

Video Game Review: 'Castlevania: Lords of Shadow' Reboots Legendary Franchise

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 12, 2010 - 6:54pm

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CHICAGO – Many beloved franchises of the previous generation have had difficulty making the jump to the Xbox 360 and PS3 and so there was reason for concern when Konami announced the first 3D “Castlevania” title for the Sony Playstation 3 and Microsoft Xbox 360. Concern no more. “Castlevania: Lords of Shadow” is an undeniable success, a game that seems to have divided some hardcore fans of the franchise who refuse to move into the '10s but completely works for this longtime “Castlevania” player.



Most of the complaints about “Lords of Shadow” seem to center around the fact that the game feels like titles outside of the franchise and it’s undeniably true. The world of gaming is cyclical. The original “Castlevania” titles influenced hundreds of games that followed and now some of those games have come back to influence “Lords of Shadow.”

It’s impossible for anyone who played “God of War III” earlier this year to not feel a bit of deja vu when playing “Castlevania: Lords of Shadow” but are we honestly complaining about a title that attempts to reach the same dizzying heights as the “GoW” franchise? And it does so with its own personality completely intact. This is no “Dante’s Inferno,” a poorly-constructed “GoW” knock-off. This is a game inspired structurally and on a core gameplay level by the legend of Kratos but also carving its own impressive way through the gaming world. It’s a fantastic title.



Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Photo credit: Konami

Players take on the role of Gabriel Belmont (voiced by the great Robert Carlyle), a name that will be very familiar to fans of the “Castlevania” franchise. As is often the case in games like this, bad things have started to happen in Belmont’s world and he is the chosen one who can reverse the course of evil. To do so, he will have to travel through various worlds and track down the Lords of Shadow to purify the land. The game takes place across 50 diverse and gorgeously-rendered 3D stages with over 45 enemies and some of the most impressive boss battles of the year. It is a huge title (arguably too big) that will take much more time than the standard platformer.



Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Photo credit: Konami

Like “God of War III,” “Castlevania: Lords of Shadow” is a combination of basic combat, boss battles, and puzzle-solving sequences. All of the above is expertly-conceived and remarkably well-executed. The basics of “light” and “heavy” attack in the X and Y buttons are there but there are up to 40 possible combo attacks that can be added to the arsenal and, as with all “Castlevania” games, the title continues to refresh itself with new weapons and powers. At first, it’s just you, your cross, and a few daggers. Before long, you’re wielding crystals, fairies, and two kinds of magic, transferring from one attack to another with ease. By about hour five of this lengthy experience, when you really feel like you’ve mastered the combat, “Castlevania: Lords of Shadow” really kicks in and becomes a viscerally enjoyable experience.

As for graphics, “Lords of Shadow” looks stunning; one of the most visually-impressive titles of the year. The only drawback is that the camera is not controllable, which leads to a few of those annoying moments where a bad angle can lead you to fall to your death. In fact, the uncontrollable camera even plays into a few of the maze-like puzzles. If you could just look to your right, you would know where to go. That can be annoying but it’s a minor complaint.



Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Photo credit: Konami

And all complaints against “Castlevania: Lords of Shadow” are minor. It is a groundbreaking title in that it proves that decades-old franchises can be fully-updated for a new generation of gamers. I understand why some hardcore “Castlevania” nuts may be more drawn to a title like “Harmony of Despair” that not only feels more like an old entry in the franchise but actually uses old artwork, character design, and even levels, but stasis is the death of any franchise and we need to embrace developers who this cleverly find a way to update their game series without losing what works about it. The heart of “Castlevania” is definitely there in “Lords of Shadow.” It’s just the body that looks and feels a bit different.

Honestly, “Castlevania: Lords of Shadow” may be the most surprisingly-enjoyable game of the year. It just works. From the continuously impressive graphics to the fluid character models to the well-designed upgrade system that stops the title from being repetitive, “Lords of Shadow” is constantly surprising. It never gets dull and never loses its focus. It’s the kind of game that will often frustrate you with its immense difficulty — some of the boss battles literally require you to die a few times to proceed — and the time commitment but also one that you simply want to get back to every time you’re not playing it. That’s the sign of a great game: One that itches at the back of your mind, demanding that you return to its world and keep playing. “Castlevania: Lords of Shadow” is a great game.

Before you go buy your own copy, check out this spectacular preview:

'Castlevania: Lords of Shadow' was released by Konami and developed by Mercury Steam. It is rated M (Mature). The version reviewed was for the Xbox 360, but the title is also available for the PS3. It was released on October 5th, 2010.



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