

MAX PAYNE & ANARCHY ONLINE REVIEWS AND STRATEGIES

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Z ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA

16 Hot
Reviews
Inside

**10-Page
Exclusive!**

Blizzard's
Massively
Multiplayer
RPG
Revealed!

World Of Warcraft

PLUS! Previewed: Ghost Recon • Zoo Tycoon
MechWarrior IV expansion • Monopoly Tycoon
Return to Castle Wolfenstein (We've Played It!)

11/2001 • ISSUE 208

\$8.99 USA,
\$9.99 Canada



11 >
Display Until: Oct 30
0 74470 06950 8

WORLD of WARCRAFT

By Jeff Green

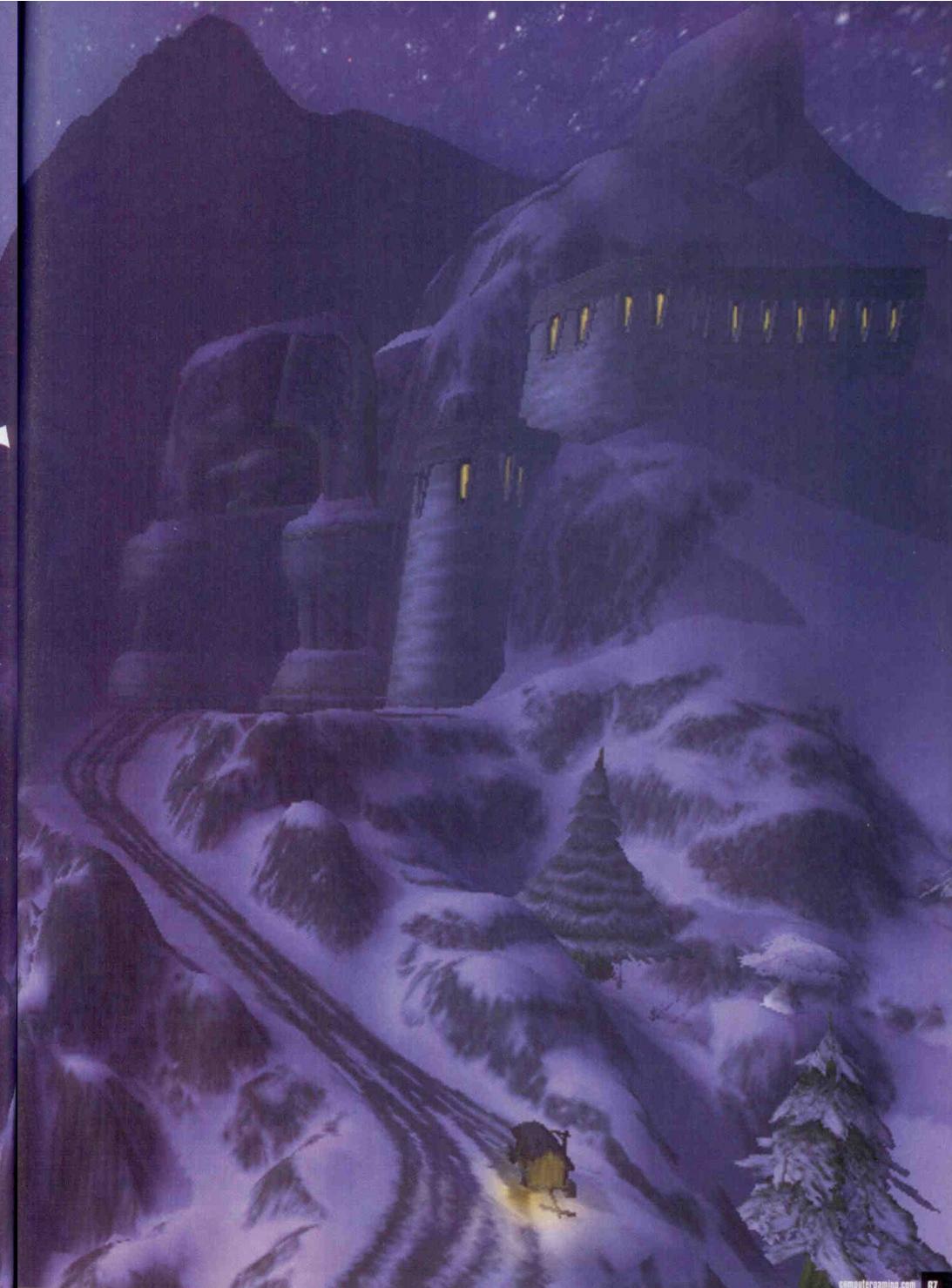


What will Blizzard do next?" It's a question we love to ask—those of us who have become enslaved by their addictive games—and one we always get wrong.

