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MMOZine

Issue 10 | March 2009

Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates

WIN!

- World Of Warcraft Hardware!
- Jumpgate Evolution Beta Keys
- LOTRO Special Edition

EXCLUSIVE

EVE ONLINE APOCRYPHA

EXPLORING THE LATEST EVE EXPANSION



+ INTERVIEW

Jumpgate Evolution

Are NetDevil prepared for launch?



+ DEVELOPER CHAT

Everquest is 10!

Happy birthday to Sony's ground-breaking MMORPG



+ EXPANSION PREVIEW

Warhammer Online: Call To Arms

Mythic go on the offensive

+ PLUS! MIDDLE EARTH ON TRIAL | GOODBYE TABULA RASA | FREE REALMS PREVIEWED

Welcome to MMOZine



If you happen to be reading this tenth issue on publication day – which happens to fall on the tenth day of March – then you should be impressed that today happens to also be a significant date in the history of the classic MMO, EVE Online, which sees the release of its most ambitious expansion: Apocrypha – which by frightening coincidence happens to be its tenth.

As if this cosmic convergence wasn't enough to have you avoiding ladders and black cats for the next week, we celebrate the tenth birthday of EverQuest, which a decade ago this month went on to become the most popular MMORPG of its day, and still has a greet deal of life left in it… unlike some other games you'll read about this issue. Enjoy the mag.

Richie Shoemaker, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

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



PAUL PRESLEY
A big fan of Seven, apparently. The one with Brad Pitt in.



JIM ROSSIGNOL
When your number is up, your number is up…



DAN GRILIOPOULOS
Has his own infinite improbability drive.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…

WIN! LORD OF THE RINGS PACK!

EVE ONLINE: APOCRYPHA

Could this update be the best EVE yet?



Warhammer Online: Call to Arms

Who could resist half-naked Dwarves?





Free Realms

Doin' it for the kids



The Chronicles of Spellborn

Could it be magic?

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

Pirate Galaxy
Dragonica
Need for Speed Online
Atlantica Online
Need for Speed
Final Fantasy XI Online
EVE Online: Apocrypha
Warhammer Online: Call to Arms
Football Superstars
Free Realms
Jumpgate Evolution
The Chronicles of Spellborn
Lord of the Rings Online
EverQuest interview



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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.

Without the multimedia playing, the magazine will look correct, but you will be missing out on all of the extra content built into each issue, like videos, animated screenshots, annotations, quizzes, competitions and more.

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

Pirate Galaxy

FIRST LOOK

A sideways look at saving the world

Publisher: Gamigo
Developer: Splitscreen Studios
Heritage: None
Link: www.pirategalaxy.com
ETA: Spring

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



The closed beta should be opening up soon enough.

What's the story?

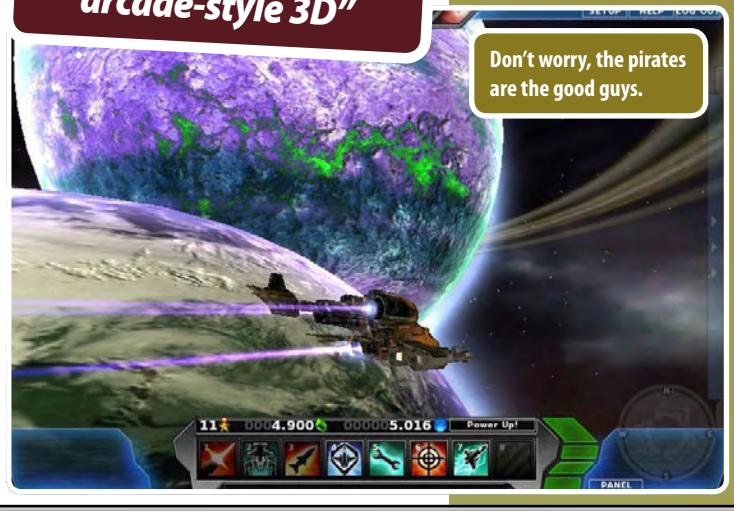
The hierarchy of MMO games runs thus: Triple-A subscription model games, subscription games with an RMT marketplace, then free-to-play games with RMT extras, free-to-play with advertising and web browser games. Pirate Galaxy is very much the latter, a sci-fi themed browser game (with optional downloadable client for those so inclined) about space adventurers battling evil aliens and other players in a quest to plunder the universe.

What do we know?

Unlike, say, EVE Online, Pirate Galaxy's space adventuring takes place in full arcade-style 3D, with players using a fairly impressive (for a browser-based system) graphics engine to simulate both soaring through the stars, heading into space stations and swooping down onto the planets for atmospheric combat action – beat that CCP! Okay, truthfully it's not likely to give the bigger boys such as EVE or Jumpgate Evolution any sleepless nights, but Pirate Galaxy appears to be designed specifically for quick-fire, dip-in/dip-out fun, making its chances of becoming a big casual hit all the better. Plus, German developer Splitscreen Studios is hoping that the technology on display will serve as an advert for just how far browser-based games have come since Runescape.

"Unlike, say, EVE Online, Pirate Galaxy's space adventuring takes place in full arcade-style 3D"





Don't worry, the pirates are the good guys.

When do we get more?

Currently in a closed beta, publisher Gamigo – the team behind such offbeat hits as Shot Online (the golfing MMO) and the oddly popular Fiesta Online – is slowly opening the doors to new players every day, until a target of 5,000 is reached. Beyond that, we'll just have to keep watching the stars to see when the Jolly Roger is hoisted and the public doors are finally thrown open.

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Dragonica

FIRST LOOK

A sideways look at saving the world

Publisher: gPotato.eu
Developer: Barunson Interactive
Heritage: Dragon Raja
Link: http://en.gpotato.eu
ETA: N/A

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



Brightly-coloured characters – check. Big numbers all over the place – check. Guess where this game comes from?



They're so cute when they're young.

"You even get pets and housing to give everything a personal touch"

The side-scrolling action adventure is making a comeback. Who's for a Dynamite Dan MMO in 2010?

What's the story?

There's been a definite shift towards grim, brutal fantasy of late. Age of Conan paved the way, Warhammer danced along afterwards, Chronicles of Spellborn and Darkfall are hacking and slashing their way into view and a thousand and one free-to-pay Asian-style titles are lining up for a charge, weapons dripping with the blood of their previous victims. Thank Buddha then for Barunson Interactive's cute-as-heck, side-scrolling, tongue-in-cheek Dragonica.

What do we know?

On the surface it looks like any one of a hundred anime-style, cutesy free-to-play games out there, but the thought of everything being handled in a side-scrolling manner in the style of Golden Axe, combined with Super Smash Brothers-style combat (think fast, frenetic and very colourful) and all manner of combos to master, suggests a quick pace to gameplay that makes it perfect for jumping in and out of on a casual basis, or teaming up with friends either to complete instanced missions or to have a good old 10-player brawl. You even get pets and housing to give everything a personal touch. Boss monsters provide the four traditional Warrior, Mage, Archer and Rogue classes with some tactical gameplay, and a progressive class expansion system means you make regular choices about how to expand your personal abilities as you level up.

When do we get more?

Late spring is the only official word on eventual release, although different territories are firing up private and open betas all the time. For Europe that's being handled by gPotato (an offshoot of casual, free-to-play specialists Gala Networks) and requires signing up for a free account to get a chance at an invite.

7 UP

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



Age of Conan

Developer: Funcom | **ETA:** Out now

Conan's reign has been rocky of late. Large-scale debt and the loss of key members of staff haven't helped, but on the plus side, the actual game is still improving and even about to get a major content update. Update 5 will see the Tarantia Commons playfield introduced, a high-level questing area with a strong storyline aspect to its many dungeons.



Atlantica Online

Developer: NDoors | **ETA:** Out now

Atlantica Online has a 'Fortnight of the Oracle' event that kicked off on March 6th. For the two-week period, everyone receives up to 150% XP boosts, as well as the chance to take part in a series of contests, races and games to earn extra rewards.

Final Fantasy XI Online

Developer: Square-Enix | **ETA:** Out now

FFXI has been ticking along nicely in the background, slowly amassing it's now very impressive half a million-strong userbase. April sees these players rewarded with not only additional content and an expanded XP system that now offers bonus currency for special buffs and teleports, but also tools for players to build their own dungeons to share with their friends.



Need for Speed Online

Publisher: EA | **ETA:** TBC

Having learned from its mistakes with the ill-fated (and ahead of its time) Motor City Online, EA is hoping not to repeat them entirely with the latest instalment in the long-running Need For Speed racing series. Free-to-play, NFSWO isn't just a cheap console port, being built for PC from the ground up, including a completely customisable interface featuring a fine selection of 'gadgets' that players can display alongside their custom-built cars.



Ys Online: The Call of Solum

Developer: Nihon Falcom/CJ Internet | **ETA:** TBC

Lovers of Japanese console RPGs will be pressing some ungodly key combo in order to jump for joy at the announcement of Ys Online: The Call of Solum, the continuation of a 22-year old saga that's almost as much a staple of Asian culture as rice and robots. Nihon promises a fast-paced combat system, plenty of dungeons to explore, and epic guild battles which all sounds lovely, if not exactly staggeringly original.



