

Video Game Review: 'Dishonored: The Knife of Dunwall' is a Quality Jungle Gym

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 8, 2013 - 11:26am

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CHICAGO – I'm of the mind that the most enjoyable video games are often times, in a way, toys. "Grand Theft Auto", "Far Cry 3", "Minecraft", "Red Faction: Guerrilla", and even the best sports games like "NBA 2K13" and older "NCAA Football" titles all contain features or elements of gameplay that tickle the tinkering part of a player's imagination. Sure, you can play through "GTA"'s plot without causing mayhem, wearing a funny outfit, or soliciting the services of a digital lady of the evening, but where's the fun in that? You can take out an enemy outpost with an AK-47 in "Far Cry 3", but isn't it a bit more...entertaining, to lure a hungry tiger into the base for some sweet, sweet, pirate meat? Hell, I still haven't made it past the third mission in "Red Faction: Guerrilla" thanks to incredibly awesome and distracting destruction physics. There's such carefree joy to be had in these games, that it enriches the experience to an incredible degree - to quote Gametrailers, you can play these games, or play with them.

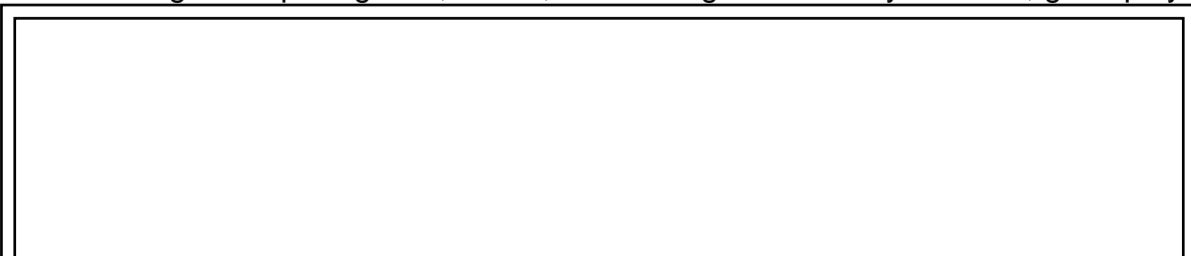


So, it's funny that despite sharing similar imagination-igniting qualities to the games listed above, "Dishonored: The Knife of Dunwall" is most definitely not a toy, and instead, it makes me think of shop class, where the joy of creativity and dire consequences of reality shake hands and somehow get along swimmingly - until you cut your pinky off, and swear to never touch that bastard band saw again.



Dishonored
Photo credit: Bethesda

And like shop class, "The Knife of Dunwall" makes a decent first impression. From the get-go, "The Knife Of Dunwall" demands stealthy gameplay while mixing in gadgetry, magical abilities, some moral choice, and an exploration-encouraging mentality that makes your character feel like a mystical predecessor to James Bond. Hardcore players may notice a difference or two between your powers in this game and those of the main game's protagonist, Corvo, but nothing is drastically different, gameplay-wise, in the DLC.





Dishonored
Photo credit: Bethesda

What is different is that this time around Michael Madsen's Daud serves as our narrator and main character - ultimately atoning (or not) for his actions in "Dishonored" the proper. It's great they got Madsen back - as he seemed to be the only member of the game's Hollywood B- list cast that remembered not to take seven lunesta before recording their lines. And despite Madsen's presence, this problem bizarrely continues in "The Knife of Dunwall" as the conversations with the mystical and all-knowing 'outsider', will leave you yearning for anything even resembling personality. Hell, Uncle Bill from "American Movie" had more passion in his delivery.

The lack of character personality is so bizarre because otherwise the game secretes this wonderful "Sweeney Todd"-meets-steam-punk-"Half Life 2" vibe from every nook, cranny, and whale oil pore. Despite its presumably gloomy aesthetic, the graphics are colorful and often times striking. Sure, Dunwall isn't going to wow you like "Bioshock: Infinite"'s Columbia, but the gothic aesthetic and larger than life character design create an aesthetic that is equal parts strangely familiar and decidedly unique, thereby giving players a breathtaking world populated by cardboard cutouts (I'm starting to think this is a *thing* Bethesda does).



