



Behileto's Notes

An Open Letter Reflecting on a Month of Kindness and Generosity in the AoE2 Community

AoE 2 Community

- exponential growth in the AoE2 community,
- a surge in events created and promoted by many



Promoted Twitch Streamers

Liltrouble__



Vegechops



Legion_of_loom



Cbassjr713



OcarinaofEllie



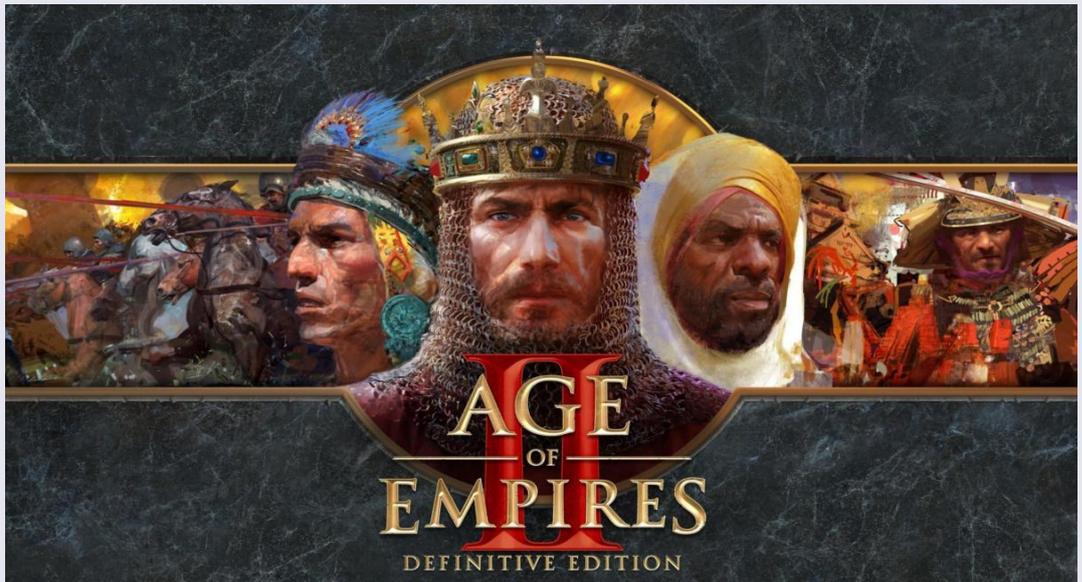
OdetteD



ShadowCrystallux



ArcaniumTitan



Dear AoE2 people.

The past few years have seen exponential growth in the AoE2 community, especially the growing number of events gathering ever increasing amounts of attention. There have been many big names, including Nili's Apartment Cup, a throwback LAN tournament, the Escape AoE Tournament, a year long event culminating in yet another LAN event, and Hidden Cup, which drew upwards of 50,000 viewers as people tried to figure out which pros were playing which in a buildup to a grand reveal.

More recently, August 2020 included the second Redbull Wolo tournament, a rare breed of sponsored competition in AoE2, which utilizes the new, fast paced Empire Wars game mode. Big name events and players have

drawn countless people into the community, myself included.

However, a community doesn't persist and resurge as long as the AoE2 community has without people dedicated to it at every level. This year, throughout the community, there has been a surge in events created and promoted by regular, small streamers, many of whom are relatively new to streaming itself, let alone organization. That alone is incredible, and it's made even better by the people.

Despite the toxic reputation that online game communities frequently garner, in my experience, the AoE2 community is largely free of garbage. I've certainly been intrigued by various online communities before, but this is the only one I've actively participated in for a prolonged period of

time, and the people are the reason for that.

With nice people, it's no surprise when kind actions, large and small, permeate throughout the community. In August, I felt that this came to a head and rapidly exceeded my already high expectations. In addition to tournaments, multiple charity events started popping up for a variety of causes.

Watching these streams was watching an entire community realize its potential, and I wasn't even able to properly view all of them. Throughout August, even during streams directly meant to help people, the positive impacts of this community's kindness and generosity manifested in unexpected ways. The following is an attempt to capture and visualize a portion of that in words.



