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# It's Gonna Hurt: Metagame Management in War Robots

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# The Speaker



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Executive Producer  
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- 4 years in Product Analytics in F2P
- 4 years as Executive Producer

# War Robots

- A **top tier** F2P tactical shooter
- More than **300M** registered users
- Players from every country in the world
- Top markets: **US, CN, EU, JP**
- Total revenue: more than **\$1B**



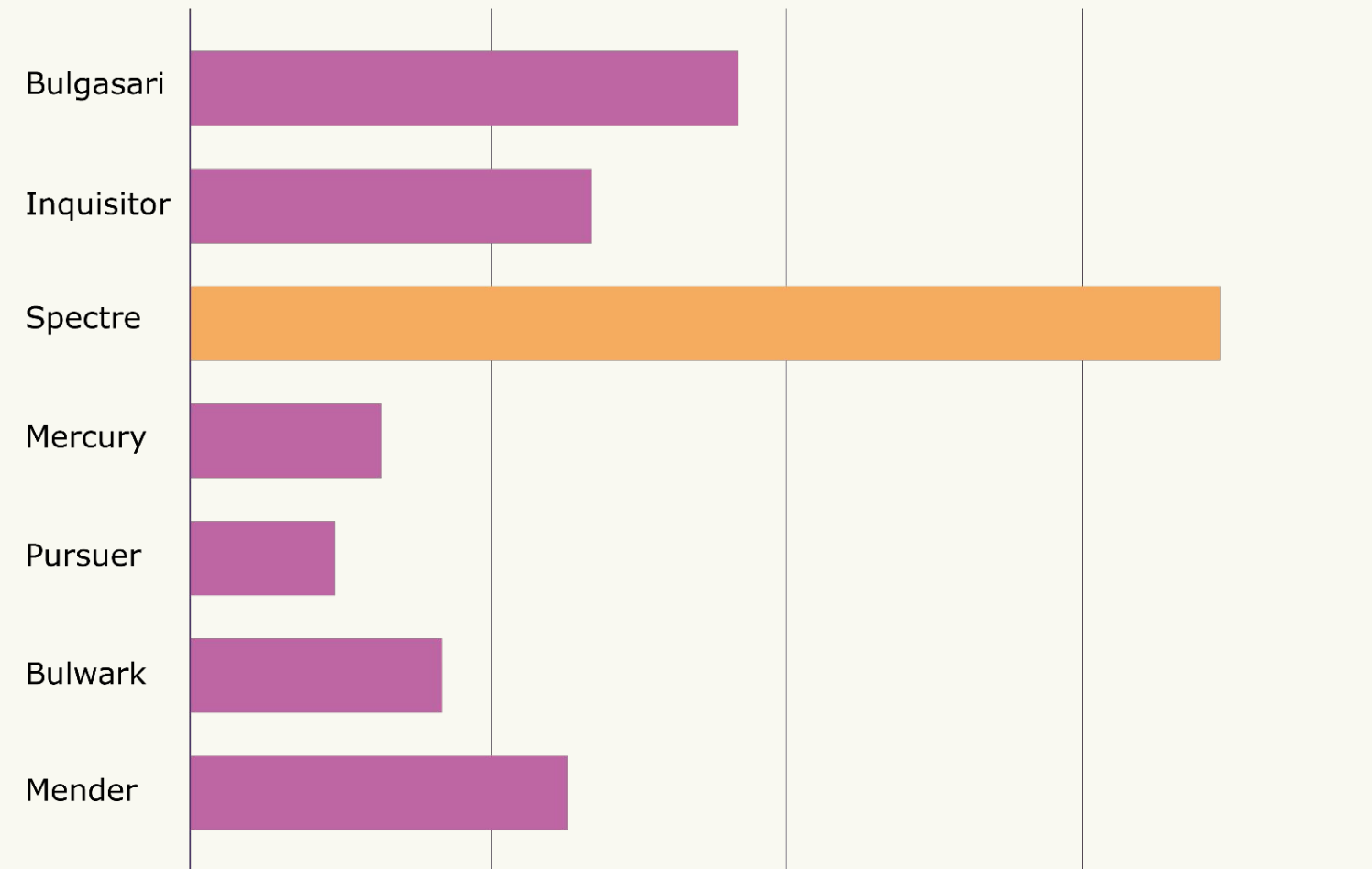
# War Robots

- **More than 10 years** in operation
- **Millions** of players have played for more than 2 years
- **Hundreds of thousands** of players have been with us for more than five years
- Thousands still play War Robots **since the first year** of the game



# “The Spectre Problem”

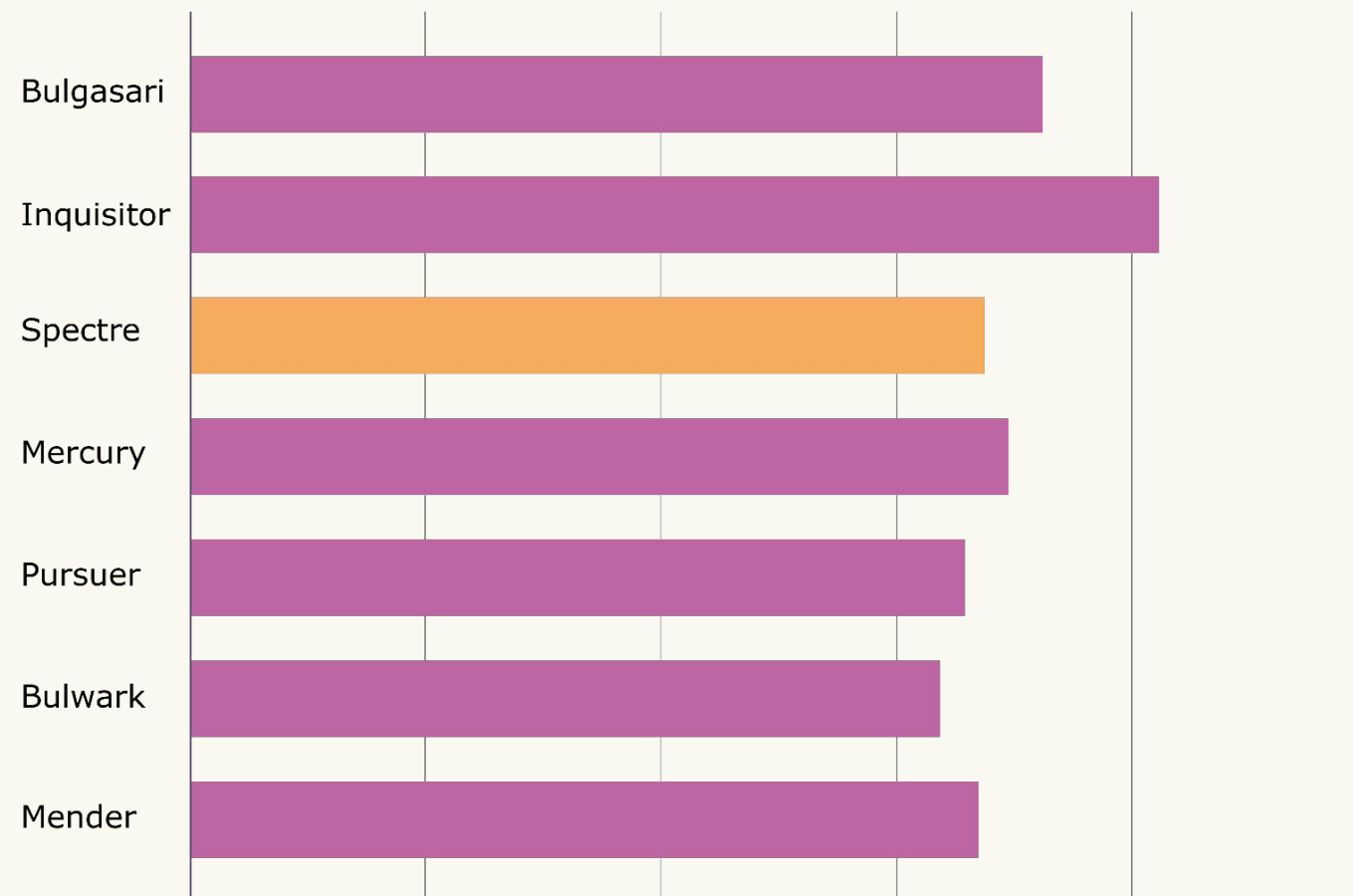
# The Spectre Problem: Prologue



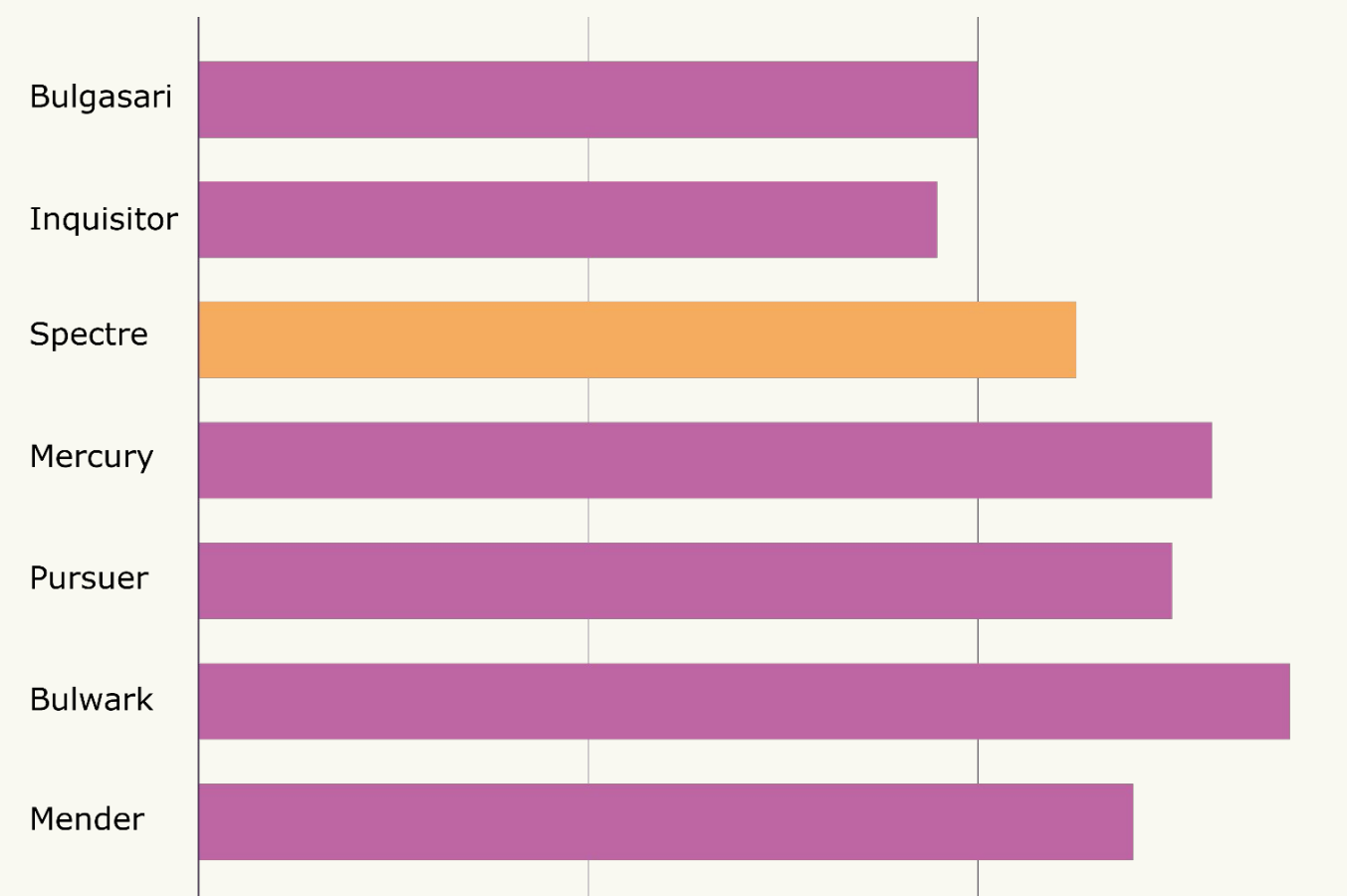
Amount of obtained robots in the first three months after release

