

Video Game Review: ‘The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 22, 2009 - 11:30am

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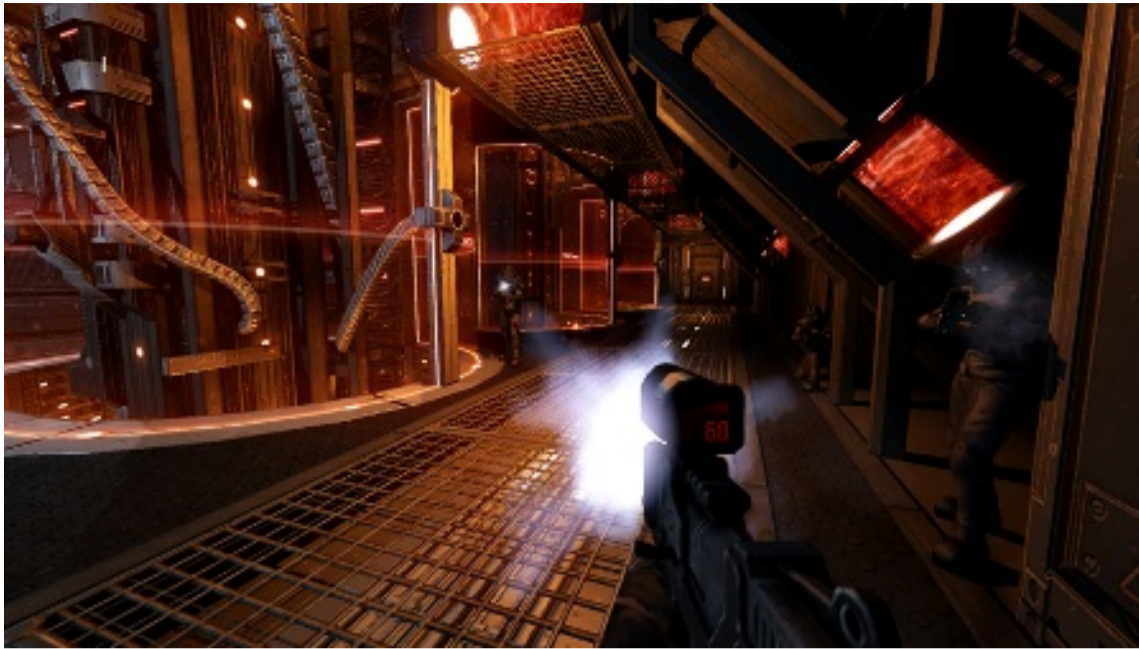
CHICAGO – [Vin Diesel](#) [14] should stick to making video games. After headlining last month’s “[Wheelman](#) [15]” and this month’s “[The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena](#) [12],” I have to admit that I like the actor more as a video game hero than I do as a movie star. “Athena” gives fans the most bang for their buck of anything the actor has been involved with in years.

Diesel's last several feature films - “[Fast & Furious](#) [17],” “Babylon A.D.,” “The Pacifier” - haven’t exactly been his best work. The actor who once seemed so charismatic in films like “Boiler Room” and “Pitch Black” seemed bored by his own routine. However, with two very good games released within weeks of each other, Diesel has proven that he can be a reliable commodity in the gaming world.



The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
Photo credit: Atari

Of course, Diesel voices the title character in “Assault on Dark Athena,” a sequel to the acclaimed 2004 game “The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay,” itself a tie-in to the David Twohy films “Pitch Black” and “The Chronicles of Riddick”. “Butcher Bay” was a massive hit for the Xbox and the sequel was highly anticipated.



The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

Photo credit: Atari

So, does “Dark Athena” live up to the high standard set by its predecessor? It very nearly does but you can decide for yourself with one purchase. In one of the best deals of the year, Atari has packaged an enhanced version of “Butcher Bay” on the same disc as “Dark Athena”. It literally is two games for the price of one.

“Dark Athena” picks up immediately where “Butcher Bay” ended (something that makes the inclusion of the first game on the disc even cooler because you’re literally just continuing the same adventure). Riddick is trapped on the Merc-ship Dark Athena, not only trying to escape but to solve several mysteries of the ship itself. There’s the child wandering through the air vents, the prisoners who could be allies or foes for Riddick, and the twisted leader of Athena, Captain Revas. She’s a very memorable villain.

The gameplay of “Dark Athena” essentially mixes stealth with an average shooter, as Riddick works his way through enemy soldiers, prisoners, and even unmanned drones. The drones are former humans who are now merely remote-controlled robots. The level where you get to actually pilot one of them is one of the gaming highlights of the year to date.

What truly separates “Dark Athena” from average first-person shooters is the variety of gameplay. It’s a title than can be played very stealthily. If you’ve seen any of the Riddick films, you know that his skill set features his ability to see in the dark. So, the player can activate a mode that allows them stealth against their enemies. Sneak up and break their neck or slice-and-dice with your wicked Ulak blades. Of course, the other option - running at them with your weapon armed and taking them down old-school - is always on the table.



The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

Photo credit: Atari

It’s the variety of combat - melee, shooter, counter-attacks, the multiple weapons available - that is the highlight of “Dark Athena”. The enemies and levels become repetitive, but the gameplay alleviates the biggest problem with most FPS games. And the second half of the game, which throws Riddick into sunlight, completely changes the gameplay.

As for the storytelling in “Dark Athena,” it’s a little rough. “Butcher Bay” had a more interesting narrative and the dialogue in “Athena” is horrendous. The voice work is good but the actual lines wouldn’t pass for a B-movie script. But you won’t notice and none of the cut scenes go on for too long. There are some oddly lengthy load times in the PS3 version I played, but, for the most part, the game is pretty smooth.

Most players won’t care. “Dark Athena” is a fun, well-paced, clever game that’s actually topped by another complete experience on the same disc, the slightly better “Butcher Bay”. And don’t worry Riddick fans. If you’ve played “BB” before, you’ll still want to do so again. Not only has it held up surprisingly well over the years, but it’s been remastered for the next-gen consoles, polished up in HD and even enhanced in gameplay. It’s like a “Special Edition” of one of your favorite games.

And that's not even it. There's a multiplayer mode with a variety of options including deathmatch, capture the flag, and arena matches. In "Butcher Bay Riot," three teams battle for control of a power cell. "Pitch Black" mode is easily the best and the most unique to the title - perfectly merging the stealth aspects of the title with multiplayer, as players try to battle Riddick in total darkness with only flashlights to guide the way.

The amazing "The Orange Box" earned high praise for giving gamers the most value for their money. "The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena" is close to that great title in the "bang for the buck" department. In today's tough economic times, how can a buyer complain about two complete, well-designed, fun games (and an elaborate, unique multiplayer mode) for the cost of only one?

'The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena' was released by Atari and developed by Starbreeze Studios. It is rated M (Mature). The version reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the Xbox 360 and PC. It was released on April 7th, 2009.



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