



## CITY OF HEROES

# City of Heroes Diary, Volume 9

Cryptic Studios' CEO Michael Lewis on the team's criteria for evaluating whether its project is ready for launch.



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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 this 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 intriguing project moving steadily toward launch, CEO Michael Lewis concludes our series with his thoughts on knowing whether it's ready for prime time.

**Have you played City of Heroes?**

YES

NO

## Next Stop Paragon City!

You've heard from design, production and QA in these diaries, and I hope they've given you a bit of insight into the tremendous amount of work that goes into the creation of a game as massive as [City of Heroes](#). It's been a long, oftentimes hard road, and I want to thank the fans who've stuck by us for years (and years!) while we've been bringing Paragon City to life. I also want to thank our publisher, [NCsoft](#), for sticking by us throughout some admittedly big delays, and our hard-working staff who have kept their critical eyes on the game and rallied in the crunch times to make sure [City of Heroes](#) is something that we're all proud of. Our launch date is looming, and it's exciting in the way that a roller coaster is exciting (i.e., its kind-of scary). But we've gotten excellent feedback from our beta testers, previews are starting to roll out, and we're already hard at work on the first updates to the game. So, I'd like to take a little time to explain about how we've decided to "wrap up" development and switch into live operations, because, of course, launch isn't the end, it's just the beginning.



Heroes started before Cryptic was even formed, as I brought together the design, art and software leads from all across the country. More recently, I've been involved in the design, planning and management of the game. One question that I decided needed an answer early on is "How do we know when we're done?" As with most projects, one can always come up with another feature to add, or a system to tweak. With a massively multiplayer project, you can spend forever adding new features... and we hope we get the chance to do so. But at some point, you have to draw the line and say "We're ready to ship." So if the answer isn't "When all the features we can think of are in," what is it? We came up with some pretty simple ones, based purely on the practical issue of making the launch a worthwhile endeavor.

The first "ready for launch" criterion we came up with is "Is the game fun within the first 15 minutes of playing?" This may seem an obvious goal, but by making it explicit, we were able to really focus our attention on it. We want City of Heroes to appeal to a wide audience, including people who have never tried an MMP before. But we don't want people to just buy the game - we want people to play it. Being a subscription-based game, we live or die by enticing players to return month after month... and the first hurdle is to get them to start having fun right out of the box. You can see this same principle applied to our game design as well. At every stage of the game, we try to present the player with "fun" choices... not difficult ones. No player should wonder, "Am I doing this right?" If you're having fun... you're doing it right.

The second ready for launch criterion is "Will people stick with the game after the initial free period?" If a player has a good enough time playing, but decides it's not worth subscribing... all is for naught. As I mentioned before, there is no end of features, tweaks and content we'd like to add... we just need the opportunity to do so. To decide if we've got enough fun / features / polish, we have to look at what gets us to the critical point - where enough gamers subscribe that we can support a large enough development team to add enough features to interest a large enough number of people to keep subscribing... etc. This is bit trickier to evaluate



We've had plenty of time to test the introductory experience. Most of our beta testers have done it many, many times. It doesn't take long for a gamer to decide if they understand and enjoy the game or not. But of course, the vast majority haven't had more than 30 days of play, so how do we evaluate the second criterion? Well, lacking a crystal ball, we've decided to address the issue with a plan - gameplay, community, and scheduled updates. If the game is fun, and the action evolves as your character evolves, then there's no reason not to keep playing. With this in mind, we've varied the locations, villains, villain tactics, team tactics and even your character's own power and gameplay options as you advance through the game. Community is an essential part of any multiplayer game - it's really the whole point to a multiplayer persistent world. If a player can find a group of friends to adventure with, they'll enjoy their stay in Paragon City all the more. And lastly, to whet players' appetites for a constantly improving and continually fresh game, we'll keep them informed about the new systems, content and features coming online in the months ahead.

Now for the Moment of Truth... did we meet our criteria? Well, I'd be a fool to say anything other than "Yes! The game is totally awesome," right? So don't listen to me... go check out the previews that are rolling out right about now. But I'll tell you my own reason for thinking City of Heroes is ready for prime time. We're receiving such an enthusiastic response from our beta testers, reviewers and (our toughest critics) the development team itself, that it seems crazy not to launch it. Between the positive beta and preview feedback, our update plan, and the unique setting and character creation, we think City of Heroes will stand out as the massively multiplayer game that everyone can enjoy.

Well, that's it for this series... I hope it has been entertaining and perhaps a little enlightening. Check out the City of Heroes website for the latest information on the game. And remember, Paragon City needs heroes! I hope to see you there!

**Michael Lewis**  
**CEO, Cryptic Studios**