

A Brief History of

MERIDIAN 59™

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What was Meridian 59?

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

- Being the 'first' 3D fantasy MMO
- Being the 'first' unmetered, portal-free commercial MMO
- Being better marketed than our competitors

The First 3D Fantasy MMO

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



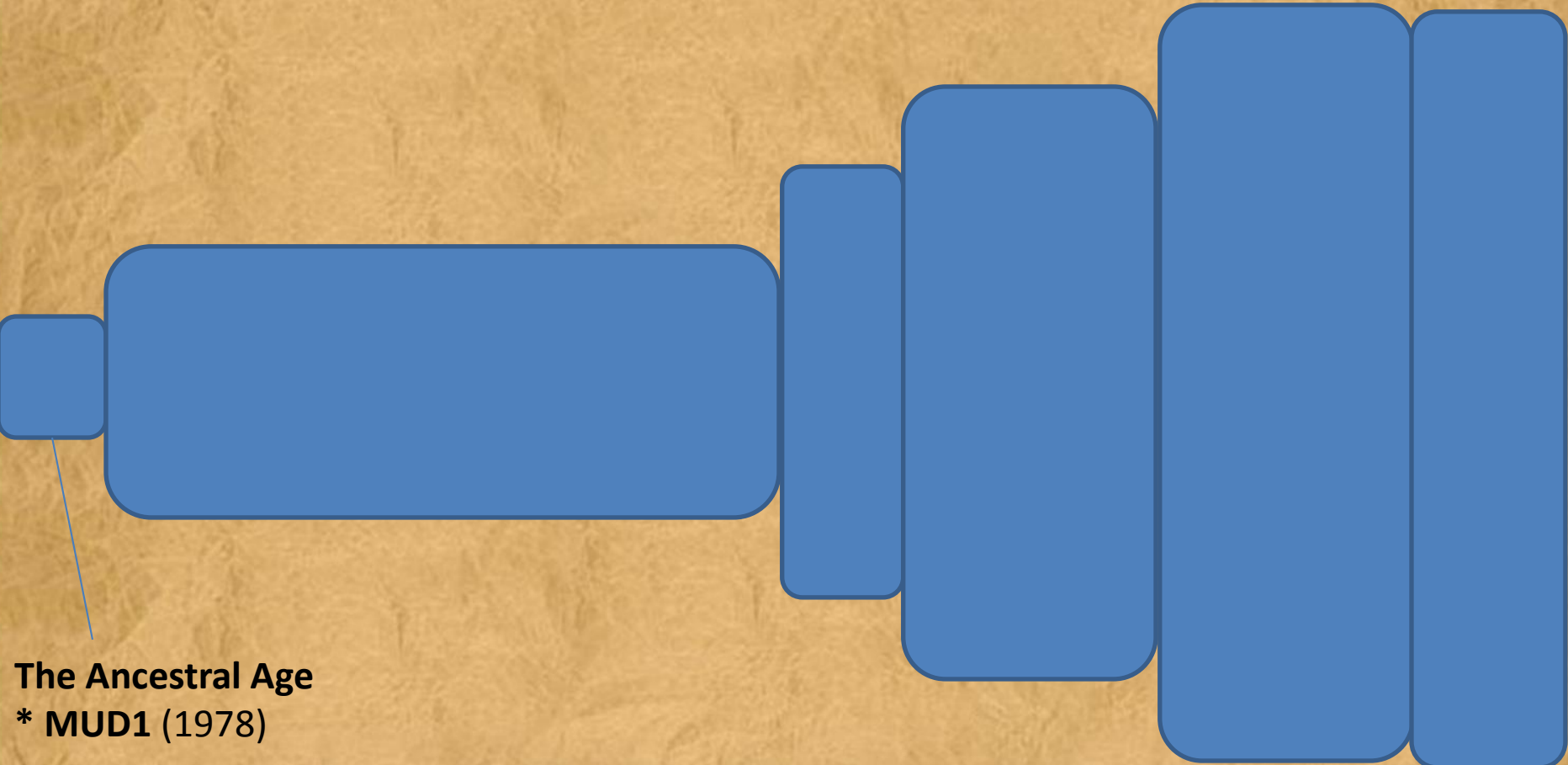
The First Unmetered MMO

Meridian 59 pioneered the \$9.95 billing rate.

Before this, online gaming typically required an hourly fee.

ON TOP of what you paid to AOL or GENIE for access.



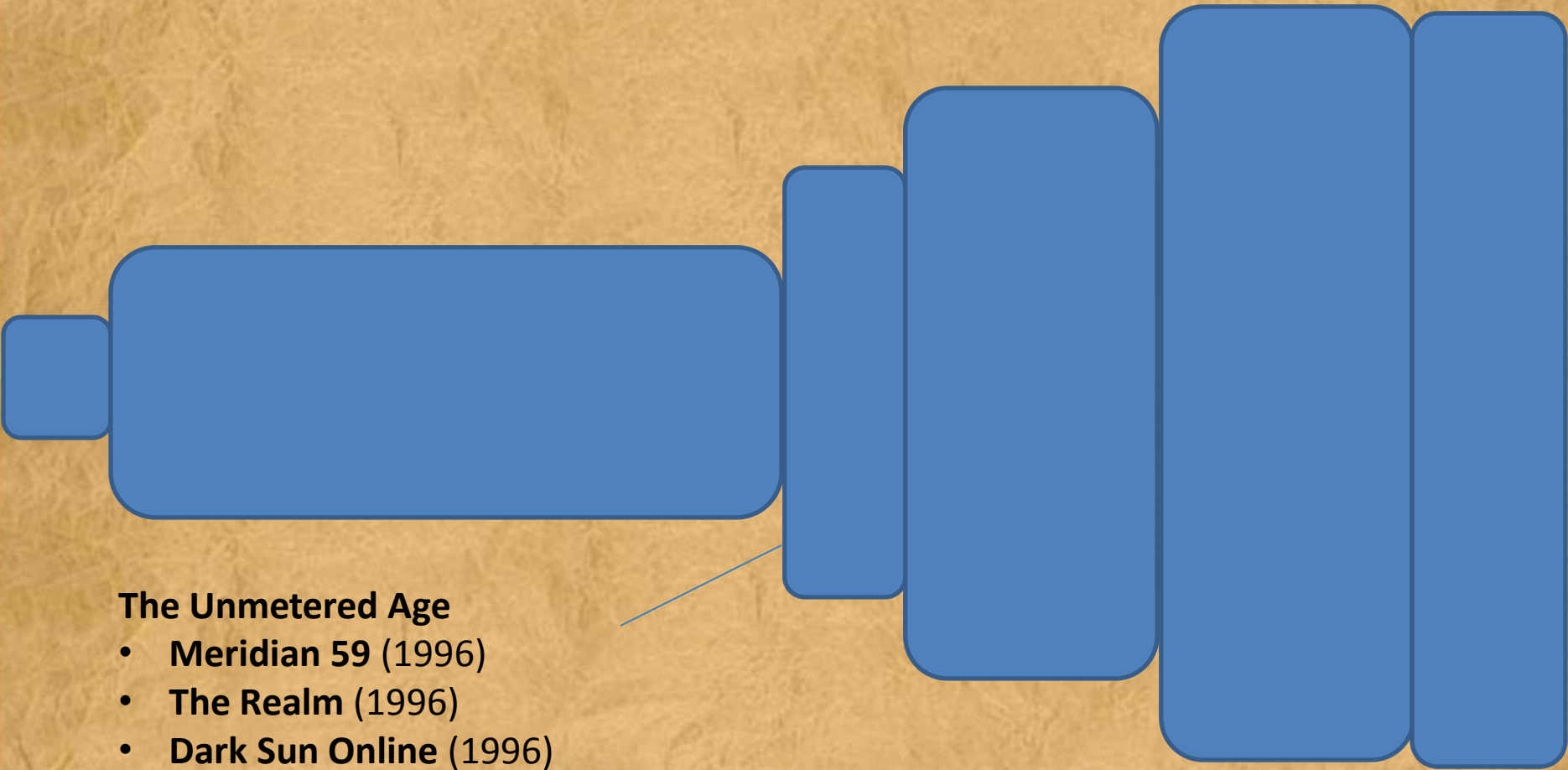


The Ancestral Age
* MUD1 (1978)



