

RYG Evaluates Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

by

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Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor was one of those rare games backed by a major publisher that actually played like a PC game and less like a ported console game. In fact, we found Shadow of Mordor was one of those rare games where a developing and publishing team actually gave some serious thought into how it should be played on a PC. And yet...we couldn't help but think how much more they could have achieved if they had taken some of their support and documentation seriously. Here are our thoughts and findings of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor.

RYG's Assessment

58%

Bargain Basement Material

(64% and Below)

Our Thoughts

So here's why we felt Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor was deserving in praise as a product:

- * With the exception of Steam it was, in effect, the cleanest game we've found both in its file structure and in the registry (which, to be honest, was non-existent!). It also removes quite easily from PCs we've tested.
- * For a AAA game it never bothered to "phone home" back to the developer or publisher server, unlike many other AAA games we've looked at in which it required "further analysis" into how their customers played their games.
- * Many of its in-game settings are quite PC friendly. We're talking mostly about in-game video settings, sound and keyboard/mouse controls.

And here's where it fell short:

- * The huge 35-40Gb+ download payload (notwithstanding the freely-provided HD textures that provided little difference, at least to our eyes, unless players were playing beyond the 1080p scope).
- * Their EULAs, TOSes both on Steam and WB to cover their products and services. (We don't think this will change unless there's an active change in mindset into how this is framed).

* The lack of any genuine documentation and support from Warner Bros's / Monolith Production's official website into the game. While Steam offered more than enough information, both internally and externally, it's not really Steam's job to provide the only content for players to determine what/if/how/why/when/where for Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor.

Our (numerical) findings may paint a different picture, but this is a game that's worth looking into, both as a product and as a game (Yes, it is that fun to play!)

About Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor

Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor is a third-person, action-adventure, medieval-fantasy game that's set in the *Lord of The Rings* universe between *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of The Rings* trilogy. Please refer to each section for our results we've evaluated and our summarised thoughts to gain a better understanding of how Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor affects PCs and plays as a PC Game.

RYG Disclaimer

This Windows version of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor (Build: v1.636.29) was obtained through OzGameShop independently with RYG funds for the purposes of evaluation and product testing. Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor was evaluated on the following system specs: Windows 7, Intel i5-4460, 16Gb RAM, AMD Radeon R9 290. Unfortunately, we could not evaluate Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor using Intel HD 4600 Graphics.

Availability

Steam: <http://store.steampowered.com/app/241930/>

Recommended System Specs

OS: Windows 7 Service Pack 1 or above (*Windows Version Tested*)

CPU: Intel i7-3770 or AMD FX-8350 above (*Chipsets released in 2012*)

GPU: NVIDIA GeForce GTX 660 or AMD HD 7950 and above (*GPUs released in 2012*)

RAM: 8Gb

HDD: 40Gb (~35.0 Gb was used in this evaluation)

Source: [Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor's Steam Gamecard](#)

Section 1 - Content Strategy and Product Marketing

- + Was released earlier than its console version
- + Was released globally on 30.09.2014
- + Is available through Steam

- + Minimum / Recommended specs provided through support.wbgames.com
- + In-game documentation and/or tutorials provided
- Is available only on Windows
- No known DRM-Free version
- Complete download size not provided through www.shadowofmordor.com
- Early access purchase required to access demo through www.shadowofmordor.com
- Released with Steamworks through Steam
- No advice on how Steamworks is used on Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor on www.shadowofmordor.com
- EULA, Privacy Policy and Terms of Service not found on www.shadowofmordor.com
- All game-related info is scattered between official site and Steam

Our Thoughts: Unless players are finding their information on Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor through Steam's official gamepage, there isn't anything to be found on WB's official site apart from some promotional material.