ON THE RADAR

2009
- DC Universe Online

AUTUMN
- Aion: Tower of Eternity

SUMMER
- Jumpgate Evolution

SUMMER
- Champions Online

Star Wars: The old Republic

Publisher: BioWare | **ETA:** TBC

The Threat of Peace is the name of a joint collaboration between BioWare and Dark Horse Comics, the result is an online comic book detailing the story behind (and leading up to) the events in the highly anticipated Star Wars: The Old Republic. Issue one is currently up on the official website, penned by BioWare's Rob Chestney and illustrated by Alex Sanchez.





Tabula Rasa

Publisher: NCSoft

After months of build-up, Tabula Rasa has finally closed. Prior to the end, the devs decided to loosen up all the restriction on loot drops and award massive XP bonuses, before unleashing the largest Bane invasion ever seen and then flipping the switch.

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Games for Windows LIVE

EVE Online: Apocrypha

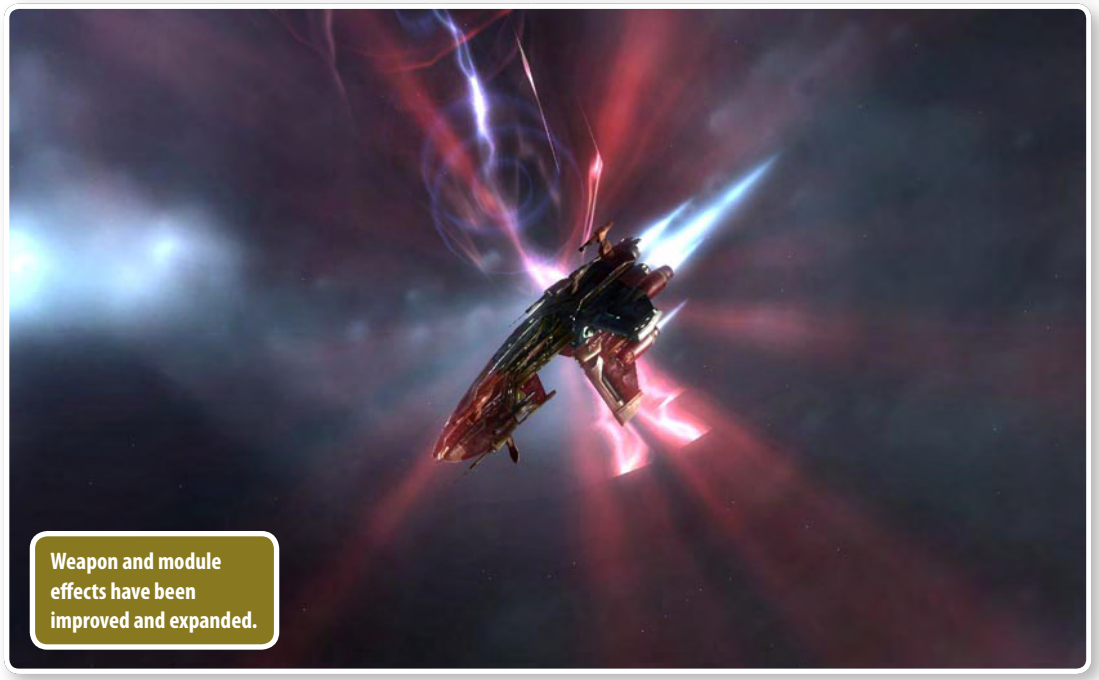
The second coming of New Eden is waiting to be probed

Publisher: Atari
Developer: CCP Games
Heritage: EVE Online
Link: www.eveonline.com
ETA: March

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

Wild Space is the collective term for EVE's sudden increase in the number of solar systems, but none are linked to the established regions by jumpgates. Wild Space can only be accessed by wormholes – temporary portals that phase in and out of existence. To detect one requires the skills and modules of an explorer, a profession that has been tweaked to make it easier to grasp the complexities of finding space needles in stellar haystacks, but also to make it a more skilful role for players to excel at. Ships suitably equipped can release scan probes until it's possible to


Battle Beyond the Stars, anyone?


Weapon and module effects have been improved and expanded.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Simple character creation



In a bid to increase the number of new players joining and sticking around, EVE's 'New Player Experience' has been given an overhaul. The process of creating a character has been greatly streamlined and is much more intuitive, with players no longer having to grasp which attributes will impact on skill training. Players are also exciting by the new ability to queue up skills for offline training, meaning that setting the alarm clock for 4am will be a thing of the past.



Gallente ships have always looked slightly fishy.



Low skill requirements means that Tech 3 ships will be easier to fly than to buy.

EVE: Apocrypha cont.

triangulate the position of an active wormhole, which can be warped to, jumped through and – assuming it doesn't collapse in the meantime – should also offer a way back home.

While an EVE that is fiddy-cent bigger is something many have been calling out for, Wild Space is not going to be colonised any time soon. Not until someone finds a way to move on the residents already there. Populating the shifting maze of Wild Space are a new (or rather, old) NPC faction, the Sleepers – an ancient caste of pre-empire humans who were assumed to have disappeared in some kind of calamity. Clearly the tracks of what was clearly an exodus were well covered up.

The reason the Sleepers have been hiding away in the folds of EVE's hitherto unknown space is because they managed to figure out Tech 3, which is also possible to manage yourself by salvaging components from the wrecks of Sleeper ships when you blow them up. Not that they're going to be easy. These fellows are bastard hard, at least compared to the drone ships found in the asteroid belts of 'nullsec'. This alone is a welcome development, since AI has never been one of EVE's strong points.



Ship manufacturers will be wondering how long Tech 2 ships will maintain their premium price.

THE JOY OF TECH

Making it happen

Tech 3 ships are very different to any ship release so far in EVE. In fact, Tech 3 isn't so much about ships as the pieces that can be put together to make them. You can think of Tech 3 as spaceship Duplo.

How it works is you have a basic hull, upon which you need to bolt on five different subsystem components, of which there are three varieties for each of the four races (effectively almost 300 ship configurations per race, before you even get to think about any modules or rigs).

The electronic subsystem modifies CPU, sensor strength and targeting. The defensive subsystem determines hull strength, cargohold and dronebay. Offensive dictates hardpoints, launcher slots and damage bonuses. Engineering determines powergrid and capacitor, while the addition of a propulsion system should make it move forward.

EVE: Apocrypha cont.

Regardless of what the nay-sayers have been predicting, Wild Space is going to be a popular destination. Not necessarily because the first round of Tech 3 ships are shaping up to be particularly impressive, but because the nature of progression and aspiration in EVE means that Tech 3 ships eventually will be necessary through popularity.

I want your techs

The problem with Tech 3 in this initial release is that it's being introduced only as cruisers, and while we're assured it won't be too long until modular battleships and other ship classes are introduced, the truth is that the range of cruiser-seized hulls already allows for a massive variety of tactical options, few of which require anyone to find a way into Wild Space to fight for and find the material to make the ship components.

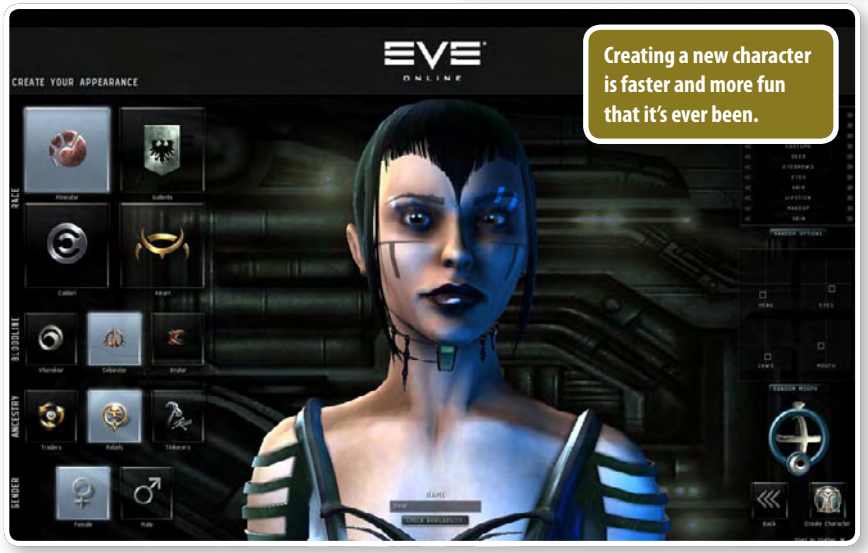
On the other hand, we do have to say that the Tech 3 ships are looking very cool indeed, providing a kind of visual customisation that EVE has been sorely lacking since its release. Even better than that though, is that it's possible to create a ship that's far more unpredictable than others in the same hull size. Whether players will get as much bang for their buck than they do with their favourite lower-tech ships is purely down to a matter of EVEnomics, though.

"CCP are claiming that Apocrypha is the most ambitious EVE expansion in the game's history"

CCP are claiming that Apocrypha is the most ambitious EVE expansion in the game's history. That may be more a statement of the economies of development rather than the reality of the new features on offer. However, CCP have always treated expansions more as phases rather than releases, and Apocrypha is the just the latest season in EVE's epic and ongoing storyline. The climax is still some way off. Like the name suggests, much remains hidden.



Graphically, EVE is looking better than ever.



Creating a new character is faster and more fun that it's ever been.

