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Gears of War bug not SafeDisc DRM's first

Legitimate owners of the PC version of the popular game were blocked starting Thursday

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January 30, 2009 ([Computerworld](#)) *Editor's note: A [follow-up to this story](#) explains that anti-cheating technology caused problems with Gears of War, not DRM.*

The antipiracy technology that locked out players of the popular *Gears of War* game on Thursday was also implicated in a 2007 bug that allowed hackers to take control of Windows PCs.

In November 2007, [Microsoft Corp.](#) revealed that copies of [Windows XP](#) and [Windows Server 2003](#) were [being exploited because of a bug](#) in SafeDisc's digital rights management (DRM) technology, which is meant to guard against illegal copying.

Legitimate owners of the PC version of *Gears of War*, a third-person shooter and sci-fi game, were blocked starting Thursday, according to numerous reports.

Blocked players would either have to re-install the game or set the date of their PC back to Wednesday, Jan. 28 or earlier.

Gears is developed by Epic Games and published by Microsoft Game Studios. The maker of SafeDisc's DRM is San Francisco-based TryMedia Systems Inc.

Formerly owned by licensing software maker, [Macrovision Inc.](#), TryMedia was sold to [RealNetworks Inc.](#) in February 2008.

The [customer support section for Gears of Wars players at TryMedia's Web site](#) did not have any information on the bug.

Representatives at RealNetworks did not return a request for comment. But [Epic said on its user forums](#) that it is working on a fix with Microsoft.

SafeDisc's DRM was popular for almost a decade, though it has been supplanted in the past year by Sony Corp.'s SecuROM.

Last fall, players of the widely anticipated *Spore* video game complained so vigorously about the burdens imposed by the SecuROM DRM that EA eventually removed it.

Pirated owners of *Gears*, ironically, were not affected since SafeDisc's DRM had been disabled.

Both incidents give ammunition to DRM critics, who argue that DRM is ineffective and actually hurts paying users more, said Michael Arrington, an analyst at Acacia Research Group.

"When it becomes such a nuisance to users, you can bet that pirates will circumvent it," Arrington said.

While game developers typically have no love for DRM because of the fear of embarrassing incidents such as with *Gears* or *Spore*, publishers still insist upon it, said Arrington. And despite the rise of subscription-based online gaming, publishers won't make games free or dump DRM anytime soon, he said.

