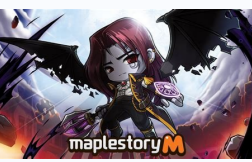


I'm not robot!



Is maplestory mobile the same.

永らく皆様にお楽しみいただいております「メイプルストーリー2」は、2020年5月27日(水)12:00をもちまして、株式会社ネクソンでのサービスを終了させていただきました。ネクソンは、「メイプルストーリー2」で培ったゲーム運用経験のノウハウを、魅力あふれるコンテンツ開発に生かしてまいります。今後ともネクソンをどうぞよろしくお願いたします。Illustration by Alex Castro / The Verge

Logging onto MapleStory back in 2004 was like entering a different world, one filled with magic, community, and ridiculously cute child-like avatars. Today there are dozens of games that offer a similar, and often better, experience. But in the early 2000s, the free-to-play, casual multiplayer MapleStory was singular, attracting fan videos, art, and later on YouTube. By 2009, MapleStory had reached an incredible 92 million players. A notable 36 percent of those players were under the age of 18, and many of them likely grew out of the game over time. While millions still play the game, its audience is a fraction of what it once was. Today, a cult following of 14 million players remains, and Nexon, MapleStory's parent company, has failed to lure in new recruits and retain them. But the players that remain can actually spend money and help the game stay lucrative. The vast majority (70.3 percent) of the user base is now aged 18 through 30, meaning many of them now have jobs and can fund their characters' stylish clothes, gear, and battle prowess through buying prepaid cash cards or swiping their credit cards, which is what I did for a spell. The problem has been that while South Korea received MapleStory 2 back in 2015, it hasn't yet come to the US market. Now, Nexon has launched the sequel in a closed beta in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania, and briefly opened up a MapleStory M mobile game in beta on Android. The original release may be waning, but these two games hold the promise of reviving an old but beloved franchise. They might even inspire a new generation of MapleStory fans. Nexon knows the "power of playing the long game." Nexon America President Jungsoo Lee tells The Verge in an email interview that the long delay for MapleStory 2 coming to the US market was due to the time involved in "testing and localizing the game through a series of closed betas for each region." It may seem strange for such an old game to receive this kind of attention from a large company like Nexon, but Lee says that his company knows "the power of playing the long game." MapleStory 2's closed beta started on May 9th, but there's no official release date yet for it or MapleStory M. As the original MapleStory aged, its daily active users were overtaken by cheaters and spammers. If you stroll into the town called Henesys where many characters stand idly while their real-life counterparts get up for a walk or to get a beverage, or to the Free Market where people trade, you'll find that spam takes up most of the general chat, and it's hard to get a word in edgewise. When hunting bosses that drop rare items, you may find cheaters running third-party programs to automatically take the items before you can reach them. Both of these unpleasant occurrences, which grew more common as the game got older, contributed to MapleStory's steady decline. For now, the beta versions of MapleStory M and MapleStory 2 are bot-free and trading between players isn't allowed yet, so there's no chance of getting scammed on a deal. During the January beta, I tested out MapleStory M on a Samsung Galaxy S8 and found a much more streamlined version of the original desktop game. Instead of having to use the entire QWERTY keyboard and memorize chain combos for characters, you only need to press a few buttons. As is the case with many other mobile games, your character moves by itself to quest destinations and even auto hunts monsters so that you can level up without a lot of effort. The town of Henesys in MapleStory M. According to Lee, the team realized grinding on mobile wasn't ideal so they created the auto play mode "so that players can still enjoy MapleStory mobile even after many hours of playing with a smaller screen." Still, the auto mode is less efficient than an active player and you do have the option to manually kill monsters and level up, if you're nostalgic for grinding. If MapleStory M seems like Nexon just ported a more manageable version of the original game onto mobile, then MapleStory 2 is the company turning the game into a whole different animal. The director of the MapleStory 2 team, Minseok Shin, says that "MapleStory 2 is not just a 3D conversion of the original MapleStory. While both games share some similarities, for MapleStory 2 we really went back to the drawing board and reimagined the game." My character, Shannon, flying over Tria with my Duckling Balloons mount, which is a funny and troll way to get around. Like many other recent massively-multiplayer role-playing games coming out of Asia such as Blade and Soul or Twin Saga, MapleStory 2 has beautiful graphics, an overwrought storyline about saving the universe from evil, and distinct classes to play. Familiar characters are redrawn to be enticing and adorable in three dimensions. The sequel also takes away the original game's gender-locked classes and limited selection of looks in the character creation page. (If you chose to play a demon slayer in the original, you'd have to spend real money or forage for a beauty coupon if you wanted to remove the character's natural gray skin and red eyes.) I chose to create a warrior-type Berserker, a dude who has a pretty angry and competitive backstory, but I was able to customize his appearance to be feminine and wear pink curls and multi-colored eyes. The game emphasizes customization and individuality