Section 2 - Digital Distribution

- + Is available worldwide through Steam
- + Download / Client Manager is optional for download of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- + Minimum / Recommended specs provided through Steam
- + Steam advises how Steamworks is used in Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- + Only Username, Email and Password are required to create a Steam account
- + Alternative payment options provided by Visa, Mastercard, Amex and Paypal
- + Confirmation of purchase and receipt provided
- + Free and unlimited access and downloads after purchase
- + Can backup purchased games 'offline' (e.g. external or optical drives)
- + Can access personal data
- + Can review and dispute and validate breaches in [Steam's Terms of Service](#)
- Is **No refunds or exchanges** for purchased games
- All players warranties waived whenever they use Steam
- Cover waived against any unforeseeable damage and/or service disruptions within Steam
- Very difficult and/or impossible to terminate account
- Account termination voids past purchases and licenses to play Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- Can't review and question changes made in Terms of Service
- Past purchase voided after refusing to accept Terms of Service

Our Thoughts: Steam offers a robust form of paying, downloading, installing and storing PC games and, for the most part, is quite simple and friendly to use. Steam does offer a trading platform between players in respect to PC games, but will not offer any consumer-related safety nets, such as refunds in the event of downloading a faulty product, service disruptions and a balanced terms of service. Other issues of contention, such as their elastic pricing options for players situated in various global regions, remains a constant sore spot.

Section 3 - Privacy Policy

- + Privacy Policy for Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor not required for gameplay!
 - + Privacy Policy found on [Steam](#)
 - + Applies to Steam only
 - + Formatted for easy reading online
 - + Written for easy comprehension
 - + 'Personally-identifiable' & 'non-personally identifiable' info are clearly defined
 - + Policy specifies what information are collected at specific areas of the platform
 - + Data centres are 100% safe and secure
 - + Info is used solely for payments, opt-in email campaigns & acct management
 - + Visible opt-in / opt-out process in respect to email and marketing promotions
 - + Players given visible access to all their game and player data
 - + Players can access, modify and validate their Steam account
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- Players not visibly notified of any changes made to the Policy
 - Players not consulted on future revisions to the Privacy Policy
 - Not advised where the info is specifically stored
 - Third parties not identified
 - Players cannot export their information tied to their Steam account
 - Player data is retained by Valve for an extended period of time
 - Can't review and query (legal) changes made to the Policy
 - No specific information on how info will be used in the event of a sale/merger
 - Players must accept ALL changes made to the Policy before using Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

Our Thoughts: Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor won't connect to any WB or third party server relating to WB. Steam's Privacy Policy, however, applies heavily on how players use and manage their Steam account (as well as their games), including how Steam functions in respect to its achievements features. Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor will connect back to Steam even in offline mode in respect to this achievement feature only!

Section 4 - EULA and Steam's TOS

- + EULA and/or TOS accessible through [Valve](#) and [Steam](#)
- + Covers Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor, Steamworks and Steam
- + Terms and conditions for Steamworks are clearly defined
- + Players can circumvent Steamworks without (legal) repercussions
- + Can legally make archival copies of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- + Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor won't blacklist specific background services or software

- Not formatted for easy reading online
- Cumbersome / difficult to read
- Drafted to only abide by the laws of California, USA
- Players not visibly notified of any changes made to the EULA and/or TOS
- Players not consulted on future revisions to the EULA and/or TOS
- Can't review and query (legal) changes made to the EULA and/or TOS
- License to play the game only provided
- No refunds or exchanges for purchased games
- Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor's source code is restricted
- Not permitted to create free 'mods' of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- **Monetisation of user-generated content** of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor is still unclear from WB.
- All players warranties waived whenever they use Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- Cover waived against any unforeseeable damage and/or service disruptions within Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- Termination process dictated by Valve
- No known resolution process available for players experiencing issues with Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor from WB and Valve

Our Thoughts: Both EULA and TOS from Warner Bros and Valve respectively are quite stacked against players and, apart from the license to play the game, leaves little room for players to actually do anything with the game other than play it on their terms. Please bear in mind that most of the wordings found in the EULA and TOS are similarly-worded in comparison to other EULAs and TOSes found in other games and distribution platforms.

Section 5 - Installation

- + Custom installation options provided
- + No third party software required
- + All game files installed in main installation directory
- + All DRM files installed in main installation directory
- + Currently-executing background services won't interfere with installation
- + Error-free installation
- No installation logs of files and registry keys

Our Thoughts: A lack of a comprehensive installation log to document what/where files and registry keys are installed is the only blemish found in this evaluation. However, the installation of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor are quite self-contained to where players want to install their games and will not install any rogue or foreign files outside of their intended destination. Players can remove the game through Steam with relative ease knowing that every game file / registry keys are removed.

