Comfort, Fatigue, and Frustration

A

Star Wars Outlaws

Analysis

266

Universitetet i Innlandet

2SPILL101 Game Design

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1.0 Introduction

I decided to write my game analysis on a game that has been in the corner of my eye for quite a while. Star Wars Outlaws, a game released August 30, 2024.

After buying the game in August 2025, It sat for months and months in my steam library, even though I consider myself quite the Star Wars (And most of all sci-fi) fan.
Not only do I love Sci-Fi, I also love open world games, immersive scenes, cute animals, gunplay, sneaking mechanics, and the list goes on.

So why did I not get it on release?
Why did I wait over a year to finally be able to play it?

That is the goal of this game analysis, to take a deeper look into themes of franchise fatigue, familiar and repeatedly cloned game systems, review bombing, performance on release and more.

But before we deep dive into it, I should introduce the game itself, to set the stage.
Published by Ubisoft, one of the world's largest and leading game publishing studios, and developed by Massive Games, known for their work on AC:R, FarCry 3, The Division 1-2, and Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora(A:FP).
The game was released about 8 months after A:FP, another game plagued by the same "Ubisoft and Franchise fatigue" that plagued Outlaws, and critics gave it mixed reviews to start with.

The story takes place during the time period between the Episode V and VI, and follows our heroine Kay, and her cute (and marketable), little alien creature "Nyx".
Together you play as an "outlaw" bounty hunter team, exploring several planets, and the space around them(In a ship!), while getting to know the seedy underworld of the SW universe. The game starts out with a heist gone wrong, that ends with the theft of a ship that will be your main base of operations throughout the game.

Within a few hours of starting the game, you are on the run from a powerful underworld boss, who just put a death mark on you, and will stop at nothing to take back his ship.

Star Wars is obviously one of the worlds most known multi-media franchises in the world. With a value of over 60 billion, the universe itself needs little introduction.
Wizards, magic, good and evil, the classic fantasy tale, but in space.
Movies, books, tv shows, a whole canon left behind in the aftermath of the Disney buyout, and more games than almost any other franchise, with over 130 releases since the 80s.

Star Wars is undeniably huge.

Of course, such big companies tend to have certain trademarks to their design philosophies, and Ubisoft is equally famous/infamous for their trademark style. Repetition, checklists, and a very “safe”, and known “Ubisoft formula”.

In Outlaws however, this has been stripped back, and everything from climbing towers to unlock maps, reputation and progression systems follow a different approach than most Ubisoft games like AC, or Watchdogs. I should also mention that the game has had some major updates since release, and is generally considered to have been released in an “unfinished state”.

1.1 Research Statement

How does Star Wars Outlaws utilize established open-world design patterns, and at what point does mechanical familiarity transition from player comfort into design fatigue?

2.0 Analysis Framework and Methodology

To ensure my analysis of Outlaws becomes more than just a straight review, I combine a structural gameplay analysis with attention to my own feelings around the gameplay.

This is balanced against the wider franchise context, and I try to follow Mäyrä's advice in An Introduction to Game Studies to keep the research question narrow and manageable (Mäyrä, 2008).

Following Salen and Zimmerman's Rules of Play and their "RULES–PLAY–CULTURE" model, I focus here on rules and play, with culture discussed more in detail later (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

The analysis is based on 60+ hours of play and light use of user reviews as contextual material.

3.0 Structural Cloning and “Ubisoft Fatigue”

3.1 Core Loops and Mission Structure

The core gameplay loop in Star Wars Outlaws follows heavily the open-world framework set down by a majority of other Ubisoft titles. Sure, you do not have giant towers to climb to unlock the map, but you still end up with the same familiar game loops, unlocking minigames, and trading systems.

This creates a high level of accessibility for most players, though it also results in a persistent sense of familiarity, which we will discuss later why it can be problematic.

