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MMOZine

Issue 9 | January 2009

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EXCLUSIVE #1

Runes of Magic

LEADING THE CHARGE OF THE FREE!

LONG TERM TEST



THE MINES OF MORIA

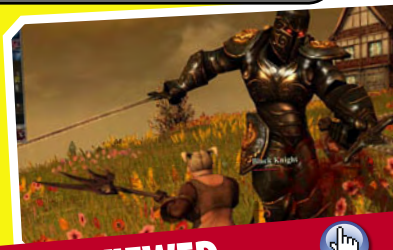
Delving deep inside LOTRO's latest expansion

EXCLUSIVE #2



ATLANTICA ONLINE

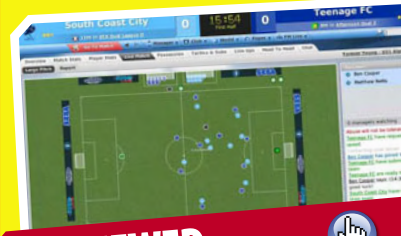
Earth and beyond in this magical combat MMOG



+ PREVIEWED

Darkfall

The old school revival is close at hand



+ REVIEWED

Football Manager Live

It's time to really get the season started



+ BACK TO BASICS

World Of Warcraft

The Journey Begins



Welcome to MMOZine

When in comes to choosing an online world, most of us are happy to pay monthly charges, believing that a more consistent experience is guaranteed when equal fees apply to all. The misnomer over 'free-2-play' games is that they are shoddy in comparison, when the truth is that f2p games still require sustainable levels of investment. The difference is that those who can't or won't pay are still allowed in, while those with money can pay extra and buy in-game luxuries. Which is the fairer tax system is often debated, but the important question is whether the games are good, and increasingly the micro-transaction-fuelled worlds are every bit as enjoyable as those many of us subscribe to. In these times when we have to tighten our belts, maybe it's just as well.

Richie Shoemaker, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…



PAUL PRESLEY
Looked for bargains in the January transfer window.



DAVE TAYLOR
Is very much hoping to find gold in the mines of Moria.



DAN HUTCHINSON
EVE Online is this man's MMO of choice.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…

WIN! A GRAPHICS CARD!



RUNES OF MAGIC

Horsing around for free



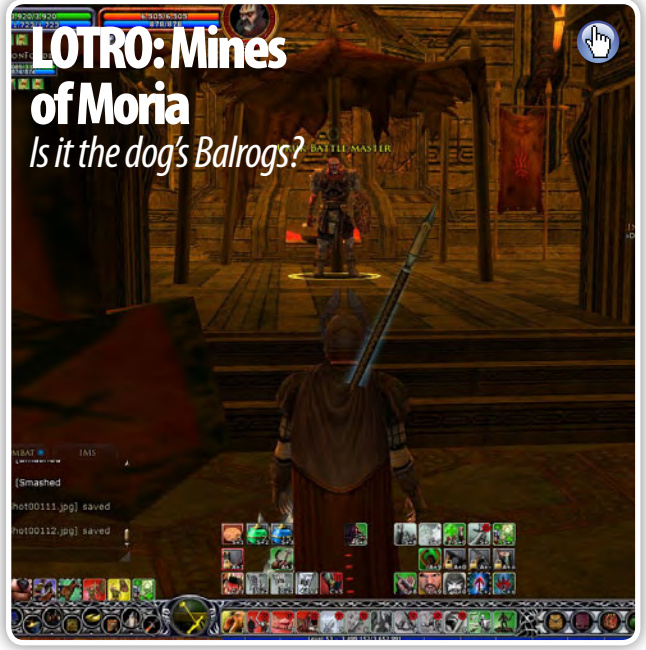
Darkfall

Enter the light



Atlantica

A world apart?



LOTRO: Mines of Moria

Is it the dog's Balrogs?

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

- Global Agenda
- Infinity: The Quest for Earth
- Shin Megami Tensei
- Champions Online
- Free Realms
- Stargate Worlds
- Tabula Rasa
- Tears Saga
- EVE Online: Apocrypha
- Runes of Magic
- Darkfall
- The Chronicles of Spellborn
- Lord of the Rings Online: Mines of Moria
- Football Manager Live
- Atlantica Online



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If you are reading this, then you didn't choose "Play" when Adobe Reader asked you about multimedia when you opened the magazine.

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We recommend you close and re-open the magazine and select "Play" when asked about the multimedia to enjoy the magazine as intended.

Global Agenda

FIRST LOOK

When two (hundred) tribes go to war…

Publisher: N/A
Developer: Hi-Rez Studios
Heritage: None
Link: www.globalagendagame.com
ETA: N/A

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Global Agenda



The Hello Kitty line of ninja blades lives on into the near future at least.

"Global Agenda is a cross between Battlefield 2 and team combat fave, Tribes 2"



"Ohh my head. What was I drinking last night?"

"Hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, hot…"

What's the story?

As the doors close on one MMO sci-fi shooting-heavy enterprise (step forward Tabula Rasa), another even more shooting-heavy sci-fi MMO stands up to take its place. Global Agenda, ostensibly, is a cross between Battlefield 2 (or 2142, if you prefer) and the perennial online team combat fave Tribes 2. All the persistent character growth of the former mixed with the hardcore gun-toting, jetpack-wearing, adrenaline-pumping action of the latter. All dished up with the visual finery that comes from the Unreal Engine 3.

What do we know?

A well-edited – if somewhat cheesy – gameplay video was doing the rounds at a public charity event, and since then we've found out that the gameplay consists of a real-world battleground, in which player-run 'agencies' face off against each other for control over key resource points has come on by jetpack-assisted leaps and bounds. A heady mixture of gunplay, melee combat and stealthy infiltration seems to be the order of the day, with multiple classes ensuring a need for teamwork among players.

Agencies have to capture and defend technology resources to further their abilities, weapons and global power, although how this ties into a persistent, real-time world with (potentially) thousands of other player groups isn't clear.

When do we get more?

It's already been under development for two years, and there were promises of a closed beta starting up towards the end of 2008, although that particular annus came and went with nary a whiff. Being a self-funded developer does mean that there's no rush, which bodes well for quality control at least.

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NCSOFT® CRYPTIC

Publisher: N/A
Developer: Flavien Brebion
Heritage: None
Link: www.infinity-universe.com/Infinity
ETA: N/A

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Infinity: The Quest for Earth





"Infinity's goal of recreating all 200 billion stars, moons and planets in our solar system is being handled by just one man"



Infinity: The Quest for Earth

FIRST LOOK

One man creates the entire galaxy…

What's the story?

We've had space-based MMOs before, and after a lengthy period of inactivity, the genre is about to welcome a couple of others to the fray, JumpGate Evolution and Star Trek Online to name but two. The main difference between all these other space-faring titles and Infinity however? Simple, Infinity's goal of recreating our solar system, all 200 billion stars, planets and moons of it, is being handled by just one man.

What do we know?

This 'Milky Way Kid' is one Flavien Brebion, and he's a programming genius. The galaxy of stars is mostly being created by procedural generation techniques, albeit ones that marry up with the star systems created by each player's clients, while many of the game's 3D models have come via well-wishers with 3D CAD developing nous.

Gameplay details are still rather thin on the ground at this stage, although it is a stated fact that players aren't limited to zipping about space lanes but rather can travel seamlessly from orbit down to the surface of every planet in the game. Brebion also boasts of complete freedom to go from small shuttle piloting to controlling vast empires, and a twitch-based real-time combat system that's loosely seen the light of day already via a standalone combat 'prototype' game that can be downloaded right now.

When do we get more?

Rumours of the game being 'vapourware' were recently refuted by Brebion in an open letter on his website, although he freely admits to progress being slow due to the vastness of the project and his limitations of only having two arms. That said, Brebion is hoping for an early alpha to go live sometime later this year.

7 UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!



Free Realms

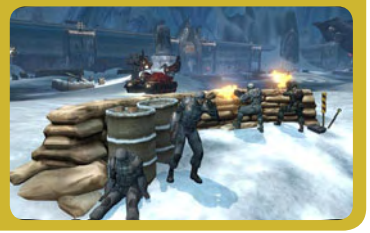
Developer: SOE | **ETA:** Spring

SOE's family-friendly MMO continues to impress in beta, but away from the screen, kids of all ages will be able to enjoy the Free Realms trading card game, courtesy of SOE Denver, the folks behind Legends of Norrath and the Star Wars Galaxies card game.

