

This electronic magazine was created by
Photics.com - A Guild Wars Fansite!

questions &
answers
with...



...the
girls of

GUILD WARS



Ranger



Necro



Monk

When I first heard about Guild Wars, I accepted the industry changing potential as self-evident. This goes beyond the no-monthly fee. The game design is also revolutionary. While all of this sounds great on paper, it can make your average MMORPG player doubtful. When ArenaNet says they've eliminated the feeling of a level grind, do you believe them? The MMORPG industry is riddled with false promises and disappointments. I can see why one would be hesitant to take things at face value. Is Guild Wars really that good? Will you love Guild Wars?

Before the improved graphics were implemented, before I could even play the game, I just knew Guild Wars was going to be great. I'm not a paid employee of ArenaNet. I don't have to like the game. I don't have to continue running a fansite. Photics.com can be whatever I want it to be. Why did I make a Guild Wars fansite?

The first reason - I was bored. Online gaming is where it's at. Unfortunately, the current bunch of MMORPGs didn't excite me. I took a good look at what was out there. I also took a look at what is on the way. I felt that nothing compared to Guild Wars. I say that ArenaNet is the only company changing the status quo. Hundreds of thousands of people pay money for the current MMORPG games. They continue to endure the monthly fees, the level grinds and other such tedium. But the players are not to blame, as there really is no other choice.

Soon my friends, soon you will have a choice.

Now don't get me wrong. I've had some great times in other MMORPGs. Unfortunately, only the negatives stand out in my mind - the monthly fees, the level grind, the insane death penalties, the absurd downtime, etc. Guild Wars is just better. ArenaNet eliminated all that garbage, so I can get straight to the action. This game is not a time sink, as skill matters. This is not a game where you turn on auto attack, then clip your toenails. Does that sound harsh? Let's hope so! That's why Guild Wars must succeed. It will force other MMORPG developers to improve their games. Millions of dollars are invested to create these games. Good enough cannot be good enough. I find today's MMORPGs to be a bit stale. ArenaNet is about to open the window and let some fresh air in. I imagine this will inspire other MMORPG developers to make their games better. ArenaNet is about to show the world a better way to design MMORPGs.

That leads to the second reason - I think you should know what your options are. Guild Wars is barely a blip on the radar. I don't understand it. When I go into my local game store, I don't see any "coming soon" signs for Guild Wars. When I go to general video game forums, I don't see zealots preaching the good word of Guild Wars. I guess the majority of the gaming world just doesn't know. It has become my crusade to inform the world. Guild Wars is on the way and it is good!



Over the last 6 weeks, I've actually been playing the game. Oh sure, you could call it testing, but we all know better. Here I am. Photics.com is still a Guild Wars fansite. Why? It's because I'm having great time. I've fought through solo missions. I've teamed up with friends through cooperative missions. I've done some significant damage in PvP missions. It's only Alpha, yet I'm having a much better time than I did with retail MMORPGs. Really absorb what that means, as that is just mind-boggling. The PvP combat in Guild Wars is the best I've ever seen for a MMORPG. It's only alpha, yet I've already enjoyed hours of blood-pumping competition.

What if PvP not your thing? There's no problem there! The solo and cooperative missions are also very exciting. They're challenging, not frustrating. They're fun, without hours of prep time. It really is summed up with one word - adventure.



Each Guild Wars profession has a distinct look. The Female Monk is shown here. Isn't she just lovely?

GUILD WARS

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"GuildMaster Photics" is a Guild Wars Fansite Electronic Magazine, by Michael Garofalo.



I'm also having a bit of extra fun, which most players might not get to experience. I've teamed up with the developers. We're talking big names in the industry. I've fought with them - and against them - in competitive tournament missions. It really has been quite the experience. The dialogue between players and developers is at the highest level I've ever seen. Sometimes the discussion can get heated, but I can see how my participation in Alpha is influencing the game for the better. Not only do the developers know how to make a great game, but they're also very good at playing it. This is critical. If I didn't respect the team, I wouldn't be here. That respect is not easily earned. You can be sure that I've tested their patience on numerous occasions.

Anyway, to the matter at hand. Some of you feel that I'm not giving you enough inside information. Some of you weren't too keen on MMORPG lingo issues. This boggles the mind, as most video game alphas are insanely strict. The mere fact that I can admit to being an Alpha tester is a liberty many other game testers cannot enjoy. I told you ArenaNet was different. So OK. You want more info, you got it! I'm going to answer seven popular Guild Wars questions.

1) What is Guild Wars combat like?

Some of you were confused with a statement from my last issue. I called combat "Turn-Based". It seems this phrase has different connotations to different people, as some people instantly associated this with dull combat. This is clearly not the case. For once, I feel my gaming skills actually mean something in an MMORPG. Oh sure, there is an auto-attack. Your guy will automatically run up to the target and start swinging away. That's a great way to end up dead. Relying on auto-attack, as your only offense, is not going to get you very far.

