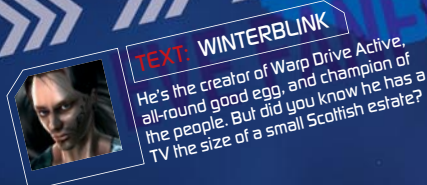


EVE FANFEST

9/10/11 NOVEMBER



TEXT: WINTERBLINK
He's the creator of Warp Drive Active. He's the creator of Warp Drive Active. He's the creator of Warp Drive Active. He's the creator of Warp Drive Active. He's the creator of Warp Drive Active.

FOR SOME IT WAS ABOUT SEEING WHAT CCP HAD IN STORE FOR THE FUTURE OF EVE. FOR OTHERS IT WAS ABOUT MEETING FRIENDS, OLD AND NEW, AND SHARING A PASSION FOR BEER AND AMUSINGLY-SHAPED SPACESHIPS. FOR ONE PERSON ESPECIALLY, IT WAS ALL OF THE ABOVE AND MUCH MORE BESIDES...

I was flying to another country to meet a bunch of total strangers and geek out about a video game. This, or some variation of it, is what people I know in 'real life' had been telling me in the weeks leading up to November 2006. These are people who do not play EVE Online, of course. Folks I know were curious why I was flying to Iceland, and as I tried to explain the game to them their eyes would glaze over with a kind of numb detachment. In the end, I wondered how I'd ever be able to explain the experience to anyone.

Many, many hours later I finally find myself standing on Icelandic soil (which there isn't a great deal of). Waiting at the baggage area for many minutes, two things dawned on me. First, I must be half asleep because I walked right past the two-meter-tall poster I had worked on for the arrivals area of the airport, meant to greet Fanfest attendees with a joke about lost luggage. Second, ironically, my luggage was nowhere to be found. Thanks Air Canada. Thanks for nothing.

After filing a claim with a rather attractive woman at the baggage desk and receiving a complimentary lost luggage travel kit (I love you, Icelandair), I travelled to the hotel with a bunch of media folks. Dana Massey from MMORPG.com was there, as well as a great guy from Warcry, and a man with whom I would clink beer glasses several times over the next few days - Monty Sharma, VP and founder of Vivox.

Eventually ending up at the wonderful Nordica - this year's Fanfest venue - I was informed by some attractive front desk girls (are there any unattractive people in Iceland?) that my room would not be ready for several hours. Missing a full day and having been up for a ridiculous number of hours, I was resigned to not sleeping for a little while longer. The hotel's buffet was open for breakfast, and we all decided to head there for a bite to eat, and to chat while we waited. Eventually my head hit a pillow and the world ceased to exist for a time.

GUILT-TRIPPING

The TV exploded into life three hours later, a flurry of foreign language totally annihilating a rather nice dream I was having. As I stood in my boxers looking out the window next to the strange bed with funny half-sheets and the TV chattering about things I would never understand, I gazed out in bleary wonder at the fascinating city laid before me. It looked a lot like a typical Canadian city would if you airburst an Ikea store about a mile overhead. Nice designs, everything orderly, and big bold lettering everywhere. Yep, still in Iceland.

Three hours later and I made my way downstairs, refreshed and ready for day one of Fanfest. It occurred to me suddenly, on this intended 'Meet & Greet' day, that I didn't have the foggiest idea what most of the guys in my corp, Mercenary Coalition, looked like and, to make matters more interesting, nobody knew I was going to be there.

Bless my soul, I come around the corner to see spiralJunkie and Xylana interviewing someone who could only be the formidable Hygelac, whose MSN picture is a suave shot of himself, shirtless. Patiently, I waited until he was done with his interview then, MWD on, I tackled him.

"Hey dude, what's up," I said.
"Hi, who the hell are you?", he asks.
"I'm in your corp," I said, grinning. "Winterblink."
"Winterblink!" A look of ridiculous shock (should have had my camera ready, damn it), a pile of expletives, and one man-hug later, I'd

made contact with my first MC member.
The order of the day then became this: find new MC member, make them guess who the hell I was. Since I was fake-bitching about not going to Fanfest almost to the hour of my leaving home, I'd sufficiently guilt tripped everyone so much nobody even thought to guess the stranger accosting them was me.

DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

Let me tell you, meeting the people I've been playing with for months now and have come to entirely respect from their actions and chats, was great. Latex Mistress would remark to me later exactly how I felt: that it was damn great to finally meet, and it was like becoming instant friends with someone you'd maybe spoken to a handful of times.
It was also quite an experience to finally meet our illustrious CEO, Seleene. I have more respect for him than he probably knows, and finally being



Some CCPeeps had taken to wearing kilts, one of whom was Kieron. And a fine set of pins he has too, eh ladies?



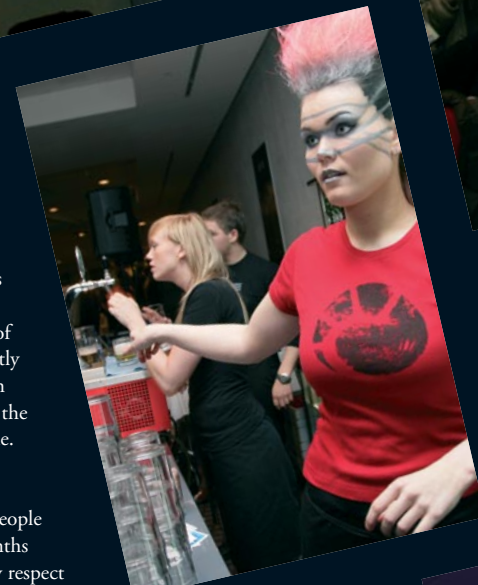
The unmistakable profile of... George Lucas?



"Now here you can see how the recent launch into China has resulted in rapid expansion. Either that or my son has spilled red ink all over my slides"



Above: joyous scenes unfold as CCP declare the free bar has reopened for business



Left: the roundtable developer chats were a big draw. This one was on the need for bigger round tables



able to shake his hand (even after being called names for not telling him I was coming) was a great moment for me. That, and he came with MC t-shirts, something I really appreciated given my luggage was still having a blast riding the luggage carousel in Boston.

There weren't a lot of developers present on day one, but it was great meeting folks like Elisabet, who seemed to be organizing everything under the sun, as well as Lilja, the beautiful angel who'd booked my flights, and Pann, recently reacquired by CCP.

Of special importance to me on the first day was finally meeting kieron. A man most will be familiar with from the forums. kieron's someone I've wanted to meet for a very, very long time, since we've had some experiences which we can both relate to. It was truly a heartening moment for me to finally meet the man and shake his hand. On the last day of Fanfest, the night before I was to fly back, he caught up with me and pulled me aside so we could talk for a while. He said a LOT, and I was honestly moved to tears. I won't repeat here what was said, but there was nothing I could say back to him to equal it, and it was a moment which is burned into my memory forever.

MC blobbed the hell out of not only the lobby of the Nordica, but the Mexican burger joint (in Iceland?) a block away. That poor waiter. His night was going so well, serving a couple here, and a small family there. Suddenly about 20 loud, hungry, foreign men burst through the door, start rearranging tables, and ordering 400-gram burgers and steaks. The totally random Icelandic weather destroyed our smooth composure on the way back to the hotel, changing from calm and misty when we got to the restaurant, to wind blowing so fast it felt as if a heavyweight boxer was punching you in the face.

Day one lasted forever, and I wish it could have lasted longer. My credit card might not agree with me on that, though.

GLADIATORS. ARE YOU RDY?

Day two, and a well-hatched breakfast plan was pulled off by members of the MC. Meanwhile the random Icelandic weather managed to delay my luggage until a later flight that afternoon.

This was the day of the tournaments, both PvP and CCG, as well as the developer roundtables. It might seem a bit silly to consider a whole day where people either went two-on-two with each other using supercharacters on Singularity, or one-on-one with EVE's new collectable card game, but the result was quite entertaining.

Folks who signed up for the PvP tournament were randomly paired, and faced off against other teams throughout the day until just two teams were left. The ship of the day seemed to be the Caracal, and it was interesting to watch the teams work together when fitting them out, some going with tried and trusted methods and others trying more unique setups.

While the battles raged in one half of the presentation hall, the other side of the partition had the CCG matches. Not being overly familiar with the card game it wasn't easy to follow what was going on, but it was interesting enough to give me the itch to learn more.



LIKE-MINDED SOULS

Meeting people like Xyliana – the heart and soul of EveTV – was another high point for me (that's me with her, above). She's someone who I felt was almost a kindred spirit in a way, who puts a lot of herself into what she does, for no other reason than because she loves the work. It was great that she was able to take time out of her busy schedule to chat with me.

