

Return of Sneak King

Written by Joshua David Anderson

The first Dishonored was a truly unique game, feeling like it fell out of a different era. Harkening back to the days of System Shock and Thief, the first game brought a style that looked like nothing at the time, and gameplay that tried to truly give players the ability to play any way they wanted. With Dishonored 2, Arkane Studios wanted to keep all of those elements in the game while giving players more freedom, more choices, and more story. The question is whether or not Dishonored 2 delivers on those promises.

Dishonored 2 picks up fifteen years after the events of the first game, with the young Emily Kaldwin now the empress of Dunwall. When a visiting dignitary from the country of Serkonos arrives, Emily and her father, Corvo Attano, are surprised to see that the late empress had a presumed dead older sister Delilah who now claims the throne. This coup succeeds and Emily and Attano are deposed, ready to take their revenge.

While the first game took place mainly in Dunwall, with its large city districts, rats, and power provided by whale oil, Dishonored 2 takes you to a different setting and allows the series to expand its lore. Emily and Corvo explore Karnaca, a coastal country to the south of the first game, with wind turbines powering most of the locales. The change of setting allows for more than just new visuals, as Karnaca is beset by dust storms, gangs, and a plague of giant flying insects called bloodflies. All of this, along with the different look of mining facilities and cities built into cliffs, gives Dishonored 2 a distinct look while still feeling like it fits in the established setting.

Dishonored 2 also changes things up by letting you play as two different characters this time. Corvo, the main character from the first, is playable again although no longer a silent protagonist. However, players can also choose to explore and assassinate as Emily, daughter to Corvo and the rightful Empress of the world of Dunwall. With the two different characters comes not only a change in story perspective, but also new ways to play, as Emily and Corvo have different powers from each other. Corvo can use his teleport-like Blink ability to zip around the world, spawn a pile of rats to distract an enemy, and then stop time and line up bullets to fire off once time starts again. Emily, however, has some very different powers, with her ability to spawn a clone of herself, mesmerize her foes, and then link several enemies together so that the single arrow she fires at one of them hits them all. The different power sets lead to very different ways to combat each encounter.

With all these diverse powers, it helps to have a good sandbox to use them in, and Dishonored 2 succeeds the best at its level design. Each area has a ton of complexity, with vertical areas to climb and explore, and many paths to the goal. This allows players to choose how they want to tackle the level. Do you stay in the shadows, never being seen, and avoid all enemies? Do you rush forward and use all the combat powers to simply brute force your way through? Or do you combine the two, sneaking in until you spring a trap on an unsuspecting guard? All of these ways of playing are encouraged and rewarded in Dishonored 2. There are plenty of things to collect for the explorer as well, with secrets and items hidden all over the levels, many of which will help you gain abilities or find a new way past an obstacle. And through all of this, Dishonored 2 tells a lot of story through its environments, so you feel like you are making narrative progress as you make actual progress.

In all, Dishonored 2 is a worthy followup to the first game, improving on nearly everything from the original, and adding plenty of new tricks and treats for returning players. Levels are large and complex, with plenty of reason to revisit them, and the story allows for some major choices to be made, letting players guide some of the resolution at the end. Add to all of this the very open design of how you handle stealth and killing in the game, and you have a package that gives players a unique experience that is very different from other stealth games on the market.

Game Title: Dishonored 2
Producer: Bethesda Softworks
Platform: Xbox One, PC, PS4
Website: dishonored.bethesda.net

★★★★★

Ratings: Mature

Genre: Action-Adventure

Release Date: November 11, 2016