MMOZine Verdict

Lacks the immediate impact of previous expansions, but should be a sleeper success

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

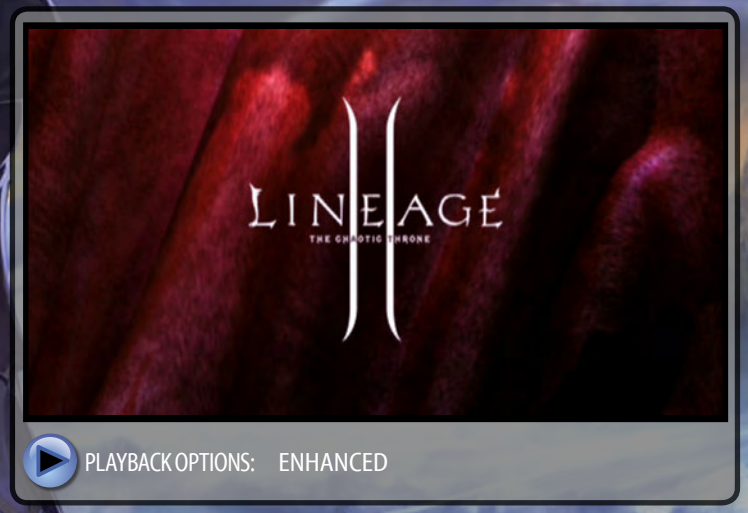
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Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Mythic
Heritage: Dark Age of Camelot
Link: www.warhammeronline.com
ETA: May

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Warhammer Online: Call to Arms

Warhammer Online: Call to Arms

It's time for a call to WAR

"Call to Arms hopes to reintroduce the final two Beserkers"

WAR fans might recall that, in the last couple of months leading up to Warhammer Online's release, drastic cuts had to be made to get the game out on time and to keep it balanced. Four of the six capital cities vanished off the face of The Old World, along with four classes (two Tanks and two Berserk classes). Since then the Heavy Metal event has reintroduced two of those tank classes – the Knight of the Burning Sun and the Black Guard – and now Call to Arms hopes to reintroduce the final two Berserkers, as well as a whole new area of the old world that conceals a missing faction, the haunted desert of the Tomb Kings.

The Orcs get a new unit, and there's two important things about



BITTER RIVALS

How to get Choppa and Slayer a little earlier

To get early access to the Choppa and Slayer, you'll have needed to access the Bitter Rivals event from February 24th. You should then spot that a new tab has appeared in the Tome of Knowledge called 'Live Events'. Every day there are new daily tasks to attempt here, with the usual Basic, Advanced and Elite influence rewards on offer to you. If you manage to get Elite rewards every day then you'll get access to the Slayer and Choppa a week ahead of everyone else!

Bitter Rivals players will also be able to take part in an exclusive RvR scenario – the Twisting Tower. Set in the Chaos wastes, this is a three-level tower with a very special reward for those who capture all three levels – alongside the exclusive siege weapons and titles you'll get anyway.


Advanced slayers get magic tattoos, bangles and stripey trousers.


A glimpse of the Chaos wastes.

Warhammer continued

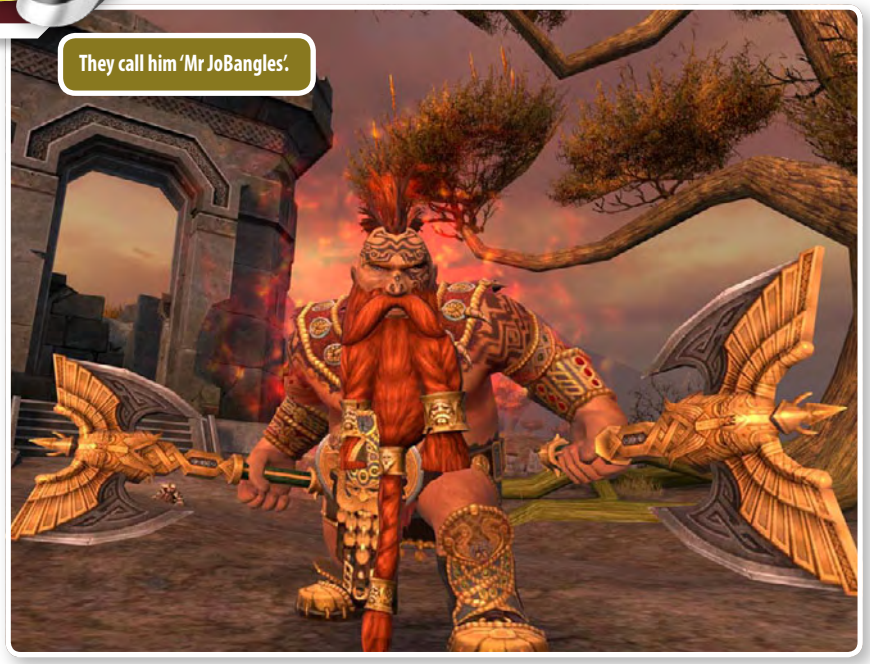
the Choppa. First, most importantly, it's an Orc; a plain vanilla Orc, so there's none of your posh Black Orc or weedy Goblin nonsense. It's a normal close combat Orc, and up until now you've not been able to play as one of those. Secondly, it's a good up-close DPS unit which the Orcs have been missing. It's armed with two weapons and light armour, and ploughs into the enemy units to build rage that allows it to do improved damage and gives access to extra moves. However, this same rage gradually removes its defences, so playing as a Choppa is a balancing act. Indeed, we've heard rumour that enterprising players have hacked the Warhammer database to reveal the full ability list – with titles like Get to da Choppa and Can't stop the Chop, it's good to see the Orc's humour hasn't disappeared.



Hammerer time

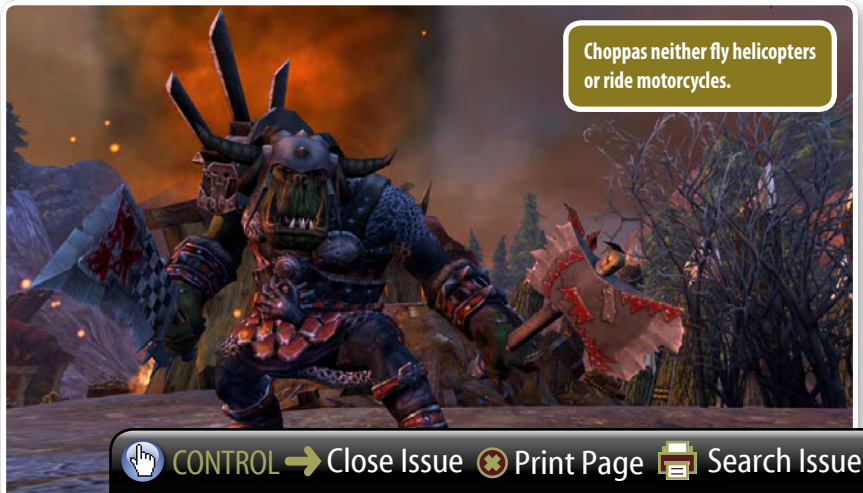
The Slayer (originally the Hammerer) has a similar Berserk mechanic but, if anything, is even more extreme than the Choppa. Slayers are suicidal Dwarves who forgo their usual heavy armour in favour of a thong (if that), pick up the largest most rune-encrusted axe they can find, and shave their hair into giant orange mohawks to attract the attention of the biggest monster they can find. Considering the lack of character on the side of the forces of Order, they will probably be a more popular choice than the Choppas, and are probably needed as a balancing tool due to the current faction imbalance in favour of Destruction. At the moment, they're slightly weaker at Tier 1 than the Choppas, but we're sure that'll be eroded and balanced as you go up the levels.


The classic 'staring into middle distance' pose.


They call him 'Mr JoBangles'.

Warhammer continued

The keenness of Mythic to reintroduce these classes and hence rebalance the factions internally, points to them eventually splitting all the factions up properly, which is where the next introduction is important. The Land of the Dead, home of the Tomb Kings, will be available for unlocking from some point in May. Expect hordes of mummies, skeletons and swarms of scarabs straight out of the Scorpion King, all presided over by immensely ancient mummified Necromancers from just after the dawn of time. Though this is only a poking a tentative toe into the waters of the undead realm, it opens up great possibilities for the faction later on.


Choppas neither fly helicopters or ride motorcycles.

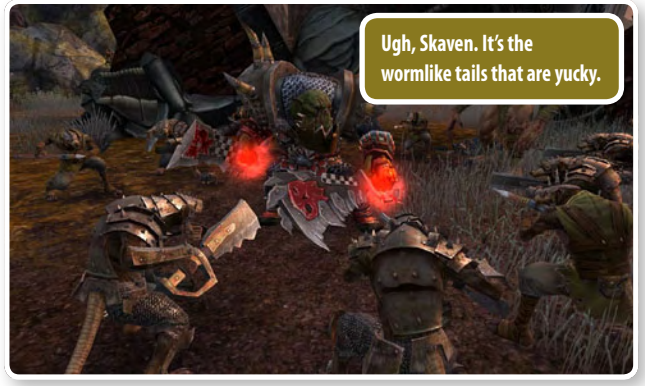
"Warhammer is the most polished major MMORG since Lord of the Rings Online"

Dungeon control

The actual dungeon itself features a new mechanic which Dark Age of Camelot, Planetside or LOTRO players will be familiar with: dungeon control. This is a Realm Versus Realm gated dungeon, meaning your faction will need to control the area to have access to it – if you're inside when it changes hands, then you'll be fighting against both a horde of AI and PvP players. Thankfully, the tomb contains enough traps and space for you to make a solid fight of your imminent death. Indeed, the area features so much new content (including a giant Pyramid tomb at the centre of the zone), that we're sure you'll be crushing skulls for weeks to come.