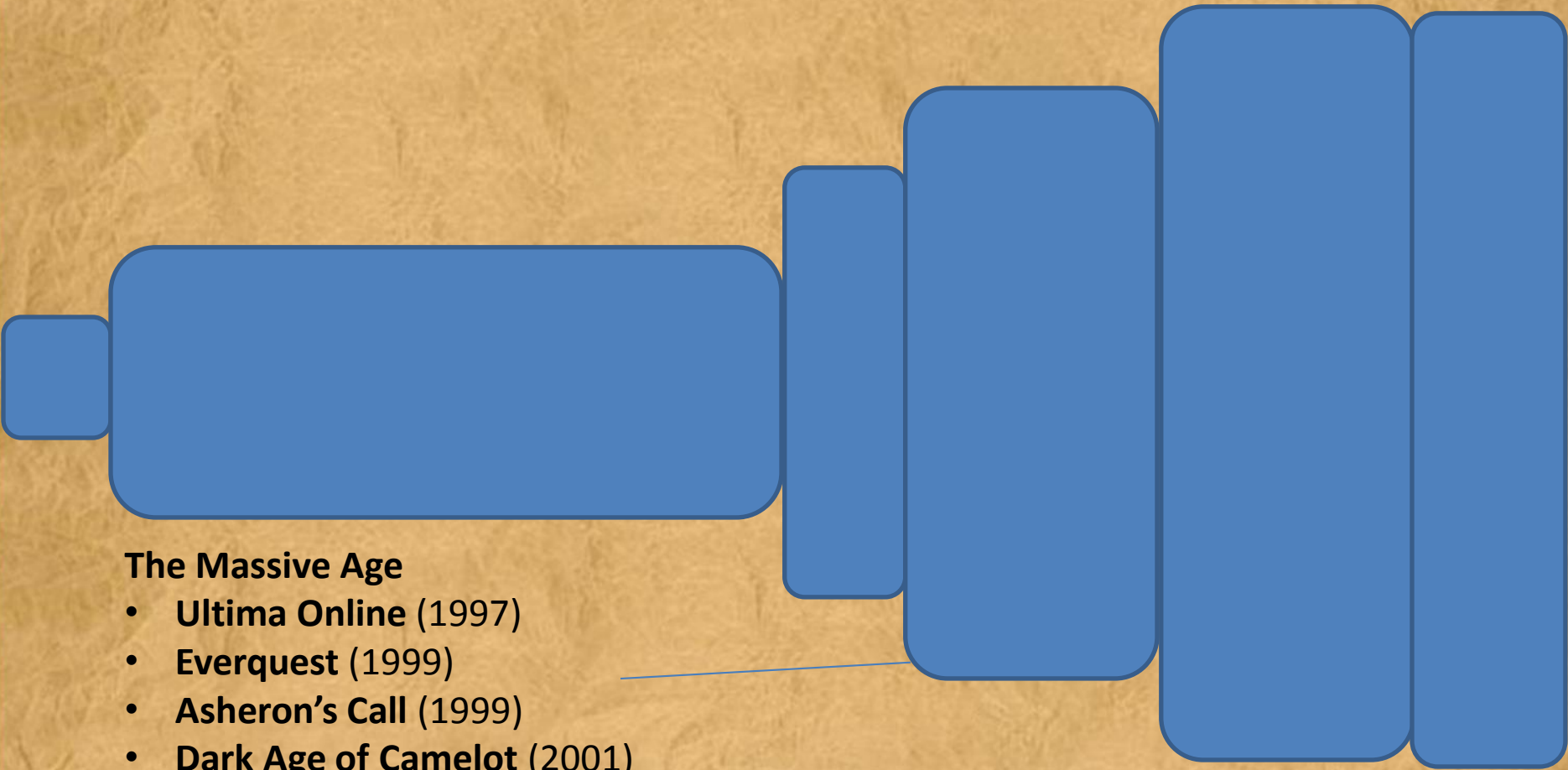
The Portal Age

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



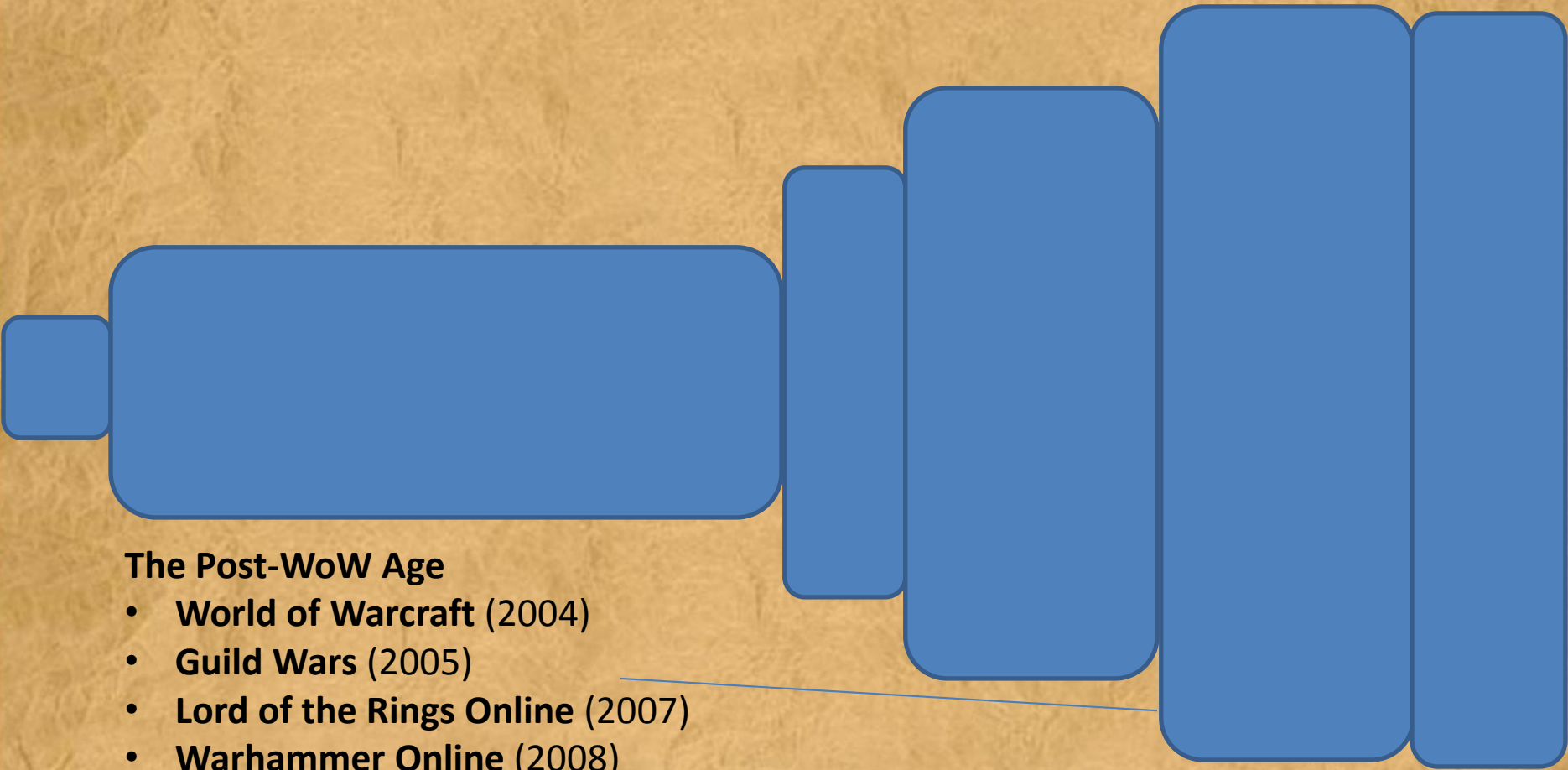
The Unmetered Age

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



