FREE!

MMOZine

Issue 12 | June 2009

Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it [illegible] mates

FIRST LOOK!
BLACK PROPHECY
Exclusive new screens

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW
JUMPGATE EVOLUTION
Join our pre-launch testflight

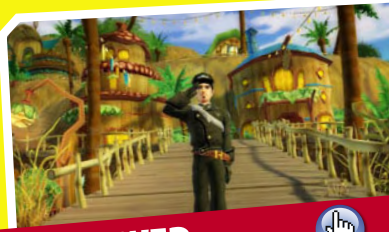
EXCLUSIVE CAPETEST!
CHAMPIONS ONLINE
IS CRYPTIC'S NEW SUPERHERO MMO READY TO FLY?

FREE!
AION
200 beta keys up for grabs!

+ PLUS! EXCLUSIVE BILL ROPER INTERVIEW! +



+ REVIEWED
DARKFALL ONLINE
A view from the inside



+ REVIEWED
FREE REALMS
Can one MMOG fit all?



+ REVIEWED
STAR WARS GALAXIES
The Empire goes on trial



Welcome to MMOZine

These last few months have witnessed MMO developers break out the sugary treats to celebrate the birthdays of their various offspring. Since EverQuest reached the grand old age of 10, EVE Online hit its seventh year of operation and City of Heroes and Lineage II broke out five candles apiece.

Looking towards this year's new arrivals, the most eagerly anticipated is Champions Online. I had a weekend with the beta recently and recognised some of the things I liked in Tabula Rasa. An obvious action-orientated slant to the combat, and a common foe that reminded me more than a little of the Bane. I'm sure the influence isn't as conscious as I make it out to be, but it shows that regardless of how long an MMOG survives, gameplay DNA will always outlive it, and that's a good thing in my book.

Richie Shoemaker, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

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



STEVE HILL
Apparently, everyone else was busy washing their hair.



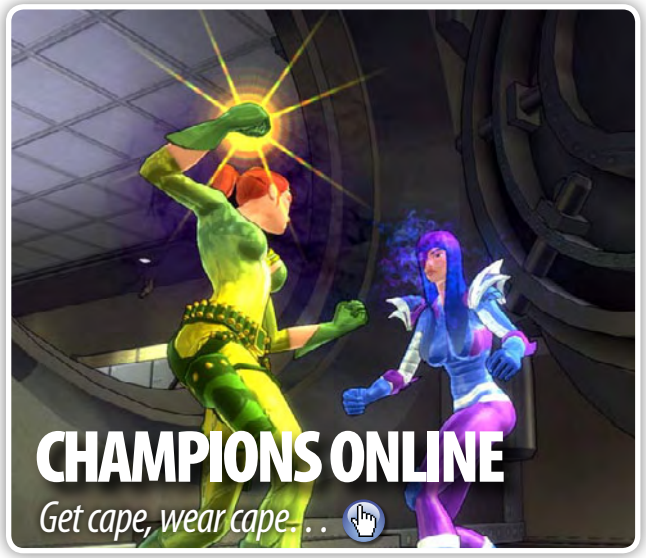
MEGAN CLARK
Ventured into MMOs where other reviewers fear to tread.



LESLEY SMITH
If it has a log-in screen, you can bet she's been through it.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…



CHAMPIONS ONLINE
Get cape, wear cape…



Jumpgate Evolution
The future's bright



Darkfall Online
Climbing to the light

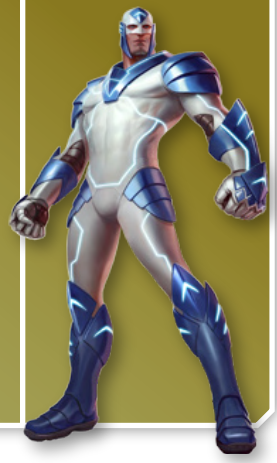


Bill Roper
The ex-Blizzard legend, in tights

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

Black Prophecy
Neo Steam
Allods Online
Dofus 2.0
Vendetta Online
City of Heroes: Going Rogue
Shadowbane
Pirates of the Burning Sea
Atlantica Online
Ultimate Online: Stygian Abyss
Champions Online
Jumpgate
Dragonica
Darkfall
Free Realms
Runes of Magic
Star Wars Galaxies



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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.

Black Prophecy

FIRST LOOK

Jumpgate, it's on your tail…

Publisher: TBD
Developer: Reakktor Media
Heritage: Neocron
Link: www.blackprophecy-game.com
ETA: TBD

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



Reakktor are emphasising combat over carebear gameplay.



"Black Prophecy is all about two factions of humanity… the Genides and the Tyi"


Smallest. Radar. Ever.

What's the story?

We're not sure the story really matters – it rarely does when spaceships are involved – but, if you really must know, Black Prophecy is all about two factions of humanity… the bio-enhanced Genides and the techno-loving Tyi, one of which you must join if you want to get anywhere fast in what is shaping up to be – judging by the name alone – quite a dark space opera from the makers of dark sci-fi RPG Neocron.

What do we know?

Black Prophecy will be hot on the tail of Jumpgate, with laser beams trying to ultimately bring down NetDevil's imminent space combat MMO. It's interesting that while the respective developers of both games have stressed they will offer very different experiences to that currently provided by EVE Online, on the evidence offered so far, they won't be offering much different from the other. Both cite real-time Wing Commander-style combat, heavily mission-based gameplay and ships that can be upgraded and traded.

When do we get more?

Reakktor have released a gameplay video that shows impressive camera work, suitably spaceshippy ship designs, a clean interface and the all-important fast-paced ship-to-ship combat. Being able to pilot your ship is very cool, too. It's very cool in Jumpgate, and with the benefit of being second out the launch bay, it should be even cooler in Dark Prophecy. When we might find that out first hand is a mystery at the present time, but it's safe to say that we're very much looking forward to getting our hands on Black Prophecy.



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Publisher: Gamigo
Developer: HanbitSoft
Heritage: Mythos, Pangya
Link: http://neosteam.gamigo.com
ETA: June

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

Neo Steam

FIRST LOOK

Okay cyberpunk, make our day…



You start the game with your very own pet.

What's the story?

If you're wondering why the name of Neo Steam's developer sounds familiar, it also happens to be the name of the company who are running with some success in South Korea the maligned-but-since-missed Hellgate: London. The company are eager to bring the game back to Western shores and if Neo Steam is successful, it could help ease the way. This seems entirely likely, because in spite of the big swords and doe-eyed characters, Neo Steam is sure to pull in fans by virtue of its steampunk status alone.

What do we know?

Neo steam is the magic sauce that powers pretty much everything in the game, from weapons – such as axes and muskets – all the way up to vehicles, the game's teleportation network and even siege engines. There are two sides in the game – the Kingdom of Elerd, which is the game's fantasy empire with wizards and the like, while the Republic of Rogwel are the ones with all the interesting gadgets. Of course, players can choose from four character classes before shipping out to Rope Island, which is where the dwindling resource of neo steam must be harvested.



More steampixie than steampunk, but never mind.

"Neo steam is the magic sauce that powers pretty much everything in the game"



Probably some of the most intriguing mounts in MMO history.

When do we get more?

After an improbably short closed session, the game has just recently entered open beta testing in Europe, which means that should you wish to find out how the game plays, all that's required is a visit to the website to download the client.

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PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

LIVE



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www.pegi.info

Allods Online

FIRST LOOK

Ships in space, but not spaceships?

Publisher: Gala Networks
Developer: Nival
Heritage: Etherlords, Allods
Link: http://en.allods.gpotato.eu
ETA: Early 2010

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



The original Allods was released in the west as Rage of Mages.

What's the story?

Allods is apparently Russia's most successful gaming series, to the degree that its creators have been handed a cool 12 million dollars to take the series online for the first time. This investment makes the game Russia's most expensive game project of all time. Luckily, the developers don't seem the type to squander this opportunity, having created a string of hits that have included Etherlords, the Blitzkreig series of RTS games and Heroes of Might & Magic V.

