Middle @-@ earth : Shadow of Mordor

Middle @-@ earth : Shadow of Mordor is an open world action @-@ adventure video game set within Tolkien 's legendarium , developed by Monolith Productions and published by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment . Officially announced in November 2013 , it was released for Microsoft Windows , PlayStation 4 , and Xbox One in September 2014 and released for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 in November 2014 .

The story of the game takes place between the events of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings . The players control Talion , a ranger who was killed by the Black Hand of Sauron . Talion 's spirit merged with the wraith of the Elf Lord Celebrimbor , and together they try to avenge the death of their loved ones . Players can engage in melee combat , and utilize some of the wraith abilities to fight against enemies . The game uses the Nemesis System , which allows the artificial intelligence of non @-@ playable characters to remember the death of the game 's protagonist and react accordingly .

The game 's development began in 2011 . In order to create an accurate environment and be consistent with the books written by Tolkien , the developer consulted several people from Warner Bros. , and Peter Jackson , the director of The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit film series . In addition , the team received assistance from Weta Workshop , who gave advice to the team in creating special effects . Monolith focused on the development of the PC , PlayStation 4 and Xbox One versions , while the development of the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions was outsourced to Behaviour Interactive . The port to Linux and OS X was done by Feral Interactive .

Middle @-@ earth : Shadow of Mordor received critical acclaim upon release . Most praise directed at its combat , open @-@ world design , the game 's lore , and the Nemesis System , which most critics agreed was the best part of the game . Some criticism was aimed at the game 's story and boss battles . The game marked the biggest launch for a game based upon The Lord of the Rings universe , and would go on to win several awards from video gaming publications . Two post @-@ release downloadable content , Lord of the Hunt and The Bright Lord , were released in December 2014 and February 2015 respectively .

Gameplay

Middle @-@ earth : Shadow of Mordor is a third @-@ person open world video game , where the player controls a ranger by the name of Talion who seeks revenge on the forces of Sauron after his family , including his wife , are killed . Players can travel across locations in the game through parkour , riding monsters , or accessing Forge Towers , which serve as fast travel points . Though Talion is mortally felled in the game 's introduction , the wraith of the Elven Lord Celebrimbor is able to use his power to keep Talion alive , along with gifting him wraith @-@ like abilities to exact his revenge . Missions in the game feature main story missions that follow Talion 's quest for revenge , side missions that involve following Gollum as to find artifacts that are tied to Celebrimbor 's past , missions to free the human slaves that have been captured by the Uruk armies and forced to work for Sauron , and additional quests to help forge new abilities for Talion 's sword , bow , and dagger . The player also has the freedom to pursue side quests and roam around Mordor , with special activities to collect specific flora or to hunt certain creatures , or to find old artifacts or Elvish seals . Completing quests earns the player a number of rewards : experience points that are used to unlock new abilities for the player from both Talion 's ranger and Celebrimbor 's wraith skills , a Power value that allows the player to access more powerful abilities to unlock , and an in @-@ game currency called " Mirian " that the player can use to improve Talion 's health , wraith skill capacity , or forge new slots on his weapons to add additional runes (as described in the Nemesis System below) .

In completing missions , the player can have Talion engage in melee , ranged combat , and stealth approaches , with some missions rewarding the player more for completing the mission in a specific manner . Talion 's ranger abilities are enhanced through Celebrimbor , allowing the player to mix combat with special focus @-@ based attacks ; these latter attacks can be used to slow time down while aiming with the bow , drain focus out of an enemy foe , or , later in the game , brand the foe to

become an ally of Talion . The combat system uses an attack @-@ chain system that enables the player to perform special moves after building the chain to a large enough value , such as instantly draining a foe of focus or performing an area focus attack . With the combat system , they can also counter and dodge attacks . Stealth is a critical element in some missions ; several areas are considered Strongholds and should Talion 's presence be discovered , an alarm will sound and more Uruks will arrive to try to kill him .

