

GUILD WARS

**Guilds
Are
In!**



World Premier Event Confusion?



The "Guild Wars World Preview Event" was greeted as a mixed blessing. The community was informed as to when the next major event would take place (October 29-31). However, it was also clear that Guild Wars would not have a conventional beta test. Was this really a surprise? When has ArenaNet done anything conventionally?

I understand the concerns. This pre-order biz can be confusing. Basically, if you pre-order Guild Wars, you get to participate in a once-a-month beta event. The first weekend of every month is slated for an "E3 for Everyone" esque event. (Alliteration just doesn't seem as powerful with the letter "E".)

Doesn't that sound a little unusual? I didn't understand the logistics of the event at first. That was when I used my pull - as an established fansite - to get the scoop on this event. I called ArenaNet. The conversation went something like this...

ME: Hi! Is Gaile Gray there?

Sexy Voice: Yes. Who's calling?

Me: This is Mike from Photics.

Sexy Voice: Who?

I was transferred to Gaile, where she explain the event to me. Unfortunately, not everyone gets a chance to have a one-on-one phone conversation with Gaile. That means I now have to do my part in clearing up the confusion. Of course I'm going to explain things in my own words.

First off, when I called for clarification, I was just making sure I had the details straightened out.

For unlike the "E3 for Everyone Event", I think this is a great idea.

Why? It's the community. The "E3 for Everyone" event ended in sadness. Aside from hanging out at Guild Wars related fan forums, there was nothing terribly productive for the community to do.

Months later, with the World Preview Event, the action will begin again. For three days anyone and everyone can play for free. No doubt the October 29-31 event will encourage players to pre-order. Afterwards, if they've pre-ordered, players then can participate in the once a month beta testing events. The only sticking point is obvious. One weekend a month doesn't sound like a lot of time.

Now some people might see this as a ruse by an '3V1L' corporate machine. That notion sounds silly to me. Is there really any doubt that you will be buying Guild Wars? The game has a phenomenal value. One weekend a month may not be enough time, but you can be sure that will be one crazy weekend. It's an event I don't intend to miss. This focuses the community into one intense extravaganza. These events will eclipse normal beta tests. Knowing that there's only going to be one chance to play a month, you're more inclined to mark the event down on your calendar.

Let's not forget about the MMORPG nomads. They apply for one beta after another, never really calling one their home. They play for free! I'm impressed that ArenaNet demands more commitment from their beta test participants. Three days is more than enough time to decide if Guild Wars is worth the \$50. In fact, I really do laugh at this. To think of all the \$50 games I beat in a few hours. These games sit collecting dust. Meanwhile, I've been playing Guild Wars for months... and it's just getting started.

I don't see any other logical way for ArenaNet to play their trump card. May 14 was so long ago. Players want another taste. Something has to be done, but how do you effectively manage all those people? Can you imagine the sheer numbers? Here's an

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

interesting quote from Jeff Strain. It will help give you an idea.

"We welcome feedback from the millions of players invited to join the events and plan to incorporate their input as we polish, tune and balance the game."

OK, what's the most important word in that statement? The word that grabbed my attention was 'millions'. There were over 200,000 accounts at the last event. What do you do if millions of people show up? This time around, game sales are involved. I'm expecting more participation and promotion as a result. The Guild Wars engine proved it has the horsepower to move thousands of players. This time I'm expecting ArenaNet to rev the motor up. The event falls on Halloween after all. You know ArenaNet has something wild planned. I imagine things will be just down crazy.

Now don't worry about focused testing. The active alpha testers are moving into the beta stage. New blood will be joining the team as well. It looks like ArenaNet has all the essentials covered. They already have seasoned testers with their current alpha crew. ArenaNet can expand their core team with beta testers. As for stress testing, the monthly events will accomplish that task.

The bottomline is that you can look at the pre-order events two ways. You can complain and make yourself miserable over this, or you can have yourself a great time. Creating an MMORPG is similar to managing a small country. Things are not always going to be perfect. But if you're reading this now, odds are you're part of this community. Why focus on the negatives? Instead, why not look forward to having a great time with your friends?

