

THE PARTY AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

IT MAY HAVE BEEN CCP'S FIFTH FANFEST, BUT FOR EVE'S HARDEST-WORKING FAN IT WAS THE ONLY ONE THAT MATTERED. HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED WHEN NEW EDEN'S BLOGFATHER GOT ON A PLANE TO THE ICY NORTH



TEXT: CRAZYKINUX

What with playing EVE, his social media evangelising and blog-casting duties, we wonder how he ever managed to find the time to get on a plane

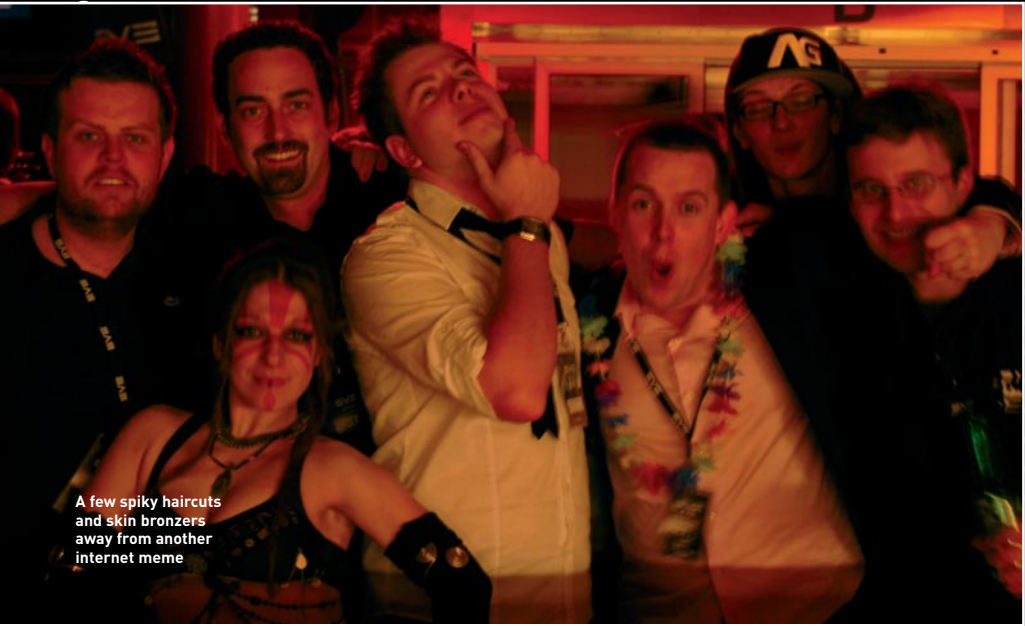
☞ The reply was always the same: "You're going... where?" It came with a dumbfounded look, as if I'd just told them I was flying to the moon. "Reykjavík. It's in Iceland". Then would come, "But... why?" And that would be the beginning of the end. "For a gaming convention," I'd answer. Dead silence. Not a word. "An MMO I play with friends from around the world," I'd add, trying to move the conversation forward, knowing it was probably going into a backward social spin from which there might never be a recovery. Oh dear. I should have answered that I was going there for the natural hot springs and their therapeutic benefits. Or to see the glaciers. Or the Northern Lights. Anything but *the truth*.

This sort of conversation happened many times during the weeks leading up to my departure for Fanfest 2008. Though close friends and family members were familiar and understanding of my internet spaceship meanderings, most acquaintances weren't. And therein would lay the heart of the issue and the source of their bafflement. Playing games with people around the world is accepted, but going on a plane to meet those people isn't what most would call normal behaviour.

Thankfully, as I counted down the last few days before my journey north to the land of the devs, I had the routine down and could answer the same questions without the slightest brain activity, or without much care that people would fear for my sanity at wanting to go to a gaming convention for a game no one had heard of, in a country few had much appreciation of. Maybe they thought *I thought* I was going to the moon. In a sense, I was.

