants seems to be entirely random. If there were reasons given for this inconsistency, such as "Well, we can't think of a unique thing to put on chiseled granite, and we don't want to force something on or reuse something.", then I'd be fine with that. However, it seems like no reasons have been given, making this decision entirely arbitrary.

There are further inconsistencies, such as the distinction between effects and enchantments. There's *some* patterns in the decisions of whether something's an effect or an enchantment (e.g. there are no effects that do the same thing under different circumstances), but there's still plenty of arbitrary decisions here. There's even inconsistency *within these* systems, such as the existence of the instant effects and the potion of the turtle master, or the incompatibility of mending with infinity and the randomness by which certain enchantments are treasure enchantments. The fact that there exists nested inconsistency in Minecraft is astonishing.

I'd also like to talk about bloat within Minecraft. The most obvious example of this is the Wandering Trader, which others have complained mightily about and which I therefore will not touch upon here. However, there are other examples. Take the food system, for example: most foods in it are utterly pointless, as evidenced by the fact that almost nobody eats them for any reason except to complete that one advancement. The food system could be reduced to nothing but the golden foods, their materials, suspicious stew, chorus fruit, sweet berries, poisonous potatoes, cake, dried kelp, honey, pufferfish, rotten flesh, and spider eyes, and for most people, there wouldn't be a practical difference.

For my final gripe with Minecraft (that I'll talk about in this essay), I'd like to discuss 1.16 and 1.17. These are the *worst* major updates that Minecraft has ever had. These were purely pandering to the audience that I imagine was forced onto Mojang by Microsoft. 1.16 was a major disappointment (no lava rain? no changes to the terrain of the Nether, only to what generates on top of the terrain? only 5 new biomes with no biome variants? no updates to the structures that already existed?), and 1.17 was actively malicious (by directly making the game worse by changing the ore generation to be far more grindy and otherwise doing practically nothing). These are symptoms of a flawed development cycle within Mojang that clearly needs to be replaced: these were *awful* updates.

It's not like Minecraft doesn't have the potential to be a good game. That potential is there, as evidenced by the fact that people do tend to like it, but often for what it feels like it should be or what they think it used to be, often without realizing it. Certainly, there are many things that it *is* good at—the bloody wonderful aesthetic of the game is a definite example of this. Yet it seems like Mojang simply doesn't care about the game. They realize that there are some good things in the game and think that that's enough, not realizing that (unless you want to pedantically get infinities involved) a sufficient quantity of bad things can always overpower the good things, and without careful thinking about whether the things one is adding is good, bad things are *going* to slip in.

You may freely use this work for any purpose, to the extent permitted by law. You may freely make this work available to others by any means, to the extent permitted by law. You may freely modify this work in any way, to the extent permitted by law. You may freely make works derived from this work available to others by any means, to the extent permitted by law.

Should you choose to exercise any of these rights, you must give clear and conspicuous attribution to the original author, and you must not make it seem in any way like the author condones your act of exercising these rights in any way.

Should you choose to exercise the second right listed above, you must make this license clearly and conspicuously available along with the original work, and you must clearly and conspicuously make the information necessary to reconstruct the work available along with the work.

Should you choose to exercise the fourth right listed above, you must put any derived works you construct under a license that grants the same rights as this one under the same conditions and with the same restrictions, you must clearly and conspicuously make that license available alongside the work, you must clearly and conspicuously make the information necessary to reconstruct the work available alongside the work, you must clearly and conspicuously describe the changes which have been made from the original work, and you must not make it seem in any way like your derived works are the original work in any way.

This license only applies to the copyright of this work, and does not apply to any other intellectual property rights, including but not limited to patent and trademark rights.

THIS WORK COMES WITH ABSOLUTELY NO WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, IMPLIED OR EXPLICIT. THE AUTHOR DISCLAIMS ANY LIABILITY FOR ANY DAMAGES OF ANY KIND CAUSED DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY BY THIS WORK.