

A Brief History of



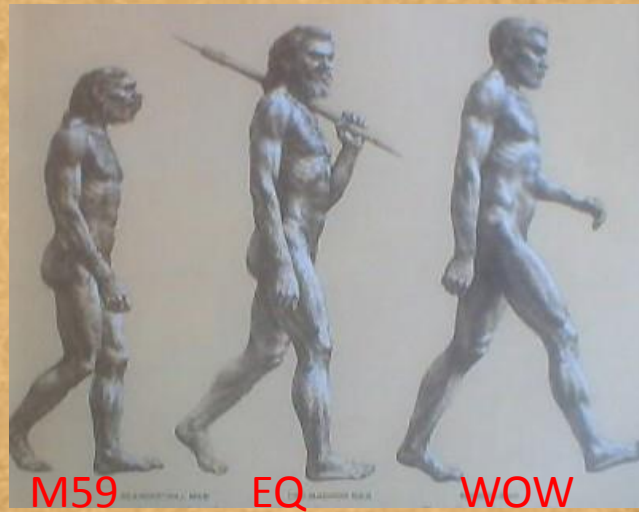
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# WHAT WAS MERIDIAN 59?

An early 'massively multiplayer' title put out by 3DO, most notable for:

- Being the 'first' MMO by a major company? (**Habitat?**)
- Being the 'first' 3D persistent experience? (**Air Warrior?**)
- Being the 'first' unmetered, portal-free commercial MMO? (**Aradeth?**)
- Being the 'first' to use the term 'massively multiplayer'? (**Maaaybe**)

I think its just best to say that we were the missing link.





# 3D ENGINE

Meridian 59 used a sprite-based BSP engine similar to the early Doom games.



# THE UNMETERED ERA

Right before we launched, AOL changed their billing model to be monthly instead of hourly

Because of this, Meridian 59 pioneered the premium box sale (\$60) + \$9.95 billing rate.

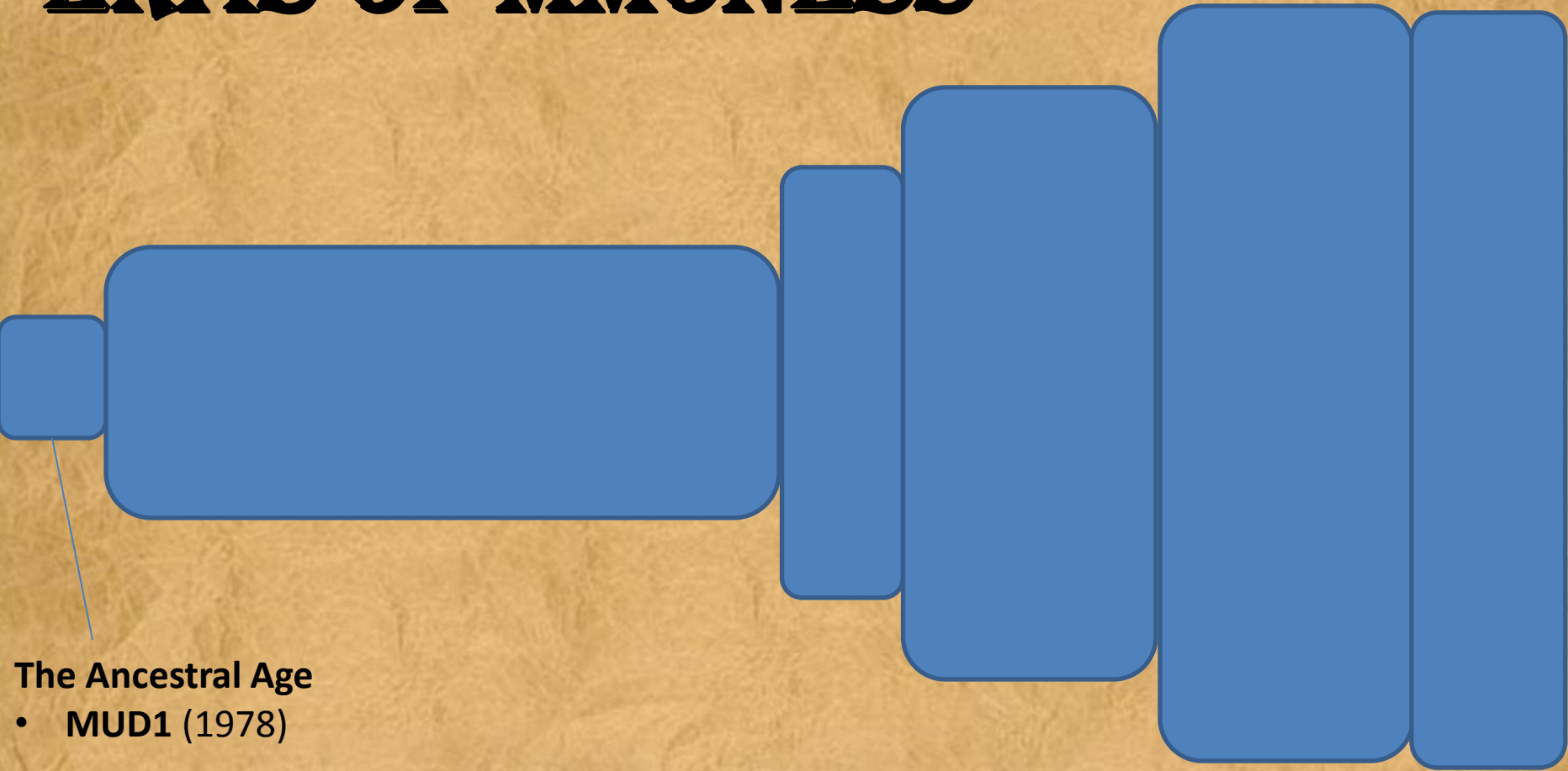
Before this, online gaming typically required an hourly fee.

On top of what you were paying AOL or Genie.





# ERAS OF MMONESS



**The Ancestral Age**

- **MUD1 (1978)**

# ERAS OF MMONESS



## The Portal Age

- Islands of Kesmai (1984)
- Habitat (1985)
- Gemstone (1987)
- Dragon's Gate (1990)
- The Imagination Network (1993)

# ERAS OF MMONESS



## The Unmetered Age

- **Meridian 59** (1996)
- The Realm (1996)
- Dark Sun Online (1996)
- Furcadia (1996)
- Underlight (1997)

# ERAS OF MMONESS



## The Massive Age

- Ultima Online (1997)
- Everquest (1999)
- Asheron's Call (1999)
- Dark Age of Camelot (2001)
- Shadowbane (2003)
- Star Wars Galaxies (2003)



# ERAS OF MMONESS



## The Post-WoW Age

- **World of Warcraft** (2004)
- **Guild Wars** (2005)
- **Lord of the Rings Online** (2007)
- **Warhammer Online** (2008)
- **Star Wars: The Old Republic** (2011)

# ERAS OF MMONESS



## The Free to Play Age

- Secret World (2012)
- Guild Wars 2 (2012)
- ???

## The MUD Tangent

- **AberMUD** (1987)
- **LPMUD** (1989)
- **DIKU MUD** (1990)
- **TinyMUSH** (1990)
- **Merc** (1992)
- ???

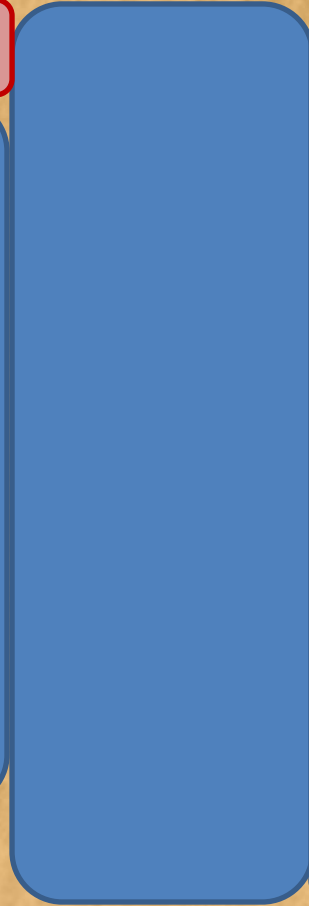
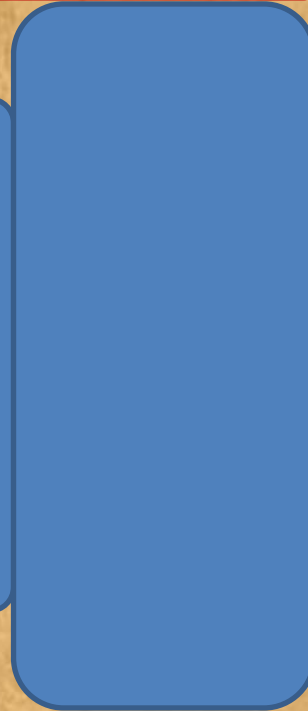