Stargate Worlds

Developer: Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment | **ETA:** TBA

Worrying news over at Stargate Command, as rumours of unpaid employees and frantic scrabbling around for investment capital leak out into the general populace. The official word from the developer is that work continues apace, while further funding opportunities are sought out. A healthy community site certainly raises hopes, but we wait with baited breath on this one for now.





Shin Megami Tensei

Developer: Aeria Games | **ETA:** 2009

Now entering open beta is the English language version of popular Japanese demon breeding and shopping-'em-up console role-player, Shin Megami Tensei. Post-apocalyptic Tokyo is the setting for the strategy-heavy fun, as players help with the construction of a tower block while fusing captured demons together to keep others at bay.

Champions Online

Developer: Cryptic Studios | **ETA:** April

Holy change of publisher, non-trademark infringing Bat-themed man! Cryptic's follow-up to the brilliant City of Heroes has moved houses from Take 2 to the newly invigorated Atari, along with Cryptic itself, furthering rumours along the way that many of Atari's IPs may be lending themselves towards MMO goodness further down the line.



Tabula Rasa

Developer: Destination Games | **ETA:** February

While General Sir Lord Rear Admiral Cosmonaut British (aka Richard Garriott) adjusts to life back on terra firma after his sojourn into deep space, and ponders a move back into fantasy online game development, his last venture, Tabula Rasa, sees out its remaining days on virtual Earth by going completely free-to-play until the servers shut at the end of February. Lovely.



ON THE RADAR

- **2009** – The Agency
- **SUMMER** – Champions Online
- **SUMMER** – Aion: Tower of Eternity
- **SPRING** – Jumpgate Evolution

EVE Online: Apocrypha

Developer: CCP | **ETA:** March

Fresh on the heels of setting yet another concurrent user record for a single server (45,000 and rising, stats fans!), veteran Internet spaceship game, EVE Online, is forging ahead to a whole new frontier – store shelves. Again. A partnership with Atari is seeing the client get a box in time to squeeze in the game's tenth expansion.



Tears Saga

Developer: NECT | **ETA:** Late 2009

Tears Saga is the new name for Puppeteers, getting set for a closed beta later this year. Key features are mouse-controlled weapon aiming and Tekken-style fighting, pitching more towards the action end of the market than is usual for an MMO.



Games for Windows LIVE

Runes of Magic

The freeplay MMO that might be worth investing in

Publisher: Frogster
Developer: Runewaker
Heritage: None
Link: www.runesofmagic.com
ETA: Q1 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Runes of Magic

If you've played an MMO at any time in the last few years (and if you're reading this we can assume with some confidence that you have), then you should feel immediately at home when you first log in to Runes of Magic. Even the name has an air of comfortable familiarity about it. It's as if it's been carefully thought through by a marketing team so as not to appear too unique, or too threatening. Were it destined to be delivered in human form the game would likely be called something non-threatening like Dave.

Dave is one of an increasing number of 'free2play' online worlds, and on the surface a very familiar one, borrowing a little too much from the likes of World of Warcraft and offering very little innovation of its own. Dig a little deeper and you soon realise that Runes of Magic borrows a great deal, not only from the world's favourite game, but also Lord of the Rings Online and even the forgotten son of EverQuest. In fact, the more you play, the more influences you spot. Some might see this as a dubious sign that a lack of imagination hides within, which may be true in a sense, but when you get right down to it, Runes of Magic is actually a very fine Frankenstein's Monster of an MMO. So much so that after a while you hardly notice the scars at all.

Set in the lands of Taborea, a generic patchwork of snowy, temperate and arid zones, the

"Runes of Magic is actually a very fine Frankenstein's Monster of an MMO"











Runes of Magic cont.

game world is as varied as any forged in the name of high fantasy, and remarkably well padded with content, with the usual selection of wolves, bears, spiders and even strangely comical mushrooms lolling about the early killing fields.

Although your choice of starting races are limited to just humans, and the player classes condensed to the standard choices of Knight, Warrior, Scout, Rogue, Mage and Priest, upon reaching level 10 it's possible to pick a secondary class. You can't level your secondary role above your primary, but you can switch them over. It's a neat little trick, one that is perhaps a little disassociating, but it allows for easy changing-out of roles should your party members be overstocked with tanks and in need of supporting staff.

"If we were to choose one word to describe the first hours of playing Runes of Magic it would be 'dense'"

If we were to choose one word to describe the first hours of playing Runes of Magic it would be 'dense'. It's not that it's just busy with new players chopping wood or baiting bears, but the starting lands are conspicuously narrow and closed in. You can barely go more than a few paces before tripping over an NPC or aggravating a mob of wolves. With quests asking you to kill and fetch all the usual things that require killing and fetching, it's perhaps little wonder that you find out that the lands before and around the major city of Varanas are well stocked with human players.

With an overall aesthetic that fuses WoW with the fudged-lens stylings of the best Asian MMOGs, an EQ2-inspired crafting system compliments things nicely. With the added reams of written quests that could give Lord of the Rings Online a run for its money, Runes of Magic does have a lot to offer. As a secondary game to kill the hours waiting for friends to join you in your subscription world of choice, it seems hard to find many faults. Whether it has enough to convince you to part with cold hard cash in order to buy in-game items will only become apparent over time. For many, the gold pieces dropped by mobs and given as payment










Strange glowing walls are there to be walked through.


Roads are generally safe, if you have a horse.

Runes of Magic cont.

for quests will be enough. Of course the developers will hope you'll be smitten enough by that point that you'll rent some extra storage space – which is thankfully cheap – or buy yourself a permanent horse (which at 299 diamonds is by far the most expensive in-game item).

Surprisingly stable

For a beta, the Runes of Magic client is as stable as any we've encountered, with bugs related to issues of poor path-finding and two-handed weapons that twitch nervously on player's backs when not in use – hardly a deal-breaker. Balancing is much more difficult to gauge. Many claim that PvP is far from satisfactory, with little incentive to be bad. Others suggest the melee classes are too weak, which may be the case. The experience point debt players must pay in order to offset death is proportionate, though increasingly harsh as you level up, but if balances are the only things people are getting heated over, then that's probably a very good sign.

Given that a whopping 100,000 people were playing happily within hours of the open beta being announced last month, we reckon Runes of Magic could well become the first poster boy for free2play online games, and the first real challenger in the West to the dominance of subscription gaming. It may have taken the best features of the best games, but at it's core Runes of Magic has a soul that is unmistakeably its own. This looks to be a case where familiarity does not breed contempt. ●


Resurrection points are not places you want to hang around.

The house fairy. No, really.

EXPORT FILES

Made in Taiwan…



Developed in Taiwan, Runes of Magic was apparently designed from the outset to be a 'Western' game. We assume at the top of the to-do list was not to make the experience a horrendous grind, punctuated by text boxes that had been given only a cursory run through an English spellchecker before being pasted into the English client. Across the first 20 levels we can attest that the game certainly isn't a grind. In fact, progression seems rather swift, on a par with the perennial World of Warcraft, which is no slouch when it comes to pounding the levelling treadmill.

