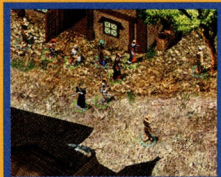




BIOWARE CORP.:
James Ohlen, Lead
Designer, Director of
Writing and Design; Ben
Smedstad, Assistant
Producer; Ross Gardner,
Designer/QA



BALDUR'S GATE

SYSTEM: PC PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY DEVELOPER: BIOWARE CORP.

INTERVIEWED: RAY MUZYKA, PRODUCER & CFO/JOINT-CEO,

Next Generation: In any PC RPG, there are many different ways to play each game. Do you have a personal strategy for doing so, and what works best for you?

Ray Muzyka: This isn't really answering the question per se, but for me, the cool thing about the battles in *Baldur's Gate* is that they are all approached differently. It seems that every one requires a different approach.

The best part of these seemed to be that the approach was consistently valid inside each battle — that is, you could try the strategy that worked in previous battles over and over, but it wouldn't work. Then you could try a new approach, again over and over, and it would work (almost) every time with a particular battle. It really makes you feel like you are solving a challenging problem with each encounter you face — very satisfying.

Above all, BG is an RPG, but the realtime strategy engine we included is very fun. The cool thing about the storyline is that you can actually role-play your characters, particularly in multiplayer — and playing the good or evil part actually causes people in the world to react differently to you.

James Ohlen: Use "web" a lot. It's a great spell and really immobilizes your enemies. A ring of free action or similar types of items are vital to this strategy, or missile weapons all round. Summon monsters then



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haste them — nasty.

Ross Gardner: There are different strategies for each different class; for Fighter, make sure Biggs never gets held, and save often. Thieves are absolutely essential for their hide in shadows and detect traps, as well as a mage — or two.

NG: When you play through the game, which enemies or specific areas do you find the most challenging?

RM: Tazok's tent was quite difficult for me — it required 16 reloads, more than any other single battle in the game. I wasn't feeling particularly creative that night, so I kept entering the tent and rushing headlong into melee combat.

JO: Centel the Spider Queen is pretty tough. She's surrounded by loads of ettercaps and spiders, and is difficult to beat. The Acolytes of Sarevok are deadly as well.

Ben Smedstad: Any mage conflict. You need to use good strategy to even hope to win.

NG: Are you the reigning champ at *Baldur's Gate*? If not, then who on the team is?

RM: No. I wish it were so, but not only are there a lot of people here who are much better, I'm positive

that there are thousands of people who will buy the game and think of things that no one here even dreamed of. Or so I hope!

JO: No, there are others in the office who are better (**RM:** Not too damn likely!)

BS: I'd like to think so, but the truth is that the hardcore gamers out there will surpass me after a while!

RG: I'd like to think that I am the best but if that is the case, it is really only because I have played it the most

NG: Have you been surprised by strategies practiced by other players during the playtesting of the game?

RM: Yes and no. The game is a faithful reproduction of the pen-and-paper game of AD&D, so much of what works in AD&D also works in *Baldur's Gate*. Nevertheless, people always surprise me with their creative solutions.

JO: No, not really, the game runs very close to AD&D pen-and-paper rules — most of the strategies you can and use in the pen-and-paper game you can also use in *Baldur's Gate*.

BS: Of course, I'm surprised by the different combos of spells with items, character class abilities, etc. other players use. The game is so huge that creative players will always find new and cool ways to solve a

problem.

RG: At every turn it seems as though a new strategy pops up from somebody with a creative mind playing through a situation with different characters and playing styles. It is really incredible how diverse all of the possibilities are in *Baldur's*.

NG: What's your crowning achievement in playing *Baldur's Gate*?

BS: 90 hours to complete the game, the first in our office to ever do so start to finish (**RM:** Curse you, Ben!)

RG: Before "hide in shadows" worked, there was this mage tower, inside which were two creatures (who I couldn't even think of surviving more than one round against, let alone killing) who now turn friendly when you talk to the mage. However, this was not the case when I first arrived. My strategy then was to load up my fighter with healing potions and send him in as a distraction while another character finished up business with the mage, hoping the fighter would live long enough. It worked, barely. It was a very memorable encounter.

NG: Were there any features that made it in the game that weren't originally supposed to?

RM: "It's not a bug, it's a feature!" as we like to say. At one point in the game, this annoying fellow named "Noober," who's intended to represent the annoying people that we've all had to deal with in our lives, starts to pester you repeatedly. He questions your characters' abilities as adventurers, mocks your clothing style, and generally aims to annoy. He closes with a comment about how this was the longest

conversation he had ever had, and how in most villages people ended up throwing rocks at him, which was somewhat of a coincidence as at that point I had just targeted him with a magical slingstone, which was flying through the air squarely at his head. Now *that's* satisfaction!

NG: Which character in the game do you find the most interesting?

RM: There are a lot of them, but most are ones I wouldn't choose to have in my party very long: Tiax, who is the self-styled ruler of the planet — and watch out anyone who gets in his way. Xzar, the delusional, mad wizard who periodically waxes philosophical. Ajantis, the paladin who does not waver when good deeds are called for — even if most people would consider them suicidal.

JO: Minsc, because he's crazy. Alora, because she's so annoying.

BS: Minsc — he's the berzerker warrior that everyone's going to love. He kicks ass!

RG: The most interesting character is Imoen, who is the first character that you meet. At first, she's really annoying but it's funny how she grows on you throughout the game, until she became my favorite, plus I think that she has the best character animation in the game.

NG: What games did you play that inspired or influenced the design?

RM: The RPGs that I really enjoyed in the past include (in no particular order): *Wizardry*, *Ultima III/IV*, *Ultima Underworld*, *System Shock*, *Pool of Radiance*, *Curse of the Azure Bonds*, *Dark Sun*, *Betrayal at Krondor*, *Wasteland*, *Fallout*, *Diablo*, and *Bard's Tale*, plus a few others.



JO: *Diablo*, *Warcraft II*, the Goldbox AD&D games, *Fallout*.

BS: All of the great ones! We chose from the features of many of the great games in the past to put together the game we wanted to play ourselves.

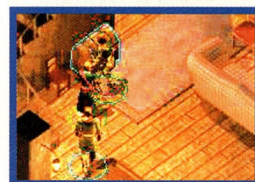
NG: Do you have any personally memorable gaming moments in *BG*?

RM: Starting it. It still gives me a feeling of quiet joy.

BS: Playing multiplayer with James and Ross, watching James hide in shadows and sneak behind the mage casting a big spell — and backstabbing for (lethal) triple damage.

JO: When I fought the Iron Throne mercenaries in the Undercity and my party died in under six seconds.

RG: I love the feeling after a very tough encounter (that has taken a couple hours of intense playing and strategy) when I finally see the villain flying off my hammer in little chunks.



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have been great, and would be great for the sequel, but there was just no time to implement them properly.

NG: What specific advice do you have for players just starting a game of *BG*?

RM: Probably nothing that players won't come up with themselves after a few sessions. But I suggest they try various PC character combinations in the single-player game, and that they try the multiplayer game at some point — it's a lot of fun to play through the game with other people in your party.

JO: Do lots of subquests!

RG: Have a diverse party, make sure you have at least one thief and at least one mage, make sure to save often and remember: "There are probably 100 ways to survive each encounter — just be creative."



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