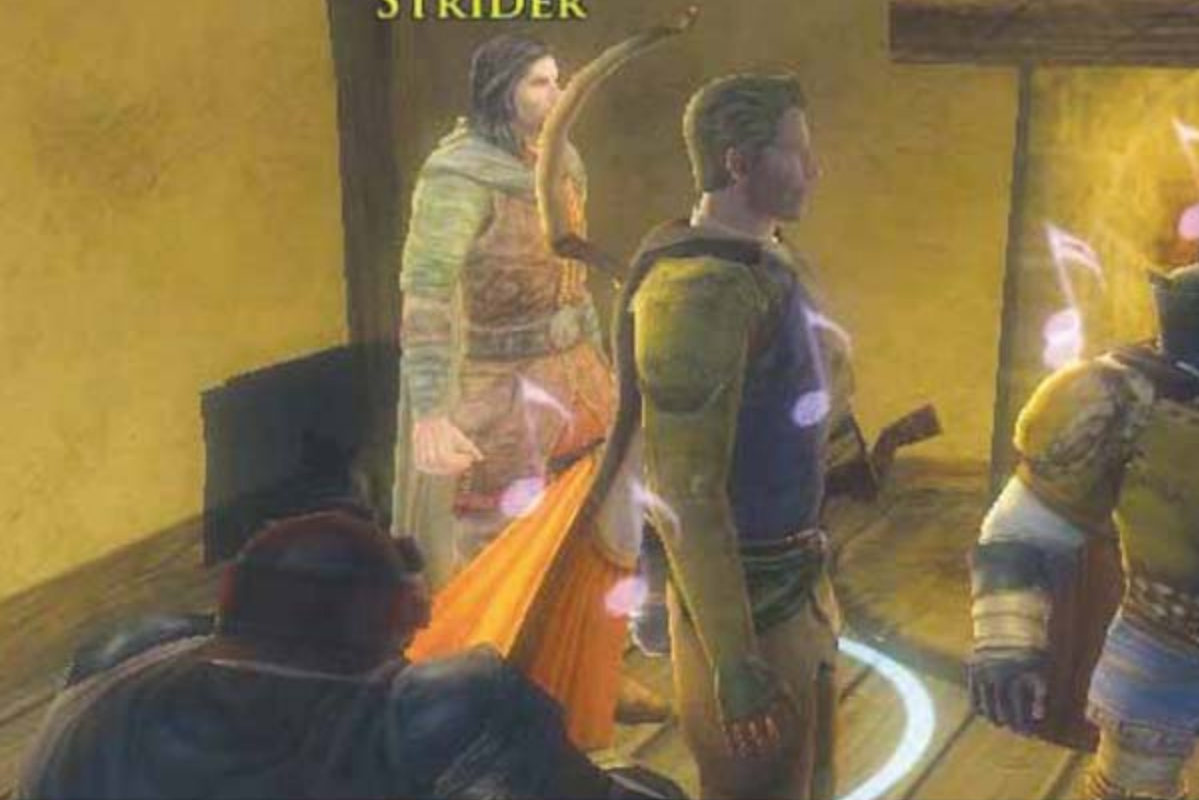


• Players can compose their own in-game music, just in case you always dreamed of hearing someone playing the Star Wars theme in The Prancing Pony.



## STRIDER



J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S FICTION OBVIOUSLY SERVES AS THE GAME'S BIGGEST DRAW...AND PROBABLY THE BIGGEST PAIN IN DEVELOPER TURBINE'S ASS.



• One purple shirt to rule them, one jaunty cap to find them, one fabulous cloak to bring them all and in good fashion bind them.



• Crafting in the game is simplistic, but lying on anvils while NPCs bang hot iron on your crotch is great fun.

# LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

## It's in the Baggins

PUBLISHER: Midway DEVELOPER: Turbine GENRE: MMORPG AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Teen  
 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.8GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 7GB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: Massive-scale VERSION REVIEWED: 1.3.10.4

## REVIEW



### The Lord of the Rings Online:

*Shadows of Angmar* won't change the way you play MMOs. And, for once, I won't complain—because it's awesome. Sure, mechanically, it's pretty much a conglomeration of good ideas from other games, with no single element to really call its own...but all those disparate pieces combine perfectly. Combat's *World of Warcraft*-ish, with some *Final Fantasy XI*-style cooperative attacks thrown in. Character customization borrows that badge-hunting thing from *City of Heroes*, but actually does something fun with it: Players can accomplish deeds (killing lots of one type of creature within a region, frequently using a specific skill, or discovering all the significant landmarks in an area) that grant titles, traits, or virtues—the bread and butter of character customization. Higher levels impart more slots for assigning traits and virtues, which grant extra damage resistance, health- and power-regeneration bonuses, or entirely new attacks. Virtue bonuses start off tiny, but add up as more deeds are accomplished...and in the end, allow a lot of differentiation between characters, without the worry that you'll gimp yourself by putting a skill point in the wrong spot.

It's a little sad that the MMO geek community gets turned upside down when a game ships after it's *actually completed* and nearly bug-free. That, along with a cheap subscription fee, low system requirements, and a strong license, has already garnered *LOTRO* a frighteningly robust player population. While traipsing through Middle-earth on launch day, I had to shut off player names just to see the world through all the gold text hovering above the sea of humanity (and Elf-, Dwarf-, and Hobbit-anity). Yet, even on the most populous servers during peak hours, the login queue never exceeded 30 seconds. It's safe to call *LOTRO*'s launch the most successful kickoff since *WOW*.

### GEEK HEAVEN

J.R.R. Tolkien's *LOTR* fiction obviously serves as the game's biggest draw...and probably the biggest pain in developer Turbine's ass, given the tall task of satisfying a legion of nitpicky fans. The fidelity to the source material is such that you can literally navigate the world using those maps printed in your dog-eared paperback copy of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Remember that brief mention Sam made in a bar about his cousin seeing a giant somewhere north of the Brandywood? Go poking around up there, and you'll probably get your ass crushed by a level 30 giant. And when you meet Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, yes, you'll genuinely loathe the bitch.

The game's world is also a bit more low-key than we've come to expect from fantasy RPGs;

## BATTLE NOT WITH MONSTERS



• I've always wanted to be a giant spider when I grew up.

*LOTRO* takes a simple but clever tack with its PVP combat. At level 10, everyone can take the wheel of a level 50 orc (in one of three flavors), spider, or wolf and scuttle around the Ettenmoors, killing level 40–50 players. Monster characters don't gain levels, but may spend points and ranks (earned by killing hero players or completing evil quests) on new traits, abilities, and appearances. It seems like a smart way of including both level-capped players and more casual people who want to do a little casual murder on the side.

after spending the last few years riding gryphons and summoning elementals to drop meteors, you might expect riding around on regular horses and flinging lighted acorns to be comparatively underwhelming. It isn't. Players obviously can't play as wizards, since Middle-earth only had five of those, but magic here is present in just about everything, though understated and nonspecific (like the "knowledge of ancient wisdom" of the Lore-master class)...which makes it all the more impressive on occasions when it shows up in full force.

The game's future is less clear. Its economy's still caught in the throes of postlaunch chaos, and the level 40–50 PVP zone (see sidebar) is still comparatively free of high-level players. A surprisingly large crop of *WOW* refugees has shown up, but whether *LOTRO* becomes just another rest stop on the path to the Next Big Thing or a place to set up long-term residence remains to be seen. Roads go ever on. • Scott Sharkey

### VERDICT

• A perfect realization of a compelling world.

• No paradigms shifted. No conventions challenged.

9/10

EXCELLENT

Games for Windows THE OFFICIAL PC GAME



• Hang in there through the Human and Hobbit newbie zone—it gets a lot cooler afterward.



• Remember that part in *The Two Towers* where Sam had to kill Shelob 20 times and then bring the venom sacs to the friendly quest-giver?

# STARCRAFT II IS HERE!

8 PAGES OF SCREENS, INTERVIEWS, AND GAMEPLAY ANALYSIS INSIDE!



"HELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME!"