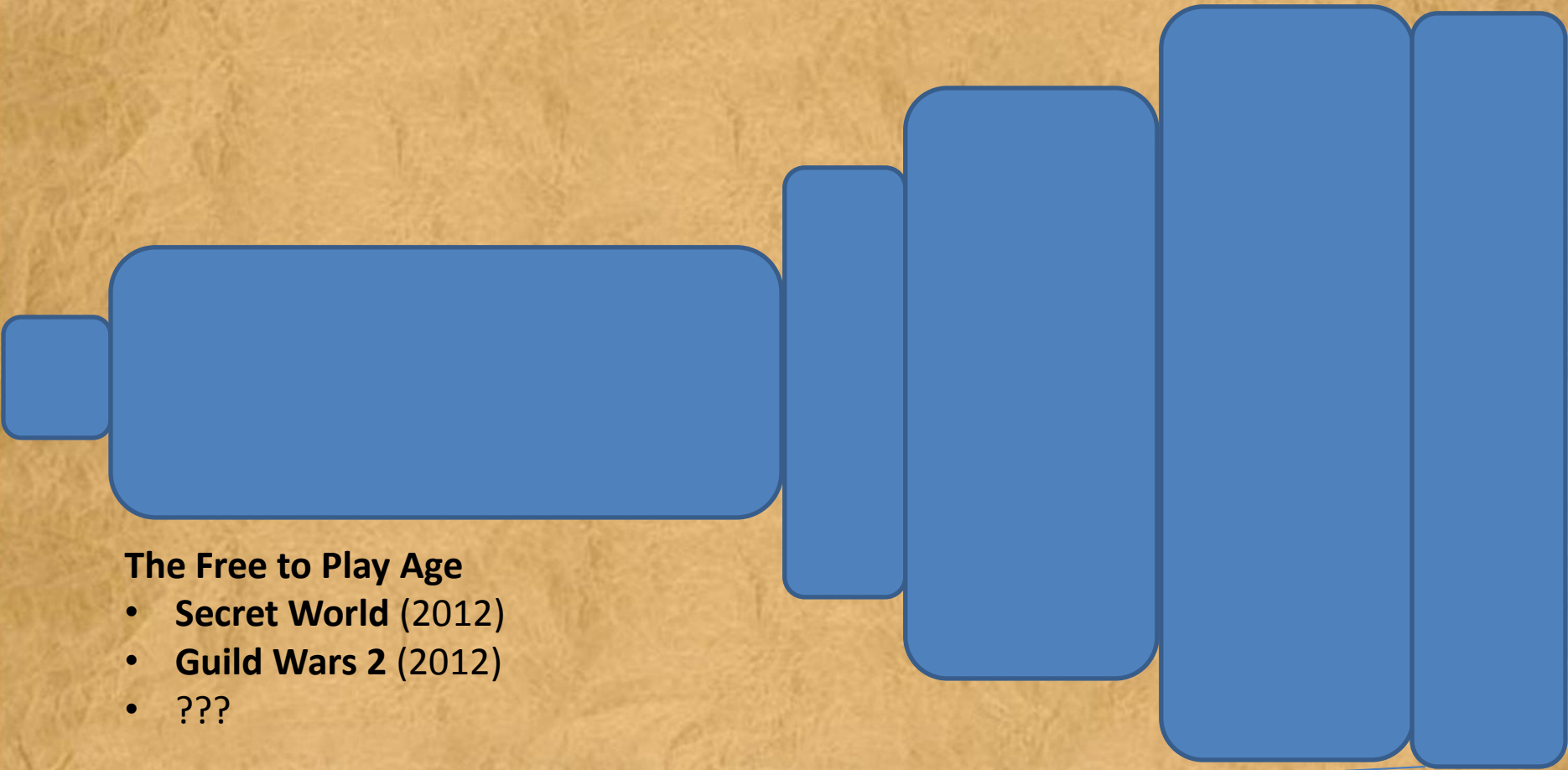
The Massive Age

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



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)**

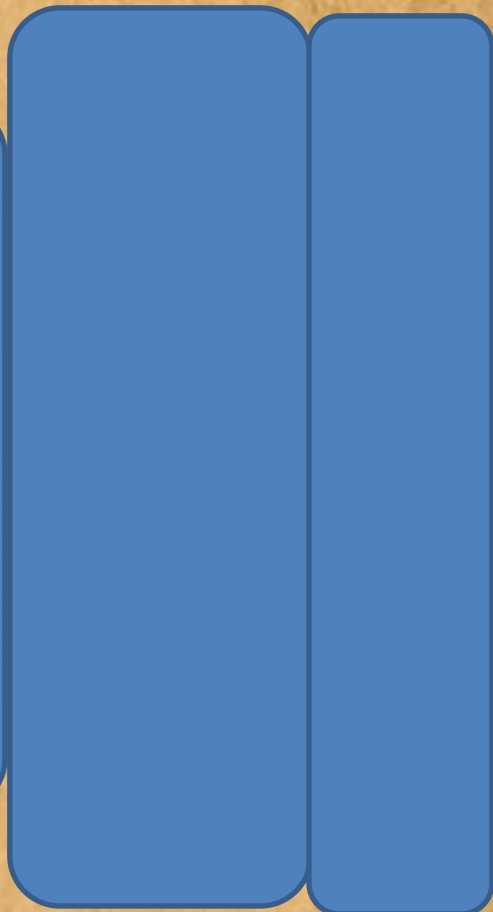
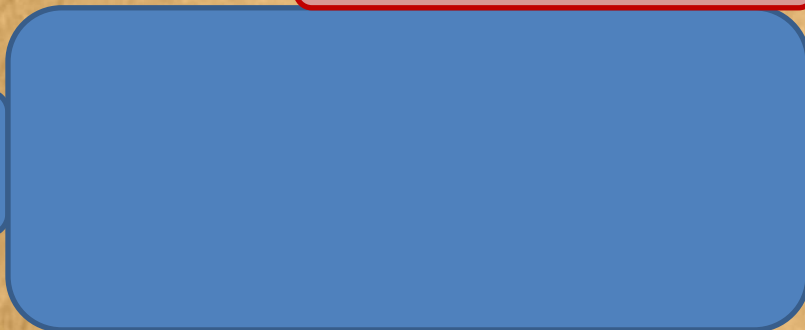


