

Runes of Magic: An analysis of a persistent realm

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the now officially released MMORPG – Runes of Magic (ROM). This paper analyzes the design and structure of ROM and its successful features.

Introduction

Runes of Magic (ROM) is a free to download and play fantasy MMORPG, set in the world of Taborea where players uncover magical mysteries and ancient riddles. Players advance from being newbie's to famous heroes by learning new skills and enhancing their abilities by making strategic combinations from the magical runes they come across. The god Ayvenas created these runes, the world, the people and potent oracles waiting to be discovered.

The game is created by Taiwanese Runewaker Entertainment and published by Frogster Interactive Pictures. The game was officially launched on the 19th of March 2009 with Chapter 1: Rise of the Demon Lord. There are many rumors about ROM borrowing heavily from World of Warcraft (WoW), Guild Wars and Azeroth. We won't talk about these similarities in detail but it is worth mentioning

that it makes complete sense to borrow successful features from groundbreaking games like WoW.

ROM comes with a multitude of features including an activatable PvP system, special zones for guild houses, a customizable user interface, individually developed skills/ spells, dynamic dungeons and hundreds of quests. In the future the creators plan to release server wars, where users across multiple servers can fight each other.

Appearance

A player is required to download a custom client capable of connecting to the game over the Internet. Once logged in, they can choose, customize or create a



character, the interface for which is quick and simple and allows zooming in and turning the 3-dimensional character 360 degrees. After that the players can enter a server of their choice. First time users need to go through a tutorial, which teaches them about the basic controls and the interface of the game. Otherwise, the game starts up where you left off. The game is played in third person mode, which is somewhat first person when zoomed in all the way.

The game renders an immersive 3D environment, the quality of which depends on the capabilities of the players' machine. The interface provides options to enhance the graphics and audio along with numerous buttons for accessing in-game functions, skills, backpack and maps on the bottom right of the screen.

Clicking on any of these buttons/ icons yields popup windows that seem to get in the way while playing. This section also includes a customizable skill menu, which allows players to drag and drop the skills into the little rectangles for quick access. This really helps avoiding the popup windows during combat. A customizable map and the players current location is displayed on the top right of the screen while the players' status is displayed on the top left. A log window is displayed on the bottom left which displays chat logs, combat logs, party and guild logs. There are no instructions on how to use the chat window or the map. The enemy or friends status is displayed in the top middle of the screen.

Names of the players as well in-game helpers are displayed floating above their heads. Right clicking on these characters yields a menu, which affords interaction with them. The names and locations of the helpers are also shown on the map. Many other items in the game can also be clicked on to yield a menu or to add them to the backpack.

Dimension

ROM is a persistent realm with seamless architecture and no zone boundaries. Players can choose to explore the world or play quests. Playing quests helps collect gold coins that can be used to purchase various items from dealers including weapons and armor. Quests can be found in the form of tasks from people in the settlements or from message boards. Quests can also help gather gold, runes, attacks, spells, potions and other abilities that can be used in different combinations.

Players can choose to learn new skills and spells that can be developed individually. They can buy recipes to create new items and spells or sell/ trade items they create from their gained skills, in exchange for gold coins. Players have the opportunity to come back and enhance these skills and spells or gain new ones at any point in the game. Runes that players discover can be combined with various items or one another to yield greater powers. These runes need to be used wisely since some of them can't be removed from a combination and could also lead the player down a path of destruction.

ROM also features dynamic dungeons that are never the same when you go back a second time. The treasure and layout is generated dynamically. The game also features housing that players can design and furnish, as they like. In a future release, guilds will be able to design and furnish entire castles, in special zones.

Influences

There is a lot buzz about ROM being a WoW clone. And why wouldn't it be? WoW is the leading game in the fantasy genre with a lot of features that should be considered as a standard for future MMO development. In that regard, the graphical quality and style of ROM is fairly similar. The layout of the interface, in-game functionality, the races and the class system borrow heavily from WoW as well.

Geography

The game is set in the ancient world of Taboria and divided into eight regions with cities in each region – Howling Mountains, Silverspring, Varanas, Asian Valley,



Ystra Highland, Dustdevil Canyon, Sascilia Steppes, Dragonfang Ridge. New regions and cities are added in every major content update. Players progress through the world as they keep playing the game and move on to more advanced quests. I talk mostly about Howling Mountains since I haven't progressed beyond that.