So when Blizzard announced that they were going to reveal their next project this September, the speculation ran rampant, as usual, as fanboys and industry dorks alike started guessing at the possibilities. STARCRAFT 2? Massively multiplayer DIABLO? A first-person shooter? The answer was finally revealed on September 2 at ECTS in London—and, as usual, everyone was wrong again.

Coming next from Blizzard is WORLD OF WARCRAFT, a massively multiplayer RPG set in the WARCRAFT universe. And although no one expected this, it is as exciting an announcement as they could have made. Finally, Blizzard is swooping down from that eagle-eye view and letting us play inside one of their fantasy universes. Finally, instead of commanding troops from above, we get to be mighty heroes ourselves, creating our own personal legends.

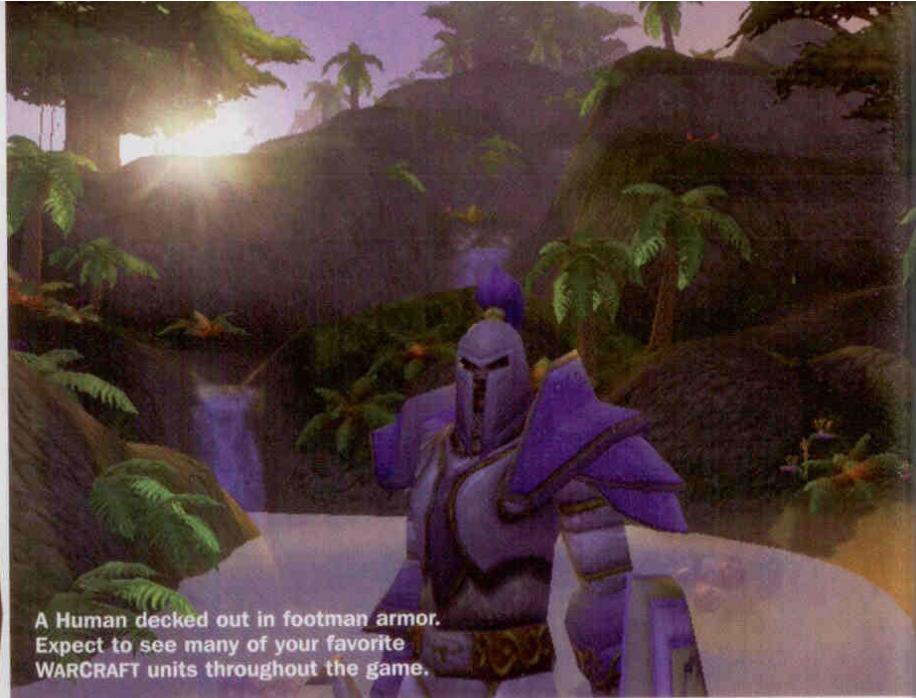
It is Blizzard's most ambitious game to date—and over the next 10 pages, the green-skinned CGW peons are ready to take you on a tour of the now-living kingdom of Azeroth in this exclusive first look. Zug zug!



Meet The Tauren



In WARCRAFT III Blizzard will introduce a third race for player characters: the Tauren, huge creatures who live in a peaceful, tribal society. They are a wise, nomadic race, who ally with the Orcs in WARCRAFT III because they identify with the Orc struggle to retain their traditions and identity. The Tauren live in the grassy lands of central Kalimdor; their only natural enemies are the brutal centaurs of Kalimdor, who have raided Tauren villages for generations.



A Human decked out in footman armor. Expect to see many of your favorite WARCRAFT units throughout the game.

As any serious WARCRAFT geek knows, Blizzard has long had a huge story in place for its flagship universe—but most of that story never appeared in the games themselves. But the WARCRAFT I and II designers were obviously frustrated storytellers, because they packed the manuals and subsequent novels with details of a deeply thought-out fantasy world (somewhat reminiscent of Raymond Feist's great Riftwar Saga) that has just begged for further enrichment. Blizzard tried to build on the story in the never-released WARCRAFT ADVENTURES, and the fact that they're coming back to it again—this time in an online RPG—just proves the level of their obsession.