The Free to Play Age

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

The MUD Tangent

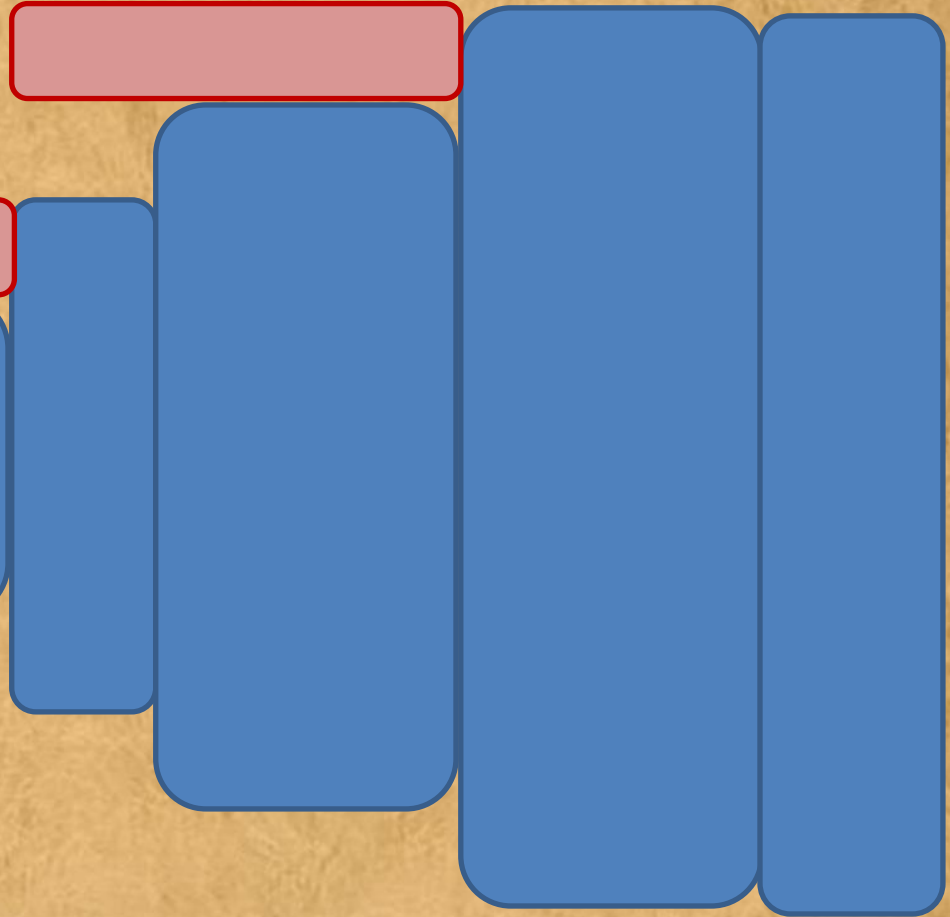
- **AberMUD** (1987)
- **LPMUD** (1989)
- **DIKU MUD** (1990)
- **TinyMUSH** (1990)
- **Merc** (1992)
- ???



The Asian Tangent

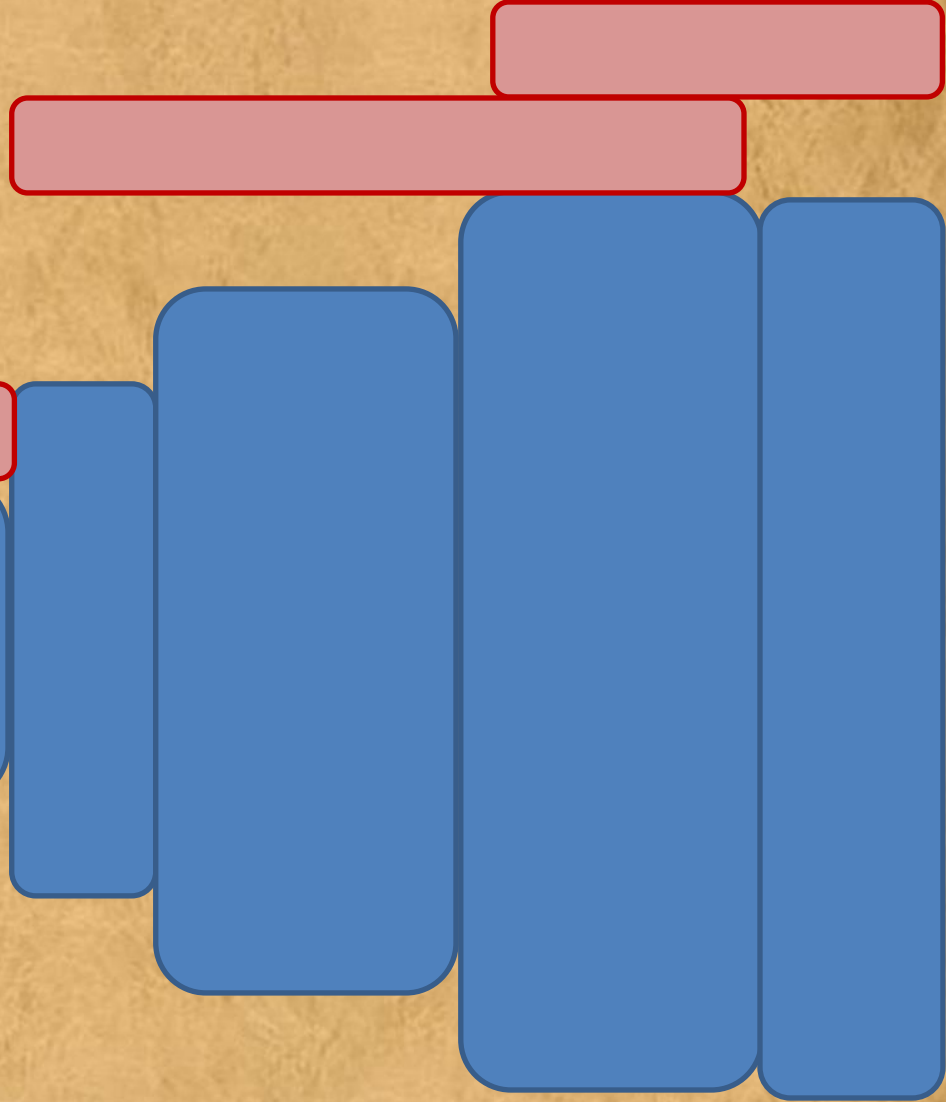
- **Kingdom of the Winds** (1996)
- **Lineage** (1997)
- **Knight Online** (2004)

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.

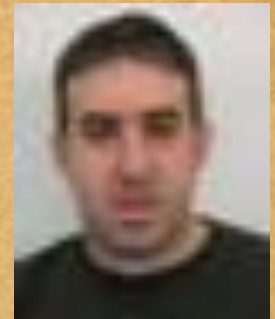
What Went Wrong?

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.

It All Starts With Two 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.