That's the focus of this issue - The Community. Nothing else in this game matters more. The World Preview Event will no doubt be a boon to the population. What will that mass of people will ultimately blend into? Will Guild Wars be a friendly and social place or will it be ruthless and competitive? That is up to the actions of each individual player. This world may be virtual, but your actions have real effects. To illustrate this, I have stories from the alpha.

Guild Features are in the game. How do they work? How does this change the game?

PvE - Significant changes have occurred with PvE since the last issue. How does this effect the game and the community?

PAX: ArenaNet makes an appearance at the Penny Arcade Expo?

One final note about the World Preview Event. Pre-orders are a big to-do in the industry. It is a measure of success. Even up until now, I say Guild Wars is playing second fiddle to lesser video games. Late October is when that can all change. ArenaNet stands a real good chance of breaking pre-order records. Guild Wars can quickly become #1.



What will the World Premier Event be like? Imagine this screenshot, times it by A LOT, then throw in a random Halloween event. It will probably be something like that.

Green Is For Guild

There was a running joke inside the alpha. The testers would ask, "When are guild features going to be in the game?" The developers would reply, "Friday!" Patiently we would wait for Friday to roll around. We'd log in. We'd run all the way down to the Guild Quarter. Yet, we would find nothing. Absolutely NOTHING! With anger we'd ask the developers, "What happened? You said guild features were going live on a Friday." Their response, "We said Friday, not this Friday."

Now you might think the developers were being needlessly cruel. They weren't. They were hounded every day about guild features. ArenaNet is made up of talented people. But like with all people, patience is not an infinite resource. I'm not surprised to see the ArenaNet crew played a few jokes. One of the devs even made a character named "Guild Registrar". Players would run up to this character, thinking it was an NPC, but it was a dev in disguise. It was a sinister trick indeed. The door of patience swings both ways. How long would Guild Wars be without guilds? Devs can't play tricks like that and not show results. The crowd would revolt. One thing was true in the developer's jest. Guild features would be released on a Friday. It wasn't just any Friday. It was FRIDAY THE 13th. MUWHHAHAHAHA!

Triskadeekaphobia should have no relevance in your life after this. August 13, 2004 - a Friday - was when guilds went live. It was magnificent day for the gaming community. I logged in and saw the usual alpha message. The intro was same as always. It said where the one hour of PvP would be held and it also said where the one hour of PvE would be held. However, there was an enlightening addition to this message. It was the news I had been waiting to see for months. The message said guild creation was now available. WOO HOO!

I went up to the Guild Registrar. It's not a building. It's just an NPC. I wondered why there wasn't a crowd around him. Was this another developer trick? Nope, this was for real. It was now time to officially create "The Crusaders" in Guild Wars.

The interface is rather simple. You talk to the Guild Registrar. It brings up an interface similar to a merchant window. The first field is for your guild name. That was no problem. I typed in "The Crusaders". The second field was a bit confusing. Here you had to enter an abbreviation for your guild. This is what other players would see next to your name. For example. If you were 'John Doe', and you were starting a new guild called 'Black Flag', you had to choose a 2-4 letter abbreviation. You could do 'BF' for 'Black Flag'. You could also enter 'Flag'. Once completed, the name over John Doe's head would appear as 'John Doe [BF]' or 'John Doe [Flag]'. I chose the letters 'TC'. My in game name is: Guildmaster Photics [TC]. Maybe I should have picked [TM] for Trademark?

The next step in creating a guild is choosing your emblem. Even though there is a WYSIWYG interface, this is no easy task. You have five choices - emblem type, emblem color, primary tabard color, secondary tabard color and tabard pattern. I spent plenty of time on this decision. With a guild called "The Crusaders", I went with the cross logo. It seemed fitting. Choosing the right color was tough. At first it looked like I was wearing a big crosshair on my torso. The traditional crusaders colors of Red & White were just too overpowering. I toned it down a bit. Instead, The Crusaders' emblem now looks like it's for a biker gang. I made the tabard black. I made the cross a dark silver. I also gave our tabard a silvery outline. I say it's not a bad choice, for over two hours of messing around with designs.