The mission structure and world layout largely follow in the footsteps of games like Assassin's Creed. For example, the stealth takedowns in Outlaws function almost identically to the use of the Hidden Blade. Because the core verbs sneak, prompt, and execute are identical, the player experiences systemic fatigue. They aren't learning a new mechanic, but rather repeating a mastered loop in a different visual coat.

The game stays within a predictable rhythm, often sending the player back and forth between hubs to collect contracts, navigate restricted areas using stealth or combat, and clear objectives across a large map.

While this design ensures the game is easy to pick up with its aforementioned accessibility , it means the pacing and progression feel similar to other titles in the genre, which I will argue did the initial release of the game, no good.

4.0 Performance, Polish, and When Familiarity Breaks

4.1 Game Feel and Technical Reliability

So we have already talked a bit about the core loop of the game, but how do I feel about it? What has been my experience of these systems?

I was lucky enough to have hardware well above the specs, so performance was not really an issue to me. I did experience some stuttering, two random crashes, but for the most part it has been okay.

I did however struggle sometimes with not knowing if I was the reason a mission failed, or if the game was having minor hiccups. But again, nothing gamebreaking.

I found the intro missions and the journey to get your ship up and running to be okay. I like most of the cutscenes so far, and the worldbuilding is amazing.

The stealth is fun, the combat is engaging, the little sidekick is a true lifesaver.

Climbing can get a bit boring, especially since it is slow, and there is a decent amount of it.
But the worst part so far has been the forced walk from a to b when inside cities.
Often, the game forces the player into a slow 5-10 minute walk just to start a quest, only to walk back. This forced reduction in speed actively breaks the sensation of player control, which Swink (2009) argues is highly detrimental to positive game feel.

Later in the game you do unlock several variations on fast travel, which mitigates this issue considerably, but not for new story missions.

I find it important to make a note of, that when performance stays stable and inputs feel responsive, even familiar actions can still feel good, which fits with Swink's focus on "game feel" as a combination of control, physics, and feedback (Swink, 2009). "Flappy Bird" is an example of this trifecta.

4.2 Frustration Versus Comfort

At first, Outlaws' familiarity can be comforting, but over time repeated issues shift that comfort into a specific kind of "Ubisoft fatigue."

In my experience, the emotional curve of playing Outlaws moved from 'I know how this works' to 'I am tired of jumping these identical ledges in the same way again.' This perfectly aligns with Koster's (2013) Theory of Fun, which argues that once a player's brain fully masters a game's patterns, it stops learning, and the experience quickly turns from fun into boredom and fatigue.

However, I never got the same impression of the game the original reviews from release had. To me the game was never buggy and broken to the point of a nuisance.

Personally having completed the game fully now, I can truly say it was an enjoyable experience, if not a bit repetitive.

So what changed?

5.0 Player Reception and Cultural Expectations

5.1 The Ubisoft Formula

The massive cultural pull of the Star Wars franchise can temporarily mask mechanical repetition for certain player segments. However, viewing this through Mäyrä's (2008) lens of game culture, the pre-existing schema of the Ubisoft Formula being so heavily reliant on checklists and map icons creates a cultural barrier. Players highly sensitive to these ubiquitous AAA design patterns often viewed the game as messy and had little patience for the repetitive design, leading to the broader cultural discussion around 'Ubisoft Fatigue'.

This all ties well back into Salen and Zimmerman's Rules of Play, where the schemas of rules, play, and culture are discussed (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). The cloned Ubisoft formula could be considered the "Rules" of the game, while the reviewers' experience of the performance and bugs can be categorized under "Play". And lastly the "Culture" can be represented by talks around "Ubisoft Fatigue", "Franchise pull expectations, and AAA game expectations

It's also worth mentioning that many reviewers also complained about the game being too "child friendly", considering the "outlaws" part of the story, and the adult themes spread throughout.

Personally I have not found the latter to be true, but I am still early into my adventure. However, the game feels to me, incredibly lacking in execution of the "star wars seedy underbelly" vision. And you can truly feel the "Disney" stamp, mixed with a general cute and playful vibe throughout the game. Considering the theme, I do wish the game was a lot more centralized around a M rating, it would truly push this game to new heights.

