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Liligaming: 5 recent netbook-friendly games

Liam Bellew
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40 Comments

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Netbooks are, generally speaking, fairly businesslike devices. We buy them for word processing, web browsing, and e-mail, not for music production or game development. We want them to be lightweight and battery-life, not for their graphics chips and processing power.

But netbook owners aren't totally out of luck when it comes to gaming, you know. We've got a whole suite of older games at our disposal, for one thing. Many of the games we've been covering here on Linuxlinks over the past few years will run on a 1.6 GHz processor, 1GB of RAM, and no dedicated video card. And thanks to the internet and other wonderful technologies, you can take your pick of titles via services like Steam or GOG.com.

But that's not what I came here to tell you about. I came to talk about the recent games that your little road warrior can handle.

5. Torchlight

If you're old enough to remember Diablo, the concept of Torchlight will be very familiar. Create a character, equip him or her with fancy weapons, armor, and gear, and hit the dungeons to bash the crap out of dozens of nasty creatures.

The hack-and-slash RPG is certainly nothing new, but Torchlight's gorgeously cartoony art style and production values bring a breath of fresh air to the genre. And once you've spent some time digging into the game, you'll discover that the character progression is somewhat deeper than you'd think, more so than what anyone has any right to expect from the simple, click-loot-repeat gameplay.

You won't find much to write home about in terms of the story, sure. But once you've gotten a sense of the game's offerings in terms of character development, enemy evolution, and new areas to explore, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to stop away.

"But the game just came out last month!" you say. "Surely my lowly netbook can't possibly handle it?" Well, it can't quite handle it at the highest settings on most netbooks. It actually includes a special "Netbook Mode" toggle in the options menu that reduces the graphics to the underpowered machine. It's all in a tidy package, too.

You can grab a demo from the official site, and unlock the full game via PayPal or Google Checkout. So on top of everything else, it's convenient!

4. Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords

An unassuming title your "purchased-but-still-unused" netbook's ideal for bashing up the foe with puzzle games. You all know Bejeweled and Peggle and can on your machines, you don't need me to tell you about them. So I decided I'd only allow one of these five slots to be filled by a puzzle game, which made things a little more interesting.

When it came right down to it, though, the choice was obvious: Puzzle Quest. At first glance, this fantastically addictive game appears to be an amalgam of two genres, and it seems like a barely-disguised knockoff of Bejeweled. But neither of those things is true.

You may not be able to tell from screen shots, but Puzzle Quest is at its heart a role-playing game. It employs many of the standard RPG tropes like plot points, leveling characters, and a magic system. The story sends you gallivanting around a simple overworld map, battling bandits, creatures on your way to defeat the evil Lord Bane.

OK, so it's not the most imaginative of RPGs. But then there's the combat. Yes, the game plunking that combat down in the middle of a Bejeweled-like puzzle game. Yes, it's a bit gimmicky, but it's pretty darn fun. Each character has a number of powers, so in Bejeweled terms you're trying to match specific combinations. Matching three or more skulls results in a direct attack on your opponent, colored gems charge up your magic weapons and cast spells, and other pieces offer gold to purchase gear to buff up your characters' or experience to raise your characters' levels.

So yes, it may sound odd, but it's entertaining as hell, and as fantastically addictive as the puzzle games it draws its inspiration from. But don't take my word for it. You can check out a demo yourself right here. If that tickles your fancy, you can buy it instantly over Steam.

3. Sine of a Solar Empire

Netbook owners have the benefit of a solid decade of great real-time strategy games to draw from. RTS games tend to brush off less graphical or flawed of a clear interface and user-friendly controls, and that means we get our pick of some of the best games that ever hit the market. Most of those titles have an netbook friendly as last year's Sine of a Solar Empire, a sweet game of galactic strategy that was designed specifically with older machines in mind.

Starting out in control of a single planet, you gradually branch out into different star systems, colonizing far-flung planets and harvesting their resources. Your growing dominion takes place in a lovely representation of 3D space, and thanks to the new engine/graphics, it's unexpectedly smooth thanks to a user-friendly interface and a reasonable pace.