# The Spectre Problem: Stats

Damage per spawn



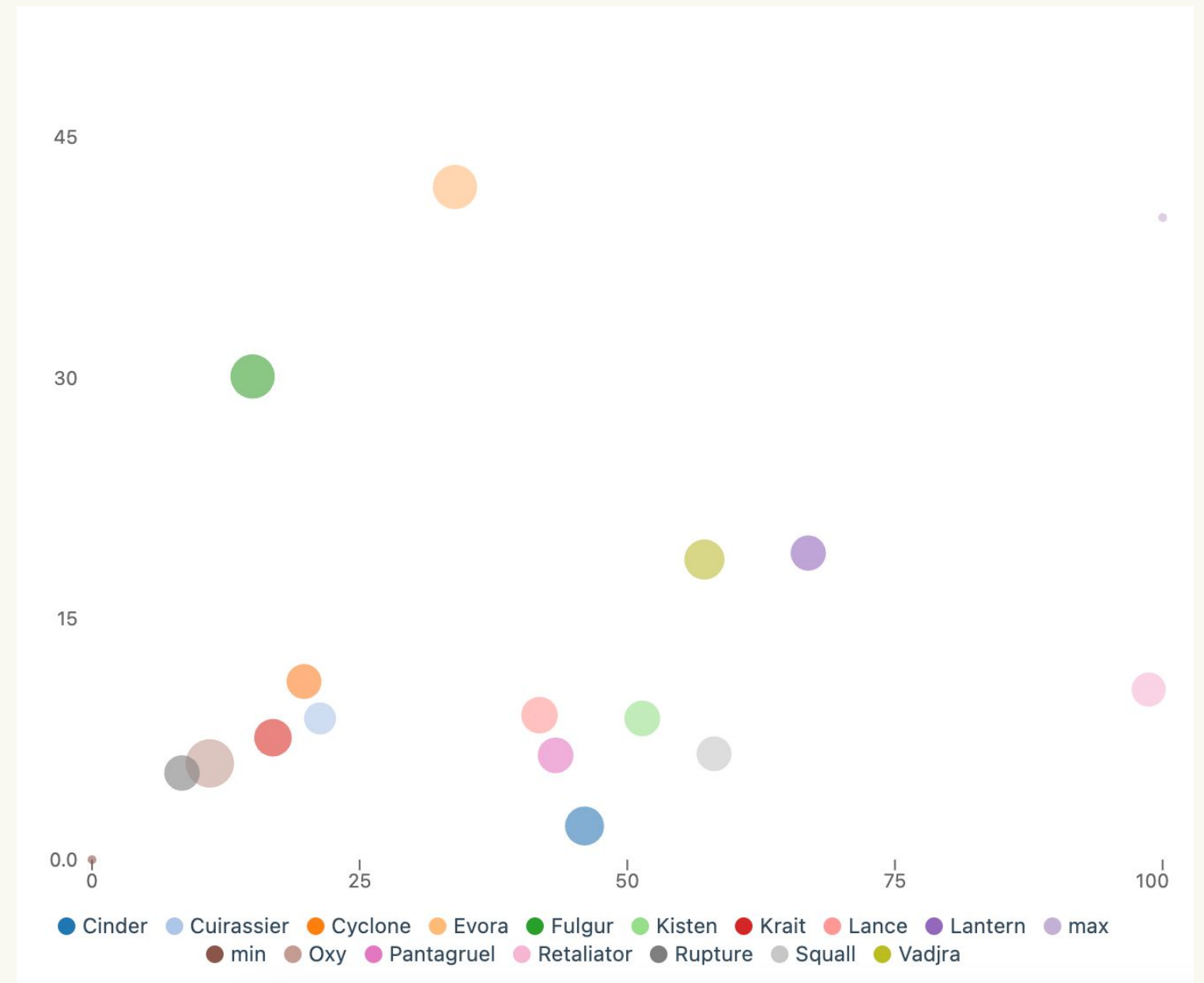
Lifetime



# Meta Maps: what is it?

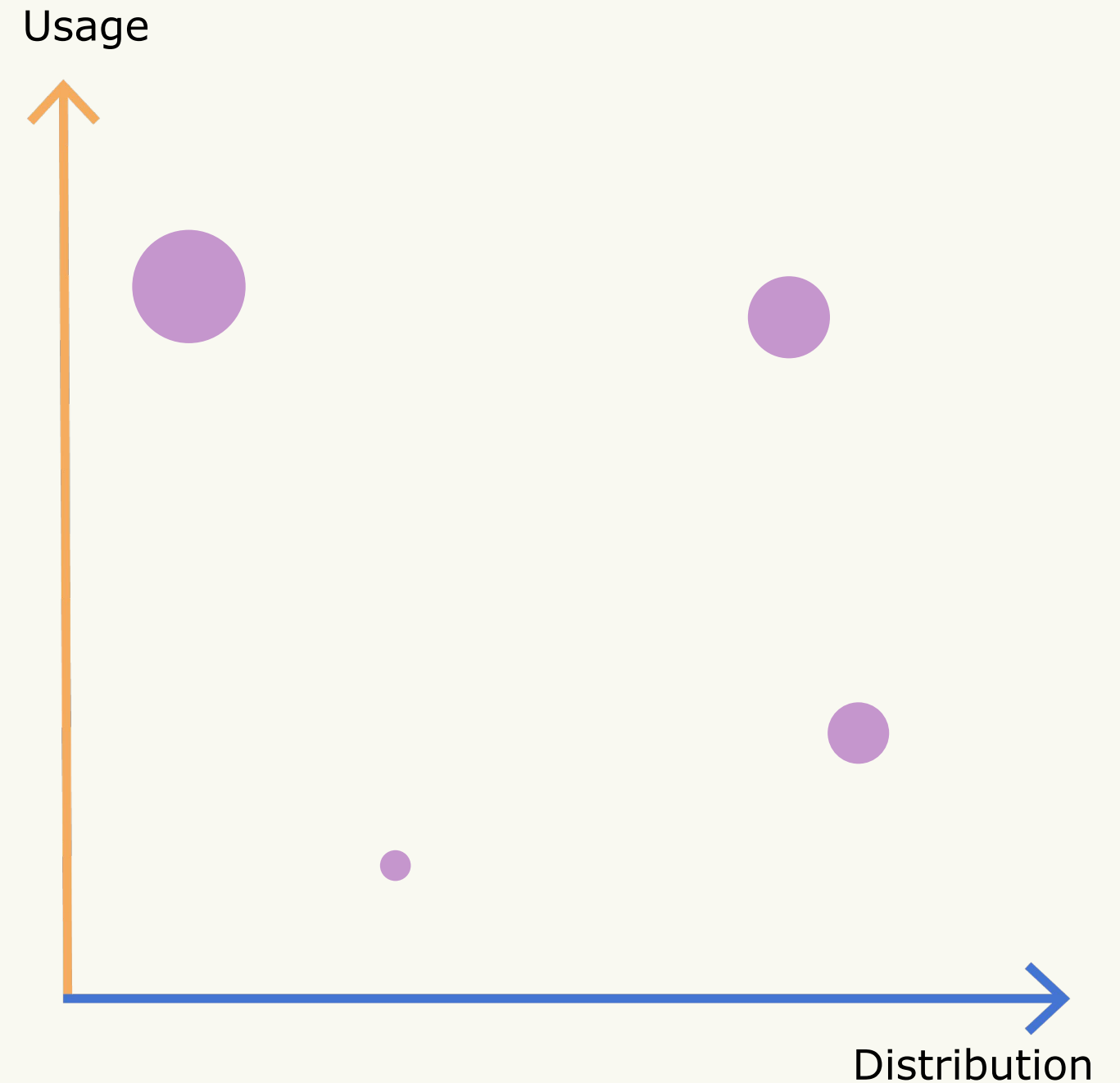
One scatter plot to represent whole metagame

The idea: to rely not on dry balance numbers while researching robots meta (like damage, lifetime, speed), but on **players' behaviour** and their choices



