

EVE FANFEST

20/21/22 OCTOBER

THE SYSTEM: REYKJAVIK. REGION: NORTHERN EUROPE. FIVE HUNDRED POD PILOTS FLOCK TO A SMALL CCP OUTPOST TO PLUG THE ULTIMATE ISK SINK. TRADE IS BRISK. LAG MINIMAL. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS CORDIAL. AND NOT A SINGLE SHOT IS FIRED IN ANGER. E-ON'S EDITOR LOOKS BACK ON TWO FREEZING OCTOBER DAYS WHEN EVE WAS AT PEACE...

⇒ Iceland is hardly what you'd call a bargain holiday destination. The name alone is enough to turn people away (as was apparently intended when the country was named back in the ninth century), but even when you realise this surprisingly clement arctic state isn't quite as inhospitable as its name suggests, the dent on the wallet can be more than a little intimidating, especially if you choose to subsist on a diet of little more than beer and pizza.

Prejudices aside, and despite minor issues of temporary overcrowding thanks to the concurrent Iceland Airwaves music festival, close to 500 EVE fans descended on Reykjavik, most from the UK and North America, a few from Australia and beyond, to meet friends, enemies, volunteers and developers to celebrate all that is EVE as it nears its third birthday. With rising numbers of paying subscribers, plans to release the game in China, the subsequent release of Titans and other vessels, not to mention the technical challenges that come with sustained growth, it was going to be an interesting couple of days for all concerned.

Apart from the running time – two full days – the most noticeable change from last year's EVE love-in was having all the official festivities hosted in the same location, Loftkastalinn (host of last year's more linear

one-day epic). Last year there were four separate venues scattered around town (scattered is perhaps the wrong word to use given the relative size of Reykjavik compared to other European capitals); this year, unless you wanted to eat or sleep, there was little need to leave the outwardly soviet-styled conference centre.

LEARNING CURVE

Whilst the venue was open on the Thursday evening for registration, EVE-related product acquisition and the annual *kieron*-shearing spectacle, Fanfest 2005 properly commenced on Friday 21st October with the EVE Championship kicking off in the 'Complex' and an impressive run of Tech Lectures taking place in the rather more hangover-friendly surroundings of the auditorium. Given the fragility of my own constitution (thanks to a long evening of enlightening, beer-fuelled conversation with EVE's Lead Designer the night before), I elected to spend most of the day trying to digest the technical details, history and ongoing development behind the 'world's largest game universe'. Needless to say, most of it went over my head, and the rest seemed to go in one ear and out the other. Papa Smurf's detailed presentation on the network cluster was by far the most punishing hour of academic torture I've ever endured, so much so that I was disappointed not to receive some sort of certificate upon leaving my seat. Nevertheless, I think I speak for all when I say that EVE's one-world architecture is far more complex than at first we thought, and whilst CCP seems to be doing a great deal to fix all the issues (as the subsequent lecture taught us), its efforts must be carefully considered and be as proactive as they are reactive.

Mulling over the technicalities of load-balancing and proxy-prefixed mumbo jumbo, I decided to take advantage of a welcome break in proceedings to check out what was going down in the Complex. Evidently a fair bit, as it turned out, with pilots falling like flies in the first

round of the Championship as the 64 entrants were whittled down to 32. It was a fairly engaging spectacle to witness, but given that the Championship was a one-on-one event, it would have benefited from having teams rather than solo combatants, as some bouts were only marginally more entertaining than mining in an Impairor. Watching two specks of light briefly tickle each other in the void of space was something most of us could have enjoyed *without* leaving the house.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

A definite highlight was the roundtable discussions. I know this because I missed them and everyone I spoke to who attended the cosy, closed-door chats only wished they could have been present for them all. If anyone still believed CCP to be cold and uncommunicative, they only had to witness these convivial meetings to realise that CCP is by far the most open games developer on the planet (I should know, I've met most of them). At these, and all other times, whether at the bar or tucked away in some hidden corner, the developers were accepting and attentive to all who approached.