MMOZine Verdict

A compilation of some of the best MMO features in one free package

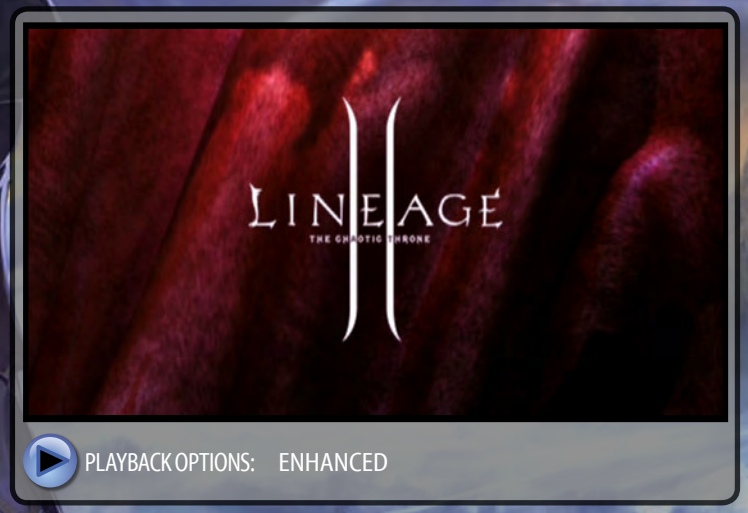
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Darkfall

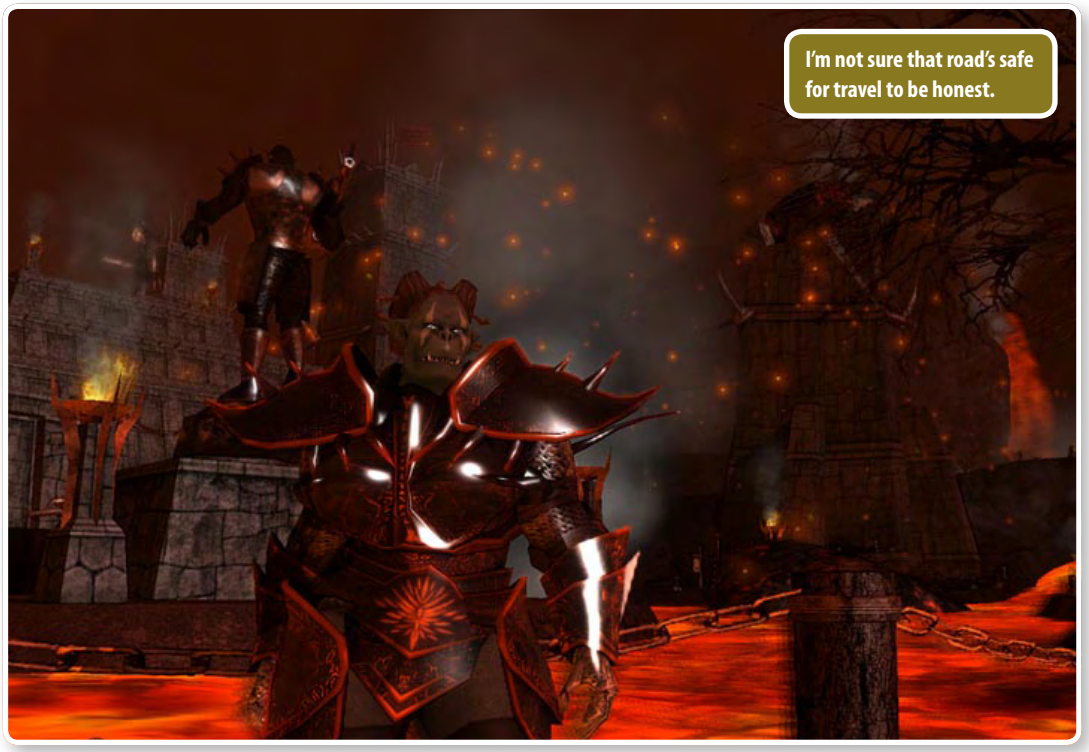
Publisher: Audiovisual SA
Developer: Adventurine
Heritage: None
Link: www.darkfallonline.com
ETA: January

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Darkfall

Fighting here, fighting there, fighting everywhere

On the surface, Darkfall's world of elves, dwarves, orcs and humans looks like any other fantasy MMO currently out there, albeit one that's been in development for so long that the makers of Duke Nukem Forever can look over and feel like they're rushing things and should probably slow down a wee bit. However, if you take more than a passing glance at this soon-to-be unleashed world then you start to notice that things aren't quite so simple.

For a start, the strong skill system bears a passing resemblance to that of Ultima Online's early days, in that nothing is off limits to any character – weapons, abilities, career paths, etc. – and instead revolves around whichever of the 1,000-plus skills, spells and abilities the player decides to begin using at any given time. The more you swing a sword, the better you get at sword-swinging, for instance. Taking it one step further and repeated sword-swinging not only raises that skill, but will affect your basic strength statistic as well, opening up a whole range of character development options to explore.


I'm not sure that road's safe for travel to be honest.


You find the oddest things when mowing the lawn.

Of course, as was seen with UO, this kind of mechanic is like catnip to the 'botters' who love nothing more than to set up macros for particular actions, stand in the corner swinging away and then just sit back and watch the numbers rise. How the Greek developer, Adventurine, is planning to counter this isn't clear, but given what occurs when you take a look at the rest of the game, we wouldn't be surprised to see some kind of blood-letting involved.

"Darkfall's biggest claim to fame is that it's a completely 100% PvP dominated world"

Claim to fame

You see, Darkfall's biggest claim to potential fame is that it's a completely 100% PvP dominated world. Nowhere is safe. Even the safe zones such as capital cities are only marginally less unsafe than the other areas. So, in keeping with the über-hardcore nature, combat takes on a different slant, eschewing the usual MMO methods for a real-time, action-packed offering, requiring effective use of blocks and attacks, a first-person ranged combat view, the

Darkfall continued

need to actually make contact with your target, and the ability to hurt your own teammates with friendly fire if your aim is off.

At least you get to know when you hit your opponent though, through the use of graphic blood splatter and the cries of pain and anguish from your foe, rather than seeing abstracted numbers floating above everyone's head like a psychotic maths professor on a bloody killing spree.

The right to loot

Kill your enemy and you get full looting rights, meaning the ever-present PvP takes on a more pressing urgency should you be carrying something particularly precious about your person.

And then, when you think it can't possibly set itself any further apart from the rest of the pack, step forward ship-to-ship combat! Outside of dedicated naval MMOs (Pirates of the Burning Sea, Bounty Bay Online), we've never so far experienced a solid, well-thought out ship-based combat system that blends seamlessly with the rest of the world. Darkfall not only promises to give you watery thrills, but to combine them with full city sieges, vehicular and mounted combat and large-scale warfare alongside the more traditional man versus monster action.

There's a lot of hidden depth to Darkfall, from guild versus guild war declarations to player-built cities to NPC mercenaries to boost your adventuring party. While it's true that solely PvP games haven't always fared that well on release to a seemingly conquest-hungry but quickly-bored-once-the-griefing-begins virtual populace, the fact that games such as EVE Online can continue to thrive offers some hope for Adventurine yet. With a European release already underway as you read this (and a US one to follow shortly thereafter), we'll see if these Greeks are bearing a gift worth spending time with very soon now.

"There's a lot of hidden depth to Darkfall"


Another peaceful day in the Hundred Acre Wood.



You know you've been hit when the red mist descends.


Not just a mount, but a handy bottle opener, too.

MMOZine Verdict

There's a lot to admire here assuming the gameplay quirks are polished

HOW COMPLETE



FIRST IMPRESSIONS



The Chronicles of Spellborn

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Spellborn International Ltd.
Heritage: None
Link: spellborn.acclaim.com
ETA: Spring

Dress to impress, then roll with your role

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of The Chronicles of Spellborn

One thousand quests, multiple experience point progression, stat-free clothing and a promise of limited grinding. If nothing else, The Chronicles of Spellborn is setting its stall out early on as a breath of fresh air in the overly populated (some say polluted) world of fantasy MMOs.

Even that fantasy label is a little misleading, set as this is in a post-apocalyptic world, albeit one that is so thick with magic and monsters that it makes no odds. Regardless, it's a tale of shatterings, demons, great houses and mighty heroes… not to mention some notably original takes on important things like character progression and combat.



Let's fight!

Let's start with the combat system, key to which is understanding the Skill Deck. Rather than rely on the tried and tested auto-target, auto-hit, pseudo-turn based systems of other MMOs, Spellborn mixes real-time combat, manual aiming (FPS-style crosshair action) and a multi-role skill bar that you pre-load with your attack moves and rotate through the rows with each trigger. The idea is you can line up combo moves by pre-loading related skills on each row, the number of slots growing as you increase in level. Imagine Guild Wars' hotbar system and a fruit machine's display area and you'll get the idea.



