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MacWorld Expo - Notes from the Floor

The MacWorld expo is not a difficult show to wrap one's self around. Easier on the feet than some shows *coughs*CES*coughs*, relaxed and not so tough to get around and find what you're looking for without a GPS locator and a signal flare. That said, there are certainly fewer products of interest to a gamer, and much less an online gamer. Let's see what turns up in our little grab bag of nuggets from the floor, shall we?

MacBook Air: It's hard to overlook Apple's presence on the floor, when they dominate the expo floor like a castle rising out of a small city. Of all the toys they brought to their party one stood out from crowd: the MacBook Air is an index finger-slender, lightweight laptop. You couldn't walk two steps in the Apple booth without seeing a demo unit on display or presented as art.

The caveat always seems to be that with style and convenience, you often pay a price in performance. The MacBook Air systems don't come with high-end Core Duo 2 CPUs, huge hard drives (but the 64 GB solid state drive upgrade option is very slick), or even optical drives, but you do get a 13.3" LED screen, gesture-based touchpad that lets you navigate on your desktop in a way similar to the iPod or iPhone, and 2 GB of memory. Luckily, there are enough external ports to add or connect to anything the MacBook Air might be missing natively.

I'd suspect you can probably play World of WarCraft (or downloadable online games, at least) on this sweet little machine, but your friends will probably be more impressed with the look of the machine than the performance of online games on it.

Guitar Hero III: Mac users rejoice! For Mac and PC gamers, Aspyr showed off their computer port of the phenom console gaming hit taken directly from the Xbox 360 version. This iteration of the game at first blush looks like it has lost nothing in translation, including the use of the venerable guitar-style controller, but does require some seriously amped-up hardware to run effectively. A minimum 2 GHz Core Duo 2 on a Mac? Nothing to sneeze at, but for game-starved Mac users, it may be worth the price of admission.

n52te: Belkin had a bigger and more impressive booth at CES, and it was a lot easier to check out what they offered this time around. Specifically for MMO, RTS and FPS gamers, the n52te keypad was a gaming interface worth checking out. The n52te comes with a 15 key keypad, a scroll wheel, an 8 way thumbpad - all in one desktop interface. If you were a glutton for punishment, you could take on Missy from the PMS Clan and get pasted on a really, really evil level from Quake 4. But at least using the n52te, players were comfortable as they were served a plate of pain. Having tried it a few times already, I can say this keypad and its myriad ways of connecting with a given game take some getting used to, but while learning at least it is comfortable and doesn't slip under tense situations.

Eye-Fi Card: This device, which has been pulling in awards left and right, gets an honorable mention simply for being cool. The Eye-Fi wireless SD memory card, at \$99, is a plug-and-play 2GB Secure Digital storage device that allows you to automatically and wirelessly upload pictures from your camera to your PC or to social networking sites without any hassles or complications.