"it's cheating to practice for a tournament and you should just yolo every game"



Community Tournaments

At the heart of the Twitch Aoe2 community is competition at every level. Thousands of viewers watch pros matching up on the ranked ladder in between facing each other in tournaments for lucrative prizepools. Competition is less fierce at lower levels, but grinding matches on the ladder is still the most common activity for smaller streamers and the past few months have seen a spike in lower-level tournaments hosted by various members of the community. Recently, off the top of my head in alphabetical order, we have and have had the ABCD Cup, the Crystal Cup, both of Legion of Loom's

Low Elo Cups, the Raiding Party Cup, the Rising Star Deathmatch Cup, and the TTTT. I firmly believe that if there's one thing which will sustain the community for the even longer run than there's already been, it's these events. The prizes for these vary, from small amounts of cash to channel roles, but beyond that, there's motivation to improve and participate with others in the community. Sometimes there's even deeper meaning as well. Out of all these tournaments, I will be focusing on Legion of Loom's Low Elo Cup 2 as its meaning to players was openly presented at its



conclusion. I'm sure there's plenty of stories just like this one from every tournament that I mentioned, including some that are still being written, but I'm sticking to what I've personally witnessed.

Full disclosure, I moderate for everyone I'm about to mention, so if anyone's going to point out bias, point to that.



Vegechop's Journey



At least one person might say that it's cheating to practice for a tournament and you should just yolo every game, but the eventual Low Elo Cup 2 winner, Vegechops, took the opposite approach. With three different coaches, erin_msr, TheGoldenRenesus, and pokeboy_782, Vegechops refined his builds and strategies for maps, resulting in excellent civilization drafts and an early, aggressive style of play distinct from the other competitors. It was so notable that one viewer donated \$50 dollars to the prize pool for, paraphrased, "the most aggressive player." The coaches would also review his opponents, explain how they played, and even mimic their style in practice. Vegechops' goal every game was to kill his opponent and kill them fast. He told me

this was motivated by not wanting to go to game 5 due to stamina concerns, and he never did, winning his first two best of 5 series in 3 games, and the last two in 4. His signatures were Ethiopians into archers on Arabia and using two petards and archers on Regicide Fortress to blast a hole into his opponent's base and raid them into submission. Even with these consistencies, Vegechops was able to change things up at the perfect moment. Before the first game of the finals on Regicide Fortress, both players drafted Mayans and Vegechops' opponent, Jive36, picked Goths as well. Vegechops had gone Mayans in previous matches, only losing to a well prepared Portuguese Organ Gun build. Jive36 went for the counter-pick, but

Vegechops anticipated this and went Aztecs. I recall watching the finals and knowing right then that Vegechops had that game. After a questionable game 2 with an Ethiopians knight switch against Jive36's Mayans, Vegechops stuck to meta civilizations he was comfortable with for the next two games to win a convincing 3-1 victory. After a range of performances from solid to dominant, Legion of Loom called his two finalists in for an interview, and not for the first time on Loom's stream, things got emotional.



Vegechop's Journey -

It was barely into the interview before Vegechops opened up about the journey above, crediting his coaches and almost offhandedly mentioning his anxiety surrounding the tournament. It could have easily progressed from there into a play-by-play of tactics in a well-fought series, but Loom picked up on what Vegechops said about anxiety and encouraged him to talk more about it.

Vegechops stated that he'd had prior issues with self-confidence from before the tournament and even wanted to quit before his first round was played. Erin_msr talked him through this, and his coaches rallied around him to ensure he was as prepared as possible for whatever came. Legion of Loom said that he'd had no

idea, and I hadn't either despite being active in Vegechops' community, seeing discussions of this exact issue come up, and even personally messaging with Vegechops about strategies and mindset going into the finals. Furthermore, Vegechops had taken a tough loss in game 1 of the semifinals, where he accidentally streamed a black screen on delay without chat, and had to adjust his stream during the break.

Despite all this, he rebounded and proceeded to dominate the next three games. These self-confidence issues could not have been less obvious from the outside, and the tournament ended up being a way for Vegechops to address them through words, then actions, and finally through words

again. Voice of a champion ladies and gentlemen.

From there, there was further discussion of these kinds of tournaments motivating and providing opportunities for players to apply themselves and improve, before then moving into the expected discussion of strategies, with both players praising each other's strengths and reflecting how much they enjoyed matching up with their opponents.

The whole tournament exemplified friendly competition, and to some, it meant even more.



"The whole tournament exemplified friendly competition, and to some, it meant even more."

