

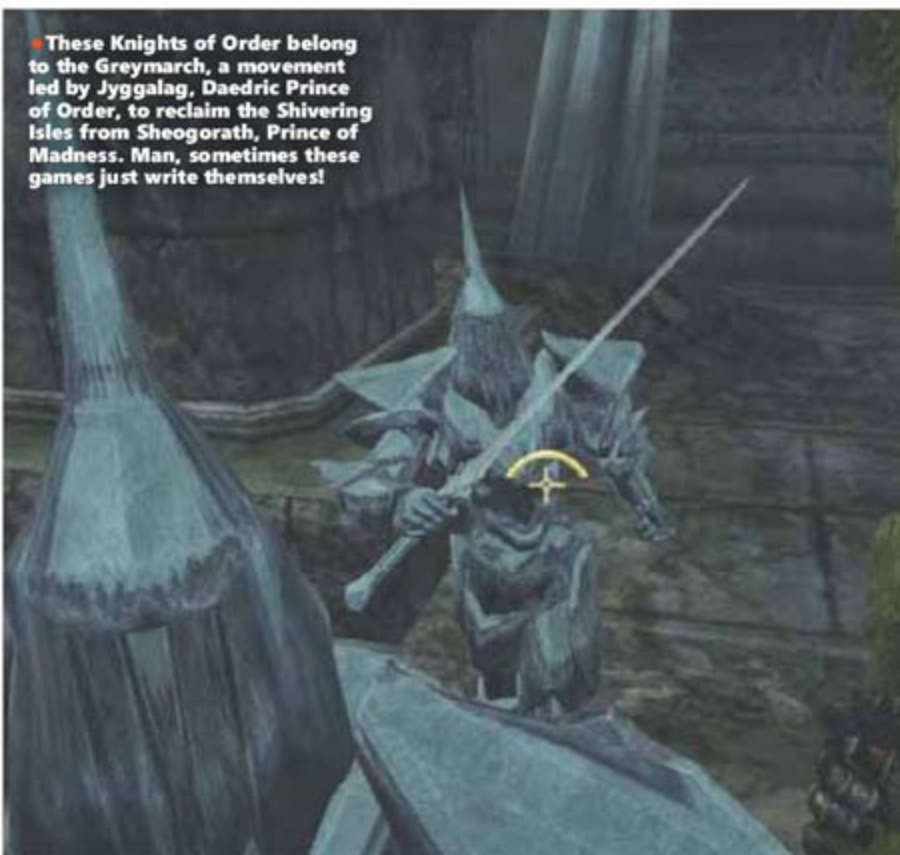
•Ahhhh, I haven't shared a lovely sunset with a pile of corpses like this since I left Detroit.



THE MANIC VERSION OF THE ISLES IS VIBRANT AND COLORFUL, WHILE THE DEMENTED VERSION IS GLOOMY AND DARK.



•As part of the main quest, you'll reactivate a dungeon used to prevent adventurers from making it safely to the Isles. Using clever traps, you can either kill them or drive them mad. Such fun!



•These Knights of Order belong to the Greymarch, a movement led by Jyggalag, Daedric Prince of Order, to reclaim the Shivering Isles from Sheogorath, Prince of Madness. Man, sometimes these games just write themselves!

ELDER SCROLLS IV: SHIVERING ISLES

Still crazy

PUBLISHER: 2K Games DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks GENRE: RPG AVAILABILITY: Retail; E-tail (www.direct2drive.com) ESRB RATING: Mature MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 1.1GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* MULTIPLAYER: None VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW

Y I often find myself saying to...er, myself: "You know, 200-plus hours of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* just ain't enough." Well, thanks to what I can only assume is a lesser-known provision of the Patriot Act, *Oblivion* developer Bethesda Softworks learned of my innermost desires and whipped up *Shivering Isles*, an expansion to last year's hit RPG that promises 30 more hours of jaunting through magical lands and harassing disturbingly lifelike NPCs.