Nemesis system

A core feature of Shadow of Mordor is the Nemesis system . The game tracks a number of specially tagged Uruks as part of Sauron 's armies , who will lead the other Uruks in battle . Defeating these leaders will help to weaken Sauron 's army , and these leaders will drop a rune which the player can install on Talion 's weapons to provide additional buffs in battle . Alternatively , being killed by a leader will cause the current mission to be cancelled and the player returned to a safe point to continue exploring , and the leader will gain additional power , making him more difficult to defeat in the next encounter . If the procedurally generated Orcs survive an encounter with Talion , they will also be promoted . Further , such deaths are tracked through online servers , and the player 's friends on the various network services will be notified of this death and be offered the chance to accept the Vendetta mission , and carry out exact revenge on the Uruk . If the mission is successful the game will give rewards to both the original player and the victorious friend .
The leader Uruk will have a range of strengths and weaknesses , the latter that can be exploited in combat to quickly weaken and defeat the leader . The player can gain knowledge of these through finding intelligence mostly by draining and interrogating marked Uruks for this . Being able to exploit such weaknesses in defeating the leader will gain a better quality rune and more experience points in this manner . Once the player gains the ability to brand Uruks , they can brand these leaders and convert portions of Sauron 's army to their side . At this point , the player can use the Nemesis system to trigger infighting within the Uruk forces which they can then directly participate in , helping to weaken the army further . Uruks that survive their encounter with Talion will remember this when Talion combats them again ; for example , an Uruk who was thrown into a fire by Talion might want revenge on him for being disfigured .

Synopsis

Setting

The game takes place in the 60 @-@ year gap between the events of J.R.R. Tolkien 's The Hobbit and The Lord of The Rings . The family of Talion (voiced and motion captured by Troy Baker) , a ranger of Gondor responsible for guarding the Black Gate of Mordor , is killed by the armies of Sauron , but Talion is revived with " wraith @-@ like abilities " and heads into Mordor to exact his revenge . Mordor is not yet a barren wasteland in this story . The player will encounter Gollum (voiced by Liam O 'Brien) . Talion discovers that the wraith who revived him is Celebrimbor (voiced by Alastair Duncan) , the greatest Elven smith master of the Second Age , who also seeks revenge against Sauron .

Plot

Talion , a captain , serves within a garrison stationed at the Black Gate of Mordor . The garrison is attacked by Sauron 's Orc forces led by three Black Númenórean captains ; the Hammer of Sauron (John DiMaggio) , the Tower of Sauron (J. B. Blanc) , and their leader , the Black Hand of Sauron (Nolan North) . Talion , his wife Loreth (Laura Bailey) , and his adult son , Dirhael , are captured and ritually sacrificed by the Black Hand in an attempt to summon the wraith of the Elf Lord Celebrimbor . However , Celebrimbor (who suffers from amnesia due to his centuries as a wraith)

instead merges with Talion , preventing him from dying alongside his family . Talion and Celebrimbor then depart to both uncover Celebrimbor 's identity ? increasing his / their power ? and avenge the death of Talion 's family .

Over the course of their travels , Talion and Celebrimbor encounter Gollum multiple times , who is wandering Mordor in search of his " Precious " (The one ring) . Gollum possesses the ability to see and speak with Celebrimbor due to his prior contact with the One Ring , and pledges to serve the " Bright Master " . Hoping that Celebrimbor might lead him to the One Ring , Gollum leads Celebrimbor to relics of his past , each of which restore parts of his lost memories . Celebrimbor gradually recalls how Sauron , disguised as Annatar , the Lord of Gifts , deceived him into forging the Rings of Power . Celebrimbor ultimately assisted Sauron in forging the One Ring , but was able to steal it from him . Celebrimbor proclaimed himself the Bright Lord of Mordor and raised an army of Orcs against Sauron . However , the Ring ultimately betrayed Celebrimbor and returned to Sauron . A victorious Sauron then punished Celebrimbor by executing his wife and daughter before finally killing him with his own smithing hammer .

In his search for the Black Hand , Talion allies himself with Hirgon , a ranger deserter who leads a community of Gondorian outcasts choosing to settle in Mordor , and Ratbag the Coward (Phil LaMarr) , an Orc who offers to bring Talion closer to the Black Hand in exchange for his assistance in climbing Mordor 's military hierarchy . Talion helps Ratbag ascend the ranks to the level of warchief by killing each of his immediate superiors , finally becoming Warchief himself . Talion then goes after the other Warchiefs in Udun , weakening Sauron 's forces in that area . Soon enough , Hirgon has a plan to draw out the Black Captains . Using acquired grog and blasting powder , Talion helps the Outcasts destroy a statue dedicated to Sauron . Instead of the Black Hand answering the " message " , the Hammer of Sauron is sent , promptly executing Ratbag for not answering his duties to kill the ranger . Talion and The Hammer then face off , with packs of Uruk joining the fight . Eventually , Talion manages to kill The Hammer .