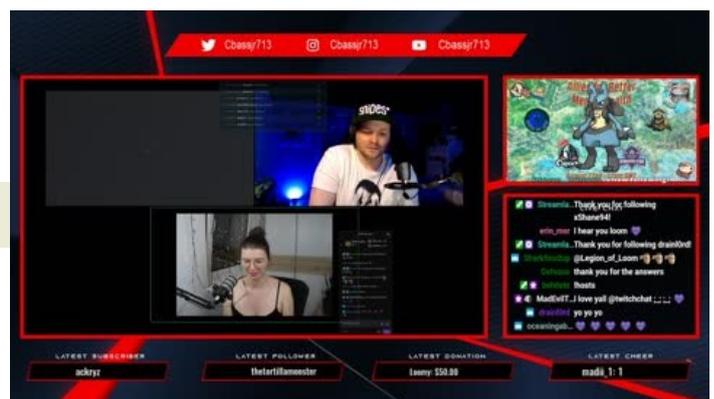
Community Support

The AoE2 community's supportiveness has always been incredible during the time I've been in it. Nearly everyone raids after they finish streaming, commands for shouting out other channels are almost standard, and there's no shortage of people willing to provide coaching free of charge out of love for the game. That alone makes for an extremely friendly community, but there's also been a strong generous streak of people gifting subs and donating.

As a result, the amount of charity streams that have popped up recently has been a relatively sudden development, as the only one I recall from all of 2019 was Aedile_Aoc's channel and events dedicated to cancer charities, but an extremely heartwarming one that

feels like a natural development. One day before the Low Elo Cup 2 Finals, CbassJr713 hosted a 24 hour stream for raising awareness and money for the Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

The whole stream was packed with showmatches, impromptu guests, including ShadowCrystallux, Salted_Pepper, and even myself at the end before I fell asleep on voice chat. The absolute highlight of the stream however, both literally and figuratively as it's a highlight on CbassJr713's stream that I've linked at the end of this document, was without a doubt the discussion between CbassJr713, Legion of Loom, and OcarinaofEllie immediately after Redbull raided with 4588 viewers.



All three of them spoke frankly about mental health and didn't ease into it. CbassJr713 started off by mentioning abuse in his past before discussing depression and worries that he might fall into abusive patterns himself, Legion of Loom discussed suicidal thoughts and actions, and OcarinaofEllie talked about thoughts of worthlessness, both internal and external. At the core of it was working to make these topics okay to discuss and removing shame associated with them. Within 20 minutes, the discussion had already thrown multiple gut punches, but for a moment, it lightened as everyone expressed their

gratitude for being part of the community and for all the friends they'd made.

However, the toughest parts were yet to come.





Behileto's Notes

Community Generosity

"when I see Legion of Loom during most streams, I see a passionate person who always commits to putting on the best show he can"

I had not watched much of CbassJr713 or OcarinaofEllie's streams before this, so I unfortunately cannot go into detail about how they previously addressed these issues on stream, though OcarinaofEllie mentioned trying not to show too much. I can however verify that this was far from the only time that Legion of Loom had addressed serious, emotional topics on stream, including his own depression. One of the major issues with understanding mental illness that was addressed during the discussion is that it's not always visible, certainly not in the ways we expect. For example, when I see Legion of Loom during most streams, I see a passionate person who always commits to

putting on the best show he can. So when he revealed having suicidal thoughts and being unsure of whether he'd make it, I was caught off guard even though Legion of Loom doesn't hide his emotions and seamlessly transitions to serious topics when needed. Making this even more poignant was one viewer permitting Legion of Loom to share a conversation they'd had and revealing that without Loom opening up on stream, this viewer wouldn't have 'made it' themselves. Even in a discussion with multiple people sharing the hardest things they've struggled with for effectively their whole lives, this moment stood out, but not because it was harder to hear than the rest of the stream. Legion of Loom openly telling thousands of people that he's not sure whether he'll 'make it' in his words, right as one of his viewers openly said that he wouldn't still be here without Legion of Loom summed up the entire reason for having this awareness stream to begin with. If that's not an example of how we can help others even if we're

struggling ourselves, I don't know what is. It's not often we get such a clear example of how sharing and reaching out can make a huge difference. My personal hope is that this awareness continues spreading, and in one case I'll discuss later, it already has. The other major success of this event was that it was part of a month long charity event which ended up raising over 1600 U.S dollars in donations, a sum that was matched by CbassJr713's workplace. The most amazing part about this however is that CbassJr713 was not the only streamer who was doing a month long charity event which raised significant amounts of money. Full disclosure, I do not moderate for anyone I'm about to mention, so if anyone's going to point out bias, you've got nothing.

Starlight Fundraiser

Without downplaying the significance of the events discussed above, which I knew I had to write about as I watched them, it's now time to move onto the event which inspired me to create this writeup in the first place, LilTrouble's Starlight Fundraiser.

The event was a wild success, raising 20,150 Australian dollars throughout August to aid sick children. For perspective on how huge that number is, LilTrouble's starting goal for the entire event was 2000 dollars, which was met on the second day of streaming. The top two donors separately met

this goal all on their own, and the three donors of over 1000 dollars combined for just under 7000 dollars of donations. 164 donors who contributed 300 dollars or less during the event combined for around 9000 dollars. 128 donors who contributed 100 dollars or less during the

event combined for around 3900 dollars.