over generic defaults. It has an obsession with asking if you want to screenshot any part of the game, and it automatically saves screenshots in a designated folder in your computer. Perhaps the biggest indication of the game's ambitions is that you finally get your own house. I never noticed this while playing the original game, but old Maplers are essentially nomads. MapleStory 2 fixes this problem by giving you a big old house so you can craft your own little corner of the game. Executive Assistant Jun introduces you to your new house with just a touch of luxury. Despite the shift to 3D, MapleStory 2 smartly retains key elements of the game and storytelling that made the original so distinctive. Certain towns like the mushroom-filled, cheery huts of Henesys, and the cool, urban thief hideout that is Kerling City, are kept and their theme music plays when you enter, bringing back a strong sense of nostalgia. The storyline has evolved and added dozens of new characters, but the core of the tale remains the same: it's the evil Black Mage versus the beautiful empress. The ever-popular thief class is still available and so are wizard, knight, priest, archer, heavy gunner, and assassin. Some less-welcome elements of the original are still in-place, like the notoriously glitchy Nexon game launcher. Still, once you're in the game, a lot can be forgiven, given how it's the community that really makes the experience fun. At its core MapleStory is an online destination for friends to gather, much like Club Penguin or Neopets. I unexpectedly met my current boyfriend of nearly three years through MapleStory when an idle summer drew us both back into the game, and have met several Maple friends in real life from across the country. We keep in touch, even if none of us play the old game much anymore. The people of MapleStory 2 seem nice enough for now. When I died and got pinned by a tombstone, I typed in chat for help, and someone actually walked over and revived me, before telling me he hadn't helped me earlier because he thought I was a non-playable character due to my suspiciously simple username. MapleStory 2's lively main city, Tria, on channel one, on a Thursday evening during beta. It's hard to predict where MapleStory 2 will go, whether it will capture that same dedicated audience as its predecessor, or if it will fall into the same traps that led to its demise. Some of the things that plagued the original game, such as DDOS attacks during one winter and random lag, are a result of age and outdated infrastructure. The game also has a limited amount of meaningful end-game content, which can bore veteran players who burned through the main story. Worst of all, the old MapleStory had a pay-to-win streak through a feature aptly named the Cash Shop. I was guilty of spending almost \$4,000 on this game over the course of a year playing my character Mercedes, an elf queen who wields dual bowguns. Each seemingly minor upgrade to my wardrobe and battle stats added up over time, resulting in that hefty sum. And I wasn't alone. Players who spend real money in the game are at an extreme advantage compared to unfunded players. Challenging bosses like Lotus, who can shoot lasers from all angles, while rocks fall from the sky, require multiple players with funding to team up and defeat it. (Luckily, I was able to re-sell a lot of that gear, recouping close to half of what I spent in the game.) Lee admits that this was an issue with the original game. "We have rightfully earned a reputation for publishing pay-to-win games," he says. "With our upcoming slate of titles developed specifically for the Western audience, we are attempting to turn over a new leaf, creating games that are truly free to play." He says that to keep MapleStory 2 and MapleStory M from becoming pay-to-win, Nexon is "no longer requiring players to pay to get certain elements necessary for winning," and it will disclose loot crate rates upfront, an increasingly common practice. MapleStory M and MapleStory 2 will still have certain features that are eased by premium currency, such as getting special haircuts and eyes, quicker transportation across towns, and extra skill pages. But players aren't at any significant disadvantage if they don't pay for those features. People have debated on Nexon forums whether the Korean version of MapleStory 2 is pay-to-win and they haven't come to any true consensus. If marriage is added, there will be support for LGBTQ weddings. There's also a chance for important changes that Nexon can introduce in its mobile and 3D iterations of MapleStory. The developers for MapleStory M have said that, while the game currently doesn't let you marry other players, if marriage is added there will be support for LGBTQ weddings. That's a step up from the original Maple, which didn't allow same-sex marriage, paralleling South Korea's real-life refusal to legally recognize gay marriage. Similarly, specific jobs and classes are no longer gender bound, even though the game still only offers two genders. These shifts are as meaningful as updated graphics, helping to move a 15-year-old game into the modern day. Recently, I log onto MapleStory 2's main city, Tria, and the square looks so bustling with life, it lags every time a person jumps. But it's the good kind of lag that shows the server is alive. Someone is playing all the greatest hits from the 90's, from Aqua's "Barbie Girl" to the Backstreet Boys' "I Want It That Way" on the keyboard, a new feature added to MapleStory 2. From this vantage point, MapleStory is looking the furthest from dead that it's been since 2009.

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