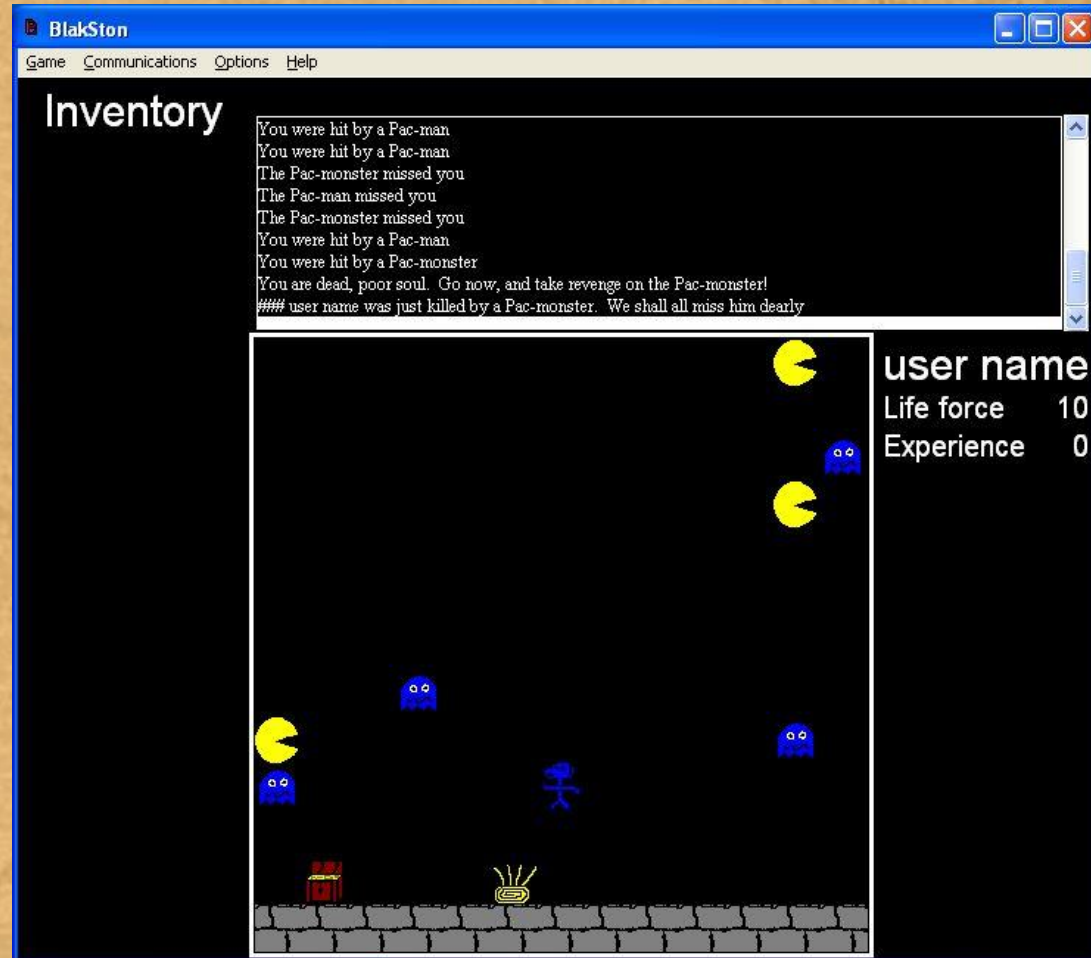


Inspiration: "Scepter of Goth", a text-based MUD from the mid 80s.

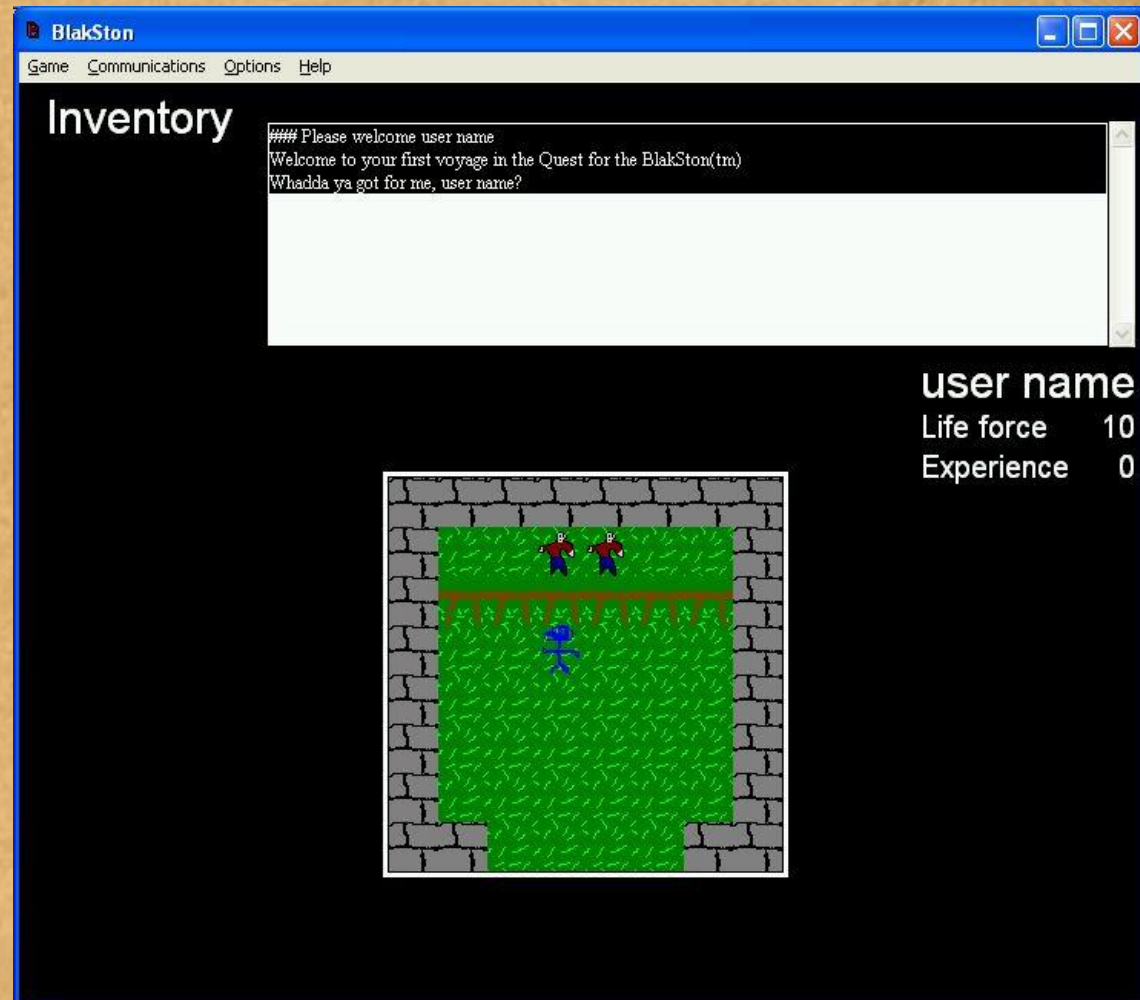
" We had little idea what we were getting into. It took us three trips to the local computer store to get the right parts to set up our two-machine network, and we had next to no knowledge of computer graphics. We were both young (I was 21 and Chris was 19) and knew basically nothing about the game industry, 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

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

Programmer art.



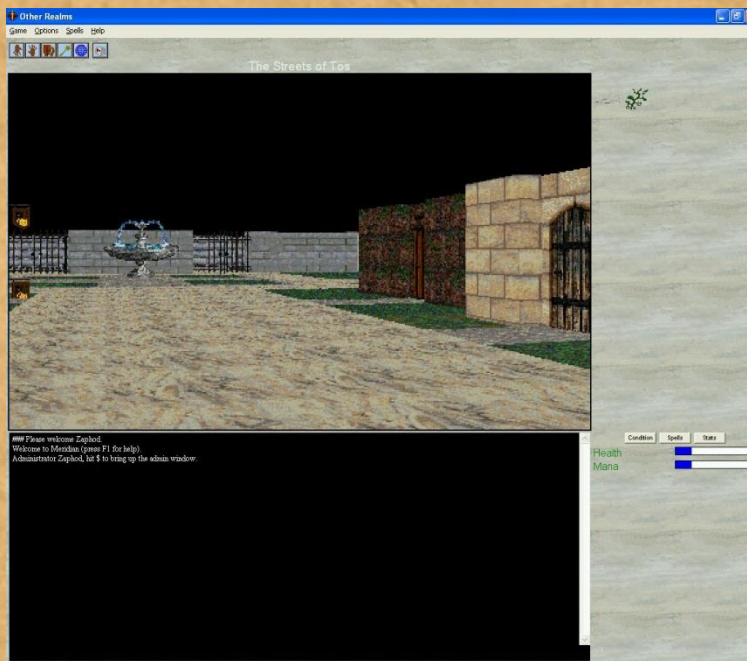
Blackstone with some just slightly less terrible programmer art.



Meanwhile, the Kirmsees had been hard at work upgrading the tech to 3D.



Due to lack of art, the first monster to work was a Cyberdemon.



“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

And Two Other 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.

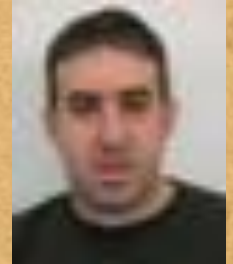


“ We worked with a small group of programmers in Sweden for a while and seemed to make some real progress with the idea of a multiplayer RPG with the world assembled out of bitmap elements on the client side (putting that on CD was our real breakthrough, though it sounds comical to say so now). Then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

Archetype Interactive is Formed...