You barely need math to tell that there was an incredible amount of generosity and that no matter how much or little was donated, it made a distinct impact. There are countless highlights I could point to dur-



ing the whole event, but the one I will focus on is the Viper versus Hera rigged showmatch, because even though it was in the middle of the Starlight schedule, I firmly believe it was the event which made 20,150 dollars possible and beyond that, showcased all the best aspects of the AoE2 community at once.

Rigged Showmatch

After it finished, I immediately started taking notes because the rigged showmatch format is as new as it is brilliant, and having TheViper and Hera as the first guinea pigs to test it immediately showcased its potential. To quickly summarize the format, viewers use channel point redemptions to enter bids for the map played, the civilizations used, buildings that the players could not build, though banning blacksmiths, barracks, castles, and economic buildings was off limits, which player deleted a

scout or starting villager, and finally the strategy that each player had to go for in the game.

There was also the potential for viewers to donate money to deny the Loom tech, no relation to Legion of Loom, from both players, or even donate mid-match to delete units or buildings. Neither TheViper nor Hera were playing for prize money.

They were dedicating their

time to the event solely to help raise money, even as it got incredibly late for TheViper.

The first match immediately showcased how unusual the series was going to be. If you haven't seen these matches but want to, stop reading here and go watch them because there will be spoilers.



Hera vs TheViper



On Not Socotra, a map with trees instead of inaccessible water, TheViper had Persians without stable going fast castle into unique units against Hera, whose Turks lacked a siege workshop and started off by trushing. TheViper bore the brunt of multiple handicaps early and ended up getting entirely walled in as he struggled to get the resources for a castle while fending off the trush.

It became apparent very quickly that these handicaps were fully capable of hampering even the best players. However, TheViper persisted and after pumping out a few war elephants, he was free to transition to Persian trashbows, which on a map surrounded by trees were effectively infinite. Without a siege workshop, Hera's pressure faltered as he was unable to push TheViper, he ended up having no counter with Turkish trash and eventually conceded the game.

The reversal in power spikes created by the showmatch rules as well as the TheViper over-

coming his initial handicaps resulted in a dramatic match complete with a satisfying comeback. The next two matches had equally novel setups, though the format's limitations showed as Hera resigned after failing a Gothic TC douche on Land Madness before TheViper could execute yet another fast castle into unique unit strategy, and TheViper dominated an Inca trush war where neither player was permitted to research Loom, the technology, not the streamer. Moving away from early game focus, the fourth game had both players execute Imperial Age strategies on Regicide Fortress with TheViper going Spanish Supremacy villagers while Hera went Chinese Heavy Scorpions with Rocketry, but no universi-ty for additional upgrades.

Further complicating both players' builds was a mid-game donation forcing both players to delete 10 units upon advancing to Castle Age, without their knowing this would happen, which hilariously resulted in both of them asking if deleting



their king was permitted. Despite the vast difference in strategy, the game ended up surprisingly even with Hera pushing first with siege, TheViper reversing with numbers and even gaining the upper hand before Hera mixed in light cavalry for a meatshield and TheViper declined to adapt, giving Hera a win to close out the series.

While the showmatch was intended to last five games total, regardless of who won, with TheViper being up late and audibly growing exhausted, LilTrouble made an admin decision to call the showmatch after game four.

Despite the early finish, bids and donations strictly related to rigging the showmatch raised 1743 dollars all on their own. The whole series was incredibly entertaining and a resounding success both in terms of content and money raised, even without a game 5.

“bids and donations strictly related to rigging the showmatch raised 1743 dollars all on their own”





“There were so many different forms of kindness being displayed all at once”



Showmatch Aftermath

While recapping a showmatch and its setup might not seem directly relevant to the larger charity event, I feel it's important to provide some lead in to what happened next. After the series concluded, both TheViper and Hera raided LilTrouble's stream, signaling that they were indeed finished playing.

However, the viewers quickly started brainstorming and inquiring about potential substitute content for a game 5. The immediate focus was on a 500 dollar donation which inquired about possibly getting TheViper or Hera to sing for the combined audience. Going along with the request, LilTrouble sprang the idea on the players, assuring them that there was no pressure.

With his incredible deadpan wit intact despite exhaustion, TheViper pointed out that the donation was to inquire about singing, not to actually sing, and set his price at an additional 500 dollar donation. Some audience members tried to coordinate this donation, but were

unable to on short notice. With TheViper out of the running for providing music to the audience, focus turned to Hera with LilTrouble asking if he'd sing.

