

Casual Mode

Intro

Heroes of Newerth is a very intensive experience. While much of our player base appreciates the “hardcore” nature of the game, it serves as a significant entry barrier for new players and a detriment for those who prefer to play in a relaxed, casual atmosphere. As a mitigating factor to the intense nature of HoN's gameplay, we provide Easy Mode as an alternative for players seeking a more relaxed, fluid gameplay experience. We are, however, unhappy with Easy Mode, which was ported over to match DotA's Easy Mode, and are not confident that it delivers anything close to what it should. The following will outline what we feel can be offered to players by an alternate game mode, how DotA's Easy Mode fails to deliver those things, and finally, what HoN Casual Mode is and how it *will* deliver those things. It is important to keep in mind that a viable alternate mode to Normal Mode HoN should be consistent with the core game; players who play Normal Mode and an alternate mode should be able to translate skills consistently from one to the other, and switch between the two seamlessly based on current preferences.

Why Does HoN Need an Alternate Mode?

Heroes of Newerth, for all of its wonderful qualities, comes inexorably tied to several traits that are undesirable to certain player demographics:

- HoN is extremely punishing. A player is punished far more for making a mistake than he is rewarded for making a good choice. This results in passive, safe play, and the popular use of heroes and items that are deemed as “reliable.”
- Progression in HoN is slow and meticulous. Gold must be earned bit by bit. Experience must be gained over time, and can even be denied from you by the enemy, slowing the process down further! You have to spend tens of minutes farming to get a cool item, and if you're having a bad game, you won't get one at all.
- HoN does not maximize fun for *everyone*. A team playing to win will often designate one or more of its players as support- players who sacrifice their effectiveness and “fun” in order to enable their team to win. It's never fun being gimped and the weakest in the game, and to provide the proper support a team needs all alone, a player will put himself in that position- and it happens every game.
- HoN games take a really long time. It is a significant time investment, and most of it is spent building up to action and climax.

With the above negatives in mind, we can analyze how Easy Mode has tried to mitigate the problems, but fails to do so in a way that is both effective and remains true to the core of the game.

Easy Mode's Shortcomings

Easy Mode attempts to rectify the above issues with HoN for the casual gamer through the following differences:

- All experience gained is multiplied by 1.5
- Natural gold gain through ticks is doubled

- Towers are weaker in Easy Mode

Those few changes are aimed primarily at speeding up the game and accelerating progression. While Easy Mode games are on average shorter than Normal Mode games, the result is achieved along with a bastardization of the core game that has led to a massive stigma being placed on Easy Mode players within the community. Let's look at the changes one by one, and analyze the positive gameplay shifts they provide as well as the new problems they present.

- Experience Boost:
 - **Positives:** Heroes level up a lot more quickly in Easy Mode because of this change, allowing players to more quickly achieve levels at which they feel strong enough to make aggressive maneuvers. The tedious early phase before players gain their full arsenal of abilities is fast-forwarded through.
 - **Negatives:** Heroes level up at 1.5 times the rate they normally do *for the entire game*. That means people almost always end games at a point in which everyone is max level. A huge problem occurs in that the early phase is not the only one that's put in fast-forward; the juicy, action-packed mid-game in which players have varying builds of skills and items, and the period of time in which player choice and action contributes the most toward defining the outcome of the game, is also fast-forwarded through. It's almost like a run-away train- it gets to where you want to go, and then zooms right on past.
- Natural Gold Gain Doubled:
 - **Positives:** The rate of progression in items is increased, allowing players to obtain more and shinier items.
 - **Negatives:** The bonus is uniform across all players; it benefits newbs who do absolutely nothing as much as it benefits a player who's playing great and getting tons of hero and creep kills. While the mode should be more casual friendly, it should *not* aim to lower the skill gap. This change not only fails to incentivize player action and reward player skill, but also dilutes the relative significance of earning gold through creep and hero kills.
- Weaker Towers:
 - **Positives:** New players die less to accidentally wandering into tower range due to lower tower lethality. Towers are easier to take on and kill, resulting in more effective pushes and quicker game finishes.
 - **Negatives:** Towers are there to *protect* players from over-aggressive enemies. New players should be able to be and feel safe at a tower like they would in Normal Mode, and use it as a platform from which they can branch out. This is also a huge inconsistency between Normal and Easy Modes that teaches Easy Mode players to adopt tactics and tendencies that simply do not apply in Normal Mode.

