

# World of Darkness is CCP's bid for the MMO mainstream



CCP Games, the Reykjavik, Iceland-headquartered developer of the space-faring MMO *EVE Online*, has rooted its success in a clear game design goal: to provide full sandbox gameplay designed to empower players to create emergent situations.

Now the company will use that design principle with its upcoming *World of Darkness* MMO. In development in its Atlanta, GA studio, and based on the White Wolf tabletop role playing IP of the same name, the game is headed up by

creative director Reynir Hardarson (pictured).

While MMOs typically promise players virtually limitless possibilities to explore and interact, there's a streak of linearity and hand-holding that is prevalent in MMO design. Hardarson suggests a few theories about why other developers don't follow in *EVE*'s footsteps in providing more opportunities for emergent gameplay.

"Designing for emergence is very difficult because you can't test it," says Hardarson. "But it's extremely fun to design this way, because you design for theory. You can't test it. The market can test it."

"We feel we've discovered some design principles which aid us in this quest. Because of this ability we have for *EVE*, it sometimes feels like we're kind of aliens in the industry," he half-jokes.

Hardarson and his boss, CCP CEO Hilmar Veigar Petursson, don't have much time for other developers' MMOs.

Petursson accuses them of making "massively single player" games.

"All to control the content and the narrative, and not embracing that people want to play together, which is what we strive for in *EVE*," he says.

"When I played *Warhammer*, I ragequit," Hardarson admits. Mainstream MMO design is about doling out hand-crafted content -- "like, here's a cookie, and all that" -- on a linear path. He wants to explore.

"I'm not a five-year-old. If I want to go in the cave and I want to die, that's my problem."

Hardarson describes the *World of Darkness* MMO as "a sandbox very much inspired by *EVE*."

"We really relinquish a lot of power to the players because we believe in emergence; the most powerful positions in the game are populated by real players," he says.

It's not just *EVE* that is an influence on the game's direction, though -- the live action role players of the Vampire the Masquerade tabletop game play this way, he says. "It's really about politics and power plays," says Hardarson.

"It's not a coincidence we merged With White Wolf games."

Still, he recognizes, "You cannot go pure sandbox all the way." This is something *EVE* has struggled with; while it does grow, it hasn't attracted a mainstream MMO audience due to its difficulty, complexity, and "learning cliff" new player experience.

"The problem with pure sandbox is you are limited to the hardcore," says Hardarson.

And the company had to abandon or severely downscale its plans to add new player-friendly PvE content into the game after [its existing player base revolted](#)<sup>1</sup>. Clearly, the developers see *World of Darkness* as a chance to advance these same goals in a fresh context.

"Our position is that this [type of gameplay] is a really positive thing, and if you go there you'll maybe have an enjoyable experience, but it's kind of like this nebulous thing, really. 'What is it that I'm going to do?' We want to drag you into it," he says.

The way to drag people in will be traditional "theme park" style PvE play, he suggests. Once players get into the setting, they'll see the appeal of the sandbox play.

The game will have purely social play, too. "Having friends, knowing people, doing favors, gives you power in the game. You can play just socially and you can progress," says Hardarson.

"You don't even have to play the game," he says. And "if you want to play the PvE, you can do that all you want," he says.

But when it comes to the emergent, backstabbing sandbox play that powers *EVE*'s success, "We will entice you to join -- there is pressure on everyone, because everyone's valuable," says Hardarson.

#### References

<sup>^</sup> [its existing player base revolted](#)

( [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/165825/giving\\_your\\_players\\_a\\_voice\\_.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/165825/giving_your_players_a_voice_.php) )

---

#### Original URL:

[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/165808/World\\_of\\_Darkness\\_is\\_CCPs\\_bid\\_for\\_the\\_MMO\\_mainstream.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/165808/World_of_Darkness_is_CCPs_bid_for_the_MMO_mainstream.php)