Talion is then sought out by the warrior Lithariel , the daughter of Queen Marwen (Claudia Black) , who claims to be able to assist Celebrimbor with his mission . Marwen is the ruler of Núrn , a kingdom of sea raiders located in the south of Mordor . She uses prophetic powers to guide Talion and Celebrimbor to another of Celebrimbor 's relics . Talion also gets help from a Dwarf hunter named Torvin , teaching Talion the ways of the hunt to dominate Caragors and Graugs (beasts native to Mordor) , eventually fighting a massive Graug from Torvin 's past who killed Torvin 's hunting partner , later revealed to be his brother . Later , Marwen advises them to use Celebrimbor 's powers to take control of an army of orcs and other beasts , using them to lead an assault against Sauron . Talion eventually realizes that the wizard Saruman is possessing Marwen , and assists Lithariel in freeing her from his control . Talion , however , still carries out Saruman 's plan , leading an army of mind @-@ controlled orcs in an assault against the Black Hand 's stronghold at Ered Glamhoth . However , rather than the Black Hand , Talion finds the Tower of Sauron waiting for him . The Tower mockingly taunts Talion that Celebrimbor chose him as a host and can free him at any time and offers the elf a place at Sauron 's side . Refusing the offer , the two battle and Talion emerges victorious after viciously stabbing the Tower to death with his son 's sword . Afterwards , Celebrimbor confesses that the Tower told the truth and promises to let Talion join his family in death if he wishes , once the Black Hand is slain .

Talion then travels to the Black Gate for a final confrontation with the Black Hand . The Black Hand quickly incapacitates him with a spell that also restores the last of Celebrimbor 's memories . He then kills himself as part of a ritual that forces Celebrimbor to depart from Talion and merge with himself . This allows Sauron to possess the Black Hand 's body and incarnate in physical form . However , Celebrimbor is able to briefly paralyze Sauron from within , allowing Talion to destroy Sauron 's physical form . With the Black Hand dead , Celebrimbor wishes to depart for Valinor . Talion instead convinces him to stay and attempt to overthrow Sauron . Gazing at Mount Doom , Talion declares his intention to forge a new Ring of Power .

= = Development = =

Development of Middle @-@ earth : Shadow of Mordor , which took about three years , began in late 2011 . The game 's lead developer was Monolith Productions , who had experience on a Middle @-@ earth game with Guardians of Middle @-@ earth (a multiplayer online battle arena game released in 2012) . According to design director Michael de Plater , Shadow of Mordor was developed in parallel with Guardians of Middle @-@ earth but handled by a separate team . It was published by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment , who had published the Batman : Arkham game series . The game was designed by de Plater , who had worked with Creative Assembly on Rome : Total War and Ubisoft on Tom Clancy 's EndWar and Tom Clancy 's Ghost Recon : Future Soldier .

Shadow of Mordor was Monolith 's first third @-@ person open world video game for the eighth generation consoles PlayStation 4 and Xbox One , and de Plater considered its development an educational experience for the studio . In Monolith 's introduction to the genre , many core mechanics were built from scratch and the studio were inspired by successful video games such as the Batman : Arkham series created by Rocksteady Studios ; those games inspired Shadow of Mordor 's stealth and free @-@ flow combat mechanics . The studio considered Rocksteady 's games good examples of how to handle a licensed title .

The game 's signature feature is its Nemesis system . The Monolith team considered themselves experts in artificial intelligence , and wanted to push its boundaries . Allowing players to choose their story (a sandbox @-@ game pillar) and " leverage the new generation hardware through innovation " , the team wanted to create a system allowing non @-@ playable characters to respond to player actions ; this later became the Nemesis system . The system 's idea was frameworked three months after development began , and to best present it everyone in the studio was involved . The developers hoped that with the system , orcs could be memorable for players . It was made more complex during the game 's early development , incorporating personal relationships among orcs , but was later pared down when the studio considered it too complicated . The Nemesis system was also inspired by pen @-@ and @-@ paper role @-@ playing games . Although most orcs are similar , some were designed with distinctive behavior patterns . These orcs have dialogue written by Dan Abnett , and the team hoped the special orcs would surprise players . The team also hoped that the system would provide tension and competition , similar to a multiplayer game . The studio was inspired by sports games , where the narrative continues when players lose a match . This can prevent immersion and narrative from breaking when players die in the game . According to Rob Roberts , the system is designed so players can emotionally attach to the protagonist through gameplay drama . They also hoped that through the system , players can create their own villain , leading to an organic story .