What do we know?

The Allods of the title are space islands set within a huge void, created in the aftermath of the destruction of the planet Sarnout. Players can travel to each Allod for questing or crafting fun, to take part in PvP or any number of standard MMOG timesinks. So far so good, but what really makes it sound special is that we'll be able to take part in sky-ship battles across the heavens, with each character manning turrets and equipment stations. The game will also offer up eight classes and six races, which is an impressive tally for any online world.

"What makes this sound so special is that we'll be able to take part in sky-ship battles across the heavens"





Multi-station ship combat is rare in an MMOG.

When do we get more?

European freeplay publisher Gala Networks have a decent enough roster of games, but Allods could well end up being their flagship title, since it's the one most likely to appeal to hardcore gamers. If so, expect the Dublin-based company to be putting the word about soon regarding all the features that as yet haven't been fully translated. Rest assured we'll be keeping a close eye on this game ourselves.

FREE 2 PLAY MMORPG

Runes of Magic



Runes of Magic
CHAPTER I
RISE OF THE DEMON LORD
www.RunesofMagic.com

Features

- Massively-online-role-playing-game without any fixed costs
- Extensive dual class system with 30 combinations available
- Mounts and pets (horses, tigers and many other creatures)
- More than 1,600 quests and quest series embedded in an epic storyline
- Player vs. player fights (battlegrounds, guild- and arena-battles)
- Instances, dungeons, boss and elite opponents as well as raids with up to 36 players
- Versatile spells and attack-skills plus unique elite-skills
- Combination system with hundreds of runes and crafting materials for individualised items
- Player- and guild-housing

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

"This is one game everyone should try!"
tentonhammer.com

www.RunesofMagic.com

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7 UP

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



Dofus 2.0

Developer: Ankama | **ETA:** Winter

The graphical overhaul for the phenomenally successful freeplay MMORPG is reaching its final stages, as developer Ankama prepare to take the code into closed beta. Recently the 2D game celebrated having 700,000 players connect in a single day, 170,000 of those at the same time.



Vendetta Online

Developer: Guild Software | **ETA:** Out now

Vendetta is the forgotten 3D space combat MMO, but in the wake of an intriguing new update perhaps that will change, as up to four players can now defend a ship from turret stations. Other recent changes have been made to cut new players some slack in starting zones.

Pirates of the Burning Sea

Developer: Flying Lab | **ETA:** Out now

It has parrots, but one thing that our favourite high seas MMOG has lacked until recently was a good ol' treasure map. As part of the ongoing Black Flags and Dread Saints content upgrade, Flying Labs have figured out a way to have players roll out the inky parchment in the search for buried gold. We'll be taking another look at the game next issue. Ready your shovels!



City of Heroes: Going Rogue

Developer: Paragon Studios | **ETA:** TBD

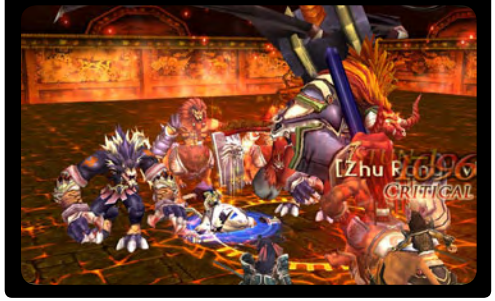
NCsoft are pulling out the big guns as they look to be pre-emptively trying to head off the imminent threat of nemesis Champions Online. The publisher has just announced the Going Rogue expansion, where heroes can become villains and vice versa. After the recent success of the Issue #14 Mission Architect release, these are heady days for fans of the original superhero MMO.



Atlantica Online

Developer: Ndoors | **ETA:** Out now

A new server has come online for Atlantica that allows any player to join it direct from any of the other six servers. Currently guild information is not carried over, but future developments could very well see guild championships taking place. In the meantime, players can engage in PvP challenge matches or take part in the lucrative Grand Championship.

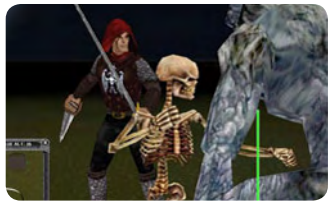


Ultima Online: Stygian Abyss

Developer: Mythic | **ETA:** 2009

Forget attracting new players, it looks like UO wants the old guard back! Stygian Abyss was the name of the first Ultima Underworld game, which in 1992 did FPS before Doom. Well, at long last Mythic are accepting beta applications. We'll be signing up in the hope that the name will be heralding a new era of 3D voxel technology for the veteran MMOROG.





Shadowbane

Developer: Stray Bullet | **ETA:** Out now

Shadowbane was to be the latest MMORPG to shut down, until pressure from fans convinced owner Ubisoft to give players a couple of extra months to play out their final days. The lights will go out July 1st for the last time. Probably.

ON THE RADAR

2010
- Star Wars: The Old Republic

AUTUMN
- Aion: Tower of Eternity

SUMMER
- Jumpgate Evolution

JUNE
- Dragonica

Champions Online

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Cryptic Studios
Heritage: City of Heroes, City of Villains
Link: www.champions-online.com
ETA: 4th September

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

A time for heroes…

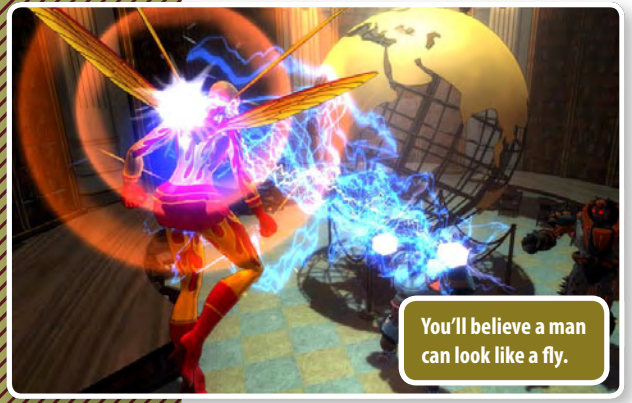
Cryptic Studios' Bill Roper may have been at the company for less than a year, but his association with the world of Champions goes back a lot further. As the Executive Producer and Design Director – and ordained minister and folk singer! – explained during a whistle-stop visit to London: "Champions Online is based on a paper and pencil RPG that was actually released in 1981. I was 16 years old at the time and actually had a first edition copy and played it so have some old-school bragging rights, having been around the Champions universe for a long time."

In fact, the story goes that Roper's efforts to get involved in the beta test led to him being offered a job at Cryptic, the MMO world's superhero specialists. Champions Online continues the theme established by City Of Heroes/Villains, and according to Roper: "One of the biggest things that we get from the superhero genre is the fact that players want to be iconic; they want to have a specific look and they want to be someone in the world that other players see and recognise.

"They want to create the hero that they envision, which means that we have to provide massive amounts of customisation. We have to make sure that we can do everything possible to let them have the experience, and create the character that fits their vision of what a superhero is."


A gun? That's not playing by the superhero rules!


Dinosaurs can be superheroes, too.


You'll believe a man can look like a fly.

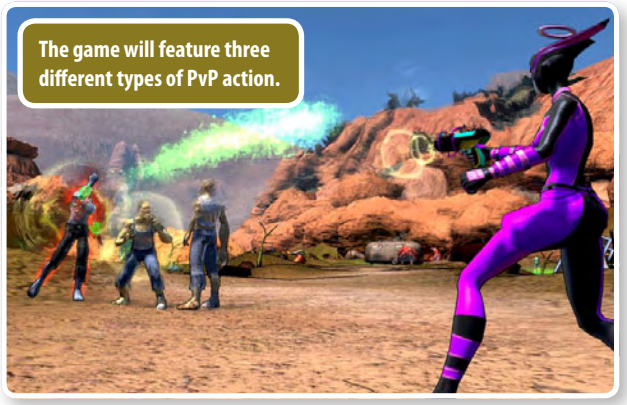

Make your own Fantastic Four.