There are still major problems with WAR, mainly to do with server populations being too limited – which we presume is because of a bottleneck. Despite that, it's the most polished major MMORG to come along since LOTRO, and this expansion should get close to restoring it to the original launch vision. ●


A slayer's dream scenario.


Ugh, Skaven. It's the wormlike tails that are yucky.

MMOZine Verdict

If nothing else, this is the best reason to grow an orange mohawk we've ever seen

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

90%

FOOTBALL SUPERSTARS

Publisher: Cybersports
Developer: Cybersports
Heritage: None
Link: www.football superstars.com
ETA: TBC

Football Superstars

Back of the net, or kicked into touch?

"Football Superstars sees you create a single footballer and shepherd them through their career"



Worst kit combination ever.

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

Ask any B-list Premiership footballer and they'll tell you that it's not enough to simply be ridiculously skilled at handling (footling?) a ball on the pitch, being at the peak of physical perfection and getting paid half the money in all the world every week, with a bonus jet every time you happen to plant the ball in the back of the net. No, the true mark of a footballer's worth as a human being is how often their name is turned into some kind of 48-point pun on the back pages of every national newspaper in the country.



The beautiful game

Football Superstars is the first attempt to turn the glamorous world of kicking a ball about for a bit then getting off your face in a nightclub to the online gaming space. While most sports games tend to focus on the whole team (uh, unless it's a solo sport in which case it doesn't, but you get the idea), FS instead sees you creating a single footballer (male or female, it's the near-future and it seems the world is far more accepting of soccerinas mixing it up with the menfolk than it is now) and shepherding them through their career from lowly Z-list celebrity barely troubling the subs bench, to first-team ball juggler extraordinaire, with mansions, bank balances to rival small countries and all the Aston Martins you can eat.



Don't quote us on this, but this could be the Training Academy, sponsored by Puma.

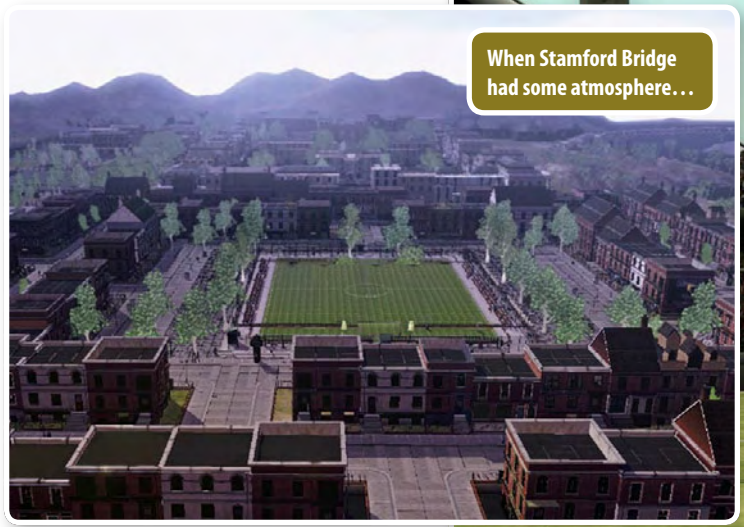
Superstars continued

This is accomplished through, naturally enough, actually playing football – online, with other players. At first these are little more than simple 'kickabouts', 2v2s or 4v4s (with computer-controlled keepers thrown in), then progressing to full 11v11 matches for your chosen club.

Between matches you can spend your time in the club gyms, boosting your stats and upping your skills, or out on the town, spending your hard-earned wages on the latest clothes, at the nightclubs or courting the press. Or just chatting with the other footballing wannabes and comparing brand names.

Ultimately though, it all boils down to the pitch, and it's how well a game of actual football FS plays that will determine whether it makes the Champions League of MMOs, or flails around the tail end of the Conference, struggling to stave off bankruptcy. While players can earn special ball control skills as they progress through the ranks is all well and good, but it's how FS attempts to stop every game from becoming mere 'chase-the-ball' affairs and encourages players to want to hang back in defence or provide cover from the wings rather than just be glory-seeking strikers all the time that will be the true test. Cybersports insists that there are plenty of character progression rewards in place for doing just that, and that the 'natural progression' approach of teams that work together being far more effective than teams of 11 glory-seekers will force players into more rounded and tactical thinking.

Football Superstars is a noble attempt to try something different within the MMO genre, and should it get through the current beta test period by learning some valuable lessons about just what it takes to provide a compelling gameplay experience, there's no reason on Earth why it shouldn't have something to offer even the most casual of footie fans. Even those that focus more on their hair gel than on their work rate. ●



When Stamford Bridge had some atmosphere…



Welcome to Danny Baker's Late Tackles Vol. 3.

"Football Superstars is a noble attempt to try something different within the MMO genre"



It was during moments like this that Brian wished he still had two legs.

MMOZine Verdict

If they can get the gameplay right then this could be great

HOW COMPLETE



FIRST IMPRESSIONS



FreeRealms

Publisher: SOE (Sony Online Entertainment)
Developer: SOE
Heritage: EverQuest, Planetside, Vanguard
Link: www.freerealms.com
ETA: April

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

Free Realms

The best things in life are free

"The basic game is very simple – a standard 3D world animated in a cutesy Disneyfied style"


Even the sheds are posh in this faux-fantasy land.

Are you having trouble training your kid to raid properly? Do you find their attention span doesn't stretch to a full 5-stage Outland raid? Worry no longer, as SOE's Free Realms aims to be the Free2Play WoW in your kid's life, training him for free while you raid, so he can join in when he's a little older. So we headed over to Sony's London headquarters to get a closer look at the title.

The basic game is very simple and familiar – a standard 3D world, animated in a cutesy Disneyfied style, with lots of hydrocephalic avatars, enemies and pets running about. Yet from the off, there were noticeable differences from the more adult MMOs. Most notably, every activity in the game is windowed off from the main world in the same way, reminiscent of Test Drive Unlimited's online race mode.

So whether you're playing mini-games like Bejewelled, crafting items in Cooking Mama-style rhythm-action games, racing cars like Mario Kart or fighting nefarious scuttling beasties in an abandoned mine like Generic Fantasy MMO #3, you'll start it in the same way: wander round the pretty-generic fantasy landscape (all streamed from the server so it's a seamless world, and you can teleport between visited locations), click on an in-game node, which can take the form of anything from a gate to a tree stump, and a window pops up. This informs


So cute you'll want to vomit.







FreeRealms

Free Realms continued

you what the mini-game consists of, your objectives, acts as a lobby for co-op/PvP elements, and includes leaderboards so you can see how your friends are doing.

From here, you start taking part in whichever job – which includes classes, professions and hobbies – your current node focuses on. There's no need for multiple accounts with Free Realms, as every character can learn every job – it just takes time to level it up and unlock special powers to use in the mini-games, such as spells in the 10-minute dungeons or car customisations for the racing job. There are even girl-targeted activities, such as grooming, decorating, gardening and shopping. Everything you learn or do is published to an automatically generated profile that anyone can see.

"There are restrictions on chat to under-13 year olds – anyone under this age can only communicate through animated emotes"

Among SOE's many notable borrowings are the game's impressive pets, which are very reminiscent of Lionhead's clever dogs Fable II crossbred with the Nintendogs pedigree. You'll be able to choose from cats and dogs at launch, as well as specific personalities such as hyperactive or curious. On top of that, as well as being able to buy them costumes (the Ninja and Panda outfits are cute as hell), you can train them to learn new tricks, reinforce random behaviour that you like and eventually you might be able to take them into combat with you.

In terms of safety, it's pretty impressive. Like ToonTown there are restrictions on chat to under-13 year olds – anyone under this age can only communicate through animated emotes, which are automatically translated to allow players of all nationalities to hook up easily, and all other chat is blocked. Parents can also restrict the amount of time or cash (which is drawn from the same SOE cash pot that your EQII, Vanguard and other Station games use) that players can then spend in-game.


We're assured that the low-res textures are temporary.


If you're looking for an MMO with a difference then this could be for you.


A very familiar-looking glade scene.


Oh god, there are pixies in here.





Free Realms continued

Along with the game's assets, we were given a vaguely disturbing piece of marketing bumph that looked amazingly cute but emphasised quite what a cynically marketed, yet well thought-through world Sony have created here. This game literally supplies everything that any other kid's MMO has ever included, and a whole lot of other stuff too, and it's all been carefully monetised to appeal to the key 12-14 demographic. Nothing in life is truly free, and the cost you pay here is a relentless emphasis on worming micropayments out of you. There's a mass of premium content waiting for you to buy, ranging from costumes, right up to collectable payment cards and a in-game and real-world trading card game.

Leaving Sony, we felt that Free Realms had ticked every box in the kids Free2Play market impressively. It's got high production values, has a bright, vanilla appearance, is almost completely non-threatening and entirely consensual, and has been designed to appeal to both sexes. However, it feels oddly like the Land of Play in Pinocchio, where young boys go to make asses of themselves. This is mainly because it lacks story or focus. If there's enough in there, kids short attention spans will be hooked, but if there isn't then they're guaranteed to poke their noses elsewhere.