# Meta Maps: how it's made?

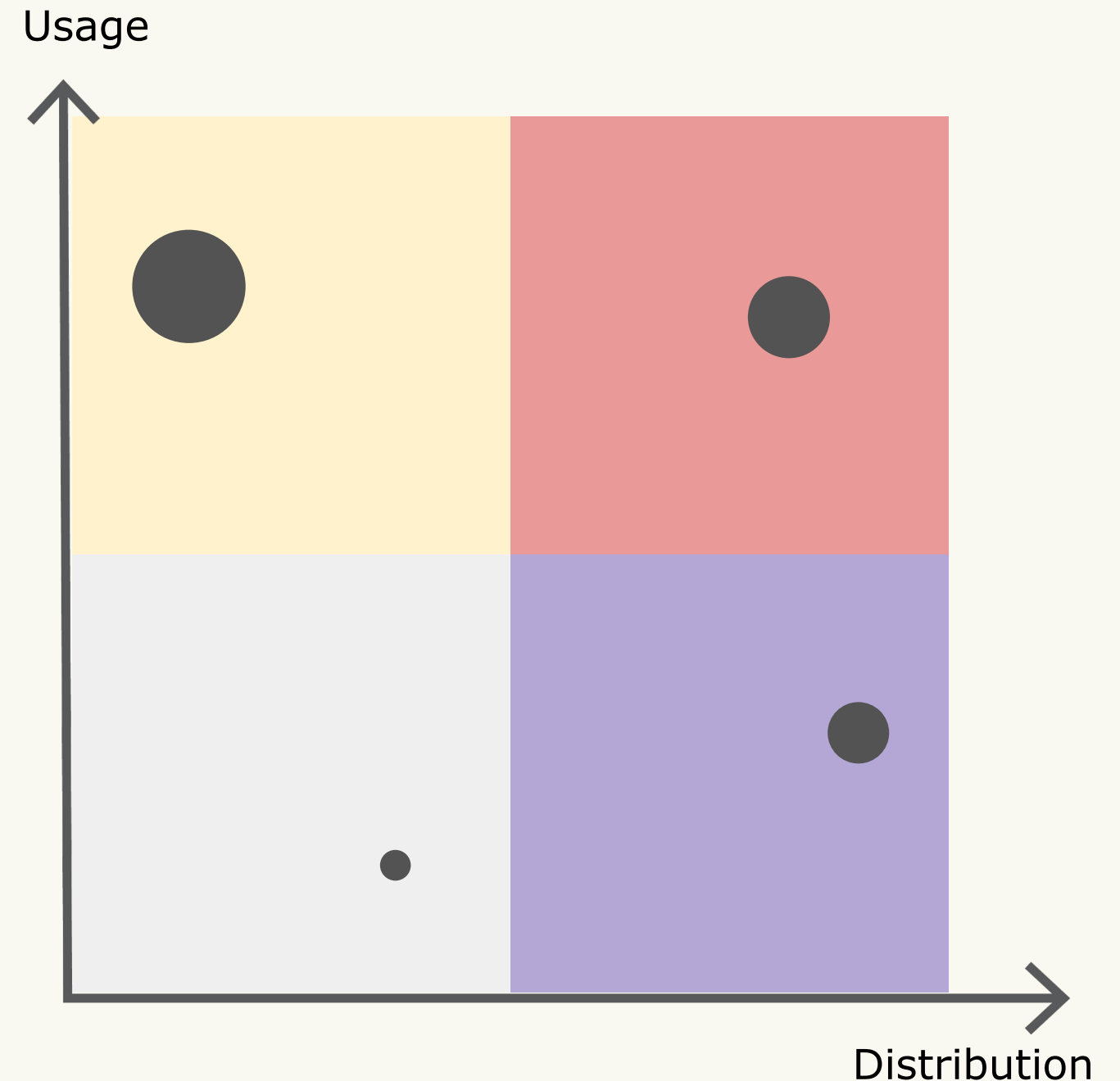
- The X-axis represents **content distribution** – the percentage of active players who have this content  
*(how many players **own** this content)*
- The Y-axis represents **content usage** – the ratio of players who used this content to the total number of active owners of it  
*(how many owners actually **use** this content)*
- Dot size represents **key metric** for this content  
*(how good this content is)*



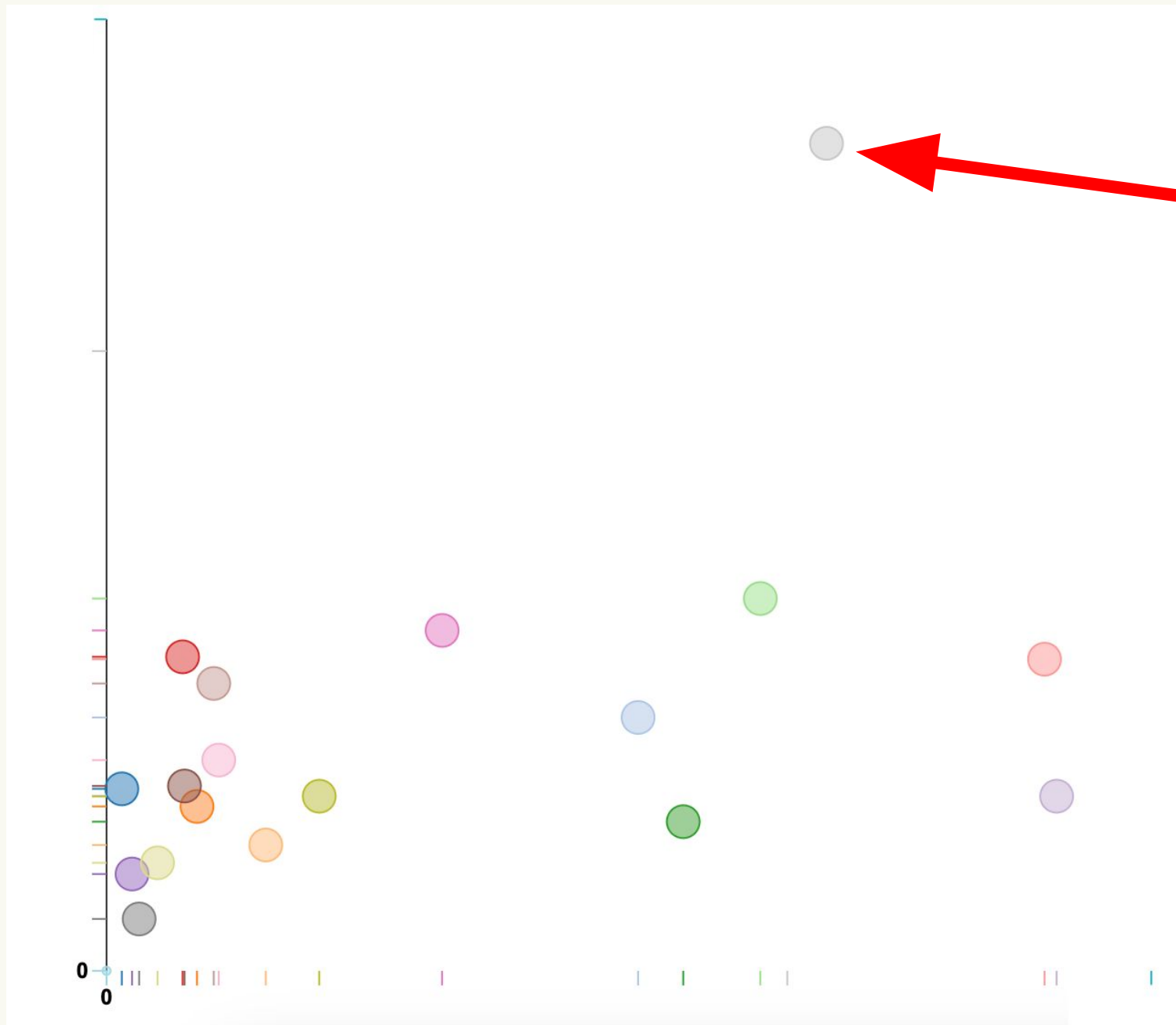
# Meta Maps: Meta Quadrants

The chart can be divided into 4 quadrants representing 4 conditions for content in metagame:

- **“rising stars”**: high usage, low distribution  
*(few people have it, but those who do use a lot)*
- **“happily retired”**: low usage, high distribution  
*(everybody has it, but they don't use it much)*
- **“outsiders”**: low usage, low distribution  
*(no one wants it)*
- **“metabreaker”**: high usage, high distribution  
*(danger zone: players don't need anything else)*



# The Spectre Problem: Epilogue



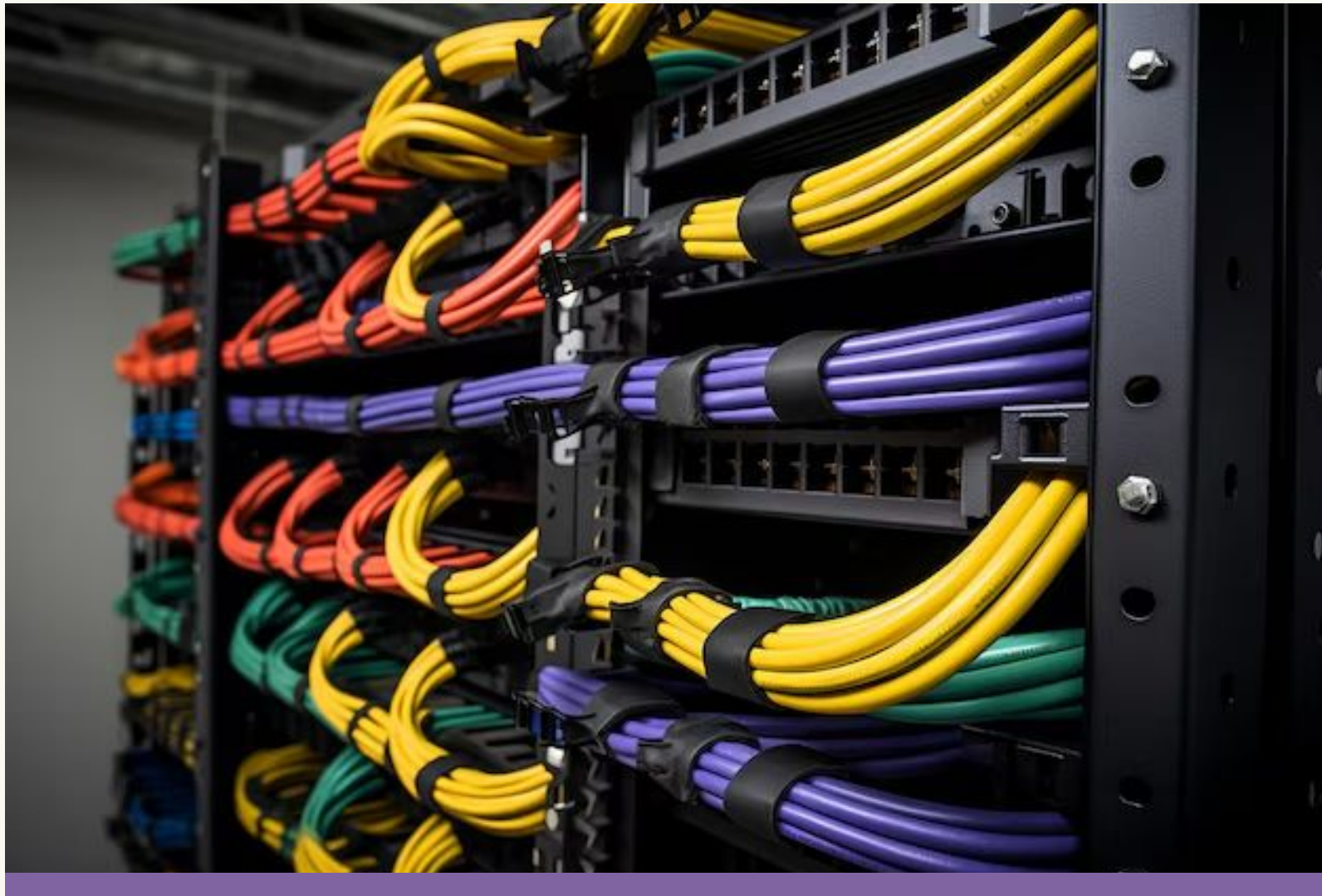
# The Spectre Problem: Takeaways

- Straightforward metrics like damage or lifetime might not always show problems with some content
- This Spectre case is not unique for WR. It happens all the time in games which releases new content, so it is important to monitor it
- Meta maps is a great tool to research metagame, because it represent players' behavior and content choices they make