Mountains with lush green vegetation and tall trees surround Howling Mountains, as the name suggests. The Pioneer's Colony is situated right at the beginning of Howling Mountains and is a small village with a few houses scattered across the lush terrain spruced with dealers, guards and players finding their way around. Beyond the Colony there are open grounds that are infested by Fungi and wolves that can be killed in order to gain items, skills or for trade. The Hidden Valley Mine, Helen's Farm, The Crushed Plain are beyond the Howling Mountains before the next settlement which is the Logar Settlement. There are a more areas beyond easier traveled on a mount since the terrain gradually changes and takes longer to travel on foot.

The game begins with the player transported to the gates of the Pioneer's Colony and an in-game helper announces players to check in with the village Council. Once the player enters the Colony and checks in with the Council they are awarded gold coins and coupons to collect free potions, armor and other items. Of course, the player needs to navigate through the colony to acquire these from various dealers. This helps a player get accustomed to movement and basic controls of the game.

Once a player has completed these basic tasks the Council gives them the first quest to prove that they are ready as a warrior. This involves killing some of the Fungi that infest the grounds and bringing back their heads. This quest helps players learn how to use their skills. Players also have a chance to acquire

potions, spells and abilities while playing the quest. Once the quest is completed they are awarded gold. A player can choose to collect and play more quests that other people in the Colony might have or check for available quests on the bulletin board. Or they can move on through the world.

Non-Player Characters

ROM is full of a variety of non-player characters. Players can interact with these characters by clicking on the blinking speech bubble with an exclamation mark, floating above their heads. This is pretty intuitive. Players can get quests or learn important information from some of these characters.

In-game helpers can be found all over the game. These characters can be clicked on or interacted with to gain important information that help players move along in the game.

Dealers and merchants are usually found in the settlements. Players can trade items or buy items from them. Items include but are not limited to weapons, armor, potions and recipes for making these.

Instructors and trainers can be found in various settlements. Most of them can be found in the Logar Settlement. These characters train the players in particular professions like tailoring, mining, carpentry, blacksmithing, alchemy, etc. Once

these skills are acquired players can make their own items or purchase recipes for items they want to make.

Other characters include Fungi, wolves, bears, animals, dwarves, gremlins, other races and newer kinds of characters and magical creatures get introduced as the player progresses through the game.

Player Characters

Players can choose from six classes – Warrior, Scout, Rogue, Mage, Priest, Knight and more coming in the future. Each class has it's own specialty.

Players can customize their characters height, body

structure, hair and face in an intuitive interface before beginning the game. A player has the option to maintain multiple characters on a server but not across servers.

After level 10, players can pick a primary and secondary class for their character.

This is called the dual class system. The user is allowed to add a secondary class that enables a secondary set of skills. This opens up a whole new variety of



tactical options and class combinations. This feature allows customizing characters to match a player's play style and adds another level of immersion.

Housing

Players can buy and start decorating their houses, in Logar, right from the start of the game. Players can furnish their house to suit their desire by choosing from a variety of furniture options and placing it in the house. All the objects can be clicked on and interacted with. Players can also interact with the fireplace and lighting to set the mood of their house. Treasure chests can be used for item storage and mannequins for storing a change of armor and clothes. Players also have the option of placing crafting sites of their chosen profession within their homes.

Players' multiple characters use the same home so it's possible to leave items and potions for other characters to use. This is a really neat feature that doesn't require a player to log in as another character to do something specific. House expansions will be available in the future that'll allow users more floors, bigger rooms, attics, etc.

Equipment

Clothes and armor come in various styles to suit a player's class, style and allows color customization. This includes leather armor, silk robes, lined jackets, chain ring and metal ring armor. Players can choose to craft these themselves or

buy these from merchants. Players can also combine runes with clothes or armor to create more powerful protection.

A variety of weapons are available to players. These range from clubs, daggers, crossbows, to long elegant swords and massive two-handed axes. Players can craft these themselves or purchase them from merchants. Many weapons are class specific and can't be used by other classes.