The CCG finals went on before the PvP tournament finals, but the presentation of the game (on the big screens) was almost impossible to follow by anyone who didn't have an excellent knowledge of the game mechanics. Hopefully next year there'll be more commentary on what plays are being made by the players and how they matter to the game being played.

The PvP tournament crowd was so enthralled, they decided to put down their cunningly-fitted ships and duke it out with BattleBadgers. It was truly a fight which was epic in scale. Not to mention length...

During the final fight, all eyes were on the large screens as everyone watched with baited breath to see who would come out on top. Structure tanking (the only way real men tank) and a bit of good luck ended up being the defining factors as both ships blew away each others' shields and armour, and began gnawing at their insides. When the last ship on the losing team's side exploded, the collective cheers of the masses was utterly deafening.

Earlier in the day, during the first rounds of the tournament, the developers sat down with the players who signed up for the Developer's Roundtables. In essence, it gave players a unique opportunity to speak with them directly and comment on the game. It's another one of those perfect examples that shows how EVE's developers are real people (I poked one, it was made of actual physical mass) who are willing to sit down, look you in the eyes, and ask you to tell them what you think, positive or negative. It's a rare thing.

All of this also meant a lot of developers were just wandering about, so Winterblink Fanfest Plan Alpha was put into action: meet CCP.

PLAN ALPHA ONE. EXECUTE

Now this deserves special attention, so bear with me. I've been playing this game a long time. Like, since the beta. Most people who know my name know me as the guy who does Warp Drive Active, the comic that graces this magazine. One of the things that

IT'S ONE OF THOSE PERFECT EXAMPLES THAT SHOWS HOW EVE'S DEVELOPERS ARE REAL PEOPLE (I POKED ONE, IT WAS MADE OF ACTUAL PHYSICAL MASS)



Left: "Now, what are all these spaceship things?" The PvP championship gets off to a flying start

Below: guess who won the QA versus Content PvP match?

was utterly amazing – like mind-blowing amazing – was the reactions I would get when I went and talked to the developers, finding out who they were and what they did, and thanking them for making a game that is so inspiring to me. More than that, it was to let them know that the work they've done, both technical and in the community of the game, has touched so many from all over the world. Some might label me a fanboy for that, but hey, that's fine, go right ahead. Just do me a favour and call me a fanman.

But when I talk about the reactions I got, I should first tell you what I was expecting. At best, I was hoping for a handshake, a pat on the back and some chitchat. That's not to say I thought of these people badly, just that in my mind I guess I didn't consider the widespread effect WDA has had in not only the community, but also within CCP.

And so, late on day two, I found myself standing in front of a blonde dev with glasses, whom I recognized from earlier in the tournament (MC frw!) when he was demonstrating something on some terminals I couldn't see. I went up, drink in hand, asked him who he was and what he does. He mentions his in-game name and it turns out I'm talking with the fellow responsible for the New Player Experience, a man named Rúnar, or Skellibjalla in-game (if I remember correctly... that wasn't the first beer of the night in my hand). We chat for a bit and he asks who I am, so I tell him I'm Winterblink.

Cue sound of record scrrrrrratching to a halt. "Winterblink? Warp Drive Active?!" All composure lost, I'm suddenly hand-shaked and man-hugged and totally beside myself with amazement at this. He runs off and grabs someone else.

"Holy shit, you're Hilmar!" I say. "Hilmar, do you know who this is?" Rúnar asks. Hilmar doesn't, and I'm not surprised by that one bit. I mean... *it's HILMAR!* My jaw was probably hanging open.

Rúnar tells him and all bets are off. Suddenly I'm in what can only be described as a Viking bearhug, and I can feel my vertebrae and shoulder blades being pressed in directions they're not supposed to go. My mind fragments into two and retreats to a quiet room for a moment to have a quick discussion about whether this is actually happening, decides it is, and promptly snaps back to reality.

And this being the perfect moment, I get to tell THE MAN how much I love the game, and to thank him for making it. It's a moment I'll honestly never forget.

WARP DRIVE INACTIVE

Nursing a four-alarm hangover on day three (God, who wasn't?), I managed to get downstairs in time for breakfast and staggered my way in for the big day of presentations. There was some great stuff shown,



NEXT ROUND'S ON ME

After the presentations, the top guys sat at a table on the stage and invited questions from the audience. They looked thirsty (especially Oveur), so I decided to buy them a round of premium pints from the bar. Can't have their voices going out on them while they did all that answering. Cheers fellas, you deserve it!