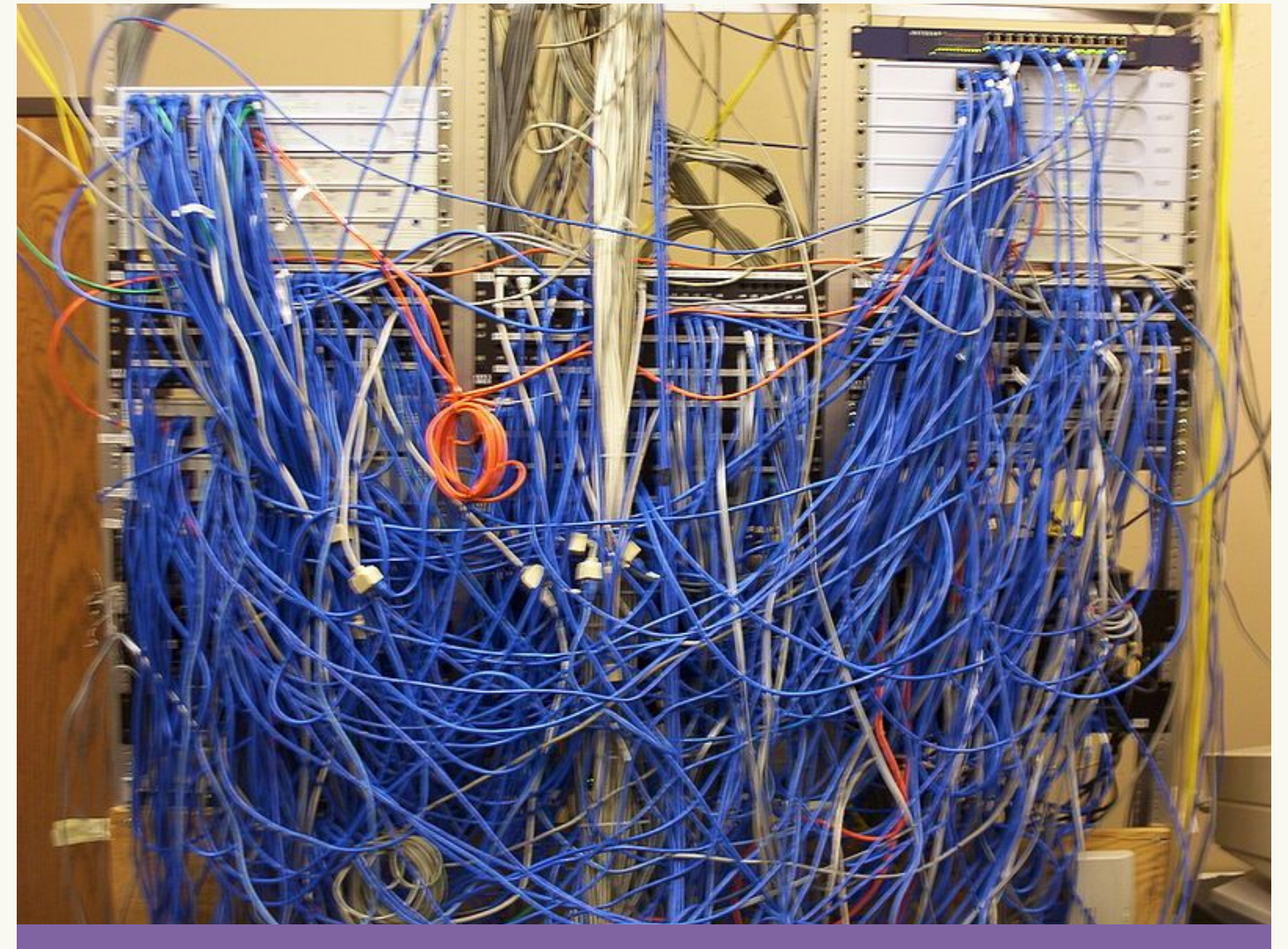
# “The Era of Meta Maps”