Keep in mind, any individual player can start a guild. It even looks like there's nothing stopping you from creating a one-man-army guild. However, you guild would not likely get very far on your own. Fortunately, I had other people to invite into my guild. This was really easy. Not only do they not have to be in the same zone as you, they don't even have to be online. You can simply enter the name of the person you want. The invitee will see a message in their guild tab. Keep in mind, you won't have to enter any stupid text based command. This is all via a graphical interface. It's clean and simple.

Once you have a nice sizable guild, you can easily keep track of them. For one, there's a listing of who's online. If your guild members are not online, the Guild Roster window will tell you how long it's been since they were online. Also, you can promote, demote and kick members from the Guild Roster page. Currently there are only three levels of rank in the



guild - Guild Leader, Guild Officer and Guild Member. The Guild Leader and Guild Officers can invite others into the guild. Right now, there can only be one Guild Leader. For those of you with collective leadership guilds, don't freak out just yet. Most of this stuff is still heavily under construction. If you think certain guild features are necessary, why not go post up on your favorite Guild Wars forum?

While you're there, you might have something else to debate over. ArenaNet made a very daring decision. In Guild Wars, you can only join one guild per account. Even though you can have alternate characters, they will all be part of the same guild - automatically. Personally, I love this idea. It makes guild management easier. I don't have to keep inviting alts. I only have to invite my friends once. It also means those who join my guild are serious. With only one guild per account, deciding which guild to join is a serious undertaking. Of course, not everyone will welcome this decision. That's something else to discuss at your favorite Guild Wars forum.

Another nice guild feature is the ability to post an announcement. There's a dedicated window to accomplish this task. That means if you make a typo, you don't have to type the whole thing over again. You can simply edit your message. Once you have entered your message, it will be sent to all of your online guildies. Also, guild members will see the message once they log into the game. Traditionalistic MMORPG players might call this a "Message of the Day" feature. However, this is Guild Wars. We don't call it that here. We don't have to change it daily either. So nah!

The most important feature is Guild Chat. This is a staple of any guild. Once you are in your guild, you can send text messages to everyone who's online. Well... everyone who's online in your guild of course. Different colors represent each channel. If a name is in yellow, the message was sent to everyone in your zone. If a name is in blue, the message was sent to everyone in your group. If a name is in green, the message was sent to everyone in your guild. This is very handy, as there are dozens of zones already. The game keeps getting bigger every week. Good communication is critical to guild organization. ArenaNet has got you covered.

An incomplete version of Guild Halls went live too. Your guild can now gather in your own private zone. Your guild hall is essentially a fort, which was built into the side of a mountain. It looks like the "Guild Hall" will be located inside of the mountain. It's nice to see that you can finally walk inside buildings. Up until now, the game has been pretty much outdoors. But this area is not just for show. It's also for fighting. While this feature was not yet operational, your Guild Hall is also a staging area for battle. From your Guild Hall, you can challenge other guilds. In traditional Guild Wars style, I doubt defeat will mean any lasting damage towards your Guild Hall.

Keep in mind, this is still very much a work in progress. I didn't bug out because my Guild Hall doesn't have a chess table. This is what it is - a great beginning. Right off the bat, the guild features in Guild Wars are on par with other MMORPGs. It's going to be great to see what else will be added before release.



The distinct mark of a guild - the tabard. In this official screenshot, you can see three examples of guild logos. The unique combinations possible are staggering.

Player vs Enemy Updates

Last month, there were significant changes to the "Player vs Enemy" content. Each individual change may seem somewhat isolated. Yet, they all join together to improve the experience of adventure. It's hard to keep track of every change that occurs in alpha, but here are some of the highlights.

Skill System Overhaul

Quite frankly, I feel the previous skill system was fine. Sure, it needed some tweaking. I don't think the developers intended Charm Lynx gems to sell for 2000 gold and up. True, the abundance of gems would clutter up your inventory. However, I was content with the system. I think some minor tweaks would have brought everything in line. I didn't hear a single person complain about the gems system. I just don't understand why the developers wouldn't leave well enough alone. I wonder if [my comic](#) had anything to do with this decision?