STAR BUCKS

Taking an ad break

Part of Sony's friendly plot to make lots of money from your kids consists of in-game advertising. However, instead of the cruder in-game billboards of the larger advertising firms, SOE hope to introduce whimsical adverts that are tied into the local genre style of each area – with a direct source of inspiration being kids' favourite Shrek. This featured product placement disguised as parody, with shops including Olde Knavery, Versarchery, Farbucks coffee, Baskin Robinhood and Burger Prince all making us giggle as the insidious seeds of brand marketing were planted deep in our temporarily vulnerable minds...



MMOZine Verdict

For ADD-addled tweens everywhere, Sony hope this will be the Free2Play WoW

HOW COMPLETE



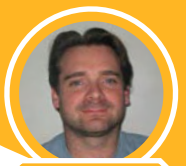
FIRST IMPRESSIONS



Jumpgate Evolution

Talking 'bout an evolution

> **"Evolution focuses on massive space combat on a vast scale, but from the pilot's point of view"**



Hermann Peterscheck, Jumpgate Evolution's Producer.

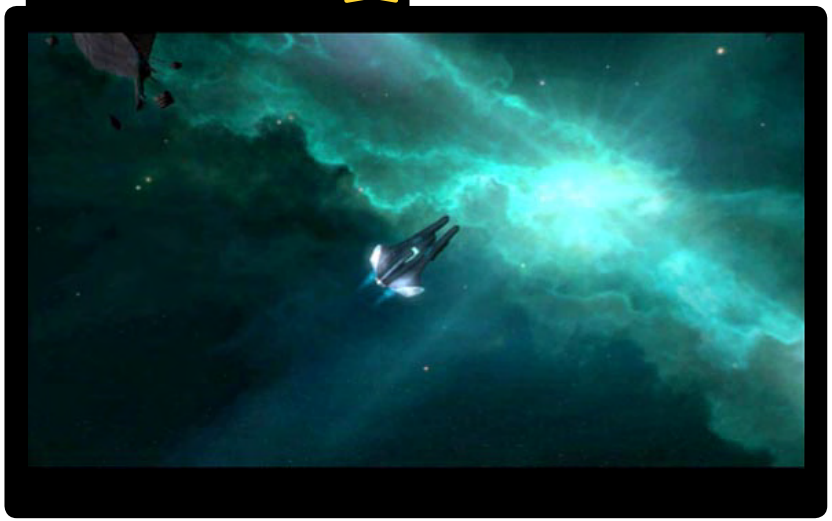
Eight long years since the release of the original sci-fi MMORG Jumpgate, NetDevil are gearing up for the launch of it's 're-imagined' successor. Producer Hermann Peterscheck talks to us about the game's evolution, fans' expectations, the upcoming beta phase and how the stars might align to show the way ahead for the all-new Jumpgate to survive and thrive.

Are you annoyed when Jumpgate Evolution is constantly compared to EVE or the X series?
Not at all. Those are both fantastic games, so to be compared favourably to great games is always flattering! I would, however, like to emphasise that our basic gameplay is different. EVE, for example, is a more empire-building online game, whereas Jumpgate Evolution focuses on massive space combat on a vast scale, but from the pilot's point of view. We want to really capture the feeling of being in the cockpit in a huge galactic struggle.

In a recent interview, Scott Brown expressed a view that MMORGs live or die on the strength of the open beta. Do you share that view?
Yes, I do. I think that in many cases games go to large scale public testing too soon and then it gives the public a bad impression of their game. I have personally played many games that I initially did not like, that after many patches and updates were really enjoyable. It's a pity that they were not able to achieve that release quality initially, but I understand the realities of the business that then leads to that circumstance.

Are you approaching Evolution's

ENHANCED VIEW





Space combat has never looked so good.

Interview continued

imminent public test period any differently to previous games?
I'm not sure. Maybe. Our approach is very simple-minded and has been consistent throughout development. We began the game thinking that a space action combat/trading MMO would be really fun. A kind of Freelancer experience but with thousands of people. All we had to do then was envision what that game would look and play like, compare it to what we had and fill in the gaps as they appear. There's really no magic to it. You build something, you test it, you fix it where it's broken. You keep doing that until you have something really fun. I think it's the only way to make games, really.

"The truth is that no-one has more experience making online action vehicles than NetDevil"

You've stressed that Evolution is more of a 're-imagining' rather than a sequel, but what does that really mean?
It's semantics, isn't it? The truth is that no-one has more experience making online action vehicle MMOs than NetDevil. That sounds like a boast, but it's true. Our first game was Jumpgate, our next was Auto Assault. Those games solved similar problems and address a similar kind of audience. Because of that we should be equipped to make that kind of game in a competitive way. Jumpgate Evolution is


Live out your Han Solo fantasies and lose your opponent in the asteroid belt.


Some parts of space are very blue indeed.


Space appears to be very busy, too.

Interview continued

simply the next iteration of making that kind of game. It encompasses over a decade of lessons and expertise that hopefully will result in something special. So what we mean by a re-imagining is that there were many things we didn't know when we made the original game and now we can go back and apply those lessons. So what it really means is that we have this image of what a space action game can be, and we are going to keep working on that image until what we play is what we see in our minds.

By what measure will you term Evolution a success?

I put a lot of personal value in how serious and dedicated people feel about something I work on. It's very gratifying to have one person give you a really touching and thoughtful evaluation. I have my own kind of test which is how badly I want to let someone play. The harder it is for me to not tell everyone I know to play a game, the better I think it is. If developers are honest with themselves they know when they are at that point. When you just can't stand keeping the game in, or when you can't hold back the beta key any more – then I think you can be confident that you have a success.

"There are many things we didn't know when we made the original and now we can go back and apply those lessons"



There's plenty of excellent design work in the various craft in the game.

CLOSED BETA KEYS!

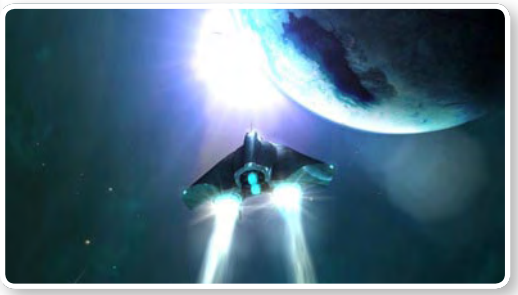
100 of them up for grabs!

JUMPGATE EVOLUTION

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: NetDevil
Heritage: Jumpgate, Auto Assault
Link: www.jumpgateevolution.com
ETA: June 2009

NetDevil have kindly offered100 MMOZine readers the opportunity to get involved in the closed beta test for Jumpgate Evolutions, which starts next month. Obviously there are many more people who'd like to get guaranteed access to the beta than there are keys to go around, so we have decided to open this up as a lottery. Simply choose your territory and when the beta goes live we will pick 50 names from each, we will contact you with your key and details of the client download when the beta is ready.

Competition closes 31st March 2009. See website for full T&Cs.





Goodbye Cruel Worlds

A MMO can live forever, but many die horribly. This is their tale

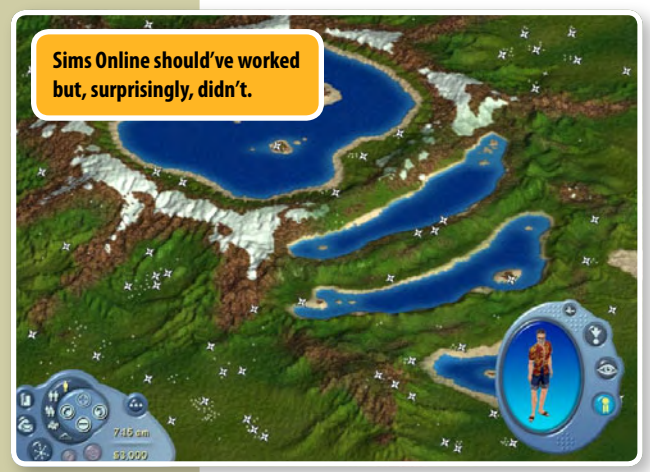
The past year has been hard on MMOs. Hugely ambitious games have come away with a mere fraction of the subscribers they seemed to deserve. Others still have been shut down entirely. The most high-profile of these were the hybrid MMO shooter Hellgate, and the ambitious science fiction MMO Tabula Rasa. The first game was made by a pair of World of Warcraft veterans, and the second was created by Richard Garriott, the father of Ultima, and one of the pioneers of the MMO space. All this proves that you really never can tell who is going to win out.

Nevertheless, it is a sad day when any games such as these have to shut down. Unlike other videogames, they cannot simply retire to the bargain bin, nor the abandonware sites. No, their lifeblood is their existence online; in their world, and in their players. When those are gone, the game truly is no more.

This dark fate – one of absolute non-existence – has just befallen Tabula Rasa. As we write these words, blogs around the world carry pictures of thousands of copies of the game being trashed in waste skips behind the developer's Texas offices. But it is not alone: it joins some big names on the trash heap of history. In 2006, NCSoft's mighty action MMO Auto Assault was killed after just a couple of months of operation. Asheron's Call 2, the sequel to a game that is still running today, was closed in 2005, despite looking like a dead cert. More amazing than any of these is The Sims Online, the online version of the most popular game in the world, which folded after desperately clawing its way through almost six years of existence.



He looks bored, but he's not the only one.



Sims Online should've worked but, surprisingly, didn't.

> *"An MMO's lifeblood is their existence online. When that is gone, the game truly is no more"*



Castle Infinity – sadly had to close when the database became corrupted beyond repair.

