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WHAT'S NEW,
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PAGE 68

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WHERE PC AND
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UNITE!
PAGE 50

SPECIAL REPORT
**GAMING IN
CHINA**
THE PC'S NEXT
FRONTIER?
PAGE 54

REVIEWED
BAD DAY L.A.
AND WE THOUGHT
POSTAL 2 WAS
BAD...
PAGE 92

PIRATES OF THE BURNING SEA

This sailboat's no Disneyland ride

PUBLISHER: N/A DEVELOPER: Flying Lab Software GENRE: MMORPG RELEASE DATE: Summer 2007

PREVIEW

NOT EVERYONE WANTS TO PLAY *WORLD of Warcraft*. Sure, the theme park-style conventions (get on the ride, see the sights, kill the big bad, and exit the ride so the next group can rinse and repeat) work well enough for more casual-minded MMORPG fans who crave an online *Final Fantasy*-like experience...while more immersion-oriented genre geeks stick to the oddball *Eve Online* or *Shadowbane* that occasionally surfaces. The design philosophy of Flying Lab Software's *Pirates of the Burning Sea* reads like a love letter to this oft-neglected minority, while also steering the pirate subgenre into previously uncharted waters.

YO HO HO, CAPTAIN BLOOD! PLEASE RETURN HERE AFTER SACKING 10 MERCHANT VESSELS!

"The truth," says producer John Tynes, "is that a lot of our staff doesn't like the MMORPG genre much. We all see the potential of the medium, but don't like the kinds of gameplay that have arisen from that potential. What we're trying to accomplish [with *POTBS*] is to create an amazing swashbuckling adventure. We're looking at the classic movies of the genre, the classic literature, and the great actors—Errol Flynn, Douglas Fairbanks—and we're asking ourselves, 'How can we give the players *that* experience and make them feel like *those* heroes?'"

➤ "MY INSPIRATION FOR SYSTEM DESIGN STARTS WITH *ISLAND OF KESMAI* AND HAS A HEAPING SPOONFUL OF EVERY OTHER MMORPG I'VE EVER PLAYED."

—JOHN TYNES, PRODUCER / Ryan Scott

One thing's for sure: Errol Flynn was certainly never told to sail out to sea, kill 20 pirates-in-training, and return to the harbor master for his 100 XP reward—nor does *POTBS* treat players this way, says Tynes. "We're not starting with a lot of the ground-level assumptions other games seem to. We're opposed to the idea of a 'treadmill' because it includes the assumption that all the stuff you do until you hit the level cap is worthless and you don't really start the game until you're maxed out. We went a different route; we wanted even the early ships and low levels to be useful and important. A cannonball is a cannonball, whether fired by a level 1 or a level 50. Not to say that advancement *isn't* beneficial...but we don't need to artificially inflate the power of a high-level character."

Every player acts as master and commander the moment they set foot in port, beginning a seafaring career (ranging from bloodthirsty pirate to honest merchant to shipwright) in a small schooner, and gaining access to bigger and badder ships over time. "We're very much about player empowerment," Tynes explains. "We want people to feel larger than life...to take up heroic roles and do amazing deeds."

This empowerment also applies to the game's player-powered economy. As players traverse 18th-century England, France, and Spain (along with a fourth pirate 'nation'), they pay player-defined prices for player-made goods. According to Tynes, "Every significant



▲ "PVP is world-relevant. You're not just ganking; you're trying to take ports for your nation and conquer the whole Caribbean."



▲ "We expect pirates to be both hunters and prey—seizing merchant cargo to sell, and in turn being hunted by the navy."



▲ "Our role model for character customization has always been *City of Heroes*, which raised the bar for the whole industry."

item in the game is player-created." Indeed, *POTBS* places a high priority on player interaction of all kinds, from the economy to PVP (though we're assured that the game "totally supports solo play"). Says Tynes: "Nobody plays *WOW* for the monster-killing; they play *WOW* because of their friends, their guilds, their rivals, and their enemies. The game is a context—the other players are the real content."

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