

[PCGAMER] Asura preview: Experimental science and PCGamer exclusive hands-on impressions

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Guild Wars pint-size Asura are as crazy as they are smart and that's saying a lot, because they're really, really smart. Their homeland may not be on the frontlines of battle in *Guild Wars 2*, like the Charr and Human starting areas, but there's more than enough chaos happening in the laboratories and neighborhoods near Rata Sum, their giant capital city. I was recently allowed to be the first person outside ArenaNet to play through these tiny mad scientists' starting area on the game's development servers and I had an absolute blast (both figuratively and literally). Here are 11 awesome things I did on my way to level 10 on my Asura Engineer.

1. Make the ugliest and cutest asura I can

My wife complains that the girl on the right (I bet you thought that was a dude, right?) looks like Kreacher (the demented house elf from *Harry Potter*) with a nose job, but I like her stone-dead demeanor and bad ninja haircut. And those giant puppy dog eyes on the other can get anything they want from daddy. There were no major surprises in the character customization: the Asura's is just as robust as it is for the other races, with complete control over facial features and appendages like those ginormous floppy ears.

2. Lose to Gavin in golem chess

Okay, I'm not proud of this one. It would've been better if I'd won, of course, but the turn-based dueling minigame is still good fun when you're on the losing side. It plays like a Rock 'em Sock 'em Robots game, where you control a mini golem on a 3 x 3 grid that occasionally spawns random power-ups. Each turn, you can either move or punch in front of you, and the first golem to drop is the loser. After Gavin left, I attempted to regain my dignity by beating up on the AI, which takes over the enemy golem if no players are up for the challenge.

3. Fix a deathmatch between two golems

Fighting fair isn't the Asura way, so I ditched the tiny golems and got myself a giant one. With a touch of Asura ingenuity—specifically, hunting down fiery harpies and using their embers to super-charge my team's golem right before it went into the cage

fight I was able to ensure victory for the good guys. Take that, Gavin!

4. Accidentally super-size mosquitoes

I didn't mean to. Well, you see, I was trying to use the enlarger beam on the tiny Asuran assistants running around the laboratory floor. They'd accidentally shrunk themselves, I saw the enlarger beam sitting on the table and I figured I could help them out. Be a good neighbor and all that. How was I supposed to know that a mosquito would fly in front of me right as I shot the beam? Or that I'd make the same error 10 times until everyone in the laboratory was dead? It was an honest mistake!

5. Save children from other rampaging monsters

Now, this one really wasn't my fault, I swear! It's those crazy developers at ArenaNet and their awesome dynamic event system, which kept the kiddie scientists lab in seemingly constant peril from enraged fire elementals, giant yaks and the like. Every time I ran by the laboratory, the kids were running outside, fleeing some new horrible disaster they'd created and no matter how times I helped, they always found some horrible new way to endanger their lives. It was, frankly, quite exciting to see what they'd cook up next and I kept poking my head in to sadistically spy on their unfortunate circumstances. The nastiest brought this angry broodmother to their doorstep.

6. Solve the energy crisis

The energy source at the nearby Opticarium had revolted, so I battled the rogue sparks floating around like a pack of electrically-charged lazy bums. My strategy: let them zap me repeatedly. Once I'd worn them down with a few gun shots, they passed out and I could toss them back in the building's power cells. Of course, seeing the place back online, the devious renegade scientists of The Inquest (a rival pack of unscrupulous Asuran scientists that tried to sabotage me at every turn while leveling up and appear to be the main antagonists for new Asura characters) overran the place with a huge army and slaughtered all of us. Time to regroup and throw them out.

7. Fight frogger

The local tribe of frog-people were supposedly nice guys most of the time, but something'd driven them crazy by the time I showed up. That meant it was time for

me to shoot their little gizzards out the back of their slimey bodies. Oh, uh & for science!

8. Light myself on fire

My big takeaway from the first 10 levels: life is anything but safe as an asura. The polite and seemingly friendly golem who offered me a weather-control staff forgot to mention that it has a very high likelihood of backfiring in humorously ridiculous ways. Equipping it replaced all of my skills with new ones related to weather effects. Create an shockwave, summon a lightning storm, rain down healing water on your enemies, it promised! Instead, I ended up puking my guts out and turning my corpse into a barbecue pit. But as the Asura say, If it s not broken, you re not innovating.

9. Quell a golem revolt

I m starting to really hate these Inquest jerks. First they tried to beat me in golem boxing, then they stole my lab supplies, overran the electricity plant, and now they hijacked all the golems in my friend s lab and ordered them to kill us. It was a fun sort of last-stand mode with waves of golems rushing in while myself and a few NPCs held the line to protect our tech. Sorry, iron giant, there s only one way this is gonna end.

10. Marvel at the sights

The Asura capital city of Rata Sum is an engineering miracle. Intricately cut into a mountain-sized cube, its geometrically shaped decorations float impossibly in the sky, dispersing vegetation, water, and technology around the place. It s an incredibly gorgeous city and fits the Asura personality perfectly. Also, I don t mean to brag, but I have a pretty sweet lab on the outskirts of town (where a lot of the personal storyline takes place).

11. Make a stand & for science!

Most of the storylines in the Asura starting area revolve around using technology to defend against threats presented by the Inquest, or that your well-intentioned neighbors had inadvertently created. The legendary Asura, Zojja, accompanied me on and off in the personal story areas, and helped discover new ways to innovate on current golem technology, without having to resort to trapping the souls of Asura inside them, like the Inquest were doing. I d eagerly anticipating playing as an Asura in Guild Wars 2 because of their potential to be a light-hearted and fun break from some of the overly serious characters and storylines the other races deal with on the frontlines of battle. From my first few hours as a mad scientist, it looks like ArenaNet s tapped into that potential and brought it to life wonderfully. I can t wait to explore more of the world

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with my tiny genius.