

Video Game Reviews: 'Rings' shines brightly, could rival 'Warcraft'

by Jeb_Haught

Game: "The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar"

Publisher: Midway

System: Windows XP/Vista

Cost: \$50 plus monthly fee

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

'THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE' - In 'The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar' players can play as a no-name human, elf, dwarf or hobbit. CNS Photo courtesy of Midway. HOBBIT WORLD - Throughout their adventures, players of 'The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar' will encounter, and sometimes aid, well-known characters from the series. CNS Photo courtesy of Midway. 'BUST-A-MOVE BASH!' - In 'Bust-A-Move Bash!' players must clear the screen of colored bubbles by hitting them with similar-colored bubbles fired from a cannon. CNS Photo courtesy of Majesco. PARTY GAME - 'Bust-A-Move Bash!' is a relaxing single-player game, and the hectic multiplayer mode transforms it into a fun and exciting party game. CNS Photo courtesy of Majestic. Now that "World of Warcraft" has dominated the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game genre for more than two years, PC gamers are on their own quest to find the next big thing, perhaps one game to rule them all. Midway hopes to answer this call with its first MMORPG, "The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar."

After several hours of questing in Middle Earth, "WoW" seems a bit shallow by comparison. Rather than having thousands of players running around as story characters, players are free to play as a no-name human, elf, dwarf or hobbit (no "bad guys"). Throughout their adventures, players will encounter, and sometimes aid, well-known characters from the series, but they must build their skills and reputation from scratch.

While there may not be as many types of characters to choose from as in "WoW," character customization is vastly more complex and flexible. For starters, players have more equipment slots to fill, and they can also enhance their abilities by earning cool titles, such as "wolf slayer." In addition, players in groups can combine their skills to perform fellowship maneuvers that can improve attack power, healing and more.

Because of its well-known lore, this game focuses on questing more than fighting against other players (PvP). This means there are thousands of interesting quests to keep players busy for months. As a result, PvP is limited to certain areas, and these locations are the only places where players are free to play as Sauron's forces.

With free additional content slated for release this summer, "The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar" looks to be "WoW's" most serious competitor to date.

Game: "Bust-a-Move Bash!"

Publisher: Majesco

System: Nintendo Wii

Cost: \$40

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 3 stars

Just before I fired up Majesco's latest puzzle game, "Bust-a-Move Bash!" I thought to myself, "Great - another simplistic game for the Wii." Little did I know that by the end of my first gaming session, my tune would change to, "Oh, joy - another fun game for the Wii."

By mixing elements from the puzzle game "Tetris" with the classic shooter "Missile Command," Majesco has managed to come up with a game that's easy to learn but quite challenging to master in both single-player and multiplayer modes.

Basically, players must clear the screen of colored bubbles by hitting them with similar-colored bubbles fired from a cannon. Three bubbles of the same color must come into contact to make them drop. Additionally, unusual ammunition, such as fire bubbles that blow up small sections of bubbles, adds variety to the strategies that players can employ.

For some real fun, get up to seven friends to join you in the fast-paced multiplayer mode and watch drinks fly in all directions as everyone frantically tries to bash the most bubbles with their Wiimotes before they bash one another over the head.

"Bust-a-move Bash!" is a relaxing single-player game, and the hectic multiplayer mode transforms it into a fun and exciting party game. Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older)

RATING KEY

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

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