## The Asian Tangent

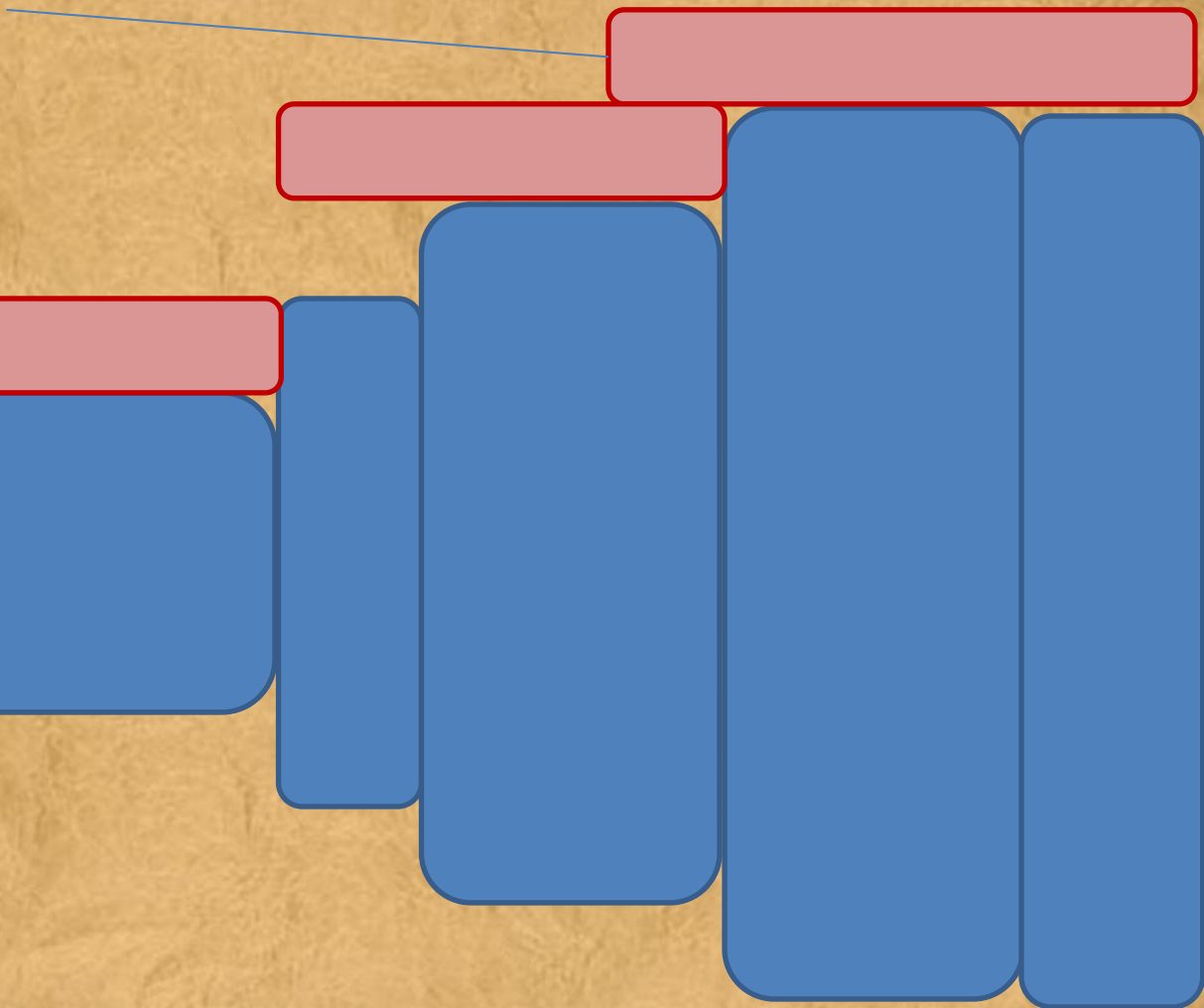
- **Kingdom of the Winds** (1996)
- **Lineage** (1997)
- **Knight Online** (2004)

*Many, many others...*



## The Kids Tangent/Warning Shot

- **Maple Story** (2003)
- **Gaia Online** (2003)
- **Runescape** (2004)
- **Wizard 101** (2008)



# WHAT WENT RIGHT?

1. We were in the right place in the right time.

# WHAT WENT WRONG?

1. We didn't know what the hell we were doing.
2. We didn't have any money to do it with anyway.
3. So pretty much everything.

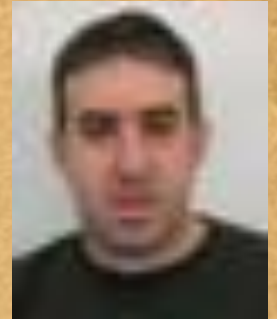


# THE TECH BROTHERS



In 1993, two brothers (Chris and Andrew Kirmse) decided to use Andrew's last free summer before entering the corporate slog to code a **door game** for a BBS.

Inspiration: "Scepter of Goth", a text-based MUD from the mid 80s by Interplay.

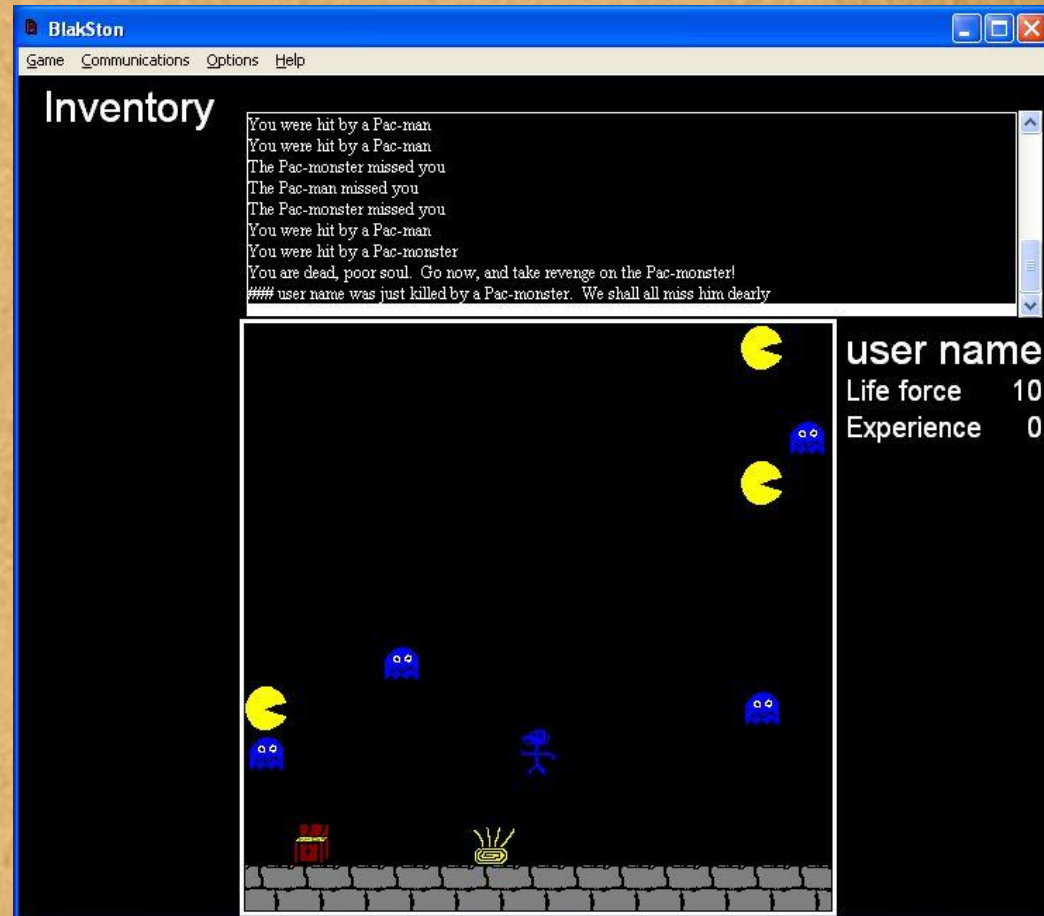


*"We had little idea what we were getting into. It took us three trips to the local computer store to get the right parts to set up our two-machine network, and we had next to no knowledge of computer graphics. We were both young (I was 21 and Chris was 19) and knew basically nothing about the game industry, or even the fact that there were huge companies somewhere churning out games. On the other hand, our complete ignorance was a great advantage when creating something that hadn't been done before." - Andrew*

# NO, REALLY

The earliest known screenshot of Meridian 59 (then called Blackstone).

Programmer art.



# AN RPG TAKES FORM

Blackstone with some just slightly less terrible programmer art.



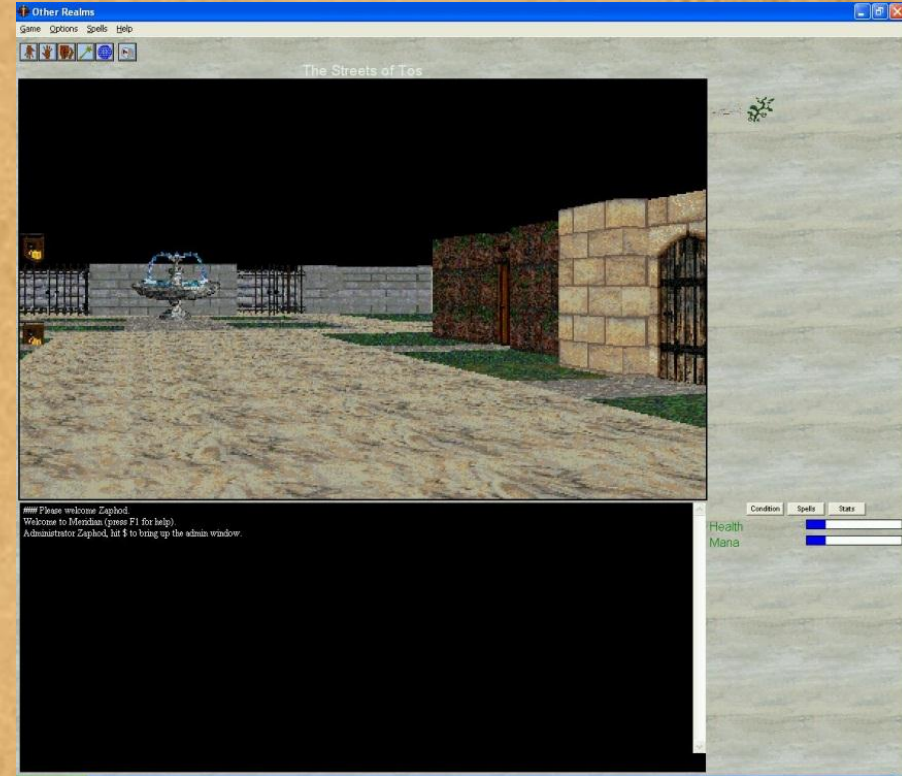
MERIDIAN 59



# GOING 3D



Due to lack of art, the first monster in the M59 engine was a Cyberdemon.