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!



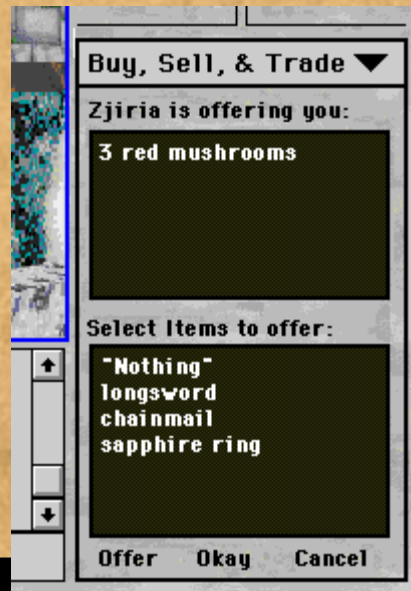
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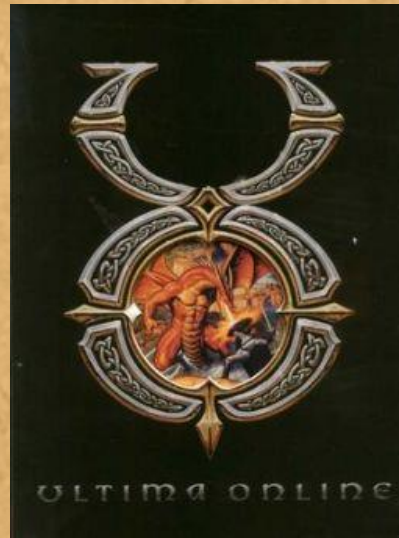
Division of Duties...

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



Early UI mockups by Mike Sellers.

**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.**

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.

To this day, there is no real explanation or backstory as to what a Meridian is, or what's up with the other 58 of them.



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

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

Preskybox.



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

The Editor was a hacked Doom editor.

The first version of it would crash if you had angles other than 90 degrees, which limited worldbuilding greatly. We wouldn't have time to revisit them all.

We actually shipped with some forests with 90 degree angled walls.

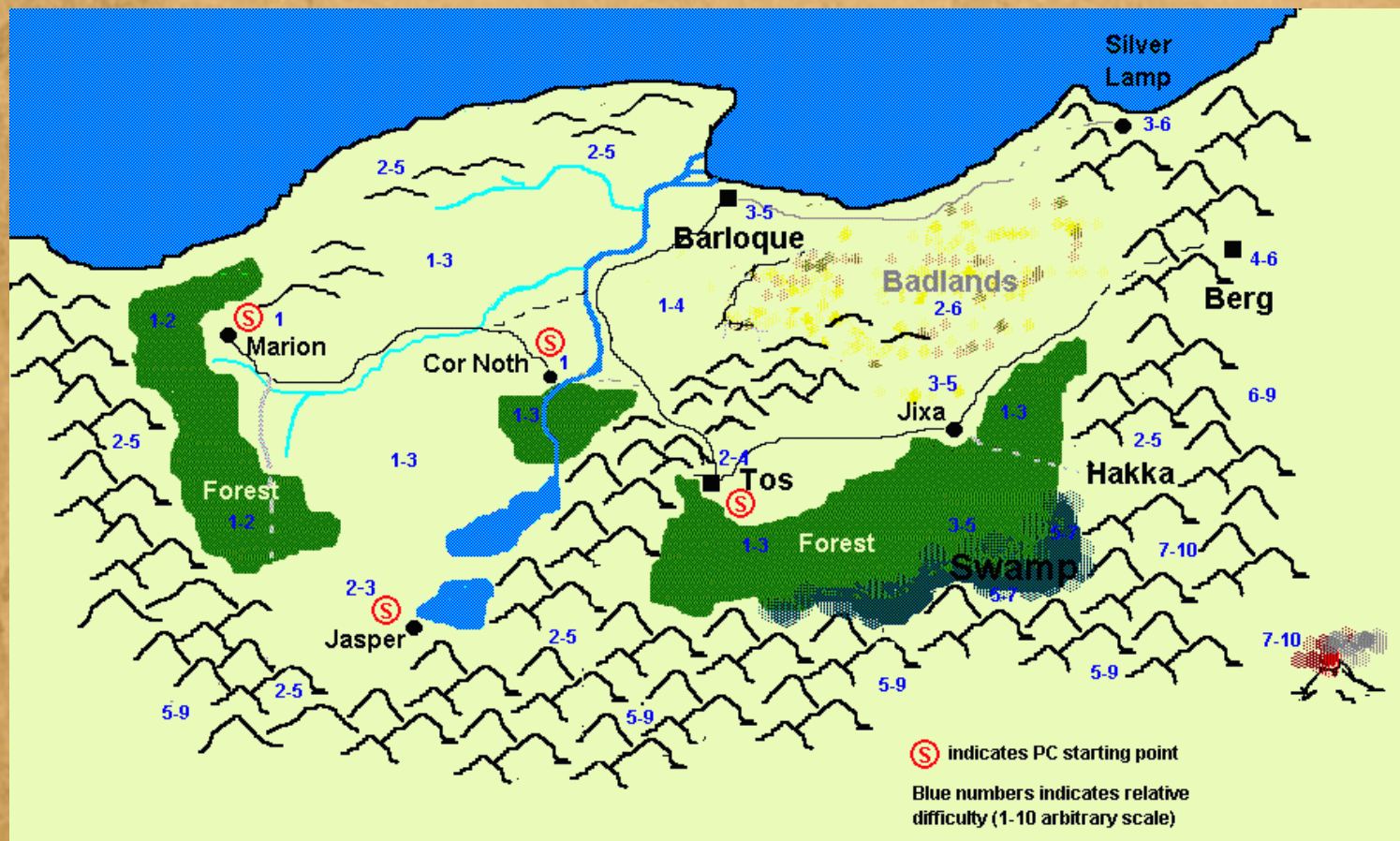


The characters were pretty much straight out of Poser (beta 1.0!)



As the new guy, I was asked to show off the female art – thus I ended up having a female gender for my 'dev' character the entire life of the project.



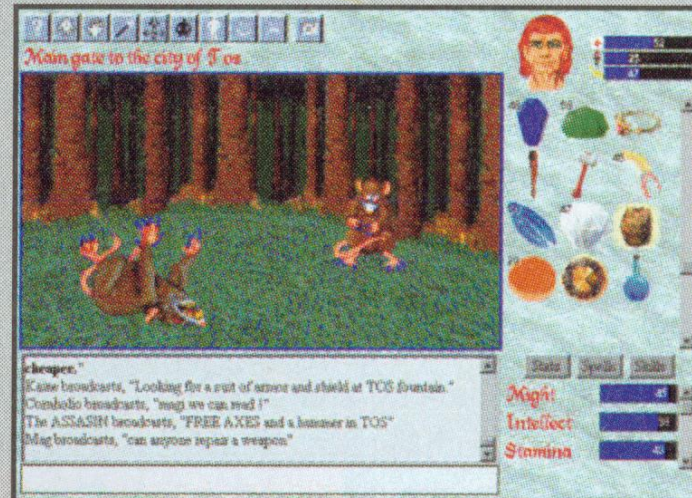


One of the first things I did was design our map.

Come to think of it, this was probably my first professional design document.

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



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

We were starting to get buzz!

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).

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

MERIDIAN 59

Meridian 59

Company: 3DO
Tech Support: 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) 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 (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.