# Meta Map Analysis

Expectation

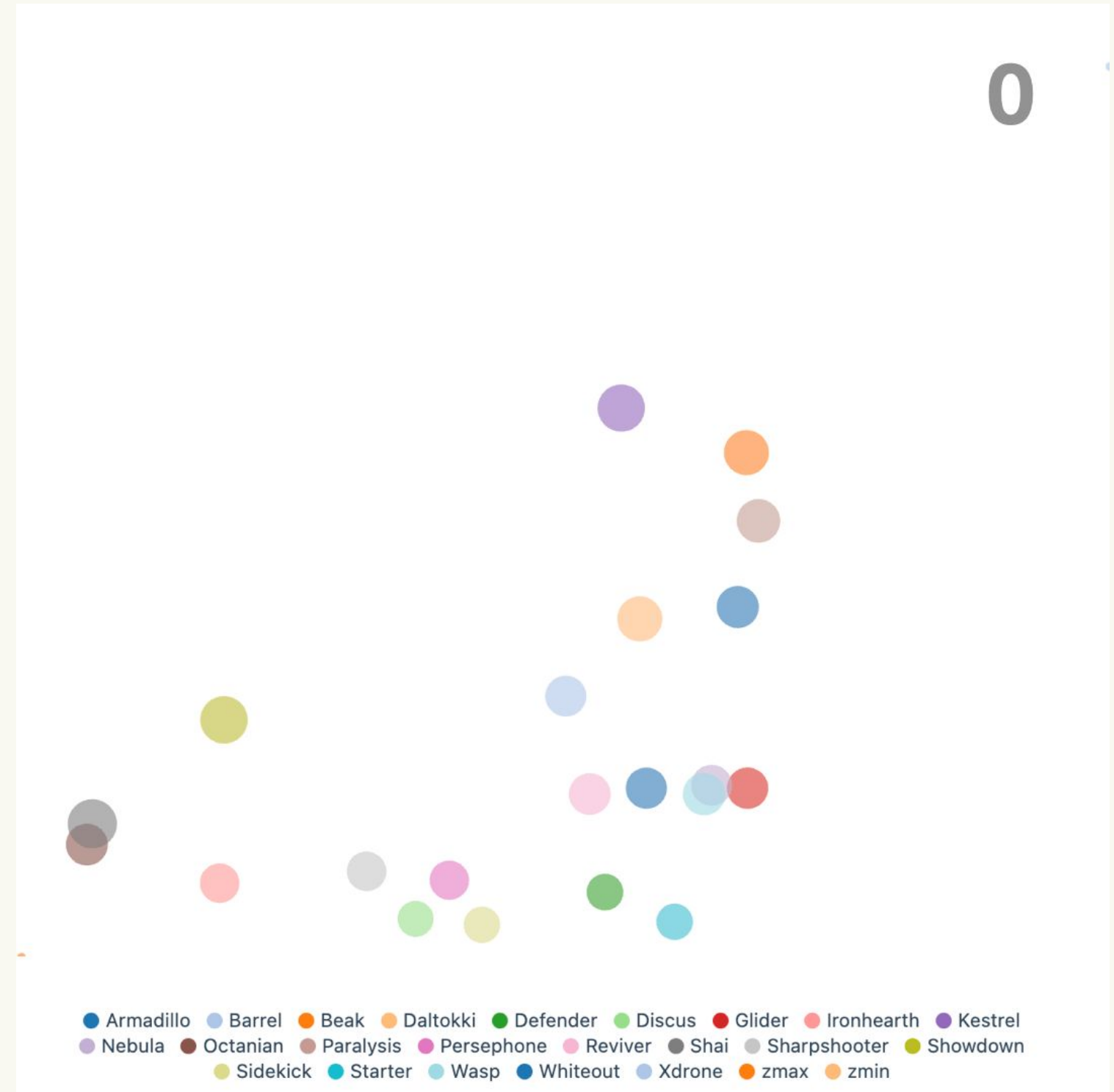


Reality



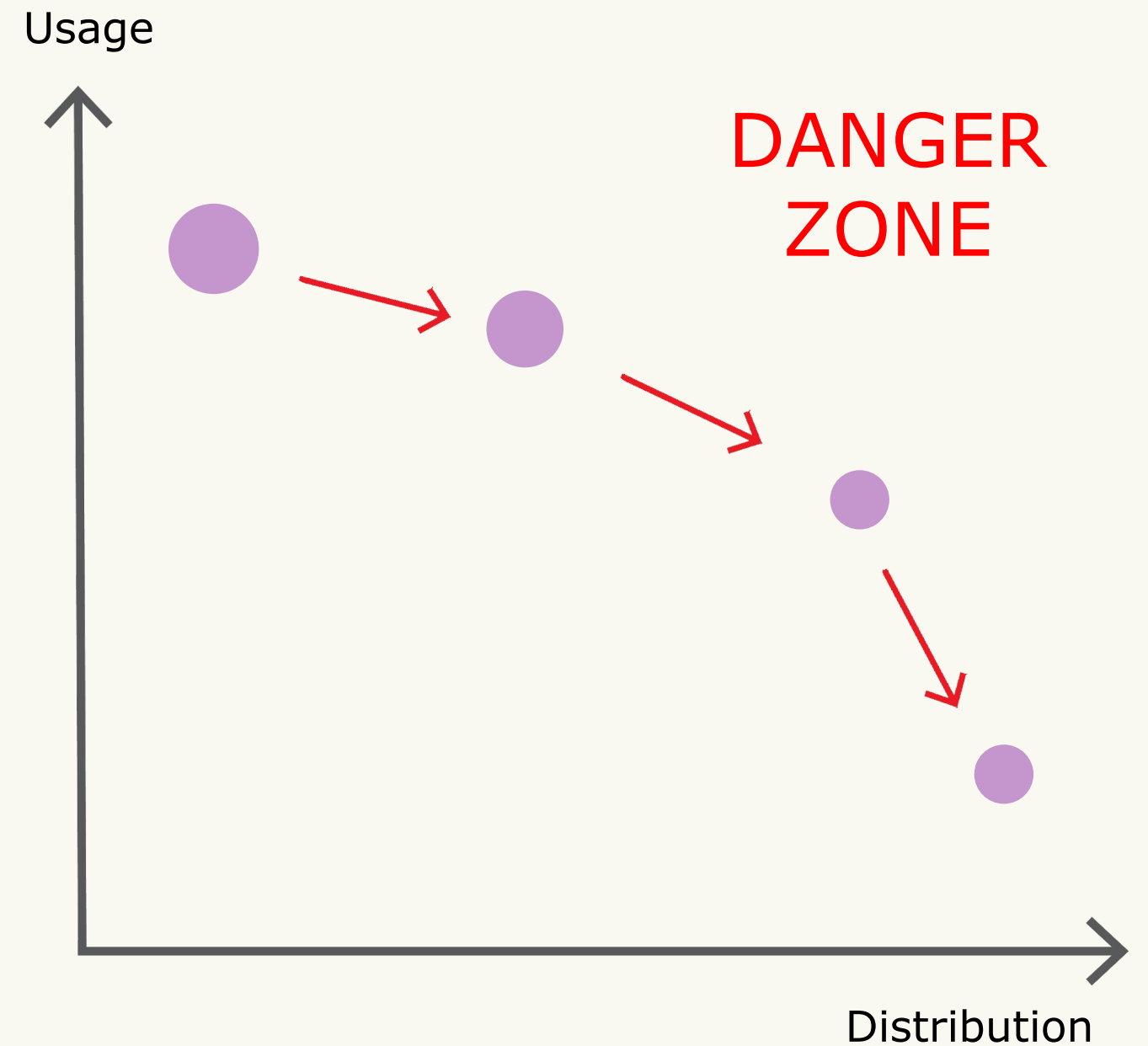
# Meta Dynamic

- Metagame is an interconnected system, rising of one content means fall of another
- Because map represent players behavior, and how they use content, changes in meta usually take some time
- Consecutive meta maps allow to monitor the metagame dynamic



# Content Life Cycle

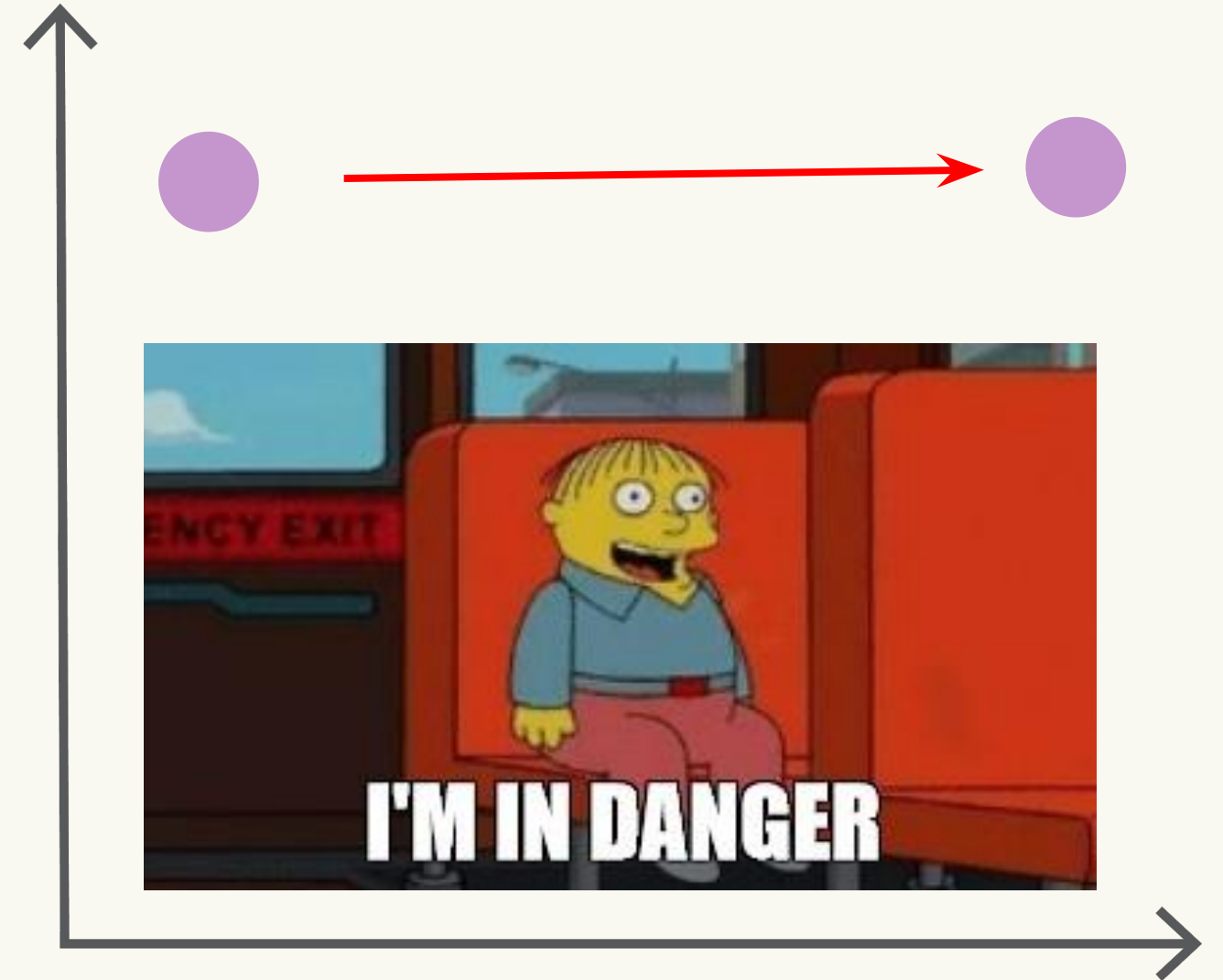
- Perfect content should go with a certain curve on a map
- That “curve shape” ensures that content meets players expectations on the release and won't bring problems in the future
- Everybody (either players or game devs) want new content to be a rising star and not an outsider



# Keeping Metagame Healthy

- If we make very strong and efficient content and then do nothing, eventually it will become metabreaker
- For maintaining healthy metagame (and avoid Spectre problem), sometimes we have to force players to start engaging with other content.

Usage



Distribution

# “Strategies for Metagame Management”



# Strategy 1: Do Nothing

*...and pray to god that players will love your new content just because it is new.*

## Pros:

+ Effortless

## Cons:

- Temporary



# Strategy 2: Powercreeping

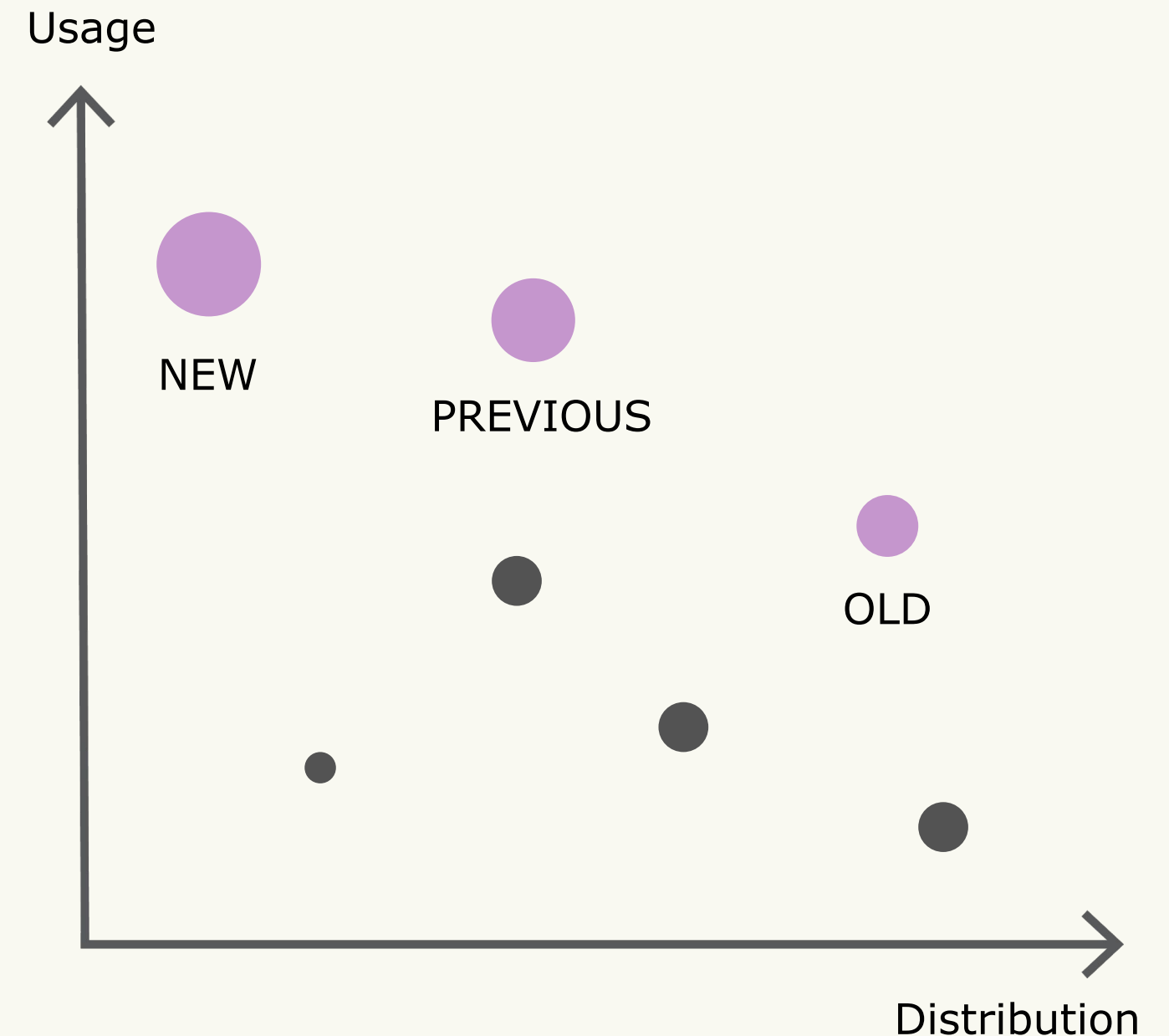
*"Best iPhone yet"*

## Pros:

- + Works very well for maintaining content cycle
- + Good for sales and matching players' expectations

## Cons:

- Difficult to use in a long run
- Increases the gap between players
- Still considered unfair