Feature continued

Perhaps the saddest tale in all of MMOdom is that of Castle Infinity. This early MMO, first released in 1996, was shut down in 2005, due to a lack of subscribers. Distraught, the fan community sought some way to save it, and a small posse of them went to the game's offices and rescued the abandoned machines from a dumpster. The team of fans brought the game back to life, giving the die-hards a few more years with their game. Sadly, however, this only lasted until 2008, when the database for the game became unmanageably corrupted. In October 2008 the luckiest MMO in the world finally died, having risen from its grave to last an extra three years. This time, it seems, Castle Infinity is dead for good.

"CCP Creative Director said he sees no reason why EVE Online couldn't last another 50 years"

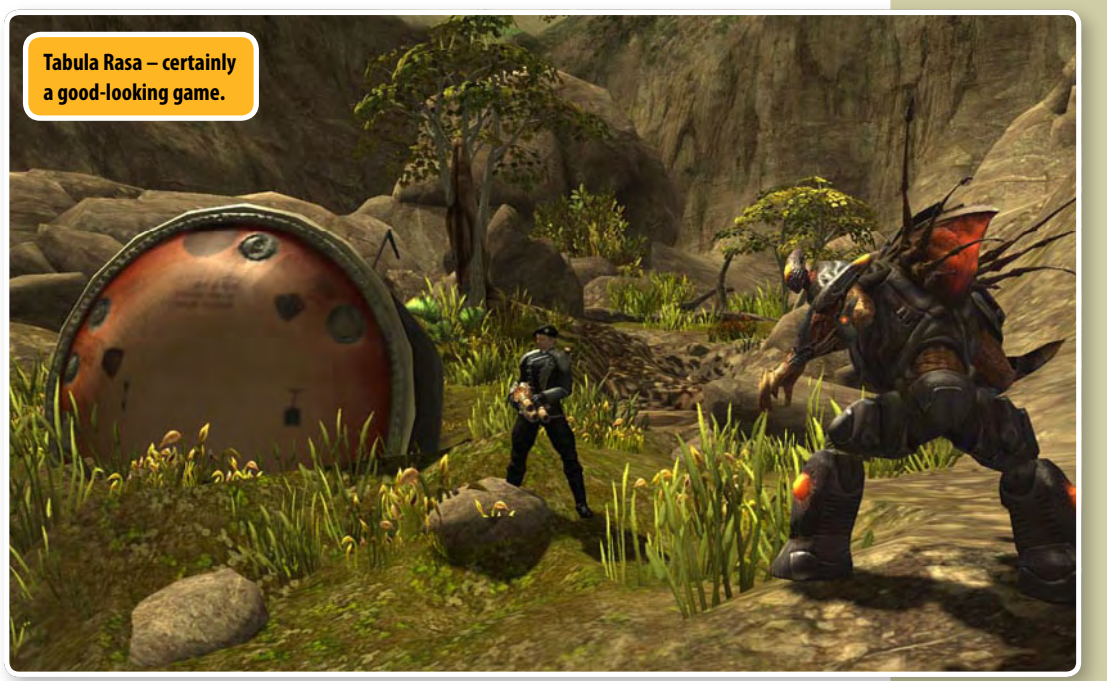
The question now, of course, is just how long the biggest MMOs can last. Indeed, given the steady growth of games like World of Warcraft and Eve Online, and their overhauls by incremental patching, can they ever die? Are successful MMOs in danger of lasting forever, and always being able to evolve to some next level? It's hard to say, but CCP Creative Director Reynir Hardarson has said he sees no reason why Eve Online couldn't last another 50 years. Will I still be PvPing when I'm 80? I can only hope.



To be honest, any game set in an Eighties nightclub was always doomed to failure.



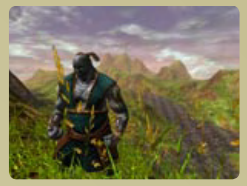
Despite plenty of fanfare from EA, Earth & Beyond never reached the sorts of subscription figures that EA expected.


Tabula Rasa – certainly a good-looking game.

THE INFAMOUS FIVE

MMOs come and MMOs go, but when you're talking about the ones that went rather more spectacularly that the rest – as we clearly are in this feature – then a few names do spring immediately to mind. So, without further ado, let us now introduce you to the Infamous Five: The MMOs that now, sadly, are no longer with us.

ASHERON'S CALL 2



Developer: Turbine
Publisher: Microsoft
Date launched: November 2002
Closed: December 2005
Peak subscribers: 50,000
Missed? It never outshone the original game, so it's hard to see this being missed.

Fine-looking sequel to the moderately successful Asheron's Call hit the shelves in 2002, hoping to cash in on Everquest's continued success. The slightly offbeat presentation of the game, however, did nothing to lure players in. Nor was it the logical stepping stone for players of the original game. Most stayed with their tried and tested original, despite creaky old technology and ancient visuals.

AUTO ASSAULT



Developer: NetDevil
Publisher: NCSoft
Date launched: April 2006
Closed: August 2007
Peak subscribers: 12,000
Missed? A clever idea, but sadly one that didn't quite work in practice.

The big selling point for Auto Assault was that NetDevil had found a way to make action combat racing work in an online game. You could crash into scenery, blow things up, crash into physics objects and battle huge enemies. A shame, then, that nothing else about the game wasn't as fun as it could be. A failure to focus on the 'massive' or 'multiplayer' parts of MMO made this sink like a rock.

EARTH & BEYOND



Developer: Westwood Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Date launched: September 2002
Closed: September 2004
Peak subscribers: 38,000
Missed? Space-flight junkies do miss the game, but it may live on in projects such as www.enb-emulator.com.

Westwood Studios followed the route of games like Elite and Wing Commander with their MMO Earth & Beyond. Sadly the game proved to be little more than 'EverQuest in space' despite the use of spacecraft instead of fantasy characters. The playbase never hit the kinds of heights EA required to keep the project running and it was finally axed in 2004.

TABULA RASA



Developer: Destination Games
Publisher: NCSoft
Date launched: November 2007
Closed: February 2009
Peak subscribers: 130,000
Missed? It doesn't seem like the game lasted long enough to be truly missed, nevertheless hardcore fans remain.

Richard Garriott, the man behind the Ultima games, got to go into space last year. His game, however, remained down on the ground. The subs never headed skyward, and it failed to live up to its name by rehashing much of what we'd already seen in dozens of other MMOs. With an unlikeable game world and uncompelling PvP, there was nothing here to hold onto.

THE SIMS ONLINE



Developer: EA Maxis
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Date launched: December 2002
Closed: August 2008
Peak subscribers: 105,000
Missed? A significant fanbase of Sims players did seem to miss this weird game.

Taking the people-simulation of The Sims into MMO space might have seemed like a logical extension, but it never really worked. This was partly thanks to the rise of Second Life, but also because EA's Sims world was fiddly and unwelcoming to use. Relaunched by the company as 'EA Land' in early 2007, the project rapidly fell apart and was cancelled just weeks later.

WIN! EXCLUSIVE WORLD OF WARCRAFT HARDWARE!

Play World of Warcraft in style with these top peripherals



For a couple of years now, SteelSeries have been making some of the best gaming peripherals money can buy. Not just good quality stuff made to look good, but gear that's designed to be used for extended periods of time. If you ever tried taking on Malygos using your tiny notebook mouse you'll have some notion of how painful it can be playing games like World of Warcraft with cheap controllers designed for business lunches. After all, you wouldn't attempt an ascent on Everest in flip-flops, would you?

Of course not all of use can afford to climb mountains, let alone buy the required footware, which is why SteelSeries are offering the chance for one reader to win the full range of their WoW-branded gaming peripherals: A World of Warcraft MMO Gaming Mouse, a SteelSeries WoW Zboard gaming keyboard (WotLK Edition) and the SteelSeries 5C mouse pad (Frost Wyrm Edition), all worth more than £180. For one runner-up, we also have a SteelSeries QcK Lich King mousepad.

To be in with a chance of securing the loot, all you have to do is answer the following question…

Competition closes 11th April 2009. See website for full T&Cs.



Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Spellborn International
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.tcos.com
OUT NOW

The Chronicles of Spellborn

Time to come out of your shell


Surprisingly, you don't get many ladders in MMOs.

"Where it does work is in the sense of originality Spellborn tries to introduce"

A fantasy world of the future, shattered by cataclysms and encased in a hard shell, with flying ships traversing magic-wracked voids, great political houses vying for power, and terrors and demons from beyond clawing for blood. And I, as a recruit into a noble army of peacekeepers, am being asked to herd cows that have wandered a bit too far back into a pen. Sigh.

The Chronicles of Spellborn is an MMO that veers between highs and lows more than any we've played for quite some time now. For all the lushness of the graphics, there's a far too limiting sense of scale in the world. For all the surprising quality of actual writing displayed, there's far too little quality in actual mission design. For all the thought that has evidently gone into so much of the game mechanics, so little time and effort appears to have been spent on either of the interface or control system.

Where it does work is in the sense of originality Spellborn tries to introduce, but even then, in many cases, the end result is something of a mixed bag.


To be fair, the environments are pretty enough, just small.

Roll over screen for annotations




Reincarnation shrines quickly become your new best friends.


Sadly this thing isn't useable.