All of the negatives add up to a massive problem. Easy Mode players develop into very different players from Normal Mode players, to the point that when they do play Normal Mode, they are considerably less effective. Because they are used to a fast-forwarded game through all phases, they get less experience with the highly important and action-packed mid-game. They might be out of position and unaware when they are needed to help the team out, instead thinking they can just sit in a lane and ride the train straight from early to end game. These players also become accustomed to the lower reward ratio for creep and hero kills relative to just staying alive and hauling in gold ticks, and then are disappointed and frustrated at their massively decreased gold income in Normal Mode. The

negative stereotype of Easy Mode players within the community might be exaggerated, but it definitely has basis. Players who spend most of their time in Easy Mode develop a vastly different set of skills than those who spend their time in Normal Mode. Due to the difference, Easy Mode players do not often see their success in Easy Mode translate to success in Normal Mode HoN.

Casual Mode

When we decided to revamp the alternate mode for Heroes of Newerth, we quickly abandoned the idea of amending the flaws in Easy Mode. It is just too flawed and simple beyond reconciliation. With the decision to start from scratch made, we laid out very specific goals to construct the mode around:

- Fast, action-packed, accessible gameplay
- Rapid progression through the tedious phases, but retains the juicy mid-game phase in full
- Less punishment, more rewards
- Gold income increased to reflect the desire of casual players to amass cool items, but still retains its linkage to good play
- Maximize intuition
- Maintain consistency in mechanics and gameplay decisions between Normal Mode and Casual Mode

Those goals were all made around the philosophy that Casual Mode should be a different *mode*, not a different game, and that it should be quick, easy to pick up for new players, and fun for both the winning and losing teams. Some of the most noteworthy and exciting changes we have planned for Casual Mode to those ends are:

- **Denies in Casual Mode do not deny experience.**
 - It's frustrating enough to have a skilled opponent deny you gold and control the engagement location with denies. Practically having your level advancement halted in the process is utterly crippling, especially to new and casual players who just want to progress and enjoy the RPG experience in full.
- **Everything in the game is worth more gold. EXCEPT gold ticks.**
 - Completely reversing what Easy Mode did, we are rewarding player actions (landing last hits on creeps, landing and assisting in hero kills, taking down enemy towers) by globally increasing gold bounties. Gold ticks remain identical to Normal Mode, so players are incentivized (perhaps even more so than in Normal Mode!) to take action and get 'er done.
- **Assists give significant gold rewards.**
 - Kill-stealing arguments will become less heated, and support heroes will be able to get items as we look to reward those who enable their allies to own. Every team needs an enabler, and he should be handsomely rewarded for his work.
- **No gold loss on death.**
 - Currently, in HoN Normal Mode and Easy Mode, if two players trade kills (barring bonus gold gained from streaks or bloodlust), gold is *taken out of the game*. That is, each player actually **LOSES** more gold than he gains from the kill exchange. Not only does this dynamic slow down game progression as teams continuously trade blows and gold is taken out of the game, but it can also bestow a very frustrating “treading water” feeling to players who earn some gold from taking part in action and then dying. The casual game should be about “what's my next move to pull off an awesome kill on that guy?” and not “I need to

farm safely and not die at all costs.”