NON SUM QUALIS ERAM

Unlike earlier *Oblivion* add-on *Knights of the Nine*, *Shivering Isles* is more than a series of new quests. Here, you pass into the titular Isles, an all-new realm ruled by Sheogorath, the Daedric Prince of Madness. Weighing in at more than a quarter of the size of the enormous main continent in *Oblivion*, the Isles offer plenty of new places to explore...and explore...and

explore. Because many of *Shivering Isles'* quests require multiple trips to unknown locations (making it difficult to use *Oblivion's* "fast-travel" system), and because you can't bring your horse to the Isles, get ready to slog through more useless real estate than a greenskeeper at Chernobyl Country Club.

Nevertheless, Bethesda employs a nifty device to extend the taste of its chewing gum: The Isles are divided into two separate realities: Mania and Dementia. While they share the same physical layout, the Manic version of the Isles is vibrant and colorful, while the Demented version is gloomy and dark. Both settings have their own nobility and warrior castes (the "Golden Saints" and "Dark Seducers," respectively), and both distrust and dislike each other. Not surprisingly, you get caught up in the middle of this web of intrigue; ultimately, you must decide whether you prefer to join the paranoid depressives or the delusional drug addicts—or else just merge the two to form the greatest grunge band ever. Meanwhile, Sheogorath tasks you with saving his twisted realm from the encroaching forces of Order, dealing with heretics who want to depose him, and handling a variety of other wacky tasks. And that says nothing about the countless miniquests you can perform on behalf of the Isles' freak show-reject denizens. Long story short: Gallons of gameplay here.

BONAE SUB REGNO CYRODIILIS

And gallons of snazzy new paint, too, from structures and costumes to whole new animations. But what's striking from the get-go (especially if you're returning to *Oblivion* after a hiatus) isn't the new stuff but rather how well the visuals hold up on *Oblivion's* now year-old engine. Climb to the top of a ridge and gaze down into a lush Manic valley, and I double-dog-dare you not to give some quiet props.

The game mechanics—though unchanged—remain entertaining as well. *Shivering Isles* is intended for characters of any level, but you face off against cooler enemies and receive swankier items if you're in the upper echelon. Although the Isles feature all-new monsters, alchemical reagents, and loot, they *don't* feature any new gameplay elements, character abilities, playable races, or classes. While the "ain't broke, don't fix" mentality holds true here, *Shivering Isles* suffers as an expansion because, for all its cleverness in storytelling and quest design, you're ultimately running through the same activities you were up to your neck in during the original *Oblivion*.

LATIN SUCKS

OK, so *Shivering Isles* doesn't reinvent the fireball. But the impeccable design of the original game breathes life into this expansion—not, as you might assume, the other way around. If you're looking for more to do in (or an excuse to return to) the vibrant world of *Oblivion*, Sheogorath's kooky kingdom is well worth the \$30 entry fee. **Eric Neigher**



• Lord Sheogorath himself. He's even got a pimp cane. And he does hair!



• Combat animations and spell effects still look stunning, even though it's been a year since *Oblivion's* initial release.



• One interesting new locale: a village called "Split," where a sorcerer's brought the Manic and Demented versions of the citizens together in the same dimension. They all hate each other, of course.

TRAVEL TIPS

Getting around the Shivering Isles can be a harrowing experience for those of us who rely on antidepressants. However, if you follow these easy tips, you should get by with only minimal extra cost at the therapist:

1 Fire! FFFF-FIRE!! Many of the enemies in the Isles are vulnerable to flame attacks, so practice your magic...or rig up one of those hairspray-Zippo contraptions, Beavis.

2 Build stuff. You can craft amber and (especially) madness ore into excellent armor and weapons: Gather those raw materials, let smiths build them into the gear you want, and enchant it.

3 Open yer yap. Unlike the losers back in Cyrodiil, a high percentage of the Shivering Isles' residents have quests to assign. Don't be afraid to indulge in the odd repartee, even if the guy talking to you is also talking to his dog.

4 Make like Chris Columbus. Scads of non-quest-related dungeons litter the Shivering Isles, and most of them contain lucre that's at least slightly unclean.

VERDICT

More engaging content; graphics still look awesome.

No new races, abilities, or magical effects; lots of schlepping from place to place; no horsies!

8/10

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