# Video Game Review: Bloody Journey Into 'The Darkness II' Pays Off

Submitted by BrianTT [1] on February 7, 2012 - 4:36pm

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CHICAGO – "The Darkness II" may not be quite as artistically successful as one would hope but it works for what it is — a gory, violent, extreme journey to Hell through the eyes of a vicious gangster who made a deal with the devil. Visual creativity goes a long way to alleviate gameplay repetition and a lack of interesting storytelling. In other words, ripping someone in half and eating their heart can make bad dialogue and a thin story easier to take.

Video Game Rating: **3.5**/5.0

First and foremost, you should know that "The Darkness II" is as VIOLENT a game as you'll play all year. Playing a character who is half-gangster and half-demon, you can have your choice of deadly force. As if shotgunning someone in the head wasn't enough to make your grandma question your choices for entertainment, you should see what she thinks when your demon arms shoot out and grab an enemy by the legs, flip him upside down, and then pull him apart like tearing a piece of paper in half. How about when you spin them forward with your left demon arm and shoot it through his body, eating his heart for extra health as you go? Grandma's gonna love that.



The Darkness II
*Photo credit: 2K Games*

In this orgy of blood and carnage, you play Jackie Estacado, the head of a New York City crime family. As the game opens, it's been some time since the action of the first game (one of the first PS3 titles back in 2007) and Jackie seems to have repressed the creature within that turned him into a demonic killing machine. Well, that's not going to last. In the prologue, you're welcomed into a restaurant a la Tony Soprano going to Artie's place and escorted to a table where two beautiful women try to flirt with you before one of them gets a bullet through the head and a vehicle crashes through the window behind her. Someone is trying to make a move on your mob family and you barely escape with your life as you're dragged through the restaurant shooting the enemies trying to kill you. As you make it out, you embrace the darkness to survive and begin a saga of vengeance and people vying to steal your supernatural powers.

The Darkness II
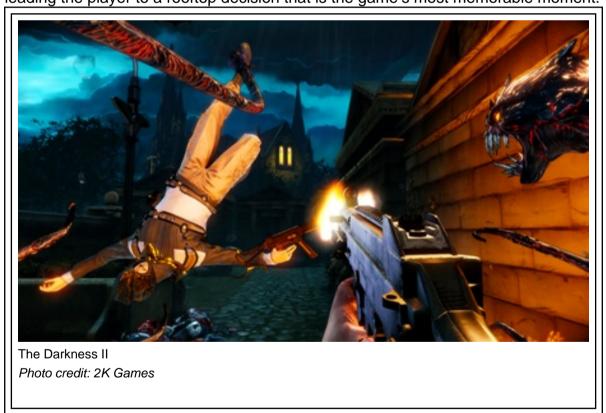*Photo credit: 2K Games*

The structure of "The Darkness II" is incredibly linear even as it pretends not to be every once in awhile. Between what are basically story missions, Jackie zips back to his mansion where he can wander around and talk to a few people but you're basically just killing time before starting the next round of destruction. Like a few elements of the game, the mansion and its NPC inhabitants feel a bit underdeveloped. The dialogue is thin, the environment is underdeveloped (you can turn the faucet on in the tub but it doesn't actually fill), and the impression that you have any real customizable choices at all actually hurts the game once one realizes that it's not true. All the character and story development in these mansion portions of the game could have been inserted into a cut scene and the game could have just embraced its linear nature instead of pretending it's not there by basically just asking you to press a button to continue a conversation.

The story of "The Darkness II" is one that pretends to be deep but is actually remarkably shallow when one finishes the game and thinks about what has just transpired. You're a gangster. You have powers. You lost the love of your life to the arms of Hell. Someone wants your powers. You want to save your love. You have to kill a WHOLE BUNCH of morons to keep them and get your girl back.

Or do you? The smartest storytelling development in "The Darkness II" comes when Jackie starts flashing to a first-person perspective in a mental hospital where the characters from the supernatural mob story play other roles (like fellow patients, doctors, etc.). Are you really crazy? Or is the evil power of the Darkness making you think you're crazy by creating the world of the asylum in your head to keep you down? I wish this element of the story had been a little better developed (like all story elements of the game) but it's certainly the most interesting one, leading the player to a rooftop decision that is the game's most memorable moment.



The Darkness II
*Photo credit: 2K Games*

But how do you get there? By killing, killing, and more killing. The right and left buttons are your friends as one on each side is reserved for gunfire and demon arm action. To succeed in combat, you'll need to master both shooting and extracurricular carnage. Sometimes you will have to shoot your armored enemy to stun them so your snake-like arm can grab them and pull out their beating heart. Your arms can also grab items in the environment and use them as shields and/or weapons. For example, grab a door off a car, use it as a shield, shoot someone to stun them, throw the door at them and slice them in half. The more creative you are with your executions and the more "Essence" you get, which is basically an XP system used for upgrades and new powers (like the very effective Swarm, which sends supernatural bugs at your enemy to distract them before your demon arm introduces their head to their ass.)
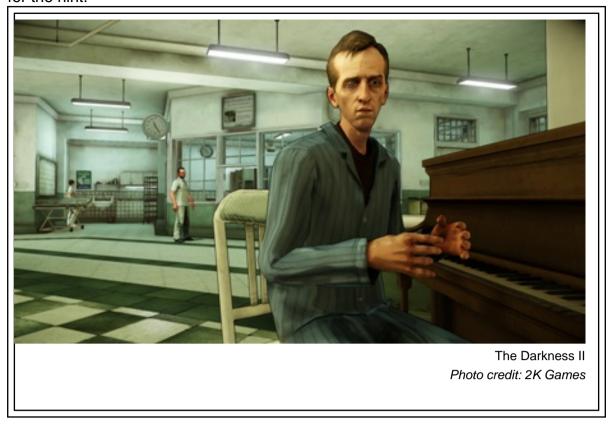
The combat in "The Darkness II" is fun, especially as the game progresses and you get more powerful, but the enemies are remarkably repetitive. And stupid. You'll laugh out loud as you're tearing a guy's head off as his partner in enemy crime stands there and waits his turn. Some of them even run at you while you're doing it. I understand that enemy AI in which the enemy has the right amount of fear of the demonic creature approaching them would be a lot to ask but it reaches laughable extremes here as you tear your way through each level with little need for strategy. It comes into play mostly in terms of light, which is not your friend. Some areas have lights that need to be shot or

generators that need to be destroyed. Some enemies even carry lights. The strategy is simple — kill the guy with the light first. You're welcome for the hint.



The Darkness II
*Photo credit: 2K Games*

The visual style of "The Darkness II" is a fascinating one as the game looks like a graphic novel come to life (it is based on a beloved comic series). With strong line detail, the visuals are definitely one of the game's greatest strengths and I think the decision to make it look somewhat flat, like a comic book, instead of three-dimensional, was a smart one.

While I enjoyed a lot of the gameplay in "The Darkness II," I have to admit that, as I realized the game was coming to an end, I flashed back on what had happened and felt like something was missing. I wanted another twist to the story, another less-predictable enemy to fight, a new variety to the gameplay. This is a good game but it could have been a great one.

It helps the game immensely that it's not over when you complete the campaign. There are a series of missions in which you can play different characters on mini-levels either on your own or co-op online. And the potential for DLC here is clearly high — new missions, maybe even a new chapter to the story. And the game ends with a door open for a third chapter. While I think this game is flawed, I hope that it's successful enough to open that door. I need to eat some more hearts.

*"The Darkness II" was developed by Digital Extremes and released by 2K Games on February 7th, 2012. It is rated M (Mature). The version reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the Xbox 360 and the PC.*

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