# Strategy 3: Direct Nerfs/Bufs

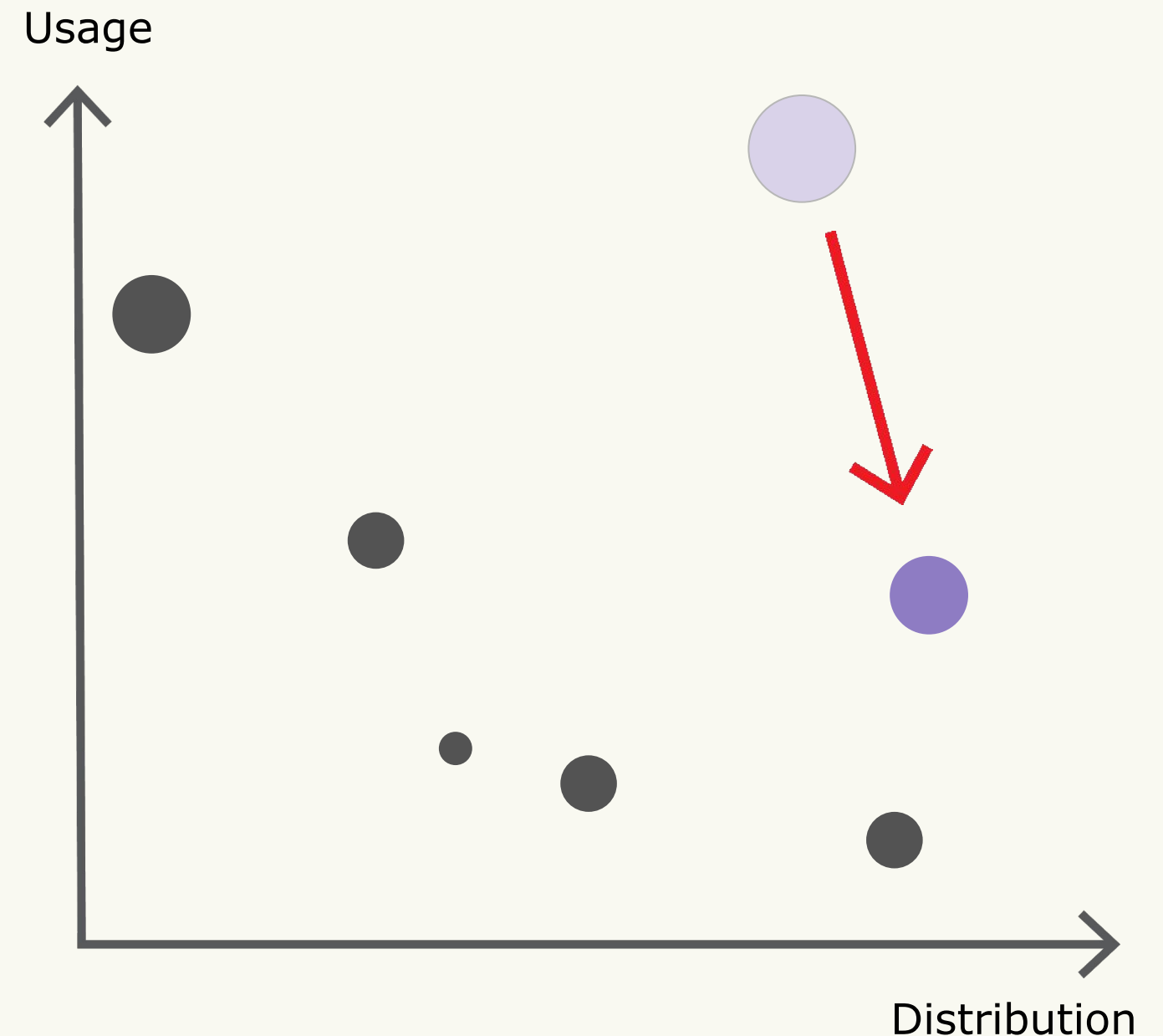
*"Sometimes you just need to bite the bullet"*

## Pros:

- + Quick and easy to execute
- + Hits right at the problematic content

## Cons:

- Nobody likes it – neither players nor developers



# Strategy 4: Indirect / Mechanical Nerfs

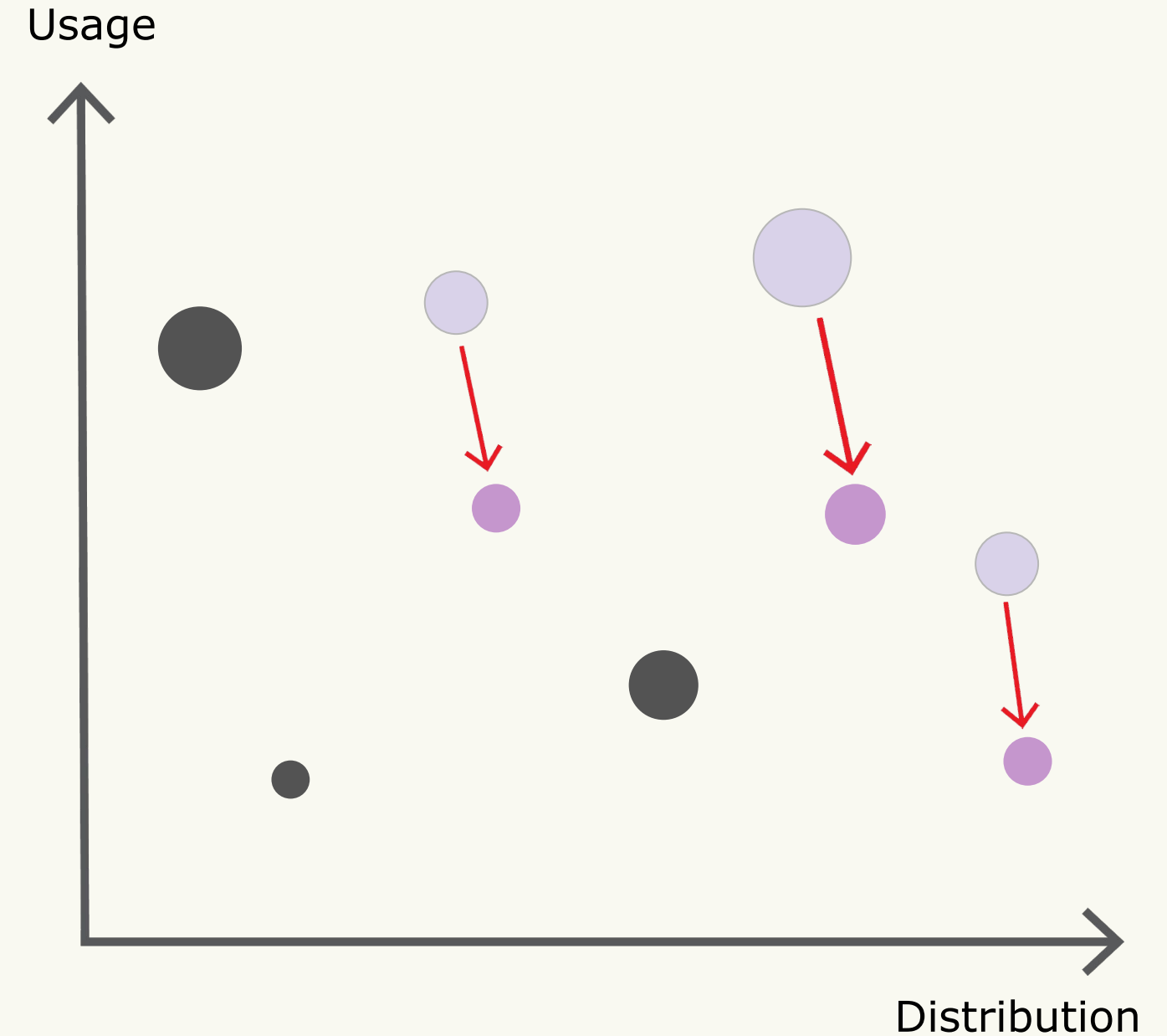
*"The circumstances have changed"*

## Pros:

- + Less painful than direct nerfs
- + Allows you to cut a whole part of the meta (every content piece which is not efficient)

## Cons:

- Takes a lot of effort
- Susceptible to mistakes



# Strategy 5: Nerf Through Buff

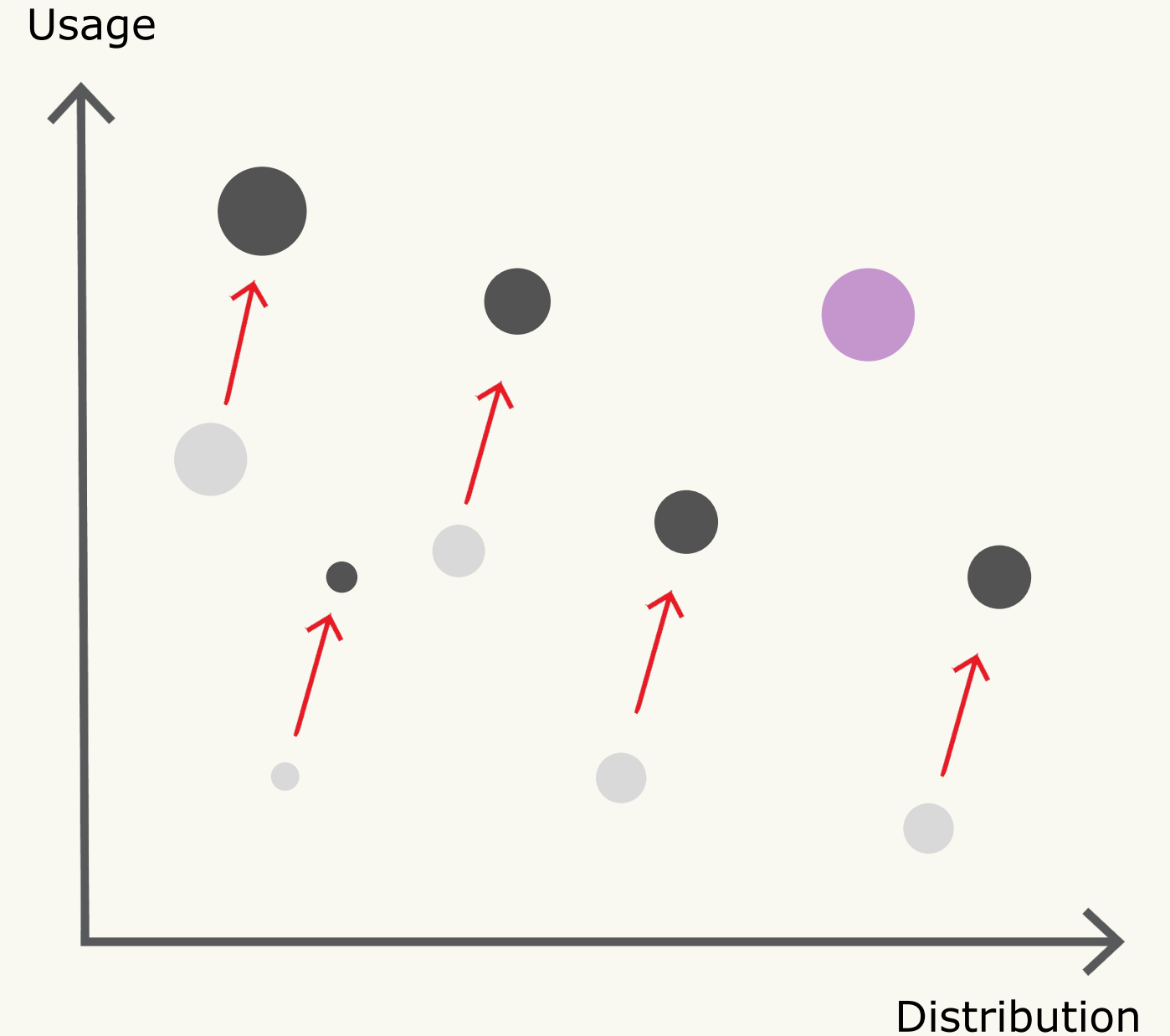
*"If everyone is special, then no one is"*

