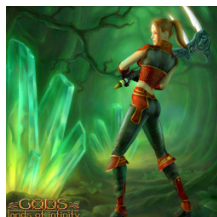


8 August 2006

By: Tudor Stefanescu, Games Editor



Gods: Lands of Infinity

A return to the roots of turn based RPGs

Gods: Lands of Infinity invites you into an old style RPG journey through the lands of Antasion. Leaving behind a war of the gods, characters can explore the new world at will, by trading, completing quests and slaying hordes of monsters in the process. The game is the tertiary release coming from the Slovak Republic's very own Cypron Studios, after the moderately successful State Of War and State Of War: Warmongers real time strategy titles. **Story**With the murder of Xarax, greatest among the gods of Bellarion, the time of peace and prosperity abruptly came to an end. War weakened man and faith alike, when driven by ambition, the Gods fought for the divine throne. For two thousand years the battle raged on, as this world was reduced to ruin with neither God gaining the decisive advantage, yet now things changed. Clerics of Mortagorn, God of Darkness, go into battle wielding a weapon of power never seen before. Their staves hold crystals which outright snuff the life out of the enemy, leaving the corpse barren on the cold wastes. Battlefield after battlefield fell before this new power. As a last hope, Arswaargh, God of Fire, created Vivien out of his divine essence, thus sending his avatar to the world of Antasion on a mission to find a way to restore balance. What kind of weapon would you fashion to bring down these immortal foes, should you be God of Fire? I wouldn't really choose a gorgeous, green eyed, red headed young woman with a soft voice (and a very short skirt), since she's usually addressed by "beautiful stranger" or Vivien. **Concept**Gods: Lands of Infinity pays tribute to the old games that made up the bulk of the RPG genre roughly ten years ago. Bearing this in mind, you must expect a lot of this vintage feeling to accompany you through the journey, with both the good and the bad. Story clichés are unavoidable and the interface is familiar to say the least. It's like a *deja-vu*. For the sake of argument, let's see what the game has in common with the older *Might and Magic* titles: -Turn based combat system; -First person party view where your allies are nothing more than icons on your interface; -Alchemy implements, with recipes and reagents to be found; -Pretty much the same item design, stats and concept; -Far off stories with seemingly heroic music to help players delve deeper into the mysteries of Antasion; -Food and water are constantly required since you can't rest and heal while camping without them; -Inventory, items, GUI, they are all look-alikes of the series. **Gameplay**I didn't find the story particularly compelling, or convincing, for that matter, but going back to the days when *Might and Magic* was a super hit, I find it to be in line with the genre's gratuitous exaggerations. Names are heavily influenced by the Slovak language, yet I am pretty sure they're botched with additional letters, to make them sound more fantasy oriented. The first character you're going to talk to is Draslaw: "A stranger, hmmm ... This is Slavingrad, the capitol of Slawonia". It could have turned out better since dialogues are fairly weak with virtually no choices to be made whatsoever. The first two quests send you to the nearby settlements by escorting various villagers; zero difficulty rating and they don't give any experience either. You have to fight for experience points. There are three ways to carry yourself through the game, by handling the job of a Mage, Fighter or "Alchemyst". It's somewhat consistent with the seven damage types used: pierce, crush, fire, ice, poison, holy and death. Vivian's primary stats are strength, dexterity, intelligence, vitality and luck, all self explanatory. It is notable the introduction of an action point system. Characters have faster or lengthier attacks so it's only natural to act within different time frames. For instance a warrior could defend for two turns, gaining some extra action points, the do a devastating three way attack. A mage could just as well cast fire arrow the first two rounds and eventually heal the warrior in the third. Magic has seen a great deal of work throughout the game. While physical attacks are

pretty straight forward in their use and evolution, magic see way more variation. Unfortunately magic is limited to combat situations. It means you can't heal your party or resurrect allies unless you are still fighting. Spells are stored in crystals, which you purchase and add to your spell book and higher level spell books hold a greater number of crystals. Using summoned creatures for a meat shield, while casting healing spells, was often enough more productive than wreaking outright destruction. Combat can get tiresome at times because, although opponents can pack quite a punch, the AI is not particularly capable. You can't hit and run so strategic moves are restricted. It's always possible to flee, should the fight get too grisly, but I don't recommend it. A serious experience penalty will incur. Similar to the socketed item system, you can find enchanting crystals and upgrade your weapons with additional damage or extra abilities for armors. It's quite promising to know you can improve existing items, since outright merchant upgraded items are expensive. Somewhere in the manual it writes Gods: Lands of Infinity also requires a great deal of economical strategy. I dislike the way developers implemented merchant economy since making a profit usually means a lot of legwork. No brains required and no massive hack and slashing either. All you have to do is buy all from the tavern, sell it around and basically deliver goods from one specialized crafter to the rest of the villagers. I'm afraid it's not particularly inspiring since powerful opponents aren't that generous with their loot. It's a bit annoying to see the game engine doesn't allow some basic moves like any involving jumping. You are not allowed to fall off the dock, into the water, nor walking through the lake or passing small obstacles like bushes. NPCs here for trading purposes mostly. They're not so talkative, nor that many, but sometime manage to get some interesting dialogues. Although there is a great deal of variety concerning clothes and faces, there is only a limited number of male and female models so they all pretty much have the same built.

Video Gods: Lands of Infinity presents full 3D graphics, implemented with the help of Cypron's own Spirith engine. Although the game uses DirectX 9.c and pixel shader capabilities, there is a notable distinction between the shiny lights and the way everything else created with the game engine looks like. Models and textures just can't cope up with the regular eye candy offered by lighting and water surface reflections. I call this unfair, since the game basically offers the same kind of graphics used four years ago, but for drastically increased system requirements. Being the main improvement besides DirectX 9.c implements, higher resolution textures just don't justify the trouble.

Sound Music is synth based, Dargaard-like, repetitive yet effective as medieval oriented ambient. Sadly, poor voice acting is ever present. I'm not entirely sure there were more than one man and one woman voice acting all characters in the first city. NPCs sound more like radio-play actors, since they share the same steady and radio phonic feeling that is rather unconvincing. It's especially upsetting in a RPG, where immersion for in-character actions is encouraged.

Multiplayer We're facing a dedicated single player RPG that needs no multiplayer extension. I don't think the genre would allow it anyway, since past game attempts were feeble and doomed to failure.

Conclusion Gods: Lands Of Infinity will greatly appeal to the RPG genre's nostalgics. Thus my heart was filled with joy when first seeing the game, yet I can't overlook the parts that are lacking. It definitely is the kind of game no-one ever makes these days, embedded in the standards of old, with both good features and embarrassing clichés. Cypron Studios prepared a mysterious journey for the curious newcomer and a vintage experience for the hardcore player. So here you have it, Gods: Lands of Infinity, the kind of game that you either hate or enjoy at first glance.