Wonder if he can get Sky Sports on that?

Champions Online cont.

He's not kidding, and as we sit down to create our character, there's an absolutely bewildering array of options available. Starting with your origin, you can choose from Alien Species, Biomanipulation, Extra-dimensional Energies, Intense Training, Mutation, Mystic Bestowal, Psionic Awakening, Super-Science Augmentation or Supernatural Being, each of which comes with various subsections. Practically every concept and genre is available, whether you want to be a magic user, wear powered armour, be a mutant with rock skin or a martial artist with twin blades.

Then of course there's the all-important costume, with the game offering total control over the colour scheme and how you mix and match the pieces. Customisation


The game will feature three different types of PvP action.

doesn't stop there, with body morphology enabling you to make tall ones, small ones, have a giant head, long skinny arms or a simian hunchback. And then there are the superpowers, which can be selected from such categories as ice, darkness, telekinesis, gadgeteering and munitions. And superheroes can't simply walk; you'll have to decide whether to fly, use super-jump, have super-speed, burrow underground

MEET YOUR NEMESIS

Making it happen



For every yin, there must be a yang. For every up, a down. For every hero, a nemesis. What we're trying to say is that Champions Online enables you to create a gallery of nemeses; your very own arch-enemy collection. Using the same character creation tools as for your hero, the nemeses will even level up at the same rate as your main character, making for some close fights when you elect to take them on in a showpiece showdown. And to show off, you can even bring some friends, with a series of nemesis-specific missions creating an additional storyline.

Champions Online cont.

like a mole, whiz around on a frozen surfboard or swing from building to building like some kind of arachnid-based human. You can even choose your emanation points – essentially electing whether to zap your magic powers from your eyes, hands or chest. Realistically, you could probably spend a day designing your character. In the event, we simply hit 'random' and get a blue-skinned muscle-bound pinhead.

Hero worship

Unleashed on what is effectively the tutorial, it's a welcome change from the obligatory rat-catching opening levels. As Roper confirms, "It's very common in MMOs that when you start the game you are tasked with very menial things to do because we have to teach you how to play the game. What we wanted to do though, was in the context of teaching people the game and going through that tutorial type experience was also making sure that it felt incredibly fun and heroic. And so the goal that we set in front of the design team was create a tutorial as if Michael Bay were creating a tutorial.

"The beginning of the game takes place during an alien invasion with ships coming around, blowing the crap out of buildings, people trapped under rubble; having to go out and find medical supplies to heal

> *"The beginning of the game takes place during an alien invasion, with ships blowing the crap out of everything"*

people, and eventually having to go and help the champions, who are the pre-eminent heroes of our world, discover why the alien invasion is happening and turn the tides of this battle to your favour."

While the opening levels are clearly aimed at the novice, the action comes thick and fast, and we did all of the above while getting up to level three in the space of an hour, all in a familiar yet pleasingly cartoonish graphical style. This autumn, we could all be heroes.



Millennium City, built on the ruins of Detroit after Doctor Destroyer did his worst.



Come on girls, kiss and make up.

MMOZine Verdict

Champions Online is shaping up to be a definitive entry in the superhero genre

HOW COMPLETE



FIRST IMPRESSIONS





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JUMPGATE EVOLUTION

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

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

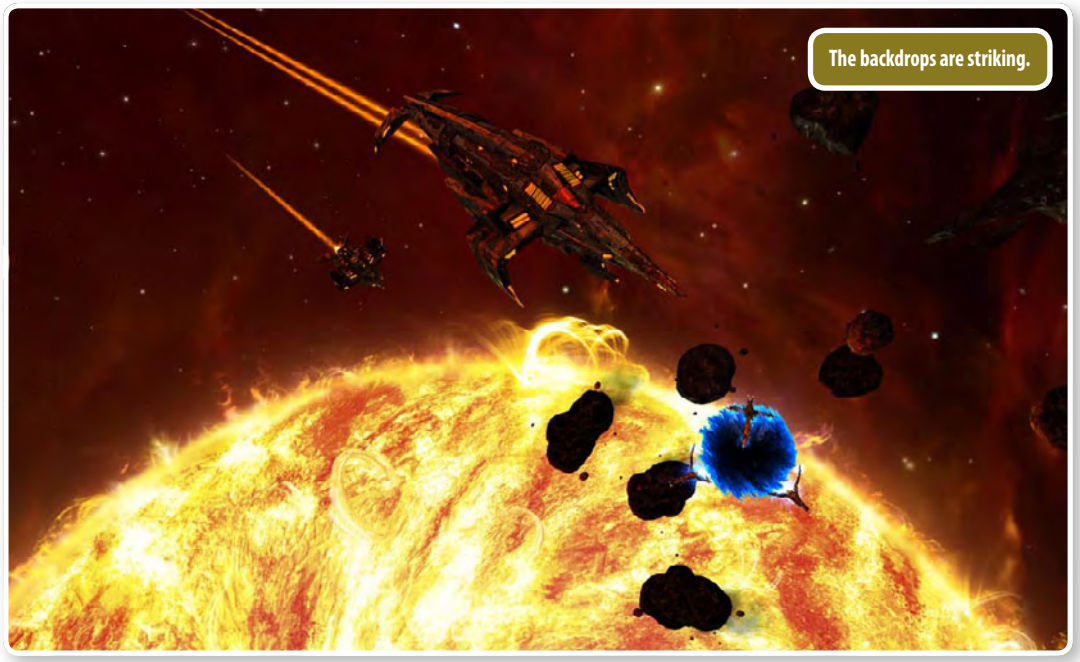
Jumpgate Evolution

Hands-on beta and PvP access to NetDevil's space epic

EVE Online may offer all the strategic fleet battles and political intrigue any space-faring overlord could ever want for, but for those of us who've ached to simply jump in a fast spaceship and blow stuff up via crosshairs and fire buttons – perhaps trading in a few slaves between planets along the way – the massively multiplayer choices have been as thin as the air in space.

Beyond the obvious fact they share a similar space, Jumpgate Evolution is not like EVE Online. Talking to testers and the Codemasters production team, you almost get the feeling that EVE is a dirty word – indeed as soon as I hinted at my six-year addiction, my QA helper just walked off. EVE, it seems, is where all the adults mumble and grumble in overly serious ways, whereas Jumpgate is bright and flashy, perhaps even exciting in a way that EVE could never be. A bag of Space Dust to EVE's Werther's Original, could be one way to describe it.

Jumpgate certainly fizzes. From the compact setting and the race and chase combat, to the dense – almost congested – star fields and third-person mouse control, Jumpgate lines itself up behind Freelancer like a kind of over-eager multiplayer wingman. Shooty bits are immediate and frenetic, colours are vibrant and the sound channels are thick with NPC voice chatter. Actually, come to think of it, it doesn't much feel like an MMOG at all.


The backdrops are striking.


The watchword throughout development has been 'accessibility'.


Expect regular updates after launch.

JUMPGATE EVOLUTION


The beta phase is achingly close.

Jumpgate continued

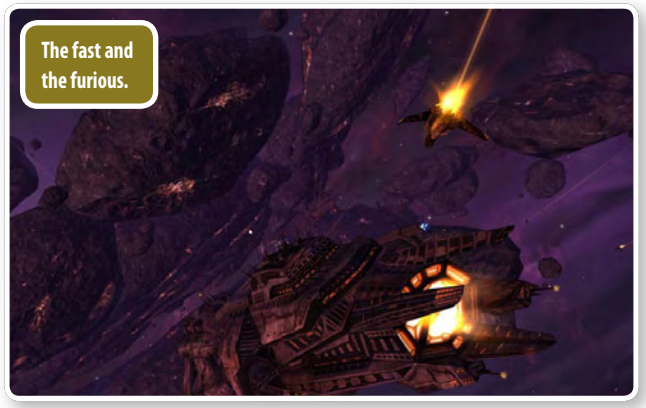
For a start, there's no character creation, no skills or attributes to play with, nor any classes to select. You choose one of three warring sides, select a portrait – we're promised the option to upload Facebook-style images – and immediately you're ready to dive into the tutorial campaign; designed to get you used to flying and outfitting your ship, and introduced to the storyline to which you have allied yourself.