After a pause, Hera let everyone know that he appreciated the support shown for charity and didn't want to disappoint people after they'd given so much, but he simply wasn't comfortable singing in front of so many people. It was obvious that he really wanted to help put on a good show for charity and Hera regularly streams for an audience of thousands, so if he was uncomfortable with having to sing on stream, it clearly wasn't something he took lightly.

Rather than leaving it there however, LilTrouble asked about other things that he might be more comfortable doing and it didn't take long to settle on Hera drawing a hilarious picture of TheViper in a clown outfit in MSPaint. Not long after that, the stream wound to close and LilTrouble got to do her first stream rerun.

The amount of mutual respect between everyone during these moments was nothing short of incredible. The players respected that the viewers had donated so much to charity and had requests that they were hoping to have honored, the viewers immediately accepted when the players weren't comfortable fulfilling said requests, LilTrouble guided the stream so that alternate content requests could be fulfilled while still respecting the players' boundaries, and there was never any pressure on anyone to step out of their comfort zone.

While this showmatch was, again, scheduled in the middle of the Starlight event, it felt like a culmination of the community coming together with incredible generosity and respect from all participants. There were so many different forms of kindness being displayed all at once, and I was more deeply moved by the Aoe2 community than I'd ever been up to that point. However, there was more to come for me before August ended.

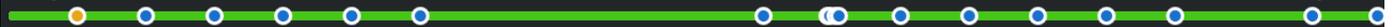
14 for Starlight

Starlight Children's Foundation Australia

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Raised
A\$20,150.00

Goal
A\$20,000.00



Everything I've typed so far has been a recounting with some analysis or opinion mixed in. While I've made sure to contact every person who I've written about to ensure what I've said is accurate, one phrase I've heard over and over is that we don't know the impact that we have on others.

After everything that happened in August inspiring me to write this piece, which is a substantial impact all on its own, I think trying to help people visualize their impact on others is a worthwhile endeavor. Obviously, the only person I'm even remotely qualified to gauge the community's impact on is myself, so if you, yes you reading this, don't mind, I'd like to talk about me. It's not something that comes naturally, so I thank you for your patience.

“we don't know the impact that we have on others”



Feeling Sick

“The ability to switch from ridiculous banter to heartfelt conversation was a remarkable one”



The events I've recounted so far have, funnily enough, been listed in reverse order of occurrence. Now I'd like to jump forward a couple days past all of them. One way LilTrouble mixes things up is playing Jackbox Party games with viewers, and part of the Starlight schedule was a stream dedicated to that as well as Truth or Dare questions, which ended up being Truth and Dare questions. For context, leading up to this stream, I hadn't had a full night's sleep in over a week, and while there were jokes about LilTrouble taking vinegar shots and eating a chili, I effectively did that for my last meal and my stomach was hurting. Furthermore, after months and months of lockdown and unemployment, I couldn't help wondering if maybe I'm only in this community because I don't feel

like I have anywhere else to go.

It's a thought I've had consistently, and when it gets too strong, I just log off for a week before coming back as though nothing happened. At that point, I was thinking this was overdue, but I'd log off after August because I didn't want to miss Starlight. Overall, it had been a bad day and I entered stream ready to vent a bit with some nasty answers in Jackbox's Quiplash. As the stream went on however, donations rolled in, and for every \$20, a new truth and dare was shared and viewers were encouraged to share their own experiences. A few of these involved embarrassment and insecurities, and I ended up revealing a few things about myself, including my concerns that my ridiculous humor actually pushes people

away from me, as well as my seeming inability to form actual connections with people in real life.

The ability to switch from ridiculous banter to heartfelt conversation was a remarkable one, and so was the response that I got. LilTrouble said in no uncertain terms that my comments were hilarious, and others chimed in with support as well. After a round of Jackbox's dating game where I got into a relationship so exclusive, I wondered whether part of it wasn't even banter afterwards (It was all banter. I got that cleared up for me.), and a final game of Quiplash, I was feeling so much better than I thought I possibly could have and deeply appreciated how much support the community had given me in the moment.

The Punchline

That's the setup, now for the punchline. The next morning, or technically the same morning as my sleeping issues persisted and I'd been up late enjoying the relief of not feeling as awful as I did, I tuned into Odette's stream as I hadn't watched much due to changes in scheduling. It was wrapping up and Odette had already finished playing for the day, so the chat turned to a relatively light discussion about anxiety and depression, its causes, chemical and otherwise, and some personal anecdotes.