Shadow of Mordor bridges the gap between The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings , with the team wanting to show iconic elements of the universe in an original way . The team had to draw notes on Tolkien 's notes and appendices to ensure that their vision for the game would not change the franchise 's timeline . Although the game 's environment is inspired by the books and films , several places (such as Udûn and the Sea of Nurnen) were re @-@ imagined . Art director Phil Straub considered consistency with the lore and presenting " something visually new " and realistic the most important elements of creating the game , and the team did not incorporate many fantasy elements in its world . To depict volcanic activity , the studio sent a team to Eastern Washington and the Columbia River plateau to photograph a volcano ; to create other parts of the game environment , they studied photos of Iceland and New Zealand and yellow stone found worldwide . Since Shadow of Mordor is set before The Lord of the Rings , its landscape is less post @-@ apocalyptic ; environments also vary by weather , lighting and atmosphere .

The game has a standalone plot . Early in development the team consulted Peter Jackson , director of The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit trilogies , who advised them against a film tie @-@ in . According to de Plater , the story is character @-@ driven to be " authentic " relative to Tolkien 's themes . The game was written by Christian Cantamessa , who was lead writer and lead designer for Rockstar San Diego 's Red Dead Redemption . According to Roberts , the story is designed for accessibility by all players (regardless of their familiarity with the franchise) by creating natural interactions and believable relationships among the characters . Its protagonist is Talion , a half

@-@ human , half @-@ wraith inspired by Boromir . Although Torvin was originally proposed as the game 's playable character , the idea was scrapped , as the team wanted to follow the philosophy of featuring standalone characters . The wraith is later revealed as Celebrimbor , creator of the Rings of Power . The development team picked Celebrimbor because they considered his backstory sufficiently interesting to expand the canon 's authenticity , allowing the team to write a story around power (a major theme of the game) . Another important component was Mordor 's tone . The team created a dark atmosphere with humor , reflected in dialogue and voice acting . This was handled by Dan Abnett , who previously worked on books related to Warhammer 's " dark and gritty " universe . The team hired David Salo , a linguist who worked on the Tolkien 's languages for the Lord of the Rings film trilogy , to develop the Orcs ' Black Speech . The game 's narrative was also inspired by BioShock , which according to de Plater , has successfully incorporated systemic stories with players ' choices .

To prevent inaccuracies , Monolith consulted several Tolkien scholars from Warner Bros. and collaborated with Weta Workshop (Jackson 's design company) on the game 's special effects and scenery . To depict well @-@ known characters the company partnered with Middle @-@ earth Enterprises , the franchise @-@ rights holder , to prevent misuse and contradiction between the game 's story and Tolkien 's .

Monolith focused on developing the game 's PlayStation 4 and Xbox One versions , with development of the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions outsourced to Behaviour Interactive . Although the game 's core gameplay mechanics , story and narrative are unchanged in the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 ports , some features (such as the Nemesis system) are less complex than the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One versions . According to the game 's developer , the Nemesis system was too large for older consoles .

The music for Middle @-@ earth : Shadow of Mordor was composed by Garry Schyman and Nathan Grigg , and a soundtrack album was released digitally by WaterTower Music on September 30 , 2014 . In designing the game 's music , the team used a number of sonic tools which synchronize with other aspects of the game (such as player actions and enemy movements) ; combat music included waterphones and spring drums .

In August 2013 an artist mentioned that Monolith Productions was working on a AAA title separate from Guardians of Middle @-@ earth , and on November 12 its title was announced . Although the game was originally scheduled for release on October 7 , 2014 , according to Warner Bros. its release was moved up to September 30 in North America and October 3 in the United Kingdom due to " fans ' excitement " . The PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions were released on November 18 in North America and November 21 in Europe .

On December 16 , 2014 , the downloadable content (DLC) Lord of the Hunt was released . Its storyline revolved around Torvin , and it included new runes , skins and bosses . Lord of the Hunt received mixed reviews from critics .

The final DLC for Shadow of Mordor (The Bright Lord) is set 3 @,@ 000 years before the main campaign and allows players to control Talion 's companion , Celebrimbor . It adds a chapter to Shadow of Mordor in which players can complete ten more missions and fight Sauron . The content was released on February 24 , 2015 for Microsoft Windows , PlayStation 4 and Xbox One .

A Game of the Year edition with DLC was announced on April 29 , 2015 and released on May 5 for Microsoft Windows , PlayStation 4 and Xbox One . A special edition , with in @-@ game items and a steelbook , was introduced on August 1 .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical reception = = =

Middle @-@ earth : Shadow of Mordor was critically acclaimed . The review aggregator websites GameRankings and Metacritic gave the Microsoft Windows version scores of 86 @.@ 67 percent (based on nine reviews) and 84 out of 100 (based on 17 reviews) ; the PlayStation 4 version

scored 86 @.@ 55 percent (based on 57 reviews) and 84 out of 100 (based on 85 reviews) , and the Xbox One version scored 85 @.@ 82 percent (based on 11 reviews) and 87 out of 100 (based on 12 reviews) .