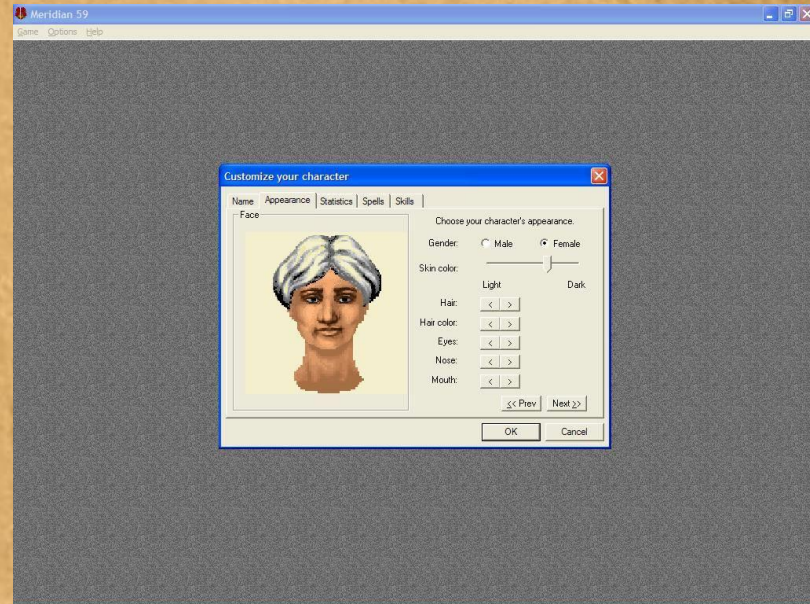
Meridian 59 is a land filled with pos-

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.]

Also note that previews and reviews had to explain how you needed an SLIP/PPP connection. Remember, these were still rare!

MERIDIAN 59

Chasing money is never fun.



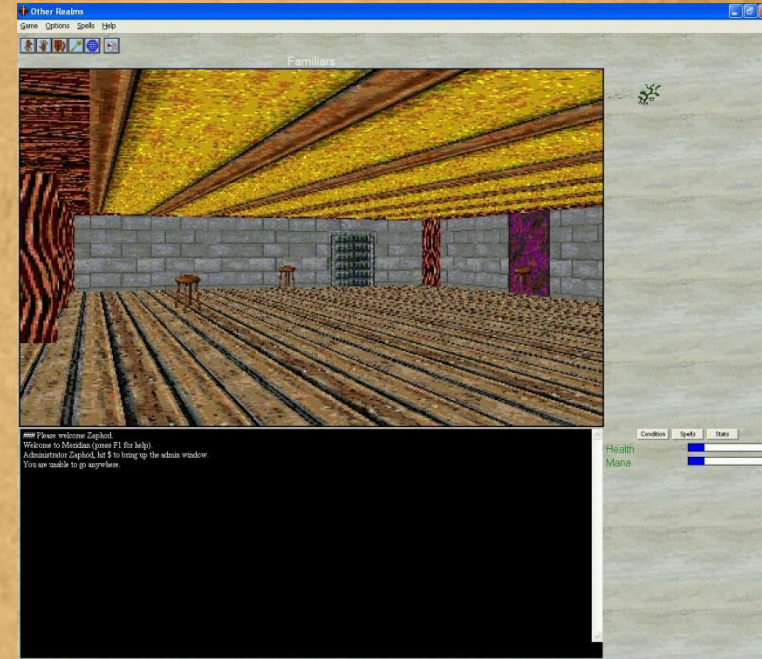
“Steve and John (Hanke) were in biz school at Berkeley at the time too -- we actually had our original box packaging design done by one of John's classes there!”

“Steve and John 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

MERIDIAN 59

To generate buzz, on December 15th, 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

MERIDIAN 50

Our first 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.



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.

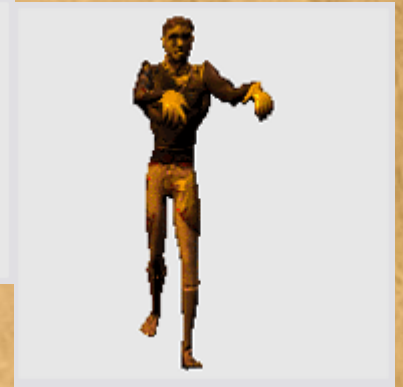
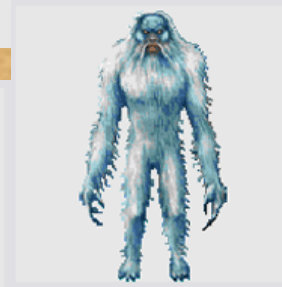
This is when I learned that I am not a very good world builder.



MERIDIAN 59

First bit of fun learning: 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.



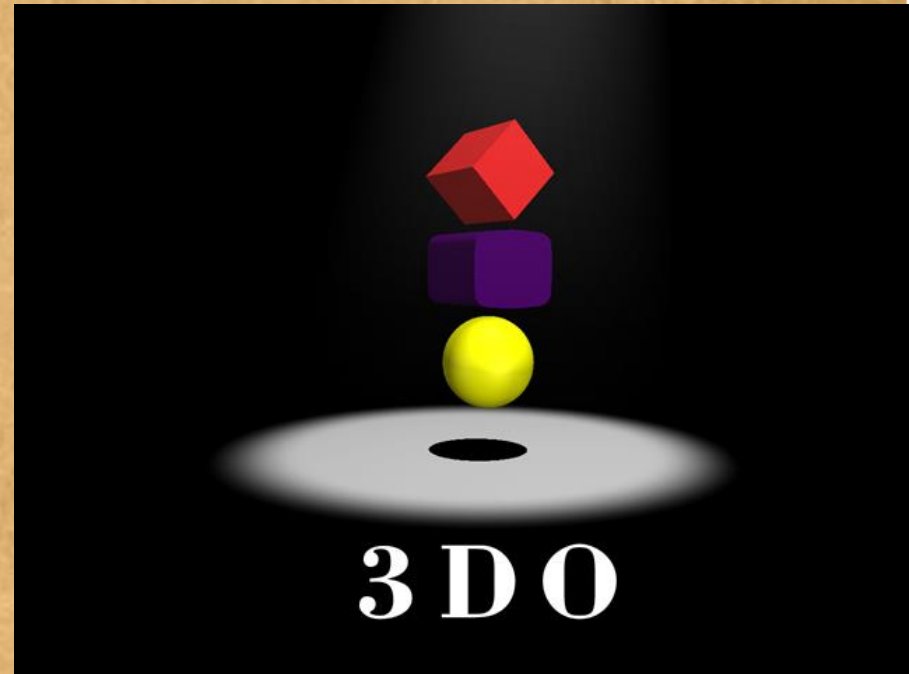
In this period, art was done remotely by artists – mostly inexpensive student-level artists. Design iteration with art was non-existent. We were, in fact, happy when they didn't disappear for months at a time.