"Spellborn mixes real-time combat, manual aiming and a multi-role skill bar"



Spellborn continued

What expands this idea is the fact that each character class isn't limited to particular combat roles, meaning you can load melee, ranged, buffs and debuffs into different slots regardless of your character, and easily switch between roles mid-combat. Or you can choose to focus on one particular role and just give yourself more powerful options in that sphere instead. A truly personalised character development scheme, and one that looks set to add a much-needed layer of tactical thinking to the genre as a whole.

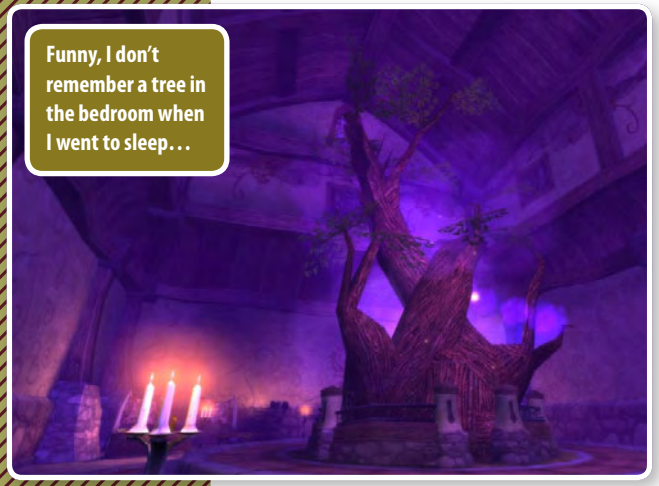
Dress to impress

Also helping the personalisation aspect is the ability for characters to wear and wield any type of armour, clothing and weapon they desire, regardless of class. Plate mail adorned wizard, sir? Absolutely.





"The game is pushing the Unreal engine to its limit, producing some stunning-looking scenery"



Bottom line is that clothing in and of itself offers no numerical bonus to your stats and is purely a cosmetic choice (meaning there are hundreds of dress-up options available from the start), and it's only through the use of 'sigils' that items take on power beyond the ability to look fab-u-lous. Sigils provide the buffs and can be applied to whatever item you feel like. Thus, your starting weapon can be continually improved right through to the level cap should you wish, rather than having to constantly change a beloved cudgel for a generic Whack-o-Stick Mk. II when you want to deal more cranial imploding damage to critters. Sigils can be swapped about at will, so even if you swap chainmail for formal dinner wear, your stat bonuses can still come with you.

There's a lot to like about Spellborn's design ideas, not to mention the game is pushing the Unreal engine to its limit, producing some stunning-looking scenery. Having already launched a seemingly successful European launch, it's soon time for the English-language players to get a look in, both here and in the US. ●

MMOZine Verdict

Original features could give this plucky upstart some muscle against the established 'big boys'

HOW COMPLETE



FIRST IMPRESSIONS



Runes of Magic

The European Community Manager defends attacks that his game is a clone…



Each settlement has a set of crafting stations.



Jörg Koonen, the European Community Manager of Runes of Magic.

More than 200,000 people have plunged themselves into the beta for Runes of Magic, making it one of the most successful test periods in recent memory. Even so, there remain claims that the game lacks identity, and people still aren't won over by the concept of so-called 'free-to-play' gaming. Jörg Koonen, RoM's Community Manager, reckons the times are a-changin'…

Do you think it's fair that Runes of Magic is being labelled by some as a clone?

"We have always said that Runes of Magic has been inspired by many MMORPGs"

We have always said that Runes of Magic has been inspired by many MMORPGs, and World of Warcraft is one of those. Many of us MMO veterans have seen a lot of the features incorporated in WoW before. We mustn't forget that there were such great games as Ultima Online, Everquest, Lineage II and the like which set standards for our genre. We think that we have taken many of their great ideas and just taken them a step further.

What features would you claim are unique to Runes of Magic?

To me, the most outstanding features are the Dual Class system, the different Rune Systems (e.g. for upgrading equipment or teleporting) and the dynamically generated instanced dungeons.

All characters in the game can chose a second class and switch the primary and secondary power. So any player can, for instance, play his Warrior/Mage to have incredible close combat proficiency at one time and then change to Mage/Warrior to unleash the raw power of magic. Each dual class combination has special unique Elite Skills that grant your chosen combination particularly powerful capabilities.



Use the Play and Stop controls to the left, or click here to see the enhanced version!



The stuff that nightmares are made of.

Interview continued

From what I've seen so far, the dynamically generated dungeon is something rarely found in full-blown MMORPGs. The system offers a great experience to all the dungeon fans that enjoy good hack-and-slash action from time to time. In return, these dungeons will offer a number of really cool items as rewards.

What's the end-game for high level players?
Just a few weeks ago we introduced epic quest lines for characters in their high 40s, and sometime in the near future we will have class, group and guild quests. There are open dungeons everywhere throughout the world, and raid dungeons of course – we all know how players love to raid and encounter epic bosses. We will also have the above mentioned 'tile-based' dungeons for the occasional good old-fashioned dungeon crawl.

We will have more PvP options, ranging from arenas to battle grounds, where players can freely PvP. For guilds we have guild wars and guild battles, where opposing guilds can have a good old scrap. Finally, there will be dungeon sieges and special Server vs. Server vs. Server maps, too.

What new feature do you have planned post-release?
For one of the first free add-ons, we have already announced that we're planning to add a new race and two new classes. The plan is to continue telling the story of Taborea, so we will definitively see new zones, new monsters, new quests and many more dungeons and instances. Eventually we'll have mounted combat as well.


Collecting resources is nice and simple.


Finding friends to group with is easy.

Why did you decide to make the game free-to-play and not subscription based?
It was no easy decision. Runes of Magic is a game that has enough features and content that would easily justify a monthly subscription – especially when you keep in mind how many people are working on the project full-time. But then we decided to go for a more community-friendly business model by making the game free-to-play, because it's our goal to create a game that is enjoyable for those who don't want to spend any money and players who like to use the Item Shop alike.

We believe that Runes of Magic will prove that free-to-play games can be commercially successful – provided they meet the standards of modern MMORPG games.

"We believe that Runes of Magic will prove that free-to-play games can be commercially successful"

Why do you think free-to-play games are often derided?
One reason for this is the belief that 'You get what you pay for', and that free-to-play games are considered to be boring, lacking in story, depth and, most importantly, support. In part that's a cultural thing, as the most successful MMORPGs in Europe and North America are subscription-based. Players have gotten used to having free access to all in-game elements, features and content for just one

Interview continued

subscription, knowing that everyone around them was playing on the same terms. Many of these games offer items in their shops that grant paying customers advantages over players wanting to invest time rather than money. As we are proving with Runes of Magic, this doesn't have to be the case. We offer thousands of quests, unique gameplay features and a support team in the background – and the things we sell in the Item Shop are either only cosmetic or save people time.

What can you say to players with no spare cash who would like to compete with the best players?
Players can substitute money for a certain amount of time, meaning that they can buy themselves items that allow them to level faster or skip certain chores. However, they won't be able to buy anything that gives them an unfair advantage over non-buying players. Most items in the shop can be found in game as well – some are rare drops, some can be purchased for in-game currency (e.g. rental mounts).

Item Shop users might reach the level cap before non-paying players and get a few things earlier, but in the end they are only saving time.

"We offer thousands of quests, unique gameplay features and a support team in the background"



PLAY TO WIN!

A graphics card and T-shirts up for grabs!

Not content with giving us all a free game to play, Frogster have handed over some free loot as well. We decided that we give quite enough away already, so in order to be able to win yourself the graphics card, we want something in return. In order to be in with a chance of winning a Gainward 9800GTX+ 512MB graphics card, courtesy of Frogster, we would like to receive your correct answer to the question shown below.

Don't be too despondent if you don't win the graphics card though, as we have a few T-shirts as runner-up prizes. You lucky, lucky people!



Competition closes 9th March 2009. See website for full T&Cs.

Runes of Magic

Publisher: Frogster
Developer: Runewaker
Heritage: None
Link: www.runesofmagic.com
ETA: Q1 2009

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Publisher: Codemasters Online
Developer: Turbine
Heritage: LOTRO Shadows of Angmar, D&D Online, Asheron's Call
Link: www.lotro-europe.com
OUT NOW

LOTRO: Mines of Moria

"The most significant upgrade is the introduction of Legendary Weapons"



Speak friend and enter, once you've cleared the rubble away.