"The simple fact is that WARCRAFT is our flagship gig," said Chris Metzen, longtime Blizzard veteran and "keeper of the arcane flame" of all WARCRAFT continuity. "DIABLO kicks ass, STARCRAFT kicks ass—I'm partial



of WARCRAFT may represent a quantum leap in ambition, scope, and technology over anything they've done previously, at root, this is still going to be a Blizzard game—with all the simplicity, ease-of-use, and—in theory—fun that that implies.

AT YOUR SERVICE

From the moment you launch WORLD OF WARCRAFT, Blizzard aims to make the

"Dude, how cool would it be to be in this world, to be those heroes?"

to all of them. But ultimately, we were like, f**k it, this is it—the WARCRAFT universe is Blizzard. There wasn't much to think about. It was a perfect fit for this kind of game."

And while it may seem odd for Blizzard to be announcing another new WARCRAFT game while they're still struggling to finish WARCRAFT III (now bumped to 2002), the fact is, WORLD OF WARCRAFT has been in development for a year already, with a team of nearly 40 people working on it full time. When we flew down to check out the game in mid-August, the team demo'd it live, on a running server, with other Blizzard employees for a full hour.

And the great news is that while WORLD

experience as simple as in all of their other games. Like all MMORPGS, you'll start out by creating your character. At this point, Blizzard is announcing only three of the player races: Human, Orc, and Tauren. The first two we all know about, while the latter is a race being introduced in WARCRAFT III (see sidebar).

Players will have a healthy number of options for making their characters stand out physically, because the team realizes that in MMORPGS, as in real life, looks do matter. As such, Blizzard is including loads of options for character creation, including numerous facial choices, hair (or, in the Taurens' case, horn) styles, skin colors, and

"The goal was to glom onto the WarCraft look and extrapolate it into a first-person universe."



even tattoos. Armor and weaponry will be huge, of course, and (as in DIABLO) the acquisition and wearing of unique, bad-ass items will be key to making your character stand out. Blizzard won't reveal character classes yet, except to say that they'll fit into the WARCRAFT universe—so you can at least expect the standard mix of warriors, spellcasters, and rangers—and you can look to the WARCRAFT II (and III, when it ships) manuals for further ideas.

The most interesting part about character creation in WORLD OF WARCRAFT is what you don't do. At the beginning, you don't assign any skill points at all. That's right: no numbers. You'll pick your race, your look, and your class—and then you jump into the game.

"We want this all to be really, really simple," said Bill Roper, another longtime Blizzard veteran (who at one time, long ago, provided all the voices to WARCRAFT I). "We don't want you to make choices about things without any information, we don't want you suddenly putting points into stats and skills that you have no idea about. Much like DIABLO II, we're gonna start you off with the right stats for your character type. But as you play and start learning things, then you'll get to assign points, and it'll feel like an informed decision."

Let's be clear: This isn't an attempt to dumb down the RPG elements of the game. It's simply a matter of Blizzard trying to do what they always do, which is create a game that's "easy to learn and hard to master," as many on the team repeated throughout the demo.

"Even though we love the current massive multiplayer games," said Roper, "the truth is that they still appeal mostly to the hardcore. The interface is very difficult, the learning curve is too steep, and they punish you too severely too early."

Project lead Shane Dabiri added, "For lots of people, you gotta remember, it's still scary to even go online, let alone play a massive multiplayer game. We want to give players a ramp-up period to feel comfortable first."



A Tauren, equipped with a wicked Dragonmaw Battle Axe, in the dense jungles of Stranglethorn. WARCRAFT players will recognize the goblin zepelin crashed into a tree behind him.

Enemy Harvest Golem



Stranglethorn Jungle, a previously unseen area in Azeroth, shows off the bright color palette Blizzard is going for in WORLD OF WARCRAFT.

The large green fellow on the left is not mere shrubbery. He's a bad-ass monster called a treant, and he was the "end boss" of a multi-part quest. The treant shakes the player's screen slightly when he's nearby, and shakes it a lot when you kill him.



READY TO SERVE

Once you create your character and enter Azeroth, it becomes clear just how serious Blizzard is. The team has created a brand-new 3D engine for the game, which you can view from a first- or third-person perspective (easily switchable with the mouse wheel), and it is a marvel.