Let's say you see a bunch of skeletons wandering around, you can open fire on them whenever you feel like. The question is - what do you attack those skeletons with? Fire? Poison? Swords? Hammers? Each attack has strengths and weaknesses. It also depends on what you are attacking. Did you attack that skeleton with Poison? If so, good! You just died. That skeleton was immune to poison. That is the essence of Guild Wars. You can only bring a preset amount of skills with you into combat. If you choose the wrong skills, a mission can go from tough to impossible.

If I see a monster, then click an attack style, my character will automatically move into position. It will also automatically attack. This is what I meant by turn-based. I didn't have to do anything but issue an attack. But again, that's a great way to end up dead. This is where the term "Controlled Chaos" is entered into the mix. The best players are the ones that position themselves. The best players are the ones that use their skills at the right time. Skill is needed to win in battle, but that is just as much as mental skill as quick reflexes.

Perhaps this is not an obvious statement - combat happens in real time. That is how techniques like "kiting" can work. With my Ranger, I'm very much hit and run. I've been known to dash along the edges of a PvP map, just to sneak behind the enemy. More often than not, they won't know where the arrows are coming from - not until it is too late. Even though there is an on-screen radar, I've still been able to surprise my



You see that little dude with the staff? You might need to squint your eyes. That's one of the citizens of Hakewood.



enemies. You can even watch the arrows flying through the air, which totally gives away an archer's position. With all that warning, players still can get blindsided. That should tell you how crazy combat can be.

Basically, Guild Wars combat is similar to other MMORPG games. However, there is more emphasis on positioning and movement. In addition to collision detection, you can dodge projectile attacks. Where you stand is very important. How you move is also important. You can gain an attack bonus by shooting arrows from higher ground. There's more to combat than a bum rush. This isn't a mindless hack n' slash game. During a mission, a party will often stop advancing. An important question will then be asked. "How are we going to get past that?" Sometimes your plans will not work out. You can then reload the mission and try something different. In PvP, you can be fighting against multiple groups of enemies. If you team over commits, you can easily find yourself facing a double team.

2) Can you tell me more about PvP combat?

First off, PvP combat is very fast. If you're looking to pick a fight, you'll have very little wait time. First, you port to a PvP map. You get your team together. You click "enter mission". When an opposing team is ready to challenge you... WHAM! It's fight time. This whole process can take less than a minute. It depends how many people are ready to fight. I imagine that once Guild Wars goes live, competition would be non-stop. Also, battles can be over just as quick. While some maps have respawning, other maps want you to eliminate the other team. I've seen seesaw battles lasting several minutes, but I've also seen total annihilation in mere seconds.

ArenaNet is working on the tournament system right now. Guilds will set up their teams. They port into battle. If you win a battle, you'll move up to the next round. If you fight your way up to the top spot, you'll be number one in the world. Not only is this a prestigious title, but there are in-game rewards for your guild as well. Don't get comfy, as other guilds will try to knock you down.

There are different types of missions. There is the standard game of eliminate the other team. Then there are matches with objectives. You could be defending or attacking a fort. You could be playing a "king of the hill" type match. It gets crazy. Even though you could be wiped out in a few minutes, you can get back into the action just as fast. While there are rewards for winning in PvP combat, I didn't see any penalties for losing in PvP combat. That's just fine with me. I say losing is penalty enough. Also, you're in control. You're not going to be randomly slain by a "Player Killer". If you want to go off and solo, to be left alone for a while, no one can bother you.

3) Do you have any stories from alpha?

Do I ever! A while back, you might have seen a posting about the Bone Dragon screenshot. It's an undead monster. It doesn't have a tail. Instead, it has a spinal cord dragging along the ground. Freaky isn't it? I did what any good-hearted adventurer would do. I got as many testers as I could find, so that we may slay this foul beast. The other alpha testers loved the idea. They were totally ready for some action. This was a night we looked at the game as players would, not just as testers. There was a challenge. We were ready to face it. We would hunt down this abomination.





What's that? Did you expect all the screenshots to be eye candy?
Take a good look at destiny. You get into Guild Wars, you go up against that.

The first thing I noticed was the sun. Judging from the size, I was able to determine which map the screenshot was taken from. The coloring of the sky, the clouds, the snow mountains. There was no mistaking which lands these were. At first I teamed up with Meat Man - from The Guild Hall. We scouted the area. We were able to break through the enemy's preliminary lines. However, with our level cap at 15, the level 22 archers just cut us down. We would need reinforcements.

The beauty of modern communication kicked in. I got on the phone and called two of my friends in alpha. MeatMan got on the IRC, bringing more fierce warriors from The Guild Hall. A couple of guys in-game also heard the buzz. In a fairly short while, we had a team capable of standing a chance. We had no idea what awaited us, but we knew that some of the best in alpha were on our side.