## Pros:

+ Feels really good, because "no one gets hurt"

## Cons:

- Highly expensive in terms of workload
- Could lead to unpredictable results



# Strategy 6. Seasons

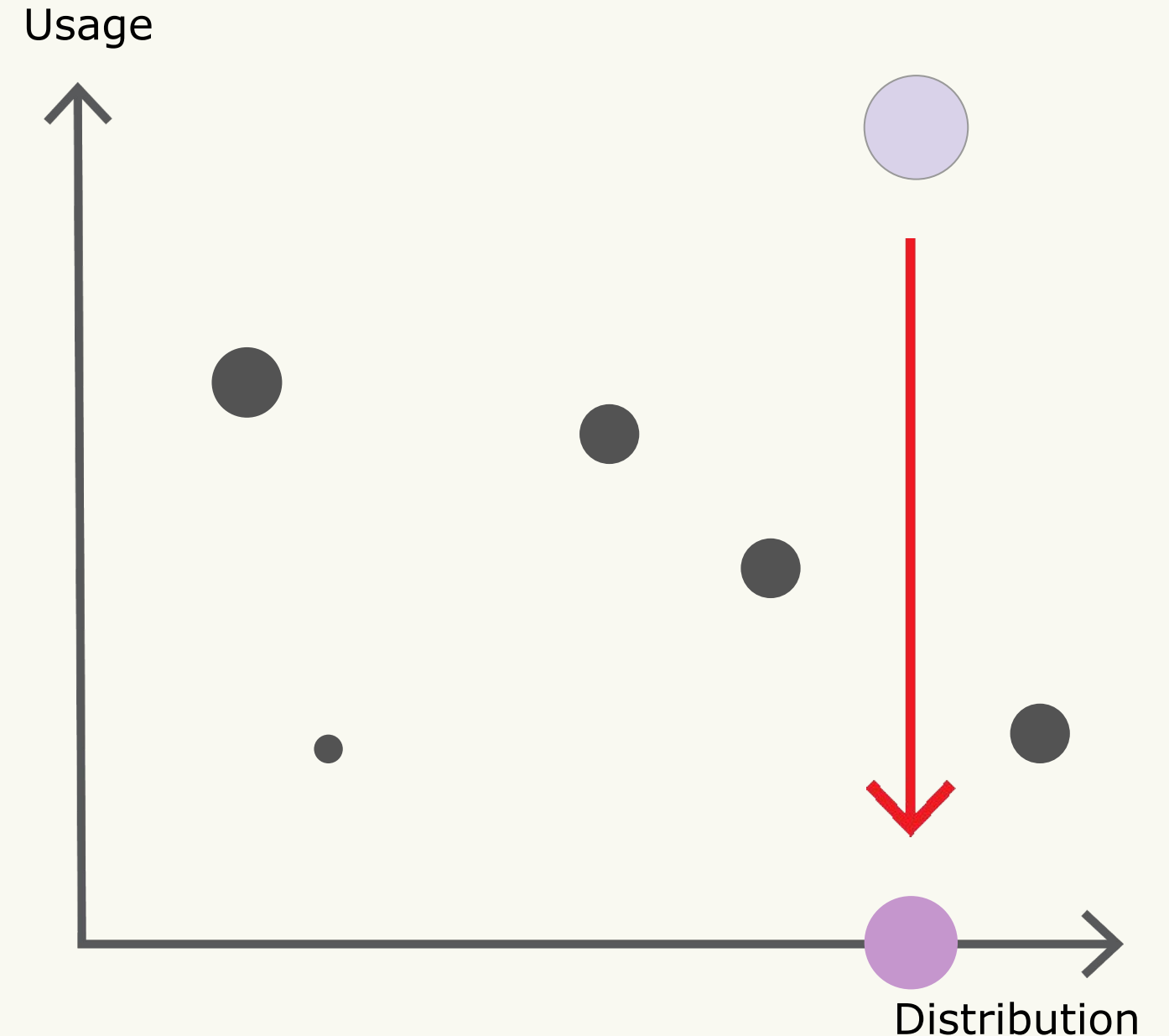
*"Winter is coming!"*

## Pros:

- + Radical solution to all meta problems

## Cons:

- May be difficult to introduce if your game is not built around it from the very beginning
- Devalues the content for players