Unlike nearly every other massively multiplayer game around, WORLD OF WARCRAFT is not going for a "photorealistic" look with lots of earth tones. It is instead opting for a more surreal and colorful look that is faithful to the WARCRAFT palette, and that feels, as Roper put it, "almost like you're inside a painting."

For Metzen, this look was crucial. "It was a very specific goal for us, to glom onto the WARCRAFT look and try to extrapolate it into a first-person universe. We were looking for something more iconic; we wanted a level of mightiness not found in other games. And that's what this game is about: mighty dudes doing great deeds."

To give the world a "live" feel, the team has added large environmental effects like moving water and skies, along with more subtle effects like swaying cobwebs and flying butterflies and birds. More important, all the monsters and NPCs in the gameworld are always doing something. NPCs don't stand around waiting for you to come to them; they have assignments, such as patrolling, guarding, or hunting. You may even see a line of peons chopping wood.

You traverse the world mostly on foot at first, though higher-level characters will gain items like teleport scrolls. The world is going to be huge, encompassing at least a good portion of Azeroth as depicted in the WARCRAFT II manual, along with new areas depicted in WARCRAFT III—though Blizzard declined to be more specific on this point.

Perhaps the coolest element of travel—and a feature that all veteran massively multiplayer gamers are going to shout out loud about—is that there are no load times between zones. The world is streaming, as in DIABLO II, so that you actually experience a smooth transition as you move from one environment to the next, with no load screen whatsoever. We actually saw this work, so unless Blizzard was using

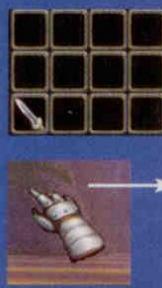


Anatomy of an Interface

This is you. The red bar is health, the blue is mana. To cast spells or use items on yourself, just click on the icon of your face.



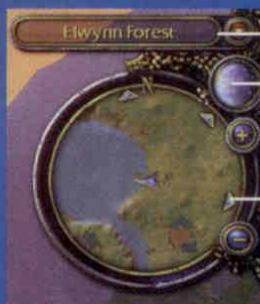
You can drag spells and items into the Action List at the lower left of the screen for quick access.



The cursor is context-sensitive. For example, when you drag it over a monster, it turns into a sword. Once you've killed the monster, the cursor turns into a gauntlet holding a bag, indicating you can now loot the corpse.



Your "paper doll" and backpack icons appear in the lower right. You can right-click on items to drop them immediately into your backpack. When you pick up armor, it automatically fits itself to the proper slot on your body.



- Your current location.
- The game's day/night cycle. You can mouse over it to get the exact gameworld time.
- As you locate places in the world, they're added to your mini-map. You can zoom in and out.

smoke and mirrors to fool us, they've already solved a major MMORPG headache. In addition, every player will have the ability to bind to a location via huge binding stones scattered throughout the world—so you won't have to beg another player to do it for you.

wait an hour to lure one creature out and then spend 10 minutes trying to kill him. ("We don't feel like you should be reading a book or doing your laundry during combat," said Roper.)

Death is going to be made somewhat less painful than in the current crop of MMORPGs. "We want it to be not terribly

"We've learned a lot from battle.net over the years, both good and bad. Hopefully we can use that knowledge here . . ."

BY YOUR COMMAND

So what, exactly, are you going to be doing in WORLD OF WARCRAFT? Combat, obviously, will play a huge role. (Yes, there will be player-versus-player—and yes, you can avoid it if you want.) Blizzard is promising, however, that battles will happen faster and more often than is typical of the genre. It won't be quite as frenetic as DIABLO II, but on the other hand, you won't have to

jarring," said Dabiri. "You've gotta be sorry when you die, but you shouldn't feel like you just got punched in the stomach and want to go cry for a week. You've got to want to jump right back in and try to do better, rather than shut the computer off and think 'the game screwed me.'"

Blizzard is also stressing, however, that players will be able to gain experience from activities other than combat, such



as going on quests, practicing trade skills, helping other players, and maybe even just exploring. Quests will range from easy, solo missions that you can do in one or two hours, to large-scale quests that may involve many players roaming all over the world for weeks.