How is the new skill system? I think the best word to describe it would be "unfinished". It's a rather unorthodox method of learning new abilities. Like before, you have to find a "Boss". That's where the whole system changes. Before, if you killed a boss, you could loot skill gems. Now, you need to use a skill capture technique. With the new system, you cannot learn a skill until you see it used by a boss. Once the boss casts a spell, you can use your ability to capture skills. You still need to have a skill point to learn new skills. A skill capture kit can be bought in towns. They cost some gold and a skill point.

There are apparent benefits to this system, as your group won't have to argue over skill gems. If you are in a group of 8 Elementalists, there will be no fist fights when Meteor Shower is found. Everyone in the group can learn the skill at the same time. Although, if someone kills the boss before you can learn the skill, I don't think it's going to be a happy time for the group. Time will tell if this adds an interesting element to combat, or if the new system is needlessly complicated.

What does this mean for the community? As a result of this change, gold has been rendered pretty much useless. If gold is useless, the economy will suffer. If there is no economy, there is less reason for players to interact. That would hurt the community. I wouldn't panic over this just yet. Remember the key word - unfinished. Obviously if I'm telling you this now, the developers have already been informed of my concerns. There are also serious omissions to this story. Sorry, I can't tell you everything. This is just to let you know alphas are sailing through some choppy water right now. Once the storm clears, I look forward to letting you know the results of this story.

You may not be part of the alpha, but hopefully these monthly magazines allow you to feel what alphas feel. Just as you can experience the joys of guild features being released, you can feel the confusion of a new skill system. How will it work out?! Just like a Hollywood blockbuster movie, I'm sure there's a happy ending.

Bye bye Pet Permadeath

Now that I got the dramatics of the new skill system out of the way, there's some very good news for Ranger fans. Your pets will no longer be permadeath. I don't even want to think of the hours I spent leveling up my pet Lynx, only to watch my fuzzy companion meet an untimely demise. It was terribly frustrating. It wasn't in the spirit of the game either. Guild Wars was promoted as a game with no frustrating level grinding, nor lasting penalties from death. Losing Lynxes over and over again was clearly against that theme. The developers acknowledged this.

Ranger pets may fall in battle, but they will return to you after the map is over. There is also a



new Ranger skill, to resurrect your pet in battle. Naturally, this needs to be balanced. We can't have players using their pets with zero regard. If your pet dies in battle, your death penalty will increase 15%. It would be the same as if you had died in battle yourself. This means you'll want to keep your pet alive. That's an acceptable compromise to me. Ranger pets will still be considered precious, but they are no longer frustrating.

What does this do for the community?! Now you don't have to worry about your teammates throwing bricks through their computer. You won't have to walk on egg shells, trying to keep your friend's level 20 Lynx alive. By eliminating pet permadeath, ArenaNet may have prevented the smashing of many keyboards. That's a very good thing for the community.

Oh how cute! It's a frog!

Our group was fighting along the shores of Kryta. The undead were running amok as usual. Smite smite... die die die. We began our push upstream. More undead were waiting for us. Hack, chop, chop, burn, die, die die. Sometimes you need something to break up the monotony. ArenaNet has been adept with adding details. These niceties are perfect for preventing repetition. After the latest round of decayed minions attacked us, after they were good and smitten, we saw something moving in the water. It was a frog! He would hop around and then disappear into the river. How adorable!

Now if you've been following along, you might wonder how a jumping frog follows the theme of this issue. How does that help the community? It's simple. That little frog did what hordes of undead could not. It stopped us dead in our tracks. We actually took time to observe the behavior of this orange sprite. In order for the community to work, players have to feel as if they are part of this world. The exploration of this world has to be desirable and believable. Little details like this go a long way. For amusement, sometimes I take off all my armor and run into the ocean. The beaches look that believable. This adds levity to our journey. If all there was to do in Guild Wars was fight, you would grow weary of the game quickly.