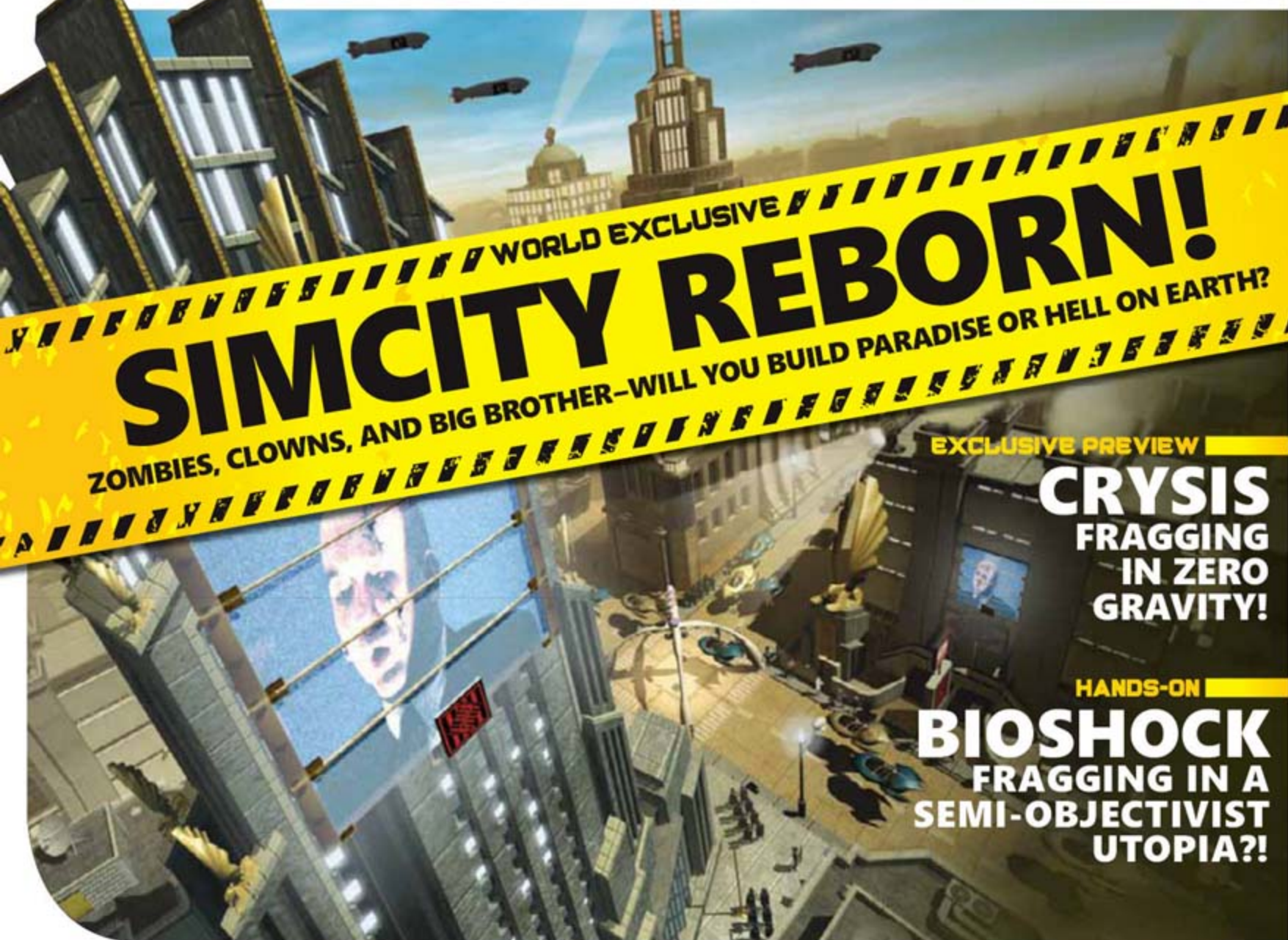
PAGE \ 34



TM

# Games for Windows®

ULTIMATE PC GAMING AUTHORITY \ THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE



EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

## CRYSIS

FRAGGING  
IN ZERO  
GRAVITY!

HANDS-ON

## BIOSHOCK

FRAGGING IN A  
SEMI-OBJECTIVIST  
UTOPIA?!



SPECIAL REPORT  
**STARCRAFT II**  
THE MOTHERSHIP  
LANDS IN KOREA



PREVIEWED  
**WARHAMMER  
ONLINE**  
WAAAAAAAAGH!



REVIEWED  
**LORD OF THE RINGS:  
SHADOWS OF ANGMAR**  
BEST MMO SINCE WOW!



TECH  
**RADEON DX10  
GRAPHICS CARD**  
FEEL THE BURN