*"[I got a book about writing] a raycasting graphics engine on the level of Wolfenstein 3D. That week I rewrote the client to use a similar engine. While we were excited to see some 3D in the game, it was slow and didn't actually look too good. Our hand-drawn trees and brick walls looked even worse in 3D than they had in 2D. Still, there was a spark of excitement whenever you would see another player walk up to you in 3D. " – Andrew Kirmse*

# THE BUSINESS BROTHERS



In 1992, two brothers who worked at GE Medical Systems were getting disenfranchised with their jobs. Mike had designed an RPG in the past, and thought that online games was going to happen.

Inspiration: Text MUDs and the wacky idea of putting art on a CD (remember, Myst wasn't out yet)



*“ We worked with a small group of programmers in Sweden for a while and seemed to make some real progress with the idea of a multiplayer RPG with the world assembled out of bitmap elements on the client side (putting that on CD was our real breakthrough, though it sounds comical to say so now). Then they totally flaked out on us, and there wasn't much we could do about it. Not a good time. ” – Mike Sellers*





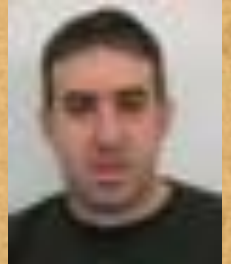
# ARCHETYPE INTERACTIVE



In 1994, the four met via a Usenet posting. The Sellers were impressed with the technical base that the Kirmses had.

After all, the Kirmses already had a tech base that could hold 30 people!

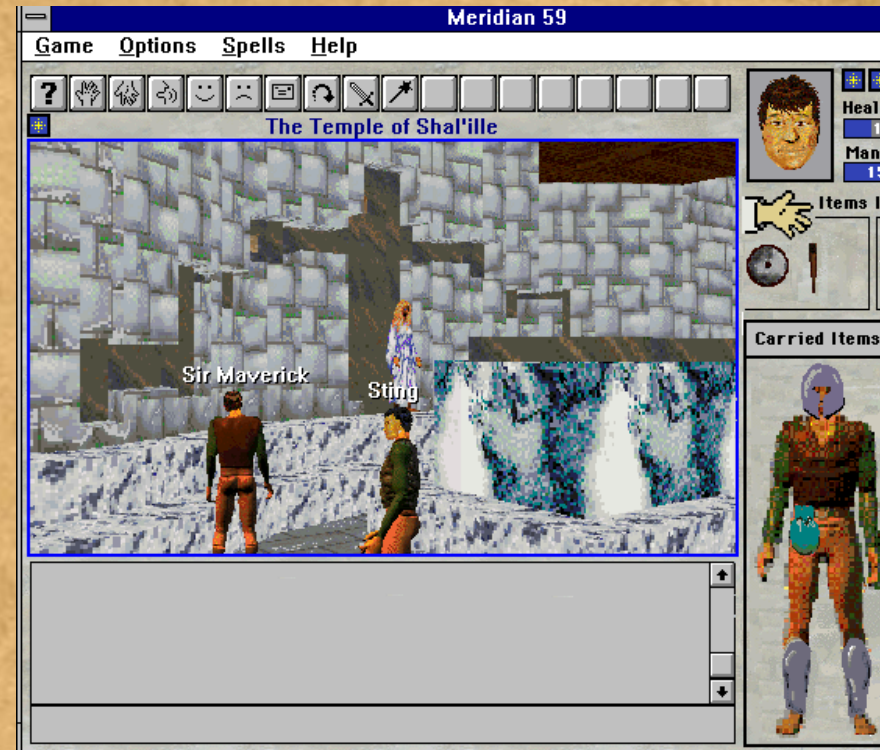
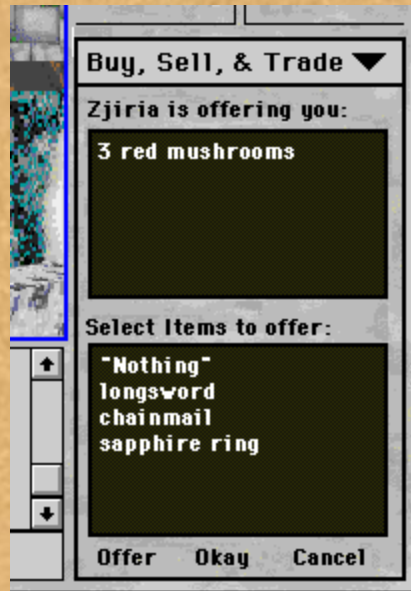
A deal is signed relatively quickly.





# DIVISION OF DUTIES

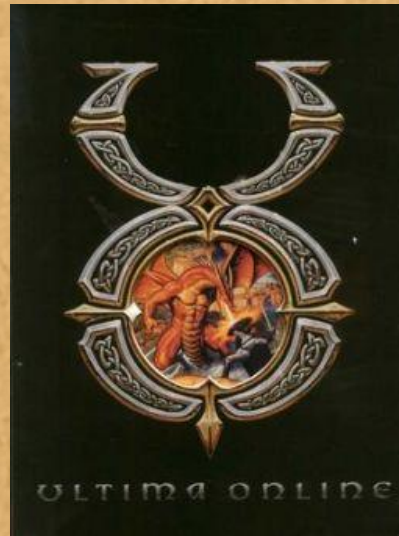
The Kirmses would handle tech. The Sellers would handle design, contracting artists, and chasing money.



Early UI mockups by Mike Sellers.

# DESIGN

Chasing money ended up taking most of Mike's time.  
So he tried to hire this guy to take over design



But he was busy.



And that's how I got into the  
games industry.



# THE NAME

Once Archetype was forged, the first name of the game was **Terranova**.

However, there were concerns that that might already be trademarked.

So instead we chose **Meridian**.

A week later, we discovered that one was definitely trademarked.

We slapped a number on the end, which solved the issue in the short term: **Meridian 59**.

The fact that naming a sequel would be tough was non-obvious.

The backstory around the name was totally retconned in after the fact months later, and still has no relation to what you experience in the game





# THE RIGHT PLACE...

Two other key things that contributed to us being in the right place at the right time:

- Windows 95: I.e. the death of DOS
- The rise in SLIP/PPP Internet Connections



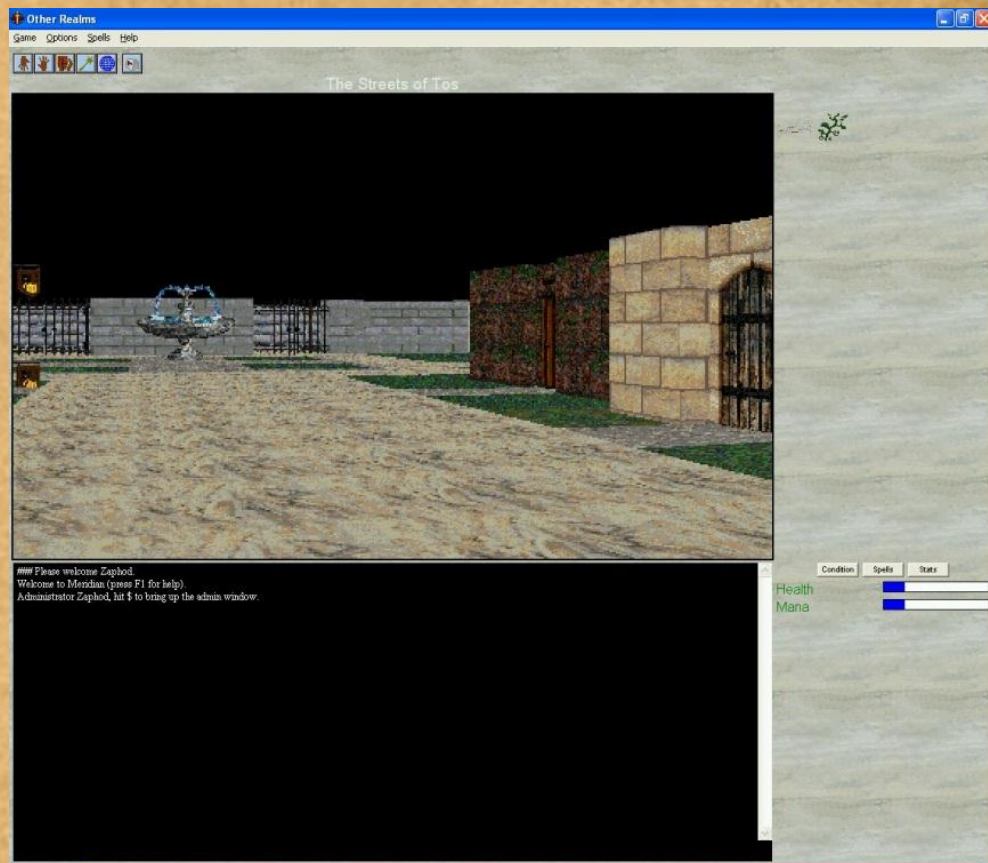
# LEVEL EDITOR

The city of Tos (my one significant world building experience).

The Editor was a hacked Doom editor (DoomEdit).

The first version of it would crash if you had angles other than 90 degrees, which limited worldbuilding greatly. Especially forests.

We wouldn't have time to revisit them all. We actually shipped with some forests with 90 degree angled walls.