Gamepads and joysticks can be used by those that have them.

It's simple stuff. Worryingly simple. After playing EVE it's like going from DNA to Duplo bricks. Then again, although you're given what amounts to fetch and kill missions, the nature of the fetching and killing is so much more intense than it is in your typical fantasy MMO (and EVE for that matter) that while this may not end up being the most cerebral game in the MMOsphere, it's already a good deal more in-yer-face than it really has any right to be.

It's hard to get a good feel for the game after just an hour or so at the controls, especially when you only get to fly in one ship, but it's easy to appreciate that Jumpgate Evolution is suitably different to almost every other mainstream MMO out there. In Jumpgate you have to consider your speed, range and make shots count, rather than rely on the Tab and number keys. This is instinctive and raw, reminiscent of the unfairly obscured Allegiance, but with enough PvE missions and trading bolted on justify the subscription fee.

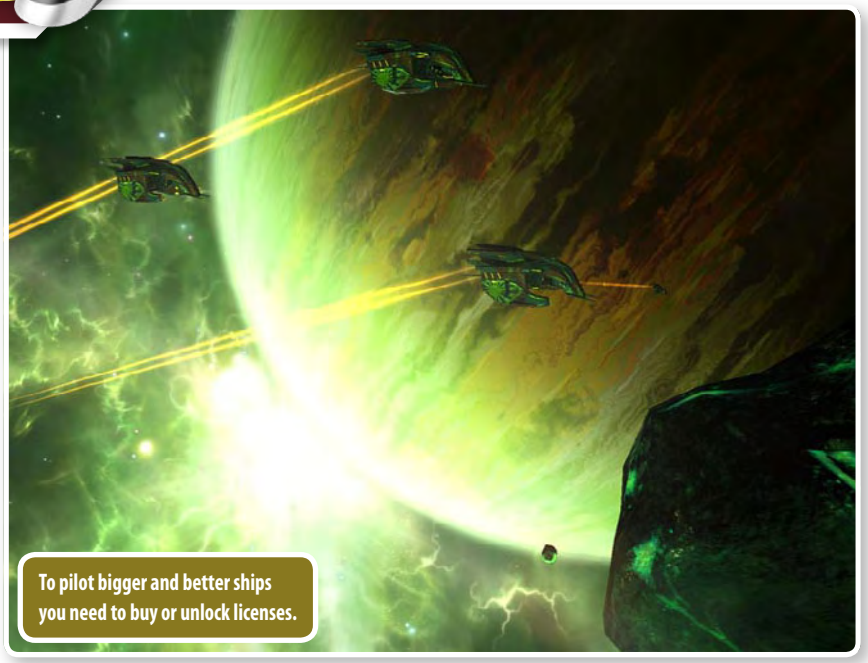
At least that's the plan. After the tutorial the game will lead players into the safer southern sectors, after which the lawless north of Jumpgate space beckons, where PvP gangs will roam and pilots will fight for the glory of their chosen empire in RvR combat in a manner that suggests a flicker of EVE influence. That's the endgame though, which seems a long way away from the rather more staged PvP combat that we were offered to take part in.


The fast and the furious.

Three teams faced off in starter ships, the aim to take down the static capital ship of the enemy. You fly out, shoot at the big lump, get shot


100-player fleet battles are mooted.

JUMPGATE EVOLUTION



To pilot bigger and better ships you need to buy or unlock licenses.



Low system requirements will be a bonus for potential subscribers.

"Jumpgate looks to offer a style of combat that could be just what space gaming needs"

Jumpgate continued

down, respawn and head out again, which is repeated until one team wins. There was no death penalty, no option to try other ships or refit them, and it was, we were assured, not at all representative of PvP in the final game. The Codemasters producer admitted to me later that it was a test scenario, one built to allow the QA guys to gauge balancing rather than measure adrenaline. As a hands-on experience of PvP combat, it was less than impressive.

While the makers of Jumpgate boast of epic battles, limitless gameplay and a fully immersive player-driven economy, it's difficult not to appear snobbish and point back to EVE, a game that could make Jumpgate wet its pants with a single glance. Then again Jumpgate looks to offer a style of combat and a level of immediacy and accessibility that could be just what space gaming needs – and what some EVE players, ourselves among them, are eager to experience. If space is going to be the next big place for MMO gamers to hang out, Jumpgate could well be the perfect vehicle to start them on their journey.

SPACE RACES

Jumpgate's three main factions return…

SOLRAIN **QUANTAR** **OCTAVIAN**

These are the game's corporatist zealots – a bunch of ultra-capitalist traders and criminals that would likely send the galaxy into a recession if given half a chance. A shame, because they used to be a nice bunch once. Luckily, some elements are hoping for a return to the old ways.



MMOZine Verdict

Action-packed and hugely fun, this could be just what the MMO world needs

HOW COMPLETE

85%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

Dragonica

Publisher: Gala Networks
Developer: Barunson Interactive
Heritage: Flyff, Dragon Raja
Link: http://en.dragonica.gpotato.eu
ETA: TBC

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

Game for a laugh…

After a day of slicing a path through evil raccoons, wolves and other twisted animals, we can conclude thus far that Dragonica isn't quite as wild and wacky as we were led to believe after our first encounter. We've not found the fart key, nor come across any of the more interesting enemy creatures that can be seen in various trailers and gameplay videos, but what we have been is more than a little taken with the game, not because it elicits waves of Golden Axe nostalgia or exhibits evidence of finely tuned design on a par with your Marios and Zeldas, but because it reminds us how ridiculous and relentless MMOGs can be.

"What you do in Dragonica is fundamentally the same as what you do in World of Warcraft"

What you do in Dragonica is fundamentally the same as what you do in World of Warcraft, only in this particular cartoon fantasy you are reminded that it's just a game; told to accept it as just a bit of fun and to not take it too seriously. As an example, as you cut a swathe









Dragonica continued

through clumps of 'sheepy sheep', one will regularly barrel and bleat into the screen and cause a crack to appear as if your monitor really is broken. Okay, it's not exactly hilarious stuff, but it's one of many likeable traits that could see the game rise above other whimsical MMOGs like, say, Rose Online – which, when we last tried it, only managed to reveal its lighter side after days and days of soulless grinding.

While Dragonica loudly proclaims itself as a 2D MMOG, the distinction between it and those with an extra dimension aren't so obvious when you start playing. The environments are more like narrow corridors rather than platforms, and jumping is only useful as a prelude to some semi-elaborate combat swipe. The way the landscape is laid out means that action is never far away and there's very little trekking to be done in order to find the requisite number of carcasses to collect. This is likely to be a very good thing for those who like their MMOG sessions to stay under the 30-minute mark, or whose time at the keyboard is dictated by mums who might get understandably twitchy letting their tweenagers in on the kind of good-natured co-operative slaughter than Dragonica provides

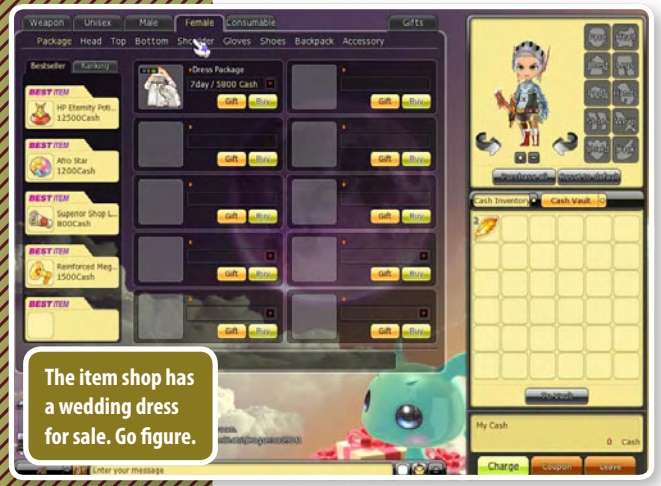
Dragonica appears to offer all the usual elements you'd to expect in an MMO, with vendors where you can sell your trash, exclamation marks above heads denoting missions that need to be completed and a steady increment of ever more tricky beasts to slay.