Having read reviews of previous Fanfests in E-ON, for 2008 I was determined to go and experience it for myself and nothing would deter me from the task at hand. By early July, everything was booked – a flight through Boston, then Keflavík, and ☞





A few spiky haircuts and skin bronzers away from another internet meme

from Iceland’s international airport a bus to the lobby at the Grand Hotel (as per Winterblink’s recommendation), I’d even gotten my Fansite Media Pass information, courtesy of CCP Fallout. This was going to be a memorable event.

FLIGHT OF THE BLOGINATOR

I booked my flights so that I would arrive the day before the start of Fanfest. I left home on the Tuesday, and flew into Boston, to enjoy a few hours roaming a huge food court with seating areas. *The true pilgrim is patient, and appreciates the time he is given to reflect on the journey at hand.* As the time of departure for my flight to the land of ice slowly approached, I made my way towards the assigned gate (I’d left the food court by this point, of course), and made myself comfortable.

It is said that EVE players can feel the presence of another capsuleer when in close proximity to them. And indeed, while waiting at the gate, I met several fellow players, from various parts of North America, walks of life and corporate affiliations. The last hour before boarding was spent discussing the historical event that was about to take place in the next few days. Then we boarded. I’d venture to say that 80 per cent of those on board were Fanfest attendees.

A few hours passed and after a long, sleepless flight, we landed in Iceland. I was here. This was it. By the time I arrived at my hotel I was willing to sleep pretty much anywhere. Lucky for us though, November isn’t a high tourist season in Iceland, and my room was ready.

After a few hours I was hungry and ready to hit the town. But where to go for dinner, and with whom? By myself? You see, even though I’d travelled all the way to Iceland to learn about my favourite internet spaceship game, I’d done so by myself. None of my corp mates had tagged along, and neither had members of the EVE blogging community, nor the EVE Blog Pack.

So on the eve of the Fanfest, I was stuck in my hotel room, with no idea where to go to grab a bite, and no one to share that meal with. This was a challenge worthy of me, and I faced it head first, with all the might of a true carebear. After a few emails, to friends who’d been to previous Fanfests, I was told to head to Vegamot, where I was told I’d find good food at reasonable prices and maybe even a few devs hanging around. I had a destination!

HOTEL GATE CAMP

On my way through the hotel lobby to grab a cab downtown I passed a group sitting together. My EVE-attuned gamedar immediately told me these folks were fellow capsuleers. Putting aside every defensive instinct I’d used in-game, I approached the group and blurred out: “You guys here for Fanfest?” The response was immediate and came from what were a group of NMTZ pilots (as well as a few other corps). Within a few minutes of meeting total strangers, I had found some new friends with whom to share some good times. The funny thing is that they

were also headed to Vegamot, where they would meet one of the three chefs of the restaurant – who was also an EVE player.

This kind of situation is something that was to happen many times during my stay in Iceland. Now it’s true that some of the folks I met knew me from *The Drone Bay* and *Micro Warp Cast* podcasts I’ve done, as well as from my blog, but it’s still amazing to introduce yourself to total strangers and within a few minutes find yourself in a heated, but friendly discussion about the best setup in a Brutix, or the best tactics against ninja carebears in attack-mining barges!

Suffice to say that this first night in Iceland ended back at the hotel lobby with a bunch of EVE strangers nursing full stomachs, fast becoming friends. We talked till the wee hours of the next day. My first day in Iceland had come to a very successful end and the Fanfest hadn’t even begun yet.