LOTRO is now polished and expanded, and one of the best fantasy MMOs out there. Welcome to Moria…

Volume One of The Lord of the Rings Online was well received by the press, but it failed to fully catch hold with the gaming public, and the lower level areas soon started to look empty. In the higher level areas though, you'll still find a thriving community, and Mines of Moria is the second "Volume" for the game, aimed at extending the high level areas for the active players.

The most significant upgrade to gameplay in Volume Two is the introduction of Legendary Weapons, which offer awesome potential for enhancing your combat skills and transforming the way you play. However, they are sadly under-represented in the game manual and therefore sometimes underused by players. Legendary Weapons are class items that gain experience as your character does through combat. They drop from mobs or you can buy them from your class trader (which is another new addition in Moria) and they provide you with a new challenge in the game: to create the perfect weapon for your character.

Just like your character, Legendary Items have levels, with points to spend each time they level up. Individual weapons have different sets of skills, so you need to select a weapon that has a decent DPS for you, and which has attributes that suit your method of play – do you want to increase your critical chance or your armour class, for example? What's more, new Legendary Weapons become available every two levels above level 51, so you have to be constantly on the look out for a better weapon. On top of levelling, Legendary Weapons can be improved with gems, which you get by deconstructing Legendary Weapons you pick up but don't want – including ones you acquire for different classes. These gems can be combined by a Relic Master to create a higher Tier gem with better benefits (five Level One gems = one Level Two gem, roughly) – you can continue doing this right up to Tier Eight. It's a real balancing act, as you have to gauge the trade-off between deconstructing the weapon you have levelled and starting again with a new one, against the benefits the new one will offer when levelled to a reasonable point.

All of this means you can end up with a very powerful and unique

Roll over screen for annotations



TOP TIP!
If you get a legendary item you can use, but don't want, don't deconstruct it immediately. Take it to level 2 (100 XP) and then deconstruct it as you will get many more runes from it.

Mines of Moria cont.

weapon. It would have been helpful if the game had introduced this complex system more fully, as it only goes as far as showing you how to get your first Legendary Weapon and then leaves you to find out the rest by yourself. Once you do understand it though, it does add a new depth to the game.

The idea of Legendary Weapons isn't new – pen and paper RPGs have had the like for decades – but MMOs have never imported the idea, and the complexity and sophistication of the system is a boon to the game, and all credit to Turbine for introducing them in such a complete form.

This does seem to have been done at something of a cost though – the new class skills as you level are less than inspired, and often just "upgrades" to existing skills, which is a shame.

Of course, there's more to the new Volume than just a new weapons' system. There's the new area of Moria, and out into Lothlórien. Moria itself is huge, split down into several areas. The fact that it's all underground hasn't stopped the developers from creating breathtaking scenes, with caverns rising up out of view, and dropping off to unfathomable depths.



Endgame instances include huge bosses and "hard modes".



We're not going to be fighting this one. Just run!

Varied quests

Thankfully, the quests are varied and entertaining, with the usual solo quests for killing *x* number of mobs, and the group quests for larger dungeons, plus raids for end-game content. There are also several solo instances for getting titles or extras for Legendary Weapons, which are great fun. Lastly, there's some small fellowship quests, which are remarkably hard. Along with XP from the quests and reputation gained (and this is an area where you'll really want to increase your reputation, because the Guards and Miners in Moria have some impressive items to sell to those with Kindred status), you also need to take a new look at the Trait system.

Firstly, there are masses of both new Traits and additional levels to existing ones, gained as usual by completing numbers of quests, killing numbers of mobs, using your skills or discovering places. Additionally though, like armour sets, class traits now stack, so you gain an additional buff by having two or more traits equipped from one tree – another example of the sophistication of gameplay that LOTRO now offers.

As well as all this new content and gameplay, there are two new classes, Rune Master and Warden. Warden is a sort of off-tank, while Rune

BIG ENHANCEMENTS

As well as new content, Moria has new ideas

EPIC QUESTS **STUFF OF LEGENDS** **TRAIT TREATS**

As with Volume One, Moria offers an over-arching storyline for you to follow in the form of an Epic Quest. It's a long quest chain, but regularly offers items rewards that are unmissable, and rival some drops from raids. This Epic system can really involve you in the game.





The 21st Hall is the new hub, with AH, vault, etc. Hunters get a Swift Travel here at level 55.

Mines of Moria cont.

Master is probably the more interesting, as it is a magic user. Magic has always been the Achilles' heel of LOTRO – by being true to Tolkein's world, it has meant a fantasy MMO where magic is rare, which is fine, but not much fun to play. Rune Master overcomes this by allowing to use, guess what, runes to cast magic. The class can switch between being a healer or a DPS, and the interesting thing is that you make the choice at the start of each combat. The more offensive spells you cast, the better you get at them, but the less attuned you are to casting healing spells and vice versa, but this cools down after combat, so you can swap to the other role on the next fight if you want. It's a fascinating class to play, but with one drawback – you have to start at level 1. In WoW, the new Death Knight came in at level 55, so not at the old level cap, but high enough up that old hands didn't have to replay content and newcomers could join the game at a high enough level to play with real life friends who had been playing for a while. Not so here; it's back to the nursery slopes of Ered Luin for you.



Even though it's set indoors, scenery in Moria is varied and as gorgeous as ever.

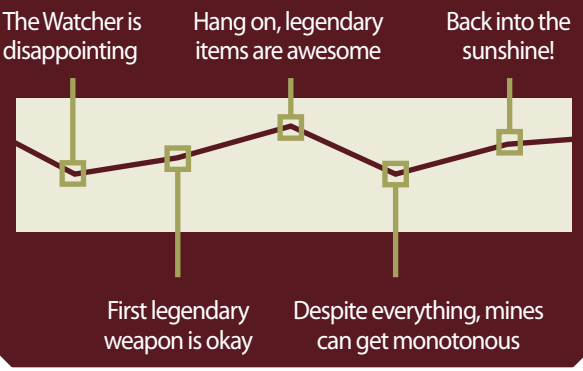
Finding flaws

This is a missed trick, and it's also a sign of the one flaw in Moria. As well as pleasing existing players, and tempting back lapsed ones, an expansion should reach out to new players. Moria struggles to do this, because a new player comes into a barren start game environment. While WoW ensures everyone has to go back to Ironforge to do certain things, thus ensuring the place is always teeming, the only population centre in LOTRO remains Bree, and after a certain point you don't need to go there. So, new gamers may well think that there aren't many people playing LOTRO and give up, where the truth is that in the high level areas, the game is packed and lively. Get into Moria, and it's genuinely busy. LOTRO needs to create a community hub where all players have to go from time to time, together with an easy way to get there. It also needs to find a way for newcomers to get up to the content where most people are playing quickly.

As LOTRO gets regular updates in the form of books, we hope this is something that'll be addressed. Until then, lapsed LOTRO gamers should get into Moria, and those with stamina should give it a go. LOTRO is now a most complex and rewarding fantasy MMO. Moria offers masses of new content, looks gorgeous and is sociable. Bravo, Turbine.

David Taylor

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



TO BE CONTINUED...
LOTRO gets content updates in the form of "Books". Book 7 will complete Lothlórien and a new raid. You can already see where the Stable Master is going to be, incidentally.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…



5 MINUTES
Enter Eregion, the new area with access to Moria. There's 2-3 levels of content here.



6 HOURS
Venture into the hills outside Moria, and complete the Epic to gain access to the mines.



8 HOURS
Complete the first part of the Epic quest in Volume Two and wander around the first few halls.



DAY THREE
Swap your first legendary weapon for something better and solo instance for a new title for it.



WEEK THREE
Head past the broken bridge of Khazad-dum and you can get back outside into Lothlórien.

