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[ArchLord](#)

The game's potential explored in the ArchLord Beta Test

The MMORPG world is a treacherous mistress, set only on meeting her own needs. Heading to the mainstream of game development, she is acting like a double edged blade, striking mercilessly where she once healed a woe. Many publishers are more interested in gaining money than creating a work of sublime beauty. It becomes apparent popularity has its price as the scene quickly becomes saturated by numerous weak and unpolished releases. There is also a hint of hope, a prophecy of redemption to bring promise to the lost. Some thought World of Warcraft to be the said Messiah, while others are still waiting for him, yet as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow, a lot of false prophets announce their upcoming victory when they shall be crowned supreme kings. Time will tell them apart, but today I present you ArchLord, one of the pretenders to the throne of the MMORPG kingdom. ArchLord is put together by NHN Games studios, one of the biggest Korean MMO developers and publishers, with Codemasters handling publishing and distribution rights. With more than 100,000 gamers signed up, The ArchLord beta testing phase is already underway. In less than a month, ArchLord will launch and everyone will see if the promises are delivered in full or are simply illusions, dust in the wind. **Story** Ancient lore tells us of the prophecy of the ArchLord, the one to obtain the five keys of the spirits and hold the ultimate power over all things living. Five relics of untold power await the daring adventurer should he be prepared to take on the challenge and eventually become the most powerful being in Chantra. The full history of the magical continent is long and detailed, available for anyone to read on the official site. Tens of pages unfold the story of the land, way too much for anyone to grasp after just one reading session. Unfortunately, the game sees only a small fraction implemented into its quests and NPCs rarely talk about game lore. It's frustrating to see you can't scroll through any of the dialogue boxes since they rarely appear to fully encompass the message. **Gameplay** The number of characters you can sustain at any one given time on a single server is limited to three. Humans, orcs and Moon Elves fight for the title of ArchLord, with predetermined class and gender options. The eight archetypes are race specific incarnations of the warrior, the bowman and the spellcaster. Thus Humans can be male archers and knights, or female mages. Orcs are male berserkers and hunters or female sorceresses. The moon Elves are exclusively female to play, sharing their love for rangers and elementalists. As far as appearance customization is concerned, players can change the haircuts and faces of their avatars but nothing more. I found the whole process to be quite limiting in terms of freedom in role playing and class availability. Classes act pretty much on the same principle and no dedicated healers are in sight. It appears the final version will feature the same deal. Off we go into the starting city of Golundo ready to make a name for ourselves and Berserker Orcs everywhere. Surprisingly, there are no quests to be had yet, something that only adds to the frustration that you can't scroll through NPC text. I guess ArchLord is based on a highly intuitive interface where you have to guess both quests and storyline. Oh well, off I go to grind some unsuspecting critters, seeing that the first skill I can actually train will only be granted to me at level 4. Stat-wise, the game features well known elements found in other MMORPG, with hit points, mana points, strength, agility, intelligence, wisdom, charisma and power. Unfortunately, there are no tool-tips for any of them so my interpretation could be subjective at best. Skills are bought from trainers and feature different ranks that increase in power with level. Each skill costs mana, so a warrior type would eventually take a hit in effectiveness due to the lack of a higher mana pool. There are potions to supplement this shortcoming. At least one out of three monsters will drop either a health or mana potion, being the game's way of minimizing