# CHARACTER ART

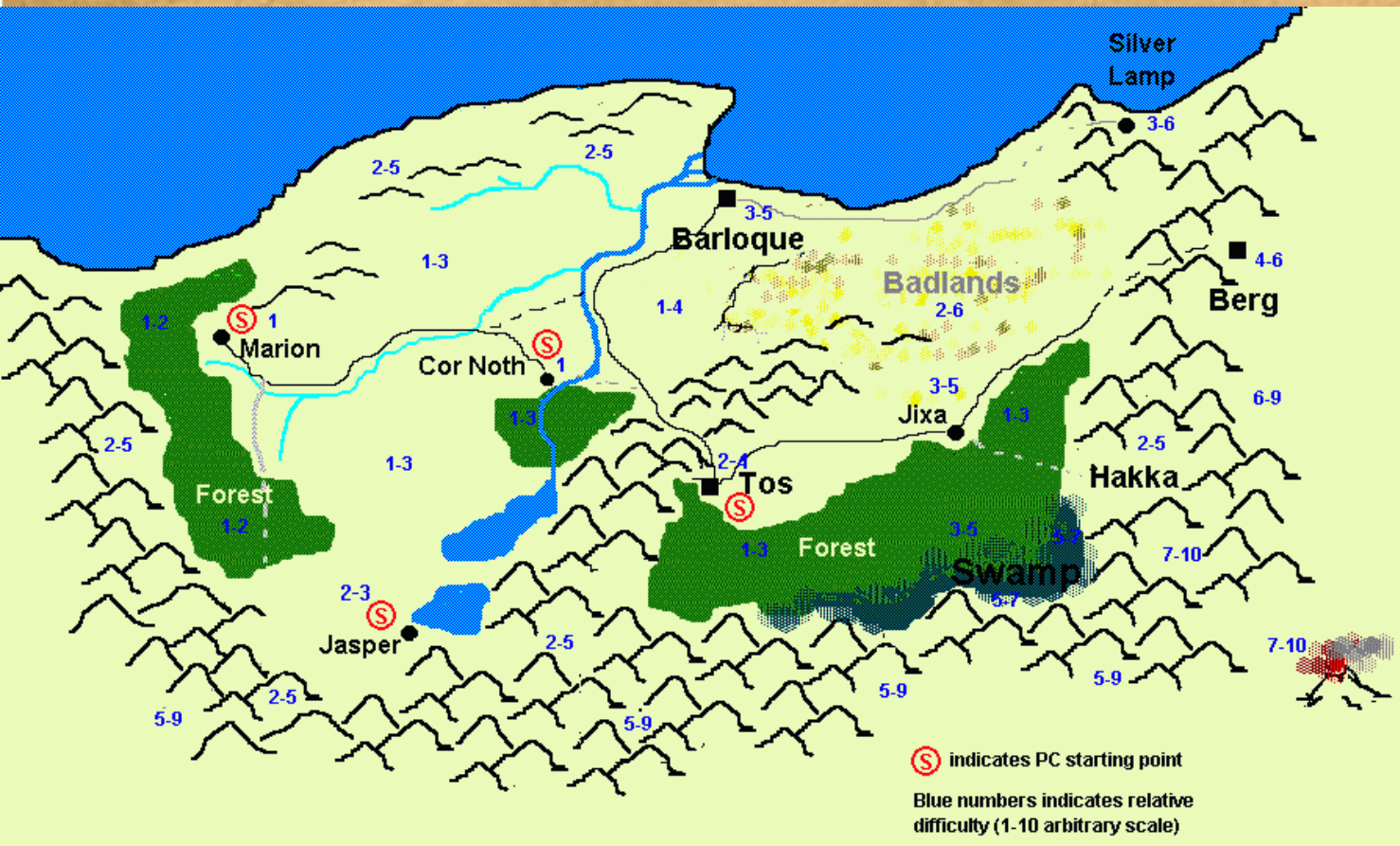
The characters were pretty much straight out of Poser (beta 1.0!)



MERIDIAN 59



# OUR FIRST WORLD MAP



This is probably my first professional design document.

The eastern rim would be cut, but otherwise this is what we shipped.

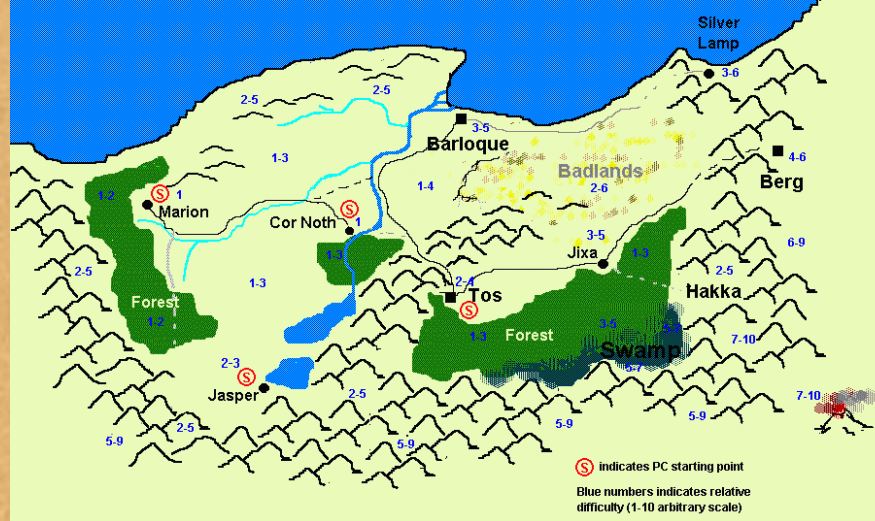


# OUR FINAL WORLD MAP



**MERIDIAN 59**





Compare!

MERIDIAN 59



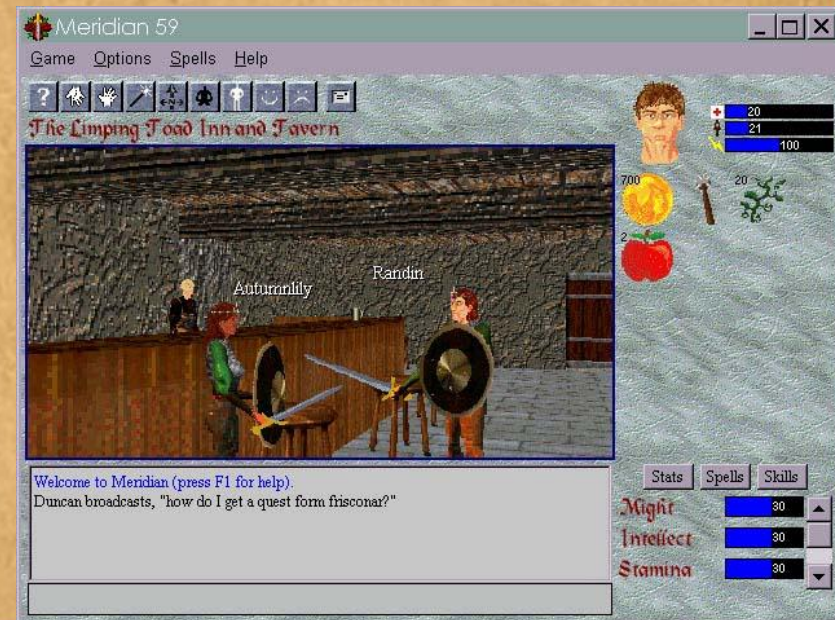
# CHASING MONEY

*"Steve and John (Hanke) were in biz school at Berkeley at the time too -- we actually had our original box packaging design done by one of John's classes there!" – Mike Sellers*

The game server for these demos was a x86 box in Chris' dorm room.

All of us would log in at the same time to make the world feel populated.

As the new guy, I got to demonstrate the female art.



**MERIDIAN 59**

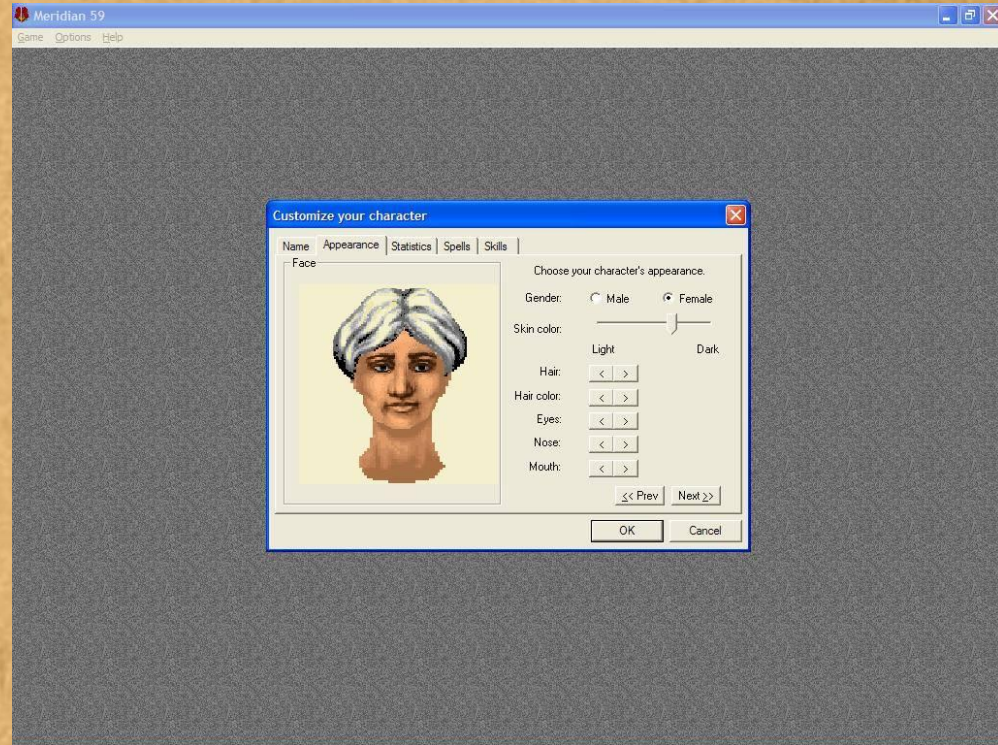


# CHARACTER CREATION

Look at that fine Windows 95 default UI theme!

Art for the faces was an order of magnitude a higher resolution than that of the bodies.