It's all very simply done, inside an interface that allows to you do all that needs doing without any fuss or bother. As such, with the action never far away and an aesthetic that might be recognised as not being to dissimilar to worlds such as Pokémon, you can almost imagine kids enjoying this more than the likes of Free Realms or Fusion Fall, with the added benefit that their old folks might enjoy a quick blast at the same time. ●





"Dragonica appears to offer all the usual elements you'd expect in an MMO"



MMOZine Verdict

An MMO for younger gamers?

HOW COMPLETE

90%

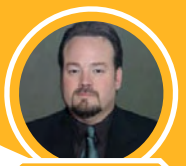
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

76%

Champions Online

More super than you might think

"Players have the ability to run and gun, and are also able to attack while using super powers"

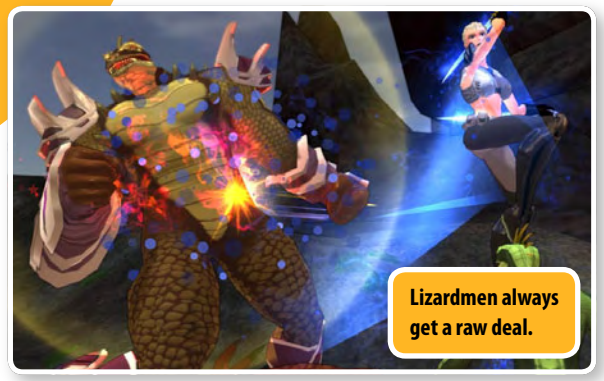


Bill Roper, the Design Director of Cryptic Studios

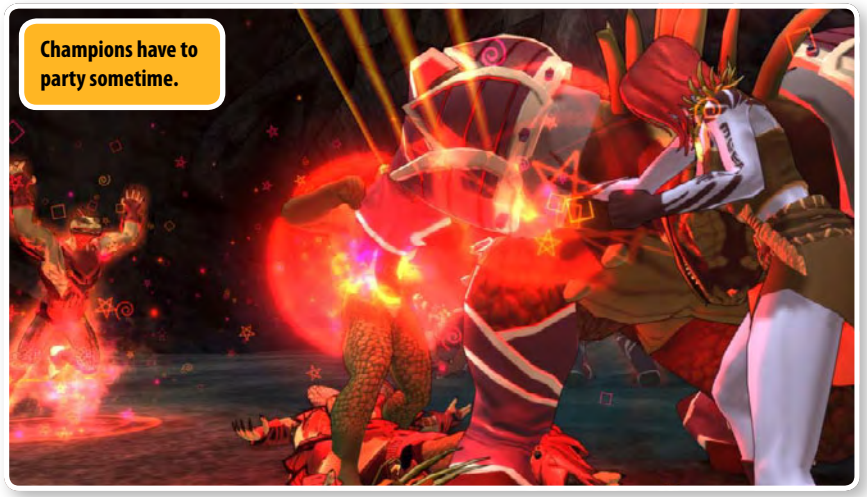
After a decade-long stretch at Blizzard, where he was Producer on Diablo and Starcraft, Bill Roper is now the Design Director at Cryptic Studios, heading up work on Champions Online. In-between bouts of illness and deadlines, we snagged him for a long chat on what makes his latest game project particularly super.

With Champions Online, has there ever been a worry that you were re-inventing the wheel?
I guess every MMO faces that. There's almost a certain level of expectation on what you're going to get gameplay-wise, from any MMO I think. So then it's what is it about yours that makes it different. What systems you have, the UI… there are so many things that can be different. Once you have a genre and a setting, you then look to what you can provide that is special, so that people want to spend time there.

What fundamentally makes Champions an action MMOG?
We not only have the ability for players to run and gun, but to also be able to attack while using super powers – flying or leaping – so it attains the immersion of the genre. Another big thing is allowing the player to be reactive in their defences. We have these tells that happen when the villain that you're fighting is using a certain type of attack, so that you'll have an idea about whether you should be moving out of the way or blocking.



Lizardmen always get a raw deal.



Champions have to party sometime.



EXCLUSIVE SCREEN!

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

Interview continued

We basically give you reasons to keep moving during a fight. It doesn't make it 'twitchy', but it does make it so you're not going to just stand there and fire off powers.

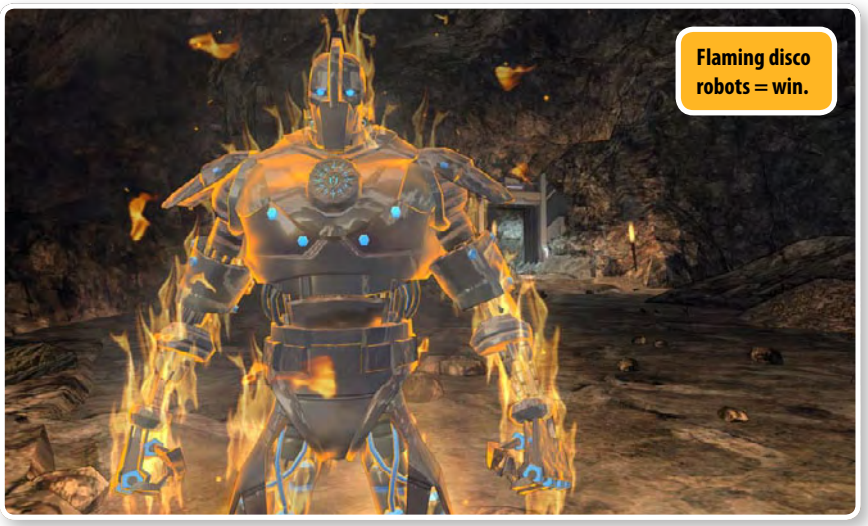
But that seems rather analogous to what a lot of MMOG players are used to, or do you think that is what they may want?
The types of things that MMO gamers like is not detracted by having action-orientated combat. We have over 900 missions in the game and you'll be going through major story arcs. The action in the combat supports all that because every fight will present its own little challenge, but without taking anything away from those bigger things that players love to do.

There's not been much talk on crafting or resourcing – how is that element fitting in?
Really well actually. We're allowing players to craft in a number of ways. One is where players can experiment with components and discover different types of items we can then create dynamically. I think of it like cooking: Master chefs play with recipes all the time and come up with fantastic new dishes, and players have the ability to do the same kind of thing in the crafting system.

When players craft things we really want them to craft things that are specifically for the concept of a hero; things that are intangible and physical. I think that puts crafting in a very special place.

A lot of heroes are pretty weak, but have killer


If your girlfriend does this then run!


Flaming disco robots = win.



Interview continued

robots who do their bidding, or vehicles… were things like bat-copters considered, or are they *being* considered?
Yeah, definitely. There are a lot of things that are in, and we constantly think about how we can add more of those. I would love in the future to be able to add alternate forms of travel that are – for want of a better word – more mundane, like a kick-ass motorcycle. Those are things that we'll definitely look at in terms of ongoing content. Coming up with those elements is what is so wonderful about playing or making an MMO. Just because things aren't there on day one doesn't mean they're not going to be there one day.

"My whole focus is on making Champions Online the best game that we can make it"

How has testing been so far, and how much player feedback have you taken on board?
Quite a bit. A lot of the changes we make are as a direct result of player feedback. Every week we have meetings about things that have been brought up on the forums and it's an incredibly valuable process.

What's the biggest misconception that people have about Champions Online?
Only that we're not done yet. We're in beta and it feels really good, but there are things that some players don't like and we're having to explain that perhaps some things aren't the way that even we envisaged them, so we're just telling people to hang on until things are locked down.

