

• Holsters and thigh-highs—together again.

SWORD OF THE NEW WORLD: GRANADO ESPADA

Grinding, grinding, over the Spanish Main

PUBLISHER: K2 Network DEVELOPER: IMC Games GENRE: MMORPG AVAILABILITY: Retail, Free Download (www.swordofthenewworld.com) ESRB RATING: Teen
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 6GB hard drive space, Internet connection MULTIPLAYER: Massive Scale VERSION REVIEWED: Retail Box

REVIEW

While *Granado Espada* sounds like it sits in the Spanish wine section next to Ponche Caballero, it's actually a land named after its discoverers, Ferruccio Espada and Gilbert Granado. This "New World" offers adventurous 17th-century families a Club Med vacation—from hell.

In this South Korean import MMORPG, you create and name a family of generic, noncustomizable characters (the only option is "class"), all dressed like baroque-style pimps and courtesans (think top hats, hoop skirts, and never-ending cleavage). Three at a time, they work the well-worn "grab a quest, kill, loot, return, repeat" paradigm. Many of the quests are ambiguous, though—clues are unclear, the quest journal is dismally written, and the dialogue windows are tedious and poorly translated.

The big standout feature here is multicharacter control (MCC), which allows you to use three units at once. Sadly, given the *huge* numbers of mobs that attack at every turn, it's almost impossible to control characters individually as you struggle for proficiency with the clunky stance-and-skill system. Each character is associated with a half-row of keys on the QWERTY side of the keyboard, and it can get ugly. Say you're maneuvering your healer: "Mass Heal! Aargh, that's 'F,' except in Assassin stance, it's Backstab, but I'm in Bard stance, so it doesn't do s***!" And by that time, the whole party's dead.

PROGRESS QUEST

On the other hand, if you use the automatic modes, the game virtually plays itself. Heck, you might as well mow the lawn as your characters finish three collection quests. Then, after a good night's rest, you note that they've gained two levels—seriously. The thing's a paradise for farmers, who don't even have to endure verbal slings from other annoyed players. If another team autoattacks your family's mobs, don't bother shouting "U n00b, YRU KS-ing?" at the dirty loot farmers—you have to actually pay

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for a megaphone each time you address the masses. Fortunately, this *does* mean way less chat-scroll stupidity...but sometimes it's just too sterile.

Some might forgive a lot of the hassles, because the visuals and score are truly splendid...and for some reason, the grind (quests often require up to 250 items) is more mesmerizing than annoying. It feels something like a more sophisticated *Diablo II*. The starting level cap is 100, but the real milestone is when you reach family level 6 on a "Baron Server" and can engage in the not-quite-commended-at-the-time-of-this-writing PVP system.

It's tough to say how well things will mature when more players reach PVP level and above and the political faction model comes into play. The game became completely fee-free about a month after release, either as an incentive for retention and new purchases, or because a "buy shiny stuff with real money" market brings in a whole lot of maintenance cash. For this reason only, it might be worth a try...but with so many other streamlined MMOs available, it hardly seems worth the learning curve. Only a revisit after about six months will reveal whether or not *Sword of the New World* manages to reach its potential...if anyone's willing to wait that long. •Cindy Yans

VERDICT

• Interesting multicharacter system; inspired mob design; hypnotic combat.

• Unintuitive from A to Z; confusing quest data; poor translation; bad bugs.

4/10

BAD



• Yes, Mistress, I do want to identify the major cities on the northern land masses.

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