Case in point. **Star Wars: Andor.**

5.2 Just needed some love?

Having deep dived into the update log of the game. The research made me aware of the patches that changed everything, and for documentation I will list them here;

List of changes made to the game after launch:

Stealth System Overhaul (Update 1.4):

The update improved enemy awareness, providing more freedom in stealth, and making the spotted grace period longer.

Combat and Weapon Improvements:

Combat Flexibility: Better explosions, added enemy weak points, and rebalanced blaster.

Weapon Management: Kay can now hold two-handed weapons found during combat while climbing or riding the speeder, reducing the reliance on temporary pickups.

Speed Combat: Improved speeder handling and allowed shooting while riding earlier.

AI and Gameplay Mechanics: Improved enemy AI, reduced enemy damage, and enabled combat in more areas of syndicate districts.

Performance and Visual Upgrades (Update 1.5.1):

Major FPS increase to users of DLSS and newer GPUs.

Quality of Life Fixes:

Improved NPC cover usage, and better quest flow to reduce mission failures.

While these changes may not seem extreme, they had a drastic impact on gameplay.

By tightening these rules such as improving AI awareness and reducing bugs, the developers successfully restored meaningful play (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

Player actions once again had discernible, fair outcomes that were previously broken by technical hiccups at launch. As this fixed version was the version I played personally, I never got to experience the limited original version.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Opening thoughts

SW:O cloned franchise design, started out giving comfort. This design choice makes the game accessible, easy and quick to learn, and digestible for all audiences. This however, can be equally bad as good, when these same familiar systems and design choices suffer from repetition, and get disrupted by bugs and performance. This can make the “comfort food”, into a true "fatigue" of both the game design and the universe franchise as well.

6.2 General Conclusion

In Star Wars Outlaws, how do “cloned” open world design patterns within large franchises, balance familiarity and being “true to form”, with franchise and game system fatigue. And in what way do bugs, performance, and reviews, affect this balance, and what does it mean to the reception of the game and its future sales.

So to answer my own research statement, after all this time. How does the design patterns balance familiarity with fatigue in Star Wars Outlaws? What are my impressions of the bugs and performance?
I will not lie, as mentioned earlier I have definitely been annoyed the few times the game crashed, and I have observed some minor glitches, but for the most part, the performance is okay, and the bugs are minimal.

Sometimes the game felt nice and familiar, like a known friend in a new coat. For example when I sneak behind a stormtrooper battalion, using my pet to get the drop on the captain, stealing his weapon, and using it to annihilate his own squad.
While other times I felt that same “Ubisoft formula” scream at me as I am climbing yellow painted railing in a giant empire ventilation facility. Timing jumps to cross giant fans, while solving puzzles that wouldn’t even stop a pre-schooler. Frustratingly falling down from making mistakes out of sheer impatience, and really just wanting the whole sequence to end.

This leads me to consider that through some of the most important major patches, they managed to resolve the issues mentioned earlier, about game breaking bugs and unbalanced stealth. The developers listened to the feedback given, and over an extra 6-8 months, they polished the game into what it has become today. Which in my opinion is a pretty decent game, still with some minor flaws, and still with the trademark familiarities of Ubisoft, but with some nice twists to it.

6.3 My final thoughts

My analysis suggests that player fatigue with Ubisoft style design is as much about execution on release and trust from the target audience, as it is about the presence of repeated systems that follow the Ubisoft formula.

And if you are ever planning on releasing a game, make sure the game is properly play-tested before, and that sometimes, spending those extra months finishing your game, and listening to the target audience feedback, can give a better outcome than relying on familiar systems and franchises.

Ultimately, the design choice to keep the game highly marketable and PG-13 created a sense of ludonarrative dissonance. The mechanical invulnerability of a cute companion like Nyx directly conflicts with the narrative stakes of surviving as a hunted outlaw in a seedy underbelly. If the franchise wishes to avoid fatigue, it must ensure the mechanical risks fit the narrative promise of the game.

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