Dishonored
Photo credit: Bethesda

There is also much fun to be had in this fantastic world, and from the get-go, "The Knife Of Dunwall" demands stealthy gameplay while mixing in gadgetry, magical abilities, some moral choice, and an exploration-encouraging mentality that makes your character feel like a mystical predecessor to James Bond - though It does takes a while to acclimate (or re-acclimate) yourself to "Dishonored"'s particular brand of..deliberate stealth-assassination, so expect to trigger alarms, alert the guards, accidentally shoot a bolt when you meant to teleport, and screw up at least a dozen times in half a dozen ways before finally getting in the groove of what "The Knife of Dunwall" is all about.

That groove, while excellent and intensely demanding of your concentration in the best way, is simultaneously a frustrating place to be. The not-quite-open world "Knife of Dunwall" is unforgiving; ammo is scarce, mana is tough to come by, and coming across a single sleep dart in a dark alley is a mitzvah worthy of a quality cigar. Often times you'll load up on a boatload of optional objectives, manage to complete all but one, then end up reloading out of a need for perfection. But it's within these frustrations that "Knife of Dunwall" shines. Throughout a mission you'll obtain a variety of secondary objectives that expand the breadth and intricacy of your goal; obtain a will from a locked chest, place an odorous sack in the ventilation system to gas out the guards, raid the safe that an accomplice helpfully left the combination for on a wall, and the list goes on. Often times these objectives all come to a head at the end of the mission, where, to complete them all you'll need to perfectly combine non-lethal takedowns, stun mines, stealth, and distraction techniques, and then still get the hell out of dodge, as missions require you

to make it back to the starting point in the map before they're officially complete. Chaos rating makes a return as well, and the ability to complete missions as quietly and non-murderously as possible adds an incredible amount of stress to the gameplay - especially if a guard spots you, and you end up quick-loading an outdated save simply because you don't want to raise your chaos score or kill any more guards.



Dishonored
Photo credit: Bethesda

The first two missions in the DLC are stellar, the first tasking you with the infiltration of a gruesome whale slaughter house - and a particularly sad whale, and the second a fancy, heavily guarded, aristocratic mansion - complete with numerous ways to infiltrate and accomplish your various objectives - including a cop-out that lets you snipe him from a balcony across the way - at the cost of your optional objectives. Unfortunately "The Knife of Dunwall" loses steam in its third mission, where you return to your previously unseen lair only to find it infiltrated by enemies who are immune to your magical abilities. At this point the game becomes a run-and-gun, which is an experience I most definitely do not want from an experience predicated on options and semi-openness, Sort of like being surprised with a standardized test while fully expecting to build a fancy table in shop class.

Ultimately "The Knife of Dunwall" gives you more "Dishonored" in a bit more polished way. If you liked the main game, you'll certainly find enough here to get your moneys worth - especially if you intend on doing high chaos and low chaos runs. If you were mixed on "Dishonored" - as I was initially, you may find yourself liking this DLC quite a lot anyway. Daud is much more compelling than Corvo, the missions are a little more self contained, and you have a bit more advisement in your objectives then you got in the main game. So, no, "The Knife of Dunwall" isn't a toy. It's not an open world sandbox, either. But instead, much like it's predecessor, it's a jungle gym - just a sturdier one for bigger kids.

"Dishonored: The Knife of Dunwall" was released by Bethesda on April 16, 2013, and was developed by Arkane Studios. It was reviewed for the Xbox 360 but is also available for the PC and PS3.

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Source URL (retrieved on Sep 21 2024 - 5:45pm):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/22039/video-game-review-dishonored-the-knife-of-dunwall-is-a-quality-jungle-gym>

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