Such openness was highlighted perfectly on the second day when, in his keynote speech, CCP big cheese, Hilmar, revealed that the company is raking in more than



Left: John Hallur (aka RealX) played a set of EVE classics, remixed and remastered

Below: the panel took questions from the floor, some of which were thrown straight back



Nathan 'Oveur' Richardsson was often to be found at the business end of a microphone



Above: Hilmar's keynote speech was candid, honest and enlightening



Left: Shin Ra has the Championship final in his sights



The EVE store, naturally, did plenty of brisk business

Ⓢ a million dollars a month from paying customers. Of course we knew this already (75,000 subscribers paying \$15 actually comes to just over \$1.1m), but to hear a developer treat the event as some kind of shareholders meeting was quite novel; some more business-minded souls would have even considered such candour reckless.

But there was no evidence of corporate frivolity here – the fast cars were well hidden and instead we heard that \$100,000 was stumped up for a single, superfast mega disk thing which was installed only the previous day. CCP promised more such devices would be deployed (TMS RAMSAN 400 Solid State Disc Arrays, I think they're called). We heard of plans to recruit more staff (since instigated and with a post on the forum), upgrade to 64-bit hardware and push efforts to upgrade client software in order to solve other hangovers. It has to be remembered that CCP currently employs 60 people and all are devoted to EVE.

Most MMOG teams run a skeleton customer support team and instead invest their dev time on new games. In the grand scheme of things \$1m is not an awful lot to play with, yet it all goes back into EVE in some form or another. With novels, board games, even feature films a possibility, EVE crossover potential could ensure much greater future revenues, cash that would ensure development would accelerate on all fronts.

BEYOND THE RED MOON

Although server performance was something of a hot topic of conversation, the biggest draw was the future of the game itself, and here

CCP finally revealed its two-stage plan for Kali.

First would come the Red Moon appetiser (now released), then, next spring (or summer) will follow the main course. Sadly there wasn't much to see of next year's add-on, as all efforts were on the software optimisations, NPC upgrades, new bloodlines and, of course, the new ship content that RMR is to provide. The second day was the one on which CCP set its sights firmly on the future, one that extended far beyond the deployment of the Red Moon expansion.

CCP's co-founder, Reynir, followed Hilmar's finance-revealing, fish-obsessed keynote, with a postulating look at the design theory of EVE; how CCP will increase the freedoms afforded to the player and how, on balance, EVE could benefit from the 'theme park' construction of *WoW* and other more constrictive MMOs. Despite interruptions from his son, for all the game theorists out there, it was a thought-provoking and revealing insight into EVE's past, present and future.

Lead Designer Kjartan's follow-up lecture went even further. No planet-scudding visuals this year, unfortunately, but a look-ahead to higher levels of socio-military structure and possible ways to further layer the social aspect of EVE with legally-binding agreements, eBay-styled feedback and rewards. Very little was set in stone, but it was clear to all in attendance that CCP still has some very big ideas on the drawing board, perhaps not as visually impressive as Titans, but in effect much more sweeping in their impact on the day-to-day business of all EVE players rather than just the combat-obsessed.



GLORIOUS FUTURE
Proposing in front of a roomful of EVE nerds is something that would, no doubt, earn a slap from any regular spouse-to-be. Here, though, we have two consenting EVE nerds in love, before a room full of EVE nerds and presided over by EVE's ethereal masters. What better venue could there possibly be? Best wishes to them both. Remember guys that under-18s are not allowed at the Fanfest, so one of you may have to stay at home next year to look after the EVElet. And make sure you remind CCP to code some pre-nuptial functionality into the new contracts system...

FEELING BLUE

The Conference finale, rather obviously, was Red Moon. Blue Moon might have been a better moniker given the range of expletives that were uttered by EVE's charismatic Senior Producer Nathan 'Oveur' Richardsson. Due to its recent deployment, it would here be wasteful to retread what is now old news, suffice to say that the by-now packed gathering whooped for joy

at seeing Titans and carriers on screen for the first time.