Spellborn continued

Removing constant weapon, armour and equipment upgrades, for instance, initially feels liberating (why shouldn't my spellcaster walk around with a great big broadsword strapped to his back?), but once the Sigils are introduced to the game and you start adding and removing bonuses to your gear, it all becomes no different to the mechanics of any other game we can think of, just with a slightly more convoluted method of making it work.

Fighting fit

More impressive is the freedom offered to you from a combat point of view. You still have to pick between three of the standard fantasy archetypes before you start your life (wizard, warrior and thief essentially), but beyond that you are given a lot of wiggle room in how you choose to specialise your avatar. The skill deck presents a sort of Guild Wars-esque limitation to how many of your learned abilities you can have loaded at once, but then takes it further by making you 'tier' them in a way that forces you to think about combinations and tactics unlike any MMO previously.

For instance, you've picked the warrior class and have learnt a fair few offensive moves. Your skill deck to begin with restricts you to two rows of three skills each, the second row only becoming active in a fight after you've chosen an action from the first (this grows in length and depth the higher you level up). As a warrior it's therefore up to you if you load up

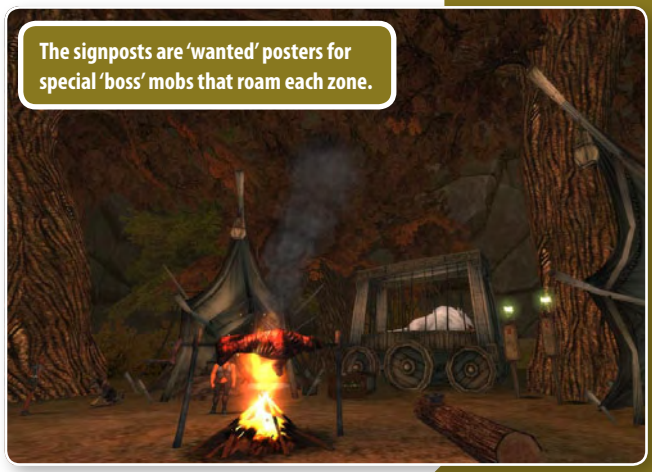
HOUSE HUNTING

Five to choose from, but who's right for you?

SILVER **SHROUD** **RUNE**

Essentially one big banking firm, House Silver is about stability through economic might. Which has proven so well in the real-world of course…

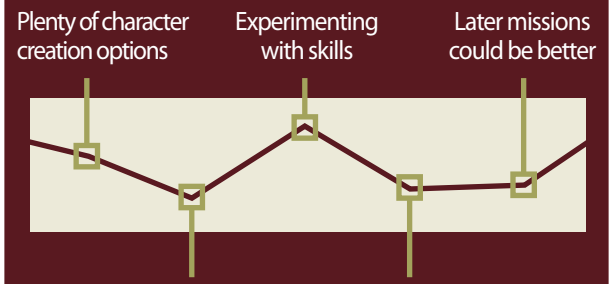



The signposts are 'wanted' posters for special 'boss' mobs that roam each zone.



Honestly, do I *look* like the sort of guy that can be reassuring to a sick child?

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



Spellborn continued

with simple melee attacks, longer recharging buffs and/or debuffs, ranged attacks or any combination therein. Combine that with abilities' recharge times and higher-level 'combination' skills that necessitate working with others for maximum effectiveness and there's a lot of scope for flexibility there. You're free to change your loadout whenever you want (providing you're not actually in combat at the time you want to), bringing a lot of forward-thinking to the game, especially if you know what sort of enemies you're soon to face in battle.

"Spellborn is out, now, and needs more than just caretaking to keep it afloat"

Where it does fall flat is in the actual implementation of that combat. The thought process is nice enough, but most fights rapidly boil down to frantic, random mouse clicking and a lot of times the skilldeck just isn't responsive enough, especially when it's looping back from the last row to the first, often undoing a lot of the tactical foreplay Spellborn has teased you with prior to actually pulling out your weapon.

We'd love to be more positive about Spellborn, really we would. But the over-arching sense of limitation it displays prevents it. For all the nice touches in combat, personalisation, setting and writing, the sum of its parts sadly fails to ever reach anything greater than a game that is solidly average on all counts. It has the feel of a bog standard free-to-play grindhouse game with slightly loftier ambitions, but nothing more.

Which is unfair as it is trying to be more than that, much more than that in fact. It just isn't really pulling it off with any real aplomb. Spellborn's real test will be in how much work gets put into it by the developers over the first six months of its launch. Some games release in a ready state and then just tinker slightly to keep the ship rolling on an even keel. Spellborn is out, now, and needs more than just caretaking to keep it afloat. The ideas it brings to the table are strong enough to warrant attention, it now needs to build a compelling game experience around them, and fast. Either that or just let other, better games pillage its stocks for their own ends and to make sure that ideas such as customisable skill combinations, upgradeable weapons, armour and clothing, and basic skills increase along with player stats (rendering obsolete the notion of… er, obsolete starting skills) all make their way into design staples for the MMO genre. ●

Paul Presley

MMOZine Verdict

Great ideas in search of a better game

- ✓ Open-ended feel to character design
- ✓ Filled with nice game mechanic ideas
- ✗ Combat should be great but is very messy

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PLAY AGAIN

Around a world in 14 days*

(*or however long the trail period lasts)

Part 1: Lord of the Rings Online

Richie Shoemaker continues his alternative look at some of the MMOs you're likely to be playing.

When you come to a dead end it's often better to turn around and try another route rather than force a way through. It was this realisation that had me stop in my attempts to get ArchLord to run (as was my plan from last issue), and instead retrace my steps to a junction that leads a merrier path to Middle-earth – the land of Hobbitses and other stalwarts of the fantasy bestiary. Hell, it sure beat having to fill these pages with furious bile over my failed attempts to get Codemasters' king-of-the-hill MMORG running.

I've played Lord of the Rings Online before, but I didn't make it past the standard issue 30-days of gametime that came with the boxed edition. It's not that I didn't enjoy playing my way across the introductory lands of Middle-earth, because I did, but other MMORG addictions meant that I couldn't commit myself to getting far beyond the shores of the Brandywine River.

Little did I realise that I would have to try to re-connect with my previous life in half the time I had before. Playing a game like LotRO on trial brings it home how short a time a 14-day trial actually is. In other games you can grasp most



It was just an ordinary town… apart from the bear, obviously.



Not the deadliest of enemies, but as least they're unarmed.



Don't you point that thing at me, young man!



"Get out from under that spider and help me!"


Down boy!

Replay continued

aspects of gameplay within a few days (even the perennially complex EVE if you have a mind to), but in Middle-earth time seems to pass much more slowly, and complexity seems not to matter all that much. Often I found myself standing on the crest of a hill, scanning the horizon and breathing in the distant smell of pipeweed that must be curling invisibly from the chimneys of the bungalows below. I would smile to myself and ponder on how wonderfully peaceful The Shire is and charming it is to be in. Simple missions to cull the local wolves, hogs and bears seemed bizarrely fitting here, when in other games they are lazy and tedious. How dare such creatures menace these delightful people!

Here's the thing. More than most MMORGs, Lord of the Rings Online is a linear experience. The storyline continues and you follow in it's wake. However, unlike the books and from which the game owes this seemingly problematic restraint, you are following the Fellowship at your own pace. The realm of Middle-earth is such an important foundation for the whole fantasy genre that as a fan you owe it to yourself to take on every exhaustive quest and enjoy every insignificant character.

"More than most MMORGs, Lord of the Rings Online is a linear experience"

Beyond being leisurely indulgent in reading every text box presented to me, on this second LotRO visit I decided to take my involvement to a new level – I had joined the role-play server. It seemed the right thing to do. I'm not a role-player by trade but I figured that if I'm going to role-play anywhere, it might as well be in Middle-earth. However, it was immediately obvious that few other people felt obliged to do the same. It was rare enough that I crossed the path of another player who wasn't hurrying past on his steed, let alone anyone willing to chew the fat in rallying against those infernal Sackville-Bagginses. Still, at least the chat channels were clear of nonsensical acronyms. Tolkien would spin in his grave if he saw Dwarves shouting "LFG MT".

Feeling lonely

As relaxed as LotRO is, 10 days in it became obvious I wasn't really having the most massively multiplayer experience and my efforts to explore the environment should be expanded to include some human interaction. LotRO's Monster Play seemed to be the best avenue, offering high level pseudo-PvP play for low-level players. So what did I do as an Orc Reaver? Yep, you guess right… I stood on the crest of a hill, scanning the horizon and breathing in the distant smell of burning flesh that must be curling invisibly from the fires of the burning keeps below. My time in this world would soon be cut short, but I will return, as soon as I reached the next dead end on this trial quest… ●

To be continued…


The camping trip was about to go horribly wrong.

WIN! LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SPECIAL EDITION

One competition to rule them all…





Combining the first two episodes of Lord of the Rings Online – 2007's Shadows of Angmar and last year's Mines of Moria expansion – this special edition comes with a soundtrack CD, a map of Moria showing the route of the Fellowship, buddy key postcards, 60 days of game time, special in-game items, an Elven cloak broach (possibly made in China as opposed to Lothlorien) and a replica of the One Ring, which we've discovered doesn't make the wearer invisible, but hopefully still might have the potential to turn anyone into a slightly unsavoury individual.