Having moderated for a charity stream about that topic just a few days earlier, I brought up Legion of Loom's monologue during CbassJr713's charity stream, how powerful the shared stories were, and how Legion of Loom's openness had literally saved a life. It was at that moment that who else but Legion of Loom himself showed up in the chat. I always say that the key to comedy is timing. I value it highly.

Right then, Legion of Loom had the best timing I've ever seen. I reiterated what I'd just said about him and congratulated him for speaking up and making a difference in other's lives. He immediately turned it around and told me how much I meant to him and the community and thanked me for everything I do. It's hard to express in words how validating this was, and it wasn't just what Loom said, it was the context around it.

“it wasn't just what Loom said, it was the context around it”



“my defenses were weaker than a Regicide Fortress base with Vegechops across from it”

The Punchline

I'd just been reassured about my insecurities during an emotional night by LilTrouble and her chat, and while I appreciated it and it made me feel better, I also had nagging thoughts that it was at least partly due to reassuring someone in the moment being the right thing to do. I'm not saying that I believe anyone in that chat was anything but genuine, it's just a stubborn thought in my own head.



However, Loom got me in the aftermath of the moment when my defenses were weaker than a Regicide Fortress base with Vegechops across from it, and when I couldn't dismiss the reassurance as simply being the right thing to do. With that context, setup, and delivery, I straight up started crying. Even after typing this exact same story out in multiple direct messages, including to Loom himself, I've still gotten emotional as I've retold it. If I ended up in a weird Saw franchise situation where I had to cry on command to defuse a bomb strapped to my head, I'd think about my family missing me first, and what Loom said to me second. Other contenders are the 27th episode of Heavyweight and videos of animals trying to wake up their dead friends.

It worked just writing this sentence, so I'd be safe. I can't think of many times I've cried tears of joy. Crying for me has been exceedingly rare, and always associated with trauma. The last time was in a professor's office after I realized that I'd blown a test through lack of sleep, had another test coming up in two days, and my memory, something I pride myself on, was failing due to the stress.

I wasn't expecting this pattern to be shattered ever, much less in an online community, and there was a special significance to this interaction occurring in Odette's chat. In order to appreciate a journey, you have to know where it started, so allow me to go back and explain.

Origin

I've always thought of the internet as a detached thing where there's distance between interactions and people. I treated it accordingly with a detached, snarky attitude where I would say whatever I thought would amuse me the most in the moment or get a laugh. Odette's chat is the place I've done that and vented more than anywhere else on the internet, and then some.

I joined the Twitch community through TheViper's YouTube channel via ZeroEmpires' YouTube channel. I enjoyed TheViper's streams as he's an incredibly talented player and entertainer, but what I liked was chatting with people, which is difficult to do in larger streams with hundreds, if not thousands,

of people. I started gravitating towards smaller streams, and the one I settled on was Odette's stream, which I found through her Extreme Streamer Showdown match with the TheViper, and followed after she had TheViper sing Big Enough on her stream. If you haven't seen the epic performance, I've linked the video on her YouTube channel and you should definitely be sure to like and subscribe because it's a performance for the ages that I'm grateful is preserved.

During Spring 2019, I was in my last term of college, just waiting to graduate and hopefully find a job. I had next to no social connections with my peers and my professors were all certain I should go to gradu-

ate school even though I openly didn't want to.

They weren't trying to be anything but encouraging, but it seeded so much doubt in my mind about whether I was making the right choices. That combined with isolation and an infuriating class that I stuck with due to the sunk cost fallacy meant I was consumed with self-loathing.

This frustration consistently boiled over in Odette's chat, which was one of a very limited number of outlets I had, and one of the only ones that didn't involve making myself feel awful about things that didn't matter so I could more easily ignore ones that did. I don't know how the moderators and Odette herself had patience for

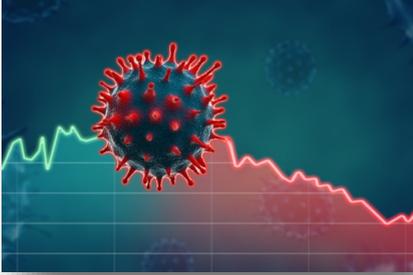
the endless amount of garbage I spewed at no one in particular, especially since Odette, being the streamer, got caught in the crossfire more than once. I can think of several incidents, which I won't go through here, but I nevertheless was allowed to stay and participate without judgment.

Later on, I graduated, got a job, my self-loathing disappeared from my choices being validated at long last, and I was ready and content to leave the AoE2 community behind.

Then the pandemic hit.