Blizzard demonstrated a sample quest for us, a multipart one that required us to travel to different locations. The original quest, given to us by an NPC, is to destroy a strange tree beast that attacks folks out in a jungle. On our way, we discover that we need a specific weapon, a flaming blade called the Firestar, to defeat him, but that

"That's what this game is all about: mighty dudes doing great deeds."



A Human player makes his way uphill toward a huge keep in Iron Forge—WORLD OF WARCRAFT will give Azeroth a sense of scale the universe has never had.

Enemy Ghoul



the hilt and the blade have been separated. To get the hilt, we have to battle some monsters in a local graveyard, and to get the blade, we need to find the thief in town who has stolen it. Once we have both pieces, a blacksmith forges them together for us and we're on our way. And the bonus, after we've killed the tree beast, is that now we have a flaming sword, com-

A Human fights two ghouls. Damage appears onscreen, leaving the chat window free for its intended purpose.

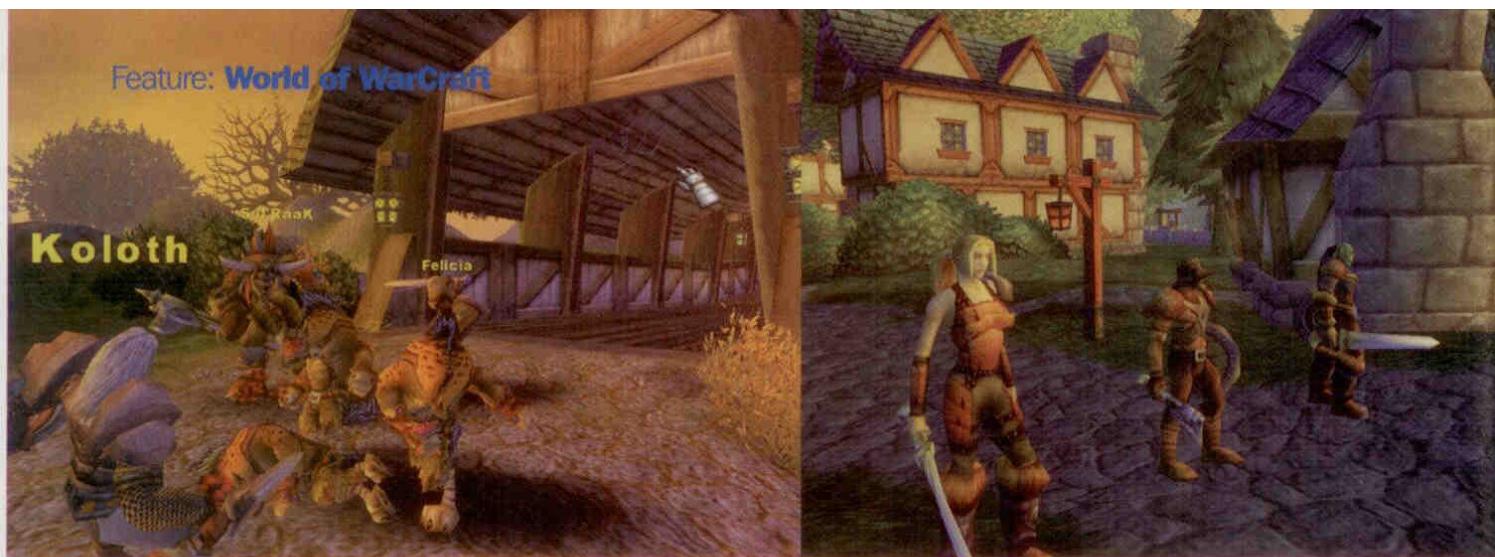
plete with particle effects, that we can show off to other players in the world.

FOR THE ALLIANCE

Of course, the game is really all about other players. Blizzard is focusing much attention on developing rewards for participating in the community and working with others.

One exciting concept they're introducing is that of ritual magic—spells that will require multiple casters to use. The example they demonstrated for us was a ritual spell that opens a portal to a special zone. To do this, we needed multiple casters because different players possessed different spells that all needed to be cast together. The reward for participating in such a ritual is that all the casters can then travel through the portal, but access is barred to anyone else. So if you're one of the few people in the world who can do certain ritual magic spells, everyone will know it, and you're going to be a popular player.