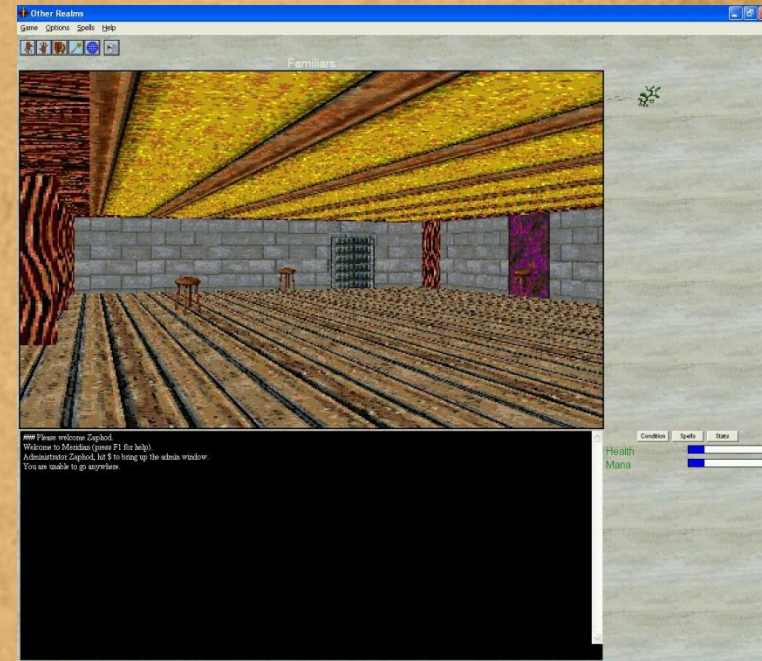
Meridian 59 had facial expressions from the outset (ability to smile and frown).



# ALPHA!

To generate buzz, on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1995, we put the game up for download and posted about it on a couple of newsgroups.

At this time there was one quest, no advancement, no spells, no guilds, and very very rudimentary combat.



*“For me, the high point of the entire project came the next morning, when I got up and logged in to find four other players online. One of them was the owner of MPG-Net, an older online gaming system, who had solved our quest and explored the entire game overnight. Our early testers were very enthusiastic despite the lack of game play and the presence of numerous crippling bugs.” – Andrew Kirmse*



# EARLY BUZZ

In print magazines, so you you know it's real!

Note the bar wasn't very high.  
"Level Advancement! Spells!"

## Meridian 59

One of the most exciting and fast-paced portions of the Internet these days are the online roleplaying games. Typical of these new breed of online games is *Meridian 59*, from 3DO, which was demonstrated at the Symposium, impressing many of the general press who had yet to see Internet gaming. Using a 3D engine and featuring such roleplaying standbys as spells, magic items, and level advancement, *Meridian 59* allows hundreds of players to interact simultaneously in a rich, fully-realized virtual world. (For more information on *Meridian 59*, see our July '96 news section).



A screen shot from *Meridian 59*, one of the featured games at Intel's Internet Symposium.

**MERIDIAN 59**



# EARLY BUZZ

## Meridian 59

Company: 3DO  
Tech Support: [meridian59-support@3do.com](mailto:meridian59-support@3do.com)  
Release Date: Available Now  
Category: Online Roleplaying Game  
Required: Windows 95, 486/66, 8MB RAM, 27MB  
hard-drive space, SVGA, Mouse  
Install: MERIDIAN.SETUP.EXE

The online world keeps getting bigger and bigger, and online roleplaying games have become a huge part of that. *Meridian 59* came along right at the beginning of the online RPG revolution, and it has time and experience on its side. With its large user base, tested and proven software, and competitive rates, it's a strong contender in the online market. It's worth a look.

Here's the nitty-gritty: Once you sign up, you've got five days to check out *Meridian 59* for free. After that, you can go to the registration web site ([meridian.3do.com/registration](http://meridian.3do.com/registration)) and register as a paying user. The fees are subject to change, but at press time the charge was \$14.95 for a one-time activation fee and \$9.95 a month for unlimited playing time.

In order to connect to *Meridian 59*, you'll need to have a SLIP/PPP connection to the Internet — the kind of connection you get through an Internet service



The first-person 3D world of *Meridian 59* opens up new horizons for online roleplaying games.

provider (ISP). When you set up the program, you'll need to visit [meridian.3do.com/trial/pcgamer](http://meridian.3do.com/trial/pcgamer) (note that there's no "www" at the beginning of the address) and sign up for the trial. Your account information will be sent to you via E-mail.

*Meridian 59* is a land filled with pos-

sibilities, with thousands of people logging on every day. The social interaction means just as much as fighting various monsters, so smile, and expect to meet more people than you ever thought you could without leaving your computer desk! [Ed. Note: For more on *Meridian 59*, see our Online Gaming feature, starting on page 65.]

Previews and reviews had to spend 2 paragraphs explaining how you needed an SLIP/PPP connection, and to pay a subscription fee.

# MERIDIAN 59



# BETA!

Our beta build had no PK rules, so when we got our next major build up, this is what the spawn-in at the zone looked like.

We very hurriedly put in PK rules.

Players complained about the nerf.

Still, the game was so full all the time (35 people!) we had to kick people off to get on ourselves.





# WORLDBUILDERS!

Tim Schubert and Rob Ellis are hired to make zones for the game, so I can focus on scripting and game design.

Well, 'hired' is a loose term as Rob was initially contributing levels to us for free.

This is when I learned that I am not a very good world builder.



**MERIDIAN 59**

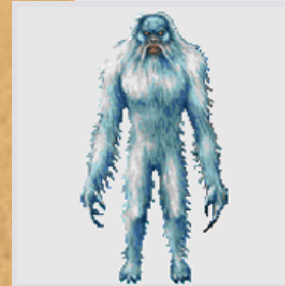
# CONTENT

Content was WAY more expensive when art was involved than when you could make rooms in all text.

Our original art list involved 30 monsters (mostly giant insects of some sort), 7 weapons, a small handful of particle effects and maybe 30 zones.

Most art was done remotely by inexpensive student-level artists. Design iteration with art was non-existent. Sometimes they'd disappear for months at a time.

One of the good ones was Chris Sellers, whose addition meant that Sellers brothers now outnumbered Kirmses 3 to 2.





# WWUOD?

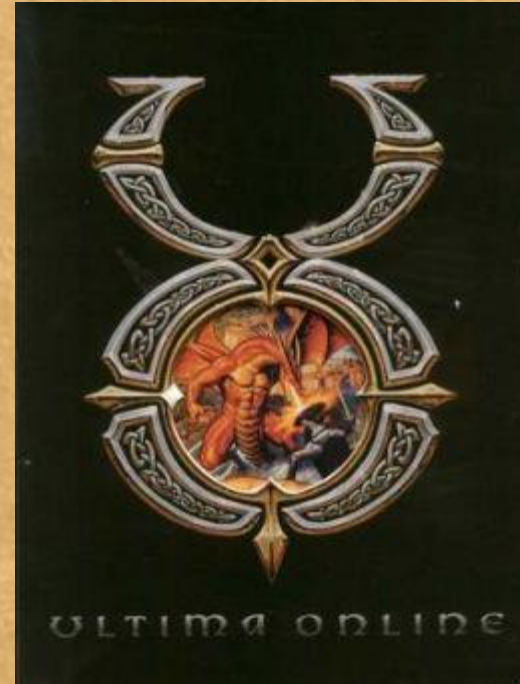
We looked closely at what UO was doing, figuring they had greater design thinkers and resources than we did.

They were abandoning levels and going with a 'use-based' advancement system, so we copied that.

This was probably my worst design decision on Meridian.

Also, my brother would like me to mention that he told me so at the time.

Every skill had its own advancement path that needed coding, which means bugfixing and exploit-proofing was very time consuming, and the game ended up by definition feeling grindy.



# MANA NODES

We couldn't figure out how to make your mana pool go up in a use-based system, so instead we put objects in the game that gave your player a permanent stat increase.

They required 'jumping\*' puzzles to get to, and rewarded explorers. They were a huge hit, and we started to get more creative placing them (making them timelocked, making them require groups to do puzzles, etc).

Guilds would go on 'world tours', taking newbies through to get all of them.



They were the inspiration for Datacrons in SWTOR, and possibly for Vistas in Guild Wars 2 as well.

\*More like 'falling puzzles, as we had no jump.



# THE UNDERWORLD

Death sent you to the underworld.

The idea was that you had to fight monsters and solve a puzzle in order to get out.

We quickly discovered that players are in no mood for any of this when they have just died.



We recycle the zone and replace the puzzle to put in a mana node you have to die (with 4 friends) to complete.

# THE BREAKING POINT

At this time, I was writing most of the design documents, coding systems, as well as acting as what passed for QA and CS for our tiny game.

I literally had nightmares about our team members begging for change on street corners because I couldn't pull it off.

Of course, I'd never met any of them, so my dreaming brain just made up appearances and assigned it to them.

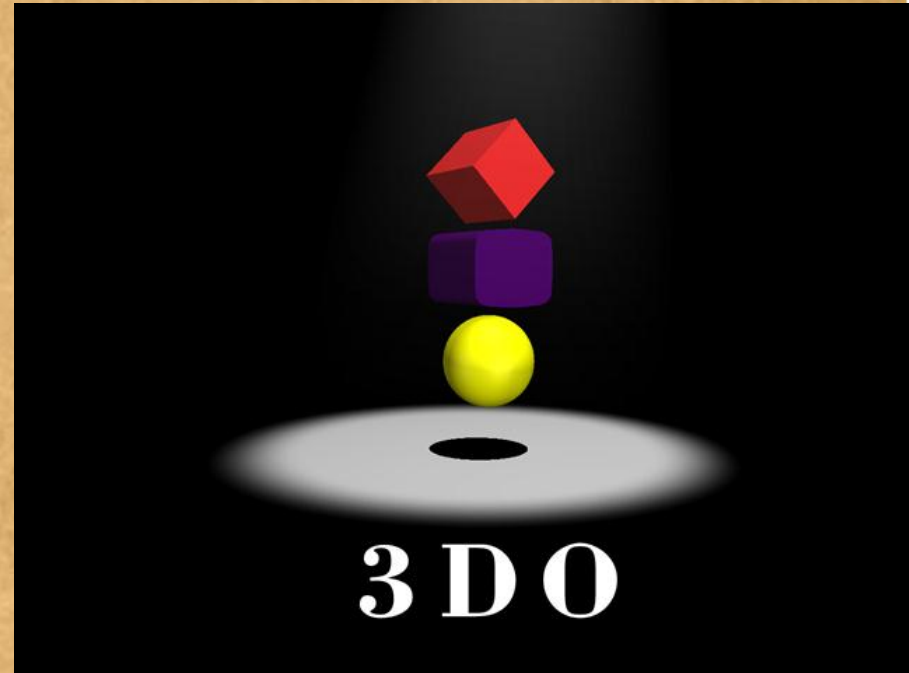




# 3DO

Our demo caught the attention of 3DO, a game company looking to abandon making hardware.