# Strategy 7. Seasonal Modifiers

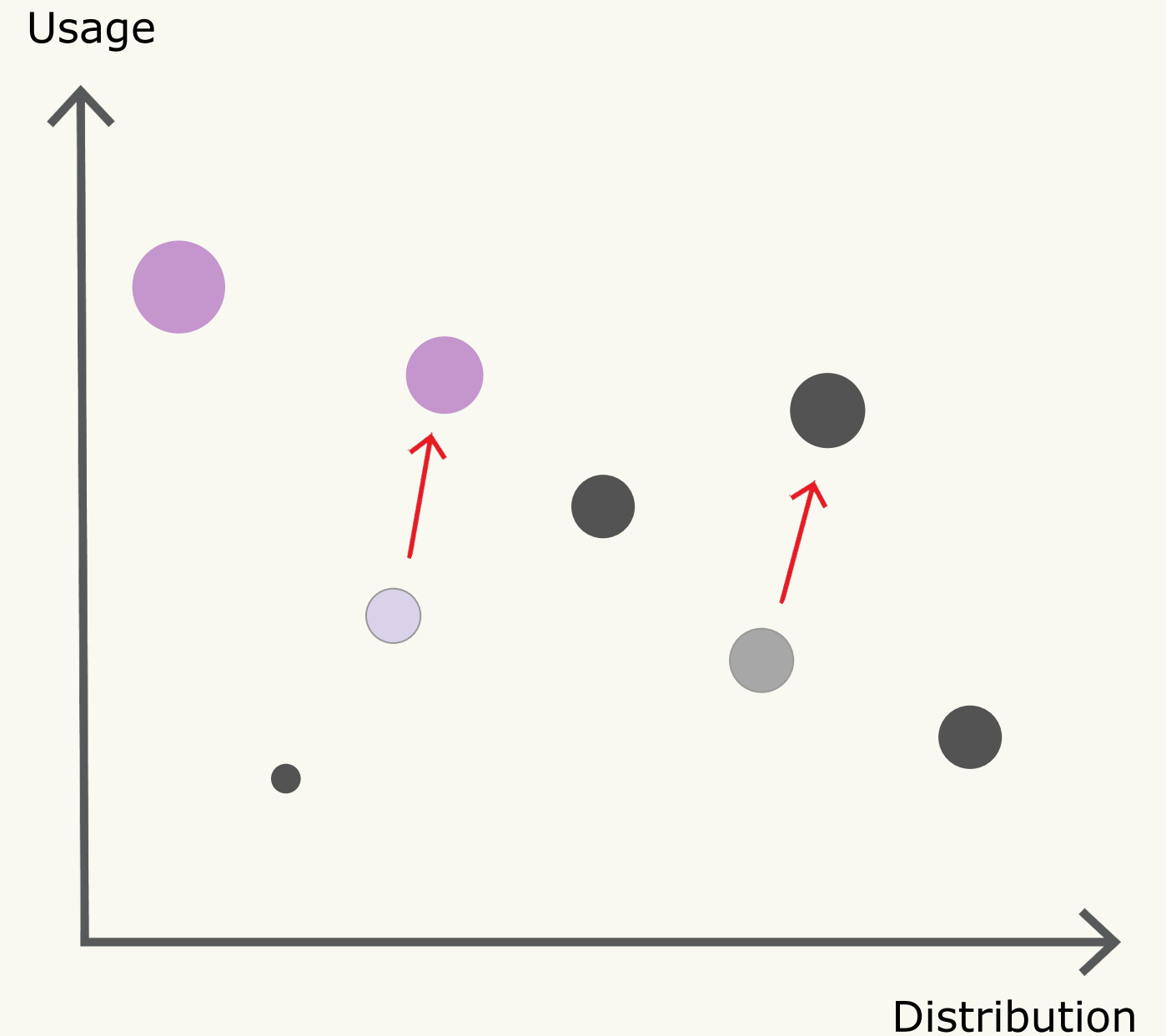
*"Your time has come!"*

## Pros:

- + Easier to implement in comparison with seasons
- + Less devaluating

## Cons:

- Less efficient than seasons but demands more efforts
- Less predictable



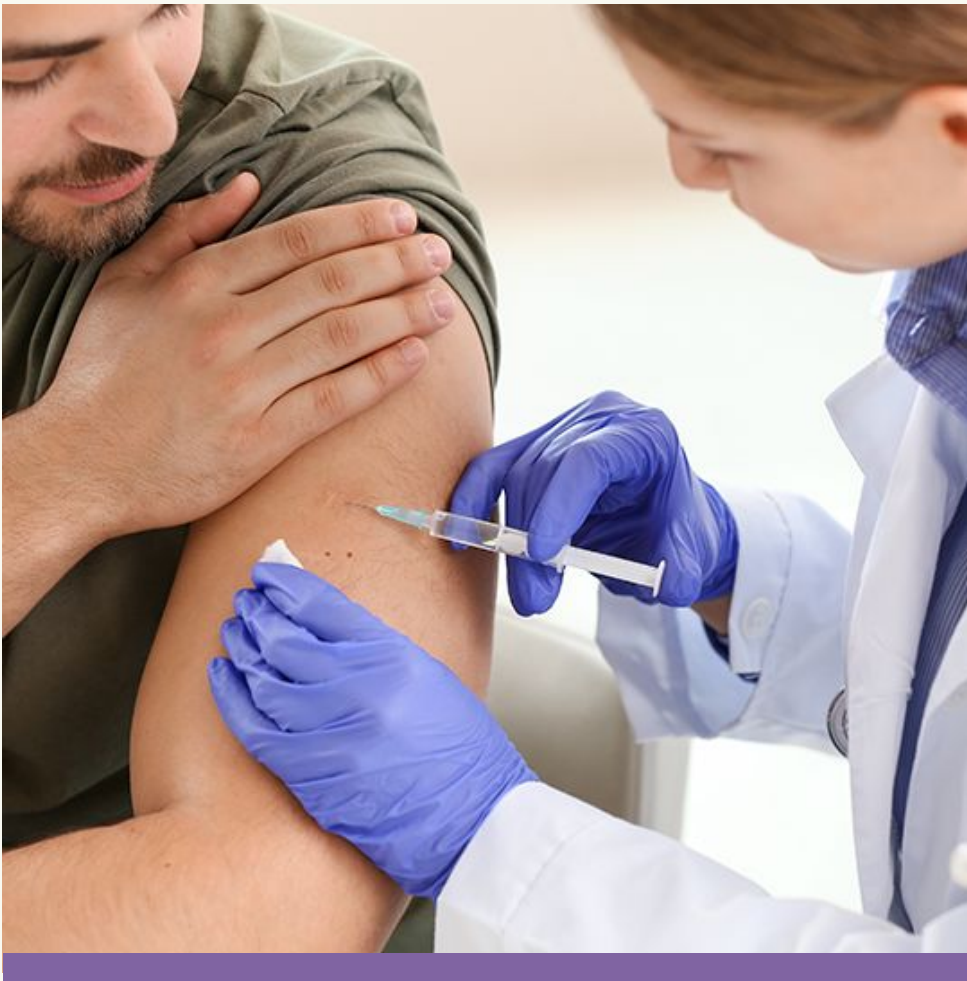
**“Is there a situations where pain is OK?”**

# Is there a situations where pain is OK?



**“Informed and prepared”**

# Is there a situation where pain is OK?



**“Informed and prepared”**



**“Part of the play”**

# Is there a situation where pain is OK?



**“Informed and prepared”**



**“Part of the play”**



**“Pain is the reward”**

# Experimental Strategy: “Intel”

30 / ?

Collection Progress 34/80

Collector Level 15

**ROBOTS**

ROBOT WEAPONS

TITANS

TITAN WEAPONS

T1  T2


T3  T4

Ultimate

Robot Name	Progress
Harpy	80%
Siren	15%
Typhon	65%
Orochi	50%
Behemoth	20%
Demeter	0%
Invader	0%
Blitz	0%
Fenrir	0%
Hades	0%

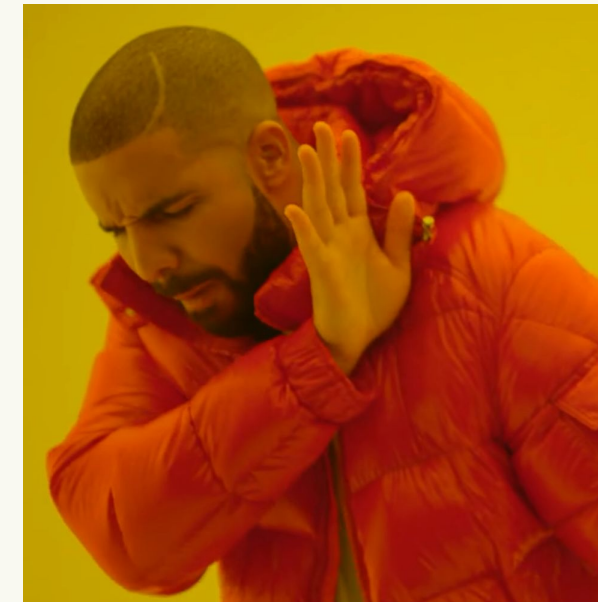
← BACK

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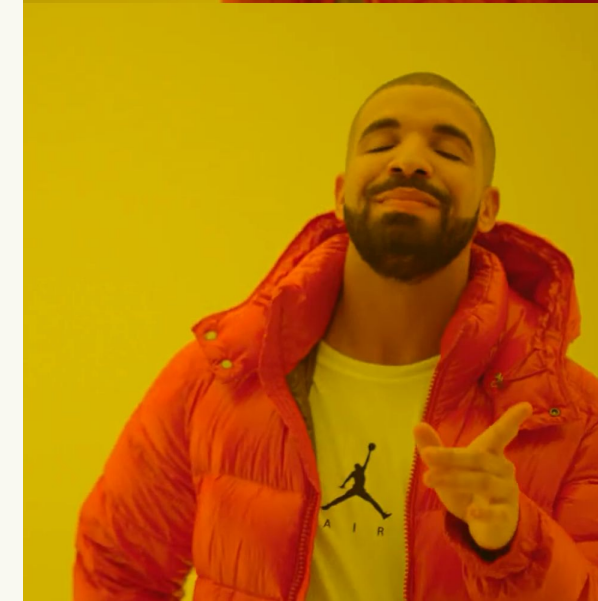


# Intel: how it works?

- Players receive bonuses for interacting with content (the more you play against certain robot, the less damage you receive from it)
- At content release nobody has bonuses against it – ensures strong start
- Eventually everybody will accumulate enough Intel for a certain content piece and it makes it less powerful
- Self-balancing system: the closer the content piece is to a “danger zone” (high popularity and usage), the faster it accumulates intel - because players have higher chance of facing it in battles



NERFS

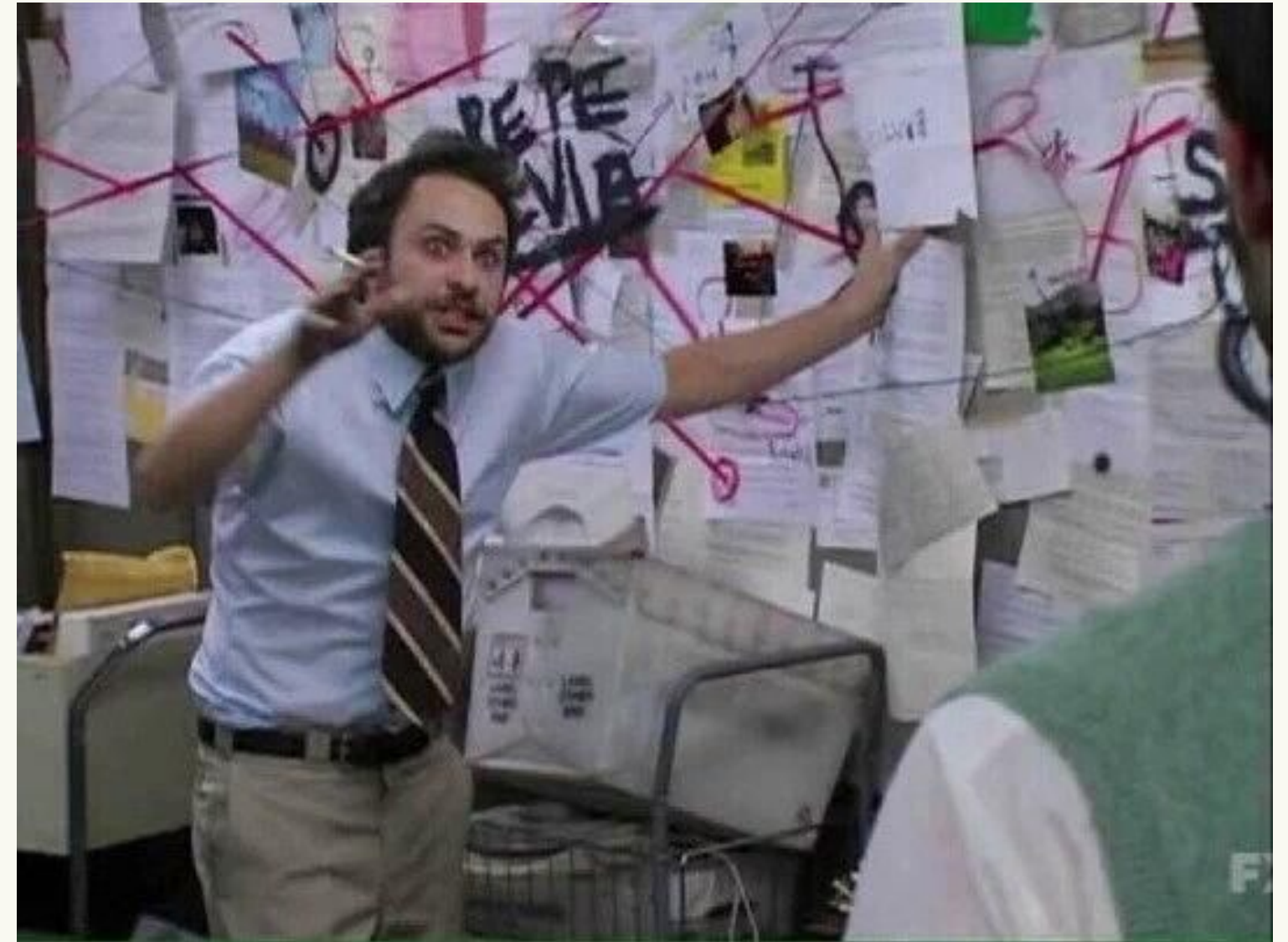


BONUSES

# Intel: causes pain (but for analysts)

The case where meta maps didn't work:

- It takes time to accumulate intel
- Subtle changes difficult to notice on map
- New content releases changes meta landscape
- Intel affects all content pieces (all the dots) simultaneously



# Intel: Results and Takeaways

## Pros:

- + Seems like it works (new content with 0 intel is stronger than old content with a lot of it)
- + Encourages players to play regularly and actively
- + Really could feel like a reward

## Cons:

- Incredibly hard to measure the impact (and take into account while balancing metagame)
- Increases the gap between new and old players
- Doesn't replace other strategies

# Some Thoughts

- **There are no silver bullets.** No strategy (not even 'Intel') and no tool (not even meta maps) can solve all problems. That's why it is important to be able to use that ones which most suitable for your game
- **Changes in the metagame can be unpleasant in a moment, but they're crucial for keeping players interested.** Eventually, every game that adds new content will face “the Spectre problem” — a metabreaker that makes the game feel plain and boring. Be ready to deal with it when the time comes.
- **It is not about sugarcoating.** Complicated strategies in meta management aren't meant to hide it

# Questions?

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