But "user-friendly" doesn't have to mean "simple," and Sine of a Solar Empire proves it with a wonderfully deep and complex tech- and unit-management system. However, Sins is disappointingly simple in one respect: it features no single-player campaign. Instead, the game is structured entirely around multiplayer play, with a tutorial and a series of computer-controlled opponents to battle when an internet connection isn't available, the real meat of the game is online. But there's a lot of meat there. Any given match can take literally hours to complete.

If galactic conquest is your cup of tea, you can check out a demo here, and download the full version at the official site. One big caveat, though. Through the game runs line on underpowered machines, many of the menus are cut off at the standard netbook resolution of 1024 x 600. Fortunately, a user has developed a simple mod to work around the problem; you can grab it here.

2. Trials 2 Second Edition

There's something about Trials 2 that I have a hard time pumping my fists up. You start it up and it feels simple as hell. You're just riding a dirtbike from point A to point B. You don't even need to steer — just accelerate and brake and lean forward and back to shift your weight.

But then the levels start getting more and more insane. And suddenly you're pulling off wheelies and jumping across impossibly wide chasms and pulling off ridiculously narrow ledges before revving off into space, landing with a bone-shattering crunch and somehow driving off.

It looks like a racing game, but what it really is is a platformer — one that, at its heart, requires the same kind of precision and timing as Super Mario Bros. The only reason not to recommend this addictive, entertaining game. Blowing through the early levels isn't much of a challenge, but that won't stop you from heading back and trying to beat your best time. And then trying to beat that.

But don't take my word for it. You can check out a demo yourself at the official site, and should you decide to purchase the full game, you can do so for ten U.S. dollars. Ten dollars!

1. World of Warcraft

OK, perhaps WoW doesn't precisely qualify as a recent game, but thanks to Blizzard's tireless development team, it's been a fun, fast-paced, addictive, and plunking gleefully continues to devour hours from the lives of its millions of devotees. (And subscription fees from their wallets.)

So you're sure to somehow managed to remain innocent of this game's siren call, you can download a free trial and level your character up to the maximum quests from nearby townsfolk. You'll solve creatures. You'll gather some offerings. This new gear lets you accept more challenging quests, to kill more powerful creatures, and to gather more gear. Repeat for 60 levels and you've got the basic idea.

I'm obviously being flip here, but the truth is, WoW is a delightfully simple, identifiably addictive, and wonderfully rewarding experience. There's a reason millions of people happily drop a minimum of $13 a month for the privilege of adventuring in Azeroth. It's fun.

And it also happens to run just fine on a netbook with 1GB RAM. You'll need to jump into the Effects tab of the settings page and turn everything all the way down, but thanks to the small screen of a netbook, you won't actually notice the difference.

You can sign up for a no-obligation, no-questions-asked, 10-day trial here. Best of luck getting away.

Did your own suggestions for diminutive gaming? Help out your fellow netbook users in the comments thread.

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Tagged: gaming | video games | world of warcraft

40 replies on "Liligaming: 5 recent netbook-friendly games"

yhes says:
09/02/2010 at 4:38 PM

I cant run black and white on my hp mini 1 it just goes black and wouldn't start, help!

Zadam says:
09/04/2010 at 8:20 AM

Hi has my netbook can play black and white, pentagaddon 733Ghzzz, Cedx Mother-ally 2, cedx-trace 4 counter-strike 1.6, Nexuiz, Nexuiz 2, warcraft 3 frozen throne, Tomatoz, Tomatoz pro 2, gpx-city, Need for Speed Hot Pursuit 2, Need for Speed Underground 2, Need for Speed Underground, Need for Speed Carbon, Tomatoz 3, Wolfs, Tomatoz 4, Tomatoz4 pro2, Have a good day
Thanks for the help
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aaronm says:
09/04/2010 at 10:04 AM

If you get an 1G ram and an intel GMA950, then Black and White 2 is playable on your netbook. Q: 7-8 gaming doesn't get better than that.

Nexuiz 2 can run too (equipped with one exception of a video card, which is needed for 1.0 Unless patch). Here's the thread:

http://www.linuxlinks.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=3024#3024

aaronm says:
09/04/2010 at 10:07 AM

Torchlight also has a health mod (unofficially, but, http://www.torchlightmodding.com/ has not a lot) a lot of mods, there is also a mod manager called Torchlauncher that functions a lot like World Mastery.