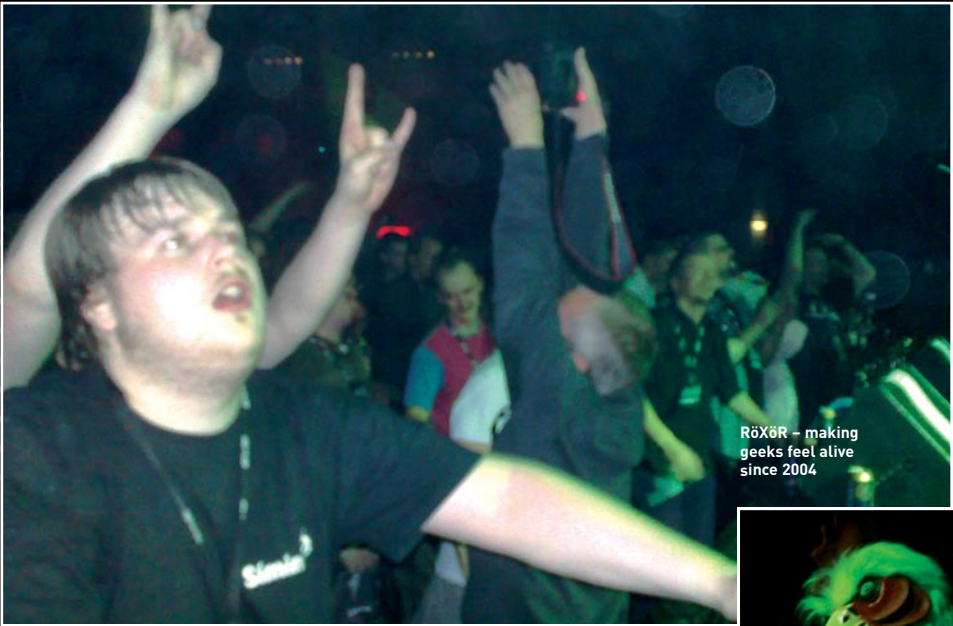
A SLOW START

After a short night of sleep (too short, actually), and a full breakfast shared with one of the guys I’d met the night before – Christoph, an Austrian fellow, game journalist and radio host by trade – we headed to the Laugardalshöll to get our Fanfest passes and peruse the schedule for the day.

As I was to discover, the first day of Fanfest is not as busy as the others, more like a half-day. This is true both in terms of the number of attendees, as well as the sessions and content being presented. The core of the day’s activities revolve around ‘Local Chats’ which are effectively discussion panels where the devs listen to the players, where ideas are presented, questions are asked and two-way conversation follows. These panels are great opportunities for us to suggest ideas and pitch concepts directly to the devs responsible for these areas of EVE. As such, I participated in two panels that day and was able to present my ideas, ask my questions and comment on others’ input, as well as receive feedback from devs such as CCP Hammerhead or CCP Dr.EyjoG.

As a member of the EVE blogging community, and having a dedicated EVE Fansite, I had been given a Fansite Media Pass, which allowed me to access the Press Room. A big thank you goes out to CCP for giving me this opportunity, and to CCP Fallout in particular for providing me with the pass. I was thus able to use this facility to blog directly from Fanfest and let my readers know about what was happening and share a bit of the experience with them. Unfortunately, my interview with EVE TV never materialized, as StevieSG and I never managed to connect. Though I was a bit disappointed, I’ve promised myself not to leave Iceland on my next visit until we get it done!

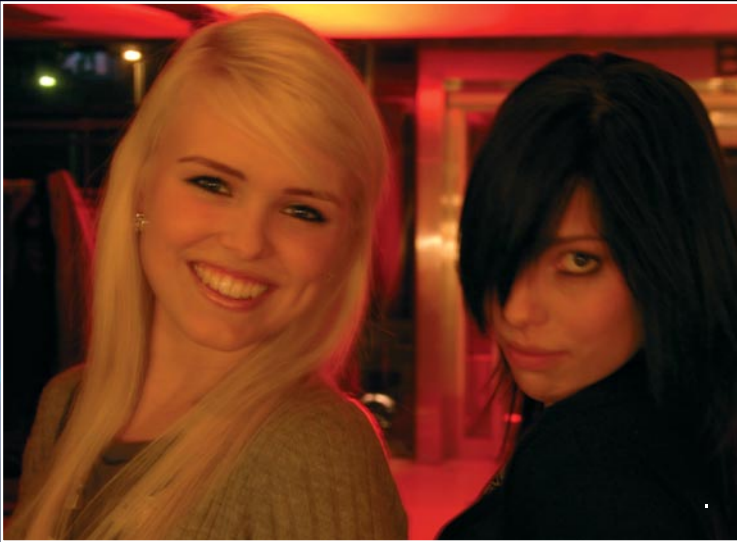
That first day at Fanfest ended with a ‘Meet the devs’ session that had been organized by CCP’s Community Team. It was really fun to meet some of the brains behind EVE, members of the Community Team, as well as folks from EVE Radio, friends such as AlienHand who’d I’d never met face-to-face, or discuss current EVE forum affairs with CCP Mitnal. Devs are real people too – even the ones that police the message boards!