Section 6 - Automatic and/or Manual Patching

- + Automatic updates are optional
- + Day-One patch optional
- + Can play Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor unpatched and with minimal bugs
- + Patch free from any other third-party DRMs
- + Patch free from any other third-party apps
- + Detailed list of changes provided prior to installation
- + Alternate notifications provided for existence of new patches via. Steam
- + Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor is playable with latest patches

- Download / Client Manager required to download and install patches
- Changes / Amendments to Privacy Policy, EULA and/or TOS not provided prior to installation of patches
- No installation logs of files and registry keys
- Rollback option not provided
- No plans for a sunset patch to remove Steamworks DRM

Our Thoughts: The latest version of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor (Build 73823) is quite stable (through our iterations of testing). Players can optionally install patches through Steam. Depending on how players see this, automatic updates through a single platform can be a timesaver or an inconvenience.

Section 7 - DRM and Activation

- + Instructions provided on activating Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- + Currently-executing background services won't interfere with activation process
- + Firewall and AV settings not modified
- + Unlimited online activations
- + Can play Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor offline
- + Only Steamworks is implemented
- + Unlimited hardware activations
- + Unlimited Installations
- + Troubleshooting process provided for failed activations

- Can't verify safety and reliability of the activation process
- A non-transferrable user account is required
- Game is locked to specific account after activation

Our Thoughts: Players will need to activate the game by logging into their Steam account after launching Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor. After that they are free to play the game offline or even online if they wish to do so. As far as we've been looking at games Steam has come a long way in keeping activations and verifications quite simple for players.

Section 8 - Gameplay

- + Can play a backup copy of the game
- + Disc not required for gameplay
- + Can play in borderless full screen mode
- + Can play in windowed mode
- + Can play in multiple resolutions up to 4K (1080p tested only)
- + Lighting, Meshes, Textures (Quality and Filtering), Depth of Field, Tessellation, Ambient Occlusion and VSync are provided in-game
- + Complete options in remapping keyboard and/or mouse controls
- + Complete options in remapping console
- + Separate volume controls provided for Music, Sound Effects, Dialog and Cinematics
- + Full subtitles and/or captions provided
- + Italian, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish audio are supported alongside English
- + Can play Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor in offline mode
- + No known connectivity issues during gameplay
- + Can play Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor error-free
- + Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor won't blacklist specific background services or software
- + Can play game at last save checkpoint
- + Can modify savegame and/or configuration file
- + Steamworks isn't running after gameplay of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

- No option for players to provide custom subtitles and/or localisation
- Will 'phone home' without players consent
- Can't opt out of achievements and leaderboards
- Saves operate under a checkpoint and/or timing system
- Can only play on one PC at a time

Our Thoughts: For the most part many of the in-game settings provided did feel as if Warner Bros and Monolith Productions were taking this PC Port of Shadow of Mordor quite seriously. Of course there are some things that raised our eyebrows, such as the use of HD textures that provided little benefit for those constrained to 1080p gameplay (and the use of those same textures requiring questionable system specs). Finally, there are instances of glitches and bugs by way of missing savegames that were reported we didn't find any experiences with that whatsoever.

Section 9 - General PC Maintenance

- + PC clean of viruses, malware, spyware and rootkits after installation and gameplay of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- + HOSTS was clean
- + Windows Startup was clean
- + Steam isn't running after gameplay of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor
- + No other PC settings were modified after gameplay of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

Our Thoughts: Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor is a clean game and won't impact on players PCs nor alter its settings outside of its gameplay.

Section 10 - Uninstallation

- + Players provided with options to back up their savegames and in-game settings
- + **Steam's support** offers a process in removing Steam completely from PCs
- Some Steam files and registry keys remain after manual and automatic removal of Steam

Our Thoughts: Removing Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor was quite simple (and effectively clean as it left virtually a zero footprint of files and registry keys). Removing Steam, however, required some further work and if players did need to remove Steam it will require some searching and patience in performing a full removal.

Section 11 - Customer and Technical Support

- + From The Official Website: <http://support.wbgames.com/link/port...adow-of-Mordor>
- + From Steam: <http://steamcommunity.com/app/241930/discussions/>
- + From SteamDB: <https://steamdb.info/app/241930/>
- + From PCGamingWiki: http://pcgamingwiki.com/wiki/Middle-...adow_of_Mordor

If you would like to discuss this report, you can do so here on our **forum** (membership is required), or via our **Twitter** page.

Changelog

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