That was almost it. The panel discussion was little more than a live Insider forum, expertly guided by *kieron*, as ever. Questions were asked on server performance, China plans, Red Moon, Kali and other things. Good questions were answered, bad ones treated with the derision they deserved, and as the proceedings drew to a close we applauded the efforts of ISD and, in particular, *Libertina* (Volunteer of the Year).

A genuine surprise then revealed itself as two antipodean attendees were invited to approach the stage to receive the now traditional gifts for having travelled the furthest to be at the festivities. The Kiwi male of the pair collapsed to his knee, the female clearly surprised, yet thankfully receptive to the proposal of a hangar merger and lifetime non-aggression pact (see *Glorious Future*, above).

RÖXÖR

The final hours of Fanfest 2005 passed in an alcoholic blur as the Auditorium closed its doors and the Complex opened for the real business of music and beer quaffage. Food was served (and dangerous it was too – I'm sure I'm not the only one to puncture a cheek thanks to embedded cocktail sticks), a trio of pretty damsels pretended to be aeroplanes, two hooded Amarrians rocked out to Super Mario and everyone managed to let their hair down – apart from *kieron*, who had lost his and seemed to be constantly organising things, somewhere.

It ended for me soon after the house band, RöXöR, took to the stage – Petur, CCP card game specialist and trained opera singer on vocals, his brother Runar, Vincent and Marti on guitar, Reynir on bass (enjoying his brief period of rock stardom immensely), Kjartan Kjartansson on drums and Kristjan playing the accordion (yes, an accordion). It was then that I realised (not for the first time) we were in the presence of a truly unique game developer; one that can not only create the greatest game, but one that can pump out a perfectly acceptable rendition of *Gay Bar* without fear of

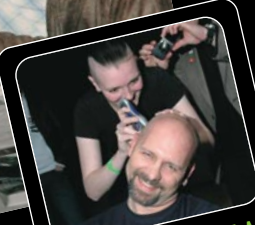
embarrassing themselves. I collected my things, bade a fond farewell to those I had met and set off into the night. It was cold, really freezing actually, and I was suddenly very skint. As I wandered back to the hotel on foot, I pondered the eBay worth of my ultra-rare Press pass should I be required to self-finance a return trip in 2006.

Unpretentious, friendly and fun, the EVE Fanfest is a rare event in the modern games industry; putting faces to names you see daily in space and on forums just enforces the fact that EVE is a social game where friendships are forged on a level that exceeds the capabilities of any other virtual world. I wondered on the plane back to Blighty, Iceland receding rapidly behind me, whether in 30, 40 or 50 years EVE veterans will return to the land of fire and ice as might a war veteran to the beaches of Normandy; a gaggle of grey-haired geeks with EVE holo-stickers plastered across their hoverchairs, moaning about the cold and the price of beer, and loving every minute of it. One wonders, too, how many skillpoints one might have amassed by then?

Skillpoints!?

Shit! ☹

⌚ The final hours of Fanfest 2005 passed in an alcoholic blur as the Auditorium closed its doors and the Complex opened for the real business of music and beer quaffage



SURPLUS OF RARE ARTIFACTS
The subject webbed and locked by a hovering GM, *Lacrimae* moves in to strip a resigned *kieron* of his hairy aft shields. Within a few seconds of precision clipping, he was left with little but a shining egg. Latest reports suggest his shields have now partially regenerated.



Left: competition was fierce in the Complex as the one-on-one Championship began

Above: Shin Ra is crowned EVE Champion and as a reward receives the prototype Brutix model as seen in E-ON issue #001



SMOKE FROM DOWN BELOW
Among a cacophony of light and sound, two Jovian ambassadors arrive to converse with the assembled delegates. Unfortunately, their impenetrable language proves to be a barrier to any cordial discussion and the visitors become quickly agitated, electing to punish the assembled pilots with their sonic wave devices.

20/21/22 OCTOBER
EVE FANFEST