Post-launch, will you be going for regular updates, or will it mainly be major yearly expansions?
I'd like us to have a more frequent schedule. I think it's tough to have people hang on for a year before they get anything. I think that there are minimum timelines that are required. I think that post-launch we should be really explicit with players about what is going to be happening, because they want to know what's coming up. If you can keep them informed and make them a part of the process then that's great.

How do you guys view City of Heroes? Is it a game you want to do well, or do you want to crush it, steal its player base and take over the world?
I wasn't here during the making of those games, so for myself my whole focus is on making Champions Online the best game we can make it. Players want to go where they will have the best experience. So if we make the best game that we can and it has that experience and players – wherever they come from – play the game, then I want to make it so they stay and help us grow the world. That's really my whole focus.




The light at the end of the beta tunnel.



Publisher: Atari
Developer: Cryptic Studios
Heritage: City Of Heroes, City Of Villains
Link: www.champions-online.com
ETA: 4th September

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Darkfall Online

Meanwhile, a million miles from Azeroth…

Publisher: Aventurine
Developer: Aventurine
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.darkfallonline.com
OUT NOW

System requirements: 2.5GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 12GB hard drive space and a DX9.0-compatible graphics card



The attacking forces use a cannon to destroy a wall. The wall was destroyed and the attackers flooded the city.

Aventurine's Darkfall Online brings the adrenaline rush back to MMORPGs. Finally, you will know that you won – not because you had better items, but just because you were *better*. Be prepared though, if modern MMOs are like a riding a shiny theme park thrill-ride, then Darkfall is like snowboarding down a mountain ahead of an avalanche. It's brutal, gritty, unforgiving and it's a rough ride, but if you survive, it can be a rush!

The emphasis on player skill starts in the lack of classes and levels. Playing a pre-designed class in an MMOG can feel like wearing someone else's shoes – you get used to them, but they never quite fit. You won't have that problem in Darkfall. You choose from a list of skills that suit your play style and to develop the skill you just use it – your skills go up as you play. The early result of this was that all players were hybrids of a sort, with the same basic skills. As players become more experienced and characters become more developed, unique skill sets are appearing and players are falling into roles.

With massive siege warfare in mind, Darkfall is minimalistic by design. There are some features designed to reduce server load that feel odd. Most


City sizes vary from small and compact to sprawling maze-like compounds. This tidy little city is located on the ocean in Mercia.


This male Orc player is wearing a combination of player-crafted full plate and looted Black Knight gear.



These clan mates duel each other to improve their fighting skills. Orc and Mahirim are the two largest races in Darkfall.



Even the easiest monsters in the game are savvy opponents. New players will get a lot of practice trying to catch and kill the crafty goblins.

Darkfall Online cont.

noticeable are the short clipping distances, the result of which is that the world quickly fades into a haze.

Another startling difference is the dynamic spawns – the monsters only spawn if a player is near. This design choice has led some to feel that Darkfall is an empty world. The simple spell graphics are another feature that seems underwhelming, but in battles they're great for reducing spell lag.

The lack of sticky targeting, combined with simple left-click swings and casts, means that you'll have to kill players and monsters yourself. To excel, players must develop techniques that will give them an advantage, such as jump-strafing while spinning to target an enemy's vulnerable back. Eventually, the boredom of repetitive clicking takes a back seat to well-timed movement.

While individual player skill is important, the ability to work well in a group also comes into play. Thousands of players battle for ownership of cities and hamlets located all over the massive world. Some clans fight valiantly to defend their homes, while others hire themselves out as mercenaries for the highest paying cause. But whatever your role, the fights are exciting, and unstoppable.

If you prefer the more intellectual side of PvP, there are some intelligent and devious minds shaping the political topography – and the game is still in its infancy. With time, the political battles will perhaps rival the performances seen in EVE Online.

THE EMPTY WORLD

Is there anybody out there?

MONSTER SPAWNS **A BIT CAMP** **RUSH ATTACK**

From a distance the monster spawns look foreboding, but quite uninhabited. This has led to rumours of an empty world.

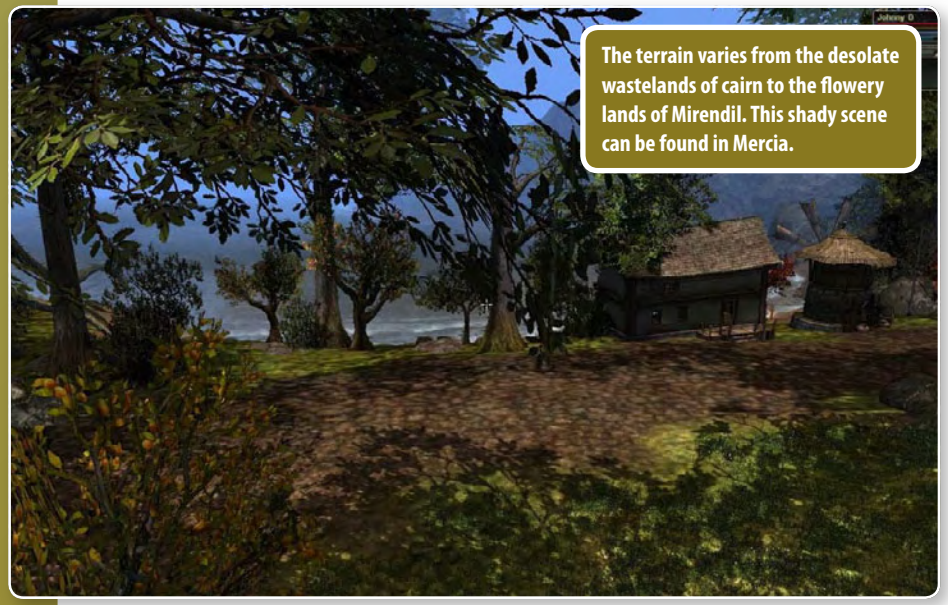




Nearly 100 players take to the sea on their way to a mainland siege.



This is a small fraction of this sprawling city located on the desert island of Cairn, in the south-eastern corner of Agon.



The terrain varies from the desolate wastelands of cairn to the flowery lands of Mirendil. This shady scene can be found in Mercia.

Darkfall Online cont.

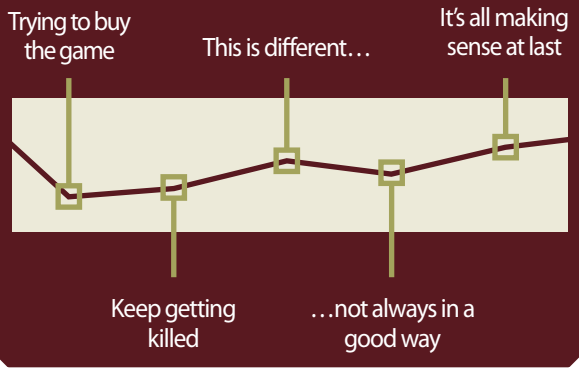
While the emphasis may be on PvP, don't underestimate the mobs. They are more closely related to FPS bots than MMO monsters. They detect players coming, run, kite, strafe, heal and call for help. If you try pulling one out of a group, their friends will notice and they will come to help. Monster difficulty increases as you approach the centre of Agon, and the dungeons can be brutal.

While the PvE is decent, you'll be disappointed if you're looking for questing and lore. There are some quest chains that involve different factions in each race, but those are more of a sideline to help new players get to grips with the game and earn some quick cash.