downtime. Quests aren't basically implying killing off a specific number of creatures bearing the same description or hunting a dropable item via grinding. It bothers me that players need to place extra clicks to start, acknowledge, and finish quests. I find the "you've just accepted a quest" textbox to be highly useless, hinting that developers think quests to be something incredibly rare events that deserve 1000% of our attention. As I said, they are neither epic nor complex and the rewards are not worth the time involved in completing them. At least, that's the case for the first few levels of the game. Overall, ArchLord is the kind of game where you need to grind creatures for hours and hours in order to advance. Funny enough, the text for adding a character to either your friend list or ignore list is the same. On occasion, you won't be able to tell the difference, especially when lag hits and that click might have gone either way, but you know what they say, love is just as strong as hate. Speaking of which, playing in a party will probably get you to express either of them. The main advantage of playing in groups is that buffs get automatically shared between characters. Since fighting monsters is usually a passive act that does not require a lot of micro and skill usage, buffs and equipment is what you'll desire for quick boosts of power. Creeps are usually displaced over small areas, thus a party could successfully take over a spawning place and grind there for hours and hours. I always disliked the idea that I have to race the 10 other players in the vicinity for my next kill. This basically encourages people to camp spawning spots without switching areas and exploring the game world. I feel this takes away from the fun of playing a MMO, being a hit in gameplay. The controls are cold stiff. Movement is based upon the WSAD cross that controls forward and backward movement along with turning around. Although you can customize the keyboard mapping, the lack of strafing is notable. Be advised that you can zoom in and out with the mouse wheel, yet you can't mouselook and it's of the utmost importance. The camera often enough changes the point of view, when turning and more chaotically when running up a hill. So you need to further adjust camera by using four more keys, namely the arrows. Up to now, you need three free hands to operate the 8 keys and the mouse at the same time, in order to properly guide your character on the adventure map. Avatars frequently change direction for no apparent reason and stop for a second in doing so, thus movement feels mechanical. This alone kills the game for me as this is a sub-standard implementation, probably adjusted to fit a lacking physical engine. Although characters can fall from higher places, over small distances, they can't jump and you'll soon enough find yourself stuck in a rather insignificant obstacle like a wooden fence, or behind the house at the base of the hill. Pathing is just terrible and I can't help but wonder how much will this impair the seemingly fast and furious world of active PvP as you can't be really good if your character stumbles on every little rock on the road. I can't imagine how extensive PvP will be carried out as long as you can't dodge, close in for the kill or run away for a strategic advantage. I would hate to see ArchLord's highly anticipated PvP system turn into rubble by players who will just play the game 24/7 showing off impressive grinding skills instead of wits, wisdom and game knowledge. Deep inside, I am still hoping this will be fixed and one could actually enjoy the long road to PvP greatness through challenging situations and gameplay variety. **Concept** ArchLord aims to impress the gaming world through one fundamental difference that will shape both PvP and the in-game social structure of guilds. Once the game hits retail and players reach the end-game content, NHN developers have a great plot twist in mind. One player will be able to control the ArchLord, a supreme being able to directly influence through power the social workings of the land. Not only does he receive a full set of impressive new armor, he also has a giant arsenal of weapons at his disposal and gains access to the flying mount, a fire breathing dragon. In addition, he can use all of his new found powers to impose a specific vision over the lands, including a tax rate over each player. It's quite a responsibility; therefore, developers prepared a special event in order to choose the most suitable characters for such a task. Basically, it's a continuous power struggle, one that gathers the six most influential guilds each month and pairs them in a game mode similar to castle siege. In a timed battle, defenders are enclosed in a heavily

fortified stronghold, while attackers have various siege engines at their disposal. Should the gates fall, the attackers must secure three out of the five objectives in order to take control of the castle. Only three guilds will remain, having to battle it out in a last-man-standing scenario. Each guild has an appointed ArchLord candidate who will eventually take charge of this destiny should his mates win the confrontation. Of course, losing guilds may very well challenge the power of the ArchLord head on in all-out war, but this may be harder than anticipated, considering the extensive list of powers available to the ruler. The ArchLord can summon up to 20 monsters or three powerful knights to aid him in battle, can change the weather and has access to very powerful spells. **Video** For a next generation MMORPG, ArchLord has quite outdated graphics. The poor geometry of the landscape design leads to a lot of rough edges, visible even on full detail and higher resolution settings. I'm not saying there are no complex buildings and special places that look good; I'm just observing that starting cities and the surrounding areas have a simple look about them. Trees are so far apart that one can't be sure if we deal with a hill, plain, mountain or forest. Grass and tree branches both receive the same unnatural feel due to the poor implementation. It's quite sad to see a respectable publisher like Codemasters getting ready to launch such a raw product. **Sound** Supposedly, the music was recorded with help from the godly London Symphony Orchestra. I am not qualified to test such a claim, yet I can tell you that regarding musical composition, tracks lack the details and finesse compelling developers to use such finely attuned music weavers. None the less, music fits great with the environment, saving face in front of other various shortcomings. Voices are not that impressive though, as they see limited use and lack the undeniable immersion qualities of extensive professional voice acting. **Multiplayer** It's too early to predict how the fight for the ArchLord title will shape the community. It certainly has a lot of potential as developers themselves signaled this can only be achieved through team effort, thus cooperation between large numbers of individuals. Other than this, I can't say PvP, or team PvP for that matter, will be frantic. If NHN wishes to stage monthly worldwide events where players can bash themselves out in a controlled environment, then I can't see any other incentives for battles out in the open. After all, healing potion heavy usage is very common, as PvP dominance follows the better gear and uncanny critical hits rather than human skill and timing. But then again, you can attack other players anytime after level 6, if you so desire. Throughout the world, special creatures are to be encountered, whereas PvE cooperation is required. Characters can band together in parties and eliminate such powerful foes, for greater loot and experience rewards. At the earlier stages of the game, I can't say ArchLord is that massive in terms of player interaction. You will often enough buy certain rare items from players, but that's about as far as it goes. **Conclusion** The overall feeling of the game seems to be lacking, due to the poor implementation of otherwise generous concepts. For instance, emotes aren't that bombastic in terms of character animation, emote speech is often enough childish and when characters actually say something, it's in Korean. Coupled with repetitive gameplay, difficult control scheme and average graphics, I can't help wondering why the media is so hyped out about the title. Since we're talking about the beta testing version, there's still time for improvements before launch, yet I am skeptical about it. News of the \$10 monthly subscription fee echoed throughout gamers' conscience, as players would rather try this cheaper alternative and spend the difference by eventually acquiring in-game items. Codemasters fully endorses this limited pay-for-extra-content policy as bonus experience and extra health scrolls are widely available.