RöXöR – making geeks feel alive since 2004



Fanfest attendees re-enact the Walking in Stations preview to less than stellar effect



Every gaming convention attracts its fair share of overly-made up freaks...er, we’re talking about the chicken man above, that is

The day ended on a high note as I finally had a chance to meet with Xyliana and, together with my new pal Christoph, we shared a good meal at a tiny Thai restaurant. Managing to find the place was an adventure in itself, which I’d be willing to share with any of you next time, as long as there’s a steady flow of ale being provided.

HUG A DEV DAY

Friday was the first full day of Fanfest and I was looking to absorb as much of the experience and news as possible. After a hearty breakfast and a nice short walk in the fresh, yet cool Icelandic weather, Christoph and I headed to the venue. Before the long-awaited ‘Walking in Stations’ presentation by TorfiFrans, we were witnesses to the ever-entertaining Alliance panel. Even though I’m in no way knowledgeable about the political landscape of EVE, I really enjoyed it. The Ivy League’s presentation, done by a slightly hungover Dierdra Vaal, of EVE University was very informative and interesting.

Before the Ambulation presentation though, I did attend another Local Chat panel on the ‘New Player Experience’. Some amazing ideas and suggestions were offered and I was happy to see so much passion in helping new players into the game – both from CCP’s perspective, and even more so from the players. The folks from ISD do an amazing job and deserve all the admiration we may give them. If you know someone in the ISD, make sure to hug them today!

After grabbing a few slices of pizzas and a beer, I quickly made my way to the Tranquility hall where TorfiFrans was about to do his presentation. Everyone was excited about this future addition to EVE, and we all wanted to see how far developments had come, and how soon we were going to enjoy it in-game. After seeing his demo, I can tell you that a lot remains to be done, but the devs are heading in the right direction. The overall feeling we got from the presentation is that CCP wants to give the players as much leeway as possible in order to have the liberties needed to build interesting scenarios for other players, but they also want to keep some control over what we’re able to do. This way, the chances of seeing a dark elf dancing on the causeway are close to none. Well actually they are nil, thankfully!

MEETING AND GREETING

There was still so much to see and learn that I wished I could have cloned myself a few times in order to experience everything. In order to let it all sink in, in between these sessions I would either head to the Press Room to post a few

articles and upload my photos and videos, or I’d sit down with friends to discuss the amazing things we’d all just witnessed.

Besides meeting some of the devs, having the chance to finally sit down with folks you’ve been playing or talking about the game with for years is probably one of the best aspects of the Fanfest. And though I didn’t get to see everyone I wanted to, I did have a chance to meet quite a few folks – Webmandrill from Scotland, Sanfrey from New Zealand, AlienHand and LaVista Vista from Denmark, and Serenity Steele from the Netherlands. I only wish I had had more time, to meet and make other friends.

My second day at Fanfest ended with an hour-long conversation with the head of Marketing at CCP, as well as other players, during the EVE Marketing Panel. Since this panel was being held during the ‘Quiz Show’, it was not very popular and there were less than a handful partaking. Because of this, we were privy to very interesting facts and information about EVE, the marketing efforts, and the upcoming re-launch of the game in retail stores. Did you know that the development costs of the whole game have been paid by the subscribers who have been with the game since its launch? Or that once you’ve subscribed to EVE for more than three years, you’re likely to stay a customer from that point forward? You should have been there!