Thanks to Codemasters and www.trylotro.com we have five copies of the Lord of the Rings Online Special Edition to give away, as well as copies of the Compilation Pack (Shadows of Angmar and Mines of Moria) for ten runners-up. As usual, entering couldn't be easier. In order to be in with a chance, just answer the following question on the right…

Competition closes 11th April 2009. See website for full T&Cs. This competition is open to European residents only.

EverLasting

Ten years young and still going strong



Clint Worley, the Producer of EverQuest.

Despite being designed by big names and having had the support of big publishing houses behind them, online worlds are collapsing like never before. Yet the established old guard – realms like Ultima and EverQuest – are still very much in operation. 10 years and 15 expansions on, SOE's flagship game remains healthy and profitable. We sat down with Producer Clint Worley, Sr and Lead Designer Ryan Barker to see how the party preparations are coming along.

Was there any sense during the development of the game that it would go on to be so successful, and for so long?

Clint: I wasn't directly involved with the development in the initial years but I did know many of the people that were. There wasn't anything to compare the game against – besides MUDs, that were all text-based. With all the requirements that EQ forced the player to have (graphics card, memory, etc) it was hard to tell how it would do.

We were working during the launch of the PlayStation 1, and the lifespan of most console titles is only a few months if you're lucky. So it was a complete surprise that it blew the doors off the industry and helped many of the current MMO teams learn the rights and wrongs of making MMOs.

What does it mean to you that EQ has made it to year 10?

Clint: It really is amazing and hard to believe. At the end of the day, SOE still supports EQ, and even with all the new MMO's entering the market we stay focused on the title that made people realise a new way of gaming almost 10 years ago.

How will you guys be celebrating EQ's first decade?

Ryan: We have a variety of new quests, events and even a new raid planned to celebrate the

> *"EQ blew the doors off the industry and helped many of the MMO teams learn the rights and wrongs of making MMOs"*



The original release featured 14 playable classes.



EVErquest? A pen-and-paper EQ RPG was created by White Wolf, now a subsidiary of CCP Games.


Luclin was one of the best expansions of any MMO.


Remember EverCrack? Looking back it seems such an innocent time.

Interview continued

anniversary. All of the anniversary content is aimed at celebrating the long history of EQ and some of the best pieces of our 10-year history. We're very confident that new and old players alike will enjoy taking a look back at how much the game has progressed over the years.

One might assume that working on EQ at the current time is more about watching the gauges to make sure nothing boils over. Would that be true?
Ryan: Not at all. We're still focused on creating new content and features to keep EQ fresh and fun. In fact we've got a number of new features planned for the next year aimed at doing just that. We're not ready to give out specifics on those features just yet though, but we'll reveal all as soon as we possibly can.

Will you continue to release one or two expansions a year for EQ?
Clint: We actually moved to a single expansion a year a few years back to allow the team to focus on the quality of the expansion and to actually let the players catch up.

We have very competitive players in EQ, and for the most hardcore we could never produce content quick enough, but for the majority of the players our

"We're still focused on creating new content and features to keep EQ fresh and fun"


'The Serpent's Spine'. Must be a good book.

Interview continued

two expansions a year was actually dropping them off the back. They were falling behind, and some of them ultimately reached a point where there became discouraged with all the new content. Now we have a single expansion each year that is released with a ton of Live content throughout the year to keep everyone happy! It has worked out well, and the players enjoy the pace.

Which expansion are you most proud of and why?
Ryan: It's a close call between Planes of Power and Depths of Darkhollow, but I'd have to go with Planes of Power. The grand scope of the content and the storyline were really ambitious, and a significant departure from the content style that had been done previously. Plus it's just really cool to be taking on all the gods and invading their planes.

"With a renewed focus on integrating the players into the development process, it's an exciting time for EQ"

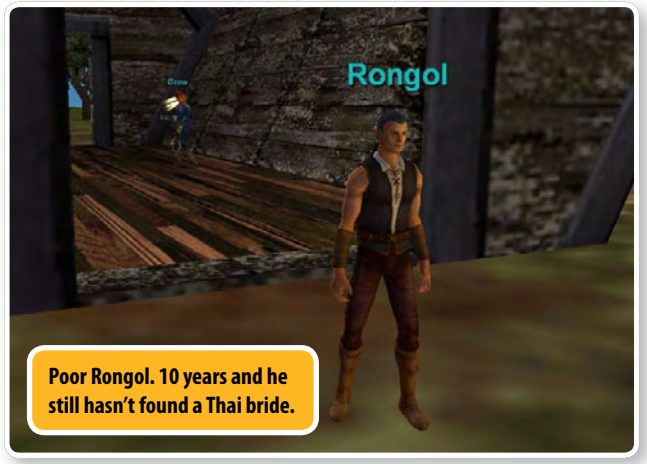
EQ has an impressive past, but how is its future looking? Will EQ be experiencing a long-slow decline into senility and organ failure, or is it just the end of the beginning? Why?
Clint: We will continue to support EQ and the players, and with a renewed focus on integrating the players into the development process, it is an exciting time for EQ. In past expansions we have focused on delivering content to the players based on the direction we would like the story to be told. Now we are turning the pages with the help of the players and looking to the ideas they give us on where the game should go.

MMO's are living breathing worlds that change every day and allowing the players that are part of those worlds mold them is the ultimate goal. Storylines that have long been untold, dungeons that have been lost, dragons that citizens have whispered about are all things that players have proposed. These are the things that make the future of EQ amazing… be part of a massive fantasy world that you and your friends can help make. Think of the possibilities! ●


An EverQuest film is said to be planned for 2010.

ENHANCED VIEW





Poor Rongol. 10 years and he still hasn't found a Thai bride.

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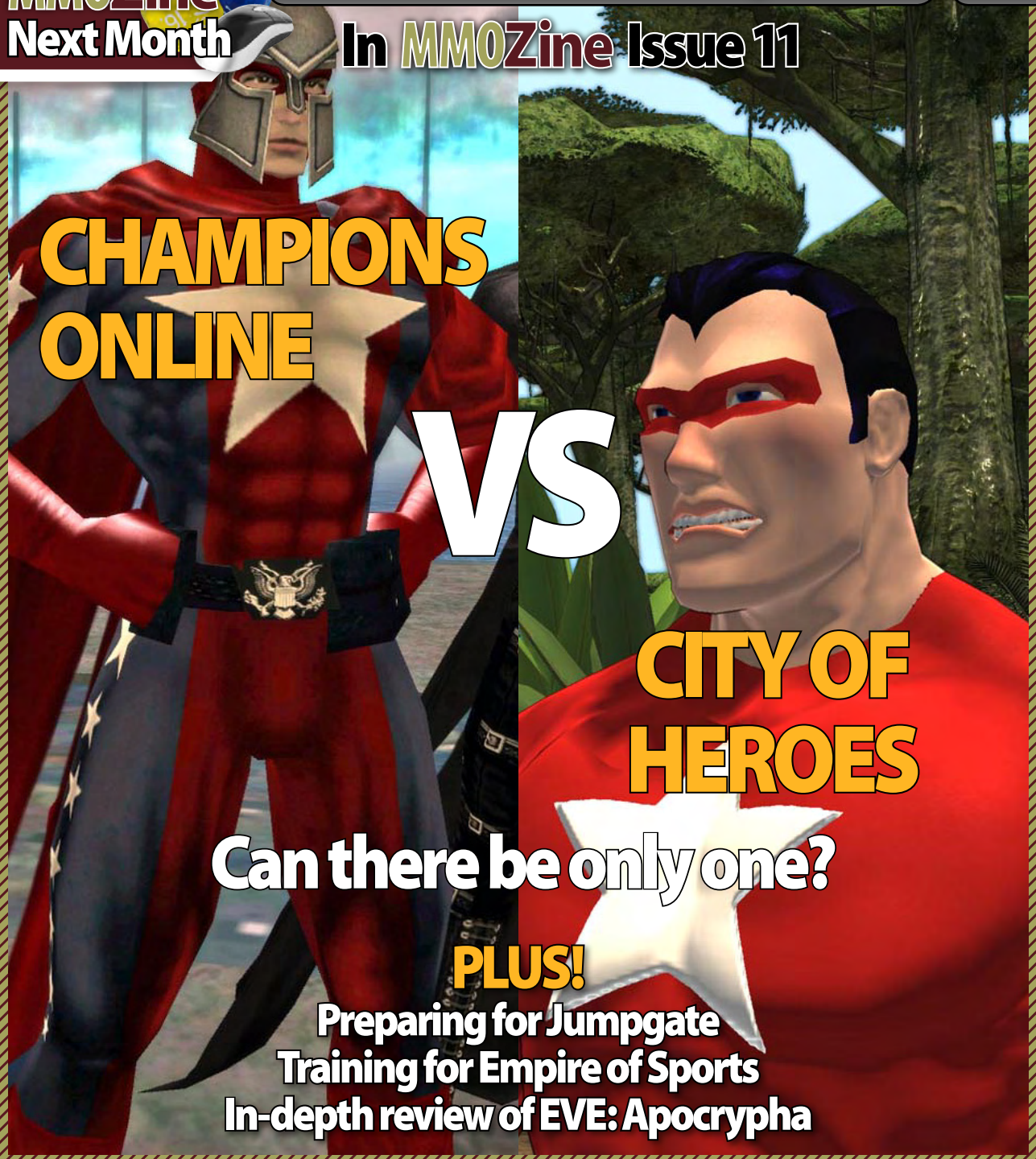
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