Another good reason to group with others is that every character class will come with an innate passive ability. When you join a group, that ability is shared automatically with everyone in the group. For example, a ranger's ability may be that his minimap is



↑
Tauren and Human players band together to fight gnolls near the Duskwood border. This bridge will actually take you to another zone, but, unlike other MMORPGs we've seen, you'll get there without a load screen.

filled in with more detail than maps of other classes. If you group with a ranger, you will receive that bonus, as long as you stay with him. Because different races will have different classes, this will also

how you conduct yourself, of course, will also affect how the other denizens of Azeroth respond to you.

MORE WORK

It all sounds good now, in theory. But will Blizzard really be able to pull this off, avoiding all the technical problems that have plagued nearly every other game of this type? So far, they remain confident.

"We've learned a lot from battle.net over the years, both good and bad," said Roper. "It's still the largest online multiplayer game service, so we have lots to draw upon."

↑
Two Humans and an Orc standing around looking cool in Goldshire. Orc and Human players will be able to play together—but you'll have to work on that relationship to make it happen.

Duskwood is the creepy forest to the south of the Human capital. Blizzard is hoping to make each area completely distinct, with a graphical look that puts you "inside of a painting."

"We don't feel like you should be reading a book or doing laundry during combat."

encourage players of different races to band together.

Orcs and Humans, banding together? We're not sure. And Blizzard isn't telling. WORLD OF WARCRAFT actually takes place about five years after the conclusion of WARCRAFT III—and whether these mortal enemies can now live in peace is a plot spoiler that Blizzard will not yet reveal. Differences in faction definitely will be a part of the game, however, and

Obviously we're not going to be running WORLD OF WARCRAFT on DIABLO II realms, because it's a completely different paradigm. But we can utilize the full breadth and scope of our knowledge on getting hundreds of thousands of people online playing with each other really simply."

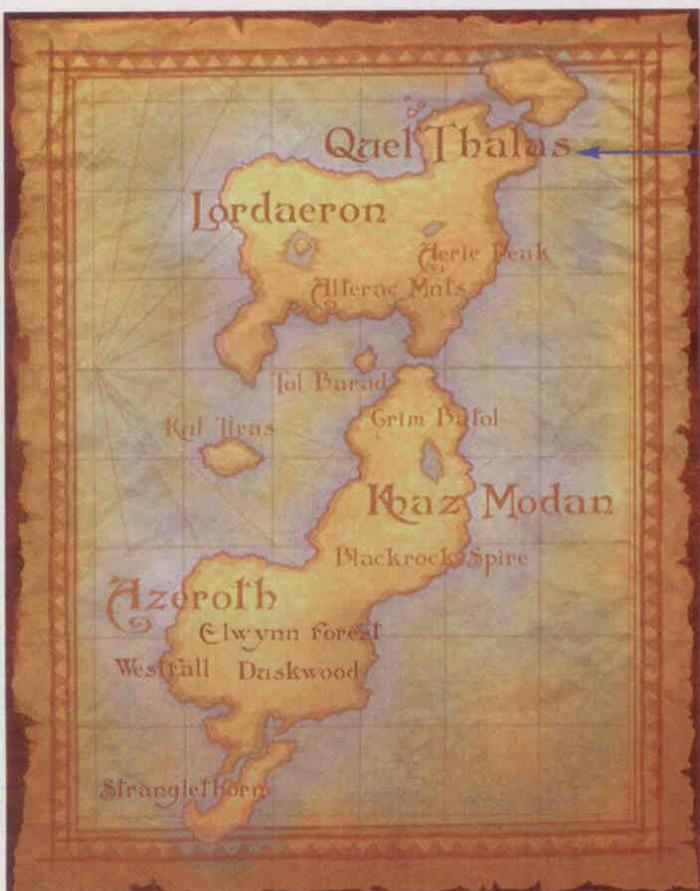
Blizzard will be setting up multiple realms on servers around the world for WORLD OF WARCRAFT, and the company plans to maintain a full-time staff with the sole

Blizzard's No-No List

When the WORLD OF WARCRAFT team first started the project, they got together and talked about all the things they don't like in other MMORPGs. The result? You won't see any of those things in their game. Or at least that's what they're saying now. Here's what Blizzard is promising you won't see in WORLD OF WARCRAFT:

- Load times between zones
- The need to camp for crucial monsters
- Too much downtime between battles
- Food and drink needed to stay alive (though these things can help heal you if you're found)
- Rats or rabbits to kill (Bill Roper: "Fleeing with my mighty dwarven warrior toward a guard to save me from a rat—that doesn't make me feel real epic and mighty.")





