

Privateer 2 : The Darkening

Game/Customer Service Issues

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to convey the top Game and Customer Service issues relating to Privateer 2 : The Darkening. This also attempts to loosely quantify what the Origin Brand represents. Should you have questions regarding anything in this document, please do not hesitate to ask.

NOTE : In no way will the game be ready to ship should all issues contained in this document be resolved. There are currently over 1000 open bugs not addressed in this document.

Supported Joysticks

PROBLEM : Currently, only 2 button joysticks are supported.

ISSUE : Thrustmaster and CH Products, along with other quality joysticks, are typically supported by Origin and have been since Strike Commander. AH-64D Longbow supported several flavors of joysticks natively. The Darkening development team has made no commitment to supporting joysticks other than two button.

SOLUTION : Basic support for the Flightstick Pro and Thrustmaster series of joysticks must be added.

Palette Flash

PROBLEM : Before and after some movies, there is a brief palette flash.

ISSUE : This looks inherently sloppy, is distracting, and happens with many video cards suggesting a code problem rather than video hardware.

SOLUTION : There should be no palette flash before or after movies.

Joystick Calibration

PROBLEM : Joystick calibration is extremely unintuitive, is difficult to calibrate properly.

ISSUE : New customers often have extreme difficulty with joystick calibration. Wing Commander Interactive Movies target newer users. A difficult joystick calibration prevents the game from being a wholly positive experience. Additionally, the joystick problems are so severe, many customers will be unable to calibrate the joystick, even with customer service representatives stepping them through the calibration.

SOLUTION : Streamline the joystick routine to add robustness.

Skill Level/Invulnerability

PROBLEM : Privateer 2 does not have variable skill levels as well as an invulnerability option.

ISSUE : The last few Origin games have enjoyed a healthy selection of Skill Levels and an invulnerability option to make transition into a new game smoother. We added these options as a company to cater to newer players, and widen appeal. Not having skill levels limits interest as well as playability for newer users.

SOLUTION : Add different skill levels and an invulnerability option. There are currently 10 difficulty options currently built into the game. Having an option in the options screen would have the following result :

Skill Selection	Difficulty Level
Rookie	: Always at 0
Veteran	: Between 0-5
Ace (default)	: Default 0-9
Hard	: Between 3-9
Crazy	: Between 5-9
Nightmare	: Always at 9

Player Alignment

PROBLEM : The player is unable to change their alignment.

ISSUE : While the player is able to transport illegal goods, the player cannot become "friendly" with any of the pirate clans. One of Privateer's fundamentals was the ability to become friendly with either Pirates, Kilrathi, or the Confederation. Privateer 2 : The Darkening does not support this feature. The player is essentially always "aligned" with the local Military force, but will occasionally come under attack for transporting illegal goods.

SOLUTION : Add the ability to align with the pirate clans. This was an integral part of Privateer I. If this is not a part of Privateer 2, it's just another space trading game.

Collision Detection

PROBLEM : Player bolts will often pass through enemy fighters. Player's collision with capital ships is unrealistic.

ISSUE : Often, while tailing enemy fighters and shooting, bolts will either register as hitting on the wrong side of a ship or not at all. This is extremely annoying for players.

SOLUTION : Improve the collision routine with fighters.

Artificial Intelligence

PROBLEM : The computer AI is extremely simplistic.

ISSUE : Many aspects of AI could be construed as primitive even when lined up to Wing Commander I. Enemies fundamentally are slow reacting pilots with little ability. By far the worst aspect of play is the avoidance AI.

SOLUTION : Beef up the basic fighting AI on higher difficulty levels as well as adding various ship maneuvers, and more advanced avoidance AI.

No Sound

PROBLEM : There is no way to select "No Sound" in the install program.

ISSUE : One of the most fundamental troubleshooting techniques with customers is to set up a game for no sound and attempt to duplicate the problem. The lack of a no sound option, as well as no VGA support extremely curtails the amount of reasonable troubleshooting Product Support will be able to perform. The Privateer 2 Development team is unable to resolve the issue because movie frame rate is tied to sound. Without a supported soundcard which functions correctly, the game will not let you install. This prevents CS from ensuring the game's functionality before leaving a potential customer.