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



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

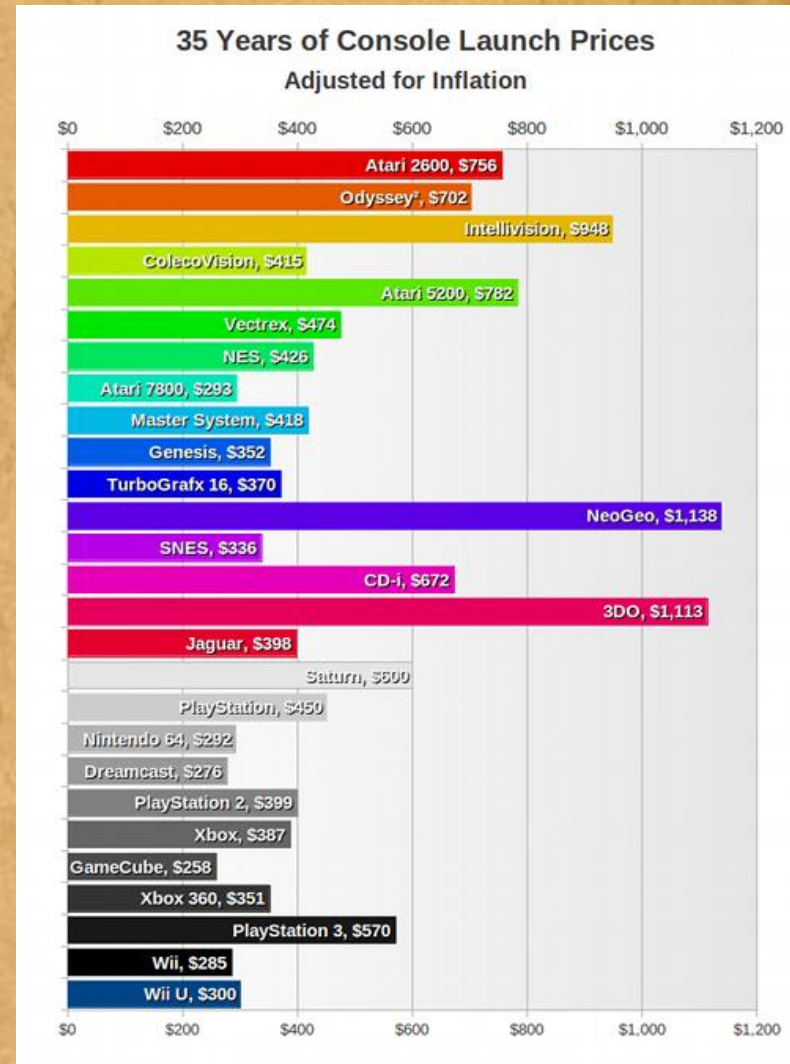
Trip Hawkins was very passionate about online gaming being the future.



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, mostly for 3DO stock options.

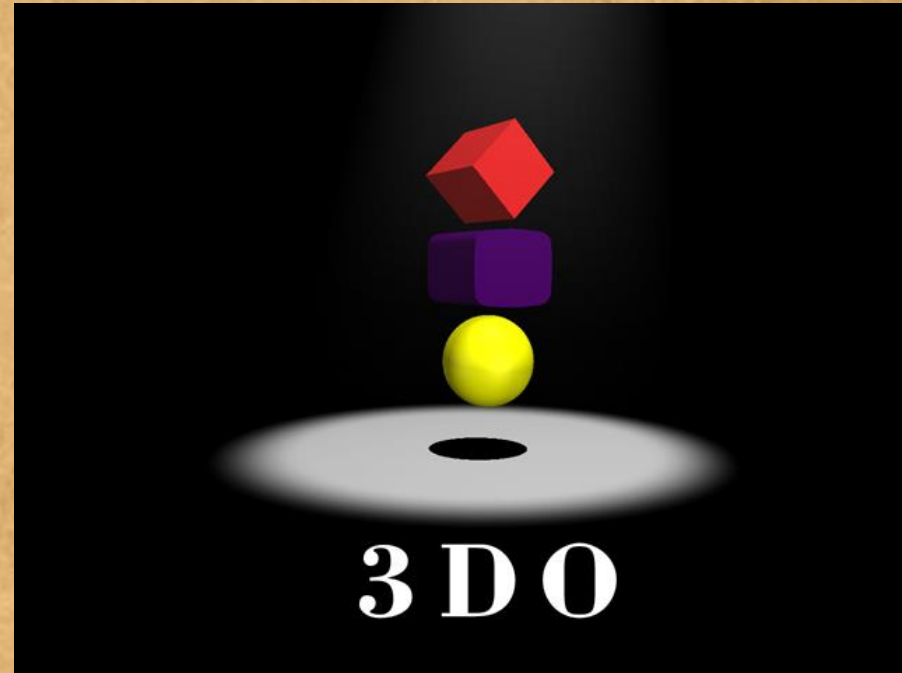
Unfortunately.



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



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.



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 gameplay, even if guild halls were pretty much useless.



25000 players played the beta before ship.

Meridian 59 Shipped on September 27th, 1996.

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

Time to virtual prostitution in-game: 8 hours.

Estimated budget: \$300,000.



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



Our first ad.

**ENGAGE IN THOUSANDS
OF EXCITING
RELATIONSHIPS WITH
TOTAL STRANGERS
WITHOUT
WEARING
ANYTHING MADE OF
LATEX.**

This is not your typical PC product - Meridian 59 is ONLY played on the Internet. Requires SLIP/PPP Internet connection.

Visit your favorite retailer or to order direct, dial 1-800-336-3506.

Play with thousands of real people!

Meridian 59 - the first Internet-based 3D graphical MUD game!

Includes Netscape Navigator Personal Edition!

Fight fierce monsters. Interact with non-player characters. Form a guild. Tell your stories with other daring explorers!

SEE YOU IN THE GAME!
<http://www.59o.com/meridian>

Play Meridian 59 FREE For 30 Days!

Let the Internet quest begin!

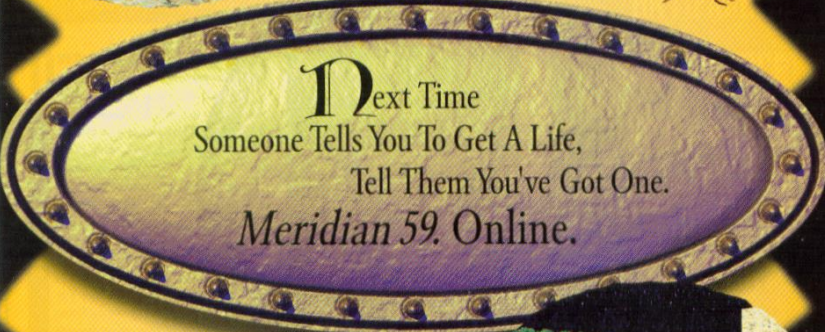
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MERIDIAN 59

Our second ad.

Play FREE!
Download Today
meridian.3do.com/trial




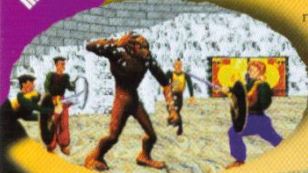



MERIDIAN™59 is waiting.
It's waiting for you to log on
to the first *next generation*
role playing game on the
Internet. It's waiting for
you to succumb to the addiction of its uncertain,
medieval time. Thousands of crafty players await you online –
each a brave explorer living a second life in this



Next Time
Someone Tells You To Get A Life,
Tell Them You've Got One.
Meridian 59. Online.

continually evolving, wonderful
dimension. Fantastic monsters, clever characters, and
special events arrive and surprise with every passing day.
Each to confront, challenge and confound you. The perilous
quest lies ahead! See you in the game. *Visit your favorite retailer*
or to order direct, dial
1-800-336-3506.

Requires 32,000K internet connection. Retail
prices include 30 day free play time. 3DO,
the 3DO logo, Studio 3DO and Meridian 59 are
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Nintendo Navigator included with the instructions
of Nintendo Game Boy Advance are trademarks
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trademarks and/or registered trademarks are the
property of their respective owners.
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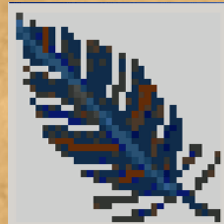
Thankfully, our 3rd ad just involved a scantily clad female that had nothing to do with the game.

MERIDIAN 59

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, and were very highly prized.



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.



PvP Experimentation was what we did a lot of.

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



The Justicar System

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.



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.





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

The second expansion included the 'Hunters and Necromancers' scenario, where.

Aligning as a necromancer or hunter gave you a powerful weapon, but also meant that if the lich queen died, all of her necromancers would die as well.

Necromancers and hunters colluded to make this not happen.

Every now and then, someone would break the rules.





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.

3DO would go out of business in 2003.



In 2004, they 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



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

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 27th, 2012, they released the game as open source.