The downfalls of Darkfall are caused by poor management of the game – it is only available for digital download via the developer's well-hidden (and often closed) online store, and much of the promised content has not yet made it into the game. The single server is doing an admirable job of handling 10,000+ players, but that doesn't help the thousands of players still waiting to play. With that said, the game is well worth seeking out if you're tired of the safety and monotony of theme park gaming. Take a step off the beaten path and see what the wilds have to offer. ●

Megan Clark

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



MMOZine Verdict

A clever game, but not for the faint of heart

- ✓ Uncompromising PvP environment
- ✓ Dynamic combat and colossal battles
- ✗ Far from being accessible

FreeRealms

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: Sony Online Entertainment San Diego
Heritage: EverQuest, The Matrix Online, Star Wars Galaxies
Link: www.freerealms.com
OUT NOW

System requirements: Windows XP/Vista, Compatible browser (eg Firefox), 1GB memory, nVidia GeForce 6 or later

Free Realms

"At its heart, Free Realms is designed to be simple and fun to play"



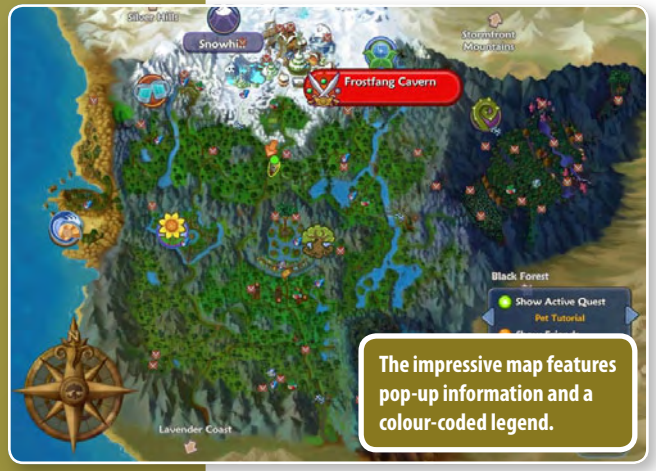
The character choice is limited but players don't seem to be complaining.

For kids, big or little

Free Realms has been capturing interest for a while now and, after going through what must be the world's shortest beta, it's finally out in the wild. This 'freemium' MMO seems to be appealing to the widest demographic ever, from kids who've never played an MMO before to die-hard adult fans who grew up with EverQuest and Ultima Online.

At its heart, Free Realms is designed to be simple and fun to play. The learning curve is a delicately carved line and the tutorial introduces different features of the game at a gentle pace so you start with a blank screen and by the end of it you have everything you'll need, from a minimap to the chatbox.

The nice part of the game is that rather than playing in a client, instead you play in a browser (we used Firefox). Each time you log in, the game updates automatically and the whole process feels that much more painless. Under a basic free account you can create one character but this rises to three if you upgrade and pay a monthly fee of $4.99.



The impressive map features pop-up information and a colour-coded legend.

Choice of races

The race choices are much more limited than any MMO we've seen – you can be either a human child or a slightly less realistic fairy; your only choice is the gender. Names are chosen using a fruit machine method of pre-selection, where you spin it round until you find three components which sound good. All of these

Roll over screen for annotations







Free Realms continued

sound slightly hippy-ish – as opposed to fantasy with a heavy preference to the natural world – so it's not that uncommon to come across characters with names like Calei Stargate or Brandon Moonstone.

Happy, perky music keeps you occupied while the game loads, and you can jump between servers on the fly. So if you're on Server 1 and your friends are on 3, it's a simple matter of reloading the game and joining them. Teleportation is an important aspect – you just click on an area of the map you've visited or on your friends' markers to teleport. Sections of the game are instanced and this can be anything from the tutorial area to certain quests which require you to enter a bubble of space and leave via a magical door.

A beautiful world

The actual world itself looks gorgeous. The colours are bright and the land is filled with magical creatures and quest-givers, and there's certainly plenty to do. Perhaps the most interesting thing about Free Realms is the choice. You don't have to fight, you can switch jobs on the fly – each having its own rather fetching uniform – and you can go almost anywhere you want to. As you move from zone to zone, the music changes and suddenly you walk out of a forest into a snowy mountain range or tropical beach. The transition is seamless, and the beauty of each new area unmatched.

MINI-GAME MADNESS

Small, and imperfectly formed

GAME ON! | A BIT CAMP | MASTER CHEF

Mini-games are the often-played backbone of Free Realms.





Free Realms continued

The controls take a little getting used to, and it's actually easier to use the keys over a mouse, but the breadcrumb trail will always lead back to the most recent quest, meaning you can never really get lost. The quests themselves often give you a choice – you can fight ogres or you can find a potion which will enable an NPC to do the job for you. Both allow you to learn different jobs and you come out with different skill levels. The idea of not having to fight is quite revolutionary and makes Free Realms feel more like a virtual world – like Second Life – rather than a traditional MMO.

Earlier we mentioned Free Realms is freemium, well it's not long before your character encounters the 'premium' part. Once you leave the tutorial zone and enter the Realms proper, one of your first tasks is to train in looking after animals. There are plenty of cute kitties but the only way you can have one of your very own is to part with cold, hard Station Cash. This is where your credit card comes in, but you can try the animal for free for ten minutes.



Learning to cook is one of many, many professions you can learn.

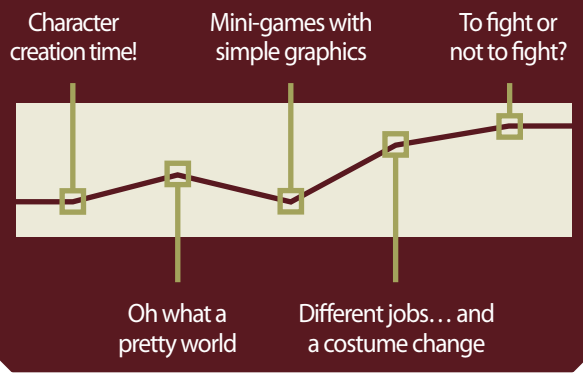
Station cash

Purchasing Station Cash by be done by buying special game cards – if you live in the US – or online, which come with a certain number of points. These can then be used to pay your account, upgrade membership or buy in-game items. Free Realms is also linked into a Trading Card Game which can grant access to a plethora of virtual items, from clothes and pets to ice cream sandwiches. Yes, it's ultimately a way on capitalising on all that Free Realms hype but given the main audience are tweens, it's probably a wise move.

Free Realms excels purely because it takes the best of all the other games out there. Unfortunately, when you get down to the numerous mini-games the graphical quality collapses – the games are simple and the graphics basic to say the least. We go from a lush world to mini-games which feel like a tacked-on addition. However, this is something that younger players will easily overlook and is a tiny blip on an otherwise good-looking and fun to play game.

Lesley Smith

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



FREEZE FRAME

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



1 MINUTE
Choose your character, pick a hippy-sounding name and enter Free Realms.



5 MINUTES
Tutorial time, and you learn the first of a dozen jobs. What do you fancy?



6 MINUTES
Wilbur the bright puce Pig is one of the cuter NPCs in Free Realms.



2 HOURS
Time to explore the world – there's everything here, including a fun fair.



5 HOURS
Catch up with your friends and enjoy the sunset at the beach. Lovely.

MMOZine Verdict

A unique browser-based MMO, and loads of fun, too

- ✓ Fun to play
- ✓ Browser-based gameplay
- ✗ Basic mini-games



Publisher: Frogster Interactive
Developer: Runewalker Entertainment
Heritage: Bounty Bay Online
Link: www.runesofmagic.com
OUT NOW

System requirements: 2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 5GB hard drive space and a DX9.0-compatible graphics card

Runes of Magic

PLAY AGAIN!



And still they come…

Although the weekly announcements for home furnishing sales might have you believe Runes of Magic has entered the post-release gold rush where Frogster look to make a return on their investment, in actuality the game is still being expanded at quite an impressive rate. As a testament to that, Frogster have announced that their user base has hit a million, and while that figure doesn't take into account the lapsed users, nor is in any way close to being the biggest freeplay MMOG, it's still an impressive first quarter for the young upstart.

As we were putting the final touches to last month's review, the region of Ravenfell came online – too high a level for us to venture into, but it's no bad thing to have another zone to aspire to visiting one day. Public quests have also made a entrance into the game, set around the Segarth Outpost, with more quests in development. The problem, however, isn't with the lack of new, but with the fixing of the old.