Relegated to a mid-afternoon slot, Oveur points forlornly to the bar area

EVE FANFEST

including real-time demonstrations of EVE's developer tools and previews of the new engine. We also got some sneak peeks at things a lot further down the road, such as walking in stations (see page 28).

For all the awesome information and events that went on during Fanfest, the main things for me were meeting everyone I could, including the people at CCP, the fine folks at MC, and the players who took the time out of their lives to show up in Iceland. That last point is something I'd like to highlight to the people at CCP.

I'm firmly of the opinion that they have created more than just a game, but a community. That sounds as if I'm stating the obvious, but people don't fly thousands of miles to show up for a weekend for nothing. I've met people in EVE that I'd consider friends, and there's not a single person from CCP or MC that I wouldn't put up in my house if they came to visit (just not all at once). Back when I had a car accident, CCP mailed me a signed Get Well card with one of those gorgeous EVE poster prints. I've never heard of any developer of a game who's done that for a player, ever. It's inspiring. I'd never considered doing anything creative for a game community before playing EVE, and I've done WDA, Nature Vraie, comics and write-ups for E-ON, and I still don't think I do enough. *(If you did them quicker it would help – Ed.)*

PRICELESS

On the plane ride home, I felt as if pieces of me were left behind. Returning to my regular life was difficult in a way, because I had no idea how I could put the experience into words to explain how special it was. Most people I know aren't gamers, so the idea of playing one game for years is utterly beyond them. Say you're back from a Fanfest in Iceland and they look at you as if you've just sprouted a second head.

But the reactions I get from folks back home is interesting. It ranges from people poking fun and thinking it's totally lame, to people wondering just who the hell I am, since it sounds as if I'm leading a double life or

something. In a way that's quite true. There's a distinct part of my life that's tough to communicate to people who don't play EVE, and I'm sure I'm not alone in the feeling of being almost depressed at getting home finally, returning to the normal routine.

On the flipside however, going to Fanfest and experiencing what I did, meeting everyone, drinking all that alcohol (hell, even signing peoples' stuff – which was very unexpected), I have to say it's recharged me in a way that's tough to describe. A few folks have said I'm a bit of a different person since coming back, and I'd have to agree.

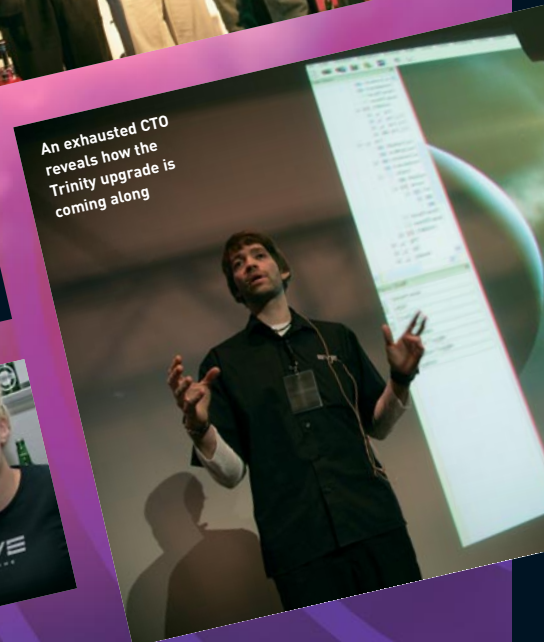
So I raise a glass to you in thanks CCP, for organizing a phenomenal Fanfest this year. It was an experience which is incredibly hard to put into words, but was overwhelmingly enjoyable. See you all next year, and look out for that poster in Reykjavik airport's arrivals section about me winning the lottery. ☺



Left: Ásgeir Jón Ásgeirsson, one of CCP's principal artists, shows off his ship-design talents



An exhausted CTO reveals how the Trinity upgrade is coming along



"Now, evil, that is evil evil... is like regular evil but a bit more... well evil... yes?"



LET'S GET THIS PARTY STARTED

After everything was done and we were distracted by sandwiches and beers, the doors flew open and the tournament/presentation area and the big party started. The whole area was made into a dance club with incredible lighting, and music provided by RöXÖR, the developer's band. It was an almost perfect way to close out the day, with everyone, player and developer alike, just chilling out and having a really great time.