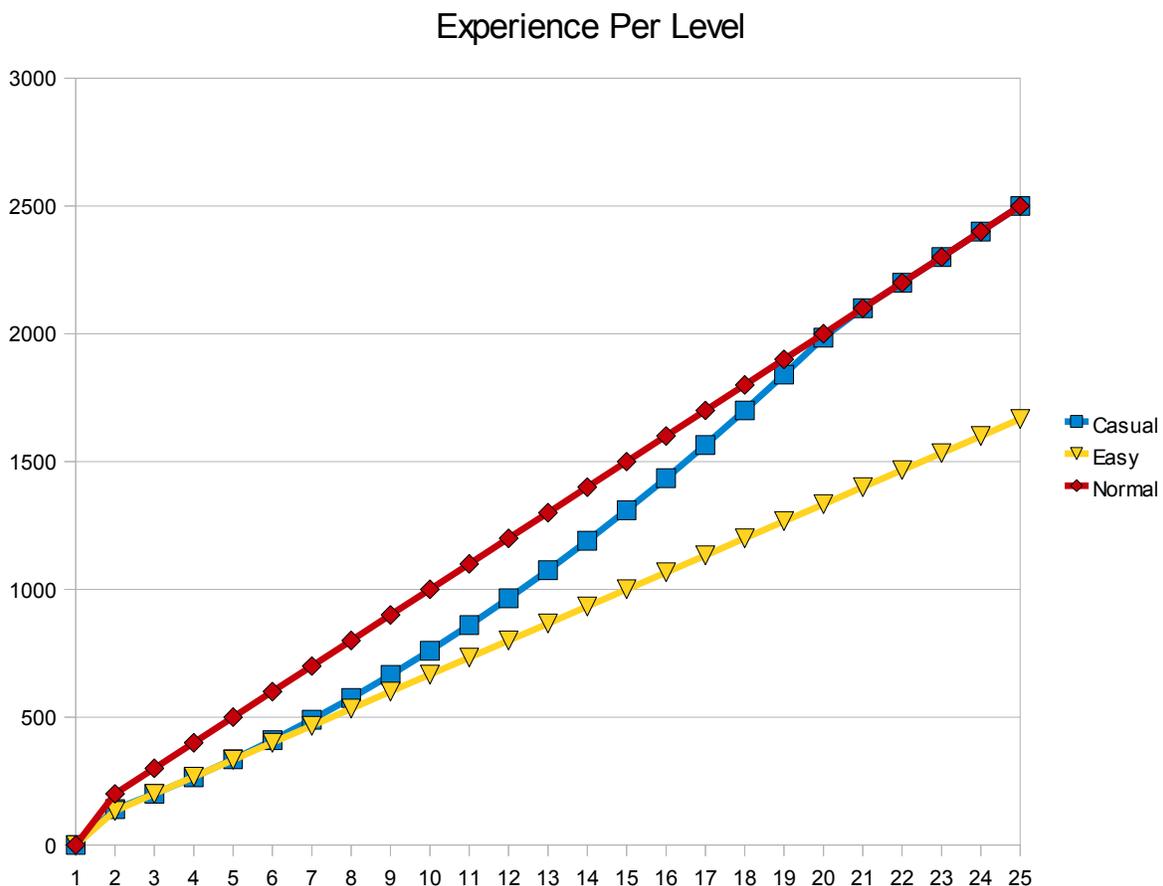
- **Randomness mitigated.**

- A casual player does not care that a creep has a range of gold bounties that it can give, and that a particular creep has given you above-average gold. Nor does he want to deal with the fact that his ranged attack has a chance to miss while attacking uphill, potentially making him miss out on a creep or even hero kill. Casual mode will feature a massive cutback on randomness, making the game more straightforward and intuitive for players.

- **Level up experience curve changed to no longer be linear.**

- Easy Mode accelerated player level progression by universally increasing the experience amounts gained. Casual Mode will approach it from the opposite angle, by altering the amount of experience a player needs to gain to achieve the next level. What this allows us to do is to diverge from the linear level up numbers in Normal Mode, and provide a means to retain the early phase fast-forward of Easy Mode without having the run-away train effect that zips through the mid-game. To help illustrate the effects of this change, view the following graphs. Please note that since Easy Mode increases experience gained to 150%, to normalize our metrics we multiplied the experience required for Easy Mode levels by 0.66.

