



Darksiders Review

Developer: Vigil Games

Publisher: THQ

Genre: Action Adventure

Player(s): 1

Platform(s): PC, PS3, Xbox 360

Description

Darksiders chronicles the tale of the first horseman of the apocalypse, War, as he fights the Destroyer's chosen warriors in the ruins of a ravaged Earth. Beginning with the end of days, War arrives on Earth to find the forces of heaven and hell already doing battle as the kingdom of man crumbles around them. Soon War is captured by the keepers of the balance, the Charred Council, and blamed for starting the apocalypse early. After serving 100 years of incarceration and stripped of his powers, War is allowed to return to the now post-apocalyptic Earth in order to find those truly responsible for the fall of mankind and clear his name. Darksiders is ultimately a tale of justice, conspiracy and, as ally Samael puts it, revenge.

Gameplay

Battling his enemies from a third person perspective, War's war features a fun combat system akin to that found in the God of War series. Upon defeating their enemies in battle, players will earn one of three different types of souls. Blue souls act as currency, yellow souls fuel War's wrath abilities and green souls replenish health.

Currency can be spent buying new moves for War's weapons, new wrath abilities, consumables and a new weapon in the form of a scythe from the demon merchant Vulgrum. Often times new items are uncovered which aid in traversal and unlock new sections of the game. Breaking off from the main quest and scouring the world can reveal the locations of hidden chests containing bonus souls, shards(the latter of which contributes to increasing War's health or wrath) and 27 demonic artifacts of the Fallen Legion which can be sold to Vulgrum in exchange for blue souls. Explorative players will be rewarded for their curiosity with some bizarre easter eggs such as a duel against a gentlemanly zombie living in a cave.

Key locations in the world of Darksiders are connected by a series of serpent holes, accessible through Vulgrum.

Players can use these to fast travel between these important locales.

The game challenges the player to defeat as many enemies as possible in order to gain more souls for purchases. While the system of acquiring new inventory and abilities via purchase generally works well, the system of buying weapons ends up feeling shallow as the scythe is the only weapon that can be bought. All other secondary weapons are found in dungeons. After players cause enough carnage with a weapon, that weapon then levels up and becomes more powerful. Players are able to add modifiers to each weapon which allows for a degree of customization. War can freely switch between weapons and items in combat but this does tend to bring out the worst in the controls as, for instance, trying to change from a secondary weapon to the cross blade and use it effectively will make players feel like they're playing twister their fingers. The controls are generally poor when there is a need to switch to and from weapons or items in a hurry.

The early hours of the game provide the player with a tutorial and an opportunity to hone their skills at the combat with some platforming to break things up. Players guide War through linear sequences which, at first, scream I-wantto-be-God-of-War until the first dungeon is encountered. The first few hours of Darksiders are where the game is at its most repetitive and derivative despite the game's best efforts to change things up by throwing the player into flying segments, challenge rooms, soul scavenger hunts and a car slinging boss battle.

Combat becomes easier as War regains the power taken from him by the council. He will be able to change into his chaos form, a berserker mode which sees him turn into an unstoppable red giant for a limited amount of time, gain more health, wrath and gain access to new abilities. Enemy types are switched out to compensate for the increase in power that comes throughout the game, more heavily armoured demons, angels carrying heavenly rifles and monster mini-bosses make the rounds trying to stop War. They, however, will fall short as War's abilities allow him to slice his way through them with only slightly more time taken due to the armour increase. When an enemy's health is low enough, the player can press a button for War to perform a savage execution move on them.

With platforming sequences accenting the combat, Darksiders can feel quite derivative in the early hours. When enemies teleport into battle all doors in the surrounding area are 'magically' locked until the last one is killed. Once areas which require no backtracking are passed, an explosion or a shifting of debris 'suddenly' blocks the path to that area and forces the player to move forwards. While many games employ these tactics, they are extremely noticeable here, especially in the near the beginning of the game. While it initially feels like action adventure 101, Darksiders reveals its true identity once the first impression is complete. The game's best feature is its cleverly designed dungeons, all containing interesting and fun puzzles. Each dungeon contains an item which is necessary to obtain in order to advance in it and which unlocks new places in the world for the player to explore (when they're not in said dungeon). Dungeons also feature a member of the Chosen who functions as the 'boss' character for that stage. Unlike some of the normal enemies, bosses rely on intricate takedown strategies rather than mindless button mashing or Quick Time Events. Studying their attack patterns and using the appropriate weapons is integral to beating them. While not an original format, Darksiders implements this system very well creating a dark and gritty, yet expansive world.

Featuring three difficulty levels and only the campaign to play through, Darksiders can be completed in 15 - 18 hours. Completionists, however, could spend upwards of 25 hours searching for every last artifact, shard and upgrade that the game has to offer.

Presentation

The cut scenes, which are utilized to convey to game's story, appear infrequently to explain where War must go and who he must kill next. While interesting enough, the story in falls victim to a lack of elucidation of certain concepts and characters. Entities such as Destroyer and one of his Chosen warriors, Straga, are simply mentioned casually in conversation without proper definitions as to who they are and what they have done in the world. While the story may stem from biblical origins, Darksiders (for the most part) forges its own path with the source material serving as inspiration and not adaptation.

On a technical level, Darksiders suitably immerses the player into the ruins of Earth. Little details like abandoned cars (brilliant for picking up and throwing), fire hydrants and parking meters are nice touches but the game can look dated when compared to some other games released in 2010. The art direction, however, saves the day with the angelic forces and demonic horde both appearing as if taken from the pages of a comic book. The design of the world, the items, the weapons and characters look great and have translated nicely to 3D. The audio is what one would expect from a post-apocalyptic adventure, creating the feeling of a desolate world without truly standing out as exceptional.

Summary

While the way to the dark side is lit up by derivative elements, the journey itself culminates in an enjoyable experience. The game is well paced after opening chapter, the combat is fun and gratifying and the game truly shines

when players are in dungeons and solving puzzles. While it isn't doing anything new, Darksiders is entertaining and is definitely an adventure worth taking.

Rating: 5.6/8 bits (70%)

Reviewer: Paul Cupido

This review was conducted on the on the PC.