"Frogster has announced that their user base has hit a million"

It's not so much that the PvP system is rotten to the core, but it would appear that the perception is that it is. When real money is involved directly with in-game items, such perceptions can be pretty powerful to overcome. ●

Richie Shoemaker


Many mission areas are almost setup like public quests already.



Chopping wood is relaxing. Or boring – the jury's still out on that one.

THINGS TO DO

Playing Runes of Magic and stuck for something to do? Here are a few suggestions to get you started…

JOIN A PVE SERVER

Seriously, if you want to keep your stuff and not have choice items stolen by a player-killer, stay away from the PvP servers. You'll be happier that way.

DON'T HOARD

Runes rewards players with countless trinkets and resources in the hope that you'll buy diamonds to rent extra backpacks. Don't give in to the temptation, though. Throw all the crap away. Or, better still, sell it.

SPENDING SPREE

If you do invest in some diamonds, good first buys are Experience and Talent Charms, Big Angel's Sigh (no experience loss after death) and a permanent mount. You'd be wise not to go overboard though.

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PLAY AGAIN

Around a world in 14 days*

(*or however long the trail period lasts)

Part 2: Star Wars Galaxies


The weird and wonderful characters of Star Wars.

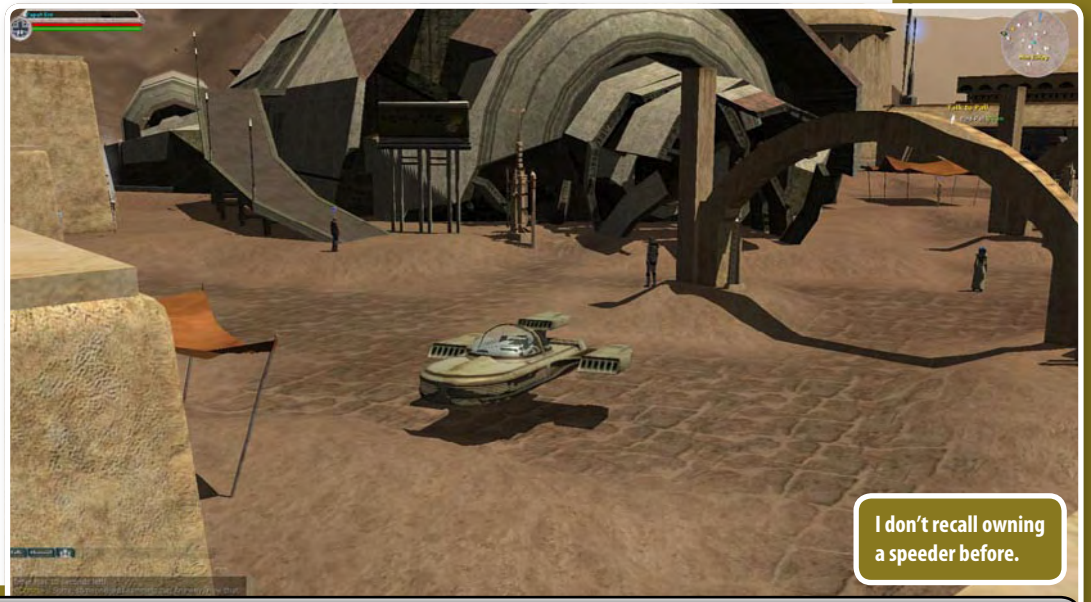
Richie Shoemaker wonders if this was the game he's been looking for all along…

With very few exceptions, Star Wars has been a source of almost unwavering disappointment ever since it's creator decided to revisit the universe with *that Binks film*. Like many, I gritted my teeth through that garish nonsense, accepted the films that followed and hoped for better times to come. I thought Star Wars Galaxies would provide them. In fact, I was sure it would. It was to be a reaffirmation for me.

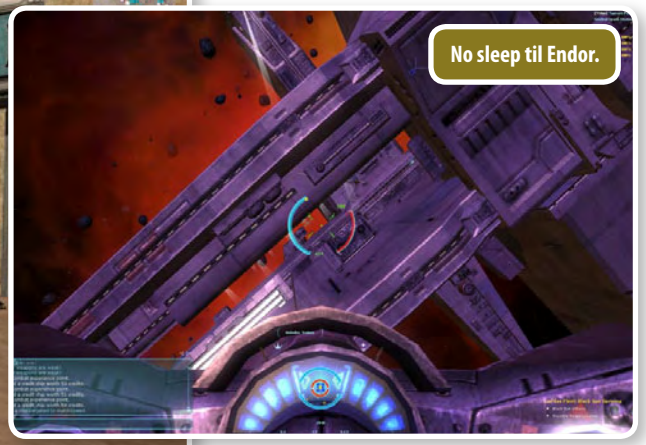
Except it wasn't. It was a betrayal. Galaxies looked great, as games before release often do. It had all the Star Wars furniture I could have ever wanted for, but something was immediately very desperately wrong, when in 2003 I first logged

"Galaxies looked great, but something was immediately very desperately wrong"


People just leave their doors open.


I don't recall owning a speeder before.





Replay continued

in. Wookiees were breakdancing. Wookiees. *Dancing!* And I, a soon-to-be great hero for the Rebel Alliance, armed with a blaster no less, was being chased through the desert by creatures that a small child should have been able to deal with. It was just wrong. I exited the game and vowed never to return. Aside from a brief dabble in the wake of the 'New Game Enhancements' (as a consequence of which, thousands of Galaxians exited and vowed never to return), I have kept my word.

Eventually it was Bioware's Knights of the Old Republic that briefly provided the reaffirmation I'd been seeking, and as news has trickled out in the last year regarding Bioware's MMO of that Stars Wars galaxy longer ago and further away, my curiosity to return to Galaxies has got the better of me. And you know what? Since I gave in, I've had a great time.

I'm at odds to explain what it is about Galaxies that I'm enjoying. The (literally) Solo tutorial is a wonderfully engaging introduction, especially with the added component of the Jump to Light Speed expansion, but as soon as you land on Tatooine the game does rather throw you in it. Combat can't quite measure up to Old Republic's, but engagements certainly aren't the bogged down slugfests I remember witnessing, and although some of the animations are less than fluid, the graphics are more than agreeable in what is an ancient game, even by MMOG standards.

"I'm at odds to explain what it is about Galaxies that I'm enjoying"

The inventory system is messy, the interface is fiddly and the mobs respawn far too quickly for my liking, but Galaxies seems to either be closer to the game I had hoped for than I ever thought it was, or that my expectation has been dragged so low by worsening movies, games and TV tie-ins that I'll subconsciously grab hold of anything that retains a mere hint of the Star Wars that I once loved.

Regardless, it's been a most unexpected delight playing Star Wars Galaxies, but next time I need something newer. ●

To be continued…



WIN! BE THE FIRST TO PLAY AION: TOWER OF ETERNITY

We've got 200 weekend test slots to give away



HURRY! STARTS THIS WEEKEND!

If you've been reading MMOZine for any length of time then you'll know that Aion: Tower of Eternity is a game we've been keeping a close eye on for many months. Just released in Korea and China, the dream-like title is winning Game of the Year awards already and proving to be quite the success story. Sadly, those of us in the West will have to wait a few months yet before we can sample the game.

…Or maybe not. In advance of what will undoubtedly be the MMOG release of the winter, NCsoft have given us 200 beta slots to hand out to MMOZine readers. This is a very exclusive opportunity, as the test event will only be running for a short time – from June 5th 1900 GMT until to June 8th 0700 GMT. Not a long stretch, but enough to get a feel for the game, and you'll be in on the action with the likes of us. Hurry up and enter though, as time is short!

Unfortunately though, the test is only available for European readers of MMOZine.

To be in with a chance of winning a test key, all you have to do is answer the following question…

Competition closes 4th June 2009. See website for full T&Cs.

In MMOZine Issue 13



Rejoice! The first UK playtest!

PLUS!

Star Wars: The Old Republic

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