Leveling: A follow-up

Last issue, I made some pretty controversial comments about leveling and Guild Wars. Is leveling really a factor in Guild Wars? No. It's not. Ever play a game where you were always the right level to accomplish the task at hand? That's how I'd describe the approach ArenaNet is taking toward leveling. To them, the story is more important than needless grinding. If you follow the story, I don't think you'll have any trouble being the right level. I think the most important aspect for PvE to convey is a sense of adventure. Guild Wars accomplishes this. The map design transcends leveling. It is more like an interactive novel.

How does that help the community? In other MMORPGs, I often broke away from the group. This was because I could level faster solo. Guild Wars doesn't work like that. Leveling isn't the ultimate achievement. That means players won't be obsessed over it. I'm imagining a very healthy playing environment as a result. Although, after you beat all the maps, what PvE content will there be? How do you add replay value without adding a grind or relying on PvP? I think that's a question for a Guild Wars forum!



Guild Wars @ Penny Arcade Expo

A good measure of the Guild Wars community is how it plays with other communities. On August 28 & 29, A popular gaming site called Penny Arcade held their first ever expo. It was called PAX (Penny Arcade Expo). If you're not familiar with Penny Arcade, I'm actually quite surprised. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, penny-arcade.com releases a comic strip. While portrayed with humorous antics, these strips usually offer profound incite to the state of the gaming industry. In fact, these strips are often used as references in Guild Wars debates.

It seemed only logical that Guild Wars should be represented at the PAX. It's not like ArenaNet had far to travel. ArenaNet HQ was practically next door from the event. Not to mention, Guild Wars made quite an impression on the Penny Arcade community. The E3 for Everyone event was well praised at the Penny Arcade forums. This accolade does not come easy. Pulling punches is not common at those forums. If Penny Arcade posters don't like a certain video game, you can be pretty sure that they're going to let you know it.

So how did the event go?!

For one, the turnout was underestimated. Plenty of people traveled great distances to attend this event. Err, no. I wasn't one of them. My role in this event would be a different task. ArenaNet set up 4 computers. Attendees could get a chance to play the game. Now don't start kicking yourself if you couldn't make it. The player access was severely limited. In fact, the event was basically focused around one map - PAX Arena. This battleground was actually a modified version of Fort Koga. The map was made smaller, and the player cap was set at 2 vs. 2. Alphas were encouraged to play alone with the PAX players. I like Guild Wars. I like Penny Arcade. Sure, why not.

Photics: The Evil Wizard?

I got into a few skirmishes with the PAX players. My outfit made me stand out from other Alpha testers. I was dressed in black. Not only is The Crusader logo dark, but my armor is almost entirely black. That dye is rare! This makes my toon memorable. I look forward to the day I can show you a screenshot. Anyway, I kited one of the PAX players around the map. It was a great running level, as it was essentially one giant circle. With Crippling Anguish or Imagined Burden, most players couldn't catch me. It's a rather devious tactic, which might be why someone called me an "Evil Wizard". Hmmm, and here I thought I was a nice guy.

I learned a few things from two days of PvP. My straight up nuking template wasn't cutting it. If a caster can't keep warriors out of harms way, it's going to be one dead magic-user. That's when I added some utility skills to my template. Instead of putting 11 in Fire, I went with 9. Instead of 10 in Air, that too was dropped down to 9. The laws of diminishing returns really applies to attributes. Dumping all of your points into a single line can be a tremendous penalty. If you're imagining what your future templates are going to look like, you might want to keep this in mind. By dropping down a few points in Fast Casting, Air and Fire, I was able to make use of two whole lines. Versatility is important. I noticed I lived a lot longer in PvP, after I altered my skills.

Anyway, feedback from the PAX players was upbeat. They sounded like they were having a good time. It's a good omen of the future - for both the Penny Arcade Expo and Guild Wars.

Some stuff you might have missed @ Photics.com

You might not know this, but Photics.com has more to see than just this magazine. Just last month, there was a New Cartoon, a Commentary article, Fansite Friday #10 and stories from the Photics.com Player Events. This is in addition to all the latest news events from GuildWars.com. You can move your mouse over this text. You see how your cursor changed shape? That means it's inviting you to click. Go on.... Click it... Click they shiny text. It will bring you to Photics.com... It's waiting for you... To... Click ... The... Pretty... Text. ☺