After getting warmed up, we got back to those level 22 archers. At first they were pretty tough, but eventually we cut them down like so much cannon fodder. We placed our Rangers on a hill, the Warriors would lead the archers into our trap. With the path cleared, we quickly realized that the developers didn't expect us to get this far. It was quite apparent that this part of the map was unfinished. Regardless, we fought on. We killed every last enemy on that map. But what of the Bone Dragon - did we find him, her, err... it? Alas, we did not find the Bone Dragon. It turns out, the monster was temporarily placed for the screenshot. It was then quickly removed. Our group had no chance to succeed, or did we? The primary goal is always to have fun. It was a blast. We were exploring. We were vanquishing evil. It was a quite entertaining night... and that's only just one story.

4) What's the penalty for dying?

Most of the time in alpha, I'm grouping with people I never met before. With other MMORPGs games, you might be terrified to do that. This is why removing severe death penalties is a great idea. If you end up in a lousy group, it's not the end of the world. You won't have to worry about losing hours of "work". Nope! If you die, you don't lose your gear. You don't lose experience. You don't have to visit a doctor. Traditionalistic MMORPG players might be cringing right now. Where's the challenge without a death penalty? Oh, it's there. It's even something to watch out for. The main thing is - it's just temporary.

When you die in a mission, you do endure a death penalty. You lose a percentage of your health and energy. You can be resurrected in cooperative or PvP missions. If you die again, your death penalty increases. A menacing skull icon will appear when you have a death penalty. Limiting the number of deaths is the key to completing a mission. So how do you get rid of the death penalty? When you leave a mission, the penalty is gone. You can even lower your death penalty while in a mission. By killing your enemies - human or computer controlled - you can eventually remove your death penalty entirely. That is if you can stay alive.

With Guild Wars, there are no corpse runs, player tombstones, exp debt, etc. ArenaNet nailed this one. If I have an off night, I'm not going to feel like less of a human being because of it. At any point in time I can quit out of the game. I don't have to worry if I'm logging out in a safe spot. There's no countdown timer. There's no need. When I get back into the game, I will be death penalty free. It does the job. You are free to explore and try new things in Guild Wars. You won't be permanently penalized for failure. However, the death penalty is strong enough to deter reckless behavior.



OK. I ran out of lovely lady screenshots, so here's the male necromancer instead.

5) Is there a player economy?

As it was publicly mentioned last month, Guild Wars is not a crafting game. However, there is an economy. Even though trading functions haven't been implemented yet, I've made some good coin selling weapons to other Alpha Testers. That should tell you how a player economy can thrive. Alpha Testers have been circumventing the current trading limitation by dropping items on the ground. In an old-western style, two players will stare each other down. One drops the coin and the other drops the loot. They will then switch sides to complete the trade. I suspect in-game features would replace this method, but that should show you how in-game items have merit.

When you kill a monster, there is a chance you will get some nice loot. In this game, the form of currency is gold. It is very rare. If you see 8 gold on the ground - wow! Pick it up! There is an auto-split system for groups, where gold is divided automatically. Loot is randomly assigned. Say a really cool bow drops in the game. It will be assigned for a player in the group. At first, no one else can pick up that bow. After a short time has passed, if the bow hasn't already been picked up, then anyone can pick up the bow. There is also a text-based dice roll command. If you prefer to settle loot arguments with the luck of the draw, you can do that too.

While there isn't a crafting system in Guild Wars, there is what could be called "pseudo crafting". Picture this. You're in a cooperative mission. You and your friends are fighting your way through Goblin infested lands. In the distance, you see a village under attack. You run to their safety. You save them. HOORAY! They offer you a reward. Their rewards are parts to weapons. You then can take these parts to NPCs. They will create a special weapon for you.



There is no encumbrance. If you're carrying 10 gold or 2600 gold, you're not going to slow down. Guild Wars is not about tedium. Sure, it's nice to compare video games to real life. But guess what - I can't shoot fireballs from my finger tips. At some point, you have to forsake realism for fun.

6) What do you think is the strongest profession?

In Alpha, I play a Ranger / Warrior. Over time, you can learn two different professions. Your primary profession is always the strongest. I've tried quite a few combinations, but Ranger / Warrior is still my favorite. It's more of a choice of what I feel comfortable with, not exactly what is the strongest. This is a role-playing game after all. I just couldn't see myself as a Necromancer or a Monk.

I feel ArenaNet has a good grasp of class balance. I chose Ranger / Warrior because that is what closely matches my play style. It's a good solo class. I prefer ranged attacks over melee. I'm not very big on being a support class either. Just in general, I don't see any one profession dominating the game. At the All Calls, you see a very good mix of professions. It's really easy to tell who's who, as each profession has a distinct look. I'll break it down the six current professions.