MMOZine Verdict

New content, levels, gameplay and classes

- Legendary weapons rock
- More content than a single player needs to level cap
- More magic with new Rune Master class



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sports Interactive
Heritage: The Football Manager series
Link: www.football managerlive.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.6GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space and a DX9.0c-compatible graphics card

Football Manager Live

Same old maddening addiction – now with added humans

The main question to ask about any incarnation of a Football Manager title is simple: Is it just as maddeningly addictive as ever, capable of piercing through even the most iron of wills, forcing grown men to stare at little coloured dots on a screen until the wee hours of the morning, forsaking friends, family and food for the promise of pretend footballing fame and fortune? Actually, that's quite a complicated question when you put it in such a long-winded fashion as that,

"No one was sure if the classic offline game would ever work in an online multiplayer format"

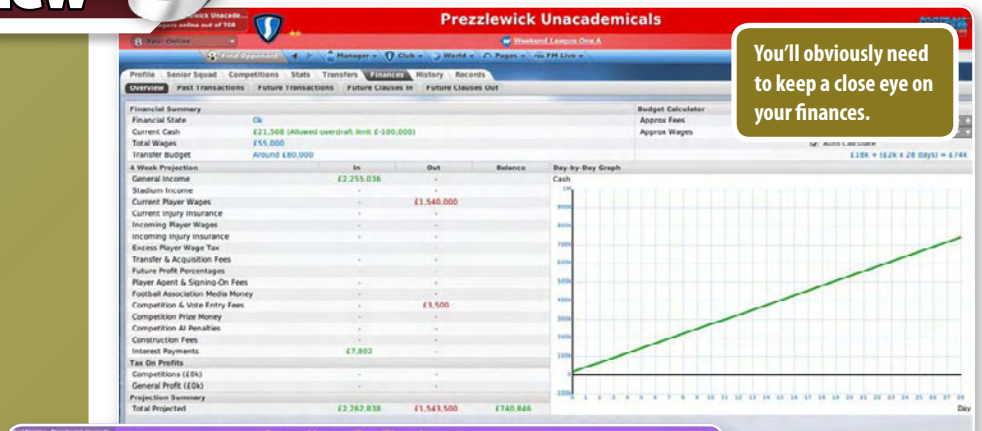
but the answer, in Football Manager Live's case is certainly simple enough… oh god, yes. Want proof? It's 3am on a Sunday morning as I write this and once I'm done I won't be going to bed but back to the pitch instead.

It was never clear, in the months leading up to FML's launch into the world, that it would be this way. Hell, no one was even sure if the classic offline football managing sim would ever work in an online, multiplayer format. Many people had tried to reach for this holy grail before, after all. Many, many people, in fact. And almost without exception, efforts ended up as either noble failures or embarrassing train wrecks. For many observers,

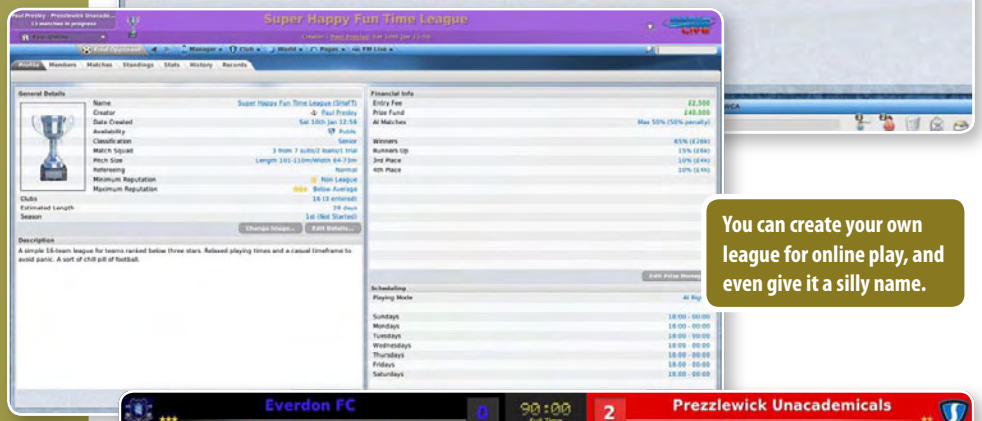








You'll obviously need to keep a close eye on your finances.



You can create your own league for online play, and even give it a silly name.



Everdon? See what we did there?

Football Manager cont.

FML was going to be Sports Interactive's grand folly, just another big name developer getting too big for its boots. Instead, by expertly jettisoning the trappings of real-world football infrastructure constraints and developing in its place an online world-friendly system (but still keeping the essential themes and spirit that has imbued every incarnation of the offline game to date), FML manages to create an addictive, playable and structurally rewarding world of football management and social competition.

"The game manages to create an addictive world of football management and social competition"

At its heart, FML is basically four systems in one: Fantasy Football, with all starting teams chosen from a preset 'average' pool of footballers, with the superstars of soccer only becoming available as the game worlds progress – thus keeping things fair and square at the start. Then there's the player-auctioning eBay setup, the traditional matchday tactical engine, and finally competitive Facebook groups if you can imagine such a thing.

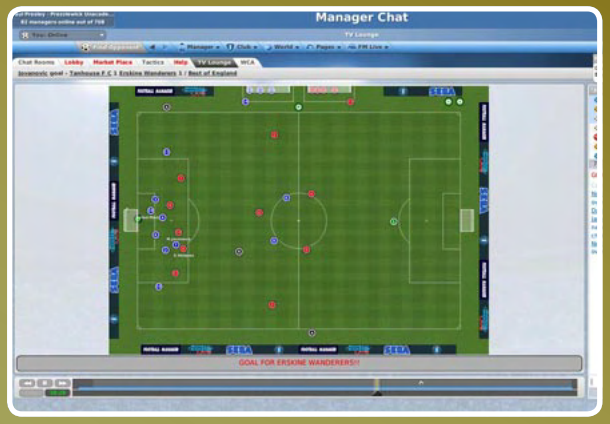
There's no one 'league' for all in a gameworld. Instead, players are

MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Talk from the touchline

TV LOUNGE | CROWD CONTROL | NEWS REPORTS

The social side of the game is equally as important in creating an accessible world to play in as the tactical sim, and FML is filled with nice touches to encourage interaction. Multiple chat channels help, including a 'TV Lounge' that shows constantly updating clips of matches in progress.





Football Manager cont.

encouraged to create their own imaginatively titled leagues and knockout tournaments, then either invite their friends or make them open to all. Your team can enter as many leagues and 'cups' as you like (or can afford to if they have a monetary prize setup), earning your bunch of players skill increases, your overall team a constantly shifting ranking score, and your wallet some much-needed cash to bring in new talent.

And it works. Matches in a league can be played in any order you like, so long as they all get done by the 'play-by' date (at which point the game's AI will play the game for you using your previously saved tactics as best it can). This is the crucial key to success that Sports Interactive has unlocked, and usually where other games have gone wrong, trying too hard to stick to the established real-world setup of fixtures and leagues, ultimately becoming tiresomely drawn-out affairs that required far too much coordination of real-world schedules by players with no real means to synchronise their play times. What happens here is you log on, scan the list of currently online opponents, play whichever matches are available, then log off until the next time (actually that 'logging off' part is harder to do than you might think, given the game's annoying habit of making you want to keep trying 'just one more tweak to the formation').



Even checking up on your mail is neatly done and a process that will keep you enthralled for ages.

Implemented well

Football Manager Live is a superb implementation of a game that many said simply couldn't be done, filled with elements that make perfect sense even as they eschew the real world in the process. More than simply being a great game of football management, it's a great social environment that has a game attached, it's a remarkably smooth technical achievement (even Mac owners can join in for god's sake), and it's a shining example of how the world of MMOs can be so much more than the usual hack-and-slash levelling grindfests when you put some thought into them and move beyond the genre's cliches. Recommended.

Paul Presley

PULSOMETER: Signs of life

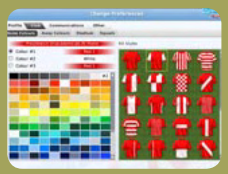


FREEZE FRAME

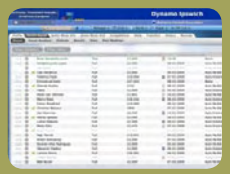
Taking you through the game, one step at a time…



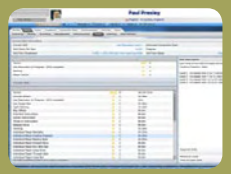
TEAM NAME
Choosing your team name is key to standing out among teams like Fundee United or Carsenal.