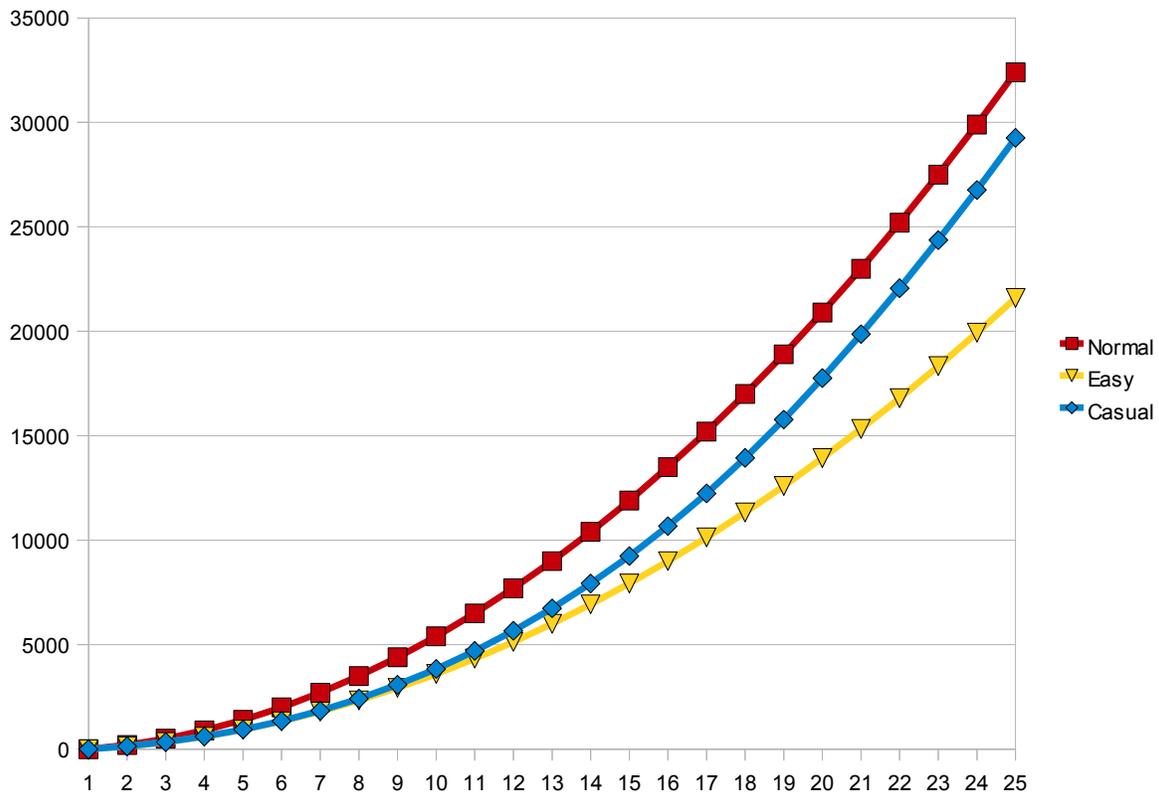
Graph 1: Experience Required per Level



Graph 1 displays the amount of experienced required to attain each level from the previous one. Up until level 9, the Casual and Easy lines are practically identical. However, Casual's non-linear shape causes it to diverge from Easy, just in time to preserve the juicy mid-game section of the game, and by level 19 completely aligns it with Normal.

Graph 2: Total Experience Required to be at Each Level

Total Experience By Level



Graph 2 displays the amount of total experience required to be at each level. As in Graph 1, we can see that Casual and Easy are almost identical in the early levels. The massive disparity between Easy and Casual can be easily seen at the end of the graph, at level 25. While the amount of experience required to achieve level 25 in Easy Mode is 66% of the amount required in Normal Mode, the amount to achieve 25 in Casual Mode is over 90% of what is required in Normal Mode.

Going Forward

Casual Mode is our attempt at constructing a specific set of changes to Normal Mode in order to deliver the things that we've determined to be important to a casual or new player's experience. Far from the simplicity and clumsiness that define the Easy Mode which HoN inherited from DotA, Casual Mode is a robust and meticulously planned set of gameplay tweaks that will continuously be examined and improved upon. It will serve to be something far more than just a platform on which new players learn the great game that is Heroes of Newerth, and something that is far superior to the bastardization of core gameplay that is DotA's Easy Mode. Casual Mode will be a persisting alternative for all kinds of players of vastly varying skill levels, an alternative that provides a different atmosphere and suits a different mood than Normal Mode but remains true to the core gameplay that defines Heroes of Newerth. We are very excited about Casual Mode, and can't wait to provide it to our player base. We are, however, even more excited about playing Casual Mode ourselves!