Trinkets, magical items, food and potions are also available for purchase from merchants. Users can use trinkets and magical items to gain bonuses and additional resistance. Potions can be purchased from alchemists and can be used to regenerate health or mana. Players can learn to cook and provide these for themselves.

Attributes

Items in ROM tend to have magical properties that can add different attributes to the players' character when worn. These can include enhancement of strength, dexterity, attack, power, defense, wisdom or enhanced damage. Some items also have special properties like granting the wearer resistance to fire. Some of these items or equipment can be combined with magical runes or crystals to yield bonuses and enhanced power levels. These need to be combined strategically though because the runes can't enhance the item beyond its capabilities. It could also yield unexpected results like lowering power levels as opposed to increasing

them. This behavior adds another level of immersion that enables the player to learn more about the runes and equipment besides experimenting with different combinations.

Profession System

ROM features various professions that players can equip themselves with.

Professions have four ranks – apprentice, craftsman, specialist and master. A player can take up a profession by simply talking to a trainer and improve their skills by crafting items and collecting the necessary materials. Players need to visit a trainer after reaching the highest level in their current rank to progress to the next. Players need to be near the tools when crafting items. These tools can be found in settlements and are indicated by a large green arrow pointing down to them, with an icon of the type of tool floating above it.

Players can also purchase recipes to craft specific items. They can then trade these items for gold or use them for their own purposes. Players can choose to take up multiple professions at various ranks. Crafting custom items allows the players to create improved equipment that could contain more rune slots to enhance the items power levels.

Combat System

The combat system in ROM depends on the players' equipment and advancement of fighting skills. Each class has it's own set of distinctive attacking

skills and are codependent on other classes. Skills can be used in a variety of combinations to generate extra damage or special effects. Groups of players need to work together to discover these combinations. Players can use various tactics to defeat the enemy and gain experience, fame, trophies or other items, on victory. In case of death, a player can be resurrected on location by a priest or will spawn at a holy stone circle.

Dynamic Dungeons

ROM includes dynamic dungeons that can be found in the form of caves and mines all over the world of Taborea. The layout and items in the dungeons are never the same the second time a player visits them. In these dungeons players find various creatures and demons and are faced with a variety of challenges that yield bonuses, fame and fortune. Player groups have the option to battle other groups in special PvP dungeons.

PvP and Guild Wars

There are almost no limitations on who can be attacked in Taborea. Players maintain various ranks of reputation that indicates their level and what it would require attacking them. Unfortunately, the PvP feature is only activated after a player reaches level 15.

Communicative Devices

The primary mode of communication in ROM is the chat window that can be seen on the bottom left corner of the interface. This window logs general in-world, guild and party conversations. Players can also maintain friendlists through the functions menu. Friends can be added by clicking on them and selecting the 'add as friend' option.

Survey Results

A short online survey was conducted and posted on the Runes of Magic forums. The purpose of the survey was to identify types of players, their play styles and what they think about the game. The results are as follows:

- All of the audience who answered the survey were male
- 80% of the audience were between the age of 18-35 years old and 20% were above 35 years old
- 40% of the audience plays ROM everyday, 60% plays a few time a week
- 80% of the audience have more than 2 characters
- Mage is the most popular class (60%) and Rogue is the second (40%)
- Reasons for choosing their particular character ranged from –
“I kind of like to think of these classes as matching my online personality that's evolved over playing several MMOGs over time.”
to
“I cant duel wield with my priest WTF!”

- 80% of the audience like to play missions, 40% of which like to play missions with friends. The remaining like to explore new areas
- 75% of the audience plays World of Warcraft
- Responses to what they like/dislike about ROM ranged from “like - endless gameplay and ambience. dislike - repetitiveness and time required at higher levels”
to
“Its one of the better free mmos”
- All of the audience uses Facebook and/or Twitter

Conclusion

I believe Runes of Magic is a successful game in that not only does it incorporate successful features, structure and conventions from its precedents; it has built upon these in an innovative way. The runes system, player housing, dynamic dungeons, guild wars and character advancement are a few features that provide the additional layer to immersion that would interest users to participate.

The ROM team offers free updates with big changes every few months that doesn't allow users to get bored and leave. The biggest advantage that ROM has over all other games is that it's completely free to download and play. That's a very tempting deal to newbie's as well as established MMO players.