SOLUTION : Add a No sound option. Movies must be able to play without sound for troubleshooting the movie player. Origin QA has absolutely no objection to the movie frame rate being unreasonably fast or slow with this option enabled.

Mouse Control

PROBLEM : Mouse control is unusable in its current form.

ISSUE : Mouse and Joystick control are the only two options for controlling the player's ship in space. The current interface allows mouse control to function, however the interface makes this device virtually useless for control. There is no way for a player to "know," via visual key, where the mouse pointer is.

SOLUTION : Add a cursor to the screen for the mouse pointer. Without it, this control device is useless.

Targeting

PROBLEM : It is incredibly difficult for players to discern whether ships are friendly or enemy.

ISSUE : There is no visual indicator for players regarding whether a ship is hostile, friendly, or neutral. This leads to players firing on ships who are not enemies, and ignorance when ships begin attacking the player.

SOLUTION : The title bar above the target in the target VDU should be changed from "TARGET" to "Friendly, Enemy, or Neutral"

Exiting

PROBLEM : When the player wants to exit the game in Gameflow, they press ESC. When they want to exit via spaceflight, they use ALT - X

ISSUE : Most Origin games use ALT-X to exit. It has almost become an Origin standard and has worked in every Wing Game since Wing 1.

SOLUTION : Change the exit key in gameflow to ALT - X.

Pro Audio Spectrum

PROBLEM : The Pro Audio Spectrum sound card cannot be properly selected in the install program.

ISSUE : The Pro Audio Spectrum sound card cannot be properly selected in the install program, and therefore has not been tested by Origin, nor the UK test team. As the Privateer 2 Development Team wants to go final very soon, our confidence level with this card is zero, because it is not being tested. Currently, Pro Audio Spectrum customers cannot install, nor see the game.

SOLUTION : Modify the install program to correctly setup the Pro Audio Spectrum.

Movie Replay

PROBLEM : After watching a movie, there is no way to replay the movie.

ISSUE : Initial impressions by many people throughout the company have difficulty initially understanding the variety of accents throughout the game.

SOLUTION : Change the way gameflow operates to include the ability to click on characters and replay the previous movie.

Throttle Resets

PROBLEM : When jumping to a new point in spaceflight, the user's throttle value is reset to an extremely low value. This forces the player to reaccelerate at every nav point.

ISSUE : This is an item of extreme annoyance to anyone who plays the game.

SOLUTION : The game should retain the throttle value when jumping to another nav point.

Changing Settings After Installation

PROBLEM : There is currently no way to adjust sound card settings without reinstalling the entire game.

ISSUE : With a slower machine and a x2 speed CD-ROM, it can take upwards of 5 minutes to reinstall the game. If a user wants to change settings, they are forced to reinstall the entire game.

SOLUTION : Create a separate program exclusively for changing soundcard settings.

Savegame Slots

PROBLEM : The game only supports 10 savegame slots.

ISSUE : Due to the vastness of the universe, 10 savegame slots is not near enough to keep track of your progress.

SOLUTION : Implement additional savegame slots

Installation Program and Directory Creation

PROBLEM : The installation program will not create multiple directories.

ISSUE : Attempting to create C:\GAMES\DARK will yield unpredictable results.

SOLUTION : The install program should create directories within directories.

Communications Range of Planets

PROBLEM : Players must communicate with planets before they will be granted clearance to land. Players must be very close to planets before they are able to communicate.

ISSUE : Flying towards planets is a long arduous un-fun part of the game.

SOLUTION : Allow the player to communicate with the planets at a much further range.

Nav Map Interface

PROBLEM : Without extensive reading of documentation, users will be unaware of the "find" function which exists within the nav map.

ISSUE : Players are dependent on the nav map for basic travel and interaction. The nav map find function works, but currently is a bit quirky.

SOLUTION : Add a "Find" button with dialog box inside the Nav map

Toggle VDU's

PROBLEM : The VDU's in your HUD will automatically turn themselves off after a few seconds.

ISSUE : Spaceflight is most of the game. VDU's will often disappear at critical times decreasing the overall fun factor of the game.

SOLUTION : Players should have the option of having VDU's remain on indefinitely. We suggest (SHIFT - VDU key)

Mission Payment

PROBLEM : Player's do not know when they are paid for missions.