Trip Hawkins was very passionate about online gaming being the future.

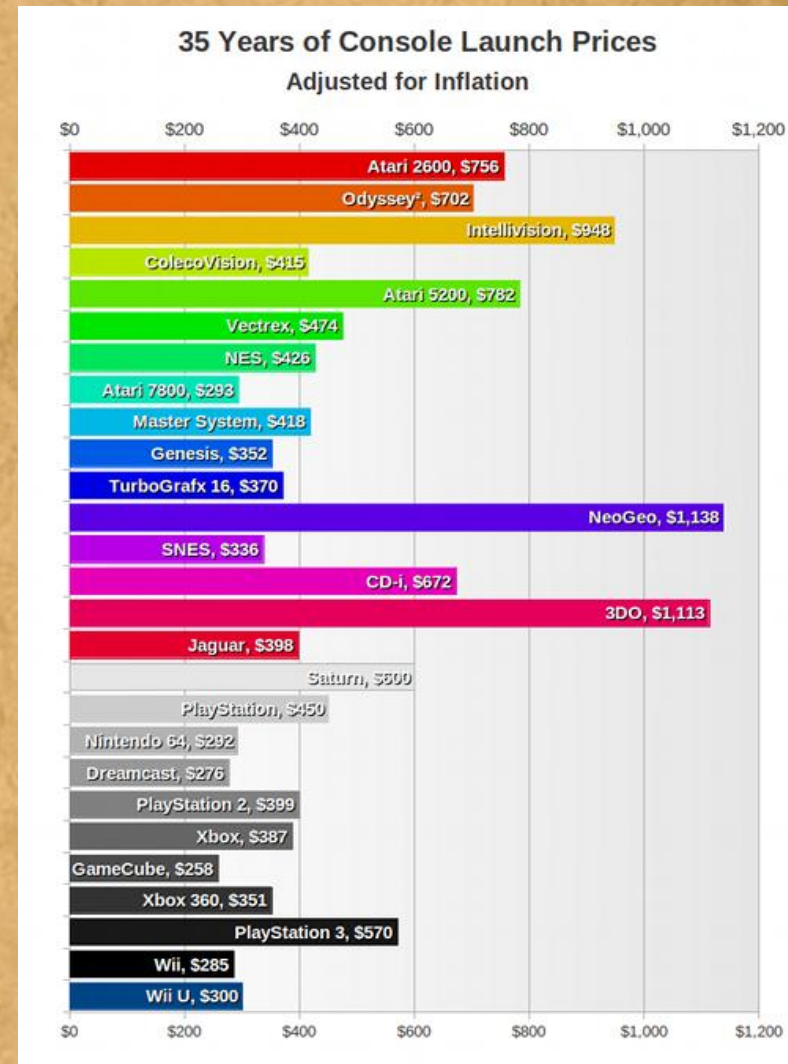


# THE DEAL

More to the point, 3DO needed to get out of the console space in a hurry.

A deal was put together to purchase Archetype very quickly, rumored price of \$5M in 3DO stock options with a 6 month vest time.

Unfortunately.



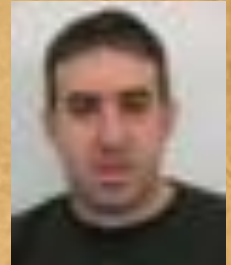
MERIDIAN 59



# YOU MUST GATHER YOUR PARTY

We all moved to San Francisco and met for the very first time.

Nobody looked like I imagined them.



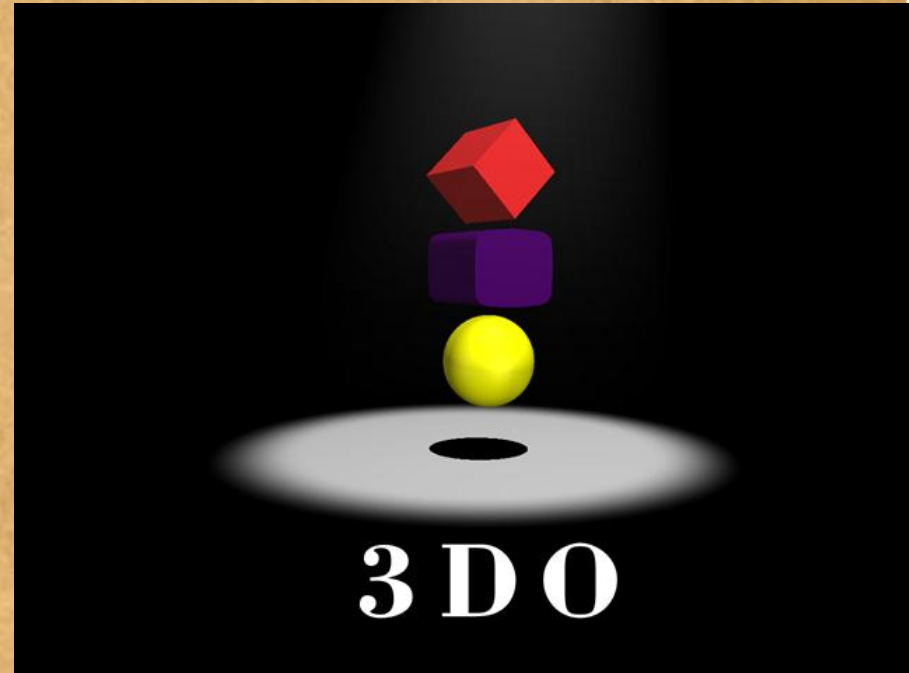
# BEING A FEEDER FISH

Before buying us, 3DO promised they weren't eager to rush us out the door, and that they would give us time to add content and replace art to become a AAA game.

This turned out to be... inaccurate. 3DO was using us to learn about the business for bigger, more ambitious online titles they had in the works.

One of these other projects involved giant robots playing baseball in space.

3DO would buy Archetype in June, and we shipped in September.





# NPC ART

They did give us an art director for those two months, who determined that all we had time to do was to upgrade the look of all of our NPCs.

Given we only had about 2 dozen of them, this was pretty easy.

Still, the look of them was pretty sharply different from everything else in the game.



# GUILD HALLS

Last major system before ship were guilds and guild halls. The system was meant to create gameplay without creating content.

There were 10 guild halls (most servers had about 30 guilds), which meant that if you wanted one, you had to take it.

Also, guild halls varied wildly in quality, so players wanted to move up.

This drove a ton of politics and player dynamics, even if guild halls were pretty much useless.





# CHAT

Meridian had global chat, and also had global chat spam. We found a novel solution.

We made it take half your energy (the pool used to use non-magic skills).

Which meant you could only chat about twice per minute, and only if you were safe. This is less easy to identify in a PK-oriented game.

It also happened to penalize warriors more than wizards.



# SHIP!

25000 players played the beta before ship.

Meridian 59 Shipped on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1996.  
(3DO fiscal was October 1<sup>st</sup>).

Setting a time-honored tradition, the disk was printed while we were still fixing emergency bugs we would patch in.

Time to virtual prostitution in-game: 8 hours.

Estimated budget: \$300,000.



Given my current project, that's kind of funny.

# MERIDIAN 59



# TECH

The game engine was not cutting edge, but the tech was remarkably robust.

We had one server crash in the first six months of operations. This was when a CSR put a troll in someone's backpack.

Stability and memory usage was so good that we tried stopping planned weekly downtimes.

That's when we discovered that all timers in the game would stop working after 22 days of uptime.



# FEATURES

## Things we had at ship:

- In-game Mail
- In-game Message Boards
- Integrated Patching
- In-game Guilds
- Who List

## Things we didn't have at ship:

- Crafting
- Grouping
- Multiple characters per account
- Banks
- Tutorials
- Loot Sharing
- Respec
- Remappable Keys
- Auction House
- Jumping
- A Quest Log
  - Or, for that matter, quests
- Character Sheet
- Quickslot bars
- Friends List
- Customizable GUI
- In-Game CS Help
- FRIGGIN MOUSELOOK



**MERIDIAN 59**



# STRATEGY GUIDE

## MERIDIAN 59



**Y**ou and thousands of other Internet explorers are about to join forces in the first 3D animated, multi-user RPG on the Net! Band together with an international cast of real players—like yourself—as you explore and battle fantastic monsters or each other. Unlike a typical PC product, Meridian 59 is ONLY played on the Internet, but don't worry because the game comes with Netscape Navigator™ and one-button access to the Net. It's simple to let your Internet quest begin, it's harder to stay alive. Here are some tips:



### Keys to your survival

- Know your enemy and make sure you don't take on opponents you're not ready to handle. Baby spiders and giant rats will provide sufficient challenge for a new citizen. More advanced fighters should pursue slimes, spiders and trolls.
- Be aware of the karmic properties of the various fauna. Some of them are of good karma and should not be attacked without provocation.
- Don't forget that you can also use magic during combat.
- Fight in pairs if you question your strength.

### Know your enemies



**Hint:** Have a mage enchant your weapon to add zing to your blows.

Beware of players with red and orange names. Players with red names are murderers! Players with orange names are outlaws who also have been known to attack innocent citizens (with less success), or cast harmful magic.

Don't worry - as a new player you are safe until you get 30 health points. By that time you will have made friends and allies to increase your chances of survival.



### How to stay alive

Keep an eye on the critical areas of health, mana, and vigor to ensure that you can survive, cast spells, and heal after a rigorous battle. Some tips to help boost your precious stats: use a Heal spell to restore lost health points, to enhance your vigor, remember to rest and eat often (both health and mana recoup faster if vigor is high).