Azeroth

Here's Blizzard's latest version of their fantasy world of Azeroth. They're basing the geographical layout on the maps from the strategy games, but are adding areas, like Stranglethorn, that we've never seen before.

Human Footman



A human character casts Word of Recall to return to his bind point. All characters will be able to bind themselves to a region—you won't have to seek someone's help to do it.

responsibility of continuing to create new content for the game. "We think of it as an amusement park motif," said Metzen. "We want you to keep coming back again and again, to keep trying new things. And our

job will be to keep the lines short and keep changing up the rides."

Blizzard is also promising to conduct extensive beta testing and swears they're going to take their time with it. "The beta test is actually the big x-factor here," said Roper. "We can't tell you if it's going to be one month or one year. We put the biggest pressure on ourselves. If a game ships on time, but it doesn't work and it's not fun, then who cares? We've always felt it's much more important to get a game right when it comes out, so that four years later people are still playing it because it's a good game."

So what does that mean for a release date? It means, unfortunately, that there isn't one. "No matter what date we tell you, you're not gonna believe us," said Roper. "So we don't have a release date."

And that was the only lousy thing we'd heard all day.

FOR THE KING

With WORLD OF WARCRAFT, Blizzard is veering away from familiar terrain and entering an extremely competitive gaming landscape fraught with hazards—as the frazzled teams of EVERQUEST, ANARCHY ONLINE, WORLD WAR II ONLINE, and others would all attest. But it's a challenge that clearly has Blizzard jazzed.

"Huge communities have always built up



Feature: World of Warcraft



Sunset over the Swamp of Sorrows, near the Orcs' Dark Portal.

around our games, from WARCRAFT II on," said Roper. "Every time we come up with a new product, we work on how we can better integrate the community and get people to interact. So a massive multiplayer game is just the next logical step. What's really exciting to us is sitting around and talking about a game that won't have a chat room."



You'll now finally be talking to other players as your character, all the time. It's exciting to us as developers and gamers."

And that last part is why Blizzard always gets it right: At root, they are just geeky gamers like the rest of us. They're making WORLD OF WARCRAFT because this is the game that they want to play.

"There is so much to this universe," said Dabiri, "so much we want to explore. All we could think as we started this project was,



Orcs versus Humans in the Iron Forge mountains.

dude, how cool would it be to be in that world, to be those heroes, and adventure in the places we fought all those massive battles in?"

Dude, we couldn't agree more. So hurry up, finish WARCRAFT III already, and let us into the world. The kingdom of Azeroth needs heroes like us. **CCW**

WarCraft III Update



The way we see it, the biggest obstacle standing between us and hundreds of hours lost playing WORLD OF WARCRAFT isn't the technology or the design or a rigorous beta test: It's that damn WARCAST III. During our visit, Blizzard kept vowing that the incredible amount of new gameworld content in WC3 will have a huge impact on the eventual state of WORLD OF WARCRAFT. So how long until we can see that 200-percent increase in content and start

speculating about its expansion in WORLD?

Well, not until spring of 2002. The good news is that Blizzard has nailed down the design and most of the units. The final unit mix will be determined by the vigorous play-balancing yet to come (an internal beta should be underway by the time you read this). The design team is overhauling the art for all the races, adding new low-poly models to ensure every unit looks great even on lower-end machines.



They're tweaking the tech tree for all four playable races, which has led to the welcome return of the gryphon aviary for the Humans. Lumber harvesting has been added to the game to create more of a classic WC2 feel, though the harvesting is performed at a slower rate and should prevent players from hacking down entire forest walls. Additionally, a great deal of effort is going into finalizing the effects of the cycling of day and night—specifically how daylight or the lack thereof affects fog of war, line of sight, and the special abilities of certain races. Oh, and there's that little matter of actually creating a single-player campaign. Fortunately, the story line is pretty well set and the multi-player testing has led to the prototyping of a variety of mission types.

What we saw looks good. From the thoughtful interface tweaks to the mobile Night Elf buildings to the devastating assortment of boss-caliber dragons, WARCAST III looks to be well on its way to delivering a great gaming experience, if not an imminent one. —Robert Coffey