ISSUE : Without writing down each transaction, a player will not "know" they are being paid for missions. This is one of the larger complaints of Privateer I, and is easy to solve.

SOLUTION : When pirates are killed, a small message is displayed indicating the bounty the player receives. Using this same system, display the credits players receive after completing a mission.

Taunting

PROBLEM : Communicating with those around you has no effect, good or bad.

ISSUE : As most missions revolve around protecting a ship of some sort, the option to taunt or draw enemies away from what they are attacking should be implemented.

SOLUTION : Make communications to other ships have an effect, particularly taunting.

Win '95

PROBLEM : There are Win 95 specific crashers.

ISSUE : Most games currently run successfully in Win 95. The Privateer 2 Development Team indicates they have no desire to fix Win 95 crashes or problems. The issue revolves around players being able to run in Win 95, then having the game crash.

SOLUTION : The Win 95 specific crashers must be fixed, or the game must prevent itself from running under Win 95.

No Keyboard Support

PROBLEM : There is no support for the keyboard in either the Install Program or Spaceflight.

ISSUE : Having no keyboard support will eliminate a large portion of our market that either has no joystick, doesn't like the mouse, or prefers the keyboard. This will also eliminate those customers that wish to play with a mouse or joystick, but can not due to technical problems, who could have then played with the keyboard.

SOLUTION : Add keyboard support to the Install Program and Spaceflight.

Keyboard Layout

PROBLEM : The keyboard layout does not conform to the standard "Origin" keyboard, nor does it match similar games keyboard layouts.

ISSUE : Origin gamers expect games which have the Origin logo to follow previous Origin standards, one of which is the keyboard. The existing layout uses a few standards, but in many ways is totally incompatible with previous games.

SOLUTION : Adopt a more conventional keyboard layout which matches previous Origin and other space combat simulators.

Font

PROBLEM : The font, while cool, is difficult to read.

ISSUE : This point was recently quantified in a magazine review where the reviewer misread the font and reported the "CIS" as the "CI5". This is just one of multiple examples.

SOLUTION : Rework the font to be a bit more legible.

Intel Logo

PROBLEM : When starting the game, the first thing a customer sees is the "Intel Inside" logo.

ISSUE : To our knowledge, Origin is receiving no monetary compensation.

SOLUTION : Remove the logo.

Subtitles

PROBLEM : There are no subtitles for movies, nor inflight comms.

ISSUE : This restricts the audience by preventing partially deaf customers, reduces translatability, and there is no recourse for anyone having trouble understanding the accents.

SOLUTION : Add a subtitle system.

Inflight Comm Origination

PROBLEM : There is no way for players to understand which ship comms originate from.

ISSUE : Random taunts and comms occur regularly, however there is no way for the player to "know" which ship sent them.

SOLUTION : Add white brackets around ships who are communicating with the player.

Gamma Correction

PROBLEM : Gamma correction, or brightness, is not a part of Privateer 2.

ISSUE : Some of the movies are intentionally dark and seedy looking. If a customer has a problem with their monitor, they will be unable to discern the details. Most Origin games contain a gamma correction option.

SOLUTION : Add a gamma correction feature.

Explosions

PROBLEM : Explosions are the same size, regardless of distance.

ISSUE : BRender (the engine) does not support 2-D polygonal scaling.

SOLUTION : Add multiple explosions from several points on the object, simulating larger explosions.

Feedback

PROBLEM : Origin Austin does not receive feedback from EAUK.

ISSUE : To be effective, Origin must receive feedback from development. This document would be unnecessary if there were good lines of communication between Origin and EAUK.

SOLUTION : Responses to e-mail, and bug feedback would help to alleviate this problem.

EAUK Development Sticker

PROBLEM : There is no sticker signaling to the consumer that the game was developed out of house.

ISSUE : There is a difference between game made at Origin, and Origin games made out of house. Consumers know this.

SOLUTION : Add a sticker on the box. Place it right next to the "BRender" sticker.

Conclusion

While the authors have limited experience at Origin, the amount of quality and customer service issues currently in Privateer 2 : The Darkening exceeds any previous experience. With many games, Customer Service does not know a lot of the issues which will be faced. It is disconcerting to "know" many of the issues we will face before a game ships, and causes anxiety for the issues we don't yet know.

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