### Don't be caught alone

Exploration of the mysterious world of Meridian can bring knowledge, wealth and power. To avoid danger on your way to distant parts, stick to the roads! Or ask a more experienced traveler to show you the way. Destinations you might want to seek out include: the Twisted Wood, the Great Ocean and the dreaded Badlands. Also look for temples (each offering new spells to learn), Castle Victoria (for intensive combat), the Cemetery of Tos (zombies come out at night), and the Arena (test your might against fellow players).

### Mastering your skills

If you seek to excel in the combat arts, you would do well to acquaint yourself with Rook in Cor North, Meridian 59's premier Weapon Master. Rook is generous with free advice and wisdom regarding the worthiness of your potential adversaries. Remember to practice your skills often (and try offering Rook shillings to acquire more knowledge).

### Develop spell casting abilities

Some Meridian residents focus their energies primarily on magic as they strive to become an expert spell caster and deemed a "mage." Meridian's legendary schools of magic are located in temples hidden throughout the land. Sha'llie — includes spells of healing, blessing & protection. Krazian — oriented towards protection and defensive spells (considered the most fitting for warriors).

Rijja — blink spell given to all new citizens.

Qor — highly potent spells that come at a high karmic cost (often sought by assassins and murderers).

Faren — chaotic, hard-to-control attack spells with no karmic orientation at all.

**Hint:** To learn spells most efficiently concentrate on one school at a time.

## The Internet Quest Begins

### Hidden areas

There are numerous secret passages and hidden shortcuts connecting all corners of Meridian. Those who know them have a tremendous tactical advantage. We will share some of these secrets, but be cautious as you travel to unknown parts (we recommend you take a friend):

- South of Tos, in Ukgoth, there is a circle of power that can offer a mage more mana if you can unlock its secrets. Be warned that the trolls are protective of their holy land.
- In the depths of the druid hills, west of Marion, there exists a cavernous entrance. The rumors of great rewards have sent many adventurers into the icy depths, but few have ever returned.
- Experienced players may find it worth their while to visit the Duke's Keep or the Princess's Castle and offer their fealty to the liege within. It may be difficult at first (try asking the elders for help), but your character will fight harder and learn faster if your faction achieves power and glory.

### Guilds: strength in numbers



Guilds are the basic social unit of Meridian society. There are many different guilds in Meridian, each with its own style and goals. The ultimate accomplishment for any guild is to take possession of its own guild hall. You are eligible to join a guild when you accumulate 30 health points.

Each guild has a specific purpose, decided by its members. Some guilds devote themselves to helping new citizens. Others are devoted to notorious acts of murder and pillage.

If you are wise and powerful, or merely wealthy and vain, you can start your own guild, and name yourself guildmaster. However, the members of your guild have the option to vote you out of office if they are not satisfied with your leadership.

SEE YOU IN THE GAME! For more information call: 1(800) 336-3506 <http://www.3do.com/meridian>

Be watchful for weapons and items you can collect throughout the game. The ultimate prize for fighters is the Mystic Sword, a fierce and deadly weapon.

Mages should seek out a circlet, a magical band that converts life force to mana.

There are also rumors of a ring that will make you invisible to the naked eye.



# MERIDIAN 59



# RPG OF THE YEAR!

Still, we won RPG of the Year 1996 from Gamecenter.

Beating out Daggerfall and Diablo.



**MERIDIAN 59**



# OUR FIRST AD

ENGAGE IN THOUSANDS  
OF EXCITING  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
TOTAL STRANGERS  
WITHOUT  
WEARING  
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# MERIDIAN 59



# OUR SECOND AD



Thankfully, our 3<sup>rd</sup> ad just involved a scantily clad female that had nothing to do with the game.

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VERY BUY  
EGGHEAD  
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The Internet Quest Begins!

# MERIDIAN 59



# ECONOMIC SELF ADJUSTMENT

A dupe bug devalued our entire in-game currency overnight

The playerbase switched to an alternative currency – Dark Angel Feathers – pretty much overnight.

DAFs were the primary reagent used to cast PK spells, dropped at a slow, reliable rate and had a very high utility factor.



# BLOOD FRENZIES

Data backups took a long time, and nothing was saved between them and downtime. So we would tell the players to 'do whatever they wanted'.

So they would kill each other.

We ended up making this a game event – 'Blood Frenzies' – which even had their own skybox.

While it was cool, the real reason was to let PK haters know they should log off now.





# MERIDIAN EXTREME

Players developed a hack program which took advantage of some of our sloppier coding to cheat, usually for PK advantage.

‘Honest’ players were so frustrated by our lack of action on dealing with this that they made an ‘update’ to the program.

This update made cheaters delete their characters.



# EXTERNAL FACTORS

The game caused marketing and PR issues 3DO had never seen before.

When we fired a dishonest CS representative, the news was announced on a stock ticker site, and our stock price dropped a point.

When we banned a guild for duping, the news made the front page of PCGamer.com. Keep in mind that denying a customer service in a game he purchased was an alien idea back then.





# SACRED HAVEN

Our German partners put up a no-pvp shard.

Given every system in the game is PvP oriented, we found this kind of baffling.



# GUIDE PROGRAM GOES AWRY

A player guide goes rogue, and uses his one power (teleportation) to teleport every player in the game to the room with the toughest boss.

They pretty much have time to type 'WTF' before falling over dead.

I log in, kick the guide, kill the boss creature.

At which point the two survivors who were most recently teleported start looting the corpses of their fellow players.





# VALE OF SORROWS



Our first expansion pack, Vale of Sorrows, came not long after we shipped. It had a handful of new zones.

It included such whiz-bang features as: a profanity filter! A latency indicator! In-game chess!



The titular 'vale of sorrows' was more pvp/group play experimentation – a mana node that required a group to take – and that took its mana away from other players.

Around this time, Rich Vogel was assigned to the project to help us out. The Kirmses and Sellers moved on to other things, leaving me and Rob to tend the store.



**MERIDIAN 59**

# FACTIONS



Another PvP experiment, inspired by schoolyard games.

Find token drops in loot, take them to a councilor to further that NPC's political interests.

While carrying tokens, you are vulnerable, slow, unarmed.

Also, the game tells people where you are.



# PLAYER ARENAS

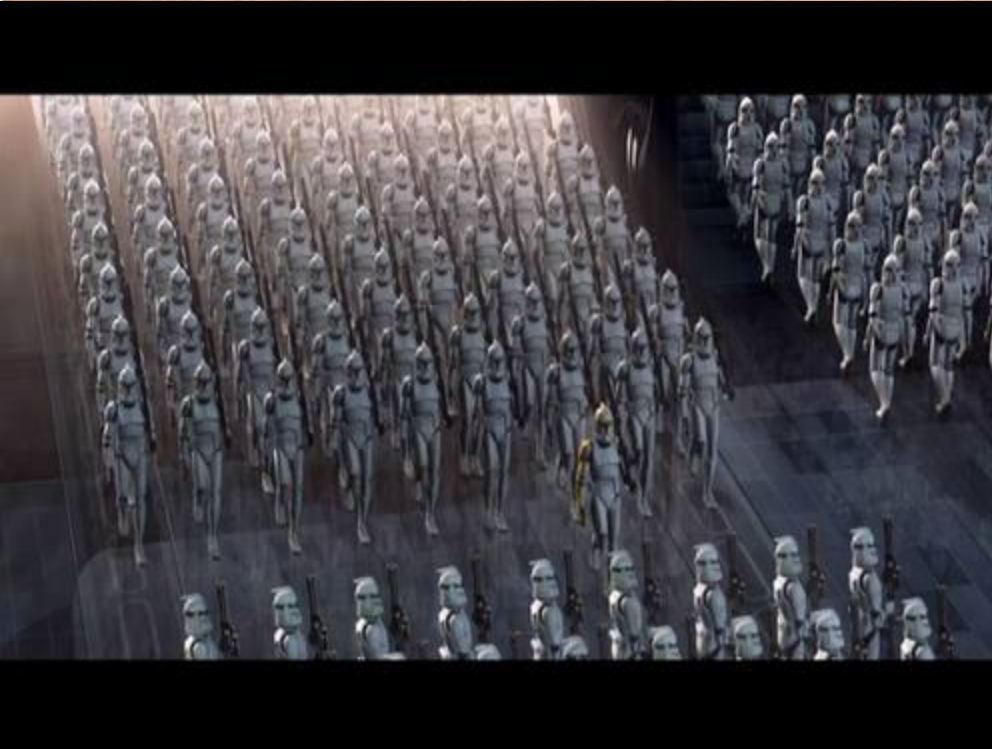


Could handle 1 on 1 as well as team matchups.

Floor configuration was randomly chosen at startup, creating a different maze every fight.

Players could watch from the stands, but could not effect the fight.

# THE CLONE INVASION



Server 109 gets bored. And invades 108 en masse.

They all choose identical appearances and name themselves identically ('clone108'). They play normally, but talk only in binary.

Server 108 FREAKED THE FUCK OUT.

Finally, someone has the bright idea to infiltrate the group by finding an open clone number, and eavesdropping on their private channel.



