



GUIDES

Crisis on Infinite Servers
Columnist Cindy Yans examines the insanity of guild recruitment.

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CARDS

Falling Pieces
Our casual-games columnist kicks his Peggle habit and takes a peek at a CCG.

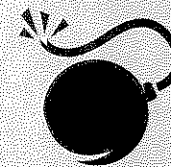
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PODCAST

Sound Off
What's the deal with Blizzard's big game announcement? The GFW editors chime in.

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TOM vs. BRUCE

Two gamers enter. One gamer wins.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

Tom and Bruce vs. Sauron in Turbine's great Tolkien MMO

PUBLISHER: Midway DEVELOPER: Turbine GENRE: MMORPG ESRB RATING: Teen



• Greetings from Rushock Bog!

COLUMN



Tom Chick

Prominent freelance videogame critic Tom Chick also runs the popular website QuarterToThree.com.



Bruce Geryk

Bruce Geryk—briny brain surgeon by day—is GFW's resident expert on anything involving a hex grid.

BRUCE: I play games for relaxation, so imagine my surprise when *The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar* tells me before I've even started the game that "our worst fears have come to pass." They have? Holy crap. Then what am I doing sitting here playing a computer game? Oh, wait—our worst fears *in the game*? OK. I'm not sure what those fears could be. The game is totally buggy? Playing the game will weaken America? Somebody misspelled something in Elvish? And if that's the case, why wouldn't the developers fix those problems before release,

instead of just putting in some afterthought cut-putting in some afterthought cut-scene disclaimer in a faux Gandalf voice? That really doesn't bode too well for *Lord of the Rings Online*.

TOM: Actually, a lot of things don't bode well for this game. For starters, it's been passed around to various publishers before ending up with Midway, the folks who brought you *Midway Arcade Treasures XII* and other decidedly non-MMO properties like *Mortal Kombat*. Furthermore, *The Lord of the Rings Online* was created by Turbine, whose credits include *Asheran's Call 2*, one of the few MMOs that was bad enough to actually shut down. In case you're not familiar with the genre, few MMOs die. Instead, they're acquired by Sony Online and folded into Station.com. However, the good news is this: *The Lord of the Rings Online* is great. But I don't tell Bruce this. I'll just let him find out for himself.

BRUCE: I'm a huge skeptic about the whole role-playing aspect of anything you might think of playing a role about. That's why I'm not entirely able to describe the feeling I get when I make my first Dwarf character and I go through one of the introductory instances/cut-scenes, and at the end I run into Gandalf, who says something about how I should tell him my story because it's probably a really interesting one. And I'm all like, "Whoa! Gandalf wants to talk to me! How cool is this stuff!" But then Tom tells me that, according to the deal our agent negotiated for us, we are contractually obligated to play as Hobbits. So I delete my Dwarf and name a character after Robert Fripp. If you know who that is without using the Internet, congratulations: You're old.

TOM: I had to think up some reason to mandate that we start out in the Shire, because it's one of the best parts of the game, and it's a great hook to get someone interested. I know this because I've been playing *The Lord of the Rings Online* since the open beta began. I've got a character of every race, I've seen all the starting areas, and I've dabbled in most of the classes. My character with Bruce is just an alt. His name is Tomwise. He's a Hobbit burglar, jeweler, and prospector. When he's not veering off course to chip away at an ore node with my pickax, he's using the inspect command on low-level char-

acters to see if they're wearing any jewelry. Usually, they're not. So I offer to sell them copper rings and necklaces for a decent price. I'm only slightly less annoying than a gold spammer. But it's a living. I make a few more copper pieces than I would selling my wares to the vendors.

BRUCE: Unlike Tom, I'm a big fan of *The Lord of the Rings*. While he's off calculating how many shekels he can earn by crafting jewelry—which I don't believe was ever depicted in the official *The Lord of the Rings* history, by the way—I'm admiring how well Turbine managed to re-create the actual Middle-earth land of historical fact. Unlike other games, where you are in the scary demon forest and then go through a short tunnel to emerge at the North Pole, The Shire à la Turbine is a pretty consistently Shire-y place. There are fields and farms, and when you run from village to village, you never have to wonder why a whole bunch of monsters are standing in a group just off the road, doing nothing in particular. It's simply foxes and bears and all the things you'd expect to find in Franco's Spain. I mean, in *Pan's Labyrinth*. Which is a whole lot like *The Lord of the Rings Online*.

TOM: See? I told you the Shire was good. Even Bruce Geryk likes it!

BRUCE: *LOTRO* is so much not a monster reservation that, at one point, Tom and I get a quest to go kill some goblins. First we talk to this guy, who tells us he has seen some goblins lurking around the edges of this forest. And I'm all like, "You're kidding—there are goblins around? I gotta go check that out, because all I've seen around here are bears, foxes, and Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco." **TOM:** Bruce and I start out delivering satchels of mail, avoiding nosy Hobbits. We plot out the best order to do what is almost literally a series of FedEx quests. Because I don't want to just walk him through the game, I let Bruce go first. This lets him learn valuable life lessons like "you can't carry a satchel of mail through the water."

BRUCE: Another great lesson leads to the discovery of the best massively multiplayer invention ever: You can jump when you're running, *but it slows you down*.

TOM: We also do some pie-delivery quests. Now our minimaps display hungry Hobbits along with >