



## CITY OF HEROES

# City of Heroes Diary, Volume 6

With beta imminent, NCsoft Executive Producer Jeremy Gaffney lays out the roadmap to launch for Cryptic's project.

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By IGN Staff

Now the greatest metropolis in America, Paragon [City](#) began in the 18th century as a quiet group of colonial coastal villages. By the time of the bloody Civil War, its location had helped it become a major port. After that conflict came decades of prosperity and continued expansion as a center for industry, science and commerce, which left it particularly vulnerable to the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed. The collapse of the economic order brought both social and political chaos. Various criminal elements, both organized and random, quickly moved in to take advantage. Through bribery, intimidation and murder, the mobs seized control. Corruption became ubiquitous. With every politician and cop seemingly on the take, there was no one to stand up for the ordinary citizens and the cause of justice - until The Statesman.

Over the ensuing decades, Paragon City attracted more super-powered heroes than anywhere else on the planet, but even their combined efforts proved unable to eliminate crime completely. As a result, when [Cryptic Studios' City of Heroes](#) launches next year, players will take up the cause of good. Using a system that allows nearly countless variations, they will create avatars that will then set forth to



prosperity has drawn a number of formidable villain organizations. These groups will offer up a diverse range of nefarious and powerful adversaries including supervillains, aliens, madmen, underground monsters, gangsters and more. With the initial stage of close beta testing about to begin, [NCsoft](#) Executive Producer Jeremy Gaffney lays out the team's roadmap to launch and beyond.

**Have you played City of Heroes?**

YES

NO

## Roadmap to Launch

As we are entering into the joys of closed beta (many of you may have already seen the announcement on the official web site), the question has arisen several times recently from fans - "So, what is remaining between now and ship?" There are a few stages to go before we're ready to hit the shelves, and I thought I'd give a bit of info on the roadmap that lies before us.

Right now, the game is a lot of fun to play - this is one of the main reasons we feel the time is right to start entering closed beta. In the [NCsoft](#) Austin offices, several of our internal teams have taken up playing it just for fun, and there are lunch and evening play sessions going on internally almost every day. There's still work to do, however - tweaking high level game play, making sure all of the (hundreds of) missions are engaging and properly laid out to give you a sense of direction at all times (at least for when you don't want to just tackle evil on your own), adding in more and more special encounters, and of course, responding to players' feedback. The internal response from those we've let into the game - our



positive - everyone feels like cryptics on exactly the right track.

So, it's a great time to be entering closed beta. The intent is to gather a whole lot of people into the game - to date, we've had over 100 people in the game a few times, and the servers performed with no noticeable lag. Additionally, we've have stress clients that simulate hundreds of clients in the game simultaneously - but there's nothing like the real thing.

Now's also the time when we will start our first major balance pass - there is a very large number of powers, enhancements, and inspirations to balance in combination with each other. The first pass on this has held up reasonably well through testing to date, but it's time to start finding and fixing exploits, resolving too-powerful or too-weak power issues, and in general, making it so that risk equals reward throughout the game. To this end, there are a few tools - during beta, people will be able to add comments and suggestions and rate each mission as they complete it. In addition, there are in-game bug-reporting tools that include a snapshot of your character and current world state to help developers debug. And lastly, one of the most valuable tools is the ability of the game's database to track internally how successful all the various power and origin combinations are, as well as how difficult each mission is.

Using these tools (even from casual playing), we can get some useful info - and the later the stage of beta, the more we expect there to be people just playing to have fun - and actively complaining when they aren't! In current testing, we often direct the play experience - a given play session might be "Go to Perez Park and try to get as deep within the forest as possible" or "Form as large groups as possible and go patrol Atlas Park."

Occasionally, as our testing of [City of Heroes](#) continues, we'll be artificially raising character levels on certain sessions so that we can get a mass of people to try out the higher level content and experiment with the higher level powers. Given that it can take a lot of time to level up to the higher levels naturally, it's good to get as



surviving to get to the higher levels as fast as they can. We'll also occasionally be wiping out the database of characters to do data changes, so it's good for testers not to be tooooo attached to any one of their given heroes.

As the closed beta progresses to later stages, we'll regularly have hundreds and thousands of players in the game, and it will begin to more closely resemble the release version both in features and in terms of having both novice and experienced players both in the game together. Finally, when we feel the game is pretty close to launch, we'll open the floodgates as much as possible to try to test everything with a huge mass of people, and work out as many launch issues as possible.

Then, finally, we'll enter the end run. During the final, more open phases of beta, we'll be relaxing the Non-Disclosure Agreement and doing the final tweaks. In addition, we'll be finalizing what things we want to be adding and prioritizing post-launch; our hope is to have a very aggressive set of features and content added regularly to the game after it is live. It's really important to us that the game only get better over time. We are aiming to do the vast majority of tweaking and balancing before open beta, but of course, even after the game is live, we'll be continuing to tune - as we get large masses of people at the higher levels for the first time. However, because of all the tools we have, we plan for the ongoing tuning to be more occasional tweaks than wholesale changes. We'll be wrong about that at least once, though - it's the nature of the online massively multiplayer beast.

And then, finally, we launch - and the real fun begins. Every time an MMP launches, many people cry out as if in sudden anguish "but the game is still changing! It should be done now!" True in some ways, but games that stay static rarely succeed. We hope to continually fix balance issues that arise - we want risk to always equal reward, and we want to reward the most "fun" behaviors instead of rewarding patience for camping spawns or just spending hours in the game. Additionally, we'd like your power choices to be a matter of style, personal preference, and preferred way of fighting as opposed to feeling dumb for not



has already been working as a good combination of the balanced roles that classes give without the rigid structure that keeps you from making the kind of unique hero you want... and fighting in a team-up or super group is a lot of fun because of that.

After launch, we want to be pouring in new content and features on a regular basis, to make sure that the game is not just the best one at launch, but raising the bar even farther afterwards. Thus, many of the most-requested features (which we don't want to hold launch for, but would be fun), will make it into free updates, and some will probably come in expansion packs. We've already been discussing with Cryptic what both of us would like to see for updates and packs, and have been talking since the early stages of development.

This is a very exciting stage right now, and a lot of the hard work from the team (and patience of the fans) is really beginning to pay off - hopefully, you won't have to take our word for it for very long, as the first lucky fans get a chance to get in the game and see for themselves the world that Cryptic has created. I look forward to seeing you there.

**Jeremy Gaffney**

**Executive Producer, Third Party Products**

**NCsoft**

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Was this article informative?

YES

NO

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