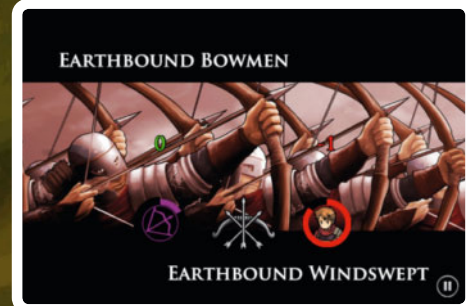




Left The HUD system uses an inspired radial menu for commanding your troops.




Above You'll see abilities and advantages stack up in the heat of battle.

Ravenmark: Scourge of Estellion

STRATEGY The war is won as iOS strategy takes a tactical switch with this stonking turn-based title

KEY INFO

Works with

 iPhone iPod iPad

Price £1.99
 Universal No
 Version 1.01
 App size 323MB
 Developer Witching Hour Studios
 Age rating 9+



Small-screen game developers don't have it easy. Finding the sweet spot between immediacy and depth is always a challenge; nailing it within three-and-a-half-inch confines is a feat. And going by the number of poor turn-based strategy titles on iOS, this genre could well be a paradigm case – just how do you pull off that 'casual-hardcore' feel? With youth, talent and balls, that's how.

Cue Witching Hour Studios, the Singapore newcomer behind this debut title. Itching for immersive high fantasy but unable to fall back on an existing mythos, these devs have crafted their own epic world. And it's deep, Middle Earthy stuff. We can only scratch the surface here, but suffice it to say

the land of Elisse provides the battleground in which you must guide the armies of the Estellion Empire to victory over the Kaysan, the dark mystics of the southern Cardani swamps.

The first campaign throws you into battle, where helpful in-game

👁️ The crisp, lush visuals make each and every battle a joy to watch 👁️

tips explain how to control your armies from above during the Command Phase. Unit classes, or Elements, are a spin on the usual suspects, each bearing an advantage over another – so ranged beats infantry, which trumps polearms, which fells cavalry, and so on.

Tapping on an element's banner throws up an ingenious radial menu that's home to a spree of tactical options. Marching orders

are a given, but it's the other menu items that excite. From here you can exploit the bonus abilities of your elements for a tactical advantage, or arrange several same-class elements into formations to unlock further unique abilities. Gather three swordsmen into a trine, for example, and they'll link shields for better protection against marauding hordes.

Element and character abilities are either passive (triggered automatically when conditions are met) or active, but it's those in the latter camp that demand keen tactical nous. Not only do some have a cool-down period, they rob you of a Command Point – and with only six points to play with in a single Command Phase, you can't just dole them out willy-nilly. Thrifty deployment becomes the straightest arrow towards victory.

Say you have six Command Points, allowing you to control an army of six trines. If these trines were broken into 18 elements, you'd only be able to control six of the 18. Combine this management with Standing Orders, which allow elements to take actions without you actively issuing orders, and your options become legion.



Consulting the Codex; young Calius stars in the game's initial exchanges.



The Battle Phase convinces, too. Swooshing screens signal moments of conflict as units trot about the landscape to the sound of clashing weapons and cries of anguish; the crisp, lush visuals make each and every battle a joy to watch; add an epic soundtrack that ratchets up the warmongering and you can't help but urge on your armies to bloody triumph. Zooming out lets you take in the entire battlefield, while a visit to the tactical menu gives details on all the elements involved. It's here that you'll also find the Codex, your portal to element attributes and a sprawling Elisse mythology. Ravenmark wants to suck you into its fantasy world and sympathise with its characters' plight, but whether it does or not depends on your stomach for this sort of thing. Sure, watching a few petty squabbles offer some context

to the missions, but thankfully you can opt to skip them and just as effectively deploy your units to secure a victory.

However closely you choose to follow the ravages of war, in the turn-based strategy genre Ravenmark reigns supreme. Boasting AI that can outflank you at 10 paces, and 15 varied campaign missions with the promise of more to come, it's a steal at two quid. With multiplayer, it'd be obscene. **TH**

Tap! VERDICT

"A classy debut that hits all the right notes and puts other turn-based strategies in the shade."



GRAB BAG

LIL' GAME REVIEWS

BLUEPRINT 3D

Wrench order from chaos! And boredom from mild interest!
Price 69p Works with iPhone, iPod touch
Version 1.0 Age rating 4+



Blueprint 3D offers 240 exploded objects that make sense

from one angle and one angle only, which you arrive at by using gestures to rotate the dots and lines. Initially, it's mildly engaging, but on discovering the same two gestures enable you to three-star every puzzle, interest wanes. And while the game looks pretty, it lacks the challenge of the similar LostPixels and the character of eBoy FixPix. **CG**



ROPE RESCUE HD

Bird over-complicates feathery rescue plan
Price £1.99 Works with iPhone, iPod touch, iPad
Version 1.0 Age rating 4+



Your avian chums have been jailed and you must rescue them.

Yup, it's a puzzle game, but Rope Rescue tries something different gameplay-wise, and has you threading finite lengths of rope through gears to unlock bird cages. At its best, the game resembles a side-on Zen Bound, but the gradual introduction of arcade elements ends up being a frustration, since your finger too often obscures the action. **CG**



RUBIK'S RACE

Like your dad trying to be cool by playing bangin' choons
Price £1.49 Works with iPhone, iPod touch
Version 1.1.1 Age rating 4+



This sliding puzzler is from the brain of the guy who did that rotating

cube toy you didn't switch all the stickers around on (honest). The aim: match the pattern in the three-by-three centre section by swiping like a crazy person. Add gloss and slightly embarrassing dance music and, well, you've got a tired 1980s puzzle game in a modern digital box. Briefly diverting, but quickly becomes forgettable. **CG**



SUPERNIMBUS

Today's forecast: oodles of charm and repetition
Price 69p Works with iPhone, iPod touch, iPad
Version 1.0.1 Age rating 4+



If character won awards, SuperNimbus would be buried under

trophies. The hand-drawn graphics look fantastic as you guide the eponymous sky-based hero, dodging planes, raining on cows and avoiding surprisingly widespread weddings and polluting factories. It's like a low-budget, brilliant children's TV show. But there's no variety in the game part, so it soon feels like watching repeats again and again. **CG**