The game 's core feature , its Nemesis system , was praised . According to Lucas Sullivan of GamesRadar , the system elevated Shadow of Mordor to excellence by making its villains memorable and adding personality to its protagonist . Brad Shoemaker of Giant Bomb agreed , writing that the system created many distinctive characters and its side content extended the game 's longevity . Joystiq 's Alexander Sliwinski said that the system made each playthrough unique and made the game stand out from other action games . Chris Carter of Destructoid found the system gimmicky , since it failed to create unique villains ; it added different appearances and weaknesses to villains without adding personality .

Shadow of Mordor 's combat was considered excellent by most critics . Shoemaker and Sliwinski compared it to the rhythm @-@ based combat system of the Batman : Arkham game series ; both found it engaging and fluid . Shoemaker praised the game 's combat variety ; the combination of the combat and nemesis systems created " a specific kind of chaotic , emergent nonsense " desirable in an open world game . According to Sliwinski and Shoemaker , even without the Nemesis system the combat system would make the game compelling . Although Matt Miller of Game Informer found the game 's focus on killing made it repetitive , failing to capture the charm of its inspirations Assassin 's Creed and Batman : Arkham , Kevin VanOrd of GameSpot called Shadow of Mordor 's combat an improvement of the Assassin 's Creed formula .

Reception of the game 's storyline was mixed . Although Shoemaker and Sliwinski praised its " dark " tone , Shoemaker found some story elements (such as Gollum 's introduction) forced and designed to appeal to a particular audience . According to Game Informer 's Matt Miller , Shadow of Mordor fails to successfully tie together all of its various plot threads in the game 's conclusion . Kevin VanOrd of GameSpot also found the storyline erratic , dragged down by anti @-@ climactic fights and scenes . Dan Stapleton of IGN wrote that the story introduced memorable characters but would not make sense to fans of the series , and his interest in the game waned towards its end . Destructoid 's Chris Carter was disappointed in a plot he considered generic (" Go here , kill this , draw out this big bad , then kill him for your family ") ; the game failed to add anything new to the universe , and its side missions were more interesting than the main campaign .

Other aspects of Shadow of Mordor were praised . Sullivan enjoyed its Lord of the Rings ' lore , and found the number of collectibles in the game " staggering " . Miller also admired Monolith 's extensive use of lore in the game , and praised its soundtrack and voice @-@ acting ; Stapleton agreed , particularly about the voice acting .

Elements of the game were criticized . Sullivan found some side missions repetitive , and Sliwinski was disappointed with some of the boss battles . Miller wrote that some Shadow of Mordor features are too complex and inaccessible for new players or those unwilling to use strategy . Critics disagreed about the Nemesis system . Miller wrote that the system fell flat in the game 's final hours ; according to VanOrd , the system was unappealing until the game 's second half . Carter found the unskippable cutscenes after a player died annoying .

Unlike Shadow of Mordor 's current @-@ generation versions , the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions received mixed @-@ to @-@ negative reviews and many technical problems were noted . According to Thomas Morgan of Eurogamer its frame rate was substandard , and Yannick LeJacq of Kotaku cited " many technical hiccups and glitches " . Morgan believed that the game developers spent little effort on the port , and LeJacq questioned the need to release the game for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 at all . Shadow of Mordor was well received by BioShock series creator Ken Levine , who called it the first open world game with a non @-@ linear story and narrative and said he would bring some of its elements to his upcoming science @-@ fiction project .

= = = Sales = = =

Shadow of Mordor 's release was the most successful for a Lord of the Rings @-@ based game . The game debuted at number two in the UK retail software sales chart in its first week (behind FIFA

15) , and was the ninth @-@ bestselling game in the United States in October 2014 .

= = = Controversy = = =

When Shadow of Mordor was introduced , Monolith was accused by former Ubisoft employee Charles Randall of using assets (such as the protagonist @-@ animation code) from Assassin 's Creed II . Monolith responded that all their project 's assets were developed from scratch ; they had confidence in their originality , and the game was based upon the Nemesis system .
In October 2014 , after the usual video @-@ game review outlets were unable to obtain early access to Shadow of Mordor , John Bain (known as TotalBiscuit) said that YouTube video creators had been offered early access in exchange for agreeing to a contract requiring them to describe it positively . Jim Sterling of The Escapist obtained a copy of one of the contracts and analyzed it in detail . The Federal Trade Commission began an investigation and announced that Warner Brothers Home Entertainment had violated the Federal Trade Commission Act , and that the company must declare sponsored advertising in the future in July 2016 .

= = = Awards = = =