

# *Guild Wars*

## **Gameplay Analysis**

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Guild Wars is a multiplayer, online role-playing game developed by ArenaNet and published by NCsoft. Set within a fantasy environment with an interactive story divided up into three separately-purchased episodes and an expansion pack, it contains two modes of gameplay: cooperative adventuring and PvP combat.

### *Unique gameplay mechanics:*

- Skill/career alteration
  - While all players start out with a main class, that is the only boundary they have on them. At level 5 they can get a secondary class which they can switch in any city. As players progress in levels, they gain skill points which they can raise and lower at their discretion in any of their abilities.
  - This is comparable to Ultima Online's "be anything you want" leveling system, where a player is not limited from the moment of creation to be something.
- Limited level cap
  - Guild Wars restricts players and all allies (PC and NPC) to level 20, which can actually be achieved early on in the game without too much effort. After hitting 20, experience points go towards skill points, which can be used to buy new abilities.
- Game balance
  - There are no "ultimate" spells or abilities in the game, everything seems to balance well to the point where it's mainly tactics that determine effectiveness in combat.
  - The game limits players to 8 abilities at a time: you can mix and match as you please while in a city or safe-zone, but as soon as you enter an explorable area those abilities are locked while there. The game has been likened to Magic: the Gathering in that it's a combination of strategies and pre-planning that allow players to meet challenges.
- Hero/Henchman system
  - Instead of having to find other people to form a group, a player can utilize Heroes and Henchmen. Heroes are NPCs that gain experience and level along with the player. Like the player they can have their abilities adjusted for strength in different areas and can have customizable equipped weapons and gear. They can also be micromanaged, their abilities being set to automatic use or being

directly controlled by the player in battle. You can have three heroes in your group at a time, though they are only used in place of actual players: if you have two other human-controlled players on your team, for instance, you can only have one additional hero.

- Henchmen are pet NPCs with more limitation: they are at a set level for whatever location the player is in and cannot have their attributes or gear adjusted. They will also automatically engage mobs in the area they are sent to or that attack the player. There are 10 different kinds of henchmen (melee, range and healer types with varying specialties), but you can only choose four for your group.

### *PvP system*

PvP battling takes place in set arenas and nowhere else. However, grand tournaments and numerous options are available to those who participate. The objectives of PvP combat are to either wipe out the opposing team, defeat their Guild Lord, capturing control points or scoring a higher kill-count on a timer.

- PvP-only characters
  - To do battle, the player can either use his PvE character or create a *PvP-specific* character; this character will be at maximum level and have access to any options and abilities that have already been unlocked on the account, but cannot be used in any of the game's story content. This allows players to immediately jump into combat with others as equals, leaving the deciding factors of victory to be their strategies and teamwork.
- Unlockable skills/weapons/heroes based on earned points
  - Winning PvP combat results in points which in turn can unlock additional PvP features not available otherwise. These gains are only available for PvP-only characters and cannot be used in the PvE game. They include weapons, armor, skills, and even other hero NPCs.
- Tournaments
  - There are three sets of large-scale tournaments available in Guild Wars – a ladder-system Guild vs. Guild; a continuous, global team vs. team tournament; and a three-time-daily automated tournament. These all allow either the guilds or individual team members to battle for prestige titles, fame and tournament points used to unlock uniquely designed items. There have also been NCSoft-sponsored tournaments which award up to \$100,000 (real money) to the winners.

### *Additional features of Guild Wars*

- Deeply involved story

- Each of the Guild Wars episodes contains an overall plot and forking storylines. Utilizing some mission cinematics and sending players on a progressive trek across the entire continent, the stories of Guild Wars are fairly deep and intricate. Progressing through the storyline unlocks more and more zones, and players often have options to take one questing path instead of another to progress through the episode.
- Non-Tolkein fantasy
  - Unlike most fantasy games on the market, Guild Wars seems to avoid the standard elves-orc universe. Guild Wars: Nightfall, for instance, uses a very African and Babylonian motif for their characters and settings. There are very few non-human protagonists to encounter through the game world, though their designs and characters are still very richly developed. The terrain itself has a strong visual impact and uses a combination of eye-catching effects like blooms and well-designed and textured LODs (levels of detail, reducing the impact of detailed structures and landscapes at a distance on your computer) to depict grand vistas and regal buildings.
- No tradeskills
  - Guild Wars has no tradeskill system. Players do not personally make anything. The closest thing to crafting available is the collection of certain materials (either gathered from dead enemies or by breaking down loot items) and providing those to crafting NPCs who can fashion them into weapons and armor (for a fee).
- In-game help linked directly to Wiki
  - Players needing assistance on quests and in-game components have immediate access to a Wiki website with details on every quest, item, and other gameplay component. This is accessible through an in-game menu, saving players the trouble of having to track down or even bookmark the website.
- Starting character customization
  - Players initially choose one of 10 professions/classes, a gender, and then an assortment of facial, hair, and skin options. There are no races except human, but each profession has unique appearance choices. Players can also choose a default color for their armor. Following this, there are no changes in character appearance except for dying clothes and a very limited armor choice, one or two different sets for the majority of the casual player's career. There are however an assortment of prestige armor choices that are extremely expensive and somewhat difficult to obtain which will allow more seasoned players to stand out visually.
- In-game support

- Guild Wars has almost no CSR support. Players are expected to get their information via the website and external sources. There is a catch-all support webform for all NCSoft games at once, but this must be hunted for and doesn't provide real-time in game support.

*Differences between Guild Wars and other online titles:*

Unlike MMO titles, Guild Wars also has no monthly subscription fee: it earns revenue through its stand-alone episode sales, its single expansion pack, and a microtransaction system that offers some basic services and benefits to players.

- CORPG, not MMORPG
  - Unlike standard online games, Guild Wars provides very limited exposure to other players. Its interactive components are either the PvP system or via in-game city hubs where all players are visible; otherwise, the entire world is a series of instances linked directly to the player that enters them. When questing, players can cooperate (hence *CORPG*, as defined by NCSoft) with up to three other players, but that is the extent of play-sharing.
- Instanced terrain
  - Other than cities and limited safe-zones, all the terrain in Guild Wars is instanced: when entering an explorable area, there are no other players than those who make up the adventuring party. While this allows the player and those in his party to have free reign over all NPCs and quest components for that area, it also severely limits interaction with others and effectively eliminates much of the game's online component.
- No monthly fee
  - There is no fee to play Guild Wars beyond the one-time purchase of the game itself. To maintain the game without fees, the server architecture has been designed to minimize bandwidth costs as much as possible. Players can purchase up to three stand-alone episodes (*Prophecies*, *Factions*, *Nightfall*) and an expansion pack (*Eye of the North*), and there is also a limited microtransaction system in place to add to revenue.
- Microtransactions (MTX)
  - The online store for MTX is directly accessible as an integrated part of the game, allowing immediate and casual access to purchases without having to load up a separate web browser. Through it, players can purchase name, appearance and gender changes, additional skills for PvE and PvP combat, prestige pets, additional character and inventory slots, and any of the game episodes or expansions.