Ranger - This profession has a lot of versatility. In addition to having superior ranged attacks, this profession can charm a pet lynx. Rangers can also use a serious array of buffs and debuffs. Rangers are very delicate though. They have significantly limited defense. They are also lousy in melee combat. The final word is not out on this class, or any class for that matter. There are many skills not yet implemented for the Ranger. There is a "Stealth" skill listed on my attribute window, but it is not activated. Also, pets are not fully functional yet.

Warrior - They're the main tank. It is amazing how much punishment this class can take. They can do a fair amount of damage with hammers. Warriors also can swing one-handed weapons very fast. They are the only profession that can use shields. They also have skills to seriously hinder their adversaries. Their drawback - ranged attacks. While any class can use a bow, Warriors are not as effective as Rangers with it. By using sprint, Warriors can catch up to their fleeing enemies. However, they will more than likely sustain a few hits while trying to get in range. Collision detection is also an issue. You can't just charge in and kill the healers, not if opposing Warriors are in your path.

Monk - The Monk is the ultimate support class. The buffs are amazing. They are the best at healing. However, Monk offense is terrible. Anything can change though, so keep your eye on the Monk. Many players pick up the Monk as a secondary profession. There are often serious handicaps for doing so though. A Warrior / Monk seems to be a logical combination, but energy is determined by your primary profession. A Warrior / Monk will find a serious energy limitation, severely hindering the Monk skills. On the flipside, a Monk / Warrior won't have the staggering defense of a Warrior / Monk. There are serious tradeoffs to consider.

Necromancer - This profession is a walking nightmare. Like a lingering plague, they can bring a slow death to their opposition. The Necromancer's biggest problem, as common with all casters, is a low defense. Energy is also an issue. When a Necromancer is out of energy, they have little to fall back on. They do have skills to resolve energy problems though. A skilled player can do very well with a Necromancer.

Elementalist - This profession is a damage-dealing class. Unlike the Necromancer's black arts, they use elemental attacks to do damage. The destruction yielded in a single hit from an elemental can be quite extensive. You can also rain fire on an entire group of enemies. However, a low armor rating is a serious penalty. A big problem I found with the Elementalist was energy usage and casting time. Even worse, the enemy knows what kind of damage you can do. They also know how easy you are to kill. That makes you a prime target.

Mesmer - Right now, the Mesmer is very powerful in PvP combat, but not as useful in PvE combat. The Mesmer is still fairly new, so expect major revisions. I like where ArenaNet is going with this profession. Mesmers bring new types of attacks to the battleground, ones I've never seen in a video game before. Backfire, Blackout, Epidemic, these are skills that can really mess up your day. Like other casters, Mesmers are light on defense. I think Mesmers make a great secondary profession to casters, adding lifesaving utility skills to the magic users.

With 30 different combinations, I couldn't really say which one is the best. Keep in mind, Ranger / Warrior is quite different from Warrior / Ranger. A Ranger / Warrior has higher energy. A Warrior / Ranger has higher defense. Not to mention, your character's physical appearance is determined by your primary profession. There are a lot of intangibles to think about. What do you want to look like? What type of game play do you like best? This is just a hint of what is involved with the professions. When you will have all the information available to you, it really is a staggering thing to consider. Alpha testers are constantly changing their professions, creating alts, and finding what suits them best.

7) Is there really no downtime?

This is another staggering thing to comprehend. With some other MMORPGs I've played, sitting is a large part of the game mechanics. I mean really think about that. You're paying a monthly fee to watch your character sit. What's even weirder is how I grew accustomed to it. After my first Guild Wars battle, I watched my energy and health quickly return. It was so fast, I thought it was broken. I felt like I was cheating, that this was somehow an exploit. I thought for sure the developers would slow things down. Nope, it was me who would have to speed up!

We're not talking easy battles either. On my very first fight, I was surrounded by 4 monsters. They were significantly weaker than me, but they did some serious damage. With 75% of my health gone, I wasn't sure how long it would take to recover. Once I was clearly out of combat, the health regeneration kicked in. Seconds later, I was at full health again.

Here's another beautiful thing. Every profession has access to a healing kit and a resurrection kit. Granted, the healing kit is somewhat limited and the resurrection kit can only be used once per mission. However, that means you don't always need a healing class in the group. More often than not, you will return to full health automatically. The way monsters are spaced out, you will generally return to full health just before you run into the next group of monsters. That doesn't mean Monks are useless, as Monks allow for more forgiving gameplay.

The game is focused on combat. If you want a medieval life simulator, this isn't the game for you. Your character doesn't eat, it doesn't sleep, all it does is fight. That's just fine with me. I'll pass on the tedium. Let's get to the adventure. So hang in there, the wait for Guild Wars will be over soon enough.