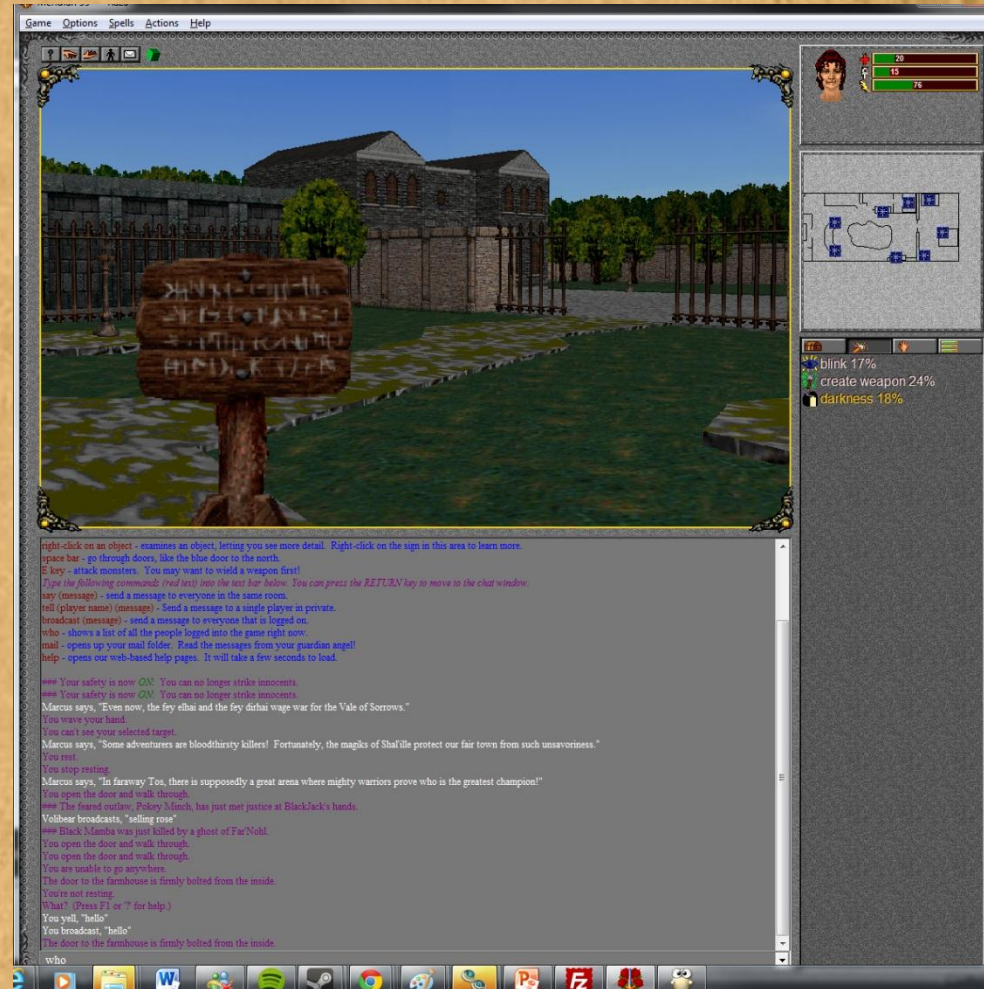
# EXPANSION 2: REVELATIONS



3DO cancelled their other online projects, and gave us their resources to compete with Ultima Online. As a result, this was a much more significant update.

# TUTORIALS

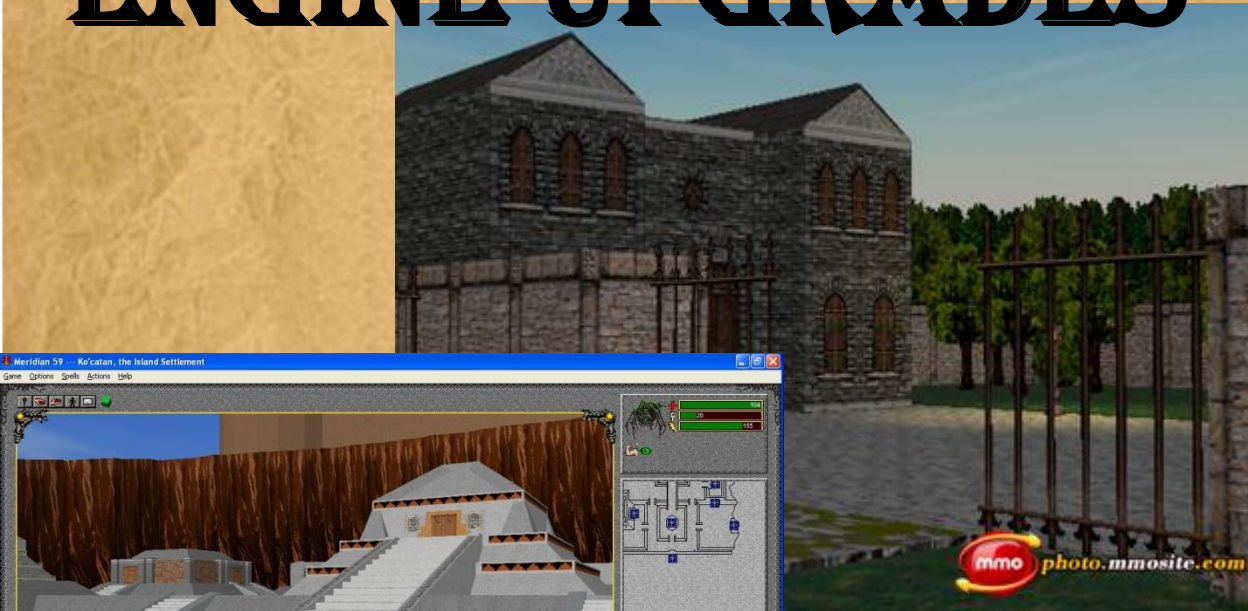
Done by the time-honored tradition of dropping signs in a zone and hoping players could figure out how to click on them.



MERIDIAN 59



# ENGINE UPGRADES



For starters the engine could now do slopes!

We used this tech to make the most ambitious new areas of the game yet seen.

This expansion was what we released on top of Ultima Online's release.

**MERIDIAN 59**

# OUR STUPIDEST MISTAKE



The expansion had a new island behind a secret passage with a simple puzzle required to solve it (cast 'dispel illusion' in the room).

Dispel illusion was a new spell.

Its reagents were only available on the new island.

Emergency hotfix and event in town to spawn monsters with reagent loot.

Players LOVED that we had an awesome event to open the island.





# THE ASSASSINATION GAME

PvP Experimentation continued.

We implemented 'K.A.O.S.' (otherwise known as 'Assassin') in game.

You got a dagger with someone's name on it. Kill them, take their dagger, last man standing wins. And you don't know who has your name on their dagger.

Toughest design problem were people who signed up but then logged for a week.



# PLAYER POLITICS

Murderers (red-named) and Outlaws (orange-named) had a rough life, but could be pardoned by the Justicar, a player-elected official who had 10 pardons to grant.

One time in 10, the electorate would get complacent and the PK guilds would elect someone who would pardon all the murderers. Interest in the next election would skyrocket.

Most Pkers would be unable to resist and end up flagged as murderers again before a week went by anyway, so social impact was less dire than most people predicted.





# EVENTS

We experimented with events with (badly) hued or rejected art.

We quickly learned that players crave something new and different so much that they didn't care about the art quality.





# OUR PLAYERS DID NOT LIKE BIG BUTTS

Expansion pack 1 (“Vale of Sorrows”) included new character art. This allows us to do things like hue clothing.

However, our playerbase focuses on the fact that the female characters all now have ‘huge, dumpy butts’.



**MERIDIAN 59**



# PRICE CHANGE



3DO also decided to change the pricing – management was offended that heavy users paid as much as the once-a-week players.

New billing model: \$2.49 per day played, but not more than \$9.99 per week, and not more than \$29.99 per month.

Remember, this happened simultaneously with UO's launch.

Our subscriber numbers dropped in half, and the word of mouth about the game never recovered.

# EXPANSION #3: RENAISSANCE

The third expansion included the 'Hunters and Necromancers' scenario. Necros got buffs for Pking, hunters got awesome weapons for necro hunting.

The hunters could also kill the lich queen. If she died, all of her necromancers would die as well.

Necromancers and hunters colluded to make this not happen. Because, hey, buffs and weapons!

Every now and then, someone would break the rules. And PK 50 people at once.



Around now, Rob and I left and a new team, including Brian Green, took over.



# THE DEATH KNELL

We expected UO to kill Meridian, but it didn't (although the price hike did a lot of damage). However, EverQuest did do significant damage, being far closer to Meridian 59 in spirit and play style than UO was.



# DEATH AND REBIRTH



3DO shut down Meridian 59 on August 31, 2000.

In 2002, Rob Ellis and Brian Green bought the game from 3DO for cheap.

Desperate fans trying to save their game actually complicated the issue.

NDS soon after hinted they had 2000 subscribers.

3DO would go out of business in 2003.





# DEATH AND REBIRTH



In 2004, the 'Meridian 59: Evolution' updated offered a new engine, capable of awesome features like dynamic lighting, rebindable keys, mouselook, and hardware acceleration.

Note that this is 8 years after Quake came out.

**MERIDIAN 59**

# IT TAKES ALL KINDS



In **2008**, a Nude Patch was released for the game.

(Remember when I said art for the faces was an order of magnitude a higher resolution than that of the bodies?)

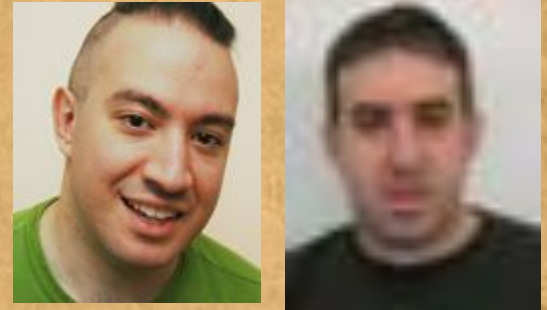


# THE OPEN SOURCE ERA

In 2010, NDS closed their doors.

The Kirmse brothers reacquired the rights. They have put the game up as a pure free-play experience.

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012, they released the game code as open source.



Two Meridian servers exist even today. I logged on. They were complaining about player killers.

Sadly, it took me 15 minutes to remember how to swing my weapon.

# MY PERSONAL LESSONS

1. Designers will always have limitations. Good designers find the best way to maximize returns inside those limitations.
2. Virtual worlds are more than just fun – they are a source of love and romance, and offer the very sick a chance to feel strong and heroic.
3. Being on a small ‘below the radar’ game is a great way for a designer to take bold chances and try new things.
4. There is no substitute for passion.



# MERIDIAN<sup>TM</sup> 59

Questions?

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