Growth



*"I suck at everything.
Make me a mod."*

I've effectively been on lockdown since February 2020, and my job's contract expired in April, so I've been without work and only had about three interviews. Needless to say, I haven't had a lot to do. I've picked up various skills with graphic design and piano that I'd always wanted, but never felt I had time to do before, and I've been safely at home, so I can't complain except for one thing. I had just started branching out socially after literal years of cutting myself from others, but that wasn't an option anymore.

Without knowing where else to go, I migrated back to Twitch and the AoE2 community after being confident I'd left it behind. I started participating again in various channels I'd followed a while back and started finding many new ones as well. I landed a moderator position in ShadowCrystallux's channel by typing, "I suck at everything. Make me a mod." at an opportune moment, and from there I started gradually getting modded in a variety of other streams to the point that me being modded everywhere is a running gag. I felt that this time I'd earned my acceptance into the AoE2 community and I was talking to a lot more people.

While occasionally I'd disappear for days to do other things or get anxious pangs in my stomach that I was forgetting things while endlessly watching streams, I felt that for the first time in years, I'd made positive steps towards improving my mental state and treatment of others. Then a chat log got posted to Odette's Discord channel. Out of morbid curiosity, I spent hours reading my old messages. After I'd gotten through all of them, I was not only disgusted, but also distinctly unnerved. The way I'd described my mental state in May 2020 was that I was at the best that I've been in the last 4 years. This was obviously untrue, but even worse was the fact that I used that phrase again, verbatim, to describe my mental state after getting my job.

I don't have the chat logs past April 2020 to look back on, but I have repeatedly described my mental state the exact same way then as well. Furthermore, I noticed a comment I didn't



remember making where I mocked Odette's stream content and quipped that I couldn't wait until I got a new job. Being frustrated with not having a job is one thing, but the fact that I took it out on someone after I thought I'd moved past doing that threw the entire narrative I had for myself into complete disarray. How could I say I'd improved at all if I was still behaving exactly the same and repeating the same lines? To their immense credit, multiple users as well as Odette hopped in to talk me through this, and I did end up feeling better, but not as good as before I'd read my old comments.

This exchange occurred at the end of July, so being there in Odette's chat a few weeks later to genuinely express emotions of gratitude was special. My

persona in that chat for the longest time was couched in snark and as devoid of emotion as I could get it, so after having my personal story of myself shattered because of how I didn't change, being there to experience something I objectively hadn't before had a distinct impact.

I never would have admitted to someone making me cry in that chat back in May, and that fact meant I was able to start building a new, better narrative in place of my old one.

Where I go from here remains to be seen, but there are some things I'm already looking forward to.

Charity Events

It's September now and the amount of times I have asked, "Wait, what happened?" has been too great to count recently. So many events are happening, charity and otherwise. CbassJr713 is competing in and running tournaments and showmatches day by day, ShadowCrystallux and ZeroZabias' three Crystal Cup brackets are still ongoing, as is Brisolyn's Rising Stars Deathmatch Cup. Legion of Loom has started a new stream event called Legion of Talk where he brings on guests to talk openly about tough, personal issues, much like on Cbassjr713's 24 hour charity stream.

The first episode is about alcoholism, drug addition, and living a straight-edge lifestyle, and it's up on Twitch now and will be on YouTube as well. Links are included below. I personally had an unexpected heart to heart talk with so many of my favorite people on my own stream, which is again linked below if anyone wants to hear what my crying actually sounds like. To save you time skipping through the highlight, the heart to heart is about 2 hours in with level design before then.

Regarding charity events, and narrowing it down to only people I've already mentioned, Vegechops and OcarinaofEllie both have upcoming charity events planned.



"I'm very optimistic that both these causes will be embraced as well"



OcarinaofEllie has a 12 hour charity stream scheduled for September 27th from 2-3 PM to 2-3 AM CET where she will be raising money for the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF) as well as awareness for the plight of animals.

Donations during this stream will go towards the IAPF investing further in community-driven conservation models, empowering disadvantaged women to restore and manage large networks of wilderness alongside their local communities, and developing alternative economic models to trophy hunting. Their goal is to employ 1,000 female rangers by 2025 and protect a network of 20 nature preserves under their management.

Vegechops has an approximately 8 hour charity stream planned for early-mid October to raise money for the Palliative Care unit at St. Mary's hospital in Montreal.

Vegechops began volunteering at the unit due to a past interest in becoming a nurse, but realizing that he couldn't due to physical constraints. He still wanted to give however, and with his empathy and listening skills, found a niche where he could assist and listen to people during their last days. He was often one of the last people that patients would see and served as an outlet for their life stories, like a last breath to show that their life had meaning and that they had lived to their fullest.