I took a break on Friday night and decided to head to bed early that evening, knowing that Saturday night was the big event, the Party at the Top of the World! After having uploaded a few hundred shots and posted a few articles, I called it a night.

WORLD DOMINATION

The last day of Fanfest was as busy a day as the previous one. I spent a good part of my morning hanging around the press area with some of the CCP PR folks as well as those from E-ON. (“Hey, would you like to write about your Fanfest experiences in the next magazine?”) After considering an offer from a strange, small English fellow called Zapatero, ☺



Unfortunately, the 'A Lady' t-shirts sold out by the end of the first day – mostly to members of Goonswarm

⌚ I attended a presentation on the current state of the Tranquility server, and how CCP will be moving towards Windows HPC Server 2008. These are big plans for TQ and it was a geek’s dream to hear how CCP is about to create the world’s biggest gaming supercomputer.

Later that afternoon, everyone slowly made their way to the big hall to see Hilmar’s ‘Mother of all Presentations’, the World Domination keynote speeches. Fan anticipation was at its highest while we waited for the presentation to start. I was privileged to be sitting in the media row, and it was quite a sight to look at all the laptops opened on their owners’ laps, keeping them all warm and toasty.

Then it started – a deluge of information! To be honest, looking a month later at the photos I took of the slides we were shown, I’m still amazed at all that we saw. From Hilmar to Nathan to Halldor to Noah and others, we were provided with a plethora of news, upcoming features, and long-term plans, enough to make all those press folks run back to their pods! The excitement it generated kept growing until the house was about to explode. Let’s just say that CCP not only knows how to control crowds, but it also knows how to get them excited. The evening’s party was looking more and more promising!

PARTY TIME

After getting freshened up at the hotel, I made my way back to the venue to join the myriad of fans at the event that rounds off the Fanfest – The Party. Though the place was huge, the ambience was amazing. When I got there, CCP’s music maestro, RealX, was working the crowd in preparation for RÖXÖY, the developer’s in-house musical bear combo. I quickly spotted some familiar faces from my hotel and we slowly made our way around the various bars, to enjoy the sights and, more pertinently, sounds.

That evening was filled with memorable moments, some of which I remember, and others which, well... seem like distant memories. I do recall being interviewed by a Japanese TV crew, meeting four Icelandic beauties and showing them how Canadians move on a dance floor, as well as having conversations with a few of the devs that were there. I’m not sure how I managed to get back to my hotel room, but I did make it in one piece, still dressed and in relatively good shape.

Somehow I completely missed the Sunday morning breakfast (go figure!) and slowly made my way downstairs to wait for the bus that

took us back to the airport. I bid farewell to my new friends from NMTZ and we promised each other we’d meet again at the next Fanfest in 2009.

Iceland is a long way from anywhere. But once a year, a few hundred devotees make their way there to meet with the Gods of their virtual world. There, they renew friendships, make new ones, and celebrate the community they belong to. Looking at it from the outside, you’d have a hard time understanding the reasons and motivation for people getting together to talk about spaceships. I know I was sceptical when I first heard about Fanfest all those years ago. Having returned from the pilgrimage myself, I have to say that I can now understand just how amazing the whole experience truly is!

I will definitely return next year. I hope to see you there, too. ☺

Read up on Crazylinux’s Musings at www.crazylinux.com. To catch all the Fanfest presentations from EVE TV, watch online at www.youtube.com/ccpgames or download from www.eve-online.com/download/videos.

⤴ THE EXCITEMENT GENERATED KEPT GROWING UNTIL THE HOUSE WAS ABOUT TO EXPLODE. CCP CERTAINLY KNOWS HOW TO GET A CROWD EXCITED

An all-action affair – and that was just the planning meeting to make the PvP Tournament charts (ho ho)

