

★ FEATURE  PREVIEW

The Outer Worlds preview: Flaws in the system

The Outer World is a single-player sci-fi RPG with flaws. And by that, I mean Obsidian Entertainment has put together some interesting ideas to push this genre forward. Shacknews gets a first look.

Ozzie Mejia | December 7, 2018 6:00 AM |  7

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Seven years is a lot of time to spend in cryogenic stasis, especially while hovering over a bustling, colonized planet along the farthest reach of the cosmos. There's a lot of catching up to do upon waking up, as one would imagine. And with that wake-up call, it's time to explore The Outer Worlds, the next game from the crew at Obsidian Entertainment.

Revealed during last night's Game Awards, The Outer Worlds represents a new frontier for Obsidian. Most recently, the studio has been recognized for delving into the fantasy realm with **Pillars of Eternity**. They've also gone the contemporary route, with *Fallout: New Vegas*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II*, and *South Park: The Stick of Truth* among their credits. The Outer Worlds represents the developer's first jump into a modern space adventure, but with original *Fallout* creators Feargus Urquhart, Tim Cain, and Leonard Boyarsky spearheading this project, there are certain elements of this single-player RPG that will also look familiar.



Players venture into an alternate future, where Earth has been colonizing other planets for 100 years. Halcyon represents the farthest colony from Earth. There appeared to be two terraformable worlds in the area, but only one proved to be livable. Most of the game will be played on Terra 2 (Halcyon), which contains man-made settlements, though Obsidian does tease trips to Terra 1 (Monarch), which is filled with monsters.

Character building will be a central component in *The Outer Worlds*. The game will start off with the main character working to unlock their own ship. The ship will act as the game's central hub, allowing for fast travel, inventory storage, and which also acts as a home to companions. Companions are far more than passive tag-alongs here. They will have their own dialogue, speak frequently, and interject in conversations. This not only makes the party system a little more dynamic, but also offers up some freedom in regards to dialogue and character building.

One sample conversation saw the main character's companion ask their own questions and cut in whenever necessary. Dialogue options are numerous. Some selections will advance the missions, some will trigger hostility in the other person, and some will advance some of the player's character traits. There's also a new type of response usable in conversations called the Dumb response. This shows off the main character's gullibility or idiocy, at which point the companion will play the straight person and move the quest along. It essentially allows players to craft their own moronic protagonist, like a Chris Pratt type. Over the course of the game, additional dialogue choices may be made available, depending on the player's attributes and skills.



Quests are sprinkled across the world, but there's no need to worry about manually flying to certain areas to access them. ADA acts as the ship's computer assistant and takes the responsibility of flying to certain parts of the planet. Players and companions travel to the planet by using landing pads. ADA also serves an unknown narrative purpose, as the developers noted that while nothing is sentient, ADA's dialogue is enough to make one wonder.

Equipping one's self for quests is more than preparing the main character, but the key to success is also selecting the right companions. Different companions can be recruited over the course of the game, each with their own unique abilities. They'll also come with their own quests and their own goals. Players must decide whether to embark on missions with companions that complement their own skill set or companions that excel at skills that the main character does not.

One idea that Obsidian is taking to the lengths of delightful absurdity in *The Outer Worlds* is the concept of branding. Virtually everything in the game is branded. Every consumable item and every weapon has a corporate brand name attached to it, along with marketing buzzwords and slogans. Narratively, it shows that corporations are the ultimate master in Halcyon. Every single NPC in the game works for a company. It's a world that has progressed beyond racism and sexism, but it's a world that's entirely consumed by competition between companies. It's a story inspired by the robber barons of the late 19th century, but with the concept taken to its next level.

Outside of the narrative elements, branding represents a chance to show off the game's quirky sense of humor. One example of branding involves exploring a colony owned by Auntie Cleo, a company that manufactures food and drugs. Among the helpful medical miracles they make is a line of products called Auntie Biotics.

(Pause for rimshot.)



The world is filled with hostile lifeforms, many of which will pop out during quests. This is where The Outer Worlds introduces its most intriguing mechanic yet. As players take damage or hit certain setbacks, they'll be prompted to take on a "flaw." Character flaws come in many forms, such as fear of the dark, fear of robots, and fear of Raptidons (Raptiphobia). Taking the flaw will put the player at a slight disadvantage that they need to work around, but in exchange, they'll receive an additional character perk immediately. It's Obsidian's way of crafting an imperfect protagonist, in the vein of Joseph Campbell, and it should go a long way towards making quests more interesting. For example, the aforementioned raid of the Auntie Biotics facility is filled with Raptidons. Raptiphobia makes rushing in a much more difficult path, however the player can also try and sneak in through the vents and take a more stealthy route.

It's entirely possible to craft a character that can get around most combat scenarios by talking their way out of a bad situation. However, if combat does pop up, players will have an array of space-age weaponry at their disposal. They'll also have the ability to momentarily slow time, called Tactical Time Dilation. This can be used to get that perfect shot in or analyze enemy stats and come up with strategies on the fly. TTD will come with a cooldown timer and it's possible to enhance this skill over the course of the game.

Obsidian is crafting an adventure filled with narrative possibilities and replayability. The Outer Worlds looks to be a game filled with different gameplay paths and raucous humor. Yes, I heard the words "diet toothpaste" at some point during this developer demo. There's going to be much more to say about this game in the months ahead. The Outer Worlds is set to release in 2019 on PC, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One.

Ozzie Mejia

Senior Editor

Ozzie has been playing video games since picking up his first NES controller at age 5. He has been into games ever since, only briefly stepping away during his college years. But he was pulled back in after spending years in QA circles for both THQ and Activision, mostly spending time helping to push forward the Guitar Hero series at its peak. Ozzie has become a big fan of platformers, puzzle games, shooters, and RPGs, just to name a few genres, but he's also a huge sucker for anything with a good, compelling narrative behind it. Because what are video games if you can't enjoy a good story with a fresh Cherry Coke?

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 **Shacknews** Ozzie Mejia posted a new article, **The Outer Worlds preview: Flaws in the system**


 **bolneze** Fuck this looks good despite the generic title, the dumb response sounds fun but c'mon unnecessary shots at Chris Pratt. I was concerned about the humor but they wa...


 **OzzieMejia** Oh, come on now. Nobody's looking at Chris Pratt's characters from GOTG and The LEGO Movie and thinking "THAT character's a genius!" ;)

 **bolneze** The characters are hilarious but you leave Chris alone! I'm sure he's very nice

 **Arcanum** Evans and Hemsworth are on record as saying Pratt is the best Chris. That doesn't stop him from frequently playing characters that are lovable dumbasses.

 **MagicWishMonkey** *Quests are sprinkled across the world, but there's no need to worry about manually flying to certain areas to access them. ADA acts as the ship's computer a...*

 **bolneze** PC gamer says it's not a full on open world

 **JackWast** I'm making over \$7k a month working part time. I kept hearing other people tell me how much money they can make online so I decided to look into it. Well, it ...



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