COLOUR ME BAD
Next comes the all-important kit designer. Your shirt colours say so much about your players.



ROLL CALL
Get your starting team by letting the game know how much of your initial capital you want to spend.



TIME FOR SCHOOL
FML uses an EVE Online style of real-time 'training' to open up hundreds of new tactical options.



BLOW THE WHISTLE
Pick a starting line-up and your tactics and experience your first match as a football manager.

MMOZine Verdict

Might not be what you were expect, but all the better for it

- Hugely addictive
- Socially engaging
- No pressure game style

Atlantica Online

Turn-based combat in a topsy-turvy world

Publisher: nDoors
Developer: nDoors
Heritage: Time'N'Tales, GoonZu
Link: www.playatlantica.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 5GB hard drive space and a DX9.0c-compatible graphics card

If we were to tell you Atlantica Online is set on Earth, it probably wouldn't surprise you too much to learn that it's a very different planet to the one we currently occupy. Bizarrely, the lands of South-East Asia are abundant with fairies and unicorns, to the point that you might be forgiven for thinking Atlantica is a happy world full of cakes and smiles. However, just like our own here-and-now, you only have to scratch the surface to realise there are evil forces at work. The fairies have become gossamer-winged harpies and the unicorns are literally plague-ridden. Even the local deer would like nothing better than to nuzzle you into an early grave.

Roll over screen for annotations

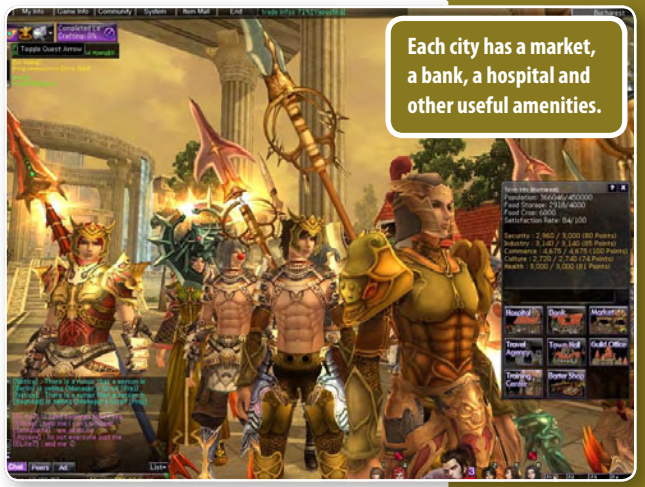


"Bizarrely, the lands of South-East Asia are abundant with fairies and unicorns"

It's all to do with some substance called Oriharukon, invented long ago by the Atlanteans, and so zealously prized thereafter that it drove to destruction every nation that took an interest in it – eventually even the Atlanteans themselves. The evil stuff has persisted to the present day, and it's setting the once benign wildlife on an orgy of random violence. By a rather happy coincidence, it also puts the narrative cogs in place that drive the grind for endless rounds of battles in order to level up, and so take on more dangerous creatures lurking in other parts of the globe.

Playing to a stereotype

Approached as a typical MMORPG, Atlantica is a little disappointing; playing almost to the Asian stereotype. Taken as a pure questing experience it's blighted by a ratchety storyline and mundane fetch-and-carry missions that amount to little more than a painfully stretched-out – but, at the same time, helpfully exhaustive – tutorial. On the plus side you can auto-route your way across the landscape without having to get too frustrated, and because mobs meander about rather than home in on you, it's easy to avoid battles should you wish to. You can even queue up your refining and crafting jobs on the move, which makes the









Atlantica Online cont.

shortcomings outside of combat considerably more bearable.

Where the game deviates from the standard MMOG template, and where it absolutely shines, is in its approach to combat. As you progress you can recruit mercenaries to join you (lesser NPCs, if you will), who will also gain experience alongside your central character. They only come out to play when you walk into a monster, at which point you're zoomed off into a mini-instance for as many rounds of turn-based combat as may be required to secure victory. It's nothing that hasn't been seen before in dozens of Japanese console RPGs, but it's a system that works brilliantly and in an MMO feels refreshingly unique.

Time for combat

A timer in combat means that quick-witted tactical decisions are required, and for each member of your gang – assuming they have enough Action Points – you can choose standard or magic attacks, use items from your inventory or rearrange your formation. Swordsmen and spearmen will typically take the front row, with long-range and magic users at the rear for protection. As you would expect, if your hero is killed, the battle ends in defeat.

Battling mobs is all well and good, but linking up and fighting with or against other players is when combat really gets interesting. You can have three players on each side, and with each able to field up to nine

WORLD GONE MAD

It's Earth, but not as we know it

LONDON MOSCOW ROME

To get to the Big Smoke you need to walk through the Channel Tunnel. Swimming is obviously out of the question.





Atlantica Online cont.

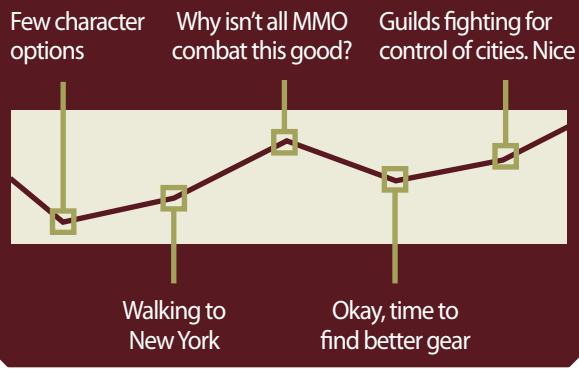
characters in their party – and with 20 classes of mercenary to choose from (including witches, cannoneer, beast trainers and mech-armoured inventors) – it can be just as much fun preparing for them as it is fighting the battles themselves. Your tactical options are limited slightly by the level of your main hero and the finances you may or may not have earned through missions or crafting, but even at level 20, when the 'Free League' opens up (which only takes a few hours to reach), the battles are rarely anything other than a lot of fun. Hopefully in a future review we can expand upon the endgame PvP between guilds battling for control of cities.

Atlantica Online isn't just a good online game, as its combat system makes it one of the most unique online worlds you can log into. It's made all the better for being free to play, and while you may be tempted to invest in some permanent slots to expand your paltry and fiddly inventory, it shouldn't be necessary to part with any money to succeed at the game on the same terms as those with more money than sense. If you can get over the fact that there are sharks in the English Channel and approach the game as a fun and thoughtful tournament combat game first – before being a role-playing experience second – you may find yourself spending more time across its bizarre interpretation of Earth than in the real thing. If you do, we suggest that you avoid Milton Keynes like the plague, though. There are creatures there that are best left undiscovered. You have been warned.

Richie Shoemaker



PULSOMETER: Signs of life



TURN UP FOR THE FIGHT

Gladiators, are you ready?

SOLO **PARTY** **TOURNY**

Standard PvE combat is your party versus the mob. It's still way more interesting that hacking at rabbits in other games.





"Atlantica's combat system makes it one of the most unique online worlds you can log into"

MMOZine Verdict

Unique MMO combat in an oddly compelling world

- ✓ Tactically engaging
- ✓ You don't have to pay
- ✗ Head-scratching at times

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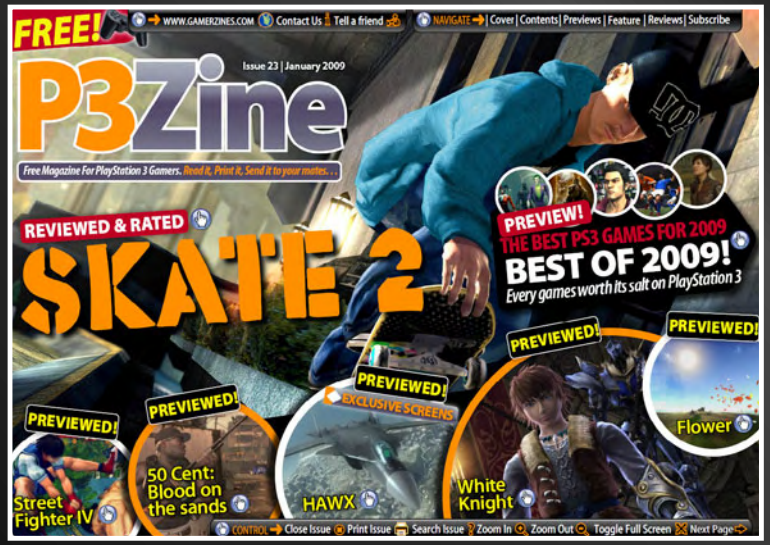
360Zine FREE! For Xbox 360

P3Zine FREE! For PlayStation 3

PLAYZINE FREE! For Wii, DS & PSP









PLAY AGAIN

Around a world in 14 days*

(*or however long the trail period lasts)

Prologue: The journey begins…



Massive gun and a scary bear? You're pretty safe we reckon.