Donations to the stream will allow the program to invest in patient activities, including art and music, obtain different materials and machinery, and create spaces where the patients can spend time without feeling like they're just in a hospital. After seeing how the community has rallied around various charity streams already, I'm very optimistic that both these causes will be embraced as well.

St. Mary's
HOSPITAL
Center
CARING THROUGH EXCELLENCE



Highlights



"I couldn't be more grateful that everyone placed their trust in me and hearing back from all of them gave me all the motivation I could possibly need to keep going."

Outside of this writeup, mostly, Debbie has had charity events running to raise money for a dog protecting organization called Pfothenilfe Sauerland, which featured a, wait for it, rigged showmatch between the TheViper and Joadn_105, and has a currently postponed talk planned between Hera, TheViper, Lil-Trouble, Odette, SarahOnFire and Lidakor, which I'm really hoping can get rescheduled.

To put it mildly, August does not appear to be a fluke for the number of amazing events occurring in the Aoe2 community, and I can't possibly do them all justice here. Therefore, I encourage everyone reading to let others know about new events. I hope I've done enough throughout this writeup to illustrate what just raising awareness and reaching out can do, and in case

I haven't, I want to give final shoutouts to everyone I've dedicated paragraphs to. I reached out to LilTrouble, Vegechops, Legion of Loom, Cbassjr713, OcarinaofEllie, and Odette asking for permission to write about them and sent all of them drafts of their sections ahead of time. Every one of them responded with their blessing and offered what help they could with Vegechops and OcarinaofEllie also providing me with their charity stream details and motivations ahead of time.

I couldn't be more grateful that everyone placed their trust in me and hearing back from all of them gave me all the motivation I could possibly need to keep going. And while I don't mean to single anyone out, I have to also give an extra special shoutout to LilTrouble, who did more than just inspire this writeup. The

statistics on the Starlight donations were all provided by her, and immediately after I commented about doing a writeup, she messaged me offering whatever help or information she could. This initial encouragement, before I'd even written anything yet, in the immediate aftermath of the Slam versus Fire rigged showmatch, ensured that this writeup would happen. I cannot overstate how much all this has meant to me throughout the process and how cathartic writing everything down has been. A year ago I was ready to leave this community and not look back. I now want it to be a part of my life forever and ever.

I love you guys 

Sincerely behileto

P.S. One of my favorite memories of returning to this community was everyone writing limericks in LilTrouble's stream. So I wrote one below.

For rigged showmatches, viewers made bids.

Sending their aid to players and kids.

***From this it became
much more than a game.***

And a place for our kindest of ids.

Feel free to share and redistribute this writeup as you, yes you, see fit. It's been released to the public, so there's no point in restricting it



I have a Twitch stream too if anyone's interested.

<https://www.twitch.tv/behileto>



The stream I mentioned.

<https://www.twitch.tv/videos/741542990>



If you want to contact me, give feedback, or let me know if I made an impact, I have a Discord server.

<https://discord.gg/cWxbqmz>



I'm also trying to make video games.

<https://ngeentertainment.itch.io/>

Honorable Mentions

LilTrouble



https://www.twitch.tv/liltrouble_



https://www.youtube.com/Liltrouble_AoE

Charity

https://tiltify.com/@liltrouble_/14-for-starlight

Vegechops



<https://www.twitch.tv/vegechops>

<http://www.smhc.qc.ca/en/departments-programs/cancer-care/cancer-care-fund-services>

Charity

<http://www.smhc.qc.ca/en/departments-programs/cancer-care/volunteer-team>

Legion of Loom



https://www.twitch.tv/legion_of_loom



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEnKHHQK6aDpBN1o3-iPPaQ>

Legion of
Talk Pt 1

<https://youtu.be/tD6YuHLpeU>

Cbassjr713



<https://www.twitch.tv/cbassjr713>

Charity

<https://adaa.org/>

Depression
and anxiety
awareness
talk

<https://www.twitch.tv/videos/725949003>

Honorable Mentions

OcarinaofEllie



<https://www.twitch.tv/ocarinaofellie>

Charity

<https://www.iapf.org/>



Odette



<https://www.twitch.tv/odetted>



<https://www.youtube.com/user/CODeshayes>

Big Enough

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xang0aBpSvs>



ShadowCrystallux

because while he's not a focus in this writeup, I wouldn't have gotten to this point without him



<https://www.twitch.tv/shadowcrystallux>



https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCszHtrKrZvf2kb6H_8QRh5Q



Arcanium Titan

who did the Definitive Edition of this writeup



<https://www.twitch.tv/arcaniumtitan>