There's mods to allow you to play as male or female in any of the classes, all new classes, tons of maps, skin and level expansions and loads of other things to make the game last longer. Torchlight is a great game, it's fun, it's addictive, it's cheap, it's easy to play, but with the new mods and gaming community, it's shaping up to be even more fun than it was at release.

chorgle says:
10/04/2010 at 10:18 PM

If you haven't seen the game Braid, it should run fine as well. And it's SO DD on Steam until Jan. 2nd. ☺

http://braid.com/forum/

darkerz says:
10/04/2010 at 4:07 PM

Lately I'ffe fun Andreas on my 512gr computer, and it's not recent but it's fun ☺

kristoiu says:
03/03/2011 at 2:07 PM

DDO plays at average framerate assuming you don't try it on ultra high graphics but if you keep it at low to medium it should run fine
(I use a MSI U110 net book)

Jason Stait says:
03/03/2011 at 2:09 PM

Didn't expect Dino to be able to run on a netbook! Nice selection of others. I forgot about Braid!

NeoTheOne says:
03/03/2011 at 2:09 PM

You have failed Joe.
EPIC!

ar910793 says:
03/03/2011 at 2:10 PM

Is there any chance games could or would ever incorporate some form of acceleration for the Broadcom Crystal chipset?

noteverycreative says:
03/03/2011 at 2:10 PM

I'm pretty sure that half-life 1/2 and/or half-life2 work just fine, as will TF classic, many mods, and the source engine in general. Thinking on Valve's gaming forum for the Tricorder work, you can't ask the powerset for cash?

Rick Minerich says:
03/03/2011 at 2:10 PM

I would suggest Gunscroll as it's a pretty awesome puzzle speed clone but it does not support Windows.

Gorozbot says:
03/03/2011 at 2:10 PM

Yes it does. Try Tarzan.

Andy says:
03/03/2011 at 2:10 PM

DTA. Dino City is a nice little runner on a netbook too.

PICKING
2X FASTER
JUST GOT
EASIER

Guest says:
11/24/2009 at 2:47 PM

This depends on your definition of a netbook and what you mean by “nicely”. If the asus eee 901 is a netbook, judge for yourself if Torchlight is considered playable. Here is a video of the game which looks a bit choppy if you ask me:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKi8l_ltmCM

Noodlebeard says:
11/24/2009 at 2:28 PM

NNOT run to any appreciable proper leverl.

Guild Wars however can..

Arthur Hogemann says:
11/24/2009 at 2:17 PM

I tested Wow on my acer aspire few months ago, at that time I got a script to ajust the whole Wow UI to the lowest settings, but while questing, at the very firsts maps, the average fps went around 12 to 15(22 fps was the top rate that I got).
With gmaBooster the game experience doesn’t change, around 2 to 3 fps boost.
Conclusion: you can farm materials, you can quest a little, but if is more then 3 or 4 mobs in your screen, leave the controls and say byebye to some gold.
obs.: I tried to run many MMOs on my netbook, but few of them gave me a good gameplay exp:
– Jade Dynasty;
– Pangya(or Albatross 18);
– Ragnarok Online;
– Ultima online;

Don’t ever try Aion … I tried and the best I got was 12fps and just logged in for crafting purposes >< …
to know more netbook freindly games go to:
https://www.aspireoneuser.com/forum/

ninjustin says:
11/24/2009 at 2:15 PM

Torchlight is great. I can play it on my netbook and It also looks great on my 42inch TV.

Polybius01 says:
11/24/2009 at 1:53 PM

Add Monster Truck Nitro with Trials 2 Second Edition; same developer but with awesome monster trucks. And don’t ever forget Diablo 2 and Starcraft!

Joe says:
11/24/2009 at 1:40 PM

Fallout 1, 2 and Fallout Tactics

P J L says:
11/24/2009 at 12:18 PM

NICE!! Thanks for the info. Have you ever checked out GOG.com? They have a lot of games and a lot of them run on Netbooks too.

changturkey says:
11/24/2009 at 11:26 AM

Sins can run on a netbook? Wtf?

JL Hatch says:
11/24/2009 at 3:42 PM

I’m sure the beginning game can… but I really do question whether the same applies for late game antics.

Marius says:
11/24/2009 at 4:59 PM

yap, and really well

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