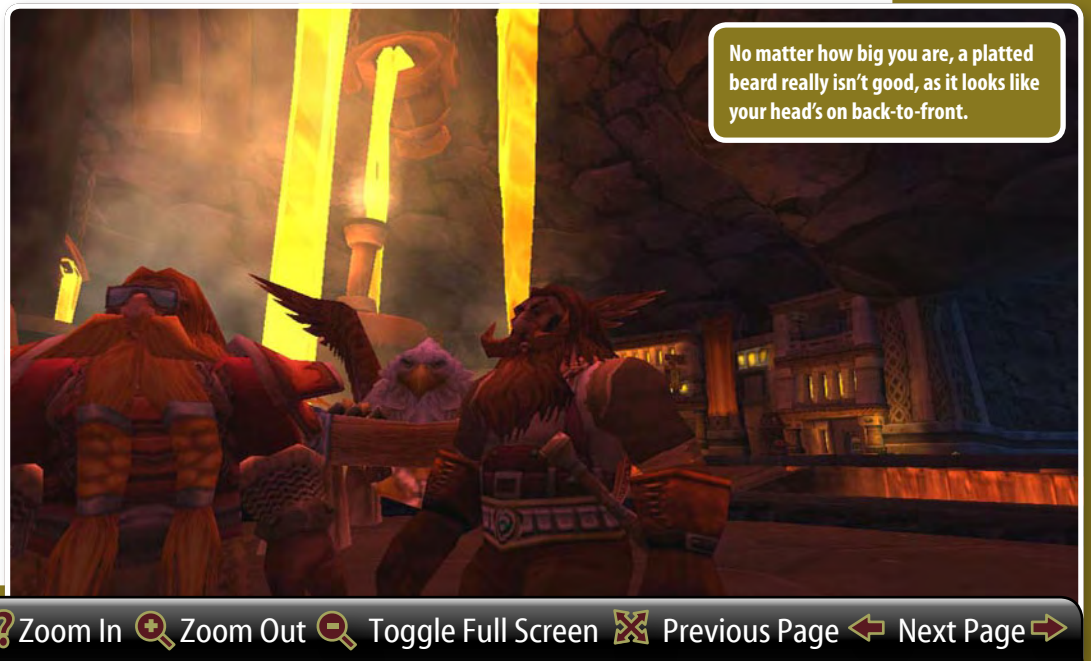
We've got something different for Replay this month, as we take a slightly alternative look at some of the MMOs that you're likely to be playing. This month we bring you one man's adventures into the World of Warcraft. In this case, the man is our very own editor, Richie Shoemaker…

Ongoing coverage of World of Warcraft across these pages has been a gradual levelling-up process, one that in the wake of Lich King's release allowed everyone to burst through the thick ice that once barred the way to level 80. Undoubtedly Northrend is a great place to hang out for those that can get there, but for most people starting out in an MMO, such locales are a long way away. It's easy to forget that every week thousands of people join World of Warcraft for the first time, and while it may not be as busy a place as it once was, life is still thriving in the Eastern Kingdoms of World of Warcraft Classic.

It's the same across dozens of established persistent worlds. Those who've been around since launch are searching the nooks and crannies for rare loot in high-level



It's only quiet here because everyone's already scarpered to Northrend.



No matter how big you are, a platted beard really isn't good, as it looks like your head's on back-to-front.





Replay continued

zones, or just waiting around for the next big expansion, while quietly there is a constant influx of visitors sniffing around the starting grounds. Developers hope such people will find a more permanent home, but inevitably many continue their search for the perfect world.

Starting an MMO years after everyone else has been through it is a far more relaxed way to enjoy an online world than when it first goes live. The hyperactive kids who once rushed about ceaselessly hacking at every living thing around have grown up and moved on, leaving behind a few veterans doing the MMO equivalent of chewing straw and rocking in chairs in their porches, while the occasional latecomers to the game run past frantically trying to evade the local wildlife.

I had such an encounter myself as I was a having a nostalgic trip to some old stomping grounds in World of Warcraft. I forget the guy's name, but he was abusing some boars near Iceflow Lake, when he aggroed more than he could handle and scarpered off. Being a kindly soul, I picked off a couple of the slavering beasts with my rifle, after which he stopping peeing his pants and eventually came back to chat. Turns out he was having a holiday from his usual game of choice, Archlord, a game that's hardly the next big thing. Interestingly, he'd always avoided the big-name games, fearing they were full of whining morons. His fears were unfounded on this occasion, because the only creatures who had cause to complain were the boars. I'd say we were the only two souls around that didn't have punctuation marks floating over our heads. Even so, he didn't plan on staying beyond his 10-day trial period: "Too many other worlds to visit," he said, running into the icy mists looking for more pork to harvest.

> ***"This meant that I would stay only as long in each MMO as its visa would allow"***

It was this brief encounter that got me thinking… My freeloading friend had unwittingly tasked me to experience all that the varied online worlds had to offer the hapless and transient newbie. It would be a long and hazardous journey, at times soul-destroying, so I would limit my time at each waypoint. This meant that I would stay only as long in each MMO as its visa would allow, reporting on how it felt to be new and alone in a strange land. I could think of no better place to begin my journey than from where he had come. Northrend, which was to be my eventual destination, would have to wait for another time.

Picking up my hunting rifle and throwing another slab of boar meat in the direction of my flea-ridden companion, I plodded through the folds of snow to Ironforge. Perhaps with enough silver I might convince a Gryphon Master that Chantra and the lands of this fabled Archlord aren't too far away. ●

To be continued…



Compo

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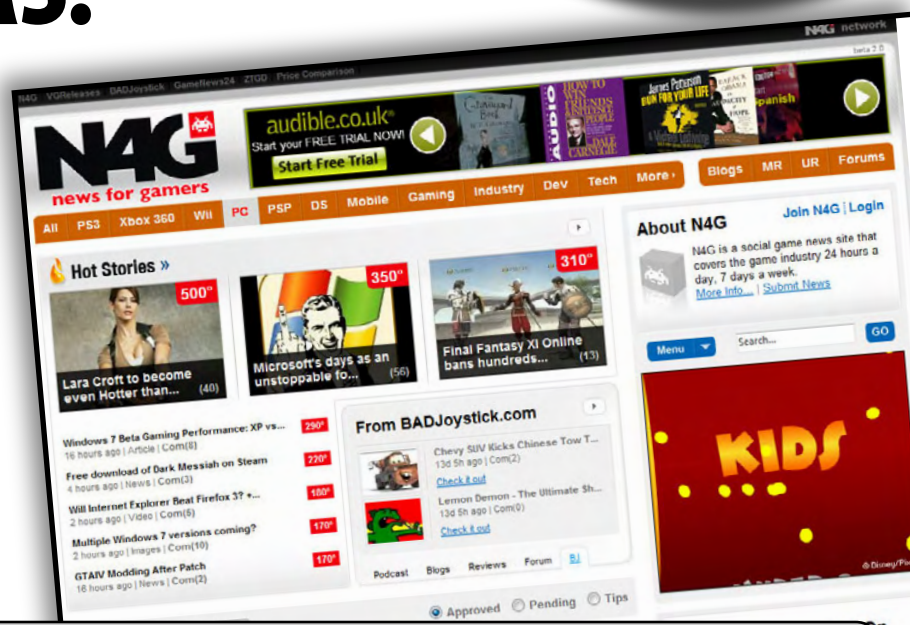


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