

AFTER HOURS

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Online Games Revisited

BY PETER SUCIU

Part of the appeal of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) is that they are built around *persistent worlds*—which means these online universes can change and develop. They are occupied by thousands of users who are able to affect the virtual environments; a static setting probably wouldn't keep most players interested for long. The most popular MMORPGs have recently undergone plenty of additions and improvements. Even experienced players will find reasons to keep coming back.

Watch for new online games based on *The Matrix* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Other fantasy games in the wings include a full-blown EverQuest sequel and Microsoft's Mythica. Online, there are always new worlds to conquer.



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: TRIALS OF ATLANTIS

Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis

If adventures on land are starting to feel a bit dry, take things under the sea in the newest expansion for this popular game.

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And check out the vastly improved look: The team at Mythic Entertainment gave the entire game a face-lift that adds realism.

The fabled lost continent can now be accessed via

recently unlocked portals, but not all of the secrets of Atlantis will be immediately available. The ancients of this long-dead society foresaw their civilization's decline and set up a series of difficult trials to challenge future cultures. The new desert and forest locations, in addition to the undersea settings, promise to be a nice change from the traditional English- and Celtic-styled world while offering new adventures and quests for experienced players.

\$29.99 list; monthly fee, \$9.99. Mythic Entertainment Inc., www.trialsofatlantis.com.

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EverQuest: Evolution



The king of online games keeps pounding away. A full sequel will be released later this year, but Sony

Online Entertainment has been steadily improving the existing world of EverQuest with better graphics and even premium content. The most recent expansions

for EverQuest make up the Evolution package: Planes of Power, Legacy of Ykesha, and Lost Dungeons of Norrath. They have been optimized to run on less bandwidth, making for a quick-paced game with fewer lengthy downloads.

These expansions introduce new classes, races, spells, and items, along with other player features. Planes of Power also delivers a new back story for the EverQuest world, which adds challenges and opportunities beyond mere day-to-day questing. This notoriously addictive game remains fresh and exciting.

\$29.99 list; monthly fee, \$9.99. Sony Online Entertainment Inc., <http://everquest.station.sony.com>. ●●●●●

The New and Improved The Sims Online

Launched in the fall of 2002, The Sims Online hasn't been quite the breakout hit Electronic Arts hoped it would be. But the game is steadily attracting a growing number of players. To keep these arrivals and the original inhabitants happy, the developers have been making continual improvements. If your idea of a perfect



EVERQUEST: EVOLUTION



life is a fairy tale combined with *The Stepford Wives*, look no further than *The New and Improved The Sims Online*.

Among the most interesting features of the New and Improved game world is your ability to hit the virtual job market, where you can see your Sims actually go to their jobs instead of merely working off-screen. This adds a new economic level to the game: With more wealth, players can set up businesses, build even more impressive dream homes, and throw wild parties.

And now, Fido isn't left behind: Pets have been added for more mischievous fun. You

can employ service Sims to help take care of your pets and aid in the management of your properties and daily activities. \$29.99 list; monthly fee, \$9.99. Electronic Arts Inc., www.thesimsonline.ea.com. ●●●●○

PlanetSide: Core Combat

Many online worlds are about exploration and building, but *PlanetSide: Core Combat* is about strife and conflict. With this expansion, the new, massive underground war zones and accompanying head-to-head combat in subterranean cities have taken a good fighting game and made it even better. Along with these locations, you'll discover ancient technology, including vehicles and weapons that can be used by *PlanetSide*'s various factions.

The new environments aren't just bombed-out buildings. You'll see a variety of hostile settings, such as volcanic lava flows and ice caverns, each putting your chance for victory

in question. If living in a world of peace and prosperity isn't your thing, a trip to the *Core Combat* world may be more your speed. But easily discouraged players should be aware that efforts to make a difference and turn the tide almost always seem to be defeated.

\$29.99 list; monthly fee, \$12.99. Sony Online Entertainment Inc., <http://planetside.station.sony.com>. ●●●●○



PLANETSIDE: CORE COMBAT

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided

This game is set in a dark time. Darth Vader and the Emperor have destroyed the once-powerful Jedi order, but the fragile Rebel Alliance has just scored its first decisive victory with the destruction of the Death Star. What era could be more exciting for fans of that galaxy far, far away?

Recently added to the game are player-controlled cities that allow for greater



STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED

cooperation with others, including protection from rival forces. You can still choose your own path: Help the Rebel Alliance in its epic struggle, or sign up for a stint with the Imperial Navy.

Unfortunately, you can't actually head to the stars just yet. Space ships will be part of an expansion to be released later this year. Till then, you can always take up moisture farming on Tatooine.

\$49.99 list; monthly fee, \$14.99. LucasArts, <http://starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com>. ●●●●○

WHAT THE RATINGS MEAN

●●●●● EXCELLENT
●●●●○ VERY GOOD
●●●○● GOOD
●●○●○ FAIR
●○○○● POOR

OTHER ONLINE WORLDS

Here are some brief updates on a few of the many other MMORPGs.

Anarchy Online: Shadowlands

With the *Shadowlands* expansion pack, *Anarchy Online* players can travel to an alternative dimension and explore more than half a dozen distinct regions, each with its own unique look and varied quests. This world is more focused on fantasy than on the hard science fiction of the original game. Funcom Inc., www.anarchy-online.com.

Asheron's Call 2

Set hundreds of years after the original game, this sequel puts players in a world that has faced a huge catastrophe that has scarred the lands. The game revolves around rebuilding

the world and attempting to unravel the mystery of the devastation.

Microsoft Game Studios, www.asheronscall.com.

EVE Online: The Second Genesis

Although the game's original publisher closed its doors, *EVE Online* continues to flourish. It features a dynamic economy, Machiavellian politics, and a hostile universe to conquer—good swash-buckling stellar fun.

Playnet, www.eve-online.com.

Lineage

The American version of the hugely popular Korean MMORPG never caught fire as wildly as its creators hoped. That hasn't kept things from jumping in this medieval world of never-ending conflict and strife.

NCsoft, www.lineage-us.com.

Ultima Online

The granddaddy of MMORPGs is showing its age—like a fine wine from a classic vintage. The developers at Origin have kept a steady supply of fresh content for the world of Britannia, with plenty of intrigue and adventures.

Electronic Arts Inc., www.wo.com.

World War II Online

When this game first launched in 2002, it was very buggy and bound to crash; it required nightly patches. After numerous updates, *World War II Online* probably has the steadiest new content of any online game. Look for a constant stream of new vehicles to command, including aircraft, tanks, and even capital ships.

Playnet, www.wwiionline.com.

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